

EDITORIAL

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Unusual Clarity. Russia Is No Longer the West



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Abstract. On March 31, 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree “On approving the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation”, which outlines key goals and objectives of national policy in the field of international relations. The Concept for the first time indicates the status of Russia as a “unique country-civilization”; emphasizes the hostility of the anti-Russian policy implemented by the Collective West and its leader, the United States; and names friendly countries that are becoming the main focus of interaction for the Russian Federation in the coming years. The authors of the Concept and many experts note that the firm and resolute wording, in which the guidelines of Russia’s foreign policy are set out, accurately reflects the objective tenseness of the geopolitical situation that has developed in recent years (especially after the start of the SMO). The Russian Federation, in fact, is in the avant-garde

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of the struggle for a multipolar world and for the independence of all national states fighting to preserve and strengthen their national sovereignty against the hegemony of the United States and its satellites. At the same time, making things clear regarding Russia's foreign policy guidelines allows the President to further improve domestic policy, bring it in line with the status of Russia as a country-civilization in terms of strengthening the foundations of public administration, achieving full national sovereignty and social justice. The article analyzes the adoption of a new Foreign Policy Concept as the President's next step in the implementation of the general course of national development that he has been in charge of for the past 23 years. We present the relevant expert assessments and the dynamics of public opinion regarding the activities of the head of state. We also look into objective historical prerequisites that determined the specifics of a new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, as well as some key tasks that are coming to the fore in domestic policy after the adoption of the Concept.

Key words: Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, friendly and non-friendly countries, President, public administration system, elites, public opinion.

March 31, 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a new Foreign Policy Concept, which, as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pointed out, “reflects **revolutionary advances** in the international sphere which have received a considerable boost with the start of the special military operation”¹.

The wording of the concept is firm and resolute, and it determines Russia's place in the international space, its historical mission and relations with foreign states very clearly. In the document, it is the first time ever that Russia is called a “unique country-civilization”, “the core of the civilizational community of the Russian world”. The Concept clearly defines the role of the Collective West as “the source of major risks to the security of the Russian Federation” and the United States as “the main inspirer, organizer and performer of the aggressive anti-Russian policy of the Collective West” (*Insert 1*).

Many experts (Russian and foreign) point out that, while describing Russia's situation and the overall geopolitical situation, the authors of the Concept call things by their proper names (*Tab. 1*).

Vladimir Putin: “**Radical changes in international affairs have forced us to seriously revise our main documents on strategic planning, including the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which sets out the principles, tasks and priorities of our diplomacy.**

The Foreign Ministry, working together with the Presidential Executive Office, the Security Council Staff, the Government and many ministries and departments, has completed a large-scale and meticulous job to update **and adjust the concept to modern geopolitical realities**”².

¹ Sergei Lavrov's speech at the meeting with permanent members of the Security Council, March 31, 2023. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70810>

² Meeting with members of the Security Council, March 31, 2023. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70810>

Insert 1

**MAIN PROVISIONS OF RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT, MARCH 31, 2023
(Presidential Decree 229 "On approving the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", dated March 31, 2023)**

<p><i>Item 4. "More than a thousand years of independent statehood, the cultural heritage of the preceding era, deep historical ties with the traditional European culture and other Eurasian cultures, and the ability to ensure harmonious coexistence of different peoples, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups on one common territory, which has been developed over many centuries, determine Russia's special position as a unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power that brings together the Russian people and other peoples belonging to the cultural and civilizational community of the Russian world".</i></p>
<p><i>Item 5. "...Russia, taking into account its decisive contribution to the victory in World War II and its active role in shaping the contemporary system of international relations and eliminating the global system of colonialism, is one of the sovereign centers of global development..."</i></p>
<p><i>Item 13. "...the United States of America (USA) and their satellites used the measures taken by the Russian Federation as regards Ukraine to protect its vital interests as a pretext to aggravate the longstanding anti-Russian policy and unleashed a new type of hybrid war. It is aimed at weakening Russia in every possible way, including at undermining its constructive civilizational role, power, economic and technological capabilities, limiting its sovereignty in foreign and domestic policy, violating its territorial integrity. This Western policy has become comprehensive and is now enshrined at the doctrinal level. This was not the choice of the Russian Federation. Russia does not consider itself to be an enemy of the West, is not isolating itself from the West and has no hostile intentions with regard to it..."</i></p>
<p><i>Item 15. "In view of the long-term trends in the world development, the national interests of the Russian Federation in the foreign policy domain are as follows:... to promote traditional Russian moral and spiritual values, preserve cultural and historical heritage of the multi-ethnic people of the Russian Federation..."</i></p>
<p><i>Item 16. "Building on its national interests and strategic national priorities, the Russian Federation focuses its foreign policy activities on achieving the following goals:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) to ensure security of the Russian Federation, its sovereignty in all domains, and territorial integrity;</i> <i>2) to create favorable external environment for sustainable development of Russia;</i> <i>3) to consolidate Russia's position as one of the responsible, powerful and independent centers of the modern world".</i>
<p><i>Item 19. "The Russian Federation intends to make it a priority to...eliminate the vestiges of domination by the US and other unfriendly states in global affairs, create conditions to enable any state to renounce neo-colonial or hegemonic ambitions".</i></p>
<p><i>Item 25. "...The use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation can address, in particular, the tasks of repelling and preventing an armed attack on Russia and (or) its allies..."</i></p>
<p><i>Item 26. "In the event of unfriendly acts by foreign states or their associations threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, including those involving restrictive measures (sanctions) of a political or economic nature or the use of modern information and communication technologies, the Russian Federation considers it lawful to take the symmetrical and asymmetrical measures necessary to suppress such unfriendly acts and also to prevent them from recurring in future".</i></p>

End of Insert 1

<p>Items 39–49. “...The Russian Federation intends to give priority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ reducing the dependence of the Russian economy on the unfriendly actions of foreign states...; ✓ monitoring and making public the real situation regarding the observance of human rights and freedoms in the world, primarily in states claiming their exclusive position in human rights issues and in setting international standards in this area...; ✓ preventing the instigation of “color revolutions” and other attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Russia’s allies and partners...; ✓ countering deployment or reinforcement of military infrastructure of unfriendly states and other threats to Russia’s security in the near abroad”.
<p>Item 51. “Eurasian continent. The People’s Republic of China, the Republic of India. A comprehensive deepening of ties and enhancement of coordination with friendly sovereign global centers of power and development, which are located on the Eurasian continent and committed to approaches which coincide in principle with the Russian approaches to a future world order and solutions for key problems of the world politics, is particularly important for achieving strategic goals and major objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation.”</p>
<p>Item 59. “Most European states pursue an aggressive policy toward Russia... In this connection, the Russian Federation intends to consistently defend its national interests by giving priority attention to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) reducing and neutralizing threats to security, territorial integrity, sovereignty, traditional spiritual and moral values, and socio-economic development of Russia, its allies and partners from unfriendly European states, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and the Council of Europe; 2) creating conditions for the cessation of unfriendly actions by European states and their associations, for a complete rejection of the anti-Russian course (including interference in Russia’s internal affairs)...; 3) the formation of a new model of coexistence by European states to ensure the safe, sovereign and progressive development of Russia, its allies and partners...”
<p>Item 62. “Russia’s course towards the U.S. has a combined character, taking into account the role of this state as one of the influential sovereign centers of world development and at the same time the main inspirer, organizer and executor of the aggressive anti-Russian policy of the collective West, the source of major risks to the security of the Russian Federation, international peace, a balanced, equitable and progressive development of humanity”.</p>
<p>Items 63–64. “The Russian Federation is interested in maintaining strategic parity, peaceful coexistence with the United States... The prospects of forming such a model of U.S. - Russian relations depend on the extent to which the United States is ready to abandon its policy of power-domination and revise its anti-Russian course in favor of interaction with Russia on the basis of the principles of sovereign equality, mutual benefit, and respect for each other’s interests. The Russian Federation intends to build relations with other Anglo-Saxon states depending on the degree of their willingness to abandon their unfriendly course toward Russia and to respect its legitimate interests”.</p>
<p>Item 66. “The President of the Russian Federation, acting in accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation and federal laws, defines the main lines of the foreign policy and, as the head of State, represents the Russian Federation in international relations”.</p>

Table 1. Russian and foreign experts on the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation dated March 31, 2023

