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The Crimean Frontier in World Development (I)

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The Establishment of Polycentrism

The reunification of Crimea and Russia was an event whose international scale, as is now clear, exceeds not only the scale of Russian-Ukrainian relations, but also the European format of world politics and even the larger «West – Russia» format. It is no exaggeration to say that this event marked an upheaval on a global level which opened new horizons in world politics. It turns out that the world is completely different now than it was at the end of 2013.

At the root of these international shifts lies a crisis of the structuring influence of the West on the rest of the world. It is quite obvious that the return of Crimea to Russia is a phenomenon of the formation of a polycentric world. This world arose as a response to the unipolar pretensions of the West and is becoming increasingly established as a new framework of international architecture, coexisting with the weakening unipolarity.

Many point to the turning back of Yevgeny Primakov's airplane over the Atlantic in 1999 as one of the first signs of the emergence of the polycentric world. The fifteen years which have passed since then have confirmed both the correctness of the change in course and the accuracy of Russia's staking on China and India as new partners. In this sense the Crimean saga of 2014 was the historically predictable response to the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999...

Since that time polycentrism has grown stronger, become institutionalized and has already saturated the fabric of the modern world. That is why we are seeing such varied responses to the events in Crimea in the planet's public opinion and such an anemic, often bewildered official reaction from Western countries.

Yet another important frontier in world politics which was defined by the reunification of Crimea with Russia is the new balance of power between the West and the East. The spring wind from the East and the South has scattered the cold fog from the Atlantic which has so long hung over Eastern Europe. Russia's sails have captured the full power of this wind.

Note that the premonitions of Chinese and Indian specialists on international relations with regard to the possible course of events in Ukraine were much more accurate than Western predictions. «Putin is not going to sit around and twiddle his thumbs,» our Asian colleagues assured the world. And they were right.

Finally, the fact of the matter is that the split of the West begins on the Crimean frontier. The European Union, as we have seen, has been sent to the «nursery», and at the same time it turns out that Washington and to some extent London will remain active participants of the global polycentric structure, focusing on the traditional concept of maintaining the balance of power between Russia and the EU in continental Europe. The chaos in Ukraine seems to be to the advantage of the United States. As G. Friedman believed from the beginning of the Kiev Maidan, the U.S. need only define a point at which further pressure on Moscow will become dangerous or too costly. However, the old scheme only worked out in part: the European Union was indeed weakened and humiliated, but Russia, on the contrary, has clearly become stronger.

The fact that the «trial of Russia by Ukraine» was deliberately forced by the «old school» part of American diplomacy as represented by Victoria Nuland (an old protégée of M. Albright) has been noted by all attentive observers. However, the followers of this line in American politics have no more trumps. The Crimean frontier has been defined so irrevocably that the U.S. will once again meet with failure. This, of course, is mostly on the conscience of the «old school» Sovietologists and specialists on «democratic transition», but their professional ineptitude does not lift responsibility from Washington, including for those killed on the Maidan.

The strengthening of Russia on the Crimean frontier, if the situation in Ukraine stabilizes, also means the possibility of a thaw in Russian-American relations a bit farther in the future; the parties need only come to a mutual understanding of the importance of acknowledging one another's legitimate interests. The novelty of the situation, however, lies in the fact that Russia is now no more interested in this improvement than the United States is.

But perhaps the main thing is this: the establishment of polycentrism on the planet continues. It appears that this will affect Europe in the near future and will apparently lead to polarization in the European camp on a broad array of foreign policy issues. In addition, in a polycentric world (unlike in a unipolar construction), the long-term existence of Eastern Europe as a vassal of the U.S. is unlikely.

It is more likely that it is in Eastern Europe that we will see the continuation of recent European

history. And the European Union, which has for some reason sterilized the domestic and foreign policy of national states, is clearly not ready for this. After all, the unanimity of 28 countries on the referendum in Crimea looks absurd. According to Freud, this is a diagnosis made by the most «liberal» Europe.

By definition, there cannot be a unified foreign policy for Finland and Spain, for Great Britain and Greece. The Czechs and the Portuguese look differently on relations with Angola. After all, foreign policy is a part of national culture. Thus the expression «the foreign policy of the European Union» is a fiction for covering up one of the foundations of the unipolar world and the non-existence of national states. There has never been a «unified Europe» in international politics in the past, and apparently there will not be one in the near future. However, this does not in the least mean that individual states and nations in that part of the planet will not have foreign policies. On the contrary: the polycentric world requires active and multilateral international interaction as the natural mode of existence of states.

And in this sense, Russia is without a doubt interested in the existence of an independent, strong, and friendly Ukraine. Such a Ukraine is possible only if the **cultural and historical identity of Eastern Europe**, the natural historical continuation of which is Trans-Ural Russia, is established in the system of polycentric international interactions at the junction of the Eurasian and Western European areas.

Therefore, already today the very existence of the European integration project demands that Brussels make large concessions to the future Eastern Europe. However, this new prospect is for now being ignored due to the loss of historical institutions in the «nursery» and, alas, due to the perpetual pettiness of the burghers.