

ATANAS BUDEV

WILL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES
BE CHEATED AGAIN?

SOVEREIGN EQUALITY
AND THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

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STENO®
PUBLISHING HOUSE

Варна, 2021

**Will Countries and Peoples Be Cheated Again?
Sovereign Equality and the Future World Order**

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Printed and bound in Bulgaria
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ISBN 978-629-241-168-8

www.stenobooks.com

Contents

INTRODUCTION	8
I. POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY VERSUS DANGEROUS GEOPOLITICAL GAMES	20
II. SOVEREIGN EQUALITY AND THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER	54
III. INTERNATIONAL ETHICS AND THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER	81
IV. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS	88

...there must be a universal structural and procedural counterweight against “civilizational” divisions, which could prevent “civilizational clashes”. History has created such a counterweight, as ancient as civilizations, but with interrelations – subject to universalization. Sovereign states are such a counterweight. And for peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation between them the necessary system-forming principle is the principle of sovereign equality.

INTRODUCTION

What would be the consequence of the current global powers' geopolitical bacchanalia: a new world order based on a new balance of global powers, a planetary catastrophe, or something else? The present text is dedicated to the study of "the else". Not because the first two options are improbable, but because the advances of "the else" can reduce substantially the probability of their occurrence and even prevent the worst of them. We should not passively wait for global forces to reach a sudden agreement or commence a fight. All sovereign states have the right to peace, creation, and justice, as well as the legal and moral-political obligation to actively defend this right. The adopted approach in this text distinguishes between the concepts of "world order" and "system of international relations", understanding the former as an international order maintained by a certain balance of power, and the latter as a system based on explicitly not excluding any sovereign states and universal principles and intrinsic mechanisms. The two concepts are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive. The international system, supposedly initiated by the Peace Treaties of Westphalia (1648), has been in constant motion, going through various stages, each of which could be called international (world) order for a specific but limited historical period.

I have the feeling that the term "world order" has been periodically used with the main purpose of defining the aspirations and efforts for the development of a self-sustainable, non-exclusive, and creative system of international relations as unfeasible and utopian. As a consequence, the research and the

subsequent policies focus on the nature of the new world order, on those who would impose and maintain it. Even in the current days of failing neoliberalism, the presumption is that, as before, the new world order will be under the control of a hegemonic state, supported by its allies. It turned out, however, that the current leader (the United States) already has a competitor in the face of an undemocratically run country but one with a phenomenally growing economy, China. The struggle for world leadership (which entails multiple geostrategic advantages) has been taking dramatic forms, threatening international security and hindering the creative development of the system of international relations. I think all this is a self-restraining, erroneous, and very dangerous approach.

Over the last four decades or so, we have witnessed the rise, ideological failure, and significant contraction of neoliberal globalization, associated with two dramatic changes in mainstream politics. The first, beginning somewhere in the early 1980s and lasting to the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009, when the neoliberal globalization whenever possible, has erased efforts for integrated national development (which presupposes, in principle, constructive and profitable participation of sovereign states in the processes of internationalization); and the second – following this crisis, occurred when the ineptitude and the damage inflicted by the elitist neoliberal globalization to international relations and generally – to international development, became obvious and it was rightly subjected to comprehensive criticism. Unfortunately, in some cases, the critics ignored the sprouts of integrated approaches in international cooperation during this period. These included ideas and accumulated experience to tackle poverty and to reduce social contrasts, even as these

problems were deepening precisely due to neoliberalism; achievements in the organization of international efforts to combat climate change and to solve other environmental problems; the results of the debates on identity issues, etc.

In both periods, albeit in very different ways, the role of the sovereign states and the sovereign equality principle, were to a great extent jeopardized: in the first, severely underestimating and undermining the role and weight of sovereign states (and statehood in general) as a factor for development, and doing that in favor of international financial capital and transnational corporations related to it; and in the second, by putting forward the geopolitical capabilities and ambitions of global states to create a new world order, ignoring or even brutally pushing aside primordial rights and aspirations of the vast majority of sovereign states, and with this – rejecting the system-organizing role of the sovereign equality principle.

Why did the neoliberal mainstream politics fail ingloriously in the first case and, I hope, would most likely suffer the same fate in the second? In my opinion, this is due to the fact that by denigrating, trampling, or, at best, neglecting sober alternative voices, it has invariably become an ideology of the ruling elites, mostly oligarchic circles. These circles have made multiple efforts to massively incorporate neoliberal ideology as a leading paradigm in international life. Concepts such as liberal globalism and global liberalism are sometimes confused, but there is a marked difference between them: the first concept is an oxymoron – globalism cannot be liberal, while the second – global liberalism (neoliberalism) – is present, not as a fait accompli or trend, but as an ideology manifesting on a global scale.

Global ideologies have two characteristics: they focus on

establishing and sustaining exclusive rights for the dominating global powers, usually disguised as ideas or necessity; and they are disseminated by all possible means, including by force. Their failure may be delayed, but inevitably and logically will happen. That is because by stubbornly defending the global power status quo, neoliberal ideologists cannot rethink changing realities and could hardly (perhaps only under strong pressure) evolve in a constructive direction. That is also due to sometimes delayed but inevitable response by the deprived sectors, countries, and peoples.

There are some current complications in international relations, in addition to traditional ones, that are often connected with a specific phenomenon – COVID-19 is an example. The corona virus has given rise to all sorts of theories about the post-pandemic development of the world, which in many cases are aimed at making the virus the main culprit for most international problems and misunderstandings, conveniently forgetting or underestimating the essential defects of neoliberal globalization. It would be no surprise that after deciding that they have achieved that goal, the strong of the day will give birth to a new mainstream politics with claims to exclusivity in the “new world order”. The corona virus, of course, is a very important feature of the current international crisis. But as many analysts point out, it did not breed the crisis, only catalyzed it. The real cause is neoliberal globalization.

On the other hand, theories have emerged of a total denial of everything done during the “neoliberal period”, proclaiming the future on the principle of antithesis. Experience should have taught us, however, that denying parts of the historical narrative is a path to nowhere. I cannot accept both, the attempts to disguise neoliberal globalization or to paint history in black and

white, much less some new holistic exercises. In this regard, I allow myself to include in these introductory words a brief retrospective of the main ideas in my works so far for two main reasons: to confirm the pre-coronavirus impasse of neoliberalism so as not to deal unnecessarily with its characteristics in the new text, and to justify my attempt to defend the positive international phenomena that have nevertheless taken place in the last decades despite neoliberalism.

In 2005, the time of the victorious marches of neoliberal globalization, in Buenos Aires was published my first book: *“LO QUE NOS HACE GRANDES: DESARROLLO INTEGRAL Y ETICA EN LA EPOCA DE LA GLOBALIZACION”* (*What Makes Us Important: Integral Development and Ethics in Times of Globalization*). As the title suggests, the main thesis was the non-opposition but rather the need of combining integral development of sovereign states with their participation in the processes of globalization (I later accepted that the correct scientific term for the objective part of these processes is “internationalization”). So, integral development, but without an autarky severance of the relationship with the world criterion and the objective interdependencies, in fact, creates the possibility for predominantly favorable participation of sovereign states in internationalization processes. I affirmed that for the advance and predominance of this constructive combination in the world there is a condition: the development of an international community, built and functioning on the principle of sovereign equality. With such a global agenda, though carried out more slowly, integral, constructive, and ethical forms of international integration could develop. In reality, it did not work out because neoliberal globalization prevailed.

As it became obvious that neoliberal globalization was a mother to some but a stepmother to others, and that it was diluting or depriving of identity national, ethnic, cultural, and other communities, the debate over their identity emerged. The debate was interesting and promising, but once it took a direction critical of neoliberal globalization, it gradually “disappeared” from the attention of a good part of the analysts. In *“INTERNATIONAL DECENCY AND IDENTITY PROMOTION”* (2011), I expressed my opinion that among many really important identities the primary role and mycelium for their development is played by the “overall national identity” – the identity of the totality of agents participating in organized social life in a state. It is known that any identity is an internal self-leavening process, which, however, is constantly exposed to the influence of external factors. The possibility of external influences having a beneficial effect cannot be ruled out, but such an effect could only be obtained if it supports the autochthonous process of development of the country and of the overall national identity of its people. A necessary condition for this is the full respect for the sovereignty of the state, in which this identity is developing, and above all for its sovereign decisions. Defining here is the principle of sovereign equality. This did not and could not happen under neoliberalism. In fact, there were plenty of examples of the opposite – weakening of the internal “leaven”, and in some cases crushing disintegration of identities.

Further on. When, under the pressure of important phenomena and events, it became increasingly clear that disregard for the sovereign state factor was leading to a deadlock, another debate was initiated: the one about the role of international ethics in adding more constructiveness and justice to international

relations. Note, not the role of international law, which has been often deviating from the interests of sovereign states to the interests of other actors in the international arena, and in the first place of international financial capital and TNCs, but the role of international ethics. It was still something to start with. However, this did not happen because the central place of the sovereign states and the sovereign equality of their relations in this ethics were being generally ignored or underestimated. In *“FOR MORE DECENCY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS”* (2013), I tried to emphasize this common flaw and the need for a more decent foreign policy of sovereign states, especially of the most influential ones. Because wonderful international ethics can be developed theoretically, but if sovereign actors do not apply it in practice, everything remains only on paper. Consistent decent international behavior of a sovereign state is not easy to develop. Based on the non-static relationship between interests and values in foreign policy, a country may have strong incentives to be honest in one case and less honest or dishonest in others. Double standards are a typical example. That is why the link between legitimacy and decency is emphasized, which reinstates the vital role of international law. But who assesses the decency of a country’s international behavior? (Who is the judge?, in the words of Thomas Hobbes). Such judge can only be a global international community, built and developed on the basis of ever-larger implementation of the principle of sovereign equality. Its main voice could be the United Nations, but the world organization must be radically reformed on the basis of the sovereign equality principle in order to be recognized fully as such. For the neoliberal globalization, however, this principle is its greatest enemy. Accordingly, the process of reforming the UN system has been at a dead end,

even for small initiatives.

Finally, in “*STATE RELATIONS AND VALUES IN THE EUROPEAN CRISIS*” (2017), I tried to apply the above-described approaches to the development of European integration and the European Union, passing through a systemic crisis. The main issue was the combination of the specifics of interstate relations, supranational institutions and the declared “European” values. The complexity comes from the hybrid and sui generis nature of the European Union. The voluntary delegation of some sovereign rights to supranational bodies and the remaining of the others (the main part) in a national prerogative, do not eliminate the validity of the principle of sovereign equality. The principle has been declared in the Treaties of the Union, but efforts to implement it more consistently (a particularly complex but absolutely necessary task in such cases) have not been sufficient, to put it mildly. It is in this direction that the possibilities for overcoming the systemic crisis are seen. All its components (financial, Greek, the euro and debt in general, migration and solidarity) are primarily due to systemic defects of the European project: a vague political union; continuing dominance of neoliberal views and economic determinism; inability of European elites to fix the structural problems of the integration process and, accordingly, to find adequate solutions to them. An indispensable condition for consistent progress in solving these and other problems is the negotiation of a new political union, in which its interstate character and the competencies of the EU institutions are clearly formulated, without leaving gray areas, as well as the elaboration and introduction of additional and efficient mechanisms, translating the legal equality between all Member States into practical results. The systemic crisis requires a systemic response,

which is currently absent, and this explains today's defects and problems of the European Union.

The outlined retrospective ideas, I hope, would serve as a background and support for the arguments in the text now proposed, especially with regard to the attempts of the neoliberal global mainstream to mutate or replace its failure with old-style nationalism and dangerous geopolitical divisions of the world, including the possible creation of "civilizational mega-regions". The first exaltations on the last topic have already emerged and would most likely spread with corona virus speed "in battle against the status quo". And one day, after a period long enough, the powerful states and international capital of that day will set out, do not doubt this, their "new model of globalization". ...

Meanwhile, the thesis of multilateralism as a constructive alternative to the unipolar world, established after the end of the Cold War, has been working out its way. Many analysts believe that this alternative already partially reflects real international power relations. The trepidation with which the national elites of many developed and developing countries expected the outcome of the US presidential election in early November 2020 has demonstrated, however, that if there is such a process, it is at its initial stage and for the moment it does not have a strong impact on the development of the system of international relations. That is because the latter is evolving continuously, driven by intrinsic principles and mechanisms, while the balance of global and other influential forces is achieved for relatively short historical periods. In other words, the actual "multilateralism" is only a political principle – as such, it is not real multilateralism on legal equality basis, but a historically

limited balance of power. The consistent application of the legal principle of sovereign equality leads to real multilateralism. Nevertheless, today's "multilateralism" can be an important factor in supporting peace, security, and development, not so much as a balance of power and interests of global powers, but as a promotion of the increasing application of the principle of sovereign equality in international life. Otherwise, it would rather contribute to the formation of the above-mentioned "civilizational mega-regions", undermine the sovereignty and exacerbate global geopolitical contradictions. This does not mean that preserving the unipolar world is the better way. I am just saying that the medicine (multilateralism between global powers) could possibly be worse than the disease (unipolar hegemony).

