

Politeja

No. 5(62), 2019, pp. 161-174

<https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.16.2019.62.09>Agnieszka BRYC 

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

a.bryc@umk.pl

## THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN RESHAPING A POST-COLD WAR ORDER

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Russia's attempts to revise a West-led liberal world order. However, challenging the West seems to be a strategy aimed at improving Russia's international standing. This strategy is undoubtedly ambiguous as Russia looks for a rapprochement, particularly with the United States at the same time. The Russian Federation abandoned the West in 2014 as a result of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula what constituted breaking international law, and engagement in the war in East Ukraine. Nevertheless, the milestone was not 2014, but 2008 when Russia had decided for the first time to use its military force against Georgia and indirectly against the growing Western military and political presence in this post-Soviet republic. This game changer was hardly a surprise, because several signals of a desire to challenge the West-led world order had appeared in the past at least twice in President Putin's speeches in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference and in 2014 during the Valdai Club session in Sochi. This article seeks to provide a perspective in the discussion about the way Russia has been trying to reshape the post-Cold War order. It probes the notion that Russia has become a revisionist state trying to shape a post-Western world order. Besides, there are a few questions to be answered, first of all whether anti-Westernism is in fact its goal or rather an instrument in regaining more effective impact on international politics and how it may influence the post-Cold War order despite its reduced political and economic potential.

**Keywords:** world order, Russia, the West, foreign policy, anti-Western strategy

## RUSSIA'S VIEW OF THE WORLD ORDER

In general, the so-called Munich speech of Vladimir Putin is recognized to be the first clear sign of a change in Russia's international conduct. During the 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Security Conference in 2007, President Putin for the first time publicly and visibly undermined the US-led post-Cold War order. "I consider – the President said – that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world. [...] What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization"<sup>1</sup>. Later on he accused the US: "unilateral illegal actions have not resolved any single problem." [...] "Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. As a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts"<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, he blamed the US for provoking a new nuclear arms race, expanding NATO in the Eastern Europe, and overall destabilizing international security, not to mention that the US was ignoring the United Nations and relying on the unilateral use of force.

However, the essential aspect of the Munich speech was a call for "constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all". The term "democratic world order" meant in fact "a multipolar world order", a concept promoted in the mid-1990s by the current minister of foreign affairs Yevgeny Primakov<sup>3</sup>.

Primakov's basic assumption was that because of being in fact weak, Russia should cooperate with all the old (Soviet) partners, especially with those distanced towards the US and wishing the world order to be less hegemonic and more multipolar<sup>4</sup>. Not surprisingly, among natural allies he pointed to i.a. Iran, Iraq, Arab countries, and China. Generally, Primakov was calling for abandoning the pro-Western strategy in exchange for making national interest a driving force of Russia's foreign policy. In other words, he was the first one who claimed that Russia would be taken seriously by the West only by challenging the American domination. He was strongly convinced that this was the only way to prevent the US from marginalizing Russia in international politics and making Washington perceive Moscow as a partner, but not a junior one<sup>5</sup>.

Although Primakov used to call for balancing the American domination in global affairs, President Putin went further and in 2014 the Valdai Club speech in Sochi

<sup>1</sup> *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, 10 February 2007, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>>, 16 December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Russian doctrine of multilateralism was nevertheless revealed by the foreign minister during the 51<sup>st</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in 1996. Y. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads. Toward the New Millennium*, London 2004, pp. 140-141.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, "A Multipolar World and the United Nations", *International Affairs*, vol. 43, no. 6 (1997), pp. 4-10.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, "Russia Seeks a New Place in the World", *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, vol. 48, no. 10 (1996), p. 14.

presented the credo of Russia's grand strategy<sup>6</sup>. First of all, the Russian president stated that contemporary geopolitical institutions, systems, and legal mechanisms have become weak, distorted, and ineffective against a rising tide of violence, instability, and brutality in many parts of the world, in particular in parts of the Middle East and in Ukraine. Vladimir Putin accused the United States of endangering global security by imposing a "unilateral diktat" on the rest of the world and shifted blame for the Ukraine crisis onto the West. Besides, he warned that Washington was trying to "re-make the whole world" based on its own interests<sup>7</sup>.

The key message to world leaders was that "the Cold War had ended, but it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting the existing rules or creating new rules and standards". Therefore, as Putin stated: "What we needed to do was to carry out a rational reconstruction and adapt it to the new realities in the system of international relations"<sup>8</sup>.

