

Russian Leader Confronts Eurocrats in Strasbourg

April 15—Alexei Pushkov, historian, journalist, and member of the United Russia Party, is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. *EIR* interviewed him April 8 in Strasbourg, France, on the occasion of a week-long session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Mr. Pushkov, head of the Russian delegation at the PACE, fought against a British-led motion to suspend Russia's right to vote, work in the administrative structures of the Assembly, and take part in election monitoring until the end of this year. The PACE voted up a resolution calling the "annexation" of Crimea illegal. It was based on a report, written by Mailis Reps of Estonia and Marietta de Pourbaix-Lundin of Sweden, which comes down to a Goebbels-style whitewash of the illegal regime in Kiev. The resolution states: "There was no ultra-right-wing take-over of the central government in Kiev, nor was there any imminent threat to the rights of the ethnic Russian minority in the country, including, or especially, in Crimea."

Pushkov had withdrawn the Russian delegation from the debate of the sanctions, calling the proceedings "a political farce" and "an inquisition." He charged that the majority had thus betrayed the principles of the rule of law and of human rights, to serve the interests of states that are intent on "the geopolitical seizure of Ukraine."

The interview was conducted by Claudio Celani and Dean Andromidas.

EIR: We have prepared four questions for you. The

first question is: Yesterday, Tony Blair told the BBC he thought it was "terrible" that the West had not intervened militarily in Syria last Summer. You, Mr. Pushkov, talked many times about the dangers of such a military intervention. Do you think that those who wanted a "big war" around Syria are trying to achieve their goals now, around Ukraine?

Alexei Pushkov: I think that Mr. Blair and Mr. [Sen. John] McCain and all those who were upset about the intervention not starting in Syria, are proponents of the so-called regime-change doctrine. It is not about democracy; it is about changing the regime in countries where the neoconservative forces, to which Mr. Blair definitely belongs, think the government in power contradicts the interests of the Western world. And to oust those governments, people like Mr. Blair are ready to victimize as many lives of American or British soldiers as is needed.

I think that Mr. Blair is sincerely hated in his own country. There have even been attempts at public trials of Mr. Blair, and the reason is, that he made up completely the reasons for the war against Iraq. He cheated his own nation. His actions led to the death of about 1,000 British soldiers, and by all standards, people like Mr. Blair should be tried by an international court. Unfortunately, the fact is, that he is not [being tried], and he is calling for new wars—a war against Syria.

For the time being, this plan failed and so, I think, those forces who were behind a war against Syria, decided they could use the situation in the Maidan in Ukraine, to achieve a regime-change there. And it was achieved, actually, because we are under no illusion: There was a very strong Western presence on the Maidan. We have seen foreign ministers and members of Parliament from Western countries coming, and basically calling for the overthrow of the existing government, which was a legal government, elected by the population. And this is the reason why now the same politicians and the same political circles try to close their eyes to the right-wing and extremist forces in Ukraine, to the neo-Nazi forces in Ukraine, try to close their eyes to the illegal character of the Ukrainian authorities, and to the fact that it was definitely a coup d'état that was conducted in Ukraine.

So, yes, I think that it is not that they are trying to achieve their goals *now* around Ukraine: I think that these people have had a very consistent approach to in-

ternational affairs, which supposes a change of regime in all countries which should be brought into the sphere of influence of NATO and the United States. So, I think that is the goal, and it can happen in Ukraine, it can happen in Kyrgyzstan, it can happen in Syria, or in so many other places.

So I think that, yes, Ukraine is part of the succession of regime changes which occurred in the last years around the world, starting with Serbia, and going through Iraq, Libya, and so on.

Behind War Danger: Trans-Atlantic Bankruptcy

EIR: The founder of *EIR*, Lyndon LaRouche, has said many times that the driving force behind the confrontation policy and the danger of war, including the regime-change policy, is the bankruptcy of the entire trans-Atlantic financial system—both the City of London and its junior partner, Wall Street. After the 2008 crisis, the speculative derivatives bubble has become even bigger and more explosive than before. Do you think, as some people in Russia have mentioned, that Russia can take the opportunity of the sanctions imposed by the West, to greatly accelerate the “de-offshorization” process and decouple its economy from the bankrupt London-New York-Basel system?

