

On the Possible Foreign Policy of the Post-Putin Russia

The Case of Alexei Navalny's Viewpoints on Foreign Affairs

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The study delves into the foreign policy plans of Alexei Navalny, the Russian politician who is currently commonly regarded as the most prominent opposition leader and the sole plausible alternative to Vladimir Putin. Drawing on his interviews, public speeches, media publications and electoral manifestos, the author analyses his foreign policy views alongside three topics, that is, Russia's policies towards disputed lands and states in the post-Soviet area (Crimea, Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria), the country's foreign policy orientation and priorities (especially regarding relations with the West) and assessment of the Putin regime's foreign policy. Following this, the author speculates on the likely foundations of Russia's foreign policy under Navalny's possible presidency and their implications for the West.

Keywords: Alexei Navalny, Crimea, Donbas war, Russian foreign policy, Russian opposition, Syrian civil war.

In recent years, among all Russian opposition politicians, Alexei Navalny, the leader of the Progress Party and the head of Anti-Corruption Foundation, has tended to be internationally considered as the most

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influential and the only one who is potentially capable of defeating Vladimir Putin. Due to his notorious anti-corruption investigations aimed at Russia's leading officials and politicians,¹ well-organised countrywide protests in March and June 2017² as well as relatively successful 2013 Moscow mayoral and ongoing presidential campaigns, Navalny's personality, views and tactics have received sizeable scholarly attention³ and coverage in the leading international media.⁴ Thrice included in Foreign Policy's Top 100 Global Thinkers list⁵ and twice mentioned in Time's annual roundups of the world's most influential people in the Internet,⁶ nowadays Navalny frequently enjoys such pretentious descriptions as "Russia's last opposition hero,"⁷ "Putin's main political opponent,"⁸ "the man who would beat Putin,"⁹ "the leader of the opposition of Russia"¹⁰ and "most prominent opposition figure"¹¹ who "has breathed new life into the opposition movement"¹² and "caused a stir in Russian politics."¹³ Of no less importance is that international politicians also to some extent seem to recognise Navalny's status as one of Russia's key opinion leaders and fighters against Putin's regime: to illustrate, his anti-corruption investigations have been highly appreciated¹⁴ by Guy Verhofstadt, former Prime Minister of Belgium and current Member of the European Parliament and leader of the European ALDE Party. Besides, some analysts point to the fact that the list of Russians, on whom the US imposed sanctions for the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, by and large coincided with the list proposed by Navalny in his article in *The New York Times* one day earlier,¹⁵ hinting that the Obama administration may have taken account of his suggestions.¹⁶

Despite his notability and a heightened interest in his personality, Navalny's political views, nevertheless, remain a rather debatable matter in Russian politics. Most of the above-cited international magazines depict Navalny as a democratic, liberal politician determined to put an end to Putin's authoritarianism, democratise the country and integrate it in the world community.¹⁷ Indeed, already now one may reasonably assume that should Navalny one day come to power, some of his policies will be extraordinary for contemporary Russia. For example, few would doubt that Navalny's Russia will witness an unparalleled anti-corruption campaign, taking cognizance of his acknowledgedly tough stance on corruption. Likewise, his readiness to legalise same-sex marriages¹⁸ can also be regarded as exceptional for someone who intends to run for presidency in a country where conservatism is presently on the rise¹⁹ and where there seems to be little

consensus on gay rights protection even among liberals.²⁰ At the same time, Navalny himself prefers calling himself “just a normal candidate from normal people, who proposes a reasonable and logical program,” attempting to distance himself from being labelled as “liberal,” arguing that a strict association with liberalism would potentially allow him to count on solely about 3-4 percent of the votes while he wants to win the presidential elections.²¹ Incidentally, a great number of the country’s conspicuous liberal public figures tend to question Navalny’s commitment to democracy and liberalism, raising concerns about his arguably authoritarian leadership style, nationalistic views, willingness to attract jingoists²² etc.

