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THE PROBLEM OF THE UNRECOGNIZED STATES OF THE POST-SOVIET SPACE IN THE POLITICS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Abstract. *The article focuses on the analysis of the problem place of unrecognized / partially recognized states and frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Its aim is to identify the key features of the Russian policy toward self-proclaimed republics, which should help to formulate an objective view of the tools used by the Kremlin in international relations. The methodology of the research includes a set of approaches (systematic, objectivity, historicism) and methods (comparative and functional analysis, induction, deduction, case studies). This makes it possible to characterize fully the evolution of Moscow's attitude towards the separatist movements of the post-Soviet space (from friendly neutrality through a covert support to a full use as a tool of a hybrid aggressive policy aimed at restoring imperial greatness); to explore Russia's military and economic policies regarding Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" ("DPR") and "Luhansk People's Republic" ("LPR"); to assess the risks posed by Russia's position to a regional security and the stability of neighbouring countries. The scientific novelty of the article is to summarize the material on certain conflict cases precisely from the point of view of*

Russia's role in their exacerbation – thus different examples of violations of the state sovereignty of the post-Soviet republics are considered through the prism of the Kremlin's contribution to the escalation. **The Conclusions.** In the article it is emphasized that Russia is primarily responsible for supporting the functioning of several unrecognized states in the territory of the former USSR. At the beginning of the 1990-ies, Moscow was not the sole initiator of the conflicts that led to this situation – however, it successfully used it to secure its presence in key areas of a regional space, and subsequently placed this deposit at the service of its imperial ambitions. Following the revision of Russia's approach to the world security environment in the mid-2000-ies, the Kremlin uses the factor of self-proclaimed republics to put pressure on the neighbouring countries, including by resorting to the practice of artificially creating separatist movements as one of the elements of its own hybrid strategy. It is emphasized that the majority of the unrecognized post-Soviet states are completely dependent on the Russian Federation in the fields of security and economics – thus, they are devoid of any sign of independence, and should only be regarded as an integral tool in Russia's revanchist neo-imperial policy.

Key words: the Russian Federation, Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, unrecognized state.

ПРОБЛЕМА НЕВИЗНАНИХ ДЕРЖАВ ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКОГО ПРОСТОРУ В ПОЛІТИЦІ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ

Анотація. У статті аналізується місце проблеми невизнаних/часткововизнаних держав та заморожених конфліктів на пострадянському просторі в зовнішній політиці Російської Федерації. Її **метою** є виявлення характерних рис російської політики щодо самопроголошених республік, що має допомогти у формуванні об'єктивного погляду на інструментарій, застосований Кремлем в міжнародних відносинах. **Методологія дослідження** включає комплекс підходів (системність, об'єктивність, історизм) та методів (порівняльний та функціональний аналіз, індукція, дедукція, кейс-стаді). Це дає змогу охарактеризувати у повному обсязі еволюцію ставлення Москви до сепаратистських рухів пострадянського простору (від дружнього нейтралітету через приховану підтримку до повноцінного застосування як інструмента гібридної агресивної політики, спрямованої на відновлення імперської величі); дослідити військову та економічну політику Росії стосовно Придністров'я, Абхазії, Південної Осетії, так званих “Донецької Народної Республіки” (“ДНР”) та “Луганської Народної Республіки” (“ЛНР”); оцінити ризики, які російська позиція створює для регіональної безпеки і стабільності країн-сусідів. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає в узагальненні матеріалу стосовно певних конфліктних кейсів саме з позиції ролі Росії в їхньому загостренні – таким чином, на перший погляд різні за характером та причинами приклади порушення державного суверенітету пострадянських республік розглядаються через призму внеску Кремля в ескалацію конфлікту й отриманих від цього бенефіцій. **Висновки.** У статті підкреслюється, що саме Росія несе основну відповідальність за підтримку функціонування кількох невизнаних держав на теренах колишнього СРСР. На початку 1990-х рр. вона не була єдиним ініціатором конфліктів, які призвели до такої ситуації – втім, вдало використала її для забезпечення своєї присутності у ключових районах регіонального простору, а згодом поставила цей депозит на службу своїм імперським амбіціям. Після ревізії російського підходу до світового безпекового середовища в середині 2000-х рр. Кремль використовує фактор самопроголошених республік для тиску на країни-сусіди, в тому числі звертаючись до практики штучного створення сепаратистських рухів – одного з елементів власної гібридної стратегії. Наголошується на тому, що більшість невизнаних держав пострадянського простору перебувають у повній залежності від РФ в сферах безпеки та економіки – а отже, позбавлені будь-яких ознак самостійності, і їх варто розглядати лише як невід'ємний інструмент російської реваншистської неоімперської політики.