Pushkov: Well, I think that whether Russia takes this opportunity or not, the sanctions which are being imposed by the West lead Russia to an inescapable process of reconsidering its economic and financial policies. So, I do not think that it is a Russian choice, in a way; it is that we are put in a position, where we become much more on our own.

About the decoupling of the economy from the London-New York-Basel system: I don’t think this is easy. London and New York are extremely important centers of economic and financial might, and we may see that all the main actors in the world have quite important ties with these centers of power: the Chinese, the Arab world, whoever. So, I don’t think that Russian business will set itself the task to shut down all contacts with the stock exchanges in London and New York, and with banks there, and so on.

But, to a certain extent, we will be forced to operate on a more national basis. For instance, Russia did not have a national [credit] card payments system; we proceeded only through Visa, Mastercard, and other internationally accepted cards. Now we will be creating a

national card system which, of course, will be active only on the territory of the Russian Federation, and the only currency it will use will be the ruble. Until now, we did not have anything like this; we were completely dependent on the systems which exist outside of Russia and are controlled by the American government. But when Visa and Mastercard decided to block the activity of certain banks, and then reconsidered it (at least in one case, because they declared that there had been a mistake in assessment), we got the message. We got the message that we cannot rely completely on these companies, because being America-based companies, they have to follow American laws. This is a small example, but it shows how the Russian financial system will reconsider its ties.

Also, I think that one of the consequences of this change of economic policy will have to do with enlarging our ties with Far Eastern economies like China, and Southeastern economies. These nations are not taking sanctions against Russia. Even Japan, which I think has frozen the negotiations on the visa-free regime [establishing visa-free travel between Russia and Japan—ed.], did not take any economic sanctions against Russia. The Chinese were mostly supporting Russia throughout this crisis, and the countries of Asia, such as South Korea, or Malaysia, or Singapore have their own approach, which has nothing to do with the approach of the NATO countries.

So, I think that Russia will have to redirect a part of its economy, like a part of its gas exports and of its oil exports, to the East, where, more and more, the center of economic might is. So, I think that it will not be a conscious decoupling of the economy; it will just be that the consequences of the sanctions will lead Russia to do something it would not be doing in a different situation. We will just have to find new markets and new opportunities for development.

Cooperation on Afghanistan Jeopardized

EIR: This leads me to the next question, which has to do with Asian development. Victor Ivanov, head of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service, last November, announced that Russia planned to put on the G8 agenda in Sochi a very optimistic plan to fight Afghan narcotics production through a program to industrialize Afghanistan, with big hydroelectric projects and other infrastructure. These ideas, including creation of a Central Asia Development Corporation, were welcomed by some European figures, such as Member of the Euro-

pean Parliament from Italy Pino Arlacchi, the former UN drug czar.⁴ But now, the G8 has been cancelled. You partially answered this question already, but do you think Russia can pursue this specific Eurasian development idea together with China, India, and other nations to the south and east?

Pushkov: I think that the decision by NATO to freeze our cooperation on Afghanistan until June of this year, if it is followed by a further freeze, will definitely lead to an absence of cooperation between Russia and the West on the industrialization of Afghanistan. It will also probably lead to a reconsideration of the transit for NATO troops, equipment, and facilities from Afghanistan to the West. This should have been following two routes: one by air, and another was a railway transit route through the territory of the Russian Federation. And I think that the plan to industrialize Afghanistan will fall victim to this political decision.

It is not our choice. We would like to have cooperation on Afghanistan, but here, of course, NATO, by cutting all programs of interaction with Russia, is also, I would say, putting us in a very difficult position. At some point, if NATO continues this policy of restricting ties with Russia, the Russian Federation can also take some decisions which would be, probably, not very welcome in NATO, but which will make any further cooperation in Afghanistan impossible.

If we speak about a larger Eurasian development, I think that Russia has engaged already in an important Eurasian development project, which is the Customs Union project. The Customs Union is working, and I think that in 2014 it will probably be joined by Armenia, which will make already four countries. I think that some other nations may join the Customs Union; I know that India would like to have a certain status with the Customs Union, and there are some other countries which have expressed interest.

