

Alexis Troude*

University of Versailles, Paris, France

FRANCE AND RUSSIA: BETWEEN DEEP DISAGREEMENT AND MUTUAL INTEREST

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the renewed Cold War, relations between France and Russia are an object of study that is both rich in paradigms and highly fluctuating over time. Since the first contacts between the Tsars and the Kings of France, the history of relations between the two countries has been marked by very prosperous and productive periods, followed by periods of real confrontation. This has continued until recently in a relative sense of mutual understanding. But at a time when, through the Ukrainian crisis, we are witnessing a consequent estrangement between the two powers, allies during the great world conflicts, it is time to reconsider these relations under the prism of new paradigms. Social relations, economic ties and political positioning are the new challenges facing France and Russia.

Key Words: *France, Russia, history of relations, mutual understanding, challenges.*

We thought we'd reached the end of the "droits de l'homme" ideal with the French government's suppression of Russian broadcaster RT France on the pretext of "supporting a terrorist state". But when hatred of everything to do with Russian culture led a museum director in Montpellier to *a posteriori* rename a painting by Auguste Renoir ("Demoiselles russes" becoming "Demoiselles ukrainiennes"), the

*Troudealexis@gmail.com

question arises as to the roots of this hatred, but also how we came to such a deep division between two great European nations which until recently collaborated in many fields and managed to live side by side in relative harmony.

The deep-rooted and long-standing relationship between the two countries has always been confused and uneven, swinging from “golden times” (Alexander III, Stalin, De Gaulle) to hatred (Napoleon, Ukraine). But these relations have always been marked by patience and efforts at mutual understanding (De Gaulle and Brezhnev). During the Cold War, a certain level of understanding was reached between France and the USSR, thanks to technology transfers and a certain conception of the world based on an idea ahead of its time: a multipolar world.

But since Putin’s “special operation”, a wave of hatred has swept through all spheres of French society (politics, media, culture, sports). At a time when Russian athletes and artists are banned from practicing their passion in France, we must ask ourselves:

- Is Samuel Huntington’s prophecy coming true, and are we not witnessing a war of civilization between the Catholic and Orthodox worlds?
- Is the Latin mentality marked by an atavistic contempt for the quintessential Russian soul: age-old spirituality and perfectionism in the arts?
- Can we say that the Cold War is still going on and has never really stopped?

HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN FRANCE AND RUSSIA ON A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE

It is forgotten today that King Henry I of France married Anne of Kiev in 1051. Yet it was with this marriage that the history of relations between France and Russia began. The paradox is that this history began with “a long period of mutual ignorance”. Indeed, it was only with the advent of the Romanovs in 1613 that the first real contacts between what was then Muscovy and France “began to exist”. *The Petite Histoire des relations franco-russes* begins by recalling how the French “gradually became aware of the emergence of a great power in Eastern Europe”.

Compiled by Jean de Gliniasty, French ambassador to Russia from 2009 to 2013 and currently research director at the Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), it deserves our full attention as

a history of the political forces, strategies, games, and stakes that drive the diplomatic balances between the two countries. In short, it's a story that provides the keys without sacrificing any of the narrative, apart from the fact that, since its publication, following the adoption of a constitutional amendment by the Duma, the head of the Kremlin, Putin, can now remain in power until 2036.

Once Ivan the Terrible had definitively rid the city of Mongol domination in 1552, Moscow soon began to concentrate intense commercial and human exchanges with the English, Dutch, Swedes and even a few French, but above all with the Germans, to the point of having a "German quarter" as early as the middle of the 16th century. It wasn't until 1717, however, that the first such rapprochement took place. This was thanks to Peter the Great's trip to France, during which he met the Regent and the young King Louis XV. France had perhaps never been so close. Its influence was evident both in the construction of St. Petersburg, of which Le Blond became one of the main architects, and in the cultural sphere, thanks to Voltaire, who in 1759 published a *History of Russia under Peter the Great* and corresponded with Empress Catherine II, who was German by birth but educated by French books. In this way, France's cultural prestige asserted itself in the face of competition from German culture.