Don't you have the impression that there is ever less talk about building a global international community to help organize international life and address general challenges of humanity; that most analysts are obsessed in discussions about geopolitical strategies and actions of the so-called global powers? In today's international politics, priority is given to geopolitical constructions over the development of such a community. At the same time, the democratization of international relations is not linked to sovereign equality, being placed instead on the ideological rails of liberalism/anti-liberalism.

If I had the opportunity, I would ask the decision-makers of globally powerful western states: What do you worry about more, China becoming the new hegemonic state or sovereign states implementing ever more the sovereign equality principle in the system of international relations? If you are worrying more about a non-democratic state becoming a world hegemonic leader, then you should constantly promote sovereign equality

principle (now and in the future world order) rather than play dangerous geopolitical games, striving for “liberal” hegemony. This is the way to make multi-polarity feasible.

The corona virus has completely exposed the unsoundness and damage of neoliberalism and has proved in a cruel way the paramount and irreplaceable role of sovereign states in international life. There could hardly be more disputes on this issue. However, this should not obscure the other main lesson from the pandemic – the need for equal and constructive cooperation between sovereign states. **More sovereignty in international relations, more necessary is the cooperation on the basis of sovereign equality.** No one is greater than the sovereign decisions, but, on the other hand, there is no other way to adequately meet global and other important challenges and speed up development than the cooperation between legally equal sovereign actors. Otherwise, we will repeat tragic periods of history, and the next pandemic will not forgive us.

The main question that the reader would most likely ask himself is whether and to what extent the specific concepts and ideas in the following text are feasible. God save us from another utopia! I do not claim that the development of the system of international relations along the lines of autonomy – equality – freedom – constructive cooperation is unalterable and immediately feasible. There are many paths and most of them long ones. But as well-known folk wisdom says, “Even the longest path starts with the first step.” On the other hand, many analysts affirm that if the world economy enters a state of depression, political monsters could come into life. Should we wait for this to happen or alternatively, supply the international system with new ideas and constructions to prevent it?

I would like to end these introductory words with one of

Immanuel Kant's philosophical and political approaches. Responding to criticisms of his idea of "eternal peace" (which today's neoliberals have unsuccessfully tried to defile), in *Metaphysics of Morality, Doctrine of Law* (§ 61) he accepts that this idea is unattainable, but "the political principles guiding to the eternal peace, to the creation of such alliances between the states, which serve for the constant approach to it, are not unattainable." Realizing the limitations of analogies as a consistent method, I allow myself to draw an analogy between the principle of sovereign equality and Kant's "eternal peace" – the full implementation of the principle of sovereign equality in real life is indeed unattainable, but the principles and mechanisms leading to its fuller implementation are not unattainable!

The views expressed in this text are entirely personal and do not involve any official institutions.

Atanas Budev

I. POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY VERSUS DANGEROUS GEOPOLITICAL GAMES

The steadily growing geopolitical contradictions between countries with global influence and ambition, the sharp decline in trust between them, and the resumed arms race with frozen negotiations to strengthen international security have put the world in a dangerous proximity to global conflict. There is a general political and moral need for such a development of the system of international relations that would create conditions for lessening geopolitical tensions and favoring peaceful coexistence and international cooperation on the basis of rules, agreed and developed by all sovereign states. The history of the 20th century has demonstrated that when international rules are created by imposing the views and interests of only the Great (now – global) Powers, they are not sustainable over time. In addition, the other (non-global) sovereign states are mostly interested in establishing a stable and democratic international legal order, which, in the opinion of the author of this text, is possible to achieve on the basis of ever-increasingly implementing the principle of sovereign equality.

I am not saying that the conditional division of the world into globally projected and non-globally projected states (with the corresponding distinctions) is theoretically predetermined and obligatory. However, when generalizing, although conditional and unfixed once and for all, the division of countries into global and non-global is a methodological necessity. Besides, attempts to downplay the factor of sovereign states, argued by the processes of internationalization, seem to be intensifying again. Today's global states, as this term is used in the present

text, are the actual continuation of the “Great Powers” as they are known in history. We are talking about powerful countries in economic, technological, military, socio-cultural, and other aspects, globally influential countries, which are the main creators and sustainers of the actual world order and which act in such a way as to remain so in any future world order. The terms “non-global states” and “non-globally projected states”, used in this text, however, need to be clarified. They could be challenged, citing arguments such as integration into the world economy, participation in important international mechanisms and organizations, and others. Is the Netherlands, for example, non-global, with its competitive and integrated into international economic chains economy, with its TNCs and high standard of living, with its efficient membership in the European Union and NATO? How could we define smaller geographically but internationally important countries such as Luxembourg, Singapore, or Switzerland? Yes, their participation in the processes of internationalization is not to be underestimated, but let us ask ourselves: do they receive a correspondingly high degree of legal personality in world politics? I do not think that the answer is in the affirmative, which is why the terms “non-global states” or “non-globally projected states” apply also to them, albeit with some clarifications. Non-global states, by virtue of this characteristic, give priority to the development of the system of international relations over the geopolitical issues of individual global powers or groups around them.

Many analysts would say that the legal principle of sovereign equality is present in many fundamental international documents, including the UN Charter. So what? The whole world history so far is a testament that in one way or another the stronger ones prevail. Why do you think it will be different

now? Come on, a little more realism!

I think it is different now, for two main reasons: the first, the progress of internationalization processes and hence – a qualitatively higher degree of interdependence, which in principle requires a much higher degree of auto-sustainment and development of the system of international relations; and the second, due to the universal need to overcome the growing trend of dangerous geopolitical confrontations against the background of the weakening of the unipolar system created after the Cold War around the United States, the emergence of a serious competitor in the face of China (with likely Russian support) and the growth of new global and regional powers. Global ambitions and escalation of geopolitical contradictions increase the danger of global and other cataclysms, which, in turn, strengthens the instinct for self-preservation of sovereign states, of their security and sovereignty.

The failure of the neoliberal mainstream, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, outlines two competing but often intertwined directions of the efforts of international financial capital and national elites of globally projected countries to steer the evolution of international relations: through “modernization” of neoliberal globalization by recognizing and correcting some of its defects, but preserving its basic essence (for example, by a vague transition from a “unipolar” to a “multipolar” world to “manage better the globalization”); or mainly through the accumulation of geopolitical muscles by global and some ambitious regional players in order to achieve more advantageous and profitable positions in the “new world order”. At the same time, although so far in theoretical terms, other possible options for the development of the system of international relations are being discussed, taking into account

to a much greater extent the interests of the vast majority (ideally of all) sovereign states by establishing and introducing new forms of systemic, equal and just international cooperation.

In the absence of ideologically opposed socio-economic systems that divide and oppose sovereign states, the “good old” geopolitics was brought to the fore to impose a “new world order” and meet global challenges.

There are many **definitions of geopolitics**, among which the current text opted to deal with the version of the British Encyclopedia: “analysis of geographical influences on power relationships in international relations.” We specify, however, that the term “geographical” is understood in its broadest possible sense, encompassing economic, military, demographic, scientific and technical, cultural, religious, and others aspects. There are few analysts who would define geopolitics as a science, while much more emphasis is placed on its practical use. As a theory, relatively close to geopolitics, are the concepts of realism in international politics, which have also accepted state-centrism as the main starting point. It would be pertinent to point out that this starting point is not a fabrication of the realists who reject ideologies in general, but a historical reality that has prevailed over the centuries. Another question is whether this reality should be interpreted as an inevitable opposition between the interests of sovereign countries. I think it should not.

In order to assess more precisely the role of today’s geopolitics in international relations, we will continue with the clarification of the main characteristic factors and circumstances influencing its methods and postulates:

- 1) Direct impact of scientific discoveries and technical

progress on geopolitics. For example, the earlier industrial revolution in the Netherlands and Britain gave them (especially to the second) naval supremacy, making Britain the world's dominant power in the 18th century, and, along with its policy of balancing other major nations, also in the 19th century. Another example is the emergence and spread of railways transport, which changed the relationship between the "sea" and the "land" in geopolitical constructions (H. Mackinder's "heartland" theory, later adopted and modified by Karl Haushofer with his "pan-regions" theory, etc.) and increased the influence of Germany, Russia, and other European continental countries. Yet further, the emergence of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, giving impetus to the West's policy of "containment" to the USSR, but at the same time determining the bipolar model in international relations; the growing role of cyberspace and artificial intelligence nowadays, whose influence on geopolitics is being clarified, but even now some consequences can be pointed out: further relative reduction of the geopolitical weight in the classic military area, population, etc., already manifested by the nuclear weapons. The arms race with increasingly deadly and destructive weapons on operational regime lowers the threshold for potential global conflicts and undermines international security. This trend already reduces the deterring effect, produced by the presumption of guaranteed mutual destruction in a global conflict.

The impact of scientific discoveries and technical progress on geopolitics has not yet been able to qualitatively change the geopolitical contradictions between the "sea" and the "land" states. This is evident from the reaction of major Western (Atlantic) powers (primarily the United States and Britain) to the Chinese "One Belt One Road" initiative. In principle, the

development of the system of international relations may lead to circumstances and times in which land and sea initiatives do not oppose but complement each other. It seems, however, that if such circumstances occur, it will be in a really very distant future.

2) Growing weight of the economic component. However, it does not include only the size of GDP, the pace and quality of economic growth, but also the general socio-economic development in a country, as well as the interest and desire of other countries to communicate with it. The growing global weight of China as a result of several decades of impressive economic growth illustrates very well the strength of this factor. George Friedman and other geopolitical analysts obsessed with the idea that a hegemonic state with its possible allies will determine the rules of the game in every world order, believe, that China cannot be such a country because it does not have correspondent military force and cannot have the indispensable global socio-cultural influence. Without sharing the idea of a necessary hegemon, I would point out that military superiority can be overcome (in our time and in the future – unexpectedly quickly – with new weapons). As for the socio-cultural supremacy, I would remind of the weak socio-cultural influence of the United States in the early 19th century before European monarchies, which had just crushed Napoleon's imperial project, comparing this insignificant influence to the recognized dominant weight of the United States in this area some 100 years later on, especially after World War II.

Economic power and scientific-technical progress are very important, particularly in peace time. They alone, however, cannot make one country a world leader, while, on the other hand, "conquering minds and hearts" is another global illusion,

at least for the foreseeable future.

3) Military power retains its importance as a geopolitical factor, especially in conflict developments, as well as its restraining power due to the persistent and increasing danger of a global conflict with current weapons of mass destruction. Nevertheless, when assessing a country's geopolitical weight, military might can partially and temporarily offset other factors such as economic power, especially in times of international tensions. The current case of Russia is the most typical, but this can also apply to the United States with its efforts to uphold and maintain its role as a world leader. As for China, its desire to complement economic with military power is evident, which, however, despite its second-largest military budget, cannot be compared to the military capabilities of the United States and Russia. The European Union, for its part, relies primarily on the economic geopolitical component and soft power. Unlike other actors with global influence, the EU does not show much desire to significantly increase its military power. In the field of security, the EU relies on NATO, but in recent decades the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been experiencing difficulties of all kinds, from funding to scope and arguments for its existence. Against this background and the "pivot to Asia" policy of the United States, the French President Emmanuel Macron came up with an initiative to build independent European armed forces to protect the interests of the European Union on a global scale, which, however, was met with ambiguity by other member states. The EU's efforts to compensate with "soft power" and the pursuit of moral leadership are not yielding the expected results, because success in this regard depends on many factors, the most important of which, in my opinion, is the combination of development assistance and human rights promotion with

a consistent struggle for inviolability of sovereignty and for sovereign equality. It is obvious that the European Union is not advancing consistently in the latter direction so far, and it is doubtful that it sets itself such a main goal.

The arms race with increasingly deadly and destructive weapons on operational combat duty lowers the threshold for potential global conflicts and undermines international security. This dangerous trend is already reducing the deterrent force of the presumption of guaranteed mutual destruction in a global conflict.

4) Non-globally projected states' behavior. As it has been already mentioned, one of the main defects of both classical geopolitics and its "modernized" versions is the illusion of global hegemonic domination or control, exercised by the most powerful country in the world and its allies. Previous attempts of direct world domination have always failed miserably. I find no reason to believe that current or future attempts would succeed. However, if we assume, theoretically, that there will be a world hegemon again long enough, the dilemma will remain for small and medium-sized countries: "clinging" to him or to his rivals, or uniting efforts to protect their interests against the pressure of global powers. Although the possibility of such unity has been discussed since the times of classical geopolitics, it has been systematically neglected by most analysts. The experience of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War was assessed as not very successful due to the Movement's concentration on non-alignment only with military blocs, underestimation of efforts to defend common economic interests, and lack of clarity on political cooperation while focusing on trade concessions and development assistance. All this can be explained by the international power structure

imposed by the bipolar model, as well as by the fact that many of NAM's member states had just become independent states. For non-globally ambitious countries, of course, sovereign equality and just international cooperation are essential, and in some cases – an immediate foreign policy goal.

For non-globally projected countries, all forms of legal peaceful struggle for equal and just international cooperation and for the development through it of the system of international relations, are or rather should be of paramount strategic importance.

