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Foreign policy of the Russian Federation since 2000

di STANISLAV TKACHENKO

***Abstract** – Lo scopo di questo saggio è delineare i periodi principali della storia relativamente recente della politica estera russa nel suo periodo post-sovietico: dalla disintegrazione dell'URSS all'attuale periodo della Guerra Fredda 2.0, nonché il deterioramento in corso delle relazioni della Russia con l'Unione Europea, che è il più importante partner economico e di civiltà. Ciò viene fatto con l'intenzione di aumentare la comprensione razionale delle iniziative e delle azioni della politica estera di Mosca nelle sfere della sicurezza internazionale e dell'economia politica, che spesso mancano nella copertura mediatica e nel discorso politico europeo. Nonostante il fatto che negli ultimi 20 anni la Federazione Russa abbia aumentato il volume degli scambi e delle operazioni di investimento con i Paesi asiatici, principalmente con la Repubblica popolare cinese, l'Unione Europea rimane la destinazione più importante per le esportazioni russe di risorse minerarie e la principale fonte di investimenti esteri diretti e crediti commerciali a breve termine.*

Introduction

Over three decades of Russia's post-Soviet history, its foreign policy has gone through several distinct periods and demonstrated a number of new trends.

The periodization of the foreign policy of Russian Federation includes a “romantic” or “Andrei Kozyrev's” period¹ (early 1990s), Eugenie Primakov's period² of challenging US unipolarity (late

¹ Andrei Kozyrev became the Foreign Minister of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in October 1990 and retained his position when the Russian Federation gained independence in 1991. As Russia's first Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev promoted a policy of cooperation with the newly formed independent States of the former Soviet Union, as well as improved relations with the West. A. Kozyrev left the post of Foreign Minister in January 1996, but continued in politics as MP at the lower house of Russian Parliament (the State Duma) for another four years.

² Yevgeniy Primakov (1929 – 2015) was a Russian politician and diplomat, Russian Foreign Minister in 1996-1998 and the Prime Minister of Russia from

1990s), Vladimir Putin's attempts to reload Russia's Western policy on the basis of balance of interests and mutual respect (2000-2007), as well as the current period of confrontation with the collective West (since 2007 and up to now). In this article we concentrate on analysis of Eugenie Primakov's impact on contemporary Russian diplomacy as well as on current trends in Russian foreign policy towards community of Western democratic States.

During the past thirty years (1991-2021) foreign policy of the Russian Federation has been characterized by foreign politicians and scholars in different ways. In the 1990s the most frequent terms for its assessment have been 'unstable', and 'lacking of values', reflecting deep crisis of Russian socio-economic system and political instability. After 2000 and the election of Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia, there were several years of 'silence', even if a lot has been written about Russia's 'siloviki' (security ministers) and 'chekisty' (secret service agents) as new 'masters' of the country. The period of uncertainty about the characterization of Russian foreign policy ended in 2004, and since then the key term in discussing Russian foreign policy has been 'assertive'³.

Russia's 'assertiveness' had a negative connotation, and the idea behind the new nickname for Russia was to demonstrate dissatisfaction, for example, with Moscow's attempts to preserve Viktor Yanukovich as the President of Ukraine in the highly disputed Ukrainian elections in November 2004 as well as during the *coup d'état* in February 2014.

Still, Ukraine was not the sole example of growing conflict between the West and Russia. Other examples of 'Russian assertiveness' – opposition of Moscow to the 'colour revolutions' in neighboring CIS countries and in Russia itself, its military operations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008, 'energy diplomacy' towards the European Union and Ukraine⁴. Russia's harsh attitude towards the February 2014 *coup d'état* in Ukraine followed by the revision of 'assertive' characterization of Russian

1998 to 1999.

³ C.F. Bergsten (ed.), *The United States and the World Economy: foreign economic policy for the next decade*, Washington, D.C., 2005.

⁴ C. Layne, *This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana*, "International Studies Quarterly", vol. 56 (2012), no. 1, March, pp. 205-213.

foreign policy. A new term was proposed by Western officials and picked up by the media and scholars – Russia's aggressiveness.