While French culture and language were making headway in Russian society (Tolstoy wrote the first pages of *War and Peace* in French), ideological paths continued to diverge, except for a brief honeymoon between Charles X and Nicholas I. Jean de Gliniasty's main point is that "ideological, religious and political oppositions between the two countries have been constant throughout their history". However, the balance of ideological power shifted when, after the black hole of the Bolshevik period, it was Soviet Russia's turn to gain influence in France through the Communist Party. The poets Aragon, Breton and Éluard were Communists, while many intellectuals and philosophers were Marxists.

The collapse of the USSR should have put an end to this ideological and political opposition. But it didn't - quite the contrary. For, explains Jean de Gliniasty, "mainly from 2012 onwards, the Russian regime has positioned itself as the defender of conservative traditions and societal values in the face of the neoliberalism and individualism of Western societies." Worse, "Russia's integration into globalization and the opening of the Russian market to "cultural products", play to the advantage of Anglo-Saxon culture". Long gone, then, are the days when De Gaulle, "overcoming ideological differences and basing himself on a reasoned

analysis of the country's interests", launched "détente" in 1966 on the occasion of his trip to the USSR, followed by "understanding" and "cooperation", opening up a number of avenues in cutting-edge sectors such as science, technology or aeronautics with "the Agreement on Cooperation in the Peaceful Use of Space, which will have an exceptional posterity". But the USSR disappointed De Gaulle by invading Czechoslovakia in 1968, "thus freezing the process of rapprochement", just as it deceived Giscard by "raising hopes, in Warsaw, of a result on Afghanistan in 1980". And Mitterrand disappointed Gorbachev just as Sarkozy disappointed Medvedev.

Jean de Gliniasty continues his chronological account to the present day, in which four regional crises are interwoven, first in Georgia from 2008, then in Syria from 2011, and in Ukraine, not forgetting Africa. All crises in which "the positions of France and Russia are opposed". Recalling in this regard that, according to the Russians, "every time France had been opposed to Russia, it had gained nothing and sometimes lost everything, and that every time it had been on Russia's side, it had gained in terms of security, international prestige and, indirectly, economic benefits", the book concludes with a series of pertinent questions at the heart of relations not just between the two states but within Europe. The dolly, according to the dictionary, is a staging device that consists of filming a shot with a moving camera. It can be combined with panning. Jean de Gliniasty's *Petite Histoire des relations franco-russes (A short history of Franco-Russian relations)* is a remarkable tracking shot that will hold no secrets for readers.

If we now consider the quality of diplomatic relations between France and Russia, we cannot speak of reciprocal hostility, but rather of strong tensions. Numerous attempts at rapprochement have been made, all of them without success, but they show that the desire for rapprochement remains.

In the days of De Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard and Chirac, the Russians saw their relationship with France as specific and sometimes difficult. This was due to several factors: shared historical references, such as the First World War or the Normandie-Niemen Regiment in 1944; knowledge of each other's language and culture among a segment of the educated population; the special position of French diplomacy within the Atlantic Alliance; the existence in France of a still-powerful Communist Party... Most of these factors have disappeared or weakened over time. Since the fall of the USSR, Russia's mentalities have undergone rapid

change, strongly marked by American influence, and France, like the rest of the world, has also become Americanized. Cultural ties have become commonplace. French foreign policy has made it a priority to build a “powerful Europe”, at the cost of numerous concessions to the spirit of the Atlantic Alliance, to the point of joining its integrated organization in 2009 in order to advance European defense.

But the European Union was now enlarged to include member states that had reason to be wary of Russia and relied more on Washington than Brussels or Paris for their security. Paris was unable, and unwilling, to influence the course of diplomacy in a Europe where the weight of American influence in the new members was increasingly felt. Conversely, after the collapse of the 1990s, Russia was determined to regain its status as a great power, if necessary, through increased interventionism, as soon as it felt, rightly or wrongly, that peaceful, non-confrontational avenues had been blocked. This was the thrust of Putin’s speech in Munich in 2007. This reaffirmation of Russia’s status as a great power will not go down well with a Western bloc in which France is increasingly integrated.

