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"Russia in its Transition from Regional to Global Power: A Comparison Study of the Stands on a Matter of Kosovo and Cyprus Conflicts"

(PROCEEDINGS)

It is obvious that the phenomena of ethnic conflicts and non-recognized states as their consequence have a strong effect on the changing world. Russia as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a state aspiring to strengthen its position on the world arena and to become one of the global powers cannot stay aside the processes of conflict management seeing that ethnopolitical and secure issues of international and regional level cannot be positively resolved without its concern. The main emphasis of this paper is to put on correlation of Russian settlement principles concept of the two ongoing acute European conflicts (in Serbia/Kosovo and in Cyprus) and its approaches to “The Kosovo Republic” and “The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” statuses.

First of all, there is a need to explain the selection of this pair of conflicts. A special detailed review reveals and asserts that both conflicts have much in common. The basic universal features are the following: different understanding by parties of their historical position, consequence of post-Ottoman heritage political arrangement, strong politicization of the ethnic processes and high-level state engagement, serious irredentist ideas influence, powerful two-way migration pressure, forceful external influence, military interventions, acute refugees problems, economic isolation of Cypriot Turks and Kosovan Serbs, hefty geopolitical significance of both territories and regions, de facto states emergence etc.

Thus, there are facts proving that both conflict cases can be considered within a system of regional security and economic development as very similar and claiming a respective consistent approach on a settlement way that in its turn will affect stability in the whole Mediterranean.

Secondly, we should underline the main reasons and key interests of Russian involvement into the settlement and management processes of Kosovo and Cyprus conflicts. Undoubtedly, nowadays both acting and wannabe global powers and power poles base their positions upon their own national and geopolitical interests, so far national security is a significant and integral part of them. Russian approaches are formed according to its national interests, national security and external
environment challenges. Current world order, geopolitical conjuncture, level of regional and international security, system game rules etc. complete these approaches.

The key aspects of Russia’s involvement into Cyprus and Kosovo processes are:

- **The UN Security Council permanent membership**
  Russia cannot stay aside conflict settlement and management due to the process of the Security Council functioning.

- **Both the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean are the extension of the so called “arc of instability”, effecting security system nearby the very Russian borders.**
  This “arc” is a part of an axis including Central Asia, the Caucasus, Asia Minor where Russian national interests were historically located. Any power balance change in this axis inevitably leads to alteration in its other parts. At the same time states claiming world hegemony, especially the USA, consider the Balkans as an opportunity to control political and economic processes in Central and South-East Europe as well as to keep western and southern Russian borders in constant tension. Z. Brzezinsky in his “Grand Chessboard” noted that the Balkan region was a potential geopolitical object of claims for European domination, that is why this area provides an opportunity to effect European security in general. Within the conditions of the Cold War the Balkans used to be a buffer zone between two power poles, and when this world order collapsed the region became a vacuum zone volatile due to severe interethnic conflicts in post-Yugoslav space. Moreover, the correlation of power balance in the triangle “Balkans-Cyprus-Turkey” has a great effect on stability around southern and south-eastern Russian borders as Russia lost huge territories and sea outlets after the USSR collapse. Thess losses could be compensated by fortifying its positions in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.
  So, in the situation status struggle for influence in these areas can be reason for confrontation between Russia and the West.

- **Self-proclaimed states are potential sources of terrorism from a point of Russian national security view.**
  Kosovo is in the center of the so-called “golden crescent” connecting Afghanistan and Pakistan with the European drug market. Its village Veliki-Tynrovac is one of the biggest drug-dealing centers in Europe. It is well known that drug trade is closely connected with criminal and terroristic organizations. There is also a reliable fact (once officially proved by a former president of Kosovo I. Rougova) that Al-Qaeda members were training at Kosovo territory in the mid 2000s. Regarding Cyprus according to some sources (but not proved officially) it is also known that commercial banks at the territory of the Northern Cyprus are used as one of the funding sources for Chechen
terrorist groups as these banks are not controlled internationally. Even a little likelihood of being connected with terrorist activity is not groundless due to the fact of not falling under international law force. Moreover, ethnic nationalism has been producing ground for terrorist activity historically (let us recollect the Kosovo-Serbian “Tigers of Arcan”, the Greek-Cypriot “EOKA”, the Kosovo-Albanian “Kosovo Liberation Army”, the Turk-Cypriot “Turkish Resistance Organization”). Also being a potential source of terrorism does not exclude the possibility of ties with international terrorist organizations.

- **Settling and managing these conflicts Russia tackles the chance to improve and to consolidate its political weight and significance on the world arena, as well as the UN authority.**
  According to “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” the UN and its Security Council must be the center of all international matters reconciliation and settlement. This role must be strengthened, though we know that it declines and is being ignored often. As Russia sees the UN as universal and key instrument to solve international problems it needs drawing of attention and strong support to restore the order. Besides, taking active part in conflict resolution and peacekeeping helps Russia to integrate into the international community and to enhance prestige.