In 1991-1996, Boris Yeltsin and leaders of democratic post-communist Russia have tried to integrate the country into a system of institutions and partnerships with the USA and leading European countries, including Italy. But Andrei Kozyrev's departure from his position of Russia's Foreign Minister in January 1996 and the arrival of a new Foreign Minister, who would later become the Prime Minister, a "political heavy hitter" of post-Soviet Russia Eugenie Primakov, marked a change in the strategic direction of the country's foreign policy. The Primakov Doctrine⁵ holds that Russia is a sovereign actor in global politics and pursues an independent foreign policy. Within this concept, Russia's foreign policy is based on respect of international law and is inspired by a multilateral approach. Russia has announced its willingness to confront the NATO eastward enlargement since mid-1990s as well as intention to enforce its domination in the post-Soviet space and in Eurasia.

The motto for Russian foreign policy during that period was "search for multipolarity". The most visible incarnation of this period was the u-turn of Eugenie Primakov's aircraft over the Atlantic Ocean (Russian Prime-Minister was on his way to USA for official visit), following the news of beginning of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in March 1999.

The coming of Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin in 2000 marked a new stage in the development of Russia's foreign policy. At first it was characterized by attempts to build relations on an equal footing with Washington and NATO countries in the anti-terrorist coalition, and then, from spring 2003 (US-led invasion to Iraq), by a gradual buildup of contradictions between Russia and the United States. During this period (2000-2007) a special feature of Russia's foreign policy was its increasing assertiveness in attitude to neighboring CIS countries, as well as harsh Moscow's rhetoric against the EU and NATO eastward enlargement. After the election of Dmitry Medvedev as the President in March 2008 younger generation of Russian leaders has been busy in searching

⁵ E. Rumer, *The Primakov (not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace", June 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Rumer_PrimakovDoctrine_final1.pdf (accessed May 12, 2021)

for a new strategy for its foreign policy, which would retain some of the achievements of previous periods, but would also be more cooperative toward the leading Atlantic nations. Such policy should create a favorable external climate for modernization of Russia's political system and its national economy.

Return of Vladimir Putin to Kremlin as the President of Russia in March 2012 has marked new period of degradation of Russia-Western relations, which is still going on for almost a decade (2012-2021)⁶.

Russia's foreign policy in 2000 – basic characteristics

Despite some differences between above-mentioned three periods (Kozyrev-Primakov-Putin), two trends are constantly present in the foreign policy of the post-Soviet Russia:

The first one is Moscow's intention to cooperate pragmatically with countries of Atlantic community by incorporating Western institutions and keeping access to Western markets. Russia nowadays is a member-State of the WTO, Council of Europe, IMF and G20, and it keeps live the trend to positive interdependence with community of democratic nations.

The second one is the striving for a multipolar world where Russia would be one of the poles, negotiating on an equal footing with other centers of power in a traditional Realpolitik style. Since much-publicized Munich speech of Vladimir Putin (February 2007), Russian diplomacy is trying to establish itself as one of the poles in world politics. Russia attaches special importance to improving relations with countries in the post-Soviet space, both in its European (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova), Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and Central Asian (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) segments. Moscow has sought to develop the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU, since 2015) into full-fledged integration block as well as to retain the

⁶ M. Laruelle, *Russia as a "Divided Nation", from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy*, "Problems of Post-Communism", vol. 62 (2015), no. 2, pp. 88-97.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a negotiation table for managing negative consequences of the USSR disintegration⁷.

The way of economic integration, concentrated around the EAEU, is new strategic priority for Kremlin. It includes the phased construction of a customs union, common market, economic and monetary union, and, as the final phase, a confederation of States. Thus, Russia is seeking to strengthen the authority of the EAEU and its structures, thus monopolizing the right to represent its interests on the international scene, especially in relations with the two superpowers of contemporary politics and economy: the USA and China.

Such inconsistency in conducting two contradicting strategies (towards Western institutions and towards genuine global multipolarity) could be explained by three factors.

Firstly, Russia is still undergoing a period of transition being at the same time at initial stage of the long road to a free market economy and democracy. Its foreign policy is a logical consequence of this complicated transformation of internal structures as well as of the entire way of life of country with 146 million citizens.

