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Tweets vs. the Officialese: How the Language of Russian Diplomacy Is Changing amid the Global Transition

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Diplomacy is in the throes of a qualitative transformation that affects all its dimensions, with new forms of international cooperation emerging, global political processes accelerating, and contacts with foreign partners and contractors expanding. The change is also influencing foreign policy narrative and the language of diplomacy, Russian diplomacy included. In this connection, it is of interest to conceptualize the latest tendencies that determine its further progress.

Top-Level Conversations

The first thing of note is a higher level of international and interstate contacts. Critical decisions in the area of global politics or economics are increasingly often taken by national leaders at their meetings, rather than in the wake of protracted talks between foreign ministry delegations. Summits consistently supplant conferences, meetings and all other classical forms of diplomatic intercourse. USSR Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko used to say that “it is better to have ten years of talks than one day of war.” Let us turn this famous maxim around: Ten minutes of talks between two presidents is more efficient in terms of conflict settlement than several meetings at the level of foreign ministers or meetings of ad hoc commissions.

This circumstance entails a change in the role of the standard diplomatic institutions. Embassies and other foreign missions have come to perform not only as analytical centers and participants in negotiations but also as “travel agencies” at the service of top public officials. Their most important mission today is to render protocol support to top-level events. As a consequence, diplomatic staff focus not so much on analysis, information and awareness-raising as on administrative and technical matters. The Foreign Ministry’s central staff and its foreign missions are less often involved in drafting briefs, memoranda, or remarks for representatives of the host state. The focus is shifting to organising top- and high-level visits, arranging accommodation and transfers, meeting visit schedules, enforcing safety precautions, and the like.

To be sure, the frequency and intensity of these activities vary depending on the time and location: Brussels or Paris certainly cannot be compared with

capitals where the powers that be meet infrequently or not at all. The diplomatic routine is reduced to welcoming a visitor or visitors at a terminal, organising transfers, making seating arrangements, and eventually seeing a visitor or visitors off. Falling into the same category are certain technical aspects that may seem small matters to the average person but are important from the point of view of observing the rules of international courtesy, specifically the use of national symbols.

Thus, today, there is far less expectation that a mid-level foreign ministry employee will have such merits as eloquence, persuasiveness, or the ability to defend his or her country's position than there was several years ago, let alone decades ago. His or her functions are more of an applied and auxiliary nature, but that is not to say that the profession is on its way out, as certain experts tend to believe; rather it is a sign of qualitative shifts in the profession.¹ The rank-and-file diplomats' rhetoric is being washed out of the foreign policy narrative.

Instead, remarks by their superiors are increasingly strong and important. The record shows that conversations on the sidelines between leaders of great powers or even their telephone conversations can make a greater contribution to solving complicated problems than numerous plenary meetings of working groups, rounds of discussions, and so on. Under the present-day conditions, it is hard to imagine a Helsinki Conference: it would simply end in nothing. But G7, G20, BRICS, Davos, and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum are quite productive. As a result, the value of the Word in diplomacy (as defined by Anatoly Kovalyov²) is no longer what it was before. Statements by Vladimir Putin or Donald Trump are increasingly weighty, in contrast to those by both countries' extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors, let alone lower-ranking diplomatic agents.

Language and Personality

These disproportions give shape to yet another phenomenon: the personification of foreign policy discourse. It is of interest to analyze foreign policy remarks by heads of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers, or heads of regions, given that these are written, based on their personal

¹ T.V. Zonova, *Professiya – diplomat [The Diplomatic Profession]*, A.V. Torkunov editor, *Diplomatic Service of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, Aspect Press Publishers, 2019, pp. 9-21.

² Anatoly Kovalyov, *Azbuka diplomatiyi [The ABC of Diplomacy]*, Sixth Edition, Moscow, Interprax Publishers, 1993, p. 66.

rhetorical characteristics and individual preferences, by members of their staff, who often have no diplomatic experience. It is they who are now engaged in the staff work, whereas the field work performed by professional diplomats is, relatively speaking, limited to ensuring the smooth operation of the mike, sound installations and other equipment. Of course, speechwriting is not a new profession, but it is the speechwriters who are indirectly monopolising the airwaves and shaping the linguistic landscape of diplomacy.

