

How I see it

Vladimir Putin

On 1 July 2014, President Putin addressed his country's Ambassadors, setting out some of the acute challenges and difficulties facing Russia. This was some two weeks before Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was brought down in eastern Ukraine.

... The potential for conflict is growing in the world, old contradictions are growing ever more acute and new ones are being provoked. We come across such developments, often unexpectedly, and we observe with regret that international law is not working, the most basic norms of decency are not complied with, and the principle of all-permissiveness is gaining the upper hand.

We are observing this in Ukraine as well. We need to understand clearly that the events provoked in Ukraine are the concentrated outcome of the notorious deterrence policy. As you may know, its roots go deep into history and it is clear that, unfortunately, this policy did not end with the end of the Cold War.

In Ukraine, as you may have seen, at threat were our compatriots, Russian people and people of other nationalities, their language, history, culture and legal rights, guaranteed, by the way, by European conventions. When I speak of Russians and Russian-speaking citizens I am referring to those people who consider themselves part of the broad Russian community; they may not necessarily be ethnic Russians, but they consider themselves Russian people.

What did our partners expect from us as the developments in Ukraine unfolded? We clearly had no right to abandon the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol to the mercy of nationalist and radical militants; we could not allow our access to the Black Sea to be significantly limited; we could not allow NATO forces to eventually come to the land of Crimea and Sevastopol, the land of Russian military glory, and cardinaly change the balance of forces in the Black

Sea area. This would mean giving up practically everything that Russia had fought for since the times of Peter the Great, or maybe even earlier – historians should know.

I would like to make it clear to all: this country will continue to actively defend the rights of Russians, our compatriots abroad, using the entire range of available means – from political and economic to operations under international humanitarian law and the right of self-defence.

I would like to stress that what happened in Ukraine was the climax of the negative tendencies in international affairs that had been building up for years. We have long been warning about this, and unfortunately, our predictions came true. You know about the latest efforts to restore, to maintain peace in Ukraine. Foreign Ministry staff and the Minister himself took an active part in this. You know about the numerous telephone conversations we had on this subject. Unfortunately, President Poroshenko has resolved to resume military action, and we failed – when I say ‘we’, I mean my colleagues in Europe and myself – we failed to convince him that the road to a secure, stable and inviolable peace cannot lie through war. Until now, Mr Poroshenko was not directly linked to the orders to begin military action; only now has he taken full responsibility, and not only military, but political, as well, which is much more important.

We also failed to agree to make public the statement approved by the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine on the need to maintain peace and search for mutually acceptable solutions. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that after the ceasefire was declared, no substantive, as they say, negotiations on the settlement of the situation ever began. Virtually, a disarmament ultimatum was given. However, even the ceasefire was not bad overall, though not enough to settle the situation on a long-term basis in a way that would be acceptable to all the people living in the country, including those in its south-east. A constitution was made public, but it was never discussed. Even within Ukrainian society there is discussion of whether it is good or bad, but nobody definitely ever discussed it with the east.

Of course, everything that is going on in Ukraine is the internal affair of the Ukrainian state. It pains us to see people dying, especially civilians. As you may know, the number of refugees in the Russian Federation is growing. We will, of course, provide assistance to all those who need it. However, killing journalists is unacceptable. I reminded the Ukrainian President of this yesterday, yet again. In my view, we are witnessing a focused effort to liquidate all media representatives. This applies to both Russian and foreign journalists. Who could be afraid of fair reporting?

Probably those who commit crimes. We strongly hope that the Ukrainian authorities act on their promises to carefully investigate the crimes.

More new hotspots are appearing on the world map. There is a deficit of security in Europe, in the Middle East, South-East Asia, in the Asia-Pacific region, and in Africa. The global economic, financial and trade systems are becoming unbalanced, and moral and spiritual values are being washed out.

There is hardly any doubt that the unipolar world order did not come into being. Peoples and countries are raising their voices in favour of self-determination, civilizational and cultural identity, which conflicts with the attempts by certain countries to maintain their domination in the military sphere, in politics, finance, the economy, and ideology.

