

EU's and Russia's Reciprocal Perception

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It has become customary to interpret the 2014 Ukrainian crisis as a watershed that marked a profound change in the way the Russian Federation and the European Union perceive each other, thus marking the beginning of a period of mutual distrust and relative competition between the two actors. In reality, by following a careful analysis, it is possible to notice that Russia, since the collapse of the USSR, has sought to establish a profound cooperation on an equal footing with the EU – a hope that has not completely waned yet – and that Russian mistrust towards reciprocal interdependence has its origin in the re-nationalisation of its energy companies made at the beginning of the new millennium. The EU, on the other hand, besides having confusedly acknowledged the current situation of mutual enmity and increased its capabilities for resilience and autonomous action, does not yet seem to have decided what it wants and how to deal with its vigorous neighbour.

Relations between the EU and Russia are particularly *sui generis* due to the two actors' different structures. Russia is a centralised State, with a unified economy and army, where the Constitution states that the President of the Federation defines “the fundamental guidelines of the internal and external policy of the State”, and that clearly leads its foreign policy according to its national interests.¹

The EU, on the other hand, is not a State, but a political actor that, although endowed with a legitimate and recognised international presence, is characterised by a nebulous sovereignty and confused institutions. Moreover, in leading its external action, the EU mixes its interests with values and declarations of a purely normative nature. As for its relations with Russia, they are so vast and complex that they are not limited to the second pillar “Common Foreign and Security Policy” of the Maastricht Treaty, but also extend to two others, “European Communities” and “Police and Judicial Co-operation in Criminal Matters”. For this reason, “several EU institutions take the initiative in formulating, articulating and implementing the different aspects of the EU

¹ Article 80

policy towards Russia.”². In addition to this, the lack of an institutional figure that is on the same level as the Russian counterpart (presidential or foreign affairs) implies that it is impossible to establish a personal relationship that could result in a trusting cooperation. Finally, it should be kept in mind that the three pillars of Maastricht are not an exclusive prerogative of the EU. In fact, member States can not only influence EU decision-making processes from within or even boycott them, but also legitimately undertake unilateral initiatives based on purely national interests, which are not infrequently dissonant or even contrary – in regards to priority or general interest – from those of the EU and other member States.

With these clarifications in mind, it is possible to suggest a genealogy of EU-Russian reciprocal perception in order to correctly interpret and grasp the actions and choices of the two actors.

I

Academic literature usually refers to the decade following the fall of the USSR as the “cautious years”³. The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union, the political, social and rapid economic developments in Eastern Europe, as well as a general lack of preparedness in Russian affairs within EU structures led to an understandably cautious attitude towards the new-born Russia. In any case, an unprecedented context of geopolitical and ideological unipolarity had come into being, where there was no real contender against the liberal order. In this context, in European bodies it was “generally assumed”⁴ that Russia would almost certainly become a member of the Union along with the other Eastern European countries, thus adopting liberal economic, political and value systems and abandoning politics of confrontation.

Indeed, the prospect of deepening Russian-European cooperation was also supported by the Russian-Soviet side and corresponded to a strong change in the mentality of the Russian-Soviet ruling class. As a matter of fact, historically the Soviets had sought to create and maintain a bloc as independent as possible from that of the Western imperialist and bourgeois powers. This choice was due to both ideological and practical reasons: bourgeois States were regarded as been aggressive and unreliable, and in any case it was believed that the communist revolution would

² Gower, Jackie, and Graham Timmins (eds.). *Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership*, London and New York: Anthem Press, 2009, p. 113.

³ Ibid, p. 119

⁴ Ivi

sooner or later spread to them too. A similar attitude was maintained by the Western bloc, which feared a possible communist expansion within its own economic and social structures. The two blocs therefore remained as independent and separate as possible.

The idea to cooperate rather than confront was advanced by Gorbačëv, who suggested to create a “common European home” where the socialist system could exist alongside the capitalist one. Such a proposal was not motivated by purely ideological reasons, but also by economic-strategic considerations. The Soviet coffers were in a bitter situation⁵, and it was therefore thought that a policy of disarmament and appeasement would be welcomed and reciprocated by Western Europeans. Once the Soviet military threat was gone, Europeans would regard the US nuclear and military umbrella as not needed anymore.

