

The XX International Conference of the Baltic Forum

“The US, the EU and Russia - the new reality”

September 12, 2015, Jūrmala, Latvia

The anniversary “BF” favourably differed from the conferences of the past not only by a round figure in its numerical order. First of all, the customary format of “an intra-European” forum this time was significantly expanded, as it is clear already from the title of the conference with reference to the United States. In the reports of many conference participants the fourth corner of the “triangle” of global politics – China - was mentioned. Especially, because the forum this time included a whole delegation of influential Chinese experts. And secondly, most of the reports were more optimistic than one might expect, given the political background existing in the world at present - the peak of the Ukrainian crisis and the steady stream of refugees to Europe as a result of many years of armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa.

The many different, often opposite views expressed by the participants of the forum therefore were not a big surprise, and the fact that among them there were more experts than ever before, who are recent heads of governments and ministries of foreign affairs of their countries, occupied influential diplomatic posts of extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors, only provided their reports additional weight.

Can it be said that out of this often very emotional discussion the outline of a new reality, for the sake of discussion of which the participants of the “BF” had convened, has been obtained? Let us refer to the sources.

The mention of the United States in the title of an intra-European forum was explained in his speech by Jānis Urbanovičs, the President of BF: “Apart from the European and the Russian point of view on the resolving of the problems of the crisis, there is one more side, the standpoint of which would be extremely important to hear. Do we know of at least one event of global or even regional level, where the influence of the USA would not be directly or indirectly perceived? More often than not the view of the US administration is dominating and it is very difficult to overestimate its influence”. And already the first speaker confirmed this in his speech.



In the detailed report of Andrey Pildegovich, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia it was not concealed that Latvia had to join the sanctions according to the advice of “friends”: “To control the situation, the EU member states and their supporters have adopted a three-vector approach to Russia. Firstly, we had to assure our allies and friends of our support, secondly, we had to impose restrictions and sanctions to stop the aggression, and thirdly, but not lastly, we have entered into a dialogue with Russia in order to reduce tension”. The State Secretary admits that due to the high level of participants BF may become a platform for preparing decisions of the state level.



The forum has already become a stepping stone for political careers. For example, for the **mayor of the capital of Latvia Nils Ušakovs** (Social Democratic Party “Concord”), whose political career started specifically in the BF. “I would like to wish the “Baltic Forum” not only to develop good recommendations, but also that these decisions would become implemented”, the head of Riga City Council remarked in his speech.

Same as in the conferences of the previous years the authoritative experts from Russia not only had active discussions with the participants of other countries, but also strived to argumentatively dispute the points of view expressed by their Russian colleagues.

The **former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Russian International Affairs Council President Igor Ivanov** talked with bitterness of lost chances.

In his speech he reminded the audience of: “the 1997 treaty between Russia and NATO, the agreement between Russia and the EU, the project of the Russia-EU Council. We were actual partners. It is a fact that in Ukraine there is a crisis. But the problem is in trust, in faith”. “If there was trust, would we have permitted a civil war in the heart of Europe in the 21st century?” he asked the conference participants a rhetorical question.



According to Igor Ivanov, there is a plunge into the direction opposite from Europe ahead of Russia: “Russia ceases to be the Eastern flank of the failed Wider Europe and is transforming into the Western flank of Wider Eurasia that is currently taking shape”. His future prospect is rather pessimistic. “We may see that for us Wider Europe has not become a reality. The opportunity that emerged for us once in a century has not been used. Unfortunately, the current generation of politicians in the East and in the West will not have another opportunity like that”, Igor Ivanov draw a bitter conclusion.

Immediately the discussion was joined by **Igor Yurgens, one of the founders of the BF, head of the Russian Institute for Contemporary Development**, according to whom the European vector of the foreign policy of Russia has not exhausted all its possibilities by far, while a conclusive turn to the East contains multiple risks which are hard to predict.