Ключові слова: Російська Федерація, Донбас, Абхазія, Південна Осетія, Придністров'я, невизнана держава.

The Problem Statement. After the end of the Cold War, the post-Soviet space became the scene of global transformations that changed the geopolitical map of the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of fifteen recognized independent states.

However, under the conditions of destabilization, uncertainty and loss of control by central authorities over certain territories, the activation of separatist ideas in parallel led to the emergence of a number of self-proclaimed quasi-state entities.

As this region has remained a part of the Russian so-called imperial heartland for centuries, we must emphasize that Moscow's position was extremely important for the state-making processes within its borders. Its historic authority and status of a central regional power have inspired some politicians and leaders to turn to the pro-Russian orientation, rejecting the policies of the new national elites of the former Soviet republics. Initially, this became one of the sources of a local separatism. Subsequently, as the Russian Federation regained its potential and embarked on strengthening control of its immediate geographical environment, the support of such agents of influence became one of the Kremlin's foreign policy instruments. In some cases, this even takes the form of a complete artificial construction of the problem of "separatism" and its use as a tool of a hybrid aggression. It can be reasonably argued that Russia's position is a determining factor that influenced the conditions of creation and existence of quasi-state entities of the post-Soviet space, and today forms the prospects for the further evolution of each particular case. Thus, exploring the main features of the Russian policy on the subject is a key element in understanding the essence of the problems that have been destabilizing the region for several decades.

The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches. The problem of the post-Soviet unrecognized states and Russian policy towards them was studied by a number of researchers. During recent years, we can specially highlight works of S. Fischer, K. Büscher, F. Smolnik, U. Halbach, A. W. M. Gerrits, M. Bader, H. T. Koelle, J. Larsen, T. Nagashima, V. Jeifets, N. Dobronravin, S. Markedonov, S. Baymukhametov. Among Ukrainian researchers we should pay attention to the results of the scientific work made by P. Hai-Nyzhnyk, L. Chuprii, A. Holtsov, V. Ishchenko, L. Kovryk-Tokar, O. Telenko, M. Zamikula. Important sources of materials on the topic are the memoirs (such as work of Russian general A. Lebed) and the articles of the current political leaders.

The Purpose of the Publication. The purpose of this article is to identify the main features of the Russian policy towards the self-proclaimed states within the borders of the former Soviet Union. For this purpose, we consistently analyze the evolution of the Russian approach to the problem, examine the military political and economic components of Moscow's interaction with the quasi-entities, assess the level of control that the Kremlin has over them nowadays.

The Statement of the Basic Material. It is in the territory of the former USSR that most of the unrecognized or partially recognized states of the European space are located. From the early 1990-ies, Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, the Republic of South Ossetia, the Republic of Abkhazia belong to this category. Since 2014, the list has been expanded with regimes that were established in the uncontrolled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions – with the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Also, we should add to this some less well-known and short-lived manifestations of separatism and pseudo-separatism. Thus, during the first half of the 1990-ies the Gagauz Republic sought to secede from Moldova; in Georgia, similar ambitions were demonstrated by Ajarian separatists; finally, for a short period of time, the status of an unrecognized state was formally claimed by the Crimea – however, the situation quickly changed when its actual occupation by the Russian military was underpinned by a formal annexation.

