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THE RELATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION WITH THE WEST BETWEEN 1991 AND 2014

ABSTRACT: The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has substantially changed the shape of the international environment. The role of the world power shaping international relations fell to the United States. Undoubtedly, it was a result of the triumph in the Cold War rivalry. The Russian Federation, the successor of the USSR, found itself in a diametrically opposite position. It faced the challenge of determining its place in the new international reality. Due to its political and economic weakness, it was doomed to build this position in cooperation with the West. This article deals with the relations between the Russian Federation and the West in the years 1991-2014. The author aims to identify factors shaping those relations and describe the mutual relations, focusing on key events. The study carried out confirms that the mutual Russian-Western relations over the years were characterized by both successes and failures, which, regardless of their character, shaped these relations.

KEYWORDS: international relations; pro-Western policy; retreat; post-Cold War; Russian Federation

Introduction

The end of the USSR and the communist system was sealed by the unsuccessful *coup d'état* in August 1991, when fierce representatives of the Soviet communist apparatus arrested Gorbachev and declared a state of emergency. The USSR was formally disbanded in December of the same year. The newly established state, the Russian Federation, turned out to be such a weak entity that it was unable to manage on its own. The lack of experience in free market economy required the use of foreign specialists. In a way, the collapse of the USSR and the establishment of the Russian Federation were similar to the fall of the Russian Empire and the creation of the new communist state in 1917. At that time, the Bolsheviks were armed with Mausers and ideological visions of Marx and Engels. In the situation that unfolded in 1991, the new state needed experts who could only be provided by the USA and its allies in Western Europe. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that it was this need that persuaded the then Russian authorities to adopt democratic policies. However, it was not so obvious, since, as Marian Broda observes, the foundation of the Russian government at that time was democratic but also authoritarian.

The latter resulted from obedience to people in power that had been preserved in both political structures and the mentality of Russian citizens (Broda 2011, 201).

Eventually, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Russian authorities decided to establish closer contacts with the West. This declaration can be found in the statements made by then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev (Trenin 2016, 25). The collapse of the USSR turned out to be a surprise for the US. According to experts, it was the CIA that was responsible for the surprise, as it was unable to identify the symptoms of the collapse. In the new world order, the US gained the position of the indisputable leader. Even earlier, during the Cold War, all democratic countries, except India, had relied on the support of the defense capability of the US. Consequently, weak Russia had no choice but to join the group of liberal democratic countries when it was necessary to carry out major reforms. The idea of joining the Western structures had been present even before the formal collapse of the USSR. There were also concerns in the West that if the USSR would not obtain approval for such integration, it could start negotiations with single key NATO members. In April 1990, the US president George Bush sent a diplomatic cable to the President of France, François Mitterrand, articulating his concerns that the Kremlin might pursue a policy concerning the problem of the reunification of Germany. He assumed that taking advantage of the historical hostility of France and the UK towards Germany, an agreement could be reached to stop the process of Germany's unification, especially that both France and the UK were still formally occupying Berlin. Bush emphasized that unified Germany would be a full member of NATO, the allied forces would remain in its territory, even after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army, and NATO would leave its conventional and nuclear forces in the region (Sarotte 2014, 90-97). He also warned Mitterrand that no other institution or organization would be able to replace NATO as a guarantor of security and stabilization in the West. Moreover, he could not imagine how a different collective security structure in Europe, including Eastern European states and even the USSR, would be able to ensure the security of Western countries. Bush clearly stated that the major security institution in Europe would not be any pan-European organization, but NATO. A month after that, Mikhail Gorbachev put forward a conception of such a pan-European security mechanism, in which united Germany would simultaneously join both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Gorbachev even suggested that the USSR should join NATO. However, this was unacceptable to the US (Sarotte 2014, 90-97).

The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between the Russian Federation and the West. The formulated goal allows for undertaking research leading to the solution of the general problem contained in the question: What factors had the most significant impact on the relations between the Russian Federation and the West in the years 1991-2014? To solve the stated problem, theoretical methods

will be used in the form of source and literature criticism, analysis, synthesis, and inference; however, the critical analysis of the literature was crucial for this publication.

