



## THEMATIC DOSSIER: Russia's Pivot to the East

## ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ДОСЬЕ: Разворот России на Восток

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### Pivot to the East as a Factor in Strengthening Russian Influence in Asia

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**Abstract.** The object of study of this article is the Eastern vector of modern Russian foreign policy; the subject determines its main directions, mechanisms, and tools. The authors rely on the theory of neorealism, which allows to consider the foreign policy of states as a desire to ensure their national interests. The authors used the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and reliability, which made it possible to study the prerequisites of Russia's policy of turning to the East, to establish cause-and-effect relations and to identify regularities in the development of Russia's international relations with the countries of the East. A systematic approach was used, as well as a number of general scientific (analysis, synthesis) and special historical methods of research: comparative-historical and problem-chronological methods. The study highlights the role of the Russian Foreign Minister Y.M. Primakov in Russia's return to the East. It emphasizes that Primakov was not in favor of breaking off relations with European countries and the USA but sought to find a counterbalance to the pro-Western course of foreign policy in the 1990s and to build up relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region (APR). The article notes the difficulties Russia faces in implementing its Eastern policy, including the geographical remoteness from most APR countries, cold climate, the small population of the Far East, the underdeveloped infrastructure of the Far East, and the socio-cultural differences between Russia and the APR countries. But the course to strengthen Russia's positions in the Asia-Pacific region is becoming a key foreign policy direction, a vital factor in the preservation and development of Russia as a developed industrial country. The paper analyzes the measures taken by the country's leadership to involve the Russian economy in the integration processes in the Asia-Pacific region and considers the dynamics of Russia's trade relations with the main partners in this region. It concludes that the policy of turning to the East has taken place, as its successes are obvious.

**Key words:** US, West, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK, sanctions against Russia, Asia-Pacific region

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## Разворот на Восток как фактор укрепления влияния России в Азии

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**Аннотация.** Объект исследования — восточный вектор современной внешней политики России, предмет исследования — ее основные направления, механизмы и инструменты. Авторы опираются на теорию неореализма, которая позволяет объяснить внешнюю политику государств стремлением обеспечить свои национальные интересы. Используются принципы историзма, научной объективности и достоверности, что позволило изучить предпосылки российской политики разворота на Восток, установить причинно-следственные связи и выявить закономерности развития международных отношений России со странами Востока. Были применены системный подход, а также ряд общенаучных (анализ, синтез) и специально-исторических методов исследования: сравнительно-исторический и проблемно-хронологический методы. Выявлена роль главы МИД России Е.М. Примакова в возвращении России на Восток. Подчеркивается, что Е.М. Примаков не был сторонником разрыва отношений с европейскими странами и США, но стремился найти контрбаланс прозападному курсу внешней политики 1990-х гг. и наращивать отношения со странами Азиатско-Тихоокеанского региона (АТР). Отмечены сложности, с которыми Россия сталкивается при реализации восточной политики, среди которых географическая удаленность от большинства стран АТР, холодный климат, малочисленность населения Дальнего Востока, неразвитость дальневосточной инфраструктуры, социокультурные различия России и стран АТР. Однако курс на укрепление российских позиций в АТР становится ключевым внешнеполитическим направлением, жизненно важным фактором в сохранении и укреплении России в статусе развитой индустриальной страны. Проанализированы мероприятия, реализованные руководством страны для включения российской экономики в интеграционные процессы в АТР, рассмотрена динамика торговых отношений России с основными партнерами в данном регионе. В заключение делается вывод, что политика поворота на Восток состоялась, так как очевидны ее успехи.

**Ключевые слова:** США, Запад, Китай, Корейская Народно-Демократическая Республика, КНДР, санкции против России, Азиатско-Тихоокеанский регион

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### Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century, as the problems of globalization have deepened, financial and political instability has gradually engulfed the leading states of the world. At

present, the trend of weakening and loss of monopoly dominance in the world of the United States of America and the countries of the collective West as a whole is becoming more and more evident against the background of the fact that the East Asian countries — China, Japan,

South Korea, etc. — are achieving sustainable economic growth, improving the level and quality of life, and greater influence in the international arena. All this indicates that the center of industrial and post-industrial growth is increasingly shifting towards East Asia. This inevitably entails a change in the balance of power in traditional geopolitical configurations and contributes to the creation of new ones with a tangible role for the East in the economy, politics, and spiritual life.