He agreed that the idea of “Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok” has outlived itself. However if we missed the mark with the first strategic direction – Wider Europe, and cooperation with the West is under question as a result of a single serious conflict, then have we precisely calculated all the consequences of creating a Wider Eurasia?



“Isn’t the escapade to the East just another attempt to enter the same West, this time from the back door? Because from our economic point of view the rules of the global economic development in the East will be absolutely the same. If we consider that it will be easier for us there, and we will not be reprimanded there for the human rights or our conduct, that is an illusion”, Igor Yurgens reminded.



Instead or in addition to this, Igor Yurgens considers, we could engage into development of a “Marshall-2” plan for Eastern Europe. Moreover, because we already have a foundation for that. He recalled that a year ago, here in Jūrmala during BF-2014, the report “Conflict of two integrations” of the Institute of Contemporary development was presented. The main idea was that Ukraine is a country with 46 million residents, which is experiencing a severe economic crisis. If the EU and the Eurasian Union will not pay to it institutional attention, the ailing economy of Ukraine is destined to be a very lengthy hotbed of tension. Therefore it is necessary to step back from the actual ban announced in Brussels for cooperation with the Eurasian Union, and then have a look at what we can do for a joint recovery program for Ukraine.

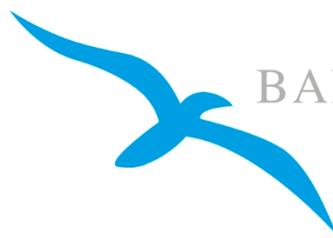
Igor Yurgens reported that already in January 2015 both the Russian government and the leader of Germany Angela Merkel started talking about the fact that for the recovery of Ukraine contacts and cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Union are possible.

“Russia, let us assume, restores Eastern Ukraine and the EU restores the rest of it, or we join our strength or we structure international framework for this implementation. And this plan will allow the EU and NATO, Russia and its partners in the Eurasian Economic Union, and during the second phase China and the United States to embark on this point not as a confrontational one, but as a point of cooperation in the economic recovery of Ukraine. Specifically this quadripartite cooperation framework from our point of view is possible. It is possible to begin assigning to the recovery of Ukraine those funds that Europe will anyway spend on Ukraine's integration into the EU, in proportions and according to a particular mechanism”, the rapporteur remarked.

The speech of the **Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation in Latvia Alexander Veshnyakov** nevertheless was of a rather pessimistic character.

“The result of “freezing” in the Latvian-Russian relations in the nineties was the rusting pipeline in Ventspils, while as the result of the present crisis we may get the rusting rails of the Latvian Railways”- was the prospect delineated by Alexander Veshnyakov.





And now and again the participants of the conference returned to the issue of the Ukrainian armed conflict. In search for its solution **Pal Tamas, professor of the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences** voiced a rather paradoxical view:

“In contrast to the highly respected fellow diplomats, who say that conflict is bad - I believe that conflict in terms of the development of international politics is very good”. And he voiced an idea that was later on elaborated on by some other participants: “The Ukrainian conflict does not have to be resolved at all, since it is from the category of irresolvable conflicts. Perhaps it should be “shelved” the same way as, for example, the Transnistrian conflict or the Kashmir conflict, and the like were shelved”.

Jeffrey Gedmin, senior fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and former president of “Radio Liberty”, reminded of one more substantial factor - the upcoming elections of the US President. “I do believe that the new US administration will be much more pragmatic. And less patient. It will not wait for Minsk-6 or Minsk-9. It will implement aid to Ukraine in a more versatile and stricter way. Including aid in armament”.

The report of the senator, **ex-prime minister of Poland Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz** contained even harsher terms. According to him,

negotiations between the West and Russia will commence only when Russia at least promises to return the Crimea to Ukraine, reconstruct Donbass and give up aggressive foreign policy.

Another European, **ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Franco Frattini**, on the contrary, considers cooperation, not dictate of utmost importance. The search for a solution to the situation in Syria, fighting ISIS - these and other security projects in the Asian region without the participation of Russia are doomed to failure.