1. An attempt to a rapprochement with the West

In its foreign policy, Russia had to maintain the course determined by the world leader. As early as the end of 1991, President Yeltsin warily knocked on the gates of the Euro-Atlantic structures. In June 1992, he paid a visit to the US, during which he suggested to the then President George Bush the establishment of a mutual military pact.¹ However, the United States did not respond to that offer. Washington justified it by arguing that no such a pact was needed. The response of the US was perceived by Russia as unfair and incomprehensible. However, the United States did not intend to leave NATO or sever its bilateral political and military agreements. In the early 1990s, Russia was such a weak state that the US, if it had wanted, could conclude a strategic pact that pro-Western Russia would certainly approve of. Instead, Moscow was treated in the same manner as the other post-communist countries, i.e., it was offered a membership in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, established in 1991. Moreover, Russia was not granted a special status within the framework of the Partnership for Peace, which was a cooperation forum created in 1994. Both institutions were of a consulting character, with Russia treated in the same way as the other countries, which did not fulfill its aspirations. The West was unwilling to become integrated with Russia due to its unstable internal situation. The democratic forces were very weak, the state institutions did not function efficiently, and the reforming elites did not have a substantial support from the Russian society. In contrast, there existed a real possibility of communist retaliation, and there was a spectre of a civil war looming over the country. In addition, the post-communist transformation was difficult due to the size and diversity of Russia.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the West regarded Russia as a country that no longer influenced the course of events in the world and was no longer dangerous. Looking down on Russia stemmed from its weakness, which manifested itself as a financial crisis in 1998, which was caused by the fact that Russia had not paid an installment of a loan taken from international financial institutions. It is worth observing that the financial difficulties of the Russian Federation were used to exert pressure on it. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from the Baltic States in 1994 was conducted under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund, which threatened to withhold another loan tranche (Hill | Gaddy 2013, 96).

¹ <http://yeltsin.ru/archive/audio/8995/> (accessed 10.04.2020).

Thus, the Russian problem started to acquire a different dimension. Concerns about Russia's substantial armed forces and its expansionism were replaced by a fear of its weakness and chaos. There appeared grim visions of Russian refugees coming to Western Europe, uncontrolled use of Russian nuclear weapons, or other states and different groups laying their hands on the Russian nuclear arsenal. In January 1992, Boris Yeltsin launched an ambitious plan of economic reforms aimed at transforming the Russian economy into a market economy. Following the example of Poland and the other post-communist countries, a decision was made to administer a shock treatment. The main elements of the reform were the abolition of the centrally planned economy, the privatization of national property, the liberalization of prices and budget cuts that restore the country's financial balance. However, these steps did not produce the expected results. Neither was unemployment alleviated nor inflation curbed. For example, in 1992, the inflation amounted to 2500 percent; in 1993, it was 840 percent; in 1994, it dropped to 215 percent, and in 1995, it was still 131 percent (Hill | Gaddy 2013, 34).

2. NATO enlargement: No for the new European security system

The shock and confusion after the collapse of the USSR passed relatively quickly. As early as 1992, a discussion started among Russian political elites concerning the national interests of the Russian Federation. They started to notice that the West was not interested in Russia and only cared about its own interests. The US became the only superpower, Germany reunited, while NATO started the process of admitting new member states. The first post-Soviet ideology of the solidarity of democratic countries under the leadership of the USA was started to be replaced by practical politics. While engaging in it, Moscow had to contend with various internal and international problems, which included the financial crisis in 1998, the dependence on the successive loan tranches provided by the International Monetary Fund, the fact that most Russian leaders were looked down on by Western politicians, lack of control over the situation developing in the post-Soviet area, and the crisis in the Balkans. However, the most serious problem was the decision by the US to expand NATO to the east. The decision had already been made in 1993 but it was implemented in 1999. Integration with Western structures, called for by President Boris Yeltsin and Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev, was only possible for the former Soviet satellite states. This changed the essence of the relations between the Russian Federation and the West. Instead of one pact of democratic countries, including Russia, the "old" pact was enlarged, which had been established to counter the threat posed by the USSR and had not been disbanded after the disappearance of the Soviet threat. Therefore, this led to the extension of the geopolitical area of the West, which would be an assurance policy against the revival of Russian

imperial ambitions, which the West believed to be manifested in the Chechnya War that started in 1994. After the enlargement of NATO, not only did Russia become the first line of defense, but it also lost the natural and demilitarized safety zone, that is, the territory of Poland. Furthermore, as a result of NATO enlargement, Russia lost trust in its new partners. In the opinion of Russia, NATO broke its promise that it would not move its borders to the east, although such a promise was never made by the West, and it is not confirmed by any documents or political declarations (Sarotte 2014, 96-97). The opinion of Russia about the alleged promise is formulated on the basis of oral statements made by Bush and Kohl during talks about the reunification of Germany. Despite this, the Russian political elites and society reached the conclusion that the West was a hypocrite and a liar and that NATO's expansion to the East ruined the security system of Europe.²

