Preserving Russian Cultural and Historical Landmarks in Uzbekistan

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UZBEKISTAN is a country with its own rich traditions, history, and culture that are closely intertwined with Russia's. The Russian Empire began to move into the region and develop it in the 1860s, and evidence of a common history still exists in various parts of the country. There have been some controversial issues in our relations that are connected, in the opinion of certain Uzbek scholars, to the Russian conquest of Tashkent and other regions and their subsequent incorporation into the Russian Empire. A biased approach toward the common past with Russia and attempts to reject it were especially pronounced during the presidency of Islam Karimov after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991. The "big brother" policy that Moscow continued to pursue with respect to former Soviet republics and their leaders may have had something to do with that. The personal motives of Uzbekistan's first president and his entourage may also have been a factor.

It was not until President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016 that the approach toward Russian cultural and historical heritage drastically changed. At present, neither the Uzbek authorities nor the Uzbek public as a whole question the value and uniqueness of Russian cultural and historical sites in Uzbekistan as an inherent part of Uzbek history (some of them have been officially recognized as cultural and historical landmarks). Furthermore, the country's leader personally oversees issues pertaining to their preservation and promotion, as result of which significant funds from the national budget are provided for restoration projects.

Another important event was an exhibition of archival documents and photographs titled "The contribution by the clergy of the Tashkent and Uzbekistan diocese to Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945," dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory and the priests who took part in the war.

The Uzbek authorities look after this cultural and historical landmark. They same applies to other parishes and pastoral activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in Uzbekistan.

In should be noted that members of the Russian diaspora living there (mainly activists of regional Russian cultural centers) play an important role in preserving Russian cultural and historical heritage sites in various regions and provinces of the republic. They help to keep churches and adjacent areas in good condition and do research to classify Russian cultural and historical landmarks.

A case in point is the activity of Russian cultural centers in the city of Dustabad (formerly the village of Soldatskoye, founded by Orenburg Cossacks who were banished from Russia in the 19th century) and the city of Nukus (the Republic of

Karakalpakstan4), where descendants of Cossack settlers still live. The Russian Cultural Center in Nukus has helped locate ancient icons preserved in the community of Old Believers, descendants of Old Believers of the Ural Cossack Army who were banished from Russia in 1874 for mutiny and settled on the shore of the Aral Sea.

Old Believers' icons are also part of Russian historical and cultural heritage, and eventually they could probably be transferred to an Old Believers community in Russia (subject to approval by the Uzbek authorities). Otherwise, these relics may over time be lost forever, since the number of community members is dwindling rapidly (in 2015, there were about 10,000, while today, there are approximately 2,000). If it still proves impossible to move the relics to Russia, then it would be advisable to discuss with the Uzbek authorities the possibility of moving them as a separate collection to the I.V. Savitsky State Museum of Arts in the Republic of Karakalpakstan.

While noting Uzbekistan's significant efforts in preserving Russian cultural and historical heritage in the republic, it is important to stress the need to expand our cooperation in this area, with corresponding bilateral agreements (in particular, on granting memorial status to some cultural and historical sites), ensuring close collaboration with the World Society for the Study, Preservation, and Popularization of the Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan, and getting Russian experts, sponsors, and patrons more actively involved in preserving Russian cultural and historical heritage in Uzbekistan.

Three Decades of Modern Russia's Foreign Policy

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ON DECEMBER 8, 1991, the heads of three Union republics – Boris Yeltsin (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), Leonid Kravchuk (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic), and Stanislav Shushkevich (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) – signed the Belavezha Accords, dissolving the Soviet Union.1 That document was unprecedented in terms of international practice and its socioeconomic consequences for the once union state. It was followed two weeks later by the Alma-Ata Declaration, which eight other republics joined, and then by the resignation of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Many experts consider that truly epochal event the final act of the drama that Russian President Vladimir Putin described as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" – i.e., the collapse of the Soviet Union and a new reference point in the history of modern Russia, which, despite its turbulent centuries-old history, found itself overnight in a

drastically altered political and economic reality. This December, many will recall those seemingly distant events in order to consider the main results of the three decades of Russia's foreign policy development as an independent state, which, like any person, goes through stages of development: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and maturity.

IN 1993, after holding a referendum, forcefully dispersing the Supreme Soviet, and adopting a new Constitution, Boris Yeltsin set out to strengthen the presidency – a step that many today see as a forced response to the pluralization of the once centralized political system, a protracted socioeconomic crisis, and growing centrifugal tendencies (in particular, the situation in Chechnya). The country's foreign policy, which was entrusted to Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev (1991-1996), had the following set of distinguishing features:
1. The desire to overcome the consequences of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR.
2. Democratic solidarity – i.e., forging allied relations with Western countries.
3. The need to integrate the newly independent Russian state into the post-bipolar order of international relations and the global economy.
4. Creating a favorable external environment for implementing democratic reforms.
5. Scaling back the political and diplomatic presence in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, first as prime minister (1999-2000) and then as president (2000-2008), who retained Primakov's associates at the head of Russia's diplomatic service – Igor Ivanov (1998-2004) and Sergey Lavrov (2004 to the present) – continued the course adopted in the second half of the 1990s that was characterized by the following set of guidelines:
1. The multipolar world concept developed as a response to US attempts to establish a unipolar world order.
2. Selective partnership in relations with the West.
3. Consolidation of heterogeneous integration processes in the post-Soviet space around Russia.
4. Diversification of the country's foreign policy.

DMITRY Medvedev's election as president and Vladimir Putin's appointment as prime minister marked the emergence of a unique phenomenon in the domestic political system – namely, the so-called "tandem," where the head of state was largely involved in foreign policy matters and the head of government, while preserving his influence in the international arena, handled matters of state development. Both lines of activity were focused on overcoming the 2008-2009 financial crisis and implementing modernization priorities.

VLADIMIR Putin again became president of Russia amid increasing confrontation with the West. This confrontation was the result of several objective trends – in particular, Russia's support for the Bashar Assad regime in Syria since 2012, the deepening crisis in Russian-US relations against the backdrop of the Magnitsky Act adopted in Washington in 2012 and the Edward Snowden affair (2013), the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and subsequent economic sanctions, and the freezing of political dialogue channels with the West (transformation of the G8 into the G7, the abandonment of many Russia-EU cooperation mechanisms, etc.). As a result, the foreign policy pursued by the president during his third constitutional term in office (2012-2018) and his fourth term (2018 to the present) has been marked by the following imperatives:

1. Developing the concept of a polycentric world order based on collective governance within the framework of traditional institutions (primarily the UN) and flexible institutions (the G20 and BRICS).
2. Continuing efforts to preserve the arms control system.
3. Working jointly on problems related to new challenges and threats.
4. The post-Soviet space: the need to consolidate integration associations, develop bilateral relations with countries in the region, and resolve frozen conflicts.
5. The Euro-Atlantic region: efforts to overcome the confrontation in relations with the US and NATO; a visible cooling in relations with the EU; constraints in bilateral relations with Germany, France, and other countries; and the crisis of European organizations (the OSCE, the CoE).
6. The Asia-Pacific region: continuing the pivot to the East through the Greater Eurasian Partnership.
7. The Middle East: preserving the leverage gained in the region through involvement in resolving the conflict in Syria; building equidistant relations with Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, as well as other regional centers of power; and participating in settling the Palestinian-Israeli, Libyan, and Yemeni conflicts.
8. Latin America and Africa: increasing the regions' untapped geopolitical and economic potential.

