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A History of Ups and Downs: The 140th Anniversary of the Establishment of Russian-Bulgarian Diplomatic Relations.

Sergey Lavrov,

Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation

The ties between Russia and Bulgaria date back many centuries. Their special nature arises from their spiritual and cultural affinity. The liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke was a fateful event in our shared history. More than 20,000 Russian officers and servicemen were killed and over 50,000 injured in fighting for the freedom of their Slavic brothers and for the triumph of the ideals of truth and justice. That was when the solid foundation of Russian-Bulgarian friendship was laid.

Needless to say, our bilateral relations have seen both ups and downs. However, each time we successfully overcame temporary difficulties and returned to the path of dialogue based on mutual respect.

I am pleased to note that despite the complicated situation in Europe, Russian-Bulgarian relations are dynamically developing. Lately, political dialogue, in particular at the top level, has intensified.

We hope that the positive momentum of political contacts will help strengthen practical cooperation, primarily in energy, trade and the economic area, especially considering that there is great potential for that. The Turkish Stream natural gas project opens very broad opportunities for our joint efforts.

In the current international situation, regional cooperation is making a significant contribution to promoting a positive interstate agenda and to building up trust and mutual understanding among nations – to a very large extent due to its nonpolitical nature.

The “integration of integrations” concept should help increase the practical payoff from regional cooperation. That is the focus of President Vladimir Putin’s initiative to form the Greater Eurasian Partnership, aligning various integration processes unfolding in both Europe and Asia. I am sure that deeper cooperation within the BSEC framework would help implement this wide-ranging initiative and eventually ensure harmonious and sustainable development throughout the Eurasian space.

We like Bulgaria’s approach toward performing its chairmanship functions, which is aimed at ensuring a balance of interests of all member countries, promoting a non-confrontational agenda and searching for compromises.

Unfortunately, the well-being and stability of the common European home today depend on a small but extremely aggressive group of Russophobes in the EU, whose actions are being effectively directed from Washington.

We hope that common sense will eventually prevail and Russian-EU relations will go back to normal, based on respect and consideration for each other’s interests, especially given that at the end of the day, both Russia and the EU are facing the same challenges.

The possibilities for putting Russian-NATO dialogue back on a constructive track have clearly not been exhausted. To that end, our partners should live up to the commitments that they assumed at OSCE and Russia-NATO summits to not ensure their own security at the expense of the security of others. For our part, we are always open to joint efforts in fighting international terrorism, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and other real, not contrived threats.

It is essential to rely on the generally recognized norms of international law, not on an exclusive set of rules that our Western partners keep changing depending on the political situation of the moment. Restoring diplomatic culture, which Washington and several other Western capitals seem to have lost, is a high priority on the agenda.

That is the only way to enhance predictability and strengthen mutual understanding between countries.

“Expanding Our Country’s Circle of Friends Has Been Our Main Goal”

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Rossotrudnichestvo is a governmental organization promoting international cooperation in culture, science, education, public relations, and cultural and scientific circles in other countries.

Expanding our country’s circle of friends has been our main goal for almost a century. It is another matter that each period of time adds some new tools for achieving our objectives and practicing our activities.

Naturally, high priority is given to promoting the Russian language and Russian education abroad.

Young people are our utmost priority. We have established a special youth affairs department that has talented, energetic, wonderful staff members, who work hard to promote youth communication projects.

Programs for compatriots living abroad are high on our list of priorities. All our centers are open to them. We celebrate important dates there. In addition, we have two programs allowing children of compatriots living abroad to visit Russia.

We are doing practically the same thing but back in Soviet days, the ideological component prevailed. In 1925, the main objective was to breach the diplomatic blockade, and so the organization worked abroad with elite, intellectual circles. They were lured over to the Soviet side and in that way they influenced their respective governments. Then the organization was used to support communist parties.

Today, we work with various audiences, and all ideology is gone.

So, naturally, our target audience and our objectives have changed. Technically speaking, we have also changed. We actively use new technology. We have our own website. We offer subscription to the Boris Yeltsin Electronic Library and other online libraries, and we provide our readers free access to all these formats.

Rosstrudnichestvo has 12 representative offices and nine branches in CIS countries, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The CIS is our priority, so we work not only in these countries' capitals but also on the periphery, including schools, universities and local communities.

Our largest center is in Berlin. It houses a concert hall and cinemas with the most modern, state-of-the-art equipment. An exhibition hall is nearing completion. The center also runs the largest Russian language course, with over 1,000 students.

We have a cultural center in Turkey: a wonderful building and wellattended Russian language courses. I would especially like to note the High-Level Cooperation Council that was established by our presidents. One of the council's components is the Russian-Turkish Public Forum, which I co-chair. There has been a downturn since the well-known events, although contacts have not stopped.

I must say that many compatriots living abroad are generally very interested in acquiring Russian citizenship. Recently, amid Russia's growing authority, as well as the difficulties apparently emerging in some other countries, higher priority has been given to the implementation of the state program for the voluntary resettlement of compatriots living abroad.

I believe the Russian language remains strong in the CIS space, and the more attractive Russia is, the more interest people in these countries will have in studying Russian, because people will understand that knowledge of Russian is potentially a new source of keeping bread on the table.

Outside of Russia, we engage mostly with the Russian Orthodox Church, since they are also guardians of the Russian language.

Practice shows that the religious factor is emerging as a key element in contacts with compatriots living abroad, especially in non-CIS countries.

We also interact with other faiths. The agency is in close contact with the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, the representative office of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia and the Chief Rabbinate of Russia.

We have joint projects with Jewish centers. We observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and January 27, the day of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

NATO's Military Activity in the North Atlantic

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THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, first and foremost its northern stretch, is what NATO considers its exclusive zone of vitally important interests. This idea is supported by the fact that it is the site of vital lines of communication and transport bridging North America and Europe, as well as strategically important military and civilian facilities, the protection of which is becoming one of the Alliance's key objectives

amid what Western sources call an unprecedented increase in activity by the Russian Navy and Air Force in this subregion.

The events that occurred first in Georgia and then in Ukraine served as the pretext for Western powers to return to promoting a more active containment of Russia. It was announced at the Alliance's subsequent summits – in Wales in 2014 and Warsaw in 2016 – that Russia was the main security challenge for all the bloc states and was their real global competitor.

The heart of this strategic concept is not political methods of achieving stated ends, but the “right” of NATO to carry out operations not only in its zone of responsibility, but far beyond those borders.

AFTER THE MEETING in Warsaw and before the next NATO summit in Brussels in July 2018, an initiative put forward by the “original” members of the alliance (including the USA and Great Britain) launched another process of reassessing the military strategy of the North Atlantic bloc. This work involved think tanks from the leading NATO countries.

In the course of a quite lively discussion about zones of concern and about subsequent steps to strengthen defensive capabilities and enhance the containment of Russia, noticeable differences of opinion within the military scientific communities of leading NATO countries came to light.

It was pointed out that at the present stage NATO's priority area in the field of security should be primarily to strengthen both the Alliance's and the USA's conventional naval forces and air forces, in order to effectively defend against Russian submarines and large ships operating in the North Atlantic and Baltic region, and to develop a new and more ambitious naval strategy for the Alliance that takes into account the rising new threats to NATO security.

In a report produced by leading experts of an American conservative think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), it was suggested to take a more flexible approach in reevaluating the Alliance's military posture.

British analysts are of the same mind as the Americans. A report by the Royal United Services Institute titled “NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising the Strategy of Collective Defence” emphasizes that in the context of the growing competition with Russia for dominance in the North Atlantic, NATO should revise its naval strategy by toughening its opposition to Russia's activity in Northern Europe. They say that if NATO loses effective control over the waters of the North Atlantic, or at least is unable to challenge Russia's access to this expanse of water, the Russian Federation could block reinforcements coming from the USA to Europe if an active conflict should arise. The main idea that the research rests on is that the North Atlantic should again be declared an independent and extended transatlantic theater of military operations.

The plans approved at NATO summits (as well as the practical steps for their achievement) to strengthen attack potential on NATO's “eastern flank,” and to further enlarge the Alliance to the east, are heightening tensions and weakening the military security of Europe by destroying the post-Cold War balance in the region. As a result of these destructive and provocative acts, Europe is increasingly turning into a zone of heightened military antagonism. There are growing risks of unintended and potentially dangerous incidents occurring, thereby seriously weakening stability in the region. In these circumstances, one cannot dismiss the possibility of NATO's aggressive intentions morphing into military adventurism by the bloc countries against Russia, in the long or even the medium term. As pointed out

above, preparations for such actions are being carried out more intensively, and the so-called “hybrid war” against our country and its allies is becoming more fierce.

Nevertheless, the increasing power of Russia, demonstrated during its antiterrorist operations in Syria and seen in the large-scale military exercises our troops have carried out (as well as the country’s firm determination to protect Russia’s vital national interests without allowing the existing strategic balance in Europe to be broken), is a serious deterrent for NATO members’ behavior. They are taking these issues into account in their decision-making on the national level and within the framework of NATO.

The EU in Search of Itself

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ELECTIONS to the European Parliament that took place on May 23-26, 2019 reflected the far from simple processes that have been unfolding in the European Union for several years now. They confirmed the desire of a fairly big number of voters to see new people among the political elites. The Right and Left centrists that had dominated the parliament for many years lost their traditional majority and, therefore, the chance to elect the chairman among themselves. This was not the only surprise.

Contrary to expectations, however, it was not a breakthrough even if Eurosceptics gained more seats than in 2014: 173 against 140 (24% of the total number of 751 seats). This means that even if they manage to form a faction, the decisive impact on the political course of the European Parliament will remain outside their reach. In an absence of a clear majority, however, they got a chance to influence new laws and decisions.

