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"Moscow Has Always Been the World's Diplomatic Capital"

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I welcome the interest that we feel within the broad sections of the Russian public, as well as abroad, in what was taking place at Moscow's diplomatic venues recently. It is an important event that goes far beyond the agenda on the table when the secretary of state and the foreign minister hold talks, and it is a signal, as a minimum, pointing to the dubious position of the U.S. administration, which periodically states that Russia "is in isolation," that Russia has lost its positions, and so on and

so forth.

I would not see any special political planning here, but the circumstances, including the situation in and around Ukraine, of course, weigh in. Of the entire array of issues, I will single out only one, i.e., the need for leaders and ministers to meet and talk.

Unfortunately, Washington's position still contains an element of demand with regard to us, to the Russian Federation, to Moscow.

The fact is that through the efforts, above all, of the Russian and U.S. militaries, which are in direct contact, in the past several days and weeks the number of violations of the ceasefire regime that was agreed upon between Moscow and Washington significantly reduced. We were able to establish coordination - I insist on this term, no matter how much Pentagon representatives might shun it, - via different channels. At the same time, we provided active assistance to Staffan de Mistura, the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Syria, who has just announced the end of the latest round of negotiations.

It is very important for the United States and countries of the so-called anti-ISIS coalition to adopt an extremely thoughtful and responsible approach towards the chance that has now appeared for a direct dialogue between the Syrian parties amid the relative calm on the ground.

We are concerned by Ankara's actions, among other things, along the perimeter of the Turkish borders. There was a difficult period when targets on Syrian territory were shelled from Turkish territory, and there are incursions deep into Iraqi territory, and there are also airstrikes. We urge Ankara to adopt a more responsible approach towards such issues because, from our perspective, these are destabilizing actions. It would be more important to ensure Kurdish representation at the talks and see to it that the border between Turkey and Syria is not porous for extremists, including militants of ISIS, an organization that is banned in Russia

If the lessons from what happened in the past few months, including the terrible terrorist acts

in Brussels, and prior to that, in many other capitals, including Ankara and Istanbul in Turkey, do not influence the political conclusions that are drawn by those who make decisions on the nature of relations with Russia and the way they should be built, then this is simply an irresponsible approach towards their own peoples. We are ready to cooperate on a level at which our colleagues in the EU and other countries are ready to cooperate.

I believe that - unfortunately, I have to say this directly and openly - Russia is unlikely to become a foreign policy issue on which the next U.S. president, whoever it is, will significantly change the approach.

I insist on my view that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party have reached a consensus based on their rejection of modern-day Russia in its various manifestations.

Barack Obama: Preliminary Results of His Presidency

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EVERY AMERICAN PRESIDENT wants to make history. Few of them succeeded; most of them simply were not up to the mark; and some made it with a negative mark, to put it mildly.

Today, Barack Hussein Obama, the 44th president of the United States, is another "lame duck." Eight years ago, he replaced Republican President George W. Bush who had drawn the country into two prolonged and highly unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with sad financial, military and political results. Against this unfavorable background, Democrat Obama looked to

the United States and the world as a person able to offer an alternative to the previous hawkish political course, to move away from conflict settlement by force and normalize, in this way, the political climate on our planet. He looked like the right man to deal with the most complex international problems.

The liberal world community hoped that President Obama would steer the country away from the war and would opt for peace.

THE SPEECHES that President Obama addresses to the national and international public sound more as sermons than speeches of a political leader. In the last few months, this impression has increased.

This is not the main thing; the question is: Is there a need to incessantly remind the world that this particular state is the beacon for mankind? If it is obvious there is no need in repeating it all over again; this is not a chemical formula to be learned by heart. There is a strong feeling that something is wrong; there is no compatibility between the imagined and the real picture.

While applying its multi-vector pressure on Moscow Washington turned the deaf ear to Russia's concerns over all sorts of military programs designed to tip the balance of power in favor of the United States. A simple enumeration of what has been done is long enough to fill an article.

America explains each new coil of arms race by the need to ensure its security. It remains to be seen whether this can be accomplished with hyper-sound weapons and global ABM system. It looks as if Americans are still convinced that the two great oceans - the Atlantic and Pacific - flanking the country's East and West coasts ensure their safety. This is a delusion.

The U.S. policy of adjusting the system of international relations to its interests has already caused a string of cruel and bloody local conflicts in the Middle East; they went on for some time to finally develop into a region-wide conflict. Today, it is developing from a sociopolitical into an intra-confessional war.

Americans are prepared to cooperate. Obama has several months left to do something in order to be remembered in history not by numerous conflicts and the state of international relations close to the Cold War⁹ but as the president who gave the world a slim hope for positive changes.

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WHILE CLAMORING to rid the world of all its nukes, pursuing a propaganda ballyhoo that it has orchestrated with support from a large group of allies and numerous deceived champions of immediate nuclear disarmament, the United States is aiming nuclear weapons and cutting-edge conventional arms at practically all countries.