THIRTY years is a significant and instrumental landmark in understanding the transformation that our country has undergone in a relatively short but eventful historical period. Furthermore, the adoption of a new Constitution in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, the September 2021 State Duma elections, etc., clearly testify to the fact that we are seeing history in the making. This means that we are yet to witness epochal, fateful events that will determine the course and pace of our country's development for decades to come.

Digital Technology Plus Transhumanism: The Last Bastion of Liberals

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The main achievement is that the independence of Russia's foreign policy has been preserved. Russia has not "buckled" under foreign pressure and the weight of sanctions. Not only has it kept face and maintained its dignity, but it has preserved its interests in the world while remaining a great power. Ten years ago, many considered Russia a regional power, but a transformation took place before our very eyes, and the world once again recognized Russia as a world power. This is confirmed by the language currently used by our "friends," who often use phrases like "Russia remains a challenge" and "Russia remains a global challenge."

In the past 10 years, Russia has conducted an antiterrorist operation in Syria, maintained a firm stance on protecting the interests of its citizens abroad, and coped with outside pressure and attempts to control its domestic politics.

The growing ideologization of foreign policy poses a major threat. Politics is yielding to the pressure of new ideologies. This is due to the change of elites, the coming to power of a new generation of politicians with new values, reference points, and experience. This process increases the turbulence on account of attempts to decisively tear down the entire architecture of traditional concepts, criteria, and values, and force the world to live according to the concepts of the postmodern ideology.

The world is becoming more and more complex and unpredictable due to the emergence of postmodern ideologies in the wake of the failure of liberalism as we know it. Today, we are seeing the neoliberal ideology very quickly turning into the ideology of technologies, which are becoming the last bastion of liberalism, and liberalism and technologism are rapidly converging right before our very eyes.

Big Data, Big Pharma, and the Green Economy of the neoliberal agenda will gradually become working tools for influencing the lives of citizens and states.

There is nothing wrong with digital technology or pharma perse. As the saying goes, you can't blame alcohol for alcoholism or knives for murders. But the latest technologies, including digital technologies, play a positive role only if they are not weaponized by postmodern ideology.

The realization that it is impossible to change human behavior through external, even shock intervention has led to the emergence of a new doctrine – the ideology

and practice of transhumanism, the creation of an “improved human.” It implies an “explosion from within,” the direct manipulation of humans, including changing their organics and biology, substituting and replacing human intelligence with artificial intelligence. Modern technologies, biochemistry, and genetic engineering open up enormous opportunities for such a philosophy, which poses a threat in the context of foreign policy, since it is essentially an effort not only to force “new approaches” on Russia, but to start “inoculating” it to change the genetic code of Russian civilization.

The imposition of transhumanistic and transgender values will eventually force every state to choose between either accepting those values or becoming an “ideological” enemy that would be subsequently punished by economic and foreign policy means.

It used to be said that with the advent of radio and television, books would be forgotten. It is unlikely that one medium will do away with another. Recent surveys by the LitRes ebook service have shown that schoolchildren, who we think never get off social media and games, have read more books than usual this summer.

You can’t force an audience to consume what you are offering indefinitely. Humans are not that controllable. They look for something for themselves in the information sources. This need, as well as individual information perception skills, can highlight and prioritize different information sources for different groups.

Today, more and more media are focused on particular interest groups. Together, they form an “all-in-one,” so to speak, conglomerate of media resources. The success of any modern media lies in a flexible policy and the ability to utilize various platforms in consideration of their target audience.

Under this approach by platforms and messengers to user-generated content, the pluralism of opinions ceases to exist, and a tendentious editorial policy can be seen that rejects everything that does not align with it. Unfortunately, this battle is currently not going in favor of those who are defending freedom of speech on these platforms.

The professionalism of employees is essential to the popularity of any type of media. Unfortunately, the level of professionalism is declining. I frequently encounter this when young employees come to work at the editorial office. This is related to problems with the education system. Endless education reforms are affecting the training of journalism professionals. The general level of education and culture, and the understanding of how to approach a topic and how to find where the “key” to a problem lies sometimes present an insurmountable obstacle to young journalists.

For several years now, International Affairs has been holding conferences both in Russia and abroad on the problems of international media. The issue of fake news has been raised more than once, and a lot has been said about fact-checking as a protective measure that can filter out fake news. Fact-checking should be done by the author as well as by technological means. Today there are neural networks that, based on frequency and the principle of detecting similar information, etc., alert editors and/or journalists to the possibility of certain information being fake. However, not everyone is able to use such tools.

There is only one way to restore trust – especially of the reader, listener, and viewer – in the media, trust in their professionalism and sense of responsibility. However, this is the responsibility of not just journalists; it is just as much the responsibility of their employer, be it the state or a private company.

Energy Developments and Russia

Yuri Shafranik, *Chairman of the Board of the Union of Oil and Gas Producers of Russia*
Mr. Shafranik was interviewed by International Affairs

OPEC has always played an important role in the stable development of the oil market. It is true that not everything always works or turns out as intended. But that does not mean that we should give up. On the contrary, with the development of OPEC into OPEC+, the capabilities of this group have only grown. Regular OPEC+ meetings are evidence that OPEC countries and Russia can come to an agreement to maintain oil prices.

But the oil market is very complex, it is very volatile and influenced by many factors. The market's balancing factor is not only demand, but also US oil production. And the US always does only what benefits the US, regardless of any agreements.

The pandemic is another demonstration of the need for state intervention in the formation of world oil market conditions. It has demonstrated and substantiated the need for OPEC as an intergovernmental organization.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), shale oil and gas production in the US over the past 10 years has met almost 60% of the increase in global demand for oil and gas, but this growth was encouraged by concessional loans, which have now dried up. In addition, most of the production of shale hydrocarbons in the US was carried out by small and medium-sized independent businesses and was also largely secured by huge amounts of debt financing. Under investor pressure in early 2020, the shale sector started to show signs of finally being able to report modest positive free cash flow, but those expectations were

dashed by the pandemic. As a result, instead of profitability growth, there have been a string of bankruptcies, layoffs, closures, and investment declines.

However, shale hydrocarbons – or rather, tight oil and gas – have major development potential given their prices and demand, which the world's leading analytical and forecasting centers take into account.

The IEA forecasts average annual investment in US tight oil over the next 10 years to be about $85 billion. That is slightly lower than prepandemic levels and would ensure output of about 11.5 mb/d by 2030. However, this forecast is far from guaranteed. If capital markets remain closed to shale operators long enough, and if operators use cash flow to repay debt rather than reinvest in production, the investment volume may remain close to 2020 levels.