5) Finally, one of the most important characteristics in my view: the non-ideologisation of international relations. Although geopolitics claims objectivity of its postulates and, together with realism, non-ideological approaches, the history so far shows that it has been used for the opposite. This is not just about the pre-war negative experience – the use of the works of Karl Haushofer and his Munich school by Nazism, which is why the term “geopolitics” was a dirty word for many years after the end of World War II. In our time, neoliberalism has been the ideological veil used to disguise the West's global geopolitical ambitions under the US leadership. Regardless of our attitude toward liberal-democratic values, it is an indisputable fact that much of the rest of the world either adhere to different values and policies or is seeking them, frustrated and often repulsed by the selfish geopolitical admixtures of proclaimed Western values. The European Union, which aspires to world moral leadership, rightly insists on international coexistence and cooperation based on rules (I do not see who would oppose it in principle), but unreasonably downplays the most important question – how and who will establish these rules, and how and who will maintain them? And, of course, what will be the role

of the principle of sovereign equality?

There is not much time for adequate answers, given the dangerous global geopolitical counter-standings and the emergence of a number of views on the future that are not in line with sovereign equality. There are already active talks and writings about a new world order of “civilizational mega-regions”, which in the future could translate into severe non-voluntary sovereign limitations or even into an end of the sovereignty of non-central states in such mega-regions.

These and other features of geopolitics as foreign policy starting point and tool of individual countries, rather than a methodology for developing the system of international relations, lead us to the **necessity of distinguishing between political philosophy and geopolitical constructions** in relation to the international system (although both can be degraded in practice to the level of ideologies defending specific interests). But **the distinction is essential** – while political philosophers seek meaning, interdependencies, and interconnections in development in general, raising ideas (optionally holistic) for the constructive development of international relations, without a special role for a particular country or countries, geopolitical analysts operate mainly in historical contexts, targeting specific relationships between countries. In short, political philosophy deals with principles and internal mechanisms of the development of the system of international relations, while geopolitics reveals the possibilities of individual countries to fit into the existing world order or into the emerging new one. To make this clearer, I would like to draw a comparison between the views of two of the most prominent contemporary representatives of the two approaches: **John Rawls (1921–2002) and Henry Kissinger (1923).**

In his major work, “Theory of Justice”, 1971, **John Rawls** expounds an egalitarian-liberal theory of society’s development in a country in the spirit of the social contract tradition. Rawls’s theory of justice has been widely recognized and has had a large number of followers, some of whom decided to “develop” Rawls’ ideas by referring them to the sphere of international relations. However, this approach was denied by Rawls himself. The denial was so emphatic, that he was forced to write a new fundamental work – “Law of Peoples” in 1999. There, he not only formalizes his disagreement but also sets out his views on international relations on the basis of international law plus the concept of moral obligations of well-doing states to assist “peoples living in unfavorable conditions”. For the right to participate in the drafting and establishment of the Law of Peoples, referring in fact to the states, Rawls sets conditions for them either to have a liberal-democratic system of government or to have a “decent” political regime. By “decent peoples” (states), Rawls means countries that do not have liberal-democratic political regime, but are not expansionist, reject war as a tool in international politics, have legal systems able to impose moral obligations on their citizens, and respect their fundamental rights. You would agree that such formulations have very little in common with neoliberalism. It is no coincidence that the “Law of Peoples” has been forgotten and even outright ostracized by neoliberal apologists. It is another question whether countries with liberal-democratic systems should automatically have a place in the Law of Peoples. Historical experience has shown that all states, in order to participate in the Law of Peoples, must meet the aforementioned conditions of decency. In short, one of the most prominent theorists of liberal democracy strongly opposed the transposition of its postulates and approaches into international

life, in which the unifying factor is the international law and criteria of decency agreed by all sovereign actors. Accepting one of the basic realist theses of state-centrism in international relations, the liberal democrat Rawls also manifested himself as an enlightened fighter for peace. Sharing these Rawls' views is one of the main starting points of this text.

Henry Kissinger is an outstanding statesman and master in geopolitics. Although there are significant elements of political philosophy in his works, they do not form a systemic theory. Kissinger is best known for his encyclopedic historical knowledge and rich geopolitical experience. In *Diplomacy*, 1994, Chapter One, Kissinger writes: "Almost as if according to some natural law, in every century there seems to emerge a country with the power, the will, and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the entire international system in accordance with its own values. In the 17th century, France under Cardinal Richelieu introduced the modern approach to international relations, based on the nation state and motivated by national interest as its ultimate purpose. In the 18th century, Great Britain elaborated the concept of the balance of power, which dominated European diplomacy for the next 200 years. In the 19th century, Metternich's Austria reconstructed the Concert of Europe and Bismarck's Germany dismantled it, reshaping European diplomacy into a cold-blooded game of power politics." (*Diplomacy*, 1994, p.17).

Kissinger goes on to say, "In the 20th century, no country has influenced international relations as decisively and at the same time as ambivalently, as the United States." (*Diplomacy*, 1994, p.17), explaining it with two opposing approaches in American foreign policy: by improving democracy in the United States to make one's home a "beacon for the rest of mankind"

(*Diplomacy, 1994, p.18*); and/or by “America’s values that impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world.” (*Diplomacy, 1994, p.18*). In this way, Kissinger in good part explains the development of the system of international relations in modern times with the hegemony of one or another state in certain historical periods, which brings him closer to classical geopolitics. On the other hand, he believes that America must find a way to ensure a peaceful transition to a more stable and multilaterally organized world. Consequently, in the Introduction to his “*World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*”, 2014, p. 10, he concludes: “The mystery to be overcome is one all peoples share – how divergent historic experiences and values can be shaped into a common order?”

As can be seen from the above distinction between Rawls’ political philosophy and Kissinger’s mainly geopolitical constructions, while the former does not directly link his views to the interests and positions of one or another individual state, the latter has such a direct connection to the United States’ policies and leadership. Political philosophy seeks internal springs and intrinsic mechanisms in the development of the system of international relations and their possible use in common interests. That is why political philosophy is a science and geopolitics is not. This does not necessarily mean that political philosophy is always good and geopolitics is always bad. It is much more preferable for them to unite efforts to change international politics for the better by democratizing the system of international relations along the lines of autonomy-equality-freedom-constructive cooperation. Geopolitics could contribute to this if it operates with approaches that provide methodologies for balancing and reconciling the interests

of sovereign states (not powers) on a global and regional scale. This would be a new but constructive working area for geopolitics. Otherwise, it would be stuck at the level of a foreign policy tool of individual countries, especially global ones, with a fragmenting and conflict-causing impact on the system of international relations. Taking the traditional path, geopolitics would intensify the contradictions between global players with the consequent damage to international security and cooperation, and it would not be very difficult at some point to turn these contradictions into open conflicts with global consequences. That's why I call them **“dangerous geopolitical games.”**

The end of the Cold War meant the end of the bloc-ideological division of the world, but not the end of global geopolitical contradictions. The neoliberal globalization set out its objective to subordinate these contradictions to its logic and goals. Not only were the controversies not reduced, but the neoliberal forces actually intensified them, shaping their overall failure. Here, of course, another necessary distinction must be made: between the development of the internationalization processes as an expression of the deepening international division of labor (objective process) and the neoliberal globalization as ideology and policy of some of the elites of powerful states, the international financial capital and related international corporations – ideology and practices, collectively known as “globalism”. The **Globalism** of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century is a product of West-centrism, expressing the interests of the above-mentioned forces but also the geostrategic interests of the Western world. Nonetheless, the essential defects of globalism provoked negative reactions not only in the non-western part of the world, but also in the

western citadels themselves. The ongoing failure of globalism, as already mentioned, has not diminished, but – against the background of and through a number of historical events such as those in Ukraine, Syria and the rest of the Arab world, the South China Sea and others – intensifies the geopolitical contradictions between the West, Russia, and China, as well as the geopolitical differences in the Western world itself. In President Trump Administration’s US National Security Strategy, confirmed in this aspect by President Biden’s administration, the two latter countries were explicitly described as “opponents”, adding Iran and other countries to the group, sparking discussions about their containment. In *Foreign Affairs* (March-April 2019) article, entitled “*The New Deterrence*”, for example, there is a call for simultaneous containment of the three “revisionist” states, noting with regret that simultaneity could have been avoided “if Moscow as a logical geopolitical partner was not unnecessarily alienated by NATO enlargement, which brought foreign armies to its doorstep despite its objections”.

West-centrism, as the most common feature of the international system, began to decline noticeably in the late 20th and early 21st centuries as a result of the rise of non-Western states, of its internal contradictions and defects exacerbated by neoliberal globalization, but also as a result of serious methodological and strategic errors of the West itself. Let us consider the **main geopolitical contradictions West – East** without claiming to be exhaustive, but – yes, with the aim of covering the minimum necessary for basic generalizations.

Russia – As it is seen in the above-mentioned article, Russia’s distance from the West was not only her choice. **The West has made a series of strategic mistakes towards Russia.** These are strategic mistakes even if we assume that the

West has pursued a deliberate policy of weakening Russia and removing it from the group of global powers, which in itself would have been a geopolitical illusion.

The first mistake was the ill-considered expansion of NATO to the East, and especially the way in which it was carried out. Indeed, expansion has happened at the urging of Eastern European countries, and the West could not ignore their demand, but could have rather provided substantial additional guarantees to Russia, not just the NATO-Russia sham committee. Such a guarantee was later conceived by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who during the events in and around Ukraine in 2014 proposed that it receive internationally guaranteed neutrality. Brzezinski, however, had previously claimed that the West had lied to Russia about not expanding NATO and had even envisioned its dismemberment into several countries in the future. Such an approach not only irritated with its arrogance but also aroused historical reminiscences and anxieties in the vast majority of the Russian population. To this error could be added the conclusion of the West that it had won the Cold War unconditionally and, as an unconditional winner, had rights over the defeated. Even if this is the case, and I do not think it is, Soviet communism collapsed primarily from its internal contradictions and defects – but even if we hypothetically accept the thesis of unconditional victory, such an approach to Russia is reminiscent of the Entente's unconditional victory over Kaiser Germany and the sad consequences of the Versailles Treaty... With the big difference that Russia after the Cold War not only maintained its military, including nuclear capacity but also made further significant achievements in the area. **With such assessments and approaches, the West has contributed to the shift in the emphasis of domestic political life in Russia**

from democratization to national revival in its own way.

The second strategic mistake was the imposition and constant expansion of sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the support of the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea was rightly condemned as a striking violation of international law, but instead of imposing sanctions, the West would have done better to admit its mistakes in the events around Maidan, then to understand better the historical and geopolitical complexity of the Crimea knot under the new conditions and to begin a dialogue about its possible unraveling in a calmer time. Instead, it took the position of a judge and imposed sanctions that were not supported by the majority of non-Western sovereign states.

Why do I consider the sanctions to be an inadequate and wrong geostrategic Western reaction to Russia's interference in Ukrainian events? First, because the West has its own (but not admitted) guilt for the resulting geopolitical complication. Secondly, because, with the exception of the sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa, taken in accordance with international law by the UN and receiving practically universal support, sanctions in the history of international relations have generally failed to change the policy of the sanctioned country, even less when it comes to a country like Russia. Thirdly, the sanctions do cause serious economic damage to Russia but have also caused significant losses to Western countries, especially European ones, provoking new divisions between them.

On the other hand, in response to the sanctions, Russia has focused on developing further its military might and achieving possible economic independence and self-sufficiency with good results, for example in agriculture and food security, its long-held dream. This objectively increases Russia's geopolitical

weight and deepens global geopolitical contradictions. Henry Kissinger rightly stated that sanctions are not a policy, but an absence of one. In fact, if we look for any logical explanation for Western policy towards Russia after 2014, we could point to a long-standing geopolitical idea, which has understandably found ground mainly in the United States and Great Britain., The idea referred to the creation of a serious obstacle to the development of relations between continental Europe and Russia, preventing or delaying for a long time the economic integration in greater Eurasia. Such an effect could be obtained in part from Ukrainian events, but its long-term validity is highly questionable, and its other side is the intensification of disunity in the West itself. For example, US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 are not accepted by Germany, not only because of its possible deprivation of profitable and stable gas supplies, but also because of the loss of positions in the Russian market – in order to have the financial means to buy German technology and industrial goods, Russia must have them available, and for now they come mainly from oil and gas exports.

West's third geostrategic mistake was not only underestimating Russia's potential, but also China's phenomenal economic development over decades, which has become a significant alternative for Russia's foreign policy and economic cooperation, not forgetting other important Asian countries. Russia has become a major source of energy resources for China, and China – the main source of technology for Russia. Transport and logistic ties between the two countries have also developed. Coordination between their foreign policies has strengthened, as has military cooperation. True, the two countries have serious interest differences and have not formed a military alliance, but unlike George Friedman, I believe that

the current strategic cooperation between Russia and China could easily develop into such an alliance if geopolitical tensions between them and the West continue to escalate.