<p>Russian experts:</p> <p>“...In the previous decades, Russia, with various degrees of zeal and success, was guided by the fact that it should integrate into different communities like the European and global. Now it's over, because civilization does not have to fit in anywhere – it is self-sufficient”³.</p> <p>“If we consider things from a broader perspective, if we look at the Constitution of the Russian Federation, take into account the fundamentals of state policy for the preservation and protection of traditional values and a number of other documents, then we see that all this is connected, it is a consistent picture, which, in fact, declares an important direction for Russia. Definitely, it is the protection of sovereignty for the preservation of the people... As for Russia's mission, it has remained unchanged for centuries. The mission is to fight injustice. So it has been for centuries and so it will be in the future...”⁴</p> <p>“The foreign policy concept turned out to be a document corresponding to its time... the key message is that Russia is ready to defend its interests, defend its sovereignty, including, if necessary, the use of tough measures in relations with its counterparties in the international arena”⁵.</p>
<p>Foreign mass media:</p> <p>Bloomberg (USA): “President Vladimir Putin approved a new Russian foreign policy concept that set out to confront the U.S. and its allies, claiming an “era of revolutionary changes” was under way in international relations...”</p> <p>Daily Mail (UK): “The 42-page document outlines changes in Russia's views on the world. In particular, the confrontation that has been brewing in recent years and repeatedly voiced by Putin in relations with the West has finally been consolidated”⁶.</p> <p>China Radio International (CRI, China): “The new edition of Russia's Foreign Policy Concept is based on the results of an assessment of the international situation, as well as its own security”⁷.</p>

The above excerpts from the new RF Foreign Policy Concept prove the unambiguity and firmness of its main provisions. Perhaps the main statement is that **Russia is no longer the West**. And it is quite consistent with the following points:

first, “modern geopolitical realities, transitional nature of the era, noticeable aggravation of

threats to international security”⁸; experts note that “the bell tolls for the existing world system”⁹, Russia is involved in an “almost real war”¹⁰, and this is “not a clash between Moscow and Kiev, but a military confrontation between NATO, primarily the United States and UK, and Russia”¹¹.

³ The state-civilizational view of things. Opinion of F. Lukyanov, scientific director of the Valdai Club, editor-in-chief of the journal *Rossiya v global'noi politike*. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2023/04/03/6426da9c9a79475863b4452d>

⁴ Political scientist pointed out that the mission of the Russian Federation remained the same in the updated Foreign Policy Concept. An opinion of political scientist A. Asafov. Available at: <https://life.ru/p/1569436>

⁵ The foreign policy concept has shown the readiness of the Russian Federation to firmly defend its interests. An opinion of I. Timofeev, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Available at: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/kontsepsiya-vneshney-politiki-pokazala-gotovnost-rf-zhestko-otstaivat-interesy/>

⁶ With its new foreign policy concept, Russia is looking for a “balance of interests” with the United States and intends to counter “existential threats”. Available at: <https://inosmi.ru/20230331/kontsepsiya-261852162.html>

⁷ “A civilization that protects the Russian-speaking people”: World media on the new Foreign Policy Concept of Russia. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/17433819>

⁸ The new foreign policy concept of Russia invites non-Arctic states to develop the Northern Sea Route. An opinion of A. Krivorotov, member of the Expert Council of the Project Office for Arctic Development, Doctor of Sciences (Economics), associate professor at the Odintsovo branch of MGIMO University. Available at: <https://porarctic.ru/ru/events/andrey-krivorotov-novaya-kontsepsiya-vneshney-politiki-rossii-priglasht-nearkticheskie-gosudarstv/>

⁹ Fursov A. The end of the world system. Will the world's population decrease by 90%? Available at: <https://denliteraturi.ru/article/7319>

¹⁰ Sergei Lavrov's speech at a joint press conference with South African Foreign Minister N. Pandor. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/23/01/2023/63ce6ceb9a794775412d1081>

¹¹ An interview with N. Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, for *Argumenty i fakty* newspaper. Available at: https://aif.ru/politics/world/nikolay_patrushev_sobytiya_na_ukraine_eto_protivostoyanie_nato_s_rossiy

“When Vladimir Putin first came to power, he tried to establish good relations with the West. He held out his hand, but his gesture was completely ignored... Putin has not changed, he has always remained true to himself, regardless of external events”¹².

“The Hill” newspaper opinion contributor Harlan Ullman notes that Western countries ignored the main call of President Vladimir Putin in his 2007 Munich speech – to abandon the idea of a unipolar world. The Russian president considered the reaction of Western leaders disrespectful; it was their mistake.

In addition, the West did not realize the seriousness of what was happening, rejecting the draft agreements on security guarantees proposed by Moscow in December 2021”¹³.

Second, the leadership style of Vladimir Putin himself, who in the course of 23 years of presidency has changed from a national leader who is quite loyal to the Collective West to a head of state who actually challenges it.

At the same time, as the President himself notes, he is guided by a **“healthy conservatism”**, which

presupposes **“a realistic assessment of oneself and others, a precise alignment of priorities, a correlation of necessity and possibility, a prudent formulation of goals...”**¹⁴

We recall that it was the actual assessment of the situation and threats to national security that forced the President to start the special military operation on February 24, 2022 due to the following reasons: transformation of Ukraine into an “Anti-Russia”; ongoing shelling of Donbass residents; NATO countries ignoring the basic requirements of security guarantees officially presented by Russia in December 2021¹⁵ and serving as a last opportunity for a diplomatic settlement of issues related to Russia’s defense of its sovereignty and preventing the advance of NATO’s military infrastructure to Russian borders; that is, for a peaceful dialogue with the West, which Russia has been conducting since Vladimir Putin’s 2007 Munich speech, in fact for 14 years.

In March 2023, the very appearance and firmness of the wording of Russia’s new Foreign Policy Concept were also largely dictated by the objective geopolitical conditions; “realistic assessment of oneself and others”, and “correlation of necessity and possibility”.

¹² *Der Spiegel*, Germany: Putin’s true face. Available at: <https://www.putin-today.ru/archives/127724>

¹³ Tsvetaev L. “Putin believed that the United States and NATO did not respect him”. How neglecting the Munich speech became a mistake of the West. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2022/05/14/14853590.shtml>

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, October 21, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66975>

¹⁵ December 15, 2021, the draft agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on security guarantees and the draft agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and the member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were handed over to the American side. They are published on the official website of the Russian Foreign Ministry (https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1790809/).

The agreement included Russia’s demand that NATO member States “shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997; “commit themselves to refrain from any further enlargement of NATO, including the accession of Ukraine”; “shall not conduct any military activity on the territory of Ukraine as well as other States in the Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia”, etc.

All these demands were ignored, as U.S. Secretary of State A. Blinken and NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg stated on January 26, 2022.

For example, Russia, in fact, was able to declare itself a “unique country-civilization” opposing the West only after the whole world was in motion and the leaders of different countries (China, India, Brazil, etc.) began to publicly declare the threat of hegemony and despotism, the need and the inevitability of a multipolar world, and the importance of national sovereignty.

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi: “Both India and Russia dream of a multipolar world. This is what the world needs today. We have moved from a bipolar world to a unipolar one, but now we are gradually moving toward a multipolar world... India and Russia share the same point of view on this issue”¹⁶.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi: “The construction of a multipolar world cannot be stopped. There are already many centers of power outside the Western world”¹⁷.

Chinese President Xi Jinping: “Hegemony, despotism and harassment cause serious harm to the world... No country is superior to all others. There is no universal model of public administration and there is no world order where the decisive word belongs to a single country”¹⁸.

Brazilian President Lula da Silva: “Why should all countries base their trade on the dollar? Who decided that our currencies are weak, that they have no value in other countries? Who decided that the dollar became the [main international] currency after the disappearance of the gold standard?”¹⁹

And it is not just words. First, it is an indicator of the real change of forces in geopolitical competition; this, in particular is proved by official statistics: over the period from 1990 to 2021, the U.S. share in world GDP decreased from 20 to 16%, and that of China increased from 4 to 19% (*Fig. 1*). Moreover, this trend has been observed over the past 30 years. Since 2017, China has topped the world economy, which in fact reflects the thesis expressed by Vladimir Putin on July 20, 2022 at the “Strong Ideas for a New Time” Forum: “No matter how much the West and the supranational elite strive to preserve the existing order, **a new era and a new stage in world history are coming. Only genuinely sovereign states are in a position to ensure a high growth dynamic** and become a role model for others in terms of standards of living and quality of life, the protection of traditional values and high humanistic ideals, and development models where an individual is not a means, but the ultimate goal”²⁰.

Second, the struggle of many countries for their national sovereignty against the global hegemony of the United States is their natural reaction to the U.S. colonialist policy, which is conducted openly and which is legislatively enshrined in official strategic documents. According to the U.S. National Security Strategy 2015, “the question is never whether America should lead”; moreover, according to the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 2021, the U.S provides itself with a right “to shape the future of international politics to advance our interests”.