The possibilities of using hydrogen for energy have been known about for a long time and have been a focus of interest more than once – in the 1970s, in connection with oil crises, and in the 1990s and 2000s, in connection with growing concern about climate change and the resulting strengthening of climate policy.

Hydrogen has become the most important component of the policy of transitioning to carbon-neutrality for all countries that have declared such a goal.

Russia is not lagging behind the trend: Not only does it fully meet its energy demand with domestic production, but is also the largest energy exporter.

But do not forget that pure hydrogen is not found on Earth. It must be extracted, and that requires energy.

The complete phaseout of coal burning is not a short-term prospect, although the G7 countries at the May 21 Climate and Environment Ministerial Meeting agreed to end state financing of thermal coal power generation by the end of 2021 and to phase out financial support of all types of fossil fuels.

Under these circumstances, in many developing countries, it is not global climate change, despite its significance, but the problems of economic growth and overcoming and eradicating energy poverty that are coming to the fore. Supporting the complete phaseout of fossil fuels for the sake of political ambitions – and the energy transition is primarily a political goal today – would mean additional difficulties for most developing countries in solving their most pressing problems. For them, the scarcity or high cost of energy resources could rule out the very prospect of economic growth and achieving at least a minimum standard of well-being for their population. So it is no coincidence that neither India nor China supported the calls of the G7 environment ministers and UN Secretary-General António Guterres to end investment in coal.

On September 4, 2021, at the Eastern Economic Forum, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, the government of Kamchatka Territory, and H2 Chistaya Energetika LLC signed a trilateral agreement to develop a hydrogen energy cluster project based on the Penzhinskaya Tidal Power Plant. The agreement formalizes the intent to start preliminary joint study of a power plant construction project.

The Penzhinskaya tidal power plant (TPP) project was in development back in the Soviet period. In the 1970s, the cost of the project was estimated to be more than $200 billion. Back then, construction of the power plant was assessed by Institut Gidroproyekt, which concluded that two large tidal power plants could be built in Penzhinskaya Bay. The cost of Penzhinskaya TPP-1 (Northern Section) was estimated at $60 billion, and the cost of TPP-2 (Southern Section) – at $200 billion. Of course, in addition to the power plant itself, setting up hydrogen production facilities requires a lot of work. Additionally, as noted at the signing of the agreement, developing and implementing domestic hydrogen energy technologies requires creating scientific and technological infrastructure to bring together experts in the field of hydrogen energy and to develop on this basis the best technologies for hydrogen production, storage, and transportation.

But this project has good prospects.

A Renewable Energy Support Program is being implemented for the period up to 2024, and a new one is being developed for the period between 2025 and 2035. Under the first Renewable Energy Support Program, about 0.5 GW of wind power plants and 1.2 GW of solar power plants have already been built. And by 2024, solar and wind power capacity will exceed 5.5 GW. According to experts, the second program will yield about 7 GW of green energy generation. Moreover, the Russian authorities are responding to the global low-carbon economy trend by creating conditions for such development in Russia.

An analysis of the problems of climate-oriented initiatives (including the energy transition) and their driving forces and beneficiaries clearly shows that such initiatives and projects will not only reduce CO2 emissions, but also redistribute energy power and impact geopolitics.

I don’t agree that no attention is being paid to methane. The main greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrogen oxide. And everyone who is dealing with or encounters this problem is aware of the higher toxicity of methane. The other thing is that the ratio between the main greenhouse gases varies between countries and regions.

Today, small modular reactors (SMRs) are experiencing a renaissance of sorts. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), 72 minireactors are currently under development or construction in 18 countries. This is because SMRs

provide the optimal solution for a stable and environmentally friendly energy supply for consumers located far from central power grids, as well as for replacing old power plants with high CO2 emissions.

The main disadvantage of small NPPs is the cost of a kilowatt-hour they produce: Not only is it markedly higher than that generated by traditional thermal and nuclear power plants, it is also higher than that generated by renewable power plants. But this disadvantage will be overcome by increasing the scale of operations.

In general, I am quite optimistic about both this area of carbon-free energy development and the capabilities of our country, where a number of new small reactors are in development: Shelf, Vityaz, ATGOR, KARAT, SVBR-100, UNITERM, ABV-6, ABV-6E, and BREST-300, which is part of the Proryv project.

Russia's Economic Diplomacy in Relations With the European Union

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RUSSIA occupies the Eurasian position on the world map, which is why economic cooperation in this area is so important. But our Western neighbors traditionally play a more significant role in our country's economy. This means that Europe is one of the most important areas in our economic diplomacy.

The European Union, with its single market comprising 27 member states, is Russia's main trade and economic partner. Even in the current difficult economic turbulence, the 27 EU member states account for more than a third of Russia's foreign trade – 38.2%, according to Russian Federal Customs Service data for 2020. That is more than the trade with all CIS countries (12.1%) or APEC member states, including the US (34.4%). At the same time, if we were to think of Europe as the EU plus Great Britain, its trade with our country reaches almost 40%.

Trade between Russia and Europe has very deep roots. In Russia, the established system of diplomacy dates back to the 16th century: In 1549, as part of an administrative reform, Ivan the Terrible established a new system of central governing bodies [prikazy] of executive power, including an ambassadorial body – the first state institution in Russian history in charge of foreign policy and foreign trade. Ivan the Terrible's revolutionary decision to form a new system of executive authorities was mainly due to the influence of his brightest and most educated

contemporaries. Researchers consider this decision rather progressive, considering the uniqueness in those days of an institution in charge of foreign policy affairs.

Developing trade was very important to Peter the Great; he established trade consulates in many European cities.6 An important step in expanding trade was the establishment of the Collegium of Commerce, which oversaw a network of "consuls and factors" in foreign lands.

Awareness of the importance of promoting Russian goods abroad, especially in European markets, existed even in the 1920s, a difficult period for our country, when it was just beginning to recover from the heavy losses of World War I, the 1917 revolution, and the subsequent Civil War.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent changes in the political structure, the importance of ensuring Russia's foreign economic interests has only grown.

The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of June 8, 1998, laid the foundation for the transformation of trade missions into trade and economic departments of the embassies of the Russian Federation in respective foreign countries.

Russia's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession in 2012 was a major step in the development of bilateral relations. Many researchers attached great importance to this accession, pointing to the opportunity to participate in the WTO's dispute resolution system.

It is noteworthy that amid the overall steep decline in Russia's foreign trade operations, its trade turnover with China is projected to decrease by a mere 2.9% and reach $107 billion.

After the events of 2014, relations between the Russian Federation and European powers continue to develop, albeit at a slow pace, given that in 2014, the European Council froze cooperation with Russia (except on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contacts) and new EU financing for Russia through international financial institutions.

