

MICHEL FOUCHER

Titulaire de la chaire de géopolitique appliquée au Collège d'études mondiales (FMSH-ENS) ; Ancien directeur du Centre d'analyse et de prévision du ministère des Affaires étrangères

Igor YURGENS

Our next speaker is Michel Foucher. I had the honour of meeting him about 10 years ago when he was the ambassador in Riga. Strategic cooperation between Russia and France has always been something to reckon with in the geopolitics of the world. Your view on what is happening in Russia would be very interesting for us.

Michel FOUCHER

Let's accept the challenge of projecting ourselves in 2037. This is an interesting exercise for a former director of the Policy Planning Staff of the French Foreign Ministry. It is a very risky one even if we have to keep in mind fundamental and structural elements in the long life of any state, history and geography, which informs about the interplay between internal factors and international context.

Let's start with the international context.

The only country where long-term projections are made public by political leaders is China, as we have heard recently, with several key dates:

2020: average affluence and outdoor projection (Yidai Yilu or Silk Roads: 4 of the 7 members of the permanent office of the central committee of the CCP had actively contributed to the One Belt One Road); the time of restraint in foreign projection is over.

2035: a modernized army.

2049: World's first power with a world-class army.

And it is the Chinese factor that will be decisive in the overall positioning of Russia in 2037 and of others countries in Eurasia and in Indo-Pacific as well. This is the real "game changer".

The Chinese challenge is even more pressing for the United States, which are confronted with a contradictory situation where the first economic partner – a co-dependence- is at the same time the first strategic rival, at least in Eastern Asia.

The Chinese affirmation is also a challenge for the European Union, which is both a huge market and a target due to the European technological advance. A former French Prime Minister told me that a high-ranking member of the international department of the Communist Party had this formula; who controls Europe controls the world. Mackinder is back and I am not sure this is good news.

China's rise is based on a solid ground: economy. Like in Europe and in the US. This is where Russia is lagging behind. From 1955 to 1985, USSR and China had the same GDP. In 2037, according to OECD forecasts, the gap will be of 6 to 1 (4583 BN \$US in ppp and 33 232; 25983 for the USA and 15277 EU 15).

The second factor is that the USA will look at them less as a European power. What has started last year is a deep trend. American people don't want anymore to pay the heavy cost of being the constable, the guardian of the world international liberal order. The sheriff put his star down. This is a long-term trend.



Between now and 2037, divergences between Washington and Brussels have grown in many respects. And the EU has grown more autonomous under the leadership of Paris and Berlin to face the global challenges.

A positive outcome of this new landscape in 20 years time – a common Chinese challenge and an evolution of the transatlantic relation – could be a better understanding in Russia and Europe of their shared interests. I say Europe, not the West.

The exit of cold war has been failed. Let's find something else. The new international context doesn't give us a wide margin of error.

2037 will mark the beginning of a 4th presidential mandate since 2018. President Sergueï Choïgou will have found his successor after two terms. The regime of visit ban in the EU will have been cancelled in 2024 at the latest, in the context of his election.

Which are the Russian interests in 20 years time?

In 2037, Russian population is 1,7% of the world total in a territory large as 13% of the world land surface. Russia remains under-populated and the equipment in modern infrastructures is still very expensive.

The Russian power is strong in military, geopolitical and diplomatic realms.

Before 2037, The Eskadra is active in the Black Sea (with more than 30 warships: 4 classical submarines, frigates, patrol boats and corvettes) in the Mediterranean, in the Arctic and, less, in Western Pacific, in cooperation with Japan after the signature of a peace treaty.

Russia is active in the UN Security Council since she has got important results in mediation in crises areas, starting with the Middle East in the 2020 decade.

The asset of energy is real, as long as oil is key for transport. But in the next 20 years, the system will change. One example: the mayor of Paris has decided that no car will be allowed to drive in the city in 2030.

So the real issue for Russia is the state of its economy at the global age. To-day, its economy is not diversified enough to take benefit from globalisation. The range of exports is narrow.

I quote a remark made by the Russian International Affairs Council in June 2017: "The underdevelopment of the Russian economy and its governance institutions poses a much more significant threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity than realistic military threats that Russia is already well protected from. It is impossible to overcome this underdevelopment in isolation from the increasingly globalizing outside world". Isolation or not? A key choice.

I'd like to prove it with a single example: let's hope that in 20 years time, modern Soyouz rockets will be launched again from Kourou in French Guyana. The decision to stop them was taken before the Western sanctions and has affected Russian technical capacities, according to a yesterday afternoon speaker.

Governance of climate issues and Arctic Ocean will be facilitated by the cooperation of first class scientists on both sides.

Russia is certainly one of the countries that took less benefit from globalisation. This is a structural internal problem of Russia. And old-fashioned zero-sum game geopolitics is not helpful in that respect. And everybody knows that the economic interaction which China and India, due to Western sanctions, is weak.

In my view, the EU may and should play a role in the modernisation of Russia in the new global context. Nothing new in a long-term perspective since the first flow of foreign investments was blocked by the October revolution one century ago.

Why working with Russia to fill the gap between its strong external power and its inclusion into the global economic game? First and foremost, because it is in the interest of the European Union.

A more open and modernizing Russia is a huge market next door. And European companies have already started to invest in the Far East development program where a fresh spirit of entrepreneurship is blowing.

If we come back to geopolitics in 2037, let's adopt an optimistic stance. Border quarrels between the EU and Russia will have been solved. Ukraine will become a neutral state like Finland. We need to remember a remark made in 2005 by Vaclav Havel: "Russia doesn't know exactly where it starts and where it ends. The day where we will decide, quietly, where the EU end and where the Russian Federation starts, half of the tension between them will disappear". This perspective could provide a sense of security and make obsolete the obsession of a territorial glaciis.

The OSCE will have regained its role and a more relaxed Nato-Russia council will have expanded its mission to sketch a new framework of security for the continent and a part of Eurasia.

Of course, to think long term needs to remind history. Since the 18th century, the role of Russia in the European concert has been put on the table. It's an invariant. The question we are facing is not, in y view, to draw a grand design for international order but to start with regional orders in Europe and the Middle-East. There are three types of orders: balance of power (Metternich), empire and force (Bismarck) and law, which we should come back to. Huge task. But I hope that in 2037, the 4 spaces formula agreed in St Petersburg in 2003 will be implemented. As we know, institutional innovations take time to reach maturity.

If we are not able to set up a new European order in the next 20 years, a new European concert, we will remain weak in the international sphere and be unable to promote stability in the critical neighbourhood that EU and Russia are sharing. Our common future will be bleak.

Igor YURGENS

Bipolarity, with which we started, works for you internationally. Your analysis of the role of China, our role together with China, and the role of the United States, fits into bipolarity. However, regarding the internal bipolarity of Russia, you decided in favour of Shoygu, which is a little bit depressing for some of us. However, you have decided, and we will try to follow.