The enlargement of NATO was the first serious blow dealt to the relations between Russia and the West. The West did not understand the Russian objections and discontent. It concluded that they stemmed from the wounded pride and imperial complexes of Russia (Minkina 2015, 10-11). If Russia opposed the admittance of the former Soviet satellite states to NATO, it meant that Russia intended to reestablish its former sphere of influence. From the point of view of the West, despite the changes on the European continent, the rivalry with Russia in Europe, Asia, and other regions of the world was still a policy whose importance did not diminish. However, the difference was that in this rivalry, the Western countries really had the upper hand. As a result, instead of the integration into a general security system consisting of democratic countries, in May 1997, Russia and NATO signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation.³ Both sides pledged to cooperate regarding security in the Euro-Atlantic area and acknowledged that they did not regard each other as adversaries. They also committed themselves to cooperating and building a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was established, as well as a Russian mission at NATO. Furthermore, a mechanism for consultation and cooperation was accepted. Taking into account Russian interests, a provision was made in accordance with which NATO pledged to deploy neither nuclear weapons nor larger military contingents in the territories of the new member states (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1997). This provision resulted in Russia's consent to the enlargement of NATO. On 8 July 1997, at the NATO summit in Madrid, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were officially invited to participate in talks concerning their membership in NATO (Zięba 2010, 96).

² <http://www.inopresa.ru/article/12Jan2015/spiegel/gorbatschow1.html> (accessed 11.05.2020).

³ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm (accessed 11.05.2020).

3. NATO operation in Kosovo: A serious blow to Russia's relations with the West

Another powerful blow to Russia's trust in the West was the NATO operation in Yugoslavia related to the Kosovo crisis. For Moscow, the problem was not the historical links between Russia and Serbia, which had become weaker during the existence of the USSR, but the general assessment of the civil war in former Yugoslavia. In the 1990s, Russia thought that it was the leaders of all national groups comprising Yugoslavia that were responsible for the conflict, i.e. Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Albanians from Kosovo. In contrast, the West regarded only Serbs as responsible for bloodshed and war. Furthermore, it supported Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Kosovar Albanians, condoning many of their actions, including war crimes.

Two weeks after three new member states, i.e. the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, were admitted to NATO, an air operation against Yugoslavia was launched, in response to ethnic cleansing conducted by the security forces controlled by Belgrade. The decision to start the operation had not been discussed with Yeltsin, who realized that the rules that had been observed so far in the international environment had disappeared and that the West no longer showed consideration for Russia (Hill | Gaddy 2013, 308). In Russia, opinions were voiced that the objective of the operation was not to provide humanitarian aid but to expand NATO even further, admitting new countries, but this time in the Balkans (Hill | Gaddy 2013, 309). The NATO air operation against Serbia, which lasted 78 days, was a difficult experience for Russia, not to say a real shock. It was the first war in Europe after 1945 with the NATO air forces dropping bombs on Belgrade, a European capital. According to Russia and some other countries, the war was unlawful, as it had not been legitimized by the UN Security Council (SC), in which Russia had the right to veto. Thus, an unprecedented situation was created. Justifying its actions, the West proposed a novel conception of humanitarian intervention, which could become a justification for Western interventions in any conflict in the world in the future. Post-communist Russia, which had committed itself, in every forum, to observing the traditional international law, and which condemned the Soviet military interventions in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, was bewildered. At the end of 1999, during a meeting with Clinton, Yeltsin reminded him that Russia was still a country that had nuclear weapons, and the US would not dictate to the whole world how to live and behave. He also used the idea of a Russo-Chinese pact as a threat, which would counter the American vision of the unipolar world.⁴

NATO's involvement in Kosovo can be considered a turning point in Russian politics during Yeltsin's term of office. In fact, the influence of what occurred near

⁴ http://www.ng.ru/world/1999-12-10/1_pekin.html (accessed 11.05.2020).

the Slatina Air Base in Kosovo should not be underestimated. It was where the first incident after the end of the Cold War occurred between Russian soldiers and a NATO contingent.⁵ The NATO forces commander-in-chief Gen. Wesley Clark was ready to use force to prevent Russian commandos' movement from Bosnia to Kosovo and their capture of the above-mentioned air base, since the Russians acted without the consent of the NATO. It was only the common sense of the British forces commander Mike Jackson that prevented the escalation of the incident.

