

Emmanuel Macron and Franco-Russian relations at the present stage

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the modern vectors of French foreign policy since the beginning of Macron's presidency and the main directions of European political processes.

The French Republic is exploring the basis for potential international alliances. During the presidency of Donald Trump, there were constant and quite significant differences between US policy and the policy of Emanuel Macron. This state of affairs has been advantageous for the Russian Federation in the context of the realization of its intentions to resume cooperation with France in full.

The French president has boldly stated that NATO's expansion and the development of its military infrastructure near its borders with Russia should not be a priority for the Alliance, as this could lead to an escalation of the conflict.

It should be noted that France's foreign policy is increasing tensions with European partners. Such differences are in Russia's favor, which is counting on the stagnation of European relations against the background of demonstrating its strength. NATO and the Kremlin's policies now have somewhat in common and are characterized by a desire to avoid large-scale armed conflict in the region.

There are several common areas where Russia and France can find common interests, namely: ending the war in Ukraine, maintaining the agreement with Iran, finding ways to resolve the conflict in Syria, stabilizing the situation in Central Africa, bilateral investments, restoring collective security in Europe, restoration of bilateral relations between the countries, establishment of cooperation between Russia and NATO.

Key words: Eastern Europe, France, geopolitics, Russia, Syria, Ukraine, EU, Iran, coronavirus, NATO.

Introduction

The European vector of foreign policy of the French Republic as a key determinant of the international activity of the state affects, on the one hand, political-diplomatic and foreign economic relations, and on the other – determines the interaction of government, business and civil society. The current

development of European political processes, the transformation of the security system in Europe, the effectiveness of the leading European institutions and the development of a format for their cooperation within and outside the European project depend on modern French policy.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The main sources were conceptual documents of French government agencies and EU supranational institutions, analytical developments of French, European and

Ukrainian research centers, as well as author's research on the perception of European political and security strategies in France and more. The purpose of the article is to reveal the conceptual

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and applied aspects of the European strategy of France as a key determinant of modern foreign policy of the state in the conditions of

transformational changes in the European region.

Results and discussion

Franco-Russian relations date back several centuries. These countries were both allies and enemies on the battlefield. We can now see the mutual desire of both countries to cooperate and achieve common interests. In 2010, French soldiers took part in the Victory Parade on Red Square during the celebration of the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II. In the spring of 2012, after being re-elected head of state, President Vladimir Putin included Paris in the program of his first foreign visit. The current political relations between France and Russia have undoubtedly been affected by the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, as a result of which the European Union has imposed sanctions on Russia and suspended its membership in the G8. Moscow and Paris have maintained a regular dialogue since 2014, which, in particular, concerned the crisis in Ukraine. In this new context of relations, which take place in the conditions of the end of ideological confrontation, it should be noted that Russia and France have become strategic partners that represent a new trend in European relations (Defarges Philippe, 1985).

Emanuel Macron has never taken an anti-Russian position, despite being negatively covered by the Russian media. When he was economy and finance minister, he called for the lifting of sanctions against Russia, and two weeks after he became president, he invited Vladimir Putin to Versailles. The President of France is also very positively perceived by the Russian minority. His open policy toward Russia may have several reasons. One of them, of course, is a strong desire to take the lead in Europe in order to be able to decide its fate. Today, Macron has incomparably less influence than the United States. Another negative factor is that Chancellor Angela Merkel has moved into the shadow of the European political scene, and she could significantly support her French ally (given the German-Russian cooperation on Nord

Stream 2). Therefore, the President of France is forced to take the initiative and make decisions aimed at gaining leadership positions in Europe. It should be noted that he used the tactic of “open hands”, which is to find a profitable agreement in the region, rather than rivalry, which, in the view of E. Macron, seeks the United States (Defarges Philippe, 1985).

Emanuel Macron’s commitment to Russia surprised the geopolitical community of international relations experts. It should be emphasized that almost no one foresaw such a scenario. On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that France and Germany are now a force in the European Union, and that Berlin still allows itself to maintain relations which it considers to be in the national interest and considering reconciliation with Russia, even at such a difficult time for NATO and the European Union.