Secondly, the fluctuations in the foreign policy of Russia can be attributed not only to the fact that Russia's elite is still very much fragmented and there are groupings with contradicting economic interests, different political and ideological preferences. Significant fraction of Russia's elite, concentrated around Vladimir Putin, is convinced that Russia's advantage is in ability to keep her hands free, maneuvering between two superpowers (USA and China) and their blocks. Modern Russia inherited from the Soviet Union a special place in the global politico-economic system, and contemporary leaders of the country are not willing to give up that inheritance.

Thirdly, significant impact on Russia is being made by a policy of ambiguity of other centers of power in contemporary international relations – the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the European Union⁸. For almost three decades,

⁷ V.V. Putin, *70th Session of the UN General Assembly*, 28.09.2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385> (accessed: 07.03.2021).

⁸ T.V. Paul, *Recasting Statecraft: International Relations and Strategies of Peaceful Change*, "International Studies Quarterly", vol. 61 (2017), no. 1, pp. 1-4.

the Atlantic community has been expressing a lack of attention to Russia, ignoring Kremlin's views on major international issues in security and economic domains. Under these circumstances Russia is trying to respond to the challenges of its own security on an *ad hoc* basis, especially when Kremlin convinced that national legitimate interests are being disregarded by other States.

The strategic course towards integration into institutions of Western-led Liberal international order has failed in mid-2000s⁹. On the eve of the St. Petersburg G8 summit in July 2006 Dr. Dmitri Trenin from Moscow Carnegie Centre has published an article, entitled «Russia Leaves the West». He has argued that, despite the transformation of G7 into G8 to include Russia, Moscow was gradually moving away from the West. It was due to the perceived substantial denial of Russian national interests by the Western powers. In September 2006, at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, after the traditional three-way consultation with his Chinese and Indian colleagues, has invited Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs to a common discussion. Therefore, for the first time he carried out a consultation of Foreign Ministers of four nations, which configured the format, defined as 'BRIC' only a few years earlier by Goldman Sachs's expert Jim O'Neil in a research paper for investors. The meeting had a positive outcome and the four ministers decided to continue those informal contacts. Besides later Munich speech of Vladimir Putin (February 2007), establishment of BRICS has marked another period in history of Russian diplomacy in XXI century¹⁰.

Since early 2000s the Russian Federation sees itself as a great power rising after years of military and socio-economic decline¹¹. That is why Moscow's principal goal at the international arena

⁹ A.G. De Robertis, S.L. Tkachenko, *The crisis of the "Liberal International Order" and the challenges from China and Russia*. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University*, "International Relations", vol. 13 (2020), issue 4, pp. 465-477; J. Mearsheimer, *Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order*, "International security", vol. 43 (2018), no. 4, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ A.S. Weiss, *BRIC-à-Brac*, RAND Blog, 2009, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2009/06/bric-agrave-brac.html> (accessed 22.05.2021).

¹¹ I. Denisov, A. Kazantsev, F. Lukyanov, and I. Safranchuk, *Shifting Strategic Focus of BRICS and Great Power Competition*, "Strategic Analysis", vol. 43 (2019), no. 6, pp. 487-498.

is to consolidate its great power potential, inherited from the USSR. The strategy of rapprochement with the USA to establish collaborative relations with the only superpower of 1990s and with US-dominated alliances (NATO, Western European Union), failed dramatically at the beginning of the current century. For the first time, Kremlin's irritation with American unilateralism has reached its peak in November-December 2004 during the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. Since then Russian leaders have intensively opposed the West's export of democratic institutions to post-Soviet countries as the key threat to regional security. In addition, the Iraqi War, which was launched by Washington in March 2003, had demonstrated the crisis of existing Euro-Atlantic structures. Moscow found itself in an unusual group of strong opponents of US unilateralism together with Berlin and Paris¹². The most typical examples of emerging coercive diplomacy of Russian Federation could be found in conflicts in Yugoslavia (1999) and Ukraine (2004)¹³. They represent foundation of Russian coercive diplomacy that began well before the intervention in South Ossetia in August 2008.