The Russian Federation clearly defined its strategic priorities and started to pursue an independent, balanced foreign policy, which did not sit well with many Western politicians who wanted to continue to see Russia dependent and humiliated.

In a globalizing world, a new Europe without dividing lines is being established in order to maintain and strengthen security and stability on the continent; prevent crises and shocks; and create a single socioeconomic, legal, scientific, and environmental space.

The influence of the EU as a global center of economic power continues to grow, as does its attractiveness to other European countries, including the post-Soviet states. Trade diplomacy could help establish pragmatic dialogue between nations, overcoming the lack of political will to strengthen relations.

Moldovan-Romanian Relations: Past and Present

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RELATIONS between Moldova and Romania have a fairly long history. It is not entirely correct to say that Moldovans and Romanians are the same people, although some politicians in the Republic of Moldova (RM), including its current president, Maia Sandu, try to present the situation precisely in this light. But detailed analysis leads to the conclusion that the Moldovans are a nation with their own history and culture that are by no means identical to Romanian history and culture. As for the population of Transnistria, it has virtually no relation to Romania. After all, most of the territory of Bessarabia (the historical name of modern Moldova) consisted of lands located between the Black Sea and the Dniester, Prut, and Danube Rivers. Today, this territory is part of the modern Republic of Moldova and southern Ukraine.

IN JUNE 2020, the RM government presented a national development strategy called Moldova 2030.14 It prioritizes four areas: sustainable and inclusive economy (focused primarily on addressing social problems); strong human and social capital; fair and efficient institutions; and health and the environment. An important point to note here is that these are the main areas where cooperation between Moldova and Romania is currently developing. Moreover, pro-Romanian sentiments in Moldova persist and continue to influence both its political class and many members of society.

Romanian policy toward its neighbors became particularly active in the 2000s, after Romania achieved two basic foreign policy goals: In 2004, it joined NATO, and in 2007 – the European Union.

FINDING a solution to the Transnistria conflict is a major aspect of Moldovan-Romanian relations. The frozen conflict itself dates back almost 30 years and until recently was the only conflict in the western region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

One of the central aspects is the problem of reaching a settlement. On June 9, 1992, a monitoring mission consisting of representatives of Moldova, Russia, Romania, and Ukraine was established in Bender. Soon afterward, however,

hostilities resumed, with massive strikes against the city of Bender, and on June 19, members of the four-party group of military observers were evacuated from the combat zone without accomplishing their mission of ensuring a ceasefire in the conflict area.

THE NEW president of Moldova is Maia Sandu, former leader of the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate, PAS), who won 57.7% of the vote in the second round of the election on November 15, 2020.23 Her campaign had the active support of Romania and its president, Klaus Iohannis. Some observers even claimed that she is more proRomanian than pro-Moldovan.

In August 2021, Moldova, like all other republics of the former USSR, marked the 30th anniversary of the declaration of its independence. Boris Yeltsin did not live to see this momentous day, but Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich, the two other signatories of the Belavezha Accords, certainly celebrated this anniversary. On the eve of this "glorious" day, Romania intensified its policy in Moldova, launching a broad campaign to issue Romanian passports to Moldovans in a process it calls "restoration of citizenship." Maia Sandu, in turn, invariably refers to Moldovans as "Bessarabians." Moreover, the Romanian authorities have been trying hard to create a pro-Romanian majority in all branches of government in the RM. The idea of a referendum on the "reunification" of Moldova and Romania has been voiced at the official level.

At a meeting with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis in late December 2020, Sandu clearly stated that Moldova would integrate into the European value and economic space precisely with the help of Romania. In the opinion of the Moldovan president, Romania has enabled the country to deal effectively with the coronavirus. She believes that the two countries share a common language, history, and culture. Incidentally, soon after the inauguration of Romanian citizen Maia Sandu as President of Moldova, the language of the official website of the RM president was changed to Romanian.

THE PROCESS of Romanian-Moldovan integration has accelerated during the presidency of Maia Sandu. But it remains doubtful that the two countries will unite anytime soon, primarily because Romania itself is economically unsound, its economy is weak, and it holds an insignificant place in the EU hierarchy. Granted, we must not forget that the Western countries, primarily the US, Germany, and France, are actively trying to influence Moldova, a small country with great strategic value because of its geographical location. The socioeconomic component, living conditions in the RM, and the well-being of its citizens are being pushed into the background. The collective West will do all it can to ensure a repeat of the Ukrainian scenario, this time in Moldova, in order to separate the country from Russia and the CIS as much as possible. Attempts to play the Romanian card are clearly important in this context.

Lingering Reverberations of the Beirut Explosion

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ON AUGUST 4, 2020, residents of the Lebanese capital witnessed and many fell victim to a real tragedy – a massive explosion of 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate in a warehouse at the Port of Beirut.

A tragedy on such a scale in peacetime is unparalleled not only in Lebanese, but also in world history. Direct material damage was estimated at billions of dollars – at least $5 billion. Commenting on the "national catastrophe" at the time, Marwan Abboud, governor of Beirut, broke down in tears on television.

The Port of Beirut, one of the largest ports in the Mediterranean, sits on a large tract of land adjacent to the historical center of the city – Downtown Beirut and Achrafieh, a [predominantly] Christian district, and other districts. It is home to the buildings of parliament, the government, ministries, state agencies, bank offices, posh restaurants, high-end shops, historical landmarks, and other sights. In particular, the famous Sursock Palace, a grand residence once owned by the Sursock family, an Orthodox Christian aristocratic family, was badly damaged. Some sources say the building dates to the 15th century.

Various theories emerged both in Lebanon and the rest of the world in the days following the explosion. It was officially announced that the explosion was caused by arc welding at a warehouse that ignited and detonated the ammonium nitrate stored there. But Lebanese society was clearly skeptical of that explanation, and the public called for a thorough investigation. Predictably, accusations were made against Hezbollah, a pro-Iranian party that has long been treated as a pariah in the West, Israel, and a number of Sunni Islamic states.

At the same time, some eyewitnesses allegedly saw an air-to-surface missile launched at the port. Many Lebanese people believed that it was an attack on the port by an Israeli military aircraft or drone.

Shortly after the explosion, the Lebanese government asked France for satellite images from the time of the blast, but rejected France's offer to help in the investigation.

There is strong public discontent with the slow pace of the investigation that began a year ago, as well as over the complete lack of transparency. To date, the circumstances of the tragedy remain a mystery to the Lebanese public.

A report submitted to the Lebanese president and prime minister back in July 2020 described the results of an inspection conducted at the port, including of Warehouse 12, where the ammonium nitrate had been stored. It stated that the warehouse was not guarded, that there was a large hole in the wall, and that the hazardous material was improperly stored.4 In 2014, when the cargo was placed in the warehouse, I was working at the Russian Embassy in Beirut and often visited the seaport, where a duty free store was opened for foreign diplomats and personnel of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). I can attest to the remarkably lax security and access and entry procedures there compared, for example, to those at the Beirut-Rafic Hariri international airport. The Lebanese security services had in effect created favorable conditions for a terrorist attack – if, of course, this was a terrorist attack.