After the collapse of the USSR and the birth of contemporary Russia, El’cin followed a similar line of thinking: since not only the Soviet war potential had disappeared, but the USSR itself had collapsed, in the Kremlin it was believed that

the Europeans would have no reason for continued dependence on the only remaining superpower. Moscow sought to use this situation for rapprochement with the EU in order to counterbalance the US. [...] For this purpose, in the late 1990s Russia promoted the idea of a geopolitical triangle between Moscow, Paris and Berlin. As the Russian foreign ministry repeatedly emphasised, the key motive for Moscow’s active engagement in this project was the desire to establish a “multipolar world that prevents any possibility of domination by one power”⁶.

Such a reconciliation was supposed to come into being “through the intensive exchange of Russian resources for European technology and investments”⁷, which would establish a relationship of mutual *interdependence*. Such Russian-Soviet proposals and initiatives were welcomed with some scepticism by Europeans, which nevertheless did not preclude them to stipulate several treaties on conventional and strategic weapons reduction or to lend capital to the dying Soviet-Russian State. In 1997 the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* was concluded, which still provides a legal basis of the EU-Russia relations by providing “an all-embracing framework covering almost every aspect of cooperation [and] institutionalizes regular political

⁵ Between 1980 and 1986, Soviet military spending accounted for more than 30% of the state budget, and oil prices halved compared to previous years.

⁶ Igor Gretskiy, *Russia’s perspective on EU-Russia interdependence*, in *Post-Crimea Shift in Eu-Russia Relations: from Fostering Interdependence to Managing Vulnerabilities*, Kristi Raik & András Rác (eds.), 2019, p. 66

⁷ Ibid

dialogue between”⁸ the two powers. A similar document was also adopted by the Russian side, which considered them “as a symbol of Brussels’ readiness to solve the most important problems on the continent without the Americans [and] gave the Russian leadership hope the EU would be very helpful in regaining ‘great power’ status”⁹.

II

The early 2000s are referred to as the “optimistic years”. The adoption of these agreements, together with the end of social unrests, the economic recovery after the 1998 collapse, and the handover of presidential reins from El’cin to Putin – who was considered to be more reliable and stable than his predecessor – contributed to the creation of a positive atmosphere that led to an effective cooperation in many fields. Russia and the EU increased trade and political exchanges. They also cooperated militarily. The 2004 St. Petersburg summit was of a particular importance, both practically as well as symbolically. The summit created “four common spaces”: the economic space; the space for freedom, security and justice; the space for external security; and the space for research, education and justice.

These years also witnessed a considerable eastward expansion of the EU; an expansion that had already begun during the cautious years. Initially, it was welcomed in a fairly neutral way by the Russian ruling class, as it was interpreted as a possible sign given by Europeans in order to show their willingness to solve European issues autonomously – without US interference.¹⁰ Indeed, following the 2003 Iraqi war and the apparent disagreements amongst NATO member States – in particular the French and German reluctance to take part in it – pushed Putin to insist on the creation of a Paris-Berlin-Moscow geopolitical triangle. However, the project stalled after Schröder left office in 2005.

But for the Russians an even worse fact was that the 2004 enlargement did not bring the desired effects. Although they knew the enlargement was going to absorb several traditionally Russophobic countries that are very close to Russian borders, the Kremlin had assumed that more important countries such as France, Germany, and Italy – which were traditionally friendlier and with whom personal trust relations had been built – would have alleviated or even neutralized the

⁸ European Commission, *EU/Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/9433-eurussia-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement>

⁹ Igor Gretskiy, *Russia’s perspective on EU-Russia interdependence*, op. cit., p. 67

¹⁰ Ivi

new member States' anti-Russian tendencies. Nevertheless, this year of expansion witnessed the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which was supported not only bilaterally by Lithuania and Poland, but also by the European institutions themselves, while France, Germany and Italy remained essentially neutral. To these concerns it must be added NATO's eastward expansion: an alliance that had already proven not to be a purely defensive one in Kosovo and in the Bush administration's declaration of war on terrorism.¹¹ When Moscow began to think that the EU did not constitute a partner for the creation of a multipolar world, but was more of a NATO and US "Trojan horse"¹² whose task was to weaken and absorb the former Soviet space into Western power structures, the "optimistic years" were replaced by the "frustrating years".

