NEW RULES OR NO RULES?

XI ANNUAL VALDAI DISCUSSION CLUB MEETING PARTICIPANTS’ REPORT
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In Search of an Order

For those who believe in the magic of numbers, the year 2014 was further proof in its existence. The World War I centenary had been anticipated in awe and History, by taking another dramatic twist, confirmed the worst of expectations. It pronounced that centuries-old conflicts are still with us and that such concepts as the balance of powers, borders, and sovereignty are still relevant even in the era of a global interdependence.

According to the British scholar Eric Hobsbawm, centuries can be “long” or “short” in political terms. Hobsbawm’s 20th century was “short”, spanning the period between 1914 and 1991. 21st century heralded as a post-Cold war century could be even shorter spanning between 1989 and 2014. So, probably it is better to define the last two decades in the way the prominent European social scientist and historian, Zygmunt Bauman did period as Interregnum, a period with no solid basis for politics, economics or social order. He coined the term liquid modernity to characterize this condition.

The Ukrainian crisis – and prior to that, the crisis in the Middle East – underscored the evanescence of many post-Cold war institutions. It exposed the numerous illusions based on self-suggestion or “strategic partnership” mantras in the absence of real trust.

The biggest anniversaries of 2014 were similar in that they were all related to shaking the foundations of the world order. Apart from the WWI centenary, we had the 75th anniversary of WWII. Even the fall of the Berlin Wall, whose 25th anniversary was celebrated last year, was an act of destruction, albeit perceived as a positive development by Europeans and the West as a whole. The old system was unattractive, but stable, the new attractive but as it turned out unstable.

In terms of anniversaries, 2015 seems to be more inspiring. Two hundred years ago the Congress of Vienna ended, laying the foundation for the “concert of nations” and paving the way for the golden era of European diplomacy. Seventy years ago, WWII ended and the UN was established, making the world order relatively manageable in the following decades. Forty years ago, the Helsinki Accords were signed, settling the postwar European borders and defining the rules of behavior. Each of these landmark events entailed the positive stabilization of an essentially anarchic international system. It comes as no surprise that we now hear calls to put the world in order by diplomatic means.

Congress of Vienna
Red lines and Rosy Dreams

These anniversaries remind us of the events related to successful or, conversely, disastrous attempts at constructing an efficient political order. Even if we believe that the contemporary world works better in many respects than it did in 1815 or 1989, the danger of a large-scale war has not evaporated.

We hear this from various political figures – from die-hard conservatives who only believe in the parity of offensive capabilities to Mikhail Gorbachev who three decades ago ushered in an era of high hopes and idealistic expectations. Not so long ago such warnings were routinely dismissed: such things were deemed impossible in an open world of global interdependence, and the traditional concepts of power were regarded as hopelessly obsolete. But today, it is beyond dispute: openness and interdependence by themselves do not increase the level of global security. They change the external conditions, not the eternal principles of international relations based on the balance of competition and cooperation. The combination of openness and mistrust tends to be destructive.

Indeed, the classical concepts fail to reflect the ongoing changes, require additions and adaptation to the swiftly changing conditions. Technological revolution made many believe that the past could not teach us anything about the future. But it would be strange to believe that globalization has changed the actors’ fundamental instincts and intentions. The international system is never static, regardless of what views of the world order are currently dominating. Anarchy is the natural state of international relations and the international players will never rein it in if they don’t work hard to maintain a balance. This requires workable, that is universally recognized, rules of behavior. Or at least the notion of “red lines” which you should not cross if you don’t want to face fatal consequences.

The rules, meanwhile, are not some kind of commandments carved in stone, they emerge from perpetual work aimed at coordinating the actors’ interests. If this work is discontinued and either side begins to believe that the order that sits well with it will preserve itself – or makes the wrong choice of measures to maintain it – the erosion and subsequent collapse of this order is inevitable. Decades ago, the Soviet Union fell victim to its own miscalculations in both domestic and foreign policies. But history has shown that inadequate estimation of capabilities is not something that was unique to the Soviet Union. What is more we are living in “the age of the weak”. According to a remarkable Harvard study, in the asymmetric wars that broke out between 1800 and 1849, the weaker side /in terms of soldiers and weapons/ achieved its strategic goals in 12 percent of cases. But in the wars that erupted between 1950 and 1998, the weaker side prevailed much more often – in 55 percent of the cases. For the weaker side it is not needed anymore to defeat or destroy, it is enough to disrupt the work of its enemy’s machine.