¹⁶ An interview with India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi for *Rossiiskaya gazeta* newspaper and TASS. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2019/09/03/premer-indii-rasskazal-ob-osobennyh-otnosheniiah-s-putinyim-i-planah-na-vef.html>

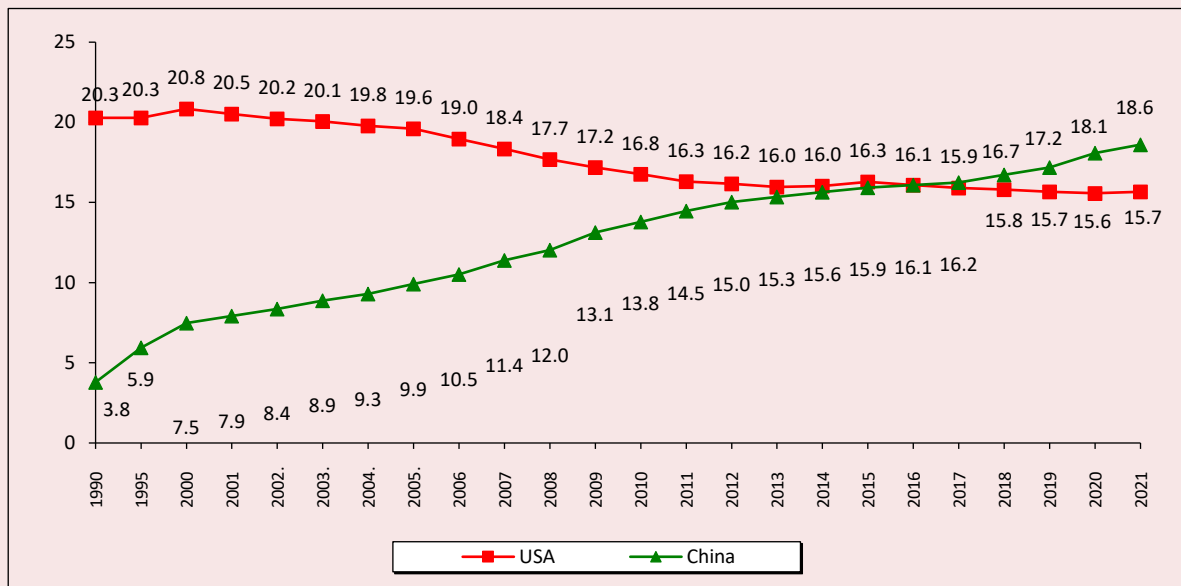
¹⁷ Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi’s speech at the General Assembly of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA). Available at: <https://ria.ru/20221025/iran-1826440160.html>

¹⁸ Xi Jinping: “Persistently move toward new prospects of friendship, cooperation and joint development of China and Russia” (author’s article for Russian media). Available at: <https://rg.ru/2023/03/20/uporno-dvigatsia-vpered-k-novym-perspektivam-druzhby-sotrudnichestva-i-sovmestnogo-razvitiia-kitaia-i-rossii.html>

¹⁹ Speech by Brazilian President Lula da Silva during his visit to China. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/643830249a7947b9dc7bf3bd>

²⁰ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the “Strong Ideas for a New Time” Forum, July 20, 2022. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69039>

Figure 1. Share of the U.S. and China in world GDP (by PPP) in 1990–2021, % of the total



Source: World Bank.

Excerpt from the U.S. National Security Strategy of February 13, 2015 (signed by U.S. President B. Obama): “...the question is not whether America will lead, but how we will lead into the future... American leadership is a global force for good, but it is grounded in our enduring national interests...”²¹

Excerpts from the U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance published on March 3, 2021 (two months after J. Biden came to power):

“We must prove that **our model** isn’t a relic of history; it’s the single best way to realize the promise of **our future**...”

...We must also contend with the reality that the distribution of power across the world is changing, creating new threats.

...The United States’ enduring advantages – across all forms and dimensions of our power – **enable us to shape the future of international politics to advance our interests** and values, and create a freer, safer, and more prosperous world.

...We will reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world... They (allies) are a tremendous source of strength and a unique American advantage, helping to shoulder the responsibilities required to keep **our nation** safe and **our people** prosperous”²².

²¹ U.S. National Security Strategy, February 2015. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/data/2015/09/07/1090125957/%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D0%9D%D0%91%20%D0%A1%D0%A8%D0%90.docx>

²² The White House has presented an interim U.S. national security strategy. Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/10829651>

To achieve these goals (as history already shows), the “hegemon” is ready to use any means to maintain leadership: from the policy of “double standards”, ignoring the norms of international law and destroying the economy of its own satellites (as it did to Germany, for example) to the military invasion of other countries, active interference in the internal affairs of other nation-states in order to incite intra-ethnic conflicts and organize coups d’etat, “fighting Russia down to the last Ukrainian”, and terrorist attacks.

Thus, by designating itself as a unique “country-civilization”, Russia not only assumes the function of protecting the entire Russian world, but also declares that such a status is possible, that there are many such nation-states, and that Russia will continue to “eliminate the vestiges of domination by the U.S. in global affairs”²³ as long as the West does not recognize this fact and take it into account.

A sober assessment of the situation has ultimately proved the West to be “the source of the main risks to the security of the Russian Federation”²⁴. We are talking about a **direct involvement of NATO member States in the conflict with Russia on the side of the “Kiev regime”**: through an unprecedented scale of sanctions pressure on the Russian economy, military assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine (pumping the country with

weapons, intelligence support, military personnel training, etc.), terrorist attacks, which American experts called “a criminal act of war committed contrary to the U.S. Constitution”²⁵, not to mention terrorist attacks on the territory of Russia²⁶.

The RF President called the explosions of the Nord Stream and Nord Stream-2 gas pipelines, which occurred on September 26, 2022, “a terrorist act committed at the state level”²⁷, and some experts have directly pointed out that **“undermining the strategic infrastructure of a country... may well serve as “casus belli” (reason to start a war)”²⁸.**

At the same time, an investigation²⁹ by American journalist, Pulitzer Prize winner S. Hersh who “specializes in investigations of the most carefully kept secrets of the CIA, the Pentagon and other U.S. government structures”³⁰ has revealed that **“the operation was prepared and carried out by the American military and special services with the help of colleagues from Norway”³¹.**

In other words, everything confirms what experts are saying: **“In the eyes of the West we are the ones who challenged it... It is ready to destroy us because we are its existential enemy”³². This idea is also reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept in the**

²³ Presidential Decree “On approving the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70811>

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Napolitano A.P. What is Biden’s goal in Russia-Ukraine war? *The Washington Times*. Wednesday, February 15, 2023. Available at: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/feb/15/what-is-bidens-goal-in-russia-ukraine-war/>

²⁶ The murder of D. Dugina on August 20, 2022, the explosion in a cafe in the center of Saint Petersburg on April 2, 2023, as a result of which the Russian war correspondent Vladlen Tatarsky was killed.

²⁷ An interview with Vladimir Putin for Rossiya-24 channel (VGTRK) on March 14, 2023. Available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/891027>

²⁸ An opinion of retired KGB colonel I. Prelin. The KGB colonel told how Russia can repay Norway for the Nord Stream pipelines. Available at: https://tsargrad.tv/news/polkovnik-kgb-rasskazal-kak-rossija-mozhet-otplatit-norvegii-za-severnyepotoki_720913

²⁹ Hersh S. How America took out the Nord Stream pipeline. Available at: https://seymourhersh.substack.com/p/how-america-took-out-the-nord-stream?r=5mz1&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

³⁰ Baranov A. The United States began planning an explosion on the Nord Stream pipelines before the start of the SMO: The full scandalous investigation of an American journalist. Available at: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27463/4718398/>

³¹ Ibidem.

³² A. Dugin’s opinion voiced at “Bolshaya igra” TV show on April 3, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ltv.ru/shows/big-game/vypuski/bolshaya-igra-chast-3-vypusk-ot-03-04-2023>

form of the provision that “the United States and its satellites” consider the “strengthening of Russia” and its “independent foreign policy” a “threat to Western hegemony”.

It is appropriate to recall that the Collective West has been pursuing an overt anti-Russian policy and has been doing it quite openly and publicly for **more than 70 years**. We confirm this by providing excerpts from official strategic documents (*Inserts 2 and 3*): the NSC 20/1 – US Objectives with Respect to Russia, August 18, 1948, and the Concept for the “Decolonization of Russia” 2022 (as an example of what the Collective West is planning for Russia at the present stage).

The gap between these two documents is almost 75 years, during which many similar projects containing plans to eliminate Russia as a nation-state have been published³³. However, judging by the nature of the goals put forward in the sources that we are reviewing in *Inserts 2–3*, it is quite obvious what kind of “future” awaited Russia (or rather, what kind of future was in store for Russia) if it continued moving toward integration with the West. And while the plans nurtured by its leader (USA) in the middle of the 20th century can already be called a *fait accompli* (after the liquidation of the USSR, the task of “reducing the power and influence of Moscow” can be considered fulfilled; *Insert 2*),

the goals publicly declared by the Collective West in the post-Soviet period (in particular, the “decolonization of Russia”) remain unachieved mainly due to the SMO and the general course of foreign policy pursued by the RF President.

Thus, having analyzed the President’s key decisions, expert assessments, global trends, and officially published strategic documents of Russia and the United States, we can draw two conclusions.

1. In many respects, the President acts like he has no other choice, but such actions are necessary.

2. The decisions taken by the head of state after the start of the SMO are becoming more clear and resolute. According to the requirements of the real assessment of threats to national security, and as the whole world is changing along with the development of a civilizational conflict between Russia and NATO members, the contours of a multipolar world are finally taking shape.

