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**THE FOURTH VECTOR OF VLADIMIR PUTIN
(Russia's Foreign Policy – Any Changes?)**

Since the year 2000 Russia's foreign policy has had many vectors, in a sense that its vector has changed more than once. At the very beginning of Putin's first presidency its main course was the establishment of firm allied relations with the United States and integration with the European Union within the framework of what was then called the "European choice" of Russia. A symbol of that period was Putin's support of the United States after the terrorist acts on September 11, 2001, and the most eloquent expression – his speech at the German Bundestag in October of that year. Then, in the mid-2000s Moscow turned away from the political "orbit" of the West, having become opposed to Washington on the principal questions of international politics and the world order. The most vivid embodiment of that period was the five-day Russian-Georgian war of 2008, and the most eloquent "literary" monument – Putin's speech in Munich in February 2007. The third period – "Medvedev's" in form, but Putin's in essence – was the pressing of the "reset button" of Russian-American relations, and the order of the Kremlin to establish "modernization partnerships" with the most advanced countries.

These changes in Russian foreign policy do not always coincide with presidential terms of office, yet, there is certain connection. It can be said that after Putin's return to the post of president, Moscow's course in international affairs is again modified. Naturally, the main reason is not the change of the country's leader. Vladimir Putin continued to remain the "first person" of the state determining the vector of its foreign policy during Medvedev's presidency. The "Libyan episode" was not the latter's improvisation: the sanction to abstain at the UN Security Council during the voting procedure was definitely given by Putin. The principally new factors are now a considerable change of the domestic situation in Russia and the continuing fundamental changes of the external medium in which Russia's policy is implemented.

Domestic Conditions

During the two decades after the overthrow of Communist power in the country essential changes have taken place in Russian society. Certain sections of the population (about one-third of it) have reached a material and cultural level allowing them to take an active part in public life. As a result, the authoritarian rule has suffered certain erosion. The more or less satisfied consumers began to turn into "angry" city dwellers. At the end of 2011 – beginning of 2012 their discontent took a vivid form of mass manifestations in the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other big cities.

The powers that be described this movement as a result of the subversive activities of the West, and above all the United States. Vladimir Putin directly accused the U.S. Department of State of financing these protest movements. Thus, the authorities were striving to present the opposition as the "fifth column" of the West doing everything to weaken Russia, and themselves as the national

patriotically-minded force defending the independence and integrity of the country. When Putin declared himself winner of the presidential election in the evening of March 4, 2012, his words sounded like a triumphant report of victory over the external enemy and his domestic accomplices.

The first steps of the newly-elected head of state were aimed at bringing to naught the potential sources of influence of the outer world on the domestic situation. A law was hastily adopted demanding that the Russian non-governmental organizations receiving financial grants from abroad be registered as foreign agents. Moscow also demanded that the American Agency on international development aid (*USAID*) stop its activity on the territory of Russia. The Russian authorities withdrew from such an agreement with the United States as the program of joint reduction of the nuclear threat in which the U.S.A. was the donor and Russia the recipient of aid. Simultaneously, in its domestic policy the Kremlin laid an emphasis on overtly conservative premises, but not on an imitation of pluralism as it used to do.

During the presidential election campaign of 2012 in the United States the Russian theme was not mentioned practically at all, except a gibberish statement of the republican candidate Mitt Romney about Russia as the “No 1 geopolitical opponent.” Nevertheless, at the end of the year, while abolishing the “Jackson-Vanik amendment,” the U.S. Congress adopted the notorious Magnitsky act, which introduced sanctions against the Russian officials accused of violations of human rights. In reply, the Russian government adopted the law forbidding the adoption of Russian children by American parents. Public opinion in the United States has unfolded a broad campaign against the Kremlin policy, and anti-Americanism has openly become one of the pillars of official patriotism.

These steps of Moscow, as well as police reprisals against Russian opposition leaders, a severe sentence passed on the members of the *Pussy Riot* group who have staged a “punk-prayer” in the main Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and also checks and inspections at the offices of German political foundations in this country have led to a marked intensification of criticism of Russian domestic policy in the European Union countries. For their part, the Russian authorities have declared for the first time since 1991 that they do not fully share modern European values, including those concerning human rights, and will follow their own orientations.

Thus, one may draw the following conclusions:

First, Russian domestic policy and its reflection in the public opinion of America and Europe have “intruded” for the first time during the post-Soviet period into the sphere of Russia’s relations with the United States and the European Union.

Secondly, this “intrusion” tends to turn into a partial “occupation” of bilateral relations by domestic subjects.

Thirdly, Russian official patriotism is now openly formed on the basis of anti-Americanism.

Fourthly, differences between Russia and the European Union have acquired not only a situational and political, but also an essential and value-laden character.

External Conditions

The world crisis of 2008–2009 was not only the deepest one since the time of the Great depression. It laid bare the profound moral vices of modern capitalism and essential drawbacks in the system of state management in the most advanced western democracies. Post-crisis progress in the United States was very slow, and in the European

Union countries the crisis took the form of protracted recession. The debt problems of a number of countries have questioned not only the integrity of the euro zone, but the very existence of the common European currency. In the conditions of the crisis the social problems have become much deeper and more painful in a number of European countries. The state debt and budget deficit in the United States have reached such dimensions that they are now a serious brake in the implementation of Washington's foreign policy.

Meanwhile, the results of the American foreign-policy course in the early 21 century are far from impressive. Iraq has plunged into chaos after the withdrawal of the U.S. troops, and Afghanistan is facing a specter of civil war on the threshold of such withdrawal. Iran continues its nuclear program, despite the western sanctions and Israeli subversive acts. North Korea carries on missile and nuclear tests and threatens with war. Finally, the "Arab spring," which the White House supported after some hesitation, has apparently beaten a track to power for Islamists, who are far from wishing to pursue a foreign-policy course loyal to Washington. Bashar Asad's regime in Syria, which used to be quite friendly to the United States, is still in power. Against this background China's economic growth continues, although at a slower pace, nevertheless, the country proclaims and pursues its national interests still more firmly. The Asia-Pacific region becomes the main area not only of world trade, but also world politics.

The conclusions made in Moscow could be summed up as follows:

First, the multipolar world, which has been talked of so much since the mid-1990s, is becoming a reality.

Secondly, the epoch of the unrestrained domination of the West in the international arena is coming to an end. The West has lost its

moral authority and cannot serve as a model for Russia. In general, democracy does not guarantee a high quality of state management.

Thirdly, American foreign policy has become cost-based and ineffective. Washington has overstrained itself in the international arena, its strategy is now more destructive than constructive, and is often unrealistic.

Hence, the foreign-policy independence of Russia should also be moral political independence. “Eyes front to the West” in the matter of values has become obsolete. Moscow should and will go its own way.

Economic Conditions

The foreign economic situation has also changed against this background. The price of oil, which dropped sharply in the heat of the global crisis, has now stabilized at the level of \$110 – 115 per barrel of North Sea “Brent” oil. After that there has not been any further increase, and the economic recession in Europe and a slow growth of the U.S. economy, along with a reduction of growth rates in China, threaten with a new drop of the price of oil. Meanwhile, the budget liabilities of the Russian government can be fulfilled only along with the preservation of the current price of oil. Besides, an energy revolution has taken place in the United States after the beginning of the industrial development of shale gas, which has changed the world economic situation. It has opened the prospect of achieving energy independence by 2030, and has also caused a change in the structure of gas trade. Combined with the measures adopted by certain countries of the European Union after the “gas wars” of 2006 and 2009, these measures have resulted in noticeable reduction of Europe’s dependence on Russian gas, and stability with regard to breakdowns in its supplies has grown.

Along with the further development of production of liquefied natural gas, this factor has had an adverse effect on the positions of “Gazprom” on the world market. In turn, the European Union has decided to start investigations of the activity of the Russian monopoly on the markets of certain EU member-states with a view to changing the rules of “Gazprom” business in Europe, particularly to revising the price formula of gas delivered through pipelines. “Gazprom” has now to work more actively to develop the Asian direction in an attempt to gain stronger positions on the markets of Japan, South Korea and China. The foreign economic position of Russia has changed after it joined the World Trade organization in August 2012. As a result of rather difficult negotiations lasting for nineteen years, the Russian side has gained considerable concessions from its partners, nevertheless, the effect of membership has become rather painful for a number of branches of the Russian economy, above all, agriculture. In these conditions one can talk of a certain temporary allergy to further integration in the world economy.

Foreign Policy in All Fields

The first international contacts of Vladimir Putin after his inauguration have shown a “renovated” outline of Russian foreign policy. On the inauguration day he received the heads of state of the CIS who attended the ceremony in Moscow, having thus emphasized the historic role of Russia as the center of the post-Soviet Eurasia. The first visit abroad by the new Russian President was to Minsk, the capital of Belarus, an ally of Russia. After that he visited Berlin and Paris, the main partners of Russia in the European Union. The European theme was continued several days later in St. Petersburg at the RF – EU summit. Further on President Putin continued to receive leaders of European countries, from Italy to Luxemburg.

After this, Vladimir Putin turned to Asia and went to Tashkent where he made a vain attempt to draw Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov to his integration plans. But soon Uzbekistan announced his withdrawal from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The next stage of Putin's diplomacy was Beijing where he took part in the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In later months the Russian President visited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Israel and Palestine territories, Turkey and India. The main diplomatic event of the year was the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Vladivostok, where the Russian President received the leaders of two dozen countries.

The multilateral meetings which have not been attended by Putin could clearly be seen against this backdrop. It was understood that the NATO meeting in Chicago would pass without Russian participation. However, Putin's refusal to attend the summit of the "Eight" at Camp David was utterly unexpected. Officially, it was explained by the need to work on the composition of the new Russian government, but unofficially, it was the reaction to Obama's absence at the APEC summit in Vladivostok. It showed that the Russian presence at such summit meetings was not an absolute priority for Putin. The only meeting he was interested in was a month later at the summit of the "Twenty" in Mexico.

The geography of Putin's visits and meetings demonstrates the priorities of Russian foreign policy. First, it is special attention to integration within the framework of the CIS, secondly, the greater role of relations with Asia, thirdly, lower interaction with the European Union, NATO, and other western institutions, and fourthly, maintenance of a certain distance in relations with the United States. These conclusions are bolstered up by an analysis of the Concept of the

foreign policy of the Russian Federation endorsed by President Putin in February 2013, and also by practical policy in each field mentioned.

The Eurasian Union

Vladimir Putin's article about the Eurasian Union, which appeared in October 2011, on the eve of parliamentary elections, became the first foreign-policy manifesto, as it were, of the new political cycle. The idea of the restoration of the unity of the post-Soviet area in one form or another is rather popular among voters. In 2009 Putin decided to step up the creation of a Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, although at the time this act seemed to render more difficult Russia's entry in the WTO. Evidently, Putin has drawn a lesson from the world economic crisis, namely, that regional integration is more reliable than globalization. This line continues: the Uniform economic area of three countries began its existence in 2012, and it is planned to set up a full-fledged Eurasian economic union in 2015.

Speaking of the economic integration of the post-Soviet states it is necessary to have in mind several aspects. First, deep integration is only possible on a voluntary basis and preferably in the economic sphere. The political integration of Russia and newly-independent states above the coordination level of their political courses is unfeasible. Secondly, an expansion of the integration area beyond the bounds of the present "three Customs Union/Eurasian Economic Area is either unattainable or is fraught with serious losses. Just as Mikhail Gorbachev and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Vladimir Putin is of the opinion that without Ukraine the Russian center of force will not have a sufficient critical mass. However, for its part the Ukrainian elite apparently realizes well enough that close integration ties with Russia would mean its movement toward assimilation and gradual abolition of

the “Ukrainian project.” Rapprochement with Moscow will inevitably provoke a political crisis and even a split of Ukraine.

Integration is viewed almost similarly by Uzbekistan. During the past twenty years the Uzbek authorities have formed their own idea about the role and place of their country in the region, and either Islam Karimov or his probable successors will hardly wish to become part of the Russian-Eurasian center of force. Of course, smaller and weaker countries of Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – are another matter. Neither Bishkek nor Dushanbe can claim regional leadership, but they will strive for discretion. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the premature inclusion of these two states in integration will not only demand sizable contributions on the part of the Russian Federation, but will also considerably lower the general level and quality of the entire integration area.

The Asia-Pacific Region

Russia’s turn toward Asia and the Pacific has just started. Yet, some people fear that the Vladivostok summit in September 2012 was the end of the turn, but not its beginning. The main threat to Russia’s security is now determined by the fact that a part of Russia, which is the most depressive economically, actually borders on the most dynamically developing part of the world. To solve this problem it is necessary to find and realize an adequate development model of Pacific Russia.