After the August 4 tragedy, the already extremely tense sociopolitical, financial, and economic situation in Lebanon began to deteriorate rapidly. Protests that had started in fall 2019 continued with renewed intensity and stronger calls for leadership changes. It is noteworthy that those calls were directed at Lebanon's entire ruling elite, which was built exclusively on a religious and clan basis.

In January 2021, the northern capital witnessed days-long mass protests that left more than 200 people injured. Demonstrators stormed city hall and the homes of all the aforementioned politicians in the city under the slogans of fighting corruption, graft, and embezzlement.

Meanwhile, the national currency continued to depreciate rapidly. While between 1997 and the fall of 2019 the dollar was at 1,500 Lebanese lira, in the summer of 2021, the exchange rate exceeded 21,000. According to the World Bank, Lebanon's annual inflation rate has risen to the highest of all countries in recent decades. Lebanese banks further tightened limits on foreign currency withdrawals.

The main reason for Lebanon's economic collapse is the collapse of the state's banking system, which at one time (before the outbreak of the civil war in 1975) was considered as stable as Switzerland's.

Over the past year, the impoverishment of Lebanon's population has reached a critical level. Wages and pensions have fallen – naturally, commensurate with the fall of the lira.

The Lebanese economy is in ruins, especially the banking sector, tourism, and the hospitality industry, which have for years driven the country's development. Restaurants, cafés, numerous shops and supermarkets, which Lebanon has been famous for, are now in deep trouble. The flow of tourists has stopped – not only from Europe, but also from Arab countries. The situation is compounded by pandemic restrictions and fires that caused extensive damage this summer.

Crime is also getting worse. The export of drugs, which have been produced in the Beqaa Valley for many years, has increased.

Of course, the political situation in the Lebanese Republic is largely determined by the deep financial and economic crisis and the situation along its borders. However, it is important to take into account purely political factors. Despite the anti-confessionalism rhetoric of radical protesters, it seems that their slogans are to a large extent essentially populist. At present, the country is not ready to abandon the system of political confessionalism. Not a single new force in Lebanese politics currently stands a chance at success without relying on the confessional factor.

It became clear at the start of the crisis in 2019 that Lebanon needed financial assistance from abroad to resolve it. Hopes were pinned in particular on the millions-strong Lebanese diaspora around the world. But the response to that, as it were, came back in spring 2010, when Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, the richest person in the world, according to Forbes (in 2010-2013, with a fortune of more than $50 billion), visited Lebanon, which was quite a prosperous country at the time. His Maronite father had left his home country before World War I, and Carlos, 70, was making his first trip to Lebanon. Replying to a question from an ORT Lebanese TV anchor about his possible investment in the Lebanese economy, he categorically dismissed all options, saying that business and the historical motherland were incompatible. It is believed that he expressed the general opinion of Lebanese émigrés.

Moscow is doing all it can to help stabilize the situation in the Lebanese Republic. High-level Lebanese delegations have repeatedly visited the Russian capital. Political consultations and discussions regarding cooperation on fighting the pandemic have been held. Last October, a new Russian ambassador arrived in Beirut: Alexander Rudakov, an experienced diplomat and expert on Arab politics who has worked a long time in Syria and Palestine. Russia is genuinely interested in Lebanon's socioeconomic and political normalization – and not only because neighboring Syria is Russia's Middle East policy priority. Lebanon is traditionally a friendly state, and the Russian people are ready to provide any assistance and help to the Lebanese people at this trying time.

International Activities of St. Petersburg University as an Element of Russia's "Soft Power

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THE USE of "soft power" instruments to strengthen the international position of our country has become increasingly important in the modern conditions of dynamic and contradictory global development. The achievements of Russian science and higher education have enjoyed considerable respect of the world academic community for almost three centuries and can play an important role in shaping a favorable image of Russia that would be appealing to the international community. In his Message to the Federal Assembly on April 21, 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin reemphasized the critical importance of science in the modern world and outlined specific steps for the further development of science and higher education.

ST. PETERSBURG UNIVERSITY (SPbU) was founded in 1724 by decree of Emperor Peter the Great. Its current status is regulated by Law No. 259-FZ of November 10, 2009, "On the Lomonosov Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University," which recognizes these two universities as unique science and education complexes and the oldest institutions of higher education in the country that have great significance for the development of Russian society.

The main purpose of international outreach is to strengthen the position of SPbU as a world-class science and education center, and create an expansive and effective network of international connections. Those connections could turn SPbU into an influential entity whose position would be regarded by other higher education institutions when determining the main directions and development trends in global education.

In this capacity, the international activities of St. Petersburg University become an integral element of Russia's "soft power." Academic ties can play an important role both in strengthening Russia's relations with friendly states and in helping to ease tension with countries that are in a state of confrontation with Russia.

The key areas of SPbU activity aimed at achieving this goal are as follows:
• further increasing the educational and scientific potential of SPbU as defined both by quantitative indicators and by expert opinions when compared to other leading universities worldwide
• strengthening the position of SPbU as a major expert and analytical center widely recognized both within the country and abroad
• developing SPbU as one of the main public diplomacy platforms in Russia.

A KEY area of the university's activities is developing and strengthening educational and scientific potential worldwide at an accelerated pace, solidifying SPbU's position in both the Russian and international education and research

markets, and demonstrating its achievements as a leading Russian university, as well as the overall strengths of Russian science and higher education.

SPbU proceeds from the premise that its core courses should be taught in Russian. However, considering the labor market and the need to attract foreign students, the university offers a number of programs and courses in other languages. At present, SPbU offers 25 major educational programs (compared to 10 in 2014) fully in foreign languages.

The educational process at SPbU has always been closely intertwined with fundamental academic research. Only instructors who introduce their scholarship into the educational process can ensure its high quality.

In 2010, the SPbU Bylaws, approved by the Russian government, stated that St. Petersburg State University serves as an expert institution for the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, the Government of the Russian Federation, federal government bodies, and public authorities of Russian Federation members. SPbU scholars have prepared a significant number of analytical materials for the state authorities of the Russian Federation on various issues concerning jurisprudence, economics, international relations, political science, and philology.

Currently, SPbU cooperates with 100 centers in 37 countries to administer testing of Russian as a Foreign Language. Despite the difficult international situation and the ongoing pandemic, this network is constantly growing both in the number of centers (there were only eight in 2015) and in geographical coverage.

Since 2018, SPbU, with the approval of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been implementing the SPbU Online School – a unique project designed to help schoolchildren from foreign countries study remotely for free following Russian secondary school programs.

RECENTLY, the trend to involve the general public and not just professional politicians and diplomats in foreign policy activities is gaining momentum. The scope of public diplomacy is much broader than that of classical diplomacy. This shift is reflected in the increasingly active participation of SPbU in various forms of public diplomacy – not just in traditional formats, but also in several new ones.