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Factoring in the great discrepancies regarding Navalny’s political ideas in general, it appears interesting to analyse his foreign policy beliefs in particular, all the more so because the existent academic research on his political views, first, mainly deals with his domestic rather than foreign policy ideas and second, is primarily dedicated to his 2013 mayoral campaign, failing to account for the changes that have occurred in both his views²³ and Russian politics ever since. Furthermore, notwithstanding that his chances to win the presidential elections in March 2018 may seem minor given his still modest rating²⁴ and the fact that the Kremlin is placing numerous obstructions to his campaign,²⁵ now that he has clearly declared his presidential ambitions and therefore, may succeed Putin as the one in charge with the country’s external affairs, his foreign policy program is of particularly great topicality. The analysis rests on Navalny’s numerous speeches, interviews, articles and electoral manifestos appeared in the period 2014-17 and is clustered around three themes on which he chiefly concentrates, namely Russian policies toward disputed lands and states in the post-Soviet space (Crimea, Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria), the country’s general foreign policy orientation (in particular, as far as Russia-West relations are concerned) and assessment of Putin’s foreign policy.

Navalny’s Foreign Policy Views

Secessionist territories

Perhaps the primary thing that will be remembered about the Putin/Medvedev regime’s foreign policy is the two military conflicts that Russia has waged in the former Soviet republics, namely the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and particularly the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian war. Alexei

Navalny's stand on them is peculiar in two ways. Firstly, he tends to pointedly stress their relative unimportance compared to Russia's domestic affairs. Even in 2014-15, when foreign policy issues (especially Crimea and Donbas) were significantly dominating the country's public discourse, Navalny's focus was primarily on internal problems: in October 2014, for example, he posited that "the issue of illegal immigration is 100 times more important than any Ukraine," believing that "[i]t's not in the interests of Russians to seize neighbouring republics, it's in their interests to fight corruption, alcoholism and so on—to solve internal problems."²⁶ Secondly, Navalny usually does not seem to want to canvass foreign policy in general and Ukraine in particular, frequently eschewing answering foreign affairs related questions as clearly and knowledgeably as he normally does whenever asked on other topics (e.g. Russian ruling elite, elections, corruption, etc.), preferring giving vague replies and trying to drive the conversation towards internal issues instead. In this vein, in October 2014, Navalny's response to the question whether he was considering Crimea as belonging to Russia or Ukraine was "Crimea belongs to the people who live in Crimea."²⁷ When in April 2017, *Spiegel's* journalist raised the point of Navalny's general avoidance of answering questions on foreign policy and Ukraine by giving replies of the kind "[m]y foreign policy consists of finally building roads and the payment of higher wages," Navalny gave a reply which explicitly implied he was treating foreign affairs as a low salience issue:

I am not avoiding it [foreign policy]. But I believe, and in this sense I am different from Putin, that Russia should not isolate itself. Everything that happens in our country is justified through Syria or Ukraine. But when one's own citizens only make 300 euros, one can't have much clout in foreign policy. Let's start with colonizing our own country. When I visit my brother in jail, I drive through the most densely populated part of European Russia—and I don't see anybody, kilometer after kilometer. That would be a great opportunity to apply our energies.²⁸

Albeit the cases of Crimea, Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are seemingly identical in that these territories' break-aways were possible only thanks to Russian military and financial assistance and are not recognised by the international community, Navalny treats each of them differently. As for Crimea, he holds a "realist"

standpoint, arguing that “despite the fact that Crimea was seized with egregious violations of all international regulations, the reality is that Crimea is now part of Russia.”²⁹ Expressing refusal to return Crimea back to Ukraine immediately—once he said the peninsula is not “some sort of sausage sandwich to be passed back and forth”³⁰—and considering the status referendum held on the peninsula in March 2014 as falsified, Navalny has been a continual proponent of a new, “fair” referendum that would be conducted according to democratic standards with the presence of international observers and hence, would potentially satisfy all the currently opposing sides, from Crimean Tatars to the EU.³¹ Yet, he does not seem optimistic about the peninsula’s future, saying that try as he might, neither the international community nor Ukraine are likely to recognise the referendum, so Crimea will most probably remain one of many unresolved territorial disputes in the world,³² suffering from a lack of investments and economic development.³³ Incidentally, Navalny’s idea of a fair referendum in Crimea is common among Russia’s democratic opposition: a similar view has been expressed by the former leader of the PARNAS party Boris Nemtsov, murdered in February 2015, and the leader of the “Yabloko” party Emilia Slabunova.³⁴ Analogously to PARNAS and Yabloko during their 2016 parliamentary elections campaign,³⁵ Navalny currently decided not to open presidential campaign offices on the Crimean peninsula.³⁶