Other, indirect, threats stem from the aggravating contradictions between the leading Asia-Pacific countries, primarily, between China and the United States, as well as between China and its neighbors – Japan, Vietnam and India. Russia should ably maneuver in these conditions in order to ensure its own interests and avoid being involved in disputes and conflicts of others. Today Moscow succeeds in

maneuvering at a tactical and operative level. Having gained participation in prestigious East Asian summits, Moscow deems it possible to limit its participation in the first one of them at the level of minister of foreign affairs. It is symbolic that his first foreign visit as the new leader of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping made to Moscow in March 2013. Chinese strategy is aimed at strengthening relations with Russia, which is a strategic rear and raw material base of China. However, there has been no strategy in reply so far.

“Economic” Relations with the European Union

The European Union remains the main trade partner of the Russian Federation. Their bilateral turnover amounts to over \$400 billion, five times more than between Russia and China. The European Union claims over 50 percent of the volume of Russian foreign trade, whereas the share of its partners by the Customs Union accounts for less than seven percent. It was to be hoped that Russia's joining the World Trade Organization would give an incentive to trade and economic ties with the European Union. However, they have not been fully realized. Russia has to get used to the consequences of its entry into the WTO, and Europe in the present situation is concerned by the most acute crisis. As a result, the two partners confined their interaction to a narrow circle of practical, or even technical, tasks – visas, trade disputes, etc. The Russian negative attitude to the policy of the European Union, above all, Germany, was largely determined by the way the problems of the Cyprus debt were resolved in March 2013, as a result of which big Russian depositors of Cyprus banks lost their money. This step was publicly criticized by President Putin, premier Medvedev, and the mass media as anti-Russian.

As to international affairs, Russia has supported the military operation of France in Mali, but was at variance with the position of

Paris, London and Berlin on Syria. Moscow's position on Syria was in sharp contrast with its approach to Libya in 2011. The reason for this was not in the change of president in the Kremlin, but in the way NATO had carried out the Libyan operation. Moscow was outraged by the fact that the action sanctioned by the UN Security Council for the protection of peaceful citizens from reprisals on the part of the government troops was enlarged right up to the change of the ruling regime in Libya and the assassination of its head. It was with due account of the Libyan lesson that the position of Russia in the UN became much harder.

The questions of sanctions and the use of force in international relations, especially control over its use, have taken pride of place in Russia's position and actions in the UN. It is especially true of the situation in Syria. Moscow is not so much advocating the preservation of Bashar Asad in power as preventing foreign military intervention in Syria. Moscow is likewise against the possible coming to power of radical Islamists in Syria. Moscow declares its readiness to cooperate with the West on Syria, if the United States and its allies agree to act within the framework of the UN Charter and refuse from the idea of the forcible change of the regime in that country. However, the problem lies in the fact that by the spring of 2013 the potential of a political-diplomatic solution of the Syrian problem seemed to have been exhausted.

“Sovereign Distancing” from the United States

In the first year after his return to the post of president Vladimir Putin was concerned with the problem of strengthening sovereignty of Russia with regard to the United States. The real reply to the Magnitsky law was not the act prohibiting adoption of Russian children in foreign countries, but the act prohibiting Russian government officials to keep

money abroad. Thus, two problems were tackled simultaneously: lowering vulnerability of representatives of Russian power with regard to foreign states, and, on the contrary, increasing intra-elite discipline and greater dependence of the Russian political elite on the powers that be in the Moscow Kremlin.

President Putin “took time out” in his relations with Washington. He seems to count on big western business rather than on governments or public opinion. In his view, the interests of the American business community can do more than agreements in the sphere of armaments.

In this connection President Putin instructed the government to raise Russia’s positions in the *Doing Business* index of the World Bank by 100 points, thus moving it from 120th to 20th place. At the end of the first year of Putin’s new presidency Russia has reached agreement with the western energy giants *Exxon Mobile* and *BP*. And in the World Bank rating it has moved upwards, to 112th place.

In the military-political sphere Moscow does not wish to display great initiatives in its relations with Washington. Despite anti-American rhetoric in the mass media and in public, Russia continues to comply with agreements signed with the United States and NATO concerning transit of cargoes needed by the U.S. and NATO troops deployed in Afghanistan. Moscow was preparing for Putin’s meetings with Barack Obama at the summit of the “Eight” in Northern Ireland and at the meeting of the “Twenty” in St. Petersburg.

Rearmament of the Army and Navy

“The weakest goes to the wall.” These words President Putin repeated over and over again several years ago. Russia began its military reform in 2008. In 2011 an announcement was made of a spectacular rearmament of the army at a cost of twenty trillion rubles

within the next ten years. Simultaneously, it was decided to reform the military industry and turn it into the driving force of new industrialization. Failure in negotiations with the United States and NATO on cooperation on the anti-missile defense in 2010 – 2011 induced Moscow to evolve a program of building the Russian anti-missile defense aimed against the United States and NATO, and also to increase the potential of nuclear containment. Although according to the existing military doctrine adopted in 2010, a large-scale war against Russia is hardly possible, the United States and NATO are viewed as potential enemies at regional and local levels.

At the end of 2012 the Russian Navy carried out major exercises in the Mediterranean for the first time in twenty years, and in spring 2013 President Putin suddenly alerted the Black Sea Fleet for the first time.

Engaged as it is in the strengthening of its military might, Moscow is now more restrained in the prospects of arms control. The further reduction of strategic offensive weapons is linked with restrictions in the system of the American anti-missile defense system; control over non-strategic nuclear arms is placed depending on solution of precision weapons, and resumption of control over conventional arms is viewed on principally new foundation. The world without nuclear weapons is considered a dangerous illusion and movement toward it a risky business.

Conclusions and Prospects

The circle of persons taking part in the formation and implementation of Russian foreign policy has changed insignificantly, despite the change of presidents. Nevertheless, foreign-policy consensus, that is, accord of a greater part of society with government policy, has become a thing of the past. Political and ideological

stratification grows, various groups, government and private corporations, companies and clans offer their own, sometimes diametrically opposed variants of foreign-policy orientations. And this process will go on. Of course, foreign policy in major fields will continue to be determined, as before, by Vladimir Putin, and realized by the existing bureaucratic apparatus in the foreseeable future, but further on it will increasingly become a subject of acute struggle of interests and ideologies.

It is too early to make conclusions as to what Russian foreign policy will be during the third term of Putin's presidency. The conditions change rapidly and sometimes quite unpredictably. However, it is already possible to state that the geopolitical trends will be directed toward Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific region. Russia will continue to distance itself from the United States and the European Union. And the fourth variant of Putin's foreign policy will, probably, essentially differ from the three preceding ones.

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**WAYS AND METHODS OF DEPOLITICIZATION
OF ETHNICITY IN THE SOUTH OF RUSSIA**

Among the phenomena which have considerably influenced ethnopolitical processes in the North Caucasus it is necessary to single out those of depoliticization and repoliticization of ethnicity, which replaced each other throughout the entire post-Soviet period. A new

wave of the politicization of ethnicity in the middle and latter half of the first decade of this century has stepped up disintegration tendencies in society and increased the danger of conflicts. In the spring and summer of 2004 an escalation of conflict processes began in the South of Russia. In these circumstances the problem of interaction of ethnic and political processes acquired a special importance in the global and specific conditions of the post-Soviet area, especially in the regions with sharply pronounced ethnonational institutionalization.

The growing interest in the problem of ethnicity and ethnic relations can be explained by the rapid increase in the number of ethnic conflicts in the post-communist world and some other parts of the planet. Besides, the disappearance of the threat of a world nuclear war has given an additional impetus to the study of less important global processes, yet playing a major role in the life of millions of people. Beginning from the 1960s – 1970s there have been growing trends to preserve peoples' originality and emphasize the unique character of their culture and psychological make-up. Millions of people in many countries of different type on all continents have loudly proclaimed and vividly displayed their ethnic identity. At first this phenomenon was called the "ethnic paradox of modern epoch."

This ethnic paradox was a result of the politicization of ethnicity and contradictory socio-cultural phenomenon, whose essence lay in reviving interest in ethnic history, traditions, the language, and specific features of culture and everyday life against the backdrop of the deepening internationalization of all aspects of public life. Ethnicity in the latter half of the first decade of this century became more pronounced in the entire post-Soviet area and on a global scale. Conflicts with a vividly expressed ethnic component take place in regions where they were not expected, and therefore the authorities and public are unprepared for them. In this connection it is necessary to

choose an optimal paradigm of managing the ethno-political processes (or create a new paradigm) and search for methods to overcome conflict situations. One of such conflict-prone factors in the South of Russia is ethnic ideology formed on the basis of national self-consciousness and realization of the self-value of a definite ethnic community. Research reveals that ethnic ideology begins with the knowledge about the processes which interest the given community. From the point of view of ethnic ideology, this is not simply knowledge without which its existence is unthinkable; this is the axiological knowledge oriented to the interests of the given ethnic community. Religious values exert a powerful influence on the essence of ethnic ideology. Apart from that, ethnic ideology, along with values, contains closely intertwined feelings and expectations of ethnic community. Thus, ethnic ideology is an important factor of ethnic identification, a form of ethnic self-consciousness and a means of integration of members of some one ethnos in a single viable entity, on the one hand. And on the other, ethnic ideology incorporates ideas which imbibe in the process of politicization ethnocratic motives and aspirations from national consciousness and ethnic self-consciousness. As a result, ethnic ideology inevitably turned into a powerful incentive to conflict and serves as a good foundation for emergence of interethnic conflicts and tension. Besides, ethnic narrow-mindedness, ethnocentrism and even ethnophobia emerge in mass ethnic consciousness, which exacerbates interethnic relations.

The present-day cycle of the repoliticization of ethnicity began after the tragic events of the spring – autumn of 2004 (a series of terrorist acts, which began with the assassination of the President of the Chechen Republic Akhmad Kadyrov, and the peak of them was the Beslan tragedy in September). The repoliticization process of ethnicity continued in 2005 – 2007 and showed that the period of relative

depoliticization of ethnicity came to an end. At the time a whole range of conflict factors came into being. Among them were the high level of the population's preparedness for organized protest actions, militarization of the region connected with a great number of arms in possession of a considerable part of the population, growing disproportion of the financial and economic development of the regions of the unified Southern federal region, growing socio-economic inequality of territorial units in the region, provocative policy of the leadership of Georgia, etc. Certain experts were worried over the position of young people in the South of Russia. They noted that economic stagnation forced young people to leave the region or join criminal groups and militant units. Besides, the aggressive and near-sighted policy of the federal center and regional authorities toward the Wahhabi followers has resulted in this religious current going underground. This evoked sympathy of some young people for Wahhabis, which enhanced the conflict potential in the region.

In the conditions of repoliticization of ethnicity conflicts with vividly pronounced ethnic component take place even in those regions of the country where they have never been expected. As to the South of Russia, there have long been ethnopolitical processes and problems. Local interethnic conflicts are distinguished by the composition of subjects, that is, municipal administrations, representatives of the local special services and formal and informal ethnic associations. Another political subject has joined political activity, that is, various national public and political organizations and associations which put forward the idea of protecting the interests not of their republics in relation to the federal center, but ethnic groups, big and small. Playing the "ethnic card" was connected with unequal real opportunities in the sphere of realization of socio-economic rights (especially the right to land) and

attempts to ensure greater opportunities, even preferences, by political means.

Originally, such conflicts have not commanded much attention, especially against the background of big regional conflicts accompanied with cases of mass violence and even military hostilities. These conflicts remained unknown beyond the boundaries of their region.

Tension is growing in interethnic relations in the South of Russia. The process of the repoliticization of ethnicity is characterized, among other things, by the popularization of the idea of “historical priority.” In the early 1990s works became popular among the national intellectual circles in the South of Russia, in which the “historical right” of one or another ethnos to possess and dispose of the natural and economic resources on the territory of its habitation were substantiated. This “right” was confirmed, above all, by “historical references” to the effect that it was precisely these people who are the most ancient, the progenitor of “Caucasian civilization,” and therefore “historical justice” demands that their “grandfather rights” lost as a result of the expansion of Russia or neighboring peoples be restored.

The politicization of ethnicity expressed in the ideology of “historical priority” exerts a great influence on ethnic identification, especially of the younger generation, and provokes national tension and interethnic clashes. Such processes are the breeding ground for the development of nationalism aimed at secession from the Russian Federation and creation of a national state which, in the view of radical elements, is the only means to restore national and cultural identity. Such views and ideology contribute to the growing popularity of separatist ideas and will make it possible to “restore historical justice” and justify the territorial and economic claims of national-separatists.

The ruling elites of the North Caucasian republics share these views. Experts note that an original local geopolitical model of interethnic relations based on ambiguous cultural-historical priorities is being formed in the region, which substantiates their economic and ethnopolitical claims. All this contributes to the emergence of such socio-economic and ethnopolitical medium, in which national-separatism gains considerable public support.

