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Парламентская дипломатия в условиях геополитической конфронтации: трансформация форматов и функций диалога России с ЕС и США

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению эволюции межпарламентского сотрудничества между Российской Федерацией, Европейским союзом (ЕС) и Соединёнными Штатами Америки (США) и выявлению его особенностей в контексте трансформации международных отношений. На основе институционального и сравнительного подходов исследуются истоки, ключевые этапы и текущее состояние парламентских диалогов. В работе отмечается, что в 1990-е и начале 2000-х гг. эти форматы формировались в либерально-институциональных рамках для социализации и интеграции. С середины 2010-х они эволюционировали в инструмент взаимной делегитимации и идеологической конфронтации. Анализ кризиса официальных каналов (Комитета парламентского сотрудничества Россия–ЕС и диалога с Конгрессом США) проводится через реалистическую и конструктивистскую парадигмы, выявляя структурные причины их стагнации. Особое внимание уделено неформальным практикам (встречи в Белграде, работа парламентских групп), выполняющим функцию поддержания реликтовых связей. В заключение предлагается модель трансформации функций парламентской дипломатии при переходе от сотрудничества к конфликту. Делается вывод о том, что возрождение парламентской дипломатии определяется не внутренней динамикой институтов, а макрополитическим контекстом и готовностью сторон к деэскалации. Методологическую основу работы составили общенаучные методы и методы социальных и гуманитарных наук.

Ключевые слова: парламентская дипломатия, Россия–ЕС, Россия–США, Комитет парламентского сотрудничества, межпарламентские отношения, геополитическая конфронтация, институциональная трансформация.

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Research article

Parliamentary diplomacy in conditions of geopolitical confrontation: transformation of formats and functions of Russia's dialogue with the EU and the US

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Abstract. The article examines the evolution of interparliamentary cooperation between the Russian Federation, the European Union (EU), and the United States (USA), identifying its distinctive features amid transformations in international relations. Drawing on institutional and comparative approaches, it analyzes the origins, key stages, and current state of parliamentary dialogues. The study highlights that in the 1990s and early 2000s, these formats emerged within liberal-institutional frameworks to foster socialization and integration. From the mid-2010s onward, they evolved into instruments of mutual delegitimization and ideological confrontation. The crisis of official channels—the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee and the US Congress dialogue—is analyzed through realist and constructivist lenses, revealing the structural causes of their stagnation. Special attention is given to informal practices (e.g., Belgrade meetings and parliamentary group activities), which serve to maintain residual ties. The article proposes a model of functional transformation in parliamentary diplomacy during the shift from cooperation to conflict. It concludes that its revival depends not on internal institutional dynamics, but on the macro-political context and the parties' readiness for de-escalation. The methodological foundation comprises general scientific methods and those of the social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: parliamentary diplomacy, Russia–EU, Russia–USA, Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, interparliamentary relations, geopolitical confrontation, institutional transformation.

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Introduction. The importance of studying the evolution of interparliamentary relations between the Russian Federation, the European Union, and the United States of America is determined not only by the current profound crisis in these relations, but also by their fundamental significance. The current situation offers unique opportunities for political analysis, revealing the transforming roles and boundaries of parliamentary diplomacy against the backdrop of geopolitical rivalry and ideological contradictions.

If at the end of the 20th century (in the 1990s and 2000s) inter-parliamentary cooperation developed within the framework of the liberal-institutional paradigm as an instrument of socialization, legitimization and strengthening of interdependence, then at the present stage it has found itself at the forefront of the confrontation between revisionist forces and defenders of the status quo, embodying different civilizational projects [1].

Studying the evolution of interparliamentary relations allows us to analyze several key theoretical aspects.

First, it addresses the issue of legislative autonomy in foreign policy in presidential and presidential-parliamentary systems. How independent are parliaments from the executive branch,

especially in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, which some political scientists classify modern Russia as?

Secondly, the topic raises the question of the viability of “track two diplomacy” and informal expert networks in the context of the de facto blocking of the official diplomatic process.

Third, it allows us to assess the role of institutional factors in both the stabilization and escalation of conflicts. The suspension of meetings of the Russia-EU Parliamentary Cooperation Committee serves as a clear example of how official institutions can be transformed from channels of dialogue into symbolic targets for sanctions.

Historically, the origins of these interparliamentary relations coincided with the "golden age" of democratic peace theory and the triumphant advancement of the idea of the "end of history." The institutionalization of dialogue through the Parliamentary Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the European Union (1997) and memoranda with the US Congress (2003) represented attempts at integrative containment of Russia—its inclusion in the liberal international order through multi-level, including parliamentary connections [2]. This process reflected a belief in the power of convergence and transformation through rapprochement. However, subsequent events revealed the fundamental difficulties of this model.