I know this has no direct bearing on us, however, what is being done to the French banks can cause nothing but indignation in Europe in general and here as well. We are aware of the pressure our American partners are putting on France to force it not to supply *Mistral* ships to Russia. We even know that they hinted that, if France does not deliver the *Mistrals*, the sanctions will be quietly lifted from their banks, or at least they will be significantly minimised. What is this if not blackmail? Is this the right way to act in the international arena? Besides, when we speak of sanctions, we always assume that sanctions are applied pursuant to Article 7 of the UN Charter. Otherwise, these are not sanctions in the true legal sense of the word, but something different, some other unilateral policy instrument.

In the past 20 years, our partners have been trying to convince Russia of their good intentions, their readiness to jointly develop strategic co-operation. However, at the same time they kept expanding NATO, extending the area under their military and political control ever closer to our borders. And when we rightfully asked: 'Don't you find it possible and necessary to discuss this with us?' they said: 'No, this is none of your business'. Those who continue insisting on their exclusivity strongly dislike Russia's independent policy. The events in Ukraine prove this. They also prove that a model of relations full of double standards does not work with Russia.

Nevertheless, I hope pragmatism will eventually prevail. We need to get rid of ambitions, of attempts to establish a 'world barracks' and arrange everybody by rank, or to impose single rules of behaviour and life, and to finally begin building relations based on equality, mutual respect, and concern for mutual interests. It is time we admit each other's right to be different, the right of every country to live its own life, rather than to be told what to do by someone else.

In its foreign policy Russia has consistently proceeded from the notion that solutions to global and regional conflicts should be sought not through confrontation, but through co-operation and compromise. We advocate the supremacy of international law while supporting the UN's leading role. International law should be mandatory for all and should not be applied selectively to serve the interests of individual select countries or groups of states, and most importantly, it should be interpreted consistently. It is impossible to interpret it in one way today, and in a different way tomorrow to match the political goals of the day.

World development cannot be unified. However, we can look for common issues, see each other as partners rather than competitors, and establish co-operation between states, their associations and integration structures. These are the principles we were guided by in the past, and they continue to guide us now as we promote integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Strengthening close friendly ties and developing mutually advantageous economic co-operation with our neighbours is the key strategic priority of Russia's long-term foreign policy.

The driving force behind Eurasian integration is the trio of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The Agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union, signed in Astana on 29 May 2014, symbolises a qualitatively new step in our relations. A powerful centre of economic development that attracts business and investors, a common market is being formed in Eurasia. That is why our CIS partners show a strong interest in this union. I hope that, very soon, Armenia will become a full-fledged member of this union. Negotiations with Kyrgyzstan are at an advanced stage. We are open to other Commonwealth states as well.

As we promote the Eurasian integration project, we are in no way trying to separate ourselves from the rest of the world; we are ready to consider prospects for creating free trade zones both with individual states and with regional associations and unions, primarily the European Union, of course.

Europe is our natural and most significant trade and economic partner. We strive to find new opportunities to expand our business co-operation, to open up new prospects for mutual investment, and to lift trade barriers. This requires an upgrade of the legal contractual base of our co-operation and the stability and predictability of ties, primarily in such strategically important areas as energy. Stability on the entire territory of Eurasia and sustainable development of the EU economies and Russia depend on well-co-ordinated co-operation based on consideration for mutual interests.

We have always held high our reputation as a reliable supplier of energy

resources and invested in the development of gas infrastructure. Together with European companies, as you may know, we have built a new gas transportation system called Nord Stream under the Baltic Sea. Despite certain difficulties, we will promote the South Stream project, especially since ever more European politicians and businessmen are coming to understand that someone simply wants to use Europe in their own interests, that it is becoming a hostage of someone's near-sighted, ideological approaches.

If we return to Ukraine, the violation by Ukraine of its commitments regarding the purchase of our natural gas has become a common problem. Kiev refuses to pay its debt. This is absolutely unacceptable. They have not paid for November-December 2013, though there were no arguments whatsoever then. Our partners are using blatant blackmail – this is what it is. They demand an ungrounded reduction of prices on our goods, though the agreement was signed in 2009, and the parties complied with it in good faith. Now, as you may know, the court in Kiev has lifted all accusations against Ukraine's former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, who signed the contract. Thus, the Kiev court authorities admit that they have done everything right not only by international law, but also by Ukrainian law as well. But they do not wish to comply, or to pay for the product already received.

