

Latin America – Russia: An Agenda for Constructive Cooperation in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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International Institute for Global Analyses

Vision & Global Trends. International Institute for Global Analyses
Piazza dei Navigatori 22, 00147 – Rome (Italy)
Seminar Publications Series – N. 5/2020 – August - ISSN 2704-8969

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First Edition: August 2020

Seminar Publications Series – N. 5/2020

www.vision-gt.eu

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On Tuesday, August 4, the outstanding video-conference “[Latin America – Russia: an Agenda for Constructive Cooperation in the Post-COVID-19 Era](#)” was held organized by the [Valdai Club](#), the Russian Embassy in Guatemala, the AMerican CHAMber of commerce (AmCham), the Central American Parliament (Parlacen) the SIECA (Central American Secretariat for Economic Integration), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the CRIES of Argentina (Regional Coordination of Economic and Social Research).

The video conference was attended by Alexis Rodzianko as moderator (president of AmCham Russia) and an outstanding panel of speakers with:

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov; Nadia de León (chairman of PARLACEN) Melvin Redondo (general secretary of the SIECA); Yaroslav Lissovlik (programme director at Valdai Club); Richard Kozul Wright (director of division on globalization and development strategies UNCTAD); Daniel Russell (Ceo of USBBC) and Lila Roldan Vásquez (head of the CARI –Argentina- Eurasian studies group)

After a brief presentation and comments by the moderator **Alexis Rodzianko** on the nature of the video-conference and the panelists in it, Russian Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs **Sergey Ryabkov** started the dialogue expressing his satisfaction with the existence of this kind of spaces for reflection in such difficult global times.

Here some quotes of his more outstanding phrases:

- “*Russia and the United States continue their dialogue on joint efforts to combat the pandemic, and this is good news*”.
- “*Washington, however, does not abandon its claims for global hegemony. This poses a threat to international stability and security.*”

He stated the need to increase channels of cooperation when the coronavirus is ravaging the entire planet, for the first time in humanity, it faces a threat that affects the entire planet, this poses a dramatic challenge, the frustrating statistics of Covid- 19 have the same effects as a war, this era requires the consolidation of international efforts together and that Russia hopes that large-scale cooperation can act as a vector for a more multipolar world.

He also denounced international actors, the countries that privilege self-interest over those of the international community in times of crisis due to the pandemic. He cataloged irresponsible and short-sighted countries that ignoring the [UN declarations](#), mainly the western powers, continue with sanctions measures to other countries, sanctions that hinder the acquisition of medical supplies and assistance, including Latin American countries (Cuba and Venezuela as the 2 main cases), without even foreseeing the lifting of sanctions even for the time of the pandemic.

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He was also very critical of the attitude of the United States [in various multilateral fields](#) such as its withdrawal from the Open Skies treaties; missile weapons treaties such as INF and START II; the North-American withdrawal from the World Health Organization.

On the cooperation agenda of Latin America - Russia, he highlighted the negative factors that Latin America faces in its current situation:

- *“Latin America continues to face dramatic social inequalities and political destabilizations: The US continues its efforts to redraw the political map of Latin America to serve its interests.”*

He stressed that:

- *“From Russia with much disappointment and concern some time ago we observed how the [Monroe Doctrine](#) and all the ideology linked to it was officially [reintroduced](#) by the United States.”.*

As positive factors he pondered that for Russia, Latin America has always been a region of political tolerance, economic opportunities and cultural affinity:

- *“For Russia, the relationship with Latin America is a value in itself of its foreign policy and bases its cooperation agenda in the region based on a pragmatic and de-ideological vision, Russia does not seek to engage its partners in geopolitical dilemmas where they must choose between friends and enemies”.*
- *“And these links have always had a positive dynamic in energy, communications, technology, medicine, logistics and transportation. We seek technological and commercial alliances, diversifying their bases”.*
- *“A paramount of Russian cooperation with Latin America was the activation in 2019 of the Latin American Institute of Biotechnology (in Managua, Nicaragua) that produces, insulin and interferon and vaccines for Latin American consumption”.*

Despite the delicate situation worldwide, the deputy-minister remained optimistic that crises improve prospects for international cooperation, and that Russia-Latin America cooperation will continue to consolidate.