Over the past six years, President Macron has taken a number of initiatives that have been appreciated by Russia: the invitation of his Russian counterpart to Versailles as soon as he was inaugurated, the creation of the Trianon Dialogue between civil societies, the invitation to Brégançon, the call for a reorientation of NATO in which Russia should no longer be the systemic enemy, the desire to build a “new security architecture” in Europe that would make it possible to settle frozen conflicts and put an end to tension... Each time these overtures were strongly criticized by our European allies, Germany in particular. In addition to France’s determination not to put too much strain on European solidarity, the Russian authorities’ internal political hardening, described by France as an “authoritarian drift” (laws restricting civil liberties, Skripal’s neurotoxic poisoning in the UK, Navalny’s in Russia, etc.), led to the adoption of new sanctions in addition to the restrictions imposed on Moscow following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass. The COVID crisis, which blocked visits to the Summit, did not help matters. On the Russian side, the priority is to establish a dialogue, however difficult, with the new American president,

In Russian opinion, there is a residual affection for France, inherited from Tsarist Russia and, paradoxically, from the Soviet period. But the state media now treat France more like one of Russia’s adversaries. The trivialization of the relationship is obvious. The rapid decline in French

language teaching in Russia and Russian language teaching in France over the last ten years is a sign of this. Russia is often tempted to make the United States the main interlocutor for the Western bloc, and Germany a key partner for the European Union. This tendency will be accentuated if the Nordstream 2 pipeline, which will bring Russian natural gas directly to Germany and is still supported by Mrs Merkel, is completed, a project which Moscow is keen to see through while Paris is opposed.

THE LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRANCE AND RUSSIA

France has a passionate relationship with Russia: the French love Russia...but they also love to hate Russia. This has been the case at least since the Napoleonic Wars, the Berezina trauma, and the unexpected alliance of 1892 between the young French Republic and tsarist Russia. Today, those contradictory passions are very much alive: in French political debate, Russia has acquired an importance that goes far beyond foreign policy.

As relations between Russia and Ukraine sow discord around the world, and Emmanuel Macron travels to Moscow on Monday for talks with Vladimir Putin, we take a look back at Franco-Russian relations, from the dictator's rise to power to the present day. December 31, 1999. While champagne all over the world has an aftertaste of Y2K anxiety, for the Russians, the hangover has lasted for several years. The cause? The presidency - since December 25, 1991 - of Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation. It must be said that, over time, the boss has grown tired of alcohol, and his speeches, with their pasty mouths and glassy eyes, no longer make an impression. The economic crisis is raging, the population is struggling to feed itself, and some are even calling for the return of Joseph Stalin. But, in a corridor of the Kremlin, a Jewish man stands out: Vladimir Putin, forty-six years old, KGB veteran and Vice-President of the Federation. Ta-tiana Diatchenko, Yeltsin's daughter, has just told him: this is his time; from now on, the country will be run by his watch, and he doesn't care what the countdown is.

French President Jacques Chirac immediately rejoiced at the appointment. A Russophile and Russian speaker, the man who declaimed Mikhail Lermontov's *Berceuse Cosaque* (1840) during the second-round debate with Lionel Jospin on May 2, 1995, and who, according to his own legend, translated Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1833) in

his youth, was delighted to have a politician who reminded him of the Russia of yesteryear.

The two Presidents became fast friends. France placed its trust in the Kremlin, which reciprocated in kind, and the Franco-Russian honeymoon began in 2003. The United States and the United Kingdom decided to invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq based on a lie, but not so for the Chirac-Putin couple! France was against interference and distrusted American justifications, while Russia, with its superpower status, acted as a buffer to protect France from a potential backlash from the United States. For the next twenty-three years, France and Russia will be bound by a shared vision of international relations: realism. The rules are simple: the international structure is anarchic, countries are enemies by essence - but can be "friends" according to their own, never common, interests - and what is commonly known as the "balance of power", i.e., the strength with which one country can dominate another, must be balanced to avoid armed conflict. In short, the more a country arms itself, the more the other must increase its military power to avoid being dominated, which, according to the manual, sets up a "balance of power" and therefore, *de facto*, a *status quo*. Both Putin and Chirac have anticipated and understood this and are doing their utmost to maintain this pseudo-distance, which in reality is nothing more than a frantic race to consolidate their power on the international stage in the case of Putin, and to catch up with the United States in the case of Chirac, despite being almost sixty years behind.

