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**A Cold Peace? West-Russia Relations
in Light of the Ukraine Crisis**

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**West-Russia Relations and
The Emerging Global Order**

by

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Polycentric world as new reality

The idea of the emerging global order, in other word the emerging polycentric world, is intractably bound with the issues of global governance and regulation, with a role and place of each state and their groupings in these processes. In fact, there are not many countries, which in principle aspire for a significant stake in the global regulation mechanisms. Even smaller number of them are inclined to claim a role in their invention. For the majority of functioning states the ultimate goal is to establish themselves as influential regional players; for some of them leading positions on the regional level is a strategic price. Very few nations have a desire and resources to strive for a place in the category of those subjects of international relations, which have trans-regional interests and adequate resources to underpin them.

In the past the top of the pyramid of global influence was occupied by great powers. In their ranks the most powerful were biggest empires. In the course of time they were replaced by two superpowers. Their main difference from previous heavyweights consisted in the fact that they wielded unmatched capacity to project their interests almost in any corner of the world, and propensity for such a projection was limited mainly by their will and mutual competition.

Russia in the beginning of the XXI century was developing as an autonomous transregional centre of influence with elements of global power. By its culture and history Russia is mainly a European country but by mentality and psychology – the transcontinental one. With its borders stretching thousands of kilometers in the west, south and east, Russia geopolitically, economically and security-wise cannot and should not concentrate its foreign policy in one direction.

This observation does not mean that Moscow lacks priorities in constructing its relations with other parts of the world. Their hierarchy is well known: the post-Soviet space, the European Union and other European countries, the United States, China and other members of BRICS, etc.¹ As foreign policy and national interests of any country are multifaceted, in each concrete situation such hierarchies of interests are different and evolving. For example, from the Moscow's point of view, nothing can be more important in the sphere of strategic stability than the US and China. But there are regions, which are significant in so many respects, which accommodate such a density of different interests for their neighbors that they become the main point of reference. Today and in the foreseeable future the region of such a comprehensive importance for Russia in political, economic, financial, cultural and security sense is Wider Europe, i.e. the European civilization stranding the land mass from the Atlantic ocean to the Pacific.

Perhaps, the dynamics of global history will lead in the future to a different set of priorities in the foreign policy of Russia. It is difficult at this point to judge if the scenario of its transformation into a Eurasian power, focused primarily on the Asia-Pacific region, is realistic and achievable. Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union keeps staying in its essence the European rather than Asian or Eurasian state. Migration of Russians from Siberia and the Far East still is not stemmed; the bulk of the economy beyond the Urals mountains is oriented towards Western markets; infrastructure in that part of the country, which constitute 2/3 of its territory, is developing too slowly; foreign investments, if not to count oil and gas, are concentrated in the European part of Russia. New pipelines, heading to China, Japan and other non-European consumers, will not change the situation fundamentally.

With all of its grandeur, the "Power of Siberia" pipeline, the long-term gas contract between Russia and China, signed in May 2014 during the official visit of Vladimir Putin to Beijing, envisages the maximum capacity of 1/4 of the European market share of Gazprom. In

¹ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Signed by the President of RF on 12.02.2013.

order to implement the “turn to the East” within a short range of time the Russian state would be expected to demonstrate the iron will comparable, for example, with the colossal task of evacuating the Soviet industry to the Urals and beyond during the Second World War. It will be impossible to carry it out relying on self-regulating market forces. Even in the long run such an assignment would demand consistent and systematic neo-industrial state policy.

However keeping in mind all challenges Russia is facing there is no doubt that it should diversify its foreign trade and foreign economic policy, its foreign investment policy adopted to the inexorable rise of China, India and other fast growth markets on huge territory from Turkey to Indonesia and in Latin America. It would be a mistake to see the European orientation of Russia in certain key spheres as a monopoly, exclusive and excluding other options. In the sphere of security, politics, economy it will be increasingly important to develop the “multivector” foreign policy, the policy of strategic depth. Besides other projects, it certainly applies to BRICS, which boasts huge potential and which already has proved its viability against all odds. The BRICS summit in Brasilia in July 2014 was a vivid demonstration that Russia is imbedded in the new emerging international system and with this in view it is almost impossible for any of its actors or their groups, in case of confrontation, to isolate Russia on global scale.

