The Russian Perception of the Post-Cold War era and Relations with the West

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The usual Western perception of Russia is based on the paradigm of the “end of history” and universality of the Western values and development model. It presumes that after the end of the Cold War Russia should have followed the Central and Eastern European countries in their democratic transition – transform its political system and process according to Western standards, develop a Western-oriented foreign policy, approximate its threats and interests perception with those of the West, and finally join the West (at least politically, and not necessarily institutionally, for membership in the leading Western institutions was not a viable alternative for Russia from the very beginning).

Thus, from this paradigm a black-and-white approach is used, which states that Russia was developing strategically in a right direction under Yeltsin (although with many drawbacks and troubles, but right in general) and then made a U-tern under Putin to come back to its traditional domestic authoritarianism and foreign policy imperialism. Moreover, it emphasizes a link between the share of Russia’s democratization and a share of its pro-Western foreign policy orientation, and states that the more authoritarian was Russian domestic regime under Putin the more imperial and anti-Western was getting its foreign policy.

The same paradigm tells that in the long-term perspective this U-tern is unsustainable, because it is a deviation from the universally right course of development, and thus it pushes towards a constant search of proves of this unsustainability (poor economic indicators or poor foreign policy achievements) and indications of inevitable change (new Medvedev’s initiatives, looking for quarrels between him and prime minister Putin, etc.).

In fact, this paradigm is profoundly wrong, and proved to be wrong already in the beginning of 90-s, when Russia started opposing NATO enlargement and showed very explicitly, that its political system will not follow the Western models (for instance, when the independent Parliament was shot down by tanks by “democratic” Yeltsin in 1993, the war in Chechnya started in 1994, and when the 1996 presidential elections were openly flawed).

It is wrong, because from the very beginning the Russian perception of itself, of the world and of the post-Cold War period, its perception of how should have the world develop, and its assessment of how they did develop in reality, differed fundamentally.

And since the task of this Consortium for this year is to analyze and unpack the narratives of how we got to the current crisis of Russia-Western relations, I will focus today on the Russian perception of the Post-Cold war period if its relations with the West, how did this perception differ from the Western ones, and how did this difference result to the current deterioration.

I will proceed in the following way:

- Different perceptions of the end of the Cold War
- Different perceptions of what kind of state should Russia become after the end of the Cold war and rejection of communist
- Different perceptions of Russia as a great power and of what is required for Russia to remain such
- Different perceptions of the international order – both in terms of power distribution, and in terms of rules and norms.
- Different perceptions of the Post-Soviet space.
- Different perceptions of European security order.
• Different perceptions of decision-making on the issues of state sovereignty and use of force.
• Different perceptions of relations in security sphere and defense.

On the bases of these, I will make a conclusion about the Russian resultative perception of the US developed throughout the Post-Cold war period, and the lessons that Russia learned from this period – the lessons that are vital for explanation and understanding of its FP now.

And I will conclude with the Russian perception of the EU and relations with the EU.

1. Very different perceptions of the end of the Cold War and, as a result, opposite world pictures and views of the places of the sides in the world.

George H.W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 28, 1992. “But the biggest thing that has happened in the world in my life, in our lives, is this: By the grace of God, America won the Cold War”.

The US regarded itself as a victorious nation, international system becoming unipolar, US values – becoming universal, and thus regarded a hegemonic policy as a normal and necessary thing, while Russia was regarded as a country that was defeated the Cold war, and the Russian demands for great power status, especially in the context of its weakness, were regarded as weird and illegitimate.

Whereas Russia proceeded from the very beginning from the assumption that it had not lost the Cold war, but had instead won the victory – together with the United States – over Communism. It hadn’t signed a declaration of unconditional capitulation. There had been no US troops storming the Kremlin. Instead, Russia had allowed the Cold war to end because it was interested in doing so.

In the Russian perception, the Cold war ended in 1989, not in 1991 or 1992, and was brought to an end through cooperation and deliberate decision of the two superpowers, not through a defeat of one of them. The year 1989 is considered as the point of departure in elaboration of the Post-Cold war international order or the “new world order” that President George H.W. Bush was talking about. The following collapse of the USSR, the Russian narrative continues, happened already after the end of the Cold war and due to internal reasons, and thus should not have provided a decisive impact on the foundations of the “new world order”, which, again, should had been built two years before.