Certain experts maintain that dissemination of such concepts as “indigenous” and “titular” ethnic groups contributes to the politicization of ethnicity and growth of tension, playing into the hands of the ethnocratic forces in the country. Ethnic ideology in its extreme forms is used by radical and nationalist forces to their advantage.

The strengthening of the vertical of federal power and incentives to the economic development of the regions with due account of the country’s specific features facilitate depoliticization of ethnicity. The end of the 1990s was characterized by such processes as a definite depoliticization of ethnicity, which was supported by a certain politicization of the religious (Islamic) factor. Nevertheless, it was regarded as a sign of the ethnic conflict process and ethnopolitical crisis in the region drawing to a close. However, in the first decade of this century local conflicts flared up with renewed force and reached a regional level. The process of repoliticization of ethnicity began. This process is characterized by the active inclusion of the confessional factor in the ethnopolitical processes in the region.

Characterizing the political process in the North Caucasus during the past decade it can safely be said that the distribution of the potential of state power in the political realm of the regions was sufficiently unequal. Due to this, official leaders at the regional level concentrated their efforts mainly on intraregional activity, whereas the activity at interrepublican and interregional levels aimed at integration in the

uniform Russian political and economic realm was viewed as something hostile. This situation created conditions for the destabilization of interethnic and interconfessional relations, growing ethnophobia and hostility toward other peoples. The main reason for failures of the attempts to bolster up the vertical of federal power in the regions is the absence of the coherent concept of the model and principles of the construction of the Russian state. Will the Russian state preserve its traditional poly-ethnic structure, or will the forces striving to destroy the country gain the upper hand? The future of Russia is at stake.

The new strategy of creating several vast macroregions out of several parts of the Russian Federation is one of the attempts to strengthen the vertical of power in the regions. Its main aim is to make the big state more manageable and mobile. However, without due account of ethnic, economic and social factors this attempt is doomed to failure. The present reform should consider the Russian ethnocultural landscape. The structural absorption of titular ethnic subjects, if with a good aim of socio-economic development, will mean the actual disappearance of the so-called second-rate ethnic groups from the map of the Russian Federation. If this touches not only small autochthonous ethnic groups, but also large ethnic communities, we shall not be able to avoid the country's disintegration. Russia is unthinkable as a mononational state. Russia as a nation is a combination of horizontal and vertical integration, where our community as a nation is more important than all socio-cultural and phenotypic differences. However, the construction of a single nation at the present time is hardly possible without the strengthening of general state and general national institutions ensuring law and order in society. But on the road to this there is another trap, namely, the threat of semi-democracy becoming non-democracy. The economic stability of the regions is of great

importance in the depoliticization process of ethnicity. An economic slump in the North Caucasian republics has contributed to the escalation of interethnic tension and disintegration of the economic and political area. The reasons for these processes lie in that economic and political ties between the republics of the former U.S.S.R. were severed after their gaining independence in the early 1990s, which had an adverse effect on the national economies of all these newly-formed states.

The growing dynamics of conflicts in the South of Russia blocked not only the interregional economy, but also foreign economic relations, which had a negative impact on the trade and economic cooperation of the countries of the Caucasian region. Thus, the improvement of the economic condition of the regions should make a positive contribution to depoliticization of ethnicity and the strengthening of the vertical of power. However, planning and implementation of economic development at a regional level could prove effective provided the regional specific conditions are taken into account on the basis of a systemic approach to all socio-political factors of the given regional subject. Primarily, it is necessary to pay attention to such factors leveling the extremist ethnic component as the investment case and competitiveness of the region. Successful planning and realization of economic development at a regional level is one of the aims of an effective regional management of conflicts. The essence of such regional management lies in prevention of socio-economic risks and creation of a positive political and economic image of the given region on a countrywide and global scale. This is of special importance for the poly-ethnic North Caucasian Federal region which is distinguished by socio-cultural homogeneity and at the same time a well-pronounced ethno-cultural diversity. A positive, attractive image of the North Caucasus is very important in the system of socio-political

relations of Russia, which has time and again been noted by the first persons of the political establishment of Russian society. The region should be presented to both entire Russia and the world as a territory of security, prosperity and social prospects. Consequently, the regional conflict-management should be an inalienable part of the strategy of the region's socio-economic development.

An important element of the image of the region is regional brand. It is connected with the goods and services produced and offered in the region. But at present, due to the absence of a proper conflict-management the North Caucasian Federal region is associated in mass consciousness not with investment case, but with a place politically and socially unstable, and on the whole is assessed quite negatively.

One of the dominant features of conflict-management related to the Caucasian region is a declaration that the Caucasus and Caucasian people are not "elements" alien to the Russian community, but, on the contrary, part of the Russian legal, political, economic and cultural area. The North Caucasus is a territory historically inhabited by Russians, Cossacks, indigenous Caucasian people, diasporas of the CIS and Baltic countries, as well as diasporas of foreign states. However, the objective processes of cooperation between peoples result in greater competition in the spheres of employment and property, and it is still more acute in business, entrepreneurship, services and trade.

Each region is represented in mass consciousness by an image with unique characteristics. This enables public figures, businessmen administration officials, market experts, journalists, etc. to adopt some or other decisions at critical moments very rapidly. The territory of the North Caucasian Federal region is unique in its historical heritage, geographical situation, and significance of the economic, political and humanitarian processes going on there. Its competitive advantages depend on the presence and use of competitive resources. Attractive

investment resources of the region can be used for creating competitive advantages of the territory, but it will largely depend on the successes in prevention of conflicts with a socio-economic basis. The development of the economic sector of the region, reduction in the number of the unemployed, higher living standards of the population (which will greatly diminish social and interethnic tension), control over the information aspect creating a positive image of the region – such are basic components of the regional conflict-management, along with the adequate system of legal regulation of interethnic tension in the North Caucasian Federal region.

So far the formation of regional ideologies in the South of Russia has been of a spontaneous character, or is a free ideological creative work of the political elites dominating in the region. At present regional ideologies in the South of Russia play an important role in the self-identification and self-organization of the territorial community, including the elite, in its interaction with the population and the federal center. Inasmuch as there are real risks of the destabilization of the ethnopolitical and economic situation in this region of Russia, so important geopolitically and economically, it is necessary to improve and widely use a sound anti-conflict management.

“Problemy sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo i etnopoliticheskogo razvitiya yuzhnogo makroregiona”, Rostov-on-Don, 2012, pp. 137–146.

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**RUSSIA'S POLICY IN FIGHTING ISLAMIC
EXTREMISM IN THE VOLGA REGION,
LATE 1990s – EARLY 2000s**

At the end of the 20th century – beginning of the 21st century ideas which were alien to Russian traditional Islam began to penetrate the Volga area, and this was due to an influx of representatives of various ethnic groups from Central Asia and the North Caucasus. This was followed by the arrival of extremist groups from there, which were joined by some local young men. The law enforcement agencies of the region unfolded a systematic struggle against them.

Members of the extremist religious organization “Hizb ut-Tahrir” (“Party of Islamic Liberation”) have been especially active in the area. It published propaganda literature in Russian, opened a special site in the Internet and distributed leaflets on mass scale in mosques. In February 2003, by a decree of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the activity of this organization was banned. Despite that, small groups of members of this organization are still present in certain regions in the Volga area.

The bodies of power in Ulyanovsk region are actively engaged in fighting national and religious extremism. The situation there is aggravated by the actual split of the local Muslim community (“umma”), which is used by Muslim missionaries from Central Asia and the North Caucasus who regularly visit Ulyanovsk region with a view to disseminating radical Islamic ideology among local Muslims.

In Orenburg region supporters of radical Islam concentrated their activity in “Al-Furkan” madrasah in Buguruslan, whose students were involved in a number of terrorist acts, including the seizure of the

secondary school in Beslan. In September 2004 explosive material and devices were found in the madrasah after which it was closed. Several students and teachers of it were tried and sentenced, and ten members of “Hizb ut-Tahrir” from Central Asia were deported.

The law enforcement agencies of Samara region have found and apprehended several missionaries of “pure” Islam distributing extremist literature. It was established that all of them were “Hizb ut-Tahrir” members. Fifteen men organized a group storing arms and explosives and distributing extremist literature. They maintained connections with members of this organization in other countries through the Internet.

The dissemination of radical Islam in Astrakhan region has been going on for about two decades. In the first half of the 1990s people from Tsumadin district of Daghestan (a republic in the North Caucasus) formed a salafist (“Wahhabi”) community (“jamaat”) in Astrakhan. At first it numbered three hundred members, mainly people of North Caucasian origin. They had a prayer house distributing special literature and held meetings with local Muslims.

Talking of Islamic fundamentalism, one should mention that an underground all-Russia conference was held in Astrakhan on June 9, 1990, which set up the Islamic party of revival (“Nahdat”). It was attended by several dozen Islamic fundamentalists from Daghestan, the Middle Volga area, Moscow and Tajikistan. The party program called for the revival of pure Islam and the need to follow the Islamic way of life. Members of the party put forward as one of their main tasks the formation of their faction in the U.S.S.R. parliament. However, the ideas of that organization had no mass support of Astrakhan Muslims. They were not eager to use Islam for political purposes, and the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism were unattractive for the local people.

In the 2000s several salafist groupings came into being in Astrakhan and in several villages of the region. Some of them were

preparing acts of terror. Most of them were uncovered and smashed by the special services, and their members arrested, tried and sentenced.

In the summer and autumn of 2010 several attacks on policemen took place in Astrakhan by members of a religious extremist organization. Most of them were captured, tried and put in prison.

In early May 2011 members of another extremist religious group were arrested, who planned to commit several terrorist acts in Astrakhan on May 9 (Victory Day). It was later found out that they were part in explosions at government offices in Volgograd in late April 2011. There were a great many arms, much explosive material, and enormous amount of religious extremist literature in the group's premises.

The problems of religious and national intolerance, and especially the threat of extremism under the slogans of Islam were discussed at a meeting of representatives of the Muslim clergy of Astrakhan region and the Republic of Daghestan with the heads of the regional administration and law enforcement agencies of Astrakhan region in early December of 1999. It was decided to step up the fight against religious extremism and develop cooperation in this sphere.

The leadership of the Astrakhan Regional Spiritual Board of Muslims has been carrying on an active work in the sphere of education and charity. It also devotes much attention to measures in the social sphere, and problems of peace and mutual understanding in the country as a whole and in the region in particular.

The ideas of radical Islam penetrated the Republic of Mordovia on the Volga in 1997. However, they met with opposition on the part of moderate Muslims, and the most active proponents and supporters of these ideas had to leave Mordovia for Astrakhan. But the salafist community they set up proved self-sufficient and continued to exist and function.

In 2005 many books of extremist nature were found in the cellar of the Cathedral mosque in the republican capital Saransk, which were used by several madrasahs in other regions.

As a result of the penetration and dissemination of radical Islamic ideas in Russia, the number of young Muslims adhering to fundamentalist and extremist views has grown considerably. This is due to many factors. At meetings of the presidents of the Volga republics and governors of the Volga regions with local Muslim leaders in recent years the subject of opposition to religious extremism has always been discussed. Among the main reasons for increasing fundamentalist and extremist trends were the activity of foreign radical-extremist movements and organizations, which discredit Russian Islam and create a threat of a split in the ranks of Muslims, lack of proper religious Muslim education, drawbacks in the work of local legal Muslim organizations, and insufficient attention to Islam of the regional and local authorities. In order to fight extremism it is necessary to revive and popularize the values of traditional Islam of the Volga area and improve interaction of the bodies of power and Islamic organizations in the social sphere, culture, education and work among young people.

*“Kaspiisky region: politika, ekonomika, kultura,”
Astrakhan, 2013, No 2, pp 19–24.*

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**POLITICIZATION OF ISLAM IN THE PRESENT-DAY
CRIMEA: CONFLICTOLOGICAL ASPECT**

Islamic religious associations are an influential actor in political processes in the present-day Crimea. Such aspects as reasons for conflicts, strategy and tactics of the sides of conflicts, interaction of

internal ethnic and external factors of conflicts draw special attention of experts and researchers. Exposure of the conflict potential of the politicization of Islam in the Crimea is important for a comparative analysis of risks for national security in the post-socialist countries. The Crimea plays an important geopolitical role in the Black Sea transborder region, and political and confessional processes in the Crimea influence the Russian North Caucasus.