The forces normally defined as extreme Right that dominate the camp of Eurosceptics are, in fact, highly varied. Some of them are much closer in many respects to the Right and Left centrists and cannot, therefore, be tagged as extreme Right. Very much like the Centrists, they are very negative about immigration from the Muslim countries in the first place; they share with the Centrists the idea of sovereignism, a specific formula of national sovereignty opposed to the current model of European integration. They cannot agree, however, on the modality of immigration policies and on acceptable alternatives to it.

Eurosceptics might close ranks on certain issues; it is highly unlikely, however, that they might knock together a fairly big faction in the European Parliament.

The European integrationist elites fear Eurosceptics because, first, they are gradually adjusting to the political landscape which makes it much harder to demonize them. Second, the sources of Euroscepticism have not disappeared. According to public opinion polls, the majority of the EU citizens are irritated by Brussels that fails to fulfill their priority demands: settle the problem of immigration, fight terrorism and reduce unemployment.

Even before he was elected president in May 2017, Macron had dreamed of the EU as a center of power able “to protect ourselves with respect to China, Russia and even the United States of America.” In

September of the same year, speaking at the Sorbonne, he offered a program of reforms in the Eurozone which, in fact, would have opened a road to a federal state.

It should be said that since that time Emmanuel Macron supported by Angela Merkel (who needed time to accept Macron's initiatives) has promoted or made the first steps toward promoting some of these ideas partly due to Donald Trump's one-sided politics and his impudent "America First" slogan.

the Eurosceptics respond to the crises and domestic problems of many member-states with the "less Europe" and more national sovereignty strategy. European integrationists led by Macron and Merkel pin their hopes on the "more Europe" argument in expectation that "nipping on ahead" will revive the integration process and add new synergy. Today, the idea of the European Union as a "new world center of economic, technological and military power" is as inspiring and mobilizing as the Common Market and the common European currency in their time. At the same time, it is not clear whether this idea will inspire and consolidate the majority of the EU citizens since the supporters of the third strategy – "different Europe," rather than "more or less Europe," more aware of the needs of its citizens – gain attention. The Greens and part of the moderate Eurosceptics are among its supporters.

This discussion and the results of the elections to the European Parliament clarified the main problem of the European Union – it needs a more flexible and more efficient model of integration that would bring its members together. The democratic states with the developed culture of compromises can cope with the problem yet this will take time.

Russia's choice is obvious: It needs the EU not only for mutually advantageous economic cooperation but also for security on the continent. The current multidirectional interaction with China can be described as an achievement of Russia's foreign policy.

Realities, however, demand that we should take into account the widening gap in economy and technologies that has already put the problem of Russia's dependence on the agenda. The problem of counterbalance is growing more and more urgent. The European Union is the closest of such counterbalances geographically, culturally and civilizationally. Disunited, the EU is still a pole of economic might that adds a lot to its geopolitical importance. Indeed, at the level of member-states, France, Germany and Italy are significant geopolitical players. It is highly important that in these and certain other EU countries public opinion is turning slowly but surely toward Russia despite the sanctions and confrontational propaganda.

Germany and China: From Cooperation to Competition

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IN 2016, China for the first time became Germany's main foreign trade partner, replacing the seemingly unshakable U.S., which came in third place after France. This event was an indicator of certain changes taking place in modern world trade and in international relations in general – what would seem to be the emergence of a trend toward the establishment of a new balance of power in world politics. The

basis for such a turn of events was China's adept and very balanced economic diplomacy against the backdrop of Washington's rather impulsive and sometimes rash actions.

Speaking of German-Chinese relations, it should be understood that over the past three years, they managed to weather a whole series of events. Several factors contributed to such an intensive increase in bilateral trade and investment activity.

First, the openly tough protectionist policy of the American administration toward Germany that Donald Trump initiated immediately after taking office further pushed German businesses to reorient foreign trade activity toward Asian markets.

Second, the mutual interest in building partnerships is due not only to the presence of a common irritant in the face of the current American administration, but also the real trade, economic and investment advantages of collaboration – namely, cooperation in the field of investment and advanced technologies.

Until recently, Berlin maintained an open-door policy for investors from China. This was only partially due to the limbo caused by Trump's unpredictable policy of promoting American nationalism and, accordingly, protectionism, and had more to do with the natural interest of German companies in easy profit.

The period of 2016-2018 was the most fruitful in the history of investment cooperation between the two countries: China literally bought at any price German assets that it found interesting

However, this turn of events soon began to raise some concerns in German political circles, including in the context of possible espionage. Hans-Georg Maassen, former president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution of Germany, described the Chinese economic course as follows: "There is no longer a need to have your spy at an enterprise – just buy the enterprise."¹³ In particular, according to Maassen, the increased interest of Chinese investors could pose a direct threat to the country's security due to the close connection of many Chinese enterprises to intelligence services.

China is using its growing economic potential to influence the existing world order and promote the foundations of its sociopolitical and trade-economic model.

The U.S.'s traditional blackmail and coercion tools are combined with a large-scale information campaign to cast Beijing as a competitor or even an opponent in the European public consciousness. Washington is doing that, of course, to discredit Chinese businesses operating in Germany.

Aware of the scale of China's plans, which clearly go beyond the framework of the German economy, as well as the degree of interdependence of the economic systems of the EU member states, Germany regularly calls on European countries to develop a common policy to curb China's economic expansion. Given Germany's central role in developing EU integration processes, the call is more likely a paradigm for the rest of the community.

Despite the existence of alternative promising forms of cooperation, Beijing nevertheless decided to reconsider its approaches to developing trade and economic ties with Germany, fearing an aggravation of relations with the "driver" of the European economy and the flagship of the EU's innovative development. In particular, China has begun to gradually open its market to German investors in response to criticism on that score from Berlin.

Despite the opinion of some researchers that the value of reshoring is overstated and the Chinese economy will be able to quickly get on the track of import substitution by using residual production capacity in the event of a possible exodus of Western companies, this phenomenon speaks to something even greater – it is a manifestation of the emerging trend of developed countries to curb Chinese foreign economic ambitions. In effect, we are talking about the beginning of a confrontation between two fundamentally opposed socioeconomic structures. At the same time, despite the trade wars with the U.S., Germany has apparently remained committed to both the neoliberal approaches that are traditional to the West in general and to transatlantic value guidelines in particular.

The Transformation of the UN Concept of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

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THE UNITED NATIONS has time and again revised its concept of postconflict peacebuilding and still has not come up with a definitive opinion.

Conflicts have their dynamics affected both by new and by old factors, and as a result become complicated and difficult to resolve, with settlement efforts increasingly often proving futile.

Today's main post-conflict peacebuilding paradigms are still not very effective. They are not consistent or stable enough, and have insufficient resources.

A sharp increase in domestic conflicts in Third World countries made the international community revise its security and development principles. The United Nations became the main actor in security affairs and put forward a concept of security that ditched the latter's traditional militarist interpretation.

According to the 1995 Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, peacebuilding should not be limited to a post-conflict peace process but should start before a settlement agreement is reached and should comprise a wide range of measures, including support for social and economic development. This idea was reflected in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which advocated an integrated conflict prevention strategy.

The peacebuilding theme was also raised at the World Summit of 2005, which, in a document entitled 2005 World Summit Outcome, advocated "a coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation."

All this represented a top-level UN decision to build a new peacebuilding architecture, and great expectations were pinned on it worldwide.

The main problem of today's UN system for post-conflict peacebuilding is that the latter is relatively low on the agendas of many of the UN member states or the agenda of the UN structures. Peacebuilding activities receive inadequate attention, are given insufficient resources, and do not normally start before guns stop firing. Moreover, it is a predominant international assumption that PBC, the PBF, and the

PBSO make up the entire UN peacebuilding system. This gives rise to systemic barriers to enlarging the UN peacebuilding mechanism.

One more problem is that some key UN institutions, mainly the Security Council, only deal with individual aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding within the limits of functions vested in them by the UN Charter. This fragmentation affects the activities of the United Nations in general – the work of its Secretariat, relationships between the Secretariat and other UN bodies, and peacebuilding operations on the ground. This problem has been generally recognized for a long time but is still extremely hard to solve.

It also causes the United Nations to pay less attention to conflict prevention than to reacting to conflicts that have already happened (although this reaction is still usually inadequate), and to give comparatively little attention to post-conflict reconstruction.

Given the scale of problems in post-conflict peacebuilding affairs, UN peacebuilding efforts require effective partnership between the Security Council, General Assembly, and Economic and Social Council, with each of them staying within the limits of competence vested in them by the UN Charter. The PBC would be able to play a unique role in strengthening such a partnership by giving the three bodies advice that could improve coordination among everyone involved in peacebuilding activities both within and outside the United Nations.

POST-CONFLICT REGULATION is normally a complex, multi-component process with its components not measurable in quantitative terms. Due to their specific character, neither the United Nations nor international financial institutions can promptly and effectively carry out tasks arising in the course of post-conflict reconstruction.

Foreign assistance should target precisely the specific needs of a recipient country to restore its social and economic sphere. It is the model for national resilience.

One important way to avoid conflict resumption is the public conviction in the post-conflict country that its economy would benefit from assistance offered by another country.

The United Nations should be an observer and consultant – it is by definition an external power for any country, and ideally would be an unbiased and honest mediator and organizer of political, technical, and financial support.

One important point is that post-conflict reconstruction means more than laying foundations for peace and development after a conflict – it can also be an effective channel for political influence. This means that Russia should move from declarations to developing practical strategies to help post-conflict countries rebuild themselves, and this help should meet the specific needs of specific countries.

