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### Save the G8

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The future of the Group of Eight depends on Russia, and Russia needs the G8.

If the other members decide to expel Russia, the G8 will simply cease to exist for Russia. In fact, it would be a blow for the entire organization. International organizations can cease to exist for many different reasons. One is that their agendas become completely trivialized. For examples you need only recall the meaningless international organizations Russia belongs to. Another is that they can be expanded to such a size that no problem can be discussed productively. If you were to include China, India, Brazil and other countries in the G8, you might as well call it the "UN Without the Small Countries."

Why does Russia need the G8? Although China and India have histories stretching back thousands of years, with cultural traditions that are far more ancient than the majority of G8 countries, and have demonstrated unbelievably rapid GDP growth rates in recent decades, they are still economies that are catching up. These economies are largely based on the technological and ideological advances of the already-developed countries. You can say whatever you wish about successful authoritarian modernization, but in the 20th century it has always been based on experience borrowed from developed democracies. You can group Russia with up-and-coming economic powerhouses like China, India, Brazil and Indonesia, as economists do. Alternatively, you can point to all the treaties the country has signed with the likes of Iran, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, as specialists in international relations do. But these countries are not world leaders. Russia should be following the lead of the countries all the others are watching: the world's economically developed nations.

Being a G8 member raises psychological difficulties for Russian leaders. It's certainly harder to be the most-backward country in a group of the developed than the leader of a group of weaker countries. But Russia's interests must be before the personal travails of the president and his aides. If liberal politicians Vladimir Ryzhkov, Mikhail Kasyanov and Garry Kasparov are able to discuss their views on what's happening in Russia in the room next door during the upcoming G8 summit, President Vladimir Putin might find this a little bit uncomfortable. All the same, this would ultimately be good for the country. This would send out a clear signal that no matter what tactical differences might exist between Russia and the rest of the G8, we still share the same basic values: the desire to make everyone rich and happy -- not just the select few -- and to extend freedom of speech to the opposition.

For over two decades, three political generations of Russian leaders have assumed a largely reactive stance when dealing in the international arena. Every action taken or statement made has been a response to an action or statement by another country. Sometimes the responses were inevitable and a matter of necessity, and sometimes they were generated as the result of Russia's inferiority complex. In the simplest cases, the principle was either "whatever is good for America must be good for us," or, starting later and leading up to the present, "whatever is bad for America must be good for us." Now that many of these strictures are gone, Russia should be able to plot its course on the basis of its own priorities. Today, the preservation of the G8 as an effective and important body is a vital task for Russia. With Russia hosting and chairing this year's summit in St. Petersburg, the fate of the organization to a significant degree is in our hands.

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