

**THE REFORMULATION OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**  
**AFTER THE FALL OF THE USSR :**  
**REFLECTIONS ON RUSSIAN POWER – REALITY, ILLUSION AND AMBITION**

*The purpose of this paper is not to describe precisely the mechanisms of the post-Soviet foreign policy, nor to analyze every diplomatic actions. It is more to understand what are the foundations of this new diplomacy: the conceptions, perceptions, ideas and principles that uses the leaders to reformulate the foreign policy while Russia was facing a historic transition. After the fall of the USSR, Russia was searching for itself and was necessary facing a deep identity crisis. Nevertheless, the idea of Russia as a "Great power" seems to be the first mark on wich politicians can refer to rethink the Russian diplomacy in a world that had deeply changed.*

The end of the USSR in 1991 is an historic break for Russia, aswell as for its international partners. The consequences that result from this transition are extremly violent for Russia. From the status of an hegemonic power since the second half of the 20th century, and from a belligerent role during the conflict that had marked this period, it is reduced to the status of a country defeated by democratic liberalism set up as pre-eminent and legitimate. Weakened, Russia enters a phase of global reconstruction. The foreign policy does not escape this redefining, and is certainly the field which suffers the most from the obvious lack of marks of the new Russian Federation.

Russia has been living since 1945 in a double logic of expansion and confinement. The opening on the world, symbolized by the fall of the USSR, then changes everything. It opens up its vision of the international relations and disturbs its world positioning. Russia sees itself confronted with a necessary revision of the representation which it has of itself and the world. It has to enter from now on into diplomatic relationships of a new type, deprived of any ideology. But also to fix the strategies and determine the actors of this new politics. In other words, Russia has to redefine itself as a power, what appears of a big complexity. Moreover,

the country is in the grip of a deep identity crisis partly due to its new territorial configuration. The dissolution of the USSR gives birth to fifteen new States, that became suddenly independent after having lived together several centuries of their History. Russia sees itself so deprived of territories from which it had never intended to be separated, feels considerably dispossessed and lives this territorial loss as an amputation of its identity. Although it remains the biggest country of the world, Russia has difficulties understanding its new space. These borders effectively have no legitimacy because they match no historic, geographical, natural, human or linguistic realities. The national borders of the USSR had never been thought to become international and represented that of simple administrative limits. The population is scattered from now on on the territory of the ex-USSR, and 25 millions Russians live beyond the borders on the State.

The post-Soviet foreign policy quickly aroused the interest of the researchers. It seems clearly that it is studied according to several themes, which are understood as inseparable and complementary and the approaches are sometimes divergent, in the way they understand and analyze this policy. In spite of this noticeable diversity, it is more or less admitted that, under the first President of Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, the foreign policy is cut in two phases. The first one, from 1992 till 1996, is the one of first Foreign Minister of Russian Federation named Andrey Kozyrev. He is seen as an « Atlanticist » whose ambitions would be exclusively turned to the West. The second phase is characterized by a rough break with the first one due to the leadership of the new Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov (1996-1998) who is an eurasist a heart who and who asserts firmly a multipolar vision of the world.

This study wishes to enlighten the redefining process of the foreign policy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. More precisely, it has for goal to consider the first post-Soviet diplomatic actions under the angle of their coherence and the deep motivations which guided them. This study will be focused on the beginning of Kozyrev's period (1992-1994). Indeed, year 1992 marks the entrance of the country to the new international system and the emergence of its first diplomatic actions. The situation and the position of Russia evolve and the objectives and means of its foreign policy are slowly rethought in 1993, to be firmly asserted in 1994, up to the entrance of the Russian troops to Chechnya, on December 11th.

The main theory developed here is that even before Primakov became Foreign Minister, the diplomacy already knows a sensitive evolution under Kozyrev. Indeed, we can analyse his politics in two phases. The first is determined by a search for a revival of Russian power, recovering all first year of existence of the country (1992). The second period, starting

from 1993 is characterized by new national interests and the strong assertion of the Russia's firm return on international scene. This policy become one of the most continuous elements of the Russian diplomacy until today.

