

THE DECLINE OF RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE IN THE POST-SOVIET REGION AND THE REASONS BEHIND IT

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<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i></p> <p>16.05.2018</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i></p> <p>15.02.2019</p>	<p>Abstract: The article attempts to highlight the key economic, political, and social factors that have adverse effects on current relationship dynamics between the Russian Federation and the CIS countries and are thus responsible for the gradual decline in Russia's influence in the post-Soviet area. Authors affirm that this specific phenomenon is predetermined, on the one hand, by the aspiration of the political and economic diversification and, on the other hand, by a number of socio-cultural and psychological factors. The article argues that Russian political leaders' perception of various post-soviet countries as "pro-Russian" is biased in its conceptual core and based on a number of subjective factors that have no actual relation to the decision-making process in these countries. In reality, the foreign policy of CIS countries is based mostly on pragmatic economic interests capable of providing steady development, which makes implementation of such subjective terms as "pro-Russian" and "pro-Western" highly misleading and unproductive, especially in the current conditions of confrontation between Russia and the West.</p> <p><i>Acknowledgments:</i> The publication has been prepared with the support of the "RUDN University Program 5-100"</p>
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Introduction

The demand for an in-depth study of specific aspects of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet area stems from this region's position within the structure of Russia's foreign policy interests, which are fixed in a number of

the country's conceptual documents, and also by the ever-broadening political and economic trends being observed between Russia and the post-Soviet states during recent decades. From the authors' perspective, there are at least

three specific features typical for cooperation between the Russian Federation and the above-mentioned states in the recent years:

- a number of political actors from the CIS states, which used to look up to Russia in regard to their foreign policy, are keen to adhere to a more diversified and multi-vector approach these days, and by doing so, they, *de jure* and *de facto*, steer clear from tightly coordinating their own foreign policy with Russia's interests;

- the above-mentioned tendency leads to a significant loss of efficacy of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet region. To a great extent, this is often explained by Russia's initial reliance on the loyalty and pro-Russian orientation of the CIS states' national elites. On multiple occasions, that alleged pro-Russian loyalty has proved to be a front for political or electoral gain;

- finally, this kind of divergence in the foreign policy interests of Russia and the post-Soviet states leads to relations between Russia and quite a few of the post-Soviet states tending to lose their previous privileged status. This results in the loosening of economic, political, cultural and humanitarian ties between Russia and its CIS partners.

Quite often, a combination of these factors leads to a certain, sometimes rather severe impairment in relations between Russia and the post-Soviet states (for example, we have seen this in episodes with Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan). In the most extreme cases, it leads to the creation and further escalation of a political conflict (Ukraine, Moldavia). Moreover, a similar tendency may be observed in the global political arena, predominantly with the western states with whom the quality of cooperation is rather low these days. Therefore, the conclusion that tendencies of this kind are not likely to be the result of some accidental or purely subjective factors seems logical. On the contrary, it seems appropriate to suggest that some objective fact lies behind them, which requires comprehensive academic research and conceptualization. Thus, the objective of this research centers on analyzing the current phenomenon of consistent drifting of the formerly pro-Russian CIS actors towards a multilateral foreign policy approach.

Methodology and historiography

In order to provide a detailed and integrated understanding of the subject, it is essential to start with a number of key notions and definitions used by the authors for the following analysis of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet region. Above all, it is important to specify the terms pro-Russian orientation (pro-Russian actors) and multilateral (multi-partner) approach.

The term **Pro-Russian orientation**, used in regard to any actors within the post-Soviet area, implies our *objective or subjective* evaluation of the political leader or national elite of a CIS country as being directly interested in building exclusive and privileged relations with Russia in the political, economic, cultural, humanitarian and other spheres. The term **multilateral (or multi-partner) approach** is used as an antithesis, which means a foreign policy strategy of an actor within the post-Soviet area that is meant to diversify political ties of a certain state in the international arena, as well as to form solid state-to-state relations with the widest possible variety of international actors, which may *in an objective manner be connected with or be subjectively assumed* as renouncing any exclusiveness in relations with Russia.

