

Valdai Discussion Club meeting

PDF by:
<https://www.pro-memoria.info>

Vladimir Putin took part in a plenary session of the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

October 21, 2021 21:25 Sochi

This year's theme is Global Shake-up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values and the State. The four-day programme includes over 15 in-person and online sessions.

* * *

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Ladies and gentlemen,

To begin with, I would like to thank you for coming to Russia and taking part in the Valdai Club events.

As always, during these meetings you raise pressing issues and hold comprehensive discussions of these issues that, without exaggeration, matter for people around the world. Once again, the key theme of the forum was put in a straightforward, I would even say, point-blank manner: Global Shake-up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values and the State.

Indeed, we are living in an era of great change. If I may, by tradition, I will offer my views with regard to the agenda that you have come up with.

In general, this phrase, "to live in an era of great change," may seem trite since we use it so often. Also, this era of change began quite a long time ago, and changes have become part of everyday life. Hence, the question: are they worth focusing on? I agree with those who made the agenda for these meetings; of course they are.

In recent decades, many people have cited a Chinese proverb. The Chinese people are wise, and they have many thinkers and valuable thoughts that we can still use today. One of them, as you may know, says, “God forbid living in a time of change.” But we are already living in it, whether we like it or not, and these changes are becoming deeper and more fundamental. But let us consider another Chinese wisdom: the word “crisis” consists of two hieroglyphs – there are probably representatives of the People's Republic of China in the audience, and they will correct me if I have it wrong – but, two hieroglyphs, “danger” and “opportunity.” And as we say here in Russia, “fight difficulties with your mind, and fight dangers with your experience.”

Of course, we must be aware of the danger and be ready to counter it, and not just one threat but many diverse threats that can arise in this era of change. However, it is no less important to recall a second component of the crisis – opportunities that must not be missed, all the more so since **the crisis we are facing is conceptual and even civilisation-related**. This is basically a crisis of approaches and principles that determine the very existence of humans on Earth, but we will have to seriously revise them in any event. The question is where to move, what to give up, what to revise or adjust. In saying this, I am convinced that it is necessary to fight for real values, upholding them in every way.

Humanity entered into a new era about three decades ago when the main conditions were created for ending military-political and ideological confrontation. I am sure you have talked a lot about this in this discussion club. Our Foreign Minister also talked about it, but nevertheless I would like to repeat several things.

A search for a new balance, sustainable relations in the social, political, economic, cultural and military areas and support for the world system was launched at that time. We were looking for this support but must say that we did not find it, at least so far. Meanwhile, those who felt like the winners after the end of the Cold War (we have also spoken about this many times) and thought they climbed Mount Olympus soon discovered that the ground was falling away underneath even there, and this time it was their turn, and nobody could “stop this fleeting moment” no matter how fair it seemed.

In general, it must have seemed that we adjusted to this continuous inconstancy, unpredictability and permanent state of transition, but this did not happen either.

I would like to add that the transformation that we are seeing and are part of is of a different calibre than the changes that repeatedly occurred in human history, at least those we know about. This is not simply a shift in the balance of forces or scientific and technological breakthroughs, though both are also taking place. Today, we are facing systemic changes in all directions – from the increasingly complicated geophysical condition of our planet to a more paradoxical interpretation of what a human is and what the reasons for his existence are.

Let us look around. And I will say this again: I will allow myself to express a few thoughts that I sign on to.

Firstly, climate change and environmental degradation are so obvious that even the most careless people can no longer dismiss them. One can continue to engage in scientific debates about the mechanisms behind the ongoing processes, but it is impossible to deny that these processes are getting worse, and something needs to be done. Natural disasters such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis have almost become the new normal, and we are getting used to them. Suffice it to recall the devastating, tragic floods in Europe last summer, the fires in Siberia – there are a lot of examples. Not only in Siberia – our neighbours in Turkey have also had wildfires, and the United States, and other places on the American continent. It sometimes seems that any geopolitical, scientific and technical, or ideological rivalry becomes pointless in this context, if the winners will have not enough air to breathe or nothing to drink.

The coronavirus pandemic has become another reminder of how fragile our community is, how vulnerable it is, and our most important task is to ensure humanity a safe existence and resilience. To increase our chance of survival in the face of cataclysms, we absolutely need to rethink how we go about our lives, how we run our households, how cities develop or how they should develop; we need to reconsider economic development priorities of entire states. I repeat, safety is one of our main imperatives, in any case it has become obvious now, and anyone who tries to deny this will have to later explain why they were wrong and why they were unprepared for the crises and shocks whole nations are facing.

Second. The socioeconomic problems facing humankind have worsened to the point where, in the past, they would trigger worldwide shocks, such as world wars or bloody social cataclysms. Everyone is saying that the current model of capitalism which

underlies the social structure in the overwhelming majority of countries, has run its course and no longer offers a solution to a host of increasingly tangled differences.

Everywhere, even in the richest countries and regions, the uneven distribution of material wealth has exacerbated inequality, primarily, inequality of opportunities both within individual societies and at the international level. I mentioned this formidable challenge in my remarks at the Davos Forum earlier this year. No doubt, these problems threaten us with major and deep social divisions.

Furthermore, a number of countries and even entire regions are regularly hit by food crises. We will probably discuss this later, but there is every reason to believe that this crisis will become worse in the near future and may reach extreme forms. There are also shortages of water and electricity (we will probably cover this today as well), not to mention poverty, high unemployment rates or lack of adequate healthcare.

Lagging countries are fully aware of that and are losing faith in the prospects of ever catching up with the leaders. Disappointment spurs aggression and pushes people to join the ranks of extremists. People in these countries have a growing sense of unfulfilled and failed expectations and the lack of any opportunities not only for themselves, but for their children, as well. This is what makes them look for better lives and results in uncontrolled migration, which, in turn, creates fertile ground for social discontent in more prosperous countries. I do not need to explain anything to you, since you can see everything with your own eyes and are, probably, versed on these matters even better than I.

As I noted earlier, prosperous leading powers have other pressing social problems, challenges and risks in ample supply, and many among them are no longer interested in fighting for influence since, as they say, they already have enough on their plates. The fact that society and young people in many countries have overreacted in a harsh and even aggressive manner to measures to combat the coronavirus showed – and I want to emphasise this, I hope someone has already mentioned this before me at other venues – so, I think that this reaction showed that the pandemic was just a pretext: the causes for social irritation and frustration run much deeper.

I have another important point to make. The pandemic, which, in theory, was supposed to rally the people in the fight against this massive common threat, has instead become a divisive rather than a unifying factor. There are many reasons for that, but one of the main ones is that they started looking for solutions to problems among

the usual approaches – a variety of them, but still the old ones, but they just do not work. Or, to be more precise, they do work, but often and oddly enough, they worsen the existing state of affairs.

By the way, Russia has repeatedly called for, and I will repeat this, stopping these inappropriate ambitions and for working together. We will probably talk about this later but it is clear what I have in mind. We are talking about the need to counter the coronavirus infection together. But nothing changes; everything remains the same despite the humanitarian considerations. I am not referring to Russia now, let's leave the sanctions against Russia for now; I mean the sanctions that remain in place against those states that badly need international assistance. Where are the humanitarian fundamentals of Western political thought? It appears there is nothing there, just idle talk. Do you understand? This is what seems to be on the surface.

Furthermore, the technological revolution, impressive achievements in artificial intelligence, electronics, communications, genetics, bioengineering, and medicine open up enormous opportunities, but at the same time, in practical terms, they raise philosophical, moral and spiritual questions that were until recently the exclusive domain of science fiction writers. What will happen if machines surpass humans in the ability to think? Where is the limit of interference in the human body beyond which a person ceases being himself and turns into some other entity? **What are the general ethical limits in the world where the potential of science and machines are becoming almost boundless?** What will this mean for each of us, for our descendants, our nearest descendants – our children and grandchildren?

These changes are gaining momentum, and they certainly cannot be stopped because they are objective as a rule. All of us will have to deal with the consequences regardless of our political systems, economic condition or prevailing ideology.

Verbally, all states talk about their commitment to the ideals of cooperation and a willingness to work together for resolving common problems but, unfortunately, these are just words. In reality, the opposite is happening, and the pandemic has served to fuel the negative trends that emerged long ago and are now only getting worse. The approach based on the proverb, “your own shirt is closer to the body,” has finally become common and is now no longer even concealed. Moreover, this is often even a matter of boasting and brandishing. Egotistic interests prevail over the notion of the common good.