Thus, for Russia the end of the Cold war in no way was perceived as a rejection of its great power identity, or of its previous history. Not at all.

On the contrary, many people started to look for the Russian identity in the previous pre-Soviet part of the Russian history – Russian empire.

So it was transformation of the Russian great power, which still remained a great power! Unlike Germany in 1945, Russia in 1991 was the same Russia but just without communism, which, in the eyes of the people and elites, made it even more competitive. Loss of the former Soviet republics was considered at that time as dropping of a ballast, which had been draining Russian resources for decades.

Besides, the Russian elite in the late 80-s – beginning of the 90-s was talking about the great contribution they made in the global peace and security by willfully ending global confrontation and opting for a new cooperative world order. Again, the end of the Cold war for the Russian elite was not a compulsory decision, but an act of goodwill, and thus they thought Russia deserved a relevant treatment and praise.

The paradigm of Russian policy in late 1980-s – early 1990-s was that we contribute to unification of Germany, allow for the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, withdraw the Soviet
troops from the CEE not because we do it in order to obtain more – leading seat at the decision-making table, position of country No 2 after the US, vice-president in the Global Earth Corporation. We dismantle the former Soviet empire, in order to rule the world together with the US.

The key task of the Soviet (under M. Gorbachev) and then Russian (in early 1990-s) diplomacy was to transform confrontational relations into those based on cooperation and partnership, but without Russia ceasing its "great power" role and position, and with Russia maintaining its inclusion in crucial decision-making mechanisms and procedures.

Then, in the early ’90s Russia believed that it should be included into the main Western decision-making institutions and clubs immediately, without humiliating procedures of transformation, and as one of the leaders of these institutions. Russia did not think that it should go through the same way the CEE and Baltic States had done.

Unlike the CEE countries, Russia demanded membership in the civilized world immediately, by the very act of rejecting communism and accepting democracy and market economy. Moreover, it demanded a special leading place in this civilized world, being at least 2nd (if not on equals) with the United States. Yeltsin speech in the US Congress in June 1992 – why don’t you address us as an ally?

It is peculiar, that already since 1992, simultaneously with a rhetoric of “joining the civilized community” – the West – Russia has been promoting idea of multipolar world. Russia has never accepted unipolarity at the official level, and argued in favor of multipolarity, and of Russia as one of the poles, immediately after collapse of the USSR and bipolarity. How do they go together? Very simple: Russia wanted to join the West immediately and as a great power, as one of the leaders of the “global North”.

What does it mean in practice? It means that Russia sincerely anticipated that it will determine the nature of international order jointly with the US. Both regionally – in Europe above all, and globally – on the issues of state sovereignty and use of military force.

In this context imagine the shock, confusion and anger in Moscow, when it turned out that this 2nd part of the agenda will be never fulfilled. That instead of building a new post-Cold war order together with Russia as an equal partner, the US started to build it without Russia both globally and regionally – that it was sidelined from the decision-making table. And this turning point happened already in the middle of 1990-, when the decision to enlarge NATO was taken. That was the collapse of the universe for the Russian FP elites at that time.

Now, let me pass to the differences in perceptions of the Post-Cold war period.

2. Different perceptions of what kind of state should Russia become after the end of the Cold war and rejection of communist

Very soon after the end of the Cold war it turned out that the Russian and Western perceptions of what should a post-communist and Russia become, differ fundamentally. The Western idea of Russia becoming a “normal European country”, a nation-state rather than an empire, was regarded as a collapse of the country. This reviled sharply already in 1994 – the 1st war in Chechnya. Triggered huge resentment on the Russian part.

The 2nd component of this problem was a Russian perception of the US role in the Russian domestic transformation, which certainly failed. And started to fail not with Putin, but long before – 1993, 1996.

There was no Marshall Plan for Russia.

At the same time, the US advice on economic reform played a certain role in the economic hardships of the 1990-s and in the ugly corrupt capitalism that was created in Russia instead of a
successful market economy. US economic advice and participation in the Russian transformation whether rightly or wrongly, but started to be associated with the unsuccessful transformation and hardships, which could be possible avoided if Russia has chosen another path. It had not chosen another path to a large extent due to the US advice.