Global turmoil (2007-2009) and transformation of Russian foreign policy

Current global economic instability (Dot.com bubble of 2000-2001, the 2007-09 global financial crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic) has had an enormous impact on Russia and its politico-economic system. At the beginning of XXI century, Russia's elite was optimistic about the future of national economy¹⁴. As the Chairman of the State Duma Boris Gryzlov stated in 2008, Russia would come out of the global instability even stronger, while the

¹² N.A. Tsvetkova, *Dealing with a resurgent Russia: Engagement and deterrence in US international broadcasting, 2013-2019*, "International Relations", vol. 12 (2019), issue 4, pp. 438.

¹³ S. Tkachenko, *Coercive Diplomacy of Vladimir Putin (2014-2016)*, in R. Kanet (ed), *The Russian Challenge to the European Security Environment*, London, 2017, pp. 115-136.

¹⁴ S.L. Tkachenko, *BRICS and Development Alternatives: Russia and China*, in S. Bianchini, A. Fiori (eds), *Rekindling the Strong State in Russia and China: Domestic Dynamics and Foreign Policy Projections*, Leiden, 2020, pp. 271-297.

United States and most European Union countries would suffer much more and weakened. More cautious experts' assessments of crisis' impact on Russian economy and social system were basically ignored. However, as the instability in Russian national economy grew up since autumn 2008, the mood in the ruling circles began to change from optimism to conservatism and isolation¹⁵. The speeches of President Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) demonstrated quite clearly the thesis that the economy has been at an impasse, that crisis in Russian industry, agriculture, foreign trade and investments has become systemic in nature and that immediate measures were required for a transition from raw materials economy to an innovative model of catch-up development. Therefore, new objective for Russian foreign policy emerged – to create and protect favorable conditions for modernization of the country.

It should be noted that none of the political leaders or leading businessmen in Russia has spoken openly against the appeal of the Kremlin to modernize public institutions and national economy. However, majority of Russia's upper stratum of society has been quite happy with the status quo in Russia's current political/economic model: supplying raw materials to developed countries in exchange for convertible currency¹⁶. They have been rather in tune with the slogans of stability, which partially conceals nostalgia for the Soviet times, than with the call for modernization where their ability to compete should be constantly challenged. It has been highly likely that the conflict of Russian innovators and conventionalists could spread from the domestic sphere to the field of international relations. Exactly that has happened in the spring of 2014, when Russia and the Western powers have found themselves in current deep and dangerous political crisis after US-sponsored *coup d'état* in Ukraine and Russia's absorption of Crimea.

An important indicator of Russia's readiness to introduce qualitative and innovative reforms in foreign policy could be new

¹⁵ D. Medvedev, *Social and Economic Development of Russia: Finding new Dynamics*, "Russian Journal of Economics", vol. 2 (2016), p. 327-348.

¹⁶ A.G. de Robertis, S.L. Tkachenko, *New Diplomacy of the Russian Federation: coercion and dialogue*, "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali", ottobre-dicembre, 2016, anno 83, fasc. 332, pp. 553-566.

course of actions towards leading international intergovernmental organizations and forums. In the nearest future Russia will unlikely become a supporter of radical changes in existing system of global intergovernmental organizations. Majority of its politicians and experts believe that Russia has more to lose rather than to gain from such changes.

First of all this cautiousness of Kremlin refers to reforms of the UN and its Security Council. This institution (Security Council) is regarded in Russia as the axial structure of the entire system of inter-governmental relations and international law. Officially Russia supports the UN reform, but in practice, it seeks to delay the process, inasmuch as any change in the composition and authority of the UN institutions, including the Security Council, would reduce Russia's role in international affairs.

On the other hand, Russian diplomacy in the new century is trying to promote bigger role for the G-20 forum, where Moscow feels more at ease than in other similar clubs for sovereign States, devoid rigid rules of intergovernmental organizations as well as power to make decisions, based on consensus. The G-20 has now become the most representative forum where the leading nations of the world discuss critical and pressing economic and security challenges. That is what motivates Russia to actively participate in its work since 2008 and to advance her own initiatives or support the ideas, broached by others.