Of course, the problem is not just the ill will of certain states and notorious elites. It is more complicated than that, in my opinion. In general, life is seldom divided into black and white. Every government, every leader is primarily responsible to his own compatriots, obviously. The main goal is to ensure their security, peace and prosperity. So, international, transnational issues will never be as important for a national leadership as domestic stability. In general, this is normal and correct.

We need to face the fact the global governance institutions are not always effective and their capabilities are not always up to the challenge posed by the dynamics of global processes. In this sense, the pandemic could help – it clearly showed which institutions have what it takes and which need fine-tuning.

The re-alignment of the balance of power presupposes a redistribution of shares in favour of rising and developing countries that until now felt left out. To put it bluntly, the Western domination of international affairs, which began several centuries ago and, for a short period, was almost absolute in the late 20th century, is giving way to a much more diverse system.

This transformation is not a mechanical process and, in its own way, one might even say, is unparalleled. Arguably, political history has no examples of a stable world order being established without a big war and its outcomes as the basis, as was the case after World War II. So, we have a chance to create an extremely favourable precedent. The attempt to create it after the end of the Cold War on the basis of Western domination failed, as we see. The current state of international affairs is a product of that very failure, and we must learn from this.

Some may wonder, what have we arrived at? We have arrived somewhere paradoxical. Just an example: for two decades, the most powerful nation in the world has been conducting military campaigns in two countries that it cannot be compared to by any standard. But in the end, it had to wind down operations without achieving a single goal that it had set for itself going in 20 years ago, and to withdraw from these countries causing considerable damage to others and itself. In fact, the situation has worsened dramatically.

But that is not the point. Previously, a war lost by one side meant victory for the other side, which took responsibility for what was happening. For example, the defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War, for example, did not make Vietnam a “black

hole.” On the contrary, a successfully developing state arose there, which, admittedly, relied on the support of a strong ally. Things are different now: no matter who takes the upper hand, the war does not stop, but just changes form. As a rule, the hypothetical winner is reluctant or unable to ensure peaceful post-war recovery, and only worsens the chaos and the vacuum posing a danger to the world.

Colleagues,

What do you think are the starting points of this complex realignment process? Let me try to summarise the talking points.

First, the coronavirus pandemic has clearly shown that the international order is structured around nation states. By the way, recent developments have shown that global digital platforms – with all their might, which we could see from the internal political processes in the United States – have failed to usurp political or state functions. These attempts proved ephemeral. The US authorities, as I said, have immediately put the owners of these platforms in their place, which is exactly what is being done in Europe, if you just look at the size of the fines imposed on them and the demonopolisation measures being taken. You are aware of that.

In recent decades, many have tossed around fancy concepts claiming that the role of the state was outdated and outgoing. Globalisation supposedly made national borders an anachronism, and sovereignty an obstacle to prosperity. You know, I said it before and I will say it again. This is also what was said by those who attempted to open up other countries’ borders for the benefit of their own competitive advantages. This is what actually happened. And as soon as it transpired that someone somewhere is achieving great results, they immediately returned to closing borders in general and, first of all, their own customs borders and what have you, and started building walls. Well, were we supposed to not notice, or what? Everyone sees everything and everyone understands everything perfectly well. Of course, they do.

There is no point in disputing it anymore. It is obvious. But events, when we spoke about the need to open up borders, events, as I said, went in the opposite direction.

Only sovereign states can effectively respond to the challenges of the times and the demands of the citizens. Accordingly, any effective international order should take into account the interests and capabilities of the state and proceed on that basis, and not try to prove that they should not exist. Furthermore, it is impossible to impose anything on anyone, be it the principles underlying the sociopolitical structure or values

that someone, for their own reasons, has called universal. After all, it is clear that when a real crisis strikes, there is only one universal value left and that is human life, which each state decides for itself how best to protect based on its abilities, culture and traditions.

In this regard, I will again note how severe and dangerous the coronavirus pandemic has become. As we know, more than 4.9 million have died of it. These terrifying figures are comparable and even exceed the military losses of the main participants in World War I.

The second point I would like to draw your attention to is the scale of change that forces us to act extremely cautiously, if only for reasons of self-preservation. The state and society must not respond radically to qualitative shifts in technology, dramatic environmental changes or the destruction of traditional systems. It is easier to destroy than to create, as we all know. We in Russia know this very well, regrettably, from our own experience, which we have had several times.

Just over a century ago, Russia objectively faced serious problems, including because of the ongoing World War I, but its problems were not bigger and possibly even smaller or not as acute as the problems the other countries faced, and Russia could have dealt with its problems gradually and in a civilised manner. But revolutionary shocks led to the collapse and disintegration of a great power. The second time this happened 30 years ago, when a potentially very powerful nation failed to enter the path of urgently needed, flexible but thoroughly substantiated reforms at the right time, and as a result it fell victim to all kinds of dogmatists, both reactionary ones and the so-called progressives – all of them did their bit, all sides did.

These examples from our history allow us to say that revolutions are not a way to settle a crisis but a way to aggravate it. No revolution was worth the damage it did to the human potential.

Third. The importance of a solid support in the sphere of morals, ethics and values is increasing dramatically in the modern fragile world. In point of fact, values are a product, a unique product of cultural and historical development of any nation. The mutual interlacing of nations definitely enriches them, openness expands their horizons and allows them to take a fresh look at their own traditions. But the process must be organic, and it can never be rapid. Any alien elements will be rejected anyway, possibly bluntly. Any attempts to force one's values on others with an uncertain

and unpredictable outcome can only further complicate a dramatic situation and usually produce the opposite reaction and an opposite from the intended result.

We look in amazement at the processes underway in the countries which have been traditionally looked at as the standard-bearers of progress. Of course, the social and cultural shocks that are taking place in the United States and Western Europe are none of our business; we are keeping out of this. Some people in the West believe that an aggressive elimination of entire pages from their own history, “reverse discrimination” against the majority in the interests of a minority, and the demand to give up the traditional notions of mother, father, family and even gender, they believe that all of these are the mileposts on the path towards social renewal.

Listen, I would like to point out once again that they have a right to do this, we are keeping out of this. But we would like to ask them to keep out of our business as well. We have a different viewpoint, at least the overwhelming majority of Russian society – it would be more correct to put it this way – has a different opinion on this matter. We believe that we must rely on our own spiritual values, our historical tradition and the culture of our multiethnic nation.

The advocates of so-called ‘social progress’ believe they are introducing humanity to some kind of a new and better consciousness. Godspeed, hoist the flags as we say, go right ahead. The only thing that I want to say now is that their prescriptions are not new at all. It may come as a surprise to some people, but Russia has been there already. After the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks, relying on the dogmas of Marx and Engels, also said that they would change existing ways and customs and not just political and economic ones, but the very notion of human morality and the foundations of a healthy society. The destruction of age-old values, religion and relations between people, up to and including the total rejection of family (we had that, too), encouragement to inform on loved ones – all this was proclaimed progress and, by the way, was widely supported around the world back then and was quite fashionable, same as today. By the way, the Bolsheviks were absolutely intolerant of opinions other than theirs.

This, I believe, should call to mind some of what we are witnessing now. Looking at what is happening in a number of Western countries, we are amazed to see the domestic practices, which we, fortunately, have left, I hope, in the distant past. The fight for equality and against discrimination has turned into aggressive dogmatism bordering on absurdity, when the works of the great authors of the past – such

as Shakespeare – are no longer taught at schools or universities, because their ideas are believed to be backward. The classics are declared backward and ignorant of the importance of gender or race. In Hollywood memos are distributed about proper storytelling and how many characters of what colour or gender should be in a movie. This is even worse than the agitprop department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Countering acts of racism is a necessary and noble cause, but the new ‘cancel culture’ has turned it into ‘reverse discrimination’ that is, reverse racism. The obsessive emphasis on race is further dividing people, when the real fighters for civil rights dreamed precisely about erasing differences and refusing to divide people by skin colour. I specifically asked my colleagues to find the following quote from Martin Luther King: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by their character.” This is the true value. However, things are turning out differently there. By the way, the absolute majority of Russian people do not think that the colour of a person's skin or their gender is an important matter. Each of us is a human being. This is what matters.

In a number of Western countries, the debate over men's and women's rights has turned into a perfect phantasmagoria. Look, beware of going where the Bolsheviks once planned to go – not only communalising chickens, but also communalising women. One more step and you will be there.

