

# Records of a Heart in Pain

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Let us imagine a clairvoyant describing the present day twenty years ago, when the first issue of *Russia in Global Affairs* was in the making. We would not have believed it. Interestingly, in reverse perspective, we seem to see the opposite, and think that it could not have been otherwise: the current events were predetermined back then and even earlier. This is why the course of events was irreversible, and the current situation is just a natural result.

One way or another, we are twenty years old. The first issue of our

magazine was published in January 2003. Was it a long time ago? Or not so long ago? I don't even know...

The sad conclusion from the past is that those who always expected the worst, the most destructive scenarios happen to be right. Those who cautioned against trusting anyone are now shrugging: We warned you! And this is happening on both sides of geopolitical barricades. What was it? Was it the inexorable march of history, cruel and not forgiving starry-eyed idealism? Or was it a self-fulfilling prophecy that nipped

any alternative and more favorable opportunities in the bud? Everyone is free to interpret it his own way, but we are where we are.

Will we learn the hard lessons? We will try, although, as is well-known, people learn them very rarely, and very partially, as a rule. Well, my colleagues and I can only take comfort in the fact that the compendium of our publications over the past twenty years is the ideal array of material to learn these lessons from, if someone decides to do so—a twenty-year-long chronicle of hopes and fears, delusions and insights, profound analysis and audacious advocacy. As Russia's number one classic Alexander Pushkin wrote: a collection of "reason's icy intimations, and records of a heart in pain."

Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank most cordially everyone who has helped make the magazine all these years in intellectual, substantive, financial, production, and technological terms. Thank you for your loyalty and leniency!

The year 2022 drew a line under that time, very short by historical standards (slightly over three decades), but extremely action-packed not only because of the abundance of events, but, above all, because of the scale of ambitions entertained by those involved: to end history, to erase barriers

and boundaries, to build a world governed by rules that are universal for all, and make Russia part of this world.

The last task is most relevant for us. Now that this undertaking has suffered an epic failure, we are curious to know who wanted it more and who wanted it at all, for that matter? Was it the Western world that sought to subjugate and thereby neutralize the permanently obstinate counterparty? Or was it Russia itself falling once again for the global "concert" and rushing to play its part in it? It depends on the angle of vision. Since we are looking at it from the Russian side, we understand its motivation better. And the last twenty years are particularly illustrative in this respect.

None other than Vladimir Putin made every effort at the beginning of his presidency to incorporate Russia into what was called Greater Europe. Compared to the previous period of the 1990s, which is considered a time of pro-Western foreign policy, Putin's efforts were much more focused and intense. They were undertaken in all directions: political, economic, humanitarian, and even military-strategic. The Russian leadership, of course, had its own ideas about the role and place that Russia could have in the international configuration. But what is fundamentally



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important is that, for quite some time, Moscow was willing to adapt to that configuration, which was the result of the West's success in the Cold War, rather than seek to change it. It is also true, though, that Russia considered fair for that configuration to show flexibility and offer special terms of participation to such a large and significant country. But to no avail.

The past twenty years can be considered in different ways on the Russian side. For some, this is just another failure of attempts to modernize the country and hit the beaten track of development. For others, it is a chronicle of disappointment in external partners who proved unable to appreciate Russia's aspirations and abused them. For still others, it is a painful but long-awaited return of Russia to its true self, to our own traditions and history—to our own identity, in fact. As is always the case, each of the explanations is correct to some extent, but the resultant is determined not by objective reality, but by the position of the observer.

Anyhow, turning to the past two decades now does not make much practical sense.

Last year's events undid what was before in all respects: political, economic, humanitarian, and military. Everything will now be built differently, because there is really no way back either for Russia, which has completed its experiment with outward integration and will now try to become part of the "world majority" (that is, non-West), which is, in fact, quite new to us; or for the world, where the amount of piled-up internal contradictions has changed its quality, and definitely not because of Russia.

While not being optimistic about the world situation, we nevertheless look with confidence at the future of our magazine. No matter what happens further, for the next twenty years, we will keep honestly recording mistakes and insights of international intellectuals who will continue to grope the way forward, now in a totally unknown territory. But it will only make things even more interesting.