3. Different perceptions of Russia as a great power and what is required for it to remain such – what is great power and what kind of foreign policy should Russia pursue and what kind of place should it occupy in the international system in order to sustain itself as a great power and play an according role?

Understanding of great power: independent player, which defines its interests itself, does not outsource defense to the others, leads (or plays a role of indispensable nation) in its region, and takes part in decision-making on global issues on equal terms with the other great powers, including the US.

In terms of the ways to achieve it, Russia has made 2 cycles in its Post-Cold war era. It started in early 1990-s with a firm conviction that it must be inside the Western structures, in the West – in order to remain a great power and participate in decision-making.

Then after the US decided to enlarge NATO, which was the turning point for Russia and shocking decision, because it destroyed the whole paradigm of its FP for the decade – late 1980-s and early 1990-s, everything it was doing positively in terms of ending the Cold war was for nothing, Russia turned to multipolarity as a doctrine and tried to sustain itself as a great power outside of the Western orbit as one of the independent poles of the multipolar system, with a role in the international system – to counterbalance the US hegemony on par with the other poles, namely China and India, and ideally the EU as well.

This attempt failed and resulted in a deep humiliation of Russia during the Yugoslavian crisis. It showed that Russia was semi-isolated. It emphasized the realities of the 1990-s, when the world was indeed unipolar, and that if Russia opposes itself to the US and the West, it simply isolates itself.

This resulted in a 2nd attempt on the Russian side to get into the Western-centric structures and a 2nd time, when Russia sincerely thought that the only way to sustain its great power status and influence was to be inside the Western decision-making structures and with the West. And the man that engineered this attempt and stood behind it was someone Vladimir Putin. He pragmatically calculated, that the world was indeed unipolar (it was before the period we know as power shift), so to be someone, you have to be an ally or partner of the US. And he did a lot to establish partnership with the US both before 911 and especially after. He hoped for a privileged partnership and even alliance with the US on the basis of our counter-terrorist cooperation, essentially in Afghanistan. And the format of including Russia into Western-centric decision-making was NATO-Russia Council. Informal member of NATO, with decision-making on the majority of issues beyond collective defense moving from NATO to the NRC.

But this attempt also failed because of hegemonic and unilateralist FP philosophy of the Bush Administration. Intervention into Iraq – just as Yugoslavia before – showed, that the US would not really consult with Russia, that it is again thrown out of the decision-making table. All the Russian hopes for alliance with the US on the basis of counter-terrorism and common decision-making within the NRC collapsed. This was the turning point for Putin.

He concluded that there is simply no way for Russia to find its place in the West, so it has to sustain itself as a great power outside of the West – as an independent pole of the multipolar system. So Russia intensified policies at the Post-Soviet space. Coupled with authoritarian tendencies in the Russian domestic politics this intensification triggered a US desire to contain Russia in the Post-Soviet space more actively. And this containment – together with the general
evolution of the US foreign and defense policies during the Bush Administration – produced steady deterioration of US-Russia relations in 2000s, resulting in the Russian-Georgian war, which was the immediate and inevitable result of the US desire to include Georgia and Ukraine in NATO.

It is immensely important, that this 2nd Russian discouragement with attempts to find its place in the West and 2nd conclusion that it should consider itself outside the West coincided with major tectonic shifts in the international system in the middle of 2000-s: power shift, rise of the non-Western great powers, increase of the oil price partly as a result of this rise, and relative weakening of the US. This evolution strengthened Russian conviction that it should look for a place for itself outside the West, not inside the West, convinced Russia that it was historically correct since early 1990-s, when it started to talk about multipolarity as the normal power structure in the post-Cold war era. And since then there were no discussions at all about whether Russia should join the West or not.

So the 2nd Russian “rejection” by the West coupled with the power shift and Russia’s economic growth in 2000-s put an end to all these discussions about the Russian place inside or outside of the West, and how should Russia sustain itself as a great power. The consensus since middle of 2000-s was that Russia should develop itself as an independent power outside of the West and maintain balance between its relations with the West and with non-Western great powers.

And so Russia intensified its policy at the Post-Soviet space, and strengthened the global dimension of its foreign policy as an independent great power: strategic solitude, independence of its foreign policy and defense, strategic deterrence with the US and nuclear parity; creation of BRICS, etc.

