

# Russian and Current Global Geopolitical Concerns in Eastern Europe and beyond

Igor Ivanov  
Former Foreign Minister of Russia



## **Gregory Kenny, ICF President:**

Our opening speaker has been in the center of great change and is known as a perceptive thinker of what lies ahead. He also draws lessons from the past as he has a PhD in History.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce one of Russia's longest serving and most influential diplomats, Ambassador Igor Ivanov. He is currently a Professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and a Member of the Board of Lukoil, one of the largest private companies in the world. Previously he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1998 to 2004 and later until 2007 as Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Essentially he was the principle national security advisor to the President.

Earlier in his career, he was Ambassador to Spain. He has written extensively on the history of Russian Foreign Affairs including a book entitled "The New Russian Diplomacy" which looks at the benefits of continuity and transparency in foreign affairs, especially in times of great change.

Ambassador Ivanov has an almost unmatched insight into Russia's historical, current and prospective relationship with the world community and global security.

Ambassador Ivanov, the stage is all yours.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, welcome to Moscow. The topic that was brought to our attention today by the organizers of our meeting is most interesting: Russian and current global geopolitical concerns in Eastern Europe and beyond. This is about the world order in the 21st century and also about security, including energy security, as well as immigration, drugs, etc. Formally, you can deal with any of these problems currently called the new challenges and security threats. But you will see that all of our countries are very much concerned with this. The ongoing economic crisis has shown us again that nations have become more and more interdependent in the age of globalization. We share all of these challenges and only together we can face them. There is no lack of trying to find the answers to these common problems. The G20 increase in activities is the most obvious example. But these efforts are not sufficient. They lag behind the rapidly evolving events. You can see that national legacies are quite frequently blocking rational decisions.

You are in Russia. So, first of all, I like to dwell on the current situation in our country and then discuss certain international problems, those that are touching upon Russian relations with Europe, the United States and some Asian countries. The global economic crisis has shown that Russian affairs are far from being in the best state. 20 years of active changes have not spared the country from its humiliating dependence on raw materials. The current economy still reflects the mayor flaw of the soviet system: It largely ignores individual needs. Russia sells things that it has not produced, i.e. raw materials or imported goods. This is why production declined in Russia much more than in other economies during the current crisis. This also explains the excessive stock market volatility.

Alcoholism, smoking, traffic accidents, the lack of availability of many medical technologies and environmental problems take millions of Russian lives. To sum up, an inefficient semi-soviet socialist style economy, fragile democracy, negative demographic trends and an unstable Caucasus represent very big problems even for a country such as Russia.

Listening to such tough words on the state of the nation, you probably will think I am a dissident. Not at all, I am quoting the words of the President of Russia, Mr. Medvedev from his article „Go Russia“, published on his official website on September 10th of this year. To start the right treatment, the doctor must first of all give the right diagnosis. I don't think there are many politicians in the contemporary world, who would venture to give with similar frankness a similar diagnosis to their own country Dmytri Medvedev did it, because he

believes that we have to overcome these problems if we want Russia to maintain the position it deserves in the world.

The following is the task he has set. In the coming decades, Russia should become a country whose prosperity is assured not so much due to commodities but through so-called intellectual resources, intelligent economy, creating unique knowledge and exporting new technologies and innovative new products.

Russia will find it exceptionally hard if not impossible to solve such problems alone in the modern globalizing world. Our current domestic financial and technological capabilities are not sufficient to improve the quality of life. We need money and technology from Europe, America and Asia in turn these countries need the opportunities Russia offers. As Mr. Medvedev has said, we are very interested in the rapprochement and interpenetration of our economies and cultures. In Russia, if we need in to change something, we need to do it ourselves. If we need to abandon previous prejudices and illusions, then we should do it. It is exactly such prejudices, that often prevent us from developing normal relations with the West and Eastern Europe in particular. No doubt you noticed the debate around the recent 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War. It was a debate about who is more guilty of that tragedy. For example, in Poland, they immediately tried to lay equal blame on Nazi-Germany and the Soviet Union. I have a lot of experience in endless debate on that and other periods of history. It is a debate that blocks our cooperation on the most relevant and real contemporary problems.

Don't get me wrong! I am not calling for forgetting history. That is impossible. On the contrary, it has to be kept in mind and it is necessary to draw the right conclusions in order to solve the problems of today. I am also not calling for a compromise of opinions on this part. There will always different perceptions of history. There is no such thing as one uniform story of history, which is acceptable in the eyes of every nation. More than that, each and every country has its dark pages of history. Let us remember the mad bombardments of Dresden and Tokyo by the Allied Forces where the target was the civilian population, or the nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the way how Britain has repatriated thousands of Russians back to the USSR right after the war, where they were sent, as expected, straight to the Gulag camps. Facts should never be hidden, they have to be discussed by historians and the public. But when we talk about that current Russian-Polish or the Eastern European debate, we have to realize clearly, that the real cause of it is not history at all. It is the present. The present is the real problem, not the past, while history is just being used as a blunt weapon in the debate over current, not past problems. That is the approach I have liked to use towards some aspects of Russia's relations with its neighbors, Europe in general with the United States and with some Asian countries.

