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### Iran and Russia on the path to building a comprehensive, principled partnership

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the main provisions of the Treaty on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation of 17 January 2025. The study examines the historical context, legal foundations, and strategic implications of the treaty, which marks a new era in bilateral relations. The agreement, signed by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Masoud Pezeshkian, outlines a 20-year framework for cooperation in various domains, including security, defense, economy, energy, and regional stability. The research methodology involves a qualitative analysis of treaty provisions and their alignment with previous agreements between the two nations, such as the 1921 Treaty between Persia and USSR and the 2001 Treaty on the Fundamentals of Relations. The study also incorporates geopolitical and economic evaluations to assess the treaty's potential impact. The results highlight that the treaty establishes a strong legal foundation for cooperation, enhancing military and technical collaboration, promoting trade and economic partnerships, and reinforcing mutual non-interference principles. A significant emphasis is placed on energy projects, including oil, gas, and nuclear initiatives, as well as the development of the International North–South Transport Corridor. Additionally, the agreement outlines cooperative mechanisms for countering unilateral sanctions and advancing multipolar international governance. The treaty signifies a strategic shift in Eurasian geopolitics, positioning Iran and Russia as key allies in regional security and economic integration. The findings suggest that this agreement will likely have long-term implications for international relations, particularly in Central Asia, the Middle East, and the broader Eurasia.

**Key words:** Iran, Russia, strategic partnership, economic and energy cooperation, foreign policy, Eurasia, the International North–South Transport Corridor

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## Иран и Россия на пути построения всеобъемлющего стратегического партнерства

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются основные положения Договора о всеобъемлющем стратегическом партнерстве между Исламской Республикой Иран и Российской Федерацией от 17 января 2025 г. В исследовании рассматриваются исторический контекст, правовые основы и стратегические последствия договора, который знаменует собой новую эру в двусторонних отношениях. Соглашение, подписанное президентами Владимиром Путиным и Масудом Пезешкианом, определяет 20-летние рамки сотрудничества в различных сферах, включая безопасность, оборону, экономику, энергетику и региональную стабильность. Методология исследования включает качественный анализ положений договора и их соответствие предыдущим соглашениям между двумя странами, таким как Договор между Персией и СССР 1921 года и Договор об основах взаимоотношений 2001 года. Исследование также включает геополитические и экономические оценки для определения потенциального влияния договора. Результаты показывают, что договор создает прочную правовую основу для сотрудничества, укрепляет военно-техническое взаимодействие, способствует развитию торгово-экономического партнерства и укрепляет принципы взаимного невмешательства. Значительное внимание уделяется энергетическим проектам, включая нефтяные, газовые и ядерные инициативы, а также развитию международного транспортного коридора Север-Юг. Кроме того, в соглашении прописаны механизмы сотрудничества для противодействия односторонним санкциям и развития многополярного международного управления. Договор знаменует собой стратегический сдвиг в евразийской геополитике, позиционируя Иран и Россию в качестве ключевых союзников в области региональной безопасности и экономической интеграции. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что данное соглашение, вероятно, будет иметь долгосрочные последствия для международных отношений, особенно в Центральной Азии, на Ближнем Востоке и в Евразии.

**Ключевые слова:** Иран, Россия, стратегическое партнерство, экономическое и энергетическое сотрудничество, внешняя политика, Евразия, международный транспортный коридор «Север-Юг»

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## INTRODUCTION

January 17, 2025 is a landmark date in the history of relations between Iran and Russia, when, following the talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who was in Russia on an official visit, the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries was signed. The High Contracting Parties emphasized that when signing the Treaty, they were guided by all previous agreements at the highest level between Russia (USSR) and Iran (Persia).