A year later, when Russia started the military intervention in Syria in 2015, President Putin developed his vision and expressed it during the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly<sup>9</sup>. In essence, he blamed the West "for exporting revolutions which have resulted in creating areas of anarchy filled with extremists and terrorists like ISIS in Iraq and Syria"<sup>10</sup>. In his view, it was not Russia but the West which was dominated by the Cold War-era mentality and the ongoing ambition to conquer new geopolitical areas. This expansion has been continuing to Russia's disadvantage not only in the political perspective but also in the military field, through new installations close to Russian borders. He stressed that "the post-Soviet states were forced to face a false choice between joining the West and carrying on with the East"<sup>11</sup>. Sooner or later – as he mentioned – this logic of confrontation was bound to spark off a major geopolitical crisis. And in this way, what happened in Ukraine was in fact inspired by the West. In other words, people's widespread frustration with the government was used for instigating a *coup d'état* from abroad<sup>12</sup>.

Such a corrected vision of world order became part of a new Foreign Policy Concept approved in November 2016<sup>13</sup>. According to this document, the world is currently

<sup>6</sup> V. Putin, *The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules*, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 24 October 2014, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>> 16 December 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Putin took part in the plenary meeting of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in New York, 28 September 2015, at <[en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385)>, 16 December 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 30 November 2016, at <[https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents//asset\\_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents//asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248)>, 16 December 2019.

going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system. Globalization has led to the formation of new centers of economic and political power. Global power and development potential are becoming decentralized and are shifting towards the Asia-Pacific region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional Western powers. In such new international circumstances, tensions are rising due to disparities in global development, the widening prosperity gap between states and growing competition for resources, access to markets and control over transport arteries<sup>14</sup>.

According to the Foreign Policy Concept, the Western powers attempt to maintain their positions by imposing their point of view on global processes and conducting a policy to contain alternative centers of power, leads to greater instability in international relations and growing turbulence on the global and regional levels<sup>15</sup>. Simultaneously, "the United States and its allies have adopted a containment policy against Russia and are using political, economic, information, and other pressure on Russia"<sup>16</sup>. According to the 2014 Military Doctrine, NATO has been described as one of the main external military threats<sup>17</sup>, however still in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept Russia's long-term Euro-Atlantic policy is aimed at building a common space of peace, security, and stability based on the principles of indivisible security, equal cooperation, and mutual trust.

## ROOTS OF ANTI-WESTERNISM

Leaving aside the everlasting debate whether Russia belongs to the West or the East, or is rather a culturally unique island, it needs to be underlined that the West has always been a point of reference in Russia's international conduct<sup>18</sup>. As a matter of fact, a belief that the threat emanates from abroad has evolved with time. An approach towards the West has been shaped neither by the crisis in Russia-West relations after 1991, nor by the Soviet empire. It is a combination of historical experience basically of the Mongol Yoke, Byzantine, and Tsarist Russia epochs<sup>19</sup>. Generally, the Mongol Yoke experience has led to perceiving the outside world in terms of danger and resulted in the need to defend it like a besieged bastion. Then, Tsarist Russia strengthened the requirement of expansion and keeping a buffer zone which separates it from a threat coming from abroad. Not surprisingly, until this day the post-Soviet republics have played a role of

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 25 December 2014, at <<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>>, 16 December 2019.

<sup>18</sup> See more: J. Diec, *Geostrategiczny wybór Rosji. U zarania trzeciego tysiąclecia*, Kraków 2015.

<sup>19</sup> See more: idem, „Próby redefinicji państwowości imperialnej nowej Rosji”, in: S. Bieliń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 67-78.

Russia's buffer zone and any attempt to intensify contacts with them is recognized by Russian authorities as an interference into its sphere of influence<sup>20</sup>.

Ideological anti-Americanism was, however a product of the Cold War rivalry of the Soviet Union and the US.<sup>21</sup> After the collapse of the USSR, mainly in the beginning of the 1990s, Russia was trying to import Western-oriented reforms and ideas. Nevertheless, quite soon it became clear that Russians felt deeply disappointed with the West, which – according to them – had betrayed Russia by breaking an unwritten promise made to Mikhail Gorbachev by then US Secretary of State James Baker that the US would not extend NATO membership to former Warsaw Pact nations<sup>22</sup>. What is more, they felt humiliated by an open marginalization in international politics and perceiving of Russia as a junior partner in relations with the US.<sup>23</sup> In fact, after 1991, Russians could only protest against NATO's eastern enlargement: in 1999 (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic); 2004 (Slovakia and the Baltic States), and 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania). They also saw their United Nations Security Council veto failing to prevent NATO's military action in Serbia (1999) and the US-UK invasion of Iraq (2003)<sup>24</sup>.