Confessional conflict is a clash of actors of policy in their striving to realize their interests connected with power, influence on state policy, and their status in social hierarchy. The subject of confessional conflict is not a community of believers as a whole, but the leaders and elites of religious organizations. They use religious systems and their world outlook, organizational and ritual principles in their own pragmatic interests, and construct politicized myths and activity instructions. A politicized part of believers involved in conflict is an agent of this influence. Religion is a means of ethno-political mobilization and cohesion. Conflict is not fatal, its development level and dynamics depend on the correlation of political resources and a degree of purposefulness of actors.

The Crimea has always been poly-ethnic and poly-confessional. According to the 2001 population census, Russians comprised 60.2 percent of the total population of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukrainians – 23.9 percent, Crimean Tatars – 10.2 percent. The rates of religious revival in the Crimea are considerably higher than in Ukraine as a whole. In 1990 the Crimea took the last but one, or 27th, place in the number of religious organizations, whereas in 2007 it took eighth place due to a bigger number of Islamic associations. According to information of the Republican Committee on Religious Affairs, by 2008 the authorities had registered 1,339 religious organizations of 48 confessions and

trends. Almost 43 percent of them belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate has 509 organizations. Registered Muslim organizations are in second place – 28.8 percent. Their work is coordinated by the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Crimea. Apart from that, there are over 600 Islamic associations functioning without registration. Protestant organizations hold third place. Judaists, Armenian Christian Apostolic Church, and others are also represented by a few organizations.

The key problem in the study of the conflict situation in the Crimea is that of the political status of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea and Sevastopol. Among the demands put forward by the Russian Orthodox Christian organizations are gaining greater autonomy and eventually joining the Crimea to Russia. On the contrary, the Tatar associations are striving for greater statehood of the “titular” people, idealizing the historical experience of the Crimean Khanate and the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the U.S.S.R. Tactically, the interests of the Tatar and Ukrainian organizations coincide in their desire to weaken the positions of the Russian and pro-Russian movements.

The interconfessional conflict situation is also manifested in attempts to create a monopoly information medium, and weaken the Orthodox organizations of the Moscow Patriarchate. As a result of the activities of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Crimea, interconfessional relations have deteriorated.

Muslim communities support the demand to abolish the practice of putting up intending crosses and roadside memorials, and in some cases their activists destroy Christian symbols at connivance of local authorities.

There are conflicts within Islamic organizations, too. Their radicalization began in the mid-1990s when separatists from Chechnya

came to the Crimea for medical treatment. They formed a criminal armed group “Imdat,” which provoked mass disorders in the district of Sudak (Eastern Crimea) in 1995. This group continues to exist and act clandestinely. At the end of the 1990s a network of Muslim communities headed by young imams and independent from the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Crimea came into being supported by Saudi Arabia and Turkey. These imams have received religious education abroad and have been oriented to their sponsors and instructors there. The quazi-legal party “Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islamia” as a branch of the “Muslim Brothers” has been active in the Crimea. Its members call for the creation of the Worldwide Caliphate. They distribute salafist leaflets and various literature of this kind. In the view of certain public figures and newspapers and journals, there are several thousand Wahhabi supporters in the Crimea today. In the autumn of 2012 “Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islamia” organized mass meetings in Simferopol.

There is a very slight difference between religious extremism and secular nationalism. The radical wing is represented by the “Adalet” party, which forms national self-defense units, “Nurjular” group, and also the “Site of Crimean Young People” oriented to salafist Turkish organizations.

The moderate current is represented by the National movement of Crimean Tatars, which rejects extremism and consists mainly of representatives of the local intelligentsia. There is also the Organization of the Crimean Tatar national movement supporting the idea of gradual creation of Tatar statehood. A strong rivalry has been going on between various groupings beginning from 2011.

The status proclaimed by Crimean Tatar organizations contradicts the legislation of Ukraine and the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea. Ukrainian laws do not envisage granting collective rights to

territorial autonomy on the basis of ethnic origin, or advantages to the “indigenous people.” Representation of interests is ensured by quotas at the Supreme Rada (Council) of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea, its commissions and consultative bodies, as well as at the ARC Council of Ministers.

To what extent does confessional conflict influence public opinion in the Crimea? Investigations carried out by a surveillance center in Sevastopol among all ethnic groups have shown that among the reasons for confessional conflicts pride of place is taken by political and national contradictions and clashes of economic interests. Religious fanaticism, intolerance, and dislike of religious organizations are secondary. Certain respondents lay the blame for conflicts on representatives of foreign political and public organizations, foreign religious centers, as well as leaders of Crimean religious organizations, and officials of the authorities of the Crimea and Ukraine. Meanwhile, a stable conflict of identities has emerged.

Summing up, the confessional conflict in the present-day Crimea caused by the politicization of Islam has a complex and bloc character. It is latent in the forms of manifestation, that is, “is postponed to the future.” But a radical Islamist project is capable to destabilize the balance of ethno-confessional interests.

It should be emphasized that the complex ethno-confessional conflict in the Crimea is not only between groups of people, but also between blocs, that is, bodies of state power and the elites of Ukraine and the region. Simultaneously, internal conflicts develop within religious communities.

An effective regulation of conflicts may be possible on the basis of a purposeful policy of integrating Crimean Tatars in a secular state and building mechanisms of real democracy.

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**THE ROLE OF CENTRAL ASIA IN THE WORLD
POLITICAL SYSTEM. THE “BIG GAME”
IN CENTRAL ASIA IN XXI CENTURY**

Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) represents the largest bloc of states in the post-Soviet area, except Russia. It occupies the connecting position between western and eastern Eurasia and the intermediate one between the developed North and the developing South. Besides, Central Asia is one of the richest world's regions in mineral raw material reserves. The geographical position and resource wealth make the region an important theater for the big political game.

The Great Powers have always been interested in Central Asia. The Russian and British Empires vied for dominance in this region in the 19th century, trying to include it into their spheres of influence during the so-called “Big Game”.

A new phase of foreign policy history of Central Asia began with the Soviet Union disintegration. The newly formed states sought to become independent from Russia and develop political and economic relations with other countries on an equal basis. In a short time, they have established diplomatic relations with all states of the world, have become members of the UN and other international organizations, signed thousands of pacts and agreements, and entered into trade-economical relations with more than 140 countries of the world.

Until recently, Central Asia has traditionally been considered a zone of Russian influence. However, Moscow did not pay proper attention to the problem of expansion and consolidation of its geopolitical positions there right after the Soviet Union disintegration.

The result was the general financial and political weakness of Russia. Moreover, Russian authorities in the 1990th did not attempt to work out a suitable development strategy of cooperation with Central Asia republics continuing to rely traditionally on the Soviet model of center-periphery cooperation.

Thus, taking into consideration the low interest of the leading world powers in the region, which had not seen yet a particular need for strengthening their positions in the former Soviet Central Asian republics, a certain political vacuum has emerged and the national elite have remained there for quite a long time after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The authoritarian regimes have been formed in the regional states, focusing solely on supporting personal power of the heads of states and their clans. They relied on the army and security services and were extremely ineffective in terms of governance. After more than ten years of independent existence, most republics of Central Asia were unable to solve economic and social problems. The region meets with problems of transportation and transit disruption, and its countries face acute trouble due to the lack of energy and water resources and also the drug problem.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the international situation changed and rivalry for Central Asia began between Russia, the United States and China as well as other eastern states to a lesser extent.

Central Asia is of a great strategic importance as its position provides a convenient and effective communication between the Caucasus region, the Middle East and East Asia.

When the struggle for energy resources escalated in the 21st century, the interest in the region of the economic giants has increased because of the presence of rich oil and gas reserves in the five countries, as well as the convenience oil and gas pipelines through their territory.

The present situation in Central Asia is determined by several factors. First, the striving of the United States and its allies to intrude into the region through economic, political and military influence.

Second, the activities of Russia and China to strengthen their positions in the region. Thus, a number of regional organizations, engaged in different spheres of interaction (SCO, CSTO, EurAsEC, etc.) in Central Asia, has been established by the initiative of Russia and China.

Finally, the situation in the region depends on economic contradictions and border disputes of Central Asian republics, that seriously worsen the interstate relations.

The Central Asian countries are of key importance for Russia, which is determined by the following factors:

- Significant reserves of natural resources in Central Asia. Ensuring the monitoring over the main traffic routes has important foreign political and geo-economic meaning for Russia.

- The question of national security, insofar as the main threat comes from the South.

Central Asian direction is one of the determining vectors of Russian foreign policy traditionally. It is the historical cooperation of Russia and nations in this region, has determined the specific geopolitical position of the five republics of Central Asia.

For years of the USSR existence, close economic and cultural ties had been established between Russia and the republics of Central Asia. They could not even be destroyed in the process occurring in the 1990-s in the post-soviet territory. However, for the last decade, Russia has paid little attention to the events that occurred in Central Asia. The Russian Federation turned to the East in seeking the strategic and economic partnership only in the 2000th.

For the first years after the Soviet Union disintegration and in the course of further evolution, Moscow had been able to maintain actual leadership in Central Asia (although with variable success), because of the loyalty of the republic's leadership and the inertia of their policy. Besides, the rest of the world treated the newly independent states with a high degree of fear and this attitude has coincided with the Russian Federation's interests.

However, at the turn of the millennium, the Russian Federation began to abuse good attitude of the regional countries' leaders, and to conduct the policy of "inertia" there.

This could have led to undesirable consequences for Moscow, because the Western strategy towards Central Asia had been formed up by that time. These states could have been involved in the sphere of increasing the activity of Western policy. China had helped Russia in that case, to be more precise, the interests of these two countries coincided at that moment and that enabled them combine their efforts.

Nowadays there are serious preconditions for activization of Russia's policy in Central Asia. These include the strengthening of the military-political, economic and cultural ties with the regional countries, and also the extension of more profound and mutually profitable cooperation with China in economic and military-technical fields. Moreover, the joint solution of security problems and neutralization of threats in this sphere should promote the cooperation of Russia and Central Asian republics.

Kazakhstan is the priority partner for Russia in this field. In the period from 1991 to nowadays, the two countries have been able to develop a solid contractual base for economic and political cooperation. Kazakhstan was the first CIS country which signed the Treaty "On Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" in May 1992. In accordance with the Treaty, the establishment of common military-

strategic space, the joint use of military bases, test grounds and other military objects provide for if Russia and Kazakhstan are threatened.

Russia and Kazakhstan are guarantors of stability in the Central Asian region. Moscow and Astana are actively interacting in the political sphere, adhering similar positions in the key issues on the international agenda and making great efforts to revitalize the regional organizations such as the CIS, SCO and the CSTO.

The law enforcement agencies and special services of Russia and Kazakhstan have been successfully cooperating in the field of fighting against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Russia is "the window to Europe" and also the major partner of Kazakhstan in foreign trade. But Russia itself can not do without Kazakh natural resources. Both countries are closely connected through defense complex.

Relations between the two countries are based on mutual understanding, aspiration of mutually beneficial cooperation. There are special relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan and the situation with the status of the Russian language proves its particular status in that country. In contradiction to the majority of the other Central Asian states.

Russian is the official communication language in Kazakhstan, and the presence of a significant number of Russian speaking people, including representatives of the titular nation, help to maintain mutual relations active and develop further cooperation with Russia. Russian is officially used on a par in state organizations and self-governing bodies with the Kazakh language.

The two states are interested in coordinating of common approaches within the framework of the security system organization.

It is important to note, that not all politicians and experts, especially in the West, are satisfied with warm relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.

Thus, during the last few months of the U.S. President John Bush term of office, Washington stepped up its criticism democratic elections in Kazakhstan, the position of human rights, as well as restrictions on freedom of the media. The working partnership of Russia and Kazakhstan in the field of energy policy has also caused concern in Washington.

Russia, despite its losses in Central Asia, has maintained different regional ties, including cultural and historical ones. The cultural factor is of a particular importance and is recognized by all actors.

Russian political analyst T. Dolinskaya notes that at present Kazakhstan is a major ally of Russia in Central Asia. However, in the medium term (5-10 years) one can expect Kazakhstan will be more actively involved in the economic cooperation with China and the EU. The basis for this trend, T. Dolinskaya supposes, will be increased competition with Russia on the market of oil and gas, products of mining and metallurgical industry, industrial technology and sources of investment resources, as well as participation in the formation of inter-regional transport corridors ("East – West" transit).

The principal basis for long-term foreign policy of Russia in the region should become "a geo-strategic pragmatism", based on the moral and ideological values.

Over the past few years, Russia has been active in the post-Soviet area, confirming the priority of the CIS as a sphere of its special interests.

Clear evidence of this is an extremely intensive character of foreign and domestic policy associated with solving Commonwealth

problems. This activity shows Moscow's aspiration to retain the strategic initiative in the post-Soviet territory in determination of the dialogue with the newly-independent states.

Since 1992 Russia has followed the principle of a formal partnership in relations with former soviet republics and the main purpose was to include all post-Soviet states in a dialogue.