The French Republic is searching for and studying the basis for potential international alliances. After Trump was elected President of the United States, there were constant and marked differences between US policy and E. Macron’s policy. The stalemate created in mutual relations has created a gap that has been successfully exploited by the Russian Federation. The Russian authorities have demonstrated their desire for close cooperation with France. For his part, the President of France emphasized the uncertainty of NATO’s position, (Macron sets, 2020) noting that it is the current US administration that rejects the concept of the international community, demonstrating that each country must take care of itself and put its own interests above those of others. At the same time, it should be emphasized that other members of the European Union are concerned about the relevance of strengthening the capacity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the interests of Member States in modern conditions. The above aspects cause

the instability of the geopolitical environment, increase distrust in Washington's policies. The key question is whether the United States can still be a dominant player in the context of European stability, and what the Kremlin's role is in accepting Paris' hand.

Francoise Tom, a history professor at the Sorbonne, said that the argument that Russia may be pro-European, have no basis (Macron sets, 2020) This is an accusation against the President of France, who does not follow the trends in the national media of Russia. The Diploweb.com website analyzed eight programs that were broadcast from July 2014 to July 2017 on three main Russian channels: Channel One, Russia 1 and NTV. The 2017 French presidential campaign was also included. These programs portrayed Europe as an opponent of Russia, and President E. Macron, repeatedly portrayed in a negative sense. Some television reports have compared him to a totalitarian ruler who does not care about his citizens. According to the media, the French sleep on the streets, have no insurance, and many of them would be happy to move to the Russian Federation if the opportunity arose. The President of France, despite his experience in economics and business, is unable to cope with the situation in the country, including due to the imposition of sanctions against Russia. France ceased to be an important player, and without a strong army it became useless. Russian journalists even went so far as to call E. Macron a homosexual because of his policies and lack of family values in his work (Image of Europe, 2018).

For its part, the French media have repeatedly spoken warmly about Vladimir Putin and activities of the Russian Federation. Encouraging statements about Moscow were intended to convince of the need for rapprochement of the political discourse of the two countries, or it was concluded that allies should be sought in the East, not in Western Europe.

First of all, Emanuel Macron calls for a strategic dialogue with Russia without naivety. The condition for such cooperation is the settlement of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as well as the cessation of the

perception of Russia as a threat. The perception of the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe as a Soviet bloc will not lead to effective decisions that are important to the modern world. The French president has boldly stated that NATO's expansion and the development of its military infrastructure near its borders with Russia should not be a priority for the alliance now, as it could lead to an escalation of the conflict.

According to journalist Antoine Izambard (the author of the book "France – China. Dangerous Ties"), E. Macron will approach the Russian Federation through Ukraine, Africa and ... the Internet. During the Ukrainian crisis, Russia was a strong player, and the actions of France (and Europe) were limited to warnings and sanctions. The same is true of Africa, where Russia is seeking to increase its influence and other countries are just watching its movements. At the same time, mention should be made of the French Republic, which has sent more than 9,000 troops to Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Senegal and Gabon. This parallel demonstrates a common interest in the region that can be used to achieve strategic goals. The last element is the Internet, which can become an information guide for Franco-Russian cooperation. The use of the media makes France's current international policy towards Russia understandable to the public, which must see the potential in establishing good relations between the two countries, aimed at building a stable and secure Europe (Loi 2018-607, 2020).

The beginning of France's politically active participation in relations with Russia was the visit of Jean-Yves Le Drian and Florence Parley to Moscow on September 9, 2019. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense met with their Russian counterparts, Sergei Lavrov and Sergei Shoigu. The meeting was defined by the Franco-Russian "2 + 2" with the slogan "trust" (French "la confiance"). The last meeting of this type was organized 7 years earlier. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian was optimistic about mutual co-operation, noting that differences between Russia and France are detrimental to common interests. Sergei Lavrov reiterated that Russia is interested in

agreements with France. According to French diplomacy, the turning point for modern relations between France and Russia was to be the exchange of prisoners between Moscow and Kiev, the ceasefire and the blurring of the line of demarcation in eastern Ukraine. However, it was noted that sanctions against Russia remain an important issue to be addressed.

