Russia-West Relations: A Piece of the Broken Mirror of Globalization

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Globalization as we know it today has become possible just after the dissolution of the USSR with the end of the bipolar international world order. Only after 1991 were conditions suitable for a relatively free circulation of values, goods, people, money, and technologies to take place. Thus, relations between Russia (as a USSR successor) and the so-called “collective West”—a term more and more frequently used in modern Russia for the EU and the US together—are quite a central piece of the mirror of globalization, in the reflection of which we can restore a more complete picture for understanding the state of globalization now, which is increasingly characterized by deglobalizing tendencies. Looking at Russia-West relations I’ll first try to identify the five main processes of de-globalization ("5-de") aiming to then propose some ideas to relaunch the process in the form of re-globalization with the help of four of the 5Rs proposed by Roland Benedikter and Ingrid Kofler: refining, reforming, reframing, and revisioning. So what is de-globalization, in the first place?

1. *De*valuation of common values and identity is the first sign of de-globalization. The very thesis that Russia belongs to the European civilization is highly debatable even in the official political discourse,[1] as value cleavages are growing and identity issues are more often becoming reasons for disputes, grievances, and misunderstanding. A new “primordialism," especially as developed in Eastern Europe, has become an attempt to find in history some “basic” characteristics of a society that could satisfy contemporary political needs. This is crucial for the process of globalization as it has been re-creating the differentiation between “us” and “them,” erecting and supporting virtual intellectual borders among peoples. An international conflict of values is openly declared by Russian authorities since President Putin articulated his critique of Western liberalism.[2] Moscow’s cooperation with Beijing, which is not trying to impose its way of life, is often portrayed as the possibility of a globalization without globalized values. Many in Russia see this positively. Advocacy of diversity[3] is now a new Russian mission in the globalized world. Thus, there is a need to revise the value dimension of

globalization to overcome the growing “primordialism”: to reveal a new set of really “global” values and to accept value diversity as a new normal.

2. *De*struction of the common space is the consequence of value and identity cleavages. Fruitless negotiations between Russia and the EU over loosening visa restrictions, stricter border controls everywhere, and a deterioration of people-to-people contacts characterize the global situation since outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. To cross a border in 2021 is more difficult than it was five years ago. There are also voices calling for the closing of borders, which was hard to imagine even in late Soviet times.

3. *De*volution of economic interdependence became the choice for many countries, including developed ones. Sanctions, trade wars, reduction of hydrocarbon dependency have been accompanied with attempts of the Western countries to relaunch industrialization and reach self-sufficiency in production of some goods. In Russia, the period after 2014 is also perceived as an opportunity to reach this kind of self-sufficiency. Green energy transformation is widely perceived in Russia as a new instrument for the EU to end its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons and deprive Russia of its competitiveness and main source of budget revenues,[4] that is, as an economic instrument of political pressure against the Russian regime. At the same time, the recent Putin speech at the Global Climate Summit 2021 stressed that there is also the option of converting this new potential threat into an opportunity for cooperation. Thus, the global responsibility that Russia strives to demonstrate should be considered by the West as a window of opportunities for the development of better, more cooperative relations.

4. But ***de*institutionalization**—meaning the destruction of existing multilateral cooperative formats without any replacement by new ones—is another process of de-globalization that makes multilateral cooperation more and more difficult. Almost all cooperation formats between the EU and Russia that existed for 30 years are not working now. The Russia-NATO Council is not working in fact. Many agreements in the sphere of strategic stability are in crisis. Russia and the West have not managed to cooperate on any so-called global challenges and have even failed to resolve issues and conflicts in regions where they share common interests, such as the Middle East and the Arctic. One of the main reasons for this is the different understanding of such concepts as “sovereignty” and “responsibility to protect” as well as the manner of their practical implementation.

5. Delimitation of information flows is another factor of de-globalization. In a world of post-truth, states do not hesitate to officially establish special departments for propaganda and counter-propaganda, to stick to censorship in social media, to blame other states of committing crimes. The instruments of information wars applied by both the West and Russia become more and more sophisticated, depriving many citizens of the means to learn the truth.