Since the early 2010s, as it became clear that the collective West did not consider Russia an equal partner, the country's leadership began to consider the pivot to the East as an alternative to the increasingly deteriorating relations with the West. In 2013, in the Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin proclaimed “the turn to the East as Russia's priority for the entire 21st century.”<sup>1</sup>

The Pivot to the East, has become one of the main topics in the international life of both Russia and Western countries (Rozman, 2018; Vinogradov, 2019; Miller, 2020; Torkunov, Streltsov & Koldunova, 2020; 2022, p. 256; Huang & Wang, 2024). This topic has become especially relevant since the financial crisis of 2007–2008 (Mankoff, 2015, p. 68). These topics are actively discussed in the context of new vectors of global governance,<sup>2</sup> as well as the prospects for the international political dimension of Russian-Chinese interaction (Govorov, 2016; Vinogradov, 2021), interaction between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (Bo, 2017; Asmolov & Zakharova, 2020).

<sup>1</sup> Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation // The President of Russia. December 12, 2013. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38057/page/1> (accessed: 15.01.2024).

<sup>2</sup> Yakovenko A. Eastern Vector of Russia's Foreign Policy // Russian International Affairs Council. March 12, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/vostochnyy-vektor-vneshney-politiki-rossii/#detail> (accessed: 15.01.2024).

Russia began to pursue a consistent policy of transferring the main efforts of the state from the Western geopolitical and geo-economic vector to the Eastern direction in order to find new markets, sources of investment and, in general, to maintain economic growth. As A.V. Torkunov and D.V. Streltsov note, “The turn to the East has become a natural continuation and practical embodiment of the foreign policy philosophy of multipolarity adopted by Russia, within which it sees itself as one of the global poles of power” (Torkunov & Streltsov, 2023, p. 6). At the same time, this step involves the search for new incentives for economic growth, technologies and markets for Russian products, as well as a rethinking of the philosophy of the development of Siberia and the Far East and the promotion of the Greater Eurasian Partnership as a world development project of the Russian Federation (Torkunov, Streltsov & Koldunova, 2022, p. 6). The world has changed dramatically over the past decade, and Asia, which has “freed itself from the role of a follower in the processes of globalization” and is now actively shaping them itself. The chosen foreign policy vector of Russia's turn to the East, according to S.A. Karaganov, in a situation where attempts to “please” and negotiate with the West are not only immoral, but also counterproductive from the point of view of Realpolitik, is absolutely correct (Karaganov, 2024, p. 44.).

This course has ultimately become a key element of Russian foreign policy, especially after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

### **Historical Background and Conceptual Framework of Russia's Turn to the East**

The first steps in Russia's return to the East, where the USSR played a key role until its collapse in 1991, were taken immediately after the appointment of Y.M. Primakov as head of the Russian Foreign Ministry in January 1996. Y.M. Primakov sought to find a counterbalance to the pro-Western course of the then political

elite. He believed that “the partnership relations of Russia, Russian business, with European countries, the United States of America have a long history, which is probably impossible to destroy through the efforts of individual political leaders.”<sup>3</sup> In the view of the new minister, Russia’s policy should have been more balanced, and Russia should look not only to the West, as under the previous minister A.V. Kozyrev (1990–1996), but also to the East. In his opinion, an important place in it should have been occupied by “building up cooperation with a wide range of partners, including the countries of the Asia-Pacific region,” which “was based on a deep understanding of the fundamental national interests of Russia, on the work of many generations of our diplomats, on the solid developments we had” (Barsky, 2016, p. 43).

The efforts made by Y.M. Primakov marked a real change in Russian policy, but it should be admitted that a quick return to the East, in the form that Moscow had hoped for at the time, did not take place. The old wisdom that “you can’t step into the same river twice” has once again confirmed its rightness. The fact is that after the emergency, still Soviet, exodus and the subsequent loss of interest by the Russian authorities in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, a lot of what the Russian state had been developing for a long time was lost.