On January 17, 2025, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation opened a new era in their bilateral relations by concluding the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Russian President V. V. Putin and Iranian President M. Pezeshkian signed the Treaty in Moscow. The Treaty was concluded for 20 years with the possibility of automatic extension for subsequent five-year periods, contains 47 articles and is the basis for Russian-Iranian cooperation, primarily from the point of view of deepening the legal foundation of bilateral relations laid down in previously concluded agreements between the two countries. Thus, Moscow and Tehran declared their mutual interest in "bringing friendly interstate relations to a new level and giving them a comprehensive, long-term and strategic nature, as well as in strengthening their legal foundations" (Preamble of the Treaty)<sup>1</sup>.

Diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation (Tsarist Russia, RSFSR, USSR, RF) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Persia) have their roots in the distant past, but the modern legal basis for them are the agreements

enshrined in a number of fundamental agreements concluded in the early 20th — 21st centuries. As recorded in the Treaty — 2025 (Article 12), this is, first of all, the Treaty between the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and Persia of February 26, 1921<sup>2</sup> and the Treaty on Commerce and Navigation between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Iran of March 25, 1940 and its annexes as the legal basis regulating activities in the Caspian.

On December 25, 1991, Iran recognized Russia as the successor state of the USSR. With the beginning of the formation of a new system of international and regional relations, Russia and Iran found themselves "in a different strategic environment: a new geopolitics emerged in Eurasia, opportunities opened up for pragmatic trade and economic cooperation, based on the consolidated position of national elites" [1, p.264]. However, as Iranian authors also noted, in the period 1991–2021, the parties failed to create long-term cooperation mechanisms and achieve the stated goals of institutionalization, and foreign trade turnover remained at a level of less than \$4 billion [2, p.1259].

The Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran entered the 21st century as "friendly states" that build relations between themselves "on the basis of sovereign equality, cooperation, mutual trust, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, non-interference in each other's internal affairs", which was recorded in Article 1 of the Treaty on the Fundamentals of Relations and Principles of Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed in Moscow on

<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive strategic partnership treaty between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Kremlin; January 17, 2025. (In Russ.). Available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/6258>

<sup>2</sup> The Soviet-Iranian Treaty of Friendship was signed in Moscow in 1921 and ratified in Tehran on February 26, 1922, and then registered with the League of Nations on June 7, 1922.

March 12, 2001<sup>3</sup> by the presidents of the two countries (came into force on April 5, 2002). The 2001 Treaty was recognized as "the starting point for a new stage in Russian-Iranian relations" [3, p.27]. An important contribution to strengthening the legal framework of Russian-Iranian relations was also the adoption of the Declaration between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Enhancing the Role of International Law of June 16, 2020.

In the context of growing turbulence in the region, unprecedented unilateral sanctions and geopolitical pressure, the Russian Federation (RF, Russia) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI, Iran) had to rethink the priorities and goals of developing their bilateral relations.

## **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE 2025 TREATY**

What new does the Treaty bring to the definition of the nature and content of relations between the countries, what are its distinctive features? First, it is worth emphasizing that the Treaty defines relations between the two states as friendly, based on deep historical ties between the Russian and Iranian peoples, the closeness of their cultures and spiritual and moral values. It states the common interests and broad opportunities for cooperation. The Treaty as a whole is intended to promote peace and security at the regional and global levels, the formation of a new just and sustainable multipolar world order, as one of the common features of "Looking to East" policy of Iran and Russia

<sup>3</sup> The Treaty on the Principles of Relations and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran dated March 12, 2001 (corresponding to 22 Esfand 1379 solar Hijra) included 21 articles and was concluded for 10 years with the possibility of extension for subsequent five-year periods. (in Russ.). Available at <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901820401>

[4, p.280], based on the sovereign equality of states and good faith cooperation, mutual respect for interests, collective resolution of international problems, cultural and civilizational diversity, the rule of international law in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, including the rejection of the threat or use of force, non-interference in the internal affairs and respect for the territorial integrity of both states.

