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Realist paradigm in the non-Russian publications devoted to the EU-Russian relations

The realist approaches have multiple theoretical and analytical advantages that ensured their popularity among IR scholars. However, today many researchers seem to be disappointed in capabilities of realism to explain complexity of contemporary international relations and particular issues of world politics. For example, the majority of experts in EU-Russian relations preferred other theoretical approaches to explain development of relations between the EU and Russia: (neo) institutionalism, constructivism, etc. But there are topics related to the relations of Russia and the EU, traditionally interesting for realists/neo-realists: security, competition for spheres of influence, conflicts of interests. The deterioration of relations between the EU and Russia contributed to growing popularity of realist approaches. Representatives of realism/neo-realism/neo-classical realism have become more active researching problems of the EU-Russian relations. Moreover, representatives of other theories started to use some theoretical assumptions of realist approaches to explain specific issues.

Traditionally realism was used to analyze Russia's relations with NATO, and researchers of Russia's interaction with the European Union used predominantly other approaches. However, the development of the CFSP, military resources, peacekeeping operations, but most importantly the strengthening of the EU's influence in the post-Soviet space, for example, the implementation of the Eastern Partnership, led to greater use by researchers of realist theories. Some foreign authors argued that the EU's foreign policy activities could be analyzed on the basis of realistic theories. The European Union could be described as one of the poles of power and compared with other poles, for example, with the US, Russia or China. Researchers identify the role of the EU in the current system of international relations, its response to external challenges and efforts aimed at spreading the zone of influence.

The realist theoretical assumptions also are used by those researchers who examine the EU-Russian relations with an emphasis on Russian foreign policy. They study how Russia develops its relations with the European Union and indicate neorealist logic of the Russian authorities. According to them, it was important for Russia, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, to regain and then maintain the status of a great power, it treats different regions as spheres of influence and vital national interests, therefore the post-Soviet space is perceived as a traditional sphere of Russian national interests and Russia reacts so nervously to the influence of other powers in this region, Russia faces external pressure and is forced to react to negative actions (for example, NATO's eastward expansion). Neoclassical realists with their emphasis on domestic political factors influencing how the state reacts to external challenges and the negative impact of the environment provide a sophisticated explanation of Russia's reaction to the international situation.

Of course, realist analytical framework is widely used by foreign scholars studying problematic aspects in relations between Russia and the European Union, the contradiction of their interests, disagreements during trade negotiations, disputes over spheres of influence or confrontation over events in Ukraine.

This review is based on publications in foreign scientific journals (for example, the European External Affairs Review, Europe-Asia Studies, Foreign Affairs, International Security, the Journal of Common Market Studies, the Journal of the European Public Policy, Security Studies), the publications of the EU Institute for Security Studies (European Union Institute for Security Studies), books and special volumes.

Thus, realist theories are now widely used by foreign researchers studying the relations of Russia and the European Union. The current crisis between Russian and the EU contributes to popularity of realist theories, but it is important to mention that application of realist approaches is limited to several topics like Russian policy towards the EU and disagreements between Russia and the EU over spheres of influence.