Introduction of the above-mentioned definitions logically determines the research methodology designed to assist in a comprehensive study of the objective as well as the subjective component of the phenomenon of drifting of these formerly pro-Russian actors towards the multi-partner principle. This research approach is based on the fact that only a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the factors determining the efficacy of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet region will make it possible to come to a logically consistent and theoretically grounded conclusion. In this regard, the authors have highlighted four major factor complexes (economic; political; historical and socio-cultural; psycho-political) responsible for the gradual drift of the pro-Russian actors towards a multilateral approach and the apparent erosion of bilateral relations between certain states with Russia. The above-mentioned groups of factors were roughly divided into three large sub-groups: objective

(economic and political); partially objective and partially subjective (historical and socio-cultural); and finally, subjective (psycho-political).

In conducting this research the authors used such explicative international relations analysis methods as the quantitative method and content analysis (especially for comparing the economic indicators of GDP growth and goods turnover between the post-Soviet area states and Russia), event analysis (used to address matters related to a number of CIS states' transition from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet), and a systematic approach, as well as process analysis, applied to foreign policy decision making (mainly in the paragraph dedicated to the subjective psycho-political factors affecting the relations between the Russian Federation and certain post-Soviet states).

In recent years, this topic has been reflected in the works of both Russian and foreign researchers. In particular, in the Russian historiography, such researchers as Galoyan N.G.¹, Kurylev K.P.², Degterev D.³, etc., have considered the issue of Russia's influence over the post-Soviet region. Moreover, certain organizational aspects of the decrease of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space have been analyzed in our publication dedicated to the drift

of the CIS countries towards multilateralism⁴. The issue of commercial and economic relations between the Russian Federation and the post-Soviet states has been reflected in the works of such authors as Fedorchenko S.N.⁵, Bazileva S.P., Chernenko E.F.⁶, Obolenskij V.⁷ Finally, the cultural, humanitarian, and ideological determinants of Russia's foreign policy in retrospect have been researched in depth by Arslanov R.A. and Dzhangiryan V.G.⁸ Regarding foreign works on this subject, there are far less of them, due to outside factors. In that context, the works of Descalzi C.⁹, Menon

¹ Galoyan, N.G. Armyano-gruzinskie otnosheniya v kontekste regional'noj bezopasnosti na YUhnom Kavkaze [Armenian-Georgian Relations in the Context of Regional Security in Transcaucasia] // *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 2015, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 120-131.

² Kurylev, K.P.; Ngoyan, A.L.; Palasios, K.E.; Skudina, O.V. Neuregulirovannye konflikty na postsovetском prostranstve v analize zapadnyh ehkspertno-analiticheskikh centrov (Unsettled Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space in the Analysis of the Western Research Centers) // *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 2016, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 482-493; Kurylev, K.P.; Naryshkin, V.S.; Ozinkovskaya, E.; Rakhimov, K.Kh. Evraziiskii ekonomicheskii soyuz vo vneshnepoliticheskoi strategii Rossii (EAEU in Russian Foreign Policy Strategy) // *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 2016, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 75-86.

³ Degterev, D.; Vasilyuk, I.; Baum, V. Parametry mnogovektornosti vneshnej politiki stran SNG: prikladnoy analiz (Multiplexity Parameters of the CIS Foreign Policy: Applied Analysis) // *World Economy and International Relations*, 2018, No. 1, Vol. 62, pp. 63-75.

⁴ PetrovichBelkin O., Bokeriya S., Yeryomin A. (2019) The Problem of Russia's Declining Influence in the Former Soviet Union: Why Are the CIS Countries Drifting Toward Multilateralism? // *International Organisations Research Journal*, Vol. 14, no 1, pp. 94-112.

⁵ Fedorchenko, S.N. MVF i social'no-politicheskie processy na postsovetском prostranstve (IMF and Socio-Political Processes in the Post-Soviet Space) // *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 2017, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 22-33.

⁶ Bazileva, S.P.; Chernenko, E.F. Sotrudnichestvo Uzbekistana i Rossii kak stabiliziruyushchij faktor na evrazijskom prostranstve (Evolution of Relations Between Russia and Uzbekistan) // *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 2016, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 505-520.

⁷ Obolenskij, V. Otkrytost' nacional'nyh jekonomik: mir i Rossija (The Openness of National Economies: The World and Russia) // *World Economy and International Relations*, 2017, No. 10, Vol. 61, pp. 5-15.