Zealots of these new approaches even go so far as to want to abolish these concepts altogether. Anyone who dares mention that men and women actually exist, which is a biological fact, risk being ostracised. “Parent number one” and “parent number two,” “birthing parent” instead of “mother,” and “human milk” replacing “breastmilk” because it might upset the people who are unsure about their own gender. I repeat, this is nothing new; in the 1920s, the so-called Soviet Kulturtraegers also invented some newspeak believing they were creating a new consciousness and changing values that way. And, as I have already said, they made such a mess it still makes one shudder at times.

Not to mention some truly monstrous things when children are taught from an early age that a boy can easily become a girl and vice versa. That is, the teachers actually impose on them a choice we all supposedly have. They do so while shutting the parents out of the process and forcing the child to make decisions that can upend their entire life. They do not even bother to consult with child psychologists – is a child at this age

even capable of making a decision of this kind? Calling a spade a spade, **this verges on a crime against humanity, and it is being done in the name and under the banner of progress.**

Well, if someone likes this, let them do it. I have already mentioned that, in shaping our approaches, **we will be guided by a healthy conservatism.** That was a few years ago, when passions on the international arena were not yet running as high as they are now, although, of course, we can say that clouds were gathering even then. Now, when the world is going through a structural disruption, the importance of reasonable conservatism as the foundation for a political course has skyrocketed – precisely because of the multiplying risks and dangers, and the fragility of the reality around us.

This conservative approach **is not about an ignorant traditionalism, a fear of change or a restraining game, much less about withdrawing into our own shell.** It is primarily about reliance on a time-tested tradition, the preservation and growth of the population, a realistic assessment of oneself and others, a precise alignment of priorities, a correlation of necessity and possibility, a prudent formulation of goals, and a fundamental rejection of extremism as a method. And frankly, in the impending period of global reconstruction, which may take quite long, with its final design being uncertain, moderate conservatism is the most reasonable line of conduct, as far as I see it. It will inevitably change at some point, but so far, do no harm – the guiding principle in medicine – seems to be the most rational one. Noli nocere, as they say.

Again, **for us in Russia, these are not some speculative postulates, but lessons from our difficult and sometimes tragic history.** The cost of ill-conceived social experiments is sometimes beyond estimation. Such actions **can destroy** not only the material, but also **the spiritual foundations of human existence,** leaving behind moral wreckage where nothing can be built to replace it for a long time.

Finally, there is one more point I want to make. We understand all too well that resolving many urgent problems the world has been facing would be impossible without close international cooperation. However, we need to be realistic: most of the pretty slogans about coming up with global solutions to global problems that we have been hearing since the late 20th century will never become reality. In order to achieve a global solution, states and people have to transfer their sovereign rights to supra-national structures to an extent that few, if any, would accept. This is primarily

attributable to the fact that you have to answer for the outcomes of such policies not to some global public, but to your citizens and voters.

However, this does not mean that exercising some restraint for the sake of bringing about solutions to global challenges is impossible. After all, a global challenge is a challenge for all of us together, and to each of us in particular. If everyone saw a way to benefit from cooperation in overcoming these challenges, this would definitely leave us better equipped to work together.

One of the ways to promote these efforts could be, for example, to draw up, at the UN level, a list of challenges and threats that specific countries face, with details of how they could affect other countries. This effort could involve experts from various countries and academic fields, including you, my colleagues. We believe that developing a roadmap of this kind could inspire many countries to see global issues in a new light and understand how cooperation could be beneficial for them.

I have already mentioned the challenges international institutions are facing. Unfortunately, this is an obvious fact: it is now a question of reforming or closing some of them. However, the United Nations as the central international institution retains its enduring value, at least for now. I believe that in our turbulent world it is the UN that brings a touch of reasonable conservatism into international relations, something that is so important for normalising the situation.

Many criticise the UN for failing to adapt to a rapidly changing world. In part, this is true, but it is not the UN, but primarily its members who are to blame for this. In addition, this international body promotes not only international norms, but also the rule-making spirit, which is based on the principles of equality and maximum consideration for everyone's opinions. Our mission is to preserve this heritage while reforming the organisation. However, in doing so we need to make sure that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater, as the saying goes.

This is not the first time I am using a high rostrum to make this call for collective action in order to face up to the problems that continue to pile up and become more acute. It is thanks to you, friends and colleagues, that the Valdai Club is emerging or has already established itself as a high-profile forum. It is for this reason that I am turning to this platform to reaffirm our readiness to work together on addressing the most urgent problems that the world is facing today.

Friends,

The changes mentioned here prior to me, as well as by yours truly, are relevant to all countries and peoples. Russia, of course, is not an exception. Just like everyone else, we are searching for answers to the most urgent challenges of our time.

Of course, no one has any ready-made recipes. However, I would venture to say that our country has an advantage. Let me explain what this advantage is. It is to do with our historical experience. You may have noticed that I have referred to it several times in the course of my remarks. Unfortunately, we had to bring back many sad memories, but at least our society has developed what they now refer to as herd immunity to extremism that paves the way to upheavals and socioeconomic cataclysms. People really value stability and being able to live normal lives and to prosper while confident that the irresponsible aspirations of yet another group of revolutionaries will not upend their plans and aspirations. Many have vivid memories of what happened 30 years ago and all the pain it took to climb out of the ditch where our country and our society found themselves after the USSR fell apart.

The conservative views we hold are an optimistic conservatism, which is what matters the most. We believe stable, positive development to be possible. It all depends primarily on our own efforts. Of course, we are ready to work with our partners on common noble causes.

I would like to thank all participants once more, for your attention. As the tradition goes, I will gladly answer or at least try to answer your questions.

Thank you for your patience.

Moderator of the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club closing session Fyodor Lukyanov: Thank you very much, Mr President, for your detailed remarks covering not only and not so much the current political problems, but fundamental issues. Following up on what you said, I cannot fail to ask you about the historical experience, traditions, conservatism and healthy conservatism that you have mentioned on several occasions in your remarks.

Does unhealthy conservatism frighten you? Where does the boundary separating the healthy from the unhealthy lie? At what point does a tradition turn from something

that binds society together into a burden?

Vladimir Putin: Anything can become a burden, if you are not careful. When I speak about healthy conservatism, Nikolai Berdyayev always springs to mind, and I have already mentioned him several times. He was a remarkable Russian philosopher, and as you all know he was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1922. He was as forward-thinking as a man can be, but also sided with conservatism. He used to say, and you will excuse me if I do not quote his exact words: “Conservatism is not something preventing upward, forward movement, but something preventing you from sliding back into chaos.” If we treat conservatism this way, it provides an effective foundation for further progress.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Speaking of traditions, you also tend to mention traditional values quite frequently, and this is a hot topic in our society. In particular, you have proposed relying on traditional values as a foundation for bringing the world together. However, traditions are destined to be unique for every nation. How can everyone come together around the same traditional values, if they have their own traditions?

Vladimir Putin: Do you know what the trick is? The trick is that of course there is a lot of diversity and every nation around the world is different. Still, something unites all people. After all, we are all people, and we all want to live. Life is of absolute value.

In my opinion, the same applies to family as a value, because what can be more important than procreation? Do we want to be or not to be? If we do not want to be, fine. You see, adoption is also a good and important thing, but to adopt a child someone has to give birth to that child. This is the second universal value that cannot be contested.

I do not think that I need to list them all. You are all smart people here, and everyone understands this, including you. Yes, we do need to work together based on these shared, universal values.

Fyodor Lukyanov: You made a powerful statement when you said that the current model of capitalism has run its course and no longer offers a solution to international issues. One hears this a lot these days, but you are referring to our country's unfortunate experience in the 20th century when we were actually rejecting capitalism,

but this did not work out for us either. Does this mean that this is where we want to return? Where are we headed with this dysfunctional capitalist model?

Vladimir Putin: I also said that there were no ready-made recipes. It is true that what we are currently witnessing, for example on the energy markets, as we will probably discuss later, demonstrates that this kind of capitalism does not work. All they do is talk about the “invisible hand” of the market, only to get \$1,500 or \$2,000 per 1,000 cubic metres. Is this market-based approach to regulation any good?

When everything goes well and there is stability, economic actors around the world demand more freedom for themselves and a smaller role for the state in the economy. However, when challenges arise, especially at a global scale, they want the government to interfere.

I remember 2008 and 2009 and the global financial crisis very well. I was Prime Minister at the time, and spoke to many Russian business leaders, who were viewed as successful up to that point, and everything is fine with them now, by the way. They came to me and were ready to give up their companies that were worth tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars, for a ruble. Why? They had to assume responsibility for their workforce and for the future of these companies. It was easier for them just to keep what they earned and shift their responsibility to others.