The adoption of a new Foreign Policy Concept is another step taken by the President to determine Russia’s place in this new future world that, in fact, has already arrived; moreover, Russia’s place should be worthy of its history, culture, historical territory, human and intellectual potential, as well as the possibilities of the country’s participation in addressing modern global issues.

³³ For example (sources: Newslab.ru. April 14, 2013; “Yedinenie” popular movement, December 12, 2002 Available at: <http://old.kpe.ru/press/special/1/147/>):

1. 1959 – Public Law 86–90: Captive Nations, according to which the peoples recognized as enslaved should be “helped to gain independence”.

2. The early 1980s – the Harvard Project, consisting of three volumes (“Perestroika”, “Reform” and “Completion”), which assumed the gradual liquidation of Russia as a state for the period from 1985 to 2000.

3. 1989 – Liberation Doctrine. Developed by the Heritage Foundation think tank and commissioned by the U.S. President George W. Bush Administration. Its purpose was to devise technologies to facilitate the collapse of the USSR and subsequently manage the processes taking place in Russia.

4. 1991 – the doctrine of the geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space, implying forceful dismemberment of the Soviet Union and then Russia, with subsequent colonization of the post-Soviet space.

5. 1992 – U.S. Department of Defense Directive 13. According to the document, in the near future the United States will become the indisputable military and political leader in the world; therefore, if necessary, the United States has the right to refrain from collective action within the framework of the UN and can take unilateral military action, as well as carry out preventive strikes at its discretion. It is noted that the goal of NATO in the future is to introduce peacekeeping forces in the regions of ethnic conflicts and border disputes on the territory from the Atlantic to the Urals. Siberia and Russia’s Baltic States were designated as separate potential objects.

6. 2000 – CIA report “Global Trends 2015”, according to which a drop in the birth rate in Russia will inevitably lead to the depopulation of the country and a decrease in the population from 146 to 130 million people by 2015, and the country itself will break up into eight small States.

NSC 20/1 – US OBJECTIVES WITH RESPECT TO RUSSIA, AUGUST 18, 1948

1. *“... There is deep dissatisfaction and concern in this country over the aims and methods of the Soviet leaders. The policies of this Government are therefore determined in considerable measure by our desire to modify Soviet policies and to alter the international situation to which they have already led...”*
2. *“Our basic objectives with respect to Russia are really only two: a. To reduce the power and influence of Moscow...; and b. To bring about a basic change in the theory and practice of international relations observed by the government in power in Russia”.*
3. *“We are entirely within our own rights, and need feel no sense of guilt, in working for the destruction of concepts inconsistent with world peace and stability and for their replacement by ones of tolerance and international collaboration. It is not our business to calculate the internal developments to which the adoption of such concepts might lead in another country, nor need we feel that we have any responsibility for those developments. If the Soviet leaders find the growing prevalence of a more enlightened concept of international relations to be inconsistent with the maintenance of their internal power in Russia, that is their responsibility, not ours”.*
4. *“Once a state of war had arisen between this country and the Soviet Union, this Government would be at liberty to pursue the achievement of its basic objectives by whatever means it might choose and by whatever terms it might wish to impose upon a Russian authority or Russian authorities in the event of a successful issue of military operations”.*
5. *“The pursuit of our basic objectives in time of war... First of all, we may accept it as a foregone conclusion that we would not be prepared to conclude a full-fledged peace settlement and/or resume regular diplomatic relations with any regime in Russia dominated by any of the present Soviet leaders or persons sharing their cast of thought... The smaller the territory left at the disposal of such a regime, the easier the task of imposing terms satisfactory to our interests”.*
6. *“We must make a determined effort to avoid taking responsibility for deciding who would rule Russia in the wake of a disintegration of the Soviet regime. Our best course would be to permit all the exiled elements to return to Russia as rapidly as possible and to see to it, in so far as this depends on us, that they are all given roughly equal opportunity to establish their bids for power”.*
7. *“The Ukrainians are the most advanced of the peoples who have been under Russian rule in modern times. They have generally resented Russian domination; and their nationalistic organizations have been active and vocal abroad... Our policy in the first instance should be to maintain an outward neutrality, as long as our own interests—military or otherwise—were not immediately affected. And only if it became clear that an undesirable deadlock was developing, we would encourage a composing of the differences along the lines of a reasonable federalism. The same would apply to any other efforts at the achievement of an independent status on the part of other Russian minorities. It is not likely that any of the other minorities could successfully maintain real independence for any length of time. However, should they attempt it (and it is quite possible that the Caucasian minorities would do this), our attitude should be the same as in the case of the Ukraine”.*

BRIEFING AND CONCEPT “DECOLONIZATION OF RUSSIA” (2022)

June 23, 2022, a U.S. government agency – the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – held a briefing in Congress entitled “Decolonizing Russia: A Moral and Strategic Imperative”.

The preamble to the briefing states: “Russia’s barbaric war on Ukraine – and before that on Syria, Libya, Georgia, and Chechnya – has exposed the Russian Federation’s viciously imperial character to the entire world. Its aggression also is catalyzing a long-overdue conversation about Russia’s interior empire... Serious and contradictory discussions are currently underway on how to reckon with Russia’s fundamental imperialism and the need to “decolonize” Russia so that it becomes a real interested party in European security and stability”³⁴.

The full text of the “Decolonization of Russia” concept was presented at the Second Forum of Free Peoples of Russia, meeting in Prague on July 23 and 24, 2022. Here are some excerpts from the document:

“We, representatives of indigenous peoples and colonial regions of the Russian Federation, are starting the process of Complete and General Decolonization of Russia. We call on all citizens of indigenous peoples and colonial regions to immediately begin active actions for peaceful decolonization, liberation, and the proclamation/restoration of the sovereignty and independence of their own countries.... To implement the Declaration on the Decolonization of Russia in practice:

1. We appeal to the national and regional elites to immediately begin the creation of National Transitional Governments / Administrations...
2. We appeal to the UN Member States to provide maximum assistance to the National Transitional Governments / Administrations to achieve the goals of decolonization and peace...
3. We call for the preparation of the Constitutions of the Republics, securing their state independence and sovereignty...
4. We call on all representatives of indigenous peoples and colonial regions to join peaceful systematic resistance. Possible forms of such resistance are strikes, demonstrations, pickets, acts of sabotage of the orders of the imperial center, refusal to serve in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, etc....
5. We call on all members of the military and law enforcement agencies... to ensure a peaceful and democratic transition of power.
6. We initiate the formation of national legions (Self Defense Forces) to protect the sovereignty and the rights of our peoples and to ensure peace.
7. We are starting the process of consultations on the establishment of the United Transitional Administration... This body will have the following tasks: • Coordination of activities to eliminate the colonial regime...; Assistance in organizing the transfer of power to democratically elected authorities...; maximum assistance to the competent international bodies in taking control of all, without exception, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction...”

Then there is Part II: “Separatist Sentiments in Russia’s Regions”, which begins with the recognition of “the rather low severity of the problem of the spread of separatist sentiments in Russia”. It also indicates that “the separatists in their discourse suggest waiting for socio-economic shocks comparable to the situation in the early 1990s. Against the background of current events in Ukraine, the separatists expect the weakening of the central government of Russia due to the deterioration of the socio-economic state of the country, the growth of public discontent and a decrease in the capabilities and resources of law enforcement agencies... A certain part of the separatists view this as a “window of opportunity” for intensifying their own efforts aimed at actualizing separatist ideas in the discourse of the revival of separatist movements”³⁵.

³⁴ Decolonizing Russia. A Moral and Strategic Imperative. Available at: <https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/events/decolonizing-russia>

³⁵ Ovchinsky V. Decolonization of Russia 2.0. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/dekolonizatsiya_rossii_2_0

However, foreign policy is always connected with domestic policy; and the fact that Russia has finally turned its back on any attempts of integrating into the modern Western world, which is outlined in the new Concept, requires significant changes within the country: if Russia has the opportunity to declare a sovereign foreign policy, then it must do the same in domestic policy, and this goal still has to be achieved.

“The establishment of Russia as a country-civilization is of great and decisive importance for domestic policy. After all, it is impossible to act as a country-civilization in foreign policy, and remain, albeit sovereign, but still part of a liberal Western-centric system, sharing its approaches, values and principles in domestic policy”³⁶.

It is worth mentioning that for many years a significant part of experts have characterized Vladimir Putin’s policy as contradictory and ambiguous.

For example, back in 2012, I. Bunin, president of the Center for Political Technologies Foundation, said that Vladimir Putin’s policy is “*two steps forward – one step back, or even: step forward – step back*”³⁷.

In 2016, the writer A. Prokhanov, analyzing the current situation in the country, wrote the following:

“There is a feeling that there are **two Russias**: the first one is deeply embedded in the Western world, Western consciousness, Western way of life... The second Russia, which forms a new growing branch of the state, is in a very complex interaction with the first... These two Russias reveal themselves in today’s ideological and political battle... This explains **the apparent inconsistency of Russian policy, the half-way, inaccurate rhetoric**”³⁸.