The “reset” of US-Russia relations under Obama and Medvedev was not perceived as another Russian attempt to join the West. It was not on the agenda. It was perceived in Moscow as the Obama Administration “correcting mistakes” of the Bush Administration and as a symbol of the US reconciling with the Russian role as an independent great power, and that the US is ready to court Russia accordingly – respecting its interests at the Post-Soviet space, respecting its opinion on global issues, etc. But during the “reset” Russia was firmly positioning itself as outside of the Western orbit, and the collapse of the “reset” in 2012 of course strengthened this.

4. Different perceptions of the post-Cold war international order – both in terms of power distribution, and in terms of rules and norms.

US – unipolarity and hegemonic foreign policy.

Russia – multipolarity and a necessity to counterbalance the US.

US hegemonism was for Russia a deviation from the “right course of history”, a dead end direction of the post-Cold war evolution, ultimately doomed for failure. Which actually happened. This strengthened Putin’s conviction that Russia was on the “right course of history” from the very beginning.

Multipolarity – a paradigm for Russia’s post-Cold war identity. So by default a conduct of a hegemonic policy by the US undermines Russian role in the international system, rejects it of a great power status.

Norms: different understanding of such norms as sovereignty and legitimacy.

Rules: different approaches to the rule of the use of force; to the rules of relations among great powers (their interests have to be taken into account).
5. Different perceptions of the Post-Soviet space.

**US-Russia contradictions in the Post-Soviet Space** exist at least since the middle of 1990s and are among the major reasons of the regular and inevitable deterioration of the US-Russia relations every time after another attempt of their improvement. Including today.

With all the fluctuations of the Russian policy toward the region and CIS countries during the 1990s – 2000s, it had the following constant: the desire to ensure predominant Russian influence in the region and to make Russia an «indispensable power», eligible for "the last vote" in the regional decision-making.

Already in early - mid 1990s Russia advocated its status as the sole and indisputable pole of geopolitical gravity on the post-Soviet space, the center of integration, and center of Russia-centric regional security order. The region was officially called "near abroad", a zone of "privileged interests" and so on. Also, since the second half of the 1990s onwards the post-Soviet states have been occupying the first place in the hierarchy of Russian foreign policy and national security interests.

The US, on its turn, had quickly moved after a short period of cooperation with Moscow on withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the former Soviet republics to Russia, to an open confrontation with Russia in the region. Since the mid-1990s their key strategic interest in the post-Soviet region, including Russia, was to prevent emergence of a new Russian Empire or Soviet Union and to maintain the post-Soviet space in a geopolitically fragmented state. Finally, the US assumed collapse of the Soviet empire as the main geopolitical prize after the end of Cold War – along with the "liberation" of Central and Eastern Europe – which the US also did not want to lose.

Thus, Since the mid-1990s Washington began to conduct a policy of protection and consolidation of independent post-Soviet states, which in fact turned into a policy of impeding any Russian influence and actions aimed at strengthening the Russia-led regional integration, a policy of encouraging centrifugal tendencies and supporting any efforts in the region to "depart from" Russia. Until its war in Afghanistan the US had no specific policies or interests vis-à-vis individual countries of the former USSR. Instead, there was a general interest in pulling them from Russia as far as possible. Today, when the US is gradually leaving Afghanistan, this state of affairs is coming back, and is especially vivid in the US policy in Central Asia.

In addition, Russia's attempts to consolidate the CIS region around itself has not only geopolitical, but also ideological significance for the US. This also encourages Washington to resist these attempts.

*There is in the American perception of Russia and Russian politics and history an unbreakable link between the Russian authoritarianism and imperialism. The more authoritarian Russia is, the more imperialist become its foreign policy, and vice versa.*

As a result the US assumed strengthening of Russian influence at the post-Soviet space, which is perceived in no other way as "restoration of empire", as a result of democracy’s decline and the "authoritarian relapse", which in its turn has a powerful incentive for Russia to slide into authoritarian tradition further and further. At the same time Washington believes that preventing Russian dominance in the region would force Russia to move back to the path of democratic development. This also means – in the US mind – that if Russia is not allowed to be imperialist in its foreign policy, external conditions for its domestic authoritarianism become less favorable. And vice versa.