As to Donbas, Navalny advocates implementing the Minsk Accords, i.e., granting amnesty to local separatists and discontinuing provision of material support to them, withdrawing the remaining Russian troops (that, in his opinion, are still remaining in East Ukraine) and restoring control of the state border to the government of Ukraine.³⁷ Yet, on this point, he seems to lack a strategic vision of what to do next and how the situation will evolve after; moreover, once elected president, he apparently wants to completely liberate himself as soon as possible from solving Donbas’ issues, putting them thoroughly on the Ukrainian government. To illustrate, consistently referring to the needed policies towards Ukraine as “easy,” meaning that the sole thing Russia needs to do is to implement the Minsk Accords, he, however, failed to give a compelling reply to the question how to deal with Ukraine that is not observing the Minsk Accords either, simply saying “I will implement the Russian part of the Minsk Accords, I will transfer the border control.”³⁸ Likewise, when faced the question of how to

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stop Ukrainian nationalists who are likely to pose danger to Donbas' citizens once the region is back in Ukraine, Navalny answered—quite jauntily—that “for this purpose, there are blue helmets, there are European troops, units of various kinds, and mankind has a rather great experience in the application of such measures.”³⁹ Finally, whenever asked about the ways to normalise Russo-Ukrainian relations, Navalny gives rather philosophical responses nearly absent of concrete political steps, arguing that Putin's policies have created such a hostile state in the person of Ukraine that there can hardly be any universal decision to tackle the problem, that “it is only time that will mainly heal the wound” and, provided that Russia performs the Minsk Accords and no other conflicts flare up, “perhaps, in a couple of generations, we [Russians] will completely normalise our relations with Ukraine.”⁴⁰ So far, incidentally, Navalny's ideas on Ukraine appear to have faced opposition both from most of the Russian pro-Kremlin media and a great deal of the Ukrainian mainstream ones with the former portraying him as closely affiliated with Ukraine⁴¹ while the latter arguing that his possible presidency would imply little, if any, change in Moscow's approach to Kiev.⁴²

According to Navalny, comparing Crimea and Donbas to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria is hardly accurate: while the latter three territories have been de facto independent since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war was, in his opinion, initiated by Georgia,⁴³ Ukrainian secessionist regions came to existence in consequence of Putin's policies. Again, he does not appear to have a clear-cut program on what to do with Abkhazia and South Ossetia: while he favours halting sponsoring them and is reluctant to return them back to Georgia, recently he admitted he is “not ready” to answer the question whether Russia should keep its military bases there.⁴⁴ It remains, nonetheless, unclear how it may be possible—with no military and economic support—to retain the independence of the territories which, as Gerrits and Bader put it, are “dependent on Moscow to an extent that is rarely observed between states that recognise each other's independence,” taking into account that “[t]he economic and intergovernmental linkages between Russia and the two regions are not just extraordinarily deep, but they directly undermine the autonomy of the regions.”⁴⁵

Common in his treatment of all those secessionist territories is that he mostly considers them not from identity-related or geopolitical, but from a purely economic perspective,⁴⁶ as territories on the

maintenance of which Russian taxpayers' money are being spent. In this vein, he supported the statement that Crimea is de-facto Russian on the grounds that pensions and salaries on the peninsula are paid from the Russian budget.⁴⁷ When facing the question of how he will interact with Abkhazia and South Ossetia once elected president, the first thing he said was that the money Russian taxpayers are currently paying to those territories amounts to 200,000 roubles (about 2,900 Euro) monthly per a local citizen, the practice which he wants to stop.⁴⁸ Analogously, his resoluteness to do away with the Donbas war also primarily relates to economic issues: his main arguments in favour of the implementation of the Minsk Accords are that, given Russia's own underdeveloped social system and abject poverty, first, the country cannot afford spending money on the war itself, the payment of salaries and pensions to locals and the sustenance of Ukrainian refugees and second, Russia needs international economic sanctions to be lifted.⁴⁹ Remarkably, for Navalny, the economic angle of the war in Donbas significantly surpasses ethical and legal considerations. Exemplary of this point is that during his debates with Igor Strelkov, a Russian army veteran who played a crucial role in the occupation of Crimea and organisation of the militant groups of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic in April-August 2014, Navalny evaded from calling him a war criminal, saying the it is not him, but the court that should decide it.⁵⁰ Instead, his main accusation of Strelkov was not that the war initiated by Strelkov has resulted in over 10,000 deaths thus far, but rather that the war is costly, is "destroying Russia's economy" and "deprives Russian citizens . . . of their money, last money."⁵¹