At present, SPbU is active in the international arena as a world-class major academic center enjoying significant international prestige and influence and utilizing a wide variety of methods and forms of international activity. The expert and analytical work of St. Petersburg University, and its public diplomacy efforts also help strengthen its competitive position with respect to leading foreign universities and research institutions.

Independence and Neutrality as the Basis of Turkmen Statehood

Batyr Niyazliyev, *Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Russia*

ON SEPTEMBER 27, the Turkmen people celebrated the 30th anniversary of a landmark event in their recent history: the day Turkmenistan became an independent state. Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov described the country's independence as the basis for the entire development of its statehood and the starting point of radical social, political, economic, and cultural reforms.

The Turkmens are at heart a state-building people. Ever since the early Middle Ages, they have been directly involved in establishing and successfully developing various states in Central and South Asia and the Middle East. There is extensive documentary evidence of this. Afterward, for various reasons, the Turkmens had no opportunity for independent development. But their statehood instinct survived, and in 1991, they embarked on a new path of sovereign development. They regained their own basis for existence and came to see the meaning and historical perspective of independent development.

During its years of independence, Turkmenistan has implemented large-scale programs to modernize the economy, create new transport infrastructure, become an industrialized country, and integrate into the world economy.

A strong social policy has become a hallmark of Turkmenistan's national development model. Social spending, which aims to raise the living standards and quality of life of the urban and rural population, accounts for more than 70% of state spending.

Our strategic industry, the energy sector, has been completely overhauled.

Turkmenistan's gross domestic product growth rate puts it solidly among the world's fastest growing economies. According to the World Bank, the income level in Turkmenistan is higher than in middle-income nations.

Special attention is paid to ensuring fresh water supplies for the population. There are drinking water production plants in the capital city of Ashgabat and all velaýats (regions) of Turkmenistan, and desalination plants on the Caspian coast. More plants are being built. More than $500 million is spent yearly on various environmental and water projects.

The Turkmen people's search for their place in the world after gaining independence was based not only on objective geopolitical analysis but also on their own historical and cultural values and principles. It was these values and principles that were put at the basis of the neutral foreign policy of the young Turkmen state.

It was one of Turkmenistan's fundamental tenets that its foreign policy be inseparable from domestic factors. The country's foreign policy, it was argued, would only be consistent, viable, and successful if it was not focused on momentary opportunistic goals, no matter how attractive they might be, but instead advanced genuine, long-term national interests that had been tested by many centuries of experience.

Our choice in favor of neutrality has proven to be a wise and farsighted decision. The basic principles of neutrality – adherence to peace, goodneighborliness, cooperation, mutual understanding, political and diplomatic problem-solving methods, nonacceptance of armed force in interstate relations, and respect for international law and the UN Charter – are increasingly in line with the interests and aspirations of the international community and receive growing support and recognition from it.

One of the main aspects of Turkmenistan's foreign policy is the consistent strengthening of a friendly, good-neighborly relationship and mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia.

The relationship between Turkmenistan and Russia is a strategic partnership. Both nations understand their tremendous cooperation potential and have been working hard in recent years to tap it on the basis of mutual interest.

Throughout its 30 years of independence, Turkmenistan has been living in an atmosphere of stability and harmony, in peace and cooperation with its neighbors and all other countries, building equal, mutually beneficial relations with them while at the same time remaining sovereign and independent in both domestic and foreign policy decision-making. This demonstrates a direct connection between independence and neutrality. For Turkmenistan, independence is inseparable from neutrality. Independence and neutrality form the basis of Turkmenistan's statehood and national identity and are guarantees of securing the place in the modern world order that our country deserves.

Indian Delegation Visits Zvezda, Russia's Super-Shipyard

THE SPECIAL strategic partnership between Russia and India is a unique and complex architecture of interstate dialogue. It could not have been built without a solid, unified economic foundation: from energy and shipbuilding to space and agriculture. A significant part of this foundation is the Rosneft public joint-stock company, acting as a driver of bilateral cooperation.

Rosneft, a reliable long-term partner of the largest Indian companies, is developing a platform for further cooperation in the hydrocarbon industry: from the production and supply of hydrocarbons to oil refining and the sale of petroleum products.

The Indian company ONGC Videsh Limited has been a shareholder in the Sakhalin-1 project since 2001 (others include Rosneft, ExxonMobil, and Japan's Sodeco). In 2020, this project produced 12.4 million [metric] tons of oil and condensate, delivering more than 2.4 billion cubic meters of gas to consumers.

Rosneft is a shareholder in Nayara Energy, which operates a high-tech refinery in the city of Vadinar, as well as one of the fastest growing chains of gasoline stations in India.

On September 1, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin met with Hardeep Singh Puri, the Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, who is also Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, to talk about enhancing investment cooperation between the two countries. They also discussed prospective projects in oil and gas production, oil refining, petrochemistry, and the sale of hydrocarbons. Assessing the current level of cooperation on joint business initiatives and the results achieved so far, Igor Sechin stated: "These projects have allowed us to become leaders in investment cooperation between Russia and India. The amount of mutual investment between Rosneft and its Indian partners exceeds $17 billion. This is more than half the total of all Russian-Indian investments to date."

The presentation of Rosneft's flagship project Vostok Oil, which is being implemented in northern Krasnoyarsk Territory, has piqued the interest of Indian partners. Igor Sechin told Hardeep Singh Puri about the main parameters and competitive advantages of this initiative.

An important part of Vostok Oil's allure is that it has created a unique, sustainable economic model. Rosneft has already obtained findings from leading international experts that confirm the project's resource base, development technologies, and economic status.

During their visit to Russia, the Indian delegation led by Hardeep Singh Puri also visited the Zvezda shipbuilding complex in the town of Bolshoi Kamen, in Russia's Maritime Territory. Andrey Shishkin, Rosneft's VicePresident for Informatization, Innovation, and Localization, briefed the partners on the progress of the shipyard construction and its main facilities.

The Zvezda shipbuilding complex is being built under the order of Russian President Vladimir Putin, by a consortium of investors led by Rosneft. Fundamentally new technological solutions are being used in its construction, giving it a chance to become one of the most modern shipbuilding facilities in the world. Construction is being carried out in two phases, and will be completed in 2024. The facilities of the first extended stage are now in operation: a hull production block, painting booths, an open heavy outfitting slipway (with a fleet of unique cranes and an advanced ship-transport system), and a transport transfer dock.

The transport and transfer floating dock is designed to launch largetonnage vessels with a length of 300 meters and a beam of more than 50 m, as well as marine equipment such as drilling platforms and their components, from the heavy outfitting slipway. The dock ensures high quality and safety of launching.

A unique feature of Zvezda is its dry dock, which was built well ahead of schedule and is now set to be commissioned. Its technical parameters will allow for the construction of most existing and prospective types of vessels, with practically no limits on tonnage or launch weight. With dimensions of 485 x 114 x 14 m, it is the only one of its kind in Russia and one of the world's largest hydraulic structures.