The ambition of this study is to analyze the foreign policy according to aspects not strictly diplomatic, in a descriptive perspective of every diplomatic actions ; but to clear the founding principles which allow to understand springs, continuities or upheavals of the diplomacy. In order to do so, it will analyze the actors of the foreign policy, but also put in perspective their frame of thought and their way of reasoning. So to speak, the "*forces profondes*"<sup>1</sup> acting on the foreign policy, such as the weight of the representations, the structures of the mentalities and the evolution of the geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic frame are at the heart of this subject.

### **" *RUSSIA IS PREDESTINED TO BE A GREAT POWER* " <sup>2</sup>**

After the fall of the USSR, although the context is appreciably different and the means of the country are decreased, the pursuit of the greatness remains unchanged. Indeed, Minister Kozyrev still declares that "*Russia is predestinated to be a great power*"<sup>3</sup>. This sentence is to reflect what will become the real *leitmotiv* of the Russian leaders. More than that, this idea is profoundly rooted in the Russian imagination and seen as a constant of the Russian history. The paradox is here obvious : as the same time that Russia is asserting its greatness, it is facing an economic, social and demographic crisis and is losing a large part of its military and nuclear potential, as well as a huge part of its population. To grasp the origins of this understanding of the country, it is necessary to analyse the feelings deeply anchored in the collective imagination.

The portrayal of Russia as being a Great power appears after the fall of the USSR as an essential datum of the country's identity reshaping. In the earlier quotation, Andrey Kozyrev expresses its deep belief in the predetermination of Russia. He confirms and specifies his words during the Conference on the transformations of Russia in the New World of February

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<sup>1</sup> « Forces profondes » - « deep strengths » - is an expression of the French Historians Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle. They used this expression in a very famous book : *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1965), in order to describe all the influences that play on the foreign policy of a country such as the representations, the structures of the mentalities, the geography, the evolution of the geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic frame.

<sup>2</sup> « USSR left a bad inheritance for the foreign policy », Andrey Kozyrev, *Nezavissimaïa Gazeta*, april 1<sup>st</sup> 1992.

<sup>3</sup> *Same*.

1992<sup>4</sup>: Russia is ready " *to assert itself in the world as a great power* ", and add: " *[It will stay] a superpower in the domains of the culture, and the human and natural resources* " <sup>5</sup>. Although he uses the term "*superpower*" to describe his country, Kozyrev is nevertheless conscious of the weakening of Russia, but does not admit it on the international scene. Indeed, Andrey Kozyrev is a lucid man and, if it is deeply convinced that the future of Russia is in its return as a Great power, he has a big awareness of Russia's place in the world.

Thus, these ambitions might seem disproportionate compared with the reality of 1992 but find their origins in a vision that Russia always had of itself all along its history. Foreign Minister of Paul the First already said " *Russia, both by its situation and by its inexhaustible strength, is and has to be the first power of the world* " <sup>6</sup>. It has to be said that, more than anywhere else, the weight of the representations is extremely important and strong in Russia. These representations have shaped the Russian mentalities and influence its understanding of the international scene and the place which she owes occupy there. So, in the first years of Russian Federation, the speeches of the political leaders are not only focused on the will to be a strong member of the international system, but also on the fact that this place is due to it by the nature of its power. This idea is made obvious through the analysis of the speeches of Boris Yeltsin and Andrey Kozyrev. For example, in an article become very famous, Minister of Foreign Affairs explains that Russia has to have a " *deserving place, which returns [to it] by the history and the geography* ", but also that " *in view of its human and intellectual resources, of its natural wealth, of its geographical situation, Russia is a major power; and the deep will [of Russia] is to be an equal and strong member of the international family* " <sup>7</sup>. This quotation summarizes the deep goals of Russia and its serious ambitions. It also shows the space of representations which reigns around the formulation of Russian ambitions. Indeed, the attributes which are quoted here (territory, history, culture, population, resources) raise classic data of the power and are constantly taken back to justify the status of Russia. The words of the ambassador of Russian Federation in the United States, Vladimir Loukine, reflects well this idea. He asserts that to know if Russia is a Great power or not " *it is enough to look at the map and to remember the history of Russia, its culture, its science* " <sup>8</sup>. The words

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<sup>4</sup> Intervention of Kozyrev during the Conference on the transformations of Russia in the New World (february 26-27<sup>th</sup>1992; *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, N°6 march 31<sup>th</sup> 1992, p. 33-34).

