

The West's TERRIBLE Dilemma Hits Hard | Dr. Ladislav Zemanek

Dr. Ladislav Zemánek examines Russia's relations with Japan, Europe's sanctions policies, and the changing balance of global power. They discuss Europe's limited strategic autonomy, the economic costs of confrontation, and Russia's growing cooperation across Eurasia. Zemánek describes BRICS and other partnerships as expanding countries' options rather than forming a unified bloc against the West. The conversation explores emerging alternative payment systems, the rising confidence of middle powers, and prospects for a more pragmatic and inclusive international order. Ladislav's

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blowback and Europe's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today for the first time with Dr. Ladislav Zemanek, a historian, political consultant, and occasional journalist. Ladislav, welcome.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Thank you for having me.

#Pascal

Well, thank you very much for saying yes to this, because you are one of the people who writes a lot of good observations that you publish, among other places, in Russia Today. You've written especially a couple of pieces, and I think you consider yourself as somebody who is kind of a Eurasianist, looking at Europe, Russia, and the Far East, or just East Asia, and your observations about, you know, how Japan and Germany are forgetting the lessons of 1945, or Russia's red lines with Japan won't budge.

You're analyzing this from kind of the—you're trying to look at Russia's points, and writing from Prague, from the Czech Republic. Can you tell us what this kind of situation at the moment between

Russia and Japan looks like to you? Because we've seen a couple of very strong incidents, including just about a week ago, how a big Second World War monument was unveiled of the Soviet soldier destroying the emblem of Japan, and the Japanese took this very badly and they were very angry. Where is this relationship going at the moment?

#Ladislav Zemanek

Let me say that I wouldn't overestimate these cases or diplomatic, maybe diplomatic incidents. But we should emphasize that today's Russia is very proud of the results and victory of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. And the historical memory in the country, among the population, across the population, is very strong. And the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War, as they call it, is one of the most important moments of their collective memory and of Russian and Soviet history. So they are very sensitive to any attempts to rewrite or provide an alternative or revisionist picture of the Second World War, and they are doing their best to safeguard the historical memory they consider their own and correct and objective.

So from this point of view, they are also very sensitive about the developments in Ukraine because they put the current events and the conflict and the war there into the broader framework of this historical picture and maybe big picture of their history. And as you know, they interpret, or they consider at least some circles or groups within Ukraine, as Nazi or those who are inspired by Nazis and their Ukrainian allies by that time. And Japan, at this moment, is supporting Ukraine. So they relate all these parts and elements to a broader picture.

And of course, from this perspective, we should also evaluate President Putin's recent visit to the Kuril Islands. Because from my point of view, it was a clear message that Russia and the Kremlin, or the Russian leadership, is very unsatisfied with Japan's position towards Ukraine, including its assistance and discussions about possible military assistance to Ukraine, as well as the military modernization or build-up which is going on in Japan itself. So it's not about one monument somewhere, or about one visit or one event, but all of this is part of a bigger picture, which is anchored or embedded in history.

#Pascal

One of the things that surprised me in the recent past was that although Japan did put sanctions on Russia, one thing they didn't do was send weapons to Ukraine. They sent medical supplies and humanitarian goods and so on, but no weapons. On the other hand, the rhetoric of Japan was very similar to that of the European states, although I would argue less vitriolic and done with much, much, much less Russophobia. However, of course, on the diplomatic sphere, very critical. Nevertheless, when the Iran war broke out, or when the United States attacked Iran together with Israel, then the Hormuz Strait closed, and Japan immediately got this shock that the most important supplier of oil and gas was being cut off.

And there was a point when they asked Russia to buy actually some oil from them first at the price cap price. But then they said, okay, fine, we're going to pay market prices later. And Russia was willing to actually sell a couple of ships full of oil to them. I don't know exactly how much was flowing, but maybe do you have any indications for how this, you know, the energy relationship between Russia and Japan is developing at the moment? Because they also still have an unfinished but not abandoned drilling project in the Sakhalin area. Do you have any information about that?