Nevertheless, prewritten remarks are one thing and off-the-cuff comments are quite another. The latter reveal what the Russian poet Yevgeny Baratynsky called an “uncommon countenance.” There are increasingly frequent hard-hitting pronouncements. US President Donald Trump, for example, described Iran as “terrorist state number one,”³ and the Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro as a “Cuban puppet.”⁴ It is Mr. Trump’s hobby to give relatively vulgar character assessments, both favourable and damning, to other heads of state. Not so long ago, for example, he called President Vladimir Putin a “great guy.”⁵

It will be recalled in this connection how President Putin blasted Józef Lipski, former Polish ambassador to Germany (1934-1939), who promised to build a monument to Hitler in Warsaw because of his plan to banish Jews to Africa: “That bastard! That anti-Semitic pig!”⁶ This negative and emotional kind of assessment, regardless of its subjective nature, seems also rather typical of the Russian leader’s discourse. An analysis of his remarks for the past 20 years demonstrates his habit of talking straight, tough and colourfully. The average person would declare that it is undiplomatic to say such things. The same, incidentally, applies to the current foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, the personification of contemporary Russian diplomacy, who occasionally regales the same average person with hard-hitting language like, “You are sick, girls!”⁷ Trying to mimic their style would be absurd and comic. But it is quite appropriate to state the existence of such phenomena as “Putin’s language” or “Lavrov’s language.”

How they are perceived by foreigners, including those who are individually addressed as well as the public at large, is another matter.

³ Trump referred to Iran as “terrorist state number one” //RBC, 06.02.2017, at <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/589822879a7947225d3556a4>

⁴ Trump branded Maduro as a “Cuban puppet” // Interfax, 24.09.2019, at <https://www.interfax.ru/world/677744>

⁵ Trump described his meeting with “great guy” Putin as excellent // RBC, 29.07.2019, at <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/29/06/2019/5d16fd5b9a79470938a353e1>

⁶ Putin brands the Polish ex-ambassador to Germany as a “bastard and anti-Semitic pig” // Gazeta.ru, 24.12.2019, at https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/24/n_13851812.shtml

⁷ You are sick, girls: Lavrov snubs Georgian female journalists // Vesti, 26.02.2020, at <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3243415>

There is a gap between the professional language of Russian diplomacy and the emotional language of Western diplomacy. The Russian diplomatic service has always been highly professional and “systemic.” Unlike its counterparts in the United States and the majority of West European countries, the Soviet and later Russian diplomatic service has always been an introverted and elite affair. This is explained by the fact that it has educational establishments of its own (Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Diplomatic Academy) and that aspirants have to prove their high potential before they are allowed to enter the profession. The Russian diplomats still form a caste of sorts with a developed and clearly expressed corporate culture. An inevitable social consequence of this isolation is the emergence of a specific language code and jargon.

One way or another, all the tasks of a diplomat involve using the language. For this reason, the intra-agency discourse is closely allied with the public, outward-directed discourse. Things are easier for other trades (for example, government agencies). Despite the similarity of the architecture and functional principles of the bureaucratic machine, their communications in the back-and front-offices are further apart. But any diplomat, regardless of his or her job, is, in a sense, “their own press secretary.” It must be mentioned that both the Director of the Foreign Ministry Information and Press Department Maria Zakharova and practically all of her predecessors are (or were) career diplomats. To compare: her counterparts at the US Department of State have been recruited, at least for the past 15 years, from other professions, mainly journalism.

In Russia today, the language spoken by foreign ministry employees in a formal setting and what they say to express a diplomatic position or report information are contiguous and eventually coincide. Target audiences are different but this is no obstacle to the convergence and interference of formats, styles and genres. As a result, certain elements of their workplace jargon end up on air.