My colleagues have often been telling me, that the nations in Eastern Europe and the Baltic go on fearing Russia, because they have with memories of difficult times in mind. In response, I ask them and myself: For what exact reason should one fear today's Russia?

I was Minister of Foreign Affairs of this country for 6 years and the Secretary of the Security Council for 4 years. Probably there were some mistakes made in our foreign policy at that time, but still I can assure you that we did nothing to deliberately scare or intimidate our neighbors. Russia has no territorial claim to anyone. It is not intending to threaten anyone. Discussing the question about the conflict last year in the Caucasus, I have to remark that the conflict there was not between Russia and Georgia. It was the Georgian attempt to solve its old conflict with South Ossetia by military means. Russia intervened on the side of the local civilian population to prevent this. But that is certainly a separate problem.

What is particularly important about Eastern Europe, including its relation with Russia? First of all, it seems that Russia is by far not the only problem there. What is clear is that East Europeans, even though members of the European Union and NATO, have a feeling that the most important things are being decided behind their backs. This is the root cause of many excessive statements. Recently, some East European leaders sent a letter to the President of the United States, Barack Obama, stating their concern about his policy. My former colleague Adam Rotfield from Poland, asked about the main message of that letter, said: It is time to be aware that Eastern Europe, that used to be a center of attention, has now somehow been sidelined from that center. There is the impression that they again are trying to impose on us a system in which the big powers say what is good and what is bad. Global powers have global views, but you have to respect small nations. He also said that the new generation is coming in. They view the world differently, and US prestige is diminishing even in Poland. That is a really interesting phenomena, that the US prestige, which had gone up in Eastern Europe in recent years, is now going down. Recently, the Marshall Foundation conducted a survey, which clearly showed not only the difference in East and West European views on America. It also showed differences in many other things. 88% of the French support Barrack Obama and only 55% of Poles. I would like to remind you, it was Poland, where George Bush had the highest support in Europe. Only 25% East Europeans think that European-American relations have improved during the last year. In the West the figure is almost twice as much, 43%. Most illuminating was East Europeans reaction on President Obama's decision to drop the placement of anti-missile defense systems in the Czech and Polish Republic. While Paris and Berlin greeted that decision there was talk in Eastern Europe of something approaching betrayal of their interests. To note, nobody there even mentioned Iran, while voicing their concern, even though it was the Iranian nuclear program that was supposed to be the reason for placement the anti-missile systems. So the only thing you can say for sure is, that Eastern Europe is different. It is

not just about Russia. East European history has led several nations of that area to their own special approach to management of their affairs. You may like it or not, but first you have to accept it. All of this brings us to make some conclusions and learn some lessons. The main lesson: It is necessary to stop drawing artificial dividing lines in the European-Atlantic space.

That space, of which Russia is an indisputable part, does have problems common to all of us. Security is one of them. The war in Georgia, that I have already mentioned, has brought back to our agenda a long dormant problem of European security. That problem is real and it is not from the Russian side that the threats are coming. Proliferation of weapons of mass-destructive, terrorism, regional conflicts, illegal immigration, climate, diseases, that is what really threatens us all. So when you speak of the European-Atlantic space, you have to work out an agenda, one that would address the security concerns of all Europe. I repeat all of it! Big and small nations.

In June of last year the Russian President visiting Germany suggested the idea of joint development of a new treaty of European security. Moscow is calling that initiative Helsinki II, Brussels prefers the codename Helsinki Plus. According to the Russian opinion, the treaty must ensure equal security for all nations by accepting a legally binding list of the basic principles of the interaction of its participants, in order to strengthen peace, ensure security and stability in Europe and on the global scale. Russia is highlighting several aspects. The first one deals with the principle of indivisible common security, the second is about armament control, the third is about settlement of regional conflicts in the European-Atlantic space. It would be naive to think that signing such a treaty would improve the situation instantly. We have to talk about a comprehensive process of reshaping all of the European security architecture. The principle goal is to restore the normal political climate, get rid of the political heritage of recent years. That clearing of the atmosphere would emphasize a constructive dialogue between Russia and the United States as well as Europe in general.

Relations with the United States remain one of the top priorities of Russian foreign policy. The state of these relations is mainly influenced by the development of international security and strategic stability and the effectiveness of containment against new challenges and threats. We can say that Russian-US relations are undergoing their most strenuous time since the cold war. The arrival of a new US President and the serious changes in public opinion are creating new opportunities in bilateral relations. We have a real opportunity to take active measures aimed at turning a new page in our relation, measures with real and long-term elements of mutually beneficial cooperation.

I am far from saying that the resetting of Russian-American relations is already a success. But I am sure that on a global level, Russia's security requires stabilization and gradual de-escalation of the residual nuclear stand-off with the United States. Part of these goals require the resumption of the arms control process. The conclusion of a new agreement on strategic defensive weapons in place of START I, a break-through on missile defense and steps forward in other areas of disarmament are all capable of creating momentum for the general progress of Russian-US relations.