#Ladislav Zemanek

To be honest, I don't have any insider or detailed knowledge about the energy cooperation between the two countries at the moment. But generally speaking, despite—even though there can be some disagreements and diplomatic conflicts between the two countries, between Japan and Russia—it doesn't mean they are not able, or if we focus on the Russian side, it doesn't mean that Russia is not willing or able to continue cooperation, for example, in the energy field.

#Pascal

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#Ladislav Zemanek

We can have a look at the situation in Europe.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Which is the European Union, to be more precise. And despite the deep conflict and disagreement and pressure against Russia from Europe, from Brussels, from the European Union, and despite the immense sanctions which were imposed on Russia, and the long-term attempts to cut off Russian imports or imports of Russian raw materials, Russia still insists that exports to Europe, to individual European countries, are possible, and Russia is prepared to continue it. And it demonstrates that even though Europe, or the European Union as a whole, is somehow involved in the war in Ukraine, despite that, Russia is willing to continue supplying raw materials, gas and oil to Europe according to the contracts which were concluded.

So it demonstrates that despite very serious conflict between the two sides, cooperation in specific areas can continue. And moreover, for example, there are some countries within the European Union which insist on the need to continue this kind of cooperation. For example, Slovakia, or before that, Hungary. Maybe it will change in the near future, given the new political situation there. But still, the

interest is very strong. And if you have a look, for example, at Germany and the prospective political changes there, which can emerge from the elections and the prospective victory of Alternative for Germany, the whole picture can change very significantly.

#Pascal

So is this your interpretation of Russia's overall strategy, to kind of have an open-door strategy, as in, if ever you want to come back, I mean, we won't forget, but we are willing to forgive in the sense that we can continue a business relationship with each other, and that this is also how they practice their relationship towards Japan? Undoubtedly, yeah. Where do you think this is coming from? Or maybe where do you think the difference is coming from? Because to me, the European approach, especially Western Europe, seems to be all or nothing. I mean, total war preparedness. I mean, they interpret everything under the lens of war.

I mean, even a drone, whatever kind of drone, in Leipzig Airport that didn't explode or do any damage, but that was found by a bus driver—that is part and parcel of the hybrid warfare. Whenever there is any kind of accident, then immediately the calls in the media that it must have been Russia are there. We all remember how, when Nord Stream was blown up, the first reaction for two months basically was to blame the Russians, which made zero sense, but that was kind of the gut feeling, and that came out. Whereas the Russian approach seems to be a completely different one toward looking at the conflict itself. How do you explain that difference?

#Ladislav Zemanek

It seems to me that the elites within the European Union, especially at the level of the EU in Brussels, have invested too much in the conflict in Ukraine, in promoting the anti-Russian policy. So it's almost impossible for them to revise their position. And that's why I believe that... the real change, if it's to happen sometime in the future, will be carried out by different types of leaders and political representatives, like the Alternative for Germany or something, these kinds of political parties. And if we compare the EU elites and Russian elites, the Russian ones are, I would say, much more pragmatic and much less ideological. They are able to maintain relations irrespective of political, ideological differences between the sides. And they don't want to promote...

#Ladislav Zemanek

Russian way of life or Russian political or economic model to other countries. It's not Russia's position. But still, in the case of the European Union, the situation is different. And of course, it was also the position of the United States before Donald Trump. Now the situation is different, which, by the way, makes the EU leaders very nervous. And their situation is not very comfortable because they are under double pressure from Russia and from the United States. And the situation for them in terms of popularity, legitimacy, in terms of economic conditions, is worsening in the European Union, which makes their position weaker and weaker. And that's why, it's my explanation, they

invest so much in provoking further confrontation with Russia, because it's quite an efficient strategy to maintain their positions and their power. It's nothing new. That's how it works throughout history.

#Pascal

Yeah, so overall, the fostering of that Russophobia in Europe has a very clear political purpose, which is not just foreign, but domestic as well. While on the other side, in Russia, we still do have people who basically started off as Europhiles, including, of course, Vladimir Putin, but many others in the leadership as well, who wanted for very many years to be part of Europe and the West, but now are changing their strategy. On the other side, we have the Japanese, who do not harbor that kind of Russophobia, but kind of tag along within the Western camp, but I would argue also have a pragmatic attitude when it comes down to it.

