

## **International Affairs: Vol.67: №6, 2021: Summary**

### **Russia, the World's New Breadbasket, Has a Special Mission**

**Vladimir Rakhmanin**, *Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* Mr. Rakhmanin was interviewed by *International Affairs*.

The protracted food shortage leading to massive loss of life, unfortunately, remains a key global problem. Hunger is a scourge that has outlived many past scourges such as the plague, smallpox, and cholera epidemics.

The number of hungry people could have been even smaller, but the situation has been aggravated by domestic conflicts: civil wars that are destroying the agricultural sector and creating a flow of itinerant refugees surviving on UN humanitarian aid. Extreme weather events and global economic and financial crises, like the one that broke out in 2008, are equally harmful. A combination of all these factors often produces a cumulative detrimental effect.

Restrictions to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus have delayed the harvest. So have difficulties in hiring seasonal workers. Border closures have caused many supply chain disruptions, forcing manufacturers to dispose of their perishable food – to simply throw it away. As a result, residents of many cities do not have their usual selection of fresh food.

Lockdowns caused a decline in economic activity, albeit temporarily. Unemployment has increased. All of this has led to a reduction in household income and purchasing power. Relative food shortages have pushed up prices.

Responsible and vigorous decisions must be made to improve the efficiency of the production, processing, and supply of food from field to shelf, from farm to table. That is why UN Secretary-General António Guterres has embraced the FAO initiative and announced a Food Systems Summit to be held in September 2021 as part of the high-level week of the UN General Assembly.

And finally, reducing food loss and waste is the greatest and most affordable resource for eliminating hunger and ensuring food security; this can be achieved using modern technology.

The FAO has decided to focus on six priority areas. We are committed to making progress in each of them, leading to more efficient and inclusive food systems. The areas include trade and agribusiness with a focus on investing in sustainable value chains; the urban food agenda; the integrated One Health approach, which presupposes maintaining food safety and plant and animal health; sustainable food

systems in small island developing states; the global initiative to reduce food loss and waste; and global dialogue and partnerships for sustainable food systems.

The world is changing, and Russia is changing with it. Ten years ago, the development paradigm of the Russian agricultural industry was completely different. It was believed that Russia's contribution to global food security was limited to providing food for its own people. Today, Russia has become the world's breadbasket, becoming the leading exporter, and therefore the main player in the world grain market.

Last year, despite the unfavorable conditions associated with the pandemic, Russian agro-food exports grew by 20% and reached \$30.5 billion in value terms.

The FAO welcomes this trend and expects it to continue. At the same time, we must not forget that Russia's new role and purpose also brings global responsibility. The FAO expects Russia to fulfill this mission responsibly in the interests of Russia's own people and all humanity, and thereby make a significant contribution to eliminating hunger on our planet.

### **Transport Corridors: Geopolitical Aspects**

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DESPITE the multidirectional trends evident in the modern planetary landscape, overall, its emerging architecture is tending toward interconnectedness. The new civilizational image is universality and indivisibility. The world is becoming so interconnected that we can talk about a different level of scientific reflection expressed in Parag Khanna's vision of possibly establishing "Connectography" as an academic discipline, with the maxim "Connectivity is destiny" serving as its refrain.

The emerging "connected" world order stems from the struggle between two dialectically contradictory trends: the globalization megatrend on the one hand, and the alternative trend of the assertion of cultural, ethnic, and national identities, increasingly popular in recent years, on the other. Both divergent trends equally contribute to the development of the "connected world." The first trend, with its fundamental basis in the "universality" of information, overcomes identity

boundaries (including national ones) and universalizes the communication channels that connect all countries, peoples, and continents into an indissoluble network, dooming the former center-periphery structures, alliances, unions, etc.

NATIONAL TCs address a number of issues determined by the domestic development strategy, including ensuring economic growth (developing natural resources, establishing a common labor and sales market), improving people's quality of life (removing existing disparities in standards of living), and ensuring national sovereignty. The Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 emphasizes that developing the industry is not an end in itself, but pursues the goal of ensuring the socioeconomic growth of the country and improving the quality of life of the population.

The Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 envisages expanding the potential of TCs that pass through Russian territory by integrating Russian transport into the European transport system, forming and developing a common transport space with the CIS countries, increasing Russia's role in the newly created integrated transport system of the Asia-Pacific region, and developing further communication within the regional cooperation framework.

Needless to say, TCs have special significance for continentally localized countries with vast territory. Thus, for Russia, much of which "is occupied by regions that are 1,000 km or more from the open sea, developing in conditions of remote isolation from foreign markets," and for most postSoviet states, there are no alternatives to integrating into global markets and using transport corridors to increase transit potential.

THE ABILITY of TCs to compress time as well as transcend and "aggregate" space endows them with instrumental geopolitical content. According to the apt expression of French sociologist Bruno Latour, "transcending distance is an act of strength".

China's claim to global leadership, which does not always complement the national interests of primarily its neighbors, initiated the geopolitical vector of transport cooperation between Southeast Asian countries and Russia. Despite certain political differences, Russian-Japanese transport cooperation is developing. Transport corridors are starting to be built from Japan to Europe along the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Transport corridors acquire the ability to "configure" space based on the interests of political actors, channeling its transformation in the desired direction.

IN ADDITION to their direct purpose of aiding the socioeconomic development of territories and improving standards of living, transport corridors (classified as national, regional, and international) have an important and inalienable geopolitical

context. Transport corridors introduce a qualitatively new level of complexity to the world's geopolitical landscape by initiating two dialectically opposite trends: "space compression" due to the increased intensity and speed of communications and "space expansion" due to the integration of new territories into the global transport system. These properties allow TCs to become an effective tool for "constructing" the geopolitical "design" of the civilizational space.

In geopolitical terms, transport corridors are a means of institutionalizing geopolitical vectors. Multimodal logistics centers function as "control valves" that can increase or limit the traffic that passes through transport routes and thus play an important role in the competition to regulate such routes. Therefore, it may be possible to define transport corridors as massive traffic flow environments organized on the basis of a single technical, administrative, and legal infrastructure that play an important role in the socioeconomic development of territories and the promotion of national interests and define the geopolitical landscape.

### **Promoting the Greater Eurasian Partnership Initiative: Convergence of the Interests of States, Businesses, and International Institutions**

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TODAY, the world economy is moving toward mega-regionalization, which implies "drawing" regional and macroregional subsystems into a single mega-regional system. The process began and is unfolding under the influence of political and economic integration associated with increasing returns to scale from reduced barriers to cooperation and much more favorable production opportunities. This trend is manifest in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in the Asia-Pacific Region (APR). Talks on the Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement and a free trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are proceeding with mixed results.

We should recall that "any integration agreement is in fact liberalization on a discriminatory basis: It removes barriers between [regional] partners and keeps them intact for third countries."<sup>2</sup> Mega-regional agreements aim to reduce

contradictions between various bilateral agreements, potentially significantly reducing transaction and production costs for all participants.

Russia and its EAEU allies view the Greater Eurasia of the future as a network of regional organizations, national strategies, free trade zones, economic corridors, transportation routes, pipelines, and digital communication and transcontinental projects with their development synchronized within the “integration of integrations” concept in the interests of regional peace, security, and prosperity.

EXPERTS continue to discuss all possible options and approaches to configuring the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

According to Vladimir Petrovsky, elements of the Greater Eurasian Partnership such as economic cooperation, megaprojects, and integration connectivity should be complemented with “guarantees against outside interference and the imposition of models of social or any other order that are foreign to society.

Some political analysts believe that the institutional forms of the Greater Eurasian Partnership “should be comprehensive and inclusive, combining policy and economics as well as ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power. They should also be palatable to great, mid-sized, and small powers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world economy hard. Many countries have found themselves in a quandary. The so-called contact economic sectors – tourism, transportation (primarily aviation), small and medium-sized businesses – have suffered more than others. And although most countries are currently demonstrating fairly rapid economic growth, the end of the crisis is nowhere in sight, and uneven development, gaps in value chains, and glaring interstate disparities (primarily digital disparities) are only increasing.

