

A Funfair Never Before Seen

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World politics resembles a never-before-seen funfair. A room of distorting mirrors, roller coasters, a fast and breathtaking merry-go-round, and swings flinging from one extreme point to the other... All of this is happening simultaneously, and we seem to be trapped inside this bizarre contraption that can pull all kinds of weird tricks. There is a feeling that a whole era is coming to an end. The previous era, which started around the turn of the century when the euphoria over the “end of history” began to raise the first doubts, was quite turbulent, too, with crises, civil wars, local conflicts and other upheavals in different parts of the world, increasingly strong self-distrust among those who only recently had been quite sure of themselves, and, on the contrary, growing ambitions where they had never been before or had simply been ignored.

And yet some fundamental change has occurred. But why did it happen? What happened in 2018? There is probably no one particular event in recent months that would mark the turn. Dispersed politics begets dispersed times. The changes are quite obvious as ev-

erybody understands that something fundamental is happening, and yet they are impalpable because they cannot be placed in time and space. Quantity has transformed into quality.

The trade war between the United States and China, crumbling international institutions, the “Skripal affair,” Turkey’s march into Syria’s Kurdish-controlled northern regions and its refusal to respect the borders, even formally, mass rejection of the establishment from Italy, Armenia, and Latvia to Brazil and Quebec, a cold civil war” in American politics, the disappearance of the Interpol president arrested by the Chinese authorities despite the damage to their international prestige, and the vanishing of a Saudi journalist who went to this consulate for some official paper... Such events are snowballing. The piled dysfunctions of the international system—the one that was created in the second half of the 20th century after World War II and was later either adapted or transformed to match the new realities in the absence of bipolar confrontation—have gone from sporadic to systemic, causing the entire

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construction to crumble; not to tumble down but to crumble, when no one really knows what should be done: it can neither be demolished nor repaired.

This is what a point of no return actually is, when you realize that the world will no longer function the way it did before but there is no way to go back into bygone golden times (or “re-gain the greatness”).

Russia is entering into a crucial and very difficult period. Chaotic changes in the surrounding reality are taking place simultaneously with the transformation of Russia itself, its political, social, and economic models, and its self-perception, for that matter. It is not just that the present generation of leaders is going, which is a serious metamorphosis all by itself with an unclear outcome, but the ideological framework is gone. In the previous periods—since the collapse of the Soviet Union or maybe slightly earlier, after the end of the Cold War—Russia always sought to fit into something or integrate with someone, being well aware of the rigid forms to choose from. There are no longer any forms now. There is nothing to fit into and there is no one to integrate with in the previous meaning of this term. But this, God forbid, does not mean inevitability or even possible autarky—this would be utterly impossible in the 21st century. Interdependence remains and will increase, but this is no longer the same kind of integration into something global it was before, some thirty or even ten years ago. Egoism is flourishing everywhere, signs of that abound, but egoism

in an interconnected and interdependent world is completely different from what we have known before.

In this issue we address the most pressing questions in the contemporary Russian politics: **Timofei Bordachev** explores relations with the West, knotty and rooted in the old-standing tradition, very emotional but barren; **Georgiy Kasianov** and **Dmitry Asinovsky** write about problems in neighboring countries: Ukraine and Iran, respectively. But both scenarios are derivatives from the Russia-West relations. We also take a look at the wide-ranging relations between Russia and rising and powerful East Asia (**Viktoriya Panova**, **Igor Makarov**, **Mikhail Karpov**, and **Alexander Lomanov**). There are more questions and uncertainties there than answers. We have asked scholars and intellectuals from various countries to share their views on the current changes in order to try and understand where the international system is going. **Alexander Losev** makes an attempt to fathom the logic of Donald Trump’s economic policy, which largely preempts global trends. Egoism may or may not bring benefits, albeit short-lived.

It is time for questions rather than answers. Questions are more important today because many of the present-day problems were caused by wrong questions asked some ten, twenty or thirty years ago. It is the peremptory answers to those questions that led to the current disquieting situation. Probably this time mankind will be able to do it the right way.