So there's maybe a bit more possibility for a rapprochement. Do you see a rapprochement between Russia and Japan overall, or is the situation deteriorating? And when it comes to the Europeans, where is the biggest rapprochement happening at the moment? I mean, we've seen how the leadership change in Hungary basically inverted its policy toward Russia. But on the other hand, the Czechs and the Slovaks and so on are not very hot on that super confrontational stance. Can you give us a layout a little bit where we are in 2026?

#Ladislav Zemanek

It's a hard question, difficult question, because I think that no one knows what will happen in the next few weeks or months or years. But I think the Ukraine war is a very, very serious factor in relations between Russia and the rest of the world. It's undoubtedly true, and it complicates relations and interactions with other partners. It's a matter of fact. But at the same time, we can see, or we can observe, a rebalancing of Russia's position in international affairs.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Departure from the Western orientation toward Eurasia, or Eastern orientation towards and focus on the Global South. And it seems to me that it works under the current conditions. And so it means that the strategy or argumentation from many Western leaders that Russia is isolated and no one is interested in cooperating with it is completely false. It's not true. Maybe, yeah, it's true that the West itself has isolated itself from Russia, but it wasn't Russia's decision. And at the same time, there are a lot of political parties and actors within the West itself which disagree with the current state of affairs. And not only in Europe, but maybe more strongly in the United States, where the current administration is obviously interested in some kind of normalization of relations with Russia.

And, by the way, I can mention that a couple of weeks ago I had a meeting with Slovakia's foreign minister, and we discussed particularly this issue, the issue of normalization or the issue of relations with Russia from the Slovak point of view, from the point of view of the Slovak government. And he

told me that the government will normalize relations with Russia in the near future. And they are preparing a restart or relaunch of some intergovernmental bodies and cooperation at the government level between Slovakia and Russia. So it demonstrates that even within the European Union, there are governments that deeply disagree with the anti-Russian policy promoted especially by Brussels and Brussels' bureaucracy and some countries like Poland or the Baltic states.

And also, which is an interesting shift and change, also by Germany and the German government headed by Friedrich Merz. Because if we compare the position of Germany in 2022 and now, it's a completely different picture. And there are also some parallels with the development in Japan, not necessarily in relation to Russia, but in their internal development, in their defense and military policy, because both countries are conducting some modernization and expansion of their military capabilities. And in the case of Germany, they are being told, or Germans are being told, that they need to be prepared for war with Russia, and Japanese are particularly afraid of China. So there are also some parallels in this regard.

#Pascal

There are parallels. Although I would argue that the general agreement within Germany is much higher that Russia is a threat, whereas in Japan, the Japanese government actually has a lot of problems recruiting people into their armed forces.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Yeah, it's the same in Germany.

#Pascal

It's the same in Germany. But the thing for the Japanese is that we must not forget, to them actually, or from my perception, they are mostly afraid not of China, they are afraid of North Korea. Because North Korea is kind of that loose gun that they just cannot put anywhere, and they have nukes. And, you know, Tokyo is literally very much afraid of the nuclear capabilities of North Korea because, you know, everything's gone. I mean, that's a real thing. But then, of course, whenever they invest into any kind of armament or change their security positions to something more hawkish, it's of course immediately also a threat to China. Whereas for Germany, Germany stakes its whole domestic discourse on Russia and Russia alone, not even Iran or something. I mean, there they kind of... yeah.

#Ladislav Zemanek

It's true that the situation is changing quite rapidly in Germany itself, but it seems to me that it is especially an issue among the ruling circles, among the government circles, among the elites, not the population as a whole, because we can point to the situation in former East Germany. The

recent election results were AfD, Merz, landslide victory. And they openly call for normalization of relations with Russia and cooperation with Russia. And the population, I think that there is a broad consensus, at least in these parts of Germany, that normal relations with Russia are favorable to German interests and themselves, because they can see it in their concrete lives, that the energy prices are skyrocketing. And of course, it's related to the war in Ukraine too. Not only. It's also about Green Deal and so on. But the Ukraine war is one of the important factors.

