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Современные векторы российской дипломатии на постсоветском пространстве

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Аннотация: Особую важность для геополитических интересов России представляют страны постсоветского пространства. В первую очередь, это касается происходящих в них политических и экономических процессов. Большим значением имеют подходы стран постсоветского пространства к сотрудничеству с Россией и их позиции в отношении интеграционных процессов на постсоветском пространстве. Ввиду значительных негативных тенденций на международной арене объединение постсоветского пространства, налаживание новых форм сотрудничества и взаимодействия приобретает первостепенное значение. Сложность и комплексность задач, стоящих перед Россией на постсоветском пространстве, подчеркивает необходимость взвешенного и прагматичного, нацеленного на перспективу подхода в двусторонних и многосторонних отношениях с государствами. В фокусе внимания российской дипломатии по-прежнему находится Украина, страны Южного Кавказа и Центральной Азии, Молдавия и Белоруссия. Именно данные страны являются приоритетными партнерами России, приоритетом ее внешней политики.

Ключевые слова: Россия, постсоветское пространство, Евразийская интеграция, безопасность, COVID-19, Белоруссия, США, Украина

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Modern Vectors of Russian Diplomacy in the Post-Soviet Space

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Abstract: The countries of the post-Soviet space are of particular importance for Russia's geopolitical interests. This primarily concerns the political and economic processes taking place in them. Moreover, of great importance are the approaches of the post-Soviet countries to cooperation with Russia and integration processes in the post-Soviet space. In view of significant negative trends in the international arena, the consolidation of the post-Soviet space is acquiring paramount significance. Numerous challenges and complexity of the tasks that Russia is facing in the present region underscore the need for a balanced, pragmatic and forward-looking approach in bilateral and multilateral relations with the states. The focus of Russian diplomacy is still on Ukraine, the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Moldova and Belarus. These countries are the priority partners of Russia, the priority of its foreign policy.

Keywords: Russia, post-Soviet space, Eurasian integration, security, COVID-19, Belarus, USA, Ukraine

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INTRODUCTION

The post-Soviet direction is traditionally considered one of the most important vectors in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation due to the historical, geopolitical, economic, military and cultural ties that closely permeate the region. Integration of the post-Soviet space has long been recognized as a top foreign policy priority, and in the context of significant changes in the international arena that provoked a deterioration in relations between Russia and its Western partners the issue of strengthening

ties with the post-Soviet states is acquiring particular relevance.

In the annual address to the Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin noted that much attention is paid to the development of transport and logistics corridors between the EAEU member states and that contacts with partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization continue to expand [1].

The success of consistent multifaceted work on the development of tight friendly relations with the CIS countries, enhancing regional integration formats (CIS, EAEU, CSTO) and the leading role of Russia in them, the rise in the international authority of common multilateral structures is a main factor in countering the fragmentation of the Commonwealth space and the key to the effective promotion of Russian interests.

The measures taken by Russia and the CIS countries at present to develop integration processes are aimed at converging economic models and market transformations, at establishing free trade regimes, streamlining payment and settlement relations, modernizing individual production and technological ties and implementing other measures that ensure dynamic interaction of partner economies. It is worth mentioning that foreign economic cooperation between Russia and Belarus is being accelerated and is developing in depth within the framework of the Union State, as well as with the countries of the Eurasian Economic Community (with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), the economic return from the developing integration with which is manifested in high rates of growth in trade turnover, strengthening production and technological complementarity of their economies, the development of interregional cooperation [2].

In the 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept the CIS countries are also mentioned first in the system of regional priorities. Of the main tasks the document emphasizes: enhancing the integration processes within the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and the EAEU, the development of such international organizations as the CSTO and the CIS, the settlement of conflicts in Ukraine, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, the formation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states under simultaneous normalization

of relations with Georgia, as well as the promotion of interregional cooperation in the Black Sea and Caspian regions [3].

Moreover, within the framework of the CIS the strengthening of coordination through the implementation of the Action Program approved by the Foreign Ministers in 2019 to enhance partnership between the foreign affairs agencies of the Commonwealth member states is becoming especially relevant. It is aimed at building up interaction on international platforms (UN, UNESCO, OSCE, etc.), discussing joint approaches to major world and regional problems, developing cooperation in the economic, educational, scientific, informational and cultural spheres, in the field of human rights protection, the fight against terrorism and extremism.