WHAT is the appeal of the Greater Eurasian Partnership initiative? What benefits can it offer to states, businesses, and the region as a whole? ... It will restore normal interstate relations. The leaders of the Eurasian countries need a platform for equal and mutually respectful dialogue to freely discuss the economic future of their common continent and coordinate steps in the interests of all. Let us hope that the rest of the world will follow this example.

GROWING interest in Greater Eurasia was amply confirmed by the Sixth Eastern Economic Forum held in Vladivostok on September 2-4, 2021, which provided plenty of food for thought about the continent’s future.

Most discussion participants agreed that the consonance of the basic principles, moral and ethical attitudes, and life values that have been characteristic of the Eurasian peoples since time immemorial would consolidate the foundation of the Greater European Partnership. Sergey Glazyev defined these values as mutual respect of national sovereignties; the principle of mutual benefit, trust, and

openness; and the desire to achieve synergetic effects of cooperation. For his part, Alexey Maslov pointed to the stable existence of states, a clear understanding of common challenges, the traditional family, the cult of friendship, respect for work and education, closeness to nature, and respect for the environment.

THE PROCESS has just begun. Its progress depends on our concerted efforts to quickly implement plans to establish this economically viable, socially responsible, innovative, and future-oriented format that is at the same time based on traditional values. One thing is clear: Those who fail to assess the advantages of involvement in the development of Greater Eurasia and its social and economic dimensions on time might lose their positions to those who decide to move forward together with the new leaders of the biggest macroregion.

### **Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications and the Freedom of Movement for Workers in the EU and EAEU**

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AN INTERNAL market envisions the free movement of goods, services, capital, and persons. Each freedom requires substantial regulatory, legal, and organizational support, which is key to the development of the internal market.

In this regard, the European Union, despite all the difficulties it has faced in promoting and advancing integration, is an example of the most effective development of the four freedoms. It is an inspiration to other integration associations, and its experience is also becoming the subject of in-depth study by experts on creating a single economic space.

Employment is the principal reason for migration within the territory of EU member states. Workers from EU member countries are able to seek career advancement opportunities irrespective of their country of origin, which allows EU member states to address problems related to a shortage of qualified professionals in a particular field.

EU regulations do not create an obstacle to the possibility of member states recognizing, in accordance with their rules, professional qualifications acquired outside the territory of the European Union by third country nationals. For example, under agreements signed between the Russian Federation and certain EU member states on the mutual recognition of Russian education certificates, professional qualifications, and academic titles, their holders are not required to go

through recognition procedures in those countries. These member states include Spain, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, France, Cyprus, Malta, Hungary, and Slovakia.

The mechanism of recognition under the general system applies to the mutual recognition of qualifications for all professions other than those subject to regulation under the specific system. The mechanism of recognition under the general system provides for the recognition of official education documents as well as, if necessary, professional experience.

Study of the EU's successful experience in the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is interesting to Russia not only with respect to promoting cooperation with the EU, but also in terms of drawing on this experience in the process of enhancing integration within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

At present, the main document regulating interaction within the EAEU is the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, signed in Astana on May 29, 2014.

Currently, the recognition of academic degrees and titles involves a rather complicated administrative procedure, including certified translations of foreign documents and dissertations in Russian, as well as consideration of dissertations by the Russian Science and Education Ministry's Higher Attestation Committee. These administrative barriers limit the mobility of highly qualified specialists within the EAEU.

The difference between the EAEU and the EU lies in the nature of these communities. Whereas the EU's objective is comprehensive integration, including along humanitarian and policy lines, the EAEU is focused exclusively on economic integration. As a result, EAEU member states are not seeking to harmonize the education field and in some cases are even deliberately avoiding the issue. On one hand, this approach stems from the fact that the EAEU Treaty lacks provisions regulating cooperation among member states on education. On the other hand, some member states are afraid of triggering an exodus of students from their countries.

Nevertheless, a systemic process for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates, and professional qualifications is clearly impossible without enhancing cooperation on education.