- **Getting involved in Kosovo and Cyprus conflict resolution Russia tends not to allow NATO consolidation in relevant regions, thus, impeding unipolar world order settlement.**
  According to “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” is decisively against NATO expansion to the East (to the Russian borders) and it strongly supports multipolar world order, which is more legitimate and just from the point of view of decision-making and international community involvement.

- **Both conflict situations are important for the purpose of universal and flexible approach to unrecognized states elaboration.**
  Contemporary international law does not contain concrete norms and rules of what to do to create new state, of how it could be recognized to become legally competent member of the international community and how many recognitions it should gain. Besides, it is well known that the international law has inner contradictions such as the collision between territorial integrity and self-determination right. Moreover, Russia itself does not have any elaborated strategy of behavior in case of new potentially unrecognized state emergence. This is of great importance due to quite a big amount of such political formations around Russian borders in the post-Soviet space.

- **Regional presence both in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean is vital considering Russian energetic and economic interests aimed to its control over the key European energy pathways.**
  First of all, as Russian economic system started its revival in the mid 90s thanks to global oil prices increase presence in the Balkans gives it an opportunity to tube oil and gas pipelines. Considering
the fact that the region is a “crossroad” of European transportation tracks and paths this presence is vital. A struggle for energy pathways diversification between pro-Russian “South Stream” and pro-Western “Nabucco” has become one more example and evidence of the geopolitical competition in the region. It is also known that Russian energy company “Gazprom” holds the majority shares of the Serbian company “NIS”.

Regarding Cyprus it is necessary to underline that supporting stability in the Eastern Mediterranean provides Russia an opportunity to increase as an active member of economic relations in this region. For instance, a high-grade deposit of gas was found on the shelf of Cyprus couple of years ago. Being now one of the biggest gas importers to Europe and not gaining any control over a new energy path in future it can find itself in a very disadvantageous position. This is why Moscow is interested in obtaining tender for the field development and decisively supports the sovereign right of the Cyprus Republic for the gas-field exploration and exploitation in its exclusive economic zone.

• **Both situations of Russia’s involvement are stipulated by civilizational aspect and an aspiration to help fraternal people.**

First of all, Russia is a traditionally peace-loving country ready to extend a helping-hand to those people who need it.

Russia has always been a part of Pax Christiana and inherited an idea of an ecumenical Orthodox power from the Byzantine Empire. The idea of Pax Christiana had transformed into Pax Rossica, and Russia became a new center of attraction for the entire orthodox world. This tradition turned into Russian assistance in struggle for independence of Serbians, Greeks, Bulgarians etc. This has become Russia’s sacral role. Nowadays religious affiliation plays less important role (and it even can be considered dangerous in this context), but mutual attraction and sympathy still remain in the relations between the Slavs, between orthodox. The Balkans are mainly area of Slavic states, Serbs are orthodox as well. Greek Cypriots are orthodox Christians too.

Both stances towards concrete conflicts are structured and paralleled with a set of specific criteria among which are conceptual, geopolitical, civilizational, management, institutional, humanitarian and economic ones. On the one hand, these groups of contributing factors conduce to characterization of Russian position and its role in the concrete regional issues. On the other hand, they help to reveal and estimate general peculiarities of Russian foreign policy in relation to ethnic conflict settlement, non-recognized states emergence, international law consolidation and advocacy, the UN prospective viability, international and regional security.

**The conceptual aspect** of Russian position towards Kosovo and Cyprus conflicts derives from the statutory conditions of Russian internal and foreign policy – its fundamental documents (“The
Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013” etc.), as well as the basic international law documents (the UN Charter etc.). This group of aspects is general and applied by Moscow universally to various political conflicts resolution. The approaches within the conceptual aspect are the following:

- conflict settlement and resolution must be executed strictly within the framework of international law standards and norms
- the UN and its Security Council must play the leading role in the settlement processes
- political and diplomatic methods of conflict resolution must be used instead of power ones.

Special aspects are divided into several groups: geopolitical, civilizational, management, institutional, humanitarian and economic ones.

**The geopolitical aspect** of Russian stance towards Kosovo and Cyprus conflicts is formed through the prism of relations with the USA and NATO. It reveals the first distinction in the approaches. Foremost, Moscow emphasizes infeasibility of military force usage and NATO and the EU consolidation over the UN in Kosovo case. And it generally talks about infeasibility of any external compulsion or constrained arbitration in Cyprus matter. Secondly, in Kosovo case Russia strongly condemned the humanitarian intervention in 1999. As for the Turkish operation in Cyprus in 1974 Moscow still rebukes Ankara very composedly and carefully.

This aspect reveals a vulnerability of Russian position due to the fact that it always has to set itself against the West.

**The civilizational and behavioural aspect** appears in Russian attitude to the conflict parties. In the conflict in Serbia Moscow adheres to explicit condemnation of Kosovars and has no contacts with this party, supplying this fact with no recognition of “The Kosovo Republic”. In the situation, when the western countries selectively and openly supported Kosovars keeping to a position that some ethnic groups deserve much more compassion than the other, Moscow had no other path than to sustain Serbs who had literally remained alone opposing the entire international community. Frankly speaking, both parties are guilty as well as both people are casualties in Kosovo conflict.