Relations between the countries in the post-Soviet space are conducted not only bilaterally, but also through organizations. For example, within the customs territory of the EAEU customs duties and economic restrictions are not applied in mutual trade and four freedoms are implemented — the movement of goods, capital, services and labor. The functioning of the EAEU presupposes the coordination of the economic policies of the member states in key sectors — the financial sector, transport and energy, industry and the agro-industrial complex and trade. In recent years the legal framework of the Union has also been expanding: a number of agreements have been signed in various areas of economic activity (transport, industry, agriculture, subsidies, competition, energy, digitalization, labeling of goods, traceability system, etc.). Programs for the formation of a common electric power market (on May 29, 2019, the Protocol on Amendments to the Treaty on the EAEU regarding the formation of the electric power market was signed), common markets for gas, oil and oil products of the EAEU are being implemented. On January 1, 2018, one

of the key documents came into force — the new Customs Code [4]. By joint efforts of the participating countries a package of anti-crisis measures has been formed to meet the vital needs of the population, maintain mutual trade, freedom of movement of goods and create conditions for subsequent economic growth. Green corridors have been opened for the import of critically important products into the EAEU, restrictions have been introduced on the export of a number of goods. The Strategic Directions for Developing Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025 have been approved [5].

The dynamic development of the EAEU legal framework has actualized the task of conjugating cooperation within the Union and the CIS in the areas of overlapping competence of the two organizations. Along with the use of legal instruments for the prevention and elimination of legal conflicts, the establishment of practical cooperation on this issue between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the CIS Executive Committee is in demand, including the regular exchange of information on legal acts developed at both sites.

The result of Russia's chairmanship in the CSTO in 2019-2020 was the adoption of a number of strategic documents on ensuring collective security, joint counteraction to new challenges and threats. In addition, the fundamentals of multilateral cooperation in the area of regional security were strengthened, mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of combating terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking is actively continuing. The peacekeeping component of the CSTO has been strengthened and joint exercises are regularly held.

Within the framework of the CIS a number of documents have been adopted that determine the vector of development of the Commonwealth in the medium term. Among them are the updated Concept of further development of the CIS, the Strategy for the

Economic Development of the Commonwealth for the period up to 2030 and the Action Plan for its implementation in 2021–2025.

The Russian Federation occupies a special position as a trans-regional power, which borders several geopolitical macro-regions at once and is closely connected with each of them. It seems important for Russia to continue to build up efforts aimed at forming an independent “center of power” in Eurasia, relying on partners among the CIS countries and the EAEU.

The purpose of this article is to determine the problematic of Russia's relations with the post-Soviet countries, taking into account their regional characteristics and conflict potential, as well as to identify the prospects for strategic interaction and long-term cooperation.

Depending on the geographical, cultural and civilizational principles, moreover in view of the historically established relations with Russia, the countries of the post-Soviet space can be divided into four categories. In the first, it is worth highlighting the countries of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova), then the former Transcaucasian republics (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia).

Some experts doubt the need to include the Baltics on the list of the main priorities of Russian foreign policy, because the countries of this subregion traditionally gravitate towards European integration. It is important to note that despite the geopolitical criterion in dividing the post-Soviet countries into groups, relations between them and Russia are developing asymmetrically. So, throughout all the years after the collapse of the USSR, Belarus is considered one of the closest allies of the Russian Federation not only in the region, but also in the international arena. In 1995 the states concluded the Treaty of Friendship,

Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, in 2000 the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State entered into force.

Economically, Belarus is more dependent on Russian sales markets than other post-Soviet countries, and the political course of the current President of Belarus is directed towards the closest neighbours, not Western partners. Until 2017, the stumbling block in relations between Russia and Belarus was the gas conflict, namely, the price of Russian gas, but the countries came to a compromise on this issue [6]. In addition, after the decision of the President of Belarus to close the border with Ukraine and stop air traffic, Russia has reiterated itself as the primary partner of Belarus.