⁸ Dzhangiryan, V.G.; Arslanov, R.A.; Kurylev, K.P.; Petrovich-Belkin, O.K. West European Countries and Their Foreign Policy in the Views of the Russian Liberals of Mid-to-Late Nineteenth Century // *The International History Review*, 2017. Mode of access: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07075332.2017.1350873?journalCode=rinh20>

⁹ Descalzi C.A.G. Russian Hegemony in the CIS Region: an Examination of Russian Influence and of Variation in Consent and Dissent by CIS States to Regional Hierarchy. Mode of access: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277072514_Russian_hegemony_in_the_CIS_region_an_examination_of_Russian_influence_and_of_variation_in_consent_and_dissent_by_CIS_states_to_regional_hierarchy

R., Rumer E.B.¹⁰, and Gomart T.¹¹ are currently most relevant.

Political reasons for declining Russian influence on the post-Soviet space

The first group of objective factors which may roughly be defined as political are closely linked to the economic circumstances determining Russia's decline in influence in the post-Soviet area. It seems logical that Russia's loss of influence on the global economy and international sales turnover mobilized the CIS states to diversify their own economic and thus political agenda. From this perspective, the core motif of the multi-partner principle and the necessity to pursue a well-balanced foreign policy course implied thereby may be observed in a number of public speeches and interviews with public officials and political leaders of the most diverse post-Soviet states¹². In order to prove this statement, let us provide three quotations by the presidents of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan: "We have no alternative but to form our foreign policy as a multilateral one. It so happens that today we are in the epicentre of the Eurasian continent. We have no other fate than to develop a multi-partner policy" (A.G. Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus)¹³; "Maintaining the balance of interests between the key global political players is one of the major tasks of foreign policy. Therefore, for us, a multi-partner approach is an independent and free foreign policy based primarily on Kyrgyzstan's national interests and the nation's welfare" (A. Sh. Atambayev, former President

of Kyrgyzstan)¹⁴; "Kazakhstan, by virtue of its geopolitics and economic capacity, has no right to fixate on narrow regional issues. That would be unclear not only to our multi-ethnic population, but to the global community as well. The future of Kazakhstan is in Asia, as well as in Europe; in the East, and in the West. Pursuing this kind of policy, we'll be able to eliminate any threats to Kazakhstan's safety. We'll be able to strengthen significant external opportunities through economic and political changes in our country" (N.A. Nazarbaev, President of Kazakhstan).¹⁵

An analysis of the above-mentioned quotations leads us to the conclusion that they are essentially the same idea being articulated in different ways, which, in view of the total discrepancy of political, economic, and social situations in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, only points to the fact that the leaders of these diverse CIS countries perceive the multilateral political approach as a pragmatic political and economic necessity. In this respect, the most telling is the quotation by N.A. Nazarbaev, which refers to early December 1991 (a few weeks prior to the dissolution of the USSR), and de-facto represents Kazakhstan's political agenda for the following decades. Likewise, it must be emphasized that although the quotations above do not include it directly, implicitly they maintain the idea of a gradual withdrawal from an exceptionally pro-Russian orientation due to its less advantageous results compared to a multi-partner approach. Therefore, the pragmatic political and economic interests of the CIS states are by no means supposed to always match Russia's national interests and foreign-policy needs. This is one of the major reasons for the pro-Russian actors' drifting towards multilateral approaches and thus for the gradual decline in Russia's exclusive influence over the post-Soviet region. Moreover, in view of the objective nature of this factor, in

¹⁰ Menon, R.; Rumer, E.B. Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014. 248 p.

¹¹ Gomart, T. What is Russia's influence in Post-Soviet sphere? Mode of access: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290650293_What_is_Russia%27s_influence_in_Post-Soviet_sphere

¹² Dorozhkin, YU.N. Aktual'nye problemy modernizatsii politicheskoy sistemy Rossii (Contemporary Problems of the Russian Political System Modernization) // *Vlast'*, 2012, No. 10, pp. 10-13.