Y.M. Primakov was faced with the task of finding Russia’s place in the changed Asia, and, above all, in the Asia-Pacific region, in the new conditions. It was no longer a question of Russia becoming an influential player in the Asia-Pacific region, a huge, dynamically developing space with gigantic financial, commodity and human flows; Russia needed at least to return to this region: find new partners and friends there, sources of investment, new commodity markets.

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<sup>3</sup> Pantyukhin A. Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov: It Is Not Necessary to Be Friends with All Countries, But It Is Possible and Necessary to Work // The International Affairs. June 29, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/17866> (accessed: 27.12.2023).

There is no doubt that all these goals have been and remain relevant foreign policy tasks for Russia. It is not worth saying that over the past almost thirty years they have been fulfilled, but it is quite obvious that Moscow has gradually moved towards achieving them.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the Russian leadership had to overcome objectively existing obstacles that significantly hampered this process. First, Russia is geographically located on the remote periphery of the Asia-Pacific region, in Northeast Asia in the zone of a cold climate. It faces the Pacific Ocean in sparsely populated areas, with limited economic opportunities due to a lack of developed infrastructure. Therefore, the Russian Far East does not act as an independent economic entity in the Asia-Pacific region, but rather as a transit center where goods from the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur trains are reloaded onto sea vessels and sent to their destination in the Asia-Pacific countries (Blakkisrud, 2018; Izotov, 2021). The integration of the economy of the Russian Far East region into the Asia-Pacific region is extremely small and is developing slowly and difficultly, since due to the small scale of the region’s economy, the East Asian countries are not particularly interested in including the Far East in pan-Asian integration processes. All this has a negative impact on Russia’s capabilities and noticeably narrows its ability to actively participate in and influence integration processes in the Asia-Pacific region.

The next objective obstacle is that socio-culturally, Russia stands out sharply in the world of Asian nations. Despite all Moscow’s desire to prove that the Russian Federation is also Asia, culturally Russia is alone in Greater East Asia (Voskressenski, 2010), but also alone in the West.

Moreover, it should be noted that the pivot will be long-term, since the Western sanctions and military support for the nationalist and anti-Russian regime in Ukraine leave Russia no chance to preserve and restore any significant

relations with the West in the foreseeable future. The old formula that “if Russian ‘Europeanism’ has always been a matter of identity, then Russian ‘Asiatism’ is just a pragmatic choice,”<sup>4</sup> is increasingly losing its relevance.

In this regard, the policy of strengthening Russia’s position in the Greater East Asia region is becoming a key foreign policy area, a vital factor in the preservation and development of Russia as a developed industrial country capable of independently advancing the economy, the production of the most modern weapons, education, science and culture, and maintaining the achieved standard of living for the majority of the population. All this can be achieved and maintained only by following a certain long-term program, taking into account what is happening in this vast East Asian region and in the direction in which events are developing.

It was a complete surprise for the Western elites when, after the start of the special military operation, the Asian states reacted to the events around Ukraine in a completely different way than they expected. It can be said that in most Asian capitals, despite the anti-Russian information pressure of the Western media, “they quite clearly understand the causes and nature of this conflict and are trying in every possible way not only to maintain, but also to expand contacts with Russia as a friendly country that consistently opposes the militarization of the region, its split into opposing blocs, and the preservation of the existing status quo” (Mosyakov, 2023, p. 70).

One of the reasons for the generally positive connotations of the image of Russia in Asia is that it is in recent years that in the minds of Asian societies, attempts to associate Russia with Western colonialism and imperialism have

ceased to be successful, and colonial exploitation and the humiliation of Asian states are in no way associated with Russia.

But they do not determine the prevailing opinions in Asian scientific and political societies. The separation of Russian history from European history is very positive in terms of building relations between Russia and Asian states, since their historical memory, unlike European countries, where everything that Russia has done for their security and freedom is simply ignored, plays a very significant role. In this regard, in the Asia-Pacific region, in the minds of the majority of local communities, Russia acts alone, and recently in some connection with China, and is considered not only a global player, but more as one of the important regional partners of the countries located there.