From a political science perspective, the mid-2010s crisis can be analyzed through several interconnected approaches:

- Realist paradigm: Russia perceived the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU, as well as initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership, as a direct threat to its sphere of influence. This overshadowed the logic of economic interdependence and institutional cooperation, intensifying the focus on security issues;

- constructivist approach: fundamental differences in values and narratives have emerged (democracy versus sovereign democracy, rules-based order versus multipolarity), parliamentary platforms have transformed from spaces for dialogue into arenas of ideological conflict;

- Hybrid regime theory: the evolution of the Russian political system, where parliament increasingly serves as a legitimizer rather than a representative, has diminished its perceived independence in the eyes of Western partners. They see it as an instrument of Kremlin policy, weakening its role in international dialogue.

Institutional foundations and evolution of the Russia-EU interparliamentary dialogue. The legal and institutional framework for parliamentary dialogue between the Russian Federation and the European Union, established in the mid-1990s, is a typical example of a policy based on the principles of liberal internationalism and neofunctionalism. This framework was enshrined in the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force on 1 December 1997. This document represented more than just a trade agreement, but a comprehensive framework for interaction. In accordance with Article 95 of the PCA, the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) was established, designed to ensure the "democratic legitimation" of the entire spectrum of relations between the parties [3].

The creation of the CPS can be explained through the prism of the concepts of “entanglement” or “soft power”: the EU sought not only to engage with the Russian government, but also to promote European norms, processes, and principles among the Russian political elite, including the parliamentary one, whose values were generally consistent with those of the EU.

The institutional design of the CPS was carefully crafted to ensure intensive interaction and symbolic equality between the parties. To address the imbalance between the supranational European Parliament and the bicameral Russian parliament, a system of parity representation was introduced: each party delegated 21 members [4]. The Russian delegation included representatives from both the State Duma and the Federation Council, engaging a broad range of political and regional elites in the dialogue. The principle of rotating co-chairs, who were elected from among the delegations, emphasized reciprocity and avoided hierarchy.

In the political science context, the PCC functioned as an "epistemological community" and a "transnational information and advocacy network." Regular meetings two to three times a year, with a broad agenda—from economics and energy to justice, security, and culture—facilitated not only the exchange of official positions but also the development of a common professional language, the strengthening of personal ties, and the search for technical solutions [5, p. 87]. It was an attempt to create a "European public space" that would extend to Russia.

The main working body was the Permanent Partnership Council, which was transformed into the Cooperation Council in 2003, the meetings of which were preceded by meetings of the Bureau of the Committee to agree on the agenda.

Parallel informal structures, such as the Russian Parliamentary European Club (founded in 1999), provided an additional flexible platform for expert exchange and interaction with business and civil society. Its online project, "Partnership and Success," served as a public diplomacy tool, shaping positive perceptions of the relationship. Until 2013, the Russia-EU interparliamentary dialogue remained a successful project from the perspective of liberal institutionalism: it served the functions of socialization, accumulation of social capital, technical coordination, and legitimization of the strategic partnership. However, it should be noted that its stability depended on a broader geopolitical consensus, which soon disintegrated.

However, the stability of this system proved dependent on a broader geopolitical consensus, which began to crumble in 2013. The current crisis in Russia-EU interparliamentary relations, which began in 2013 and escalated sharply in 2014, illustrates the triumph of realist logic over liberal institutionalism. The conflict over the EU's Eastern Partnership program revealed fundamental differences: Brussels promoted the idea of expanding regulation and creating a "circle of friends," while Moscow defended vital security interests and spheres of influence [6]. From a constructivist perspective, this represented a clash of two narratives: the European choice of neighboring countries and the historical and civilizational unity of the post-Soviet space.

The events of 2014 marked a turning point. The EU's decision to suspend the PCC as part of the sanctions regime had profound symbolic consequences: the cooperation institutions lost their autonomy and became instruments of geopolitical pressure. This marked a strategic shift from integration to containment through isolation. PCC meetings have not been held since the spring of 2014.

The crisis, however, gave rise to alternative, unofficial formats. For example, from 2015 to 2019, annual unofficial parliamentary meetings were held in Belgrade, serving as a channel for maintaining human contacts and informally exploring positions despite the official confrontation. However, these initiatives remained vulnerable and dependent on the external context, which led to their termination first due to the pandemic and then due to the further deterioration of relations.