#Pascal

So if we think about the overall strategy that certainly a couple of the neoconservatives in the United States had in the last 10 years, which is, of course, to make sure that Brzezinski's vision of the world remains alive, which is a fractured and fragmented Eurasia in the interest of the United States and, you know, using Ukraine as one of these pivotal states that can be leveraged for that purpose, that if this war actually ends on the terms of Russia and if the hurt on the Europeans, which they imposed on themselves through these sanctions, is big enough and suddenly states start flipping, like Germany, like France with Marine Le Pen, it might actually lead to the opposite. It might then lead to a further integration of the Eurasian continent, if we get lucky. Would you think that that is actually one of the possible mid- or long-term scenarios?

#Ladislav Zemanek

It's one of the possible scenarios. Of course, there is no guarantee it will happen in such a way. But if the war ends in Ukraine, there is no reason why not to restore relations with Russia, because Russia, even though it's a Eurasian country, or Asian country in a sense, it's also a European country. And it's not only about history and culture, but also about geography. And Russia is a part of Europe, and that's the fatal misunderstanding or misconception of the liberal elites in the European Union, that are able to believe that they can push Russia off Europe, but it's not possible.

There can be no durable security in Europe without Russia. It's not about my personal attitude towards the country, but it's a matter of fact. It's reality. There can be no security in Europe without Russia. And Europeans would benefit a lot from restoring energy cooperation with Russia, because, again, it's not only about energy, but Russia is a huge market. And European businesses would be eager to go there and invest there, and they would make a lot of money. So it's pragmatic. It's not about ideology.

#Pascal

Do you think such a shift is actually possible, toward pragmatism in Europe? Because, you know, a good colleague of ours, Glenn Diesen in Norway, in one of his books, he made the very important argument that, look, as long as Europe doesn't recognize that it is the northern peninsula of the Eurasian continent, there will be no continental integration, as long as the Europeans think they're separate, when in fact it's one continuous landmass, right? You can literally walk from Portugal to

Singapore, because Singapore has a bridge connected with the mainland. But you can do that. You can walk to Vladivostok. It's one single landmass. But the Europeans mentally think of themselves as separate, whereas I do think that the Russians are those Europeans that have the strongest understanding of their also Asian and East Asian integration. So do you think it is pragmatism that might help Europe? Or do we need, like, this kind of very fundamental ideological shift of where the Europeans see themselves in the world?

#Ladislav Zemanek

I still believe that the ideological shift, which would be also very important, can follow. But realistically, the first step must be normal economic cooperation, people-to-people exchanges, and so on—the restoration of normal relations between Russia and Europe. And, of course, some ideological rethinking of the position of Europe in the world and Eurasia might follow in the future. But it will not... It will not happen first. Definitely not. Because European societies are not prepared for such a radical shift from the old thinking. New thinking would be desirable, but it will not happen very soon. That's why I argue that the first step should be just restoring normal exchanges and interactions between European countries and Russia. And then we will see.

#Pascal

I thought when the US and Israel attacked Iran that this event would actually help the Europeans to suddenly see that, you know, there are other countries' unprovoked wars of aggression happening around the world and, you know, that something like a genocide in Gaza would actually suffice for the Europeans to say, like, okay, maybe we need to take a step back and reassess our moral values—not the compass, but the framing, right—of everything as good and bad. But it kind of didn't lead to that. I don't know how you see it. Did you notice an impact on this other, like, large conflict that is now ongoing, on the way that the Europeans approach their theater of war?

#Ladislav Zemanek

No. Too bad. No, but look, it's connected to specific realities in Europe because Europe is not a single state. The European Union is not a single state. It's a community of 27 countries, and it makes a difference. So despite there being a broad consensus on many policies and on many issues, the differences between individual countries still remain in place, and it will not change anytime soon, which complicates the situation. So we should take this fact into account when evaluating the possibility or the agency on the part of Europe to behave more independently and more autonomously, because there's no single center that would decide, that would manage and rule the entire continent or entire European Union.

So the picture is much more diversified than it can seem at first glance, and as I mentioned, the liberal elites are in quite an uncomfortable position at the moment because they alienated themselves from Russia, they have a complicated relationship with China, and now they are very

unhappy about what's happening in the United States with the Trump administration, which is openly hostile to the EU leadership and EU structures.

