

Natalia Zaslavskaya

Geopolitics, Interdependence Theory and Regimes Theory in Foreign Publications about the EU-Russia Relations

Geopolitical approach, the interdependence theory and international regimes theory are widely used by the scholars studying relations between the EU and Russia. Let's try to examine the reasons that determined popularity of these theoretical approaches among non-Russian researchers, and the way how they are usually used for research of EU-Russia relationship.

What makes geopolitics so popular when it comes to the issues of EU-Russian relations? First of all, geopolitics is highly important for understanding of the Russian foreign policy decision-making. The Russian officials traditionally pay special attention to geopolitical consequences of their decisions. Therefore, researchers studying Russia's relations with other international actors, including the European Union, usually examine geopolitical concerns of the Russian authorities. In addition, the end of the Cold War led to serious geopolitical changes in the world, international actors had to determine their geopolitical priorities, protect their influence in the contemporary international system, or use new opportunities and expand their influence. There are several ways how foreign scholars used the geopolitical approach studying relations between Russia and the EU. First of all, they examine geopolitical traditions of Russia and use this knowledge in order to explain Russia's geopolitical priorities, Russia's relations with the West, in particular, its relations with the EU. In fact, it became a rather popular approach. The scholars concentrate on the geopolitical priorities declared by the Russian foreign policy decision-makers, and try to determine geopolitical aspects taken into account during decision-making process. Some researchers examine geopolitical aspects of the EU activities. However, in case of the EU geopolitical considerations play a marginal role. Usually scholars concentrate on global and regional priorities of the EU in order to explain European activities in

different regions and countries. Geopolitical approach also could be used to study sectoral cooperation between the EU and Russia. Today geopolitical approach is widely used by experts in energy cooperation. Russia and the EU are described as two centers of power with alternative interests and behavior patterns representing two different positions on the prospects for the development of relations. The Russian side is perceived as an actor focused on geopolitical and realist objectives, in this case energy resources are used by the state for its own power and security. The European side is described as an actor focused on liberal values, protecting the market and free competition. From this point of view, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine concerning the Russian gas transit to the EU countries and Russia's search for alternative consumers for its energy resources are described as a confirmation of Russia's geopolitical approach. It should be mentioned that today such geopolitical simplification is often criticized, foreign scholar tend to use a more sophisticate version of geopolitical approach, they combine geopolitical approach with other approaches and theories. Some scholars prefer to use constructivist versions of geopolitics, including critical geopolitics. Growing number of scholars recognize importance of ideas, values, social interaction. Geopolitical identities and perceptions are constructed and transformed. These researchers in their publications study the process of knowledge formation, emphasize geopolitical subjectivity and different identities.

The interdependence theory could be perceived as a certain alternative to the geopolitical approach. In contrast to geopolitical approach with its emphasis on interests and capabilities of actors to expand their influence, it concentrates on mutual interests and actions beneficial to all participating actors. In case of the EU and Russia independence could be illustrated by trade with the EU interested in energy resources from Russia and Russia interested in technologies, financial resources, industrial and agricultural products from the EU. However, contradictions between Russia and the EU, especially conflict over the crisis in Ukraine and 'war of sanctions', have influenced research agenda. Researchers started to pay more attention to negative aspects of interdependence. So some authors argued that the EU's dependence on Russia played a negative role as it reduced effectiveness of the European pressure on Russia. Quite often researchers look only at one aspect of the relationship, reducing interdependence to one-way dependence and explore its consequences, ignoring the general context of interdependence. This theory is often used by foreign researchers considering Russia-EU relations, especially in the field of energy.

The theory of international regimes is a useful theoretical model explaining international cooperation based on mutual interests of the involved actors and their intentions to solve problems and adopt common norms of behavior. This theory explains limited cooperation without necessity to create common institutions and delegate competence to some international authorities. International regimes do not require a high degree of harmonization between actors,

thus, participating in general regimes, they can still differ substantially from each other. Flexibility of this concept made it popular both among neo-liberals and among neo-realists explaining international cooperation. This theory is often used by experts in the EU-Russia relations. Usually they use it to describe sectoral cooperation, for example, energy cooperation and visa-facilitation regime.

This review is based on publications in foreign academic journals (for example, Communist & Post-Communist Studies, Eastern Journal of European Studies, Energy Policy, Environmental Economics & Policy Studies, Environmental Politics, European Union Politics, European Journal of Migration & Law, European Security , Europe-Asia Studies, Geopolitics, Journal of International Affairs, Journal of International Affairs, Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Perspectives on European Politics and Societies, The International Spectator.), publications of research centers and institutions (for example, the Center European Policy Studies (CEPS), books and special volumes.

Taking into account results of this review of various foreign publications, it can be argued that the geopolitical approach, the theory of regimes and the theory of interdependence are widely used today by the foreign researchers dealing with the issues of EU-Russian relations. The list of publications analyzed in this review is not exhaustive, but it allows us to draw conclusions about the ways how these theoretical approaches are used.