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Foreign Policy Orientation and Russia-West Relations

Unlike Putin, whose rhetoric tends to stress Russia's distinctiveness both from the West and the East, Navalny does not seem to focus on this issue at all, sometimes, similarly to Putin, considering the country as being in "a unique position between Europe and Asia"⁵² and sometimes regarding Russia to be a part of the Western world.⁵³ In general, in his speeches and manifestos, Navalny tends to abstain from specially highlighting the West in general or Europe in particular, simply listing them among several key players with which he is willing to build friendly relations.⁵⁴ On a more careful reading of his manifestos, however, it becomes evident he still somewhat favours Western states among other actors, arguing that "Russia's strategic interests in the

contemporary world in many respects coincide with the interests of developed Western countries . . . It is them with whom Russia will develop equal partnership and alliances.”⁵⁵ At the same time, for Navalny, Russia’s position in the world and the country’s relations with the West appear to be a pragmatic/rational rather than ideological/identity-related matter. While clearly rejecting Putin’s “third way” and “Eurasianism” ideologies⁵⁶ and refraining from depicting the West as the main hindrance to the development of Russian economy,⁵⁷ as often does Russian official propaganda, Navalny nevertheless seems to accentuate an economic, trade and political rather than ideological alliance with the West, overtly stating that he will build his policy towards all international actors, including Western countries, through the prism of “whether Russia benefits from this and . . . whether the Russian Federation’s citizens make more money on this.”⁵⁸ In a similar manner, he considers Russia’s accession to WTO as right in that the country’s most economic sectors capitalise on it.⁵⁹ According to Navalny, Russia and the West have common strategic interests, among which he lists freedom of trade, battle against international terrorism and reduction of international tensions.⁶⁰ Notably, the Progress Party’s electoral manifesto states that under its rule, “Russia will abandon supporting the regimes which rest on lie, violence and suppression of democracy” and “Russia will support post-Soviet states’ movement towards democracy and civil freedoms, avoiding gross political or military interferences in the affairs of the neighbouring states,”⁶¹ which may be interpreted as a sort of readiness to promote democracy and human rights abroad, but solely in a “passive” form which does not require any material expenses.

Remarkably, Navalny tends to understand international politics chiefly in *realpolitik* terms, as states’ constant struggle for their national interests. Almost identically to Putin’s statements, Navalny’s manifestos tend to underline that under his presidency, the country’s foreign policy would be *independent*⁶² and its cooperation with the EU—*equal*.⁶³ Pointing to the fact that the unity of the Western world, as commonly perceived from Russia, is in many respects exaggerated and in fact, EU member states compete with one another with each nation placing its own interests before those of the EU, Navalny believes that Western powers are generally interested in Russia playing the role of “hinterlands of resources” and hence, try to impede its technological advancement.⁶⁴ Given this, it is no wonder that unlike the world’s most liberals, Navalny does not see any problem in cooperating with Donald

Trump or European far-right parties should they once come to power in their countries.⁶⁵ Again, this point seems to reflect his general belief in the priority of objective national interests over ideological considerations: supposing that a country's foreign policy is in many aspects inertial and guided by economic interests independent of ideology, he did not believe in December 2016 that Russia's relations with the US would change significantly under Trump.⁶⁶ Yet, noteworthy is that Navalny tends to comment on Russia-West relations rather vaguely, negligently, which seems to indicate that he lacks a clear program on this issue. Consider, for example, the answer that he gave at a meeting with his supporters:

When I become President, what relations am I planning to build with the United States? Usual, normal ones. Well, Trump will come here, we'll shake each other's hands. Everyone wants one simple thing—that is earning money. And I want Russia in its relations with the USA to earn money as well, I want us [Russia and the US] to cooperate in the oil-and-gas sphere, in outer space and everywhere else.⁶⁷

