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Russia's Foreign Policy Shifts

Abstract. For more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have still been remaining closely tied to Russia. Through the formation of economic and military alliances with the countries of the region, Russia has been maintaining control over Central Asia. The Ukrainian crisis of 2014 has showed to what extent Russia was ready to defend what she considered to be her traditional spheres of influence. This paper deals with the new ideas in Russian foreign policy as «Russian world», «state-civilization», and the doctrine of «sovereign democracy». Before the Ukrainian crisis, these concepts have been gradually introduced and developed in the Russian foreign policy discourse. Russia has tried to construct «state-civilization» identity enforced by the Russian people, language and culture. Hence, the ideas of «civilizing mission» of Russia on the Eurasian continent and unique character of Russian civilization have been developed. However, the new concepts of Russian foreign policy have caused great concerns in neighboring countries.

Key words: Russia, foreign policy, identity, concepts.

Introduction

Ukraine's «Orange revolution» of 2004 has been interpreted in Russia as an «exported revolution». After the revolution Russia has increased its positions in post-soviet countries. Since 2005, Russia has been declaring its mission in the protection of its own identity, the «Russian world», and traditional values. In the President's Address to the Federal Assembly of 2005, V.Putin has defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As he said: «it became a genuine drama for the Russian nation. Tens of our millions co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory». However, the most important thing emphasized by the Russian President in that speech was an idea of continuing the civilizing mission of the Russian nation on the Eurasian continent. It has been stressed that the «civilizing mission of the Russian nation in Eurasia consists in ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community.»[1]

Methods

Questions of the «Russian world» concept, the concept of «sovereign democracy» formation are largely furnished by research with eclectic meth-

ods such as discourse analysis, process-tracing and modelling that help to trace the origin and evolution of new Russia's political, military and economic positions in Central Asia.

New Concepts in Russia's Foreign Policy Since 2005

By stressing her civilizing mission on the Eurasian continent, contemporary Russia has revived the ideas that were essential for colonial policy of the European powers in the past. Colonial empires developed the distinction between civilized and uncivilized nations for sustaining their hegemony. The civilizing mission of any empire derived from a sense of superiority over the conquered nations. European colonial powers including the tsarist Russia had to justify their territorial expansion by mission to civilize the conquered nations. In Russian political thought the idea that Russia is more than a state dates back to the 19th century.

In the last decade, the idea of Russia as a state-civilization has been further developed by Russian authorities. If till the early 2000s, the integration with European institutes has been declared as important priority of Russia' foreign policy, then since 2005 Russia has been appealing to the need to turn to its own millennial history, culture and traditional

values. In his Annual Address of 2012, President of Russia V.Putin said: «For centuries, Russia developed as a multi-ethnic nation, a civilization-state bonded by the Russian people, Russian language native for all of us...» [2].

In 2013, in his speech at Valdai, President V.Putin has further developed the idea of Russia as «state-civilization». He said: «Russia as philosopher Konstantin Leontyev vividly put it has always evolved in «blossoming complexity» as a state-civilization, reinforced by the Russian people, Russian language, Russia culture, Russian Orthodox Church and the country's other traditional religions. It is precisely the state-civilization model that has shaped our state polity...»[3] I.Zevelev, the Russian scholar, noted that «since 2008 the philosophical foundations of contemporary Russian foreign policy are increasingly being shaped in terms of civilizational identity» [4].

The comprehensive support of the «Russian world» has been stressed as one of the priorities of the Concept of Russia's foreign policy in 2013. Since the second half of the 2000s, the number of institutions aimed at the implementation of the «Russian world» concept were formed in Russia. One of them is the Fund of support and protection of the rights of Russian compatriots living abroad formed in 2012.

Along with the «Russian world» concept, the concept of «sovereign democracy» has been developed in Russia in the last decade. According to the concept, the Russian democracy is the democracy of Russian people, with their own traditions of self-rule, and it is not fulfillment of external standards. The idea of «sovereign democracy» has received much support from Central Asian states. It is well known that since 2000s some post-soviet countries including Central Asia, together with Russia, have been speaking unanimously at international meetings, criticizing the Western standards of democracy and pointing out that they have had their own specific culture and history.