The Prompt Global Strike (PGS) concept, adopted by the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, is based on the thesis that the United States may be drawn into a conflict that breaks out somewhere outside the reach of American military bases abroad and develops too quickly for U.S. troops to be able to reach its site in good time. Targets for U.S. attacks would

exist briefly and be vulnerable only for a short time. Besides, they might be well protected from air strikes.

The U.S. Defense Department expects the PGS arsenal to strengthen the deterrence forces, enabling them to destroy crucial enemy facilities or "mobile targets" at any time during a conflict, including at the very start of it.

The PGS program would block the international nuclear arms reduction process, prevent the signing of new arms control agreements, and encourage many countries to acquire weapons of mass destruction and means of defense against them.

The PGS project received a boost from the Obama administration's declared plan to press for the complete global nuclear disarmament. The revised U.S. National Military Strategy, published in June 2015, describes this project as crucial for achieving American military superiority over potential adversaries, including Russia.

As other measures to avoid misunderstanding, U.S. Air Force analysts have proposed using different deployment sites for PGS and nuclear missiles and improving cooperation with Russia. Eventually, these measures would enable Russia and other nations to distinguish potential non-nuclear U.S. strikes from nuclear attacks. All this allegedly would build confidence and mutual understanding, improve cooperation and dispel suspicions about the PGS project.

It is imperative to launch intensive campaigns at the United Nations and other international bodies, primarily the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, to explain the mounting danger of the PGS project to the international community as it threatens to upset strategic stability and global security and would have new unpredictable consequences for the entire humankind.

Are There Limits to NATO's Expansion?

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THE EPICENTER of the earthquake that shatters Ukraine is located far beyond its dilemma of economic integration with the European Union or the Eurasian Union headed by Russia. The international dimension of this crisis concerns the defense and security issues or, to be more exact, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion to the east of Europe so that to tip the balance of power with Russia. This time NATO's persistent efforts at the borders of Russia produced two important events

- an armed opposition in pro-Russian Donbass and reunification of Crimea with Russia, an event of historic consequence. This means that the project NATO is realizing in Ukraine as part of its security doctrine destabilized European security. The true nature of the "defense" concept, a component of the widest spectrum of global relations in the security area, has been thus clarified.

Are there common features between the Ukrainian crisis and far-away Latin America? These features would not have been obvious without the crisis caused by NATO's expansionist project to pursue its aims far outside Eastern Europe. The problem stems from the fact that in the twenty-first century NATO became a structure of varied interests and global ambitions stretching far beyond the responsibility zone as outlined in its Charter.

NATO's persistent attempts to spread along Russia's geopolitical borders suggest that some time in future its members will not stop at spreading toward South America. Attempts of this sort have been already made. Repercussions will not be as dramatic as in Ukraine but, in the long-term perspective, no less destructive.

TWO ASPECTS of NATO's policies stand apart in South America and attract a lot of attention: first, the security doctrine of NATO that has already caused concerns in South America and elsewhere in the world.

This approach includes very meaningful references to other security threats such as "key environmental and resource constraints, including health risks, climate change, water scarcity and increasing energy needs will further shape the future security environment in areas of concern to NATO and have the potential to significantly affect NATO planning and operations."

The new NATO doctrine relied, in particular on NATO-2020: Assured Security, Dynamic Engagement prepared by a group of experts headed by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright to be discussed at the Lisbon Congress.

IN THE POST-BIPOLAR WORLD, NATO's expansionist project in Europe, its one-sided military interference and expansion of the sphere of action beyond the "responsibility zone" made it a structure of global ambitions.

NATO has already destabilized the system of European security and invited Russia's response. It remains to be seen whether the NATO project will destabilize the security system of South America, a faraway continent, and how its states will respond.

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THE FACT that since September 28, 2015, when President Putin delivered his historic speech at the UN General Assembly in New York, the situation in the Middle East has radically changed is self-evident and requires no additional arguments. This was accomplished by Russia that not merely called on the world to set up a united anti-terrorist front but confirmed by its actions that it was prepared to fight "the cancer," i.e., ISIS, consistently and efficiently.

We have to admit, however, that the movement toward a united anti-terrorist front turned out to be much slower than we would have wished and much more erratic than we could have expected. Common interests might finally persuade the main world and regional

centers to form a common front. Let's assess the barriers on this road.

Anybody from the region looking at the United States can see that its strategy of ensuring global domination and distancing from the Middle East is the highest barrier on this road.

Throughout the 2000s, Washington was actively promoting it as allegedly supported by the world community to justify its military adventures by the noble slogan of protecting common people against the "bloody dictators" and as an alternative to the international norms registered in the UN Charter. Today, Obama, according to his interviewer Jeffrey Goldberg, said, with a great degree of irritation, to Samantha Power, U.S. representative at the UN and the theoretician of this neoliberal doctrine: "Samantha, enough, I've already read your book."