¹³ Lukashenko Asserts, Belorussian Foreign Policy shall be multi-vector (In Russ.). Mode of access: <https://ria.ru/world/20170203/1487110298.html>

¹⁴ Atambayev: Multi-vector Foreign Policy is Based on the National Interests of Kyrgyzstan (In Russ.). Mode of access: <http://krg.rus4all.ru/exclusive/20160505/726618208.html>

¹⁵ Kazakhstan Development as the Sovereign State is a Right Strategy Implemented by the President N. Nazarbaev (In Russ.). Mode of access: <http://inform.kz:8080/arb/article/2299544>

practice, it does not seem possible to overcome “manually,” or in other words, through any purely subjective measures (for example, by building warm personal relations with leaders of the relevant countries). On the contrary, in order to improve this situation it is important to utilize the widest possible range of measures aimed at overcoming the current differences and to align the actions of the Russian Federation and the CIS states regarding the key economic, political and humanitarian issues, thus ensuring bilateral rapprochement between Russia and the post-Soviet states. This will minimize the threat of a conflict or any dramatic deterioration of relations between the parties in the future.

Dynamics of economic interactions between Russia and CIS countries

One of the major economic factors determining Russia’s gradual loss of political influence over the post-Soviet area is the current general decline in Russia’s influence in global economics and international sales turnover during the last two and a half decades. According to figures from the World Bank, in 1991 the purchasing power parity GDP ratio of the Russian Federation (RSFSR) was 3.9% as compared to the overall world figures; then by 2008 it had declined to 3.4%, and finally in 2017 it decreased to 2.8%.¹⁶ Clearly, this decline of Russia’s economic performance cannot but impact the policy it pursues in the post-Soviet area. This can be explained by an increasingly noticeable lack of economic and thus political instruments of influence of the Russian Federation over the CIS states, and also by the general loss of appeal for the CIS states of a foreign policy meant to build tight commercial and economic relations with Russia. These countries tend to gradually refocus their own policy toward a multilateral economic cooperation with the dynamically developing external actors (particularly China). Finally, the gradual decline of Russia’s influence over the global economy had the most adverse effects

on Russia’s sales turnover within the post-Soviet states, with the most significant turnover loss between the Russian Federation and quite a few of the CIS states being observed after 2014, and a marked aggravation of Russia’s economic issues due to the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis and imposition of western sanctions. Thus, from 2014-2016 aggregate turnover between Russia and Belarus was reduced by 23% (from 30.5 to 23.5 billion US dollars); Kazakhstan – by 37% (from 20.8 to 13.03 billion US dollars); Uzbekistan – by 32% (from 3.96 to 2.7 billion US dollars); Armenia – by 4% (from 1.4 to 1.34 billion US dollars); Azerbaijan – by 51% (from 3.96 to 1.95 billion US dollars); Ukraine – by 63% (from 27.8 to 10.2 billion US dollars).¹⁷

Analysis of the key figures stated above makes it possible to draw the conclusion that the overall picture within the last few years is marked by a gradual deterioration of certain trade and economic relations between Russia and most of the post-Soviet area states; moreover, the continuing process of Eurasian integration and the Eurasian Economic Union extension are, unfortunately, unable to delay this process to any adequate degree. This dynamic resulted in dissolution of the economic “safety cushion” which, on the one hand, made it possible to mask any contradictions emerging from time to time between the Russian Federation and certain CIS states in prior years, while on the other hand, served as a solid ground for building a constructive political dialogue regarding the fullest range of issues. In this context, particular attention is drawn to the Ukraine case and interrelations with it which are marked by a peculiar “vicious circle,” i.e. aggravation of political contradictions leads to a decrease of intensity in trade and economic cooperation between states

¹⁶ The World Bank. World Development Indicators. Category: “GDP, PPP (current international \$)”. Mode of access: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>

¹⁷ Foreign Trade of Russia. Federal Tax Service of Russia Data (In Russ.). Mode of access: <http://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2017-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiey-i-belarusyu-v-2016-g/>; <http://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2017-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiey-i-kazahstanom-v-2016-g/>; <http://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2017-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiey-i-uzbekistanom-v-2016-g/>; <http://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2017-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiey-i-armeniy-v-2016-g/>; <http://ru-stat.com/date-M201601-201612/RU/trade/AZ/>; <http://russian-trade.c>

and a dramatic reduction of turnover between them, which in return leads to further political escalation that is harder to overcome due to a total absence of common economic interests. It seems appropriate to mention that lowering of turnover between Russia and the post-Soviet states causes a significant decline in the influence of the pro-Russian actors in the CIS states and the economic “pressure group” associated therewith, which is objectively interested in preserving tight economic and political relations with the Russian Federation, which directly and dramatically empowers these states’ alternative foreign policy path and strengthens the line towards multilateral policies. Therefore, the two key economic factors – the general decline of the Russian Federation’s influence on global economics and the decrease in turnover with the post-Soviet states – can be named the major reasons for the post-Soviet states’ drifting towards a multi-partner approach.

