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Russia-Europe Relations in Historical Perspective: Investigating the Role of Ukraine

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ABSTRACT There seems to be a consensus within both Russian and European analytic communities as to the ultimate reason behind the dramatic deterioration of Russia-EU relations over the last three years. This reason boils down to a single word: Ukraine. This essay intends to investigate a two-pronged question: 1) how the differing, quasi-imperial natures of Russia and the EU make it hard for them to find an accommodation in their shared neighborhood and 2) how the recent EU-Russia dynamics prompted Moscow's policy elite to re-conceptualize Russia as a distinct civilization, apart from Europe. While exploring these issues, the essay will maintain a special focus on Ukraine whose role in the Russia-Europe relationship has historically been and continues to be pivotal.

There seems to be a consensus within both Russian and European analytic communities as to the ultimate reason behind the dramatic deterioration of Russia-European Union relations over the last three years. This reason boils down to a single word: Ukraine. “By all estimates the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union have reached the lowest point,” contends Russian expert Timofei Bordachev. “What both sides saw 20 years ago as an important and mutually beneficial project has been ruined by the military and diplomatic crisis concerning Ukraine.”¹ Finnish academics Tuomas Forsberg and Hiski Haukkala characterize the conflict in Ukraine and the consequent rupture in EU-Russia relations as a “perfect storm.”² According to prominent Russian foreign policy pundit Fyodor Lukyanov, “Ukraine came as a shock and unleashed all the negative feelings *vis-à-vis* each other which had accumulated during 25 years of [Russia-EU] cooperation.”³ In Tom Casier’s opinion, “with the Ukraine crisis the pragmatic competition that characterized the EU-Russia strategic partnership for a long time has derailed into direct confrontation,”⁴ while Roy Allison argues that all kinds of differences in Russia’s and the EU’s interests and outlooks had been simmering for years, “until they surfaced prominently and violently around what all along argu-

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Russia's international conduct over the last several years, both in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, appears to demonstrate that foreign policy formulation involves more than a rational analysis of "correlation of forces," economic interests and geopolitical positions

a rational analysis of "correlation of forces," economic interests and geopolitical positions. It would seem that foreign policymakers' decisions can also be powerfully influenced by various forms of political imagination, including historical myths and symbolic geographies. To get a better handle on the fluctuations in EU-Russia bilateral relations, one has to take a closer look at how Russia's proverbial love-hate relationship with Europe vacillates back and forth between two interconnected spheres: the world of political imaginary and the realm of actual decision making. Notably, Ukraine has pride of place in the dreamworld of Russian greatness.

This essay intends to investigate a two-pronged question: 1) how the differing, quasi-imperial natures of Russia and the European Union (coupled with the political imagination of their respective elites) make it hard for them to find a convenient compromise or settlement in their shared –and contested– neighborhood in Eastern Europe and, specifically, in Ukraine and 2) how the recent EU-Russia dynamics prompted Moscow's policy elite to reconceptualize Russia as a distinct civilization apart from Europe. While exploring these issues, the essay will maintain a special focus on Ukraine, whose role in the Russia-Europe relationship has historically been and continues to be pivotal. Over the last several years, there has emerged a body of literature that seeks to make sense of the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, of Russia's rift with Europe and of the reasons behind the Russo-Ukrainian war.⁶ Most of these works, however, have been produced by social scientists and International Relations specialists whose vision the historian Hugh Ragsdale once famously characterized as "impaired," the importance of their scholarship notwithstanding. As these scholars tend to "draw materials for the reflection on the contemporary problem entirely from its own time and place," the end result of their intellectual efforts often suffers from one serious drawback: the foreshortening of perspective.⁷ There is a dearth of studies offering a deeper historical contextu-

ably was the most predictable geopolitical and normative flashpoint, Ukraine."⁵

The Ukraine crisis and subsequent Russo-Ukrainian war were sparked by a seemingly technical issue: the planned signing by Ukraine of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Yet Russia's international conduct over the last several years, both in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, appears to demonstrate that foreign policy formulation involves more than



High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini and Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Lavrov give a joint press conference after their bilateral meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels on July 11, 2017.

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alization. This essay intends to fill in this lacuna, correct the distorted outlook and provide a broad historical perspective.

