

Variables and Constants

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This issue differs from the previous ones, as our readers have probably noticed. The more chaotic the international situation is and the more absurd its manifestations are, the more in-depth and stricter approach is needed in order to figure everything out. This is why we have decided to step away from the all-embracing publicistic style and move closer towards solemn academic writing. However, this does not mean that we will no longer cover pressing issues, but we will try to look at them more thoroughly from the methodological point of view, *sine ira et studio*. This is perhaps the only way today to achieve detached rationality required for analysis.

And yet, the subject addressed in several articles presented here is least fit for unemotional examination. It is Ukraine. In fact, it seems to have summed up nearly the entire international agenda of recent decades. The Ukrainian issue has become the quintessence of the discussion on a new European and world order: internal and external circumstances, history and modernity, men-

tality and geopolitics have all got intertwined in a tangled knot. Attempts to cut it made it even tighter, with no way out anywhere in sight at the moment.

Our authors are trying to understand the reasons for such a discouraging result. **Alexei Popov** analyzes most thoroughly the development of Ukraine's political identity from the moment the notion of 'Ukrainian nation' came into being to the present day. He makes a timid attempt to look into the future but admits that it will most likely be futile. **Sergei Perevezentsev** considers a separate aspect in the history of modern Ukraine—creation and perfection of a historical myth which is largely based on estrangement from Russia. **Andrei Teslya** mulls over the connection between the political identities of Russia and Ukraine. He believes that it is easier for Ukraine to build its own identity separately from Russia and vice versa. Moreover, Russia's place on the world stage in the post-imperial era (which has settled in globally) is a pressing issue which has no clear answer for the time being.

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Grigory Ioffe compares two “non-Russias”—kindred and historically very close peoples which are implementing their own national projects. Ukraine and Belarus are political antipodes, but there is a growing belief that the Belarusian example has more chances to succeed in terms of building effective statehood and certainly in terms of co-existing with the former mother country. **Serhiy Kudelia** looks through historical and political intricacies in hope to see some signs of a future settlement between Russia and Ukraine currently locked in an acute conflict. **Yelena Babkina** studies processes in those part of Ukraine which has happened to be in the midst of civil confrontation and have separated themselves from the Ukrainian political space—Donbass. **Giovanni Savino** puts the issue of nation-building in Eastern Europe in the context of similar processes that took place in the past in Western and Southern Europe, and particularly in Italy. Many things repeat themselves, but as always, parallels may be misleading. In his interview, **Vladislav Petrushko** touches upon one of the significant, but controversial, aspects of nation-building—the religious one.

Pavel Shlykov examines a completely different example, which, however, fits into the same paradigm. Turkey, a country that survived the collapse of the empire and the construction of a nation state by harsh authoritarian methods, is once again

going through a process of transformation and the search for a new model. Religion plays a leading role in these efforts, which is quite instructive, even though no one can say now what will come out of this.

And yet, the processes taking place at the national and regional levels are entwined in a fundamentally changing global context. The speed of these changes is truly shocking. **Glenn Diesen** writes about the end of liberal globalization, how protectionist sentiments are gaining the upper hand, and what this may mean. **Georgio Prodi** and **Enrico Fardella** take a look not at what is disappearing in the world system but at what is coming to take its place—One Belt, One Road project. It may serve as an example of not just redistribution of trade and economic forces but of new principles of interaction in the global economic system. **Vassily Kashin** reminds us that changes in the world, even the most fundamental ones, do not always lead to transformation of countries. North Korea, which was believed to have been doomed some thirty years ago, vividly proves that even the most extravagant regimes can be quite strong and sustainable.

The modern world is an example of amazing, and sometimes paradoxical, dialectics. In fact, what should be stable and almost everlasting changes overnight, while things that look like temporary perversions can outlive the most intractable mainstream trends.