At the time, we agreed that the state would lend them its shoulder: they kept their businesses, while the state paid off their margin loans and assumed responsibility, to a certain extent. Together with the businesses, we found a solution. As a result, we saved Russia’s largest private companies, and enabled the state to make a profit afterwards. We actually made money because when the companies were back on their feet, they paid back what they owed the state. The state made quite a profit.

In this regard, we do need to work together and explore each other’s experience. Other countries also had positive experiences in making the state and the market work in tune with each other. The People’s Republic of China is a case in point. While the Communist Party retains its leading role there, the country has a viable market and its institutions are quite effective. This is an obvious fact.

For this reason, there are no ready-made recipes. Wild capitalism does not work either, as I have already said, and I am ready to repeat this, as I have just demonstrated using

these examples.

In a way, this is like art. You need to understand when to place a bigger emphasis on something: when to add more salt, and when to use more sugar. You see? While being guided by the general principles as articulated by international financial institutions such as the IMF, the OECD, etc., we need to understand where we are. To act, we need to understand how our capabilities compare with the plans we have. By the way, here in Russia we have been quite effective over the past years, including in overcoming the consequences of the epidemic. Other countries also performed quite well, as we can see.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Do you mean that we are moving not only towards an optimistic conservatism but also towards an optimistic capitalism?

Vladimir Putin: You see, we need to build a social welfare state. Truth be said, Europe, especially the Nordic countries, have been advocating a social welfare state for a long time. This is essential for us, considering the income gap between various social groups, even if this problem exists in all the leading economies of the world. Just look at the United States and Europe, although the income gap is smaller in Europe compared to the United States.

As I have said on multiple occasions, only a small group of people who were already rich to begin with benefited from the preferences that became available over the past years. Their wealth increased exponentially compared to the middle class and the poor. This problem clearly exists there, even if it is not as pressing in Europe, but it still exists.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Thank you.

I will ask the last question so that we do not keep the audience waiting. You mentioned the UN's invaluable role. We can understand this, since the UN is a fundamental institution, and so on. However, many now criticise the UN, and you have mentioned this in your remarks.

Just a few days ago, President of Turkey Erdogan, whom you know well, said that the Security Council must be reformed because a group of WWII victor countries monopolised power, which is not the way it should be. Do you agree with this statement?

Vladimir Putin: I do not. He has recently visited Russia, as you know, and I had a meeting with him. I raised this question myself, saying that I saw his main points. I have to admit that I did not read the entire book, but I did look at some of the ideas. I agree with some of them. This is a good analysis. We can understand why a Turkish leader raises this issue. He probably believes that Turkey could become a permanent Security Council member. It is not up to Russia to decide, though. Matters of this kind must be decided by consensus. There are also India and South Africa. You see, this is a question of fairness, of striking a balance.

Different solutions are possible here. I would rather not talk about this now, getting ahead of things and preempting Russia's position on this discussion. But what is important (I just said so in my opening remarks, and I also said this to President Erdogan), if we dismantle the permanent members' veto, the United Nations will die on the same day, will degrade into the League of Nations, and that will be it. It will be just a platform for discussion, Valdai Club number two. But there is only one Valdai Club, and it is here. (Laughter.)

Fyodor Lukyanov: We are ready to step in.

Vladimir Putin: Valdai Club number two will be in New York.

Fyodor Lukyanov: We will go and replace it with pleasure.

Vladimir Putin: But this is the point – we would rather not change anything. That is, some change might be necessary, but we would rather not destroy the basis – this is the whole point of the UN today, that there are five permanent members, and they have the power of veto. Other states are represented on the Security Council, but they are non-permanent members.

We need to think how we could make this organisation more balanced, because indeed – this is true, and in this sense, President Erdogan is right – it emerged after World War II, when there was a certain balance of power. Now it is changing; it has already changed.

We are well aware that China has overtaken the United States in purchasing power parity. What do you think that is? These are global changes.

And India? Another nation of almost 1.5 billion people, a rapidly developing economy, and so on. And why is Africa not represented? Where is Latin America? We definitely need to consider this – a growing giant there such as Brazil. These are all topics for discussion. Only, we must not rush. We must not make any mistakes on the path of reform.

Fyodor Lukyanov: The leaders of the Valdai Club will consider holding a meeting in New York. Only, they might not issue visas to all of us, I am afraid, but no problem, we will work on that.

Vladimir Putin: By the way, why not? The Valdai Club might as well meet in New York.

Fyodor Lukyanov: After you and Biden agree on the visas. (Laughter.)

Vladimir Putin: I do not think the heads of state will need to step in. Just ask Sergei Lavrov, he will speak with his colleagues there.

Why not? I am serious. Why not hold a Valdai Club session on a neutral site, outside the Russian Federation? Why not? I think it might be interesting.

We have important people here in this room, good analysts who are well known in their countries. More people can be invited in the host country to join these discussions. What is wrong with that? This is good.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Well, we have just set a goal.

Vladimir Putin: It is not a goal; it is a possibility.

Fyodor Lukyanov: A possibility. Like a crisis. It is also a possibility.

Vladimir Putin: Yes.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Please, Piotr Dutkiewicz.

Piotr Dutkiewicz: Mr President, I would like to return to the words you have just said, that Russia should rely on Russian values. By the way, we were talking about this at a Valdai Club meeting the day before yesterday.

I would like to ask you which Russian thinkers, scholars, anthropologists and writers do you regard as your closest soul-mates, helping you to define for yourself the values that will later become those of all Russians?

Vladimir Putin: You know, I would prefer not to say that this is Ivan Ilyin alone. I read Ilyin, I read him to this day. I have his book lying on my shelf, and I pick it up and read it from time to time. I have mentioned Berdiayev, there are other Russian thinkers. All of them are people who were thinking about Russia and its future. I am fascinated by the train of their thought, but, of course, I make allowances for the time when they were working, writing and formulating their ideas. The well-known idea about the passionarity of nations is a very interesting idea. It could be challenged – arguments around it continue to this day. But if there are debates over the ideas they formulated, these are obviously not idle ideas to say the least.

Let me remind you about nations' passionarity. According to the author of this idea, peoples, nations, ethnic groups are like a living organism: they are born, reach the peak of their development, and then quietly grow old. Many countries, including those on the American continent, say today's Western Europe is ageing. This is the term they use. It is hard to say whether this is right or not. But, to my mind, the idea that a nation should have an inner driving mechanism for development, a will for development and self-assertion has a leg to stand on.

We are observing that certain countries are on the rise even though they have a lot of unsolved problems. They resemble erupting volcanoes, like the one on the Spanish island, which is disgorging its lava. But there are also extinguished volcanoes, where fires are long dead and one can only hear birds singing.

You, please.

Piotr Dutkiewicz: Mr President, you have referred to Lev Gumilyov, who presented me with a samizdat edition of his first book in St Petersburg in 1979. I will pass this samizdat on to you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you very much.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Samizdat, a tradition.

Dear friends, please introduce yourselves, when you take the floor.

Alexei Miller: Good afternoon, Mr President.

I am Alexei Miller, a historian from the European University at St Petersburg.

Vladimir Putin: There are two Alexei Millers. Russia is a rich country. (Laughter)

Alexei Miller: Two years ago, you were asked during a meeting at the Valdai Club about the European Parliament's resolution, which made the Soviet Union (and hence Russia) and Nazi Germany equally responsible for the outbreak of WWII. Since then, you have commented on this issue several times in your statements and in the article published in the summer of 2020.

In particular, during the ceremony to unveil a monument to the victims of the siege of Leningrad at the Yad Vashem memorial complex in January 2020, you said you would like to propose a meeting of the Big Five leaders to discuss this issue as well, so that we could overcome the current confrontation and end the war on memory. I believe the situation has not improved since then. Or maybe you know something the general public is not aware of, maybe there have been some improvements? It would be great if you could tell us about this.

My second question follows on from the first one. When there is such confrontation in the countries that are involved in the war on memory, some forces may be tempted to join ranks and to restrict, to a greater or lesser degree, the freedom of discussion, including among historians. Such discussions always involve a difference of opinions and some risqué or even wrong views. Do you envision the threat of such restrictions in our country?

Vladimir Putin: No, I do not believe there is such a threat in our country. We sometimes see the danger of not being responsible for what some people say, indeed, but then this is the reverse side of the freedom you have mentioned.

As for my initiative to hold a meeting of the heads of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, it has been supported by everyone, in principle, and such a meeting could have been organised. The problems that arose are not connected with

Russia but with some disputes within this group of five countries. As I have said, they are not connected with Russia. This is the first point.

And the second is that the pandemic began soon after that, and the situation has become really complicated.