### Economic Dimension

Even before the start of the special military operation, it was possible to talk about an obvious positive trend in economic ties in the East, when in the first quarter of 2019 alone; Russia’s foreign trade turnover with Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries reached almost 50 billion USD. An increase of 9% compared to 2018.<sup>5</sup> This amount is more than a third of Russia’s total trade turnover with the countries outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the first quarter of 2019.<sup>6</sup> At the end of 2022, the volume of trade between Russia and the countries of the APEC region increased by 6.1% compared to 2021, and

<sup>5</sup> Results of Russia’s Foreign Trade in the First Quarter of 2019 // Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. 2019. (In Russian). URL: [https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/file/8b679322cb019103d76c84bbf5f1f828/ItogiTorgovli\\_1kv\\_2019.pdf?ysclid=lr3uu6dmlj394342204](https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/file/8b679322cb019103d76c84bbf5f1f828/ItogiTorgovli_1kv_2019.pdf?ysclid=lr3uu6dmlj394342204) (accessed: 15.01.2024).

<sup>6</sup> Report on Russia’s Foreign Trade in 2020: Trade Turnover, Exports, Imports, Trade Partners, Structure, Goods, Dynamics // Foreign Trade of Russia. (In Russian). URL: <https://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2021-02/vneshnyaya-torgovlya-rossii-v-2020-godu/?ysclid=lr3loz98q181966823> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

<sup>4</sup> Spanger H.-J. Russia’s Turn Eastward, China’s Turn Westward: Cooperation and Conflict on the New Silk Road // Valdai Papers. 2016. No. 47. P. 12. (In Russian). URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/22146/> (accessed: 28.03.2024).

in the first eight months of 2023 it increased by another 11.8%.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, a lot has been done in Russia in recent years as part of the turn to the East. In recent years, major infrastructure projects have been implemented connecting Central Russia, the Urals and Siberia with the ports of the Pacific Ocean. Significant funds have been invested in the construction of tunnels and second tracks on the Baikal-Amur Mainline, the construction of the Chita — Khabarovsk and Vanino — Lidoga highways, and the reconstruction and expansion of the capabilities of Pacific ports. An important milestone in this process was reached in December 2019, when Gazprom, together with the Chinese company CNPC, built and put into operation the Power of Siberia main gas pipeline to supply gas from Yakutia to the Primorsky Krai and the Asia-Pacific countries.<sup>8</sup> The Eastern Siberia — Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline, built in the early 2000s, connecting the fields of Western and Eastern Siberia with the oil-loading port of Kozmino in the Far East, should be added to this list as well.<sup>9</sup>

All these infrastructure projects implemented over a long period of time have fully justified themselves. This became especially clear in 2022, when, after the start of the special military operation, the turn to the East moved from the sphere of economic planning to the sphere of survival of the Russian economy. All that was built formed the basis for a sharp increase in Russian trade with the countries of

the Asia-Pacific region, which acted as a key alternative to Russian exports to Europe.

For example, Russia's trade turnover with China in 2022 increased year-on-year by 29.3%, reaching 190.27 billion USD, which was an all-time record for the two countries. Russia's surplus in 2022 amounted to 38 billion USD, more than tripling compared to 2021.<sup>10</sup> At the end of 2023, trade with China reached a record 240.11 billion USD, an increase of 26.3% compared to 2022.<sup>11</sup> Recall that Moscow and Beijing expected to increase bilateral trade to 200 billion USD by 2024, but the above data indicate that this plan was fulfilled ahead of schedule.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Federal Customs Service for 2022, Russia's trade turnover with India increased by 46.5% in 2021, reaching 13.5 billion USD, and in 2022 it increased by another 2.4 times compared to 2021.<sup>13</sup> Trade with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states also increased significantly, amounting to 20 billion USD in 2021, an increase of 27%, and in the first ten months of 2022 it increased by another 25%.<sup>14</sup>

All this convincingly proves that Russia's turn to the East turned out to be quite a successful and well-thought-out policy. It was possible to create an infrastructure framework for a transport scheme focused on the countries of

<sup>7</sup> The Russian Delegation at the APEC Summit Pointed to the Growth of the Russian Economy // *Izvestia*. November 17, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://iz.ru/1606610/2023-11-17/delegatciia-rf-na-sammite-ates-ukazala-na-rost-rossiiskoi-ekonomiki> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