The military and ideological domination of the West that came with the end of the Cold War did not succeed to make the system more manageable. Yes, the West was able to monopolize the right to speak on behalf of the whole international community and for some time this was universally recognized. But it failed to rebuild the world in the spirit of tranquility and stability, ensure the triumph of its own principles even within the confines of a cultural area close to its own borders (Russia serves as a spectacular example). Francis Fukuyama’s The End of History and the Last Man was a bestselling book in the trans-Atlantic world in the early 1990s, but never became popular internationally, unlike Samuel Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations. The experiment to create an America-led unipolar world has demonstrated that a single power is unable to manage world politics. However, the transition to a multi-polar model based on diverse political cultures, beliefs, economic
and technological capabilities has so far only exacerbated the symptoms of anarchy. And the emerging powers’ bid to revise the de facto established rules bears risks for both themselves and the status quo. Multipolarity sounds good but it tastes bad at the moment.

A knot that can’t be severed

The spread of democracy and market economy has had a controversial effect, too. They led to divergence rather than convergence. The international community as a whole is becoming more democratic, and the number of actors vying for the right to participate in the construction of a new world order is growing. Arguably, there has never been so many of them. But they are predictably unsatisfied with the fact that international organizations are perpetuating the privileges of a narrow group of countries (the Big Five permanent members of the UN Security Council). Consequently, states and societies have yet to find the optimum formula for coexisting in a world with a growing number of players and contested or ignored game rules.

Economic interdependence doesn’t mitigate contradictions – on the contrary, it often aggravates them. Geopolitical competition complicated with a lack of understanding between the key players is undermining the world economic system. Citizens’ distrust of governments, political and business elites is the new universal norm. It turns out that governments (both democratic and undemocratic) are virtually unable to govern their countries. They have more and more troubles taxing the rich, arresting terrorists and integrating immigrants. Often, national governments are even unable to identify the reasons for their crises, which are frequently caused by a combination of internal and external factors.

The type of instability varies from country to country depending on the form of government, but the common denominator is that world politics is increasingly defined by the countries’ internal problems, not their direct competition. Or, rather, external competition is the consequence of internal disruption, contradictions grow and they become
increasingly difficult to untangle. Alexander the Great, who sliced the knot of the Phrygian king Gordias with the stroke of a sword to avoid untangling it, is not a role model here. Everything is entangled so intricately that a sword would destroy both the ties and the fabric of national interests constituting the knot.

Contrary to the historical wisdom which declares that national states must mobilize their internal (financial, human, and technological) resources to remain influential on the world arena, today’s great powers tend to rely on global capabilities to achieve social and political stability at home. The crisis of globalization, deepened by the global financial decline, leads to a lower governability of the world’s most powerful nations. The new world order is based more on a general decline in power than the broadly discussed shift of power from the North to the South. As Moisés Naim puts it, “power no longer buys as much as it did in the past. In the twenty-first century, power is easier to get, harder to use — and easier to lose”.

The growing confusion of the ruling elites generates dangerous illusions as to how to respond to the increasing number of challenges. One of them is isolation, which comes in two variants. The first variant is defined by the belief of the leading powers (so far, these are the western powers) that they could isolate the trouble makers and transform them by isolating them. The second one is based on the premise that a state can “close up”, isolate itself from the external environment and defend its sovereignty, therefore relying on the autarkic idea of self-sufficiency. Both approaches fail to pass any reality check and the more leaders try to follow this path, the bigger the damage is to everyone.

The world players are united by their fear of the specter of ungovernability. Over the past five years political protests have erupted in more than seventy countries around the world. Some of them are autocracies, others are democracies; some of them are rich and prosperous, others are poor and depressed. Some protests took place in the countries hit hardest by the economic crisis, while others broke out in the fastest growing economies, which have been left largely unscathed. In some countries riots led to the overthrow of governments; elsewhere they simply became disruptive to the governments’ operations. But each of these cases gave the feeling of a deficit of power or the inadequate results of its application. Even worse, one could feel the lack of political fantasy, which would enable those in power to have a fresh look at the changing context and put forward some brand new ideas. So Fukuyama, having proclaimed the end of ideological diversity a quarter of a century ago, had good reason to languish for a leftist alternative – and acknowledge that no one was offering it.

The majority of crucial global players are rather guided by the hope to manage the backlash against globalization than to manage globalization itself. It is no accident that most countries have come to regard openness and interdependence as a threat rather than an opportunity. The responsibility of governments to their populations for avoiding upheavals is growing, while their ability to control the developments is decreasing. New factors – primarily of a technological and communicational nature – are emerging. They evolve according to their own logic and outpace governments’ ability to react to them. In other words, new technologies give individuals capabilities comparable or even surpassing those of governmental structures. For example, even as governments seek to control the Internet, the life of millions of people becomes unimaginable without web technologies, and any attempt to sever them will cause a shock to the entire society.

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damage control. The second one is for individual countries, or cohesive groups of countries, to consolidate within national or regional confines in order to minimize the impact of external factors. Even though it is quite evident that the first option is more efficient (and, possibly, the only rational one), the entire logic of the international situation tempts global players to employ the second model.