As of 16 June 2014, as you may know, we have transferred Ukraine to a pre-payment system, so they will get exactly the amount of gas they pay for. Today they do not pay; therefore, they get nothing – only in the so-called reverse mode. We know all about this reverse mode: it is a fake; there is no reverse mode. How can you supply gas two ways along the same pipeline? One does not have to be a gas transportation expert to understand that this is impossible. They are playing tricks with some of their partners: in fact, they are getting our gas and paying some western partners in Europe who are not receiving their volume. We are quite aware of this.

We are not taking any action at this point only because we do not want the situation to deteriorate. However, everyone should draw the proper conclusions from the situation. The main thing is that honest gas consumers and suppliers should not suffer from the actions of Ukrainian politicians and bureaucrats.

Generally, all of us – Ukraine, our European partners, and we – should seriously consider how to reduce the probability of any type of political or economic risks or *force majeure* situations on the continent. In this connection, I would like to remind you that in August 2015 we will be

marking 40 years of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. This anniversary is a good reason not only to return to the basic principles of co-operation on the continent that were laid down in 1975, but also to jointly make them work, to help them take root in practical European politics. We have to work consistently to rule out any unconstitutional coups in Europe, any interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, the use of blackmail or threats in international relations, or the support of radical and neo-Nazi forces. All of us in Europe need a sort of safety net to make sure that Iraqi, Libyan or Syrian – and unfortunately, I have to say, also, Ukrainian – precedents do not become contagious. This is especially dangerous for the post-Soviet area, because the states have not yet gained political or economic strength, they do not have a stable political system. It is very important that the constitutions of these states be treated with great care and respect.

Why is this important – and not only in the post-Soviet area, but all over Europe? Because even in those countries of Western and Eastern Europe where things seem to be going fine, there are quite a few hidden ethnic and social contradictions that may become acute any moment, may serve as ground for conflicts and extremism, and may be used by external forces to rock the social and political situation to achieve an illegitimate, undemocratic change of power with all the negative consequences.

Firm guarantees of indivisible security, stability, respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs should become the basis that we can use to build a common space for economic and humanitarian co-operation that would spread from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean – I already spoke of this as a single space from Lisbon to Vladivostok. I would like to ask the Foreign Ministry to draft a set of proposals in this respect, with special focus on the inadmissibility of any attempts to influence internal political processes from the outside. The job is to work the traditional principle of non-interference into the modern European realities and initiate a serious international discussion on the subject.

We also need to continue strengthening the eastern vector of our diplomacy, to more intensively use the impressive potential of the Asia-Pacific region in the interests of the further development of our country, primarily, of course, of Siberia and the Far East. We should continue to direct Russia's policy in Asia and the Pacific at maintaining the security of our eastern borders and at supporting peace and stability in the region. The coming leadership of Russia in the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), and the SCO and Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

(BRICS) summits, to be held in Ufa in summer 2015, work to support this.

We need to strengthen overall partnership and strategic co-operation with the People's Republic of China. We can say that a strong Russian-Chinese connection has taken shape in the international arena. It is based on a coincidence of views on global processes and key regional issues. It is of primary importance that Russian-Chinese friendship is not directed against anyone: we are not creating any military unions. On the contrary, this is an example of equal, respectful and productive co-operation between states in the 21st century.

We intend to develop further our relations with our traditional partners in this area of the world: with India and Vietnam, who are playing an ever greater role in the world; with Japan and other countries, including the states of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). We intend to use further the potential of the growing markets in Latin America and Africa and the great experience of political and humanitarian relations with the countries there.

Our contacts with the United States of America are of great importance for the whole world. We do not intend to shut down our relations with the USA. True, bilateral relations are not in their best shape, but – I would like to stress this – not through Russia's fault. We have always tried to be predictable partners and conduct our affairs on the basis of equality. However, in return, our lawful interests were often ignored.

Regarding various types of international meetings, if we are assigned the observer role, without a decisive vote on key issues that are of vital importance to us, then such meetings are of little interest to us. We should not sacrifice our vital interests just for the sake of being able to sit and observe. I hope our partners will eventually come to understand this obvious fact. So far, we have been hearing ultimatums or mentoring. Nevertheless, we are ready for dialogue, but I would like to stress that this should be an equal dialogue ...