When Teodor Shanin, a prominent British historian, was once asked how soon the process of Russia's "decolonization" would end so that it could emerge as a "normal" nation-state, the veteran student of Russia dismissed the question as deeply flawed. "The truth is," Shanin said, "that when empire ends, it might well be replaced by a new one."⁸ Russia's annexation of Crimea, its role in the fomenting of war in Ukraine's eastern provinces, and its military involvement in the Syrian conflict prompts one to reflect on the nature of Russia's recent conduct and on Russia itself. Where does Russia as both a state and a nation begin, and where does it end? Many students of the past would agree that an empire as a polity is characterized by unstable, movable boundaries—a feature that derives from the imperial ideal of universalism. Some scholars would even argue that ascendant, vigorous empires never have their frontiers clearly demarcated; when they are properly fixed, it is a signal that the given empire is in its twilight years. Russia in all its historical guises has been an empire for almost half a millennium. "The fact that the empire [before 1917] was a single land mass without clear constitutional or territorial borders between peoples made it all the more difficult to define who Russians were or what being a Russian meant."⁹ It is only natural then, contended in 2014 Russia's leading sociologist Aleksandr Filippov, that the Russian Federation, "as the largest chunk of the Soviet empire that collapsed less than a quarter century ago, has inherited one of the most important features of imperial organization of space: the uncertain, dynamic nature of borders."¹⁰ Within this context, President Putin's recent pronouncement (which

was seemingly meant to be a joke) at the Russian Geographical Society's awards ceremony that Russia's borders do not end anywhere is highly symptomatic.¹¹

The Soviet collapse left Russia in a unique geographical position –bordering more states than any other country in the world. Most of these neighboring states are former imperial borderlands, and most of the frontiers are former, Soviet-era internal administrative borders that are poorly delimited and demarcated. Thus, it should not come as a great surprise that the Kremlin's strategic planners distinguish between the Russian Federation's formal state borders and what they consider to be Russia's strategic frontiers, defined largely by security and economic interests. The latter is much more expansive than the former, and tend to coincide with the borders of the former Soviet Union. This distinction is reflected in the existence of Russia's customs and security borders that do not run along Russia's *de jure* borders.

Then there is the much trickier issue of how Russia's formal state borders relate to what can be termed Russia's "sphere of identity." The Kremlin clearly makes a distinction between the two, underscored by the way Russian leaders use the term "compatriots" when discussing ethnic Russians in neighboring states.¹² The distinction also provides an ideological foundation for the concept of the "Russian World."¹³ In such a way, the Kremlin can justify to itself that a "genuine" Russia extends far beyond the Russian Federation's borders. When the Ukraine crisis erupted, the assertion that the Russians are the largest divided people in the world became the Kremlin's ideological lynchpin. The need to protect Russian kith and kin was the principal justification for Russia's land grab in Crimea and of its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine's east. That said, President Vladimir Putin seems more interested in regional hegemony than in imperial domination. The existence of Russia's multiple borders (both formal and strategic), as well as the gap between its "geobody" and "cultural body," are viewed by Kremlin strategists as useful instruments of manipulation –largely soft power tools that can be deployed to establish Moscow's controlling influence in post-Soviet Eurasia. Russia would have preferred to preside over a pan-Eurasian "neo-imperial" structure, something akin to the EU. But it has not turned out the way the Kremlin would have liked. The reason why Putin's plan to draw Ukraine into his pet project –the Eurasian Union– failed and he resorted to raw force is that he was acting out of desperation: he sensed he was losing the geopolitical competition over Ukraine to the West. Ukraine, argued Andrei Tsygankov, an international relations professor at San Francisco University, became "Vladimir Putin's last stand."¹⁴

Why would this be so? As the heirs of a former empire, Russian political leaders are able to recognize an empire when they see one. The masters of the Kremlin appear to suspect the EU of harboring imperial ambitions. They view the EU's behavior in Eurasia as that of an "empire of a new type" –a normative or bu-

reaucratic empire that resolves its strategic problems through extending its internal bureaucratic norms and regulations— notably, Jan Zielonka has advanced, in his (admittedly controversial) book *Europe as Empire*, the notion of a “neo-medieval empire.”¹⁵ Such an empire’s primary means of exercising power is via the extension of norms, while its “imperial-like” territorial acquisitions are made not by conquest, but by the imitation of European ways by those who aspire to become part of European “normality.” One should still not lose sight of the sensitive interrelationship between politics and territory. The EU/NATO double enlargement involves more than a mere technical assimilation of standards and procedures. Their enlargement was grounded in larger strategic considerations –it was, in fact, an exercise in power politics, a move aimed to fill the unprecedented power vacuum in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse.