In this way, the concepts as «Russian world» and «state-civilization» have been gradually introduced and developed in the Russian foreign policy discourse by the beginning of Ukraine crisis of 2014.

Furthermore, Russia put forward the right to use any means to achieve the goals. In this way, Russia has been continuing the Soviet practice of justifying the wars. If the Soviet Union labelled the revolutionary, national-liberation wars to be just, Russia has justified her right to wage wars to protect the rights of Russians and her compatriots abroad.

Thus, Russia has declared her right to interfere in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, if she decides that the rights of her compatriots are being violated. It is obvious that such a policy would be interpreted in neighboring countries as a threat to national security.

One of the main priorities of Russia's foreign policy toward post-soviet states has been forcing them to join Eurasian Union. Ukraine was seen as a key member of the project. However, Ukraine's revolution of 2014 has demonstrated that Russia could not secure its positions in this country. Russia has formed Eurasian Economic Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, later joined by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. For Russia, the EEU has been the way to strengthen its control over the post-soviet states. It is the Russian project to lead the group of friendly but dependent nations.

In 2013, President of Russia noted that Russia's primary priority was a close integration with her neighbors. As he said: «the future Eurasian Economic Union...is not just a collection of mutually beneficial agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia...»[3].

The contemporary Ukraine has made its choice in favor of European institutions. By losing Ukraine as a potential member-state of the Eurasian Union, Russia has created the project where she has had an absolute dominance with more than 80 percent of the EEU's GDP. Almost immediately after the EEU treaty came into force, issues related to transit among member-states have begun. In political terms, Russia has not also gained unanimous support with regard to Ukraine from EEU's member-states.

Moreover, economically weakening Russia will not be able to develop the Eurasian Union. In the report on future of the Central Asia prepared by the Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic Studies in 2015, one of the possible scenarios included that Russia would have to concentrate on internal economic and social issues and would reduce its involvement in the EEU.[5]

Russia's political, military and economic positions in Central Asia have been increased in the recent years. Marlene Laruelle, director of Central Asia Program at George Washington University, wrote in 2014, that «Russia remains a crucial player in the region...With the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow is

ever more present on Central Asia radar...»[6] The Central Asian states still remain dependent on Russia. However, the new concepts in Russia's foreign policy are not attractive for these countries; on the contrary, it raises their suspicions about Russian ultimate goals.

Conclusion

Russia's Crimean campaign of 2014 has been a major revision of the Russian foreign policy doctrine. Russia has begun to rely on a completely new interpretation of the national identity. However, 2 years after the Crimea, the Foreign Minister of Russia S.Lavrov, in his recent article noted, that «Russia in its deepest essence has been one of the branches of European civilization». At the same time, it has been emphasized that Russia has its own «genetic code» and never merged with the West.[7]

Russia is still in the search for its own identity. Given the growing Russian nationalism in the society and multinational composition of the country, the process of construction of Russian identity will be complicated and long-term process. The current Russian political elite have been trying to form

«state-civilization» identity enforced by the Russian people, language and culture. Hence, the idea of «civilizing mission» of Russia on the Eurasian continent has been developed. The main elements of the new identity are the role of Russia as a defender of conservative values and a unique mission to protect the sovereign right for political development, taking into account the specific cultural traditions and history. In this regard, Russia has declared the right to fight against any attempts to topple the existing regimes. Russia's policy is reminiscent of the Holy Alliance's policy, created after the Napoleonic wars with the aim to suppress revolutions. One of the major differences today is that Russia does not have allies among the Western nations as she had in the 1820s.

The «Russian world» concept caused great concern in neighboring countries. Annexation of Crimea, participation in the conflict in the east of Ukraine has increased distrust even in the closest allies. Russia with the new concepts in its foreign policy will not attract true allies. Russia with its growing nationalist sentiments in foreign policy would fail to form a strong alliance in the region.

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