As for Russia's policy in the post-Soviet area, the Progress Party's manifesto mentions it only after Russia-West relations, which indicates that Navalny hardly deems Russia's so-called "near abroad" as a pillar of the country's foreign policy—as distinct from Russia's current Foreign Policy Concept which states that "[t]he foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation include developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and further strengthening integration structures within the CIS involving Russia."⁶⁸ However, pointing to the "close cultural and language ties" that the post-Soviet states have "for historical reasons," Navalny does not reject the Eurasian integration completely, suggesting that it be continued, but only "to the extent that it will contribute to the mutual benefit"⁶⁹ of its participants rather than to the detriment of economic interests for geopolitical purposes. In general, Navalny appears to conceive of the post-Soviet space in terms of *internal* (security, economic) rather than *foreign* affairs: in this vein, guided by the desire to be able to control an inflow of migrants to Russia, he actively proposes to introduce a visa regime not only with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, but even with Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, Russia's fellows in the Eurasian Economic Union.⁷⁰

Attitude to Putin's Foreign Policy

Navalny's stance on Putin's approach to foreign affairs is highly critical and one can distinguish three major lines of his criticism. The first—and the main one—relates to Putin's foreign policy being arguably injurious to Russia's developmental needs. In this respect, Navalny's primary argument is that Putin spends too much on the country's external affairs whereas Russian economy is in serious need of investments. This "excessive expenditure" argument pertains both to direct war expenses on the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria⁷¹ and provision of material aid to other states: regarding the latter, Navalny recently criticised Putin for the fact that since 2005, the Russian government has cancelled debts owed by Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Cuba, North Korea, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Venezuela.⁷² Notably, Navalny tends to specially highlight the fact that it is the money of *Russian* taxpayers that the government spends *abroad* in lieu of allocating them for *domestic* economy, many spheres of which remain backward. To exemplify, at one meeting with his constituencies, criticising Putin's decision to spend 100 billion roubles on the gasification of Kyrgyzstan, while 40% of the territory of Russia itself is allegedly not gasified, Navalny said that his "foreign policy credo" as President would be that he would stop writing debts off.⁷³ In his own words, when campaigning in Russian provincial towns, he usually formulates his argument in the following fashion:

OK great, so Putin is promising to rebuild Palmyra, but why don't you look at the roads in your city? What do you think the priority should be? Fixing the roads in Voronezh or Stavropol or rebuilding Palmyra? The Americans are loaded. Let them fix Palmyra, and we should concentrate on our own problems.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Navalny considers Putin's foreign policy to be harming the country's society and exacerbating security concerns. Along this line, he criticises Putin's policies in the post-Soviet space for they have arguably led to an "uncontrolled inflow of labour migrants" which "negatively affects both the unqualified labour market and the general state of society that is not able to integrate the migrants at the same rate as the increase in their number."⁷⁵ Supportive of the general idea of Russia's participation in the Syrian civil war, Navalny still conceives of Putin's policies in Syria as incapable of accounting for the interests of Russian Muslims. In his own words, "[i]t is absurd that we [Russians] are intervening on the side of the Shiites in a war between Sun-

nis and Shiites even though almost all Russian Muslims are Sunnis”:⁷⁶ as a result, “people from the North Caucasus go to Syria in droves to fight along their Sunni brothers against Shi’a.”⁷⁷ In Navalny’s opinion, in place of endeavouring “to save Assad, who represents a military junta,”⁷⁸ “Russia should join the international coalition against Islamic State.”⁷⁹

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Another point in Navalny’s criticism is that Putin arguably fails to use available foreign resources to the advantage of Russia’s socioeconomic advancement. One of such resources is the global Russian diaspora whose skills and competences, according to Navalny, could be potentially utilised for the furtherance of Russia’s image abroad as well as the country’s domestic development, but such is not being done arguably because Russians residing abroad perceive their historical homeland as hostile to them.⁸⁰ Another resource of this sort is the experience and expertise of the world’s developed states which, in Navalny’s opinion, Russia fails to use for its own domestic reforms because Putin’s international policies have ruined Russia’s relations with those states.⁸¹