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The EU has its own “sphere of identity,” but its *modus operandi* is diametrically opposite to that of Russia. Being a norms- and values-based entity, the EU cultivates an identity that essentially is not territory-bound. This incompatibility of principles will make an EU-Russia accommodation, in terms of delimitating their respective “spheres,” extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible. Whereas Russia’s sphere of identity is limited to the “Russian World” (however broadly understood), for the EU there is potentially no limit, as technically it can expand into any space where its norms and values are welcomed and adopted. It was perhaps inevitable that Ukraine was the place where Russian and EU principles would clash. For years, Moscow had managed to keep Kyiv within its orbit by manipulating identity. And when the Kremlin sensed that the “European values” underpinning the Euromaidan revolution seemed to have triumphed over the Moscow-sponsored ideal of “Slavic/Eurasian unity,” Russia resorted to an “old-school” solution, and sent in its troops.

The ideas and images that guide Russia’s policies have a long pedigree. The realm of Russian political imaginary, replete with its historical myths and sacred geographies, has been formed over a long period of time. It is quite remarkable to what extent Russia’s history made the issues of Russia’s identity (the “empire vs. nation” dilemma), its international status (the vision of Russia as a great power) and its elites’ perception of Ukraine (the notion the big Russian nation) interconnected and intertwined. The following conceptualization could be put forward: historically, Russia started moving west and absorbing “Ukrainian” lands when it had already become an empire –i.e. a territorially large polity ruling over culturally diverse populations and playing a signifi-

President of European Council Tusk and Ukrainian President Poroshenko leave after a press conference during an EU leaders summit at the European Council, in Brussels, on June 22, 2017.

AFP PHOTO / JOHN THYS



cant role in international relations. But only when it incorporated the bulk of Ukraine's territory by the end of the 18th century did Russia truly become both a *European* empire and a *European* great power. At the same time, the incorporation of millions of Eastern Slavs residing in the lands of ancient 'Rus' that were earlier ruled by Rurikid princes marked a crucial moment: from that point on the Ukrainian question became inextricably linked to the Russian question, at the heart of which has been an ongoing (and still open-ended) process of forging the Russian nation.¹⁶

I would thus argue that Ukraine's place in Russian mental mapping is unique, because it is where the *imperial* and the *national* meet. In general, the 19th century ethnic nationalism (and in Europe, contrary to Hans Kohn's famous assertion,¹⁷ nationalism was mostly ethnic across the board) would be viewed as empire's nemesis. Its development would provoke a destabilizing strife between peripheries and metropole and/or prompt imperial governing elites to undertake attempts aimed at nationalizing empire.¹⁸ Yet, given the many markers of identity that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians share, a number of leading Russian ethnic nationalists –from Ivan Aksakov to Alexander Solzhenitsyn to contemporary ethnic nationalist thinkers, many of whom have been opposed to empire– would refuse to consider parts of Ukrainian lands and certain segments of Ukrainian population as something distinct from Russia. For more than two hundred years, these three notions –empire, great power-ness, and the awareness that control over ethnically kin Ukraine is key for retaining the status of empire and of great power– have blended in Russian self-understanding into one,

making this conflux of ideas the cornerstone of what might be termed the Russian imperial mindset.

Many crises of the empire (particularly the 19th century confrontations with resurgent Polish nationalism) would challenge this imperial outlook, provoking responses on the part of Russian imperial bureaucracy and intellectual elites, while

the empire's end would fundamentally destabilize the Russian question and bring the issue of Russian identity straight to the fore. Over the last hundred years the Russian imperial formation –first as the realm of the Romanovs and then as the Soviet Union– lived through imperial collapse twice, and, symptomatically, in both cases the Russo-Ukrainian war became an unfortunate subplot of the post-imperial drama. In the first case, the empire imploded within the broader context of World War I, which was waged –at least on the Eastern front, as Dominic Lieven correctly argues– by the belligerents (all of the empires) who were above all seeking control over Ukraine.¹⁹ Very soon the Bolsheviks would be fighting Ukrainian left wing nationalists (including Ukrainian Marxists)²⁰ precisely because they were convinced that without Ukraine's resources, their newly born Soviet state (incipient communist empire) would not be viable.

