EU has Launched its Own Quasi-BRI, Where Should Russia Stand?

This year on 1 December the European Commission - that is, the de facto government of the EU - launched a project which, if successful, may raise the Union to an entirely new level of significance in the international arena, making it one of the leading players in the modern “Great Game” of world politics.

Discussion is underway on the formation of a so-called “Global Gateway,” with the help of which, per the European Commission’s statement on the matter, they will implement “a new strategy to boost smart, clean, and secure links... across the world” and in the most varied spheres of human action.

Fully financing the project for the period from 2021 to 2027 will cost an estimated total of 300 billion Euros. As far as can be understood at present, the main sources of these funds will be the principal participating countries and the European transnational banks. The leading roles are to be taken by Germany, France, Spain, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In all of this, naturally, nothing is said about the readiness of the peoples of the European countries to sponsor this GG project.

There are also reports of “attempts to mobilize the private sector” to participate in the European Commission’s global project. There is considerable cause to doubt the success of these “attempts,” bearing in mind that the “private traders” are not selfless in their underlying motives. They are hardly concerned with the problems of the various aborigines overseas, the latter being parasitized on by all manner of political swindlers, both European and “native.”

Meanwhile, this (alleged) ability to attract the resources of just such “private traders” is presented by Ursula von der
Leyen, president of the European Commission, as an important competitive advantage over China’s already well-established Belt and Road Initiative. Another advantage ascribed to the BRI’s European competitor is an (again, alleged) “smart” system that will prevent the GG’s target countries from falling into “debt traps.”

One notes once again that counteracting the global influence of the PRC - which it is extending without firing a shot (in marked contrast to the methods employed in the days of the “white man’s burden”) - is one of the main goals set out in the extensive Communique adopted at the last G7 summit. The main provisions of this document are to be implemented through the Build Back Better World (B3W) project.

References have been made to this same Communique during the initiation of the GG project. Plans call for goal-oriented Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) to act as working instruments of the GG by liaising between the leading creditors and the target countries to implement specific projects. Evidently the experience of the prototypical “Team,” which was created a year and a half ago to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, was considered a positive one.

In this one can observe that two global projects are being launched in the political “West” which will in all likelihood come into conflict with one another. For the present they are united by, again, an anti-Chinese orientation and an openly declared demand that the objects of the forthcoming activity comply with “democracy and the values that underpin it.”

On 5 December the US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, speaking at the close of an event with her EU colleague Stefano Sannino, declared that the two parties’ policy approaches to China were “increasingly convergent”. There was no such definite statement from her European opposite number, however.

It remains to be seen whether the above-mentioned oxymoron arising from the incompatibility of “democracy” in the original sense of the word with what is today understood as (European!) “values” will serve as the basis for a similar “convergence.” More than likely, both B3W and the GG are intended to spread these values rather than make any provision for the welfare of developing countries. It would seem that NATO has been contracted to “underpin” this “spread”

As the saying goes, “you don’t have to want it, but you do have to do it.” Other variations on the same theme include “gunboat diplomacy” and “speaking softly and carrying a big stick.” It all comes down to who’s expressing such “wisdom”: a common criminal or the president of the United States. Another important consideration is its area of application: is it limited by national borders, or does it overcome them?

But this is to stray from the point. In China, the reaction to the emergence of the GG project, like B3W before it, has been largely negative. Some signals, however, indicate a willingness to in some way combine China’s BRI with the GG.

But here one must take note of the increasing pro-Taiwan and, it follows, anti-China activity within the field of European politics. Particularly notable in this regard are several groupings in the parliaments of leading European countries (France, Ireland, the Netherlands), and also groups in the “new Europe.”

Lithuania stands out among this latter group, which in the end received a hefty and well-deserved kick. This should be understood as an education in basic etiquette. But instead of thanking the teacher for such valuable instruction (to say nothing of their precious time) and taking steps to mend their ways, Vilnius ran to Brussels to complain about this lesson from the school of hard knocks. As a result, they will have to stay in the introductory class.

As far as Russia is concerned, it seems obvious that it should have nothing to do with any projects burdening themselves with the above-mentioned “values.” But it would be unwise to put oneself in a position of strategic isolation in an international arena where, going forward, the status of a leading player will depend less, and less exclusively, on military capacity and more on significant involvement in one or another of the several global projects outlined above.

Russo-Chinese co-operation must be brought to a whole new level, in particular by including the Russian Federation’s transcontinental infrastructure projects within the BRI. Within the frame of an “expanded BRI” - that is, with large-scale involvement by the PRC - it will be possible to resume the process of developing Siberia and the Far East that began under the Russian Empire and accelerated sharply during the Soviet period.

China will receive the opportunity to participate in “Siberian” projects, which should have nothing in common with recent “cross-border” plundering. Russia will in turn be able to join in China’s initiatives in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The prospects for developing a joint strategy for Afghanistan and Central Asia more generally are highly
promising.

One cannot definitively rule out attracting firms from other countries (Japan, Germany, the USA, India) to the “Siberian” branch of this “expanded BRI” - that is, of course, if they display an interest in it. Co-operative work on large-scale projects is also a time-honored and effective means of resolving political problems.

In Russia, the “quiet sabotage” of rapprochement with the PRC (thinly disguised by the meme of a “Chinese threat”) should be brought to an end. This manifests itself most especially in the Russian media landscape, almost devoid of material looking beyond a “Euro-Atlantic” framework, and “up to its eyeballs” in second-rate “Ukrainian” problems.

The upcoming joint ceremony to open traffic on the road bridge across the Amur in the Blagoveshchensk region (earlier postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic) would make a suitable occasion to launch this strategic-informational “u-turn.” This, hopefully, will inaugurate a period of heightened and intensified Russo-Chinese economic co-operation.

In the extreme case, both countries must be prepared to strike back hard against attempts to introduce the above-mentioned “values” to their territory by one method or another. To this end, the current “back to back” strategic positioning must be replaced by a “shoulder to shoulder” one.

Finally, one must fully and in all seriousness comprehend “the true stakes of the issue” that in recent times has been ever more apparent to humanity as a whole. A mortal enemy is threatening the soul of each and every individual: European, Asian, American, or African.

This is, if you will, a question of existential significance. There can be no kind of compromise with those who promote and directly implement projects for the spiritual (and, to be sure, physical) killing of human beings under the meme of adherence to “democracy and the values that underpin it.”

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