Finally, one more line of criticism refers to the fact that Putin’s policies have arguably weakened the country’s international position. In this respect, Navalny states that, similarly to domestic politics, in his foreign affairs Putin tends to disregard the established rules and his own promises. One instance of this point is the Minsk Accords which Putin has signed, but never respected,⁸² another—the Crimean referendum that, according to Navalny, was falsified and thus hardly represented the true opinion of Crimean people, which he considers among the reasons why the international community has not recognised it.⁸³ In addition, Navalny accuses Putin of transforming Ukraine, Russia’s neighbour and Europe’s largest state, from Russia’s brotherly nation and important partner into a state hostile to Russia.⁸⁴ Besides, Navalny regards corruption and poverty, peculiar to Putin’s regime, to conduce to Russia not being respected internationally, believing that “in the modern world, a country is respected if its citizens live freely and in affluence.”⁸⁵

The above-mentioned discussion, however, should not give an impression that Navalny criticises Putin’s *all* foreign policy moves. Rather, he relates to him only those with which he disagrees. Illustrative of this point is, for instance, Russia’s accession to WTO, which Navalny welcomes, deeming it as advantageous to multiple sectors of the country’s economy, however, he does not explicitly link it to Putin.⁸⁶

Discussion

Now that the review of Navalny's standpoints on key foreign policy issues has been done, it is possible to speculate on his likely foreign policy foundations, drawing relevant parallels and implications. The first noteworthy point is that as far as his foreign policy is concerned, Putin is generally notorious for prioritising geopolitical competition over Russia's economic development: as Blank notes, "its roots are not in economics but in geopolitics and... Putin's program is fundamentally geopolitical in its thrust, not economic."⁸⁷ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the official discourse of the Putin regime accentuates international issues more than domestic ones, for it is foreign affairs that are used for national identity construction.⁸⁸ By contrast, Navalny clearly treats foreign policy as a side issue, as a derivative of domestic policies, viewing it in the first place as a source that may contribute to the country's modernisation. Given Navalny's "Russia first" standpoint and his tough stance on migration, the far-left criticism that equates him with Trump⁸⁹ does not appear very far away from reality, though Navalny himself may not be completely agree with such a parallel. Importantly, the fact that he attaches little importance to foreign policy is, in a sense, one of the *pillars* of Navalny's presidential campaign: to exemplify, in a recent interview, he said, "[I]n my electoral campaign, I distinguish an important task, that is, to divert the focus of political discussion toward domestic policies."⁹⁰

As a consequence of this, as was shown above, Navalny does not appear to have as clear and detailed a program on foreign policy as the one he has, for instance, on corruption. He tends to be ambiguous and evasive whenever encountering questions on foreign affairs—in stark contrast with his detailed knowledge on domestic issues. It would even not be an overstatement to argue that Navalny somewhat does not appear to be interested in and familiar with foreign policy topics: to illustrate, in one interview, he called the problems of Donbas and Crimea "not related to each other";⁹¹ another time, when listing the countries whose debts Putin has written off,⁹² Navalny made no difference between *dictatorships* amicable to the Putin regime (e.g. Syria, Venezuela) and simply *developing countries* (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan), though this difference seems to be of crucial significance in this case. In view of that, it does not appear surprising that Navalny's foreign policy views contain a number of contradictions, the origin of which Laruelle foresaw

as early as in 2013, linking them to Navalny's desire to combine hardly reconcilable liberalism and nationalism.⁹³ To name a few, he wants to participate in the Syrian war as a part of the international coalition while spending no money on the country's restoration; he is willing to continue the Eurasian integration as long as it is beneficial for Russia simultaneously championing the idea to impose a visa regime with Central Asian states and finally, he intends to establish friendly relations with the West without giving Crimea back to Ukraine.

