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We can start our discussion. The subject of our workshop today is “Russia in Twenty Years”. The question is impossible to answer, because if I take myself 20 years back, to 1997, Russia was declaring at that time that it wanted to be part of the European Union and probably even of NATO. We drew up four spaces: a common economic space, a common humanitarian space, a cultural space, and a space of security. We were on our way to a very serious honeymoon. It started in 2003, when new President Putin reconfirmed his European choice and went to Brussels to sign the strategic documents.

In 1997, 20 years ago, it would have been pretty difficult to predict what is happening now, in 2017, so today we can only discuss the options and scenarios. However, there are some givens. The current situation is one of them, and in the short term, Russia would be coming back to the international stage. Yesterday, during the Middle East discussion, people were rightly saying that Russia was back in the Middle East, through the Syrian case.

Russia is strong enough to be present in many difficult conflict situations. Russia managed to get through economic crises, from the first stagnation onwards. This year, it will hopefully have 2% GDP growth. The Russian economy now is totally different from what the Soviet economy was, and it is much more flexible. It is an economy that adapts to the new normalcy under sanctions and low carbon prices. That is in the short term.

Mid-term, we see some risks and difficulties. The Russian economy is not what the Soviet economy was by volume. Back in 1991, Russia still represented 19% of world GDP, and now, we are at 1.5, aspiring to reach 2%. The economy is not restructured. We definitely have some serious weaknesses, and we should cut ourselves to size in terms of our international aspiration and positioning.

The long term seems unknown to us. As Ambassador Panov said today, we do not know what will happen. However, as our Emperor Alexander II once said, the distance is our curse. In 20 years, the distance will be no question. Today, we discussed artificial intelligence and many other things. The fourth industrial will probably make the distances in Russia, that were our curse in many ways, a nonissue. Long term, we could be a leader in Eurasia, which Zbigniew Brzezinski called a key to the geopolitical control of the Earth. Alternatively, we can collapse again, as the Soviet Union did in 1991, if the policies are not right. That is also a scenario which could be visualised.

To discuss all of this, we have an excellent panel of gentlemen who know Russia very well, both Russians and non-Russians. We can easily start a discussion today which will probably bring us to some clarity on what is going to happen to my country in 20 years.