In the case of Cyprus Russia is loyal to both parties, it continues dialogue within the framework of conflict settlement both with Greek Cypriots and Turk Cypriots, though it recognizes just The Cyprus Republic independence. As for the contacts between Russia and the Turkish part of the island they are carried out between Chambers of Commerce and Industry, in the academic sphere
(student exchange programs etc.) and so on. Russia also strongly supports Turk Cypriots withdrawal from economic isolation.

It is also important to mention that in the 90s Russian authorities used to refer to factor of civilizational closeness and Slavic fraternity of Russians and Serbs, but in the matter of Cyprus it never made any explicit announcements of similar nature, even though Russians and Greeks are of the same confession. Meanwhile, Russia is usually condemned by the international community (including the very Turk Cypriots) for its quasi biased approach in this context.

**The humanitarian and economic aspect** of the Russian position is elaborated within a framework of the problems that people in the conflict areas face. It reveals a common denominator in the matters in hand. So, both cases share the claim to resolve the problems of isolated nations (Kosovan Serbs and Turk Cypriots). The international society usually ignores or diminish the problems of Kosovan Serbs staying at the territory of the so-called “Kosovo Republic”, but they are really severe. The Cypriot matter is complemented by the necessity to even the levels of both communities economic development (the Greek Cypriot and the Turk Cypriot).

**The management aspect** is based on direct elaboration of paths and methods of the conflicts in Serbia and Cyprus settlement and affection on the parties. This sphere promotes arising specific Russian interests zone and its particular attention because Russia has similar interethnic conflicts on its own territory and directly near its borders – at the Post-Soviet space. Of course, Moscow has a great experience in ethnic conflicts reconciliation. In both matters Russia appeals to direct negotiations between conflict parties, also in Cyprus it encourages intercommunal contacts.

In Kosovo issue Russia had been advocating Yugoslavian (and then Serbia and Montenegro’s) territorial integrity and Kosovan autonomy promotion till 2004. Then, the matter resolution was defined in the international community by a formula “standarts before status” in 2004. Russia was ready to admit any resolution in this situation excepting Kosovo division, but the formula should have been strictly followed. And when this formula was violated in 2008 with a unilateral declaration of the Kosovar independence, Russia returned to its adherence to Serbia’s territorial integrity.

As for the situation in Cyprus, Moscow suggested a plan of establishing a demilitarized state based on bicomunal and bizonal federation with joint legal personality. The situation changed significantly after the referendum in April 2004, when Greek Cypriots voted for Cyprus joining the EU without the Turkish part. There was a draft resolution suggested by the USA and Great Britain in the UN Security Council the day before the referendum, the main point of which was
the following: the island must be reunified regardless of the referendum result. Russia vetoed this draft and its position contains a very important detail since that moment: any decision made for conflict resolution must derive exclusively and directly from the Cypriot communities. Said differently, it can not be imposed from outside. In the meantime, in Kosovo issue Russia does not deny a possibility of external decision intrusion.

The point that likens Russian approaches is infeasibility of artificial time frames and any unilateral decisions.

Finally, the institutional aspect reflects Russian views at the role of international organizations in Cyprus and Kosovo settlement. According to the official position the leading role in these processes must belong to the UN, and the other organizations must be subjected to it in the conflict areas. As for the EU Russia highly appreciates its concern in the resolution search process in Cyprus and underlines the fact that its involvement attaches positive dynamics to the settlement. On the contrary, the EU engagement in the Kosovo matter according to Russia’s assessments merely aggravates it and promotes the UN significance decline also given the fact that the EU is biased and obviously supports Kosovars. Besides, Moscow is totally against any alterations of the international presence mandate (UNMIK and UNFICYP) without relevant Security Council resolutions.

This structural analysis reveals general lines in Russian positions towards Cyprus and Kosovo conflicts. In the former case its emphasis is placed on the realization of any decision made by both Cypriot communities regardless of whether it is status-quo preservation or reunification. In the second case Russian efforts are primarily focused on non-Albanian people in the area of “The Kosovo Republic” security and rights defense. The significance of these general lines is also confirmed by the content of Russian officials speeches and papers.

Thus, taking into account the fact that Russia adheres to the principles both knowingly difficult to implement and make international society follow them (like searching for balance between territorial integrity and national self-determination, holding to international law without any significant sanctions for disobedience, seeking for decisions equally suitable for both conflict parties etc.) we can conclude that its policy is aimed at conflicts status-quo preservation, which could assist it to keep its role of regional regulator and its impact on important partners (like Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Serbia etc.). On the other hand, it is acceptably in similar fashion that total settlement is also profitable for Russia as it becomes more and more problematic for it to retain the position of the international law defender when the world is changing so rapidly.