A sober analysis shows that Europe has found itself in a quandary. The recent events, the terrorist acts in Paris on November 13, 2013 and in Brussels last March, revealed its, so far carefully concealed, weaknesses. First, it blindly followed the United States as an active participant in the Arab Spring that destroyed the statehoods in Libya and Syria. The results of this were exactly like Russia predicted.

Europe is gradually moving toward a sober assessment of what is going on and why; there are clear signs of this. However, a lot of time has been lost and today there are no reasons to expect that Europe is ready to join forces with Russia.

Russia's Middle Eastern concept should contain a carefully worded idea of a new image of the region that its peoples will find attractive, not the ideas of Armageddon.

Russia's Pivot Toward Asia: Myth or Reality?

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IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS of 2015, political analysts within and beyond Russia actively discussed its pivot to Asia, specifically, whether such rebalancing of interests was justified or not and whether the great expectations corresponded to the results of Russia's Realpolitik. A larger part of discussions centered on Russia's major Asian partner - China.

Russia's pivot toward Asia has become a reality generated by both political and economic interests. And even if it does not develop as fast as we would like and is accompanied by certain difficulties that come at a price, it has already started, and we can hardly expect any reversal in this area.

This rather low-quality information flow has triggered a much more serious discussion. When reviewing the results of Russian

policy toward Asia, a number of political analysts have taken a more balanced approach, containing, however, a great amount of criticism.

BEHIND A WAVE OF CRITICISM against Russia's pivot toward Asia one can easily discern practical interests of various political and economic groups inside the country. On the one hand, all those who have business interests and property in the West, have been trying to prove a harmful and risky nature of any cooperation with the "unpredictable" and "self-seeking" East. On the other, proponents of a more "nationally oriented" domestic policy have been striving to remove the present government, which they regard as a successor to the pro-Western course of Gaidar-Chubais. Mindful of the above, we should, however, concentrate on examining the essence of the aforementioned arguments.

The framework for promoting relations with such countries as China and India was not primarily built on meeting Russia's economic interests, but rather on finding partners that would see the world's future in a similar way and support the idea of multipolarity as an alternative to the unipolar world where the West would be solving all the problems at its own sole discretion. The BRICS states' striving to change the mode of operation of some international economic institutions and strengthen their positions is also primarily linked to their geopolitical ambitions.

To sum up, Russia's pivot toward Asia has become a reality generated by both political and economic interests. And even if it does not develop as fast as we would like and is accompanied by certain difficulties that come at a price, it has already started, and we can hardly expect any reversal in this area.

Outlook for the Post-Maidan Phase of Eurasian Integration Project

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EXPERTS increasingly often use *maidan*, the Persian for "open field," as the key word in describing today's geopolitical situation in Eurasia. The conflict in Ukraine has affected the geopolitical configurations in Central Asia, and has created new obstacles and challenges to the Eurasian integration project, a large-scale plan to build an economic alliance of Russia and several other former Soviet republics.

These events have had a serious geopolitical effect on Eurasia. Analysts and experts in Central Asia immediately began to extrapolate the logic of the Ukrainian crisis to Central Asian countries.

Russian society became more unified because of the Ukrainian conflict. There was an upsurge in patriotism and a rise in national awareness, and not only among ethnic Russians but among all ethnic groups of the country.

Today, the Central Asian countries have a clear realization of their need for economic relations and trade with Russia. Russia is boosting its economic cooperation with all countries of the region. However, it is still unbalanced interaction.

The way the majority of Russia's population sees the Western sanctions fully coincides with the picture produced by media content. Any news of new potential Western sanctions against Russia, no matter how insignificant and even ludicrous they may be, actually serves to further consolidate Russian society.

Despite major differences between the Central Asian economies, for instance those of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the majority of them experience similar problems such as poor diversification, unemployment, undeveloped infrastructures, the monopolization of the domestic markets, and rampant corruption. These problems stimulate the outmigration of labor, primarily to Russia.

Western pressure on former Soviet republics could have been expected to hinder Eurasian integration but, on the contrary, has facilitated it. Post-Maidan Ukraine is a graphic illustration of a

debacle of the kind of political regime that Central Asian elites are considering for their countries. For this reason, now the elites of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are much more in favor of the current Eurasian integration project, which does not link economic cooperation to a country's democratic standards as is done by the West. The current process of Eurasian integration is based on two simple principles - depoliticized economic cooperation and joint tackling of security problems.

Russia takes a pragmatic attitude to the Eurasian integration project as an enterprise that is justified historically and meets the country's strategic objectives. Neither the population nor the elites in Russia want this process to be politicized.

At present, Eurasian integration mainly takes the form of energy trade and joint energy projects as energy interests are the priority for the ruling elites and big business in the countries taking part in the project. But the deeper integration is the more industries will benefit from it. One way to popularize Eurasian integration is to create facilities for Kyrgyz farmers to supply their produce to the markets of Customs Union member countries.