Russia, realizing that international processes were taking an unfavorable turn, encouraged establishment of a new structure of global management, where its voice would be heard, as well as its interests would be taken into consideration. BRICS since its first Summit in 2009 has proved precisely this kind of institution¹⁷. Its members (initially four but now five) share with Moscow their concerns over the negative influence that the US unilateralism is putting to bear on international security¹⁸. The BRICS countries are not happy with Washington using the IMF as well as the

¹⁷ O. Stuenkel, *Emerging Powers and Status: the Case of the First BRICS Summit*, "Asian Perspective", 2014, no. 38, p. 95.

¹⁸ T. Bordachev, V. Panova, and D. Suslov, *BRICS and pandemia of cooperation*, *Report of the International Discussion Club Valdai*, April 2020, https://www.globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/doklad_briks-i-pandemiya-sopernichestva.pdf (accessed: 27.05.2021). (In Russian)

World Bank to meddle in the internal affairs of developing States¹⁹. They are against the absolute domination of the US dollar in global monetary system and have a positive outlook on the de-dollarization of the international finances. The five biggest developing countries also regard the US policy of building up their internal debt as irresponsible.

To overcome the negative US influence on world affairs, Russia together with other BRICS countries have addressed a major task of construction of a world economic governance system that would be fully independent from the United States. The first elements of this system are already in place and up and running: the New Development Bank as an opponent of the World Bank; the Contingent Reserve Arrangement as an alternative to the IMF; the Global Financial Messaging System (GFMS) created by the Bank of Russia as a safeguard against entire States being weaned off from SWIFT. The BRICS initiatives have significantly eroded the United States' and the EU's ability to damage Russian Federation financially and economically.

BRICS is capable for positively influencing the international processes in the security area as well. It has almost slipped our minds that a very significant event took place on September 5, 2013, when a brief BRICS summit was held at town of Strelna near St. Petersburg just a few hours prior to the opening of an annual G20 Summit at the same location. Debates of leaders of BRICS nations on how to settle the Syria crisis and the positions coordinated in its wake, enabled President Vladimir Putin to present to the G20 Summit on September 5-6, 2013, the consolidated view of all the five BRICS countries – that a US military operation against a sovereign State (Syria) would be absolutely unacceptable for international community (i.e. for BRICS member-States). That opinion has been taken seriously by the US President Barack Obama, and military pressure that the United States had been stoking around Syria for several months, instantly ceased to be explosive. Some scope emerged for diplomacy (Syria's renunciation of its chemical weapons) and in a matter of few weeks international intermediaries organized the

¹⁹ *Concept of participation of Russian Federation in BRICS. Approved by the President of Russian Federation on February 9, 2013, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d452a8a232b2f6f8a5.pdf> (accessed: 30.09.2020).*

first round of peace talks on Syria. So, BRICS with Russia as its founder does have marked impact nowadays when it comes to the field of international security and this is very positive experience for current generation of Russian diplomats²⁰.

BRICS has its obvious limitations. For example, in its present form (with China and India as full members) it would not be able to become a military alliance²¹. But already now its five members can veto Washington's reckless actions in different parts of the world, including Middle East, Latin America and post-Soviet area²². The US will hardly dare to oppose the collective will of these States as it did before when invading Iraq (2003) or igniting the fire of the Arab Spring in Egypt, Libya and Syria (2010). This strategy of Russian diplomacy since 2000 is making our world more predictable and safer.

Contemporary Russian foreign policy is not able to ignore economic weakness of the country. Lack of material and human resources puts limits on ability of Kremlin to project its military power beyond the State borders. The outflow of capital from Russian domestic market and significant devaluation of national currency in 2008-2009, as well as in 2014-2016, marked significant blows to Russia's international prestige. Numerous global turmoil in the 2010s has clearly demonstrated that Russia's economy is one-sided and it depends on the export volume of energy and metals, on dynamics of their prices international markets. The potential for sustainable economic growth driven by domestic demand has remained extremely low in Russia even after 30 years of radical reforms.