- *“During this pandemic, Russian assistance has been received by: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, in testing teams and personal health protection, in addition to humanitarian aid.”*

The possibility of assistance to other countries in the region such as Paraguay, Colombia, and Peru has been addressed.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund announced the signing of an agreement under which 150,000 [Avifavir packages will be sent to seven Latin American countries](#): Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay. In addition, Russia will also send supplies of the antiviral drug to South Africa and transfer the technology to Bolivian firm Sigma Corp SRL in order for it to be produced locally.

The deputy-minister Ryabkov closed his presentation by stating that in the current difficult circumstances it is essential to avoid politicizing the situation of the pandemic, a true global challenge, which requires joint efforts between all States, and that Russia is ready to make its contribution, and it's doing it.

Nadia de León (chairman of PARLACEN) spoke on "*the imperatives of the Parliament of Central America in foreign relations*" approached from a historical perspective, the ups and downs of Central American regional integration, the role of Parlacen as a regional legislative body that has sought to promote the region as a zone of peace and human development

The current chairman of Parlacen also spoke of the Central American and the current situation of the legislative body, where its functions are carried out through digital tools (official sessions and committee meetings are carried out digitally) and highlighted the priorities of Central America and the Parlacen;

- *To strengthen ties with the largest and emerging economies, increasing Central American exports and their diversification for economic reactivation, especially for SMEs, deepening cooperation relations with other Latin American regional legislative bodies such as: **Parlatino, Parlasur, Parlandino** to increase intra-regional economic exchange and brotherhood in Latin America, to strengthen parliamentary ties with the European Union, Russia and the United States.*

Melvin Redondo (general secretary of SIECA) highlighted the role of SIECA, a body that provides analysis of both intra-regional and global opportunities for the economies and entrepreneurs of Central America. He also highlighted the Central American regional integration process, qualifying it as "*pioneer*" (within Latin American integration) when it began with the formation in the 1950s of the ODECA (Organization of Central American States) and then with the SICA (System of Central American Integration) both processes that seek to consolidate democracy, peace and economic development in the region, the regional blocks will have the challenge and responsibility of being the engines of economic recovery in a post-Covid stage. In this last topic, he stressed that identifying the complementarity in supply and demand in the exchange between Central America and the Eurasian space will be fundamental for the future.

In the closing of his participation, he highlighted the important steps that Russia has taken to join SICA as an observer, and as a strategic partner of the Central American region.

Daniel Russell (Ceo of USRBC- US-Russia Business Council) spoke about *US priorities in its cooperation with Russia as well as other countries*:

In an overview from the business sector, he observed the challenge posed by the economic decline and the recovery that must take place after the covid-19 pandemic. And he also highlighted the current complicated business climate:

- Global institutions that set norms are currently in a state of fragility, a growing trend towards economic protectionism and constant geopolitical tensions (such as between the US and Russia, the US with China and others)..

Russell also highlighted a tendency towards open hostility towards trade liberalization, which he considers to be misguided.

Regarding the business relations between the US and Russia, he highlighted that according to the business consultancy [EY](#): "*three-quarters of US investments in Russia are considered investments in strategic sectors.*"

Russell mentioned the economic interdependence generated by business exchange as a key element to lower geopolitical tensions. To end his speech, he proposed "*relaxation*" in

trade policy measures worldwide and greater business and political inter-dialogue within countries, and quoted the director of the WTO, Roberto Azevedo, who maintains that: [“If countries work together, we will see a much faster recovery”](#).

Richard Kozul Wright (Head of the Department of Globalization and Development Strategies of UNCTAD) addressed the topic *the global economy after the pandemic*.