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THE ACTIONS of Barack Obama's administration in Latin America in some respects differ from what his predecessors were doing there. These differences emerged during his election campaign. It should be admitted that he has inherited an extremely beneficial legacy from George W. Bush, who, during his two presidential terms, failed to achieve his main goal in the region, i.e., to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), largely due to the leftist drift that emerged there in the early 21st century.

It was also remarkable that in his election campaign speeches, Barack Obama has moved away from the traditionally high-profile but, as a rule, unrealistic plans for "a single America" and pan-American interests and values.

Before Obama, no American president dared even so much as to hint at the possibility of normalizing relations with the Island of Freedom for fear of losing the votes of the anti-Cuba lobby in Florida.

Obama took a risk and, unexpectedly to many, received support from the majority of voters and in addition, acquired popularity in Latin America, unprecedented for a U.S. president. According to most polls conducted in Spanish-speaking countries, the approval of his course reached 80% towards the end of his presidency.

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For the first time in the history of U.S.-Mexican relations, the U.S. president officially acknowledged that drug cartels fought mostly with American weapons smuggled in from the United States.

Naturally, the Obama administration had to react to the critical situation in one way or another. In May 2010, as a matter of urgency, the U.S. and Mexican presidents created a special commission to develop joint measures to stop the violence on the border.

On the whole, a certain measure of harmonization has recently emerged in U.S.-Mexican relations. The latest meeting, which took place in Mexico in May 2014, addressed an array of issues related to strengthening North American security, better border protection and joint action to eliminate the effects of natural disasters. Barack Obama openly supported the Mexican president's efforts to implement energy, telecoms and education reforms.

OBVIOUSLY, the most significant event in the past few years was the U.S. and Cuban decision in December 2014 to restore diplomatic relations. The decision was hard for the Obama administration, while the U.S. president had to show his lobbyist skills on the Capitol Hill, especially considering that after the Republican victory in the November elections, it was they, not the Democrats, who took control of a number of key committees.

The political crisis in Brazil has affected its relations with Venezuela, which has entered into the period of a profound economic crisis and political turbulence. Preoccupied with their internal political problems, in particular, the unprecedented corruption scandals, the Brazilian authorities took no efforts to normalize the situation in the neighboring country or to adjust its course in a direction beneficial for itself.

Finally, it should be noted that, if the strategy of two rings is implemented, the United States, on the one hand, will provide support for its allies in the region (the Pacific Alliance), and on the other hand, it will effectively sideline not only MERCOSUR, but also a number of new Latin American associations that were created a few years ago, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

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ON FEBRUARY 4, 2016, in Auckland, heads of 12 Pacific Rim states signed a treaty on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the first trans-regional mega-partnership, which will come into force in the next two years as soon as at least six countries, representing about 85% of the total GDP of the TPP, have ratified it.

Other trans-regional agreements - between the EU and Canada and the EU and Japan, the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and others -

are moving in the same direction.

They are expected to radically change the structure and nature of the international division of labor and, in the final analysis, cause deep-cutting reformatting of global economy.

Officially, the TPP members spoke of the partnership as an alternative to the economic unions functioning in the Pacific Rim (ASEAN and APEC in the first place) and pointed to their more liberal trade conditions than those offered by the WTO and the local FTZ. In fact, the United States is pursuing its unpublicized aim of trimming China's rising influence; it wants to remain in control in the APR and restore the lost positions in Asia.

In the 20th century, Europe and the United States had been talking about reviving the Silk Road yet China filled the idea with a new and highly creative conceptual and material content. Many of the developing countries left outside the two mega-partnerships are given a chance to be involved in trans-regionalization that creates real prerequisites for common economic space in Europe, Asia and Africa.

The Belt and Road project will become the "softest" and flexible partnership in which its members will discuss the future roads of economic development to identify the triggers of possible conflicts, remove them and unify their strategies by taking into account the economic, political and legal practices of all members.

Trans-regionalization is a new stage of globalization that creates inter-state economic alliances of a new type and pushes them to merging.

TRANS-REGIONALIZATION is a serious challenge for Russia. If our country fails to find adequate responses it will be mercilessly pushed to the periphery of world economy. Formally, its losses caused by the TPP and RCEP are negligible - not more than 0.1-0.2% of GDP until 2025 since raw material exports are less vulnerable to excessive protectionism; as for the branches with higher value added, the barriers for them will be much higher. Russia was driven to the

WTO by the need to achieve structural shifts.

This means that Russia should pour more efforts into economic competitiveness and, in the first place, into the branches that will make Russia's exports more diversified. We should look for chances to set up new and promising economic partnerships so that to tap to the full Russia's potential.

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Mikhail Leontievich Titarenko died in February 2016. This article is his last contribution to our journal.

RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC TURN to the East has revived the academic and social-political discussion about our country's Eurasian self-determination and an adequate understanding of its Eurasian identity. It seems, however, that we have not yet grasped the true philosophical, geoeco-nomic and geopolitical significance of Russian Eurasianism;

we should arrive at its comprehensive understanding and formulate its definition.