India's heightened interest in Zvezda is also evidenced by the fact that in 2019, the shipyard was visited by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Although it is just beginning to develop actively, cooperation on the Zvezda shipbuilding complex may become an important element of Russian-Indian relations. This undertaking, which paves the way for a plethora of large-scale business projects, is another important example of how the Russian-Indian strategic partnership has built up a powerful reserve of strength. Neither the COVID-19 pandemic, nor the world's political turbulence, nor fluctuations in the economic environment can affect it.

Ukrainian Nationalism in the Russian Empire and Its Remnants

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MODERN Russian historians and journalists have been paying a great deal of attention to the Ukrainian national movement in the former Soviet Union. A lot of research has been done of the emergence of Ukrainian statehood; generous territorial transfers to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and East European countries; the Ukrainification of former Malorossiya [Little Russia]; and the activities of Ukrainian radical nationalists before, during, and after World War II. Various aspects of the revival of nationalism in Ukraine in the 1990s are also on historians' radar.

The presence of the Malorossiyan governorates in the Russian Empire and this state's fragmentation as a result of nationalist movements receive less coverage today, despite having been well studied, but the topic of Malorossiya is no less important to understanding the nature of Ukrainian nationalism, which is hindering the reintegration of Ukraine with Russia.

The genesis of the nationalist movement of the 19th and the early 20th century in Ukraine has been explored extensively by Russian historians before the Bolshevik

revolution of 1917, by Russian émigré scholars after the revolution, and by modern Russian and foreign researchers. In the former Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin's postulate that the Russian Empire was a "prison of peoples" prevented fully objective studies of the Ukrainian nationalist movement.

IN THE Russian Empire, Ukrainian nationalism gradually took shape around the mid-19th century under domestic and foreign influences. But attempts to inject the independence virus into Malorossiya, the area covering much of modern Ukraine, began even before that.

By the end of the 19th century, the word "Ukrainians" had come to denote adherents of the Ukrainophile movement. The term was broadly used in intelligentsia circles shortly before and during the February Revolution of 1917. It was only in the Soviet period that the word "Ukrainians" became established as an ethnic autonym. By and large, as an ethnonym, the word "Ukrainians" became a "symbol of the demolition of the imperial ideology and a marker of a new national movement in Eastern Europe."

EVEN modern Ukrainian anti-Russian historians cannot deny that there was no ethnic discrimination against Maloross in the Russian Empire. However, the Russian government of those days is accused of hindering the development of the Ukrainian language.

When considering the language issue in Malorossiya of the 18th and 19th centuries, one needs to consider the Gallomania of the Russian aristocracy of that time and their indifference to the use and development of the Russian language. This caused problems even for the Russian language, not to mention the rest of the native languages of the empire.

In the early 1860s, the Russian government raised no obstacles to the publication of Ukrainian primers. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Education even allocated funds for the publication of mathematics textbooks in Ukrainian for schools in Malorossiya.

Quite a lot was done to promote Ukrainophilia in Malorossiya by numerous educational societies (hromadas) and cultural groups. Russian historian Dmitry Semushin believes that Ukrainification in the Malorossiyan governorates was not a foregone conclusion, but there was an "obvious deficit of a state policy of identity" there. The delay with the introduction of general primary education created a mass nationalization niche for the Ukrainophile intelligentsia, which was building an imaginary community of "Ukrainians in Ukraine" in it.

THE UKRAINE issue always occupied a relatively modest place among the political, social, and economic problems of the Russian Empire right up until its

collapse. But although the Ukrainian nationalist movement was small and marginal, it was fanatical and well organized.

AFTER the start of World War I, Ukrainian nationalists intensified efforts to shape Ukrainian identity in Malorossiya and eradicate Russophilia in Galicia. Ukrainophiles actively helped the Austrian authorities carry out mass persecutions and violent repressive measures in Galicia.

Under the Soviet system, former and new nationalist leaders found administrative means, such as a new language policy, to implement various elements of the "Ukrainian idea." This amounted to a dramatic process of de-Russification of former Malorossiya, as well as a number of adjoining territories.

Nationalist propaganda in modern Ukraine hinges not only on hatred for Russia, but also on the negation of the traditions, cultural values, and achievements of the Malorossiyan and Soviet periods of Ukrainian history and on the denial of the bilingualism and dual identity of the Ukrainian people. Having changed cultural and historical terminology and abandoned traditional assessments of the heroes and events that have tied Ukrainians to Russia for centuries, present-day nationalists are trying to overhaul the Ukrainian mentality to make it match an artificial aggressive and defective nationalist ideology constructed some time ago. This is an impasse that has been a pointless and excessive strain on multiethnic Ukrainian society for many years. Pro-Russian Ukrainians, whom nationalist propaganda declares a foreign and hostile element of society and whom are threatened with repressive measures and violence, have been forced to seek the return of eastern territories populated by them to Russia, to leave Ukraine, or to go underground. Today, only few people in Ukraine are able to say what they think. But history keeps following its course, slowly but surely.

Kabul-Moscow 1944: An Enigmatic Appointment

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THE SUCCESSFUL landing of British and American troops in Sicily in the summer of 1943 and the further course of Allied military operations against Nazi Germany and its satellites in the Mediterranean brought major political changes in the region. A coup on July 25, 1943, removed fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, who was replaced with Marshal Pietro Badoglio by order of King Victor Emmanuel III. The new government capitulated to the Allies; it severed all relations with Nazi Germany and on October 13, 1943, declared war on it. That

same day, the Anti-Hitler coalition of the Soviet Union, the US, and Great Britain recognized Italy as a cobelligerent.

The events on the Italian Peninsula initiated not only the collapse of the fascist bloc in Europe but also determined a new alignment of forces in the confrontation between the Anti-Hitler coalition and the Axis Powers on the eastern periphery of World War II, including in neutral Afghanistan.

For several months after the coup in Italy, the position of the Italian diplomatic mission remained fairly shaky. The new Italian government sent no information, let alone instructions, on how to rebuild relations with the Allied powers. Later, Ambassador Quaroni admitted that since Afghanistan had not been among the priorities of the Badoglio government, all attempts to acquire at least relative clarity had been useless.

By order of the British government, the British diplomatic mission in Kabul was to shoulder all the expenses of the Italian mission in Afghanistan. In exchange, London wanted Pietro Quaroni to communicate with the Italian government exclusively through the British Embassy, while the Italian ambassador was expected to reveal to the British the full scope of his previous subversive activities against the Allies in Afghanistan.

Soviet requests for the information that the British Embassy was acquiring from Quaroni were brushed aside by James Squire, who said that talks with Quaroni concerned only the latter's anti-British activities in India.

The Italian diplomat entered the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kabul for the first time after the start of the Great Patriotic War on November 30, 1943. By that time, the Italian mission in Afghanistan no longer represented a hostile country; it was the informal mission of an ally.