To date, constant consultations are being held between the leaders and working groups of Russia and Belarus, and a number of agreements have been signed aimed at strengthening political and economic integration (in the energy, military-technical, information and financial spheres).

UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

In recent years relations between Russia and Ukraine have continued to deteriorate. Experts note the “pendulum” political course of the Ukrainian administration immediately after the country’s independence in 1991. Since 2013 events in Ukraine began to develop actively, which led not only to the internal conflict, but also provoked the current crisis in relations between Russia and the West. Moreover, in connection with the harsh anti-Russian rhetoric, which has only worsened after the arrival of President V. Zelensky in power, it is difficult to predict a thaw in bilateral relations, as well as the establishment of minimal contacts.

The issues of the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine and the reunification of the Crimean peninsula with Russia remain acute. Thanks

to the Russian assistance, it was possible to achieve a radical reduction in shelling on the territory of the DPR and LPR and to preserve the ceasefire between the parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict. There is an unanimous opinion that the common border between the two states poses hotbeds of instability for Russia and for the deployment of the potential of the North Atlantic Alliance on its borders [7]. In the summer of 2021 NATO and its allies held the Sea Breeze military exercise in the Black Sea. The maneuvers involved 32 warships, 40 aircraft and 5,000 servicemen from 17 NATO member and partner countries. Moreover, in the Black Sea since June 14 were the British destroyer “Defender”, the Dutch frigate “Evertsen” and the Spanish Navy patrol ship “Rayo”. The Russian Ministry pointed up that the Russian military and border guards opened warning fire on the course of the destroyer “Defender”, which violated the Russian border in the Black Sea near Cape Fiolent (Crimea) [8]. Russian experts believe that under the cover of NATO exercises weapons and ammunition will be supplied to the Ukrainian troops deployed near the DPR and LPR [9]. In turn, Russia began large-scale military maneuvers in the Mediterranean, which provoked a new escalation in relations with the alliance.

President Vladimir Putin underlines in his article “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians” that Russia is open to dialogue with Ukraine and is ready to discuss the most difficult issues. Furthermore, during the 2021 annual phone-in Vladimir Putin stressed that Russia does not consider Ukraine to be among unfriendly states, thereby emphasizing the readiness of the Russian side for dialogue, despite the hostile attitude of the Ukrainian administration to Russia and the latest measures taken, including the upcoming Ukrainian bill on the indigenous peoples of the country, which did not include Russians [10].

Russia's demand for the implementation of the Minsk agreements remains essential, the importance of which Ukraine deliberately negates and increasingly violates the terms of the ceasefire [11]. Moreover, the recently approved National Security Strategy of Ukraine reiterates the need to return the territories allegedly "occupied" by Moscow, but there is not a word about international obligations to resolve the conflict in the Donetsk region. The goal of the country's accession to the EU and NATO is explained not by the desire for its own development, but solely by the task of containing Russia. In an effort to rewrite the Minsk agreements, in which Kiev, to the detriment of all other provisions, prioritizes only the clause on the resumption of control over the border, the Ukrainian authorities are seeking to enlist support abroad. So, soon the Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine plans to submit the final version of the draft law on the so-called transitional period. According to the comments of the Minister for Reintegration A.Reznikov, at the moment the text is being studied at the embassies of a number of foreign countries, after which it will be sent for consideration to the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the OSCE ODIHR. It is known as another attempt to enlist the support of international partners in Kiev's efforts to rewrite the Minsk agreements.

This draft involves the introduction of a special legal regime for certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions while maintaining the current conditions of the socio-economic blockade. Before that, it is planned to establish military control over the border and the entire territory of the Donetsk region, although, according to paragraph 9 of the "Package of Measures", the resolution of the border issue should be completed after a comprehensive political settlement. In addition, the draft proposes the launch of certain civil-military administrations instead of the local elections

provided for in paragraph 4 of the "Package of Measures". Finally, instead of the amnesty prescribed by paragraph 5 of the participants in the events in the Donetsk region, the concept of so-called transitional justice with the selective use of repressive instruments based on politically motivated assessments from Kiev in each case appeared. At the same time, there is no mention about a permanent special status of the region, or about any dialogue with its real representatives.