In the meantime, however, their interests were becoming more closely aligned: Russia had become embroiled in the Chechen war (1999, which Chirac denounced under the Yeltsin regime, creating a diplomatic incident at the time) and was tirelessly fighting Islamist terrorism; France supported the Americans after September 11, 2001, although in the meantime, as a result of the war in Yugoslavia, Islamism was gaining a foothold in France, following the example of the Roubaix gang, which ran rampant from 1993 to 1997. A little later, in 2003, as the European Union began to worry about an external peril in the light of successive attacks against the West, it decided to enlarge - with the Treaty of Athens - its "club of ten" into a "club of twenty-five", and at the same time organized a zone combining defense and economy. Jacques Chirac, remembering the Gaullist principles of geopolitics, sensed a good opportunity and tried to open the door to Vladimir Putin, faithful to his conception of a partnership between different sovereign nations. His aim: to bring

Moscow back into the Euro-European fold to create partnerships that would benefit France first, and then take away a little of its power. But Russia has its own agenda, with vassal states in the East that it wants to continue dominating, and in the face of the reluctance of certain member countries (apart from Germany, which is also encouraging this rapprochement through Gerard Schroeder), this pact will never see the light of day. Far from ratifying the good relations between France and Russia - Putin was nonetheless seduced by Chirac's efforts to integrate him - the French president went further in 2006, offering the Legion of Honor to the now Russian dictator, who returned the favor in June 2008 - then under the puppet presidency of Dimitri Medvedev - by decorating the Correzian with the State of Russia Award. When Jacques Chirac dies in 2019, Vladimir Putin will speak of him as "a wise and visionary leader who always defended his country's interests [...] a true intellectual, a true teacher".

But that was without counting on the new French president Nicolas Sarkozy, elected on May 16, 2007, who, for his very first international airing - the G8, June 7, 2007 - decided to talk to his Russian counterpart before a press conference in front of an audience of journalists, pens sharpened, ready to "ask the tough questions". Whereas the former mayor of Neuilly had arrived confident, here he was, after this very brief exchange with Putin, nervous and stunned, so much so that the press was amused that evening by rumors of a vodka-fueled binge between the two men. Nothing of the sort. Nicolas Sarkozy has only just been rebuffed by the dictator. His fault? Asking for clarification on Chechnya and the murder of the journalist...

On March 2, 2008, Dimitri Medvedev, Vladimir Putin's closest colleague, was elected head of Russia. The outgoing president did not want to undo the constitution - with its bad memories of the USSR - which does not allow more than two consecutive terms and sent his double to the front of the stage, although he remained "head of government", of course. Nicolas Sarkozy quickly saw an opportunity to make his mark on the international stage, taking on complex geopolitical issues and adopting an interventionist strategy, as in the conflict between Russia and Georgia. At the time, South Ossetia, a small territory to the north of Georgia that had been independent since 1992, was disputed by Tbilisi, and only Russia recognized its autonomy, much to the dismay of the international community. Tensions ran high, and in August 2008, Georgia sent in its army to regain control of the territory. Russia in turn sent in

its men. The result? Mikheil Saakashvili's troops were quickly repulsed, and Moscow declared South Ossetia independent, despite threats from the international community.