A. Grozin, Head of the Department of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the CIS Institute, believes that "theoretically, the best way is if the problems of the continent are addressed to the countries of the continent. As soon as, even well-meaning foreign observers interfere in Eurasian problems, conflicts are often aggravated. It will be better to solve both economic and political problems independently. In studying the problems carefully, not only the true content of the conflict can be found, but also a significant foreign influence will be noticeable. Today's division in camps, forced from abroad by both the Americans and Europeans, has not worked any longer.

Washington's representatives are very careful in their official statements concerning Russia's role in Central Asia (they simply keep silent about it). At the same time, they clearly indicate the USA's strategic interest in this region and the US military presence remains in the region for a long time.

In turn, China has become more wary of U.S. policy for restriction of Chinese influence in Central Asia. Historically, this region considered as a kind of "patrimony" of China and for the past 10 years, China has created an extensive system of economic ties.

The geographical location of China is, undoubtedly, important for the countries of Central Asia. Dynamic and accessible as it is, the Chinese market is of interest for goods export from Central Asia. For some countries of the region have been attracted to China, while others more closely cooperated with Iran and Turkey. However, all Central

Asian countries consider Russia as an unchangeable ally and major economic partner.

For the past few years, foreign policy of the Central Asian republics has become more self-sufficient. Having realized its importance for the great powers, the states of the region began to carry on a many-vector policy, seeking to benefit from cooperation with China, Russia, the United States and the EU.

A new tendency in Central Asia has been the so-called regionalization, i.e. ties development between the countries of the region and other states. As a result, the Central Asian republics have been paying more attention not to mutual cooperation, but to the analysis of the possibilities of cooperation with other countries, be China, Russia, the USA, India, Japan or the EU. Besides, abovementioned states are interested in the region as a whole, not in selected Central Asian countries. All events in Central Asia have been regarded from the point of view of their influence on the entire region.

The political regimes of Central Asian republics are a some mixture of democracy, authoritarianism and Islamism, imposed on an ethnically mixed population. In addition, there is rivalry for leadership at the regional level between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which increases the defense spending of these countries and destabilizes the already precarious situation in Central Asia.

The political leadership of Kazakhstan has realized that the peoples of Central Asia have not only common history, culture and mentality, but also similar geopolitical interests. The security of one country depends on the security of other states in the region. The idea has been expressed by the President of Kazakhstan in his work “The Critical Decade”. Nursultan Nazarbayev noted, that the national security of Kazakhstan had to be closely linked to the national security of other states in the region. The security of Central Asia should be

regarded as a component of the security of Central Eurasia. This region has to be part of Eurasian security system, which is part of a global security system.

The desire of Kazakhstan to become the most powerful nation in Central Asia, and then turn into a sub-regional political center, seems to be quite justified. Astana does not wish to remain on the outskirts of political events in the conditions of the consolidation of the Eurasian space, and regardless of the previous divisions into blocs and camps.

Popularization of Islam in Central Asia was another factor, determining the interest of major powers in the country. The growing influence of Islam on life and politics in the region could be explained by the fact that the population of Central Asia became more interested in national culture, part of which was Islam, after disintegration of the Soviet Union. Thus, the ideological vacuum, which was left after the departure of Soviet Communist ideology, was filled by dogmas of Islamic religion.

Having significant financial, economic and political resources, the West lowers its demands for democracy in the region. The main premise in Western policy has become to oust Russia from the region and restrict China's activity in the economic sphere.

The Central Asian States cannot effectively use the possibilities of regional cooperation for their economic development due to differences in the objectives, strategies, models of modernization and institutional foundations of the economy. Still, these factors have been playing an important role in the region, that make cooperation rather difficult at an international level. However, regional integration remains one of the most frequently discussed issues during the formation of economic policies in Central Asia.

In Eurasia, as a whole and in Central Asia in particular, it is possible to observe the processes of transformation and

traditionalization at the same time. From this point of view, one can assume that at present, only Russia and Kazakhstan are interested in the integration of Eurasia. The other states of the region either choose the priority of national development, or move to traditionalization, or conversion to the periphery of world politics.

In present conditions, the integration of Eurasia, both for Russia and for Kazakhstan is a priority task in the foreign policy, and both states can play a leading role in this process. For both countries, the development of integration processes means, first of all, a strategic solution to the problem of national security. From the point of view of strategic interests, practical implementation of the Eurasian ideology is capable to enhance the centripetal tendencies in both political and economic terms. The policy of broadening versatile contacts, especially with neighboring, can help to create a broad network of economic, cultural and political communications. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the political situation in Russia and in the CIS countries.

In addition, the strengthening of intraregional links would be a real obstacle to the development of centrifugal tendencies, the penetration of Islamic fundamentalism and U.S. influence in Central Asia.

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TURKMENISTAN: HAS THERE BEEN A THAW?

Turkmenistan has several specific features distinguishing it from the other Central Asian countries. First of all, it is the most traditional society. The country

Has a high level of urbanization; of the population of approximately 5 million, 800,000 live in Ashgabat, and several other towns have population of more than 200,000/ The Soviet period brought the development of the modern gas, construction, and textile industries and a modern education system (as measured by 1970s standards). But Turkmenistan remains a society based on a tribal construction with the corresponding hierarchy and even a kind of tribe-based 'division of labor". Members of the largest and most influential Akhal-Teke tribe hold the highest state posts (the country's former and current presidents both belong to this tribe.) Of course, this tribal structure should not be seen as an absolute. Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Niyazov, owed his rise not just to his tribal identity but also to his work in the Communist Party apparatus, including in the Central Committee. He never forgot his tribal identity, hover, especially since the Akhal-Teke tribe was the largest and most powerful among the tribes. To his credit were the efforts he made to act as a mediator in relations between the different tribes.

Niyazov was the exemplary Soviet politician and representative of Soviet political culture even as the society he ran remained quintessence of traditionalism. This turned post-Soviet Turkmenistan into a symbiosis of Eastern despotism and totalitarianism. In the post-

Soviet are, the term “totalitarian” could be suitably applied only to Turkmenistan under Niyazov’s rule.

It was his regime’s almost similarity to the Soviet regime that made Niyazov try to distance himself in every way from the Soviet past and put into oblivion any notion of continuity with regards to the Soviet period. In 1998, at a meeting with a Russian State Duma delegation, Niyazov explained: “Not a single person here expressed the desire to fight against the communist ideology. Nobody in Turkmenistan utters the words “communist” and “communism”. These words faded from our social lexicon all on their own.” In neighbouring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan these words and the respective parties continued to function, albeit without any real influence. Niyazov turned out to be the most zealous guardian of the Soviet communist tradition, which did not allow any opposition to exist.

Niyazov’s assumed title, “Turkmenbashi” – “Father of the Turkmen” – was not simply the expression of the ambition, but also reflected his desire to transform the Turkmen people from a collection of tribes into a new Turkmen nation. This nation began to form back in the Soviet period. The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic was established as the nucleus of Turkmen statehood in 1924.

No one can deny that Niyazov-Turkmenbashi made marked progress along this path, transforming Turkmenistan into a nation state and becoming its undeniable, albeit eccentric, leader.

Under the Constitution adopted in 1992 (and subsequently amended five times), the president was at the same time also prime minister and formed the government. The parliament has powers only to examine the candidates fore the post of interior minister and justice minister. In 1999, the country’s highest representative body, Halk Maslahata, gave Niyazov the right to remain in office without limit. In 1994 and 1995, there was even talk of establishing a hereditary

monarchy, and members of Niyazov's entourage were ready to make him Shah and declare Turkmenistan his shahdom, but Niyazov, no doubt guessing what jeers would come from abroad, decided this was excessive. During the discussions of this possibility, however, the word "republic" vanished from the country's official name (the only such case in Central Asia), leaving some maneuvering room for Niyazov, should he want to take on a monarch's title in the future.

Neutrality was proclaimed the main principle of foreign policy. Of all the organizations that Russia established, Turkmenistan chose to be a member only of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), although the reality it took no real part even in this organization's work. Consistent with its foreign policy, Turkmenistan did not join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Niyazov attempted to get rid of any external influences and to consolidate Turkmenistan's status as an independent country, equally distant from all foreign groups and forces.

Like all dictators, he became gradually more paranoid with age, often changing the members of his entourage. According to people who worked with Niyazov, including government ministers, he did not listen to anyone advice and often made spur-of-the-moment and hasty decisions.

Niyazov died on December 21, 2006. His death has been the subject of debate to this day, with some asserting that he was poisoned by members of his inner circle, fed up with his unpredictability.

Niyazov's death was followed by a period of a brief and fierce succession struggle from which Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov emerged as the country's new leader. Berdymukhammedov, a dentist by profession, was Niyazov's former personal doctor before becoming health minister from 1997 till 2001, and then deputy prime minister.

Niyazov did not designate a successor and could not have done it in any case, since his death was sudden,

Berdymukhammedov looked like an unexpected compromise figure, although history has known enough cases of “interim” leaders ending up with lasting careers at the political summit. No one probably seriously expected the new president to radically change the face of the country, but there were hopes for some transformation nonetheless.

Change did come, most importantly in the form of some liberalization. Moscow-based analyst Andrei Grozin described the new regime as “more vegetarian,” while Sebastien Peyrouse called the reforms “cosmetic” and said they were illusions of a Krushchevian Thaw.” In reality, the changes made were not even half-hearted but purely formal. Yet the regime has managed to change its image, going from near totalitarian to hardline authoritarian, or, to put it another way, from the category of exotic exceptions (like North Korea), to the category of the typical.

However the steps toward liberalization have not changed the political system itself. The Law on Political Parties was passed on January 13, 2012. Berdymukhammedov gave his seal of approval to a multi-party system, saying that it “is relevant in terms of the big changes taking place in state administration and in terms of the big changes taking place in state administration and in terms of modernizing political mechanisms and rethinking the role and place of the country’s social and civil institutions.” But hardly anyone believes that the parties that could emerge would be allowed to operate outside the authorities’ control. Turkmenistan still has just one party at the moment – the Democratic Party, which is essentially just the renamed Soviet-era Communist Party of Turkmenistan and is completely under the president’s control.

Berdymukhammedov won his second presidential election in February 2012, with 97.14 per cent of the vote. And while in 2007 he had received 89.2 per cent of the vote and had five “rivals”, this time he had seven opponents (public groups and organizations initially put forward as many as fifteen candidates.) Public wit called these candidates the “seven little goats”, implying that the role of Wolf had already gone to Berdymukhammedov. And indeed, these “rivals” succeeded in getting no more than from 0.16 to 1.07 per cent of the vote. Borrowing and election campaign trick from Putin’s book, Berdymukhammedov declined to take part in TV debates with his opponents, “giving” them his share of the airtime.

The country had closed its land borders to foreigners before the elections, and People arriving at the airport had the contents of the computer disks inspected. The security services also had blocked access to two opposition websites operating from abroad.

In 2011, Berdymukhammedov announced that members of the opposition based abroad – the Republican Party and the Vatan Socio-Political Movement – could take part in the election. This did not happen, however, first, because the conditions for free elections were non-existent in Turkmenistan, and second, because to take part in the election , the opposition politicians would have had to return home and ran the risk of being arrested.

Turkmenistan agreed for the first time to submit a report on the human rights situation to the UN Human Rights Committee. Several politicians were released from prison, including former Speaker of the Parliament Ovezgeldy Atayev, and also several of those arrested in connection with the 2002 assassination attempt on Niyazov. But the main suspect accused in that case, Boris Shikhmuradov, remains in prison and his fate and the start of his health is unknown.

Berdymukhammedov restored the ten-year primary and secondary education system in schools (during Niyazov's time there was a nine-year program), reopened the country's Academy of Sciences, as well as the Opera and Ballet theater, which Niyazov had "abolished," and allowed internet cafes to open, although under strict government control.

One of Berdymukhammedov's most noticeable steps was to liquidate, albeit not completely, the Turkmenbashi cult of personality. In this respect, he can be compared in some degree to Nikita Khrushchev.

Berdymukhammedov freed the Turkmen people from morning public readings and study of Niyazov's "Ruhnama", which his intellectual and political cohorts had compared to Koran.

Niyazov's name was no longer mentioned in the national anthem, and the oath of loyalty to Turkmenbashi was dropped. The months went back to their Gregorian calendar names.

But the process of dismantling the cult of personality did not fundamentally change anything. Berdymukhammedov himself has never expressed doubt in his predecessor's greatness and has been cautious in the way he proceeds, fully aware, as are the other politicians in the country, that to completely dismantle Niyazov's image would deal a blow to him and his colleagues, too. It would thus be naïve to expect Berdymukhammedov to start seriously denouncing the old regime, while a real transformation of the power system could only begin after this.