In addition, Ukraine continues to prevent foreigners from entering the country on the basis of documents confirming vaccination with the Russian "Sputnik V", since it is not included in the list of those approved by WHO [12].

RUSSIA AND MOLDOVA

The victory of Maia Sandu in the presidential elections in 2020 marked a new round in the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Moldova.

Despite certain disagreements, the cause of which is, firstly, the Transnistrian problem, and secondly, the activities of pro-Romanian unionists, an alliance with Russia in the economic sphere is also important for this country. In this regard, the key role is assigned to the labor market for Moldovan citizens, the sales market and energy resources.

However, Sandu's early announcements as president escalated political tensions. For example, the president highlighted the need for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria and called for reformatting the Russian peacekeeping mission into a civilian mission under the auspices of the OSCE [13]. In the fall of 2021 a meeting is planned to resolve the Transnistrian conflict in the 5+2 format (Chisinau and Tiraspol as parties to the conflict, Russia, Ukraine, OSCE as mediators, the European Union and the United States as observers), which will consider this issue.

In June 2021 the State Duma of the Russian Federation in its statement condemned the actions of Moldova and Ukraine, leading to the disruption of the settlement of the conflict in Transnistria and aggravating the situation of Russian compatriots living there. The political forces supporting President Sandu are using every opportunity to strengthen the blockade of Transnistria and disrupt the negotiation process, as well as to destroy the proven mechanism of the peacekeeping operation in the region. Of particular concern is the prospect of stopping transport communication and supplying the population of Transnistria, to which, despite the international obligations assumed, Moldova and Ukraine are leading together. From September 1, 2021, they intend to block border crossings in the region for cars with Transnistrian license plates, which will deprive more than 100 thousand car owners of the possibility of movement and is prohibited by international law. Before that, as the deputies of the State Duma point out, from July 11, Moldova, by agreement with Ukraine, plans to introduce a full-scale joint customs and border control at the only checkpoint for Transnistria “Kuchurgan” on the Ukrainian side. This is fraught with restriction of foreign economic activity of Transnistria, including the supply of medicines and medical products, food and others. Similar measures, despite the coronavirus pandemic and under the pretext of fighting it, were taken in the spring of 2021 [14].

Sandu’s foreign policy priorities indicate her intention to change the vector set by the previous president. For example, Romania, Ukraine and the countries of the European Union were singled out as the most important allies, together with the Eastern Partnership program. It is no coincidence that the first official visit of the new President of Moldova took place in Kiev.

As for Russian-Moldovan relations, Sandu stated that she advocates constructive relations

with Russia, which should be expressed in the restoration of Moldovan exports to Russia, solving the issue of social protection of labor migrants working in Russia, as well as in resolving the problem of the Transnistrian conflict. At the same time, Sandu has already questioned the advisability of Moldova’s participation in the EAEU, stressing that an existing free trade agreement with the CIS countries is sufficient for the Republic. However, with the support of the socialists, in December 2020 the deputies of the Moldovan parliament voted to return the status of the language of interethnic communication to the Russian language and the full return of Russian television and radio programs.

In June 2021 the third delivery of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine to Moldova took place. As stated by the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova, Russia confirms its readiness to continue to assist the Republic of Moldova in countering the spread of the new coronavirus infection, as well as its interest in maintaining and developing friendly Russian-Moldovan relations.

TRANSCAUCASIAN REPUBLICS

Azerbaijan is a fairly large and independent country from Russia, which is not interested in integration processes and, at the same time, is in special partnership relations with Turkey. The problematic issue is still the confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nevertheless, today Russia and Azerbaijan carry out strategic interaction equally important for both countries. It is built on a pragmatic basis and is expressed in trade, economic and military-technical cooperation. Azerbaijan is not a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, however, according to experts, its entry into the EAEU in the near future is not excluded, since Azerbaijan’s ally, Turkey, considers this option as an alternative to the EU.

Concrete results were yielded by Russia's efforts to resolve regional conflicts and crisis situations in the Transcaucasian subregion. Thanks to the mediation of Russia, hostilities were ended and peace was restored in Nagorno-Karabakh, emergency humanitarian assistance was provided to the population, conditions were created for the return of refugees and displaced persons, a peacekeeping operation was launched, and the foundation of a joint Russian-Turkish center for monitoring the cessation of hostilities was agreed.