Consequently, in the 1990s, Russia was following the order constituted by the West. Such a strategy was undertaken by Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, who tried to fully integrate the country with the West. The liberal westernizers were assuming that Russia belonged to the West because of shared values like democracy, human rights, and the free market<sup>25</sup>. President Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev pursuing the policy of strategic partnership with the West were inspired by Western promises of both political and financial support. The reality was, however, more complex. Western investments remained scarce and the Russian voice was ostensibly ignored in international politics<sup>26</sup>. Simultaneously, the dramatic economic decline and the takeover of the bulk of Russian economy by a small group of oligarchs resulted in a vast criticism of the president and the reformists. As a matter of fact, all of these circumstances have opened the window for statists and those who believed in the need to restore Russian power and prestige in international politics<sup>27</sup>.

Therefore, from the very beginning Vladimir Putin put forward pragmatism and self-focus in the foreign policy doctrine. It was in fact a combination of Westernism and

<sup>20</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy. Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Lanham 2016, pp. 79-81.

<sup>21</sup> A. Jach, „Rosyjska nostalgia imperialna”, in S. Bieliń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 79-88.

<sup>22</sup> A. Pushkov, „Russia and America: The Honeymoon's Over”, *The Foreign Policy*, no. 93 (1993-1994), pp. 76-90.

<sup>23</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy...*, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> J. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy. The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham 2009, pp. 97-144.

<sup>25</sup> D.M. Kotz, F. Weir, *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin. The Demise of the Soviet System and the New Russia*, London 2007, pp. 151-210.

<sup>26</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy...*, p. 26

<sup>27</sup> D.M. Kotz, F. Weir, *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin...*, pp. 167-192.

pro-state attitude<sup>28</sup>. In his first article as a president – “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium” – Vladimir Putin emphasized patriotism, a strong state, and social solidarity as key values. Unlike Gorbachev or Kozyrev, Putin was not eager to replicate Western social democratic or liberal values on Russian soil and made it clear that Russia would never become “another US”. He rather saw his country as a modern great power capable of adapting to a changing world<sup>29</sup>.

Thus, Putin’s anti-Americanism contained substantial elements of calculation. Criticism towards the West, and particularly the US was rooted in domestic policy, rather than in the international situation. Attacking Washington became an extension of domestic politics by other means. In adopting anti-Americanism as a tool to regain the lost – during his term as prime minister – mass support, Putin was acting in the tradition of previous rulers, such as Tsar Nicholas I, Lenin, and Stalin, who exploited the idea of a Russia besieged by enemies abroad and traitors within<sup>30</sup>.

What is more, conservatism has become an ideological foundation of the Kremlin’s new political strategy. Its main objective is to stabilize the regime by consolidating Russian society around this project, diverting people’s attention from the economic crisis and the complicated domestic situation. The Kremlin has also used this argument to justify Russian great power aspirations, implying the right to shape the world order, to legitimize its confrontation with the West, and to facilitate its search for allies<sup>31</sup>. Such a strategy has brought quick benefits by neutralizing the public’s discontent with the Kremlin’s policy and redirecting its frustration against the West<sup>32</sup>.

## FROM AN ASSERTIVE PARTNER TO A CHALLENGER

Russia’s assertiveness towards the West has been growing for years. Initiated in the mid-1990s, it came into being in the 2000s. For the first time Russia decided to demonstrate its military might in front of a neighboring country in 2008. But the situation deteriorated in late 2011 when the Kremlin had to face mass protests resulting from election fraud<sup>33</sup>. Massive social protests made Putin radicalize his politics as he was convinced that the riots –in Russia in 2011/2012 and ‘colored revolutions’ in the post-Soviet sphere – Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) – were inspired by the US to topple his power or to weaken Russian influence in the near abroad<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy...*, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium”, in V. Putin, *First Person. An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin*, eds. Timakova N., Kolesnikov A., London 2000, pp. 209-219.