In 1927, the romance that had developed between Pietro Quaroni and Larisa Chagina under the watchful eye of Soviet counterintelligence agencies resulted in a marriage concluded first in an Orthodox church in Moscow and later in a ceremony in a Catholic chapel at the French Embassy. Larisa was arrested immediately after the ceremony (in the Soviet Union, marriages to foreigners were banned) and taken to the Lubyanka – the "cellars of the NKVD," as it is commonly called today. After three months of "passionate Romeo's" frantic efforts to secure his young wife's release, Larisa was finally freed. In 1928, the reunited young couple left the Soviet Union.

It took Quaroni and his wife several weeks to reach Kabul across India and the territory of independent Pashtun tribes. Peshawar, a Pashtun tribal center in the North-West Frontier Province of British India, was their last stop. The young couple found the life of local tribes to be not at all as they had imagined it based on

their reading of Kipling's books. The cruel realities of everyday life clouded the literary romance and the exoticism of the local lifestyle. The people struggling to survive in the harsh climate and barren mountains were guided by Pashtunwali, the Pashtun code of honor, rather than by the laws of British India.

Larisa Quaroni was not frightened. According to her husband, she visited local markets and small shops in the center and outskirts of Peshawar on her own.16 It remains unclear whether she wanted to meet somebody in the narrow streets of this Oriental city. Even before the couple reached Kabul, "interested people" had already learned that the wife of the new Italian ambassador was a bold and determined woman who was willing to take risks.

According to Russian historian Yury Tikhonov, during his service in Afghanistan, Quaroni's perfect knowledge of the Pashtun tribal zone earned him respect and credibility among the European diplomats stationed in Kabul. On the eve of the Great Patriotic War, Konstantin Mikhailov, the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan, frequently mentioned Italian Ambassador Quaroni in his diary. His reports contained detailed descriptions of his talks with the Italian diplomat on January 26, April 8, and June 10, 1941, in the Soviet Embassy in Kabul, and on May 1, 1941, at a reception at the German Embassy.

It should be said that in Afghanistan, Quaroni proved himself more of a resident spy of Italian intelligence than an ambassador. Luciano Monzali writes that he was especially successful in opposing the British.

Pietro Quaroni showed that Italy was not interested in destabilization in the North-West Frontier Province; the Italian resident spy wanted to preserve key positions in his contacts with the Pashtun tribal leaders in order to keep tabs on the Abwehr and its field operations. All recent publications make no mention of the Italian trace in this operation connected with Larisa Quaroni, and her involvement in it is downplayed.

Italian authors prefer to reduce Larisa's role to that of a "courier" responsible for supplying Pashtun leaders with confidential information from the Italian mission.25 Russian authors make no mention of her at all. Yury Tikhonov limited himself to mild reproaches of Pietro Quaroni for "risking the life of his wife," who had organized the route from the Afghan capital to the tribal zone.26 We still do not know who informed Soviet intelligence about Operation Feuerfresser.

Even though Stalin approved Quaroni as Italian ambassador to the Soviet Union, Quaroni received no special privileges in his new post, and the Italian mission did not receive most favored nation status. The mission did not even get a building suitable to their needs. During his nearly three years of service in Moscow, he and the embassy staff lived and worked in a hotel in strange conditions and with "unimaginable" prohibitions, with diplomats working in their own rooms.

The Soviet authorities continued to keep tabs on Quaroni. In 1954, Corriere della Sera, an influential Italian daily, announced that it would start publishing the memoirs of Ambassador Quaroni concerning his work in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The first installment was commented on in the Soviet satirical magazine Krokodil (No. 8, 1954) by a certain B. Vladimirov, who considered it "showboating."

Larisa Chagina is not mentioned in the multi-volume history of Soviet Foreign Intelligence published in the 1990s in the context of the events in Afghanistan during World War II. The authors write about the international composition of Soviet spies in Afghanistan: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Indians, etc., and two anonymous Russians.

Was the Russian wife of Pietro Quaroni, the Italian ambassador to Afghanistan, an active supporter of the White Guards, a successful foreign spy, or a courageous Russian patriot determined to serve her country no matter what during the most dramatic episodes of its history? Today, anybody who studies this subject can offer their version of what happened practically eight decades ago. If and when the enigma of the appointment of Pietro Quaroni as Italian Ambassador to Moscow in 1944 is resolved, it will add new details to the picture of the Great Game of the world powers in Afghanistan during World War II.

The Russian Diplomatic Corps at the Crossroads of History

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THE SCHOLARLY value of the historical-biographical reference book The Last Diplomats of the Russian Empire: 1900-1917, prepared by career diplomat minister counselor second class Yury Ivanov and sociologist Yelena Ivanova* cannot be overestimated. It is a rich source of information about the Russian diplomats who served at the turn of the 20th century, during World War I and the revolutionary transformations in Russia. The collected material is valuable to researchers studying the history of diplomatic service, as well as to those interested in the history of Russian emigration. The book contains a trove of factual material indispensable for sociological studies of the specifics of professional groups and their emergence. Its scholarly value is unique: The material, professionally presented in compact form, immerses readers in the social and political problems

of an entire generation of Russian diplomats while also providing information about the fates of individual diplomats.

This is the first attempt in Russian historiography to compile information about over 1,200 career diplomats, staffers, translators, and interpreters employed by the central office and missions in various countries. The uniformly structured, succinct biographies offer personal information about the statuses and national heritage of members of the diplomatic corps; their educational level, career trajectories, and involvement in the preparation and holding of international political events; their contribution to scientific, public, and charitable activities; and their published works.

Among the indisputable merits of the book are the structured presentation of the biographical material and the high quality of its presentation. The fairly compact form of presentation in no way minimizes the lives and careers of the outstanding diplomats and practically forgotten employees of the Foreign Ministry presented in the book.

The book's appendices are also interesting: lists of tsarist diplomats who remained in Russia or returned from emigration and of tsarist diplomats who continued to work in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the RFSR/USSR. According to incomplete information, over half of the diplomatic corps did not return to Russia or left it during the first years of Soviet power.

The book tells the story of one of the most difficult periods in Russia's history and the fate of an entire generation of diplomats. Especially interesting from a scholarly viewpoint is the fairly varied information that can be used for qualitative sociological study of the statuses of professional diplomats and how they changed in emigration. This makes it possible to analyze how emigration disrupted the family traditions of diplomatic service (disrupted diplomatic dynasties).

The book's impressive reference material (thematic and geographical indices, textual references about the most important international conferences where Russia was represented, information about the leading educational establishments that trained future diplomats, and facts about all sorts of organizations, archives, foundations, etc.) makes it a veritable encyclopedia of the diplomatic service in 1900-1917.

The bibliography deserves special mention: It is based on legal acts and archival materials collected by Yu. Ivanov, as well as on monographs, memoirs, academic journal articles, Internet sources, etc.

The encyclopedic format should not frighten off potential readers: The book reads like a fascinating story about the fates of the last generation of tsarist diplomats in the context of Russian history. The research the authors carried out in preparing

this publication should be continued to present the history of the Soviet diplomatic corps in the same highly successful format.