At the instigation of the European Union, Nicolas Sarkozy flew to Moscow and met with Dmitri Medvedev in the hope of convincing him to sign the ceasefire, a document already signed by Mikheil Saakashvili. But while the world watched cynically as the French president was too much of this, not enough of that, a peace agreement was finally signed between Georgia and Russia, even though the latter continues to declare the territory independent to this day. On August 29, Georgia broke off diplomatic relations with Russia. This episode sealed the friendship between Nicolas Sarkozy and Dmitri Medvedev: from then on, France was perceived as a courageous and strategic power by Russia, which did not hesitate to declare this during visits abroad. The two presidents also invite each other on numerous occasions to discuss human rights, democracy, and potential closer ties. Russia pampers Paris, as it enables it to improve its image in the West, and France, not to be outdone, caresses Mos-cou to lay down a few conditions in case the Euro-pean Union leans too much towards Germany and therefore the United States.

The Syrian crisis had already been raging for almost a year when François Hollande was appointed head of state on May 15, 2012. Eight days earlier, Vladimir Putin had been re-elected President of the Russian Federation. A meeting was quickly set up in Paris on February 27, 2013, but unlike Jacques Chirac, the current did not run smoothly between the two political leaders: François Hollande, who wanted to remain true to his progressive pro-gram, saw Vladimir Putin as a violent, unscrupulous dictator, and for the Russian, François Hol-lande represented everything he despised.

November 21, 2013. In the streets of Kiev, many ha-bitants are revolting against the government of Viktor Ia-noukovytsch, which has refused an "association" agreement with the European Union in favor of Russia. Known as "Euromaidan", the demonstration was violently repressed by the ruling powers, leading to riots in the Ukrainian capital from February 18 to 23, 2014. As a result, Viktor Yanukovych was deposed and replaced by Oleksandr Turchynov. In the Kre-mlin, however, this announcement upset Vladimir Putin, and on February 26 he decided to invade Crimea, a peninsula in the south of Ukraine that had become autonomous in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR. The international community was outraged, and France joined in condemning the Russian head of state's actions.

Since 2014 Russia has become a topic of debate for French domestic policy. The annexation of Crimea, the role of Russian television channels abroad, sanctions, the nature of the Putin regime, etc. – all these issues divide the French political elite. The question “Should we let Russia be Russia?” has become a domestic political marker. For many French political movements, improving bilateral relations with Russia is a diplomatic, military and political priority. According to them, French economic interests on the continent are at stake. In several sectors such as the pharmaceutical industry, luxury goods, energy, and banking, the sanctions are to be quickly dismantled. Sanctioning Russia, they argue, undermines French growth. This is the line of argument of some parliamentarians who regularly propose resolutions in the National Assembly and Senate.

The political inspiration of those movements is very heterogeneous. Marine Le Pen’s far right, to be sure, shares with contemporary Russia a cult of authority, a vertical notion of power, a distrust of Islam and a fascination with the Russian president. The authoritarian, nationalist and French traditionalists believe that Vladimir Putin is the international leader of their national branch. But the sovereigntist left of Jean-Luc Mélenchon or right of Florian Phillipot also finds today’s Russia attractive.

That deeply rooted French political tradition finds a source of inspiration in Russia. Even some classical conservatives plead for a rapprochement between France and Russia. They share with Russia the goal to protect Christianity in the Middle East. For them, Putin has the same goal in Syria as King Francis I and Napoleon III. For all these political leaders, restoring bilateral relations with Russia is a way to challenge the “political correctness” they loathe in France. For all these very heterogeneous currents, France should let Russia be Russia. Moreover, France should be inspired by Russia...

Among the French elite, an opposite current enjoys great influence. Atlanticists and liberals are the main opponents of Putin’s Russia. They have long been active in the ministry of foreign affairs; the establishment press and in think tanks. They see Putin’s Russia as a direct and immediate threat to the security and stability of Europe, as we can see in Georgia, Ukraine, Crimea, the intervention in Syria, and Putin’s close relations with Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Russia, in their view, is dangerous for the very identity of Europe. They criticise the centrality of the Orthodox Church in Russia, and the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. The religious soar in Russia undermines secularism and modernity. They see

Russia as a land of persecution for feminists and human rights activists. Russian domestic politics, with its vertical power, is a synthesis between post-Soviet and tsarist authoritarianism. Europe must not allow Russia to conquer it, territorially and politically. Letting Russia be Russia, they claim, would be naïve and even suicidal. The goal of today's Russia is nothing less than the destruction of Europe – its values and its democracy. For Europe's sake, Russia should be prevented from being Russia.