A noticeable contribution of BRICS to the construction of polycentricity is that it is not the restoration of the balance of power in its traditional sense but rather a way to increase adaptability of aspiring countries to the runaway world, a way to increase clout in international affairs without imposing your views on others. This is a logic of rebalancing instead of counterpoising, the application of soft and smart power instead of forcing others to accept your position.

It is highly probable that in the following decades the dynamics of international relations will be defined by two groups of states – those that comprise BRICS and the combination of the EU and the US. In fact, this process is already ongoing. Under these circumstances, Russia finds itself in quite a unique situation when it is objectively one of the leading actors vis-a-vis the EU and at the same time the strategic partner of BRICS’ members. Of course each of them has its own track of relations with the EU and the US; what is important that they pursue these tracks on the basis of polycentricity.

Strategic horizons of Russia are clearly seen in the G-20 format. Moscow has used it and will continue to do so as an additional leverage to coordinate regional and global policies with China and with other fast growing economies and aspiring nations. G-8 format, dismantled by its Western members because of the Ukrainian crisis, has not exhausted its potential. The suspension of the Russia’s membership is not an unsurmountable obstacle on the way of pursuing Russian interests but to resume sooner or later G-8 functioning would be in everybody’s interests.

One may argue that soon after the breakup of the bipolar world the humankind found itself in a situation familiar to the XIX and the first half of the XX century, a situation of shifting partnerships and competition among various centres of power. The notion of multipolarity (or polycentricity) became widespread. It took the place of the “concert of powers”, born on the tailcoats of the Vienna Congress in 1815. However, the polycentric world, which is taking shape before our eyes, is a unique product of the latest stage of globalization².

The principle distinction of multipolarity in comparison to “concerts” of the past is threefold. First, the world is drifting away from Eurocentrism and in broader terms from Euroatlantism. For the first time in modern history on all continents there are aspiring nations, which harbor transregional ambitions. Second, the ability to influence the course of regional or global affairs now depends not so much on dominance let alone on coercion but on persuasion, attractiveness and smart combinations of soft and hard power. Third, the second half of the XX

² The comprehensive research of polycentricity is undertaken in: *Russia in a Polycentric World*. Ves Mir Publishing, Moscow, 2011.

century gave us the legacy of international law, which is based on the Charter of the United Nations. Therefore, there is a good reason to argue that to declare the postwar Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations dead is a mistake. The international law as it evolved after 1945, as a component of the Yalta-Potsdam system, is still the benchmark to judge the legitimacy of states' actions, a sort of a strait jacket, which hampers intentions of those who is prone to violate the established norms of conduct.

The international law, being a thoroughly codified system, still accommodates the ingredient of competition allowing for different interpretations of events. One of the most well-known manifestation of this is deep rooted dialectics of two principles: territorial integrity and self-determination. After the Second World War the former for a long time dominated Europe. However, in other parts of the world the latter got the upper hand as a result of anti-colonial struggle and demise of European empires. From the beginning of 1990s, with the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, then Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine the principle of self-determination again has come to the fore in Europe. It still keeps its attractiveness in the eyes of a number of European peoples, striving for their own statehood, primarily Scots, Catalans and Flemish.

To be apprehensive of bipolarity because it ostensibly reconstructs the concert of powers of the XIX century seems to be misleading for the three reasons mentioned. In any case, one may argue that to run counter objective forces of history, to turn the clock back is impossible. What is within our reach is to correct these processes, to maximize their advantageous consequences and to minimize negative ones. The worst thing to do is to pretend that nothing happens and to ignore the reality. It is not less senseless to warn against polycentricity on the ground that it is much more complicated and unpredictable than bipolar or unipolar world. The whole history of humankind is a testimony to the fact that mechanisms of regional and global regulations get more intricate not simple and from this point of view the XXI century will be the continuation of its predecessors.

The law of rise and fall of great powers functioned all previous centuries; it appears that this law is carrying on. Not a single country, which dominated international affairs during previous periods of history, has succeeded in preserving its status or in enhancing it. In most cases, hegemonies of the past yielded their positions and slid back to lower categories. Sooner or later they were challenged by new aspiring nations and the next reconfiguration of regional, transregional and global influence took shape.

