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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

NORTH-WEST RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Integration is one of the main consequences of globalization. Elements of microsystems are growing closer, which brings to the foreground problems of interaction and — in a longer perspective — those of close cooperation between different social systems. The article considers the case of North-West Russia, the only territory having a common border with the EU, in order to examine the issue of Russia using the geographical factor, which Otto von Bismarck called the most powerful and intrinsic factor in history. The significance of this factor increased after the Cold War. It was then when the independent Baltic States became a platform for emergence and recognition of the Baltic Sea region. The author focuses on the social and cultural integrity of the region and considers the traditional Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea states as interrelated components of a single region, different from other European regions in terms of economic interests, as well as its natural and sociocultural landscape.

Key words: global challenges, regionalization, cooperation, partnership, inter-civilization border areas, Western and Russian values, sociocultural diffusion, convergence, European integration

The inter-civilisation interaction has always been an important factor of the development of humanity. The world is developing along the path of convergence and globalisation. The development of interconnections and interdependences between different countries, peoples, and their cultures has spread to various aspects of social life. In the modern risk-fraught world, the role of inter-civilisation and cross-culture interaction in ensuring the world stability is constantly increasing.

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In this context, border areas are of special interest. It is the border areas where an immediate contact of different sociocultural communities takes place. Russian social scientists are especially interested in this since Russia's unique geographical feature is a significant number of countries bordering on it. Effective cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring countries is relevant both for Russia and its border regions. Given the genesis of the Russian state and the historical development of Russia, the country's interaction with uniting Europe seems to be of special importance for the efficient use of its geostrategic resources. The country benefits from its location on two continents when modernising its social system (the economic, social, political, and legal aspects).

As a result of the 1990s reforms, Russia is faced with the choice whether to further develop the country or maintain its current state. Today, Russia needs neither the deifying of the West, in which some have succeeded, nor the idolising of its own uniqueness, in which others strive to succeed even more. Russia rather needs a clear understanding of reality and maximum use of modern achievements without losing the country's individuality, as has already been done by the most advanced Asian countries and is being done by advanced states of South America. Russia, as well as Ukraine and Belarus, is following a special, but still European path of development. A wider interaction with united Europe increases Russia's chances of modernisation and, thus, establishes more fruitful relations with China, India, the Pacific Rim, the USA, Latin America, and, of course, post-Soviet states, first of all, Ukraine. Today's Russian nomenklatura gets irritated when the European Union pursues a policy based on such values as democracy, supremacy of law, human rights, competition without the exploitation of administrative resources, etc. towards the former-Soviet space. But does it contradict the objectives set for the new, democratic Russia by its leadership in 1991? Aren't these the values that have been constantly declared by Russian politicians today? And, finally, aren't these the values stated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation? One can hope that the expanding integration of the Russian Federation and the EU will make it possible to move from declarations to actions.

As for the European Union, despite all complications in relations with Russia, cooperation with Russia does not only save the EU from its energy and raw material dependence on the Middle East and North Africa and self-imposed relations with unstable and dangerous regions of the world, but also a necessary condition for a dignified response to the American, Japanese, Chinese, and other global challenges and the preservation of its geostrategic standing. Throughout centuries, Europe set the tune for the world, but today the pressing issue is not that of leadership, but that of the role of Europe in the globalized world. For Europe, the eastern enlargement of the EU is the only opportunity to find its place in the international architecture of the future.

As early as in the post-war years, there appeared signs of Europe lagging behind, first the USA and, then Japan in terms of economic development. In the official documents, the EU leadership sets the task of turning the EU into the driving force of the world economy based on knowledge, sustainable

economic growth, and a higher employment rate, which is set out in the Lisbon Declaration of 2000. However, the economic achievements of Europe turned out to be mediocre. Over the last 15 years, the average rate of the EU economic growth has reached only 2.1 % against the world average of 3.7 %, and the US average of 3.2 %.

Thus, both the European Union and the Russian Federation are facing the same global challenges, responses to which largely depend on the combination of the existing resources. Over the last decade, both Moscow and Brussels have gradually understood the fact. In 2003, an agreement on the formation of four “common spaces” between the Russian Federation and the EU was reached at the EU-Russia summit. These spaces include the common economic space, the common space on freedom, security and justice, the common space on external security, and the common space on research, education, and culture. The EU leadership believes that the economic cooperation with Russia is a necessary condition for a dignified response to the American and Japanese challenges [11, p. 14].

