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**Russia and Europe in the context of US presidential
elections**

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End of the year provides a great opportunity to look back, draw lessons from the past and think about the future. With 2016 came a lot of anxiety together with positive expectations. Two major events are to be pointed out. Russia's obtaining the status of a great power on the global arena was the first significant fact and the most important political dominant for the country. The second global event was the US presidential elections and Donald Trump's becoming president of the United States with his promise «to make America great again». Thus the two countries, which are thought to have been ideological opponents and rivals for global leadership throughout the second half of the 20th century, declared the idea of regaining their former greatness.

In the 1990s Russia, which had long had the world's second economy, equal to the western countries' military potential and the great power status (confirmed by Yalta agreements in 1945), lost its global positions. The speech of President Putin in Munich in 2007 raised the necessity of the country's regaining its role in the world economy. First steps towards the goal were made through the increase of military budget, military operations in Syria and massive support of the actions of Russian government. Vladimir Putin became one of the world's most popular leaders at that time.

Restoring the great power status took place amidst continuing economic problems, aggravated by the events of 2014 and Ukrainian crisis (negative effects were disguised by the misleading arguments of the benefits of sanctions and import substitution). In 2016, the Russian GDP fell by 0.8% in annual terms, while the GDP per capita was 26100 USD (73rd place in the world). The volume of trade of the USA, as well as of the EU and China, exceeds that of Russia by

more than 7 times (Japan – 2.4 times). The share of Russia in the trade turnover of China, the USA and Japan is less than 2%. EU – 6%, mainly due to the EU's imports of hydrocarbons, which fell from 164.4 to 92.3 billion USD (share of hydrocarbons in the EU imports from Russia fell from 76.4 to 68%). These figures suggest that, in terms of economy, Russia has been losing its status of the great energy power.

As for the USA, the need to «make the country great again» does not correlate with the statistics either. The USA placed second after China in terms of GDP (PPP). However, the country retains the leading position for a lot of other indicators. For President Trump it seems to have been more of a rather catchy campaign slogan than a political goal.

One might get a feeling that some Russian political figures are waiting for some kind of confirmation of the Russia's status as a great power by President Trump. The expectations about improvement of the relations between Russia and the USA (including lifting of the sanctions) are placed on him. Such a belief is based on a number of statements by the former presidential candidate on his fellow feeling for President Putin. Expectations that the original political course of the new president will not correlate with the prevailing anti-Russian sentiment in Europe also contributes to the situation.

Trump's unexpected appearance on the American political horizon can be compared to the victory of the Russian populist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in the Duma elections in December, 1993. His party received almost 23% of the votes; Yeltsin's party had only 15.5%. That time the voters did not get an opportunity to see unfortunate results of believing in empty promises due to the specifics of Russian electoral system. Otherwise, people would have taken the bad experience into account and made the right choice which would lead to a truly democratic society with a system of checks and balances.

Stagnation can be noted in today's US-Russian relations. Development of the current situation depends on Trump's decisions, which are hardly to be expected in the near future. This suggestion stems from the diplomatic inexperience of the new president in the first place. It forms Mr. Trump's caution in relations between the USA and the world in general, and Russia and China in particular («sensitive» countries for the former administration). The lack of Trump's close ties with Washington bureaucracy, unlike most of his predecessors, also plays its part. The 45th US president is the only person in American history who has never spent a day in public service. All other presidents came to the White House with experience of working as governors or members of Congress, except for General William Grant, the Civil War hero, and General Dwight Eisenhower, the hero of World War II.

It is far from being clear, which political course Mr. Trump will choose, taking into account his numerous promises during the election campaign. American voters will get their chance to find out how the President-elect implements his promises, that are often far from reality. At the same time, the US system of checks and balances was created a long time ago by the founding fathers and its effectiveness has been verified many times.

The new US administration has promised to review its relations with Moscow, especially since they cannot get any worse. The expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats by the leaving Obama administration dropped bilateral relations to an unprecedentedly low level. It is hoped

that Trump and his team will use the obvious opportunities that provide a base for serious dialogue. There are at least three such opportunities for the White House: synergy against ISIS (terrorist organization, banned in Russia), which was repeatedly mentioned by Trump; the problem of nuclear arms control and compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (the INF Treaty); the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Today Russia and the USA fight apart against ISIS in the Middle East. Russia concentrates its forces in Syria, while the USA leads an international coalition against ISIS in Iraq. Moscow is driven by the assumption that the support of President Assad together with Iran is appropriate, even at the cost of conflict with the Sunni world, i.e. the overwhelming majority of Muslims. This fact impedes the possibility of combining or at least coordinating forces of the two countries. The situation is worsened by the unclear position of Turkey, which plays an important role in the region. The USA and members of the Western coalition aim to offset Assad, which seriously hampers joining forces against ISIS. Neither Russian air strikes, nor air forces of the coalition can ensure a complete victory, given the network-based character of the terrorist organization. From the military point of view, some terrorists in Aleppo, unfortunately, were killed together with civilians, while others left the territory carrying their weapons through humanitarian corridors. This gives them an opportunity to draw their weapons tomorrow against those who provided them with a way out today.

If a coalition with participation of Russia and USA is created, it will face not only the need of joining forces against ISIS, but also of totally blocking its activities. Countries under the threat of terrorism should strengthen and coordinate control over entry to and departure from their territory. No country should buy oil or cultural artifacts from ISIS, no country should supply ISIS with any goods except humanitarian aid to the population under occupation. Total control over cash flows into the territories controlled by ISIS is required. Money is more important for a terrorist organization than weapons, which cannot be obtained without financial support.