<sup>8</sup> Power of Siberia. The Largest Gas Transportation System in the East of Russia // *Gazprom*. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.gazprom.ru/projects/power-of-siberia/?ysclid=lrchshgusl651979687> (accessed: 05.10.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Eastern Siberia — Pacific Ocean Oil Pipeline (ESPO) // *Neftegaz.ru*. March 19, 2013. (In Russian). URL: <https://neftegaz.ru/tech-library/transportirovka-i-khranenie/141847-vostochnyy-nefteprovod-vsto/> (accessed: 13.01.2024).

<sup>10</sup> The Trade Turnover Between Russia and China in 2022 Increased by 29.3% // *TASS*. January 13, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16791461> (accessed 6.09.2023).

<sup>11</sup> China — Russia Trade Volume Grew by 5.2% in the First Quarter // *Vedomosti*. January 12, 2024. (In Russian). URL: <https://dzen.ru/a/ZaDgImrIXoHVICm> (accessed: 16.01.2024).

<sup>12</sup> The Share of the Russian Federation in China's Trade Does Not Exceed 4% // *Kommersant*. December 26, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6426566> (accessed: 11.09.2023).

<sup>13</sup> The Trade Turnover Between Russia and India Increased by 2.4 Times in 2022 // *TASS*. January 26, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16894469> (accessed: 12.09.2023).

<sup>14</sup> Russia Will Continue Cooperation with ASEAN with an Emphasis on Diversifying Trade // *TASS*. January 24, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16871755> (accessed: 12.09.2023).

Asia. Today, this scheme is more in demand than ever before and has literally become the “road of life” for the Russian economy. On the sidelines of the ASEAN International Business Summit held in November 2022, Chairman of the Russia — ASEAN Business Council Igor Polyakov said that “the annual trade turnover between Russia and ASEAN countries will increase to 100 billion USD by 2025.”<sup>15</sup>

It should be noted, that the figure of 100 billion USD in trade between Russia and the ASEAN countries by 2025 seems quite fantastic, given that in 2021 Russia and the ASEAN countries traded only 20 billion USD.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, if we take into account the fact that a massive reorientation of Russian medium-sized businesses from the West to the East is already taking place, then this figure of 100 billion USD begins to take real shape.

One of the problems in realizing this goal may be the underdeveloped transport infrastructure, which today cannot always cope with commodity flows towards the Pacific Ocean. For example, the transport of containers by rail in communication with terminals in the Far Eastern basin increased in 10 months of 2022 by 19%, and according to the Ministry of Transport, 5 port container terminals in the Far East had a load of 117%.<sup>17</sup> The situation with the movement of goods to Pacific ports is so difficult that by the end of 2022 only about 70% of solvent export-import was exported.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The Trade Turnover Between Russia and ASEAN Countries Will Grow to 500 Billion Dollars // Prime. October 10, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://1prime.ru/world/20221110/838779313.html> (accessed: 12.10.2023).

<sup>16</sup> Russia Will Continue Cooperation with ASEAN with an Emphasis on Diversifying Trade // TASS. January 24, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16871755> (accessed: 12.09.2023).

<sup>17</sup> Container Turnover in the Far East Is Growing Through Force // RZD Partner. November 17, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.rzd-partner.ru/logistics/comments/konteyneroborot-dalnego-vostoka-rastet-cherez-silu/> (accessed: 22.11.2022).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

All this information points to two existing trends — rapidly growing commodity flows (coal, oil, timber, fertilizers, grain, groupage cargo, machinery and consumer goods) and real logistical constraints that may not allow a significant increase in trade with Asian countries. At the same time, the bridges over the Amur River in Blagoveshchensk and in Leninskoye (Jewish Autonomous Region) have been put into operation. The development of the North — South Transport Corridor through the Caspian Sea and Iran to India opens up new opportunities for the development of Russia’s trade with the countries of the region.

In addition to solving infrastructure problems, the success of this policy will also depend on how favorable the atmosphere will be for Russian business to enter the Asia-Pacific countries.