The current actualization of Russia's Eurasianism prompts going back to its historical and philosophical background that, in its turn, makes it necessary to supply this concept with detailed commentaries, within reasonable limits, on its meaning.

This article deals with the essence and meaning of new Eurasianism that surfaced in the ideological and political discussions after the Soviet Union's disintegration amid the efforts to formulate a national idea very much needed to consolidate and inspire sovereign Russia challenged by an uncompromising cultural and civilizational expansion of the West. This expansion diluted, to a great extent, the cultural-civilizational self-identity of the Russian and other peoples of the Russian Federation that became apolitical and spiritually depressed; the ideas of local separatism, regionalism and isolationism were gaining momentum while ethnic tension and disagreements were becoming more and more obvious.

The idea of new Eurasianism supplied Russia with the key to the geopolitical and also spiritual-humanistic self-identity of the Russian nation and the spiritual secret of Russian civilization.

The critics of the concept of Eurasianism as a paradigm of the development of Russia (who belong to the camp of Europeists) spare no effort to discredit it by their references to the Eurasianism of the post-World War I period (the 1920s-1930s) that was obviously an anti-Western movement. It should be said that the anti-Western vector was caused by the specifics of the time.

In the philosophical context, new Eurasianism has created a planetary field in which each culture, first, specifies its place in relation to other countries; second, discovers in a new way its own traditions that invigorate consciousness and self-identification; third, very much in line with its own nature, it acquires its own way of existence and development; fourth, together with other cultures it is involved in building up an intellectual vocabulary of mankind; fifth, all cultures acquire unity that suppresses the possibility of cultural conflicts, achieves symphony and initiates a constructive

and mutually enriching dialogue of cultures.

The genuine dialogue between the Chinese and Russian cultures is going on and will be deepening. China is manifested as a persona of high spirituality and Russia as a persona spiritually belonging to the new Eurasianism. They will conduct their dialogue in the language of human thought.

The Soviet Union's disintegration, the huge Western pressure on Russia and the West's open and cynical interference in the domestic affairs of the sovereign Russian State brought the country close to the erosion of state and civilizational identity of Russia and its citizens. Today, Russia must answer the question: 'What is Russia and what road should it follow?'

Official Diplomacy and Peacekeeping Efforts of Religious Organizations

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TODAY'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS are characterized by mounting unpredictability and instability and the rapidly growing risks of deepening inter-civilizational, intercultural and interreligious divides. A number of experts on international issues note that there is reason to talk about a global crisis of religious freedoms. In substantiation of this, they refer to the sad statistics of Christianophobia that, according to human rights advocates, exists in 139 countries. Islamophobia exists in 121 countries. The level of anti-Semitism in the world shows no signs of abating. On the

contrary, in recent years, the situation has deteriorated everywhere. And most disturbingly, the understanding that respect for religion and religious freedoms is critical for the normal development and prosperity of human communities seems to be weakening in the world at large, in particular in Europe and the United States.

We are confident that international stability and sustained global development is only possible on the basis of a mutually respectful dialogue between different faiths and civilizations with the observance of peoples' rights to determine their future independently. Comprehensive assistance to this principle is Russia's unquestionable policy priority both at home and on the international arena.

Despite the measures taken by states, there has been a considerable rise in intolerance against Jews, Muslims, Christians and members of other religions in the OSCE region.

I cannot but mention problems that Christians are faced with in a number of Western states, where for some reason it has become non-PC to indicate a person's affiliation with the Christian religion, and people are even beginning to be embarrassed by Christian values, which constitute the foundation of European civilization. Aggressive secularism is gaining ground. The concepts of morality and traditional ethnic, cultural

and religious identity are eroding. There are growing instances of vandalism and the desecration of churches and cathedrals, holy places, cemeteries, and Christian symbols. It is increasingly difficult for believers to openly practice their faith.

We are confident that an effective recipe to cure the problems faced by the international community today is to build a moral platform for consolidating the efforts of all its members based on traditional values that have ensured mankind's progressive development from generation to generation. We believe that religious organizations play a very important role in this process. We will provide all the necessary assistance to the constructive efforts to ensure international stability and sustainable global development based on an equal and mutually respectful dialogue among different faiths and civilizations on the solid basis of international law.

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THE WESTERNIZATION of Ukraine, a process that was engineered abroad and gained momentum in December 2013, sparked a large-scale national crisis, which has affected the entire Ukrainian society. Among other things, it has highlighted the deplorable state of the Ukrainian economy. Neither politicians nor analysts nor outside observers venture to predict when this crisis will come to an end. To make the Ukrainian crisis worse, neither Europe

nor the world in general has been able to resume stable growth.

On the whole, the nature of GDP restructuring makes clear that Ukraine is undergoing an accelerating deindustrialization. The crisis has had the heaviest impact on the extractive industries, manufacturing and construction, and on a sector crucial to them - banking and finance.

The crisis has laid the groundwork for large-scale redivisions of property in Ukraine, and some of their results will be manifested in Ukrainian companies' activities in the EU after the launch of a Ukrainian privatization program that was scheduled for 2015 but was put off due to incomplete legislation. So far no privatization deals have been made either with domestic or with foreign investors.