<sup>5</sup> *Same*.

<sup>6</sup> Théodore Rostopchine, *Projet de politique étrangère*, 1<sup>er</sup> october 1800, quoted by Patrice Gourdin, *Géopolitiques*, Manuel Pratique (Paris : Choiseul, 2010), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Kozyrev's Intervention at the Columbia University (september 24<sup>th</sup>, 1992 ; *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, N°19-20 october 1992, pp. 20-23).

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Vladimir Loukine, *Moskovskie Novosti*, may 19<sup>th</sup> 1992.

of the political leaders are so of a disconcerting resemblance. The conception of Russia as a Great power appears from then on as anchored in the mentalities. The French specialist of Russia and questions of security, Isabelle Facon, wrote on this subject that " *the feeling of power of Russia has an equal only its feeling of vulnerability* " <sup>9</sup>. Therefore, this idea seems to make consensus within the political elite. Taking into account the differences of opinion which exist in fields such as economic and social ones, it is important to note this phenomenon in this period of reformulation of the domestic and outside policies.

However, the political authorities are not the only ones to adopt this type of speech. This idea is widely spread within the society. We can quote as an example an entitled article " Will Russia become a major power? " <sup>10</sup>. This article presents interviews of Russian citizens on this question to determine their opinion on the subject. Most of the answers are naturally positive and the justifications focus on the following data : the territory, by asserting that Russia is " *the biggest State of the world* ", but also the " *size of her population* ", the " *strength of its culture* " and the " *weight of its history* ". Besides, this idea is not only spread in all the society, but the historians analyze this phenomenon as a real fundamental datum of the Russian civilization. The words of the historians Andrey Ermonskiï and Vladimir Sheinis show it perfectly. The first one consider that : " *Russia can and has to be a Great power* " <sup>11</sup>, and the second write that " *in the Russians subconscious, at the heart of our being, are priorities of Great power*" <sup>12</sup>. So that, the « greatness » is seen as an obvious foundation of Russia and of Russian society. Nevertheless, this assertion is unmistakably connected to the fear of losing the Great Power status that Russia has known for so many centuries. President Yeltsin formulates well this fear of the decline when he evokes an anecdote in his *Memoirs* <sup>13</sup> : " *before leaving for the United Nations Security Council where I had to speak, I flew away for Crimea to meet the officers of the fleet of Black Sea on the warship Moskva in the natural harbour of Novosibirsk. [...] I kept in memory faces worried about sailors who seemed to ask me: is Russia going to remain a naval strength? A real power?* ". The vision of Russia as being - and in front of to be - a Great power is thus a real social representation which Russia has of itself and is also present up to the heart of the society. The Russian sociologist Irina Kobrinskaïa expresses well this idea when she writes: " *the Russians, worried above all by*

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<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Facon, *Les chemins de la puissance*, (Paris : Broché, Artège, 2010), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> « Will Russia become a Great Power ? », *Nezavissimaïa Gazeta*, june 20th 1992.

<sup>11</sup> « A chance for Russia », *Moskovskie Novosti*, january 19th 1992.

<sup>12</sup> V. Sheinis, « One Useful and Harmful Falsification of Russian History », RFE/RF, 24 mai 2009, quoted by Isabelle Facon, *Les chemins de la puissance* (Paris : Broché, Artège, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Boris Eltsine, *Sur le fil du rasoir, Mémoires* (Paris ; Albin Michel ,1994), p. 245.

*their problems, get rid nevertheless with difficulty of their citizen's mentality of a great power*"<sup>14</sup>. This perception of itself inevitably influence the perception of the world and of the international relations. Russia wishes before anything being integrated. It enters a slow and long phase of adaptation to the international system and conciliation with the powers that dictate the principles.