Such reconfigurations did never happened overnight and the ongoing one will take a significant time to solidify. The present system of international relations strands both XX and XXI centuries. It is still attached by numerous bonds to the postwar period. It is highlighted for example by drastic efforts of Euroatlantic states to prevent their marginalization in the emerging polycentricity. Some observers still define the US as the superpower; others reserves this status for rising China. However, it is a unique nature of polycentricity, which differs it from the epochs of empires, concert of powers and superpowers. In essence, it is reflected in low chances of new transregional or global hegemonies being born. Force fields of political, economic and other sorts of influence are distributed so even as never before and this trend is reinforcing itself. It will be a daunting task for any pretender to overcome the force of these fields.

The role and place of Russia in the changing configuration of powers

Russia had an opportunity in its history to enjoy the status of the largest land empire, later a superpower. In both capacities it played an essential role in shaping mechanisms of regional and global governance and regulation. After the breakup of the USSR for the first time since XVIII century Russia found itself in the range of regional, even subregional actors. However, history has shown that the depth of its downgrading was not entirely conditioned by the iron logic of

"rise and fall". The time showed that Russia's stance in the world could be significantly improved.

Presently Russia is a transregional power with elements of global reach. Today the thesis of Russia's international obligations sounds quite natural although in the recent past it was treated by many with skepticism and even with outright denial. Even today quite a few specialists in Russia not to mention foreign ones urge Russia to avoid the "unbearable burden of strategic depth".

I believe that this skepticism is misguided. For a long time successful internal development (and the XXI century makes it even more vivid) has relied heavily on the successful foreign policy. In the world, which is deeply intertwined, it has become the axiom. Of course, *est modus in rebus*, and the foreign policy, severed from reality, can be a burden for a country. But to find a right balance between the foreign policy activity and demands of internal development is a matter of quality of public administration and not the denial of necessity of such an activity. To waste domestic resources for the sake of illusionary foreign policy dividends is not less unacceptable than inaction in foreign policy detrimental to national interests.

A desire to restore the role of a superpower would be deceptive for modern Russia not less than inability to protect and further its interests as one of the centres of influence in the XXI century. Notably, aspirations of the Russian political class and society to see the country in the league of leading subjects of international affairs are not accompanied by messianic fervor or by declarations of some exceptionalism. At the same time the latter has returned to the political lexicon of the US leaders, as was demonstrated by Barak Obama speech in June 2014 in West Point. There are varieties of this approach to self-assessment in other countries. For example, in the UK since the times of Tony Blair the idea of "pivotal power" has come into vogue. One may get the impression that the more some international actors are made to adjust their policies by undercurrents of global development, the more they are willing to prove that this is not happening.

To realize its potential in foreign policy Russia is going to use mechanisms of regulations inherited from the second part of the XX century as well as mechanisms invented in the wake of the bipolar world. Among the first – the UN with all its ramifications, WTO (as continuation of GATT), OSCE (as continuation of CSCE), etc. Among the second – G-20, BRICS, SCO, CSTO, Eurasian Economic Union, etc. Without an active foreign policy it would be impossible for Russia to create or to contribute to creation of these organisations and therefore to have a say in regional and global mechanisms of regulation.

Moreover, in order to improve its chances in reserving for itself the appropriate place in the XXI century world order Russia needs to act even more energetically in the foreign policy field. Besides other things, it will be increasingly important to take into account the following paradox of modernity: in many cases it is impossible to enhance one country's influence without the buttress of regional integration even if this requires a delegation of part of your sovereignty upwards. In other words, it is the ability to establish yourself as a core of a certain group of states. An obvious example is Germany, which has acquired its present status of a European heavyweight due to its membership in the EU, or the US as a core of NATO, or Brazil as a centerpiece of several Latin America organisations. In the light of this instructive experience, it is very rational and advisable for Russia to press on with its role as a leader of integration projects in the post-Soviet space. Their further development and the rate of success in the following years will be a significant component of Russia's ambitions to embed itself in the international order as a transregional centre of power.