The EU assures Russia that the DCFTA will mean no essential changes to Russian-Ukrainian trade and is on the whole a routine accord.

The Ukrainian government and the European Commission gloss over the need for Ukrainian companies to adopt EU quality standards, and hence either modernize their production facilities or close them down and set up new ones.

This aggressiveness manifests itself particularly clearly in Ukraine's debt negotiations with Russia. It is apparently based on two theses that are common among the international financial community. One of them is that Ukraine's debts are the product of the "war" in the east of the country, a conflict that, according to Western allegations, was orchestrated by Russia. The other is that Russia puts economic pressure on Ukraine by raising customs barriers in response to its free trade deal with the EU.

By and large, one has the impression that current processes in Ukraine's manufacturing, trade and financial services are parts of the same plan. They are apparently designed to build a comfortable environment for U.S. and EU investors, while Russian investors would not only have any opportunities of fair competition but would face artificial barriers rendering all their plans senseless.

Russia's Public Diplomacy: The Balkan Aspect

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IN THIS ERA of global political, economic and information transformations, public diplomacy holds an increasingly strong position as an effective form of international political activity. Due to technological progress, domestic and foreign policy is itself becoming a public field of activity, "a new genre of government in the age of information."

UNLIKE CLASSICAL DIPLOMACY, public diplomacy is an activity pursued not by the state but by a "self-motivated part" of society, "including any citizen who is not indifferent to what is happening in Russia and beyond."

Besides, public diplomacy has its own target audiences. Professional diplomacy is the exchange of opinions within the same political environment - diplomats and politicians take action to influence a policy course of a foreign country, its political decision-making and corresponding measures. The target audiences of public diplomacy are the societies of foreign countries from ordinary citizens to civil society institutions. Changed or shaped by foreign public diplomacy, the public opinion of a country can influence the latter's foreign policy agenda. The public diplomacy of a country may also result in a different attitude to that country on the part of various nongovernmental entities abroad such as media outlets, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, or business associations.

Public diplomacy is not the same as propaganda - it has different objectives and methods.

Information and explanation are the best description of what public diplomacy is all about. Public diplomacy primarily means information about a country, its culture, values and politics aiming to stimulate a desire to cooperate with it. Simultaneously, public diplomacy is a way for a country to prevent discrediting its policies. Bulgarians, Greeks or Serbs who know the history of their countries, are familiar with Russian culture and traditions, often visit Russia and closely collaborate with various Russian non-profit organizations, in other words, come within the realm of

Russian public diplomacy, will never believe in memes about the aggressive policy of Russia that are propagated by Western media and social networks.

IN CONCLUSION, let us emphasize once again that public diplomacy is pivotal to the advancement of Russia and for ensuring a key role for it in the rapidly changing world. Public opinion is a principal political barometer in any country, and the Balkans are no exception. Russia needs a permanent and serious dialogue with every segment of society in Balkan countries. Most importantly, one should remember that non-cooperation also produces results, just as cooperation does. Russia's plan is to cooperate. The next step is to put it into practice.

Migration as a Bane and Boon for Germany

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THE MASSIVE FLOW of refugees and migrants into Europe is a problem of political, humanitarian, social, demographical, and economic dimensions.

With its number one economy in Europe and number four economy in the world, with its huge experience as a "melting pot" of ethnic communities and its humane treatment of non-ethnic Germans and non-Christians, Germany has come to symbolize a comfortable European home of tolerance with high living standards and a stable welfare state. German politicians with foreign roots have taken senior positions in government and political parties.

THE TORNADO OF MIGRATION has put an end to Germany's trouble-free existence. The German government is feverishly looking for a

solution. More than 900,000 migrants were registered to have arrived between January and November 2015. In September, October and November, more than 10,000 people crossed the border into Germany every day. The political, social and economic situation not only in Germany but also in other European countries depends on whether the Germans live up to this challenge.

Surveys produce a picture that is volatile but clearly shows an anti-Merkel trend, and public sentiments confirm this. Polls suggest that half the population fears that the current inflow of migrants will result in the erosion of German national identity and lead to higher taxes as a source of support for newcomers.

GERMANY urges other European countries to do more to resolve the crisis. It insists on addressing the causes of the crisis and drawing up a mechanism to settle it. But Merkel uses different tones in talking to European nations and to the United States. Whereas she has been very firm with the former, she thanked President Barack Obama for his decision to put off the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, which she considers another potential source of refugees.

Obviously, dealing with migration problems should be the job of not only efficient administrators with good knowledge of the situation but also of specialized law enforcement agencies with employees knowledgeable about the cultures and languages of migrants' home countries. The Berlin criminal police force provides unique services with officers of immigrant origin, people with Turkish and Serbian roots for example.