### **OSCE Field Operations in Post-Soviet Countries**

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THE CORE tasks of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) include maintaining peace and security in member states and helping them prevent or settle crises or conflicts that may arise in their territory or in their relationships with one another. OSCE field operations in vulnerable member countries are an important tool for the organization to carry out these tasks. Any such operation is naturally conditional on the consent of the host country and requires the approval of all OSCE member states.

However, since Western states constitute the majority of OSCE members, the West makes the largest contribution to the organization's budget, and most OSCE Secretariat officials and field operation leaders are Western representatives, field operations are a convenient geopolitical weapon for the West. This explains why the OSCE has played and continues to play a key global geopolitical role.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, it became a priority of Western member states of the then Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which later changed its name to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to promote neoliberal political and economic reforms and to orchestrate the establishment of pro-Western regimes in former Soviet republics.

The SMM to Ukraine, deployed in March 2014, is the OSCE's largest field presence in the territory of the former USSR.

The SMM is mandated to help the Ukrainian government reduce tensions, "foster peace, stability, and security," and monitor and support "the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments" throughout the country.

One of the SMM's key tasks is to monitor the various aspects of the Donbass ceasefire, including the disengagement of forces, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, and demining.

Year after year, the SMM has been acknowledging in its reports that it has failed to achieve a stable and comprehensive ceasefire.

The OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk on the Russian-Ukrainian border was established by the Permanent Council on July 24, 2014, in response to a Russian proposal. It was staffed with 22 observers and two Vienna-based officials, and from February 1, 2019 to January 31, 2020, had a budget of 1.5 million euros.<sup>11</sup> The mission had its head office in the town of Kamensk-Shakhtinsky in Russia's Rostov Province. The mission was a Russian goodwill gesture aimed at persuading Kiev to opt for negotiations to quickly resolve the crisis in eastern Ukraine.



But the Ukrainian government and its Western patrons failed to appreciate this move.

The overall situation in southeastern Ukraine has been characterized by the OSCE as unstable and unpredictable, which threatens the implementation of the package of measures prescribed by the Minsk agreements and endangers the personal security of OSCE monitors.

The office of Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was instituted in August 1995. The representative is based in Tbilisi and helps the chairperson-in-office seek an agreement to end the armed conflict and make arrangements for the deployment of an OSCE peacekeeping operation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Effectively, this job is limited to monitoring the situation and preparing reports for the OSCE.

As for Central Asia, by the time the OSCE held its Istanbul summit in November 1999, it had established a field presence in all five Central Asian states. For the next decade, the OSCE's Central Asian missions enjoyed comparatively extensive autonomy. The decisions of regional governments to host such missions were motivated by a desire for stronger national security. The principles of those missions were in line with the foreign policies of the host countries and were presumed to help them strengthen their sovereignty, statehood, and national security.

Central Asian governments began to gradually shift their stance on the OSCE missions in their countries because the countries were strengthening their statehood and the OSCE had built up a less-than-positive track record in those states. Most Central Asian countries forced the OSCE to change the mandates of its missions in them by demanding that they closely interact and consult with their governments, and strictly obey their laws and rules.

The Euro-Atlantic community was openly upset. Western experts warned that the alleged refusal of Central Asian countries to closely cooperate with the Western-supported OSCE might result in more narrow cooperation with a wider range of states and their institutions.

ANALYSIS of the activities of OSCE field bodies in the CIS, on which the organization spends a large share of its budget, shows them to be insufficiently effective. Back in 2004, the CIS complained in a statement that OSCE field missions focused purely on monitoring the human rights situation and democratic development in the host countries instead of providing the diverse assistance that their mandates required and that represented the OSCE's full range of responsibilities.

Another shortcoming of the OSCE's field activities is their basis on presumed opposition between the "democratic West" and the "post-Soviet East." Other weak points are double standards, thematic and geographical imbalances, and mechanical attempts to force neoliberal models of democracy on post-Soviet and other non-NATO and non-European Union countries with disregard for their national characteristics. Such selectiveness and bias are patent departures from the OSCE's mandate.

Today's escalating international tensions and economic and financial crises throughout the OSCE space that have been sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic mean that incessant conflicts and the unprecedented growth of racism, aggressive nationalism, and neo-Nazism are becoming tests for OSCE mechanisms and institutions.