Lastly, there is one more economically significant factor responsible for the decline in Russia’s influence over the post-Soviet area – the pragmatic involvement of the CIS states in trade and economic cooperation with a wide range of extra-regional actors – for example, with Western countries. In prior years, under conditions of no conflict between the Russian Federation and Western countries and under relatively tight economic, cultural and humanitarian ties, this kind of ambition by the post-Soviet states did not and could not result in any significant financial or reputational harm to Russia. Nowadays, in the context of raging anti-Russian sanctions and dramatic intensification of foreign policy contradictions, fueled primarily by the Ukrainian and Syrian crises, the CIS states are facing the “either us or them” dilemma, meaning “No third is given”. Finally, even though previously the post-Soviet states were considering merely diversifying their economic policies and building solid trade relations with a variety of external actors, right now the outlines of the so-called zero-sum game are becoming more apparent. In these circumstances certain states need to decide which side of the global standoff to choose. Moreover, either choice unavoidably results in the deterioration of relations or even conflict with the other side. Clearly, this dilemma has been imposed on a number of the CIS states

(most significantly, those having a long-standing trading relationship with the West). This inevitably weakens Russia’s economic and thus political standing in the post-Soviet region.

Socio-cultural and civilizational factors in relationship between Russia and post-Soviet countries

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and gaining independence by the CIS countries gave a powerful impulse to the rise of national identity in the newly-formed countries, and often the search for the post-Soviet states’ ethnic and national identity was accompanied by a dramatic separation from their common past. An enormous controversy resided in the fact that in many cases representatives of any new national elites put all the blame for the current socio-economic and political issues on the past “colonial” (according to their perspective) heritage and the policy of the Soviet Union and hence Russia, as its successor state. In particular, this tendency was the most striking from 1991-2017 in the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Moldova and, to a certain extent, Georgia, while this trend was much less evident in the Central Asian states, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. It is logical enough that the subjective perception of the Russian Federation as an actor is in some way responsible for the current domestic and foreign policy failures of the newly-formed countries, along with the objective difficulties in building a full-scale dialogue with Moscow regarding the whole range of very puzzling problems. All those things were bound to have a certain impact (an extremely adverse one) on Russia’s position and its degree of influence over the post-Soviet area.

It seems reasonable to assume that in order to create a more comprehensive image of the current drift of the pro-Russian actors towards the multilateral principle, it should be noted that this tendency is conditioned not only upon trade and economy, but is also based on historical and social factors, i.e the so-called determinants centering around the gradual divergence of cultures of Russia and other post-Soviet states following the dissolution of the USSR, as well as on a de-emphasis of the Russian language in the public and cultural life of the CIS states. As of today,

the Russian language is official in only three post-Soviet area states – Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, while its significance in other CIS countries is declining progressively. Moreover, this scenario is dramatized by another three factors of significant importance: first, regarding most post-Soviet countries, by the current overall systematic reduction of use of the Russian language, in both secondary and higher education, science, culture, radio and TV, as well as in everyday life. Second, by the Russian federal authorities' almost complete lack of support of the Russian language in the post-Soviet states, and the poor performance of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*). Finally, it is also affected by the transition of certain CIS states from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet: such a reform took place in Moldova even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1989; Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan made this transition in 1993; Azerbaijan completely rejected the Cyrillic alphabet in 1992-2001; finally, a similar reform took place in Kazakhstan by an Order dated October 26, 2017.¹⁸ Therefore, the decrease in the Russian-speaking population's numbers and thus in the potential pro-Russian "pressure group" in the CIS states is one of the major socio-cultural preconditions for Russia's loss of standing and degree of influence over the post-Soviet area.