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Notably, it is hardly fair to regard Navalny as fully "liberal" when it comes to foreign policy issues - although, to borrow the terms of IR theory, he may be justly deemed as "neoliberal" in the sense that he directly prioritises *absolute* gains (Russia's economic development) over *relative* gains (geopolitical competition).⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that he considers Russia's internal development to be the highest priority signifies not only that he would give up sponsoring the world's dictatorships—the other side of the coin are his suggestion significantly toughening laws on migration and his immediate rejection to provide developmental aid to poor states, both of which have little to do with liberal values. What is more, as against Putin, Navalny appears to attribute great importance to the respect of international norms, yet this respect seems to be important not for him *per se*, due to *moral* principles, but simply for *practical* reasons, because adherence to rules and norms eventually produces a country's reputation of a predictable and responsible actor in the international system, which is eventually conducive to its stable economic development. In light of this fact, it is small wonder that his criticism of Putin's policies in Syria and Ukraine focuses on the high cost of the wars rather than ethical concerns. To understand how such mindset could eventually translate into a real foreign policy, let it suffice to say that it bears a close resemblance with the current official Serbian discourse about the foreign policy of the country's dictator Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s. As one study notes, [t]he predominant political narrative in post-Milosevic Serbia rejected Milosevic's wartime strategies as wrong and destructive; not because they caused great suffering and mass casualties in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, but because they economically, politically, and diplomatically devastated Serbia and denied it aspirations to regional domination. In other words, Milosevic was not wrong to fight the wars; he was wrong to lose them.⁹⁵

For the West, Navalny's pragmatism on foreign policy on the one hand means that he would reject Putin's blatant anti-Westernism and thus, Russia would finally heed the world community's opinion on human rights, annulling the recently adopted domestic laws that violate European standards (e.g. the so-called Dima Yakovlev law, the gay propaganda law, the law on the priority of the national Constitution over the resolutions of the European Court of Human Rights, etc.). Otherwise stated, under Navalny, foreign leaders would likely find it easier to influence the Russian government's decisions by raising their concerns—which is nearly impossible under Putin who traditionally views conceding as expressing a weakness, which he fears arguably due to narcissism and bullyism, intrinsic in his personal psychology.⁹⁶ Yet, similarly to contemporary Serbia, Navalny's Russia would likely experience significant problems related to European identity construction while—at first glance smoothly and successfully—drifting westward and complying—often unwillingly and reluctantly—with international demands and norms.⁹⁷ For post-Soviet states, the fact that Navalny would treat Eurasian integration simply from the viewpoint of economic profitability and not geopolitics means that Russia would finally stop trying to politicise the integration process and forcibly push other states into the Eurasian Economic Union, like Putin did with Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁸ All in all, Navalny would probably bring Russia closer to Europe and the West, but he would hardly turn the country's foreign policy by 180 degrees, as far as seeking integration into NATO and the EU. In fact, the conclusion made by Katz as early as in 2012 in his article entitled "What Would a Democratic Russian Foreign Policy Look Like?" seemingly holds for Russia's possible foreign policy under Navalny's presidency:

[A] democratic Russia will more or less work together with America and other Western governments more than the Putin/Medvedev leadership does now, but differences among them on various issues will continue [...] [M]any of the current differences between the Western democracies, on the one hand, and the Putin/Medvedev administration, on the other, are likely to remain after a democratic transformation in Russia [...] Any Western expectations that a democratic Russia is likely to lead to a more pliable Russian foreign policy that will follow the US and/or European Union lead are likely to be disappointed.⁹⁹

A question that arises is whether Navalny's views on foreign affairs may substantially change should he come to power. Indeed, research shows that after winning elections, candidates often embark on policies that are at odds with their electoral promises—either because they realise the impossibility of implementing their plans once they have taken office, or because they blatantly lied when campaigning, populistically trying to gain votes.¹⁰⁰ Neither of these, nonetheless, seems to fully correspond to Navalny's case. The former is unlikely, given that much in his plans (e.g. his intentions regarding Crimea) reflects a clear attempt to balance between liberals' and conservatives' foreign policy expectations and nothing in his program appears wittingly unrealisable (e.g. he does not promise to accede to the EU in five years or the like). Moreover, his foreign policy plans will be most probably welcomed both by Western leaders, tired of Putin's intractability. With regard to the latter, indeed, on the one hand, Navalny's program rests on "safe" ideas, ones that are both critical of the incumbent government and likely to gain popular support. In this category fall not only corruption and embezzlement, but even his call to redirect the government's attention from geopolitical toward domestic issues, for it corresponds to Russians' growing fatigue of the primacy of international issues in the government's policies and their dominance in the official discourse.¹⁰¹ At the same time, there is little doubt that Navalny believes in most statements he makes, given that his current arguments—primary focus on corruption, the "Russia first" stance, the call to introduce visas with Central Asia, etc.—by and large coincide with what he used to say and do before he got presidential ambitions. Moreover, regarding him to be a blatant populist appears inaccurate also because some of his ideas are not only diverse from, but somewhat opposite to predominant public attitudes. The examples of such include not only his above-mentioned support of gay rights, but also his position on Crimea the annexation of which, as recent polls show, is overwhelmingly favoured by Russians.¹⁰²

