

CONSENSUS IS LOOKING FOR A CAPITAL

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The ‘Washington Consensus’ is fundamentally based on effective methods for the treatment of foreign nations. This consensus focuses not on what is good for America but rather on that which is beneficial for others. Therefore, in regard to a new global consensus, it is an issue of where it can be properly tested as it requires fresh fields for its confirmation and validation.

Twenty years ago, the Soviet catastrophe created such an experimental field, as a territory of ideological uncertainty emerged in Eurasia. Nobody knew what policies needed to be implemented and the Washington Consensus came in handy. Why look for a new policy when there was a consensus regarding one that had already brought success? After all, what defines consensus in politics if not a series of successes that emerge from its application of standard procedures within multiple countries? The place of consensus is formed when nations, experiencing the success of a policy, allow for talks about the standards of political effectiveness. Unfortunately, the financial crisis interrupted these proceedings, leading to the dissolution of the Washington Consensus as announced by the British Prime-Minister and a new uncertainty in the issue of global political standards.

Washington and Moscow – the absence of an alternative

John Williamson, the father of the term ‘Washington Consensus,’ described it as a policy that, in essence, rejects alternatives, painting all other doctrines as ‘crazy.’ This view of the Consensus was met with delight in Moscow. The fall of communism was seen as proof of the inadequacy of ideological alternatives, and as an exodus from world values into the sphere of ‘pragmatism,’ a term that is still uttered in Russia with religious piety. In Russia the term ‘absence of alternative’ is no longer viewed with negative connotations but is now seen as a symbol of superiority and the effectiveness of power. The new Russia is an anti-ideological, anti-value society, which prefers political solutions without alternatives. New principles have not been formulated in Moscow for a long time as a result of the distrust that has formed towards universal ideas as such.

Nevertheless, there is a consensus within the country, and it is working – an internal consensus. Formed around the alternative declared by Putin, today this consensus is still maintained and holds the support of a significant number of Putin’s majority. However, does Putin’s consensus have the ability to become a supranational ‘Moscow Consensus?’ In order to achieve this, negotiations on the global standards of effectiveness should have been started.

The speech in Munich – an attempt to reach the ‘Moscow Consensus’

Vladimir Putin’s famous speech in Munich in 2007 can undoubtedly be viewed as Russia’s attempt to declare to the world the formation of a new global consensus. This declaration was not one of merely sovereign interests, but represented all nations who were excluded by America from the process of modern world management. In short, this alternative consensus became a form of representation for the world’s unacknowledged powers. The initial response was a

strong antagonistic reaction to Russia’s claim to a new non-Washington centre of global consent, yet, after only a year, Washington itself expressed the arrival of a non-American world order, and since then, this concept has become widely accepted. However, Putin’s pre-crisis Moscow did not become the capital of the new consensus. Speaking in terms of a national force, Russia did not offer an alternative (the ‘multi-polar world’ is a reality but not a suitable alternative). President Bush’s globalism was rejected, but Russia has yet to offer any alternatives, even within post-Soviet space. Therefore, the weakness of the doctrine revealed through Putin’s speech in Munich is not the radicalism of its rhetoric but rather its lack of development for new standards in a post-American world. The doctrine does not act as a *language of values nor does it communicate a language of new standards.*

Leadership and consensus

The two notions – the ‘Washington Consensus’ and American leadership, often get mixed up, but it is important to remember that consensus does not always imply leadership. The return of American global leadership is, at this point, rather unlikely and while Russia may not have a great deal of conceivable chances to seize the role of the new leader, it finds itself in the crossroads of developing a future consensus. Sometimes a new consensus can be formed due to the lack of capacity of all others. For example, because of the impossibility of a ‘Beijing Consensus,’ which seems to be rather evident, one finds oneself in the centre of consent almost by ‘default.’ Nonetheless, consent needs to be generated and while the Russian state itself is, in some ways, a global ‘invention,’ it still needs to formulate its principle standards, establish its values, and strive to reach consensus with other global projects in the 21st century. After all, the place where all nations meet will become the venue for a new global consensus. ■