Negotiations on START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), on compliance with the INF Treaty and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons have not played a central role in foreign-policy statements of the President-elect so far. However, these are the issues on which Russia could become a real (if not the only) US partner in global security. Before taking office, Mr. Trump offered Russia to trade reduction of warheads for lifting sanctions. Such a move revealed the lack of political experience, but also Trump's interest in the problem, which is shared by Russia.

Some of Trump's statements (he called NATO «an outdated institution» and mentioned «the need to make Europeans pay for their own security») caused serious concerns among the members of alliance. Debates on creation of the European army have revived in the EU (Washington and London were against them). However, there is no clear understanding neither in Brussels nor in Washington what exactly the USA will require from its allies.

There might be some progress in the relations between Washington and Brussels and it will be focused on increasing European military budgets. The new US president may finally reject the TTIP agreement with the USA, he can in fact restore the «special relations» with Britain after Brexit. However, Congress or Trump's former business colleagues will hardly allow him

to revert globalization, integration processes or yield American leadership in NATO. Common sense will also restrain Trump's intentions, since the new president definitely has one.

The future of relations with the USA does not seem to be the only problem for the EU today. After the migration crisis, Europe obviously and expectedly shifted rightward. How long this trend will determine the EU countries' policy depends on the steps of the EU in general and countries' leaders in particular to resolve the problem. It is necessary to find an opportunity to shift from an uncontrolled migration (mainly of those who do not intend to work and provide for themselves) to a controlled process of granting political asylum to those who really need it with access quotas to the EU labor market. European migration costs would be high enough to launch a process of building Europe in Africa by channeling funds to the troubled countries, instead of the opposite process.

The European Union, which has been an example of successful integration and one of the most essential pillars of the system of relations on the continent for many years, is going through hard times. However, it is too early to give up on this project. The difficulties that the EU is experiencing today made its leaders look for the way out of the current situation. It is not just about the migration crisis, but also such questions as the future EU enlargement, dominance of administrative bureaucracy, search for a balance between the Union centralization and national identity. The EU has a chance to cope with the key challenges since it has a huge and rather healthy economy.

The relations between Russia and the EU remain at an unprecedentedly low level. The reason for such collapse is, most and foremost, the Ukrainian problem. Sanctions implemented by the Brussels were initiated by Obama's administration. There is hope in Russia that the new administration will initiate the process of lifting sanctions and Europe will obediently follow the example of the older partner. But it seems that we slightly overestimate Trump's readiness to revoke the decisions made by Congress as well as Europe's readiness to always follow the US, especially in those issues where Washington departs from the usual European political standards.

With current warfare of heavy artillery and tanks in the center of Europe (Ukraine) and NATO aircraft bombed Yugoslavia in 1999, the European idea of security has found itself at a dangerously low level. The hope that we will be able to build a new concept of comprehensive European security with the new US administration without cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, is hardly realistic. Direct negotiations on complete resolution of the existing conflict between its apparent and hidden participants may provide a way out of the situation. Although Russia's relations with the western countries today are deprived of ideological confrontation, there is a belief both in Washington and Brussels, that Moscow has resumed its attempts to restore its political influence. The events of 2014 are perceived as a demonstration of the Russian world revival policy, not excluding the use of military force. And this is seen as a threat to the European and global order.

Greatness of a state is no longer determined by the number of tanks or ballistic missiles today, as it used to be in the 20th century. It is no longer determined by the number of colonial enclaves or zones of influence, as in the 19th century. The development of science and

technology which provides people with decent living conditions is the factor that determines greatness of a state today. The success of technological development is closely linked to globalization and exchange of ideas that is impossible in the conditions of political and economic isolation of Russia from the West. If we talk about the shift of Russian politics and economy from West to East, neither the trade ties with China (although they are of global importance), nor the trade ties with Japan, with the «northern territories» problem as a built-in limitation, cannot justify such reorientation. Neither China nor Japan are highly interested in the Russian market. From the political point of view, Japan is bound by close ties with the USA. While China, despite some forms of strategic cooperation with Russia, is very cautious about deepening these ties. The possibility of getting new technologies from Japan is limited by sanctions, and from China – by the lack of such technologies.

The situation is as follows: Russia is facing the risk of crossing the threshold of technological backwardness and after that, it will be difficult to regain the real great power status. Market economy in Russia requires democratic reforms (including free elections, judicial independence and respect for private property) to function properly at its full potential. Mr. Gorbachev, who launched the reforms, could not complete them due to the opposition from his own Politburo colleagues. Mr. Yeltsin did not implement reforms because of health problems and the lack of support. But we have had a tandem of the president and prime minister with the support of vast majority of population for the last 17 years. There are tremendous opportunities for progressive reforms, but until now only declarations have been heard. Election programs of parties and candidates for public offices are full of reform projects that no one is in a hurry to implement. One may get an impression that the reforms have become an empty pre-election pledge, rather than a mechanism to overcome crisis.

There is a fundamental dependence of Russia's status as a global power on the level of its economic and social development. Building the country into a great power is a noble and important goal, but the presidents of Russia and USA must remember the words of John Stuart Mill, the great English philosopher of the 19th century: «A state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished». This is a universal principle which can be applied to any country in the world.

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