In 2021, when reviewing one of the key documents defining the vector of development of the Russian Federation – the National Security Strategy³⁹, philosopher A. Dugin noted: “The positive core of the national security doctrine is brilliant, and it enjoys full support and solidarity. Nevertheless, we cannot but note some inherent contradictions it contains. **The sovereign patriotic realist document is mined with liberal inclusions**”⁴⁰.

Yu. Vorotnikov (Chairman of the Political Technologies Committee for the Russian Association of Public Relations) on the 2022 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: “The absence of a unifying concept indicates that a unified idea of the future of Russia has not yet been developed”⁴¹

³⁶ Dugin A. The concept of foreign policy as the apotheosis of multipolarity and the catechism of sovereignty. Available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/24125>

³⁷ Expert: “Putin lives by the Leninist principle” (opinion of I. Bunin, president of the Center for Political Technologies Foundation). Available at: <https://aif.ru/politics/world/35309>

³⁸ Prokhanov A.A. “The State of the Polar Star”. Available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/8623>

³⁹ On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: Presidential Decree dated July 2, 2021. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046>

⁴⁰ Dugin A. New peaks and inertia of bipolar disorder. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novie_vershini_i_inertciya_bipolyarnogo_rasstrojstva

⁴¹ Skorobogatyi P. (2021). Self-reliance strategy, *Ekspert*, 29, p. 54.

It is also worth noting that even today, in 2023, i.e. after the start of the SMO, some experts say that “Putin’s ideological project has some kind of

internal duality, incompleteness, which is a huge deterrent to launching a nationwide mobilization project in Russia”⁴³.

“A mature Russia under Vladimir Putin has not been formed yet as a full-fledged and consistent state. She is at a crossroads. Although it would seem that a number of Rubicons have already been crossed – some were crossed after the events at Bolotnaya Square in 2011–2012, others – in 2014, and some very important events – in 2022...

The format of “Putin’s stability” still dominates us, even now, after a whole year of hot fighting. Why is this so? First of all, because the powerful clusters of the old order, the order before the SMO and even before the Crimean triumph, continue to live, rule each in their own sphere, do their own thing...”⁴²

Perhaps we can agree with experts that the duality and inconsistency in the policy of the head of state is largely due to the fact that “he relies on the people, but the elites just don’t understand him”⁴⁴.

Let us provide some facts to prove the point. According to the monitoring sociological measurements, broad social strata support the President’s activities – both in general and in relation to the course of independent foreign policy pursued by Russia.

✓ Thus, according to VCIOM, the overwhelming number of Russians believe that Russia must pursue an independent foreign policy. Moreover, in the past 15 years (from 2008 to 2023), the proportion of those who share this point of view has increased from 54 to 67% (*Tab. 2*).

Table 2. Russians’ attitude toward Russia’s foreign policy goals, % of respondents

Answer option	2008	2023	Dynamics (+/-)
Russia should pursue an independent foreign policy, but not seek to dictate its terms to other countries	54	67	+13
Russia should behave like a great power, dictate its will to other countries	24	18	-6
Russia’s foreign policy may not be independent if it does not contradict the interests of its citizens	8	7	-1
Russia’s foreign policy should be subordinated to global interests, even if national interests are affected	2	2	0
I find it difficult to answer	11	6	-5

Source: VCIOM data. Russia’s foreign policy course: Fighting for sovereignty. Analytical review. April 10, 2023. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/vneshnepoliticheskii-kurs-rossii-v-borbe-za-suverenitet>
 Wording of the question: “In the modern world, some States dictate their conditions to other countries, some conduct an independent foreign policy without imposing their views on anyone, and many States do not conduct an independent foreign policy. What do you think Russia’s foreign policy should be?”. Ranked according to the data for 2023.

⁴² Averyanov V. The Russian bear was woken up a little earlier than it should have been. Available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/24112>

⁴³ Russia. The front is everywhere. Round table “The Russian Dream: The situation at the fronts”. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/rossiya_vsyudu_front

⁴⁴ A. Dugin’s opinion voiced at “Bolshaya igra” TV show on April 3, 2023. Available at: <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/big-game/vypuski/bolshaya-igra-chast-3-vypusk-ot-03-04-2023>

✓ More than 80% of Russians note that this is exactly the policy pursued by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Over the period from 2008 to 2023, the share of those who hold this opinion has increased nationwide from 79 to 87% (Tab. 3).

✓ According to VoIRC RAS, the share of people who believe that the President is preoccupied mainly with the country’s international standing has increased almost twofold⁴⁵ during all of Vladimir Putin’s presidential terms (from

2000 to 2022; by 32 percentage points, from 26 to 58%; Tab. 4; Insert 4).

✓ The share of those who consider the President’s actions to strengthen Russia’s international positions to be successful has exceeded the share of those who share the opposite opinion over the past 23 years (by 15–20 percentage points; Tab. 4; Insert 4). Although we should note that the share of negative assessments regarding the course of the President’s foreign policy for the period from 2000 to 2022 has not changed significantly (31–32%⁴⁶).

Table 3. Russians’ attitude toward Russia’s current foreign policy, % of respondents

Answer option	2008	2023	Dynamics (+/-)
Russia defends its national interests regardless of whether the governments of other countries like it or not	33	59	+26
Russia is trying to defend its national interests, but it does not always succeed in doing so	46	28	-18
Russia practically fails to defend its national interests; it does the bidding of the governments of other countries	8	5	-3
I find it difficult to answer	13	8	-5

Source: VCIOM data. Russia’s foreign policy course: Fighting for sovereignty. Analytical review. April 10, 2023. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/vneshnepoliticheskii-kurs-rossii-v-borbe-za-suverenitet>
Wording of the question: “How would you describe the foreign policy that Russia is pursuing today?”. Ranked according to the data for 2023.

Table 4. Attitude of Vologda Oblast residents toward the President’s work on the implementation of Russia’s foreign policy course, % of respondents

Answer option	2000	2022	Dynamics (+/-)
Proportion of those who believe that the President is preoccupied mainly with the country’s international position*	25.9	58.2	+32
Proportion of those who consider the President’s actions to strengthen Russia’s international position successful**	42.3	47.7	+5
Proportion of those who consider the President’s actions to strengthen Russia’s international position unsuccessful**	30.9	32.1	+1

VoIRC RAS data for the Vologda Oblast.
* Wording of the question: “What do you think is the major concern of the RF President?”.
** Wording of the question: “How successfully, in your opinion, is the President coping with the problem of strengthening Russia’s international position?”.
More details are provided in *Insert 4*.

⁴⁵ The source of sociological data for RAS Vologda Research Center is the monitoring of public opinion, carried out since 1996 on the territory of the Vologda Oblast.

Monitoring is carried out once every two months; 1,500 respondents over the age of 18 are interviewed in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets, and in Babaevsky, Velikoustyugsky, Vozhegodsky, Gryazovetsky, Tarnogsky municipal okrugs and in Kirillovsky, Nikolsky, Sheksninsky municipal districts. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by observing the proportions between urban and rural population; between residents of settlements of various types (rural settlements, small and medium-sized cities); gender and age structure of the adult population of the Oblast. Survey method is questionnaire poll at the place of residence of respondents. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

More detailed information about the survey results is available at the official website of VoIRC RAS: <http://www.vsc.ac.ru/>.

⁴⁶ Such a share of negative judgments is typical of most socio-demographic groups. Slightly more negative assessments were noted among low-income groups and residents of Vologda, among whom the proportion of those who consider the President’s actions to strengthen Russia’s international position unsuccessful is 40–41% (for more information, see *Insert 5*).

✓ We should also note that when Russia is living through hard times and amid escalating threats to national security, all the strata of Russian society show increasing support for the political course implemented by Vladimir Putin. This is evidenced by the results of the year that has passed since the beginning of the SMO (in 2022, compared with 2021, support for the head of state increased by 5–6 percentage points in all major socio-demographic groups; *Tab. 5*).

And this becomes even more evident when we look at the results of Vladimir Putin's first presidential term, against the background of the "historical catastrophe" that the country went through in the late 1990s. Support for Vladimir

"The concentration of power in the hands of Yeltsin and his clique led to a **historic catastrophe**. It manifested itself **in the death of about 10 million people** who simply had not survived the "reforms" of the 1990s; **in the collapse of most of the industry and agriculture; in the loss of all foreign policy positions**. This is, in fact, **an external governance regime**, when American advisers were sitting in the offices of Russian ministries and dictating what to do and how to do it"⁴⁷

Putin during his first presidency (2000–2003) exceeded that of Boris Yeltsin in the last years of his presidency (1998–1999) by 50–60 percentage points, and in almost all population groups (*Tab. 5*).