"...security projects in the Asian region without the participation of Russia are doomed to failure." - F. Frattini





Chairman of the Board Blue Star Strategies (USA), analyst Sally Painter asked a key question: „What do Russia and the Russian people want? Is it different from what Putin wants?” - the American political strategist urged to consider. – “My Russian friends say that the Russian people are very different from Mr Putin. The question is how we can work together to resolve this problem”.



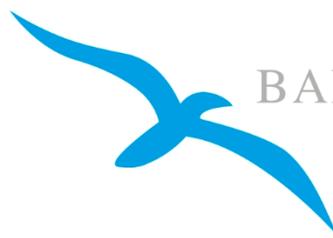
In response, the **Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations Alexander Dynkin** said from the podium what, in his opinion, the Americans want. “The Russian-European divorce practically becomes a reality, and the unresolved question remains as to who will bring up a teenager with a difficult heredity, namely Ukraine.”

Further he remarked: “If we look at the US national security strategy and carry out frequency analysis of that strategy, the keyword will be exceptionality. In the previous strategy the key word was leadership. I can discuss leadership; I do not especially object to it. But the word “exceptionality” in the strategy of national security raises many questions”.

This is the new reality from the perspective of Alexander Dynkin:

“The new reality demands abandoning of the Eurocentric point of view as the dominant and universal point of view. The 21st century will be different, probably even more dangerous than the 20th century; therefore we have no right to afford the luxury of a frontal confrontation”. - A. Dynkin





Vyacheslav Trubnikov, a member of the directorate of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences and army general believes that the new reality calls for new thinking, because the reason of many political failures is “the inertia of Cold War thinking”.

“Russia was not ready and would not be ready to play the second violin in the orchestra, which is directed by someone else,” he reminded.



In turn **Elena Telegina, director of the Russian Institute of Energy and Geopolitics**, in her report offered the new energy reality. We will see not only the sunset of the Wider Europe but also the sunset of the hydrocarbon era.

“There are no major risks of long-term reduction in oil prices”, - the expert believes. At the same time “transfer to energy independence at the expense of economic expediency already is a reality”. And further to this: “alternative energy has found its place, and has served specifically as disintegration, as regional energy independence, which is the main direction of development. Specifically this energy independence, albeit at a higher price may, and is likely to lead to the fact that we will see the sunset of the hydrocarbon era, the era of hydrocarbon economy” - Elena Telegina believes. The expert urges the politicians to take into account that the new political unions will be held together by energy. “On the market this confrontation will be accompanied by very complicated processes, formation of new regional integrational associations, based on energy issues, as well as political differences inside separate regions”.



"...this energy independence is likely to lead to the fact that we will see the sunset of the era of hydrocarbon economy - E. Telegina

Nikolai Mezhevich, professor of the Faculty of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University, Doctor of Economics, also believes that “there will be no more former international relations, including international economic relations”. His recipe of the new reality is as follows: to return to the almost forgotten, but once successful method:

“If the current system of international relations does not work, then why not return to a proven format, and these formats existed, for example, the Congress of Vienna” - N. Mezhevich





However he also notes the “Eastern” direction of the foreign policy of Russia: “Building of a strategic partnership between Russia and China, in my view, can be very interesting”.

Sergei Tsyplaev, Dean of the Faculty of Law of the Northwest Academy of Sciences Institute of Management and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation, believes that “irresolvable conflicts” may also be turned to the benefit of all.

“It makes sense for politicians, economists, ideologists to consider the intellectual and other opportunities, to find an option that would gradually transform the Crimea from a bone of contention, from our Alsace-Lorraine into an interlock, which would unite Russia and Ukraine. Probably it will be necessary to consider some kind of a deferred status, and it is clear that today any political paths of settlement are practically failed, and therefore, most probably, as in the case of France and Germany after the war, it will be necessary to start with the economic issues, and it will be extremely complicated”- this Russian expert is convinced.



