From a broad historical perspective, a 10–15 year spell of time is not very long. However, if this time span happens to embrace profound changes in the social and political spheres, considerable shifts in public values, and transformational processes on a global scale, then the period can certainly be regarded as of special significance.

The last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century can be seen as just such a period of dramatic social perturbations. The collapse of communism, the disintegration of the bipolar world order, the downfall of the Soviet state system, and Russia’s proclaimed reorientation towards freedom and democracy are among the world’s most momentous events. The deep transformations in question are of special importance for Russia. Indeed, these changes have affected more than just specific aspects of Russia’s domestic and foreign policies. They have had an impact on the very essence of Russian self-consciousness and self-identity, and upon common beliefs in the country’s role and place in the world.

The scale and nature of the changes happening beneath our very eyes in Russian domestic and foreign policy can be adequately appreciated only by carrying out impartial and thorough analysis. Naturally, first and foremost, any researcher has to examine the actual transformations—whether in Russia’s domestic or foreign policy—giving due regard to detail, on the one hand, and the broad context of the ongoing developments, on the other. However, familiarity with these policies as they are specifically represented and justified in strategic documents, the presentations of political leaders and state officials, and in the writings of scholars and analysts may prove to be no less important and insightful for scholarly and practical purposes. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what we had in mind when we embarked on this anthology, which deals with the Russian foreign policy outlook in the crucial period of 1991–2004.1

1 The Russian-language reader Foreign Policy and Security of Contemporary Russia was published in 2002 (Moscow, ROSSPEN).
After the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, Russia faced essentially new domestic conditions and an unprecedentedly complicated international situation. Having lost its previous geostrategic, economic, military, political and ideological potential and been left to deal with the “hybrid” unbalanced and decentralized political system, the “personalism” of the Yeltsin epoch, the institutional disintegration (as compared to Soviet times) of its foreign policy mechanism, and growing competition among new interest groups, the country and its people also faced an acute crisis of identity on both the international arena and in the sphere of its national interests. Determined as they were by the ruling elites’ “subjective” choices, rather than by the “objective” reality flowing from the country’s geopolitical situation and historical traditions, the interests in question turned into a site of disputes, disagreements, and tense conflicts among various political and ideological postures.

What follows is a tentative sketch of the key milestones of the developments. Essentially romantic and full of illusions, the stance assumed by the radical wing of the Russian “Westernizers” of the early 1990s (in the foreign policy sphere, until approximately 1994, this group was represented by what one might call the “early” Russian Foreign Minister A. Kozyrev) matter-of-factly assumed that Russia would be immediately included in the civilized community of Western nations. Of course, this stance was countered by powerful forces striving for the communist and national-imperial restoration. However, neither before nor since has this type of unconditional pro-Western orientation commanded as much influence in Russian political discourse.

The splits in the Russian political class became deeper, and there was a more thorough review of foreign policy priorities in the wake of Russia’s failed expectations and ruptured illusions with regard to “alliance with” and “accession to” the West, its injured ambitions, the internal critical tendencies in the economic and social spheres, political instability, as well as its growing disappointment over NATO enlargement, conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, failure of the “CIS project,” US warnings of impending withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, etc. Of course these developments have been analyzed in the writings of experts and reflected in the practice of foreign policy. The foreign policy of the Primakov period was (appointed Foreign Minister in January 1996) quite clearly marked by its orientation towards constructing the anti-American international axis in the Realpolitik style, and was welcomed by a considerable part of the Russian elite, becoming conceptually embodied in the idea of “multipolarity,” while—on a practical level—it led to attempts to create counterbalances to US dominance in the form of various axes: Russia-China-India-Western Europe-Japan, etc. The conceptual errors further aggravated the failures in the foreign policy. The consolidation of the leftist and nationalist opposition, combined with the rise of the radical state imperial instincts in a consid-
erable section of the Russian bureaucracy in the 1990s, proved to be an additional critical factor. It must be admitted, though, that this factor emerged largely as a result of the increasingly evident US “arrogance of power” and the West’s general condescending treatment of Russia as a “disciple.”