THE WORLD PLAYERS ARE UNITED BY THEIR FEAR OF THE SPECTER OF UNGOVERNABILITY

Politics vs. economics
The political contradictions of major states put into question the very foundation of economic globalization. Non-economic factors (national security interests) stand behind the widespread use of sanctions, and this is enshrined in the fundamental documents of the GATT/WTO. But the interpretation of national security interests is at the discretion of governments, which practically rules out any coordinated efforts. The logic of economic viability gives way to the logic of political confrontation, even if the latter harms the country’s own economic positions. It is noteworthy that both sides in the “sanctions war” for Ukraine – the US/EU and Russia – have threatened to use the mechanisms of the World Trade Organization to contest their opponents’ actions, but have not done so. Everyone realizes that these developments have nothing whatsoever to do with economics.

The Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated that the political needs of a state outweigh business interests, although since the end of the 20th century it has been a common belief that the world is progressing in the opposite direction. The business community, in spite of its huge capabilities and operations beyond national jurisdictions, bows to government pressure. The era when the power of transnational capital seemed to be unlimited is apparently coming to an end. The paradox, however, is that in order to solve the multiplying problems of developing and maintaining stability the states need external resources, which are traditionally controlled by private transnational actors. Meanwhile, the aforementioned technologies retain their trans-border nature and so evade national control.

The state itself is in an ambiguous situation.

Rapid fall of the Russian currency at the end of 2014
Under pressure from the global environment it seeks to expand its capabilities to protect itself and control supranational processes. And societies, alarmed at the impact of the global environment, expect governments to protect them. But the demand for a more active state role is countered by the deepening mistrust for it by the citizens.

Back in the mid-2000s many scholars and politicians predicted a renaissance of leftist sentiments amid the evident flaws of the neoliberal economic model and growing indignation at the global ideological monopolism that took hold after the collapse of “real socialism”. In reality, we have something different. The dirigiste approach, envisaging a strong directive influence of the state over the economy, is still not in demand. Leftist mass movements have not generated a realistic alternative, focusing mostly on a harsh critique of the existing omnipotence of the market. Instead of getting a left alternative we got spontaneous anarchism, whose adepts are not the poor, but the prosperous middle classes fearing the loss of their well-being.

The decline in trust for the market does not lead to a growth of trust for the state as a controlling body. Conversely, people are more and more disappointed in the ability of politicians and ruling classes as a whole to solve the problems of nations. Citizens can see that governments are struggling for the credit of trust and expanding authorities to stay the course and exert more pressure on the populations.

**THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE POLITICAL NEEDS OF A STATE OUTWEIGHT BUSINESS INTERESTS**

The phenomenon of democracy with no real choice, i.e. a real ideological alternative, leads to the rise of marginal populist parties and movements whose aim is not to implement their agenda (which is usually rather vague), but to discredit the establishment. Hence the popularity of anarchistic ideas that the state will be gradually supplanted by new technologies, from Internet democracy and omnipresent social media to cryptocurrencies and “big data”. And the fact that these expectations are essentially utopic and that technologies are always only an instrument does not mean that the state can simply brush off these ideas. Their emergence clearly indicates a crisis of new governance models. Meanwhile, attempts by the establishment to expose populist opponents, not to mention the desire to limit their political capabilities, often lead to an opposite result, especially as the ruling parties are unable to offer anything new even at the level of rhetoric.

The paradox of power in a world fixated on internal security problems is that as governments decrease their vulnerability to external influences and pressures more and more successfully, their own influence and power abroad dwindles.

An America self-sufficient in energy may not fear upheavals in the Middle East, therefore instability in the Gulf will provide less influence on it. At the same time, the United States’ independence from Arabian oil would mean a decreasing American influence in the region and a reduction in the latter’s motivation to have a solid relationship with the US. Saudi Arabia won’t have to rely on a union with Washington now that the United States doesn’t rely on its oil. As Russia is successfully nationalizing its elites and repatriating capital and the children of prosperous parents studying in Western schools, it is significantly losing its influence in Europe and the US and is unlikely to restore it. China, whose economy depends primarily on internal consumption, will also be losing its erstwhile role in the world: as its dependence will decrease, so will its leverage.

The secret of power in a world of interdependence is that the sources of vulnerability are at the same time the sources of influence. The moment a country’s elites become less dependent on their own society (by opening accounts in foreign banks, sending children to study abroad or moving production overseas to benefit from cheap labor), they lose its trust and, consequently, the ability to govern. Conversely, as they focus on internal affairs and follow a path of isolation, their capabilities
to control their own country expand, but instruments to influence external factors evanesce.

Governments will need to find a fine balance, as they now have a twofold goal: to strengthen their countries’ sovereignty and decrease the negative consequences of interdependence while at the same time maintaining a proactive presence in the external environment. This means the additional appeal of regionalism as an alternative to both globalism and isolationism.