The Treaty gives priority to issues of cooperation between the Parties in the field of security and defense (Articles 1 and 2). Thus, the Parties agreed to counteract interference by third parties in their internal and external affairs, to prevent the use of their territories for the purpose of supporting separatist movements and other actions that threaten stability and territorial integrity, as well as hostile actions against each other (Article 3). In this regard, the conclusion of separate agreements by intelligence and security services is provided for (Article 4).

Subsequent Articles (5 and 6) define the main activities in the field of military and military-technical cooperation, such as: the exchange of military and expert delegations, calls of warships and vessels at the ports of the Parties, training of military personnel, conducting joint military exercises, implementing joint maritime operations to provide assistance and rescue, as well as combating piracy and armed robbery at sea. All areas of interaction between the Parties are spelled out in detail, including cooperation with Interpol, in the area of combating international terrorism, transnational organized crime, illegal migration, and other challenges and threats (Article 7). It should be noted that the military-technical cooperation between Russia and Iran is based on

intergovernmental agreements signed in 1989–1991<sup>4</sup>.

The Parties cooperate with each other on a number of legal issues of ensuring the security of citizens of their countries (Article 8), as well as within the framework of international organizations, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies, on global and regional issues (Article 9). Key issues of cooperation in the international arena include, in particular: arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation (Article 10), international information security, counteracting the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes, support for the course towards internationalization of the management of the Internet information and telecommunications network, including through more active involvement of the International Telecommunication Union in resolving these issues, as well as the creation of a legally binding regime for the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts based on the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of states (Article 11).

Articles 12 and 13 define the main aspects of cooperation between Russia and Iran in the Caspian region, Central Asia, Transcaucasia and the Middle East in order to strengthen peace and security, prevent interference and destabilizing presence of third states in these regions. The Parties confirmed the exclusive competence of the Caspian states in resolving issues of security and economic development of their region. The Agreement also addresses issues of cooperation between the Parties on the platforms of international organizations, in particular the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in the interests of strengthening its potential in the areas of politics, security, economics, culture

and humanitarian affairs, which will contribute to the expansion of trade and economic ties between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 14).

In matters of domestic policy, the Parties undertake to create favorable conditions for the development of cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities of the two states, as well as for the establishment of direct ties between Russian and Iranian regions, facilitating mutual familiarization with their economic and investment potential, including through business missions, conferences, exhibitions, fairs and other joint interregional events (Articles 15 and 16).

Trade and economic cooperation remains the most significant for bilateral relations, coordinated by a special body — the Permanent Russian-Iranian Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. The Treaty envisages the development of industrial cooperation, the creation of mutual economic advantages, including joint investments, including in the economies of third countries, financing of infrastructure, simplification of trade and business mechanisms, cooperation in the banking sector, promotion and mutual provision of goods, works, services, information and results of intellectual activity, including exclusive rights to them (Articles 17 and 18).

Significant foundations for successful trade and economic cooperation are also agreements in the transport sector — road, rail, air, sea and multimodal transportation, as well as the training of specialists. The Parties confirmed cooperation in the development of international transport corridors, in particular, the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), as well as in the implementation of modern digital transport systems (Article 21). It should be noted that a new interpretation of the International

<sup>4</sup> Cooperation with Iran. Rosoboronexport. Available at <https://roe.ru/export/iran/> (in Russ).



North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) concept is becoming increasingly widespread, considered as a new type of integration association [5, p.20].

The Agreement does not ignore such a difficult topic for the Parties as coercive measures in international relations, and activates the provisions of the Declaration of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the ways and means of countering, mitigating and compensating for the negative consequences of unilateral coercive measures dated December 5, 2023 (corresponding to 14 Azar 1402 solar Hijri).