These two positions are deeply rooted in French political tradition. The pro-Russian authoritarian far right, the sovereigntist leftists and the Christian conservatives use the term “Russian question” to reinforce their statesmanship. Russophobia is also very well established among the French elite: the moral high ground always belongs to those who criticize Russia absolutely. Last August, President Emmanuel Macron seemed to renew pro-Russian trends in the French diplomatic line. And in October he bluntly branded NATO as “brain dead”.

A few days before the G7 summit, from which Russia has been excluded since 2014, Macron staged a relaxed and friendly moment with the Russian leader on the Riviera. I would contend his rapprochement with Putin's Russia is much more modest. On a few issues, France and Russia have the same goals. On nuclear proliferation, for instance, both states want to preserve the 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear programme. Yet they explicitly diverge on the implementation of Intermediate Nuclear Forces. On international terrorism in the Middle East, they share the fear or the “returnees”. Yet even after the 2015 Paris attacks, they never managed to co-operate on the ground.

A common French-Russian front against terrorism remains a slogan. Regarding Ukraine, France has promoted the Normandy format for the resolution of the conflict in Donbas. Yet it never ceased to promote the renewal of sanctions against Russia. In other words, the French President does not seem to be interested in destiny, or even the future of a post-Putin Russia. To him, Russia is a power of the past, a legacy of the 20th century. Yet it cannot be the useful partner the Soviet Union was to de Gaulle's Great Vision for France.

DISTANT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATION SINCE FEBRUARY 2022

The Russian head of state delivered his usual indictment of NATO and Ukraine, accusing them of threatening his country and peace on the

European continent by refusing to put an end to their, in his view, anti-Russian policies. He said nothing about his plans for the tens of thousands of Russian troops still camped on Ukraine's borders, raising fears of an invasion. Without revealing the content of the proposals discussed, Vladimir Putin nevertheless said that "some of the ideas" of his French counterpart could "lay the foundations for joint progress", after more than five hours of discussions. "President Putin has assured me of his readiness to commit to this logic and of his desire to maintain the stability and territorial integrity of Ukraine", said Emmanuel Macron, who wants to "build concrete security guarantees" for all the states involved in the crisis. During their joint press conference, Vladimir Putin said he would speak to the French president after his meeting with his counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky in Kiev on Tuesday. "We will do everything we can to find compromises that will satisfy everyone", said the Kremlin leader, because a Russia-NATO war "would have no winners".

According to the French presidency, Emmanuel Macron's proposals include a commitment not to take any new military initiatives on either side, the launch of a dialogue on Russia's military posture, peace negotiations on the conflict in Ukraine and the start of a strategic dialogue. The French president is the first major Western leader to have met Vladimir Putin since tensions escalated in December. The trip is part of a series of European diplomatic efforts this week and next. Putin, on the other hand, once again denounced the West's refusal to give in on ending NATO's enlargement policy and withdrawing its military resources from Eastern Europe, while denying any threat to Ukraine. "To say that Russia is behaving aggressively is illogical", he said, "we are not the ones moving towards NATO's borders". Once again, he accused Ukraine of being solely responsible for the impasse in peace talks between Kiev and pro-Russian separatists, sponsored by Moscow despite the Kremlin's denials. He allowed himself a quip aimed at the Ukrainian president, who has been critical of elements of the peace plan negotiated in 2015 between Kiev and Moscow via Franco-German mediation. "Whether you like it or not, my pretty, you'll have to put up with it", Vladimir Putin blurted out. Macron came to the rescue of his Ukrainian counterpart, praising "his composure", and noting that the presence of the Russian army on his doorstep was enough to make him "nervous". Russia already annexed part of Ukraine in 2014, the Crimean Peninsula, and is seen as the instigator of the conflict in the east of the country.