As we can see, most of the precedents of separatism are related to the period of the beginning of the 1990-ies, when in the conditions of the collapse of the USSR, some of

the local elites turned to the realization of the state-building ambitions. Taking the situation from the standpoint of the Russian Federation, we consider it erroneous to impose an undeniable responsibility for these events solely on Moscow. In fact, at the first stage Russia had a considerable number of internal problems, the solution of which distracted the authorities' attention from the active interference in the affairs of the former Soviet republics. Undoubtedly, some circles of the Russian political elite had their interests in the conflict zones – and under the conditions of weakening of the central governmental control even used the state resources for their protection. However, during the beginning of the 1990-ies, we did not see any evidence of a centralized and planned Russian strategy aimed at intensifying a local separatism – rather, it was a matter of local initiatives of certain political circles and elite representatives, justified by business interests, personal ambitions and understanding. For instance, in the case of the Transnistrian conflict, the key role of the 14th Army Commander Alexander Lebed in opposing Moldovan forces trying to regain control of the region is a well-known fact. In many aspects he acted on the basis of his own vision of the situation and his own understanding of the interests of the Russian Federation – not according to the specific instructions and plans drawn up in Moscow. He even got some criticism from the central command, which tried to implement a non-intervention policy in the conflict zone (Lebed, 1995). Thus, it was this semi-professional, in some ways “amateurish” approach that characterized the first reaction of the Russian authorities to the “sovereignty parade”. However, the initiative actions of specific Russian politicians and field military commanders made a significant contribution to preventing the rapid defeat of separatists' forces at the beginning of the 1990-ies. And only when the central government in Moscow consolidated its position, it began to coordinate actions in order to use the situation to its own advantage – on the basis of its own military potential and threats of its use. For instance, the support of the Abkhaz and Nagorno-Karabakh separatists was used to destabilize Georgia and Azerbaijan, who tried to implement too independent and self-contained policies. The experts believe that this was one of the factors that forced Tbilisi and Baku to give up part of their ambitions and join the CIS (Fischer, Büscher, Smolnik, Halbach, 2016, p. 12). In any case, this approach of the Russian Federation resulted in the freezing of some conflicts. It also led to emergence of the unrecognized state entities of varying degrees of perspective and success.

In the XXIst century geopolitical concepts, which provided for the creation of a strong Russian state with a belt of political, economic, and security-dependent allies / clients in the post-Soviet space gained popularity. In the foreign policy of the Russian Federation at the beginning of the 2000-ies there is a clear line of the Russian authorities on the formation of a separate regional center of power around Moscow (Kovryk-Tokar, 2013, p. 212). Having recovered from the transformational crises of the end of the XXth century, and receiving a new leadership of Vladimir Putin and his surroundings, who cherished the hope of regaining the status of a global player and center of power in international relations, Russia began to re-evaluate its political vectors. At the same time, it turned out that the presence of the self-proclaimed states was a kind of a hidden deposit for the Russian authorities – an unusual resource that could be used to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet space. An important milestone in the process of changing Russian open position on the issue of the unrecognized states was the Kosovo precedent. According to many experts, it changed the context of this issue and laid the groundwork for reviewing the official Russian approach (Jeifets, Dobronravin, 2017). A discussion in the Russian Parliament, launched in the spring of 2008, illustrates the truth of this statement. The nature of the conversations and its rhetoric demonstrate the signal, which

Russia was giving to the world about its position on the issue. They showed that the Kremlin, in a full compliance with the revisionist vision of the world order declared in Munich the year before, was ready to intensify its international activities without fear of confrontation with the West, and allow a departure from the traditional orientation on the fundamental principles of international relations (Fischer, Büscher, Smolnik, Halbach, 2016, pp. 10–11). This was confirmed by the presidential initiatives to open consular offices in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, cooperation intensification of the Russian state bodies with representatives of these unrecognized states, and an official documents recognition of individuals and legal entities. Thus, Russia was preparing to imitate the US policy toward Taiwan regarding Moscow-oriented quasi-formations of the post-Soviet space (except Nagorno-Karabakh case, since its status was directly related to Russia's strategy of playing on the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation) (Kobrin'skaya, 2008, p. 2). However, only a few months later, the Russian authorities demonstrated a more radical approach. Having provoked a conflict with Georgia over South Ossetia, the Kremlin effectively occupied the Tbilisi-uncontrolled Georgian territories and recognized their independence as a demonstrative step. By this, Moscow gave a direct answer to the Kosovo precedent and demonstrated a clear ambition to apply for a global leadership based on a "special model" of relations with the surrounding actors (Hai-Nyzhnyk, Chuprii, 2016, p. 106). Thus, the Russian Federation showed readiness to intensify its aggressive policies in traditional areas of interest and lack of respect for the territorial integrity of other state actors. The West's weak reaction to these events only encouraged Moscow to a further escalation.