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Notes

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- 2 Neil MacFarquhar and Ivan Nechepurenko (2017), 'Aleksei Navalny, Russian Opposition Leader, Receives 15-Day Sentence,' *The New York Times*, 27 March, available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-russia-prison-sentence.html>> (accessed 13 August 2017); Andrew Roth and David Filipov (2017), 'Tens of Thousands Rally across Russia in Protests against Corruption,' *The Washington Post*, 12 June, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/thousands-rally-across-russia-as-anti-corruption-activist-navalny-defies-moscow/2017/06/12/c1ba69c6-4ec6-11e7-b74e-0d2785d3083d_story.html> (accessed 13 August 2017).
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 - 21 Echo of Moscow (2017), ‘Полный Альбац,’ 07 August, available at: <<http://echo.msk.ru/programs/albac/2032360-echo/>> (accessed 14 August 2017).
 - 22 See e.g. Радио Свобода (2017), ‘Верна ли цель Алексея Навального?,’ 26 June, available at: <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/28579456.html>> (accessed 14 August 2017); Andrey Movchan (2016), ‘Как Навальный изменит страну, которая не хочет меняться?,’ *Obozrevatel*, 14 December, available at: <<https://www.obozrevatel.com/blogs/26403-kak-navalnyj-izmenit-stranu-kotoraya-ne-hochet-menyatsya.htm>> (accessed 14 August 2017); Oleg Kashin (2017), ‘Will Russia’s Only Opposition Leader Become the Next Putin?’, *The New York Times*, 03 July, available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/03/opinion/russia-putin-aleksei-navalny.html>> (accessed 13 August 2017).
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 - 24 On 11 April 2017, only 2% of Russians were ready to “certainly vote” and another 7% - to “possibly vote” for Navalny, see Levada Center (2017a), ‘Акции протеста 26 марта и Навальный,’ 6 April, available at: <<http://www.levada.ru/2017/04/06/aktsii-protesta-26-marta-i-navalnyj/>> (accessed 21 August 2017).
 - 25 See Sharkov (2017); Mortimer (2017); Bennetts (2017); The Guardian (2017), ‘Kremlin Critic Alexei Navalny Jailed for Third Time This Year,’ 2 October, available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/02/russian-opposition-leader-aleksei-navalny-returns-to-jail>> (accessed 07 November 2017).
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- 30 Dolgov (2014).
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Dolgov (2014); Dozhd (2017), 'Алексей Навальный — Ксении Собчак: "Путин и Собянин испугались? — Да"', 09 June, available at: <https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/sobchak_zhivem/navalniy-436786/> (accessed 14 August 2017); Radio Svoboda (2016), 'Алексей Навальный: президентская заявка,' 20 December, available at: <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/28186648.html>> (accessed 14 August 2017); Echo of Moscow (2017), 'Особое мнение,' 14 July, available at: <<http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/2017794-echo/>> (accessed 14 August 2017).
- 33 Such a reply implies that Navalny has no doubt that Crimeans would endorse an accession to Russia, which may appear presumptuous, but in reality, it corresponds to what independent reports, surveys and studies show, see e.g. Konstantin Kosaretsky (2015), 'The Annexation of Crimea to Russia. Opinion Poll,' *Global Research*, 12 February, available at: <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-annexation-of-crimea-to-russia-opinion-poll/5430781>> (accessed 20 August 2017); Shaun Walker (2016), 'No Regrets over Ukraine Split, but Crimeans Want More Love from Russia,' *The Guardian*, 19 January, available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/19/crimeans-still-tigerish-over-split-with-ukraine>> (accessed 20 August 2017).
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