Psychological and ideological dissensions between Russia and CIS countries

The psycho-political factors weakening Russia's policies in the post-soviet region are interpreted by the authors as a reasonably wide range of personal and subjective reasons which directly lead or may potentially lead to a wrong or corrupted evaluation of the current stance and specific character of bilateral relations between Russia and certain CIS countries. Proceeding from this definition of political and psycho-

political factors, this group may roughly be divided into several sub-categories, each being characterized separately.

First of all, this refers to a biased judgment of the initial intentions and political affiliations of any actors within the post-Soviet area which present themselves as being pro-Russia oriented. Quite often representatives of the national elites of the CIS countries use pro-Russian rhetoric either as populism aimed at either gaining the favor of part of the electorate, or gaining some direct profit from Russia. The most striking example of national elites in this category is when members of Belarus' political class seek financial profit for their country by representing themselves as Russia's closest (or only) reliable allies. Likewise, this sub-category may include national elites of Armenia for which the pro-Russian orientation is significant only through the lens of their pursuit of safety and an early resolution to the frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for their own benefit. The situation that formed as a result of the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia in 2003 may be one more illustrative example of a corrupt evaluation by the Russian political elites of those political aspirations which were initially inherent to the so-called pro-Russian actors in the post-Soviet area. In particular, Mikhail Saakashvili was initially considered by the Russian political class to be a pro-Russian candidate and an advantageous alternative compared to Eduard Shevardnadze's multilateral political course. The subsequent developments clearly demonstrated that Russia's original reliance on Mikhail Saakashvili having a pro-Russian orientation was fatally flawed; hence, shortly afterward, it became one of the key causes of escalation in the South Ossetian conflict and the "five-day" Russo-Georgian war in August 2008.

Secondly, one more issue with Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet area is the sort of absolute priority given to the term "pro-Russian orientation" i.e. identification of this term with a presumed willingness on the part of the political forces from the CIS countries to make concessions and compromises regarding a great variety of issues. This point of view leads to the false conclusion that pro-Russia oriented actors in power in a post-Soviet state gives Moscow carte-blanche when it comes to that country's foreign policy course. This naturally causes seriously harm to bilateral communication and, moreover,

¹⁸ Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 26 October 2017 No. 569 "On Translation of Kazakh Alphabet into Latin Alphabet" (with amendments of 19.02.2018) (In Russ.). Mode of access: http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33613600#pos=5;-103

causes a fast moving drift by the formerly loyal and completely pro-Russian forces towards a multi-partner approach. In particular, this tendency used to be characteristic of Russian-Ukrainian relations during the presidency of L.D. Kuchma (1994-2005) and V.F. Yanukovych (2010-2014). The same tendency, we suppose, may be observed in Russia's cooperation with Belarus and many other Eurasian Economic Union states: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and partially Kazakhstan. Russian foreign policy decision makers tend to mistakenly assume that these countries have little or no alternative to the pro-Russian political course, which under such logic would mean their willingness to make various concessions in economic, political and humanitarian spheres for the sake of preserving exclusive relations with Russian Federation. Third and finally, another psycho-political aspect contributing to the decline in Russia's influence over the post-Soviet region centers on a critical overestimation by the Russian governing class of the so-called subjective, personal factor in relations with the CIS countries. In the authors' opinion, this issue most obviously manifests itself in the three following capacities:

A) First and foremost, we should mention the Russian political elite's incorrect identification of good personal relations between country leaders with the willingness to pursue a purely pro-Russia oriented foreign policy line; in other words, this refers to the failure to understand that a warm and friendly relationship with the leader of a certain country by no means guarantees a specific vector of its foreign policy development. It seems appropriate to state that this kind of mistake is most often made regarding post-Soviet countries, however there also are some examples of an extra-regional nature (in this context, the most vivid and remarkable is the example with the USA: good personal relations between the two presidents – V.V. Putin and D. Trump – scarcely affect the dynamics of the bilateral communications and in fact do not influence the ongoing confrontation).

B) According to the authors' point of view, Russia's stance in the post-Soviet region is being highly compromised by an obvious tendency of the Russian political class to make certain major foreign policy decisions based on a purely subjective approach, disregarding any

comprehensive expert and scientific analysis and the vast range of statistical data available. Such an irrational approach to decision-making in foreign policy has always been a result of an excessive accumulation of power in the hands of a single leader or a small group of individuals. However, we are referring to the following quite logical tendency: the more concentrated the accumulation of power in any given state, the more domestic and foreign policy decisions are made based on a subjective approach, which ultimately leads to major repercussions in the international field.