III

The frustrating years were characterized by a general inability to implement the hoped-for collaboration projects between the EU and Russia. Moreover, the Kremlin began to demand that the EU develop a foreign policy *with* and not *on* Russia, as opposed to what was implemented during the prudent years. In addition to this and of a greater importance are the strategic (and not only practical-economic) considerations behind Putin's reversal of the neo-liberal paradigm of wild privatization of the Russian energy assets in favour of their re-nationalisation. While this move was welcomed by the European community due to its stabilising effects in Eastern Europe, it also revealed a first change in the way the Kremlin was interpreting its increasing interdependence with the European actors. In fact, Gorbachev's and El'cin's idea was that (1) by increasing the reciprocal interdependence between the two formerly separated geopolitical blocs (Russian natural resources in exchange for European capital and technology, as well a deeper overall cooperation); and (2) by removing the cause for Europeans' concerns for a possible Soviet-Russian military threat, a mutually beneficial interdependence could be achieved. Once this situation was achieved, any unilateral action against one's partner would be disadvantageous for the both parties.

However, the 2003 *Russia's Energy Strategy up to 2020* considered such an interdependence as being a possible source of threats. The document specified that "the country's

¹¹ A good analysis on how NATO's military campaign in Kosovo was perceived in Russia is provided by Giulietto Chiesa, *La Russia allo specchio*, in I quaderni speciali di Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica, supplement to 1/99.

¹² John Mearsheimer, *Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin*, in Foreign Affairs, 2014

role in the world's energy markets largely determines its geopolitical influence”¹³. It is certainly not by chance that Lavrov argued that it was this influence, as it was played on energy supply by Russia and other countries, to be one of the reasons as to why “the West is losing its monopoly on the globalization process.”¹⁴ Such a monopoly had also been criticised by Putin the year before in his famous Munich Speech, where he insisted on the existence of a Russian foreign policy that was independent from that of the West. Following that, in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war, the 2010 Russian Military Doctrine listed “the desire to [...] move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation” as well as the “interference in [the] internal affairs [of] the Russian Federation and its allies” amongst the “main external military dangers”¹⁵.

In any case, Russia and the EU continued to deepen their cooperation and interdependence. In 2008, negotiations on an agreement that was to include new legally binding commitments began, while in 2010 a *Partnership for Modernisation* was launched. They both are now frozen. Although these initiatives signalled an ever-present willingness to promote mutual cooperation, they were much more modest than the “four common spaces” initiative, and mainly underlined European interests in Russian energy resources and Russian interests in European technology. Common values as well as the will to transform Russia into a liberal democracy, which were clearly stated in previous common declarations, were now omitted. In conclusion, the EU supported Russia’s entry into the World Trade Organisation, completed in 2012.

IV

Although Russian foreign policy was characterised by an increasingly realistic and diffident approach, the same was not true for the EU, which in 2008 launched the *Eastern Partnership*¹⁶: a broad programme extended to all the remaining former Soviet European space (Russian was not included as it demanded a separated partnership that took into account Russia’s greater economic and political importance). The *Partnership*’s open aim was to spread a liberal

¹³ Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, *The Summary of the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period of up to 2020*, Moscow, 2003

¹⁴ Sergei Lavrov, *The Present and the Future of Global Politics*, Russia in Global Affairs, 2007, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_8554

¹⁵ *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* approved by Russian Federation presidential edict on 5 February 2010, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_militaryDoctrine.pdf

¹⁶ European Council, *Eastern Partnership*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>

model of economic, political and social development in Eastern Europe, and therefore paved the way to a further EU enlargement. In the same year, the NATO Bucharest summit declared that Georgia and Ukraine would become full members of the Alliance. In the following year, Albania and Croatia joined NATO.