In the West, where the professional diplomatic community is more heterogeneous, this phenomenon is less pronounced. There is a higher personnel turnover; there are fewer career diplomats and more political appointees. A case in point is the so-called spoil system of ambassadorial appointments in the US, where priority is given to the President’s cronies from most varied spheres, rather than the career State Department staff.⁸ Besides, both junior and senior diplomatic posts go to people with totally different educational qualifications and backgrounds.

⁸ T.V. Zonova, *Diplomatiya: modeli, formy, metody [Diplomacy: Models, Forms, Methods]*, Moscow, Aspekt Press, 2017, p. 11.

More often than not, it is a long and linear path to a Russian ambassadorship. It starts at the attaché level. This personnel model can be regarded, based on a certain assumption, as a historical constant traced back to the Ambassadorial Prikaz period. Russian students have even invented a meme: “To rise up to Lavrov’s level, you have to go through Torkunov’s school.”⁹ Looked at from the value point of view, the profession represents a calling for most Russian diplomats. They are diplomats for real, whereas Westerners are career diplomats. For them, a foreign ministry job is a chapter (a longer or a shorter one) in their career and much less to do with their personal biography.

Of course, there are exceptions in Russia as well. A graphic example of a “non-systemic” ambassador, who has exerted much influence on the language of diplomacy, is Alexander Bovin (1930-2004). Between 1970 and 1982, this prominent journalist was a speechwriter for General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Leonid Brezhnev. He is believed to have coined a number of famous maxims, including: “The economy must be economic,” “We have taken this path and will never deviate from it,” and a number of others. Between 1991 and 1997, he headed the Soviet (for two days) and Russian embassy in Israel. He has left fascinating and witty memoirs describing his experiences, notably *Five Years among the Jews and MFA Personnel*¹⁰ and *Notes by an Unreal Ambassador*.¹¹

But this is yet another confirmation of the fact that in Russia it makes sense to speak about the language of individual diplomats. Official institutions are distinguished by dry rhetoric. Some outstanding individuals can speak a figurative and appropriate language, but not institutions. Yet it is the other way around in the West. An emotional – occasionally excessively emotional – speech is a collective effort. Institutions “speak” in different ways. In Russia, they subconsciously take cues from the official clichés like “TASS is authorised to state.” The West is oriented to the US State Department’s tweets that are little different style-wise from the Trump tweets. The voice of a “typical Russian diplomat,” even if it still has some impact owing to its socially consolidating function, is less and less audible. The abovementioned high-ranking diplomats may compensate for this shortfall with their vivid and original narrative, but there are limits to its outreach. This circumstance greatly complicates the dialogue between the elites at the cognitive level. Adherence to different values and a different corporate culture of professional communities makes the search for points of contact and common interests more difficult.

⁹ Anatoly Torkunov, *Russian diplomat, Rector of MGIMO University, Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Co-Chair of the Russian-French Trianon Dialogue*.

¹⁰ Alexander Bovin, *5 let sredi midovtsev i yevreyev [Five Years among the Jews and MFA Personnel]* Moscow, Zakharov Publishers, 2002, 576 pp.

¹¹ Alexander Bovin, *Zapiski nenastoyashchego posla [Notes by an Unreal Ambassador]* Moscow, Zakharov Publishers, 2004, 824 pp.

Nothing but the Truth

Generated by its predecessors, the third phenomenon is about the foreign policy discourse becoming increasingly self-interested. Claims like “diplomacy is a search for a compromise,” which earlier it made sense to accept critically, today verge on the archaic and utopian. Diplomacy defends and promotes national interests. A compromise is seen as something akin to a concession and a sign of weakness. But more often than not it cannot be dispensed with.