It should be noted that Azerbaijan is supported by such large international organizations as the UN and the OSCE, which consider Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan.

The second participant in the conflict is Armenia, which considers Nagorno-Karabakh as the ancestral territory of the Armenians (since the II century BC), as well as a "nation-forming issue", since its withdrawal from this historical region calls into question the existence of the Armenian nation in the Caucasus. In this conflict Armenia counts on the help of Russia as its strategic ally. In addition, Russia has been fulfilling its historical mission as a guarantor of stability in the Caucasus for centuries.

Despite the Euro-Atlantic partnership policy pursued by Armenia after the 2018 velvet revolution, it remains a military-political and economic ally of Russia in the region. Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and is a member of the CSTO. Furthermore, the Russian military base Gyumri is located on the territory of Armenia, which carries out combat duty within the framework of the United Air Defense System of the CIS countries. It should be borne in mind that Russia is one of the main investors in the economy for Armenia, and the gas monopoly Gazprom Armenia is wholly owned by the Russian Gazprom.

Over the past two years Armenia's foreign policy towards Russia has undergone some adjustments. So, on July 16, 2020, the Armenian Parliament adopted the draft law "On Audiovisual Media", which provides for the removal of foreign channels from the free state broadcasting network. The leading Russian channels, which, according to the Armenian leadership, "pose a threat to the national security of the country," fell under the "information cleansing". Thus, the Euro-Atlantic vector has made its own changes in Russian-Armenian relations, while human relations remain at a high, friendly level.

In foreign policy, Armenia adheres to the line of the European strategic partnership, repeatedly stating that accession to the EU is seen as one of the long-term goals. Armenia already participates in a number of European programs — "European Neighborhood Policy", "Eastern Partnership", and also signed an agreement on "Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership with the EU" in 2015.

In October 2020 in the Joint Statement of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russia-USA-France) there was a sharp condemnation of the aggravated situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. After another aggravation of the conflict Russian peacekeepers were deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh. For Russia the priority is the early and peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict, since it is actually developing at the borders of Russia.

Many were surprised by the publication on November 10, 2020, of the Joint Statement of the President of Russia, the President of Azerbaijan and the President of Armenia on a complete ceasefire and all hostilities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Peace Agreement signed by the three parties provides for the entry of Russian peacekeepers, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the leaving of a part of the territory

of Nagorno-Karabakh under the control of Azerbaijan [15].

The aggravation of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations is taking place against the backdrop of political instability in Georgia, where the emerging Biden administration is beginning to gradually soften relations between pro-American political forces: the ruling Georgian Dream coalition and the opposition United National Movement party [16].

Today interaction between Russia and Georgia is carried out within the framework of the Geneva Discussions, which take place several times a year. In June 2019 Russian-Georgian relations experienced another wave of aggravation. Despite this, the economic interaction between the countries continues, the trade turnover between the countries is at the level of 2018, equal to approximately \$1.355 billion, which is 25% more than in previous years. Food products (Russia is the main importer of Georgian wines), agricultural raw materials, metallurgical products prevail in the structure of Russia's imports from Georgia. Russia supplies Georgia with oil, oil products, wheat, etc. Georgia is a supplier of labor to Russia, while Russia continues to invest in Georgian assets, remaining the leader in terms of the volume of remittances to Georgia (in 2020 the amount of transfers amounted to \$364 million) [17].

On June 29-30, Geneva hosted the 53rd round of the International Geneva Discussions on Security and Stability in the Transcaucasus with the participation of representatives of the Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia, the Republic of South Ossetia, the Russian Federation and the United States under the co-chairmanship of the European Union, UN and OSCE. The Russian delegation was headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Rudenko [18]. The participants in the Geneva Discussions agreed that the situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South-Ossetian

borderlands remains generally stable. Moscow, Sukhum and Tskhinvali proceed from the need to further build up efforts to strengthen security on the ground. An early start of the process of delimiting the borders of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia with their subsequent demarcation could really promote cooperation in this important direction.