Such perception of the Russian policy in the CIS became particularly explicit in 2000s, when strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in Russia became an evident fact. So the US intensified the policy of containing Russia at the Post-Soviet space. It started to support anti-Russian elites
in the region even more, and granted full-fledged support to the “color” revolutions in the region, such as in Georgia and in Ukraine, which brought to power absolutely anti-Russian elites.

Whereas the Russian leadership believed that the US simply impeded restoration of the Russian Federation as the "great power", strove to extend its weakness and simply prevent Russia to pursue a policy which is regarded as necessary for its political influence in the world and economic competitiveness.

Moreover, since mid-2000s, Russia has been suspecting that the US wants to change the ruling regime in Russia by organizing a "color revolution", which may be exported from the neighboring CIS countries. There was a stereotype that Russia should be surrounded by a belt of democratic and prosperous countries, and eventually this will trigger a regime change in Moscow itself.

As a result, Washington became considered not just a geopolitical rival, but also a "personal foe" of the key political figures of the Russian leadership, including President Putin himself, since the second half of 2000s.

Contradictions started to grow since 1990-s, when the US supported alternative integration groupings at the post-Soviet space, such as GUUAM.

The 1st major clash was the US-Russia rivalry over the Ukrainian “orange” revolution of November-December 2004. Since that time the US-Russia relations at the former USSR became an open and systemic hostility. Especially taking into account the fact that the major instrument for the Bush Administration to support geopolitical independence and democracy of the post-Soviet countries, above all Ukraine and Georgia, was including them into NATO. So bringing these two countries into NATO became one of the major priorities of the Bush Administration in the years 2007-2008. And for Russia this was among the gravest threats to its military and especially political security and great power identity. This was indeed the only factor that could provoke a “big war” in Europe for the 1st time since the end of the Cold war.

The 2nd episode of open US-Russian confrontation at the Post-Soviet space was the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 and the first case of Russia unilateral revising internationally recognized borders in the former USSR. The US interpreted it as Russian attempts to restore "the Empire." This war provoked the sharpest by then crisis of US-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War and put them at the brink of systemic confrontation. An indicator is that the Bush Administration was discussing use of force against Russia to overt its offensive in Georgia.

Now we have the 3rd stage of the battle – again Ukraine. The nature of the conflict and its roots are the same. Whereas the consequences are tremendously different.

6. Different perceptions of European security order.

In early 90s Russian authorities believed that NATO as a Cold War relic ought to follow the example of the Warsaw Treaty and be dissolved for a brand new non-aligned and indivisible European security system (including Russia and the United States) to appear. Moscow assumed that it should would play a key role in this process and be treated as an equal partner in redesigning European security architecture both by America and Western European countries.

It is essential to keep in mind that Russia never considered a role of “partner” in European security affairs, which has “a voice but not veto” appropriate and sufficient. Instead it demanded a part of “co-designer” of this system, and considered that its role in bringing the Cold war to an end, the way how Cold war ended (by cooperation of two superpowers in 1989), together with the military (nuclear above all) might Russia was retaining, make this demand absolutely legitimate.
Yet, to Moscow’s great disappointment, this approach was rejected by the Clinton Administration. Already by the end of 1993 a decision was taken in Washington that European security system should be based on already-existing institutions, particularly NATO, rather than on new ones.

Instead of creating a new Pan-Euro-Atlantic security order, the West made a decision to extend the Cold War era US-led order to the former communist bloc, the order in which the West and largely the US remain the indispensable and unquestionable leader.

The decision to start NATO expansion, officially taken by the alliance at Brussels Summit in December 1994, became a cornerstone and a factor of US-Russia relations in the 1990s. It brought to an end a «romantic stage» of the early 90s, with Russian attempts to rapidly build a strategic partnership with the US, and showed a deep crisis in bilateral relations.

It was this decision that compelled Russia to reject the strategy of joining the West, and to adopt the multipolar philosophy of foreign policy, according to which Russia should be an independent pole of the multi-polar system and should oppose the US globalism and hegemonism.

For Moscow, NATO expansion symbolized that the US was treating Russia as the Cold War loser rather than its “second winner”.

