



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conference on

Russia in the World after September 11th 2001

27 April 2002,
Moscow

Abstract

In cooperation with the Moscow Association for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation (AEAC) and the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Science, the Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies (LIEIS) organised a half-day round table discussion on the standing and role of Russia in the world in the wake of September 11th 2001 and the ensuing events. This meeting took place against the background of a rapidly evolving international situation, not only with respect to the so-called 'war against terrorism', but also in terms of the future of international organisations such as the EU (and the possibilities of a common foreign and defence policy) and NATO, particular the new NATO-Russia Council, to be signed on 28 Mai in Rome in the presence of President Vladimir Putin and President George W. Bush.

Approximately 25 participants, including several Russian and Western professors of international relations and also younger scholars and graduate students, analysed the world situation in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the response on the part of the USA and its allies. All the participants agreed that the world has entered a new era and that Russia needs to assimilate this systemic change and its new position if it is again to play an important role on the world stage.

In the course of three main discussion sessions and on the basis of short presentations and interventions, the debates revolved around the present and future relations between Russia on the one hand, and the USA, Europe and Central Asia on the other hand. These relations are not only of a bilateral nature, but have been, and in future, are likely to be mediated by a number of institutions, including NATO, the European Union (EU), as well as the United Nations (UN). It was stressed by all participants that in the wake of the events related to September 11th the end of multilateralism has been consumed and Russia has found itself in a weaker position than ever before in the post-Second World War era. This new constellation

implies not only that the nature of the relations with the USA is at the centre of all strategic considerations, but also that Russia may hold the key to an alternative strategic pan-European alliance which brings together Western, Central, Eastern, South-Eastern Europe as well as Russia.

I. The World Situation after September 11th 2001

Ambassador Anatoly Adamishin, AEAC Vice-President, argued that Samuel Huntington's thesis of the 'clash of civilisations' has some mileage insofar as most contemporary conflicts take place along the lines of cultural and civilisational differences and boundaries. The danger which lies in underestimating this dimension of the current political and military system, as well as the increasing privatisation of politics and the rise of private multinational co-operations, is that all of these factors have contributed to undermining traditional forms of multilateral diplomacy.

Dr. Armand Clesse, Director of the LIEIS, raised the question as to whether Russia is fully aware of the new world situation and of its own standing within the emerging new order. He wondered whether Russia had taken the full measure of its economic decline and the loss of its political power, especially since its practically unconditional backing of the USA in the so-called 'war against terrorism'. Even if Russia still disposes of the nuclear threat and deterrent, it cannot avoid facing up to the question of its future political and military strategy and of its role in the system of international relations.

Professor Andras Balogh from the University of Budapest put forward the thesis that the world has entered a period of transition since September 11th, since, contrary to the British strategy in the 19th century, the US has no clear consistent vision, while Europe, despite its assets, does not quite know how to pursue its vision.

Dr. Christopher Coker, Lecturer in international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, claimed that US unilateralism was not born after September 11th 2001, but as early as 1989. In a first stage, during the Clinton Administration, the unilateral approach of the USA took the form of congressional initiatives on the one hand, and military interventions decided by the President on the other. The US elections in 2000 and September 11th have marked the alignment of Congress and Presidency and therefore an almost unprecedented form of national unity and unconditional support (including by large parts of the population) for US military adventures.

II. The centrality of Russia's relations with the USA

Dr. Coker argued further that this new configuration implies that relations with the USA can take two forms: either 'band-wagoning' (e.g. the British stance since the Second World War) or else balancing (e.g. the French position, based on national sovereignty and on building up the EU). This is all the more true since the USA does no longer distinguish between allies and associates (as was the case under the Wilson doctrine) but today only accepts associates and has no longer any stake in allies.

The Deputy Director of the USA and Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Science, Dr. Victor Kremeniuk, pointed to the need to denounce some of the myths associated with the world prior to, and after, September 11th. US-Russian relations were hostile throughout the Cold War, ruled by the nuclear threat and the maintenance of the *status quo*. After 1989, the entente was of a very short duration, ending with Prime Minister's Primakov U-turn in respect of the strategic alliance between Russia and NATO. September 11th seems to have inaugurated some form of professional relationship between the leaders of Russia and the US, without, however, defining a new foundation for a permanent strategic partnership.

Several students expressed their pessimism as to the US readiness to reform the current form of international relations and to revise its unilateralist stance. Similarly, they criticised a lack of clarity on the part of the current Russian leadership, namely with respect to the use of the nuclear threat and deterrent. One of the central questions which emerged at this stage of the debates is the possibility and scope for reform of the various international organisations, above all the UN. According to Dr. Vladimir Baranovsky, there are three basic scenarios: first, the USA has no medium- or long-term vision and Russia could realistically play a more important role in shaping the contours of a future system of international relations. Second, US actions serve not only its own, but also Russia's interests, for example in fighting terrorism and exploiting petrol resources in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. Third, US and Russian strategies collide and there will be a period of sustained tension.