On June 27, French President Emmanuel Macron announced he would visit Russia to discuss regional security, regional conflicts, climate change and other issues with President Vladimir Putin. Just one day before, Macron and Putin held a video call to discuss a number of bilateral and international issues, including crises in Ukraine, Libya and Syria. If Macron's Russia visit goes smoothly, it will be the seventh meeting between the two leaders since Macron took office in May 2017. Given that relations between Russia and some major Western countries have been at a low point for a long time after the Ukraine crisis, it is not easy to have such frequent interactions between top leaders of Russia and France.

Anyone familiar with the history of international relations during the Cold War knows that even during that icy period, when relations between the West and the Soviet Union were strained, former French president Charles de Gaulle attempted to establish a «special partnership» with the Soviet Union. The coexistence of the close Franco-Soviet relationship and the bipolar structure was in line with the purpose of the Soviet Union to drive a wedge in the Western camp and the purpose of France to maintain its great power status. It formed a win-win situation between France and the Soviet Union. The special relationship between the two sides during the Cold War laid a foundation for their later relationship. Macron has attached great importance to France's relationship with Russia. For instance, he hosted Putin at the Versailles Palace at the beginning of his tenure, led a business delegation to the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, and stressed the importance of Russia in solving the Syrian crisis and the Iran nuclear crisis on many occasions. More importantly, Macron would like to visit Russia even during the ongoing pandemic. It can be said that the special partnership between France and Russia remains strong.

France's policy toward Russia reflects what European countries have gradually realized: The West has failed to encircle and suppress Russia after the Ukraine crisis, and the degree of interdependence between Europe and Russia is higher than that between the US and Russia. In this context, Berlin and Paris are both adjusting their policies toward Moscow. This suits Moscow well. On July 1, Russia completed a referendum on a constitutional amendment. This marks a new period of rapid adjustment of power structuring and personnel in Russia. Naturally, Russia does not want to put too much energy on external affairs during this period. In fact, Russia has always had high hopes for France since the onset of

the Ukraine crisis. Although France canceled the sale of amphibious assault ships to Russia, Russia's countermeasures against France were different from those advanced against the US and the UK. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new changes to the international situation and Russia is reacting accordingly with measured diplomacy. Russia's foreign policy has strengthened its emphasis on multilateralism.

However, Russia and other European powers face obstacles with this new detente of sorts. The Ukraine issue presents the biggest hurdle. If the Ukraine issue can move forward in a positive direction under the mediation of France and Russia, it will undoubtedly be of great benefit to the consolidation of Franco-Russian relations. Although Paris intends to mediate between Moscow and Kiev, there is limited room for negotiation. After all, neither Russia nor Ukraine is likely to make concessions.

France, as a European leader, also needs to take care of the feelings of its followers in Europe. Undoubtedly diplomats from Paris and Moscow will further bask in each other's glow amid the backdrop of growing US isolationism. Then again, both will have to keep in mind that substantial progress of their special partnership will be hard to achieve. Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine on Thursday morning, with explosions heard in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. French President Emmanuel Macron condemned the invasion and called for an immediate halt to military operations. In the build up to the invasion, France and the EU slapped economic sanctions on Russia, cutting some trade relations with the country.

The French government has insisted that this will not hurt the French economy, with Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire telling the Senate that the French economy is only a «little exposed» to events in Ukraine. «Russia is not a major nation for France. The impact on the French economy will be limited,» he said. The GDP of Russia is smaller than that of Italy and France does not have a significant trading relationship with the country. «France exports less than €7 billion worth of goods per year [about 1 percent of all exports] to Russia,» said Le Maire, adding, «we import less than €10 billion euros per year from Russia - that is less than 2 percent of French imports.»»I want to be very clear - we have a battery of sanctions that are much more penalising if Vladimir Putin persists in violating the law.» While the stock market is based largely on informed speculation and not always a reliable indicator of things to come, it is worth noting that the CAC 40, the Paris-base stock index, had plunged by close to 5 percent by on Thursday in response to the invasion.

