**Ján Bratko :**

**On the International Situation and Russian Foreign Policy**

Until World War II, European politics had been influenced by power and colonial interests for many centuries. It was this conflict and its results that elevated the United States to the position of a world power. Since then, the politics and influence of the USA have been undaunted, at least by a power such as the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

An important historical era, we could call it an age of Europe, ended with the events of December 1991 – the break-up of the Soviet Union. For the first time in almost 500 years, there was no global European power. None of the European states satisfied the economic, military and political prerequisites for becoming a power on the global level. The days were gone when Europe began to force its way to the forefront of the world at the end of the 15th century, creating a global imperial system. Since 1991, the only country to become a global power has been the United States, by producing 25 percent of global GDP and dominating the world's oceans. The USA had previously never been a dominant global power.

In spite of being an indisputable global power for almost a quarter of a century the USA was usually unbalanced by this predominance - situation which characterised the global system of the whole past generation. Contrary to the promises given to us by Western powers, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on the strengthening of peace and democracy we are witnessing military conflicts, with no precedent since the end of World War II.

The absence of power balance, which held the Powers in their interdependence and forcing them in cooperation, has led to the pursuit of global solutions through the use of brute force, local armed conflicts and to the gradual isolation of u.s. foreign policy throughout the world. American military forces were deployed in countries thousands of kilometers faraway from USA. NATO operated in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Afganistan and Libya. As a result we are witnessing huge material damage, thousands of civilian victims, anarchy, disintegration of society and hatred sowed in devided population.Spreading fear and labelling countries as terrorists and villains does not and cannot fulfil the duties of a responsible world leader.

We are witnessing the deliberate concealment of the facts, violations of international law and its arbitrary interpretation which, according to the needs substitutes the legal standards in world politics. Gradual control of global mass media made it possible to present events in "black and white vision"

Misunderstanding or insensitive perception of national liberation movements in specific countries, and the perception of national sovereignty as a relative value, leads all political relations to a dead end. The situation when the post war agreement clearly does not any more apply, international law increasingly often being broken, while international organisations are not being respected in the resolution of conflicts, leads to a gradual decline of international order and a situation similar to that prior to World War I.

The concept of cooperation, peaceful coexistence and balanced interests ended in the '90s, though even after the collapse of the Soviet Union M.S.Gorbatchev in 1990 suggested a Common European House, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, and the Concept of General Security. All of this, however, was rejected by NATO. Victors of the Cold War, under the slogan the “winner takes it all” decided to misuse their exceptional position in the unilateral world regardless of other countries´ interest, including Russia.

The idea of transplanting its own model instead of solving the conflicts, however, led to its further escalation. The result of provoked chaos is the rise of radicalism in all its forms.

The enlargement of NATO by the integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet Baltic States, the support of the “coloured revolutions” in Ukraine, Georgia and Kirghizstan, the establishment of military bases in Central Asia, including the announcements of the establishment of missile bases in Central Europe, all of this led to the Russian conviction that the USA and NATO countries were gradually absorbing its periphery to ensure its permanent weakening and vulnerability*. The former u.s.minister of defence R. Gates called the hasty adoption of the countries of the Eastern bloc to NATO for error and an attempt of the West to invite Ukraine into NATO for gross provocation.*

The Russians have realised that the policy of the West towards them is incredibly hypocritical, remaining faithful to Anglo-American visions of the decline of Russia, that nothing negotiated with western politicians stands if not based on power. Precedent become a war in Libya, which was the most stable country of the region and now is caught up in a tribal civil war. The countries which has caused it are now distancing from this conflict.