Table 5. Dynamics of the level of approval of the President's activities in various socio-demographic groups, % of respondents

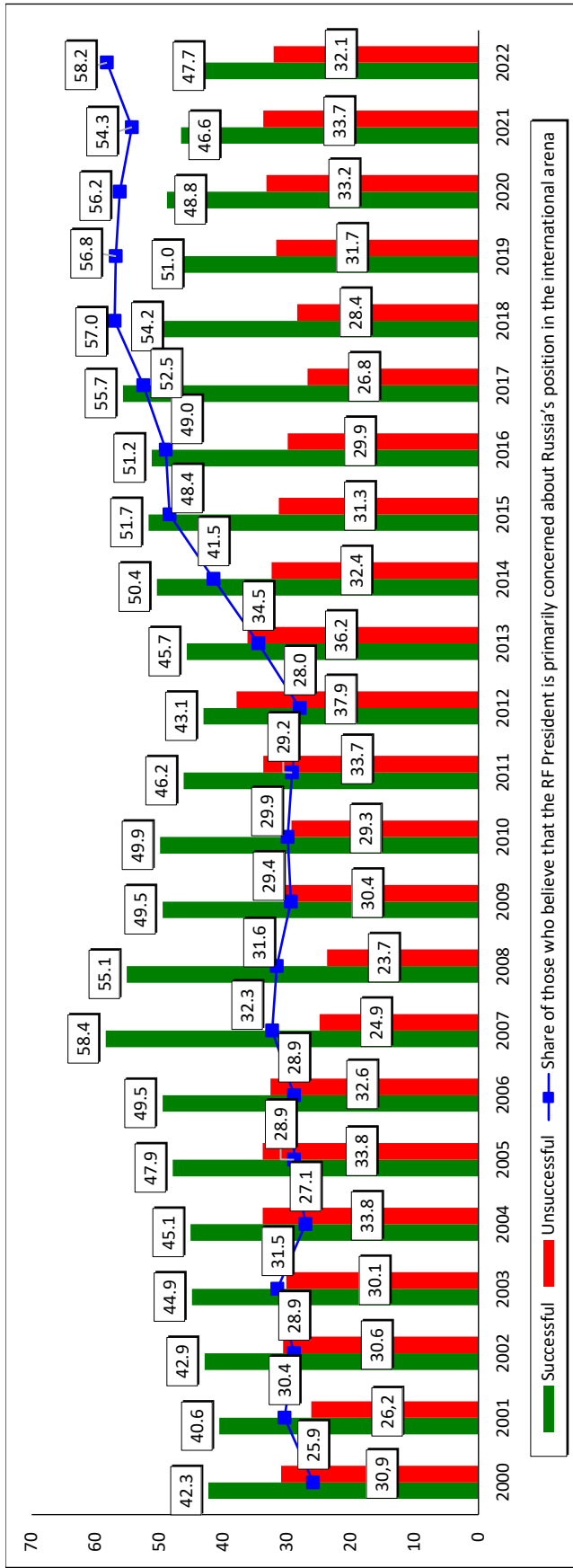
Population group	Average annual data		Dynamics (+/-)	Average annual data		Dynamics (+/-)
	1998–1999 (last years of Boris Yeltsin's presidency)	2000–2003 (Vladimir Putin's first presidential term)		2021 (year before SMO)	2022 (year when SMO was launched)	
<i>Sex</i>						
Men	12.7	65.8	+53	48.7	54.3	+6
Women	9.9	66.0	+56	53.7	59.2	+6
<i>Age</i>						
Under 30	10.4	68.8	+58	46.7	51.4	+5
30–55	11.0	65.2	+54	49.3	54.9	+6
Over 55	12.3	64.4	+52	55.8	61.6	+6
<i>Education</i>						
Secondary and incomplete secondary	11.9	61.9	+50	46.0	51.4	+5
Secondary vocational	10.5	66.6	+56	52.0	58.1	+6
Higher and incomplete higher	10.9	70.1	+59	56.4	62.4	+6
<i>Income group</i>						
Bottom 20%	9.5	55.4	+46	38.4	40.8	+2
Middle 60%	11.1	68.3	+57	53.9	59.8	+6
Top 20%	15.2	73.2	+58	62.6	64.0	+1
<i>Territory</i>						
Vologda	10.4	66.2	+56	45.1	48.0	+3
Cherepovets	10.4	64.6	+54	57.3	63.8	+7
Districts	11.9	66.5	+55	51.7	58.1	+6
Oblast	11.2	65.9	+55	51.4	57.0	+6
TOTAL number of positive and negative changes in all groups			14 / 0			14 / 0

Source: VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring.
Wording of the question: "How do you assess the current work of the RF President?".

⁴⁷ Afonin Yu. Yeltsin is a traitor and the personification of catastrophes. Available at: <https://kprfrzn.ru/analitika/jurij-afonin-elcin-predatel-i-olicetvorenie-katastrof>

Insert 4

Assessment of the President's success in addressing the problem of strengthening Russia's international position, % of respondents*



* Wording of the question: "What do you think is the major concern of the RF President?" (answer option is "the position of the country in the international arena"). VoIRC RAS data for the Vologda Oblast.

Over the period from 2000 to 2022, the share of people who believe that the RF President is primarily concerned about Russia's position in the international arena increased by 32 percentage points (from 26 to 58%).

The proportion of those who consider the actions of the head of state to strengthen Russia's international standing successful annually exceeds the proportion of people who share the opposite point of view. At the same time, during all of Vladimir Putin's presidential terms, the share of positive judgments increased by 5 percentage points (from 42 to 47%).

Insert 5

Assessment of the President's success in addressing the issue of strengthening Russia's international position, % of respondents*

Population group	SUCCESSFUL			UNSUCCESSFUL			Dynamics (+/-)
	Average annual data for...			Average annual data for...			
	Vladimir Putin's first presidential term (2000–2003)	Vladimir Putin's fourth presidential term (2018–2022)	Dynamics (+/-)	Vladimir Putin's first presidential term (2000–2003)	Vladimir Putin's fourth presidential term (2018–2022)	Dynamics (+/-)	
	Sex						
Men	43.4	47.7	+4	34.6	34.0	-1	
Women	42.2	51.2	+9	28.1	30.0	+2	
	Age						
Under 30	47.2	47.7	+1	27.3	31.0	+4	
30–55	43.2	48.3	+5	31.2	33.1	+2	
Over 55	36.4	52.2	+16	33.9	30.5	-3	
	Education						
Secondary and incomplete secondary	37.9	43.1	+5	31.9	34.5	+3	
Secondary vocational	41.4	51.0	+10	30.3	29.9	0	
Higher and incomplete higher	49.8	55.1	+5	30.5	31.4	+1	
	Income group						
Bottom 20%	32.4	32.9	+1	36.2	41.2	+5	
Middle 60%	43.5	51.0	+8	31.1	31.7	+1	
Top 20%	53.0	61.3	+8	27.1	27.0	0	
	Territory						
Vologda	47.6	46.9	-1	29.9	39.7	+10	
Cherepovets	43.9	60.8	+17	32.7	25.2	-7	
Districts	39.6	44.8	+5	30.3	31.1	+1	
Oblast	42.7	49.7	+7	30.8	31.8	+1	
TOTAL number of positive and negative changes in all groups			13 / 1			3 / 9	

* VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring. The question is asked since 2000. Wording of the question: "In your opinion, how successful is Vladimir Putin in addressing the problem of strengthening Russia's international position?"

On average, over the five years of Vladimir Putin's fourth presidential term (2018–2022), compared with the average annual data for his first presidential term (2000–2003), the share of people who positively assess the actions of the head of state aimed at strengthening Russia's international position has increased in almost all major population groups (except residents of Vologda, whose estimates have not changed significantly). The proportion of positive judgments increased especially among people over 55 years of age (by 16 percentage points, from 36 to 52%) and residents of Cherepovets (by 17 percentage points, from 44 to 61%); and in the Vologda Oblast as a whole — by 7 percentage points (from 43 to 50%).

The share of those who believe that the President is failing in his efforts to strengthen Russia's international position has increased in 9 out of 14 socio-demographic groups over the same period, especially among residents of Vologda (by 10 percentage points, from 30 to 40%). In the Vologda Oblast as a whole, the proportion of negative judgments has not changed significantly (31–32%).

Thus, public opinion trends (registered by various research organizations) provide an answer to the question why Vladimir Putin throughout his presidential terms has the opportunity to rely on the support of the majority of Russians, including in the implementation of his foreign policy course.

However, the same cannot be said in relation to a significant part of the elites, because “many of the carriers of Westernism are still in Putin’s entourage, but they do not oppose him openly; rather, they pretend to be his friends (the so-called sixth column)...”⁴⁸

Currently, amid the ongoing SMO, some of the representatives of big business engage in quite a “legitimate” and public propaganda, which, although subtly, but persistently pushes forward the idea that Russia’s struggle for its national sovereignty is the wrong course and that it is necessary at all costs to “make it up” with the West, starting with the termination of the SMO on any conditions dictated by the Kiev (or NATO) regime. In particular, on March 2, 2023, at the Krasnoyarsk Economic Forum, businessman O. Deripaska said that “the state apparatus and state capitalism are a dead-end track”; and according to experts, this is a “subtle manipulation” leading to the fact that “the most reasonable thing would be to sell our army, population and territory to the enemy” (*Insert 6*).