<sup>30</sup> B. Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, Washington 2015, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> W. Rodkiewicz, *Potemkin Conservatism. An Ideological Tool of the Kremlin*, Warsaw 2015, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> R. Dannreuther, “Russia and the Arab Revolutions”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 98 (2011).

<sup>34</sup> E. Stepanova, “Does Russia Have a Grand Plan for the Middle East?”, *Politique étrangère*, no. 2 (2016), pp. 23-35.

Therefore, Putin's fundamental conclusion was "the more assertive towards the West Russia is, the stronger position in international politics it will hold". So, the new strategy meant challenging the US especially in the regions where Americans created a political vacuum. Such a vacuum appeared first and foremost in Syria after the social riots of 2011. Although the Middle East has never been a priority in Russian diplomacy, the conflict in Syria has created an opportunity to make the international community notice Russia's role, far from a marginalized one, in weakening American impact in the region and motivating the US to bargain with Russia. Above all, the Kremlin is interested in recognizing its role in shaping the world order, achieving compensation in Ukraine as well as pulling back the West from the post-Soviet republics<sup>35</sup>. Not surprisingly then, Putin refused to simply help the US oust Syrian president Bashar al-Assad from his post. By the way, the lesson of Libya, where Moscow's abstention at the UN Security Council in 2011 had allowed a NATO-led humanitarian intervention, which resulted in a regime change and a loss of Russian interests in the country, was also learned.

Thanks to the military intervention which started in 2015, Russia has achieved its current objectives at remarkably low cost, because most of the burden was borne by Iranians who send land forces of Hezbollah and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to Syria. First of all, Russia came back to the tiny group of key political players in global politics since any peace treaty in Syria could not be negotiated without Russia. Secondly, the Kremlin has strongly improved its international image as a power regaining its prestigious international status. Thirdly, by marginalizing the US impact on the developments in Syria, Russia has strengthened its image of a successful challenger to the US.

The political crisis that erupted in Ukraine in early 2014 has ended the era of co-operation in Russian-Western relations and opened a new period of heightened rivalry, even confrontation<sup>36</sup>. Basically, the crisis had its roots in competition for the geo-economic orientation of Ukraine. Although the EU was stressing on the Europeanization of Ukraine, for Russia it meant a further expansion of the West in Eastern Europe. Moscow was namely interested in making Ukraine integrate with the Eurasian Economic Union rather than signing an Association Agreement with EU. Therefore, Russia decided to engage in an open conflict with Ukraine, first by annexing the Crimean Peninsula and then by initiating separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. President Putin was expecting to achieve a few goals. First of all, to cut the process of binding Ukraine with the EU and more widely with the West, which would end up with limiting Russia's influence in the near abroad<sup>37</sup>. Secondly, Putin had to prove that he has been successfully rebuilding a new Russian "superpower" and in this project Ukraine is of key

<sup>35</sup> D. Trenin, *Putin's Syria Gambit Aims at Something Bigger Than Syria. What is Russia up to in the Middle East?*, Moscow Carnegie Center, 13 October 2015, at <<http://carnegie.ru/2015/10/13/putin-syria-gambit-aims-at-something-bigger-than-syria-pub-61611>>, 16 December 2019.

<sup>36</sup> D. Trenin, *The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-power Rivalry*, Moscow 2014, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> A. Włodkowska-Bagan, „Ambicje imperialne Rosji i innych mocarstw w przestrzeni poradzieckiej”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 191-214.



importance. Indeed, Russia succeeded in destabilizing Ukraine and making international negotiations ineffective. Nevertheless, Moscow also paid a high price for such aggressive policy – the European Union and the United States imposed set of sanctions which have seriously impacted Russian economy and some members of the political elite were banned from entering the EU countries. In a long-term perspective, the goal of the Kremlin is to keep the conflict in Ukraine unsolved or at least frozen. Simultaneously, it is very important to make the West return to the policy of “business as usual”, because it would allow Russia to implement the scenario of Finlandisation of Ukraine and keep it *de facto* in its sphere of interests<sup>38</sup>.

