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RUSSIA'S POLICY - BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

Different people have different opinions on the topic, but I want to pay your attention to the idea of two major politicians: Sergey Lavrov and Vladimir Putin on this issue. According to the head of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, Russia has never made such a choice - to support either East or West. We have no right for such choice. We are located on the territory, which has been developed by ancestry in tight cooperation with Europe, southern and eastern neighbors. President Vladimir Putin's presence at the ASEAN summit in Malaysia underscores the fact that Russia is now paying consistent, serious attention to the eastern direction in foreign policy. Now Russia has decided to turn to the South and the East. And here, oddly enough, we have met with increasing success, which President Putin is entrenching still further. Contributing factors include the following: Russia's participation in the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Russia's increasingly active involvement in resolving diplomatic problems related to unifying the two Koreas, and North Korea's nuclear weapons; rapprochement with India. Now there is also Russia's participation in the ASEAN summit, and, more importantly, President Putin's participation (as a guest, so far) in the East Asian Summit. This organization, initiated by Malaysia and China, is aimed at countering US dominance in the Asia-Pacific - one of the world's key geopolitical zones. And the fact that Putin was invited to make a brief speech at this event serves to multiply Russia's geopolitical role as a player in world events.

While the West disputes and constantly downplays that role, the East is evidently starting to back Russia. In the past, Russia's foreign policy suffered from an excessive slant to the West. We didn't even study the East properly. Now Putin is not only studying the East, but hammering some new strategic rails into geopolitics for the new Russia. And as we can see, this is producing some stunning

results. Russia's global role has been enhanced over the past six months, entirely due to this demarche to the South and East. Putin doesn't even need to take any outward action; he just says "yes," nods, keeps silent, and smiles - but all analysts of any substance understand the significance of those smiles and nods. Increased activity to the East served to multiply our geopolitical resources. Of course, our relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region are still underdeveloped; trade turnover between us is very small. But if we imagine what kind of market Russia could gain for its products (primarily energy resources, since all those countries are experiencing serious energy supply shortages), it becomes clear that our country's role will be practically decisive in many of the region's friction points - such as those between China and India, India and Pakistan, Indonesia and China, Malaysia and the United States. We stand to gain a vast field of action, where our resources will be welcomed - especially since the Asia-Pacific countries have no complaints against us. We find ourselves in a situation that is ideal for us. And in that respect, Putin's current visit shows that it's not just a matter of routine diplomacy, but a matter of Russia waking up to the East. And the East discovering its relevance for Russia.

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TEA CEREMONY

Tea is one of the most popular drink, not only in the Eastern and Western civilizations but all over the world. Russian people like tea with lemon. Englishmen have tea with milk. Americans like to drink ice tea. But Japanese tea has its own history and ceremony. The tea ceremony (Sado) is a ritual way of preparing and drinking tea. The custom has been strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism. Nowadays, the tea is a relatively popular kind of hobby. Many