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Russia, the US, and Smaller Europe (the EU): Competition for Leadership in a Polycentric World

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The author analyzes relations within the triangle – Russia, the EU, and the US and provides an overview of basic research on the contemporary world order and the positions of Europe and Russia. The author elaborates on five types of relationships, which are possible within this triangle.

There are numerous landmark works and international documents on the destiny of Europe and the world in which Europe had lived and lives. In varying degrees, these issues concerned people throughout modern and contemporary history. One can recall the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648, the Congress of Vienna of 1814-1815, the Versailles Treaty. Back in 1918 the first volume of one of the most popular books on the Old Continent – “The Decline of the West” by Oswald Spengler was published.

While reasoning about the fates of Europe and the world, it is important to remember the decisions of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945, the Charter of the United Nations (June 26, 1945). Later life in Europe was arranged in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Charter of Paris in 1990.

After the end of the cold war the two most popularized concepts of the world order became “The End of History” by Francis Fukuyama and “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington. However, both concepts have largely remained speculative and were substantiated by reality only partly.

The heyday of the apologetics of a new form of Eurocentrism in the shape of the European Union came at the beginning of the XXI century. Here are just two examples: the book by Jeremy Rifkin "The European Dream" [Jeremy Rifkin, 2004] and "The European Superpower" by John McCormick [John McCormick, 2007]. A much more realistic picture of the world and the place of Europe in it can be found in Henry Kissinger's "World Order" [Henry Kissinger, 2014].

In recent years, a number of fundamental studies on the contemporary world order and the positions of Europe and Russia have appeared in Russia. Here are some of them: a book under the editorship of Academician A.A. Dynkin and Academician N.I. Ivanova "Russia in a Polycentric World" – the result of research by the institutes of the Department of Global Problems and International Relations (RAS) [Rossija v policentrichnom mire, 2011], as well as "Global Governance: Opportunities and Challenges" [Global'noe upravlenie: vozmozhnosti i riski, 2015]; a book of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations "Global Perestroika" [Global'naja perestrojka, 2014]; a number of books from a multi-volume series "Old World – New Times" ("Staryi Svet – Novye vremena") of the Institute of Europe, RAS: "Greater Europe. Ideas, Reality, Prospects" [Bol'shaja Evropa. Idei, real'nost', perspektivy, 2014], "Russia in the Diversity of Civilizations" [Rossija v mnogoobrazii civilizacij, 2011], "The European Union in the XXI century: a Time of Trial" [Evropejskij sojuz v XXI veke: vremja ispytanij, 2012].

The books by Academician A.A. Kokoshin [Kokoshin, 2006. Kokoshin, 2011], dedicated to the issues of strategic stability and planning, the work of Academician A.O. Chyubaryan "Russian Europeanism" [Chyubaryan, 2005], the book by Academician N.A. Simoniya and Academician A.V. Torkunov "Globalization. Structural Crisis and World Leadership" [Simonija N.A., Torkunov A.V. Globalizacija, strukturnyj krizis i mirovoe liderstvo, 2013] - drew extensive attention of the academic community and the political class. Conceptual ideas are presented in the work by Academician V.V. Zhurkin "European Army: Defeats and Victories" [Zhurkin, Evropejskaja armija: porazhenija i pobedy, 2012]; in a number of studies of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) "Russia – European Union: Potential for Partnership", [Rossija – Evropejskij sojuz: vozmozhnosti partnjorstva, 2013] and of MGIMO (University) "Concert of Great Powers" of the XXI Century" [Koncert velikih derzhav" XXI veka, 2015]. The book by Dr. V.A. Nikonov "Modern World and its Origins [Nikonov, Sovremennyj mir i ego istoki, 2015] is among the most recent studies of the history of Russia and its place in the global system of coordinates.

The very formulation of this range of problems may raise a question: "Why is a regional organization put in one row with two nation-states?" The fact is that the European Union has broadly and long ago been aspiring to imitate a federal state. Meanwhile, Russia and the US are examples of exactly such an arrangement. In the beginning of the XXI century, the EU has practically become a regional organization with elements of both – a confederation and a federation. The EU is the only international organization where the scope and areas of supranational and international regulation are comparable. One can say that the EU is a quasi-state system (Table 1). It is worth noting, that various competences of the EU are not

static, but dynamic. The trend towards adding confederate and federal competences prevails, but there is a reverse movement as well¹.