## UNDERMINING THE WEST

For a long time the West, and precisely the European Union, was not recognized as a threat to Russia but rather as a model of modernization, a trading partner, source of technology and investments<sup>39</sup>. However since the “color revolutions” spread widely in the post-Soviet republics in the early 2000s, the Kremlin started correcting its assessment. Consequently, in a new paradigm the EU is believed to be able to undermine Russia’s domination in the post-Soviet sphere, firstly by promoting an open-door policy and secondly, launching in 2008 the Eastern Partnership focused on attracting post-Soviet countries in the EU-Russia common neighborhood. Lastly, from Moscow’s perspective it was Brussels that was responsible for what happened in Ukraine in 2014, as it was pushing Kiev to sign the Association Agreement with the EU<sup>40</sup>. In this sense, Europe’s easternmost march was assessed as a strategic challenge to the Russian idea of associating with the post-Soviet republics, as without Ukraine as part of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World), these plans would come to nothing<sup>41</sup>.

Russia’s desire to restrain Europe was not devoid of limitations, however<sup>42</sup>. First of all, sanctions imposed on it combined with a lost chance of modernization and the 2008 global financial crisis brought about an economic recession followed by long-lasting stagnation which is likely to prevent Russia from getting back to the fast track of development in the close future<sup>43</sup>. Secondly, there was a strategic miscalculation. If European countries had reacted relatively calmly to the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which

<sup>38</sup> J. Kirchick, “Finlandization Is Not a Solution for Ukraine”, *National Interest*, 27 July 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Ф. Лукьянов, „Атлантический дрейф. Что означает для России отдаление Европы от США”, Московский Центр Карнеги, at <<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/72960>> 16 December 2019.

<sup>40</sup> J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin”, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, pp.1-12.

<sup>41</sup> A. Wierzbicki, „Russkij mir jako projekt restauracyjny imperium”, in S. Bieliń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 101-136.

<sup>42</sup> A. Bryc, “Making Russia First Again”, *Green European Journal*, 27 January 2020, at <<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/making-russia-first-again/>>, 28 January 2020.

<sup>43</sup> S. Bieliń, „Szanse modernizacji na tle osobliwości rosyjskiej polityki”, in S. Bieliń, A. Skrzypek, *Bariery modernizacji Rosji*, Warszawa 2014, pp. 207-230.



was in fact the first Russian successful military activity outside of its borders since the collapse of the Soviet Union, their response to the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine took Moscow by surprise. What the Kremlin expected was broadly speaking a lack of unity among the EU members and a well-known reluctance to take a clear stance<sup>44</sup>. Thirdly, what was supposed to set up a new opening in relations with the United States in the aftermath of Donald Trump coming to the White House in 2016, turned out to be a fierce crisis in bilateral relations. The new American president was, however, keen on resetting relations with president Putin, but Russians miscalculated again. Their uncovered meddling in American presidential elections resulted in new waves of punishment, sanctions, and ostracism<sup>45</sup>.

Being aware of harsh circumstances, bad timing, and its own weakness in contrast to the superiority of the West, Russia has prioritized hiding its own weaknesses and using the weak points of the West. Moscow assumed that the strategy of managing instability may bring results within Europe as it had worked in Ukraine and the post-Soviet space. Russian strategists had a number of cards to use. First and foremost, were fueling the conflicts and discrepancies throughout the Western world via disinformation, media coverage, and social media tools<sup>46</sup>. Next, creating a demand especially among the Western European countries to go back to the business-as-usual formula with Russia and in the meantime downplaying warning signals from the East Europeans by labeling them Russophobic and hence not reliable. Last but not least, it was strengthening the European Far-Right as Russia's ally or a Trojan horse in the democratic and liberal world<sup>47</sup>.

Instead of confronting the whole European camp, from the Russian perspective, it was much more reasonable to promote bilateral contacts with its key countries like Germany, France, and the pre-Brexit UK<sup>48</sup>. Regarding the latter, in Kremlin's view Brexit has successfully made London focused on leaving the EU and neutralized it as one of the leading powers in the continent<sup>49</sup>. In the case of Germany, the unquestionable European leader, Moscow was trying for a long time to keep *Russeversteher* axiom in Berlin's Ostpolitik. Therefore, neither Nord Stream 1 nor Nord Stream 2 have ever been "purely business projects", since for Russia both gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea are undoubtedly of a strategic and geopolitical importance. Not to mention the fact that from Moscow's perspective, such luxury contracts were supposed to keep their partner pro-Russian oriented<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> See more: R. Dragneva, K. Wolczuk, *Ukraine between the EU and Russia. The Integration Challenge*, London 2015.

<sup>45</sup> See more: S. Cohen, *War with Russia? From Putin and Ukraine to Trump and Russiagate*, New York 2019.