In addition, throughout virtually the entire period of the SMO, there still emerge concrete

examples (facts) of the conduct and managerial decisions of officials that contradict the position taken by the head of state and the opinion of the majority of Russians (we give such examples in virtually every article⁴⁹). This includes ostentatious disregard for state symbols and for the President personally; discrediting the Russian army and patronizing pro-Ukrainian propaganda actions, etc. (*Insert 7*).

The facts given in Inserts 6–7 clearly explain why the war that our country is currently forced to engage in is “not only against the direct enemy – Ukrainian Nazism and the globalist liberal West supporting it, **but also against the injustice that sometimes happens inside Russia itself**”⁵⁰.

And although there are many factors that currently do not allow the President to carry out a personnel revolution “from above” (for example, the lack of personnel replacements due to the fact that in Russia the process of genesis of the elites is stalling”⁵¹; the emerging internal vulnerabilities in the system of public administration, which in the context of the SMO can be used by external enemies, etc.), the head of state acts in accordance with his “ideology of healthy conservatism”, i.e. he solves problems methodically, consistently, proceeding from “**a realistic assessment of oneself and others, a precise alignment of priorities, a correlation of necessity and possibility**” (*Insert 8* presents the RF President’s key decisions, which we have been monitoring since April 2022).

⁴⁸ Korovin V. Where are you, Putin’s commissars? Available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/23998>

⁴⁹ See, for example:

Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. The President called on the officials of all levels to “stop fooling around”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 16(1), 9–34.

Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). A framework for a new Social Contract is being formed in Russia. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 15(6), 9–34.

⁵⁰ Dugin A. The Wagner factor and the thesis of justice. Available at: <http://www.zdravrusia.ru/politika/organizaci-i/?nnew=10139&sview=3>

⁵¹ Khaldey A. What the nationalization of the elite is. Available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2606896.html>

Excerpts from the speech of businessman O. Deripaska at the Krasnoyarsk Economic Forum on March 2, 2023:

1. *“State capitalism and all this, as it is sometimes called “StateGasMeat” – of course, is a dead-end track. I am horrified to see the resources that have already been spent, well, obviously in vain, even over the past year. If earlier I thought there were billions, now I already see that there are trillions. No doubt, our economy should be based on the market and nothing else. Issues should be regulated by the competitive environment”.*
2. *“Of course, the talks are going on about the decriminalization of entrepreneurial activity. In general, it is necessary to do away with this outdated practice and stop incarcerating everyone and his dog for no one knows why. It happens that someone commits an economic offense, they compensate for it; well, let them go back to work”.*
3. *“The reduction of officials, I don’t know, by 2–3 times, the reduction of law enforcement officers probably by a couple of times.... And it seems to me that this is also an overdue question, that there is too much of this state apparatus and state capitalism. And we need more freedom; more freedom and competition, indeed”.*

Comments by an expert⁵²:

“At the Krasnoyarsk Economic Forum, O. Deripaska is trying to convince everyone that state capitalism is ineffective, there will only be enough money for a little over a year, and then there will be a terrible end. His supporters repeat: the militarization of the economy will sink any state. Shells are unprofitable, they destroy houses and apartments, but they are very profitable for manufacturers. These are guiding arguments, and the readers should make the conclusion for themselves: the Russian economy will not survive the war, the war must be stopped this year. How to stop it? You know full well. Just go and stop it. Stop what? Stop everything. Without going into detail. It will be enough for those who understand. This is how liberal propaganda works, this is its technology, regardless of the ideological content... This is manipulation, but it is subtle. Guns instead of oil are worse than oil instead of guns... It remains only to add: long live captivity, the most cost-effective system!”

I don’t blame Deripaska and his comrades – he would never have gotten so rich under state capitalism and would not have lived such an adventurous and exciting life on a yacht with interesting female companions.... Deripaska voices the opinion of 3/4 of the Russian business and administrative offshore elite.

Talking about the unprofitability of the military economy is talking about the unprofitability of the battle for the Motherland... The market and the war are two incompatible things, like genius and villainy. The market will sell the victory rather than win it – this is the logic and nature of the market. Only state capitalism wins the war. State capitalism controlled by the harsh hand of a tough leader.

The trouble is when merchants start trying to lead the war. War is madness for them. For them, the most reasonable thing is to sell their army, population and territory to the enemy. Where else will you find such profitability? What then? And they don’t think that far”.

⁵² Khaldey A. “Why Deripaska teaches Putin how to fight”. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/pochemu_deripaska_uchit_putina_voevat_

Insert 7

Some examples of actions of officials and deputies, which contradict the public attitudes of the head of state and trends of public opinion

1. February 20, 2023, A. Lependin, deputy of the district assembly of Maloyaroslavetsky District of the Kaluga Oblast, did not stand up during the performance of the national anthem of Russia. The local commission on deputy ethics was engaged in investigating the case. In accordance with Article 7 of Federal Constitutional Law 3 “On the national anthem of the Russian Federation”, during rendition of the national anthem, those present should stand. Violation of the procedure for the official use of state symbols of the Russian Federation entails a fine of 2 thousand to 150 thousand rubles.

V. Parfenov, head of the Maloyaroslavetsky District Administration, said that he did not believe in the deputy’s excuse for remaining seated due to having problems with his legs (“After all, he came to the meeting on foot, he was able to come”). G. Novoseltsev, chairman of the Legislative Assembly of the Kaluga Oblast, noted: “The act is disgusting. The explanation is stupid. If there is an offense, it must be punished”. The Magistrate’s Court fined Lependin five thousand rubles under Article 17.10 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation “Violation of the procedure for the official use of state symbols of the Russian Federation”.

2. February 21, 2023, M. Abdalkin, deputy of the Samara Provincial Duma for the Communist Party, posted a video online in which he is sitting in front of his PC with noodles on his ears and listening to the President with great attention. The video is accompanied by a sarcastic comment: “I fully support, I completely agree, great speech. I haven’t heard anything like this in the last 23 years. I’m excited”.

Attention to the video was attracted by A. Khinshstein, State Duma deputy for the United Russia party. On February 28, the deputies approved the conclusion of the regulatory committee, which recommended “naming and shaming” the communist and sending materials about his behavior to law enforcement agencies and the prosecutor’s office⁵³.

3. February 27, 2023, in the main building of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, the association of fellow countrymen of students from Ukraine held an action sanctioned by the university administration – it was allegedly an exhibition, but in fact a propaganda campaign. The story had a wide public response⁵⁴. As a result, vice-rector of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia Sergey Bazavluk was dismissed; he not only approved the anti-Russian, anti-state propaganda campaign of the Ukrainian association of fellow countrymen, but, according to students, it was he who banned the organization of a Russian association of fellow countrymen in the university⁵⁵.

4. March 28, 2023, the prosecutor’s office approved the indictment in the case of ex-mayor of Yekaterinburg Ye. Roizman⁵⁶. He is accused of public actions aimed at discrediting the army during a live broadcast on July 1, 2022 on one of the video hosting sites. The ex-mayor posted a video clip on his social medias with footage shaming the Russian army and soldiers⁵⁷.

Previously, he had already been prosecuted for a similar violation of the Code of Administrative Offenses, fined three times for discrediting the army for a total of 150 thousand rubles and once for disrespect for the authorities for 85 thousand rubles⁵⁸.

* Included in the register of foreign agents.

⁵³ Prakh A. Noodles and a fine to boot. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5845163>

⁵⁴ Ivanov A. Continuation of the scandalous story of ukrophilia (and the absence of a Russian association of fellow countrymen) in the RUDN. Available at: [https://zavtra.ru/events/prodolzhenie_istorii_s_ukrofiliej_\(i_otsutstviem_russkogo_zemlyachestva\)_v_rudn](https://zavtra.ru/events/prodolzhenie_istorii_s_ukrofiliej_(i_otsutstviem_russkogo_zemlyachestva)_v_rudn)

⁵⁵ Ivanov A. The vice-rector of RUDN, who actually sanctioned the infamous “Ukrop” sabbath, was dismissed. Available at: <https://narodsozor.ru/2023/03/18/uvolen-prorektor-rudn-kotoryj-fakticheski-sankcioniroval-nashumevshij-ukropskij-shabash/>

⁵⁶ The Ministry of Justice of Russia recognized Yevgeny Roizman as an individual performing the functions of a foreign agent. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/11/2022/638105a9a79476935e6c6e1>

⁵⁷ Ex-mayor pleaded not guilty to discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Available at: <https://versia.ru/yeks-gradonachalnik-ne-priznal-vinu-v-diskreditacii-vs-rf>

⁵⁸ <https://360tv.ru/news/crime/rojzmanu-utverdili-obvinenie-po-ugolovnoj-state-o-diskreditatsii-armii/>