What else justifies such a selection of actors? We are speaking here of the European (Christian) civilization, keeping in mind its several branches [The Treaty on European Security, *Dogovor o evropejskoj bezopasnosti*, 2011. Gromyko, *Civilizacija kak ob#ekt issledovanija i rossijskaja identichnost'*, 2011. Gromyko, *Civilizacija i Rossija. Spory prodolzhajutsja*, 2009. The Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept, *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki RF*, 2008. Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept, *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki RF*, 2013]. These branches are represented by Russia, the countries of the European Union and the US. Together they form a sort of a civilizational triangle (“Europe from Vancouver to Vladivostok”). All vertices of this triangle come from a single historical core. Further, in time their paths have diverged in many respects, but a certain part of their common heritage was preserved, for example, the experience of an alliance during the WWII.

A few words on terminology. “Smaller Europe” in this context denotes the sum of 28 countries – members of the European Union as of 2015. This is the smaller Europe, as it is only a part of the Old Continent, the history of which is unthinkable without Russia and some other countries². From a geographical point of view, Russia is certainly more than just a European country. That is why the term “Greater Europe” is widely used. It is not a new term. In its essence, it is more than a hundred years old and incorporates the idea of the “United States of Europe” of the early XX century, the idea of pan-Europe in the interwar period, the Gaullist idea of a common European space and the more recent interpretations of Europe “from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

In addition, these three subjects of world politics – Russia, the European Union (to be more precise – several of its member-states) and the US are united in their desire to produce and develop strategic thinking. This assumes that they have their own picture of the world order, strong science, experienced diplomacy, large resources, long-term statehood. Few would deny that Moscow, Paris, London, Berlin and Washington historically have an inherent drive towards strategic thinking and at times they show such thinking. However, this ability has a negative side and carries its own risks: the more powerful the country is, the greater are the negative consequences of strategic thinking if it is applied incorrectly. For example, a number of US military campaigns in the early XXI century clearly confirm this.

As for the EU, its pretensions to strategic thinking so far have not come to fruition. However, some experience and progress is visible. For example, a strategic, on a European scale, historical reconciliation between France and Germany has been successfully achieved. In terms of doctrines, the first (and so far the only one) European security strategy appeared in 2003. This doctrine, in particular, states: “As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world’s GNP, the European Union is inevitably a global

¹ The analysis of the situation from point of view of governance methods is given in: Kaveshnikov N.Yu. *Metody upravlenija v evropejskom sojuze*// MEIMO, 8 August 2015, M.: Nauka.

² The term “Smaller Europe” has been used in the works of the Institute of Europe (RAS) for several years, for example, see: Maksimyichev I.F. *Est’ li budushhee u Bol’shoi Evropy?*// *Sovremennaya Evropa*, No 1, 2013.

player... Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world” [A Secure Europe In a Better World, 2003: 1]. This document shows plenty ambitions: “We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and, when necessary, robust intervention” [A Secure Europe In a Better World, 2003: 11].

Table 1.

Federation (exclusive competences of the EU)	Confederation (mixed competences)	Interstate association (competences of national governments)
Customs Union (1968)	Foreign policy	Security and defense policy
EMU — Eurozone (19 of the 28 member- states)	Fiscal policy (“European semester”)	Tax policy
EU Single Market	Banking Union	Governance arrangements (the right of veto when the European Council - summit of the member- states’ leaders - takes certain decisions)
Sectoral policies	Energy Union	
Social policies aspects, especially occupational safety and health	Legislative process (acquis communitaire)	Part of social policy
The Schengen Area	Immigration policy	
	Employment policy	
System of law (primacy over national law including constitutional law)	The EU common space of freedom, security and justice	
Own budget of EUR 143 bln (2015). For comparison: the UN budget is \$2.8 bln. At the same time, this is only about 1% of the EU-28 GDP.	The growth of powers of national parliaments (the “yellow card” mechanism)	

If in 2003 the word “strategy”, “strategic” was used 13 times, in the strategic review as of 2008 – 18 times (Report on the Implementation of the EES. Dec. 2008 S407/08). Here is just one quote: “To ensure our security... we must be ready to shape events. That means becoming more strategic in our thinking, and more effective and visible around the world”.

