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**National Interest between Regionalization and Globalization:
EU and Eurasian Economic Union as Cornerstones of a Multipolar World**

Statement

Panel Discussion

“European Choice: Globalization or Re-sovereignization”

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The nation-state in the global context

Because state sovereignty is founded in the inalienable rights of the citizen, “re-sovereignization” necessarily means respect of the right to **self-determination** and **re-democratization** of politics, at the domestic and inter-state level. Globalization has meant an erosion of national sovereignty at all levels. In the European framework, supranational structures and procedures have undermined democratic decision-making not only at the domestic, but at the inter-governmental level as well. Irrespective of increasing and ever more complex forms of international (i.e. intergovernmental) co-operation, the locus of democracy is the sovereign **nation-state**.

In many parts of the world, including in the industrialized countries, particularly in Europe, neoliberal globalization has meant a steady deterioration of the standard of living for large sectors of the population and, accordingly, the widening of the gap between rich and poor. In terms of socio-cultural identity, globalization has also brought a **uniformity** of lifestyles and an increasing **pressure to conform** to standards set by the dominant global player(s). (This also includes education policies such as those of the OECD.) Under conditions of largely unregulated markets and worldwide competition for ever cheaper labour costs, one should not be surprised about the erosion of popular support for the project of globalization, and particularly so in Europe. Who will defend the rights and interests of the citizens in this entangled web of worldwide and largely unregulated interaction where “survival of the fittest” appears to be the overriding theme? Is it the **nation-state** – where the individual’s political rights are ultimately anchored in, or will the economic and social rights and aspirations (of individuals and social groups alike) be further advanced in the framework of a **regional grouping of sovereign nation-states**, due to the synergy effect of an arrangement that allows more efficient co-ordination of policies than insular action of each state on its own?

The European dilemma

Under the present circumstances of aggravating geopolitical tensions and the reemergence of a cold war scenario, the crucial question will be whether Europe, and particularly the group of states represented by the European Union, will be prepared and able to emancipate herself/themselves from the dominant influence of the United States, for many the erstwhile protector during the power struggle with the Soviet Union. The entrenchment of a new, potentially even more pervasive, **bipolar** division of the globe, with a political division and

destabilization of Europe, can only be prevented if major regional groupings such as the European Union effectively act *independently* of the dominant Western power, namely the United States, that, since the period of the cold war, seems to have arrogated the role of protector and, thus, power-broker – originally in the then member states of the European Economic Community (EEC) and, subsequently (since the 1990s), also in the wider Europe. Europe’s collective ability to leave this legacy behind and challenge the hegemonial rule of the transatlantic superpower will indeed be crucial for the emergence of a **multipolar order**. Only such a structure, representing a **balance of power** among all major actors, will deserve the name “**New World Order**” – and not a system in which one hegemonial country from outside the region is the final arbiter of European politics. Europe’s interests are the combined national interests of each and every state on the continent. It is the Europeans themselves who are called upon to define those interests in consultation **among themselves*** – and not their transatlantic partners of the post-World War II era. The traditional (historic) **transatlantic** partnership will have to be transformed into a **Eurasian** partnership, which alone is in conformity with the realities of physical geography as well as with today’s geostrategic imperatives.

The meaning of “re-sovereignization” in the global context

Under the circumstances of global **realpolitik** – in an environment that is characterized by the hegemonial drive of the self-proclaimed winner of the bi-polar power struggle of the post-World War II era, **re-sovereignization** and **defense of the national interest** mean regionalization, not globalization, of the framework in which nation-states operate. The latter (globalization), ultimately meaning subordination to the leviathan of a world state, is not only incompatible with the requirements of **democracy**, whether national or international; in its neoliberal version (which appears to be the dominant one), it would also mean a structural weakening of the **social and economic rights** of citizens in many regions, not the least in the industrialized world. Only the former model of inter-state cooperation (namely regionalization) will contribute to the emergence of a **multipolar world order** that will give hope for a stable balance of power in which the interests of smaller or weaker states will not be marginalized, or virtually absorbed by a global hegemon.