EU countries are increasingly divided on how to deal with the migration crisis. Merkel is against proposals to close borders and to suspend accepting migrants or set quotas for it. She and her supporters see registration camps as the optimum solution and advocate humanitarianism and economic and political pragmatism as the key principles for dealing with the migration problem.

Foreign Policy of France: Moving Away From Gaullism

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IN FEBRUARY 2016, Foreign Minister of France Laurent Fabius left his post after nearly four years in office; this rekindled the discussion about France's foreign policy and its steadily declining international significance. Gaullism proved to be a universal doctrine that defied the course of time: Till the end of the Cold War, all French presidents followed his course, Socialist François Mitterrand being no exception. In fact, his presidency gave rise to the term the Gaullist-Mitterrand tradition

as a confirmation of the continuity of France's foreign policy.

There is no agreement among the experts in contemporary history of France over the practicality of de Gaulle's concept. Its successes are obvious: France that occupied a compromise position between the Soviet Union and the United States initiated the détente; it was instrumental in signing the Four Power Agreement on Berlin, the Final Helsinki Act² and started other processes in world politics.

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH EXPANSIONS of the European Union that spread to five states of the former socialist bloc and the Baltic countries can be described as the key events of European history of the last decades. The talks about possible expansion had begun earlier, during the perestroika years in the Soviet Union, the deepening crisis made this possibility highly probable while the European grandes began to look at expansion as the main factor of European policies.

Washington's rapidly rising influence in Eastern Europe and the gradual integration of East European countries in NATO created a threat of Americanization of the EU.

Chirac accepted the EU expansion of 2004-2007 for geopolitical, rather than economic reasons. His decision proved to be erroneous: Washington increased its impact on decision-making in the European Union while the prospects of signing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Agreement between the EU and the U.S. made the trend even more obvious.

The recent resignation of Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius fanned discussions of the results of his four years as the head of France's foreign policy.

Historians repeated time and again that Russia and France are natural allies. In his time, General de Gaulle summed this up as: "Russia for France is an interlocutor, the mutual understanding and cooperation with which were and remain absolutely natural. This is political and human reality; it is as old as our countries and goes back to their history and geography. In fact, there have never been serious contradictions between us, even at the time of the War and Peace or the epoch of Sevastopol."

Prospects for National Reconciliation in Afghanistan

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THE TIME that has passed since most of the Western military contingent was withdrawn from Afghanistan has not led to the materialization of the weak hope for the government's ability to meet the formidable challenges involved in stabilizing the situation and peace-building in the country, including on the basis of dialogue with the armed opposition. Extreme instability will most likely predetermine the internal situation in Afghanistan also in the foreseeable future.

The candidacy of a new leader, Mullah Mansur, was not to everyone's liking, including, at any rate, at the initial stage, the closest relatives of the former Taliban leader. It cannot be ruled out that to consolidate his power, the new leader immediately adopted a

tough position with regard to the Kabul authorities. However, after a show of force, Mullah Mansur purportedly started demonstrating a certain propensity for contacts with the Afghan government.

Mullah Mansur's death in early December 2015 (which, however, is contested by certain sources) as a result of an internal conflict graphically confirmed the continuing deep crisis within the Taliban movement and the lack of a common consolidating platform with Kabul's armed opponents.

The long-running crisis in Afghanistan, which has its own internal dynamics, in the past few years, has also been increasingly proceeding alongside the rapid development of events in the Middle East, above all, the phenomenon of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

The appearance of a new extremist force, specifically ISIS, in Afghanistan has created new circumstances and uncertainties regarding the prospects for the national reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

The paradox is that if by the beginning of the century, Afghanistan was one of the main hotbeds of international terrorism in the post-Soviet period, today, ISIS activists have an increasing impact on the development of the situation in a number of regions in the country.

The post-Soviet Central Asian states, above all Tajikistan, as well as Uzbekistan, are increasingly concerned over a possible terrorist threat from Afghanistan.

Amid the present-day deterioration of Russia's relations with the West the latter can be interested in getting Russia involved in another conflict in the expectation that it will get bogged down in new problems that will inevitably follow this move.

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SET UP IN 1948, Israel a year later was officially recognized by Turkey that became its closest partner in the Middle East, the region swept by the Arab wars of independence in which Turkey was the only pro-Western state. In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser explained that "Turkey, because of its Israeli policy, is disliked in the Arab world." At that time, their ties were mostly symbolic.

In Turkey anti-Semitism was fed by Islamism, left anti-Zionism and right nationalistic extremism; practically all analysts were pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli which explains anti-Semitic hues of all debates on the conflict in the Middle East. Having quarreled with all their neighbors and with Russia, the leaders of Turkey, recently the most irreconcilable enemy of Israel and the benevolent patron of Hamas, are moving toward normalization of their relations with Israel.

Turks have a century's worth of poor relations with Arabs. They resent the fact that Arabs refuse to support their position in Cyprus and find Arabs generally unreliable as economic partners. For their part, Arabs frequently blame the Ottoman Empire, which controlled much of the Middle East through four centuries, for their current plight.