Of course, it was always like this. But at certain stages in history, the world political narrative appealed to certain collective values, options aimed at the “common benefit,” or compromise. To all intents and purposes, the arguments put forward by the participants in the foreign policy processes were meant to explain why certain actions and measures that were originally beneficial for them alone would benefit all others as well, to wit, allies, third countries, the world community as a whole, and, in tour-de-force cases, even enemies. This is an art in its own right: you send them away with a flea in their ear, but they thank you and head in the indicated direction at a brisk trot. From the moral and ethical point of view, this approach can be regarded as somewhat hypocritical and manipulative, but still this is how diplomacy operated in the 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries.

Today, there is no need for these kinds of overtures to partners and the public. The fact that something is necessary for “us,” “our people,” and “our country” explains the need for and adequacy of certain specific steps, as well as one’s overall international behaviour. Again, the tone is set by the United States, which finds a reflection in its leaders’ statements. A simple example: addressing the Davos World Economic Forum in January, Donald Trump devoted nearly all his remarks to himself and his achievements, mainly in the sphere of American domestic policy.¹² While the public expected a presentation of his position on the most important global political issues, he made no bones about testing his election slogans.

We must not think that the presidential team, hoping to return for a second term in office, was so engrossed in the election campaign that they

¹² Fyodor Lukyanov, “Stabilnost i peremeny” [Stability and Changes], *Russia in Global Politics*, 23.01.2020, at <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/stabilnost-i-peremeny/>

mistook the Swiss forum for a caucus in the United States. The signal they sent was that the president did not intend to disguise the interests of his political backers as international interests, not even in word, let alone deed. The gist of the matter was not that he was positioning himself above all others but the egocentric message: “We owe nothing to the world.” It is another matter whether the world owes something to us and whether we can take this on our own. Can we reach our goals independently or will we need to make tactical alliances to achieve them? The above axioms are emerging as the foundation of all subsequent speculation.

These signals reflect structural changes in the political culture as such and are evidence of what certain researchers several years ago defined as a “revival of geopolitics.”¹³ Egotism can take different forms depending on the sphere of application (such as protectionism in the economy) and is no longer shameful. It is not condemned. Others are trying to adapt and speak in the same vein.

What was a butt for criticism, disdain and censure in the early 2000s is being touted as well-nigh a virtue. I recall how in my post-Soviet childhood it was considered utterly rude to call an offender an egotist. This was the kind of humanism that distinguished the pre-social-media epoch. In the current system of values, parents are more likely to tell their little child that being an egotist is a good thing. Politicians and diplomats no longer have to dissemble or pretend: straightforwardness, even if occasionally cynical, is slowly but surely on its way in.

In interaction with certain partners, one increasingly comes across entirely exotic interpretations of diplomatic verbal practices and ethics. A case in point is the concept of Transformational Diplomacy first presented in 2006 by the then US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Promoting democratic values at any cost without stopping short of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, values that the Americans themselves designate as such, has laid the groundwork for the so-called hybrid wars.

As early as 2009, a transition from soft power to smart power was introduced at doctrinal level, something that not only allows but directly incentivises diplomats to engage in information attacks directed at destabilising “spoiler” regimes and their political systems. Based

¹³A.V.Kortunov, “Blesk i nishcheta geopolitiki” [The Splendor and Poverty of Geopolitics], *Russia in Global Politics*, 25.01.2015, URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/blesk-i-nishcheta-geopolitiki/>

on the maxims “The end justifies the means” (Ignatius of Loyola) and “There is no avoiding war, it can only be postponed to the advantage of others” (Niccolò Machiavelli), this approach has largely determined the foreign policy vector of both previous and current US administrations. Combined with other factors, this has led to a surge in international tensions and aggravated the existing antagonisms between states. Since 2018, the foreign policy narrative has been increasingly based on yet another idea derived from the heritage of US political scientist Joseph Nye Jr., sharp power, implying an even more manipulative use of diplomacy to influence public opinion abroad.¹⁴ Should we be surprised after this at the renewed talk about Cold War 2.0?

#Brevity Is the Sister of Diplomacy

The fourth trend is a reduction in the average length of foreign policy remarks. Speakers are for the most part encouraged to be brief in direct information engagement with a target audience. There are more and more reasons for this “instantaneous” intercourse and so, to be effective, diplomats’ remarks must be short, concise and condensed.