Meanwhile, a "modest" cult of Berdymukhammedov himself is starting to emerge. He now has his own title – "Arkadag" – "Protector", which sounds almost as pretentious as "Father of the Turkmen."

The "Golden Age" Niyazov proclaimed has given way now to the more modest and realistic "Renaissance Epoch." At the same time,

an “era of might and happiness” has been declared, and conferences on the topic of “Turkmenistan my homeland – land of health and happiness” take place at the country’s universities and other public forums. A concrete path, the “Path of Health”, has been laid in Kopetdag Mountains eight km from Ashgabat.

Instead of Niyazov’s “Ruhnama,” Turkmen now read the “Turkmennama” (“Story of the Turkmen”), which extols the Turkmen people’s glory rather than giving moral lectures. The book is a typical product of national ideology, written by scholars close to the authorities. In typical fashion, it portrays the Turkmen as a chosen people; thus, the Biblical patriarch Noah is said to have landed in Turkmenistan, and if local academician Odek Odekov is to be believed, the Turkmen are the ancestors of the Aztecs and the Vikings, and Zarathustra came from southern Turkmenistan. Russian epic folk Ilya Muromets has also been added to the Turkmen gallery of great names. Not that there is anything original here, for many countries indulge in such legend-making, especially in the post-Soviet space, where many peoples are trying to improve the “quality” of their national identity.

Portraits of the president fill the country once more, potentially surprising the casual visitor who does not follow developments in Turkmenistan, for Berdymukhammedov looks a lot like his predecessor (one rumor even has it that he is Niyazov’s illegitimate son), thus creating the impression that one and the same person has been in power all these years.

Power lost its sacred aspect after Niyazov’s death. Berdymukhammedov does not have the required charisma, and people do not worship him the way they did Niyazov. His nickname, “GB” (beginning associations with the all-so-familiar acronym “KGB”), was born out of a sense of humor rather than out of fear.

Berdymukhammedov realizes that he probably will not be a “second Turkmenbashi” and does not make this his ambition in any case, preferring to give himself the image of “liberal despot.” So far, he is succeeding.

Turkmenistan is a Muslim society, though it is hard to say exactly what role Islam plays there. The nomads practiced a syncretic form of Islam that influences family relations and everyday behavior but does not play any big part in shaping politics. Turkmenistan’s Islam was aptly characterized by the term “cultural Islam,” widely used in Soviet literature in the 1970s-1980s.

But for all its apolitical nature, even “cultural Islam” influences Muslims’ outlook, including their political perceptions. Moreover, “cultural Islam” is very resistant. It survived the Soviet period, adapting to the environment’s demands and coexisting with the state-imposed atheist education. Religious scholars during the Soviet period noted that remnants of Sufi Islam also persisted among the Turkmen.

In this regard, little has changed at first glance in post-Soviet Turkmenistan. Islam’s influence is most visible in family life and rituals and appears distanced from public and political life. Turkmenistan has not been affected by the Islamic revival that began with the Soviet Union’s decline. And it has been affected still less by the politicization of Islam that is taking place. Attempts to create Islamic parties or movements, as happened in the neighboring republics, have not been successful, partly because of repression. In the early 1990s, when the president of one Muslim country visited Turkmenistan, a policeman was sent to home of every member of the Islamic Party for the Renaissance of Turkmenistan (there were only four of them) to stop them from leaving their houses.

Niyazov did not pay any attention to Islam at first, not seeing any threat to power in it. In 1992, Niyazov said, that “there is no reason to

exaggerate the likelihood of Turkmenistan's Islamization." In maintaining a closed society and state (the idea of Turkmenistan's neutrality was aimed at keeping the country sealed off), Niyazov followed the Soviet example to some extent, replacing the cult of Lenin with a cult of himself. But in the mid-1990s, he decided that some kind of official recognition of Islam was needed and that Islam could also help to strengthen his regime. Furthermore, he wanted to expand contacts with Muslim countries, hoping to receive financial assistance from them.

Thus, the country began building mosques, and imams started singing Niyazov's praises in their sermons. In imams' sermons and in religious literature, as well as in official propaganda, a symbiosis of religion and idol worship emerged. Niyazov put Islam under his total control and did not allow even a hint of criticism from the Muslim clergy. Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, the chief mufti of Turkmenistan (formerly imam of the Tashauz mosque and kadi in the Mari Region) and the country's most influential spiritual figure, who attempted to initiate an Islamic revival in the late 1980s-early 1990s, was imprisoned for criticizing excessive worship of Niyazov.

Niyazov monopolized Islam, in which he genuinely thought himself deeply knowledgeable. In this respect he begs comparison with other post-Soviet politicians, such as Tajikistani President Emomali Rahmon and Chechnya's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov. In 2000, Niyazov ordered the burning of 40,000 copies of the Koran because he did not like the way they had been translated into Turkmen.

Berdymukhammedov shows little interest in Islam and takes the earlier approach that politicization of Islam in Turkmenistan is not possible. There is no evidence yet to back up the talk that a religious-political opposition could emerge in the country. At the same time, there is an opinion that there exists a so-called "parallel Islam", and

some of those who have left Turkmenistan say that even in rural areas, some villages have two mosques (such were the words of one respondent), one of which is an underground prayer house in which protest sermons can be heard.

Turkmenistan is unlikely to be able to completely isolate itself from events taking place in the rest of Muslim world, and it cannot build some kind of “Great Wall” on the borders with its Central Asian neighbours, where radical Islam is becoming increasingly active. If Berdymukhammedov is to face the rise of Islamic protest sentiments, this will be something he obviously ill-prepared for.

Fossil fuels are cornerstone of Turkmenistan’s regime. Gas sales accounted for 70 per cent of the country’s GDP in 2009. The authorities use gas revenues to maintain a tolerable standard of living and put on a show of caring for the people’s needs. Gas ensures the regime’s survival and the success of its populist ideology. When he came to power, Berdymukhammedov did not abolish free supplies of gas, electricity, and also water and salt for the population. What’s more since 2008, private car owners receive 120 liters of gasoline free each year, but owners get 200 liters, and motorbike owners get 40 liters.

Turkmenistan has the world’s fourth largest gas reserves. Politicians, engineers, and economists debate the exact size of these reserves. The Turkmenistan authorities say they have accessible reserves of 20 trillion cubic meters. Russia, which has the world’s largest accessible gas reserves, has 44,8 trillion cubic meters. According to British Petroleum, Turkmenistan’s proven reserves increased by no more than between 2.6 trillion to 8 trillion cubic meters from 2000 to 2011. Accessible reserves come to no more than 3 trillion cubic meters. The Turkmen authorities put the reserves of the biggest field, Yolotan, at 6 trillion cubic meters, but in reality they are several

times lower. What's more, Yolotan gas has a high hydrogen sulphide content, making extraction more difficult.

The Turkmen authorities have deliberately exaggerated the country's gas reserves and offer big contrasts to foreign partners from all directions – China, Europe, Iran, and Russia – only these contracts do not always have a real basis to them. However, these tactics have kept potential buyers' interest in Turkmenistan's gas running high and enabled Ashgabat to attract investment for building the required infrastructure.

Turkmenistan's gas production has undergone such large ups and downs over the last twenty years that it is hard to assess its real level today. The big fluctuations were due as much to the global economic situation as to Turkmenistan's own technological capabilities. Between 2000 and 2008, for example, gas production went up from 42 billion to 66 billion cubic meters per annum, but in 2010 it dropped to 45 billion cubic meters. Gas exports in 2010 came to only 22.6 billion cubic meters. In 2012, estimated gas production will reach 66.5 billion cubic meters. Development is currently underway at the Garabil and Gurrukbil fields, the Central Karakum, and on the right shore of the Amu Darya River.

For many years, Russia was Turkmenistan's largest gas buyer, but starting in 2008, relations between Moscow and Ashgabat soured. In 2008, Turkmenistan sold Gazprom 50 billion cubic meters for \$7 billion, but at the end of that year, with the global crises underway, Gazprom refused to agree to the higher contract price that Turkmenistan demanded. This provoked a dispute that finally led Gazprom head Alexei Miller to cut off the Russian supply route in 2009. An explosion took place in the gas pipeline. Gazprom said that the causes of explosion were purely technical, while Ashgabat claimed that Gazprom deliberately set it up. This left Turkmenistan without the

possibility of supplying gas to Russia. Sales resumed again only in 2010, but came to no more than 11 billion cubic meter. Moscow refused to purchase the remaining 40 billion cubic meters, using this as a leverage to pressure the Turkmenistan authorities.

Europe's market no longer needs large quantities of gas from Turkmenistan, and Gazprom is able to satisfy Europe's gas demand with its own resources. This is keeping Turkmen-Russian relations tense. Naturally, Ashgabat has responded by stepping up efforts to diversify gas supply routes. It has been supplying gas to neighbouring Iran for the last few years now, delivering from 8 to 14 billion cubic meters in 2011, according to various estimates. Iran has also made a proposal to Turkmenistan to build a new gas pipeline with an outlet to the Persian Gulf.

Turkmenistan again showed interest in the NABUCCO project, but to join the project Turkmenistan would need to construct a 300 km trans-Caspian gas pipeline, to which Russia and, recently, India have expressed objections. There are two proposed routes for the NABUCCO project: a trans-Anatolian and a trans-Adriatic (Turkey-Greece-Italy) route. The project is the main rival of the Southern Stream project, in which Moscow has big economic and political hopes. So far no one has offered to invest in building an underwater pipeline across the Caspian anyway. (Some think that in the case of an extreme aggravation of tension, Russia would be ready to prevent the construction of an underwater pipeline using any means, including its formidable Caspian Military flotilla, which is the most powerful among the Caspian states' navies.

China is in the process of becoming Turkmenistan's main gas customer. The gas pipeline to China was opened in 2009, and in 2010 Turkmenistan exported around 5 billion cubic meters of gas to China at a price of \$192 (or \$170-\$180) per cubic meter. Gazprom was paying

\$240 per cubic meter at that time. Export to China could reach 15 or even 30 billion cubic meters in 2012, and 65 billion cubic meters by 2015. Work on a second pipeline to China has already begun.

Ashgabat places big hopes on the TAPI project. This project envisages the construction of a 1,735 km pipeline linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, with capacity of 30-33 billion cubic meters of gas. Along with the Chinese export routes, it is seen as the main alternative to cooperation with Russia.

An agreement on the project was signed in 2010. The project cost is estimated at \$7.6 billion, but higher figures of up to \$12 billion have also been cited. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2013, and the pipeline will start operation in 2016.

In Turkmenistan's view, TAPI will help to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, certain Taliban groups could also use the gas pipeline, or more precisely the related security issues, as a mean to put pressure on the Afghan authorities and to issue, as a mean to put pressure on the Afghan authorities and to use extortion tactics against the companies and countries anxious to ensure that the pipeline operates smoothly. The need to guarantee that the gas flows safely and without interruption could therefore contribute to the radical opposition's growing influence (as was the case in Russia during the Chechen wars).

Interest in TAPI has been shown not only by countries looking to buy Turkmen gas, but also by Gazprom, which is increasingly getting involved in energy projects not directly related to Russian gas.

TAPI faces a host of obstacles. First, Turkmenistan's partners are still worried about insufficient transparency in setting the financial issues. As during Niyazov's time, gas sales remain under direct presidential control, with 80 per cent of the revenue going into Berdymukhammedov's own pocket, thus continuing the tradition

started by Niyazov, who controlled all energy sector contracts through special accounts in what has become one of the distinguishing features of Turkmenistan's shadow economy. Turkmenistan's laws state that only 20 per cent of oil and gas export revenue goes to state budget. Berdymukhammedov has simply developed these corrupt schemes further. Contracts concluded between foreign buyers and Turkmenistan are thus essentially contracts concluded with the country's president.

Second, instability continues in Afghanistan, and third, the project's success depends on the unpredictable relations between India and Pakistan.

Finally, there is the question of whether or not Turkmenistan actually has enough gas for all these ambitious projects. The country plans to increase its gas production to 230 billion cubic meters its exports to 180 billion cubic meters by 2020. Of these exports, 65 billion cubic meters will go to China, 33 billion will be supplied via TAPI, 20 billion will go to Iran, 10 billion to Europe, and 42-52 billion to Russia.

After the dispute with Russia, Turkmenistan will concentrate on developing gas exports to its eastern neighbours – China, India, and Pakistan – and to Iran in the south. Gas exports to the West and to Russia will probably play a secondary role, all the more so since Turkmenistan has plenty of rivals in the European market.

According to the World Bank's Control of Corruption Index, Turkmenistan is sixth on the list of least favorable countries out of 210 that was reviewed.

China is the one exception. Beijing gave Ashgabat a loan of \$4.1 billion in 2010 to develop the Southern Yolotan gas field. However, as in Tajikistan's case, this binds Turkmenistan so tightly with China that one could speak of the country turning into a "China province."