The idea of the meeting received a highly positive response, and I hope it will be held eventually. This definitely will be beneficial. We are discussing this with our American partners, with our Chinese friends, with France – incidentally, the French President supported it immediately, as well as with Britain. They have their own ideas and proposals on additional subjects that can be discussed at such a meeting. I hope the necessary conditions will develop and we will hold this meeting.

As for historical memory, the memory of WWII, you know, of course, that I am ready to talk about this with arguments in hand. We have many complaints about the country's leadership between 1917 and 1990, which is obvious. However, placing the Nazis and the Communists before WWII on the same level and dividing responsibility between them equally is absolutely unacceptable. It is a lie.

I am saying this not only because I am Russian and, currently, the head of the Russian state, which is the legal successor of the Soviet Union. I am saying this now, in part or at least in part, as a researcher. I have read the documents, which I retrieved from the archives. We are publishing them now in increasingly large amounts.

Trust me, when I read them, the picture in my mind started changing. You can think about Stalin differently, blaming him for the prison camps, persecution campaigns and the like. But I have seen his instructions on documents. The Soviet government was genuinely doing its best to prevent WWII, even if for different reasons. Some people would say that the country was not ready for the war, which is why they tried to prevent it. But they did try to prevent it. They fought for the preservation of Czechoslovakia, providing arguments to protect its sovereignty. I have read, I have really read – this is not a secret, and we are declassifying these archives now – about France's reaction to those events, including regarding the meeting of the leading politicians with Hitler in Munich in 1938.

When you read this, when you see it, you understand that attempts can indeed be made to distort these facts. But you can at least read these documents. I can

understand the current Polish leadership's attitude to the 1939 events, but when you tell them: Just take a look at what happened slightly before that, when Poland joined Germany in the division of Czechoslovakia. You lit the fuse, you pulled the cork, the genie came out, and you cannot put it back into the bottle."

I also read the archival documents which we received after the Red Army entered Europe: we have German and also Polish and French documents, we have them. They directly discussed the division of Czechoslovakia and the time for the invasion. And then to blame it on the Soviet Union? This simply does not correspond to reality and facts.

Simply put, who attacked who? Did the Soviet Union attack Germany? No, it did not. Yes, there were secret agreements between Germany and the Soviet Union. Incidentally, I would like to note that the Soviet troops entered Brest when the German troops had been already deployed there; the Germans simply moved back a little and the Red Army moved in. Do you see?

There is no point adding a political dimension here. Let us act calmly at the expert level, read the documents and sort things out. Nobody is accusing the Polish leadership. But we will not allow anyone to accuse Russia or the Soviet Union of what they did not do.

And lastly, I would like to say that there are some perfectly obvious things. Firstly, it was Germany that attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and not vice versa, and secondly, let us not forget who stormed Berlin. Was it the Americans, the British or the French? No, it was the Red Army. Have you forgotten this? It is easy to recall, for it is an obvious fact.

As many as 1.1 million of our people died in the Battle of Stalingrad alone. How many casualties can Britain claim? 400,000. And the United States, less than 500,000. A total of 75 percent, and probably even 80 percent of the German military potential was destroyed by the Soviet army. Are you a little rusty on this?

No, you are not rusty at all. These events are being used to deal with the current internal political matters in an opportunistic manner. This is wrong, because nothing good will come of manipulating history. At the very least, this does not promote mutual understanding, which we need so badly now.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Orietta Moscatelli, go ahead please.

Orietta Moscatelli: Orietta Moscatelli, Italy. Thank you for the meeting.

As you mentioned, different things have been said about Homo sovieticus over the 30 years since the Soviet Union's disintegration. Was there really a person like that? Here is my question: Do you think it was true? Do you believe Russia has fully overcome Soviet experience as a society? What are the main features of the Soviet times that you have kept in your life?

Vladimir Putin: I, as well as many people of my generation certainly remember this idea and this formula – a new community, Soviet people, the Soviet person. Of course, all of us remember this. In reality, this definition is not at all bad. This is my first point.

The second point. Look, the whole world and the United States describe the US as a “melting pot,” in which people of different nations, ethnicities and religions are melting together. What is bad about this? They are all proud – the Irish, people of European and East European origin, you name it, as well as Latin Americans and Africans by their initial descent – many of them are proud to be US citizens and this is wonderful. This is what “the melting pot” is about.

Russia is also “a melting pot.” Since the formation of a united Russian state – the first steps were made, probably in the 8th-9th centuries, and also after Conversion of Rus', the Russian nation and a centralised Russian state began to take shape with a common market, common language, the power of a prince and common spiritual values. The Russian state began to be established and later expanded. This was also a “melting pot.”

Nothing particularly new was created in the Soviet Union except one very important circumstance: this new community, the Soviet person, the Soviet people acquired an ideological tinge. Of course, there was nothing good about this because this narrows the horizons of the possible. This is the first point.

The second point. Positive features of the Soviet times reflected on the Soviet people. What were they? Patriotism inherent in our peoples, supremacy of the spiritual dimension over material things, all these values I mentioned, including family ones. But negative things in the life and destiny of the Soviet Union also stuck to the Soviet

people. Thus, they were deprived of property as such. Private property was embodied in a household plot, but this is quite a different category. Hence, their attitude to labour, the one-size-fits-all approach and so on.

The Soviet Union had many problems. They triggered the events that led to the collapse of the USSR. However, it is wrong, crude and inappropriate to paint everything black. Yes, I know we have people that paint everything black. Hence, they deserve to be put into something that smells bad.

There are both pluses and minuses, as for “the melting pot,” I think it was good to have it because it enriches the people, enriches the nation.

You know, what is typical of Russia, something you can find in all historical documents: when expanding its territory Russia never made life difficult for the people who became part of the united Russian state. This applied to religion, traditions and history. Look at the decrees of Catherine the Great who issued her instruction in clear terms: treat with respect. This was the attitude towards those who preached Islam, for instance. This has always been the case. This is a tradition. In terms of preserving these traditions, the new community of the Soviet people had nothing bad about it except the ideologisation of this melting pot and the results of its functioning.

I think I have described everything linked with the Soviet period of our history. Now I have mentioned this again and I do not think it is worth discussing this topic again.

As for me, like the overwhelming majority of people of my generation, I faced the problems of that period, but I also remember its positive features that should not be forgotten. Being from a family of workers, yours truly graduated from Leningrad State University. This is something, right? At that time, education played the role of a real social lift. On the whole, the egalitarian approach was very widespread and we encountered its negative impact, such as income levelling and a related attitude to work, but a lot of people still used the preferences of social lifts I mentioned. Maybe, it was simply the legacy of past generations or even cultivated in the Soviet Union to some extent. This is also important.

I have now recalled my family. My mum and dad were simple people. They did not talk in slogans but I remember very well that discussing different problems at home, in the family, they always, I would like to emphasise this, treated their country with

respect, speaking about it in their own manner, in simple terms, in the folk style. This was not demonstrative patriotism. It was inside our family.

I think I have the right to say that the overwhelming majority of the Russian people and the other peoples of the USSR cultivated these positive features. It is no accident that over 70 percent of the population voted for preserving the Soviet Union on the eve of its collapse. Many people in the union republics that gained independence regretted what had happened. But now life is different and we believe it is going its own way and generally recognise current realities.

As for the Soviet person, the new formation, as they said then, I believe I have already said enough on this subject.

Fyodor Lukyanov: This year's Valdai Club meeting is special in part because we have a Nobel Peace Prize laureate here with us for the first time in our history.

I would like to give the floor to Dmitry Muratov.

Dmitry Muratov: Thank you. Good afternoon.

Mr President, Valdai Club guests, Fyodor, I want to let everyone know that the prize money has been distributed.

Thanks go to the Circle of Kindness Foundation. Furthermore, we hope that our modest contribution will help everyone realise that the Circle of Kindness Foundation helps young people under 18, but then after they are 18, they are left without guidance. It is like saying, "Thank you, we saved you, and now goodbye." We look forward to the Circle of Kindness Foundation (they appear ready to do this) expanding its mandate. There is the children's hospice Lighthouse, the First Moscow Charity Hospice Foundation Vera, the Podari Zhizn Foundation, the Anna Politkovskaya Award, and the Foundation for Medical Aid for Media Members. That is all.

Of course, I also think that, to some extent, probably, this is a prize for our country as well, although I consider myself an impostor. I will do my best to make sure it benefits our people.

Now, if I may, a brief remark and a question.

Mr President, I have very carefully studied the answer you gave during Moscow Energy Week regarding foreign agents, where you said that we were not the first to adopt this law, that the United States did so back in the 1930s.