4. Putin and cooperation with the West

The failures of Yeltsin's policies in the West discouraged Putin from making an attempt to establish closer contacts with Western countries. At the beginning of the 2000s, the acting President Putin invited the then NATO Secretary General George Robertson to Moscow.⁶ This is how he tried to improve the mutual relations that had been damaged during the intervention in Kosovo. During the off-record bilateral meeting, he returned to the issue of Russia's membership in NATO. In fact, Putin took an action to establish closer relations with the USA as early as before the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. He tried to establish working and personal relations with the US President George Bush. There were symbolic gestures made, such as the liquidation of the last remnants of the Soviet geopolitical legacy, i.e., the Cold War signals intelligence base in Lourdes in Cuba as well as the navy base in Cam Ranh Bay in the south of Vietnam. Although the liquidation of the base in Cuba was an especially friendly gesture, Washington mistook the intentions of the Kremlin. Americans believed that it resulted from the fact that Russia could no longer maintain the expensive post-Soviet infrastructure located abroad.

After 9/11 terrorist attacks, Putin not only expressed his solidarity with the US, but he also intended to conclude a Russo-American pact. He was ready to grant the US substantial assistance, also concerning the fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. In these new circumstances, he was also ready to accept the presence of American soldiers in Asia and Transcaucasia with understanding. Furthermore, he did not take any action in response to the withdrawal by the USA from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), signed in 1972 by Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon. The US announced this move in December 2001, arguing that it had to have effective means of defense against terrorist attacks launched by the countries regarded as members of the so-called "axis of evil".⁷ Putin's tolerance for Bush's actions was even more symptomatic, as for 30 years

⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/671495.stm> (accessed 12.04.2020).

⁶ <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340> (accessed 19.05.2020).

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/polish/011213152118.shtml> (accessed 20.03.2020).

the USSR and later the Russian Federation had considered that treaty as the foundation of strategic stability, since its aim was to make it impossible for both nations to destroy each other. At that time, Putin believed that despite the skepticism of the West regarding the integration of Russia with the Euro-Atlantic community, friendly relations between the US and the EU were still possible. It is interesting to observe an opinion voiced by Margaret Thatcher, who stated in a book published in 2002 that Russia was a country that was still a long way from being normal. It had many problems of its own to solve. Even if it solved its own problems, the former UK prime minister argued, its Euro-Asian identity would remain persistent. It would never accept the US as the international leader and, if it were admitted to NATO, it would use obstructive tactics against the US and try to win US allies over to its side (Thatcher 2002, 109).

Bush's administration remained indifferent to Putin's friendly gestures. It was much more involved, first, in the war in Afghanistan and later, in the preparations for the attack on Iraq, which took place in March 2003. In May 2002, during his visit to Moscow, even though Bush made declarations of the final end of the Cold War and the need to conduct the largest reduction of nuclear weapons in history, a new page in relations between Russia and the US was not opened. Soon, relations were adversely affected by the lack of Russia's support for the attack on Iraq, in which Russia acted together with Germany and France. The relations deteriorated further as a result of the so-called "Yukos case" and the Mikhail Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003.⁸ Furthermore, the US would not regard the operation mounted by the Russian security forces in Chechnya as an instance of fighting against international terrorism. In both the United States and the Western countries, there were meetings with the leaders of Chechen fighters. During the proclamation made to Russian citizens in September 2004, after the terrorist attack in Beslan, Putin plainly blamed those who supported the terrorists who aimed at dismembering Russia. Naturally, these words were addressed to the US.⁹

5. Unequivocal change in Russian foreign policy

The Kremlin gradually began to redefine its foreign policy. It came to a conclusion that, as a large country, the international community perceived it as hostile in nature. Consequently, no significant country in the world, and especially the US, wanted a strong Russia, as it might become a serious rival. A Russia that can be exploited and manipulated was much more convenient. Therefore, the country had a choice.

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/16/business/a-new-twist-in-russia-s-yukos-oil-affair.html?n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fPeople%2fL%2fLebedev%2c%20Platon> (accessed 28.04.2020).

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpdIjXow5IQ> (accessed 12.04.2020)

It could either fight for the status of a power and secure for itself the same position in the world as that of the US and China, or it could become a large second-class country such as India or Brazil (Trenin 2006, 87-88).