The fourth geostrategic mistake of the West (mainly the United States) towards Russia and in general, concerns the dismantling of international nuclear security structures without adequate efforts to replace them with new ones. The trend of a new arms race is the main military threat to international security, and I think it started with the withdrawal of the United States from the Treaty on the Limitation of Missile Defense Systems (AMD) in 2002 (I agree with the Russian president on this issue). This treaty was the cornerstone of the deterring effect of guaranteed mutual destruction in a nuclear conflict, a key pillar of the international nuclear security architecture. A truly uncertain and horrific pillar, but one that should have operated until a fundamentally new architecture of international strategic security was established. After failing to persuade the United States not to abandon the limitation of the missile defense systems, Russia said it would react asymmetrically and remained silent until its announcement that it was creating hypersonic missiles, making the current and possible in the foreseeable future missile defense systems meaningless. Another similar step, explained with Russia's violations, to which it responded with counter-accusations, was the withdrawal of the United States from the Treaty on the Destruction of Medium-Range and Short-Range Missiles in 2019, followed by the withdrawal of Russia, which is regrettable and has the potential to resume old frictions between the United States and NATO's European allies. The United States and Russia have said they will refrain from deploying such missiles in Europe, but this is not guaranteed legally. The

United States also withdrew from the Open Skies Treaty, again arguing that Russia had not complied. With this, they have once again distanced themselves from their European allies, who were interested in this treaty and who, before its elimination, preferred to put pressure on Russia in the direction of its strict observance. The Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (START-III), has been prolonged for five years at the beginning of 2021, very good news that could lead to additional constructive efforts for strengthening international strategic security and stability. The new arms race significantly expands the most dangerous area of the West – Russia contradictions. Remember that the military field is the strongest side of Russia’s geopolitical weight. If the West believes that Russia will not survive economically (as the Soviet Union did not at the time), then this is far from certain, and again the China factor is downplayed.

Finally, there is another important factor: since the end of the Cold War, the West has embraced the neoliberal ideology that has reinforced the illusion of its omnipotence and of the unshakeable leadership position of the US as the only superpower. In the same vein, the US has continued to “administer justice in the world” without (by habit) delving into concrete realities. Each such US approach found fewer and fewer defenders among sovereign states and the world community (an exception was the international reaction to the terrorist acts on September 11, 2001). In the circumstances described above, to which we must add the devastating neoliberal socio-economic changes in Russia during the 1990s, Russia was logically not among the thinning supporters of these American practices. In addition, it turns out that the ensuing decline of neoliberalism so far has not led to alleviation of tensions and to more constructiveness in international relations. Just on the contrary.

The strategic mistakes of the West towards Russia mentioned in the text may give the impression that only the West is to blame for the tensions in their relations. This, of course, is not the case. Russia is to blame for its use of force and disregard for international law, as was the case with the annexation of Crimea, independently of whether the majority of the Crimean population wanted to join it or not. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there emerged a general problem with a significant Russian or Russian-speaking population remaining in Russia's neighboring countries, which in some places was not treated on an equal footing. The problem is not that Russia has committed to defending the rights of this population, but that it is doing so in a way that is inconsistent with international law, putting an emphasis on the territorial aspect of the issue. In other words, – to the detriment of the principle of sovereign equality, awakening the corresponding historical reminiscences. And there are, of course, long-lasting imperial habits and inclinations.

An eloquent indication of the development of dangerous tendencies in the geopolitical contradictions between the West (especially the United States) and Russia is the propaganda engagement (on both sides) of the politically active population and of the general public as well, including on an emotional-patriotic basis. The growing Russophobia in the United States and the American accusations towards Russia, with good reason or not, are a constant topic in the American media space. In the Russian media, on the other hand, is ever more present the topic of the traditionally hostile and aggressive American policy towards Russia with the basic aim of its disintegration or fragmentation, carried out throughout all historical periods, regardless of how Russia was governed. Such evolution of

public opinion in both countries is reminiscent of the escalation of “patriotic” passions in Europe in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War...

Summarizing the aforementioned strategic mistakes of the West towards Russia, it can be concluded that they are the result of prioritizing geopolitical goals over efforts to strengthen the international system!

Having largely overcome the trauma of the collapse of the Soviet Union and secured new powerful weapons, Russia has begun to reanimate its geopolitical capabilities and take respective actions. It is stepping up its Asian foreign policy and establishing a strategic relationship with China and together with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic in 2015 created the Eurasian Economic Union, which has the potential to expand in Central Asia and which Russia is carefully leading to possible political integration. Russia has also been directly involved in the Syrian civil war, turning the internal balance in favor of the Syrian government, while stepping up ties with other important Arab countries. Taking advantage of Turkey’s nationalist foreign policy under President Erdogan, Russia has achieved active co-operation on important international issues and in strategic sectors of the Turkish economy. Russia, Turkey, and Iran have become guarantors of the Astana negotiation process on Syria, and despite differences in goals, traditional and new contradictions, the transfer of this tripartite interaction to other areas or issues cannot be ruled out. Russia has launched large-scale activities in the Arctic Ocean and the possible Northern Sea Route and it is visibly stepping up its ties with countries in Africa and Latin America and so on. In general, Russia’s global “geopolitical awakening” is already causing geopolitical shifts, most of which are met with hostility

by the West, and each of which has either become a source of tension or has the potential to become such a source.

These and other sharp geopolitical confrontations between the West (especially the United States) and Russia are “dangerous geopolitical games” that are increasingly difficult to control at a high political level. We sometimes see better cooperation at the expert level, independently of the deteriorating working channels of communication. This is not normal for a peaceful time.

China – Since the term of President Nixon and the policy of “Chinese card”, the United States to one degree or another (under different presidential administrations) considered that it had levers of influence to guide China’s development to its inclusion in the West-centric system. China, for its part, has embraced neoliberal globalization not ideologically but pragmatically. It has achieved an incredible and long-lasting economic boom, maintaining and developing its specific economic and political systems. By the time the West, and especially the United States, began to realize the illusion that it could guide China’s development, the Asian giant had already become the world’s second economic power (first by purchasing power parity); developed its own high technologies; become the world’s largest creditor and “factory”, linking its economic development not only to that of the United States but also to that of the EU, Russia, Africa, Latin America and, above all, to the countries of East Asia; China has initiated the “One Belt, One Road” mega-project and launched a series of modernizations of its armed forces. It is important to answer the question of why the West and the United States, in particular, have been “tricked” or were simply mistaken in believing that

China would eventually accept the West-centric paradigms? The answer is terribly simple. **Instead of exploring China's unique historical narrative and related internal mechanisms of development, including in the conditions of deepening internationalization, in order to assess correctly its potential, they have steadily followed the path of geopolitical gains and profits, their gains and profits!**

The mega-project “One Belt, One Road” has a high geopolitical content, reminiscent of a concept from the strongest years of classical geopolitics. It has a global reach, although in the foreseeable future it is aimed mainly at Eurasia. President Trump's policy toward China, which identified the Asian country as an adversary and major competitor to world leadership, the global economic consequences of the corona virus pandemic, and other factors have led some analysts to talk about shrinking of the mega-project and even its failing, forgetting about the consistency of China's long-term strategies throughout its millennial history. This reminds me of the experience shared by Henry Kissinger from his first trip to China about 50 years ago when during the flight he was worrying about how to treat the issue of Taiwan with the Chinese. During the talks with Mao Zedong, the issue was not raised by the Chinese side at all, but at the farewell, Mao patted him on the shoulder and told him not to worry about Taiwan, because “we will wait 100 years”...

China has also demonstrated its power with the high degree of mobilization during the COVID-19, while in the West, for a number of reasons, the pandemic inflicted severe damages, the economic dimensions of which seem to exceed those of the Great Depression of 1929–1933. In the geopolitical controversy between the United States and China, as in the case of the United States and Russia, there are propaganda and

hybrid countermeasures in areas of security, trade and monetary policy, illegal acquisition of technology, responsibility for the emergence and treatment of the corona virus pandemic.

Taking into account the already existing trends and the effects of the pandemic, many geopolitical analysts have decided that this would significantly change the international structure of power and would accelerate the transfer of its center from West to East. To some, not very high extent, in the medium term, this is likely to happen, but, in my opinion, it is too early for serious forecasts. Because China's economic expansion in the world is facing significant obstacles, including coordinated ones, and because of China's serious internal problems, the non-resolution or its delayed overcoming could undercut its truly incredible economic growth.

The great danger for China, however, is another one – to slip on one of the main flaws of classical geopolitics – the understanding that every (new) world order must be led or controlled by one leader – and decide that “this honor in the right belongs to itself”. If this happens, China's influence in the world, instead of continuing to grow, will begin to diminish, as negative reactions from third countries will be added to Western opposition. Whether such a hypothesis will make its way so far is difficult to predict. One thing we can be sure of: China will continue to develop on a path of its own, whether it is called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” or another less ideological name. That is why China's message to the world through its Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Munich (2020) Security Conference should be taken seriously, not as propaganda: “the West also needs to eschew the subconscious belief in the superiority of its civilization and abandon its prejudices and anxieties regarding China. It needs to respect

the choices of the Chinese people and accept and welcome the development and rejuvenation of a major country in the East, one with a system different from the West. For China's development and rejuvenation is an important part of human progress and embodies the colorful diversity brought by multilateralism." (*fmprc.gov.cn – 15.02.2020*). At the same time, China is already well aware that the unilateral advantages and vivid practices during the neoliberal period (through unfair trade and foreign exchange policies, open or covered protectionism, infringements of intellectual property rights, force demonstrations in the South China Sea, etc.), gained in the past through Deng Xiaoping's line of "invisibility", have terminated. This is history. Today, China faces a possibility of a direct military clash with the other major global power, the United States, and its allies in East and South Asia. The most tangible and immediate danger comes from the US-China strategic counter-standing in the South and East China Seas.

What is more, a new Cold War is on the horizon. At least that is the way in which analysts assess the speech of US State Secretary Michael Pompeo on 23 July 2020, named by them "Fulton 2". Renouncing "the old paradigm of blind engagement with China", Pompeo affirmed that the USA and other democratic countries "can't treat this incarnation of China as a normal country, just like any other". So he states that "Maybe it's time for a new grouping of like-minded nations, a new alliance of democracies If the free world doesn't change – doesn't change, communist China will surely change us..... Securing our freedoms from the Chinese Communist Party is the mission of our time, and America is perfectly positioned to lead it because our founding principles give us that opportunity." (*US Department of State.html*). Many pages

could be written down to reveal what were the meaning and the objectives of Pompeo's speech. Trying to do that in synthesis is an ungrateful work, but the attempt is worth doing in one aspect. In order to convince other democratic countries to share their assertions, first US leaders should prove that there is a serious problem of international relations, not only a problem of bilateral Sino-American relations, and, second – prove that this new American approach towards China is not an attempt to achieve US geopolitical ends with ideological means. If American diplomacy is successful in this endeavor, the other countries could talk about the issue. Biden's administration is expected to develop some new ideas about US-China relations but it seems that the non-ideologisation is not one of them.

The confrontation between the United States and China, complemented by Russia's geopolitical activity, to a lesser extent by the activities of EU, UK, India, and other countries striving for global significance, is likely to set the tone in the world's geopolitical processes in the first half of the 21st century, though periods of agreement and easing of tensions between them are not excluded. This opposition, especially its military component, is undoubtedly a "dangerous geopolitical game" of great caliber and with unpredictable developments.

The West – there are geopolitical shifts inside the Western world as well. For the time being, they do not cause divisions and sharp oppositions, which could be qualified as "dangerous geopolitical games". Atlantic and European structures continue to exist and even expand, but internal contradictions are already seriously reducing their effectiveness. In the post-Cold War period, NATO began gradually to lose its identity, and with it, according to some, the reasons for its existence. Efforts have been made to develop it as a guarantor of international

security, but the reactions of the rest of the world and the differences between the major member states have frustrated this exercise. NATO only began to revive after Russia's "geopolitical awakening" and its use of force, but intra-Western controversies, fueled by shrinking neoliberal globalization, persisted and tended to grow. The divisions resulting from the struggle between Western neoliberal globalists and national conservatives ruling in the United States (2016–2020), Britain and other countries, as well as the growing electoral influence of similar and even more radical nationalist forces in Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and other EU member countries undermine the already weakening unity of the West. Indicative of the significant differences between the United States and its influential European allies were the highlights in the speeches of the heads of state of the two most influential EU member states at the aforementioned edition of the Munich Security Conference in 2020. French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized the need for the EU to have its own (independent of the United States) strategy for the future and independent military capability (separate from NATO), as well as possible co-operation relations with Russia. German President W. Steinmeier in a noteworthy speech, for his part, said that "And under its current Administration, our closest ally, the United States of America, rejects the very concept of an international community. Every country, it believes, should look after itself and put its own interests before all others. As if everyone thinking of himself meant that everyone is being considered..." (*Bundespraesident Deutschland, Munich, 14 February 2020*). It is true that Biden's administration is trying to change course, repairing some of the damage and leading once again, but it remains to be seen if it would have the means to achieve the

objective.

Under the motto “America is back”, Joe Biden’s administration clearly demonstrates a marked distinction from Trump’s policies, which should mean both the restoration of its commitments to the international community and, above all, to its allies (in the words of President Biden – “our (American) great structural advantage”). Joe Biden’s first foreign policy steps, aimed at neutralizing a number of moves by the previous US administration, show definitely determination and consistency in this regard. At the same time, one cannot expect a simple return to the American foreign policy from 4 years ago, especially in the ways of preserving global American leadership and neutralizing such ambitions of the main competitor for such leadership – China. On the issue of global leadership, there is an impressive unity among the otherwise rather divided American political elite. The tendency of highly dramatizing the problem of global leadership both domestically and internationally could lead to wrong decisions and actions by the United States with serious consequences for their influence in the world.