All these deglobalization processes are unfortunately taking place not only in Russia-West relations, but in other parts of the world as well. Is it, then, possible to relaunch globalization? What is needed to reverse the processes mentioned above?

First of all, globalization needs a ***virus-like idea*** that could be shared globally. Examples could be the ideas of a "global commons," "sustainable development," and a "green transition." The EU has already placed these concepts as the founding principles of its new agenda for cooperation with southern neighbors—Africa and the Mediterranean. Russia, as mentioned above, is still rather cautious, but hoping for cooperation. Would it be possible to re-globalize—to relaunch globalization—on the basis of a commonly shared value that green is good for everyone and for the future of the Earth?

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Second should be a deep and comprehensive ***joint revision of concepts***. Today many of them—including "global commons," "sustainable development," and "green transition"—are too vague and need further elaboration.[5] What a "global commons" really is, what "green transition" will mean for Africa and its demography, what the new labor division between the suppliers and consumers of green energy will look like, which factors will determine who will be the new leaders of a green(er) world. All these issues have to be discussed worldwide, otherwise these new foundations of globalization will lack substantially shared legitimacy.

The third dimension to providing a positive revision of globalization is the conscious ***reconstruction of a common idea space***. This could first of all include the relaunch of people-to-people contacts, especially for scholars, scientists, and students—meaning visa-free regimes, exchanges, and scholarships. This reflects the

need for open and free discussion and the exchange of knowledge and ideas.

The fourth needed element is the *co-**evolution of new types of economic interdependences***. Green energy transformation will inevitably deprive supply countries of their main revenues and have them differentiate their economies. For some of them this process of economic transformation can be very painful and may even provoke social unrest. New types of cooperation have to be proposed to prevent the economic collapse of these countries.

Fifth, a ***re-institutionalization of multilateral formats*** is needed to promote international dialogue on the new global challenges. The UN Security Council, G7, G20, BRICS, SCO, WTO were founded in a historically different reality. They didn't manage to bring about true multipolarity or to overcome the conflict between sovereignty and globalization or between globalization and regionalization. Today more and more countries share the idea that climate change is the new true global challenge. The EU, the US, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, and many African countries have already demonstrated their adherence to new green agenda. Thus, the existing global summit on climate needs to be supplemented with regional multilateral formats to study the regional consequences of energy transition, to prevent conflicts and disproportions and to monitor how the global climate agenda

can be best implemented locally. Here the ideas of “Greater Europe” or “Greater Eurasia” or the idea of a “green Arab world” proposed by the Saudi Arabia regime can be helpful.

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Which of these proposals is realistic? And what is the outlook for any of them actually coming about?

Unlimited information flows are hardly probable even in a positive re-globalization. Yet *the need to prevent disinformation and censorship* from destroying multilateral cooperation on a new global green agenda for the benefit of all participants can be practically implemented.

Thus, aiming to relaunch globalization we will have to stick at least to four or the 5Rs of re-globalization: *redefining* its foundations, meaning re-calibrating the basic ideas and values framing our understanding of where we’re going to, and then, *reframing* our interdependences to make them more legitimate for all participants and *reforming* multilateral cooperation formats, fashioning them to help jointly develop these new interdependencies. And finally, we need to *revision* our attitude towards the free movement of people and knowledge, as they are the only drivers that can make a positive re-globalization a reality.

Notes

1. “Russia Is a ‘Distinct Civilization,’ Putin Says.” *The Moscow Times*, May 18, 2020. https:/www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/05/18/Russia-is-a-distinct-civilization-putin-says-a70295

2. Vladimir Putin says liberalism has ‘become obsolete’. Financial Times, June 18, 2019. https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36

3. Trenin D. Russia’s Changing Identity: In Search of a Role in the 21st Century. Carnegie Moscow Center, 18.07.2019. https://carnegie.ru/commentary/79521

4. Romanova T. “Russia’s political discourse on the EU’s energy transition (2014–2019) and its effect on EU-Russia energy relations.” *Energy Policy* 154 (2021) 112309.
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