C) The above-mentioned overestimation of the personal factor and role of the pro-Russian leaders of the CIS states, in return, on the part of the Russian governing class causes a fundamental underestimation of the critical need for solid and systematic work with the civil society structures, the opposition, and NGOs of the post-Soviet states. In other words, idealization of the role of the pro-Russian politicians from the CIS states (or any persons being wrongfully identified as such) leads to pursuance of a quite risky foreign policy course oriented towards cooperation just with one of the significant influence groups in any relevant country. Empirically such an approach results in a situation where the change of power in any CIS country *de facto* leads almost to a full breakdown of the current relations with Russia and further escalation of conflict, which for example took place after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, as well as after the protests in Kiev in late 2013 and early 2014.

Conclusion

This analysis of the above-mentioned factors causing the pro-Russian actors' drift towards a multilateral approach in foreign policy and thus the decline in Russia's influence over the post-Soviet area makes it possible to draw a wide range of conclusions. First, when considering the current relations between the Russian Federation and the CIS countries, it should be kept in mind that the dynamics of their bilateral and multilateral relations are to a considerable degree defined by a very wide complex of both objective and subjective factors. Thus, we should recognize that the above tendency associated with the gradual decline in pro-Russian influence over the post-Soviet region, unfortunately, is not

going to cease in the near future. This postulate, according to the authors' point of view, follows the thesis that this trend is based on a variety of economic, political, historical, socio-cultural and psycho-political factors, which acquire a significant synergistic effect by mutually strengthening and intensifying one another.

It seems appropriate to emphasize that if the subjective factors adversely affecting Russia's policies in the post-Soviet area may potentially be severely minimize in a relatively short term, then the objective factors, which primarily refers to the decline in Russia's influence over the global economy and the decrease of its sales turnover with the CIS countries, are much harder to deal with. Any improvement of the current dynamics may require much more time. However, the global political and economic trends will play a significant role in this process; therefore, for Russia it is critical to exercise extra caution and sensitivity in making key foreign policy decisions affecting its interests in the post-Soviet region. According to our point of view, in the age of globalization and escalation of a wide range of transnational challenges and threats, all foreign-policy actions by any world state should be free from emotion and based on a thorough and comprehensive scientific analysis with the use of available empirical and factual data, while the approach itself should result in the absolute rationality and predictability of the foreign policy course of any relevant actor.

Ultimately, the success of the Russia's foreign policies in the post-Soviet region will depend largely on Moscow's restrained reaction to any sovereign choice made by the post-Soviet states in the economic, political, socio-cultural and humanitarian spheres, as well as on the fastest possible minimization of the above-mentioned subjective factors. This includes a complete rejection of any irrational and unreasonable actions that may potentially damage Russia's relations with a significant portion of the global community, including its closest neighbors among the post-Soviet countries.

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ОСЛАБЛЕНИЕ ПОЗИЦИЙ РОССИИ НА ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ И КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ПРИЧИНЫ ДАННОГО ФЕНОМЕНА

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Ключевые слова:

Российская Федерация; международные отношения;
постсоветское пространство; национальные интересы;
политический прагматизм

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются основные политические, экономические и социальные факторы, оказывающие влияние на взаимоотношения между Россией и государствами СНГ и в той или иной степени обуславливающие снижение влияния РФ на постсоветском пространстве. С точки зрения авторов, данный феномен объясняется, с одной стороны, стремлением государств СНГ к диверсификации своего внешнеполитического курса, а с другой – целым рядом социо-культурных и психологических факторов. Авторы полагают, что восприятие отдельных государств постсоветского пространства в качестве заведомо пророссийских является ошибочным в своей основе и базирующимся на неверной оценке текущих международных реалий, в то время как на практике внешнеполитический курс постсоветских стран в первую очередь определяется конкретными экономическими интересами соответствующих государств СНГ. В этой связи использование таких терминов, как «пророссийская» или «прозападная» ориентация стран СНГ представляется авторам достаточно малопродуктивным и не способствующим выработке реалистичного внешнеполитического курса в отношении данных государств.

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