Modern communication, including on foreign policy topics, is akin to fast food or instant coffee. The age of digital diplomacy dictates its rules: the core messages must conform to Twitter criteria, that is they need to be no longer than 280 characters (140 before November 2017). Everything that exceeds this rigid symbolic framework is indigestible.

This speculative hypothesis is confirmed by empirical data: the author of this article has conducted an analysis of a selection of 311 speeches by heads of state, prime ministers and foreign ministers, as well as related programmatic articles for 2009-2019, and the results showed that the length of texts had reduced by 11% on average each year. The signals are getting clearer: monologues of many hours’ duration by erstwhile record-setters like Fidel Castro or Ahmed Sekou Toure, monologues that diplomats took down in shorthand and summarised in an effort to identify the “conceptual core,” are a thing of the past. The future belongs to newsflashes and hashtags.

¹⁴ Nye J. *How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power. The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Influence* // *Foreign Affairs*, 24.01.2018. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power>

“Don’t Speak Beautifully”

Despite the newly acquired brevity, the language of interstate communication is growing less concise, and this can be identified as the fifth trend. As mentioned above, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s language has been traditionally dry, clear and precise.¹⁵ Today, however, even this environment is showing signs of erosion in terms of the categories and terms used.

A case in point is the notion of “challenges” (global, big, new, and others), which has penetrated the foreign policy and international narrative comparatively recently. In turn, this English calque is etymologised from the Latin *calumnia*, which means “trickery” and “false statement” (and this is not accidental). The word “challenge” has sneaked imperceptibly into various spheres, including global political rhetoric, and is currently in wide use.

Popular Russian dictionaries (Ozhegov, Ushakov) define it as a “summons or invitation” or the “desire to enter a struggle or dispute, as expressed by a glance, words, actions, etc.” There is no need to explain that its current usage includes more meanings than those listed above.

A rather interesting interpretation of “big challenges” is contained in the glossary appended to the Concept of International Scientific and Technological Cooperation of the Russian Federation approved by the Government on February 8, 2019: “...A totality of problems, threats and possibilities, which objectively demands a response from the State; the complexity and scale thereof are such that they cannot be solved, removed or implemented exclusively by augmenting resources.”¹⁶ Even at first glance it may seem rather odd that problems, threats and possibilities are brought together to form a totality. In this way, both COVID-19 and, for example,

¹⁵ R.O. Reihardt, “Ot klishe k neologismam: evolutsiya yazyka sovremennoi rossiyskoi diplomatiyi” [From Cliches to Neologisms: An Evolution of Russian Diplomacy’s Language], *Russia in Global Politics*, 30.01.2020, at <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/ot-klishe-k-neologizmam/>

¹⁶ *Kontseptsiya mezhdunarodnogo nauchno-tekhnicheskogo sotrudnichestva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [Concept of International Scientific and Technological Cooperation of the Russian Federation]. Approved by the Government of the Russian Federation on February 8, 2019. Accessed at <https://france.mid.ru/upload/iblock/7f8/7f8aadb5de45b3a58103046d70eabef2.pdf>

digital economy, find themselves in the same basket. If problems and threats are perceived as something big and frightening, then possibilities obviously appear as unprecedented and certainly unlimited. This is not even a substitution of notions but a switchover of the perception code from the rational to the emotional. On the face of it, it sounds fine and impressive, but the substance is pushed into the background. After all, no one has bothered to explain in this document or many others, what real forms these challenges assume (apart from being “big”).