The EU has no shortage of strategic claims. Traditionally, the EU documents and the

statements of its leaders mention strategic partnership with NATO. Such partnerships have been created with Japan, China, Canada, India and, until recently, with Russia. There have been adopted: The Anti-Terrorism Strategy (2005), The Strategy for the External Dimension of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (2005), The Strategy for a Secure Information Society (2006), The EU and Africa: Towards a strategic partnership (2006), The EU Strategy towards Central Asia (2007), etc.

It is also clear that the intertwining of competition and cooperation between the three players is growing. This is complicated by increasing internal contradictions in the EU. It is worth noting that all parts of the triangle compete in various forms. For example, we remember well year 2003, when the Euro-Atlantic structures became split due to contradictions over the invasion of Iraq. The topic of Russia today remains perhaps the only one in relation to which the traditional notion of an collective West remains in force although the attitudes here vary even against the background of the Ukrainian crisis. Manifestations of this are visits to Russia in 2015 of Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande, Matteo Renzi, Nikos Anastasiadis, Alexis Tsipras, Robert Fico, the presidents of Finland and the Czech Republic, Turkey, etc.

In addition to internal interdependence within the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok, all the three players – Russia, the US and the EU – are exposed to an increasing influence from abroad, primarily from China, India, Brazil and other emerging centers of power. In these dynamics of relationships – both between the three players and with other countries – the factor of state sovereignty becomes of great importance.

We witness a sort of a renaissance of the nation-state phenomena in the early XXI century. Unlike the EU, neither Russia nor the US, nor China, nor India, nor Brazil are seeking to transfer part of their sovereignty to supranational structures (although elements of this are already in place within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union). At the same time, however, the erosion of the state within the European Union has noticeably slowed down, as is evidenced by, for example, the UK intention to reclaim part of the powers previously delegated to Brussels. All across the world, the growing new centers of influence adhere to the view that a strong national state is essential.

Nevertheless, we also witness opposite processes, such as crisis developments in the functioning of a nation-state. Within the EU, the experiment with blurring the principle of state sovereignty has led to several unintended consequences and side effects. Regional nationalism and separatism increased in Spain, the UK, Belgium. The situation on the periphery of the European Union – In the Balkans – is even worse and is completely disastrous in the regions adjacent to Europe. These are entire regions of failed and collapsing states in Africa, the Middle East, on the Arabian Peninsula. A number of the EU member-states and the US have played a negative role in aggravating these negative processes, including the use of military force in the already fragile state structures' environment.

In the past few decades globalization has worked to “tie” countries together, to enhance their interdependence. The trade boom in the 1990s – early 2000s between Russia and the

European Union is a vivid example of this process.

However, this process has its own counterforce – regional integration, which, similar to gravity, pushes towards each other geographically close countries most intensely. The examples of the EU, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, NAFTA and now the Eurasian Economic Union are quite telling. In other words, the “tyranny of geography” is showing through. Hence the paradox of our time: to promote one’s interests successfully it is necessary to become the core of a regional integration project. No country is able to do this alone anymore. This way, Germany had received undoubted benefits from becoming de-facto the economic heart of the European Union and the Eurozone.

Mega-integration projects, or “integration of integrations”, represent the most recent trend in history. In a way, such projects have already been implemented in the form of, for example, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, COMECON, the Non-Aligned Movement. But in most cases these projects came as a response to a bipolar world and were driven largely by political and ideological reasons. Four super projects are currently being lobbied. This is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) of 22 Asia-Pacific countries led by the United States; the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the US and the EU; the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Zone led by China and the Economic Belt of the Silk Route also led by China. It must be noted that in those projects where the US and the EU participate, Russia is an outsider, in other projects it has uncertain prospects.

It is necessary to mention one more factor that is strongly influencing the relations in this triangle. This is the “sliding”, shifting character of the centre/centers of globalization. For several centuries until 1945 the world was eurocentric; until the early 1990s it was bipolar with the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union. Then, until 2001, there was a “unipolar moment” with a bias towards the US. Following that, polycentrism began to establish itself, while retaining the hierarchy (multilevel structure) of states. The center of gravity started to move towards the Asia-Pacific region (to be more precise – towards AIPR – the Asian-Indian-Pacific Region).

What unites and distinguishes the three civilizationally distant relatives?

Below are basic indicators on population and territory. All three parts of the triangle in different order belong to the group of top ten countries of the world (line “EU” includes leading member-states by population, Table 2).