Nonetheless, the crises have not brought about a curtailing of Russia's presence in some regions of the world. On the contrary, Russia acted as a creditor and provider of financial assistance to some CIS member-States (Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

²⁰ H.V. Pant, *Can BRICS Shape a New World Order?*, "International Studies Review", vol. 18 (2015), no. 4, p. 731.

²¹ S.L. Kastner, P.C. Saunders, *Is China a Status Quo or Revisionist State? Leadership Travel as an Empirical Indicator of Foreign Policy Priorities*, "International Studies Quarterly", vol. 56 (2012), pp. 163-177.

²² Z. Tianbiao, M. Pearson, *Globalization and the role of the State: Reflections on Chinese international and comparative political economy scholarship*, in G.T. Chin, M. Pearson, and Y. Wang (eds), *International Political Economy in China: The Global Conversation*, London, 2015, pp. 78-107.

Moscow is intensifying its inter-State cooperation within the Eurasian Economic Union (since 2015), the Union State of Russia and Belarus and the CSTO. In early 2000s Russian diplomacy initiated a new 'come back' to other regions of the world: Latin America (Venezuela), Middle East (Syria) and Africa (Libya, the Central African Republic). Thus, while the impact of slow economic development and stagnation on Russia's current foreign policy has been equivocal, the Kremlin tended to consider the crisis not only as a threat but also as a 'window of opportunity' at international arena.

Degradation of Russia-Western relations and prospects for new détente with Europe and the USA

Since the collapse of the USSR, relations between Moscow, Brussels and major European capitals went through a zone of radical changes. The key characteristic of a new period, which started in 2014 and will probably continue for many years ahead, is 'full-fledged political break', i.e. moving from a system of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to a new and totally unknown 'non-system', i.e. playing diplomatic and military games without established and mutually recognized rules of the game²³. Both Russia and the EU have changed significantly since crises begun in Ukraine in early 2014²⁴. The Brexit (2016) has marked a new European reality – disintegration of 'ever closer Union', while numerous economic and diplomatic sanctions of the USA and EU led to destruction of infrastructure for Russia's security and economic cooperation with Western powers, which has been constructed by several generations of politicians and businesspeople from both sides of an emerging Iron Curtain²⁵.

²³ A.P. Tsygankov, *Crafting the State-Civilization*, "Problems of Post-Communism", vol. 63 (2016), no. 3, pp. 146-158.

²⁴ *EU Global Strategy, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June, 2016, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/about/eugs_review_web_4.pdf (accessed: 16.01.2021).

²⁵ S. Fischer, I. Timofeev, *EUREN Report 2: Alternative Futures of EU-Russia Relations in 2030*, November, 2020, <http://eu-russia-expertnetwork.eu/en/analitics/2020-11-euren-report> (accessed: 09.12.2020).

Since Russia is not willing to participate in the Internal Market of the European Union, the consequences of deterioration of bilateral political relations with Brussels would not become so noticeable for its national economy. Surprisingly, tremendous growth of EU-Russia trade (from about Euro 50 billion in early 1990s to over Euro 300 billion in mid-2010s) didn't lead to positive interdependence between partners. The parties (EU and Russia) have not created economic and investment links that would be so extensive that destruction of them would leave both parties broken.

After the beginning of military and diplomatic crisis in Ukraine in late 2013, bilateral trade between Russia and the European Union countries, as well as technological cooperation between them, was subject to economic and personal sanctions and other forms of non-commercial restrictions. In response to measures of economic pressure that the EU countries put on Moscow in March-September of 2014, the Russian government imposed restrictions on access to its market for a number of European goods – primarily agricultural products. The technology exchange has also been disrupted by sanctions against Russian companies related to Crimea. At the same time, investments of the major EU economies into Russia slightly increased during the same period, mostly due to foreign direct investments from France, Germany and Italy²⁶.

Numerous institutions of political dialogue and communication between elites, from summits at the highest level to working groups of Russian ministries with Directorates of the European Commission, have been frozen since March 2014. The idea of holding summits of Russia's President with leaders of the European Council and Commission has been criticized since early 2010s, and this shows that the parties realized that this format has become unneeded and fruitless.