So they can't afford to be so opposite to the United States, even though they have maybe a more skeptical perspective on the developments in the Middle East and on the war with Iran. But realistically, they can't afford to cut themselves off from the United States. But it's, I would say, there is a paradox, because they want, at least rhetorically, they are in favor of building and developing the so-called strategic autonomy of the European Union, which is exactly this kind of policy: more autonomy, more agency, more independent position in international affairs, including possible non-intervention or opposition to the war with Iran. But it's limited by the fact that it is the European Union now which is much more, I would say, much more isolated than Russia, in a sense, because they are hostile to Russia, to a certain degree China, Iran, of course, United States too. In a sense, so the situation of the European Union is very, very specific, and it's quite complicated for not only the current leadership, but for them too.

#Pascal

No, it doubtlessly is. But what do you make of the argument which is out there that the whole strategic autonomy discourse in the European Union actually is just another way of trying to serve the transatlantic alliance, the NATO alliance, by saying, like, look, the Americans are unreliable. We need to have more investment, 5% target, right? Everybody pour a lot of money into your weaponry, and then two, three years down the road, when the next president is around, you know, the next Biden or whoever it is, or Kamala Harris or whoever comes along, right, who is just as hawkish on Russia or on international affairs, you know, then everybody will be buddy-buddy again. And you just have then a bigger, stronger NATO, stronger in the sense of, like, more militarized NATO. So that this discourse is basically dishonest because it doesn't really aim at strategic autonomy. It aims to increase the NATO capacity through the discourse of strategic autonomy. Do you put any credence into this interpretation?

#Ladislav Zemanek

Maybe it can be partially true, but still, I think that even in Brussels, they are increasingly aware that Europe and the European countries cannot rely on the United States so much or so heavily like in the past. And of course, one part or one aspect of this recognition is higher investment in defense and military capabilities.

It's undoubtedly true, but it's not necessarily motivated by the idea of Atlanticism or transatlanticism. It's just a reaction to the reality that it's obvious that the United States are not so much interested in Europe anymore, and they want to focus more on Asia-Pacific and the American or the Western Hemisphere, and Europe is not so important for them anymore. And this is the natural reaction: how to maintain or continue, let's say, maybe exclusive or very high-level cooperation between the United States and Europe. The discussion in Europe about military and defense capabilities is not

only about NATO, because if we have a look at the documents which were edited by or released by European Commission and other agencies of the European Union regarding military and defense in relation to strategic autonomy, to this narrative.

It's not only about NATO. It's also about greater integration or interoperability between European armies themselves, not necessarily linked to NATO, which also, by the way, provokes discussion within individual member states of the European Union, because there is an argument that the European Union shouldn't be engaged in building its own military capabilities and military units and so on, that it's the primary responsibility of NATO. And the other argument says that it's not necessarily contradictory. Europe can focus more on building its own defense capabilities or military capabilities, which will be parallel to NATO structures. And if we evaluate this argumentation, it would be closer to real strategic autonomy, because there would be parallel structures alongside NATO, because NATO, of course, is dependent on the United States as its primary actor. So the discussion is more, I would say, multilayered.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, no, you're absolutely right. And, you know, two things do not necessarily need to exclude each other. I mean, that people who believe that strategic autonomy might also be good for NATO and those who believe that, you know, we need to prepare for any case, that they necessarily work against each other? Rather not. I mean, a similar thing is happening in Japan, a similar discourse: one part of the spectrum that says we need to do more for the alliance, therefore we need to invest more into our defense, and the other that says, no, we need indigenous capabilities because the Americans are not reliable. But it ends up in the same thing, being like, okay, more investment into defensive capabilities.

But where do you think this then leaves, like, the, let's say, the positive part of the equation? You know, we saw a lot of division that the Ukraine war created, right, naturally, but we also saw integration in Russia and China, Russia and India, Russia and even Southeast Asia, that kind of developed, further developed their relationship. How do you see the entire BRICS part or the Global South part of the equation now working into this political dynamism?

#Ladislav Zemanek

The Russians say it's a global or world majority. It's a very popular term in Russia.