Russia takes the position that the interests of host countries must be the basis of the OSCE field presence in the CIS. Russia has proposed adopting uniform principles for conflict resolution that would take account of the specific character of each conflict. Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus have proposed reforms to tighten control of OSCE field operations, including the appointment of their personnel by the OSCE Permanent Council and a reduction in the duration of their mandates

OSCE field operations would be more effective if they were designed for specific projects needed by host countries.

### **US-Iran Track II Diplomacy**

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TRACK II diplomacy is a tool for promoting confidence-building measures to facilitate conflict resolution or reduce tensions through unofficial, informal negotiations. It is used not only to settle interstate disputes, but also to resolve domestic conflicts (civil wars, including those involving outside interference). At the same time, dialogue participants are close to the decision-making process,

being unofficial representatives of their respective countries: public figures, retired military officials, and influential, politically connected experts.

This format of unofficial, informal negotiations has existed for a long time, but the phrases Track One and Track Two diplomacy were coined by Joseph V. Montville, a diplomat, and William D. Davidson, a psychiatrist, in 1981. Initially, the terms were applied essentially to public diplomacy: from nonpolitical cultural exchanges to meetings on conflict resolution efforts – all “strategically optimistic” steps to prevent war, identify common interests, and address mutual concerns.<sup>1</sup> Davidson and Montville note that in the 1970s and the 1980s, Track II diplomacy in the US was explored by the Institute for Psychiatry and Foreign Affairs, which studied the behavior of parties to a conflict. Today, Track II is taken to mean preliminary discussion preceding official negotiations.

Even at the height of the Cold War, the era of the “great confrontation between John and Ivan,” landmark disarmament agreements were developed using Track II approaches.

Needless to say, this foreign policy tool is not a panacea and it cannot help resolve protracted conflicts overnight, in one fell swoop, but in a situation where, according to the UNHCR, the number of internally displaced people has reached 82.4 million, it seems that the use of dialogue formats that lay the groundwork for negotiations is justified.

THE TIME FRAME of this study covers the period from 2009 through 2017: two terms of the Barack Obama administration in the US (2009 to 2017) and two Iranian administrations – presidents Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021). Meanwhile, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been in power since 1989. US-Iranian Track II negotiations are a representative example of Track II diplomacy, because they demonstrate the limitations of successful negotiations and their dependence on domestic political logic and the foreign policy context. US-Iranian Track II initiatives are unique, since they were implemented in a situation where diplomatic relations were broken off in 1980, with both sides making unprecedented use of strategic communication (propaganda and counterpropaganda).

Iran perceives the US presence in the region not only as an existential threat to its national security, but also as a deterrent to its Shia Crescent ambitions. (This refers to the crescent-shaped region of the Middle East where there is a strong Shia minority population that Iran has sought to unite under one banner, including in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and the Persian Gulf countries.<sup>14</sup>) However, Iran was interested in having the economic sanctions lifted, so it agreed to establish, first, unofficial and then official dialogue with the US.

Under President Obama, Washington viewed Tehran's actions as destabilizing, and sought to restrain its growth by using an array of various diplomatic and economic tools. At the same time, the Obama administration was interested in coordinating with Iran on regional issues.

Many US-Iranian Track II initiatives were facilitated by international mediators. In 2013, following negotiations in Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Switzerland, an interim agreement on the Iranian nuclear program was signed. The Pugwash Movement held several meetings in The Hague and Vienna, and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) organized regional dialogues in Europe. US public discussions were held at the University of Southern California.<sup>18</sup> A significant role in this process was played by Ambassador William Luers, president of the United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA), who held Track II meetings with Iranian representatives in partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, as well as by his wife, Wendy Luers, president of The Foundation for a Civil Society (FCS), under whose auspices The Iran Project became an independent project.

Canada and Oman also lent support to the US-Iran dialogue. The University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs with the support of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade launched the Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran.<sup>19</sup> Oman, which adopted a "positive neutrality" approach, hosted a number of unofficial meetings between the US and Iran.