The great powers, if we judge them by their actions, have given up on the idea of creating a functional system of world economic management and increasingly rely on their own trade and political blocs. Therefore, if several years ago regionalization was seen as a strategy for building a more global and interdependent world, today it is more often perceived as an alternative to the world order and the rise of regionalism has become a new norm. But creation of constructive and efficient regional orders is no less daunting a task than building a world order. What’s more, if this path is successful, it doesn’t mean that the planet will disintegrate into unrelated fragments. Interrelation and interdependence of the big blocs will still be with us, but the principles of their coexistence in this format are yet to be developed. The next stage of political evolution of the world system will essentially be about this.

**Sovereignty and interventionism**

Despite the numerous changes and upheavals of the late 20th – early 21st centuries, the basic principle of the international system has not changed: the nation state, albeit experiencing many new influences, remains its main structural unit. The core of this multifaceted and complex discussion on the rules and norms of behavior in the world is the attitude to sovereignty, which has been a key concept of international relations since the emergence of the Westphalian system in the 17th century. Attempts to reconsider sovereignty have been the single most important factor affecting the international situation since the early 1990s.

The fundamental problem of sovereignty was behind the attempts to build a “new world order”, beginning with the Desert Storm operation in January 1991. The situation was almost unique in that virtually the entire international community (including the Soviet

*Citizens throw stones at the UN troops for their failure to end bloodshed, Kongo, 22.10.2008*
Union in its final days) joined efforts to protect the sovereignty of a state that was attacked, Kuwait. Importantly, the process launched at that time logically led to a flagrant violation of accepted norms - military intervention in a sovereign state, Iraq, its occupation and regime change sidestepping the UN Security Council. This, in turn, set in motion a deep crisis of the entire “new world order” concept.

The Arab Spring and the Ukraine crisis have highlighted the issue of how the international community reacts to internal upheavals and regime changes in sovereign states. One can argue that such collisions, along with territorial conflicts, will lead to a chain of perturbations that will accompany the emergence of a polycentric world in the years to come. At the same time the rise of the Islamic State made it clear why non-interference of the domestic politics of others could be the guiding principles of international politics.

The classical notion of sovereignty as the right of governments to act at their discretion on the territory under their control is highly unlikely to make a comeback. But the 1990s’ liberal approach legitimizing external intervention has not proved effective, and the results have been unsatisfactory in most cases. In practice, the R2P (responsibility to protect) operations end up being sheer foreign intervention into complex internal processes, often to support one side of the conflict and change the regime. This can be a path to major international cataclysms.

The responsibility to protect, which is a moral, not legally binding notion, showcases a disconnect between the formal principles of the law and its interpretation by particular participants in international relations. A glaring example of the ambiguous nature of the post-Cold War international law environment was the conclusion of the Independent International Commission on Kosovo, which declared in 1999 that NATO’s military campaign against Yugoslavia was “illegal, but justified”. This formal distinction between the notions of “legal” and “legitimate” has had dire consequences for international law. This contradiction has not been overcome, on the contrary, it has only aggravated over time. It reached its peak during the Ukrainian crisis, when the moves of all parties – both direct participants and external forces – were defined by political, not legal, logic. The Ukrainian collision has provided numerous examples of

**IN PRACTICE, THE R2P OPERATIONS END UP BEING SHEER FOREIGN INTERVENTION INTO COMPLEX INTERNAL PROCESSES**

Does containment work?

Major shifts in the perception of the role and significance of nuclear weapons have taken place in the post-Cold War era. The hegemonic approach demonstrated by the most powerful nations and the general growth of instability have led to the widespread view that these weapons are a tool to protect sovereignty and repel a potential aggressor.

The traditional role of nuclear weapons
The view that responsible actors will never use nuclear weapons undermines both the basis of the deterrent as well as the stabilizing role these weapons played in the past. The fact that nuclear tests were discontinued many years ago and the risk of a possible use of the “bomb” is being downplayed actually decreases world stability more than enhances it. Meanwhile the intensity of the propaganda war that accompanies, for example, the Ukraine crisis, makes one fear that without the nuclear deterrent a conflict between the great powers could be not just virtual, but real.

In spite of touted initiatives like the Global Zero campaign and plans to build a nuclear-free world, in practice great powers, primarily Russia and the United States, are upgrading their arsenals. The American missile defense project, albeit controversial in terms of efficiency, can stimulate other nuclear states to expand their

An armed conflict similar to the last century’s world wars is unlikely but cannot be completely ruled out. Following the end of the Cold War, the prospect of irresponsible regimes or criminal non-state actors getting hold of weapons of mass destruction was deemed the major threat. This risk undoubtedly remains, but as the era when the world was permanently ready for a possible nuclear conflict becomes a distant past, a new danger emerges: “the threshold of fear” firmly established in the second half of the 20th century is reducing.
arsenals. This would finally negate the moral-political basis of the current non-proliferation regime. When the Non-Proliferation Treaty was being signed, the compromise between the powers that were allowed to be nuclear and the rest was that the former committed to take steps to reduce and, in the long-term, destroy their nuclear arsenals. This rationale was already brought into question in 1995, when the NPT was extended indefinitely, i.e. the nuclear powers were no longer formally bound by any reduction commitments. Meanwhile, if the major powers begin a new race of nuclear capabilities, then others will have to take their own decisions on how to ensure their security. The scary forecasts of the “domino effect”-type increase in the number of nuclear powers in the next decades are most probably exaggerated, as procuring a bomb requires a huge investment which not every country aspiring to have one can afford. But no one seriously believes that the non-proliferation regime is inviolable.