#Pascal

The global majority.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Yeah, global majority. It's the world minus the West.

#Pascal

Which is still a huge world, yeah. Yeah.

#Ladislav Zemanek

So sometimes it's also synonymous to Global South, in a sense. But Global South, the conception or the concept of Global South, usually doesn't include Russia. So for Russians, it's more convenient to use this term, the term of world or global majority. But even the Russians are aware that it's not a homogeneous bloc or homogeneous community of states, that different actors, different countries have different priorities and different national interests. But despite that, it's true that after 2022, they succeeded in deepening cooperation with China and

#Ladislav Zemanek

with Iran.

#Ladislav Zemanek

And it also seems that the operation of such multilateral organizations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or you mentioned BRICS, is moving forward and that it brings tangible results. Like last year, at the summit in Tianjin in China in September 2025, the SCO Development Bank was established. It's one of the examples of concrete results. And in any case, such platforms and such organizations shouldn't necessarily be seen as opposition or alternative platforms to the West and to Western institutions.

But it's a supplement to the existing structures that enable the participating states to broaden the possibilities, or broaden their agency, their actorness at the international level, because it creates new channels, new instruments for cooperation. And, for example, for Russia, one of the main priorities is the gradual establishment of alternative payment systems. It's logical because, of course, they are suffering from the sanctions and from the exclusion from the SWIFT system. So it's one of the priorities which connects Russia with Iran, for example, very deeply, because Iran is in a similar position in this regard.

So yes, for example, I don't know, in June or July there was a meeting of foreign ministers of ASEAN countries and Russia, and it demonstrated that members of the ASEAN organization, the Southeast Asian nations, are very interested in cooperation with Russia, irrespective of the pressure from the United States or other Western countries. So it demonstrates that the world is changing, and the Ukraine war accelerates this process of cooperation, certain emancipation, or demonopolization of the international order, because the individual countries, not only the major powers like Russia or

China or India, but also middle-sized countries, middle powers, are emancipating themselves, and they behave much more assertively and much more independently than just a couple of years ago.

#Pascal

This is a very useful word, I think, that you used, which is like, you know, this kind of multilateralization. And it's not a decoupling from the West, but it is a demonopolization of these Western structures. We are getting closer and closer to actually having real alternatives, right? I mean, the big ones are still not there. There is no global alternative yet to the SWIFT system. There are, like, little systems and certain bi- and multilateral ones, but not a global one. But we're getting closer and closer, and the Ukraine war actually drives home the same point. Scott Bessent and the U.S. idea of creating, you know, like, of putting extraordinarily high secondary sanctions on anyone who still trades with Iran—I mean, this is another one of these moments when the United States seems to want to test a power that it already lost a couple of years ago.

What do you make of that? Because it seems that this kind of policy is also the sanctioned policy. I mean, it is getting weaker and weaker because the structural influence is getting weaker and weaker. Why do you think that the U.S. and Europe are still clinging to those kinds of methods, which 50 years ago, sure, were a huge threat, but we're in 2026? How do you explain it to yourself?

#Ladislav Zemanek

It is just a bad habit for them. But maybe it can be interpreted as a weakness at the same time, because they are not able to cope with the situation in a way that would be satisfying for them. And this is one of the ways how to make some punishment, but it's a punishment for them too, maybe primarily for them—for us, because I'm from Europe, and we can observe it every day, the negative consequences of these sanction policies. Of course, it brings harm to Russia or to Iran. Of course it does, but it's a double-edged sword.

#Pascal

Can I ask you about this? I was recently back home in Switzerland, and actually walking around in Switzerland and being there, I couldn't see a negative impact. But when you're in Czechia, do you see negative impact from the blowback, from the sanctions—anything in your daily life?

#Ladislav Zemanek

Of course. It can be demonstrated, for example, in energy policy. Because, of course, these sanctions target imports of raw materials from Russia, which were one of the pillars of European prosperity for decades—the cheap Russian raw materials, gas and oil and other products. And it pushes inflation high. And I don't know exactly the situation in Switzerland, but, for example, in the Czech Republic, the inflation in 2023, if I'm not mistaken, was around 20%. 20%? Yes. Oh, wow.