In his well-known interview to *The Economist*, the President of the French Republic, speaking of tensions with Turkey and the United States, said that today we are experiencing a “death of NATO’s brain” (Emmanuel Macron, 2019). The statement was intended to explain his assessment of the US withdrawal from Syria and Turkey’s actions in the region. In the next part, E. Macron noted that NATO does not have clearly defined strategic goals, and Europe needs to strengthen its security. He added that there had been no talks on the US president’s decision, despite the fact that the countries are NATO partners, and expressed concern about Turkey’s aggression in an area where Paris’ interests are at stake. The French president has said that what happened in Syria is a huge problem for NATO as a whole. In such circumstances, it is very difficult to determine whether this will be ensured in the future by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which provides for military solidarity of members of the alliance in the event of an attack on one of them.

Following President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s comments, the French Foreign Ministry called on Turkish Ambassador Ismail Hakki Musa to explain the unacceptable statements, which should not appear in Turkish-French relations, or to replace the necessary dialogue between the two countries.

Macron E. acknowledged that France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty was never considered. The President of France explained that his words were caused by the frank and unacceptable actions of the partners at the previous two NATO summits, during which the focus was on how to reduce financial costs for the United States, rather than on important issues. The head of state noted that it is necessary to consider the issues of peace in

Europe, relations with Russia, Turkey’s actions, as well as to determine who is the real enemy of NATO. At the same time, the priority for E. Macron was to strengthen the involvement of counter-terrorism partners in the Sahel, where almost 5,000 French soldiers are stationed. He asked Member States to increase support that would be useful to all after the eradication of terrorism. The result of these negotiations was the statement of the President of France that “the proclamation of its commitment to collective security is not a real union – it is necessary actions, not words (Sahel: Emmanuel, 2019).

As we can see, E. Macron sees the need for joint action within NATO, but only where the interests of France are violated. According to him, any actions that do not fit into the strategic policy of France are incorrect, and only participation where it is in the interests of France can benefit the entire alliance. E. Macron notes that NATO has only one enemy – terrorism, and this phenomenon should be fought together with the Russian Federation.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that France’s foreign policy is leading to increased tensions with European partners. However, such differences are in Russia’s favor, which expects to stagnate as part of a “demonstration of force”. The policies of both NATO and the Kremlin are the same now: fear of the possibility of an armed conflict in the region. The exceptions are the territory of Ukraine and Syria, where such actions are practically allowed. So, this should be seen as a poker game in which one side will have to say a pass. However, no one expected that one of the cards in the NATO deck would suddenly turn around and fall on the table, completely disrupting the situation. Thus, the United States lost its ace. On the other hand, France risks losing the confidence of the rest of Europe, which in principle is unlikely given its strong position in the European Union. Therefore, the French position may seem confusing or dangerous to some, but it should be considered more in the category of seeking opportunities. The French have always been proud of their *Liberte*, so it is only natural that

they do not want to be limited – even at the cost of imbalances in Europe.

Diplomacy is important, especially in the context of regularly renewed sanctions against Russia. There are also significant differences in the approach of NATO members to the annexation of Crimea (NATO), political freedoms in Russia or the European Union's interference in the public life of individual member states. However, there are clear signs that the French Republic and the Russian Federation need each other.

France and Russia can find a solution to the conflict in Ukraine. The main dispute is the legality of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. At present, the most important thing is to find a compromise that will restore Ukraine's sovereignty over its eastern borders (the goal of Paris). The implementation of these activities in the long-term strategy should be carried out in the format of Normandy, and E. Macron should play a key role in the negotiations.

At the same time, for the Russian Federation, the most important thing in its contacts with France is the creation of such an influence that the French president, if not forced, will at least persuade or persuade Ukraine to give up territories occupied by pro-Russian separatists. The method and arguments that will be used to convince the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky are of secondary importance. In this case, the effect is important, which can have significant consequences. Capitulating Ukraine, accepting Russia's demands, will begin the process of self-liquidation of the state. Despite Ukraine's enormous problems with education, corruption and, above all, internal security, the authorities are trying to keep Russia's attacks under control and not take any violent steps. The problem, however, is that Ukraine is beginning to fight not only with Russia, but also with other countries that were initially supposed to help it in the conflict with the Kremlin.