It became evident that, instead of building a new security order in Europe with Russia as a co-designer, the US were just institutionalizing their own “victory” and the new geopolitical reality emerged after the collapse of the USSR, once and for all preventing any possibility of Russia to restore its dominance in Central and Eastern Europe.

NATO enlargement institutionalized the notion that “with the grace of God America won the Cold war” and consolidated the reality emerged in 1992, not in 1989. This made all the Russian previous contribution to ending the Cold war largely depreciated, if not utterly mistaken, and left a strong sense of offence and betrayal.

Ultimately, as Washington refused to discuss Russian membership in NATO even hypothetically (while implicitly signaling that the answer was “no”), whereas for the majority of other post-communist countries the door was potentially open, Moscow felt itself isolated, drifted and surrounded.

7. Different perceptions of decision-making on the issues of state sovereignty and use of force.

The Russian perception of great power presumes that it must participate in decisions on the use of force, and these decisions must be taken jointly.

So when the US makes and implements these decisions unilaterally, Russia feels humiliated – it is not treated as great power, rejected a full-fledged participation in decision-making on an issue, in which in the Russian multipolar perception great powers must participate: use of force. The question of war and peace.

There were several such episodes in the Post-Cold war history, and all became turning points in Russia-Western relations at that time, resulting in a new crisis.

- NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999
- US war against Iraq in 2003
- Unilateral declaration and recognition of Kosovo independence in 2008
- NATO war in Libya against Muammar Qaddafi regime in 2011

8. Different perceptions of relations in security sphere and defense.
This problem has 2 dimensions.

8.1. The role of nuclear weapons and the problem of strategic deterrence

This is another factor resulting from the Russian perception of itself as an independent great power even in early 1990s: Russia has never ever in the Post-Cold war period supported destruction of strategic nuclear parity and strategic deterrence in the US.

Nuclear weapons – as credible deterrence, as an instrument of defense in conditions of Russian conventional weakness, and the pillar of Russian influence and great power status in the world.

Putin has claimed it time and again, that Russia survived during the 1990-s precisely because of NW, precisely because of maintenance of strategic parity and deterrence based on mutual assured destruction with the US.

This is a problem in itself – undermines trust and compels the sides perceive each other as adversaries.

Problem for US-Russia relations: US pushed for departure from strategic balance of the Cold war and from MAD.

8.2. Missile defense.

9. All these factors combined created a conviction on the Russia side, that the US is a deliberately malevolent actor towards Russia. The US started to be seen – already in the 1990-s, and then its perception was several times strengthened and claimed to be proved in 2000-s and 2010-s - as the major opponent of Russian rise and post-Cold war revival as a great power both globally and regionally.

It was the US who became the major opponent of Russia in many regions, starting from the Post-Soviet space, and in many decision-making institutions, above all the UN SC, and it was the US hegemonic policy, which provoked major anger on the Russian side.

NATO expansion, ignoring of Russian objections, support of independence of post-Soviet republics, support of independence or autonomy of some regions inside Russia – Chechnya – all this was regarded in Moscow that the US deliberately wants to keep Russia week, that it grasps the moment of its weakness and prevents the rise. NATO expansion, of course, 1st and foremost.

10. Another important perception that Russia elaborated during the Post-Cold war period is that the only thing the US understands, and the only thing that can bring Russia a success, guarantee that Russian interests and concerns are taken into account and respected, is force. Ability to use force and resolve to use force.

This is very important for understanding Russian FP and Putin’s calculus now.

Persuasion, attempts to convince the US to respect the Russian interests don’t work. They are doomed for failure. Russia is simply not taken into account and ignored. On the contrary, the use of force helps.

There have been 2 major cases in the post-Cold War period that created this perception and thus made a huge impact on the Russian FP: accelerated marsh of the Russian paratroopers to Pristina airport in Kosovo in 1999; the Russian-Georgian war in 2008.

Now you understand why Russia used force in Ukraine to defend its interests – and this is widely regarded as success. (If there were no intervention, there would be no Minsk accords and no obligation on the Ukrainian side to reform the Constitution. If there had been no intervention, there would be no discussions inside the EU about a direct dialogue with the EEU). And why
Russia intervened in Syria. It is just this use of force that allowed at least some hope for the diplomatic process.