So, I think that, definitely, the new leaders of economic development, such as China, India, and some others, will be our important partners in our further economic development. Unfortunately, the economic ties with the West may suffer because of political positions. That is probably not bound to happen with the Asian nations. The Asian nations do not try to dictate any kind of political conditions to Russia; they are not taking sanctions against us. They consider us as partners and

not just a nation which should follow Western advice. And that is a big difference in dealing with the Easterners in comparison with dealing with the Westerners.

When we deal with the West, we always feel that we are being pressured, we are being criticized, we are being told what to do and what not to do, as if in Washington and Brussels, they know better what we should do, we Russians, and what is better for our national interests. The Chinese, the Indians, the Malaysians, and the South Koreans, even the Japanese, have a completely different approach. They think that, as they decide for themselves in Tokyo and Seoul, Russians can just as well decide for themselves in Moscow. And that creates a very positive political setting for the development of economic cooperation, too.

Defense of Earth vs. Geopolitical Fantasies

EIR: A growing number of Americans, including in military and political circles, agree with LaRouche, who says that the President of the United States is playing with the danger of a thermonuclear war, involving the United States and others against Russia and China. Some of them even agree that Obama should be impeached because of that. Others are very upset about the shutdown of Russian-American cooperation in a whole range of areas, from space exploration to nuclear energy research. You personally have stated that nations should be working together to defend the planet from asteroids and comets—the Strategic Defense of Earth. What would you say now about the importance of international cooperation on solving the common tasks of mankind?

Pushkov: I will say that, unfortunately, a big part of the political class of leading nations (and I mean, first of all, the United States) is blinded by geopolitical issues, and the desire to dominate in the world. It is called “American leadership” but I think Mr. [Zbigniew] Brzezinski put it more correctly when he called it “American hegemony.” I think that the goal of achieving American hegemony is a false goal. It’s also false for the United States, because it diverts its potential to something which may endanger the United States, much more than promote their case.

When I said that nations should be working together to defend the Earth from asteroids and comets, this is something that seems to be a distant danger, but in fact, if you look at the scientific data of the last ten years, you will see that on two or three occasions, very big asteroids passed at a distance which, by cosmic

4. See “Interview: Pino Arlacchi: The ‘Mackinder Mantra’ in U.S.-Russia Conflict,” *EIR*, March 21, 2014.

space measures, is just a hair's breadth from the Earth. Something like 300 million km—it's almost nothing! A slight shift somewhere, and they hit us. And then, nothing will be important: It will not be important whether Mrs. Hillary Clinton will be the next President of the United States or not; it will not be important what Mr. Robert Kagan thinks in Washington, and what the United States thinks about the reunification of Russia with Crimea. All of a sudden, things will get to their, I would say, real value. And the real value will tell us that we have missed a huge opportunity to defend ourselves from absolute evil, because we were following Mr. Robert Kagan's fantasies of how America will dominate the world.

So, I think that these false goals are something which is blinding the American political class. Not all of them: I know that in the American Congress, I would say, probably 10% of the Senators and Congressmen display a reasonable approach. But the majority is blinded by this issue. It is as if the most important issue in the world were to tell everyone how they should behave, and how they should look inside and outside, and what kind of democracy they should have! But if we have a global

climate crisis, if we have the oceans rising only one meter, half of New York will be submerged, and then, all of a sudden, we will see that this is not important—what we are debating now with the United States. What is important is to survive as humanity.

And, unfortunately, I am afraid we are much closer to this than we think, and nothing is being done for this. There is no program for using the Earth's missile potential and nuclear potential to fight asteroids, for instance. This problem "does not exist"! But there is, of course, a program that costs billions and billions of dollars—to establish an ABM system that will try to neutralize the Russian nuclear potential.

How can I put it? What is it? blindness? Lack of understanding? Or just a self-serving image of might that people fool themselves with? I am afraid that something will happen which will show us the relativity of those geopolitical goals, which are being set and promoted as the most important thing in the world. I think that there are other things that are more important, and if we don't understand it ourselves, the course of events will show us that we were wrong.

EIR: Thank you very much.

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