Negotiating the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea: Some Nuances

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THIS AUGUST will mark the first anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. The heads of the coastal states unanimously regarded the signing of the “Caspian Sea Constitution” at the Fifth Caspian Summit in Aktau on August 12, 2018, as a historic and extraordinary event. Russian President Vladimir Putin called it epochal. The completion of more than 20 years of negotiations on the main Caspian treaty, coupled with the signing of intergovernmental documents on cooperation in the fields of economy, transportation, incident prevention, combating organized crime, terrorism, and the work of border agencies, opened a new chapter in the history of the Caspian Five regional mechanism.

An important element of the Caspian international legal framework was (and still is) the agreements concluded by most of the Caspian states in bilateral and trilateral formats on delimiting the seafloor and subsoil assets of the Caspian Sea for subsoil use. Although not pan-Caspian, these documents are nevertheless of key importance in the system of relations in the region.

The clarification of conceptual issues made it possible to outline the contours of other sections of the convention. The political and military-political principles that were of key (if not decisive) importance were agreed upon: Only littoral states are allowed a military presence in the Caspian; military construction is to be conducted within the framework of a stable balance of arms and to a reasonable degree without prejudice to the security of other parties; confidence-building measures are stipulated in the spirit of predictability and transparency. The exclusive authority of the five countries in resolving all key issues of the Caspian agenda is clearly indicated. Common approaches were formulated to shipping, transit to oceans, fisheries, scientific research, and environmental protection.

During the discussions, the partners agreed that they were in essentially identical situations. They invested in developing transportation infrastructure, and coastal and marine economies. At the same time, they realized the insular and extremely vulnerable nature of the common water body.

Three weeks before the Aktau Summit, on July 20, 2018, in Moscow, the environmental ministers of the five Caspian states signed the Protocol on EIA to the Tehran Convention. Another important step had been made toward the decisive event.

Some parties opposed the verbatim transfer to the Caspian Convention of the rules on the “peaceful passage” of foreign warships spelled out in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. And that is understandable. If the contracting parties are the majority of the countries of the world, and the scope of application is all the seas and oceans of the planet, it is logical to use universal language. But when five neighboring countries are reaching an agreement on a closed and relatively small body of water, modifying the UN language is appropriate in order to specify the regulations.

AT THE FINAL STAGE of work on the convention, the parties realized the need to create a permanent consultation platform that would oversee implementation of the convention, as well as monitor Caspian cooperation on various tracks in the interest of building and improving it.

A distinctive feature of communication within the SWG was direct contacts between delegation heads and members; the principle of consensus in decision-making; a focus on results; and the desire for synergy.

FOLLOWING AKTAU, Sergey Lavrov emphasized: “Now we have an absolutely universal basis for considering any cooperation issue in the Caspian. Until recently, we had agreements on protecting biological resources, on security and in a number of other areas, but suffice it to say that seven international legal documents were signed in Aktau. Over the entire period of the Caspian summits since 2002, nine were signed: nine documents over the course of four summits; seven documents in the course of one summit. Moreover, this is not only a quantitative result but also a really qualitative one.”

The agenda at the current stage also includes the issues of navigation safety, scientific research, joint efforts to combat drug trafficking, and tourism projects.

BY ADOPTING the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, the Caspian littoral countries showed solidarity and a commitment to creating favorable conditions for sustainable development and maintaining stability in the region, to deepening mutually beneficial economic cooperation by comprehensively resolving territorial and resource issues, and to overcoming potential disagreements.

Political and Economic Space in the Caspian Region: A New Configuration

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The genesis of new political-economic realities in the Caspian in the course of preparations for this consequential summit and its far-reaching impacts on the political-economic configuration in the region deserves closer scrutiny.

In view of the political processes unfolding in the world in 2017, the basic documents of the Russian Federation specified its relations with other states and foreign policy priorities.

So far, Aktau remains highly important when it comes to moving cargo to other countries. In April 2019, regular feeder container service was opened along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) used to bring goods from China and Central Asia to Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Earlier, in October 2017, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia signed a treaty on an international TITR association to attract transit and foreign trade cargo and develop integrated logistic products along the TITR.

Under pressure of the rising importance from the transit and logistics factor and the need to optimize the transportation process in the Caspian, Moscow developed and approved the Strategy for the Development of Seaports in the Caspian Sea, with connected rail and road transport, to 2030. Approved by the Government of Russia in November 2017, the document is expected to ensure sustainable development of the Caspian Region and cover the infrastructural, legal and economic aspects.

The Caspian countries do not limit themselves to new export routes; they are struggling to widen their presence on the external hydrocarbon markets.

In recent years, Dagestan, a Caspian littoral republic of the Russian Federation, has been demonstrating industrial development and agricultural growth. Its economic future is associated with, among other things, development of port facilities.

Simultaneously, the Astrakhan Region came up with several initiatives related to a free trade zone; it was suggested to remove restrictions on wheat export to Iran; develop cruise tourism in the Caspian; improve the sanitary and veterinary checkpoints; create facilities for building passenger, transport and fishing ships; oblige oil and gas companies to use Russian shipbuilding enterprises; and improve the extraction facilities in the Russian sector of the Caspian.

On August 12, 2018, Aktau, a city on the Caspian coast, hosted the Fifth Caspian Summit; meeting of foreign ministers of the Five were held within the summit that agreed on a plan of realization of the agreements achieved by the presidents in the economic, transport and economic spheres.

The set of other five-party documents signed in Aktau is no less important. The vast normative legal base will allow the Caspian states to accelerate realization of the already launched projects in all spheres of marine activities and formulate new high-tech initiatives. It is expected that these subjects will be discussed in detail within the economic forum to be held in Turkmenbashi in August that will be attended by ministers of economies of the Caspian states, members of the business community and representatives of industrial enterprises. This highly promising cooperation format will increase the region's competitiveness at the international level, create conditions for sustainable development of the Caspian states and their subjects and help resolve the most important problems created by the collective use of the common sea.

Effectiveness of Russia's Foreign Policy Information Support in Its Confrontation With the United States

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ONE FEATURE of the modern system of international relations is the increased influence on it of the information component. The transnational nature of the media space is being actively utilized by world actors to achieve their foreign policy objectives, leading to a clash of their interests and the beginning of information confrontation. The goal of modern-day confrontations is not only to fight for resources or territory but to fight for control over minds and public loyalty. In that respect, today it is strategically important to all states that they be viewed positively by the international community and successfully get the mass audience to form a favorable perception of their positions on the world stage, achieving understanding and acceptance of their actions and objectives.

Modern Russian scholarship does not have a well-established concept of information confrontation. The term is defined in the individual works of various authors. In general terms, it can be understood as a relationship of opposition and rivalry between several information entities that are influencing the information space of an adversary through various means and methods.

The relevance of studying how effectively Russia can foster an objective perception of its foreign policy position abroad will inevitably increase. Amid the current media confrontation between the U.S. and Russia, studying Russia's influence on the American public is of particular interest.

The main channels for promulgating Russia's stance on situations on the international stage in the media space can be divided into official and unofficial. Official channels include official websites and official social network pages of government agencies responsible for shaping foreign policy, which include the Russian president, government, Foreign Ministry, and Defense Ministry.

The next method of influence is conveyed through international media. Unfortunately, Russia has a relatively small number of international information sources that could provide quality services and thereby contribute to the international community's understanding of Russia's position.

To study the effectiveness of Russian media influence on the American audience, the methods and means used to present information need to be examined. The most convenient approach is to consider the presentation of information on a specific subject. The reunification of Crimea with Russia in 2014 is proposed as such a reference point, given that it was a key moment in modern Russian history that triggered the reevaluation of Russia's position in the international arena and a decline in Russian-American relations.

Russian media outlets operate in the same information field as U.S. media in direct proportion, thereby confronting them. Nevertheless, due to an excessively large disparity in the amount of information supplied, Russian news agencies are significantly losing out to Western ones.

The efforts of Russian media resources to counter the widespread propaganda against Russia are insufficient. The heightened activity of the Russian state in the international arena and the adoption of bold political decisions require appropriate information support in order to convey Russia's position to the countries and peoples of the world as efficiently as possible.

So, it would be appropriate to create content directed at the target audience, to use the opponent's "weak spot" in order to achieve Russia's goals – namely, to leverage the domestic political confrontation in the U.S. In addition, the presence of two politically engaged parties (the Republicans and Democrats) creates a need for Americans to look to other, external sources of information. Russia could very well become a provider of these services.

Media and Information Literacy as a Strategic Resource for Diplomacy in Dealing With Information Threats and Challenges

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It takes a considerable amount of knowledge to be able to build international ties in various forms and at various levels. While diplomats are professionally skilled and experienced in intercultural communication, in negotiating, in looking for, analyzing and verifying information, and in studying other

countries, people who are outside the diplomatic profession are usually short of skills and knowledge of this kind. Information space accumulates multitudes of viewpoints and a wide range of ideologies and theories, and one can hardly get one's bearings in it without comprehensive and critical analysis. It is no less important to keep up with rapid developments in technology and detect key trends in communication and behavior in physical and digital space, which means knowing how to react to constant changes in the international information environment.

The combination of these abilities is often termed media and information literacy (MIL). This term covers a whole range of competences: adequate command of a wide range of (ICTs), the ability to think analytically and critically, and good skills to assess, use, create, and disseminate information. MIL definitions along these lines are extensively used by the United Nations and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in documents on media and information issues the best-known of which is UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP).

In its programs, UNESCO credits media and other information providers with promoting democracy and intercultural dialogue and helping improve governance but complains that quite often they publish disinformation, promote stereotypes and pursue discriminatory policies, excluding some social groups from public debates. The organization also points out that public television, libraries and archives often have restrictions put on them by the state. These are common practices in most countries, and MIL aims to teach people to navigate their way through the vast sea of information.

UNESCO's 2012 Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy says: "MIL competencies ... extend beyond information and communication technologies to encompass learning, critical thinking and interpretive skills across and beyond professional, educational and societal boundaries."¹² Hence, MIL is a comprehensive notion denoting not only diverse competencies but also a degree of activity.