During recent years, the Russian Federation demonstrated a new approach to the problem of the unrecognized states. The Kremlin uses it as a tool of a direct aggression against its neighbours. Russia no longer simply supports certain separatist movements, responding to the objective situation and contributing to the intensification of the conflict. It simply initiates the conflict, artificially forming the separatism problem. The movements and groups created in this way are devoid of minimal signs of independence – they are completely controlled by Moscow and depend on its financial and military assistance. In this specific format the aggression against Ukraine was developed, resulting in the occupation of the Crimea and the part of Donbas (Fischer, Büscher, Smolnik, Halbach, 2016, p. 9).

Despite the specific nature of each case, today we can confirm that almost all unrecognized or partially recognized states of the post-Soviet space are totally dependent on the Russian Federation (the only exception is Nagorno-Karabakh, which is oriented on Armenia – but it is also supported by Moscow indirectly, through its allied relations with Yerevan, thus giving an opportunity to blackmail Azerbaijan in order to keep Baku under some Russian influence (Holtsov, 2017, p. 18). In fact, their existence is supported solely at the expense of the Russian factor, both in the economic and the security fields.

For instance, in the economical context the occupied regions of Georgia are completely dependent on Russia. In 2016, South Ossetia's own contribution to the budget was limited to 8% – the other part was provided by a financial assistance from the Russian Federation (Markedonov, 2016). In the case of Abkhazia, the situation is a little better – as Sukhumi has some potential for an independent economic activity. However, experts also estimate the high level of Russia's contribution to the budget of the republic. Even officially more than 50% of the Abkhaz budget is received from Russia through direct a financial aid or trade (Telenko, 2018, p. 449) – but unofficially this sum is even larger. In 2017 the Russian contribution to it amounted to 4,7 billion rubles; in 2018 – to 4,3 billion rubles. It is estimated

that during the period of 2008 – 2015 Russia provided near 71,6 billion rubles to Tskhinvali and Sukhumi (Baymukhametov, 2019). Also, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have virtually no foreign economic relations outside their partnership with Russia. Transnistria costs Russia much less – and here Moscow supports the local authorities by helping to provide the region’s population with pensions and health care systems, implementing housing programmes (Baymukhametov, 2019). Another recipient of the Russian funds are the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (“DPR” and “LPR”). These entities are solely sponsored by Moscow. The exact size of such help is difficult to estimate, since the parties hide the accurate data. The experts agree that Russia’s annual expenditures in this area amount to more than \$ 3 billion (Baymukhametov, 2019). The funds are channeled from two sources – in the form of a direct funding (shadow activity) and through the Commission for Humanitarian Assistance in the Donbas Republics, headed by Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation Sergiy Nazarov (an open activity). Moscow tries to compensate these costs by fully exploiting the industrial potential of the occupied territories. However, the Ukrainian experts estimate that the chances for reaching these indicators are very small (Chernysh, 2019). These “investments” have no economic benefits for Russia at all. They are motivated solely by political reasons. The economic dependence of the self-proclaimed republics on the Russian Federation is compounded by the comprehensive implementation of the Russian standards in their economy.

A separate feature of Russia’s economic policy towards the unrecognized and partially recognized states is the direct control of their economic resources and infrastructure. Such policy is an element of Moscow’s “hidden annexation” strategy. For instance, Russian Railways controls the Abkhazian railway infrastructure. Oil from the Abkhaz shelf is also exploited by “Rosneft” company (Gerrits, Bader, 2016, p. 301). The Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation is responsible for the infrastructure development of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Rejection of customs restrictions on trade actually transforms their economies into the part of Russia’s economic space (Kobrinskaya, 2008, p. 3). In the case of the occupied territories of Donbas the Russian Federation resorts to another strategy. Not recognizing officially the independence of the so-called “DPR” and “LPR”, while fully controlling these pseudo states, it applies a predatory strategy by resorting to the direct exploitation of the region’s industrial infrastructure and natural resources. There is a clear evidence of the thieves’ export to the Russian territory of equipment and documentation from the Ukrainian enterprises, which began during the active phase of the conflict. Nowadays, the Russians manage coal production in the occupied territories. However, it is by no means a matter of trade relations – only the use of shadow schemes controlled by the Russian secret services (Chernysh, 2019).