As much as one can dwell on philosophical discussions about the benevolence of the values and collaborations established between the EU and Eastern Europe, as a matter of fact the EU's policies that aim at spreading democracy, liberal values and partnerships are promoted also by funding *de facto* anti-Russian individuals and organisations. This can be problematic for a country such as Russia, which heavily relies on inter-personal and unofficial networks with the local elite in order to project its influence abroad.¹⁷ Moreover, there was no shortage of statements made by high-ranking officials that support the claim that such support was actually a malicious one. For example, Carl Gershman, president of the US *National Endowment for Democracy*, “one of CIA’s many legal showcases”¹⁸, defined Ukraine as “the biggest prize”, and in 2013 he wrote in *The Washington Post*: “Ukraine's choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. [...] Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”¹⁹ Similarly, the 2014 *coup d'état* in Ukraine, which followed many Arab and coloured springs in the Middle East, led to the establishment of a deeply pro-Western and anti-Russian administration composed of individuals who publicly echoed far-right ideologies (note the European dissonance between the officially promoted liberal values and the values of the practically supported political groups).

The Russian reaction – and the Russian army movements as well as Russian official statements by senior officers suggest that the annexation was not premeditated – seems to have taken most of Western observers and political officials by surprise. What is certain, however, is that a realist view on international relations had long been established in the Russian ruling class by then. Mearsheimer argues: “two sides have been operating with different play-books: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine.”²⁰

¹⁷ Vadim, Kononenko and Arkady, Moshes, *Russia as a Network State. What Works in Russia When State Institutions Do not?*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011

¹⁸ Luc Michel, *Le svolte della geopolitica Africana nel XXI secolo*, in *Eurasia. Rivista di studi geopolitici* 1/2020, p. 32

¹⁹ Quoted from John Mearsheimer, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *Ibid*

That the US provoked the Ukrainian crisis by unknowingly moving too eastward is, however, a dubious statement. US post-Cold War geopolitical perspectives had already been outlined by Huntington²¹ and Brzezinski²², who respectively envisaged that the future conflicts would erupt upon “civilisation fault lines” (Ukraine lays upon one of the fault lines that make up the former Soviet space), and that the EU and NATO eastward expansions would function as a “democratic bridgehead” towards Russia (namely it would be US military and political springboard towards the heart of the Eurasian continent).²³ While also in post-Soviet Russia comprehensive and medium-to-long-term geopolitical perspectives were eventually outlined (for example by Sergey Karaganov and his Valdai Club as well as by Aleksandr Dugin, who argued for a Russian pivot towards Asia²⁴), similar intellectual elaborations were practically none existent in European institutions. In fact, the EU continued – perhaps due to inertia or ignorance – to lead its foreign policy towards the diffusion of its own neo-liberal political and economic model.

V

The Ukrainian crisis caused no identity crisis either in Russia or the US, as these two actors had long since understood their own positions on the global stage. The Ukrainian crisis, on the other hand, caused a major disorientation to the European decision makers and officials, who were caught unprepared and essentially unable to implement coherent and effective policies. In addition to Russian interventionism, at that time many other events revealed the EU’s intrinsic weaknesses and general inability to react to the difficulties it was forced to face. Just to list a few of them: the migrants crisis, the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, al-Assad’s resistance in Syria, US unilateral termination of Iranian nuclear deal, the flourishing of populist movements, the eruption of trade wars, etc. All these events cast serious doubts on the European assumption’s that the world was marching towards a liberal future. Moreover, they showed the stunned Europeans

²¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon&Schuster, 2017

²² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, 1998

²³ It should be noted that policies of this kind were also present in Obama’s foreign policy concept of multilateralism and, more recently, in the Trump administration’s latest document outlining national security principles, where relations with other actors tend to be interpreted as zero-sum mechanisms.

²⁴ For an analysis on the Eurasian Economic Union as an alternative to the European Union, see Dragneva, Rilka and Kataryna Wolczuk, *Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?*, Chatham House Briefing Paper, 2012, p. 1-16.

that the interdependence they had been promoting since the end of the Cold War was a potential source of weakness that could be used against them.²⁵

All of these events forced the EU to reconsider its foreign policy. Three years after the beginning of these crises, the EU's reflections led to the 2016 *Global Strategy*,²⁶ where the EU institutions tried to outline the Union's main foreign and security directives. This Global Strategy is still in force today and still outlines the EU foreign policy guidelines towards Russia.