Wow. So the price level now is incomparable with the situation five years ago. It's completely different. Of course, it's also related to the pandemic and the consequences of the pandemic and restrictions and so on.

But also, and not less importantly, with the war in Ukraine and with the sanctions. And it's not only a problem of the Czech Republic, but I've already mentioned my conversation with a Slovak foreign minister, and he's also very critical of the sanctions policy of the European Union and, of course, also the United States. And now it is Slovakia which is obstructing or blocking the imposition of a further package of sanctions. So it's harmful. And also, I haven't noticed it, but he mentioned during the conversation that even some European countries which call for further sanctions against Russia are at the same time asking Brussels for compensation, financial compensation, for negative impacts of these sanctions on them. So it's crazy.

#Pascal

It absolutely is crazy. No, you're right. It's just, I wonder how this works, you know, within this European framework, you know, how it tends to be the ones at the fringes that tend to take the first blow. And not just in terms of, like, military strategy. One of my favorite examples is, you know, the healthcare sector in Switzerland, which is one of the wealthy cores. We don't produce enough doctors, so we take doctors and nurses from Germany, which then get them from Poland, which then get them from Ukraine, and then Ukraine is screwed, right? It's just, like, these problems, they tend to spiral out. Is this something you also see in other sectors, how the fringes of Europe are those that are hammered down the most when it comes to the economic situation?

#Ladislav Zemanek

Hmm. I think the problem is that the sanctions make obstacles to normal economic processes. That's the basic thing. Because even now, there are quite often some accusations and investigations of Czech companies which sell their goods in Russia. And at the same time, for example, there are, if I'm not mistaken, more than 1,600 German companies operating on the Russian market, and it demonstrates that European business would be interested in restoring normal relations and canceling the existing sanctions because it's harmful to all. There is no winner in this situation.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, you're absolutely right. The potential benefits of an actual agreement, of ending all of this, are huge. Unfortunately, we are not getting there. Maybe... We touched on a couple of subjects now, but in the last minutes we have, is there something that's on your mind that you think, that you look at the moment yourself in particular, that helps you to understand where the Eurasian journey is going?

#Ladislav Zemanek

Eurasian journey. What do you mean exactly? Because Eurasia is a diverse continent, a huge continent, the biggest one. But no, undoubtedly, it's true that there is a strong tendency towards integration in the Eurasian macro-region. I'm not talking about Europe right now, but about Russia, China, India, and other countries, Central Asia, which is becoming increasingly more influential and relevant geopolitically and economically, I would say, and also Southeast Asia.

And the trend and tendency, trajectory, is clear: East Asia, or the Asian part of Eurasia, if we can say it this way, is growing and is becoming increasingly influential. And also Europe should take notice of this trend, because now Europe is becoming more and more isolated. And it seems to me that the rest of the world, or the global majority, let's say it this way, doesn't understand very well what's going on in Europe, in the minds of the European or maybe Western leaders, and they are surprised by their behavior. So it seems to me that those countries in Eurasia which are able to cooperate with each other, either bilaterally or within a multilateral framework, should continue this and promote this kind of integration and cooperation, and Europe hopefully will join them in the future.

#Pascal

Let's see how long it will take the Europeans to actually get the cues of the time, that Manifest Destiny is East and not West. But for the time being, we're stuck in our old habits. Ladislav, people who want to find your work or to read more from you, where should they go?

#Ladislav Zemanek

There are a lot of platforms, but of course, if they are not blocked, they can have a look at my RT articles, which are published regularly several times a month on different issues and aspects of international relations. Also, I have some publications at Valdai Discussion Club. It's both in English and Russian. And those who would be more interested in European or even Czech or Central European developments, especially political developments, can find me at Parlamentní listy. It's a Czech media outlet where I work as a political journalist. So just put it in Google and they can find it. Or Yandex or other alternative browsers.

#Pascal

I will try to find the link to that and then put it into the description box below. So if you want to read more from Ladislav, you can click there and find him, and also on the other platforms. And with that, Ladislav Zemánek, thank you so much for your time today.

#Ladislav Zemanek

Thank you for the pleasant conversation.