As noted above, the issues of nuclear weapons and sovereignty are becoming increasingly interrelated. The post-Cold War experience of the violent overthrow of sovereign countries’ governments has given nuclear weapons a new function. Now it is the last trump, a guarantee of non-aggression. The example of North Korea on the one hand and Iraq or Libya on the other clearly indicates that if a country has reasons to fear external pressure, going nuclear is a rational option. This is another serious challenge to the non-proliferation regime.

Finally, the Ukrainian crisis has shown that non-nuclear states cannot rely on security guarantees from the nuclear powers. The 1994 Budapest memorandum was not enough to secure Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

The broad range of issues related to the role of nuclear weapons in today’s world requires a serious unbiased discussion, and the responsibility to initiate it lies with the two nuclear superpowers, the United States and Russia. The model of bilateral negotiations on reduction (previously – limitation) of nuclear
arms, pursued from the 1970s into 2010s, is hopelessly obsolete. These discussions could conceivably move to a multilateral format and develop new common principles, covering in particular the possibility of providing nuclear guarantees to concerned nations. A new conceptualization would enable the participants to leave behind the current state of harsh Russian-American confrontation rooted in the past and start finding answers to questions related to the common future.

**IN RECENT YEARS, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS HAVE BEEN SHARPLY CRITICIZED FOR THEIR INEFFECTIVENESS**

**Transformation of the global system**

The combination of socioeconomic circumstances inside a country and growing economic and geopolitical competition in the international arena creates the conditions for the aforementioned conflicts and enhances the countries’ urge to detach from the global environment. It is no secret that the “keys” to the global system are in the West’s hands. The smarter participants in world politics and economics, such as the countries of East and Southeast Asia, have been successfully capitalizing on this system. But the aggravation of the Ukrainian crisis dramatically illustrated the capabilities of political impact. Pressure exerted on the Visa and MasterCard international payment systems, as well as the SWIFT bank communications system to block Russia for political reasons undermines the main tenet of globalization: it is supposed to be equitable, because it is the market that decides, not the governments.

Transformation of the global system will be fraught with upheavals, but the trajectories will be different.

One of them is democratization of world governance, adaptation of the current institutions to a diversified world, considering the opinions of various groups and coordination of interests, based on the economic and political weight of participants. However, representation in itself is not a cure-all and provides no guarantee of
efficient governance. Not every aspiring power, even if it has the material resources, possesses the adequate capabilities. And those who possess them do not always use their potential for the good of world governance.

In recent years, international institutions have been sharply criticized for their inefficiency. In terms of their performance this critique is probably justified, but it would be unjust to make them, and especially structures such as the United Nations, responsible for the dysfunction of the world order. The UN is a mirror reflecting the state of affairs in the world community, a function of its ability to negotiate. The UN, just as many other international institutions, is as workable as its member states allow it to be. What the world is experiencing right now is not a crisis of its institutions, but a crisis of the very notion of what is possible and desirable. The same framework can be filled with more up-to-date content, adequate to the current situation, if the participants agree to coordinate their basic interests and pursue reasonable self-containment.

**IT IS POINTLESS NOW TO DISCUSS AN ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS**

The UN was conceived as a tool to prevent military conflicts between the leading nations, not to exercise global governance. In this sense, the end of the Cold War did not expand, but, conversely, narrowed the organization’s capabilities. The West believed that its victory in the systemic confrontation of the second half of the 20th century gave it a moral and political right to make global decisions. But the United Nations’ institutional structure has not changed – it reflected the results of another conflict, WWII – and it was impossible to reform it based on the “informal” victory in the Cold War. So the United States preferred to bypass an international body it deemed obsolete, thereby challenging the original mission of the United Nations.

As a polycentric world is taking shape, the United Nations can take a deep breath, since there is not, and cannot be, any other international forum comparable to it in terms of legitimacy and representation. But this requires an agreement of old and new leaders to make the UN structure fit the new reality. There are no precedents for such a peaceful agreement (absent a major military conflict shaping the world hierarchy), but its absence in the present climate will only precipitate a decline in overall efficiency and authority of the Security Council.

It is pointless now to discuss an alternative system of global institutions. The problem that most countries face today is the need to save money or use it more efficiently, therefore no one will pay to duplicate those institutions already in place. Meanwhile, the changing nature of the global environment and its transition to polycentrism, i.e. empowerment of world regions, creates an objective demand on institutionalization of the “poles”, the establishment of powerful regional organizations responsible for “their” part of the world. In this case the role of global institutions could transform into the coordination of activities of the regional “pillars”, elaboration and enforcement of their rules of interaction.