The status of ethnic Russians remains a sensitive issue in relations between Turkmenistan and Russia. The exact number of

ethnic Russians in the country is not known. The Russian Foreign Ministry put their number at 3.5 per cent of the total population in 2005, and in 2001. Niyazov said they constituted 2 per cent of the population. Clearly, their number is somewhere around 120,000 to 150,000 people.

The Turkmenistan authorities have taken an ambiguous approach to the Russians. The Russian cultural and language environment is shrinking. The only Russian-language newspaper in Turkmenistan now is Neutral Turkmenistan, which contains nothing of interest and is just a dull symbol of a Russian-language presence in the media. A ban was put on the import and distribution of Russian newspapers in 2002, and, supposedly for technical reasons, the Russian radio station Mayak, which used to broadcast by Russian Public Television (ORT) was limited to two hours a day.

The Russian Community of Turkmenistan, a public organization whose mission was to protect ethnic Russians' rights, was closed down at the end of 1990s, and its leaders, Nina Shmelyova, Vyacheslav Mamedov, and Anatoly Fomin, were given prison sentences and then forced to leave the country. Russian community organization had at least minimal opportunities for social activity in the other Central Asian republics, including the defence of the Russian population's rights, but in Turkmenistan they lost all such opportunities.

The Russian leadership abandoned the Turkmenistan Russians to their fate, showing no interest in them until 2010. The Russian government's interests were solely in energy cooperation and gas purchases and transit, and any other issues got only peripheral attention, if even that.

Turkmenistan and Russia signed an agreement on dual citizenship in 1993, which set out the rules in this area. At that time, Turkmenistan's Russians had the same rights as ethnic Turkmen.

But in 2011, Ashgabat announced that people with dual citizenship would not be allowed to leave the country unless they made a choice in favour of Turkmen citizenship only. Additionally, on April 1, 2012, a new law changing the rules for travel abroad came into force. Now, only those with a new foreign travel passport can go out of the country, but this new passport is not issued to people with dual citizenship.

Russia did not recognize Turkmenistan's withdrawal from the 1993 agreement as lawful, but could do nothing to change the situation. Meanwhile, Russians in Turkmenistan now also have found themselves unable to privatize their homes. Rumors have it that the prices at which they would have to purchase their homes from the state will be set at such prohibitively high prices that it will be impossible for them to do so. It is difficult to say whether Russia will be more energetic about protecting Russians' rights in Turkmenistan. But in Turkmenistan, as in the other Central Asian republics, what is needed is to develop and implement a set of principles and a general concept for protecting Russians' rights; however, at the moment, as over the past years, this is still not on the agenda for Russia's strategy in the region.

Opinions are divided on Turkmenistan's future. One view, expressed in a report by the American organization Crude Accountability, suggests that sooner or later Berdymukhammedov's regime will encounter the same problems that have brought down regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. The question is whether events will follow the milder "Tunisian" scenario, or whether they will take the Libyan path and evolve into a civil war.

In contrast, journalist Arkady Dubnov, one of the best experts on Central Asia, thinks that "Berdymukhammedov's sun will shine for a long time yet". Dubnov's view is the more likely one since Turkmenistan's society is clearly not ready for mass protests yet. In

term of its organization, it can indeed be compared to Libyan society, but the Libyans live in a completely different geopolitical environment than the Turkmen. Turkmenistan has been on the periphery of global political and cultural processes for decades. It is too “sluggish,” and even a hypothetical revolution would not radically change the dominant values and political culture there. Thus, Berdymukhammedov’s sun, and the “sun of dictatorship” in general will indeed shine there for a good while yet.

As for foreign policy, no major change should be expected. The regime is not about to renounce the declared policy of neutrality that has already bought it a fair number of advantages and has been recognized by its international partners. Turkmenistan is very unlikely to allow military bases to appear on its soil. There is no substance to the rumors that the United States is seeking to take over the former Soviet Air Force base in Mary (although it is true that the base in Mary would be a very convenient platform from which to launch airstrikes against Iran).

Turkmenistan’s participation in the CIS is purely formal. It is symbolic that Ashgabat has never hosted a CIS summit. There are no grounds for the hints made that Turkmenistan might join the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and it certainly has no plans to join the Customs Union, and even less so the Eurasian Union. Perhaps the only organization it might consider joining in the future (under special conditions) would be the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but such a decision would depend above all on Ashgabat’s interest in developing relations with China.

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**A SUM OF CONVERGING INTERESTS:
SHOULD WE FEAR GROWING CHINESE
INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA**

Along with the center of gravity of world development moving toward the Asia-Pacific region, the political importance of Central Asia as the geopolitical core of the Eurasian continent is growing. The rapidly developing cooperation of China with this region is becoming closer. What interests influence this process? And how long can this interaction last?

Importance of the Region for the PRC

Central Asia is strategically important for the national security of China. Along with Russia, the PRC regards this region as a deep rear and supportive pillar in the face of the military reorientation of the United States to the Pacific basin, where Chinese-American rivalry is growing stronger. China becomes more concerned over the increasing interests and activity of the West in Central Asia against the backdrop of the indefinite future of Afghanistan.

The PRC experiences a growing resource deficit and problems with the sale of its products and has serious plans concerning Central Asian countries which possess great natural riches and need financial and trade partners free from ideological considerations. Beijing's decision to bolster up its positions in the region is not a tactical ruse, but a long-term choice. The PRC is ably using the desire of Central Asian countries to diversify the geography of their cooperation and

sometimes even make them confront one another in order to draw greater benefits for themselves. However, the Chinese are far from being altruistic, although they do resort to granting free aid. Big investments and credits are conditioned, as a rule, by acquiring machines and equipment, that is, serve to maintain comparatively high development rates of the Chinese economy.

Significance of the Chinese Model

A specific component of the China – Central Asia tie is the political and economic structure of the PRC, that is, “socialism Chinese style.” By its nature this model resembles the ideas of the New economic policy (NEP) in Soviet Russia in the first half of the 1920s. The processes in the spirit of the adaptation of the NEP ideas to the specific features of China have unfolded on the ruins of the “cultural revolution,” and modern realities and ideas have formed an integral structure with three components.

First, the selective and measured use of market levers in the economy, inclusion in the world division of labor, careful borrowing of foreign experience, and creation of attractive conditions for drawing investments from abroad. Such actions have enabled China to make a “big leap forward” and become one of the leaders of world development. Suffice it to recall that at the time of the 2008 – 2009 crisis there was no “painful phenomena” in the Chinese economy, and in 2011 the GDP in China increased by 9.2 percent (in Russia – by 4.3 percent).

Secondly, preservation of commanding positions in the economy in the hands of the state, including continuity of long-term planning with the leading role of the Communist party armed with modified ideology. Reforms in the political sphere were less dynamic than in the economy. Everything is being done with caution, which can be

explained by the need to ensure social stability among the almost 1.5-billion population.

Thirdly, the foreign-policy course determined by the two above-mentioned aspects. Its initial premise is rationalistic ideology of pragmatism based on the Chinese philosophical principle “shishiqiushi” which was proclaimed by and adhered to by Deng Xiaoping and his followers from the late 1970s.

In essence, it was the principle of peaceful coexistence transformed in accordance with the present conditions and the international legal sphere. Its foundations are non-interference in internal affairs, respect for the people’s choice of the social system and development methods, solution of problems by political means, encouragement of good-neighborliness. These features became the basis of the Chinese partnership strategy, including with Central Asian countries. Recently, this policy has included the course to “harmonization” of society and international relations.

The positive trend of the Chinese policy of partnership has been welcomed by the ruling elites of Central Asian countries. Many elements of the “triad” of the Chinese model have become orientation points for them. The ruling circles of these countries have seen that China is ready to help them. Naturally, caution continued to be exercised, but prejudices were gradually pushed to the background and interests began to draw closer.

The setting up of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 lent the China – Central Asia ties an institutionalized character. The interests of the six founding countries (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) have drawn closer due to their understanding of the acute need for joining efforts and opposing transnational challenges and threats (international terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, etc.), as well as ensuring conditions for the

maximal stabilization for the development of Central Asia. The driving motive was the sharply risen danger stemming from Afghanistan.

China has legitimized its participation in the affairs concerning this region through the SCO. This stems from its Charter and other documents, as well as the very mechanism and style of its functioning. The SCO's potential will, apparently, be fully disclosed in its medium-term strategy of the organization's further development, the first steps for its elaboration having been taken at the SCO summit in Beijing in 2012.

China in the Center of a System of Organizations

China wants its voice in Central Asian affairs and in the SCO itself to be clearly heard. This is shown by its positions on several timely problems.

First, Beijing realizes full well that Afghanistan is again becoming a pain in the neck for the SCO. This organization cannot isolate itself from the problem, which was shown by giving Afghanistan the observer status in 2012, with China's active assistance. But should the SCO take upon itself the role of the main foreign actor in Afghan settlement after 2014, thus transferring the problem from a global, UN, level to a regional level? Answer to this question is important by itself, and also because it is related to the China – Central Asia ties. Besides, Beijing really fears any destabilization of the region due to the wave of chaos and bellicose Islam moving from the Middle East.

Secondly, a well-balanced approach which the PRC demonstrates in the question of expanding the basic composition of the SCO. It can largely be explained by its reasonable concern over the fact that once begun this process can inevitable turn into continuous changes of the alignments of forces within the organization.

Thirdly, if we turn to the economic component of the SCO, which China upholds and develops, there are many unknown circumstances. Five countries which founded the organization (without China) are members of the CIS. Taking into account the fact that Belarus has an observer status at the SCO, and Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan have declared their desire to join the organization, the latter may virtually include practically all CIS member-states within which a free-trade zone began to be formed. Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are on the way of creating the Eurasian economic union by 2015 (they may be joined by certain Central Asian SCO member-states). At the latest APEC summit in Vladivostok in September 2012 a course was confirmed aimed at creating a free-trade zone of the Pacific, and a list of commodities was approved whose import duties would be lowered by five percent (Russia and China were among the participants). Moscow received many proposals on the creation of free-trade zones, including with China and India. Beijing began to talk of a currency union within the APEC framework.

What about Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Iran, Turkey, Sri Lanka?...In order to enable all SCO member- and observer-states to participate in business cooperation actively it is necessary to have clear understanding of what countries take part in concrete projects, what countries elaborate integration schemes, and how SCO efforts and projects are financed. Until all this is done, the SCO mechanisms will hardly be able to work properly.

The China – Central Asia bond will be quite important for determining the further development course of the SCO.

Can Central Asian countries ignore or reject it? Hardly, although there can be certain tension and frictions. On the whole, these countries are interested not only in sound relations with Beijing, but also in their constant progress.

There are negative forecasts, too, which suggest two variants, but with one finale – inevitable Chinese aggression. The first one proceeds from premise that the growth of the integral might of any state is aimed at creating the material basis for implementation of an offensive policy of force, including armed seizure of territories. That is, all peaceful foreign-policy declarations of the Chinese leadership, its diplomatic practice, and signed political agreements are only a cover, which Beijing can throw away at any time it would wish. Thus, the PRC is not trusted any longer. It is believed that its turning into the first-class world power is fraught with a danger of a global scale, and the neighboring countries may find themselves under threat of a *blitzkrieg* in not so distant future.

Undoubtedly, each country should be vigilant and circumspect, and possess a military potential big enough and at the ready. The greater and more important the state, the more technologically advanced this potential. Experience shows that in the present conditions it is not so simple to solve the problems of one's own influence through military ventures. As to the PRC, there is no evidence of its refusal to implement partnership policy, including with Central Asia.

The second variant presupposes that China will be prompted to embark on the road of expansion by the growing crisis phenomena inside the country. Such forecasts have been voiced for about thirty years, since the time of Deng Xiaoping. Special exacerbations are observed on the eve of large-scale changes in the upper echelon of the Chinese party-government leadership, which take place every ten years. The latest difficult period of preparations for the 18th CPC congress (November 2012) was accompanied by the world financial-economic crisis which had a negative impact on the economy. The Beijing leaders realize full well the need for adopting serious measures. This can be seen from broad discussions taking place quite freely, as well as

regulating steps undertaken by the leadership. However, nobody and nowhere puts forward a question about abandoning the basic principles on the ground that they did not justify themselves historically. The proposals made and measures adopted do not go beyond the bounds of particular, let alone serious, revision and corrections of the same model, which does not have, as before, a mobilization character. Irrespective of the personal composition of the new leadership of China, it is quite doubtful that it could lose orientation in time and space.