The obvious lack of spatial reference and geopolitical inscription, as well as the strong identity crisis, seem to be offset by the deep objective of the diplomatic actions : Russia has to be a Great Power. The search for of a "Great power" status becomes the guide of the foreign policy. Our reflection thus examines in what way the imagination of the Russian power is at the heart of the definition of its ambitions on the international scene from 1992 till 1994. It is under this prism that we will consider the foreign policy, to seize its aspirations and hesitations, as well as its orientations and realizations. Nevertheless, the abyss which builds up itself between the effective power of Russia and the obstinacy of a vision of the country as being predestined to be a major power can only be a source of wrong geopolitical vision of the world and internal contradictions in the country.

### ***A SEEKING POWER POLICY***

Russia indeed dashes from 1992 into a wild pursuit in partnerships with the West. Although relations with the near abroad and the CIS countries are considered as "priorities" by Russia, they remain ambiguous and paradoxical. If Russia's former partners of the Cold War and the other regions of the world as Middle East, Asia or the Third World are not forgotten, they remain strictly placed as secondary interests of Russian foreign policy. The foreign policy is then organized into a hierarchy according to the interests of Russia.

Indeed, this resolutely West directed policy answers a certain logic. Andrey Kozyrev longs above all the Russia's reborn on the international scene as an European power, in a peaceful way. The Gorbachevian inheritance - rethought, adapted or sometimes denied - remains then so present in the reformulation of the foreign policy. Kozyrev considers that

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<sup>14</sup> Irina Kobrinskaïa, « Vnutrennie faktori vnechnieï politiki v postcommunisticheskoï Rossii (Internal factors of Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Russia) », in : *Rossia Politicheskaïa* (Political Russia), Moskva : Carnegie Moscow Center, p. 276 ; quoted by Isabelle Facon, « Facteurs permanents et fédérateurs de la politique extérieure russe : entre blocage et renouvellement », *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 2000, vol. 31, no 2, p. 157-189, p. 164.

" *Russia is l'enfant terrible<sup>15</sup> of the actual civilization* "<sup>16</sup>. The more important for Russia is, to his opinion, to reintegrate the " *civilized world* ", to become a " *normal power* " and to put an end to the deep economic and social crisis that Russia is facing. He clearly thinks and says that this aim cannot be reached without the support of the West. Russia starts then a reset in the relations with the West which are not confrontation's relations anymore, but relations of "partnership and friendship", specially with the United States, the NATO and with Europe. Indeed, the first Russian-American<sup>17</sup> meeting signs a new age of international relations and of Russian foreign policy. The diplomacy toward Europe is also well developed as Russia exprims its desire to be a member of the European Union and of the European Council, and asserts then its European identity. These diplomatic relations with the West are considered as really " *strategic* " and " *necessary* " by the Minister of Foreign Affairs<sup>18</sup> and are tools to make the Russian power get up to itself. Thanks to the Western partnership, he hopes to find again the image, the role and the status of a great power. From then on, these actions, far from corresponding to a precise doctrine - the " *Atlantic* " one, are conceived in a perspective reflected to answer the urgency of moment and the obvious search for power.

Nevertheless, this policy is quickly subject to numerous challenges and Andrey Kozyrev is widely criticized to the point that some people tell about him that he is the " *Enemy N°2 of Russia* "<sup>19</sup>. President Yeltsin hesitates several times to dismiss him, but eventually prefers maintaining him. Indeed, Kozyrev has a real representation's role on the international scene, as far as his positions please the West. Then, Kozyrev stays Foreign Minister, but he has been quickly pushed aside from power in order to avoid any significant troubles on the domestic field. As a consequence, the formulation of foreign policy depends then on many different actors and becomes really complex to analyze. But, whereas Kozyrev has only an extremely limited weight in the conception of the foreign policy, he is still hardly criticized and seems actually to crystallize all the criticisms made to the Yeltsin's regime.

The criticisms concern Russia's position in front of the West, and in particular in front of the United States. Most of the Russian political elites perceive this perpetual quest for helps

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<sup>15</sup> In French in the text.

<sup>16</sup> Introduction d'Andrei Kozyrev (janvier 1992 ; *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, N°2-3 janvier 31th – february 15th 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Camp David Meeting, february 1<sup>st</sup> 1992

<sup>18</sup> Cf. articles : « A change for survival », in : *Foreign Affairs*, spring 1992, pp. 6-22 et « Strategy for Partnership », in : Andrey Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (ed.), *Russian foreign policy in transition: concepts and realities*, (New York : CEU Press, 2005), pp. 193-205.