Moscow took the second phase of NATO enlargement in a relatively calm manner. In this phase, seven countries were admitted, including Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and former Soviet republics. The Baltic States were considered alien since they were strongly determined to choose the pro-Western strategic orientation. However, as a result of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004-2005, as well as the color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the Kremlin came to believe that Washington was making a political entry into the post-Soviet region on a large scale, which Moscow regarded as its exclusive sphere of influence (see Cordesman 2014; Berzina 2014). Furthermore, the Kremlin came to a conclusion that the aim of these actions was not only to drive Russia away from the area of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but also, in the long run, to oust the Russian government. On the other hand, Russian protests against NATO enlargement were perceived in the West as evidence that the Kremlin aspired to restore Russia's imperial status. The West also had additional evidence supporting its opinion. It was, for example, Putin's statement that the collapse of the USSR was the largest geopolitical disaster. Another good case in point was the assassination of a journalist Anna Politkovskaya and a former secret service officer Aleksandr Litvinenko. These facts not only affected Russia's relations with the West, but were also a direct cause of the demonization of Putin in the Western media.

Paradoxically, at the same time, Putin made an attempt at improving cooperation with Germany, whose support was necessary to establish closer relations with the EU. In September 2001, during his visit to Germany, Putin gave a speech to the Bundestag. After a short introduction in Russian, he delivered the main part of the address in German, which was a clear proclamation of Russia's pro-European choice. The German authorities and political elites were convinced that the security on the European continent was not possible without a cooperation with Russia. Putin raised even bolder points. In his opinion, Europe could remain a strong and independent centre for global politics only if it combined its demographic, territorial, economic, cultural, and defensive capabilities with those of Russia. Furthermore, Russia's natural resources were also considered significant.¹⁰ The Russian president's words were applauded.

At that time, Russia was supported by the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, which became important as the new conservative government in Warsaw at the end of 2005 adopted an aggressive political course against both Moscow and Berlin. Warsaw's strategy was reinforced by the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline along the bottom of the Baltic Sea, which Poland treated as a Russo-German

¹⁰ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/37942> (accessed 11.05.2020).

agreement, reached without Poland's consent, reminiscent of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.¹¹ Furthermore, the above-mentioned assassinations of Politkovskaya and Litvinenko were a cause of questioning Russia's identification with European values. Schröder's and Chirac's retirement from politics in 2005 and 2007, respectively, meant that there were no longer political leaders in the EU who supported a close cooperation with Russia. The increasing criticism of Russia in the West induced Putin to make the Munich famous statement at a conference in Munich in February 2007, which marked the end of this stage of Russia's efforts to foster cooperation with the West. The final confirmation of this change was the Russo-Georgian conflict.

Despite the conflict with Georgia, a new Cold War did not start. In September 2008, a global financial crisis that attracted the attention of state leaders erupted. What is more, Barack Obama's victory in the presidential elections in 2008 led to a revision of the US previous foreign policy followed by the Republican Party. Instead of condemning Russia, the US offered the famous 'reset' in the relations between Washington and Moscow (Blank 2010, 333-367). Relations with Russia were not a priority goal for Obama, who had to resolve problems that had been created by the previous administration in Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Putin, who at that time was a prime minister, continued to be an influential politician. It seemed that it was him who controlled the state and approved of the actions of the new president. He gave Medvedev freedom to develop a partnership with western countries on modernization, whose aim was to strengthen the Russian economy with western resources. Additionally, he looked for opportunities to reach an agreement with the United States on security, in which the above-mentioned 'reset' started to produce the first results.

In the spring of 2010, the presidents of the US and Russia, i.e., Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev, signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in Prague, thereby replacing the old treaty of 1991, which had expired in December 2009.¹² Moreover, Russia granted permission to transport military equipment across its territory intended for an operation in Afghanistan, while a transshipment point was established in Ulyanovsk, which was colloquially called the 'NATO base'. However, the period of good relations and cooperation lasted only for a very short time. According to Russia, NATO's actions in Libya, supporting Gaddafi's adversaries and his subsequent overthrow, went far beyond what could be called a humanitarian operation authorized by the UN Security Council. Although Russia was against interference in Libya's affairs, it did not exercise its right to veto. Instead, it abstained from voting and allowed Western countries to conduct the operation (Stempień 2019, 294-315). However, the Kremlin was under the impression that the

¹¹ http://www.gazociag-polnocny.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=115&Itemid=53 (accessed 05.06.2020).