Despite a certain slowing down of economic development and growing social tension, the PRC reserves of strength are considerable. Its model's advantages can be seen in the constant ability for self-perfection, high adaptability, and the able use of the "soft force" (which is considered very important). All this presupposes moderate and cautious foreign policy and priority of strengthening good-neighborliness "in the rear." In this context the China – Central Asia bond, along with the Russian direction, looks as an important factor contributing to the dynamic stability of the Chinese model. Politically, this model is strategically advantageous for both China and its neighbors.

Another scenario suggests to regard the SCO as a step to the forthcoming creation of the Eurasian military-political alliance, which could serve as an outward form for a certain neo-imperial Russian superpower project. This subject was discussed at the first meeting of the "Izorsk Club" in August 2012. In actual fact the realization of the idea to form such alliance will be to the detriment of Russia, inasmuch as the neighboring countries will see in their cooperation with China a safeguard against a new aggressive course of Moscow.

Are Contradictions Inevitable?

The Russian Federation in recent years has purposefully demonstrated serious intentions to resume its active presence in Central Asia, both politically and economically. The region is simultaneously in two bonds – with China and Russia. Do these bonds oppose each other?

Political concerns over security and stability of the Central Asian region of both Russia and China coincide. This is shown by their close and fruitful interaction in the entire range of the SCO activity. There are no signs of any antagonism. Culturally, the region is and will remain absolutely original toward the two states and one can hardly expect any Russian-Chinese confrontation in this sphere. There can be two spheres where Moscow and Beijing can become rivals. It is primarily the economic sphere, which is quite natural and inevitable. And there is another sphere, that of the “soft force,” in other words, peaceful competition of the images of the two countries. True, in both cases Russia and China could join efforts in concrete initiatives and projects in the SCO or in any other formats.

The relations of trusted strategic partnership between Russia and China make it possible to hope that there will be no claims for the role of the hegemon. As to the Central Asian countries, they play the role of mutually complementing factors confirming their sovereign self-value and enabling them to form advantageous conditions of socio-economic development as their think fit.

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November – December, 2012.*

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REASONS FOR AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE WEST AND RADICAL ISLAM

A couple of years ago such an alliance would have seemed incredible and undesirable for any side. The United States was waging a bitter war with “al Qaeda,” the Taliban, and terrorists, including those in Islamic guise. Islamic parties based their policies on anti-Americanism and anti-western sentiments, calling for solution of all problems on the metaphysical basis of the Koran and Sunna.

Today, slightly more than a year and a half later, after the beginning of the disturbances in the Arab world, which were called the “Arab spring” by the West, the existence of such alliance does not need confirmation. All the same, it looks abominable and incomprehensible. The outrage in the Islamic world caused by the film “Innocence of Muslims” distributed in the Internet in mid-September 2012, and the assassination of the U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, again demonstrated the abnormal character of the West’s “friendship” with radical Islamists.

For those who are unfamiliar with the subject we should note that when radical Islamists began to gain power in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, who had only recently been considered in those very countries and in the civilized West as terrorists, diplomats and politicians in the United States and the European Union would repeat that that was a “natural process, that Islam would overcome radicalism, and Islamists, under the impact of the obligations they had assumed in the course of the electoral process, would steady down, reconcile themselves with the existence of the opposition, and begin to adhere to the standards and rules of western democracy. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the radical Islamic forces came to power by legitimate means and therefore

there was no reason to fear them. It was better than stagnation under the rule of the former dictators. In other words, the aim was nothing, and movement to democracy – everything.

The rosy picture painted by western political alchemists began to darken soon after the beginning of the events in Syria in spring 2011, when western states, primarily, France and Britain (not without support of the United States), rendered considerable aid to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the attempt to overthrow the dictatorial regime of Bashar Asad. Prior to that, the West “overlooked” the proclamation of the Sharia law to be the foundation of the legislation in Libya. It reacted just as phlegmatically to the onslaught of Salafists and other radical elements on government bodies in Tunisia. Stormy protests in France against the destruction of the mausoleums of Muslim saints in Timbuktu in July 2012 by the Salafist grouping “Ansar ad-din” (very close to “al Qaeda”) in Mali died down very rapidly, and little was left of the desire to send French troops there; only protests and gestures of despair at UNESCO remained.

An expert on Syria is well aware of the fact that in that country, just as it is the case of Egypt, there has never been any well-organized opposition to the ruling regime except the “Muslim Brothers.” The Syrian “Brothers” have been preparing and conducting in deep secrecy terrorist acts against the power of the Alawites for over thirty years, but scored no success up to now. Their ideology and actions were analyzed by the well-known expert and former secret agent Alain Chouet in the right-wing French newspaper “Le Figaro” of September 6, 2012. The Sunna majority, though dissatisfied with Bashar Asad’s regime, has for a long time adhered to the idea that it was not for them to be allied with such radical elements. The poly-confessional society in Syria was much more secular than in many Arab countries, although in the 1990s Islamization processes began to develop among the Sunnites, which

caused serious apprehensions of representatives of other confessions, above all Christians, who began to enlarge the areas of their compact habitation.

Naturally, the main sponsors of the rebels in Syria knew about this, just as those regional actors helping them, who either give refuge to these radically-minded people (incidentally, Turkey has done this to the Chechen terrorists), or supply the militants with money and weapons, which were in abundance in Libya after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

However, knowledge about those who rules the roost in the patchy Syrian opposition has not stopped its western sponsors. Washington has made a clumsy attempt to camouflage assistance to the armed rebels in Syria by sending specialists to Turkey who were supposed “to filter assistance” and prevent it from falling into the hands of “al Qaeda.” In recent months, from the spring of 2012, the rebels’ base has been noticeably radicalized, and now it is less and less oriented to the liberal slogans of the Syrian National Council or the leaders of the Syrian Army of Liberation. But this does not change anything in the policy of western countries. The West’s aid to the radical Islamic groups continues.

Certain Russian experts, like, for example Sh. Sultanov (the newspaper “Zavtra”), put forward a version that western support of the “Muslim Brothers” is connected with the fact that political Islam is today a political force without alternative, and the “Brothers” themselves are the most moderate in the entire spectrum of Islamic organizations.

Explaining why Washington stakes on “moderate fundamentalists,” as he terms them, Sh. Sultanov singles out four factors: first, it is precisely the “Muslim Brothers” who are the most open spokesmen of the trend of increasing Islamization in this region,

possess a developed infrastructure, and have a powerful social support and experience in a prolonged political struggle.

Secondly, in his view, the United States is striving to arrest the further radicalization of “Islamic revival” with the help of the “Muslim Brothers” and prevent the coming to power of extreme Salafists, Jihadists and Taqfirists.

Thirdly, he thinks that the American strategists rely on the possibility to use the “Muslim Brothers” potential for opposing the spreading of the regional influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Lastly, the countries where the “Muslim Brothers” come to power become closely tied to the global system created and led by the United States. This is why it has mechanisms and possibilities of proper influence.

Unfortunately, this analysis is correct but partly. Indeed, the United States has certain possibilities to influence the “Muslim Brothers,” but they are not limitless.

As to the first two arguments of Sh. ultanov, they are dubitable and can seriously be disputed. The fact that the “Muslim Brothers” are a powerful transborder and transnational organization using the principle of work of the western masonic societies and created with the support of the western (British) special services does not mean that the United States should rely on them. For this purpose there should be coincidence of aims and tasks, which is not so in this case. Otherwise the United States and the old western colonial powers would have supported the Arab nationalists as the most influential force in the region during the Soviet period. But this was not the case, inasmuch as the aims and tasks did not coincide. This is why the very fact of the influence of the “Muslim Brothers” is not the reason for their alliance with the United States.

As to the second argument, it looks dubitable, too, in the eyes of Middle East experts. There are ideological differences between the “Muslim Brothers” and Salafists, indeed. The former are more pragmatic and cynical in reaching their aims, and they often camouflage them as common democratic ones. They have mastered the liberal discourse of pluralistic democracy well enough, and it is actively used for drawing both western and autochthonous liberal elites to their side. The parties and groupings they organize can bear the most diverse names – HAMAS, the “Party of Freedom and Justice,” etc. But this does not mean that there is an insurmountable gap between them and Salafists, Jihadists, Taqfirists and “al Qaeda.” Otherwise there could not have been such close cooperation between the “Muslim Brothers” and Salafists, as was the case in the course of the “Egyptian revolution,” when Salafists repeatedly helped the “Brothers” and actively supported them especially in backward rural districts.

The experience of HAMAS in Gaza has shown that despite maneuvers and negotiations with the secular nationalistic FATH movement, the HAMAS is not going to renounce its monopoly on power (Salafists openly talk of the need for it). Although they constantly talk of democracy, just as the Bolsheviks did in their time.

Of course, cohesion of the camp of radical Islam is supported by the presence of the common enemy – the secular regime of Bashar Asad, but after its abolition differences between the two factions of fundamentalists can flare up with renewed force. But these differences will not be on the subject of a democratic model which should be built, as has usually been the case of Europe – in an argument, say, between socialist and right-wing liberal parties. The main argument will be about the form of a caliphate to be built on the ruins of the secular national states, the place of the center of that caliphate, and its head. Does the United States understand it? The aim of the United States

proclaimed by George Bush, Sr. was the promotion and development of democracy in the region, but not the creation of theocratic states. Or does Washington understand it now as it is suggested by the “Muslim Brothers?” Or are the right-wing nationalists of Europe right in asserting that the western elites have come to terms with Islamists in exchange for cheap oil in the crisis period and refusal from anti-western terror?

Thus, if the arguments of Sh. Sultanov, a very authoritative expert who knows the region well enough, are valid, or partly valid, what is the real reason for such a strange alliance which has cost the U.S. Ambassador in Libya his life?

We can hardly have a definite answer today. The U.S. policy in the region looks too whimsical and contradictory. On the one hand, Washington kills Osama bin Laden, and on the other, is arming his followers in Syria.

There are two versions: either the West commits a strategic error, or it uses, or tries to use, radical political Islam in its interests, which would help it take the “right side of history,” as the U.S. Department of State thought at the initial stage of the developments of the “Arab spring.” Or both are correct.

This author stands closer to the view of the well-known Russian public and religious figure Geidar Jemal, who noted in his recent interviews that if the West was going to use the “Muslim Brothers” for abolishing the obsolete dictatorial regimes (something like it was once done in Afghanistan when Soviet troops were driven out from there), it succeeded in doing this because the aims of “police batons” and Islamists coincided tactically. But later, as further developments have shown, their ways parted. The United States and its western partners should demonstrate the construction of liberal democracy in the countries where the “Arab spring” has triumphed, but the Islamists have

their own program pursuing other aims. The assassination of the U.S. Ambassador in Benghazi may, probably, become the “moment of truth” after which support of radical Islamists can hardly be depicted as support of democratic processes in Arab countries, and it will be harder still to implement them.

If U.S. support of radical Islamists continues, then it would be possible to believe another, conspiracy, version. According to it, everything what has been going on in the Middle East during the past two years is a result of the actions of the world’s financial-political elites, which prod Washington, and London and Paris along with it, to bring the globalization processes to the logical end; to complete the destruction of national sovereign states in Eurasia with the help of radical Islamists (in this their aims coincide with those of the Islamists), create the situation of chaos in which it would be easier to prolong the life of the dying dollar, and prevent the formation of a really multipolar world based on big regional blocs of states possessing their own strong regional currencies capable to throw a challenge to the present currency-financial system. This is why the present “Arab revolutions” are aimed not against Arab dictators, but against the Eurasian Union and China taking shape before our very eyes.

This variant may seem fantastic to many people, but the appearance of the film-provocation “Innocence of Muslims” is in line with the aim of plunging the region of the Middle East and North Africa into chaos and religious obscurantism. However, the crude nature of this clumsy provocation proved harmful to its authors and only instigated anti-American sentiments in the region. The money invested in the large-scale anti-Russian campaign in the Middle East under the slogan “Russia – the enemy of the Arab nations” (it is financed by Saudi Arabia) seems to have been wasted, inasmuch as

large-scale anti-American manifestations in the region and beyond it continue unabated.

In any case, no matter who and what stands behind the policy of western support of radical political Islam, it becomes ever more evident that in the confrontation between liberal post-modernism and the metaphysics of one of the most dynamic religions the former is losing, which can be seen by the illogical actions of the western political class.

Political Islam, which has long been mustering its strength for a fight against secular society with its values, is now strong as it has never been. Its spokesmen have ably been using the anti-imperialist vocabulary of nationalists and communists and their slogans. The main thing is that they have well learnt the slogan of another radically-minded political figure – Vladimir Lenin, who said: “The imperialists themselves will give us a rope on which we shall hang them.” But, apparently, people in Washington have long forgotten Lenin’s works. It’s a pity...

“Blizhny Vostok, arabskoye probuzhdeniye i Rossiya: Chto dalshe?” Moscow, 2012, pp. 131–136.

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