So far the only objective process is the gradually rising prominence of the United Nations General Assembly, which does not have the right of veto. And although its resolutions have no direct action, they create the atmosphere of world politics. It is noteworthy that on many issues the majority of mankind speaks out against the moves of the Security Council permanent members, in fact voicing their distrust for the way the majors govern.

The other path is that of growing sovereignization, attempts of state institutions, struggling for authorities and control, to close up as they face external influences and processes. No particular country can be “unplugged” from globalization unless it is ready to be doomed to autarky and backwardness. However, signs of disappointment are present in various countries and societies and their efforts, albeit uncoordinated, can begin to seriously undermine the global system. The harsh
measures of the West to retain domination are likely to generate counteraction.

The debates on how to regulate the Internet can serve as a conceptual model of broader contradictions. Quite recently, the World Wide Web was believed to be a symbol and a rampart of globalization and the process of its spread and deepening was considered irreversible. Today we see an earnest discussion on probable fragmentation of the Internet, and demands to nationalize its segments or, at the very least, to protect them from possible manipulations from abroad, are heard even from the established democracies, not to mention the countries regarded as undemocratic.

The perception of the Internet as such is changing. As cyberspace is evolving into a battlefield, both in terms of information and militarily, the entire philosophy of the Web as a “space of freedom” is being eroded and all the limitations of interstate rivalry begin to apply to it. One possible way out is to make the Internet more democratic and accountable to national governments, for example by the UN taking over the Internet administration functions from the US-based ICANN corporation. The second way, if this doesn’t work, is to really break up the World Wide Web into regional or national webs, which would have a powerful impact on globalization as such. But it cannot be ruled out that the latter can become the consequence of the former if countries fail to find an efficient way to coordinate their interests internationally.

Paradoxically, the possible fragmentation of the Internet into national or regional zones cannot solve the big issue of security, since complete isolation from the other zones is impossible, and where there are any points of contact, the swiftly evolving technologies will ultimately find a way of mutual penetration.

A concert of projects

The 20th century was an era when ideologies dominated international politics, which made it unique in comparison to all previous historical periods. The end of the Cold War meant the end of ideological rivalry, but, as it soon became clear, rivalry in all of its forms – military-strategic, geopolitical, economic – did not disappear. In a sense, the world system reverted to the traditional principles of permanent struggle-interaction of its key actors, but in a different format. Erosion of ideologies gave way to more archaic forms of ideas-based organization. As many societies are seeking national identities, the world of “liquid modernity” is attempting
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1914

«TRIPLE ALLIANCE»

Key actors:
GERMANY
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY
ITALY

Total number of allies by the end of WWI:
8 countries

Year of foundation:
1882

Year of ceasing functions:
1915

«ENTENTE»

Key actors:
GREAT BRITAIN
FRANCE
RUSSIA

Total number of allies by the end of WWI:
25 countries

Year of foundation:
1907

Year of ceasing functions:
1920

From 1915

Key actors:
GERMANY
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY
BULGARIA
OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Cold war

NATO

Key actors:
USA
GERMANY
FRANCE
GREAT BRITAIN
CANADA
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
DENMARK
ITALY

Total number of allies:
12

Year of foundation:
1949

Year of ceasing functions:
Still functioning

WARSAW PACT ORGANIZATION

Key actors:
USSR

Total number of allies:
7

Year of foundation:
1955

Year of ceasing functions:
1991
to rely on religion as something tested by time and offering a clear self-identification.

This, in turn, influences liberalism - the only politically significant ideology in today's world – which underpins the political and economic leadership of the West. As it resists the erosion of the “end of history” worldview, proponents of the liberal political philosophy are becoming more radical and more assertive in the promotion of their interests in the world. The conflicts surrounding the publication of anti-Muslim caricatures are an extreme manifestation of the clash between Western Enlightenment ideas and rising traditionalism. The right to self-expression, taken to its extremity, leads to an inadmissible extremist response, while both sides believe they act out of self-defense.

The clash of ideas is intensifying, but now it increasingly resembles a conflict of cultures and identities, especially as globalization, i.e. powerful unifying pressure on governments and nations, heightens the universal tendency to rely on traditional roots. Meanwhile, the aforementioned weakening of the state as an institution only stimulates the search for other forms of self-organization. In some cases citizens expect external forces to “direct” their own governments onto the desired track (like expectations of the EU aspirant countries, the Ukrainians’ perception of the “European choice” being the most glaring example). In others, attempts are taken to make the state isolate itself from the external world in a bid to avoid the negative consequences of integration. Sometimes the latter follows from disappointment in the former.