Recognising that the increasing interconnectedness and reciprocal interdependence of global actors is not necessarily synonymous with development and security, the EU believes it must “chart the way between the Scylla of isolationism and the Charybdis of rash interventionism. [So from now on] principled pragmatism will guide our external action in the years ahead.”²⁷ The key concept of the strategy is “resilience”²⁸, which is defined as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises”²⁹. The need to cooperate with Atlantic partners and NATO is emphasised, but it is added that it must be accompanied by a stronger European independence and capability for autonomous action and decision making. As for Russia, the Global Strategy calls on “a consistent and united approach”, which requires “substantial changes in [our] relations”. Specifically that, although the EU refuses to recognise “Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea nor the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine”, “we will [...] engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when our interests overlap”.³⁰

Following the adoption of the Global Strategy, the EU and its member States have effectively created institutions and supported each other in order to become more “resilient” against external threats and implemented effective responses against hybrid, cyber, energy and logistical challenges.³¹ Nevertheless, as much as these initiatives have marked a net improvement in regard to European management and coordination of its foreign and security policy, the Global

²⁵ For an analysis on how the crisis of the liberal world was perceived in EU institutions, see Sonia Lucarelli, *Unione Europea nell'era post-liberale: una sfida esistenziale dalle radici globali*, in *La Fine di un mondo. La deriva dell'ordine liberale*, ISPI, Milano, 2019.

²⁶ European Council, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

²⁷ Paragraph 2

²⁸ The words “resilience”, “resilient” and “resilient” appear 35 times in the document.

²⁹ Paragraph 3.5

³⁰ Paragraph 3.4

³¹ For a list of the numerous programmes implemented by the Global Strategy in order to increase EU resilience, see Rein Tammsaar, *The Eu After 2014: Reducing Vulnerabilities by Building Resilience*, in *Post-Crimea Shift in Eu-Russia Relations* (op. cit.), p. 104-119.

Strategy still lacks any real strategic perspective that goes beyond passive resilience and the possible policy response to an external actor's assertiveness. Although the idea of reforming Russia towards liberal-democracy has been discarded or at least no longer discussed, the normative approach of the EU is becoming of a defensive type.³² The approach that is gaining ground is that the EU should characterise itself, together with other Atlantic allies, as a defence bastion for liberal values, while maintaining a purely realistic approach *vis-a-vis* other actors.

However, despite the harsh tone towards Russia, EU member States have kept running their unilateral foreign policy beneath the communitarian official approach. As a matter of fact, although member States have kept confirming EU's official foreign policy, they have also not too secretly gone out to their own way and stipulated bilateral commercial agreements with Russia, thus diminishing EU sanctions' effectiveness.³³

In the same year that the EU was trying to turn its foreign policy around and fix its shortcomings, a similar document that reflects "Russia's view of the modern world, as well as its goals and objectives"³⁴ – still in force – was adopted by the Kremlin. The document defines not only NATO but also EU expansion as a "geopolitical expansion" that caused the ongoing crisis between Russia and the West.³⁵ This is the first official Russian document in which such a definition is also reserved for the EU, which is now officially regarded as the political and military bloc of a strategic rival.

Nevertheless, next to these aggressive tones and actions of disturbance, on the official website of the Permanent Mission of Russia to the EU, we read in commentary to this document that "there is no viable alternative to mutually beneficial and equal-footed cooperation between Russia and the EU". For this reason, the Kremlin is "ready to mutually approximate positions and seek compromises, but only on the basis of equality and true consideration of each other's interests" and each other's areas of influence (European Union and Eurasian Economic Union),

³² Mikael Mattlin, *Dead on arrival: normative EU policy towards China*, in *Asia Europe Journal* 10, 2012, p. 181-198. In this interesting article, the author underlines how the role of normative principles in guiding EU policy towards China resulted in an almost complete failure, all to the disadvantage of the EU. The author therefore proposes that the EU should follow a "defensive" normative approach, i.e. set the example and no longer try to export its values.