THE MOST OBVIOUS obstacle to MIL and to building information societies are different development levels of countries, as a result of which digital technologies are used on a wider scale and develop more rapidly in some countries than in others.

There are global, national, regional, and global digital divides, which means that efforts to overcome them should be made at each of these tiers. Teaching MIL may be one solution.

Another problem is poor ICT infrastructures, which hinder ICT accessibility. In 2015-2016, the Yandex company, in collaboration with London-based market research group TNS, today known as Kantar, and Russia's Public Opinion Foundation, carried out a survey on the use of the Internet in Russia.

There need to be mass education systems for all age groups to enable people to orientate themselves in the information world. Education of this kind should give anyone the basis for starting a "digital way of life."

Media and information-literate people will soon be able to partner with governments in dealing with a wide range of issues, integrate into an emergent digital economy, participate in network, public, and electronic diplomacy, and ultimately create a knowledge society and a genuine information society where everyone interacts fruitfully with everyone else.

Participation of Russia's Constituent Regions in Implementing Its Foreign Policy

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BY THE END of the 20th century, foreign relations maintained by individual constituent territories of various countries had become a generally accepted element of the global political system. Practically ever since politicians and experts have been focusing their attention on the relationship between such contacts and Russia's foreign policy as the presence of individual Russian territories in the international arena was seen as a potential challenge to the centralized character of the country's foreign policy, to its security, and to its territorial integrity. Foreign contacts established by the administration of constituents regions of countries in seeking greater autonomy and solutions to regional political problems have been labeled "protodiplomacy."

However, international and Russian experience testifies that, if they are in tune with national interests, the foreign relations of regions not only can make those regions more competitive but can also be a serious catalyst for national development.

Today, economic effects on Russian regions of political developments abroad have become a matter of special scholarly interest in Russia. One instance are effects of Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2012, which forced Russian regions to make adjustments that resulted in financial losses and social problems. Another instance are impacts of economic and political sanctions imposed by the West on Russia in 2014 and afterward.

TATARSTAN began its history of international relations in 1992 and since then has accumulated rich experience in this. Tatarstan's international activities, which the region closely coordinates with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, play a significant role in advancing Russia's national interests and are part and parcel of the country's multidirectional foreign policy.

Common Turkic cultural roots form the basis for successful cooperation between Tatarstan and Turkey. Tatar delegations to Turkey are received at the highest level, and Turkish leaders have repeatedly visited Tatarstan.

For many Turkish companies, Tatarstan has become the door into the Russian economy. Turkish businesses have invested \$2 billion in Tatarstan. There are ten large Turkish-owned factories in the region. There also are Tatar-Turkish logistical, social infrastructure, health service, and educational projects underway in Tatarstan. Seventeen local level twinning agreements have been signed.

Despite the anti-Russian sanctions, Western European, American and Japanese capital maintains strong presence in Tatarstan's economy with various Western and Japanese companies doing business in the region.

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS and foreign trade model to be used by constituent regions of Russia involves not only contacts with regions in foreign countries but also participation in national-level foreign policy activities with the Foreign Ministry playing the coordinating role. Russian regions' economic and cultural resources and geographical and ethnocultural diversity are important factors in their international relations.

Via its foreign economic contacts, Tatarstan helps Russia implement its strategic task of building a competitive innovative economy and winning markets for its high-tech products. Tatarstan's business contacts with regions in various countries help Russia diversify its geography of economic relations with additions that include agreements with Asian and Muslim countries.

Coordinated international activities by Russian regions serve to advance national interests. They help Russia integrate into the world community and maintain fruitful relations with foreign countries in various fields.

Military and Military-Technical Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus

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MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION between Russia and Belarus takes place in the context of a common and broad political partnership between the two countries and very close political, economic and sociocultural ties.

Russia and Belarus have fundamental common security interests that are assured both by the cooperation of the two states within the CSTO and by very extensive bilateral interaction, especially as part of the Union State. Both Russia and Belarus condemn the eastward expansion of NATO and the intensification of military preparations in such NATO countries as Poland and the Baltic countries.

The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on the Creation of the Union State has been in force since 1999. This agreement states (in Article 18) that the jurisdiction of the Union State includes joint defense policy, the coordination of military development activities and the joint use of military infrastructure.

Russia and Belarus realize how much further development and improvement is needed of the Regional Force Group (RFG), created in 2000.

The Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Joint Protection of the External Border of the Union State in the Air and the Creation of the Single Regional Air Defense System (SRADS) of Russia and Belarus was ratified in Minsk on February 13, 2012, by a decree of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

SRADS has been successfully tested during operational and combat exercises, including during Union Shield joint exercises of the Russian and Belarusian Armed Forces. Belarusian and Russian SRADS units

demonstrated the level of cooperation during joint action, and also confirmed the preparedness for effectively repelling air strikes.

An important element of Russian-Belarusian military cooperation is joint military exercises.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking after a regular meeting with his Belarusian counterpart Vladimir Makei, noted that during the meeting they “expressed concern about attempts to demonize Russian-Belarusian military cooperation, including in the context of the September Zapad 2017 exercises, and the use of this propaganda campaign to justify the additional deployment of NATO military forces on the eastern flank.”

Belarus’s ability to engage in rather substantial military-technical cooperation with Russia is largely due to the presence in Belarus of the State Military-Industrial Committee (SMIC), an important government agency created by Belarusian President Lukashenko in December 2003.

According to several estimates, Belarusian supplies make up 15% of the Russian defense order. In turn, Russian arms and military equipment exports to Belarus cover a very wide range: from small arms and cannon artillery to aircraft and air defense systems.

The cooperation of Russian enterprises with such a well-known enterprise as the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant OJSC (MZKT) plays an important role in Russian-Belarusian military-technical cooperation. The nature of its products and technological solutions make this enterprise unique in many ways. Deliveries of multi-axle special wheeled chassis produced by OJSC MZKT are widely used in various weapons systems that play a prominent role in Russia’s Armed Forces.

Both states are working on modernizing weapons and military equipment. One striking example of Russian-Belarusian military-technical cooperation is the interstate industrial group Defense Systems, which includes five Belarusian and 12 Russian enterprises.

Military and military-technical cooperation between Russia and Belarus relies heavily on the extensive traditions of the Soviet period, when the two countries were part of a single state. Belarusian defense industry enterprises were an integral part of the defense industry of the USSR and occupied a respectable place in it.

Principal Phases in the Foreign Policy of Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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THE COLLAPSE of the Soviet Union together with the emergence of new independent states, a major 20th-century geopolitical upheaval, put a difficult task before Kazakhstan – as one of these new states, it needed its own foreign policy. Despite its 550-year history of statehood, this time Kazakhstan again had to build a system of government from scratch. The new Kazakh state set about building dialogue with the international community, taking international transformations and new challenges into consideration.

A while ago, the president of the country formulated fundamental principles for Kazakhstan's foreign policy, set priority goals for it that reflected the country's place in the international community, and mapped out methods for achieving them.

Nursultan Nazarbayev stated all this in an article entitled "The Strategy for the Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign and Independent State" and published on May 16, 1992. This article was in effect the first attempt to set guidelines for the development of independent Kazakhstan in a complicated international environment.

In his article, Nazarbayev argued that the nation should put its national consciousness at the basis of its ideology. He announced that Kazakhstan would pursue a peace-loving foreign policy and seek equal and mutually beneficial relations with other countries.

Kazakhstan has been pursuing a policy of peace ever since it gained independence. It had nuclear weapons that were inherited from the Soviet era and were the world's fourth-largest nuclear arsenal after the United States, Russia and Ukraine, withdrawn from its territory. Allegiance to the principle of reduction of weapons of mass destruction during the second foreign policy phase brought Kazakhstan its greatest political and reputational dividends. Kazakhstan is the world's only state to have voluntarily parted with nuclear weapons.

In 2005 President Nazarbayev ordered some amendments to it in response to developments such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the spread of terrorism. Kazakhstan was confronted with a new task – becoming a regional leader and defending this status. The country began to follow the "economy-before-politics" rule in its foreign policy and chose Russia, China, the United States, the EU, Central Asia, and the Islamic world as its priority partners.

Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy is a plan for Kazakhstan to become one of the world's 30 most developed countries by 2050.

The 2014-2020 Concept is a follow-up to Nazarbayev's 2014 state of the nation address entitled "Kazakhstan Way – 2050: Common Aim, Common Interests, Common Future." The concept pays special attention to the necessity of creating favorable international conditions for the implementation of Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, stronger cohesion of the country's diverse ethnic groups, high living standards, civil rights guarantees, and a democratic, law-based state. Whereas the previous concepts prioritized national interests, today priority is consistently shifting to public needs, which is essential for a country that has opted for a democratic path.

Kazakhstan puts substantial resources into its international image. It runs various image-building projects, which despite public concerns about their financial aspects, bear fruit.

A Sinologist who was educated in Moscow and was director-general of the UN Office in Geneva from 2011 to 2013, Tokayev will undoubtedly bring a lot of novelty into Kazakhstan's foreign policy. However, any of his potential innovations will definitely be consistent with the course set by the first president of Kazakhstan, Yelbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev.

“God Is in Heaven, the Earth Is Hard, and Russia Is Far Away”

Author: Aleksandar Vulin

Defense Minister of the Republic of Serbia

The Kosovars are trying to provoke a conflict and unleash a war through violence against Serbs and Russians (consider the brutal beating of UN employee Mikhail Krasnoshchekov).

I would like representatives of NATO member countries to heed what I am saying.

KFOR’s mission is to deter hostilities, not act when something has already happened. In this particular case, they failed to prevent violence.

Serbia has no other negotiating partners except KFOR, and they are not telling us the truth and are not in fact a neutral side.