As mentioned above, the Foreign Ministry itself remains a bulwark of tradition and conservatism. The language used for corporate communication and for outside audience is logical and meaningful. The name itself of one of the functional subdivisions of the central staff – Department of New Challenges and Threats (DNCT) – points to the fact that the former and the latter are totally different things. The DNCT’s purview has been defined and is totally clear: international cooperation in fighting terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational organised crime, and piracy, as well as cooperation in the areas of space exploration, communications, science and technologies.¹⁷

At the same time, the trendy but ephemeral words like “challenges” have the capacity to erode the semantic framework of diplomatic language as such. They are highly toxic and contagious. It is largely on their account that the rhetoric of certain decision-makers starts resembling the linguistically fine-tuned, if comically meaningless monologues by Sir Humphrey, the main character of “Yes, Minister,” a popular British TV series.¹⁸ Or they may come close to general “blah-blah” like, “We are conducting active work with the partners, aimed at reaching a broad consensus.”

This process is imperceptible but its results are there for all to see. It would have been unthinkable for the Foreign Ministry to use these categories and formulations in the 2000s (let alone earlier periods, particularly the Soviet one). Today, however, “language challenges” are almost the norm.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation / Central Staff. Accessed at https://www.mid.ru/ru/about/structure/central_office

¹⁸ Christmas Message from Sir Humphrey / Yes, Minister. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYx_H0iEdCI. Yet another example of brilliant political satire dealing with relations between politicians and diplomats in the UK: Diplomacy is about surviving until the next century / Yes, Prime Minister. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hsNfNMOSvE>

Respect for the Word: Applied Recommendations

In the first place, it makes sense to start fighting what the main character in Venedikt Yerofeyev's *Moscow-Petushki* defined as “disrespect for the Word.” “Respect” must not be regarded as a synonym of “awe.” In the Andrey Gromyko period, foreign ministry employees feared making punctuation mistakes, let alone orthographic ones, because the penalties could be really severe, ranging from reprimands to demotion. So, they checked every letter and comma, often lapsing into panicky moods or paranoia.

Following the transition from typewriters to PCs, employees stopped fearing technical mistakes, misprints, or even semantic errors. Rosenthal's Russian language manual is a rare sight on their desks. Their writing and punctuation style is increasingly one-of-a-kind, even where there is no need for that at all. To quote the writer and literary critic Dmitry Bykov, “In the liberal 1990s, commas were used at random or ignored altogether; in the stable 2000s, people got frightened and played safe by putting commas where they were not needed at all.”¹⁹ To be sure, language is a living organism, but it seems that some of its norms should still be preserved and cultivated. In particular, this applies to the language of foreign policy.

For a number of years now, the Foreign Ministry and related organisations have hired university graduates, who have taken the Unified State Examination as part of their entrance exams (the same is true of those who become involved in the so-called people's diplomacy). Leaving aside the advantages or disadvantages of this form of knowledge control, we must note the fact that at the higher education stage, the command of Russian (or the lack thereof) is accepted as a *fait accompli*. According to university teachers, a proportion of the students have bad grammar, despite their high marks in entry examinations and their grades over the course of their education.

From the academic and methodological point of view, professors and lecturers at specialised departments find it hard and uninteresting to fill in the gaps left by secondary education. It is an open question whether a student should be given a lower mark for a well-done work dedicated to an international issue that abounds in stylistic and other mistakes. The answer is clear if these mistakes obfuscate understanding. In other cases, the outcome

¹⁹ D.L.Bykov, *Orfografiya kak zakon prirody / Totalny diktant [Orthography as a natural law / Total dictation]*, 23.04.2011. Accessed at: <https://totaldict.ru/dictants/orfografiya-kak-zakon-prirody/>

depends on teachers and their aesthetic feeling, that is on a patently subjective and individual factor. In the practical sense, the solution of this problem could be facilitated by the following:

1. Teaching Russian at universities (primarily humanities universities) not only as a general education subject during the first few years but also as a specialised subject in senior classes up to the postgraduate level.

2. Verifying the relevant language skills of applicants for civil service positions, with a test based on the entrance examinations for the Foreign Ministry's Higher Courses of Foreign Languages (HCFL).