Intergovernmental dialogue on EU-Russia visa-free travel, which had long been of great importance for Moscow, was interrupted by the European Union since the Ukrainian crisis in

²⁶ M. Siddi, *Economic Cooperation between Italy and the Russian Federation: History, Success Stories and Challenges*, in *Russia's Digital Economy Policy and Korea-Russia Cooperation Measures*, Korea Institute of International Economic Policy, 2019, p. 4.

2014 as well. The reason for that was the intention of Brussels and Eastern European States to keep the visa issue as an instrument for encouraging individual countries of the former USSR to participate in the institutional formats of relations promoted by the EU. Political and military dialogue between Russia and Western States (first of all – with NATO) in the field of global security was fragmentary for a long time and was not utilized to negotiate on questions of vital importance. In fact, it completely died out in November 2009 after the US Administration has torpedoed draft of the Treaty on European Security, which was proposed by Dmitry Medvedev in June 2008 to, first of all, European countries. A number of decisions of the Donald Trump Administration at global security sphere, including US departure from the Treaty on Open Skies, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, additionally undermined principle of transparency and trust between Russia and Western powers since 2017²⁷.

Despite the fact that over the past 20 years Russian Federation has increased its volume of trade and investment operations with Asian countries, primarily with continental China, the European Union remains the most important destination for Russian exports of mineral resources and Russia's largest source of foreign direct/portfolio investments and short-term business credits. However, since the Administration of Joe Biden came to power in the United States, European Union and its member-States are promoting «return of the USA back to European affairs»²⁸. In practice, it means that Brussels would be ready to outsource policy-making and routine diplomatic practice towards Russia to the White House and the US State Department. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the formal termination of the political dialogue of Russian Federation with the European Union as an actor in global affairs would be able significantly turn back ongoing process of raise of US involvement into European affairs.

For seven previous years (2014-2021), leaders of the European Union and Russia have repeated multiple times that there would be no 'business as usual' in bilateral relations. In practice, it

²⁷ E. Shiraev, "We had it coming": *The 2016 Russiagate and its aftermath revisited*, "International Relations", vol. 12 (2019), issue 4, pp. 465-476.

²⁸ J.R. Biden Jr., *Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing US Foreign Policy After Trump*, "Foreign Affairs", vol. 99 (2020), no. 2, pp. 64-76.

meant that there would be no normal relations at all, except of minimal contacts in those areas, where some EU member States and Russia (including regions of Russian Federation) have become interdependent in a true sense of the phenomenon. Nowadays EU-Russia relations are worse than in any period after the collapse of the USSR. Existence of sharp and systemic crisis in EU-Russia relations is widely recognized by both sides, including structures of public management, business, civil society and academic community²⁹.

The challenge for political elites and academics in the European Union, Italy and Russia is to preserve a few existing fields of common interests (military security, trade, people-to-people contacts) and develop a set of new ideas on ways for return of mutual trust. The regional dimension of interstate cooperation (contacts between EU member States and Russian regions) is the most promising sphere for accomplishment of this mission since there is no need to discuss sensitive issues of arms race, conflicts outside of Europe, etc. Tactics of 'small steps', which is designed to preserve institutional structure of bilateral relations, is becoming priority to Russian foreign policy, its institutions of executive branch of power in Russia, national corporations and civil society institutions since COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021).

Conclusions

In the coming years Russia will preserve the main traits of its foreign policy – the desire to maintain socio-economic and hard security, both globally and in bilateral relations with the community of Atlantic nations. Internationally, Russia's primary mission, something that the current leadership pays great attention to, is to protect the existing system of international law with a strong emphasis on respecting sovereignty and non-interference by States in the internal affairs of other States. At the same time, Russia will endeavor to give impetus to integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union. Its main objective is to achieve the status of the leader in the post-Soviet space and to attain a mandate to represent

²⁹ R. Sakwa, *The pandemic, Russia, and the West*, "International Relations", vol. 14 (2021), issue 1, p. 4.

the interests of sovereign States within this space internationally. The resources of Russia's diplomacy in next decade (2021-2030) will largely depend on the shape of its national economy. However, the implementation of the aforementioned two goals (maintaining the status quo and leadership in the post-Soviet space) will be top priority for Russian diplomacy regardless of the state of its economy.