The border area of immediate contact between the RF and the EU comprises North-West Russia, whose considerable part belongs to the Baltic Sea region and North-East Europe, which also constitutes a significant part of the region. The Baltic Sea region countries are immediate neighbours of Russia. Historically, they are not only EU member states. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Estonia, and Russia used to be one state over a long period. Thus, relations in this region feature elements of sociocultural homogeneity, a feeling of common fate and common state interests.

The processes taking place in these areas largely exemplify the interaction of Western and Eastern Christian values, which is manifested in the economic, political, legal, ethnocultural, moral and psychological aspects of the social practice traditional for these countries. These areas exhibit trends towards increasingly conflict-prone situations, on the one hand, and processes of sociocultural diffusion, on the other. It results in the accelerating trend of civilizational convergence of Western and Eastern Christianity. This latent motive behind the formation of a united Europe is taking on a tangible form alongside the economic and political considerations. For Europeans, Christian values are uniting values. A vivid example of this trend is the meeting of the leaders of two confessions — those of Orthodox Russia and Catholic Poland — whose relations have been strained for a rather long time.

One should emphasise that the significance of cross-border neighbourhood is determined by features of adjacent regions. The territorial structure of the Russian economy is of pronounced Eurocentric nature; Russia faces the European Union with its most developed part, which shows a cultural and innovative potential of global significance. A study into different areas of cooperation between Russia and its neighbours is a relevant task for modern Russian social science, since Russia has to find a proper position within the new geopolitical configuration.

The merging of all European ethnic groups without ignoring the unique nature of each of them into a common organisational space is a response to global challenges and a natural course of history. The need for European in-

tegration in order to preserve Europe's standing in the world was clearly understood by the best Russian thinkers as early as the 19th century. S. Yu. Witte wrote: "Imagine... the European countries united in one entity, one that does not waste vast sums of money, resources, blood, and labour on rivalry among themselves... If that were done, Europe would be much richer, much stronger, more civilized, not going downhill under the weight of mutual hatred, rivalry, and war. The first step toward attaining this goal would be the formation of an alliance of Russia, Germany, and France. Once this was done, other countries of the European continent would join the alliance... But, if the European countries continue on their present course, they will be running a risk of great misfortune" [1, p. 122—123]. A mere five decades later, in 1939, this prophecy of the outstanding Russian reformer tragically came true.

Interaction between North-West Russia and North-East Europe is widening due to a number of factors, first of all, due to their immediate neighbourhood. The American economist and a Nobel Laureate, Paul Krugman, believes that the trade volume between the USA and Canada would be 13.5 times as little if these countries did not border on each other [4, p. 208]. Another factor is similarity in mind-set, natural characteristics of the Nordic peoples, which ensures mutual understanding. One can also quote the famous Dutch sociologist, G. Hofstede, who supervised large-scale cross-cultural studies based on the psychological test methodology. When measuring parameters of organisational culture on the "personal achievement — solidarity" scale, the author came to a conclusion that Swedes, Finns, Estonians, the Danes, Norwegians, and Russians form one cluster, which he called the "North European solidarity syndrome" [12]. Prof V.A. Yadov, who paid special attention to the comparative analysis of ethnocultural features, also believes that, in general "the Russian cultural matrix is rather distant from the Romance and Germanic ones and is closer to the mentality of the Nordic peoples" [8, p. 68].

There are ample data obtained as a result of comparative studies, which show that the Russian cultural matrix is distant from the Romance and German ones and is much closer to the mentality of the Nordic countries. Close centuries-long cooperation between Russians and Norwegians in 'the Pomor zone' is an example of this closeness, which, at the current turn of the helix of history, brings to the foreground preservation of the common historical heritage and centuries-long traditions of cooperation from the Vikings-Varangians and, later the Rurik Dynasty and the Novgorod princes to these days. Today there is a task to further development this cooperation and form its qualitatively new character. Close cooperation between two border towns, Nikel and Kirkenes, may serve as an example of a new matrix of modern neighbourhood policy, especially in developing the energy potential of the Arctic, where Russia and Norway play a decisive role. Norway's interest in establishing special contacts with Russia through different organizations — the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Northern Dimension (ND) has a tangible manifestation in the form of investment.

The centuries-long ties between Russia and Sweden, which were immediate neighbours until 1918, are a subject of many historical and ethnographical works. In particular, the famous economist, G. Myrdal, considers the Russian commune and traditional Swedish settlements related phenomena [13 p. 33—34]. The Swedish cultural studies scholar Magnus Ljunggren emphasises that Astrid Lindgren is Russian at heart and the popularity of her character Karlsson is explained by the fact that is a Russian archetype [2, p. 129].