The emergence of new and reconfiguration of old mechanisms of regional and global regulation will continue for years to come. This will be a period of time when different international actors can join the process, correct it and even shape it. If not for the assertive foreign policy of the Soviet Union, the UN would have looked different, less conducive for promotion of Moscow's interests. Why the UK for all the decades past has failed to become the

driving force in the EU and now is its only member deliberating about leaving its ranks? Because long time ago it missed the opportunity to become one of its founding members and to invent its rules. Why Brazil is successfully establishing itself as a leader of Latin America? Because at the right time it exhorted its efforts to shape integration processes on the continent in a way, which were favorable to it. I think that this pattern will continue to reproduce itself: some countries will enhance their positions in world affairs due to application of strategic thinking (horizon scanning); others will be lose out because of inaction, passiveness or wrong strategic calculations. Assumingly, Ukraine has lost opportunity to become on par with Russia a driving force in the integration projects in the post-Soviet space.

Smaller Europe (EU) – Russia – the US: strategies of geopolitical survival

What variants of strategic development exist for Smaller Europe in the coming decades? Based on the linear logic the European Union is positioned to develop further as an autonomous actor of the XXI century. There are two ways to augment this status. First, the inertia scenario – with the help of well-known methods such as "power by example", i.e. by attractiveness of the model of development, soft power, pool of sovereignty, solidarity, etc.; second, the modernisation scenario – with the help of further federalisation including the field of the CSDP. The first way is less problematic as it does not require further institutional changes but at the same time less promising against the backdrop of the comprehensive crisis, which the EU has been engulfed in for seven years now. "Modernisation or slow death" – quite a real perspective for the European Union. In a situation when euro zone experienced a genuine threat of a breakup, when several of its members were on the verge of bankruptcy, when several countries are still in recession, when rates of unemployment in many places are record high and one of the major members is planning the in-out referendum, it is difficult to keep convincing yourself and non-members that the EU model of development still is sound and does not need the overhaul.

The second scenario – quality changes in the EU – is much more difficult as it runs counter numerous entrenched interests. Its consequences are less predictable and risks are higher including the risk of a "multi-speed Europe" getting out of control and centrifugal forces taking upper hand over centripetal ones. Nevertheless, it is the second scenario, which gives some hope that if the project undergoes quality changes, its gravity will restore its previous force. And the potential is still there: even in its present dented state the EU is the biggest market in the world; it boasts half of the world expenditures for international development and half of the world social expenditures. Many of its members enjoy high living standards and generous welfare states. The development according to the second scenario cannot be constrained to soft power instruments. Geopolitical weight, as Joseph Nye convincingly put it, will be defined in the XXI century by smart power, which combines in different situations different combinations of hard and soft power³. It seems that under the veil of "business as usual" a significant part of the EU political class inclines to go down this rout.

At the same time, critics of further territorial and political enlargement of Smaller Europe abound. The view is that in its present state the EU is already overstretched. Indeed one of the towering obstacles for internal and external development of the EU is its heterogeneity, which reached new heights since the biggest ever wave of new members in 2004 with later additions. The constant increase in social and economic inequality inside the EU is its obvious weak point, which should be tackled. However it is telling that in recent years economically and socially most problematic countries have been not so much "young European" but countries of the "periphery", which are represented not only by Ireland (accession year 1973), Greece (1981) or Spain and Portugal (1986) but also by Italy – one of the founding members. Therefore, the roots

³ See: Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *The Future of Power*. Public Affairs, New York, 2011.

of the current problems of the integration project, laid bare by the economic crisis, go much deeper than the hasty enlargement of the 2000s.

Currently the structure of the EU is based on a sort of multipolarity unlike the principle of multilateralism. Various centres of influence inside the EU cooperate as well as compete. These inner tensions are accompanied by the desire of Smaller Europe, although diminished in recent years, to extend its sphere of influence to the post-Soviet space, to the whole of Mediterranean region and the Middle East. So one may argue that there is both an internal strategic overstretch, producing “enlargement fatigue”, and external one, leading, for example, to the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean Union debacles.