The Russian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian sides noted the counterproductivity of the confrontational line of Tbilisi, which hinders the progressive work, including in the humanitarian group. An agreement was reached to hold the next round of the Geneva Discussions in mid-October 2021.

On June 14, during the NATO summit in Brussels, the leaders of the alliance supported the right of Ukraine and Georgia to join the military bloc, without naming any dates, but pointing out the need to continue reforms in these countries. Further, during a meeting of NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg with military observers, he said that Ukraine needs to do more in terms of reforms for accession.

CENTRAL ASIA

The ideas of Eurasianism, a common historical past and broad economic cooperation, formed the basis of the Agreement on the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, signed in 1995. A year later Kyrgyzstan joined the Customs Union, which subsequently led to the transformation of this organization into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and later into the Eurasian Economic Community (EEU) [19]. The very same ideology of Eurasianism has grown into the emergence in 2016 of the concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership, which is still actively developing.

Relations between Russia and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are developing most favorably in this cluster. Russia plays a

significant stabilizing role in the economic and political life of the aforementioned states.

The relations between Russia and Kazakhstan are based on trade and economic interaction (Russia accounts for a quarter of Kazakhstan's trade turnover [20]), energy, fuel and investment cooperation. The most ambitious joint projects of the countries are the operating Caspian Pipeline Consortium and the development of the Imashevskoye oil and gas field.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rather closed countries in relation to the outside world. There are a number of problems in relations with Turkmenistan. The first is the unresolved issue of citizenship of Russian citizens living in Turkmenistan, where the Constitution, adopted in 2008 and currently in force, prohibits citizens of the country from having dual citizenship. Today, the Russian Federation has not officially ratified the protocol on the termination of the 1993 agreement, by which countries recognized the right of their citizens to obtain dual citizenship (Russian and Turkmen).

Another stumbling block in relations between Russia and Turkmenistan is the Afghan-Turkmen border, which Russia would prefer to strengthen with the help of its military forces (in 2016 the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation offered assistance to the President of Turkmenistan in protecting the border, but was refused). Nevertheless, the countries carry out diplomatic relations on the basis of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of April 23, 2002, and October 2, 2017. In August 2018 the interstate Strategic Partnership Treaty signed a year earlier came into force, with which the countries confirmed their mutual interest in cooperation in various spheres of state life and ensuring mutual security and regional stability based on countering global threats and challenges. Also in 2019 Gazprom and Turkmenistan signed a long-term contract

under which the Russian company intends to purchase up to 5.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan annually for five years.

Another focus of interest is centered around the Caspian region. Russia and Turkmenistan, as well as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (alongside with Iran), share the Caspian Sea. On this issue, a certain consensus was reached in 2018 at the summit in Aktau, where the presidents of the countries signed a convention that fixed the right of the parties to "the extraction of aquatic biological resources within 25 nautical miles of coastal space."

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Uzbekistan are characterized by regular meetings at the highest and highest levels. They began to be implemented more intensively with the coming to power in Uzbekistan of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Thus, during the visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Russia in 2017, agreements on joint investment projects were signed, the cost of which amounted to about \$12 billion, as well as a contract with Gazprom for the supply of gas.

Uzbekistan and Russia are closely cooperating today in the field of trade, investment, labor migration, education and culture. It is worth noting the military-technical cooperation of the countries, which implies mutual supplies of military products, repair and maintenance of military equipment, carrying out development work. Uzbekistan did not formally withdraw from the CSTO, it only suspended its participation in the organization. On May 11, 2020, at the meeting of the upper house of the Uzbek parliament, a resolution was adopted on joining the EAEU as an observer.

Political instability remains a serious challenge in Central Asia. This is most acute in Kyrgyzstan, where the victory of the populist Sadyr Zhaparov in the early presidential elections held in January 2021 is unlikely to provide stability to the Republic and may lead

to an armed confrontation (probably on an inter-clan basis).

Among other problems in this region there is a need to highlight the islamization and radicalization of the local population (these processes occur most rapidly in Kyrgyzstan) due to the spread of the ideology of religious extremism, terrorism and radical nationalism, as well as interethnic contradictions and extremely acute socio-economic problems in all Central Asian states, with the exception of Kazakhstan, which have only worsened against the background of the coronavirus pandemic, which leads to mass labor migration to Russia of Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz.