<sup>46</sup> See more: A. Polyakova, M. Laruelle, S. Meister, N. Barnett, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses. Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom*, Washington 2016.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bryc, "Making Russia First Again".

<sup>48</sup> A. Polyakova, M. Laruelle, S. Meister, N. Barnett, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses...; Russian Involvement and Junk News during Brexit*, Computational Propaganda Research Project, Data Memo no. 2017.10, 19 December 2017.

<sup>49</sup> *Russian Involvement and Junk News...*

<sup>50</sup> S. Kardaś, „Nord Stream 2 w polityce energetycznej Rosji”, *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 4 (2018), pp. 92-112.

This is why Germany's shift in 2014 has limited Russia's headway in fueling discrepancies and clashing interests between the European East, West, and South flanks. Russians, who are accustomed to packaging international matters have failed because, in this particular case, Germans, being experienced in equal-distance policy like in the Middle East towards Israelis and Palestinians were able to continue, however not unanimously, the Nord Stream 2 project and at the same time to vote for maintaining the sanctions on Russia. What is more, the shift in Ostpolitik is nowadays presumably based on an irretrievable loss of mutual trust. Frankly speaking, it was rather hard to improve mutual trust at least after the 2016 "Lisa case" when Germany turned out to be targeted by Russian disinformation machinery aimed at manipulating public opinion or a growing bias with some German parties, which like "Die Linke" or populist AfD have developed links with Russian state institutions<sup>51</sup>. Nevertheless, contrary to South European countries, Germany's security institutions have quite soon identified Russia as one of the country's main challenges and in consequence Russia not only has become a security risk to Germany, but also bilateral relations have become increasingly politicized and securitized<sup>52</sup>.

The Russia-friendly group was quite soon joined by the French president Emmanuel Macron, who facing massive protests of "yellow vests" and trying to attract right-wing electorate as well as improving France's position towards Germany announced a concept of "Europe's strategic autonomy"<sup>53</sup>. Whereas the diagnosis might be correct, the solution was widely criticized, especially in Eastern Europe. In Moscow, on the contrary, some of his remarks, for example about "the brain death of NATO" were commented on by Maria Zakharowa, the spokeswoman of Russia's MFA as "golden words"<sup>54</sup>. The Kremlin also lauded Macron's call for overcoming security dependence on the US in the face of deepening global competition with the US and China.

Just like Angela Merkel has learned that Putin's Russia will not respect Western values, Vladimir Putin has learned – as he used to stress – a few lessons as well. The first 1999 Kosovo lesson made him realize the impact of the "CNN effect"<sup>55</sup>. From then on he has invested much into Russian-language international broadcasting, media coverage, and social media tools. The second was 2007 cyberattack on Estonia, a small but impressive e-state with very advanced e-governance<sup>56</sup>. This was the first massive cyberattack on a sovereign state, which showed Putin that cyber-aggression is cheap,

<sup>51</sup> S. Meister, "The 'Lisa Case': Germany as a Target of Russian Disinformation", *NATO Review*, 25 July 2016.

<sup>52</sup> J. Lough, *Germany's Russia Challenge*, NATO Defense College, Fellowship Monograph 2018, p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> B. Lippert, N. von Ondarza, V. Perthes (eds.), *European Strategic Autonomy Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests*, Berlin 2019, pp. 11-13.

<sup>54</sup> „Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain-dead”, *The Economist*, 7 November 2019.

<sup>55</sup> P. Robinson, *The CNN Effect. The Myth of the News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, London–New York 2002, pp. 94-114.

<sup>56</sup> W.C. Ashmore, "Impact of Alleged Russian Cyber Attacks", *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, vol. 11 (2009), p. 10.

effective, and legally still in the shadows. In this way, cyber activity became the new Russian domain, where its capabilities have been consequently improving and being tested on the US and European neighbors<sup>57</sup>. The last, 2008 Georgia war lesson proved that the old Leninist question “who will beat whom” is still valid. The relatively soft reaction of the West surprised the Russians and made them assume that if the West once averted eyes from the country which Russia attacked, it may do the same next time.