Of course, there is no need to go over the top. But it seems that resolute measures are long overdue. If we fail to act, the diplomats' speeches, which are already fading into the background against the vociferous statements made by national leaders, will be drowned out completely by the white noise and cacophony of the media. Sergey Dovlatov, one of the last 20th-century Russian classics, said that you had to be soft-spoken to be heard in America. In addition, present-day diplomats, both Russian and foreign, must know how to speak to the point and grammatically correct.

In this regard, it seems useful to reread Kovalyov's ABC that covers both the semantic aspects and the importance of maintaining dignity in the area of foreign policy, whether through the spoken word or practical action. Despite its edificatory and moralising tone (the book ends with the optimistic remark: "You will make it!"²⁰), it could be of interest in the didactic sense. Specifically, it is useful to correlate the above trends with Kovalyov's tetrad of a diplomatic document:

- a) the protocol formula;
- b) the conceptual core;
- c) the reasoning;
- d) the citation of facts.²¹

In line with the democratised protocol, the protocol-related formulas will be inevitably simplified based on the logic that "the protocol is for an individual" and not "an individual for the protocol." The habit of "taking this opportunity to assure you of my very high respect" will soon become a thing of the past, leaving the simple and easy-to-understand "respectfully." The conceptual core ought to be convincing. It is through this that individuality is expressed. And the reasoning needs to be laconic. In terms of content it should be free from

²⁰ Anatoly Kovalyov, *Azbuka diplomatiyi [The ABC of Diplomacy], Sixth Edition, Moscow, Interprax Publishers, 1993, p. 238.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.77.

moralising and, desirably, from egotism. If the latter is in demand in some other countries, this does not mean that we must follow the same path. It should also be distilled from verbal parasites.

Finally, the stating of facts should be precisely the stating rather than interpretation of facts, let alone reiteration of false reports. The power of diplomacy is in the Truth.

It remains to be added in conclusion that the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic will inevitably affect all spheres of human life, including foreign policy and its language. Its most obvious impact is the suspension of many international negotiating venues and tracks or the transition of these to online formats. Given that contents and form are inseparably linked, this shift is likely to influence both.

National egotism and the prioritisation of national interests will only grow, while globalisation will be subject to attack. It is human to look for a scapegoat in critical situations. The best candidates for this role are “strangers” as well as the globalists/internationalists/cosmopolitans. No matter how primitive these xenophobic and anti-globalist judgments seem, if duly handled and digitalised, they cannot but become part of the arsenal of populists and demagogues appealing to the basest feelings of their audiences. The emergence of this content is a response to the social expectations of certain groups.

Some experts are predicting that humanity will soon reach the point of no return in the belief that the reality will not be the same after the world recovers from the current tragedy.²² This refers to the global transformation of both value attitudes²³ and more applied things.²⁴

Of course, it is difficult to judge now whether post-virus diplomacy will be qualitatively different from what it is today. But it makes sense, even in the lockdown environment, to preserve and maintain the grandeur of its language. It is the language of diplomacy, as one of the most important rewards of culture, which has repeatedly proved its efficiency in the course of history, that is able to stimulate the international cooperation which is so needed both during this time of hardship and afterwards.

²² V.V.Popov, “Koronavirus i tsivilizatsionnyi razlom” [The Coronavirus and the Civilizational Split], MGIMO University, 16.04.2020. Accessed at: <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/koronavirus-i-tsvilizatsionnyy-razlom/>

²³ O.N.Barabanov, “Tsennosti koronavirusnoi epokhi. Mir uzhe nikogda ne budet prezhnim?” [Values of the Coronavirus Epoch. The World will Never Be the Same?], Valdai International Discussion Club, 10.04.2020. Accessed at: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/tsennosti-koronavirusnoy-epokhi/>

²⁴ I.N.Timofeyev, “COVID-19: chto budet, yesli otpravit vsekh domoi?” [COVID-19: What if Everyone is Sent Home?], Valdai International Discussion Club, 20.03.2020. Accessed at: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/covid-19-chno-budet-esli-otpraviv-vsekh-domoy/>



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