Russia is a great power and it has its own interests. However, when it comes to Serbia, it takes our interests into consideration. We highly value that. Russia always stands by us, at all international platforms, and we simply cannot ask for anything more.

Military-technical assistance is very important for us. In 1999, the Serbian Air Force was destroyed. Thanks to Russia and Belarus, we now have MiG-29 fighter jets. We are also buying other weapon systems and military equipment from Russia and receiving assistance in personnel training. That is of major importance to us. As a matter of fact, to a very large extent, this is the reason why we are a regional power.

As long as Aleksandar Vucic is president and I am defense minister, Serbia will never participate in anti-Russian sanctions or campaigns, and of course, Serbia will not join NATO.

We need peace. However, we must be prepared for anything to achieve it. Serbian people say: We will do almost anything to ensure peace, but we will do absolutely anything to be free.

I have published two books in Russian – Mrak [Gloom] and Krasota [Beauty].

Mrak is a story of ordinary people whose fate shows the history of the breakup of Yugoslavia, the economic and political situation and the military conflict in Kosovo. Krasota is a historical study of the siege and sack of Constantinople by Crusaders, the fall of Byzantine Empire, and the impact of Catholic Rome on the eastern Mediterranean and Serbian lands. I am really flattered by the fact that my books have been published in Russian – the language of A.S. Pushkin, F.M. Dostoyevsky and M.A. Bulgakov.

Concerned Scientists on the State of the World

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TODAY, international relations, global problems and the scientific community are much closer connected than at any time in the past. The mounting wave of risks and threats demands scientific

studies, analyses and assessments as the starting point for dealing with multiplying crises and defining them. No wonder scientists with adequate knowledge and adequate instruments of research sounded an alarm in an effort to arrest the movement to the point of no-return. Their concerns about the processes and the phenomena that might endanger the very existence of mankind developed into an important factor of international life long before the movement acquired organizational forms and the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) was set up in the United States.

The idea of drawing scientists together for the studies of global problems in an independent non-governmental context was prompted by many talks and exchanges of opinions between scholars and intellectuals. After World War II, they realized that scientific thought should advance to the forefront to formulate adequate responses to threats and challenges created by technological progress, destruction of the environment and depletion of natural resources. The First International Conference on Science and Human Welfare held in 1956 in Washington supported the idea of the World Academy and set up an international preparatory committee with Robert Oppenheimer representing the United States.

The World Academy of Art and Science was officially set up in 1960. It is an international non-governmental organization, a worldwide network of people elected to the Academy for their outstanding contributions to the studies of global problems that face mankind.

It promotes interdisciplinary dialogues; it generates original ideas and integrated perspectives of dealing with global problems. It is working hard to identify creative and catalytic ideas capable of supporting sustainable and fair development for the present and future generations free from encroachments on human rights and dignity.

The Academy is concentrated on the advancement of ideas, strategies and initiatives designed to create the humanitarian paradigm of development adequate to the requirements of the 21st century.

On March 18-23, 2019, scientists of the School of Global Processes, Moscow State University, attended the joint scientific conference of the WAAS and the Club of Rome at the Inter-University Center in Dubrovnik, the favorite site of many international events. The topic of the discussion, In Quest of a New Paradigm & New Civilization, stirred up a lot of interest in the context of activities of the Academy and the Club and realization of a new project, Emerging New Civilization Initiative (ENCI).

The conference discussed the depth and content of necessary social changes, existing ideas about the world order, instruments and mechanisms of civilizational transformations, and the emergence of a new civilization from the extreme state of the civilization as we know it today.

The Club's history goes back to 1967, when Aurelio Peccei, a successful Italian industrialist, met Alexander King, an outstanding Scottish scientist. When travelling around the world for business purposes the Italian businessman became more and more convinced that the state and pace of global socioeconomic development, environmental decline and the deepening gap between the North and the South threatened continued existence of mankind.

The projects, discussions, reports, and publications by the Academy and the Club in their totality present a fairly comprehensive picture of global problems and challenges that cause concerns in the academic community and force its members seek for adequate answers and solutions.

The Russian Economy and Trade Wars

Armen Oganesyan, *Editor-in-Chief, International Affairs*

TODAY, we're going to raise one of our most acute issues, the sanctions against Russia. I expect that, in the course of our discussion, we'll find out objective trends in the entire phenomenon of sanctions. It's a very important point that sanctions that are imposed on entire sectors of our economy become geopolitical measures. Ratcheting up sanctions may set off a frontal confrontation.

Ivan Timofeyev, *Director of Programs at the Russian International Affairs Council*

In Russia, the terms sanctions and trade wars are normally used as synonyms. In my view, this is incorrect.

There are political and legal factors behind the risk of new near-term sanctions. The main political factor is that the reasons for the sanctions haven't ceased to exist. Nor has a mechanism been developed that would make us safe against potential future sanctions.

Another problem is that, if, from the American point of view, Russia has ceased to violate international law, three years must pass for the sanctions to be lifted. Moreover, Russia would have to provide guarantees that it wouldn't commit alleged violations of international law that triggered the current sanctions. All this suggests that there's no way the sanctions will be lifted any time soon.

Dzhakhan Polliyeva, *Candidate of Sciences (Law), political scientist*

Today's sanctions are similar to trade war instruments, something that isn't spoken about openly in the West.

Over the past 20 years, in spite of the two global economic crises, water routes have stably been used for carrying more than 85% of cargo in world trade, and there is growing demand for sea cruises. All this might exacerbate competition between continents. But why should America compete with anyone if it can take some action to avoid this? America expects this large-scale sanctions campaign to keep bringing dividends for a long time.

The current anti-Russian sanctions affect the interests of numerous countries and are different from former sanctions. It's a big question mark what economic and geopolitical effects they will have and what roles Russia and Europe will play. Forecasting is a difficult task, but we need to foresee potential scenarios because the situation is changing very quickly.

Sergey Zheleznyak, *Member of the Committee on International Affairs of the Russian State Duma*

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING was absolutely predictable. I can't quite accept Mr. Timofeyev's point that sanctions and trade wars are essentially different things. In my opinion, sanctions and trade wars are closely interrelated and mutually supportive. Political objectives that are pursued by some sanctions are still usually based on the economic interests of those who impose or support those sanctions. The United States says so openly, without any inhibitions.

Moreover, I believe that the main impact of sanctions are not the effects of actual restrictions that they impose but their toxicity, namely sanctions give rise to prejudices and negative expectations, and consequently governments and companies become reluctant to cooperate with the sanctioned country or companies. In fact, even before the current anti-Russian sanctions were launched, many Western financial and economic institutions voluntarily avoided deals with Russian entities.

It's obvious that the United States has always based its policies solely on its own interests. All illusions

about its good intentions should have been given up back in 2014. Russia has without delay taken every measure to ensure its national security.

Sergey Markov, *Director, Institute of Political Studies*

One can't rule out additions to the sanctions list of companies owned or co-owned by the state. We should stand ready for it – everything may happen very quickly. There may be seizures of movable property by court order. There have already been quite many court orders to that effect. Gazprom, which is co-owned by the state, Russian ships, aircraft – all of them may be threatened.

The Americans, and NATO as a whole, have decided that a cyberwar is possible. Because of their dominant influence, they don't have any serious plans to get involved in debates on cyberspace regulation. Instead, they're thinking about cyber intelligence and about getting ready for a possible serious strike. A strike of this kind is a matter of the future. But intelligence is a fact, and cyber mines are being developed already. Joe Biden said several years ago that the United States had planted some cyber mines. All this makes me approve of our fast-track passage of the law on Internet stability.

Nikita Pichugin, *political scientist*

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, trade restrictions and sanctions, primarily politically motivated sanctions, have become the main part of the U.S. foreign policy arsenal. They supplement the United States' missile diplomacy and are used where military conflicts are unacceptable. One important distinction between sanctions and trade wars is that sanctions are "personalized" – they target specific actors such as political leaders, businesspeople, and companies, – while trade wars involve whole industries and are hindrances in economic relations in general. But sanctions and trade wars have the same objective of marginalizing their target, generating mistrust in it, and preventing any diplomatic efforts to hamper the implementation of these tasks.

In my view, special attention should be paid to the maritime transportation issue. Historically, nations that were global leaders were sea powers. The growing activity in Asia Pacific, which recent American doctrinal documents refer to as the Indo-Pacific, stokes competition among global players. China's Belt and Road Initiative involves laying a shipping artery in the Indian Ocean while Russia is working hard to make its Northern Sea Route an alternative shipping link between Asia and Europe. Neither project can remain unnoticed by someone seeking global leadership. A comprehensive Russian-Chinese partnership and strategic interaction will be constantly tested by trade wars and sanctions.

Vladislav Belov, *Deputy Director for Research, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences*

ONE CAN STATE the theme of our roundtable as the five-year period of development of Russian industry under sanctions, March/April 2014 to March/April 2019. It has to be admitted that these five years have largely been lost for the Russian economy. Hopes that Russian companies would make use of the import substitution opportunities and gain competitive advantages haven't come true. Unfortunately, no miracle has happened.

My forecast is that the sanctions will be extended for new periods. The Germans tightly control dual technologies. For example, no matter what civilian research institute of the Academy of Sciences tries to buy some optical equipment, there'll be a ban on exporting it because it's clear how it may be used. There are heavy losses, and the engineering industry is the worst off.

Georgy Petrov, *adviser to the President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry*

In my opinion, there have been two phases of sanctions. The sanctions of 2014 were extremely useful for us. Sorry for this pragmatism, which borders on cynicism. The sanctions of 2014 dispelled a thinking

stereotype that was dominant in our country in the 1990s and early 2000s – it’s not a big deal that we aren’t protecting our industry, we’ll just sell some oil and buy all we need. We used to hear these of this kind from senior federal officials. It turned out we couldn’t buy all we needed.