Instead of sticking to Chancellor Metternich's ancient principle that relations between states must be based on mutual consensus (*Metternich, who had never trusted the unpredictable Tsar Alexander, always tried to be around him and help him solve security issues*), it seems the West decided to stick to the philosophy of Bismarck who based his concept of relations between states on the use of brute force. When speaking of Russia, he said: *"The power of Russia can only be undermined by splitting off Ukraine from it... it is therefore necessary not only to separate, but also to antagonise Ukraine towards Russia. For that purpose, one must just find and aid traitors among the elites, and with their help change the self-identity of one part of a great people to such a degree that it will hate everything Russian, hate its own people and not even notice this. Everything else is just a matter of time."*

As if in the spirit of Bismarck's concept that resembles the former war in the Balkans, today we witness a shift of the geopolitical battle site to Ukraine. Ukraine begins to resemble the conflict in former Yugoslavia where the powers succeeded in setting brotherly nations against each other, while the resultant damage will not be mended even in several generations. Unlike the beginning of this year, when the pro-western media reported on every step of the Ukrainian governance against the demonstrators on Maidan, today they blatantly ignore the violence committed against civilians in Donetsk and the Luhansk region. In spite of this primitive propaganda, the fact remains that Ukraine is just a pawn in this conflict and has become a victim of the EU's irresponsible politics. The main motive for the conflict is the geopolitical interest to gain new markets at expense of Russia.

In the beginning, the conflict could have been resolved at the level of the EU, Russia and Ukraine. However, the EU, instead of seeking a solution by itself, engaged the USA in the conflict, thus cutting itself off from the possibility of practising its own foreign policy. The inactivity of Slovakian diplomacy is even more incomprehensible. With all its experience from the Balkans and Cyprus, where the Slovak diplomats proved themselves to be highly professional negotiators, it did not take advantage of the opportunity to enter into a mediation of the conflict in its early stage. Who else should know Ukraine better than Slovakia, sharing borders and a big part of common history with it? Who else should be more interested in a peaceful solution to the conflict and a strong Ukraine on its borders? Instead of joining discussions as a negotiator, the Government does not even have a single opinion to solve the conflict.

The EU sanctions imposed on Russia and their tightening under the baton of the USA is just a display of helplessness and an absent political solution. Such an attitude only shows that the main cause of this crisis, with no solution in sight thus far, is the economic crisis, on the one hand, and the crisis of leading figures unable to find solutions, on the other.

If Slovak companies have to leave the Russian market due to sanctions, they will be soon replaced by companies of our european partners. It seems that we have not learned from recent history when, thanks to politics of former Czechoslovakian President Havel, we liquidated, “in the name of peace”, our armament production to allow the free markets to be taken over by armament concerns of the western powers. This resulted in the increase of armament concerns' profits, and economic slump in our country and an astonishing increase in unemployment from which our country has not yet recovered.

**Russia**

The USSR collapse in 1991 turned the process which had constantly been taking place from the birth of the Russian Empire in the 17th century and which gradually incorporated Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Siberia. The Saint Petersburg-Moscow axis was its core and Russia, Belarus and Ukraine were its gravitational centre. The borders of the Empire had always been dynamic, usually stretching and sometimes contracting according to the development of the international situation. From 1945 to 1989, after gaining control of territories taken over during World War II, the USSR borders stretched up to Central Germany.

The Russian Empire disproved the assumption that a political and economic power requires a strong economy. Despite never having been a prosperous country, Russia was often militarily very powerful. It defeated Napoleon and Hitler, it managed to face the USA for more than 40 years during the “Cold War” in spite of a far less developed economy.

One of the factors holding the country together was the economy, the second factor was the military and security apparatus. The Russian security apparatus played an especially important role. From many points of view, it has always been the most modern and the most efficient institution in the country. When this apparatus failed, as after World War I and in 1989 to 1991, the regime could not survive.

However, 1990 was a catastrophe for the Soviets. Except for several regions, the Soviet Union break-up led to chaos and privatisation turned into major theft. According to Sergei Glazev, an advisor to President Putin, the disintegration of the USSR was a pay for not being able to convert its economy on a new technological basis in a timely manner. At the same time it was also a triumph of U.S. information and psychological weapons to which the USSR failed to face up.