1991 and its aftermath saw a repeat of the pattern –albeit with a quarter-century interval between imperial collapse and the breakout of a new Russo-Ukrainian war. There is, of course, one intriguing question: why is there a time lag between the empire's end and an eruption of a borderland conflict? Scholars pursuing comparative empire studies have demonstrated that the effects of an empire's demise might make themselves felt in the next generation or even later. One fundamental factor that explains a relative quiescence in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet empire's disintegration is the international context. Twenty five years ago, the imperial collapse took place in a relatively relaxed atmosphere of détente created by the preceding East-West rapprochement and hopes of a future integration of the bulk of “imperial debris” into the “civilized community” of liberal democracies. The international atmosphere in 2013-2014 was starkly different. Russian elites had a sense that they were under attack led against Moscow by two imperial like polities: the United States and the European Union. The latter's concept of “enlargement” was and is perceived by the Kremlin as particularly worrisome: Russia appears to be confronted by an assertive neighbor whose eastern border is not fixed, but indeed moving steadily further eastward, gobbling up, piece after piece, what used to be parts of the “outer” and even of the “inner” Soviet empire. The EU-sponsored policy of “Europeanization,” Russian strategists hold, infringes on what they consider post-imperial

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Russia's legitimate sphere of interest and in general, undermines Russia's "strategic depth." After all, even some Western scholars concede that Europeanization "offers Russia the option, either of being imperIALIZED within [Europe's] folds, or, alternatively, remaining marginalized on the periphery of Europe."²¹ This brings us back to the vision of Ukraine as "Putin's last stand." According to one astute observation, "weakness and expansionism were

in any case by no means necessarily at odds with each other."²² Students of Russian foreign policy remind us that "what seemed like aggression and expansion to foreigners might, in fact be, born of [Russia's elites'] sense of weakness and vulnerability."²³ Ukraine was destined to become a "red line," simply because it is viewed by many in Russia –all post-1991 treaties notwithstanding– as part of Russia's sphere of identity.²⁴ That is how anxieties, connected with imperial rivalry, Russia's quest for great power status and the issues of national identity have combined into a combustible mix and resulted in the current crisis.

It is noteworthy that Russia's Ukraine debacle seems to have brought about a dramatic shift in Moscow elites' political imagination and symbolic geography, while giving a powerful boost to the process that had already been under way for a while –namely, Russia's mental distancing from Europe. To be sure, over the last three or four centuries, perceptions of Europe in Russia (and of Russia in Europe) as well as interpretations of the nature of the relationship between the two have been in a state of flux because in essence "Europe" and "Russia" are social constructs that were understood differently in different historical periods and in different contexts. One of the most remarkable acts of the Russian social construction of Europe occurred in the early 18th century. During the Petrine era, Russia's court geographers and historians were instrumental in remapping Europe's frontiers and making the Urals a widely accepted eastern boundary of Europe, thus firmly grounding the bulk of the Russian Empire's western territories within the Old Continent. This exercise in mental mapping served as a symbolic foundation for Peter the Great's and Catherine the Great's Europeanizing policies, with Catherine proudly declaring, in 1767, in her celebrated *Nakaz*, that "Russia is a European state."²⁵ Over the course of the next two centuries there was of course a good deal of zigging and zagging on the thorny issue of Russian "Europeanness," but by the time the Soviet Union was nearing its end, the Kremlin appeared to embrace Catherine's formula. In the late 1980s, one of Mikhail Gorbachev's pet topics was a "common European home;" Boris Yeltsin talked of the need to "rejoin European civilization;" and, as late as 2005, in his

“state of the nation” address, Putin contended that Russia is “a major European power,” which for the past three centuries has been evolving and transforming itself “hand in hand” and “together with other European nations.” These days, however, the Kremlin leadership contends that Russia constitutes a self-sustained civilization distinct from the European one.²⁶ Moscow’s leading political thinkers argue that Russia needs to detach itself from Europe and liberate itself from any Eurocentric outlook. While Russia has been living in a Eurocentric world for at least 300 years, they assert, Europe has viewed Moscow as the “Other” –either as the “barbarian at the gate” or the “eternal apprentice”– for several centuries. At the same time, Russia has gone through the same phases of fascination, expectation, disillusionment and outright confrontation over the past 25 years as it had previously from the early 18th to the early 20th century. Now, some eminent Russian pundits assert, “Europe will have to admit that the structure of the dialogue with Russia will have to be changed. Not because the apprentice did (or did not) learn the master’s skills. This is no longer important. The thing is that the apprentice is simply no longer there due to the fact that he no longer aspires to be a member of the guild and to achieve its recognition.”²⁷