He argued that many countries due to the Covid-19 pandemic face worse socio-economic prospects than the 29 'crises or other types of events of this style, he observed that it is a global crisis in economy, in health, added to a deteriorated environment, global problems that require international cooperation, but that is precisely where he highlighted that multilateralism is also in a deep crisis.

- *multilateralism is in crisis and needs to be rebuilt to address these global problems*

Kozul Wright argued that different explanations for the crisis of multilateralism can be traced, but many are linked to the current geopolitical crisis that the world is experiencing. Kozul Wright stressed that hegemonic decay has a lot to do with all current global "shocks". The strength of the US is no longer what it used to be, and it's the US itself within it that is confused as an actor about its future role in the international system.

Kozul Wright continued:

- *International cooperation in a much weaker state today than during the 2008-2009 financial crisis*

For many people, Covid-19 was a black swan, but it has only accelerated certain processes that were already underway, the worrying signs of the global economy were already visible at the end of 2019, at the end of that year UNCTAD produced a [report](#) describing the state of fragility of the global economy, which the Covid-19 pandemic made much worse.

He also commented that in a state of total global uncertainty, economists try to understand this new situation, but analytical tools still have their limitations. He explained that for prospecting future scenarios, economists have an "alphabet" to estimate the geometric shape of economic recovery ([V, U, L, W](#)). UNCTAD is optimistic about a V-shaped recovery (very fast growth, rebound, after a major depression) but that largely depends on the economic policies of the major economies, he hope that the answer is not the same to the crises of 2008, where austerity measures initially gave signs of recovery in the economies, but in the medium-long term the recovery-economic growth curve flattened.

To end his presentation, he called to learn about the lessons of the 2008-2009 crisis, so that there is a better economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and advocated for a more active role of the State in its interior and abroad throughout this process and also cited an article in the Financial Times that had a lot of impact, the article argued that:

- [“Radical reforms — reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades — will need to be put on the table. Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy”](#).

Yaroslav Lissovolik (program director at the Valdai discussion club) titled his dissertation as: "*the role of the US and Russia in the new global architecture*"

He highlighted Covid-19 as an accelerator of pre-existing processes. He also mentioned the global role of Russia in integrating several new spaces of economic-financial architecture such as the banks AIIB², NBD³, EDB⁴ as well as the efforts of Russia to promote the projection of the trans-regional relations of the Economic Union Eurasian, with Mercosur citing one example.

Lissovolik argued that one of the great challenges of the international system is the "*aggiornamento*", a reform of the Bretton Woods system of institutions more consistent with current times, with new actors and dynamics, as well as the reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO), although he also stated that the way in which this reform is carried out will depend a lot on the actions of the United States.

Lissovolik also commented on the importance of multilateral spaces such as the G20 and the United Nations having frameworks, channels, and programs that anticipate possible global crises.

Finally, he shared a proposal from the Valdai Club (a proposal that previously that forum already presented at the T-20 of the G20, as he explained) that would consist of a G20 but made up of regional blocks, where major world issues can be addressed.

Lila Roldán Vásquez (head of the Eurasian studies group of CARI-Argentina, who was also the Argentine ambassador to Ukraine) entitled her dissertation as: "*Latin America - USA-Russia in searching a common agenda*".

Roldán Vásquez, argued that the relationship between Latin America and the US adopts different angles according to the interests of each country and the agenda is focused on investments or on the treatment of common challenges such as drug trafficking or migration, and that the interest of the United States in the region declined in relation to others then in the late 90s and early 2000s.

On the other hand, Roldán Vásquez pointed out that [in recent years there has been an increase in relations between Russia and Latin America.](#)

"...*Relations with Russia are not ideological, they are practical since the region seeks a diversification of markets (...) for its part, Russia goes to Latin America in search of diversified commercial opportunities and some kind of political support in the international arena...*" she finally added.

² Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

³ New Development Bank (BRICs)

⁴ Eurasian Development Bank

Q&A Section

In the questions and answers section of the dialogue, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov answered a question about the role of Russia in the binomial-dilemma that would appear to present itself to Latin America in the strategic competition between the US and China:

- ***“Russia won’t be part of that geopolitical game”***

He made it clear that Russia will surely not be part of a possible geopolitical triangular game with the US and China in Latin America, since Russia does not have the same capabilities as the other two actors and that from the strategic vision of Russia relations with Latin America should be characterized by a cooperative logic of mutual benefit (win-win) and pragmatism, these cooperation dynamics, he argued, will always be guided by pragmatic visions; *Russia will not subject its partners to geopolitical dilemmas* and he highlighted the Russian-Argentine relationship as an example of a link of mutual benefit. Russia won’t act for Latin America as an actor to support itself in a counterbalance, to offset the competition between Beijing and Washington in the region, but it will continue to maintain cooperative relations with Latin America, although he clarified that trilateral cooperation, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic should not be ruled out.

- ***“Those practices go against the core elements and principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.”***

It was his answer to the question about Russia's position on the persistent US policies of imposing economic sanctions unilaterally (such as in the blockades against Cuba and Venezuela) that impede the fluidity of international cooperation (in times of pandemic, necessary international aid) and that Russia has also been suffering the same extortionary measures since the referendums that consecrated the return of the Crimean territories to Russia in 2014, and in which in this aspect Russia has not found a “*common ground*” with the United States for dialogue.

- ***“We have to find ways to ensure relief to the countries most in need and with the fewest resources”***

He argued that it is the responsibility of institutions such as those of the Breton Woods system, the G20, the Club de Paris, the economic powerhouses to find coherent strategies to achieve this objective. Macroeconomic policies of expansion, not austerity, should be promoted globally.

My own questions

As an observer-participant of the digital event, I was able to ask the Deputy-Minister Ryabkov two questions:

- ***“Is there any prospect from Russia to collaborate with South American efforts to "catch up" with the latest technology?”***

In this response, he expressed his wish that such cooperation be carried out, since Russia has a lot to contribute, he said regarding the digitization of public services, of special interest today in public health services, other axes of technological cooperation could include biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and he stated that Russia is not exaggerating by

claiming that it has made important advances in the development of drugs that help combat Covid-19 in the near future. Regarding this, he highlighted the observations of his presentation, where he mentioned that Russia has significantly promoted the installation of technology in Central America (the Latin American Institute of Biotechnology). Other areas of cooperation of interest mentioned were telecommunications and the peaceful use of nuclear power, agricultural technology.

- ***Is there any interest from Russia to improve Argentina's naval capabilities in fishing, hydrocarbons, naval surveillance, etc?***

In this regard, he pointed out that initial contacts had taken place in the Macri administration and that he is sure that under the administration of President Alberto Fernández these contacts would continue.

He quoted the slogan: "*it's the economy, stupid*" when explaining the interest that exists between both governments and their respective businessmen to associate in relation to the naval field, but the contacts are still distant.

Regarding fishing exploitation, he acknowledged his lack of knowledge about any Russian-Argentine association project on the subject, but he stressed that this doesn't mean that it is not an interesting area of cooperation to continue advancing the in the bilateral agenda.

For the last, he emphasized that when travel and contacts will be reestablished, all those axes of cooperation can be discussed further, without major impediments.



USA - LATIN AMERICA - RUSSIA: CONSTRUCTIVE COOPERATION AGENDA IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

SPEAKERS:



Sergei Ryabkov

Deputy Foreign
Minister of the
Russian Federation



Nadia de León

Chairwoman of the
Central American
Parliament



Melvin Enrique Redondo

Secretary General
of SIECA



Daniel Russell

President and
CEO of USRBC



Lila Roldán-Vásquez

Former Ambassador, Head of
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Yaroslav Lissovlik

Programme Director at the
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MODERATOR:



Alexis Rodzianko

President and CEO of
AMCHAM in Russia

Tuesday, August 4th // YOUTUBE LIVE (ValdaiClub)