THE MODERN WORLD IS IN A STATE OF TRANSITION

The modern world is in a state of transition, and the erosion of relationship-building rules is far from the only attribute of this state. The new external conditions, which are aggressively penetrating the lives of governments and nations, give rise to a process of rethinking and self-identification in a changing environment. In fact humanity is living in an era when a variety of nation-building projects are being implemented simultaneously, leading to a complex and often conflict-laden interaction. The conflict of geopolitical interests is not the only reason behind it: we are witnessing a clash of dramatically different principles rooted in incongruous cultural and historical traditions.

Europe is the most vivid illustration of the post-Cold War reality. The years 1988-1991 saw the emergence of a distinct European order, for the first time in several centuries. This order was based on a sophisticated system of mutual interference in internal affairs and security built on the principles of openness and transparency. The new postmodernist system did not rely on a balance of powers, did not prioritize sovereignty and did not separate internal affairs from foreign policy. It rejected the use of force as an instrument to settle conflicts and encouraged the growth of interdependence between the European states. The postmodernist European order was not interested in revision of borders in Europe, creation of new states, as it was after WWI, or population transfers for the sake of securing borders, as it was after WWII. The main objective was to change the very nature of borders. Europeans forbade themselves from thinking in terms of geographic maps and replaced maps with various economic charts and diagrams. The Ukrainian crisis has signaled the end of the post-Cold War European order. It turned out that it is not only the non-Western states (like the BRICS) that do not recognize the European postmodernist order as something universal and applicable in other parts of the world. When the aquis communautaire faced another geopolitical reality to the east and south of the EU, it became clear it had reached the limit of its expansion.

Europe is in search of a new order. The history of the past 25 years needs to be conceptualized as a story of parallel identity building projects, each of which is young, weak, and vulnerable in its own manner and taking place in the context of growing interconnectness and
huge potential due to developmental problems. The ideological confrontation which offered at least two development models ended after the Cold War, the majority of lay autocratic regimes turned out to be unable to respond to new challenges, while their possible alternatives look increasingly radical and destructive. But the rise of Islam as a political force, including its most extreme forms – as is the case with the Islamic State – is an inevitable phase in the development of a new identity. It is too early to predict what this can lead to, but the implementation of a homegrown project – be that an updated version of authoritarianism or a return to the golden age of the Caliphate – will collide with other interests.

The rise in political and economic activity aimed at redefining the countries’ roles in a changing world is being observed in a number of regions: Africa, Latin America, Central Eurasia, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Tensions are growing in the Asia-Pacific Region, where the dialectic of interdependence and rivalry is especially pronounced. This is reflected in attempts by the United States and China to implement their large-scale economic initiatives there.

The United States, which is yet to reassess its leading role in a changing world, will also be seeking new conceptual solutions, even if today the US establishment does not question the normative foundation formulated 25 years ago. The different projects can strengthen each other, if they are implemented in a coordinated manner with mutual interests and differences being acknowledged, or hamper each other’s progress, as is the case with the EU-Russia rivalry over Ukraine. Two most important questions for the future are whether China becomes a new role model and if the American

Volunteers who joined the government army to fight against radical Islamists, Iraq, 15.06.2014
interdependency. The painful attempts to implement them largely define the majority of current standoffs.

The EU is a project based on the idea of security by collective sovereignty. Brussels presumes that it is surrounded by would-be members of the European community or candidate states. But the European Union is plagued by a deepening mismatch between its gravity force and ability to transform. Stagnation of the European economy coupled with the growth of anti-European and anti-immigrant sentiments is making Europe extremely vulnerable to any crisis on its borders.

Russia as a project, beginning after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is best understood as an attempt to construct a new type of civilization-state, which mobilizes the nation to resolute actions on behalf of the state. The Soviet self-identification is gone, although it is often appealed to and some of its trappings are being restored. The transit period of the 1990s and 2000s did not lead to the emergence of a stable developmental model, and the Ukraine crisis is essentially opening a new era of transformation. The Russian elites are trying to create a tough and conservative state, which can be integrated with the world economy and at the same time protect its internal politics from external influence. The latter is seen as a guarantee of survival in an aggressive environment. Russia's self-identification envisages the delineation of a mental areal, which does not simply imply formal borders, but is a sphere of “us” as opposed to “them”. The clash with the European Union over Ukraine, which formally triggered the crisis, revealed the incompatibility of mindsets in the two parts of Europe. Without a new self-perception being formed on both sides of the “dividing line”, Russia and the European Union are unlikely to discover a basis for common evolution. But what they can do is to control damage and lay the foundation for further interaction – when a better time comes.

The tumultuous awakening of the Middle East, which aspires to political and ideological renovation, is the crucial process for the future of the world. The reason is that this wealthy region with great prospects is unable to fulfill its

*G20 summit in Saint-Petersburg, 06.09.2013*
“global leadership” project changes as the world system transforms.