TRACK II negotiations between the US and Iran have been going on since the late 1990s, but they intensified under the Barack Obama administration, leading to the signing of a landmark multilateral agreement, i.e., the JCPOA. However, the successful experience of Track II diplomacy is not enough to overcome decades of deep-seated distrust. The domestic political agenda is directly affecting both Track I and Track II diplomacy. In a situation where ideas of détente are circulating in the country, dialogue will be in demand, but with the domestic political agenda prevailing over foreign policy logic, dialogue formats are becoming hostages of containment strategy, and all bridges are being raised.

### **Politics of History in the Baltic States: Impact on Russian-EU Relations**

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THE TERM "politics of history" emerged as a category of political practice first in the 1980s in Germany and then in the 2000s in Poland. Russian historian Alexey Miller comments that the politics of history is a special set of methods involving

the use of state administrative and financial resources in the field of history and politics of memory in the interests of the ruling elite [10, p. 19]. In practical terms, the politics of history is a political tool that aims to rally the nation around a historical narrative. In general, as the German historian Jan Assmann emphasizes, the politics of history studies public debates and political and administrative decision-making, and its essential characteristic is the adoption of normative legal acts.

In the case of the young states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR, the politics of history is aimed at uniting the masses around the political elites who came to power, to ensure their legitimacy. It is used as a tool for shaping national consciousness and identity, and consolidating the unity of social groups. It is notable that while in domestic politics it seeks to create a positive image of the government and the state, at the international level, it usually forms a negative image of a country or groups of countries that are considered rivals. Thus, a friend-or-foe opposition is created.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania de facto became part of the USSR but de jure remained independent states. That is how the “principle of continuity” became the foundation of the modern politics of memory of the Baltic states, implying the continuity of the first Baltic republics that existed in 1918-1940 with the newly emerged states in 1991.

After the Baltic states left the USSR, their main goals were to “return to Europe” and break political and economic ties with Russia. The new political leaders showed coldness toward their eastern neighbor in every possible way and at the same time sought to avoid conflicts and disputes with European countries. For example, on its path to the EU, Lithuania had to improve its relations with Poland.

The glorification of collaborators in the Baltic states has never found unanimous support in West European states, so when Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004, they had to search for a compelling explanation for how Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians who fought on the side of Germany for the “freedom from Bolshevism” could simultaneously have had a hand in Nazi war crimes and the genocide of Jews.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Western Europe developed its own common cultural heritage and collective memory. The memory of the Holocaust and Nazism became a key element of the pan-European historical and cultural consensus after World War II. According to that consensus, West Germany, along with France and other West European countries, repented for the persecution of Jews while simultaneously building democratic societies and pursuing social and economic development. But then, in the 21st century, as the European Union expanded, the cultural and historical consensus began to transform, absorbing new narratives

from other countries – namely, Poland and the Baltic states. The intensity of anti-Russian rhetoric in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania started to surpass that of most other EU member states and began to influence the EU's position on the Kremlin.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the EU began cementing East European history narratives in which the main victims were not Jews who suffered in the Holocaust, but titular nations under the pressure of the “communist dictate.” Communism was presented as a purely external, “Moscow evil,” so promotion of the “Soviet occupation” narrative conveniently fell into the context of condemning Russia's foreign policy.

THE POLITICS of history pursued by the Baltic states aimed at legitimizing the ruling regimes and consolidating society has come into conflict with the established cultural and historical consensus in Western Europe. Until the end of the 20th century, the prevailing consensus in the EU was “Holocaust guilt,” where the key role was played by the theme of the responsibility of Europeans for the genocide of Jews. But with the emergence of post-communist East European countries promoting the “Soviet occupation” narrative, that consensus gradually began to blur, and the East European model, focused on the suffering of the nation and the existential threat motif, became predominant. From then on, the “Soviet occupation” narrative has been discussed not only in the Baltic states and Poland, but also at the level of the entire EU.