Hence, instead of confronting NATO and the EU openly, Russia implemented already tested measures like widespread disinformation in Western Europe, precise cyber targeting and corruption of the parties which might be useful in promoting Russian interests and worldview. Not surprisingly, Russia's best assets are far-right parties and politicians, who are, in general, ardently anti-European, -liberal and -migrant, as they disapprove of European integration, but prefer – in line with the Kremlin – conservative values, nationalism, autocracy, and xenophobia<sup>58</sup>. Their number is growing along with populism, which is becoming widespread throughout the Western world. The former Italian PM and a leader of Lega Nord, Matteo Salvini, is among the most prominent friends of Putin, whom he openly admires and calls sanctions against Moscow “a madness”. Next, there are France's far-right icon Marine Le Pen, Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán who imported Putin's version of “illiberal democracy” or the then Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl at whose wedding party President Putin was dancing and who represented one of few EU governments which did not expel any Russian diplomats after the Skripal poisoning in the Great Britain in 2018.

## TO CONFRONT OR COOPERATE WITH THE WEST?

Russia's conduct towards the West is twofold. On the one hand, Russia challenges the West by undermining the liberal world order, but on the other hand, President Putin has always assured that Russia is ready to return to a pragmatic and partner relation with the West<sup>59</sup>. Simultaneously, both President Putin and minister of foreign affairs Siergiey Lavrov, use to underline that without Russia several security problems cannot be solved, likewise the conflict in East Ukraine, Iranian nuclear program, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and not to mention the need to restrain a growing China.

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections in the US seemed to be very promising for a new opening with the West. The Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton was a worse-case scenario for Moscow, because she was behind not only the so called Russian-American reset, but – in Putin's opinion – she inspired the social

<sup>57</sup> See more: *The Global Disinformation Order. 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, Computational Propaganda Research Project, Oxford Internet Institute, 26 September 2019

<sup>58</sup> A. Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right. Tango Noir*, London 2018, pp. 162-220.

<sup>59</sup> *Putin's Speech at the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly*, 28 September 2015, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>>, 28 January 2020.

protests in Moscow and Sankt Peterburg after parliamentary elections in Russia in 2011. Donald Trump was giving hope for a much more realistic policy, more pragmatic contacts, and readiness for a reset with Moscow<sup>60</sup>. Nevertheless, meddling into American elections in 2016 and a domestic conflict between the Republicans and Democrats prevented President Trump from making any progress in relations with Russia.

## IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS

Russian anti-Western conduct should be taken as an instrumental one. Russia is defiantly devoted to bargaining with the West, as the United States is still a point of reference in Russia's foreign policy. Russia, which has never agreed to become a junior partner in relations with the West, will not accept its minor role in relations with China and what is more, China distinguishes from the West by being a much more unpredictable partner.

Undoubtedly, the strategy of challenging the West seems to be successful, but this is only at first sight. The strategic goals have still not been achieved, inter alia making the West recognize once and for all the post-Soviet sphere as a Russian buffer zone; granting Moscow a prestigious rank among key global players by returning it to G-8 and finally lifting sanctions which did not allow Russia to develop and modernize its economy. Instead of improving its position in the global economic race, Russia was left among the minor states far behind the top 10. Besides, nothing forebodes the claim that in the close future Russia will catch up with the most developed countries.

Last but not least, the once lost trust in relations with Russia is not likely to be rebuilt very soon. Despite the growing pressure to set up a new opening with Russia, particularly in Western Europe and probably a warm welcome of the rapprochement in Moscow, the image of a revisionist Russia is very unlikely to change without returning the annexed Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine, leaving the separatists in East Ukraine to their own devices or stopping to interfere in elections in the West.

## REFERENCES

- Ashmore W.C., "Impact of Alleged Russian Cyber Attacks", *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, vol. 11 (2009).
- Bieleń S., „Szanse modernizacji na tle osobliwości rosyjskiej polityki”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Bariery modernizacji Rosji*, Warszawa 2014.
- Bryc A., "Making Russia First Again", *Green European Journal*, 27 January 2020, at <<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/making-russia-first-again/>>.
- Cohen S., *War with Russia? From Putin and Ukraine to Trump and Russiagate*, New York 2019.

<sup>60</sup> M. Rosenberg, M. Mazaetti, "Trump's National Security Pick Sees Ally in Fight Against Islamists: Russia", *The New York Times*, 10 January 2017.