By GDP PPP and GDP at the official exchange rate, they belong to the top ten leading countries of the world. The GDP per capita draws them far apart, but the indicators still remain comparable, with a number of EU members lagging behind Russia (Table 3 shows in brackets the place in the ranking; line “Russia” shows for comparison a sample-group of EU members by GDP per capita; column 5 shows a sample group of EU members-states).

It is worth noting that 21 countries in the world have a GDP PPP of more than \$1 trln. In sum, by this indicator they have \$ 82 trln. But only nine of them belong to what traditionally is called the “West” (the EU represented by Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain, as well

as the US, Canada, Japan and Australia). The rest, non-Western countries, including Russia, account for 54% of the GDP (\$45 trln) of the mentioned 21 countries.

Table 2.

		Territory (mln sq.km)	Population (mln)	
1.	Russia	17	142	(10)
2.	Канада	9.98		
3.	USA	9.8	318,9	(4)
4.	China	9.596	1 355	(1)
5.	Brazil	8.514	202.6	(5)
6.	Australia	7.741		
7.	EU	4.325	512	(3)
			80.9	(18)
			Germany	
			66.2	(22) France
			63.7	(23) Britain
			61.6	(24) Italy
8.	India	3.287	1 236	(2)

The share of Russia in the EU combined foreign trade in 2014 amounted to 8.4%, taking the third place after the US (15%) and China (14%). For comparison: the share of Russia in the US foreign trade is 1% and China – 2%. The EU is the largest trading partner for Russia, while the US is at the 20th place.

In the beginning of 2015, the EU's share in Russia's foreign trade amounted to 46%, or about EUR 285 bln, the share of China – about 11%, or about \$90 billion. The trade turnover of Russia with the US is below \$30 bln, while the trade turnover between the EU and the US is EUR 515 bln; between the EU and China it is EUR 467 bln. From this point of view, the “gravity” pushing Russia towards the EU is still several times greater than in the case of China and especially the US.

The Ukrainian crisis brought its own corrections. In 2014 the trade turnover between Russia and the EU fell by 10% compared to 2013 and continues to fall. However, from country to country the picture varies. This way, mutual trade with the UK fell in 2014 by several tens of percent, and it increased by 1-2% with Bulgaria and Malta. The trade turnover of Russia with non-European countries in 2014 in general has increased: for example, by 30% with Mexico, by 86% with Egypt, by 7% with China and by 6% with the US.

The European Union is passing through an extremely complicated stage in its history, with no guarantees against a backward movement or from fragmentation of the Eurozone.

Table 3.

1	2	3	4		5
2014; \$	GDP PPP (trln)	GDP at official exchange rate (trln)	GDP per capita (K)		GDP to 2013 +/- (%)
1. China	17.630	10.36 (3)	12.9 (113)	GDP PPP (trln)	7.4 (14)
2. EU	17.610	18.4 (1)	38.3 (42)		1.4 (171)
3. USA	17.460	17.42 (2)	54.8 (19)		2.4 (131)
4. India	7.277	2.048 (11)	5.8 (160)		5.6 (43)
5. Japan	4.807	4.77 (4)			1.3 (173)
6. Germany	3.621	3.8 (5)	44.7 (27)		1.4 (165)
7. Russia	3.456	2.057 (10)	24.8 (69)	Poland (72) Hungary (73) Latvia (75) Romania (85) Bulgaria (93)	0.5 (196)
8. Brazil	3.073	2.244 (8)	15.2 (101)		0.3 (198)
9. France	2.587	2.9 (6)	40.4 (39)		0.4 (197)
10. Indonesia	2.554	0.856 (12)			
11. Britain	2.435	2.848 (7)	37.3 (44)		3.2 (101)
...13. Italy	2.066	2.129 (9)	34.5 (49)		-0.2 (202)
					-0.8 Croatia
					-3.4 Cyprus

Source: CIA World Factbook 2015.

In the first quarter of 2015 the GDP of the Eurozone countries grew up by 0.4%. Three EU countries still remained in recession (Finland, Croatia, Cyprus) and this is despite the fact that the ECB has started a large-scale program of quantitative easing exceeding \$1 trln. Leading EU countries balanced on the brink of recession: the GDP growth in the UK was 0.3%, 0.6% in France, 0,3% in Italy after three years of recession, 0.3% in Germany (0.7% in Q4 2014).