The Parties guarantee non-application of unilateral coercive measures against each other, either directly or indirectly, refrain from supporting such measures by any third party if such measures affect or are directed directly or indirectly at one of the Contracting Parties, make practical efforts to reduce risks, eliminate or minimize the direct and indirect impact of such measures by a third party on mutual economic relations. The areas of non-application and joint overcoming of coercive measures are defined, in particular: individuals and legal entities of the Contracting Party or their property, goods, works, services, information, results of intellectual activity, including exclusive rights thereto, originating from one Contracting Party, intended for the other Contracting Party. Moreover, the Parties take steps to limit the dissemination of information that can be used by a third party to introduce and escalate coercive measures (Article 19). Experts noted in this regard that “the agreement will facilitate interaction in conditions of restrictions and support for each other in international forums, preventing hostile actions by third countries. The strategic partnership between Moscow and Tehran guarantees that they will not conclude separate

deals with the West that infringe on the interests of one of the parties” [6].

The following instruments are intended to promote the development of successful trade and economic cooperation: loans, joint support for mutual exports, investments, mutual capital investments between individuals, public and private companies, ensuring due protection of mutual investments, as well as the creation of a modern payment infrastructure independent of third countries, the transition to bilateral settlements in national currencies, strengthening direct interbank cooperation and the distribution of national financial products, a simplified customs corridor. Antimonopoly policy and mutual recognition of standards. It is also envisaged to support special/free economic zones on the territory of the Parties, the creation of industrial zones, including for the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in the gold mining, gold processing, diamond and jewelry industries (Articles 20, 25, 26 and 27).

Thus, conditions have been created for the elimination of the main barriers to the development of trade and economic cooperation: Russia and Iran being under external sanctions; an incomplete understanding of mutual opportunities, especially in the private sectors of the Russian Federation and Iran; strong bureaucracy and relative weakness of corporate structures; focus of companies and states on cooperation with Europe and the West (as a preferred choice); lack of systemic interaction between banking and insurance structures; lack of fundamental agreements to ensure financial and insurance activities; extremely low level of humanitarian ties; low level of tourist exchange [7, p.6,18,16,32].

The most important area of cooperation is energy. A project to build a gas pipeline from Russia to Iran is underway: “If we talk

about the volumes of possible supplies, we believe that we need to start with small volumes, up to 2 billion cubic meters, and in general this could reach volumes of gas supplies to Iran of 55 billion cubic meters per year", explained V. V. Putin. Moscow and Tehran are also discussing cooperation in the oil sector. As for Iran, the country has been in dire need of reliable and stable buyers of oil and gas for the past 30 years due to sanctions imposed by the West [8, p.396]; Russia is also solving similar problems in the 2020s.

The flagship joint project for the construction of two new units of the Bushehr NPP by Rosatom is also advancing. M. Pezeshkian figuratively expressed new opportunities for countries in the field of energy dialogue, emphasizing, "a person as an organism has certain capabilities. It is the vessels that supply the necessary energy to different parts of the body. And we need the same vessels as energy supply routes". As predicted, the conclusion of the Agreement will accelerate the resolution of issues in the field of logistics, customs, and energy.

Experts drew attention to the importance of international partnerships involving Iran and Russia, other BRICS countries, which can improve national economies and put them at the forefront of global innovative energy solutions [9, p.228]. The Agreement obliges the Parties to coordinate their activities in developing cooperation in a number of key areas: in the oil and gas sector (including the construction of nuclear power facilities), in agriculture (including fisheries, veterinary medicine, plant protection and quarantine, seed production), healthcare, medical education and science, in ensuring sanitary and epidemiological well-being and food safety, including through the harmonization of hygienic requirements and standards (Articles 22, 23, 24, 28 and 29). The Parties agreed to implement joint projects in the field of high-

er education, science, technology, innovation, develop direct partnerships between interested scientific and educational organizations of higher education, conduct joint research and events.

In general, the Agreement concluded on January 17 gives grounds to believe that a basis has been created for expanding bilateral ties in such important areas as energy, medicine, biotechnology, space, aircraft and automobile manufacturing, metallurgy, chemistry, new materials, laser technologies, telecommunications, IT technologies, instrument making, shipbuilding, transport; agriculture, forestry and fisheries, construction, ecology, banking, tourism.