Let’s not forget that hydrocarbons still make up 60% of our exports. You hit where it hurts, and in our country, hydrocarbons are the main sanctioned industry. Why then our transportation facilities are targeted too? Because the energy industry can’t survive without sea transportation. That’s clear. What about hitting any other sectors? Those are monitored continuously and are under permanent pressure anyway.

So, after all, despite all their negative effects, the sanctions sometimes stimulate us to address our own problems. In conclusion, can I make one brief comment. If one believes written sources, it was Athens and Sparta that were involved in the first war of sanctions. What was the end of it? A war. Who lost it? Athens. Real wars are lost by those who have introduced sanctions. One should learn from history.

“The Doors of the Nations... Must Be Battered Down”

Author: S. Rybas

writer and historian, Honorary Member of the RF Academy of Military Sciences

In 1907, the president of Princeton University, future President of the United States Woodrow Wilson, said: “The doors of the nations which are closed against him (the manufacturer) must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process.”

Having entered World War I with a budget deficit of \$4 billion, the United States made the whole world its debtor and ended the war in 1919 with an \$11 billion surplus.

On August 23, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression agreement known in the history of diplomacy as Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It was at that time that the Soviet Union, the UK and France tried, in vain, to reach an agreement on mutual defense in case of a German aggression. The Polish leaders contributed to the failure by flatly refusing even to discuss a possibility of letting the Soviet troops cross their territory.

The talks between Moscow and the military delegations of the UK and France failed: The Soviet Union was left unprotected by the lack of agreements with the Western democracies. It was at that time that Moscow signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; assessed by Churchill as “cold-headed, calculating and highly realistic.” He was no Stalin’s admirer.

Contrary to what is said today, the pact perfectly fitted the diplomatic standards of the time; in fact, it was preceded by several international treaties.

What were the “terrible repercussions” if seen through the “alternative history” optics?

Having pushed the Soviet-German border some 200-300 km to the west, these “repercussions” critically affected the course of the Great Patriotic War. Otherwise, the Blitzkrieg could have immense chances of success.

God knows for how long the war would be going on; Germans might have used this time to make an atomic bomb. The United States would have been the next target of Germany and Japan as its ally.

Was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact expedient? The answer is obvious. It saved tens if not hundreds of millions of lives and several states.

What can we see in the mirror of Clio? History repeats itself even if the plots are new; the same opponents play the same chess game on the same world chessboard. Those who accuse the Soviet Union of signing the pact are either political ignoramuses (ha-ha!) or deliberately distract attention from their own schemes be it War Plan Red or any other projects.

The 75th Anniversary of the RF Foreign Ministry's Financial Service

Author: A.Lysikov

Director of the Currency and Finance Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

THE HISTORY of financial services support for foreign policy activity dates back many centuries, and I would like to make a brief digression into the past events preceding the establishment of the Currency and Finance Administration on August 12, 1944. On that day, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs issued Order No. 221 on the reorganization of the Currency and Finance Office as the Currency and Finance Administration (CFA).

In the 15th and 16th centuries, all financial matters, including interstate relations, were the responsibility of the Treasury Department (from which the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) was hived off, among others, in 1549).

The DFA was responsible not only for Russia's diplomatic relations, but its trade relations with other countries. It also had the authority to collect taxes from certain territories that were used to pay salaries to the Duma boyars and civil servants. The Office of POW Affairs, responsible for raising funds to ransom POWs, also answered to the DFA.

g the DFA. On February 13 (February 24 New Style), 1720, Peter the Great issued a decree titled "Regulations on the Collegium of Foreign Affairs," a document that essentially became its statute.

Under Peter the Great, permanent diplomatic missions and consulates were established abroad. In May 1722, Peter the Great issued a decree setting salaries for Russian diplomatic representatives stationed abroad.

On January 28 (February 8), 1779, Empress Catherine the Great issued a decree on financing the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, setting payrolls and salaries for its central office in St. Petersburg, the Moscow office and the Moscow archive, as well as for missions abroad.

In 1802, pursuant to Alexander I's manifesto, eight ministries were established, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, the Collegium of Foreign Affairs remained as the main foreign policy administration body.

In April 1832, Emperor Nicholas I issued a decree to the Senate titled "On the Establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," bringing the ministry's new structure in line with that of other ministries. In

May of the same year, the Department of Economic Affairs and Accounting started work, with a staff of 254 people. It dealt with all of the ministry's financial and economic matters, as well as human resources at the central office and Russia's missions abroad, including mission and embassy churches.

Following the outbreak of the First World War, in the fall of 1914, a temporary bureau of remittances and loans was established within the First Department. The Foreign Ministry took care of Russian citizens who remained abroad due to the outbreak of hostilities, including military reservists, persons subject to military service obligation and prisoners of war.

After 1917, a new stage in the history of national diplomacy began. Pursuant to a decree of the 2nd All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) was established, headed by L.D. Trotsky.

The early 1930s saw the second stage of the recognition of the Soviet state, when diplomatic relations were established with Spain, the United States, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and several other countries. In those far from easy times, Yakov Martinson was appointed to head the NKID's Finance Department. He repeatedly made short-term foreign business trips to organize and oversee the financial and economic activities of Soviet plenipotentiaries in other countries.

In December 1993, the Currency and Finance Administration was reorganized as the Currency and Finance Department (CFD) as part of the program to improve the organizational structure of the ministry's central office.

I would especially like to highlight the role of the ministry's financial experts, who helped provide timely and sufficient financing for the operation of the ministry's central office, regional offices and missions abroad following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the country's economic decline.

It is important to note that the provision of financial support to missions abroad is one of the department's most complex and multidimensional functions.

In addition, it should be noted that Russian missions abroad perform several other highly important functions, such as protecting the interests of Russian citizens, working with compatriots living abroad, implementing military memorial programs, holding elections, and so on. Financial support for these projects is provided in close cooperation with the CFD and other ministry departments concerned. The CFD regularly organizes retraining and advanced training programs for accountants at Russian missions abroad and holds workshops and consultations on financial matters.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate CFD veterans and current employees, accountants at the ministry's missions abroad, regional offices and subordinate organizations on the anniversary. They have been doing their job in a responsible and highly professional way, which is very important for ensuring the RF Foreign Ministry's activities.

The Currency and Finance Department: The Heart of the Foreign Ministry

Author: B. Idrisov

veteran of the Currency and Finance Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

I have worked with many prominent personalities. V.V. Kuptsov, a CFA veteran. He was party secretary at the Currency and Finance Administration (as it was known in those days), a natural born leader. He could help, scold and punish or reward you, and he was certainly a real expert.

Yu.A. Chulkov joined the CFA in 1987. A lot changed in the administration on his watch. There were significant personnel changes, with many high-level specialists employed, including those with academic advanced degrees.

S.F. Dyatchenko was a unique person, of course. I have known him since 1973. He worked with a magnifying glass because he had poor eyesight. He was an acknowledged expert; there were few people like him.

Thanks to V.A. Rybin, in 1973, the CFA began to hire young specialists fresh out of university, mainly graduates of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. That significantly improved the quality of the department's personnel. By the late 1980s, there were practically no employees without a higher education. Prior to that, there was a large proportion of staff with only a secondary specialized education.

Perhaps the 1990s were the most trying period at the CFD. The Foreign Ministry was underfunded. The ministry's missions abroad began to search for new sources of revenue. Major efforts were being made. Many missions engaged in self-financing, so to speak.

The central office had no money to pay wages. Foreign currency was delivered by diplomatic mail from missions abroad and exchanged for rubles, and wages were paid. Thanks to such nontraditional solutions at the CFD, in particular those made by its director, Yu.A. Chulkov, the ministry's diplomatic staff was largely preserved. It is no secret that many experienced, knowledgeable employees quit at that time.

When I joined the CFA in 1973 (by the way, the subject of my graduation paper was "Current and Calendar Planning in an Automated Experimental Production Management System"), P.P. Korablyov said: "We need to introduce automation technology into our accounting and reporting procedure. Go work on it." In a sense, I was a pioneer in that field, but in reality, the CFD did not start using automated accounting and data processing technology until 1979 or 1980.

The CFD is the heart of the Foreign Ministry, as it were. Where there is life, there is money, and where there is money, there is life. The operation of the central office would be impossible without the CFD and without material and technical supplies for our missions abroad. The CFD has strengthened its position and consolidated its status. Previously, there were accounting and planning departments at the Capital Construction Administration and the Procurement and Property Office. Granted, I do not think that all of them should have been integrated under the CFD's umbrella: We have been through that. However, such are the legal requirements.

There can be a strong and healthy Foreign Ministry only with a healthy and strong CFD.

Russian-Moldavian Relations Under the First Romanovs

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HAVING BECOME THE CZAR of All Russia, the Grand Prince Ivan III (1462-1505) defined in a nutshell the foreign policy doctrine of the Russian State: to gather under Moscow's power all lands that had belonged to Kievan Rus.

From the first year of its rule, the House of Romanovs officially proclaimed Czar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov and his descendants as legal heirs of the Moscow princes of the Rurik dynasty who would continue their foreign policy course. The czarist dynasty should be given its due for managing, during 300 years of its rule, to assemble gradually and consistently the greater part of the Kievan Rus within the borders of the Russian State.

The Moldavian Principality that appeared in 1359 in the Carpathian-Dniester region did not improve the lives of common people. After a long and unequal struggle against the Porte, they were conquered by the Ottoman Turks and were ruled by Turkish sultans. In 1511, the Moldavian rulers had to officially accept Ottoman suzerainty.

The reunification of Ukraine and Russia that took place in Pereyaslavl in January 1654 was gradually moving the borders of the Muscovite state to the territory of the Principality of Moldavia. New dividing lines separated the Muslim and the Orthodox world changing the political context and the balance of power on the international arena. This gave Russia a chance to become again the main actor in the Carpathian-Dniester region and reunite the lost lands with the historical Motherland.