The main concern however stems from a potential rise in energy costs, with France importing about 20 percent of its gas from Russia. On the global market, gas prices shot up by about 10 percent on Tuesday, over concern about supply problems linked to the invasion of Ukraine. Speaking to BFMTV on Wednesday, Le Maire said that France could maintain its current freeze on gas and electricity prices if necessary. «The freeze on gas prices is set to run until the Summer of 2022. If we need to prolong it because we see an explosion in prices, it seems to me indispensable to do so.» The economy minister said that the invasion provided further proof that France needs to diversify its energy supply. As far as petrol is concerned, Le Maire cautioned, «we don't know what Vladimir Putin's decision will be and how high the barrel price will go.» The signs suggest that car drivers in France will likely suffer because of the conflict, with petrol prices already topping €1.70 per litre. Ukraine has traditionally been referred to as the breadbasket of Europe, due to its status as a major wheat producer.

Fears over a Russian invasion, which have proved well-founded, have led the price of wheat to soar - this inflation will likely trickle down to supermarket store prices soon. The price of wheat smashed its previous record high in European trading on Thursday, reaching €344 per tonne, far above its previous record of 313.5 euros recorded late last year. Farmers in France are also particularly worried about retaliatory sanctions from Russia which would see French exports banned. In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Putin responded to western sanctions by banning the import of EU agricultural products, which hurt the French dairy sector in particular. The head FNSEA, a French agricultural union, said that French agricultural exports to Russia have never fully recovered.

French media report that there are some 160 French businesses operating in Ukraine. It is unlikely that these will continue to function if the country descends into all-out war. The French government has asked for French foreign residents of Ukraine to leave the country. Meanwhile in Russia, the presence of French businesses means that France is the second biggest source of foreign direct investment in the country. 35 out of France's 40 biggest businesses have branches in Russia, employing around 160,000 people. Renault and Leroy Merlin are both market leaders in the country. In previous periods of tension between the West and Russia, French businesses have continued to thrive in Russia.

REFERENCES

Books

- d'Encausse Hélène Carrère. 2019.*La Russie et la France*. Paris : Fayard.
- de Gliniasty, Jean.2021. *Petite histoire des relations franco-russes*. Paris : Les carnets de l'Observatoire.
- de Montplaisir, Daniel 2023.*France-Russie, la grande histoire*. Paris : Mareuil Editions.

Other sources

- www.revueconflits.com/jean-gliniasty-relations-franco-russes-etienne-de-floirac
- neweasterneurope.eu/2020/01/28/france-russia-a-love-hate-history/
- www.france24.com/fr/europe/20220208-ukraine-après-sa-rencontre-avec-emmanuel-macron-vladimir-poutine
- www.globaltimes.cn/content/1194080.shtml
- www.parismatch.com/Actu/Politique/Relations-franco-russes-entre-amitie-tensions-et-coups-de-bluff-1786370
- www.thelocal.fr/20220224/how-will-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-impact-the-french-economy

Алексис Труд

Универзитет у Версају, Париз, Француска

ФРАНУЦСКА И РУСИЈА: ИЗМЕЂУ ДУБОКОГ НЕСЛАГАЊА И ЗАЈЕДНИЧКОГ ИНТЕРЕСА

Резиме

У контексту обновљеног Хладног рата, односи између Француске и Русије су предмет проучавања који је богат парадигмама и који се мења са времена на време. Од првих контаката између цара Русије и краљева Француске, историја односа између две земље обележена је веома просперитетним и продуктивним периодима праћеним периодима стварне конфронтације. То се до недавно наставило у смислу релативног разумевања. Али у време када смо, кроз украјинску кризу, сведоци последичног дистанцирања две силе које су биле савезници током великих светских сукоба, време је да се приспитају те релације кроз призму нових парадигми. Друштвени односи, економске везе и политичке позиције представљају нове изазове са којима се суочавају Француска и Русија.

Кључне речи: Француска, Русија, историја релација, међусобно разумевање, изазови.