Take the idea, announced by President Biden, of convening a global summit of democracies. In itself, it is a very good idea, because democratically governed countries are expected in principle to lead the fight for a safer, more creative, and more just world. But the idea can also be developed in a wrong way if it is perceived as a sign of a sharp rise in ideologisation of international relations, followed by respective actions in this direction. 15–20 years ago, the idea of creating a “democratic UN”, with destructive potential for the international community and cooperation, was seriously discussed, and was logically rejected by the vast majority of international analysts, even from countries that were designed to form part of it. In our times

the most effective barrier against dangerous ideologisation of international relations is the active and increasing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality.

A struggle between democracy and autocracy can be waged and is waging, but within non-democratic countries, not in the international arena. Transferred to international relations, it falls victim to foreign geopolitical interests and rather hinders the development of democracy in these countries. This does not mean international passivity in the face of atrocities of authoritarian regimes, but the protection of human rights must be conducted within the framework of international law, which is far from narrow in this area.

The discrepancies between the USA and the EU in international politics are manifested even clearer in practical terms in the fields of security, multilateral trade negotiations, environment, and climate change, the nuclear agreement with Iran, the Middle East, and the Palestinian question, etc., and of bilateral negotiations on trade and economic liberalization suspended in Trump's period. For some time, the COVID-19 pandemic further shook Western unity. From a global geopolitical point of view, however, the most significant change in EU-US relations is due to the US policy of "Pivot to Asia" started by President Obama. According to Joschka Fischer, without the North Atlantic support, Europe will have no choice but to turn to Eurasia, and with the United States facing Eurasia and Europe facing Eurasia, the only winner will be China. Whether Western strategic coordination on China is further confirmed or becomes a new area of American-European contradictions we will see later. In any case, deepening American-European divergences objectively is weakening the coordination of common positions of the West on global issues, accelerating shifts in geopolitical

strata and relations, increasing with it the “geopolitical appetites” of Russia, China and some relatively weaker (so far) players such as India, Turkey, Iran and others. At the same time, Western geopolitical approaches as – first neutralize Russia and then deal with China or vice versa (first attract China and then easily deal with Russia), and only then to proceed to think about the development of the system of international relations and the role of the international community, are deeply flawed. They underestimate the diversity and weight of the rest of the world and historical experience. Things are complicated by the coincidence of intra-Western contradictions and discrepancies with the simultaneous course of systemic crises in both the United States and the EU.

In the **United States** over the past four years, political divisions and opposition between national conservatives and globalists have taken extremely sharp and virtually irreconcilable forms, and this process is likely to continue for a long time. Three acute crises are hitting the country: historic-political (the unresolved racial problem, the actual internal political confrontation); mega-structural-economic (the rifts between financial capital and the real economy), and social (the severe social damage of neoliberalism and the coronavirus pandemic), which are mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, in my opinion, there are chances for some mitigation of American internal conflicts, based on the instinct for self-preservation and common sense motivation. However, much more will be needed to overcome the systemic crisis.

The **European Union** seems to be in a better position only from outside. In addition to current problems caused by the global financial and economic crisis 2008–2009 and other important phenomena such as migration, the European

systemic crisis is due also (and above all) to initial defects and ambiguities of the European project. To the crisis with the euro, the Greek, debt, and migration crises, were added those of solidarity, of the political and financial-economic divisions and contradictions in resolving problems. The systemic EU problems are complicated by methodological errors or inconsistencies: ideological (still dominant neoliberal thinking); economic and structural (market and economic determinism, accompanied by ineffective structural policies); political (inability to deal with inconsistencies between the national policies of countries with different narratives and levels of development), and cultural and psychological (who is more industrious, more frugal, etc.), as well as by the intellectual deadlocks in Brussels' and national elites on existential issues of European integration. The efforts to gradually overcome unity problems have so far reached the so-called "differentiated integration", which obviously does not offer the necessary systemic solutions. The European systemic crisis has also its negative geopolitical implications. Intrigued by its soft power, the EU fell into the trap of wishful thinking and missed (or neglected) the development of international life towards harsher manifestations of Realpolitik. The EU is still unable to fully assimilate Brexit, which, in addition to its economic and geopolitical consequences, should also be seen as a kind of invitation to the Union to focus on clarifying the European project, strengthening internal cohesion and the Union's global projections. The pursuit of moral leadership in the world was not in itself a mistake, but it had to include and even prioritize the increasingly fuller implementation of the principle of sovereign equality. In my opinion, the EU urgently needs to negotiate a new, guiding political union, renouncing the follow-up, try-and-error model, and the leading role of

economic determinism. If Europeans do not know what political union they are striving for, they will continue to hesitate and disagree about ways to reform the union and to reconcile more creatively national and European interests and values, with all the ensuing consequences.

Summarizing, the current geopolitical shifts and counter-standings on a global scale go far beyond what is traditionally known. It is not just about new technologies and their current and future impact on geopolitical constructions and realities, which will be very significant indeed. For this reason alone, one cannot rely solely on geopolitical approaches, based on the current global balance of power, to establish a constructive and just world order. Such an order can be achieved through the joint and equal efforts of all sovereign states.

Both the West and the East (mainly China and Russia) are changing rapidly, maintaining and even intensifying confrontation as a dominant feature of their relationship. Latin America and Africa, which have been traditionally but unreasonably underestimated, have not yet spoken. This trend can only mean one thing – overcoming the conviction of each of the two parties in its own right, which implies some form of subordination of one side by the other, is postponed for the future. This is a destructive pattern that, if followed, will make growing tensions in international relations a constant companion to their development.

The upper views, expressed in general terms, have surely left out significant geopolitical processes and events without due attention. I hope that those exposed still outline the main global geopolitical trends and the dangerous contradictions, real and potential conflicts they contain. Going back to the

beginning of the text, I would like to point out again that the “accumulation of geopolitical muscles” to influence the world order or the vague forms of transition from a “unipolar” to a “multipolar” global world are not the only envisioned alternatives in international relations. We are currently in a state of international transformations, the evolution of which will be the work not only of global players.

II. SOVEREIGN EQUALITY AND THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

Against the background of the described and other geopolitical contradictions and counter-standings, the majority of the analysts focused on geopolitical calculations, assessments, and forecasts of the capabilities of the global powers, their moves, near and far goals. Initiatives and proposals for global powers' summits have emerged to de-escalate tensions in international relations. Simply put, the tensions have risen dangerously and therefore need to be reduced! But this is not the way it happens in life. A conceptual and methodological basis is needed to constructively guide the development of the international system, not simply to settle or mitigate some global oppositions that would probably be temporary. The system of international relations has been reduced to a geopolitical accumulation of muscles, lengthening and hybrid struggles aimed at imposing a new world order that is beneficial to some of the global powers (or may be to all of them?). Efforts to build and develop a global international community in possible unison with internationalization processes have been almost forgotten, although the rejection of the once "popular" and silly ideas in the recent mainstream past, such as the creation of a world government, was justified and necessary.

However, not everything was negative in the decades of dominant neoliberalism. As far as we can talk about a global international community, for the time being it has only one though not very democratically functioning and efficient voice – the UN, from whose real reforming the things could have moved on. Instead, there were and there are ardent talks

about “multi-polarity” or “multilateralism” in general, without interpreting these concepts in the light of today’s circumstances. The engaged world community and non-global sovereign states were confused first by the call for everyone to take care of himself, and then further disoriented by the revived division of the world into democracies and autocracies. Are there any constructive alternatives to all this? I am convinced, there are. I allow myself to hope that the ideas shared below outline in general terms one of them.

The principle of sovereign equality is a system-forming principle and is enshrined as such in the UN Charter, whose Article 2 (1) states: “The organization is built on the principle of sovereign equality of all its members.” The principle of sovereign equality means that states have the same rights and obligations and are equal members of the international community, regardless of differences between them of economic, socio-political, military or other nature.

In the Declaration of the UN General Assembly on the Principles of International Law of October 24, 1970, the concept of “sovereign equality” includes the following elements:

- all states are legally equal;
- all states enjoy the rights inherent in full sovereignty;
- all states are obliged to respect the juridical personality of other states;
- territorial integrity and political independence of states are inviolable;
- all states have the right to freely choose and develop their political, social, economic and cultural systems;
- all states are obliged to fully and conscientiously fulfill their international obligations and to live in peace with other states.

The UN Charter was signed at the end of World War II (26 June 2045) and came into force on 24 October, 1945. The immediate post-war realities substantially influenced the first steps of the new organization. Based on arguments of political expediency, the principle of sovereign equality was not fully applied even in the most important structures of the world organization itself (e.g. the division of the members of the Security Council into permanent and non-permanent and the right of the former to veto). However, the authors of the Charter placed this principle at the heart of the UN system. Why did they allow this inconsistency? In my view, because, proceeding from the key system-forming essence of this principle, although realizing the weight of post-war geopolitical realities, they undoubtedly accepted that over time its increasing implementation (not only as legal but also as international ethical principle) will be possible, as Kant argues the operation of the principles leading to a state without wars. It is known that the practical application of this principle in multilateral and bilateral negotiations and agreements, in international life in general, was the exception (or only on paper) rather than the rule, which is why any attempt to revive its real system-forming function must include ideas, suggestions and efforts in practice. I believe that **the increasing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality must be sought in the consecutive, independent and intertwined constructions in reality of the three main pillars of Kant's political philosophy: autonomy – equality – freedom.** Progress in this regard would lead to real and concrete positive changes in international politics, to a creative and better functioning system of international relations. And the future world order would be assessed in terms of its conformity to such development of the system of international relations.

Internationalization does not change the meaning of the above approach. When seeking in good faith and constructively the intersections of their sovereign interests on the principle of their legal equality, sovereign states do not oppose the processes of internationalization and international cooperation. Exactly the opposite! It is this approach that protects these processes from sudden and destructive failures and makes possible the creation and development of an active international community based on sovereign equality. In this sense, the attachment to the principle of sovereign equality is a litmus test and a basic criterion for democracy and constructiveness in the international arena.

I have often asked myself: How is it possible not to see a real alternative to neoliberal globalization? Instead, nationalist and internationally undemocratic options are pushed forward as destructive alternatives with the probable purpose to be easier overcome by globalism. What I mean as real alternative is advance in possible unison with internationalization without market fundamentalism and its dominance over states' sovereign rights; a creative internationalization through active, equal and voluntary cooperation between sovereign states. In the same vein, I see a real chance for the system of international relations to become self-sustaining and non-exclusive.

For a more in-depth interpretation of **the term “world order”**, the best way for me is to turn again to Henry Kissinger's book *“World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History”*, 2014, (Penguin press), in which such order is defined as a clever balance between restraint, power, and legitimacy. “Every international order, Kissinger writes, must sooner or later face the impact of two tendencies challenging its cohesion: either a redefinition of legitimacy or

a significant shift in the balance of power.” (p. 365). This is the way the world order changes. “To achieve a genuine world order, its components, while maintaining their own values, need to acquire a second culture that is global, structural and juridical – a concept of order that transcends the perspective and ideals of any one region or nation. At this point in history, this would be a modernization of the Westphalian system informed by contemporary realities.” (p. 373).

The Peace of Westphalia is a “reflection of a practical agreement, not a unique moral insight. Reserved from assessments of the absolute in favor of the practical and ecumenical, it is an attempt to crystallize an order from diversity and restraint” (p. 3). “Order in this sense can be cultivated; it cannot be imposed” (p. 8). Kissinger is convinced that “the genius of this system and the reason why it spread across the world was that its provisions were procedural, not substantive”. (p. 27)

From Kissinger’s views it could be concluded that the new world order should be built by sovereign states on a procedural and ecumenical basis, taking into account current realities. There are no ideological conceptions and worldviews in the Westphalian system, and precisely this has made it possible. The difference in this respect between the Westphalian system and the “European Concert” (established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, after the defeat of Napoleon) is obvious: in the order drawn up in Vienna there are such conceptions, worldviews and mechanisms for their imposition. That is why the Westphalian agreements came to be seen as a system (not an order) that is still evolving, while the European Concert was a world order that lasted less than a century.

Another contemporary geopolitical analyst, **Richard**

Haass, President of the US Council on Foreign Relations, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019, affirms that “the most illuminating parallel to the current international situation is the European Concert in the 19th Century.... it (the Concert) provides a model for collective security management in a multipolar world”. It is noteworthy that while one (Kissinger) focuses on generally agreed practical procedures, which are more elements of a system than an order, the other (Haass) speaks of a “collective model of security management”, or an order imposed by global forces. In the same article, Haass hypothetically admits another world order: “a new, democratic, rule-based, modeled and led by middle powers in Europe and Asia, as well as Canada, an attractive concept that simply would not have the military capacity and domestic political will to go far enough. A more likely alternative is a world of weak order, a world in greater disorder.” (*How a World Order Ends and What Comes in Its Wake?*”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019). These two approaches, in my view, illustrate very well the difference between a system of international relations (although Kissinger sometimes speaks of the Westphalian system as an order) and world order.