- Dannreuther R., "Russia and the Arab Revolutions", *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 98 (2011).
- Diec J., „Próby redefinicji państwowości imperialnej nowej Rosji”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015.
- Diec J., *Geostrategiczny wybór Rosji. U zarania trzeciego tysiąclecia*, Kraków 2015.
- Dragneva R., Wolczuk K., *Ukraine between the EU and Russia. The Integration Challenge*, London 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516268>.
- Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 30 November 2016, at <[https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents//asset\\_publisher/CptICk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents//asset_publisher/CptICk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248)>.
- The Global Disinformation Order. 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, Computational Propaganda Research Project, Oxford Internet Institute 2019.
- Jach A., „Rosyjska nostalgia imperialna”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015.
- Kardaś S., „Nord Stream 2 w polityce energetycznej Rosji”, *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.35757/SM.2018.71.4.05>.
- Kirchick J., "Finlandization Is Not a Solution for Ukraine", *National Interest*, 27 July 2014.
- Kotz D.M., Weir F., *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin. The Demise of the Soviet System and the New Russia*, London 2007, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203799369>.
- Lippert B., von Ondarza N., Perthes V. (eds.), *European Strategic Autonomy Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests*, Berlin 2019.
- Lo B., *Russia and the New World Disorder*, Washington 2015.
- Lough J., *Germany's Russia Challenge*, NATO Defense College, Fellowship Monograph 2018.
- Mankoff J., *Russian Foreign Policy. The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham 2009.
- Mearshheimer J., "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014.
- Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club*, 24 October 2014, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>>.
- Meister S., "The 'Lisa Case': Germany as a Target of Russian Disinformation", *NATO Review*, 25 July 2016.
- The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, *The Security Council of the Russian Federation*, 25 December 2014, at <<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>>.
- Polyakova A., Laruelle M., Meister S., Barnett N., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses. Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom*, Washington 2016.
- Primakov Y., "A Multipolar World and the United Nations", *International Affairs*, vol. 43, no. 6 (1997).
- Primakov Y., "Russia Seeks a New Place in the World," *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, vol. 48, no. 10 (1996).
- Primakov Y., *Russian Crossroads. Toward the New Millennium*, London 2004.
- Pushkov A., "Russia and America: The Honeymoon's Over", *The Foreign Policy*, no. 93 (1993-1994).
- Putin V., *The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules*, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 24 October 2014, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>>, 16 December 2019.

- Putin's Speech at the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly*, 28 September 2015, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>>.
- Robinson P., *The CNN Effect. The Myth of the News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, London–New York 2002.
- Rodkiewicz W., *Potemkin Conservatism. An Ideological Tool of the Kremlin*, Warsaw 2015.
- Rosenberg M., Mazaetti M., “Trump’s National Security Pick Sees Ally in Fight Against Islamists: Russia”, *The New York Times*, 10 January 2017.
- Russian Involvement and Junk News during Brexit*, Computational Propaganda Research Project, Data Memo no. 2017.10, 19 December 2017.
- Shekhovtsov A., *Russia and the Western Far Right. Tango Noir*, London 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315560991>.
- Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, 10 February 2007, at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>>.
- Stepanova E., “Does Russia Have a Grand Plan for the Middle East?”, *Politique étrangère*, no. 2 (2016).
- Trenin D., *Putin's Syria Gambit Aims at Something Bigger Than Syria. What is Russia up to in the Middle East?*, Moscow Carnegie Center, 13 October 2015, at <<http://carnegie.ru/2015/10/13/putin-s-syria-gambit-aims-at-something-bigger-than-syria-pub-61611>>.
- Tsygankov A.P., *Russia's Foreign Policy. Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Lanham 2016.
- Wierzbicki A., „Russkij mir jako projekt restauracyjny imperium”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015.
- Włodkowska-Bagan A., „Ambicje imperialne Rosji i innych mocarstw w przestrzeni po-radzieckiej”, in S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek, *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015.
- Лукьянов Ф., „Атлантический дрейф. Что означает для России отдаление Европы от США”, *Московский Центр Карнеги*, at <<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/72960>>.

---

**Agnieszka BRYC** – Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Political Science and Security Studies at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń/Poland. In the years 2011–2018 – a member of the Board of the Centre of Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich). Editor-in-chief of the journal *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*. Areas of expertise and research: foreign policy of the Russian Federation; Israel’s security policy, security studies. Author of several books, such as: *Israel 2020: Doomed to Power?* (Poltext 2014, in Polish), *Security of the Post-Soviet Territory*, (co-editor, 2011, in Polish); *Russia in the XXI Century: A World Player or the End of the Game?* (ed. 1. 2008, ed. 2. 2009, in Polish); *The Goals of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (2004, in Polish).