¹² <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1020229,title,USA-i-Rosja-podpisaly-uklad-START,wid,12151167,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1184a7> (accessed 19.05.2020)

West had cheated Russia once again. Russia was also amazed at the US support for antiregime riots in North Africa and the Middle East, i.e., in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, called the Arab Spring (Kaszuba | Stempień 2018, 35-44). Moscow could not understand the policy of leaving once traditional allies alone, such as the President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak, and supporting Islamist movements in their fight against the previous authorities. However, the greatest disappointment for Russia during the presidency of Medvedev was the refusal of the US administration to create a mutual Russo-NATO anti-missile defense system. In addition, it was not without significance for Russia's relations with the West that the leaders of the United States and western countries wanted Medvedev's presidency to continue, describing him as more modern, open and friendlier than Putin. It was a serious affront to Putin when in 2011 Angela Merkel publicly described Medvedev as 'her candidate' in subsequent presidential elections. From Putin's point of view, this statement referred to the internal balance of power of Russia (Zygar 2016).

It is possible to guess that Medvedev's foreign policy, perceived by Putin as ineffective, was one of the reasons for which he decided to run for presidency in 2012. The social protests during the Duma elections in 2011 and the presidential elections in the following year firmly convinced Moscow that it was the West, and especially the USA, that was behind the social discontent. Having been hurt, Putin's response was not to attend the G8 summit in Camp David in May 2012 and the NATO summit in Chicago in the same month. It seems that he was still ready to cooperate with the West, but on the conditions set out during his address at the conference in Munich in 2007, in which equality with the US was a key element in the Russo-US relations. However, Putin's expectations were thwarted by Obama, who responded in the same way and did not attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit (APEC) held in Vladivostok in September 2012. Instead of the president, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton represented the US.¹³

Although the APEC, consisting of 21 countries located around the Pacific Ocean, is based on loose cooperation, it was supposed to show Russia's ambitions to play an important role in the area of Asia and the Pacific. Moreover, its aim was also to balance Russian European policy through Russia's activity in East Asia (Kaczmarek 2012).

Conclusions

The president of the Russian Federation was deeply convinced that the West did not accept his arguments. In a speech in the Duma on 18 March 2015, he clearly expressed all his grudges:

¹³ <https://riss.ru/analitics/2611/> (accessed 18.11.2020).

[...] Time after time they lied to us (the West), made decisions behind our backs, put up with *fait accompli*. That was the case with NATO enlargement to the east, with the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. Each time they said, 'it does not concern you'. It is easy to say that it does not apply. Yes, with the deployment of a missile defense system, not counting our sense of danger, the machine has started, it works. This was the case during talks on visa problems, with promises of fair competition, with free access to global markets. [...] Today it is necessary to end hysterics, reject the cold-war rhetoric and reconcile with an obvious fact: Russia is a sovereign, active participant in international reality, just like other countries, it has its national interests, which should be noticed and respected. [...]

To sum up this thread of deliberations, the West not only underestimated, but ignored Russia's way of thinking. On the other hand, those who made the decision in the Kremlin were well aware of the carelessness of the West. They correctly assessed that the maneuver involving the capture of Crimea would be a surprise, not resulting in a military intervention. From the perspective of the Western states and European public opinion, Moscow's actions deserve condemnation. The West was surprised with and indignant at the actions of the Kremlin, because there is a widespread belief that the times of occupying another territory in the imperial style and annexation have passed forever. In the modern world, the norms and principles of the emergence of new states, as a result of a referendum or humanitarian intervention by international organizations legitimized by the United Nations have evolved. However, from the point of view of the Russian authorities, as well as the majority of the population, Ukraine is historically part of Russia. Therefore, it is necessary to defend against a potential attack on the western borders, and the friendly authorities in Kiev constitute a strategic and cultural imperative. For Russia, it would be best to impose such a political system that would guarantee a full control and prevent a future integration with NATO and the EU, in fact transforming this state into a Russian protectorate.¹⁴

In the opinion of the Russians, moral reasons are on the side of Putin, who is trying to restore a status of a respected world power to Russia. The use of secretive methods, disinformation, deceit, lies, and a military force to annex Crimea allowed him to gain support in Russia and eastern Ukraine. It also surprised the West, which had lost control over the course of events and could not effectively oppose the Russian annexation. It also could not react to the threat of force, a perfectly organized informational and non-informational operation of the Russian Federation.

Seven years after the conference in Munich, the relations between the Russian Federation with the West became very similar to what they had been like during the Cold War.

¹⁴ <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-03-19/rosyjski-plan-wasalizacji-ukrainy> (accessed 19.05.2020).

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