The Baltic states play a central role in lobbying the “Soviet occupation” narrative in the EU. Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian politicians constantly put forward initiatives to adopt resolutions and declarations condemning communism and equating it with Nazism. Baltic politicians support this topic on the agenda, and therefore anti-Soviet (anti-Russian) rhetoric in both domestic and foreign policy is typical for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The clash between historical narratives is leading to conflicts of ideas and the deterioration of relations between Russia and the EU. Thus, it can be argued that “memory wars” have become a sore point in relations between Russia and the EU preventing the establishment of constructive dialogue between Moscow and Brussels.

### **The Kremlin vs. the Élysée Palace: Fighting for Africa?**

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MAJOR political changes are currently taking place in West and Central Africa. France is losing ground in the African countries that used to be its colonies,

although it still considers them its indisputable sphere of influence. And this is not a one-way street. The African countries themselves are trying to move away from traditional dependence on a single donor, sponsor or patron and to expand their cooperation horizons.

The arrival at the turn of the century of new or new-old players, primarily China and Russia, to African countries intensified the transformation of economic and political orientations on the continent.

During his recent diplomatic tour of African countries, Macron at first tried to cast himself as a new-generation politician, willing to conduct dialogue with his African partners on an equal footing. However, when he saw that his overly flirtatious rhetoric was rejected, he lost his cool and became moralizing and rude, which was absolutely unacceptable in terms of diplomatic protocol. Local and foreign journalists have repeatedly commented that the French president's ambitiousness irritated Africans, commenting that "young Africans are becoming more and more hostile toward the French presence on the continent."

African leaders stopped showing him due respect. As he met with his African counterparts, the French president constantly stressed that China's economic and political expansion into the continent was at odds with the long-term interests of African countries. However, most of the time, his rhetoric met with little sympathy from his partners, who were more interested in practical steps – specifically, investments and loans – than in assurances of "old friendship" and promises of some future benefits.

The reality is that African countries have started to view France less and less as an ally that they can rely on.

The official version, which justified France's armed intervention on "humanitarian grounds," was supported by France's NATO allies and was widely covered in the press of the "free world." But in reality, French troops were there to retain control of the uranium mines that for decades had been operated by AREVA, a French multinational group, on discriminatory terms for countries in the region, while China, which was prepared to purchase uranium at market prices, and the Tuareg leaders, who sought to get their share of profits from the mines located in their tribal territory, were increasingly laying claim to the Sahel uranium. Additionally, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other Islamist groups were starting to eye the uranium ore deposits.

CHINA'S persistent efforts to make inroads into the region have prompted growing concern in France. Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré's willingness to expand cooperation with the Celestial Kingdom compelled French intelligence agencies to stage a coup in 2012 and remove the inconvenient Malian

leader from power. The Élysée Palace installed the obedient Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta as the country's new president.

After the government failed to reach a peace deal with the separatists in 2015, the civil war resumed, leading to more casualties. During the first three years of Keïta's rule, more than 1,300 people were killed on both sides.

IN AUGUST 2020, a military coup took place in Mali – the fifth since the country gained independence in 1960. Keïta was so unpopular that the military, which opposed him, took over the presidential palace almost without a fight. Scores of protesters gathered at Bamako's Independence Monument. The Army and the National Guard supported the insurrectionists

THE EVENTS in Mali cannot be viewed solely in the local context, since the situation in the country right before the coup was not much different than the situation in neighboring West African countries. The military coup in Mali, which was supported by civil society institutions, was a sign of a deep economic crisis in Francophone African countries, and furthermore, of a crisis in the Élysée Palace's Africa policy in general.

THE LONG tradition of friendly relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Mali lends the current situation a certain flavor.

Now, a pro-Russian military government has come to power in Mali, which could give a new dimension to the situation in the country. In this context, some French analysts have expressed concern that Russia intends to influence the political process in Mali and that the new government would be anti-French. It was also alleged that Russia has offered to send its military to Mali to fight terrorism and to “normalize the situation” there. Paris is wondering whether the Russian-Malian agreement would allow the Wagner PMC to establish a base in Mali, as it did in the Central African Republic (CAR).

THE SEARCH for a way out of the extremely unpleasant situation is compelling Emmanuel Macron to look for leverage over Vladimir Putin to stop the Russian advance in tropical Africa and at the same time find arguments and mechanisms that would be supported by his NATO allies, especially the US.