We need to expand this analysis. **Headley Bull** defines international system as a system between states, formed when two or more states maintain sufficient contacts between them, with sufficient mutual influence on their decisions, to make them behave – at least to some extent – as parts of a whole. This is a good non-ideological definition. At the same time, Bull introduces the concept of “international society”, which is defined as a group of countries aware of common interests and values, adopting a common set of rules for their relations, and building jointly common institutions. With the advent of

the neoliberal mainstream, however, there emerged confusions between the interpretations of the two concepts, culminating in the idea of countries with liberal-democratic political regimes creating their own “democratic UN,” an idea with dangerous and destructive potential for international relations. It was rejected, including by the countries envisaged to become its members, but contributed to the attempts for liberal-democratic ideologisation of international relations and, in practical terms, to the argumentation of interventionism for the purpose of “democratizing” sovereign states from outside.

One of the most prominent representatives of neorealism, **Kenneth Waltz**, gives a different definition of the international system – as a combination of “structure” (ordering system-forming principle), interacting units (sovereign states) and structure (this time as organized in some form supranational international entity). With this definition, Waltz goes a little beyond classical realism, but not so far as to affect its basic ideas. Although Waltz introduces the supranational third element, he considers that this element does not change the nature of the system, which remains anarchic, and in which national interests, interpreted internationally according to their strength, play a decisive role. In this way, Waltz actually proposes a kind of partial “institutionalization” of the postulates of realism, which reinforces inequality in international relations and which tends towards a world order (not a system). This attempt to “modernize” realism in fact distances somewhat from its claim to non-ideologically organized international relations, because in practice it would mean accepting hegemon’s “values” by the supranational structure and because it opens the door to the theory of “sovereign democracy” – in itself a serious theoretical construction, which, however, interpreted in international

relations according to its force, in fact opposes the principle of sovereign equality.

From these and other definitions of the system of international relations, it can be concluded that the system's functioning depends both on its system-forming principles and on the state and trends in the development of its constituent parts – the sovereign states. Neoliberal globalization has systematically ignored the second dependence, forcing sovereign states to compete for proactive participation, regardless of their preparedness and degree of integrity of their development. The damage was, in many cases, appalling, especially for developing countries with significant natural resources but with weak institutions. Such states were looted literally and figuratively (looting potential development capacities). Other countries have joined international integration schemes without the necessary institutional and economic preparation with somewhat less but also negative results. There were also some successful countries in the neoliberal wave (China, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, India, Chile, Vietnam, and some others), which managed to combine efforts for integrated national development with their participation in the processes of internationalization.

The accelerated economic development of the countries of East Asia, especially China, as well as of other parts of Asia (India, some ASEAN member states), in political and theoretical terms manifests itself in the form of promoting various **Asian theories of international relations**, some of which – with roots in ancient times. What they have in common is the emphasis on conceptual pluralism, historical traditions, and the corresponding models of development. These theories have so far not received enough weight in international politics,

subordinated now to Western views. In the process of shifting the center of power from West to East, however, Asian theories and approaches are expected to gain more ground, and for now, it is difficult to predict whether they will gradually incorporate into Western paradigms or develop some forms of interaction or opposition to them. In practice, the East has adopted and assimilated to a large extent some of these paradigms, for example, the basic role of sovereign states in the Westphalian system, while upholding the role of the state as an important factor for development, including in the period of dominant neoliberal mainstream. For example, East Asian countries have embraced the idea and practices of trade liberalization, free movement of capital, the expansion and deepening of economic cooperation, but do not unconditionally accept its (Western) political implications. Of course, one country more, another less, but the general trend is present.

In a broader ideological sense, there is another crossing point – in the relationship between individual and collective rights and responsibilities. In today's world, collective rights as religious, cultural, ethnic, trade union, and other minority rights are broadly recognized, but in the general Western paradigm, the individual occupies a central place, especially in neoliberal constructions. This kind of absolute priority of individual rights is not accepted unconditionally by most Eastern societies and countries, which seek a better balance between them and collective rights, and some even directly prioritize collective rights. Part of these practices is carried out by authoritarian or other undemocratically organized political regimes, but this is not surprising given the above-mentioned differences, especially when targets are set for surpassing economic development. In a peculiar way, this crossing point in a number

of cases manifested itself during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. East Asian countries (China, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, and others) did not hesitate to quickly introduce measures of social distancing and isolation restricting some individual rights, while Western countries needed much more time to adopt this approach, which had its political, social and economic consequences.

I suppose some of these Asian and other approaches are meant by Henry Kissinger when he speaks of incorporating new realities into some modernized version of the Westphalian system “at this point in history.” The main question, however, is how will the new realities be included? According to Kissinger, the United States must strengthen the value side of its foreign policy in order to be able to participate as a leader in implementing necessary radical changes in the system of international relations. Kissinger, however, does not address the consequences of a possible discrepancy between these changes and US foreign policy and American values, a possibility that is already becoming a reality to some extent and that calls into question his (Kissinger’s) methodological sequence. Henry Kissinger, followed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Haass, and others, believe that without American leadership, instead of an orderly transition to a new world order, we will have a much more insecure one. (I believe, on the contrary, that the current chaos will only increase until the world learns to develop international relations on an ecumenical and egalitarian basis.) At the same time, Kissinger has repeatedly spoken of a “multipolar world” and in the book mentioned he makes an outstanding analysis of the various conceptions of world order (European, Islamic, Asian – Chinese and Indian, American), which suggests the need to take them into account in the

transition to a new world order. But the question posed (What would be the next world order?) has other answers as well.

If we accept **the alternative of developing the system of international relations on the basis of the paramount role of sovereign states and the increasing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality** (in my opinion, this is the right way), the international arena would be legally as flat as possible and international institutions – most stable and just, and ultimately most efficient. Violations and deviations from applying sovereign equality principle carried out under whatever allegations, have a lasting legal, political and moral negative effect and undermine actual and potential opportunities for the integral development of the countries concerned. They often lead to long-term structural constraints, unjustified unilateral economic and methodological dependences. It is annoying to repeat well-known truths, but sometimes it is really necessary: observance and more consecutive implementation of the sovereign equality principle does not contradict, on the contrary, it promotes and substantiates aspirations and struggle for democracy and human rights.

Rawls's theory shows that the principle of sovereign equality has points of contact with both idealism and realism in international politics. Sovereign equality provides, in fact, a link between state relations and values on a stable and sustainable basis. With political will, it can be a methodological basis and an effective tool for resolving conflicts of any kind. Therefore, **this principle should be put in front of the brackets of any international political considerations.**

Each sovereign state has followed a unique trajectory of development, has a unique historical narrative with which it has entered and enters in a unique way in the processes of

internationalization. For this reason, the state's fundamental obligation and logical aspiration are to participate in these processes without losing the emphasis on integral national development. In order to guarantee this sovereign right to all countries, it must be based on a universal principle that cannot be any other than the principle of sovereign equality. If there is a basic need for universal law and value, it is precisely this principle.

At the same time, we are witnessing constant and relentless efforts to focus on **other essential aspects of development in pursuit of universalization**: artificial intelligence; welfare state (renewal after coronavirus); the fight against poverty and the growing social contrasts, etc. – topics of crucial importance which, however, without the priority of sovereign equality, would dissolve or be blocked in unsettled international relations and would not lead to the results expected. The constant search for “global” (holistic) explanations of trends and events in international life has its important place under the sun, but it should take into account the need to develop mechanisms for settling relations between uniquely developing countries in order to make these relations peaceful and creative. These theories do not call into question the principle of sovereign equality, but such an effect could sometimes be produced by underestimating its system-forming function and the uniqueness of the development of any sovereign state. Many analysts – globalists almost put a sign of equality between the supporters of sovereign equality and various nationalist movements (both hinder internationalization!?). Others argue or hypocritically posit that activating non-global states for the cause of the growing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality in international relations supports

authoritarian political regimes. Exactly the opposite! It is this thesis, behind which is the aspiration to introduce ideologies in international relations, that makes autocratic regimes look like “fighters for sovereign equality” and in practice strengthens their international positions! It should also be borne in mind that such conclusions and proposals, made on a holistic basis, could give rise to new global ideologies which do not accept or ignore the need for ecumenical, equal, and just international cooperation. The idea “to reset capitalism” of Klaus Schwab could become an example.

In real life, there have been, are, and will be many countries that defend their interests not so much on the basis of this principle, but prioritizing pragmatic goals, occupying a subordinate, but with immediate economic benefits, place in global or regional geopolitical relations. They accept (or are forced to accept) methodological and other dependencies on global or powerful regional players. To the extent that this is a sovereign decision based on an assessment of objective realities, it should not be morally reprehensible. But there is something more important – such an approach cannot be universalized, i.e. it cannot serve as a universal legal basis for international cooperation on a global scale. If in the test cases of attendance to sovereign equality principle the state in question does not take a sovereign principled position, it objectively supports the right of the strong. In other words, life constantly shows that interdependence has a principled and a pragmatic side, which complicates the active participation of many sovereign states in international processes. The way out for sovereign states is to take principled positions, at least on global issues, and, if necessary, to coordinate their positions and organize a broad front on vital issues against the forces of anti-sovereign equality.

In order to be accepted and exercised globally, this approach should meet two conditions: 1/ the rules of the world order must be drafted on an equal interstate basis, i.e. by all sovereign states, for which no one and nothing is greater than the sovereign decision; 2/ Only then we could talk about efficient and fair interstate global, regional or thematic international organizations and institutions. If these are not successful, the reasons should be sought in defects and deficiencies in the fulfillment of condition №1. Of course, as has been pointed out, such consistency can only exist in the ideal case, whereas in real life the dependences of smaller and non-global states force them to seek compromises to protect and develop national interests. The most important thing is, on the one hand, that sovereign states make their decisions independently and, on the other, adopt, in Kissinger's words, a **“second culture that is global, structural and juridical.”** *“World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History”*, 2014, (Penguin press), p.373. Here, too, the adequate fulfillment of the second condition (the acceptance of the second culture) depends on the fulfillment of the first (independent sovereign decisions). That is why **accepting the need for a second, global culture of cooperation, I argue that its “structural and juridical” forms should be negotiated by all countries on an egalitarian basis.** In this situation, I would call this second culture differently: a **“culture of sovereign equality”**. The adoption and development of such a culture is a sovereign decision of each state, but the interest is common for all states.

It is very important to realize the following: in order for the culture of sovereign equality to prevail in international relations, sovereign actors must actively defend and apply it, regardless of the continents and the regions where they are

located, regardless of the integration schemes and even military-political blocs that they belong to. A country's participation in a military-political alliance (say, NATO) or an integration project (for instance, the European Union) should not run counter to the "culture of sovereign equality", especially since the principle has found a place in the founding documents of these organizations. In principle, all international organizations should build on this basis, both in terms of their internal structures and interactions and in relation to third countries. In fact, the application of the principle of sovereign equality is one of the inalienable basic features of this "second global culture". We may have, of course, situations in which a member state of a union in a particular case is forced to choose between its union obligations and its philosophical and political values. What this country chooses is its sovereign right, but it should know that international authority means something in the world of today, and like any authority, it is very difficult to create, but very easy to destroy.

The theory of global justice of the European project "Globe" sets out three directions for achieving such: global justice as non-domination, as impartiality, and as mutual recognition. I will briefly dwell on the first trend, built on the tradition of Franco-German republicanism since Enlightenment times, according to which individuals are protected against their subordination by other individuals through the non-dominating and non-dominated state. I share a large part of the argumentation of the project in this trend: non-domination presupposes political and legal cooperation between equal states; sovereignty is no less a moral and fundamental value than human rights, including because it is a constitutive part of the independence of individuals; states are a legitimate factor in

protecting the individuals living in them; sovereignty is based on the legitimacy of the state and not on its political regime, so it cannot be discriminated against on the basis of assessments of that regime (an exception is made here for genocidal political regimes); international institutions are important, but they must be democratically established.

In this part of their theory of global justice, researchers from the Globe project differ significantly from neoliberalism. They also address a particularly important issue in international relations: how do the principles of sovereignty and sovereign equality relate to the legal and moral-political positions of some sovereign states in defense of human rights in other sovereign states? They do not give a clear priority to one over the other, but rather try to see them as a common requirement for global justice. In real international life, however, the relationship between sovereign equality and respect for human rights gives rise to very different interpretations, expressed in fierce international legal disputes and oppositions. The problem is very old and the cases are countless. They, for example, fit into the current escalating contradictions between the West, on the one hand, and China and Russia, on the other. In my understanding, the legal principles of sovereignty and sovereign equality have priority in interstate relations, but respectively the legal international obligations, voluntarily accepted by sovereign states, including on the issue of human rights (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Helsinki Accords, etc.) are also of utmost importance. This approach also seems incomplete and slightly different from the above-mentioned positions of the “Globe” project. However, it contains a priority, supported by common sense and possibilities for the real international promotion of human rights, which can be best protected and

promoted internationally when this is not done at the expense of sovereign rights.