All of this brings us to make some conclusions and learn some lessons. The main lesson: It is necessary to stop drawing artificial dividing lines in the European-Atlantic space. Why do I speak about disarmament? I think it is the most sensible item in our bilateral relations. If you get an agreement in this area, you have more trust and mutual understanding. I suppose in December, we can prepare this new treaty about nuclear strategic weapons and it will be signed. Russia and the United State must learn to cooperate achieving not only their own national objectives but also think about common interests.

Speaking about Russia, I can also say that without this co-operation with the United States or at least the normalization of relations and conclusion of new agreements, Moscow will be unable to ensure global strategic stability in military affairs, build a new system of security in Europe, prevent an exacerbation in the post-soviet space. In the long term, without such cooperation with the United States, it will be much harder to achieve the modernization of the Russian economy on the basis of high technology.

Speaking about the United States, I think that America's new political approach should include a comprehensive strategy of relations with Russia, which means that Washington has to regard Russia strategically, not ideologically. We said the same things to the previous American administration, but unfortunately we were not heard. I am not talking about concessions to Russia, but about bringing modern policy in line with modern realities. Russian relations with the European Union need resetting too. They are going through a complicated period. Together, we have to work out a long-term roadmap for our rapprochement. We have to base that map on our converging interest and on the realities of European and global politics. You have to keep in mind one basic principle for this convergence: We both gain from such cooperation. There is no doubt that a real strategic partnership or maybe an even higher form of integration (not integration of Russia into the European Union) will strengthen the roles of the European Union and Russia in a multi-polar world, if it facilitates their development and their resistance to challenges and threats in the future. It is obvious that Russia, due to its geopolitical interests and geography, has and will always have a multi-vector foreign policy – China, Japan, India and other Asian countries will always be very important for my country.

So in which direction does this Eastern vector drive Moscow? Among these big powers just named, it is China which is Russia's key strategic and trade partner. Coordination of Russian and Chinese policies on the key global issues is a well-known fact. We have strategic cooperation in many fields. We are linking our countries through energy projects. We are discussing the problem of our trade structure. I will say frankly that Russia is unhappy about exporting its raw materials to China in exchange for Chinese products, but we cannot do much about it now. With Japan, we are happy about the rapid extension of business ties, but we have a so-called territorial problem, which is still spoiling the political climate. A few years ago, all our negotiations with our Japanese partners started with territorial questions and afterwards it was difficult to speak about business and other projects. Now we speak about business, we speak

about cultural and political relations. We also speak about territorial questions, but I think that if we have better economic relations, better understanding in other international affairs, if we create a new atmosphere in our bilateral relations in the future, it will be easier to find a common language about this very difficult territorial issue. It is exactly the reverse with India. There we have perfect political understanding and no problems of any kind. I think that we won't have any in the future. But still we have very sluggish trade. I have no explanation for that. I have discussed that with Indian prime ministers and Indian ministers here in Moscow during my tenure as minister. Frankly, I failed. I cannot explain why with such good political relations, with so many opportunities and such big markets in India and Russia, with so many common interests, we still result in such small trade.

But you cannot view Russia's relations with China, India and Japan only as three separate sets of bilateral ties. China, India, Japan and Russia are all global powers and they are all actively shaping the new global order. It is changes in the United States, which are the main point of interest for all four of us. For each of our three Asian partners, the new relations with the US take precedence over their ties with Russia. The same thing is true about Russian foreign policy. In all four cases the name of the game is achieving a more reasonable and cooperative partnership with the American administration of President Obama. Helping each other to achieve that goal is the best way for our four nations to strengthen strategic partnerships with each other. All in all, it boils down to one word „change“. The vector of this change is partnership and cooperation between the key global powers in these group of nations.

While discussing this, our Western partners must realize that Russia, while becoming more democratic will not necessarily become more yielding. It is rather more likely that a renovated Russian state with a more modern economy will overall become a more equal and more demanding partner. But even then, Russia will have to be a partner, not something else. Competition is acceptable but surely not adversity. In the West, the end of the cold war has been widely and mistakenly interpreted as a Western victory, while in reality Soviet communism crumbled under its own weight. It is a dangerous delusion to think that we have entered a new cold war time, through which we can solve the current problems. I think there is no reason for any new cold war. We have no deeply rooted issues between us. We have no competition in ideologies or life styles. We have different thinking, which is a normal subject for dialogue and discussions. That dialogue has to be reset and restarted.

Coming back to the subject of historic blame, I can only repeat, of course you have to know your history. You have to remember the past. What is more important, you have to learn the lessons of the past. If you talk about the World War II, then we are all guilty to greater or lesser extent. We are all guilty of letting that tragedy happen. By failing to stop Nazi-Germany from military adventures, the Soviet Union is guilty as well as Great Britain, France, USA or other nations, who were guided mostly by their national interests without paying due attention to collective efforts for repelling the common threat. That lesson of the past should unite and not divide us. Thank you!