In order to hide its own role in supporting local conflicts in the post-Soviet space, the Russian Federation actively uses existing links between the unrecognized republics. For instance, South Ossetia is actively used to cover the Russian activity in the territories of the so-called “DPR” and “LPR”. Local companies actively use the South Ossetian Bank – an institution established in a similar quasi-state, which, however, has official branches in the Russian territory thus serves as a channel of access to the Russian banking system (Chernysh, 2019).

Similar to economy, the military component of the Russian policy towards the unrecognized post-Soviet states was dominant from the outset. An important element of the Russian intervention in the conflicts around the self-proclaimed republics was the peacekeeping policy. To legitimize its presence in the conflict zones (namely in Transnistria,

Abkhazia and South Ossetia) Moscow turned to this tool. This was made to gain credibility with the Western partners and to secure dominant positions in certain regions.

Nowadays, the Russian Federation is actively using the territories of the unrecognized and partially recognized states of the post-Soviet space as springboards that surround the Russian national borders as a forward bastion. After the war of 2008, the Russian commanders initiated the creation of military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were put into service the following year. In 2009, Russia signed agreements with the authorities of the self-proclaimed republics to deploy its permanent contingents on their territories for a term of 49 years, with the possibility of its automatic prolongation for another 15 years. From 7 to 8 thousand Russian servicemen armed with modern equipment serve in the occupied Georgian territories (Military Balance, 2018 p. 206). In parallel, the Russian Federation supports the development of the so-called national armed forces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the years that followed, the implementation of security agreements only emphasized the dependence of the self-proclaimed republics on the Kremlin. As of 2018, local military units at the disposal of local authorities are in fact integrated into the Russian military structures (Kuimova, Wezeman, 2018, p. 3).

In the territory of the self-proclaimed Transnistria Russia has been holding a contingent of 1,500 troops since the beginning of the 1990-ies. Formally, it was primarily intended to ensure the protection and export of the Soviet weapons from the territory of the unrecognized republic. However, at the beginning of the XXIst century, the process of transporting a military equipment was actually completed – but Moscow was in no hurry to reduce its military presence. Nowadays the Russian contingent is in fact the guarantor of the protection of the Russian interests in the region and the tacit evidence of support for a local separatism (Zamikula, 2017).

In the case of the pseudo-republics of Donbas, Russia has a total control over their military capabilities. It was created and maintained solely with the help of Russia's financial and logistical assistance. From an organizational point of view, the units that form the "armed forces" of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" are integrated into the hierarchical command structure of the Russian Southern Military District. The Russians created two army corps from them – the First (in Donetsk) and the Second (in Luhansk), which maintain the illusion of the existence of an independent rebel army. In fact, they are directly subordinate to the command of the Russian 8th Army. Moreover, in order to enhance the military potential of the quasi-republics, Russia's own military units are used, operating on a rotational basis in the territory of Ukraine. The weapons available to the so-called separatists are of the Russian origin only and should be considered as an integral part of the military might of this state.

The Russian Federation has resorted to such a strategy for several reasons. In its revanchist policy, the Russian authorities try to regain the status of a superpower in the new system of international relations. Relying on long-known concepts of spheres of influence and a global competition within the international space, it seeks to "capture" certain regions, without allowing other powerful actors there. The deployment of military bases in this case is an element of this strategy, which should prevent the strengthening of the position of the United States of America in the Caucasus and the Black Sea space.

Also, the presence of military contingents allows to increase a political influence on the countries of the region. It becomes a deterrent that consolidates the situation in a format that is favourable to Moscow. The Russian bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are designed to prevent Georgia from a successful implementation of Euro-Atlantic integration processes

(Markedonov, 2011). The “creeping occupation” of the Georgian territory, which was carried out during recent years with the direct involvement of the Russian servicemen, plays an important role in these processes (Larsen, 2017, pp. 2–4). Similarly, the conservative stance of the Russian leadership on the Karabakh conflict is actually turning Azerbaijan and Armenia into hostages of Moscow.