As mentioned by George Friedman, director of a private American consulting agency, says in in his article Putin´s evolving strategy en Europe - Russia has been on the path to resurgence since Putin won the presidency in 1999. He inherited a broken, weak and chaotic Russia. He is a student of geopolitics, and he understands Russia's constraints and the overreaching that led to the fall of the Soviet Union. Putin's mission was to return Russia to stability and security - [a massive undertaking](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081014_geopolitics_russia_permanent_struggle) for the leader of a country that not only is the world's largest but also is internally diverse and surrounded by potentially hostile powers.

After taking the power Putin developed three basic principles: the security system is the heart of the state; Moscow is the heart of Russia; Russia is the heart of the former Soviet Union. During his first mandate, during his first mandate initiated a whole series of important reforms centralising the power in Russian regions by the appointment of governors, attacking a militant group in the Caucasus, reducing the influence of oligarchs and centralisation of the economic and political systems.

Ukraine is vitally important both economically and geographically to Russian national security. When Washington, with help of non-governmental organisations, began to put pressure on Ukraine to change its regime to one that would lead to a permanent weakening of Russia, Putin recognised their efforts to establish a pro-western government that would be interested in access to NATO. As soon as the Orange Revolution had taken place, Putin decided to rectify the situation.

The first step was to demonstrate clearly that Russia had re-established a significant part of its power and was ready to use it. The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 was a lesson meant not only for Georgia that, like Ukraine, was considering accession to NATO. It was a message to Ukraine and also to all other countries of the former USSR that Russia would again become the centre of Eurasia. In fact, Putin's project of the Eurasian Union joining Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia, represents a large economic and military part of the former USSR.

Russia for its further development needs peace on its outer borders. The economic integration, especially with regard to its new economic strategy, offers such possibility. That is why, after the consolidation of State power, the leitmotif of the Russian strategy is the creation of a system of alliances within the borders of the former Soviet Union, offering economic support and strategic depth for the maintenance of its security. The rest of the world or its significant part knows that an invasion of Russia is unimaginable. However, Russia, on the basis of its historical experience, can.

Until 9/11, the USA was engrossed in “peeling” off the parts of the former USSR like the Baltic States, and their integration into the western system. After 9/11, the USA was obsessed with Jihadist wars, leaving room for the stabilisation of Russia and its regional power strengthening. After pull-back from Afghanistan, Russia has to be concerned about US concentrating on its weakening and decline.

The situation in Ukraine and the introduction of sanctions on Russia have speed up the steps of creating a Eurasian Union, which is expected to start working in January of the next year. Russia fully focussed on strengthening its economic cooperation with China which is one of the founding countries of BRICS *(As Nixon managed to break a bundle of Russia and China, the current foreign policy of the West and the U.S., by contrast, has helped their repprochement).*

The Russian priorities and the possible reactions to international challenges and threats, including the situation in Ukraine, are well described in the work of Putin's advisor for the national economy Sergei Glazev, entitled “How not to Lose a War”, in which he rejects the versions of a coincidence in the case of the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, considering it the climax of a coup organised by the USA. According to Glazev, even if Yanukovych had signed the Association Agreement, the crisis would have erupted 18 months later at the Presidential elections.

To prevent the gradation of the Ukrainian crisis into a world war, Russia cannot play into the hands of the American scenario to ignite it. On the contrary it wants to deal with the crisis so that this scenario can be thwarted. The situation in Ukraine could be turned by Russian military action, but that would lead to internationalisation of the conflict and the next step towards the start of a war. Therefore, it is necessary to create a broad international coalition against the policy of spreading controlled chaos.

Glazev also analyses the trends that tend to provoke violence and wars. Analysing the long-term cycles of economic and political dynamics, he shows that the most probable period of extensive regional wars against Russia is between 2015 and 2018. This is in accordance with the period of transition to a new technological structure with new technological trajectories being completed and the current economy being modernised. In this period, changes in the structure of international relations are accompanied by a technological transformation. The struggle for domination of the world market taking place between the new and old leaders in technical and economic development is leading to the growth of international tensions and provoking war conflicts that have previously led to world wars.