The Russian-Iranian summit in Moscow and the conclusion of the Agreement were given priority coverage and commentary in the Russian mass media. After the signing of the Agreement, a press conference of the presidents of Iran and Russia held in the Kremlin.

At the press conference, Russian President V. V. Putin noted that the Agreement covers all areas of bilateral cooperation and is truly fundamental for the implementation of a comprehensive partnership in relations between Russia and Iran. V. V. Putin assessed the new Russian-Iranian Treaty as a truly breakthrough document aimed at "creating the necessary conditions for the stable and sustainable development of Russia and Iran, our entire common Eurasian region". The Russian President used the address "dear friends" to the members of the Iranian delegation [10]. According to the Russian President, the volume of trade between our countries "does not meet our capabilities", and the new realities associated with the launch of large-scale transport and civilizational international initiatives of China and Russia in Eurasia, especially the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), re-

quire coordination through industry ministries<sup>5</sup>.

The top leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized the strategic importance of developing comprehensive relations with the Russian Federation, in particular, on the eve of the visit to Moscow, during the meeting of President M. Pezeshkian and Supreme Leader of Iran A. Khamenei. In implementing the decisions taken, M. Pezeshkian emphasized that the entire spectrum of Iranian-Russian relations was discussed during the talks with V. V. Putin. The parties came to the conclusion that "we need to continue working in this positive spirit and manner both bilaterally and regionally and in the international arena. Today's major agreement that was signed will open a new big chapter in our relations, especially in the trade and economic relations between Iran and Russia", which will become a solid foundation for further movement forward.

The leaders of the countries discussed significant grounds for strategic cooperation, including the active participation of Iran and Russia in new regional structures such as the SCO and BRICS, Iran's participation as an observer in the events of the Eurasian Economic Union; joint approaches and views of Iran and Russia in the fight against terrorism and extremism, a unipolar world; support for cooperation in the South Caucasus, Syria, the Middle East, and Afghanistan.

Clearly, this treaty can be start for the change in the regional stability. As Iranian expert mentioned "Signing the CSPT by determining a framework for sustainable synergy can contribute to the interests of Iran and Russia as two like-minded countries that both play a major role in Central Asia, the Caspian Sea region, the South Caucasus, the Levant, and the Middle East" [11].

<sup>5</sup> News program "Vesti". TV channel "Russia 1". 19.01.2025. (In Russ.).

The busy news agenda in the Russian media in connection with the visit of President M. Pezeshkian and the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement testified to the high level of interest of Russian society in Iran and this event. The news channels emphasized that the new Russian-Iranian agreement covers almost all areas of cooperation between the two countries — from economics, energy, defense to culture, art, education and healthcare, which allows giving a powerful impetus to the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Iran<sup>6</sup>.

It is noteworthy that Russian commentators emphasize the long-term nature of the concluded Agreement, the readiness of the parties to begin a new stage in bilateral relations and use their joint potential to develop new market segments in order to minimize the effects of sanctions pressure and expand cooperation in the interests of the peoples of the two countries<sup>7</sup>. The rapprochement between Russia and Iran, commentators note, began in the early 2020s. Russian President V. V. Putin has repeatedly emphasized the parties' desire to develop relations in many areas and their focus on strategic partnership: "Relations between Russia and Iran are friendly and good-neighborly. The countries effectively coordinate their efforts on pressing issues<sup>8</sup>".

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Imam Ali Khamenei, sharing this approach, pointed to the synergy effect that

<sup>6</sup> Analytical program "Main with Olga Belova". TV channel "Zvezda", 19.01.2025. (In Russ.).