### Russian-Chinese Cooperation

It should be noted that the core of Russia’s policy of turning to the East is the Chinese direction, that is, the establishment of special relations of strategic partnership with China.

Today we can say with certainty that there is no other country in the world that would be so close to China and share with it traditional values, many common goals, aspirations and ideals as Russia. Moreover, it can be noted that not only the top state officials are actively in contact, but also the border regions of the two countries are actively interacting.

Both countries are engaged in a wide range of ties, concentrated mainly in the economic and infrastructural spheres. Here, joint energy projects between Russia and China should be highlighted first and foremost. Among the largest, first of all, is Yamal LNG, in which 20% of the shares belong to the Chinese corporation CNPC, and another 10% to the Silk Road Fund.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Shmeleva T. Joint Projects and Common Economic Interests: In What Spheres Russia and China Cooperate // Rossiyskaya Gazeta. December 20, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/12/20/sovместnye-proekty-i->



Another Chinese company, Sinopec, has acquired a 10% stake in SIBUR, to implement several important projects for China, including petrochemical plants. *ZapSibNeftekhim* in Tobolsk, as well as the construction of the Krasnoyarsk Synthetic Rubber Plant, whose products will be directly delivered to the Chinese market (Voronova & Novikova, 2023, p. 4684).

The Arctic LNG 2 project, where China has shown an example of tough resistance to the US sanctions, should also be singled out. This liquefied natural gas (LNG) project was originally intended to involve foreign investors. However, after the U.S. imposed sanctions on Novatek, which owned Arctic LNG 2, French and Japanese investors froze their investments.<sup>20</sup> However, this did not happen with Chinese companies, which were hoped for in Washington. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, commenting on the US sanctions, said that Chinese and Russian companies will continue normal trade and economic cooperation: “China has always opposed unilateral sanctions ... China and Russia will continue to carry out normal trade and economic cooperation based on the spirit of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit.”<sup>21</sup>

Another important component of Russian-Chinese relations is interregional and cross-border cooperation. In 2022, 75 billion USD out of 190 billion USD accounted for interregional trade between China and Moscow as a federal city.<sup>22</sup>

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obshchnost-ekonomicheskikh-interesov-v-kakih-sferah-sotrudnichaiut-rossiia-i-kitaj.html (accessed: 12.01.2024).

<sup>20</sup> Japan and France Freeze Investment in Arctic LNG 2 // Interfax. March 25, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/831275> (accessed: 12.01.2024).

<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Stated that China and the Russian Federation Will Continue Trade and Economic Cooperation // TASS. December 26, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/19629369> (accessed 12.01.2024).

<sup>22</sup> Kulagin V. How the Regions Unfold to the East // Vedomosti. July 14, 2023. (In Russian). URL:

Moscow, as a separate region, acts as a flagship of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the regional context — Moscow has a huge consumer market even on a global scale, open to the promotion of Chinese goods. The position of Moscow's regional leadership on attracting Chinese business and the development of contacts and cooperation is characteristic. Vice-Mayor of Moscow V.V. Efimov said: “We are interested in Chinese manufacturers coming to our market not only with finished products, but also with their own technologies, preferably within the framework of a joint partnership.”<sup>23</sup> In these words of the Moscow vice-mayor, one can clearly see the most interesting model of mutual cooperation with companies from the People's Republic of China. Their position is that the mere import of finished products is important, of course, but each region is considering the possibilities of its development and economic growth. And this is possible only if a part of the production ends up on the territory of a particular Russian region, which allows it to increase the number of jobs and form an industrial infrastructure.

The second important point, which is especially appreciated by the leadership of the Russian regions, is the establishment of mutual partnership relations. In this way, they expect to understand and adopt the most effective business management methods adopted in China, to form the architecture of their regional business in such a way as to avoid unnecessary obstacles in the establishment and development of contacts and entrepreneurship. In addition, a significant interest for the same Moscow, according to V.V. Efimov, has cooperation with China in microelectronics, mechanical engineering and machine tool building.<sup>24</sup>

Recently, other Russian regions, especially the eastern ones, have noticeably intensified their

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<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/06/14/980097-kak-regioni-razvorachivayutsya-na-vostok> (accessed: 15.01.2024).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



contacts with China. Their leaders began to regularly attend various Russian-Chinese business events — business forums, conferences, exhibitions. In 2022, 9 governors, mainly from the Far East, took part in such events. But in 2023, the situation changed and 19 governors participated in such events, four even visited China outside the federal program on their own initiative.<sup>25</sup> These are the heads of the Khabarovsk Territory, the Jewish Autonomous Region, Republic of Tatarstan and the Kaluga Region. All of them discussed issues of economic cooperation, and the head of the Jewish Autonomous Region also discussed issues of cross-border infrastructure, expansion of trade and economic investment.