How does the principle of sovereign equality manifest itself within the various international integration formations and mechanisms? Regional integration has had its achievements in recent decades, adhering to the principle of “open regionalism”, – the EU as a common market, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, and others. They form part of the processes of internationalization and, if well prepared and freely negotiated, are generally in the interests of the participating countries. At the same time, these integration mechanisms have serious problems with the presence of small and big countries, countries with varying degrees of socio-economic development and different historical narratives, as well as with different geopolitical locations and ambitions. Member countries delegate voluntarily part of their sovereignty, but this delegated part of the sovereignty does not disappear – it is transferred to the relevant supranational bodies or institutions. And if the interests of a state are not well represented and defended in supranational bodies or institutions, then there comes a conflict between the “residual” sovereignty of that state and the sovereignty delegated by it. This, for example, is one of the reasons for the existing contradictions between big and small member states with different influences in the European Union. Sometimes these problems become widespread and acute, threatening the cohesion of regional integration mechanisms, but in most cases the centrifugal forces have prevailed so far. These regional integration entities are not perfect, but they are creative. They have nothing to do with the concept of “civilizational mega-regions” that has entered the media. The latter not only evoke historical reminiscences of Karl Haushofer’s “pan-regions” and Samuel Huntington’s idea

of “clashes of civilizations.” These would be gray areas with the overwhelming influence of mega-regional central powers that would eventually dismember the world, depersonalize and subjugate the smaller states to the interests and methodology of the mega-regional powers. In such a hitherto hypothetical development of the world, quite logically the first victim will be the sovereign equality. The claims that these civilizational mega-regions will not affect the political and cultural spheres are naive tales. According to Alexander Dugin, we can imagine the post-global world as several large mega-regions and a number of secondary ones, whose central country will be inherently analogous to traditional empires. (!) But first, fortunately for the nations and their sovereign states, neoliberalism has failed to create a highly globalized world, which makes “post-globalism” a “hanging” category. And second, the internal national forces that once made their decisive contribution to the disintegration of traditional empires are now with more pronounced identity, more independent, relatively stronger, and more developed. In the world, of course, there are wide and less wide civilizational spaces, which do not always understand each other and even openly oppose, sometimes peacefully, sometimes not. All that is needed for peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation is to respect sovereign equality principle between the states of all civilizational spaces.

Recently, in order to attract international support for the idea of “civilizational mega-regions”, the technique of choosing the lesser evil has been used. The logic goes along the following line: sovereign states, even the most powerful ones, are quite shaken by globalism – corporations are gradually pushing out states as the main organizational forms of public life and international relations – they are becoming unrecognizable

political, financial and police conglomerates (something like the British West Company, which originally conquered India) – so the only positive alternative to such a development are the “civilizational mega-regions”. What a logics?! The truth is that both “alternatives” are ideological avatars of globalism, using detours after failing a frontal attack. The point is not that elements of that logic are missing in reality. To one degree or another, some of them are discernible. The problem comes from efforts to make a false dilemma unalterably dooming sovereign states. It is precisely the latter and their struggle for sovereign equality that can stop the “alternative” avatars of globalism.

So there must be a universal structural and procedural counterweight against the “civilizational” divisions, which could prevent “civilizational clashes”. History has created such a counterweight, as ancient as civilizations, but unlike them – with interrelations subject to universalization. Sovereign states are such a counterweight. And for peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation between them, the necessary system-forming principle is the principle of sovereign equality.

Other analysts argue that with the development of mega-regions, civilizational or not, world leadership will not be in the form of global hegemony, but rather “situational, profiled and focused on individual areas of influence”. I would rather compare such “situational and profiled” regional hegemonies to moving sands under international relations – a constant threat to world peace and security.

The system of international relations, which is assumed to have been initiated by the Westphalian peace agreements, continues to evolve. Since these agreements, the world has gone through at least 4–5 specific periods, each of which

could be designated as some kind of world order. The system of international relations is maintained and developed on the basis of principles and procedural rules (sovereignty, sovereign equality, non-interference, etc.), while the world order is maintained mainly by a certain balance in international power structures. In the end, I think that the degree of compliance with the general tendencies in the development of the system of international relations is a particularly important factor for the constructiveness and stability of a world order (and hence for its duration). Of course, I do not mean that the system of international relations is historically predetermined or with linear development. But we know, all of human history, or at least since the decline of the Roman Empire, has passed through many unsuccessful attempts to impose values and worldviews by force, (the Crusades, the Napoleonic Wars to “spread the ideas of the Great French Revolution”; the Bolshevik Revolution and its plans for a “world proletarian revolution”; the two world wars – especially the Second; the two poles of the Cold War and the unipolar world after it; global neoliberalism). This shows not only how easy it is to trample on sovereign rights, what catastrophic consequences it has, but also how difficult it is to maintain in subjugation countries and peoples. Napoleon had said that anything could be achieved with a bayonet, but that one could not sit on it.

In contemporary international life, the slogan of multilateralism is actively used. I do not think that this is the exact term and the defining correct goal for the development of the international system. **Both multilateralism and its antonym – unilateralism – are political-historical rather than juridical terms. The juridical principle, which gives an adequate expression of equality and equal respect for**

sovereign actors, is the principle of sovereign equality. Sovereign equality includes multilateralism; it is its ultimate expression, while the opposite is far from always true. UN Security Council resolution #1973 (to stop the repression of the Gaddafi regime against the Libyan people) was adopted unanimously – it was a multilateral product, some form of multilateralism. We all know what they led to....

A significant obstacle to equal and just international cooperation is the actual poor state of **international law and its role in the system of international relations**. This unhappy situation is due to two main factors: the serious deviations of international law during the around 40-year period of the dominant neoliberal mainstream; and the arrogant disrespect to international law demonstrated by global states, and not only by them. If giving specific examples of the latter is completely unnecessary due to the abundance of violations, for the former I would give the example of neoliberal eclectic and unprincipled mixing of international public and international private law at the expense of sovereign states and in favor of international financial capital and transnational corporations (TNCs). It is about resolving disputes between sovereign states and TNCs mechanism – Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS), effectuated by specially created international courts. Putting on equal legal plane sovereign actors and TNCs is a consequence of neoliberalism, built on its thesis of the declining role of states and strengthening the role of “free” capital, i.e. international financial capital and TNCs. Here, of course, the principle of sovereign equality is inapplicable, since one of the two parts is not a sovereign actor. This approach is a direct attack on the very essence of sovereignty. The reactions in some EU Member States to the courts envisioned in the EU-Canada Free

Trade Agreement (CETA) have led to some democratization of the way they are set up, but not to their replacement by other mechanisms. In this case, the sovereign rights of developed countries are violated, what is left for the cases of protection of sovereign development strategies and sovereign decisions of the developing countries?! There can be many examples, but the conclusion is one – in order to develop the system of international relations towards a fuller implementation of the principle of sovereign equality, the codification of international law must be accompanied by a major overhaul of its development during the neoliberal period. I think international ethics can also help in this regard if the efforts to open more space for it yields results. The issue will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Nations and peoples are the driving force of state sovereignty but in international politics, peoples are represented above all by their sovereign states. Various confusions arise on this issue, which is why more detailed clarification is needed. In an interview the **French President Emmanuel Macron** told “*The Economist*”: “First of all, there is a factor which we may have underestimated, which is the principle of the sovereignty of the people. And I think that the spread of values, of the humanism that we hold high, and the universalization of these values in which I believe, only work to the extent that you are able to convince the people.... Because the sovereignty of the people is in my opinion an unsurpassable factor. It’s what made us what we are, and it must be respected everywhere.» (*The Economist*, November 2019). The content and especially the spirit of this statement deserve respect and positive moral evaluation, but it can also be misleading. When the president of a large and developed country talks about people’s sovereignty

in other countries, I am on the alert. I would not like to interpret Macron's words about people's sovereignty as the only unsurpassable factor in the sense that state sovereignty can be surpassed, but such an interpretation cannot be ruled out. In short, both people's and state's sovereignty should not only be unsurpassable; they must be the obligatory international legal minimum for constructive development of the system of international relations.

It would be naive to just hope and wait for the global states or for some of them to come to such thinking on their own and, at their initiative, to give up their prerogatives and practical privileges legally fixed in the UN system. Very indicative in this regard is the approach of the Russian Federation, expressed in the article of its **President Vladimir Putin** in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on June 19, 2020, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II (and confirmed in his speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2020). In this article, in addition to general assessments and reflections on the war that are not subject for discussion in this text, Putin touches on the creation and development of the United Nations and its place in international life in postwar decades:

“What is the right of veto in the UN Security Council? To put it bluntly, this is the only sensible alternative to a direct confrontation between the largest countries ... Of course, we see that the UN system is now working with tension and not as effectively as it could. But the UN performs its main function as before. The principles of the UN Security Council are a unique mechanism for preventing a major war or global conflict. Quite often in recent years, the calls to abolish the right to veto, to give up the special powers of the permanent members of the

Security Council – are practically irresponsible. If this happens, the UN will essentially become the same League of Nations – an assembly for empty talks, devoid of any levers to influence world processes. How it all ended is well known. That is why the victorious countries have embarked on the formation of a new system of world order with the utmost seriousness, so as not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors..... Our duty – to all who take political responsibility, and above all to the representatives of the victorious countries in the Second World War, is to ensure that this system is preserved and improved». *Rossiyskaya Gazeta, June 19, 2020.*

In fact, President Putin’s approach represents Russia’s interests in the current international situation on this issue. He does not say how he sees a possible “preservation and improvement” of the UN system, “without forceful battles to build a new global hierarchy.” And there is the key. **Calls for eliminating the veto in UN Security Council are not irresponsible; they, on the contrary, are very reasonable and even belated.** They aim to improve the UN system through the fuller implementation of the principle of sovereign equality in international relations, while President Putin’s approach aims to preserve the post-war world order and Russia’s place in it.

This position of the Russian Federation does not hold up also because 75 years after the end of WWII, the international realities are very different from the post-war ones, and the discrepancies of the UN system with these realities are perhaps greatest in the structure and the decision-making process in the Security Council. It is also controversial to affirm that it was the veto power of the permanent members of the Council that prevented a major war or global conflict. While acknowledging the indispensable role of the world organization in this regard,

we can point to other particularly important factors such as the dissuasive influence of the guaranteed mutual destruction in a nuclear conflict, the positions of third countries (much of the rest of the world), the World Peace Movement and others. After all, the unequal status of UN Security Council members and the “special powers of the permanent member states” from political expediency immediately after the end of World War II have long since become completely unjustified and harmful privileges.

On the other side, Russia’s proposal for a summit of the five nuclear states, permanent members of the Security Council, to find ways to ease tensions and meet immediate global challenges can, of course, only be welcome, but its results will not be effective in the long run if the meeting ignores the principle of sovereign equality.

Of course, global powers are also interested in building a more secure and stable world. They will seek to participate (each of them making the most of their geopolitical advantages) as profitably as possible in the power structures of the new world order, but this does not mean that they are willing to risk everything. And the public opinion in these countries is a formidable power. In addition, individual global states, with relatively weaker global positions at the moment, might at least verbally accept in some form and conditionality the “culture of sovereign equality.” However, we should not forget the effect of Talleyrand, the foreign minister of defeated Napoleonic France, during the Congress of Vienna, who actively defended the cause of equality at the beginning of the Congress, but immediately abandoned this approach after France was admitted again to the club of the Great Powers.

Joining efforts by non-global states in defense of the

principle of sovereign equality may sound not so realistic today. Attempts to ideologically deviate from this universal question have not stopped and will continue to follow one after another. Pessimism in this regard has serious grounds. In fact, the inclusion of the first chapter in this text, dealing with the dangerous geopolitical games of global powers, makes sense also as an argument for overcoming this pessimism. **The truth is that the more clearly you are led to global confrontations and cataclysms, or to international entities that subjugate or depersonalize you, the more frequently you turn to your likes.** The pursuit and activity of uniting the efforts of non-global states would stimulate willingness to make reasonable compromises, as has happened, albeit in very different circumstances, undeveloped forms, and limited scope, in the negotiation of the Westphalian agreements.

The escalation of contradictions and conflict behavior in the relations between global powers is, as is well known, reflected in the growing pressure on non-globally projected countries to take a side in this opposition. Obviously, this tendency goes against their sovereign rights and decisions and to the detriment of sovereign equality. This pressure and the “twisting of hands” are most pronounced against countries of neuralgic and flammable regions such as the Middle East, the Black Sea region, Central Asia, and others. It is for this (and in principle) that **the struggle for peace and the struggle for sovereign equality in our time is, in fact, one common cause:** promotion of sovereign equality is a form of struggle for peace, and today’s struggle for peace is simultaneously a struggle for sovereign equality. Sovereign states are the most important factor in this common endeavor, though the role of the world non-state community is also significant. Therefore,

I believe that, given the dangerous global geopolitical games described, **the revival of the World Peace Movement is urgently needed**; it can interact with many other international organizations and movements striving for international public goods.

Recently, especially in times of COVID-19, almost all analysts have talked about the importance of sovereignty, while much less emphasis is put on the principle of sovereign equality. But please don't tell me that goes without saying. Sovereignty is a fundamental principle for the existence of any state, but for equal cooperation between states, the principle of sovereign equality is crucial.