<sup>7</sup> Putin told how relations between Russia and Iran are developing. Ria News. 05.06.2024. (In Russ.). Available at <https://ria.ru/20240605/putin-1950813789.html?ysclid=lyekk7d2m1867012728>

<sup>8</sup> Putin called the relations between Russia and Iran friendly and good-neighborly. Regnum. July 6.2024. (In Russ.). Available at <https://regnum.ru/news/3900156?ysclid=lyektrxz8v564632280>



arises from the interaction between Iran and Russia. The leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized the importance of developing sustainable, comprehensive, permanent and strategic relations with friendly Russia "in all areas that are beneficial to our countries and peoples"<sup>9</sup>, including cooperation in the spheres of economics, politics, culture, science and technology, aviation and space, in the defense and military fields, on security issues and in countering terrorism, including in Syria [1, p.265].

## CONCLUSION

Ensuring security and creating an atmosphere of trust and constructive dialogue in the Caspian region and in the Persian Gulf area and more broadly in Southwest Asia is one of the priorities of the foreign policy of Russia and Iran, a significant goal of their regional cooperation. Given the huge reserves of hydrocarbon resources concentrated in these sub regions, their strategic position as connecting centers of Eurasia, the processes taking place there affect the state of international relations, as well as global economic, energy and transport stability. The strategic goal is a stable and conflict-free region, open to broad international cooperation and mutually beneficial comprehensive economic cooperation.

In the international arena, Iran, which is under sanctions pressure, in the 2020s is building strategic partnership relations in various configurations with Russia, China, India and Pakistan, with neighboring countries, Syria, Egypt and Turkey. Iran's accession to the SCO, BRICS<sup>10</sup> and the activities of the EAEU, with its increased participation in the

Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), appears to have completed the formation of Iran's Asian outline of strategic partnership. Thus, we can talk about geoeconomic, geopolitical and civilizational foundations for the emerging Iranian-Russian strategic partnership as a system-forming factor in regional integration in Central Eurasia.

The Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran are expanding the grounds for developing a strategic partnership between the countries, including at the regional level. For Russia and Iran, the main challenge is the promotion of large-scale initiatives in Southwest Asia, generally understood as the "Silk Road" ("Belt and Road", "New Silk Road", Greater Eurasian Partnership, where the core infrastructure project is the International North-South Transport Corridor) [12]. This is a new challenge of a new vision of the priorities for arranging the emerging space of development, security and integration in the region.

It is natural that the emerging alliance between Iran and Russia in Southwest Asia is seeking support, first of all, in geo-economics project foundations (energy security, the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Belt and Road) and can be deployed in any direction. One of the important areas of cooperation between Iran and Russia could be the development of a common policy towards Afghanistan, aimed at involving this country in large-scale regional trade and economic cooperation. From a geopolitical point of view, Moscow and Tehran occupy the axial space in Eurasia, forming a middle zone of geopolitical influence and uniting the potential of the leading Eurasian civilizations.

According to Russian experts, the Treaty emphasized the greatness of Iran as a civilization and a special culture embodied in the state under the rule of the Imam. "We must

<sup>9</sup> Meeting with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Ebrahim Raisi. Kremlin. January 19.2022. (In Russ.). Available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67608>

<sup>10</sup> On January 1, 2024, a number of new countries joined the BRICS group, including the Islamic Republic of Iran.

remember that Russia and Iran are two countries-civilizations that have much more in common than it seems at first glance" [13, p.18]. Iran and Russia, India and China — four ancient civilizations of Eurasia — form a promising framework for the Eurasian strategic partnership as a module of new global cooperation.

Russia and Iran as countries — civilizations have common interests, conditioned by deep historical ties between the Iranian and Russian peoples, closeness of cultures and spiritual and moral values, desire to pro-

mote the formation of a "new fair and sustainable multipolar world order" (Preamble of the Treaty).

By concluding the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Russia and Iran have demonstrated their readiness for Eurasian economic integration, which is increasingly becoming the leading geostrategic project aimed at ensuring the technological, financial and intellectual sovereignty of all participants in this essentially global process of establishing a new economic system and comprehensive security on Earth.

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### CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

Vladimir I. Belov — the concept, analysis of information, preparation and editing of the text.

Daniyal M. Ranjbar — the concept, collection and analysis of information, preparation of the text.

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The authors declare no relevant conflict of interests.

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