Former **German Ambassador to Russia Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz** also supported the idea of conflict as a “start-up”. “Reconciliation after the Second World War began with a regional conflict that could not be resolved between France and the West Germany of that time. It was a small area – much smaller than the Crimea - Saar. Then the leaders wisely decided that if the conflict could not be resolved, it should be frozen and then history would be allowed to resolve it, but at the same time, these countries were already starting integration in other areas. This would make the territorial issue irrelevant, as in the future borders would not be so important”.

Director of the Department for Russian and Central Asian Studies, Institute of Shanghai Li Xin decided to return the question posed by his American colleague Sally Painter, who was asking from the podium what the Russians want and whether this differs from what Vladimir Putin wants. According to him it is also important what the Americans want. “For solidarity with the USA Europe has already paid with the debt crisis and now pays also with the crisis related to the influx of refugees, which threatens the destruction of European civilization as such”, the researcher believes. According to him,

“the future is in the ambitious Eurasian project of the People’s Republic of China, “the economic belt of the Silk Road”, which China, in cooperation with Russia and the EU is now trying to recreate.





As usual, the most unexpected views were expressed at the conference during the discussion. “So what does Russia want?” - Ambassador von Ploetz returned to the question posed by Ms. Painter. And he received an answer from Igor Yurgens: “Russia wants the same as Germany – to get rid of the source of tension in the very heart of Europe”. At the same time Igor Yurgens assigns special hopes specifically to the cooperation between the two countries. “In his famous book, “Does America need a foreign policy?” Henry Kissinger in one of the chapters provides one of the versions of the answer: in order to prevent an agreement between Germany and Russia”, - Igor Yurgens cited this authoritative opinion. He is convinced that specifically these two countries, by way of strategically joining effort, could potentially become adversaries of the US, whereas we have to be friends, but then “America will talk to us much more seriously, if we can achieve the start of a strategic partnership between our countries”, - Igor Yurgens said.

“Does this mean that the new reality is a strategic partnership between Russia and Germany? Most probably the answer to that will be provided by BF-2016. However, no matter what format will be selected - Helsinki-2 or Marshall-2 – it is only a vector, only a discussion or preparation for a discussion, which in itself would be a huge step forward”. “I remember the agreement of Helsinki-75, I was a graduate student then, and the very fact that the event was thought of and read about, discussed and talked about already changed the Soviet Union from within”, - this representative of Russia concluded.

The results of a full day of discussions were summarized by the **BF Chairman Jānis Urbanovičs**. He recalled the old children’s cartoon “The Little Raccoon”, where the protagonist was afraid of his reflection in the pond, made faces to it and even tried to threaten it with a stick. But Mom advised him to smile to “the one who sits in the pond”, and the raccoon, seeing his smile in the reflection, stopped being afraid.

“Now, when the leaders of many countries display complete lack of interest in what somebody else said, and when asking a question, do not expect an answer, it is an extremely dangerous situation”, - Jānis Urbanovičs remarked. “We all need to recall biblical wisdom: do not do to others what you do not want done to you. We may not love or respect each other, but it is already impossible to do without each other. Therefore, it is necessary to find some kind of a platform, possibly Helsinki-2, with which we would not live even worse. Global security is a continuation of the ability of the international community to solve local insecurities” - Jānis Urbanovičs believes.



See the video from the conference- 2015 here: <http://balticforum.org/en/conference-2015/video15/> .

See the photos from the conference- 2015 here: http://balticforum.org/en/conference-2015/photo_report_15/

Reference

“The Baltic Forum” - an expert discussion forum, founded in 1998. The President of the Forum - Jānis Urbanovičs (Latvian Social Democratic Party “Concord”). Chairman of the Advisory board of the Baltic Forum Igor Yurgens, Chairman of the Russian Institute for Contemporary Development.