It appears that Putin’s pro-American/pro-Western (anti-terrorist in terms of its initial motives, and yet embracing a far larger sphere in terms of its consequences) “revolution” after September 11, 2001 marked a radical turn by Russian foreign policy towards a new agenda, with recognition of global realities and essentially new threats, a cure for the imperial “phantom-limb pains,” and redefinition of national priorities in favor of internal tasks of economic and socio-political modernization. As V. Putin’s public utterances showed, the President’s course in the foreign policy sphere was distinctively based on an awareness that—contrary to expectations—the post-Cold War world had become more unstable, more unpredictable and more dangerous, especially in light of the new threats posed by international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growth of transnational criminal activities, and the escalation of regional conflicts, including some waged by frustrated “might-have-been” states. Therefore, the cardinal national project that Russia was to embark on was formulated as a stark dilemma: either to undertake a systemic (primarily economic but also socio-political) modernization and become involved in the worldwide globalization processes, or lag hopelessly behind and become a “third-rate” state.

Has everything been done in Russia (as well as in the West) to resolve the dilemma? At present, it is hard to come up with a definite answer to this question. And there are a number of reasons why.

First of all, one can not rule out a possible aggravation of the tension between the increasingly distinct autocratic tendencies in domestic policy, and the impulse in foreign policy that is essentially modernizing in terms of its aims, and pro-Western in terms of its orientation.

What remains unresolved is also the issue of institutionalizing the new type of “limited partnership” relations with the West, and transforming declarations made at the highest level into specific procedures and institutions that can function virtually routinely.

Besides, it remains unclear to what extent and how efficiently Russia can overcome the great-power ambitions that persist in the minds of a considerable section of the Russian political elite, but that are neither adequately supported by any substantial resources, nor compatible with relevant tendencies in global development.

Apparentely, the West has not fully determined its policy towards Russia either. In particular, neither the USA, nor the European Union seems to have accepted the idea of integration with the Russian Federation. With the excep-
tion of some areas of common interests, Russia has moved onto the periphery of the West’s interests.

As a matter of fact, the Russian reaction to these developments, which has become increasingly distinct since the start of Putin’s second presidential term, appears more explicable. Refraining from confrontation and international crises or conflicts, and aware that it is fated to remain “outside the West” in the foreseeable future and merely involved in superficial interaction with it, Russia is increasingly inclined to assume the posture of an “independent variable” in today’s international “equation.” Russia strives to determine and accentuate its own independent place in world politics without committing itself to other (particularly, more powerful) international players. “Pragmatism, economic efficiency, priority of national interests” (V. Putin’s expression!) is the credo of the foreign policy conducted by Russia today.

Hence Russia’s tendency to depart from ideological and confrontational “multipolarity” and move towards a pragmatic “multi-vector” course in its foreign policy, prioritizing the development of—economically beneficial—links and relations with the USA, the EU, European countries, as well as with Asian partners, including China, India and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Hence also the pointedly regional, rather than global, priorities in Russia’s foreign policy today, with the CIS standing out among these priorities. However, this stance is no longer dictated by the illusory mission to integrate the post-Soviet space with the Russian Federation, but rather by a clearly defined economic interest, namely to safeguard preferential conditions for the spread of Russian capital into the CIS countries (the “liberal empire” declared by A. Chubais, who represents the extreme version of this posture).

As we can see, there is a multitude of unresolved issues and quite tangible challenges that Russia’s foreign policy is facing today. No doubt, discussions, disputes and conflicts over these and other issues will continue. There is no point in trying to predict the possible outcome of these debates, but their nature in itself is an indication of the trajectory of Russia’s transformation (despite all the setbacks) over the period 1991–2004.

Our anthology comprises three parts. The first part includes some of the main official documents of the Russian Federation (agreements, charters, doctrines, conceptions, declarations, etc.) that either directly determine the strategic orientation of its activities in the sphere of foreign policy, or have a direct bearing on this orientation. The second part contains public statements and articles by the Russian political leaders: from President Putin to the ministers of foreign affairs and defense. Finally, the third part comprises articles written by well-known Russian scholars and analysts that deal with the key issues of Russia’s foreign policy and give an idea of the debates ongoing within the Russian academic community.
We would like to believe that the materials we have included (in the limited space of this anthology) can give a fairly extensive and valid idea of how Russian foreign policy has taken shape, evolved and what conceptual foundations it has proceeded from in the period since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism. We leave it to our readers to make their own judgements on where we did and did not succeed in carrying out this project.