Up until now, the EU is unable to resolve two other dangerous problems – deflation and

unemployment. The prices remained depressed in Europe throughout 2014 and stayed in the negative zone while the ECB target indicator was 2%. Unemployment in the EU in average exceeds 12%; the situation is especially dramatic in Spain – around 25%, and in Greece – around 30%. Young people below 25 years are in the most desperate situation. For example, more than 40% of young men in Italy are unemployed.

The immigration problem stands alone. In 2014 the number of only illegal migrants to the EU has reached almost 300 ths. In 2015 the situation rapidly deteriorated and by the end of the year the number of illegal migrants and refugees who had arrived with a poorly controlled flow on the territory of the EU exceeded one million.

What are the possible combination of forces in this triangle? All in all, there are five of them (though they are conditional):

1. *Greater Europe – a rapprochement between Russia and the EU* against the backdrop of the sunset of the American dream as the world knew it in the 20th century. The main impediment here is a lack of full political subjectivity of the European Union and strong anti-Russian sentiments in some EU countries. In this case the stakes can be placed on a multi-speed movement in the development of the European Union's common foreign policy. In its internal development the EU over time has paid more and more attention to a "two-speed movement" (for example, in creating the Schengen area, the Eurozone, the Banking Union), where some countries became the "core" of a specific process and others - the "periphery". Similarly, this principle can play a positive role in the common foreign policy, including Russia – EU relations.
2. *The reinvigorated partnership between the EU and the US* in the event of escalating tensions between Russia and the West to the level of a structural rivalry. To prevent this, much depends both on external factors and on Russia itself, which needs to move towards modernization. The main obstacles for the aforesaid variant are American "exceptionalism" and, at the same time, skeptical sentiments and even anti-Americanism, in the EU. Washington has been losing its interest in Europe for a long period of time. The negotiations on the TTIP, the revitalization of NATO in Europe amid the Ukrainian crisis have slowed this trend. However, it is unlikely that in the medium term it will weaken. The possible election to US presidency of a figure with neocon flavor, can give an additional impetus to the EU to return on the path of strengthening the autonomy of its foreign policy.
3. A new "restart" of relations, a *rapprochement between the US and Russia* against the backdrop of decreasing attractiveness of the European integration project and the buildup of global problems requiring cooperation of major powers. The main impediment here again is still the same American messianism, deeply rooted anti-Russian sentiments in the US, low economic interdependence between Moscow and Washington. However, recent developments, including the success of negotiations of the "5+1" and Iran, a new window of opportunities for combating ISIS in Syria with the participation of Russian military, the negotiations of the presidents of Russia and the US on the margins of the UN General Assembly on September 29 – show that the idea of a "concert of powers" can remind of itself from time to time even in the XXI century.

4. *Strategic partnership of all three parts* of the triangle on equal footing with the participation of other major countries, for example, at the platform of OSCE, G20 or the UN Security Council. The main obstacles here are described in options 1-3. However, this scenario also has a chance to be implemented in case of positive developments in the relations between Russia and the EU or Russia and the US. In this case, the third party may be convinced to adapt to the new trend rather than resist it. The growing factor of China may also work to build better relationships between other centers of influence. Global and, therefore, common challenges such as terrorism, climate change, further exploration of space, uncontrolled migration, etc. will push all international players towards interaction.

5. *A drift of "all from all"*. Like option 2, it is least beneficial for Russia in particular due to its position in the international division of labor and the undesirability of limiting its space for geopolitical maneuvering solely in the eastern direction. Clearly, the strengthening of strategic cooperation with China will be one of the pillars of Russia's strategy on the international arena in the XXI century. However, taking into account the imbalances appearing between the two countries, it will be important for global stability – In the conditions of a polycentric world – to maintain a more balanced system of relations that preclude the opposition of one group of states and organizations to another.

Each of these five options is possible, though with a different degree of probability. As always, in practical life processes with elements of all of the mentioned options will develop. It is important which of these elements will be dominant and which will be secondary. It is in the interests of Russia to ensure that not a single configuration of major powers is exclusive, and that not a single strategic drift is irrevocable. As in the case of market economy, "self-regulation" has long ago been recognized as a dangerous myth. If major states wish to ensure that "the mix of ingredients" in international relations of the new century is correct and universally acceptable, they should not make the mistake of relying on tactical maneuvering and the autopilot. Political will, strategic thinking, pragmatism and repudiation of national egoisms will be crucial for the success of all the components of the European civilization.

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