It is also hoped that **new philosophical and moral-political insights** could enter more actively into international life, providing new ideas and instruments for building a safer and more just world. Since neoliberalism is declining, and one of its essential aspects was the pronounced dominance of the material (profits and consumerism) over the spiritual, it is not illogical to expect a certain revival of the spiritual and intellectual life, which in international relations is associated with equal respect for ideas and practical approaches to the development of all countries and peoples, i.e. with the increasing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality.

III. INTERNATIONAL ETHICS AND THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

In the face of the dangerous geopolitical games and complex trends in the development of the system of international relations, especially against the background of what is happening in the world today, to bring the topic of international ethics to the forefront may seem frivolous or even unfortunate. I do not agree for the following reasons:

- Unlike previous historical periods, non-global countries could play an important role in the creation of the new world order due to the increased and largely maintained interdependence in the world. It is these countries that are mostly interested in the ever more growing role of ethics in international relations;
- International ethics, supported by an increasing number of sovereign actors, contributes in principle to the creation of a favorable international environment for the reduction of geostrategic contradictions and oppositions, to the search for international legal ways and compromises for their alleviation and possible resolution;
- In any case, international law will inevitably form the legal basis of any new world order, and international ethics in principle gives impulses to the development of international law, often suggesting necessary decisions;
- International ethics in principle supports the system-forming role of the principle of sovereign equality, which, in addition to its juridical content, carries a strong political and ethical charge;
- International ethics is the necessary fine-tuning in efforts

to achieve a fairer world, a world of more solidarity, to support “disadvantaged peoples” through mechanisms of international interstate cooperation and activities of truly independent non-governmental organizations.

Ethics is a theory of morality that has developed in two main directions: ethics of duty and virtue ethics. The **ethics of duty**, also known as “**deontology**”, considers moral norms as binding and obligatory, with the ability to be universalized, regardless of the attitude of the actor and the circumstances under which he acts. The actor has participated in the creation of moral norms or has accepted them in a sovereign way post factum and from then on his main moral obligation is to obey them. This ethics, based mainly on Kant’s moral postulates, when related to international relations, was present in all significant efforts to develop international law and to establish world international organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN) despite criticisms of their effectiveness. **The virtue ethics**, first developed by Aristotle, consider moral obligations from the point of view of the actor, who decides what his moral response should be in a particular situation – acting with honesty, courage, fear, cunningness, or other qualities. Besides, if he acts consistently, showing positive qualities, he “accumulates” virtue. In other words, the ethics of duty is focused on action, while the ethics of virtue is focused on the qualities of the actor.

In international relations, the two strands of ethics act both in independent and interrelated ways, with the former supporting the development of international law and the latter determining the moral integrity of sovereign actors. Therefore, from a moral point of view, both the actions of a state in each case and its behavior, in the long run, are evaluated. This is

necessary because a country's foreign policy is built and conducted on the basis of two main pillars: national interests and accepted values, which are in a non-static and not always linearly evolving combination. Simply put, a country's foreign policy can have strong incentives to be honest in some cases and less honest or dishonest in others. The double standards are an eloquent example. The phenomenon of "accumulation of international integrity" could only exist as a trend over long historical periods, and even then not without exceptions. This phenomenon cannot follow a guaranteed trend; the assessments of sovereign actors' separate actions should not be replaced by "old glory".

The above does not necessarily mean a high degree of relativism – there simply must be **moral criteria** according to which any significant international action of a sovereign actor is evaluated, regardless of its trajectory and domestic political characteristics. Such a basic criterion is **the relationship legitimacy – decency (integrity)**. A country's foreign policy actions are legitimate when they correspond to the letter and spirit of international law, i.e. to the approved and accepted (through participation in the elaboration or expressed explicit consent) international norms. In other words, duty ethics, which by definition refers to individual specific actions of a state, has a direct connection with the integrity (moral category of the virtue ethics) of that state. Ultimately, the moral foreign policy image of a country comes as a complex expression of both characteristics: accumulated moral qualities and international moral evaluation of each of its subsequent actions. For example, the military intervention of one state (or group of states) in another sovereign state, without specific authorization of the UN Security Council, is by definition not

only a violation of international law but also dishonest. Such was the case of the second Gulf War and the subsequent US intervention in Iraq in 2003, regardless of the goals declared or actually pursued. Another example is the annexation of Crimea by Russia, following the events in Ukraine in 2014, which is illegitimate and dishonest, despite the previous history and even if indeed the majority of the Crimean population wanted the peninsula to join Russia. These and other similar examples have a very negative impact on the constructive development of international relations, “accumulating” in them both illegitimacy and dishonesty. It is difficult to imagine how much and what kind of “accumulation” would occur in case of further exacerbation of the dangerous geopolitical contradictions and conflicts between global powers...

The relation legitimacy – decency (integrity) is fundamental to the nature of the future world order and its stability. That is clear, but it is not all. There are, in principle, circumstances in which this relationship is valid in the opposite direction: for example, in the event of a breach, or substantial deviation of international law, as well as a significant change in international power relations, the sovereign states’ positive examples for actualization and expansion of sources of legitimacy can serve as an important impetus for strengthening the role of international law.

Another criterion in determining the moral international image of a country is the **independence, consistency, and predictability of its foreign policy**, which are not solely individual characteristics but also have a beneficial effect on the constructiveness of the system of international relations as a whole. If a country does not independently take its sovereign decisions and is not respected on an equal footing by its

partners, we cannot expect it to be a responsible and morally active sovereign actor in the international arena. It is worse for countries that believe that their sovereignty is more important than that of other countries. For this reason, in the Declaration of the UN General Assembly of 1970 as an inalienable element of sovereign equality, is the statement that “each State shall be obliged to fulfill its international obligations in full and in good faith and to live in peace with the other States”.

Apart from the criteria, the other main and indispensable factor in assessing the moral side of the foreign policy actions of sovereign actors is the answer to the question – **Who is the judge?** Globally, it cannot be other than a global international community, built on the principle of sovereign equality, and making consistent efforts to ensure its ever bigger implementation in international life. Only such a global international community, self-regulating and not excluding, could pretend to make impartial international moral assessments. Currently, there is no such international community; it could be created by substantially enhancing the role of the UN through its successive reforms in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality.

Until such a community is established, new intermediate mechanisms could be elaborated to promote integrity in international life and to limit indecent actions of sovereign (global or not) states. For example, an **establishment outside the UN system of a globally functioning international ethical body or forum, but not a court**, possibly with regional subdivisions, to assess the ethical content of significant and influential international actions of states, mainly in terms of their conformity to the principle of sovereign equality. How do I generally imagine the effect of the moral assessments of

the proposed international body or forum? For example, in the implementation of the One Belt, One Road initiative it would assess the real benefits for the participating countries, the extent to which their participation is the result of an independent sovereign decision, without “wringing hands”. Or decisions of regional international organizations vis-à-vis third countries. Or decisions on the purposes and scope of international humanitarian operations. Or even in assessing the judgments of the aforementioned special courts for resolving disputes between sovereign states and TNCs (Investor-State Dispute Settlements – ISDS). Of course, decisions are ultimately made by the participating sovereign countries. The ethical body or forum by definition will have no power neither right to change sovereign decisions. In fact, it should protect them in the first place. But ethical evaluation would make dishonest actions more visible and could expose immoral intentions or practices in an international process, event or initiative. In short – it will be only a moral guide.

Objections would immediately arise as: “another bureaucratic structure” suggested, there are so many in the UN system and most of them are inefficient; the participation and methodological influence of the representatives of the global powers in the activity of the proposed entity will again be decisive, etc. What would I answer? In the first place, the proposed international body or forum will be outside the UN system, i.e. outside the privileged positions of the permanent members of the Security Council; it will be formed on a non-state civic basis, as independently as possible; it will only give moral assessments under guaranteed objection procedures. Proposing it outside the UN system does not mean underestimating the world organization, but rather indirectly supporting it in its

efforts to reform itself in a way that is increasingly consistent with the principle of sovereign equality. Secondly, the creation of such non-state international body or forum would breathe new life into the international and national communities in the period of restoration of the paramount role of sovereign states in international relations, preventing this necessary and important process from regressing to the “state of nature”, after which it could be belittled and limited by the interested forces. Thirdly, these moral assessments by definition cannot be above sovereign rights, but they could serve as a moral focus guiding or orienting sovereign and other international actors in creating thematic coalitions on one or another significant international issue. Last but not least, these moral assessments would increase the importance of international ethics in the development of the system of international relations as a whole. The great difficulty, in my opinion, would be not so much the justification of the proposed international body or forum, but the ways of ensuring its impartiality and independence needed in order to be entitled to claim morality and serve as a moral landmark in international life. The hope is that the relevant specialists would offer their solutions.

The “culture of sovereign equality” is a process both in states’ foreign policies and in international life as a whole. In principle, sovereign actors could deliver their advances with conviction and perseverance. The inspiring moral conceptual power of international ethics would help them to be an important factor for the creative and just development of the world, to join the driving forces for shaping the future world order, to contribute for its better correspondence to the constructive development of the system of international relations.

IV. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

In the world of today, and especially after COVID-19, there is a pronounced desire of the states to strengthen their sovereignty. **Neoliberalism is passing, albeit slowly, away. The interdependent world, however, is a reality, regardless of returns and zigzags. Globalism is in decline, but the processes of internationalization continue.** Creative and equitable international cooperation should be developed by states with ever stronger sovereignty, for which no one is greater than their sovereign decisions. Sovereignty and sovereign equality draw a historical line of development, consistent with the processes of internationalization and the need to curb the geopolitical dictates of global powers. However, one should not focus only on these two principles missing the same emphasis on equal cooperation between sovereign states, because this would lead to nationalist-populist approaches and practices that fan the flames of geopolitical bacchanalia. This cooperation requires consistent and relentless efforts because it is more complex and difficult to develop than “solutions”, imposed in one way or another; it logically takes much longer to achieve. Nevertheless, in my opinion, this is the right way to develop a peaceful, secure and just world.

This is however the bright prospect. Unfortunately, there is another, bleak prospect of uncompromising and reckless struggle for supremacy between global powers, sometimes replicated by regional ones, which can lead to global conflicts or to the creation of more or less closed “civilizational mega-regions” around each of them. According to Samuel Huntington, the central powers of such civilized mega-regions (civilizations)

will negotiate on world peace and security issues, as well as on other global issues. If they do not, “clashes of civilizations” will follow, which was more likely. Notwithstanding these predictions, the dangerous geopolitical trends and games, we observe, would not necessarily transform into unprincipled compromises and agreements for an unjust world order or a world divided into “civilizational mega-regions” (or “hard spheres of influence”). To prevent such tendencies, the activity of all is necessary: sovereign states, peoples, communities, and individuals.

How can non-global countries increase their international weight and participate according to their possible joined capabilities in the formation of the future world order? They must be sovereign in taking their decisions, act legitimately and consistently, “accumulating integrity” and overcoming their methodological dependencies on global states. This approach enhances their subjectivity and strengthens sovereign equality in international politics while giving priority to the development of the system of international relations over global geopolitical confrontations.

How feasible is all this? There is an incredibly impressive monument in the Indian capital Delhi – Gandhi leads the Indians to extract salt from the sea water, thus eliminating this dependence on British colonial rule. At that time with such non-violent methods of struggle the people of India gained their independence. Why this example could not be followed now by peaceful sovereign states with their efforts to influence the formation of the future world order, encompassing it to sovereign equality and creativity? The sovereign states should be able to form common and thematic coalitions on global issues and challenges, above all on the cardinal issue of

confirmation and increasing implementation of the principle of sovereign equality in international relations. Otherwise, their development, to one degree or another, will be subordinated, depersonalized, and, ultimately, forced to lag behind, unable to reach its potential. Such a negative process, in my opinion, will be guaranteed if, in one form or another, the so-called “civilizational mega-regions” make their way.

It is clear to many observers that diplomacy, as an effort to understand the other and find common ground with him, is getting rare, especially on a global scale. The basis, on which this essential characteristic of diplomacy could be restored and developed further, is through achieving equal respect for others and their sovereign rights and interests. In other words – through the acceptance of the principle of sovereign equality and of the possibility for it to be implemented to an ever more increasing degree.

To the heirs of the great geopolitical thinkers Halford Mackinder, Carl Haushofer, Samuel Huntington, and others I would respond in two words: sovereign equality! It is easy to say. But in order to obtain and develop its system-forming function in real life, including in the future world order, a titanic struggle of nations and their sovereign states is needed. They should not leave themselves to be cheated again! Sovereignty and sovereign equality are not automatically connected; they may stand up and develop together in a continuous and persistent struggle. The results of this struggle will define the development of international relations as a system of autonomous, equal, free, and constructively cooperating sovereign states, in constructive accordance with the processes of internationalization, including a consecutive creative and just world order.

Atanas Budev

**Will Countries and Peoples Be Cheated Again?
Sovereign Equality and the Future World Order**

First edition

STENO Publishing House
Tel. +359 52 608 546, +359 800 222, +359 886 700 953
e-mail: stenobg@gmail.com
www.stenobooks.com

ISBN 978-629-241-168-8