In February 1654, a month after the decision passed by the Rada in Pereyaslavl to reunite with Russia, Ivan Grigoryev, a confidant of Moldavian Prince Gheorghe Ștefan, was urgently dispatched to Moscow with the plea to accept Moldavia as one of its subjects. Moscow agreed to start negotiations immediately. Soon after it, in May 1654, Russia was engaged in another war with Poland for Ukraine (1654-1667).

It should be said that the process of rapprochement of the rulers of both countries was not a chance or a short-lived phenomenon. Interethnic contacts between Great Russians and Moldavians had a long history; the ethnicities had passed through similar development stages.

the Moldavians came to Moscow to discuss a possible transfer of the principality under Russia's rule under certain conditions.

Despite obvious Moldavian mercantilism, Czar Alexey Mikhaylovich, a highly religious person, was convinced that the Orthodox people could not and should not be abandoned to the mercy of Catholics or Muslims. He did not hesitate: on June 7, 1656, at the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin, Metropolitan Gedeon swore perpetual allegiance to Russia for himself, Gheorghe Ștefan and the spiritual and secular officials of Moldavia. The Russian czar handed the Charter of the Transfer of the Principality of Moldavia to Russian suzerainty to the Moldavian delegation. By this sumptuous official

ceremony, the “medieval publicists” intended to consolidate the positions of the “Russian party” among the Moldavian boyars.

It should be said that the talks between the Russian czar and Metropolitan Gedeon did not specify the status of the Moldavian Principality as part of Russia. This point was deliberately avoided by the Russian side; the oath that the Moldavians gave at the Cathedral of the Assumption contained no mention of the issue.

In fact, the Moldavian project of the vassal relations with Moscow was not welcome in the Kremlin as ill-timed.

Not infrequently, the level of Moldavian “passionarity” (the term coined by Gumilyov) proved to be higher than that of Great Russians; the history of the relationships between them contains numerous relevant examples; the Moldavian nobility, for example, used much better methods of training professional administrators. The process was supervised by Moldavian spiritual hierarchs. In culture and education, they outstripped many countries and were highly respected in Moldavia and outside it.

The talks in Moscow and exchange of letters between the rulers of Russia and Moldavia in 1698 summed up, to a certain extent, the progress in the relations between the two countries during the reign of the first Romanovs. It should be said that practically all contacts between the Great Russians and Moldavians revealed mutual complementarity and sympathies.

The pro-Russian feelings of the Moldavians who were close to the Great Russians by their frame of mind and confession not only consolidated bilateral relations but created the foundation on which all Orthodox peoples closed ranks in their struggle against aggressive plans of Turks and their satellites.

The Church and secular contacts between Russia and Moldavia that took place during the rule of the Romanovs were a political capital that could and should be used wisely. Everyday life demanded a new format of relations between the two countries which became possible thanks to the reforms of Peter I and qualitative changes in the developments of contacts between Russians and Moldavians.

The Second Front: A Russian Diary Unknown Recollections of a Soviet Admiral, Observer and Participant in Operation Overlord

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EVENTS commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landing are over. However, the taped dictations of Admiral Nikolai Kharlamov, recently found in his family archive, remind us that Soviet military personnel were present and active in the English Channel and Normandy itself in 1944.

Strictly speaking, this is not news to specialists. In his memoirs published back in 1983, Admiral Kharlamov, who headed the Soviet military mission in London in 1941-1944, describes how he received a call from the Imperial General Staff, how British Field Marshal Alan Brooke, Chief of the Air Staff Charles Portal and Admiral of the Fleet Andrew Cunningham were waiting for him and how the latter,

after a fitting pause, said: “Admiral, we asked you to come to hear news of extraordinary importance.... We would like you to be present as an observer from our Russian ally.”

Jumping ahead, it should be said that in June 1944, Kharlamov became not just an observer but an active participant in the landing operation, and later he personally set foot on the French coast.

OMAR BRADLEY spoke of Nikolai Kharlamov as follows: The Russians were very fastidious about rank and greeted us strictly according to seniority. The higher-ranking young admiral went before two Red Army generals. He was prim and pointedly proper, but his face was impassive.

KHARLAMOV is a valuable witness of the inner workings of the historic visit to the United Kingdom in May 1942 of Vyacheslav Molotov, People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR. It was “historic,” because it was then that the “big” Anglo-Soviet agreement was signed: “The treaty between the USSR and Great Britain on an alliance in the war against Nazi Germany and its accomplices in Europe and on cooperation and mutual assistance after the war.”

In the current conditions, it is especially worth recalling that Moscow and London agreed back then not to join any alliances and not participate in any coalitions directed against the other side. The duration of the articles on post-war cooperation was set for 20 years. Unfortunately, the expiry of the treaty coincided with the eve of the Cuban missile crisis.

IN HIS TAPED RECOLLECTIONS, Kharlamov explains how he ended up on the British cruiser in the English Channel in June 1944 and with Allied forces stationed in Normandy a month later.

However, even Admiral Kharlamov had to deal with intelligence information, if not with intelligence people themselves.

“THE PEOPLE are for; the government is against”: That is the title of a chapter in Admiral Kharlamov’s memoirs. The narrator of the British propaganda film says: Cities, villages and towns are organizing a week of assistance for the Soviet Union. To that end, children are collecting articles for sale in support of the Soviet Union.

The wife of Admiral Kharlamov, Anna Mikhailovna, was part of a group of wives of employees of Soviet diplomatic and military missions who sorted the gifts that came through the Red Cross from ordinary Britons.

Listening to Admiral Kharlamov’s recollections from the family cassettes, you get a deeper sense of how everything was (and probably always will be) in relations between two such amazing peoples as the Russians and the British. After all, aren’t we the only two nations in Europe who use the word “Europe” to refer to everyone else in that space except themselves? We always have our own interests. Nevertheless, Admiral Kharlamov told his relatives that, in his opinion, Lord Beaverbrook was the most consistent supporter in the British establishment of helping the USSR: “Not that he would love the USSR; he looked at things soberly and said: ‘This must be done now, to save England!’ He was forthright. He was not a lover of our country – no! But he was a realist and a sensible person.”

On the 17th Parallel: Marking the 65th Anniversary of the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam

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ON JULY 20, 1954, an agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam was signed at a conference in Geneva of the ministers of foreign affairs of the USSR, China, the U.S., Great Britain, and France.

Under the terms of the agreement, the territory of Vietnam was temporarily divided (until general, free elections that were to be held in July 1956 but were disrupted by the South Vietnamese side) by a demarcation line that ran slightly south of the 17th parallel along the Ben Hai River. A demilitarized zone was created with a total width of ten kilometers, five on each side. The final declaration of the meeting stressed that it was to “serve as a buffer zone in order to avoid any incident that could lead to the resumption of hostilities.”

While stationed at the Soviet Embassy in Vietnam, I had occasion to visit the 17th parallel ahead of the air war the U.S. unleashed against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This article presents little-known facts and rare testimonies of those whom I spoke with about everyday life in the demilitarized zone during the tense ideological and armed confrontation between the two divided parts of Vietnam.

From the numerous accounts of those whom we spoke with – political workers, police officers, local residents, and two defectors from the south – a picture emerged of incessant violations by the South Vietnamese authorities of the demilitarized zone regime established by the 1954 Geneva Agreements.

In addition to relaying broadcasts of their radio stations, both sides actively organized various propaganda events to psychologically influence residents of the demilitarized zone that were divided into two parts by the demarcation line, showing a lot of ingenuity to avoid being accused of violating its regime established by the Paris Agreements.

Beginning in 1957-1958, improvised stages fashioned atop fishing boats that had been lashed together and moored to the shore were used for concerts, which were very popular among residents of the south bank. Starting in 1963, artists began performing right on the beach, on a raised platform. On February 11 and 12, 1964, residents of the south bank for the first time were allowed to watch a performance of circus artists freely and not stealthily, with eyes peeled for the police, unlike in previous years. Performances of Soviet artists and international soccer matches began to be broadcast in 1962.

On the south bank, where there was no nearby market, performances of dance ensembles and the national theater were held on a platform near the bridge, next to the high mast from which their flag hung.

From Vinh Linh, we returned to Dong Hoi, where residents told us about recent tension in Quang Binh Province from the escalation of subversive activities by the South Vietnamese authorities. Saboteurs were parachuting from the air, landing from ships at night, and even crossing the mountains. In the previous year, in 1963, more than one hundred illegal crossings of the province’s borders were recorded; most of the sabotage groups were captured.

The winds of the approaching war were felt everywhere. On August 5, the U.S. launched the first air raid on the territory of the DRV, and on February 7, 1965, regular massive bombardments of settlements in North Vietnam began.

One of the first casualties of the barbaric raids was a thermal power station built with technical assistance from the Soviet Union in the city of Vinh, which I visited during that memorable trip to the 17th parallel. In November 1965, with our delegation, I had the opportunity to again visit this thermal power plant that had been destroyed by the American bombing campaign.

The First Wave

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I WAS LUCKY. Early in the 1990s, I was appointed correspondent of the Trud newspaper to Benelux. It was in Belgium where I met Russian émigrés of the first wave. As children, they had left Russia together with their parents immediately after the revolution or during the Civil War and never thought that they would never see Russia again. They grew up in foreign lands, started their families and taught their children to love Russia, the country the younger generation never saw.

Sergey Nabokov lived in Brussels; he was a journalist with an excellent command of Russian, English and French. A first cousin of writer Vladimir Nabokov, he was the chronicler of the Nabokov family and told me a lot of highly interesting stories about his childhood in Russia, life in emigration and the relationships with his famous cousin.