Interpenetration of cultures of the Baltic peoples was especially prolonged and intensive. So, the Old Slavic language was the official state language in Lithuania until the 18th century. All fundamental legal documents of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, including the Statutes and Metrica were written in the Old Slavic. In 1573, the first Eastern Slavic grammar and the first alphabet book were printed in Vilnius; almost until the end of the 16th century, Lithuanians professed Orthodoxy. Prof. A. Juozaitis, a former advisor on culture to President Brazauskas, made a brief and categorical comment on the point: “In terms of cultural studies, Lithuania is Baltoslavia” [5, p. 3], which follows the same pattern as Academician D. Likhachev’s definition of Russia as “Scandobyzantium” [6, p. 572]. One can give many more examples emphasising the cultural and civilizational unity of the peoples of the Baltic Sea region. Globalization contributes both to the awareness and preservation of this unity. The Estonian writer K. Kender, when debating with local Russophobes stressed that when an invasion of aliens — either from the South or the West began, Estonians would remember that Russians are as Ugric as Estonians themselves [10]. Regardless of the ethnic component, close cooperation of neighbouring countries becomes a condition for survival in the globalised risk-prone or, maybe, even catastrophe-prone world.

History evolved in such a way that Russia — for seventy years — and the countries of Eastern Europe and the Baltic — for 45 years — opposed Western Europe in the 20th century. However, it was an ideological opposition. Of course, it continued longer than the ideological opposition with Germany in the 1930—1940s. Although its ramifications will influence peoples residing in both Europe and the Baltic region for many years to come, it did not affect the cultural and historical code of these peoples. It has to be emphasised that the conflict between liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism, which the current generation is so sensitive to, is just a passing historical phenomenon.

Experts are right in considering Northern Europe as a single regional system. In view of the changes that have taken place over the last decade, the notion ‘Northern Europe’ has become broader and more multidimensional than ever before. It would be only natural to consider the traditional Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region states as interdependent components of a single region that is distinguished from other regions not only by its economic interests, but also by a common natural and sociocultural landscape. The regional identity is described as “non-European, non-Catholic, non-Rome, non-imperialist, non-colonial, non-exploitative, peaceful, small, and

social-democratic” [14, p. 21]. The public opinion of many Northern European countries is increasingly in favour of including North-West Russia into the Nordic space. Consequently, the growth in regional consolidation does contribute to the integration of European space, and this aspect is of special significance and relevance to Russia.

The alliance, which emerged in Europe in the 20th century, turned out to be neither a “Fatherland of Europe”, as Charles de Gaulle expected it to be, nor a “Europe of Fatherlands”, as K. Adenauer once wrote, but rather a “Europe of regions”, as Giscard d’Estaing called it 20 years later. Russia is also an alliance of regions — and not only in terms of the political and administrative organisation of a federative state. The sociocultural and geostrategic diversity of Russia stands comparison with that of the European Union, including in terms of receptivity to social innovations.

North-West Russia has its own regional features distinguishing it from other Russian regions, so does the regionality of North-East Europe. Northern Europe has its specific features that differ the region from other European regions. However, these specific features are quite similar to those of North-West Russia. At the same time, it is not only the geographical (relatively harsh climate), political, (long-standing social-democratic traditions, pacifism as a key value), economic (stable, verified competitive economy), confessional (Christian values), mental and psychological (calm, tolerant, diligent people), but also ideational and conceptual perception of itself as a certain and distinctive social and spatial unity and the awareness of belonging to a special collective cultural and historical identity. Russian North-West, which is quite similar to its EU neighbours in the aforementioned characteristics, does not only complete the constructive unity of this cross-border sociocultural zone, but also attaches a greater geocivilisational meaning to it.

The geostrategic position of North-West Russia as a border region accounts for its specific sociocultural features, which is manifested in the mass consciousness of the most promising and active part of its population. Both value systems and attitudes of the respondents make it possible to speak of additional resources for the expansion of sociocultural interaction between Russia and the EU. Statism — a common, even hereditary quality of Russians and the Finnish — has a geographical component: a harsh natural environment and low population density. Secondly, it is provincialism, which is explained by two main reasons: 1) a distant location from the traditional European centres, and 2) a much later — in comparison to the rest of Europe — formation of the urban population (earlier, the absolute majority of the Russian, Baltic, Finnish, and Norwegian population was rural). However, unlike Russia, the provincialism of our neighbours is aggravated by the feeling of their “minority” — small territory and sparse population, which has never (except for a few periods of European history) allowed them to make larger European states and, first of all, Russia take their position into account. The need to compensate for their “minority” was handled by these countries with different degrees of success. Finland and Norway achieved the best results.