But, Mr President, since we do not adopt every law that is adopted in the United States, my question about foreign agents remains. After all, I believe this concerns not only dozens and dozens of journalists and human rights activists who are listed in the register, but also hundreds of thousands and even millions of readers. Therefore, I believe it is a serious matter.

Most importantly, you have just mentioned Leningrad University and I think your subject of study will help us understand each other well. This law does not provide for any court recourse. You are designated a foreign agent and there is no argument of the parties, no provision of evidence, no verdict. It is a stain. Let me remind you of our favourite childhood book. This is the same kind of brand Milady in The Three Musketeers had. But before Milady was beheaded, the executioner of Lille read the verdict to her at dawn whereas in our case there is no verdict whatsoever.

Furthermore, it is impossible to get away from this law. There is not even a warning that you become a foreign agent starting, say, tomorrow. For many, this status undoubtedly means they are an enemy of the Motherland. I remember from my days of army service that under the guard service regulations, the sentry first fires a warning shot in the air. Excuse me, but only security guards at prison camps shoot to kill without a warning shot.

I believe we need to sort this out, since the criteria are woefully vague. Take, for example, receiving organisational and methodological assistance. What does this mean? If I am asking a member of the Valdai Club for a comment, and they come from another country, does that make me a foreign agent? They make their announcements on Fridays. I want to remind you that tomorrow is Friday.

I would like to ask you to respond to the way this issue is presented. Perhaps, you, Mr President and, for example, the State Duma Chairman, could hold an extraordinary meeting with the editors from various media in order discuss the issues at hand.

Thank you very much.

Vladimir Putin: First, I would like to congratulate you on the Nobel Prize. I would like to draw your attention to one fact: Nikolai Berdyayev, whom I have mentioned, was expelled by the Bolsheviks on the well-known Philosophy Steamer in 1922. Nominated for a Nobel Prize more than once, he never received this award.

Dmitry Muratov: That was about literature.

Vladimir Putin: No difference, but yes, I agree. The first Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Barrack Obama also received Nobel peace prizes. So, you are in good company. Congratulations! But we really know. You have just spoken about a hospice. I would give you a prize for that because you are doing this good work. It is truly noble work, the Circle of Kindness, and the like.

Your concern about foreign agents; I will not deviate to the right or left. Look, you said that here when these decisions are made... firstly, American laws. Do we have to copy everything from the Americans? No, we do not need to copy everything. Yet many liberals in Russia still think we should copy almost everything. But I agree with you: not everything.

You said this is not decided in court. This is not done in the United States either. They summon people to the Department of Justice. Ask Russia Today about what they are doing. Do you know how tough they are? Up to and including criminal liability. We do not have this. This is not about the position of some public figure, some public organisation, or a media outlet. Their position does not matter. This law does not ban anyone from having one's own opinion on an issue. It is about receiving financial aid from abroad during domestic political activities. That is the point. The law does not even keep them from continuing these political activities. The money that comes from abroad, from over there, should simply be identified as such. Russian society should know what position someone comes from or what they think about internal political processes or something else, but it should also realise that they receive money from abroad. This is the right of Russian society. In fact, this is the whole point of this law. There are no restrictions in it at all.

So, when you said there is no verdict, that is right. There is no verdict. There was a verdict for Milady – her head was cut off. Here nobody is cutting off anything. So, just continue working like you did before.

But you are right about one thing. I will not even argue with you, because this is true. Of course, we probably need to go over these vague criteria again and again. I can promise you that we will take another look at them. I know it happens occasionally. Even my personal acquaintances who engage in charitable activities were telling me that cases were being made against them portraying them as foreign agents. I am aware of the fact that our colleagues discuss this at the Human Rights Council. I keep issuing instructions on that score to the Presidential Administration and the State Duma deputies so that they go over it again and again, improve this tool, and in no way abuse it.

So, thank you for bringing this up. We will look into it.

Thank you very much.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Just a quick follow-up on that. Mr President, are you not afraid of excessive acts?

Vladimir Putin: I am not afraid of anything, why is everyone trying to scare me?

Fyodor Lukyanov: Okay, then we are afraid, and you tell us about excessive acts, since you know your former security service colleagues well.

Vladimir Putin: Not everyone, this is a mass organisation, how can I know everyone?

Fyodor Lukyanov: Well, not everyone, but many.

Vladimir Putin: When I was [FSB]director, I sometimes even summoned operatives with specific cases and read them myself. And now I do not know everyone there. I left it a long time ago.

Fyodor Lukyanov: I am talking about specific cases. Their psychological makeup is that overdoing things is a safer approach than missing things. Will there be no blanket approach to identifying foreign agents?

Vladimir Putin: What?

Fyodor Lukyanov: Will they not use a blanket approach to identifying foreign agents?

Vladimir Putin: Is there anything there that looks like a blanket approach? How many do we have? Every second, or what? I believe there is no such thing as widespread branding of people as foreign agents.

I think the danger is vastly exaggerated. I believe I have formulated the underlying reasons for adopting this law quite clearly.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Good. In addition to a Nobel prize winner, we also have a foreign agent in the audience.

Margarita Simonyan, please share your experience.

Margarita Simonyan: Yes, thank you, good afternoon,

We have been foreign agents for many years now. Moreover, I was summoned for interrogation in the United States several years ago, because we did not register as foreign agents earlier, despite the fact that our lawyers, including former rather high-ranking officials from the US Department of Justice (Dima, this information is mostly for you, congratulations on winning the prize), told us – and we have these legal opinions in writing – that this law does not apply to us, because it clearly said in English “except the media.”

But when our audience started growing, and we got in their way, they told us: “We do not care what the Department of Justice is telling you, you either register or go to prison for five years.” And I have a summons for questioning because I myself failed to register earlier, before they registered me. I do not travel there anymore, just in case, because I might be jailed. This is my first point.

Vladimir Putin: There is no fence against ill fortune, Margarita.

(Addressing Dmitry Muratov) You see, in the United States, some people face a five-year sentence.

Margarita Simonyan: Yes, five. And we know people who are doing time under this law, five years.

Secondly, unlike in Russia, this law definitely has consequences and implies sanctions. For example, one's accreditation to Congress gets instantly revoked, and if you are not accredited with Congress in the United States, you can no longer go anywhere – not a single event, nowhere (I can see people that know this nodding their heads). You actually work on semi-underground terms there. This is how we have been working for how long now? Six years. But we will continue to do this work.

Mr President, as a mother of three young children, I would like to thank you very much for your healthy conservatism. I am terrified by the thought of my 7-year-old son being asked to choose a gender, or my 2-year-old daughter being told from all mobile devices, and even at school, as is now happening in many Western countries, that her future is that of a “person with human milk who gave birth to a baby.” And the thought that these tentacles of liberal fascism, so-called liberal, will reach us and our children. I really hope that this will never be allowed in our country, despite its great openness.

You mentioned bloviating, which the so-called humanistic foundation of the European political thought turned out to be, but this so-called freedom of speech turned out to be bloviating too. Freedom of speech turned out to be a postcard made for the people we were in the 1990s, so that we could look at it and think: “Wow, it does exist. Great, we will do that too, we will not have foreign agents, and everything will be fine with us.” This freedom of speech has just strangled our YouTube channel, which was very popular, and everything was cool there, really. And you know very well that this is not a privately-run outfit, but a public project which we created not for ourselves, but for the Motherland, and we have run out of options to get this project back. And we no longer believe in anything other than reciprocal measures.

According to their own analyses, Deutsche Welle was behind us in Germany in certain rankings. It broadcasts in Russia without any problems, but we cannot broadcast there. We have already built studios, hired people, produced shows and earned an audience, but now, with the strike of a pen and without any reason, and, Mr Muratov, without a court ruling, everything fell apart in a single moment.

This is no a question actually, I am asking, pleading for protection, Mr President. I do not see any other way to protect us other than through retaliatory measures.

My question is the following. Moscow has recently hosted a Congress of Compatriots, and you sent greetings to the participants. I took the floor at this forum and asked those of my colleagues in the audience, people who are proactive in defending

the Russian world and the Russian language around the world, sometimes putting their lives and freedom at risk, who wanted but could not obtain Russian citizenship, to raise their hands. Half the audience had their hands up.

We have discussed this many times. You may remember that several years ago we spoke about granting citizenship to Donbass residents. The procedure was streamlined for them. Can this be done for all Russians? Why is Russia shying away from doing this? The Jews did not hesitate about it, and neither did the Germans nor the Greeks, but we are hesitating. This is my question. Thank you very much.