Dr. Mirsky mentioned two forms of anti-Americanism, one common general form which is increasingly widespread in the world, and one form specific to Russia and going back to 19th century history. Both forms are not only a manifestation of nationalism, but also, and increasingly so, a strong reaction to US unilateralism, which implies that all accounts of multilateralism lack any convincing basis. This is also to say that both powers, the USA as much as Russia, need to adopt a balanced approach, predicated upon pragmatism, not ideology, and on cooperation, not confrontation.

Dr. Coker pointed to two of Russia's distinct assets in seeking to redefine its relations with the USA: first, the important natural resources and, second, the crucial geographical positioning with respect to US military campaign against terrorism. The central question for Russia is then how to use these two assets to its advantage.

III. What might be the nature of Russia's future relations with Europe and Central Asia?

Prof. Balogh drew attention to the crucial importance of the future Russia-Europe relations: he argued that Europe is characterised by generally high economic growth and a diverse yet united culture, both of which are important for Russia's economic development and its political integration. What emerged from this account is not so much simple resistance and opposition to the US, but a genuinely different, alternative vision of the future international relations system. The Director of the Institute of Europe, Dr. Dmitry Danilov, agreed that the relations with Europe will increasingly be at the centre of Russia's geo-political and economic considerations, but that a newly founded partnership with Europe can only be realised as part of a pan-European civilisation, cultural and political space and framework. To this pan-European space belong not only Central and Eastern Europe, but also South-East Europe and

possibly further regions. Moreover, such a vision is realistic only if all parties involved agree on a common definition of European culture and civilisation.

The debates intimated that such a new Russian and European partnership is increasingly possible, subject to the condition that both cease to view the USA as the only important interlocutor and their only possible future. Dr. Coker emphasised that Europe should become aware of the imminence of the withdrawal of US troops from the Balkans and that Russia will have to accept an extension of NATO towards former Socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. However, in the medium run the current US strategy will lead to a political and cultural vacuum at the very heart of Europe. This will be the crucial opportunity and test for the potential of a new alliance between Europe and Russia.

Dr. Sergey Lounev from the IMEMO focused on the potential for cooperation between Russia and Asia, arguing that it is quite possibly more important than the potential for cooperation between Russia and Europe. For Russia's natural resources are indispensable to the development of Central and South-East Asia (mainly China) and the scope of market outlets on the Asian continent for Russian products exceeds by far that of Europe. It is also true, according to Dr. Lounev, that the Asian culture is much closer to Russia's, in particular the middle-way between the extremes of individualism and collectivism. Europe will be important for Russia in terms of economic cooperation, but any political and strategic alliance requires that Europe fully respects Russia's peculiarities and interests.

Outlook

The round-table discussions served a two-fold purpose: first, establishing and consolidating contacts between the AEAC, the Institute of Europe of the RAS and the LIEIS, particularly among the younger, developing scholars and the graduate students. These fruitful contacts have the potential of yielding further interesting results on the basis of future research work and future meetings. Second, the discussions pinpointed a number of problematics which need to be addressed, as well as some interesting approaches which might have some mileage in conceptualising international relations after the events related to 11th September 2001. For instance, a common European and Russian project seems to command an increasing interest among scholars (and perhaps also decision-makers), but there is a distinct lack of ideas and concepts capable of articulating such a common vision. In particular, the notion of a pan-European civilisation needs to be spelled out and explicated. This also begs the question as to which political forces are in a position to activate those cultural resources in order to overcome the present ideological impasse which seems to consist in centrism for the sake of it and which is void of any vision beyond accommodation with, and possibly regulation of, the *status quo*.

Another problematic intimated by the discussions concerns the future geo-political and military strategies. Both Russia and Europe, albeit in different ways, are – for the time being – locked in the so-called ‘war against terrorism’. According to the logic underpinning the present US approach, this war will go on indefinitely, both at home and abroad. The question for Russia as well as Europe then is how to coordinate action against organized international crime, including cross-border terrorism, while not launching fully-fledged wars on countries

because they simply dare disagree with US policy and conflict with US interest. Moreover, both Russia and Europe will have to decide whether to continue to back pro-Western corrupt oligarchies and to ignore the Muslim opposition, or whether to engage in a critical dialogue with the latter. International security, be it in the Middle East or in Central Asia, will hinge on such a wholly new approach.

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