Two hundred years ago, when Europe, then a political equivalent of the “world”, was shaping its future at the Congress of Vienna, the “concert of nations” was born. Apart from sharing the spheres of influence (which was a norm at that time), the great powers agreed to create a mechanism to maintain the balance of powers and interests in the time of peace and to adjust and restore this balance at times of conflict. The concert did not save Europe from wars, but enabled it to control damage, which the inevitable contradictions incurred to the countries’ relations. The succession of congresses and peace conferences which continued for almost 100 years helped Europe avoid disastrous collisions. And when the mechanism had played out, which was inevitable over the course of time, the world plunged into the nightmare of World War I.

Today, everything is much more complex. The concert hall encompasses the whole world, there are many more soloists, they are more diverse and the instruments they play are often strange. Moreover, almost all of them preside over their own mini-ensembles with specific relationships. There is no common sheet music, no single conductor (just as 200 years ago, though). So the only way to avoid cacophony is to hear each other and to write together a score enabling all to achieve some sort of harmony.

The concert of nations which is required today is essentially a concert of various projects. Arguably, the only forum where the necessary discussion can be launched is the G20. It came into being thanks to economic shocks – first the 1997 Asian financial crisis, when this format emerged at the ministerial level, and then, the global financial crisis of 2008. The group, hastily convened at G. W. Bush’s initiative, acted as a therapist for the markets. Ever since then, its focus has been on the global economy, money, and trade. Today the G20 is experiencing a swift transformation from a purely economic group to a political
one, because this is dictated by the entire logic of global development.

In the modern world politics means more for the economy than it was believed at the dawn of globalization. Political disorder and the absence of a stable world arrangement are becoming a crucial factor of global economic instability. Globalization has not eliminated geopolitical rivalry and contradictions between the major powers, as was hoped a quarter-century ago. And when interdependence does not prevent conflicts, it aggravates them, causing universal damage.

WHEN INTERDEPENDENCE DOES NOT PREVENT CONFLICTS, IT AGGRAVATES THEM, CAUSING UNIVERSAL DAMAGE

The 2014 developments can serve as an illustration. The G20, called to react to economic crises, has no other option than to develop a political dimension, especially as it has the premises to become the most influential body of global regulation.

The UN Security Council will continue to be the legitimating authority, no matter how critical other states are with regard to its activities. The G7 is a Western-only club, extremely influential, but not recognized as an authority in the broader world.

The G20 emerged accidentally, but logically. The inclusion of the world’s twenty largest economies is an understandable criterion. The group is representative enough, including both developing and developed states, hi-tech and raw material export-based economies, democratic and autocratic countries. It encompasses all dominant religions and cultures, countries of all regions, from the Far North to the South Pacific. It does not possess formal legitimacy, but it does have an informal one.

There is nobody dictating the G20: the members’ equality is factual, not statutory. Its heterogeneity allows for maneuvers and coalitions. In 2013, the group made an important contribution to world politics. A heated exchange over dinner in St Petersburg,
when opinions were equally divided, and a quarter-hour conversation between Putin and Obama on the margins prevented an intervention in Syria. This was one of the few examples of solving modern problems instead of creating them.

Enabling the G20 to coordinate political, as well as economic interests would be the first step toward composing the 21st century’s global political music.

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The Cold War never became hot, but neither did it end in a “peace”, a universally recognized agreement on the new game rules. In January 1992 President G. H. W. Bush announced in his State of the Union address that America had won the Cold War, whereas officially it had neither victors, nor losers.

A new bout of confrontation over the crisis in Ukraine, labeled by many as “Cold War 2.0” was a consequence of how the first Cold War ended (or did not end). The absence of precise and comprehensive agreements leads to misunderstandings, which threaten to grow to quite dangerous proportions. Western leaders were wrong to interpret Russia’s incapacity to block the post-Cold war order as ascendance. They were wrong to read weakness as conversion.

The fundamental changes in the international environment, growing ungovernability and various threats to peace require a universal understanding of the complexity of the changing world and its future directions.

The milestones commemorated in 2015 are related to situations when the disposition of forces and interests was clear. Following the defeat of Napoleonic France, the victorious powers were sharing the spoils trying far-sightedly not only to find a balance, but also to create the mechanism for its preservation. By 1945 there was also a group of responsible nations that were striving to avoid new world wars and shaped an institution reducing the risk of fatal confrontation. Finally, the Helsinki Accords shared the spheres of influence in Europe based on the recognition of the fact that the status quo provides a higher level of security than attempts to revise it.

The new international order could not be simply re-assertion of the institutional status quo but at the same time this new order would remain founded on the principles declared in Helsinki four decades ago. There can be no return to past agreements at the new stage of history: the circumstances have changed too dramatically as has the circle of those who can influence the situation in the world. But it is extremely important to remember the atmosphere of those periods when international actors were able to hammer out efficient principles for operating the global system.

The world has entered an era requiring an increased degree of caution and the ability to avoid ill-advised moves, something the international actors have lost in the post-Cold War era period and have to acquire once again. Otherwise the eternal peace and well-being that were thought to follow the end of bipolar confrontation may turn out to be a dangerous illusion and a prelude to the collapse of the stable development model.