Alexander Bakunin was a great nephew of Mikhail Bakunin, the founder of anarchism; he belonged to another ancient and respected Russian family. His father fought in the ranks of the White Army during the Civil War in Russia; as member of the guard of General Alexander Kutepov and later his personal secretary, he together with the rest of Wrangel's army crossed the Black Sea from Crimea to the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli. The period known as internment at Gallipoli began. For twelve months, the corps under General Kutepov maintained perfect military order despite huge privations. Alexander told me a lot about Pryamukhino, the family landed estate. I visited it much later and could testify that the memory of all generations of the Bakunin clan was carefully preserved.

I met Anastasia Shirinskaya-Manstein in Tunisia. This courageous woman spent her life in Tunisian Bizerte where she had arrived early in 1921 on destroyer Zharky of which her father was captain and which belonged to a Black Sea squadron. She told me a lot about Russian seamen in Africa and the very sad fate of the Russian warships stationed in Bizerte. Her modest flat was a small island of Russian culture in this African country.

All of them went into emigration together with their families from Crimea. They boarded ships in Sevastopol and in Yalta. Crimea was the symbol of the lost Motherland to which they remained loyal throughout their lives.

ON MAY 28, the Museum of Russia Abroad was opened in Moscow. Its exposition included the internment at Gallipoli, the evacuation from Crimea, the Russian squadron's stay in Bizerte and many other pages of Russian emigration. The ceremony in the Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad attracted descendants of the first wave emigrants. Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov addressed the audience: "Today, no matter what, we will retain our sovereignty, ensure our national security and defend our citizens, history and our civilizational identity. Of course, we will always be able to defend the rights and dignity of our compatriots. I have no doubt that that the Museum will become an important spiritual and intellectual center that will help us preserve and promote the Russian national heritage abroad, as well as a useful site for conducting effective dialogue with our compatriots around the globe. It will help ensure historical continuity, link ages and generations and perpetuate the names of those who, while living in foreign lands, did not forget their homeland."

Geopolitical Processes in Latin America

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GEOPOLITICAL ANTAGONISMS besetting various parts of the world are a much more serious problem today than ever before due to globalization. One of the scenes of clashes of geopolitical interests is Latin America, which lays claim to being a sovereign actor in world politics. Geopolitical issues in Latin America are a subject that is being investigated by many Russian scholars, mainly researchers working at the Institute of Latin American Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Led by the consulting director of the institute, Vladimir Davydov, they have spent quite many years exploring these problems. However, some interesting work has been done by other Russian scholars as well.

One of them is Anton Yemelyanov, an associate professor at the political science department of the Moscow State Linguistic University and the university's academic secretary. Yemelyanov's study of the genesis of the civilizational identity of Latin America and geopolitical impacts of the origins of this identity on that part of the American continent as an entity in modern international relations is especially important since civilizational identity is a key factor in the political development and integration of nations.

In his book, *The Geopolitics of Latin America*,* Yemelyanov argues that civilizational identity is just a sum of national political identities and other factors but that quite often it may also possess cultural characteristics of its own.

The identity of Latin American civilization, which is different from Western civilization, certainly deserves close attention. Globalization quite often manifests itself in the spread of some of the worst products of mass culture, and this is justly rejected by nations that are keen to preserve their identity. Yemelyanov argues that, since Latin America has for a long time remained within the orbit of the United States, anti-globalization sentiments there typically take the form of rejection of the American way of life.

The subjects raised by Yemelyanov include interaction between Orthodox civilization and Latin America. In his view, Latin American countries and Russia have the potential for closer bilateral relations and for more extensive cooperation on various international problems.

One of the tasks Yemelyanov sets himself is to examine geopolitics in Latin America through the prism of subregional integration processes. He comes to the conclusion that, to some extent, the civilizational identity of Latin America as part of the American continent affects integration processes in it and puts forward the thesis that Latin American states have collective civilizational interests in the international arena.

Works such as *The Geopolitics of Latin America* are substantial contributions to knowledge about Latin America in Russia. They stimulate the emergence of centers of Ibero-American studies in our country and shed light on aspects of Russia's relations with Latin American countries that remain poorly known, helping strengthen those relations. *The Geopolitics of Latin America* would be a great help to any scholar or diplomat specializing in Latin America.

Regions in the Maelstrom of Change

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EACH NEW BOOK by Irina Zvyagelskaya* is groundbreaking – and for good reason. The author of the newly published monograph “*The Middle East and Central Asia: Megatrends in the Regional Dimension*” is a wellknown specialist in international affairs whose academic interests, although broad, include two leading research areas related to the regions featured in the title of this monograph – the Middle East and Central Asia.

The author of the monograph set an important objective: to determine how the current evolutionary trends (megatrends) of the modern system of international relations are affecting the Middle East and Central Asia. This statement of the problem is itself fundamental: Russian researchers are more interested in the situation forming in this regard in other regions of the modern world, leaving aside (relatively, of course) the situation in the region that is home to the states of the Arab world and Israel and the region of the former Soviet Union. This means that this new work, in closing an existing gap, makes an important contribution to further understanding processes encompassing the whole world.

The Middle East region is becoming increasingly unstable. An increasing number of “failed” states is appearing, and the “virus” of anarchy they produce is spreading to neighboring countries and territories, contributing to a rise in the number of nonstate actors and an increasing “de-sovereignization” of countries that have become the object of intervention by external forces – both global and regional.

Speaking about modern international terrorism and its influence on the Middle East and Central Asia, Zvyagelskaya proceeds from the “ISIS example,” not forgetting about the existence of other terrorist groups that have operated (or are operating) in both regions. Nevertheless, ISIS is significant to her because this organization was “at the center of the international agenda” (p. 57). The author is interested in the reasons for the appearance of the organization and the expansion of its influence,

which does not imply a detailed study of its origins and development in her book; a considerable number of published works are already devoted to that subject.

The author highlights “the attractiveness of the medieval archaic,” noting that the issue by no means comes down to secularism, seemingly categorically rejected by Islamists.

Having Afghanistan as a neighbor became a fundamentally significant challenge for all Central Asian states. The author’s conclusion again leaves no doubt: “In recent years, the radicalization of youth ... has become more pronounced.”

A separate chapter of the work is devoted to “hybridization in war and politics.” The author bases her definition of a “hybrid conflict” on the already stable assertion that it involves both regular and irregular military forces, and “state and nonstate actors united by a common political aim”.

The author also discusses “hybrid regimes,” which feature not only an “authoritarian, rigid power vertical” but also “elements of democratic institutions,” including those formally bearing “all signs of being democratic” yet “restrict the rights of certain population groups” due to the specific character of domestic political development or a special “understanding of threats” (p. 89). Zvyagelskaya (while expressing various reservations) considers the regimes of all Middle Eastern and Central Asian states to be “hybrid.”

The author of the monograph is not inclined to absolutize Middle Eastern and Central Asian social upheavals. The “Arab Spring” did not affect the entire Arab world (and especially the Arab monarchies); the former regime was restored in Egypt and reformed in Tunisia. The Arab regimes remained largely stable thanks to the legitimacy of their rulers, supported by both traditional and modernized institutions.

Finally, the last section of Zvyagelskaya’s work examines how the current state of “fuzzy” international relations is affecting ongoing or reemerging conflicts. Turning to the regional space of the Middle East, the author notes the decreasing significance of interstate conflicts, which are being replaced by conflicts “within states, most often on a religious, ethnic or tribal basis,” as well as a “wave of social demonstrations of the ‘Arab Spring’ era that are ultimately also taking shape ... in the framework of traditional identities”.

As I asserted earlier, Zvyagelskaya’s new book is groundbreaking. The author has practical knowledge of the situation in the regions she studies and at the same time carefully takes into account the conclusions of her Russian and foreign colleagues. Will the book be interesting? Without a doubt: The widest possible readership (not only specialists) will find it interesting.

“Oh, Spring Endless and Boundless...”

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IN HIS TIME, Russian poet Alexander Blok, greatly impressed by the ambiguous and tragic events of the uncompleted revolution of 1905, wrote an outstanding poem that began as

Oh, Spring endless and boundless -
Endless and boundless dream!
I discover you, Life! I embrace you!
And I greet you with the clang of a shield!

These words came to my mind while I was reading the latest book of Prof. Alexander Vavilov, one of our best Orientalists, "Cataclysms of the "Arab Spring."

The author has analyzed the "endless and boundless" phenomenon of the Arab Spring to point out that the honorable aims and high-flown slogans of those who poured out into the streets of Arab capitals in the turbulent revolutionary days were never realized. In fact, today, the majority of these countries are struggling for survival amid new contradictions, conflicts and splits.

The negative course and deformations of the unfolding processes were caused by large-scale interference of external forces, the West in particular, that needed weaker Arab countries with impotent governments; unbalanced or non-functioning structures of power and state governance; deepened social and ethnoconfessional contradictions; armed clashes and the use of force as the first steps to a civil war.

The author has relied on the realities of Iraq, Libya, Syria and other countries to point to the fact that the West widely used extremist and terrorist elements and groups determined to elbow out the political leaders of these countries and intimidate their populations to get access to the instruments of political power.

The author has analyzed in detail Russia's policy of opposition to terrorism, creation of the conditions conducive to restoration of peace and regional stability. Russia pays a lot of attention to the relations with the Arab states for the simple reason that the Arabs are in the majority in the Middle East with its population of 540 million. The European Union, another closest geographic neighbor of Russia, can boast of the same or even slightly smaller numbers (510 million).

Today, the Arab states of the Middle East are our most important partners in the efforts to prevent an emergence of a new world order based on sanctions. According to different sources, today over one-third of the countries (71 states or over half of the Earth's territory) is living under sanctions.

We should join our forces to ensure a fairer international political, economic and financial order which means that we should know each other better to achieve an understanding of what should be done and how. Alexander Vavilov's book supplies us with important benchmarks to sort out the far from simple and highly ambiguous processes unfolding in the Arab world.