There is another variant of strategic development, which is worth analyzing in case if Smaller Europe is a fading centre of power and influence in the XXI century no matter, which one of the two above scenarios take effect (the inertia scenario and the modernization scenario). The logic goes that if it is impossible to stem the strategic sidelining of the EU in global terms relying only on its own resources, than perhaps it can be done in couple with external factors. In other words – the union with what other key international players can prevent the further relative marginalisation particularly of the EU?

Indeed, it may seem not highly plausible, if to judge by long-standing trends, that the EU can escape from three fundamental corrosive factors. First, demography. In 1900 the population of Europe as a whole stood at ¼ of the global one, in 2014 – at 10,3%. According to the UN it has already reached its maximum and is projected to decline between 2013 and 2100 by further 14%⁴. By 2050 according to the medium fertility estimates the share of Europeans in the world population is expected to fall to 7,4%⁵. By 2065 one third of Europeans will be people older than 65⁶. Second, the problems with relative decline in the EU economic competitiveness⁷. Moreover, the data show that this decline started not with the world economic crisis in 2008 but much earlier, in the 1990s. Third, slow long-term decline in the EU (and European) share in world GDP⁸. In 2002-2012 the EU share of world GDP (PPP) shrank from 25% to 19,9% (the EU-28 share in world nominal GDP in 2012 was 22,9%).

Individual states, acquiring the status of the EU member, in their majority have enjoyed the integration project’s surplus value and additional instruments to guard their national interests inside the EU and outside it. Now it may be the turn of the EU itself to use the same upgrading method – to enter an integration project of a higher level, i.e. transregional integration with other significant centres of influence. For the latter such a proposal may be the attractive option as well. With all its shortcomings Smaller Europe is a global player in world trade, innovations, science, education, social and technical standards, in international development and partly in conflict resolution.

At the same time, it is doubtful that the EU in its present form is privileged to expect that there will be a “scramble for Europe” on the part of other international actors. The EU in many aspects is in a mess and its appeal is far from what it was until recently. Almost the same can be said about problems, which Russia faces. Both Moscow and Brussels should admit that a possibility of their marginalisation in the XXI century is not scaremongering. It is quite real in case if geopolitical combinations, which do not include them, will become dominant, for example, Chimerica or a variant of a “tripolar world” (USA – China – India).

Apparently there are only two potential “integrators” for the EU, the strategic lock with whom may halt the weakening of strategic positions of Smaller Europe: Russia (the Wider Europe project) and the US (a new transatlantic deal). There is no other more influential partners of the EU in the space of the European civilisation. Theoretically the membership of Turkey in

⁴ http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012_Press_Release.pdf

⁵ <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Excel-Data/population.htm>

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *The Future of Power*. Public Affairs, New York, 2011. P. 161.

⁷ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Europe2020_CompetitivenessReport_2014.pdf

⁸ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EX-14-001/EN/KS-EX-14-001-EN.PDF

the EU can give it a new existential boost (more than 70 mln new "Europeans", new dimension of multicultural nature of Smaller Europe, the geopolitical wedging of Europe in Asia, etc). But probability of such a membership at this point in history is rather low. The enlargement fatigue may be seen not as a drawback but as a manifestation of common sense of the EU. It is quite clear that in the foreseeable future the main task of the organisation is to solve its present difficulties and not to import new ones.

The project of Wider Europe is problematic for the EU for a number of reasons: significant anti-Russian sentiments, especially in some East European and in Baltic countries, substantial differences in economic and political structures between Russia and most advanced members of the EU, mismatch in a number of strategic goals, etc. But arguably attractiveness of such a strategic lock is also obvious, taking into account the size of Russia, its human capital and natural resources, advanced positions in several spheres: nuclear industry, space industry, energy, military complex, cross-regional infrastructural potential. Several macroeconomic parameters of Russia are appealing: the size of the GDP, small budget deficit, low public debt, one of the largest gold and foreign currency reserves, relatively small share of the state in the economy, flat income tax, etc. with all its home-bred problems, the potential of the Russian economy is big. The last but not the least, the strategic lock between Russia and the EU would be a union between equals and not the subordinate relationship.