The question of how Russia’s historical experience relates to that of “Europe” is of course at the heart of one of the most heated and protracted intellectual debates about Russia’s identity,²⁸ and its analysis is far beyond the scope of this essay. My position on this highly controversial issue is informed by two helpful concepts; one is the notion of the West-East “cultural gradient” introduced and developed by the late Martin Malia. This vision rejects the existence of a sharp dividing line separating “East” from “West” and refers instead to the image of a softer gradation and unity as one moves across the Eurasian continent.²⁹ The other is the idea of “relative synchronicity within a *longue durée* development” advanced by Maria Todorova. Struggling to come up with a conceptual antidote to the discourse of backwardness, Todorova argues for the relative synchronicity of Western and Eastern Europe within a long-term framework. By analyzing various European nationalisms within the unified structure of modernity, she redefines the “East” –Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia– as part of a common European space.³⁰

Yet such a vision, while affirming Russia’s basic Europeanness, does not deny the fact of its peripheral position within European civilization. Russia’s relative subalternity *vis-à-vis* Europe appears inevitable simply because historically it did not generate its own vision of modernity but rather adopted a European one.³¹ This situation produced a painful dilemma that has long tormented Russian intellectuals –a specific stratum that came to be known as *intelligentsia*– over the last 200 years. First, as Alan Pollard pointed out, “The elements which created [Russian intellectuals’] consciousness tended to be products of the West, so that the very qualities which endowed the intelligentsia with understanding, and thus with its very essence, also alienated it from national life, to

This newest revision of Russia’s symbolic geography has arguably streamlined Moscow’s strategy towards neighbouring countries, which are now viewed as buffers between the two assertive civilizational poles: the United Europe and the “Russian World”

represent *which* was its vital function.”³² Second, with regard to Russia’s external relations, awareness of the derivative nature of the modern Russian intellectual tradition and of the country’s cultural dependence on Europe clashed with the grand idea of Russian greatness. The idea of Russia as a learner who would have to go to school with Europe seemed to belittle it and made Russia appear to be a junior partner in the European Concert of great powers. Yet as was once noted, “Great Powers do not go to school. On the contrary, they lay down the line and teach others.”³³ It was the intellectual struggle with this double-barreled dilemma that animated the intelligentsia’s discourses of nation and of Russia’s international identity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, from the famous Westernizer-Slavophile debate to the pan-Slavist vision of Russia as a distinct “cultural-historical type,” to the imagining of Russia as a “Middle World,” to, finally, the classical Eurasianism’s reinvention of Russia as “Eurasia” –a self-contained world unto itself. Underlying all of these exercises in symbolic geography was an intent shared by several generations of Russian national-minded thinkers to challenge the pervasive Eurocentric outlook and assert Russia’s status as an autonomous civilization, fully sovereign and on par with, or even superior to, any (other) major European power.

It is from this rich reservoir of metaphors, meanings, images, and tropes, created over the past 200 years by Russian conservative and nationalist thinkers, that Kremlin-connected ideologues are currently drawing. Their first priority, particularly in the context of the deep rift between Russia and the EU that resulted from the conflict over Ukraine, is to “provincialize Europe” and assert Russia’s status as a Great Power that needs no recognition from the association of European states, which moreover seems to be losing its geopolitical significance in the emerging new multipolar world order. Hence the metaphor of a rebellious apprentice who seems uninterested in becoming a member of the guild. While Europe’s position in the global pecking order is changing, Moscow analysts contend, Russia’s remains solid as a rock. The deep conviction that Russia *has* to be a Great Power is widely shared by both its rulers and its ruled. As prominent Russian historian Aleksei Miller suggests, “We can talk about the protection of sovereignty and, starting with Peter I, of the status of a Great Power, as a *traditional Russian value*.”³⁴ This obsessive quest for greatness –which is understood above all as the ability to act as regional hegemon– is the first reason behind Moscow’s



updated symbolic geography which now portrays Russia as a state-civilization in its own right, clearly separate from Europe, which, in Dmitri Trenin's words, "having ceased to be a mentor and a model, is now just another neighbor, part of a Greater Eurasia stretching from Ireland to Japan."³⁵