11. As a result of these clashing perceptions all the attempts to establish sustainable US-Russian partnership in the Post-Cold war period failed.

The 1st failed after the US decided to enlarge NATO and eventually resulted in a crisis of 1999.

The 2nd failed after the US decided to invade Iraq and eventually resulted in the crisis of 2008.

The 3rd failed after the US decided to conduct a regime change operation in Libya, and the sides failed to agree upon missile defense, and resulted in a “mini-crisis” of the US-Russia relations in 2012, and the new systemic confrontation now.

And the 4th attempt failed after Russia rejected in 2013 the US proposal …, and the US supported Maidan in Ukraine, supported a regime change in Ukraine and rushed to consolidate its foreign policy outcomes.

In addition to these clashing perceptions the reason is that the sides failed to overcome the Cold war heritage of their relations, namely the dominance of the strategic deterrence logic in the US-Russia relations.

12. Russia perception of Europe and the EU. Up to now I was talking about the Russia perception of its relations with the US. what about the EU? After all, the Ukraine crisis was sparked (not caused, but sparked) by the Russia-EU tug of war. How did it happen, that 15 year after Vladimir Putin proclaimed the “European choice”, Russia and the EU found themselves in rivalry at the Post-Soviet space and the stagnation?

It happened because Russia misperceived the EU twice.

First, in the 1990-s Russian apprehension of the EU was based on the multipolarity paradigm and in the context of NATO expansion. It saw the EU as the future independent pole of the multipolar system – independent from the US and as a counterbalance to the major manifestation of unipolarity and US hegemony in Europe – NATO. So Russia was welcoming the EU enlargement as a way to resist and prevent NATO enlargement. It was opposing the “positive” “multipolar” enlargement of the EU to “negative” “unipolar” enlargement of NATO.

Then, in early 2000-s partly due to its modernization agenda, partly because of poor knowledge of what the EU was and how it functions, partly because of its desire at that time to integrate into the Western structures, and partly because of the EU propaganda, Russia believed that integration with the EU without becoming a member stimulates your economic modernization without threatening your sovereignty. Later this illusion disappeared, and now Russia understands, that to preserve your sovereignty you have to either join, or develop strategic partnership, or integrate with the EU as the US does, not as the EU neighbors do. It also believed that enlargement of the EU would transform the countries of the CEE fundamentally, and eradicate their anti-Russian sentiments and policies. In fact, it is these countries who changed the EU, not vice versa.

Later these stereotypes started to vanish one after another, and the Russian perception of the EU started to change.

At the same time, by 2004 the 2nd Russian attempt to join the West failed, and Russia returned to its self-perception as an independent pole, which needs to have its own periphery. So, Russia intensified its efforts to integrate post-Soviet countries around itself, to create a Russia-centric economic community. Common economic space agreement was signed in 2004 – before the “orange revolution”, and Ukraine participated.
This coincided with the EU enlargement and intensification of the EU policy at the post-Soviet space, which clashed with the Russian policy and Russian priorities.

The EU was pursuing a strategy of including all the post-Soviet countries, including Russia, into the EU-centric orbit. Its vision of Europe was based on concentric circles model, with the EU in the center and all the other countries including Russia as oriented towards the EU in this or that form, associated with the EU in this or that form. This certainly clashed with the Russian perception, which depicted Russia (together with the Russia-centric integrationist arrangement) and the EU as two equal poles of Europe. Cooperative bipolarity and integration of integrations of equals.

The turning point was the orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004. After this Russia-EU relations at the former USSR were growing rivalry.

And mostly troublesome for Russia was of course elaboration of the Eastern Partnership of the EU, which implied association of the 6 post-Soviet countries with the EU, excluding their ways to participate in Russia-centric economic arrangements.

What was also irritating, is that the EU was imposing its vision of Wider Europe and economic order of the Post-Soviet space, refusing to talk to Russia about this order. Again Russia was rejected as a great power and pillar of Europe. For more than a year Russia was suggesting 3-party negotiations to the EU in order to elaborate the economic order for the countries of the Eastern Partnership jointly. The EU rejected. Russia has been offering EU-EEU negotiations, but the EU was rejecting and didn’t want to hear. So, Russia decided to go another way: carrots and sticks policy towards Yanukovich to force him to reject association with the EU.