The ideological rupture took shape with the European Parliament's 2021 approval of a report enshrining the principle of "not business as usual" with Russia [7]. This document shifted disagreements from the realm of pragmatism to the realm of a value confrontation, completely burying any prospects for resuming official dialogue in the medium term. The activity of the Russian Parliamentary European Club also petered out. Researcher D. E. Moiseyev aptly summarizes the current situation, noting that "the European Parliament, guided by the EU's foreign policy principles for building relations with Russia, remains adamant on a number of issues that hinder the restoration of a full-fledged political dialogue. Among the main disagreements between the parties are the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the political crisis in Ukraine, and the military conflicts in Syria and Libya. At the same time, both sides recognize the importance and necessity of cooperation." "Therefore, resuming the work of the CPS would be highly desirable, but, unfortunately, in the current political context, it is practically impossible" [5, p. 91]. Thus, by 2025, interparliamentary cooperation between Russia and the EU, once

carefully constructed as a multi-level system, is in a state of complete stagnation. Despite periodic statements of theoretical readiness for contacts on both sides, all formats, both official and unofficial, remain inactive, reflecting the depth of the systemic crisis in relations.

Parliamentary Dialogue with the United States: A Realistic Partnership with Elements of Formal Confrontation. Russia's interparliamentary relations with the United States initially developed on a different, more fragmented and politically charged basis than their dialogue with the European Union. While interaction with the EU was embedded in a regulatory integration project, dialogue with the United States from the outset resembled classic great-power diplomacy, focusing on issues of global security, strategic stability, and pressing bilateral problems.

This specific character was determined by the fundamental tenets of American foreign policy. Despite the change of administrations, US global strategy demonstrates significant continuity in its key ideological principles, goals, and methods. This fully applies to Washington's policy toward Russia. It is based on a stable confrontational-competitive paradigm, which depends little on the specific internal transformation of the Russian state. Washington's defining consideration is Russia's strategic role in the world and its ability to influence the formation of the foundations of world order, which conflicts with the American vision of monocentric leadership [8, p. 10]. This paradigm predetermined the instrumental and limited nature of interparliamentary relations, which from the outset were subordinated to the logic of interstate rivalry rather than integration.

The official history of these relations began later, with their starting point being the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between the Russian Federation Council and the US Congress, signed during a brief period of rapprochement following the events of September 11. Its symbolic significance, proclaiming a "new qualitative level" of interaction, significantly outweighed its practical value. This was confirmed by the rhetoric of the parties: as the head of the Russian delegation, Sergei Mironov, stated at the time, the document marked "the beginning of a new stage of productive joint work." US Senator Benjamin Frist also acknowledged the unprecedented level of relations, noting that existing differences "are best resolved by friendship" [9].

The most formal channel of dialogue, based on interaction between the upper chambers, was established in 2004, and the State Duma joined it a year later. However, subsequent contacts, including the first meetings of delegations in 2005 and the peak committee meeting in 2007, timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of diplomatic relations, often boiled down to a ritual exchange of tough positions on the most contentious issues – the American missile defense system, the status of Kosovo, and democracy issues [10]. In this context, parliamentary diplomacy served not so much to seek compromises as to publicly demonstrate and uphold official lines, fulfilling the function of mutual deterrence.

The 2014 crisis led to a virtual halt in this work, which was officially confirmed in 2017 with a statement "freezing" contacts. However, amidst the total cooling at the highest level, an interesting phenomenon emerged: certain segments of the political establishment attempted to maintain niche communication channels, following departmental or bureaucratic logic. Thus, as early as 2017, a meeting of the parliamentary group on relations with the US Congress was held in the State Duma, and in 2018, at the initiative of the US Ambassador to Moscow, an American delegation visited. These meetings, held behind closed doors and touching on sensitive topics (Syria, Ukraine, accusations of election interference), demonstrated the attempts of certain groups to maintain dialogue to maintain influence and access to information [11].

However, these efforts proved fruitless and failed to counter macropolitical trends. The parliamentary group's work ceased after February 2022, bringing an end to this already fragmented and intermittent dialogue. Thus, interparliamentary interaction between Russia and the United States, initially largely symbolic and demonstrative, ultimately faded completely, reflecting the overall dynamics of bilateral confrontation.

Current state: between the rhetoric of openness and the practice of isolation.

Currently, a paradoxical dichotomy is observed between rhetorical declarations of openness to dialogue and their actual absence in practice. Statements by Russian representatives (for example, K. I. Kosachev) fit into a broader narrative that positions Russia as a party that is not closing the door to negotiations and blames the West for their absence [12]. This rhetoric functions as a tool of informational and political confrontation, maintaining the image of a rational and constructive actor willing to engage in dialogue.