The beginning of the 2020s will thus be the most dangerous phase for Russia, with the beginning of technological rearmament of the developed countries and China. Between 2008 and 2018, the USA will break free from the depression and experience a new technological leap. It is during the period of 2021 to 2025 when Russia could If Russia again falls behind in technological and economic development this would debase its defensive potential, escalating social and ethnic conflicts, as was the case in the USSR at the end of the '80s.

The coalition that will have an impact on European countries drawn into the war against Russia in spite of their own national interests, is the BRICS countries (their economic growth can thwart the destabilisation organised by the USA), Korea and the countries of Indochina (that have no interest in the worsening of relations with Russia), the countries of the Near and Middle East (a new world war would bring them an escalation of their own regional conflicts), Latin American countries of ALBA and the countries of G77, the heirs of the Non-Aligned Movement, who are traditionally arguing against war and for a just international order.

In economic sphere Glazev considers it important to concentrate against the very foundations of US military-political power – the issue of the dollar as a world currency. If the USA intensifies their aggression, the coalition should stop using the dollar in its business and as a reserve currency.

The considerable vulnerability of Russia was revealed by the 2008 crisis. In 2012, the total extent of losses on tax collection due to capital outflow is estimated at 5000 billion roubles. If these threats start to cross the tolerable limit, it will be necessary to take measures to assure the economic safety of Russia in conditions of global instability - to stop the illegal capital export, reduction of external dependency and vulnerability towards the sanctions, including the possibility to transfer the foreign exchange reserves and deposits of the state own corporations, held in dollar assets, into gold and currencies of friendly countries.

Glazev stress that Russia is in no way less experienced than the USA as a global political leader. If the country wants to aspire to this role, Russian social awareness must get rid of its inferiority complex induced by the pro-American media in times of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and American dominance during the Yeltsin era. Russia still has an intellectual and economic potential sufficient for its independent development.

The main development priorities were suggested also by president Putin in his speech at the APEC Summit last month. He pointed out the structural economic transformation as one of Russia´s top priorities, including a wider trade exchange and development cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for more than a quarter of the Russian trade volume. The aim is to ncrease this share to 40 percent and the government is taking concrete steps to expand the geography of Russia exports and increase the share of non-raw materials and high-tech goods.

For wider involvement of countries of the region he highlighted the importance of the Eurasian Economic Union that should start to work fully from next year. In addition to Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia, Vietnam, with whom negotiations are under way for a free trade zone, would also become a members of the Union.

To streamline the movement of goods the Government accedes to the modernisation of the Trans-Siberian railway project, and the Amur-Baikal, which should constitute the backbone of the "inter-continental bridge" between Asia and Europe. The modernisation of the rail network will also be linked to the development of port capacity in the far East, and transportation and logistics centers with the use of the Russian global navigation system GLONASS.

In his Valdai speech, Putin referred to the question of the need to draw up plans for social development in the field of education, health, strengthening of local governments and improvement of national identity. He stated that the problem was especially serious in that the government had not fully succeeded in turning around the negative demographic trends which approach a dangerous limit that could mean the loss of national potential.

**CONCLUSION** - The effort to suppress Russia, as it is demonstrated in Ukraine is irrational. The conflict in Ukraine has presently assumed international dimensions by engaging all the important players and it cannot be resolved except around the negotiating table. The question is whether there is still an interest in resolving it in a peaceful way. The constant toughening of sanctions towards Russia doesn´t indicate that.

Although Russia is being portrayed today as a centre of all evil, it is necessary to become aware that international security is not possible without Russia. Security must either be global or there will be no security at all. Europe, in particular, should realise this, as the cruellest wars in history have taken place on its territory.

A mentioned in open letter of our Association from May 16 this year, Powers are often wrapped up into each other. However, they can be more successful in maintaining peace, only if they improve their communication with the rest of the world and its nations. The continuation of the current unrest in Ukraine is intolerable and it is high time for Powers to stop it.