In July 2021 the United States and its allies completed the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, after which the Taliban terrorist group launched a large-scale offensive and has now taken control of about half of the country. There have already been several cases when the retreating units of the Afghan army crossed the border with Tajikistan, fleeing the enemy. Dushanbe has announced mobilization due to the growing Islamist threat. Vladimir Putin in a telephone conversation with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon confirmed that Russia is ready to provide assistance to Dushanbe within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. There are also Russian military personnel stationed at the 201st military base on the territory of Tajikistan [21].

CONCLUSION

It seems necessary to note that the analysis of the problems of relations between Russia and the countries of the post-Soviet space allows to assume the further fruitful development of all-round cooperation in the main areas listed in this article. First of all, this concerns political consultations within the CIS, economic interaction between the EAEU member states and military and strategic cooperation within the CSTO and SCO respectively. There is

every reason to believe that the post-Soviet space will continue to occupy a paramount place in the system of regional priorities of the Russian Federation and will find their fixation in future editions of the main foreign policy document of the Russian Federation.

The line on the development of large-scale cooperation with partners in the post-Soviet space, the fullest possible disclosure of the potential of regional integration structures with Russian participation (CIS, EAEU, CSTO) is an organic part of a comprehensive policy aimed at ensuring the necessary depth of Russia's involvement in multifaceted relations with the Commonwealth countries, as well as on the possibility of realizing Russian interests under various scenarios of regional policy development.

In the context of growing negative competition in the CIS space with external forces striving to reformat the region and gradually oust Russia from it, the tools for influencing the official authorities in the post-Soviet countries are improving. In addition to the already traditional methods, such as supporting the opposition, nationalist forces, imposing a dependent approach to building ties with Russia, promoting alternative forms of integration, new levers of pressure are being formed, up to openly promoting the destabilization of the domestic political situation.

Numerous challenges and complexity of the tasks that Russia is facing in the post-Soviet space underscores the need for a balanced, forward-looking approach in relations with regional states that are priority partners in foreign policy.

Despite the active Western involvement in the region and the unleashed information war against Russia, the full-scale interaction of the Russian Federation with the countries of the post-Soviet space during the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly strengthened

bilateral ties between states. At the regional level international cooperation to counter the coronavirus epidemic was conducted primarily within the framework of the EAEU and the CIS — organizations that Russia considers to be priorities. Measures have been taken to coordinate and provide support to countries belonging to these organizations.

Within the framework of the CIS and the EAEU large-scale work has also been launched to respond to the spread of COVID-19 and minimize its negative consequences. In April 2020 the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) established a “green corridor” and exemption from customs duties when importing medical goods necessary for the prevention and treatment of coronavirus infection into the territory of the EAEU. Besides, a temporary coordinating council was created within the EEC to monitor the situation related to the prevention of the spread of coronavirus, as well as develop rapid response measures.

On April 10, 2020, the heads of government at a meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council adopted a set of measures aimed at ensuring economic stability in the context of the development of the coronavirus pandemic. The Council of Heads of Authorized Bodies in the Field of Sanitary and Epidemiological Welfare of the Population of the EAEU Member States has established a regular exchange of

information on the current situation with the spread of the virus and the implementation of anti-epidemic measures. The elaboration of proposals for mutual assistance is also coordinated by the Council.

The Coordination Council on the problems of sanitary protection of territories from the import and spread of especially dangerous infectious diseases within the structure of the CIS apparatus bears the main burden on the exchange of experience in the field of medical and sanitary response to a pandemic. The CIS Executive Committee has established a Working Group to monitor the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of daily monitoring of the situation in the CIS and the measures taken by the countries are sent to the states. Moreover, through the CIS channels, an agreement was reached on facilitating the evacuation of citizens of the Commonwealth countries from far abroad by airplanes of Russian airlines [22].

The measures taken by the Government of the Russian Federation during the pandemic to set up new digital platforms in order to protect the health of citizens and resume safe cross-border passenger traffic were also supported by the CIS and EAEU countries. It is prudent to continue engaging regional partners in efforts to use these platforms, including the well-proven “Travel without COVID-19” app.

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