Similar signals from the West, such as the initiatives of Congresswoman A.P. Luna or discussions of neutral platforms in Europe, are predominantly informal in nature [13]. These signals reflect either the personal positions of individual politicians or tactical maneuvers in intra-party or intra-institutional struggles, but they do not indicate a change in the official line. Therefore, such initiatives should be interpreted not as harbingers of imminent normalization, but as evidence of the persistence of the idea of dialogue in discourse, potentially relevant as the political context changes.

The potential of parliamentary diplomacy at this stage lies not in conflict resolution, but in fulfilling two key functions: maintaining potential channels of contact, i.e. continuing expert discussions on issues of mutual interest, such as the Arctic, space exploration, epidemiological security, and cybercrime at the level of specialists and former politicians; and forming a “buffer zone” in institutional memory, i.e. recording the history of previous interactions and personal connections within the political elite for the possible resumption of cooperation after the de-escalation of the situation [14, p. 22].

Theoretical synthesis: transformation of the functions of parliamentary diplomacy in the context of conflict. An analysis of the evolution of interparliamentary relations allows us to propose models for the transformation of the diplomatic functions of parliaments in the context of the transition from cooperation to confrontation (Table 1).

Table 1. Models of transformation of diplomatic functions of parliaments in the context of transition from cooperation to confrontation

Functioning during the period of cooperation (up to ~2013)	Operation during the conflict period (post-2014)	Theoretical justification
Legitimization: confirmation and support of rapprochement processes	Delegitimization: publicly condemning an opponent's actions in order to undermine their legitimacy	Constructivist and narrative theories
Communication and conflict resolution: discussing positions, finding compromises and common ground	Limited signaling: informal probing of readiness for dialogue through secondary channels	Game theory in the analysis of negotiation processes
Expert networks: building transnational communities of knowledge and sharing experiences	Relic networks: preserving residual personal and professional connections in marginal formats	Social network theory and advocacy group analysis.
Soft power: creating a positive image of the country	Ideological conflict: mutual demonization and mobilization of domestic audiences	Public Diplomacy Theory and Propaganda Analysis

As analysis shows, parliamentary diplomacy has largely lost two key positive functions (legitimization and communication) in Russian-Western relations. Confrontational and marginal elements have come to the fore, while their effectiveness as a means of conflict resolution is negligible, as they lack their own negotiating resources and are strictly subordinate to the executive branch, particularly in matters related to war and peace. Nevertheless, the role of parliamentary diplomacy as "institutional memory" and a potential "backup channel" should not be underestimated. It functions in standby mode, and its activation will be a consequence, not a cause, of broader political de-escalation.

Conclusion. The history of Russia's interparliamentary relations with the US and the EU represents a micromodel of the evolution of the post-bipolar world order. A political analysis of this history, spanning the optimistic period of institution-building in the 1990s, the uneven cooperation and growing tensions of the 2000s, and the institutional collapse and divergence of values in the 2010s and beyond, allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Institutions follow policy, not the other way around. The Russia–EU Parliamentary Cooperation Council (PCC) and parliamentary groups with US participation were created as instruments of integration and conflict resolution. However, the shift in the political landscape toward confrontation led to their marginalization: the institutions were either frozen or disbanded as symbols of failed rapprochement.

2. Limited autonomy of parliamentary diplomacy. In the context of systemic confrontation between great powers, it lacks independence. Its revival requires prior consent or at least tacit mutual interest at the executive level. Informal initiatives (for example, those of Belgrade or parliamentary groups) remained peripheral and were easily blocked during escalations.

3. Transformation of functions. From a means of legitimizing cooperation, parliamentary diplomacy has evolved into an instrument of mutual delegitimization and ideological confrontation, while retaining rudimentary roles in signaling and maintaining peripheral connections.

Currently, a full-scale dialogue is unlikely due to the lack of political preconditions. However, the potential for its restoration remains in the long term thanks to:

- the institutional template: the experience of the PCC and the procedures developed remain in the “archive”, ready for activation.

- Human capital: politicians and experts on both sides retain memories of periods of working together.

- theoretical consensus: the idea of parliamentary dialogue as a valuable instrument has not lost its legitimacy, as confirmed by occasional public statements by politicians and experts.

Thus, parliamentary diplomacy in Russian-Western relations exists in a state of suspended animation as a potential resource. Its revival is determined not by internal dynamics, but by the geopolitical context and the willingness of the parties to move from confrontation to minimal cooperation. This study highlights the fragility of cooperative institutions in an era dominated by power politics and the long road to their restoration.

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