³³ For example, several member States have signed bilateral trade treaties with Serbia and Belarus, to which they sell products that are then shipped to Russia.

³⁴ Постоянное представительство Российской Федерации при Европейском союзе, *Внешняя политика России*, <https://russiaeu.ru/ru/vneshnyaya-politika-rossii>

³⁵ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации (утверждена Президентом Российской Федерации В.В.Путиным 30 ноября 2016 г.)

“excluding any attempts of blackmail and diktat.”³⁶ Should these conditions be met, “We [=Russian ruling class] are convinced that gradual steps towards creating a common economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok based on the principles of equal and indivisible security should serve as a strategic guideline in shaping a new architecture on the European continent.”³⁷ Russia extends an olive branch while flexing its muscles.

Conclusion and observations

It has become customary to argue that the 2014 Ukrainian crisis marked a watershed in Russian and European relations and respective foreign policies. This article has attempted to show that there has been no objective change on the Russian side, whose foreign policy objectives have been essentially the same throughout the thirty years that followed the end of the Cold War. Namely, Russia has been trying to build a multipolar world where it could safeguard its internal sovereignty and maintain a certain capability for external projection. If anything, what has changed is the way in which Russia has tried to reach its goals: cooperation and increased interdependence with the EU (cautious years), a wary autarkic turn and political realism (optimistic and frustrating years), an opening of a relative state of conflict (from 2014 onwards).

On the European side, after the challenges it faced and legitimacy crisis it suffered in 2014-2016 – which forced the EU to review its liberal assumptions and acknowledge the short-sightedness of its normative prescriptions – there has been an improvement in European capability in regards to resource and coordinated response *vis-a-vis* difficulties and threats that may arise. At the moment, the watchwords in the EU for EU-Russian relations are “interdependence”(which describes the empirical situation) and “resilience” (which suggests what to aim for in the situation of interdependence).

In any case, the “principled pragmatism” outline in the Global Strategy is not at all to be considered as a comprehensive and medium-to-long-term strategy, as it lacks the *decision* on what kind of relationship the EU wants to establish with Russia, what it wants from Russia, and what it can realistically expect and demand. These considerations are valid not only for EU relations with Russia, but also for EU relations with any other global actor. The UE needs to *decide* what it wants to be and what role it wants to play in a world that has not followed the liberal prescriptions

³⁶ Постоянное представительство Российской Федерации при Европейском союзе, *Внешняя политика России*, op. cit

³⁷ Ivi

that it still thinks as valid. As long as this decision is lacking, Europe will remain someone else's geopolitical object (be it a more or less resilient democratic bridgehead).³⁸

Russia, for its part, seems to have made up its mind long ago, drawing clear boundaries between what it is willing to negotiate and what it considers to be its vital interests. And yet, however much it denotes the EU as a geopolitical adversary and EU expansion and social engineering as a threat, it is well aware that it can neither afford to cut ties completely, nor to renounce any possibility of dialogue and cooperation with the EU. This explains why, alongside its aggressive tones and strong actions, Russia still hopes that the EU decides to reconcile itself and end all social engineering experiments outside the EU borders. But whether the EU wants to become an autonomous pole in a world that appears to have rejected EU's liberal assumption and where its relative power is clearly diminishing, that is a choice only Europe can take.

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³⁸ In a final note, it should be underlined that the liberal magazine *The Economist* (27 July 2019 edition), after acknowledging the Putin administration's deliberate eastward turning as well as the Russian decision to prefer China over Europe, has recently stated that it can only be hoped that the next Russian administration decides to turn westward again. Moreover, it states that such a westward veer needs to take place before Russia gets entangled in the Chinese tentacles, which will make Russia unable to choose for herself. There is no doubt that such hope is widely shared in European institutions. The Global Strategy's concept of passive resilience can be correctly interpreted as a strategy of the "let us just wait and hope that things go back the way they used to be." However, it is important to realise that if Russia carries out the veer hoped by the *Economist* while Europe remains in a state of vassalage *vis-a-vis* the US, any possibility for the EU to establish itself as a meaningfully independent geopolitical actors will be foreclose – no matter how much the EU may have enhanced its resilience capabilities.



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