* For details see Hans Köchler, “Decision-making Procedures of the European Institutions and Democratic Legitimacy: How Can Democratic Citizenship Be Exercised at Transnational Level?” in: *Concepts of democratic citizenship*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2000, pp. 147-165.

Prospects of European-Russian relations

The prospects of European-Russian relations must be seen in this inter-regional context. Under the conditions of the 21st century, **bilateral** cooperation between the multilateral entities “European Union” and “Eurasian Economic Union” can be the basis for peaceful co-existence within the larger Eurasian geopolitical framework. In order to be credible and sustainable, this arrangement has to exclude, from the outset, the interference of “third,” namely extra-regional, parties (such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The legacy of the earlier division of the globe in the era of bipolarity cannot be carried on under totally different geopolitical conditions. A transatlantic security organization with a (self-proclaimed) **global** mission does simply not fit into a comprehensive framework of Eurasian partnership. The overlapping of structures of regional (economic and social) cooperation (such as the EU) with military alliances (such as NATO) undermines the very consistency and stability of these arrangements.

Frictions between regional organizations – and their core states – in the European space can only be avoided if states at the periphery are not drawn into a situation of rivalry between the major member states of the two regions (EU / EAEU). Particularly in cases where the territory is split along ethnic lines, those states should consider to choose an internationally guaranteed **status of neutrality**. This is even more important in a situation where the security architecture is effectively “out of balance.” Although the cold war between the erstwhile socialist and capitalist blocs has ended more than two decades ago, one party’s security organization, namely NATO, is still existing and even expanding – in spite of the dissolution of its erstwhile rival, the Warsaw Pact. Under these conditions, the cold war doctrine of “containment,” pursued by way of an aggressive expansion of the Western sphere of influence, is totally counterproductive to peace in Eurasia.

The two “unions” along the Northern axis of the Eurasian continent (EU / EAEU) are not be understood as supranational entities, or super-states, but as groupings of sovereign nation-states, representing the national interests of each and every of its constituent members. To state it yet again: Especially in an era of aggressive economic globalization, individual states can better secure their national interests – and eventually defend them vis-à-vis hegemonial tendencies of the strongest global player(s) – in a well-defined framework of

intra-regional cooperation. It is to be recalled that a more effective coordination of economic policies, with better international competitiveness of every single member state, was also one of the founding ideas behind the establishment of the then European Economic Community (EEC).

Multipolar order of the future

Intra-regional cooperation within the EU and EAEU respectively, complemented by **inter-regional coordination** of policies between the two communities, is the best way to secure the sovereignty and vital national interests of all involved states.* Dictated by the dynamics of globalization and by the absence of a balance of power at the global level, this complex form of multilateral, and multi-layered, intergovernmental cooperation is more than a mere **vision**; it is the very **rationale** of a long-term strategy aimed at the construction of a **multipolar world order** of which the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union could become two of the cornerstones.

In view of geographical realities** and the imperatives of geopolitics, European countries should be prepared to embark upon the project of **trans-Eurasian partnership** – instead of indulging in transatlantic nostalgia and continuing to depend on a transoceanic “strategic partnership” that has made the countries of the European Union hostage of geopolitical confrontations that are not of their own choosing.

* On related structural issues of international relations see Hans Köchler, “Global Security in the Absence of a Balance of Power: The Importance of Inter-regional Cooperation,” in: *The Global Community. Yearbook of International Law and Jurisprudence 2008*, Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 323-327.

** For details see Hans Köchler, *Unity in Diversity: Eurasia’s Contribution to Civilizational Dialogue*. Statement delivered at the international conference “The Role of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Dialogue of Civilizations,” Almaty, Kazakhstan, 9 June 2009. I.P.O. Online Papers, 2009, at www.i-p-o.org/Koehler-Globalization-World_Order-IPO-OP-2009.htm, ch. (I).