<sup>19</sup> « Kozyrev, enemy N°2 of Russia », *Dien* , N°6 14-20 february 1993.

and support, as an obvious sign of weakness. For the detractors of Andrey Kozyrev - situated in the extremes of the political spectrum (communists and nationalists) - the revival of Russia can only be conceived in narrow relations - bound with an asserted imperialism - with the countries of the near abroad - the " vital interest " of the country. Conceptions of the Russian power, of its vital interests, and of the role it has to play in the world are thus in confrontation. The arrival to the Duma of the Party of the ultranationalist Vladimir Jirinovski, which collects a third of the voices during the election of December 1993, modifies widely the political scene. The " neo- Eurasism " thought that Jirinovski represents, envisages a " particular way " for Russia, conceived as a power of East and West, and the return to the Empire's borders - extended of Finland and Poland to Alaska. The political weight of Jirinovski necessarily influences the foreign policy. In addition to this report, high leaders of the diplomacy - first of all, of Yeltsin and Kozyrev - slowly change their perceptions of the West. They gradually become aware of the necessity of asserting the particular interests of Russia, which remains a strong power in spite of the period of transition that it is going through. So post-Soviet foreign policy slides of a " seeking power " policy towards a " power policy ", and the role and the representation of Russia on the international scene evolves thus gradually.

### ***THE POWER POLICY***

So, we witness an overturn in the foreign policy. Begun in the first months of 1993, this reversal knows its most accomplished development in 1994. While the post-Soviet diplomacy till the end of 1992 can be analyzed under the prism of the " seeking power ", years 1993-1994 are characterized by the progressive assertion of a " power policy ". This expression has two meanings. The first one, consisting in saying that the Russian foreign policy actually seems to match a policy of great power and that it is recognized by the world as such. The second aims to express the idea that this policy is confidentially guided by an ambition of power.

Thus, this power policy defines itself by the paradoxal assertion of Russia as an absolutely unique power with its own interests and the will to be completely integrated into the international community. That is to say that this policy is a double game of integration and rejection, of equality and peculiarity. This paradoxical logic is however to reflect the ambiguous Russia's geographical position : between Europe and Asia, between East and the West, even of East and West. The stakes in foreign policy so join a historic continuity and are connected to constant questionings on Russia's representation of itself and of the world. This

new policy consists above all in a redefinition of national interests. Indeed, these interests are mainly managed towards the near abroad - the CIS - which is then officially pointed out as a priority in the speeches and in the facts. The politics has especially for aim to reinforce the economic, social and cultural integration of this Community, but also to solve the several ethnic conflicts on the territory. This new policy especially builds itself around the assertion of particular interests in this region. Russia insists on the fact that no one - and especially not the United States - can better understand the logic of the region.

Moreover, the politics multipolarises so considerably and becomes centred on the regional plan. This can be seen with a real rapprochement with Asia, especially with China, India and the countries members of ASEAN<sup>20</sup>. But also with North European and Arctic countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. Thus, the policy is really resized in a more restricted scale. Therefore, this is actually a new conception of the Russian power that is set up here. Indeed, the will of link with the countries of Asia and Pacific Ocean, expresses itself the desire to redirect Russia towards its oriental origins, and to assert gradually its unique status of Eurasian power.

This sudden political reversal is unmistakably connected to the disorders of the domestic policy. Kozyrev is forced to grant more importance to the CIS, in order to redirect its policy towards the East and to lead a more offensive and strong policy. So, this new direction of foreign policy must be understood as a direct answer to the reproaches of its "americanization". But, by wanting to adapt himself, Kozyrev's statements take an artificial tone, sometimes exaggerated. His new vocabulary is clearly like that the opposition's one. Thus, Kozyrev remains hardly criticized, in Russia and abroad.

However, the western direction, far from being given up, is amply stressed to arrive to a finer alliance with the United States and an almost intimate link with the European countries. Russia sees itself even admitted to the rank of the world Great powers, which symbolizes its historical entrance to G8 in July 1994. Russia seems then to be perceived and admitted as being in fact a great power. Nevertheless, the position toward the West is way more offensive. A sudden change in the foreign policy leaders' speeches - that become firmer - perfectly shows the transition towards this another type of politics. The perpetual - and artificial - assertion that every diplomatic decisions match with Russia's "national interests" shows that Russia does not want to be seen as a member of the international system that needs to be helped and integrated anymore, but as an equal and strong power that has its own interests.