According to analysts, the strong Turkish-Israeli ties enhanced the region's stability by serving as a powerful military deterrent against would-be enemies. The United States profited from the Israeli-Turkish alliance that might open a road to a pro-American alliance of democratic states, similar to that in Europe.

Despite the indignation stirred up by Ankara's demarche, the Israeli leaders and Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak cautioned against excessive criticism and pointed out that the Turkish-Israeli disagreements notwithstanding, Turkey remained the key figure in the region and that both countries should, therefore, preserve their strategic relations.

It looks as if Ankara decided to exchange its NATO membership for domination in the Middle East. This explains why Erdoğan intensified the conflict with Israel: This was the first step toward a Middle Eastern NATO of sorts that would unite all Arab countries under Turkey's leadership. Normalization does not mean a strategic alliance as it was ten years ago. The road toward final agreement is very long and very difficult; much depends on good will and political determination.

Current Objectives of India's Foreign Policy

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THE COLLAPSE of the bipolar system of international relations coincided with the start of successful economic reforms in India, which were launched in 1991 and led to serious discussions on that country's role in the world.

Today, the main objective that India sets itself is to sustain its high pace of economic growth and modernize its economy. This will enable the country to solve numerous problems, among other things creating jobs and doing away with extreme poverty.

The Indian government is aware of the scale of the tasks facing the nation, but the current international state of affairs seriously impedes their implementation.

In the meantime, India has to look for foreign resources to implement the large-scale Make in India initiative, a program that has been launched by Modi and is his government's domestic priority. The program aims to make India a global industrial center and thereby create millions of jobs for the country's growing population.

Modi has repeatedly pointed out that economic imperatives and bilateral relations with various countries will determine India's foreign policy. This has been hailed in India both by the electorate and the media.

NonAlignment 2.0 puts forward bold and interesting ideas. But, though the geopolitical theories set forth in it are not to be dismissed, they don't amount to a strategy. The report propounds principles to underlie India's foreign policy, which is important, of course, but fails to make it quite clear in what way balancing between the United States and China would help India attain its key objectives. While the report makes general statements to the effect that India's foreign policy should be determined by its economic interests, there is a lack of a core in it that would clearly set out overall national interests and explain how they should be pursued.

India has declined persistent Western appeals to join in criticism of Russia and, moreover, has supported Russia. This has demonstrated once again that Indian-Russian bilateral ties have a value of their own and that India won't trade them for boons from the West, which would have been a more than easy path for New Delhi to take. For the West, there can be no better example of the independence of India's foreign policy than its relations with Russia.

Relations with Russia remain a priority for India, which was demonstrated by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee's presence at, and the participation of Indian troops in, the Victory Day parade on Moscow's Red Square on May 9, 2015 and by a Russian-Indian summit that day.

The Middle East in the Deadlock of Radicalism

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RADICAL GROUPS have always exploited, and continue to exploit, religion, ethnicity, ideology, and lack of education to sustain their influence. Radicalism deforms social environments in which it emerges. As a result, radical terrorist organizations existing in a specific society interact not only with one another. They do not only create their own social base but help build the social base for a political opposition, thereby setting off significant social transformations.

Today, when one's every movement can be traced, it would be naïve to assume that intelligence services, and hence governments, may be unaware of the existence of terrorist organizations and the plotting of major terrorist attacks.

Terrorism is used as a means to achieve major national, regional, and global objectives. If a country plans an operation against another country or against a region, it activates terrorist organizations set up on the territory of the target country or region, and then moves its troops into it, using terrorism to make such intervention appear "legitimate."

RADICAL ORGANIZATIONS that were set up a while ago on an ethnic or a religious basis on territories comparatively close to us have become so robust and enjoy so much public support that they can no longer be ignored.

RADICALISM with the mass-scale violence that it involves is one of dozens of problems stemming from the past.. It would be a fair conclusion that the geopolitical evolution of the Middle East toward radicalism was set off by power collapse in Iraq and accelerated by Syria and Libya effectively becoming failed states as well. Yemen may be put in the same category - although there were signals that the country might launch reforms, it was unable to evade a civil war.

Besides its visible part, the radicalization trend based in the Middle East has created a global ideology that is adopted by terrorist organizations outside the region and to an extent is a source of inspiration for them.

The absence of efficient state security systems in Middle Eastern countries facilitates the emergence and growth of non-state entities. The gradual weakening of what until a while ago had been powerful security forces in Iraq and today's deplorable condition of that country is the best example. Turkey, which lies nearby, should try hard to preserve the potential of its security forces. One more problem in the Middle East is the estrangement of the population, which, having no access to a range of services, does not see itself as part of government protection mechanism and so is exploited by non-state entities.

Let us not forget either that Turkey had a similar experience in the 1990s when people who were driven into radicalism by the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party rallied around Hezbollah and later came to represent a terrorist threat to the entire country. And, moreover, the example of Pakistan shows us that a country caught in a whirlwind of terrorism and radicalism may spend years upon years looking for a way to restore stability.

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