On the whole, the Chinese government has a positive perception of Russia's new foreign policy strategy, including in the context of interregional development, as China, according to Zhou Liqun, chairman of the Union of Chinese Entrepreneurs, seeks to develop its northeastern regions.<sup>26</sup>

### **Cooperation Between Russia and North Korea**

As the international situation worsens and confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region tends to grow, the positions of Russia and the DPRK are rapidly converging on many issues. In the face of North Korea, Russia has received full support in connection with the conflict in Ukraine, which shares Russian assessments of the policy of the United States and Western countries in international and regional affairs.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kulagin V. How the Regions Unfold to the East // *Vedomosti*. July 14, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/06/14/980097-kak-regioni-razvorachivayutsya-na-vostok> (accessed: 15.01.2024).

<sup>26</sup> China Spoke About the Benefits of Russia's Pivot to the East // *RIA Novosti*. June 15, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20230615/vostok-1878222079.html> (accessed: 23.02.2024).

<sup>27</sup> Davydov O. V. Russia, the DPRK and Security on the Korean Peninsula // *MEMO RAS*. October 23, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.imemo.ru/publications/>

An event that marked a new stage in relations between the two countries was the Russia — North Korea summit, which took place in Russia in September 2023. During his six-day visit to Russia, Kim Jong-un “a vision of the future of relations between the two countries was clearly formed,” despite the absence of any agreements signed during the trip (Nikiforov, 2023, pp. 152–153). In the DPRK, the meeting of the two leaders has already been called epoch-making — the Korean Central News Agency noted that the visit of the head of state to Russia fell on “a significant and important period in the development of Russian-Korean relations.”<sup>28</sup>

Speaking about the economic aspects of cooperation, we can name the priority vectors of relations between Russia and North Korea, designed for comprehensive long-term cooperation:

- increasing trade turnover and industrial volumes of the North Korean industry;
- formation of a separate special zone in the Primorsky Krai, on the Russia, bordering the DPRK and China, assuming special conditions for customs duties, visa regime and tax benefits;
- creation of mechanisms for partial replacement or rotation of Central Asian labor migrants with Korean labor personnel for their work on the territory of the Russian Federation;
- implementation of infrastructure investment projects;
- creation of a payment system for settlements in rubles for import-export trade operations and servicing the implementation of investment projects;
- resolution of the problem of international insurance of export credits and Russian investments in the DPRK, suspended due to the United Nations sanctions in 2016.<sup>29</sup>

policy-briefs/text/russia-north-korea-and-security-on-the-korean-peninsula (accessed: 23.02.2024).

<sup>28</sup> An Epochal Moment That Set a New Milestone in the Development of Korea — Russia Relations // *KCNA*. September 14, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <http://kcna.kp/ru/article/q/e47f15998b6c765617c6dcf8a7df644b.kcmsf> (accessed: 23.02.2024).

<sup>29</sup> Zaripov I. Economic Cooperation Between Russia and the DPRK: Problems and Possible Development

## Conclusion

Thus, it can be stated quite definitely that the pivot to the East of Russia is being realized, it contributes to the rise of the Russian economy, to the survival and strengthening of the Russian Federation in the most difficult conditions of the

Prospects // Invest Foresight. November 23, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://dzen.ru/a/ZV9DN0gXIZmxLJ8K> (accessed: 23.02.2024).

country's isolation from the West. Everything that was created by the Russian state in the 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries in the economy, politics, infrastructure, in changing the perception of the country in favor of positive connotations is in demand, works effectively, justifying all the huge investments that were spent by the Russian government to turn to the East.

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