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<sup>20</sup> In 1993 members are : Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei.

Nevertheless, if Russia seems to lead successfully a new regional policy that it is gradually accepted on the international scene, does Russia can actually be named Great power? Its ambition to be a special power and the revival of the neo-imperialist positions are both denounced by the countries of its near abroad and by the international scene. This ambition reach its climax with the First Chechen War that put an end to a policy of pacification and conciliation and the revival of a policy outside the international law. Moreover, by asserting its particularism, far from being integrated into the international community, Russia sees itself in fact marginalized. On the other hand, while Russia seems to be gradually accepted and seen as Great power on the international arena, the Americans grant it in fact only a second role in the new world order. For instance, Russia is forced to give up its positions and its convictions several times, specifically concerning conflicts in the Middle East and in Yugoslavia, and the widening of NATO. Those few questions actually crystallize the constant ambiguous Russian-American relations – between cooperation and confrontation.

### ***BREAKS AND CONTINUITIES***

Although the " power policy " already shows its limits in 1994, it is more stressed under the successor of Andrey Kozyrev, Yevgeny Primakov. He indeed continues the important directions of the policy led since 1993 : a continuous rapprochement with the near abroad, an Asian direction and a stronger positions in front of the West. Thus, whereas most of the theories show Kozyrev's period as uniform and radically different from that of Primakov, it has to be emphasized that the foreign policy knows a noticeable evolution in 1993 and stays unchanged till 1996.

Moreover, Andrey Kozyrev is besides often depreciated in the historiography. He is mostly seen as a strict Atlanticist, who doesn't really understand the contemporary stakes. Even when the logics and the overturn of its policy are analyzed, he is perceived as a weak man and as a follower without personal ideas. Nevertheless, Kozyrev is an extremely pragmatic person. He adapts his politics according to the current stakes in order to reach a precise purpose : Russia has to be a Great power. Thus, while Russia intends in 1992 to start a new page of its history, it bases itself on principles that are constant in its History. With the ambition of greatness - a consensus within the political elite, it finally returns to values

inherited from the Russian and Soviet Empire. This phenomenon is extremely interesting and can easily be understood : facing a huge identity crisis, the only remaining criteria is the history and the imagination bound up with the representations of itself and of the world deeply rooted in the mentalities.

Whereas Vladimir Putin's presidency is radically different from that of his predecessor on the matter of domestic policy, the foreign one is instead in continuity with the Yeltsin's diplomacy. Indeed, most of Putin's international positions and decisions seem to be a radical « power policy », led by an incredible ambition of power. But, whereas under Yeltsin this belief in the great power's fate of Russia was more an illusion, taking account of the domestic realities, under Putin Russia had known a real reborn, especially on the economic field, which gave it a new role on the international scene that considerably increase the ambition of power of its leaders. Russia is in fact nowadays considered as an unique and special power, sometimes outside the international order because of its domestic politics and its own comprehension of the international rules, but also as a strong member of the international system which has a huge role to play. Russia is actually inspiring both fear and admiration. This ambivalent, ambiguous and paradoxal position of Russia strongly remains the logic of the foreign policy led since 1993. This is why the understanding of the reformulation of post-Soviet diplomacy is necessary to analyze the actual diplomacy.

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This paper is a short summary of a Research thesis achieved in order to obtain a Master Degree in Contemporary History of International Relations at the University Paris Sorbonne : « Imaginaire et ambition de puissance dans la politique étrangère post-soviétique. L'enjeu des nouvelles frontières (1992-1994) », Paris Sorbonne, directed by Professor Olivier Forcade, Mention Félicitations du Jury, June 2013, 288 p.

To quote this article : Julie Deschepper, « The reformulation of Russian foreign policy after the fall of the USSR : reflections on Russian power – reality, illusion and ambition », paper for Forum organized by Youth Diplomacy, « The Europe Meets Russia – a Forum for Young leaders », Berlin September 23rd-27th 2013.

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