The development of regional integration in Northern Europe reflected the opposition between two political concepts — those of an “outpost” and a “bridge”. The former suggests that regional integration should contribute to the transformation of the Nordic countries into a fortress of the West at a border with the East. The advocates of the latter theory considered these states as a reducer of tension ensuring the cooperation of two systems; Finland was the most successful in fulfilling this function.

The North of Europe, which includes North-West Russia, is an example of broad development of intergovernmental, multilateral, transboundary, and other heterogeneous ties, which gained a new impetus in the 1990s, when the ideas and practices of regionalism entered the phase of intensive development. It was a result of the concern of the Nordic countries about an increase in political competition, as well as the trend towards Euro-construction, which could make the Nordic countries a marginal Euro-periphery [9, p. 109]. A larger scale of interaction between Russia and the EU significantly increases this threat. “After the Baltics had entered the EU and 1.5 mln Russians or approximately 2 mln Russian-speaking persons had become citizens of united Europe and almost 1 mln residents of the Kaliningrad exclave had virtually found themselves within its borders,” T. M. Kochegarova rightfully states, “this cooperation gained additional advantages” [3, p. 45].

When assessing the prospects of integration of the western and eastern parts of the North of Europe, which is becoming increasingly relevant in connection with the future development of Arctic hydrocarbons, the representative of the Russian Federation in Finland Prof V. A. Shlyamin emphasised that the features and rates of integration would largely depend on the results of the dialogue on the Russia — EU level [7, p. 30]. As an integral unity, the North of Europe includes two territorial formations: the North-East of the EU and North-West Russia. North-West Russia has unique in their scale deposits of natural resources (19 % of proven national oil reserves and 22 % of proven national gas reserves, ferrous, non-ferrous, and rare-earth metals, diamonds, apatite, mica, marble, sweet water, timber, etc.). The Shtokman gas field, which was discovered in 1988, is assessed today at 3.8 trln cubic metres and 30 bln tons of gas condensate. Large gas reserves were also discovered in the Kara Sea.

The subsoil of North-West Russia is much richer than that of any European country, and a number of gas, oil, diamond, non-ferrous metal fields are considered unique on the world scale. Its timber resources are estimated at 9.5 mln cubic metres; the quality of timber, according to international experts, is one of the highest in the world. North-West Russia has access to the Baltic and Barents Seas and eight large seaports, being situated in the vicinity of main industrial centres of the Russian Federation. According to the customs authorities, 80 % of EU cargo is transported through North-West Russia. If the specific weight of the EU countries in Russian international trade amounts to 54 %, in that of North-West, it is much higher (68 %) [7, p. 39]. The share of foreign investment in the Russian region is also very high — 70 % of the total foreign investment. As to

the cost measurement, the share of foreign trade amounts to 20 % of the national average; here, North-West Russia yields only to the Central Federal District. All three main sectors — raw materials, manufacturing, and research and innovation ones — are well represented in the economy of North-West.

It has to be noted that Russian enterprises do not aspire to develop creditworthy projects to attract foreign investors. Alongside lack of own capital, it is a result of lack of knowledge and, sometimes, lack of desire to make business transparent, since the invitation of a foreign partner requires full disclosure of accounting documents and financial flows. And of course, there is still a problem of the unchanged taxation system, customs duties, and the fiscal policy towards foreign investors. The need for investment is exacerbated by the fact that most of the largest mineral deposits of North-West Russia — both those of hydrocarbons and nonferrous and rare-earth metals (aluminium, tin, titanium, magnesium, nickel, lead, chromium, zinc, beryllium, bismuth, molybdenum, tungsten, etc.) — are scattered over a large territory. These deposits often situated at a considerable distance from railways, transmission lines, and settlements. Considering its rich mineral resources, North-West Russia — as well as the Scandinavian and the Baltic countries — is considered today a priority and essential prerequisite for European economic growth. In terms of achieving this goal, the north-western region is an invaluable intermediate area between Russia and Europe, between Eastern Christian and Western Christian civilisations. This Russian territory can boast a significant intellectual, industrial, and cultural potential, considerable natural resource deposits, and a developed transport and communications infrastructure.

A comparison of the current trends and developments taking place in North-West Russia and the neighbouring Baltic States, Finland, and Scandinavia, makes it possible to identify the most efficient ways of promoting mutually beneficial cooperation.

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