The idea of a new transatlantic deal is more comprehensible and straight-forward. The TTIP negotiations point out in this direction. However, this type of strategic alignment would rule out the development of CSDP, insure the "bigger brother" kind of relations, abandonment of foreign and geopolitical European ambitions, reliance on a partner across the ocean, whose foreign policy and economic interests in many ways do not coincide with the interests of Europe. The EU will have to share with the US the burden of hard power and the responsibility for future instances of military adventurism abroad. Even more important is to answer a question – won't such a union be directed at the salvation of "Washington consensus", which betrayed its weariness if not to say exhaustion since the start of the world economic crisis in 2008?

There is a view that a retreat of the EU to the role of a "smaller brother" is justified for the reason that it will provide Smaller Europe with inside influence on the policy of the US. However this idea has already proved its incapacity not once. The recent conspicuous example was the irreparable damage inflicted by Washington foreign policy on the political career of Tony Blair. Nevertheless this idea has been regularly discussed in the European political and expert circles. At the same time Europe has never been free from anti-Americanism for different reasons. The US reputation was severely dented because of the causes of the world economic crisis. "American dream" has lost much of its appeal. The country politically is deeply divided, its infrastructure, services and welfare long time ago ceased to be the envy of the world. The essential question is: if the US is in the phase of long-term decline isn't it a wishful thinking to count on the strategic lock with them to upgrade Smaller Europe globally?

	1995	2007	2020	2030
USA	21,7	19,4	18,3	16,6
China	5,5	10,1	17,7	22,7
Japan	8,3	6,0	4,6	3,6
India	3,1	4,3	6,9	8,7
Russia	2,8	2,9	3,1	2,7
EU-27	24,5	20,8	18,6	15,6
France	3,6	3,0	2,5	2,1
Germany	5,3	3,9	3,2	2,5
Britain	3,4	3,1	2,9	2,5

Source: Economics Intelligence Unit (EIU.com).

Indeed the given Table demonstrates that the positions of the US and the EU are weakening and apparently will continue to do so. It should be noted that Russia, according to this figures, is in a shaky situation as well. With the present structure of its economy and even in case of moderate growth, which presently is not on the cards, the share of the country in world GDP will probably stagnate or will decrease in comparison to other more dynamic centres of growth. The country desperately needs neoindustrial modernisation policy. The Ukrainian crisis and anti-Russian sanctions have showed that over-dependence on export of natural resources is a poor ground for a place in the premier league in the XXI century.

Theoretically there is a third variant – the new «concert of powers» in the triangle «Russia – Smaller Europe – USA». This combination would solve the dilemma, which partner to build strategic partnership with, Russia or the US, would unite the space of the European civilisation in its entirety, would guarantee this concert the role of the global leader in economic, political and military affairs for several decades. It would be Wider Europe Plus.

Unfortunately the probability of such a scenario at the moment is scant. Firstly, the US seems to be stuck in the unipolarity set of mind for long time to come and therefore will not agree to a status of *primus inter pares* in the mentioned triangle. Secondly, taking into account the low visibility of the EU as a subject of the global political process (apart from the window dressing in the form of CFSP), it is clear that in the foreseeable future Russia and the US would prefer dealing directly with national capitals rather than with Brussels. Such state of affairs would only prolong the present stagnation of CFSP, would further marginalize those members of the EU, which do not yield much influence. Thirdly, in the EU and USA anti-Russian sentiments are stronger than anti-American feelings in Smaller Europe. Fourthly, in case of the rise in geopolitical tensions between China and the US, it would be difficult to expect Moscow to preserve equidistance with Beijing and Washington and would tend to support the former.

Each of the strategic locks, outlined above, with participation of Russia have their own logic and attractiveness (Wider Europe and the new concert of powers). In spite of the fact that at present, against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, it seems impossible to realise any of them, it would be a mistake to write them off completely. The world in 10 years time will be a very different place. However, if the dream of the European civilisation coming together or the Wider Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok is not going to come true, then the success of

integration projects in the post-Soviet space will acquire additional and even existential meaning for Russia.

Whatever course the history decides to take, whatever combinations of power and influence Russia gravitates to, it is the imperative for Moscow to establish itself as a core of integration processes. The more successful such a policy proves to be, the broader transregional and global maneuver Russia is going to have at its disposal.