Overview of key decisions made by the President of the Russian Federation (February 22 – April 18, 2023)⁵⁹

<p>February 28, 2023 – Federal Law “On suspension by the Russian Federation of the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms”.</p> <p>According to the note of the State Legal Department, “the American party purposefully fails to fulfill its obligations under the Agreement in this field of activity. In this regard, the Federal Law suspends the operation of the Treaty” (we are talking about the agreement between Russia and the United States on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms, signed on April 8, 2010).</p>
<p>February 28, 2023 – Federal Law “On denunciation by the Russian Federation of the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption”. The Russian Federation denounces the Convention and terminates participation in GRECO (Group of States against Corruption), since the Council of Europe decided to terminate Russia’s full membership in GRECO and deprive Russia of the right to participate in the discussion or adoption of reports, as well as the right to vote.</p>
<p>February 28, 2023 – Federal Law “On termination of international treaties related to the Council of Europe with respect to the Russian Federation”.</p> <p>On March 16, 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, grossly violating the Charter of the Council of Europe, adopted a resolution on the termination of Russia’s membership in the Council of Europe from the same date. The Russian Federation proceeds from the fact that the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and other international treaties of the Council of Europe have ceased to be valid for Russia as of March 16, 2022.</p>
<p>February 28, 2023 – Federal Law “On amendments to the Federal Law “On the state language of the Russian Federation”.</p> <p>Amendments are being made to improve the mechanisms for ensuring the use of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation throughout the Russian Federation, expanding and specifying the areas in which the use of the state language of the Russian Federation is mandatory, clarifying the powers of federal government bodies aimed at protecting and supporting the state language of the Russian Federation.</p>
<p>March 18, 2023 – Federal Law “On amendments to Articles 13.15 and 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation”.</p> <p>Public actions aimed at discrediting the provision of assistance by volunteer formations, organizations or persons in the performance of tasks assigned to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, if these actions do not contain signs of a criminal offense, are subject to administrative liability: a fine for citizens in the amount of 30 thousand to 50 thousand rubles; for officials – from 100 thousand to 200 thousand rubles; for legal entities – from 300 thousand to 500 thousand rubles.</p>

⁵⁹ The Insert is a continuation of the monitoring of management decisions of the authorities, which we have been conducting since June 2022.

All the issues of the monitoring are presented in the articles:

1. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). A difficult road after the Rubicon. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 15(3), 9–41.
2. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). On the way toward crossing the inner Rubicon. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 15(4), 9–31.
3. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). The special military operation reveals new features of civil society. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 15(5), 9–32.
4. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2022). A framework for a new Social Contract is being formed in Russia. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 15(6), 9–34.
5. Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. (2023). The President called on the officials of all levels to “stop fooling around”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 16(1), 9–34.

Continuation of Insert 8

<p>March 31, 2023 – Decree “On approving the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”. The main provisions are presented in Insert 1 (<i>pp. 11–20</i>).</p>
<p>April 3, 2023 – Decree “On establishing the state fund “Defenders of the Fatherland” for the support of participants of the Special Military Operation. The fund was established “in order to create conditions that ensure a decent life and activity of participants of the special military operation, other persons and their family members”. The founder is the Government of the Russian Federation. First deputy head of the Presidential Administration S.V. Kiriyenko was appointed chairman of the Supervisory Board of the fund; A.E. Tsivilev was appointed chairman of the fund.</p> <p>The fund and its branches carry out their activities in each constituent entity of the Russian Federation. The fund’s activities are aimed at organizing and providing assistance to combat veterans who participated (assisted in the performance of tasks) in the special military operation; persons who participated in combat operations as part of the Armed Forces of the DPR, the People’s Militia of the LPR, military formations and bodies of the DPR and LPR; members of their families.</p>
<p>April 3, 2023 – Laws on the integration of the DPR, LPR, Zaporozhye and Kherson oblasts into the judicial system of the Russian Federation.</p>
<p>April 3, 2023 – Federal Law “On amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation”. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation and individual federal executive authorities, in accordance with the procedure determined by the Government of the Russian Federation, organize annual monitoring of the socio-economic and legal status of employees serving in these bodies, citizens dismissed from service in these bodies, their family members and persons who are (were) dependent on them, as well as consideration of the results of this annual monitoring.</p>
<p>April 3, 2023 – Federal Law “On amendments to the Federal Law “On state support of cinematography of the Russian Federation”. The concept of “film for children and youth” is introduced, which means a film intended for viewing by children under the age of 18, aimed at educating the younger generation, created on the basis of a script and corresponding in subject matter, content and artistic and stylistic solution to the physical, mental, spiritual and moral development of children. It provides for the possibility of full state financing of the production and rental of national films for children and youth, which are feature films.</p>
<p>April 5, 2023 – Decree “On amendments to Presidential Decree 723, dated October 7, 2022 “On the application of additional special economic measures in the fuel and energy sector in connection with the unfriendly actions of some foreign states and international organizations”.</p>

April 14, 2023 – Federal Law “On amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation”. The law establishes the procedure for military registration and conscription. Military registration, removal from military registration and amendments to military registration documents will be carried out without appearance of citizens in person. It established the obligation of citizens to receive summonses sent to them in writing and duplicated in electronic form. A citizen who has received a summons is obliged to inform about it personally within two weeks by appearing at the military commissariat, or through the State and Municipal Services Portal. Citizens who are subject to conscription for military service and who have not received a summons must appear in person at the military commissariat within two weeks from the date of the beginning of the next period of conscription for military service. Measures have been established in case of non-appearance for insufficient excuse:

- ✓ foreign travel ban,
- ✓ ban on the state registration of individuals as individual entrepreneurs,
- ✓ ban on the registration with the tax authority of an individual as a taxpayer applying the special tax regime “Tax on professional income”,
- ✓ suspension of the registration of immovable property for state cadastral registration and (or) state registration of rights,
- ✓ restriction on the use of the right to drive vehicles,
- ✓ ban on the state registration of vehicles and the provision of loans.

April 18, 2023 – RF State Duma approved a new draft law “On citizenship”. It provides for the possibility of deprivation of acquired Russian citizenship:

- ✓ for terrorist crimes, grave crimes against the state, as well as crimes in the sphere of trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, forgery of documents or at the voluntary request of a citizen;
- ✓ for public calls to action against the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, discrediting its Armed Forces and participating in an undesirable foreign or international nongovernmental organization;
- ✓ for public calls to extremism, encroaching on the life of a statesperson and for organizing an armed rebellion in order to forcibly change the constitutional order of Russia and for committing actions that pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation;
- ✓ for the promotion of sabotage activities and training for the purposes of sabotage activities, as well as for the organization of sabotage communities.

The draft law provides for a reduction in the number of requirements for more than 20 categories of persons when they are admitted to Russian citizenship, as well as expanding the powers of the head of state to determine the category of persons who are entitled to simplified acquisition of citizenship of the Russian Federation.

Thus, the “ideology of healthy conservatism”, which Vladimir Putin has been guided by throughout his presidential terms, on the one hand, causes some discontent among experts and society as a whole for the reason that **many internal problems are becoming stagnant and lingering, and the measures to neutralize them are “long overdue”**⁶⁰.

On the other hand, we cannot but admit that such a strategy has allowed the President over the past 20 years to **change the status of Russia from a country defeated by the Collective West in the Cold War (with all the ensuing consequences such as the collapse of the USSR and the 30-year hegemony of the victors), to the opportunity to publicly, at the legislative level, declare itself as a “country-civilization”, the “core of the Russian world” that protects the right to exist and represents not only its own interests, but the interests of virtually all nation-states who openly and actively declare the inadmissibility of a unipolar world and the importance of national sovereignty.**

The new Foreign Policy Concept firmly states that Russia is no longer a modern liberal West. However, now this clear fact, which is still quite hard to believe, requires an equally clear continu-

ation in domestic policy, based on a simple principle formulated by the head of state: “We had to do it ourselves. And we did it. And we did it better. And if we didn’t have to, we wouldn’t have done it”⁶¹.

To declare the status and goals for the coming years is one thing; to defend these statements in the face of external threats is another; but no less important is the internal situation in the country – **the fact that the majority of representatives of all social strata support the general course implemented by the President. After all, “if Russia remains part of this world mentally, economically and socially in such a wobbly condition, then the bell will toll for it, too”**⁶².

Public opinion trends indicate that time is ripe for Russia to have a domestic policy concept, which, as clearly and firmly as the Foreign Policy Concept, would set out the guidelines and algorithm to overcome its “mentally, economically and socially wobbly” state and strive toward a welfare state that ensures and protects **the priority of traditional moral values, the possibility of implementing an independent foreign policy and social justice for the majority of its population.**

⁶⁰ Presidential Address, March 1, 2018. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/42902>

⁶¹ Vladimir Putin’s visit to the Tula Railway Engineering Plant on April 4, 2023. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70859>

⁶² Fursov A. The end of the world system. Will the world’s population decrease by 90%? Available at: <https://denliteraturi.ru/article/7319>

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