At last, but not least, we should point out the importance of the military component of such policy. The geographical location of the Russian forces on the territories of the unrecognized entities is by all means strategically important for the improvement of the Russian military potential. The bases in Transnistria and the South Caucasus create a kind of frontier defense. At the same time, they can act as a springboard for the offensive. The Russian presence in Abkhazia is also fully in line with the Black Sea region’s militarization strategy. It is an important element of Russia’s plan to turn this region into an anti-access and area denial (A2/AD)zone.

Russia’s political influence on the unrecognized republics of the post-Soviet space was also strengthened by means of the passportization process (Nagashima, 2019). Provision of Russian citizenship to local people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was one of the reasons for the escalation of the situation in 2008. It was also used as an excuse for the Russian military intervention – as the Kremlin stated that it tried to defend the Russian citizens from Georgian forces. In later years the process continued, and now the same strategy is used in the case of Donbas. It demonstrates the Russian approach to this conflict, and creates a direct additional threat to the national security of Ukraine.

The analysis of the situation around the self-proclaimed states of the post-Soviet space and Russia’s policy towards them allows us to propose classification of the cases, which were characterized in the current article. In terms of preconditions, sources and circumstances of the formation of such problems, they can be divided into three groups. The first includes the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where a local separatism had a real ethnic basis. In Transnistria, it was caused more by a political confrontation between elites; although to some extent it was based on the Russian identity of the region’s population. Instead, in Donbas, the separatist movement was artificially formed solely due to the external Russian intervention.

From the point of view of Russia’s current formal perception of the problem of the self-proclaimed states, it should be emphasized that Moscow is officially recognizing independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In particular, it has made efforts to ensure that a similar decision is made by its international satellites and client states. This allows researchers to use the term “partially recognized states” in relation to the occupied Georgian territories, which distinguishes them from other self-proclaimed actors (Ishchenko, 2016, p. 210). However, in our opinion, it is necessary to understand clearly that in this case, the recognition is only a formality – because it was carried out exclusively by the occupier and his few allies. Therefore, an unbiased analysis of the situation proves that in reality the status of these territories does not differ from other examples considered in the article.

Regarding the ideological context of Russia’s approach to individual cases, we can see differences in Moscow’s position concerning the regions where it supports separatism (or directly initiates the problem) under the banner of protecting the Russian population (which coincides with the concept of “Russian world”), and on ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus. However, from a political point of view, nowadays all these areas are the elements of a single strategy aimed at ensuring the regional dominance of the Russian Federation.

The Conclusions. Russia plays an extremely important role in the development of events within the precedents of the frozen conflicts and the creation of self-proclaimed states in the post-Soviet space. It uses these destabilizing factors to form a favourable atmosphere within a regional space, in which the above-mentioned quasi-republics become instruments of its foreign policy. The Russian policy in this area has passed several stages of development – from friendly neutrality through a covert support to a full use as a tool of a hybrid aggressive policy. At the last stage, Moscow implements a new strategy – from now on it initiates pseudo-separatist movements (such as in Ukraine), thus artificially creating the conditions for the formal declaration of new independent states that actually function exclusively in the territories occupied by Russia. The latter thesis is confirmed by their total dependence on the Russian Federation – in political, economic and military terms. In recent years, Russia has strengthened control over a number of unrecognized and partially recognized states by resorting to a strategy of “a hidden annexation”. Such a threatening policy is of a particular relevance in the military sphere, since the Kremlin has created several bases on the territory of the former USSR where it maintains its military presence and which can be used for a future aggression.

In the current situation, there is a certain blame of the West – as it missed a moment when the Russian Federation turned the problem of frozen conflicts into a powerful tool for rebuilding and strengthening its influence in the post-Soviet space. For too long, Europe and the United States have looked at the Russian actions through their fingers, de facto agreeing to Russia’s preferential role in resolving these issues and thus removing responsibility from their shoulders. However, since the events of 2008, the depth of the threat posed by such Russian policy becomes clear. Therefore, opposition to the Russian strategy of destabilizing the post-Soviet space by supporting and artificially creating separatist movements should become an important element of the global strategy of the international community to eliminate the threat posed by the Kremlin’s neo-imperialist approach.

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