The French Republic and the Russian Federation can also become closer thanks to the 2015 nuclear agreement signed between Iran and the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China and Germany. The Trump administration

has condemned the deal and suspended sanctions against Iran. Since then, Tehran has resumed nuclear activities, violating the status quo aimed at maintaining a balance of power. In this situation, France and Russia must have the same vision. The agreement should be upheld to avoid the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, which is already at risk of conflict. Suffice it to say that the United States has imposed sanctions on Iran, and France has done the exact opposite. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, an ally of Russia, has found another ally in Europe, E. Macron offered Iran a loan of \$ 15 billion (St. Petersburg. 2020).

The protracted civil war in Syria threatens not only Syria and other countries in the region, but also Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the fighting and several million were displaced. Now the refugees are heading to Europe. Russia's role in this conflict is significant, as it has decided to intervene far from its borders, and accusations of facilitating the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's regime must be taken into account. Today, Russia is seeking agreements with Turkey and Iran. Support for France could be crucial to the Kremlin's government and at the same time end the conflict. The French Republic can become a player who joins the game and ends a long and devastating war.

Turkey is also trying to involve France and Germany in the fight for Syria. Thousands of migrants who can enter Europe are President Erdogan's main trade coin in the process of putting pressure on the European Union. First of all, he is concerned about the EU's political and diplomatic commitment to resolving the situation in Idlib. If the French Republic adheres to its non-interference position, it will in some way support the Russian Federation, which wants Turkey to be left alone. At worst, about 4 million Syrians will end up in Turkey. Thus, the Kremlin has taken the position of an observer of the confrontation between Turkey and the European Union, demonstrating the indifference that is taking place in Syria. Even losing their own soldiers.

It should be noted that Russia's economic cooperation with individual EU countries,

including France, continues to develop. More than 500 large Russian companies use French capital, the trade turnover between the two countries increased at the end of 2018 and amounted to 14.2 billion dollars, at the end of 2020 – about 15 billion US dollars. France was the second largest foreign investor in Russian stocks after Germany.

The OSCE's inability to verify compliance with arms treaties and conflict prevention in Europe, as well as the US withdrawal (Withdrawal, 2019) from the INF Treaty on the Complete Elimination of Medium-Range Missiles, forces the French Republic to assume the role of chief negotiator between Moscow and Washington. If E. Macron wants to cooperate with the Russian Federation, he must choose between solidarity with Eastern European allies (Poland and the Baltic states) and the issue of Ukraine and the search for

compromises with Putin. The Russian president is also aware that too many concessions to any NATO member, even France, could contribute to Russia's isolation in Europe and the loss of its influence. In this perspective, the willingness to compromise both E. Macron and Vladimir Putin will be crucial.

Emanuel Macron's effective steps to bring Paris closer to Moscow were supported by former President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy. He also encouraged multilateralism and rapprochement with Russia. At the same time, he criticized Donald Trump's methods of action against China and Iran. The former president has already spoken about bilateral relations and called for the lifting of sanctions against the Russian Federation after the annexation of Crimea.

Conclusions

1. The Russian Federation sees significant potential for cooperation with France. Vladimir Putin believes that after reaching an agreement with Macron, other countries will follow the same path and forget about the events of the last six years, looking for opportunities to establish cooperation. According to Françoise Tom, this would be a major achievement of the Kremlin's long-standing policy, which is based on the tactics of information warfare and preparing the ground for the realization of its interests.

2. If the United States decides to reduce its influence in Europe or is pushed out of it, Russia will clearly take a dominant role. Ties between Russia and France are growing stronger, while

the US presence in Europe is largely due to conflict. Therefore, the instability of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization may be the reason for the emergence of a new center of power in Europe.

3. Macron E. is aware of Russia's crisis in Europe after the annexation of Crimea, and therefore can use it for negotiations. At the same time, improving relations with Paris is of great importance to the Kremlin.

A promising area of further research is the strengthening of cooperation between France and Russia, which may intensify significantly against the background of the economic downturn in the post-epidemic period.

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