Vladimir Putin: First, regarding the retaliatory measures, I think we need to be cautious when someone makes mistakes like this, and I do believe that you have suffered from them, when a channel is closed or you are unable to work. I know about the fact that your accounts were blocked and that you could not open, etc. There is a plethora of instruments to this effect.

Margarita Simonyan: More like carpet-bombing.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, to make it impossible for you to work there. I know.

On the one hand, of course, they are infringing on freedom of speech and so forth, which is a bad thing. But since they are doing this, you and I have to think about how to spread the word about the fact that they are cancelling you, and then more people will become interested in what you do.

Margarita Simonyan: The only problem is that there is no place for people to watch us. People are interested, but there is nowhere to watch us.

Vladimir Putin: I do understand, but we need to give this some thought, and explore technical and technological opportunities.

As for retaliatory measures, let me reiterate that what matters the most is that they do not turn out to be counterproductive. I do not oppose them, but I do not want them to be counterproductive.

As for your question on Russian citizenship, you are right. My position is that we need to improve this tool. There are questions here related to socioeconomic matters:

clinics, kindergartens, jobs, housing, etc. Still, the citizenship laws must become increasingly liberal. This is obvious. By the way, this is what the labour market compels us to do. We are thinking about this.

Margarita Simonyan: Thank you, Mr President.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Colleagues, in addition to those in this room, there are other participants who are watching us online, as they could not join us here due to the well-known circumstances.

I would like to ask – Robert Legvold, our longtime friend, member of the Valdai Research Council, professor at Columbia University.

Robert Legvold: Thank you very much, Fyodor. For me, it is a disappointment that I have not been able to be with all of the participants in the Valdai conference, but I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to be part of this session. The topic of Valdai this year has been very transcendent and fundamental questions, and I admire Valdai for doing that.

President Putin has certainly risen to the challenge of that agenda and has addressed it in an extremely engaging and revealing fashion.

My question, however, is narrower but more specific, and I apologise for descending to this level, but it is a question that is important in my country. I think it is important in your country. Although neither your government nor the Biden administration believes that a reset of the US-Russian relationship is possible at this juncture, how do you evaluate or assess the evolution of US-Russia relations since your meeting with President Biden in June? In what areas has there been progress, if any? And what, in your view, are the obstacles to further progress? Thank you very much.

Vladimir Putin: On the whole, I have spoken about this; I have answered questions like this. I can only repeat myself now. On second thought, not just repeat – there is actually something to be said about what is happening.

The meeting in Geneva was generally productive, and it seemed to us – when I say ‘us,’ I mean my colleagues and myself – that overall, the administration was interested in building ties, reviving them at least in some important areas.

What did we agree on? We agreed to begin consultations on strategic stability, and the consultations began and are held regularly, on cybersecurity issues as well. At the expert level, cooperation has started. So we can safely say that although the scope of matters we agreed on was limited, we are on the right track nonetheless.

These are the most important matters for today. And in general, the administration (on the American side) and Russia (on the other side) are fulfilling the plans and are moving along this path. And when this happens, as we know, it is always a sign, one of a systemic nature. And now, look, our trade has already grown by 23 percent and in many areas. This, among other things, is an indirect effect of our meeting in Geneva.

So, overall, we are on the right track, although, unfortunately – I would not like to talk about sad things now, but we also see certain backslides, remember that phrase we used years ago – one step forward, two steps back – this is also happening sometimes. Still, we are progressing in line with our general agreements.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Thank you. Since we are in a new world now, for balance, I will give the floor to our kind friend Zhou Bo from Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Go ahead, please.

Zhou Bo: Mr President, it is really my great honour to ask you this question. First of all, let me thank you for this opportunity. I will ask you something about Afghanistan. Afghanistan lies in the heart of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. So, if Afghanistan has a problem, then the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has a problem. Now the United States has withdrawn from Afghanistan. So how can the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is led by China and Russia, united with other countries, help Afghanistan to achieve political stability and economic development? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: The situation in Afghanistan is one of the most urgent issues today. You know, we have just had a meeting in the appropriate format, in part, with

representatives of the Taliban. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is also active in Afghanistan. This is a very serious issue for all of us because for both China and Russia it is extremely important to have a calm, developing Afghanistan that is not a source of terrorism, or any form of radicalism, next to our national borders, if not on our borders.

We are now seeing what is happening inside Afghanistan. Unfortunately, different groups, including ISIS are still there. There are already victims among the Taliban movement, which, as a whole, is still trying to get rid of these radical elements and we know of such examples. This is very important for us, for both Russia and China.

In order to normalise the situation properly and at the right pace, it is necessary, of course, to help Afghanistan restore its economy because drugs are another huge problem. It is a known fact that 90 percent of opiates come to the world market from Afghanistan. And if there is no money, what will they do? From what sources and how will they fund their social programmes?

Therefore, for all the importance of our participation in these processes – both China and Russia and other SCO countries – the main responsibility for what is happening there is still borne by the countries that fought there for 20 years. I believe the first thing they must do is to release Afghan assets and give Afghanistan an opportunity to resolve high priority socio-economic problems.

For our part, we can implement specific large projects and deal with domestic security issues. Our special services are in contact with their Afghan counterparts. For us, within the SCO, it is very important to get this work up and running because Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are right on the border with Afghanistan. We have a military facility in Tajikistan. It was based on the 201st division when it was still Soviet.

Therefore, we will actively continue this work with China on a bilateral plane, develop dialogue with relevant structures and promote cooperation within the SCO as a whole. In the process, we will allocate the required resources and create all the conditions to let our citizens feel safe regardless of what is happening in Afghanistan.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Thank you.

Mikhail Pogrebinsky, please.

Mikhail Pogrebinsky: Thank you, Fyodor. Thank you, Mr President.

I will try to ask a question, the answer to which is awaited, I am sure, by hundreds of thousands of people in my homeland.

You mentioned a Chinese proverb about living in a time of change. Our country has been living like that for almost 30 years now, and the situation is becoming more difficult in anticipation of winter, amid the pandemic, and, I would say, the situation with the Americans. A couple of days ago, we had Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin visit our country. He brought \$60 million worth of weapons and promised us a bright future as a NATO member, figuratively speaking.

I will note right away that any allegations that NATO is irrelevant because Europe does not agree, are prevarication. One does not need to be a NATO member to have US or British military infrastructure deployed in Ukraine. I believe this process is already underway.

In your July article on historical unity, you wrote that transforming Ukraine into an anti-Russia country is unacceptable for millions of people. This is true, and opinion polls confirm it. Over 40 percent have good or very good thoughts about Russia. However, this transformation has, in fact, started. A rather long and very dangerous, in my opinion, distance in this direction may have already been covered. I think that if this idea with a para-NATO infrastructure continues to be implemented, the process to form what is now a not so stable anti-Russia Ukraine will be cemented for many years to come.

You wrote in your article that if the process continues unabated, it will pose a serious threat to the Russian state, and this may be fraught with Ukraine losing its statehood. People who oppose this movement are facing reprisals. You are aware that they are trying to put Viktor Medvedchuk in prison based on some outlandish charges.

How, in your opinion, can this process be stopped? Maybe, you have a timeline for when it might happen? What can be done in this regard at all?

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Unfortunately, I will probably have to disappoint you – I do not yet know the answer to this question. On the one hand, it seems to lie on the surface: the easiest thing is to say that the Ukrainian people must make a decision themselves, and form the bodies of power and administration that would meet their needs and expectations. From one perspective, this is indeed true.

But on the other hand, there is another perspective, and I cannot avoid mentioning it. You have just mentioned Viktor Medvedchuk, who has been charged with high treason. For what? Did he steal some secrets and illegally disclose them to a third party? No. What then? Was it his open political position about stabilising Ukraine's internal affairs and building relations with its neighbours because those relations are extremely important for Ukraine itself? It is concerning that such people are not allowed to raise their heads. Some of them end up killed, and others locked up.

One gets the impression that the Ukrainian people are not allowed and will not be allowed to legally form the bodies of power that would uphold their interests. The people there are even afraid to respond to polls. They are scared, because the small group that has appropriated the victory in the fight for independence holds radical political views. And that group actually runs the country, regardless of the name of the current head of state.

At least this is how it was until recently: people ran for leadership positions relying on voters in the Southeast, but once elected, they almost immediately changed their political positions to the opposite. Why? Because that silent majority voted for them in the hope that they would fulfil their campaign promises, but the loud and aggressive nationalist minority suppressed all freedom in decision-making that the Ukrainian people expected, and they, in fact, are running the country.

This is a dead end. I do not even know how this can be changed. We will wait and see what happens in Ukraine's political affairs in the near future.

For our part, we are making every effort to improve these relations. But the threat you just spoke about — not even spoke about, only mentioned — is quite important to us. And you are right that formal NATO membership may never happen, but military expansion on the territory is already underway, and this really poses a threat to the Russian Federation, we are aware of this.

Consider what happened in the late 1980s – early 1990s (I will not tell the whole story now, although you just made me think about talking more about it), when everyone assured us that an eastward expansion of NATO infrastructure after the unification of Germany was totally out of the question. Russia could be absolutely sure of this, at the very least, so they said. But those were public statements. What happened in reality? They lied. And now they challenge us to produce a document that actually said that.

They expanded NATO once, and then expanded it twice. What are the military-strategic consequences? Their infrastructure is getting closer. What kind of infrastructure? They deployed ABM (anti-missile) systems in Poland and Romania, using Aegis launchers, where Tomahawks can be loaded, strike systems. This can be done easily, with the click of a button. Just change the software – and that is it, no one will even notice. Medium and short-range missiles can also be deployed there. Why not? Has anyone even reacted to our statement that we will not deploy this kind of missile in the European part if we produce them, if they tell us that no one will do so from the United States or Europe? No. They never responded. But we are adults, we are all adults here. What should we do in this situation?

The Minister of Defence arrives, who, in fact, opens the doors for Ukraine to NATO. In fact, his statement must and can be interpreted in this way. He says every country has the right to choose. And nobody says no, nobody. Even those Europeans you mentioned. I know, I spoke to them personally.

But one official is not a security guarantee for Russia – he may be here one day and he might be replaced the next. What will happen then? This is not a security guarantee; it is just a conversation on a given topic. And we are naturally concerned.

Fyodor Lukyanov: Mr President, since you mentioned NATO...

Vladimir Putin: Yes, sorry. About the bases – I know about the corresponding clauses in the Ukrainian constitution. It allows setting up training centers. But these can be anything at all, accounted for as a training center. As I already said, and it was also said publicly: what if tomorrow there are missiles near Kharkov – what should we do then? We do not go there with our missiles – but missiles are being brought to our doorstep. Of course, we have a problem here.

Fyodor Lukyanov: We started talking about NATO. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was interviewed just two days ago, and he announced that NATO is adjusting its strategic vision somewhat, and now views Russia and China as one common threat rather than two threats. This is an interesting approach, apparently a far-reaching one. But if this is how they see us, maybe it is time for us to unite with China and consider someone else as a threat?

Vladimir Putin: We have said many times that we are friends with China, and not against anyone else, but in each other's interests. This is the first point. The second point is, as distinct from NATO, from the NATO countries, we are not creating a closed military bloc. There is no Russia-China military bloc and we will not create one now. So, there is no reason to talk about this.

Fyodor Lukyanov: I see.

Mark Champion.

Mark Champion: Thank you. Mr President, on the subject of the potential for sending extra gas to Europe, which, as you know, is in a gas crisis at the moment, you have talked about this before, but, you know, at times it has been quite confusing. Sometimes Russian officials indicate that there is additional gas available that can be sent if Nord Stream 2 is opened, and at other times, they have suggested that there is no gas available to send to Europe. And I just wondered if you would take this opportunity to clarify whether there is additional gas available that Russia can send to Europe, if say, Nord Stream opened tonight, or if there is not.

Vladimir Putin: Frankly, it is strange for me to hear questions like this. It seems to me I explained everything during the Russian Energy Week in Moscow. However, if these questions are being asked, we should certainly talk more about it.

Look what is happening. I believe I said at the meeting with the Government yesterday or the day before yesterday: this is not just about energy sources or gas, but also about the state of the global economy. Shortages are increasing in the leading, economically advanced countries. Take the United States, for one. It has recently made yet another decision to increase its national debt.

For those who do not deal with the economy, I can tell you what a decision to increase the national debt means. The FRS will print money and put it at the government's disposal. This is emission. The deficit is increasing, and inflation is increasing as an emission derivative. This leads to price increases on energy sources, on electricity. This is how it works, not the other way around.

However, the situation is also deteriorating due to realities in the energy market. What are these realities? You just spoke about Europe. What is going on in Europe? Maybe I will repeat some of my ideas or maybe I will say something new, if I recall it. In the past few years, the European Commission's philosophy was entirely devoted to regulating the market of energy sources, including gas, via a commodities exchange, through the so-called spot market. They tried to persuade us to give up long-term contracts where prices were tied to the exchange, that is, market quotes on crude oil and petroleum products.

Incidentally, this is market price formation. Since gas prices are established with a lag of six months after a change in oil prices, this is, firstly, a more stable situation and, secondly, a six-month lag allows consumers and suppliers to make adjustments along the way based on developments on world markets.

So, everything began to be brought to this spot market, but it largely holds gas on paper, not real gas. These are not physical amounts, which are not increasing (I will explain why in a minute). A figure is written on paper, but there is no physical amount, it is declining. So, a cold winter requires gas from underground storage; a wind-free hot summer means a lack of wind generation on the necessary scale. I have already mentioned the macroeconomic reasons, and these are the sector-based reasons.

What happened next on the European market? First, a decline in production in the gas producing countries. Production in Europe fell by 22.5 billion cubic metres during the first six months. This is first. Second, gas storage facilities were underfilled by 18.5 billion cubic metres and are only 71 percent full. The gas storage facilities were underfilled by 18.5 during the first six months of the year. If you look at annual consumption, this number must be doubled.

Primarily American, along with Middle Eastern companies withdrew 9 billion cubic metres from the European market and redirected the gas to Latin America and Asia. By the way, when the Europeans were formulating the principles governing the formation of the gas market in Europe, and said that all gas must be traded

on the spot market, they were proceeding from the assumption that the European market is a premium market. But the European market is no longer a premium market, you see? It is no longer a premium market. Gas was redirected to Latin America and Asia.

I have already said that 18.5 billion cubic metres, plus double that amount, 9 billion (undersupplied to the European market from the United States and the Middle East), plus a decline in production of 22.5 billion – the deficit on the European market may amount to about 70 billion cubic metres, which is a lot. What does Russia have to do with it? This is the result of the European Commission's economic policy. Russia has nothing to do with it.

Russia, including Gazprom, has increased deliveries to the European market by 8.7 percent, I believe, and deliveries to non-CIS countries by 12 percent, I think. But when we speak about non-CIS countries, we mean China as well. This is also good for the international market, because we are increasing deliveries to the global market, and increased deliveries to the European market by 8.7. In absolute terms, this represents over 11 billion cubic metres of gas. American and Middle Eastern companies undersupplied by 9 billion, while Gazprom increased its supplies by more than 11 billion.

Can everyone hear me? Not in this audience, but the so-called stakeholders. Someone out there is cutting supplies to you, while we are increasing them.

But this is not all. Today, under the so-called long-term contracts – I would like you to listen attentively and to hear what I say – the price of gas is now \$1,200 or \$1,150 for a thousand cubic metres. European companies that have long-term contracts with Gazprom receive it – take note – at four times less than the current price! Gazprom does not make any windfall profits. We are not concerned about this because we are interested in long-term contracts and long-term mutual commitments. In this case, we ensure the opportunity to invest in production and produce the required amounts for our consumers steadily and reliably.

You are asking me if it is possible to increase supplies. Yes, this is possible. Speaking about Nord Stream-2, its first line is filled with gas and if the German regulator issues the permit for shipping tomorrow, it can deliver 17.5 billion cubic metres of gas the day after tomorrow.

Technological work on filling the second line of Nord Stream-2 will be completed before the end of this year, in mid- or late December. The total volume is 55 billion cubic metres of gas. Considering that in our estimate the shortage of gas in the European market will reach 70 billion cubic metres, 55 billion is a decent amount.

Once the second line is filled, and the German regulator issues its permit, we can start supplies on the next day. Is this possible or not, you asked. Yes, it is possible, but one must have a responsible attitude to one's commitments and work on this.

By the way, we keep saying: Nord Stream-2, Gazprom... But there are five European companies taking part in this project. Why do you mention Gazprom alone? Have you forgotten about them? Five major European companies are working on this project. So, this affects not only the interests of Gazprom but also the interests of our partners, primarily in Europe, of course.

To be continued.

Publication status

Published in sections: News, Transcripts

Publication date: October 21, 2021, 21:25

Direct link: en.kremlin.ru/d/66975

Pdf by:
<https://www.pro-memoria.info>