The second reason that set in motion the process of Russian "civilizational self-determination" was Ukraine's resolute move to define its own civilizational belonging. Popular support in Ukraine for the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and the country's much more salient "European orientation" following the 2014 Revolution could well be characterized not just as a political but also as a "civilizational" choice. What the Euromaidan stands for is, first and foremost, a value-based vision of Ukraine as part of a wider Europe. Developments in Ukraine in late 2013-early 2014, as some astute Russian analysts readily admit, caused not a small amount of confusion within Russia's political class. Basically, Russian governing elites were faced with a tough question: if a European orientation is compatible with Russian identity, then on what grounds is Moscow preventing other post-Soviet nations from joining the EU? According to some new-generation conservative thinkers who are critical of what they characterize as the inconsistencies of Russian foreign policy course, the ambiguity of Moscow's civilizational self-identification has also manifested itself in the equivocation of Russia's overall diplomatic strategy that appeared to be pursuing two differing policies at once over the two decades immediately preceding the Ukraine crisis. On the one hand, Moscow had long seemed keen

A Ukrainian serviceman prepares ammunition for the fighting with pro-Russian separatists in Avdiivka, Donetsk region on March 31, 2017.

AFP PHOTO / ANATOLII STEPANOV

Given the gravity of the current crisis and, in particular, the role Ukraine plays in the Russian elites' decision to reimagine the country as a local civilization with a distinct value system, the confrontation is likely going to continue for quite a while

to get integrated, both economically and culturally, into Europe over the heads of the East European “in-between” states, but on the other hand, the Kremlin was hell-bent on blocking the independent efforts of these states to associate with Europe, including through their leaving Russia’s orbit. Boris Mezhuyev, a conservative Russian political thinker, neatly formulated the Kremlin leadership’s dilemma: “If pro-Euro-

pean orientation is the only possible option for the Slavic peoples, including the Russian people, on what basis can we dispute the pro-European choice of the Ukrainian people?” His harsh verdict was as follows: “Russia clearly had a flawed politics of identity” and this sorry situation urgently needed to be remedied.³⁶ The remedy was duly found in the realm of civilizational theory which proclaims Russia and Europe to be distinct civilizations, each producing a gravitational pull and possessing its own sphere of influence.

What is truly fascinating is how quickly Russia’s official/mainstream perspective on “Europe” has run full circle during the Putin years: from the perception of Russia as a full-blown member of the European community of nations, to the vision of it as part of a “Greater Europe,” to imagining Russia as the “true Europe” and the EU as the “false Europe,” to the contention that Russia constitutes a distinct civilization apart from Europe. This newest revision of Russia’s symbolic geography has arguably streamlined Moscow’s strategy towards neighbouring countries, which are now viewed as buffers between the two assertive civilizational poles: the United Europe and the “Russian World.” From now on, Russia is going to “treat the territorial integrity of states, in which there exist divergent ideas about their civilizational identity and where there are provinces that lean towards Russia, as *conditional* –depending on the neutral status of these countries and their readiness to recognize the ‘Russian World’ as a cultural and political reality.”³⁷

How long will the rift between Russia and the EU last? Some scholars correctly note the cyclical pattern of Russia’s relations with Europe, pointing out that this love-hate relationship represents recurrent swings between these two opposing attitudes.³⁸ So theoretically, a new *détente* might well be in the cards. Yet given the gravity of the current crisis and, in particular, the role Ukraine plays in the Russian elites’ decision to reimagine the country as a local civilization with a distinct value system, the confrontation is likely going to continue for quite a while. Even if there is a new rapprochement, argues Andrei Tsyganov, “excessive convergence with Europe is inimical to Russia’s *civilizational*

interests. The continuation of political dialogue and a plethora of well-established trade and investment ties cannot hide a chasm between the two parties' outlooks and values."³⁹

It would thus appear that Kyiv's single-minded turn towards Europe accelerated Moscow's flight from what generations of Russian intellectuals considered –albeit for different reasons– the center of their own civilization: while the Westernizers were captivated by powerful examples of Europe's social progress, the Slavophiles (such as Alexei Khomyakov and later Fyodor Dostoyevsky) spoke fondly of Europe as the “land of sacred miracles.” But this is hardly the end of the story about the role of the Ukraine factor in Russia-Europe relations. Only when Russian elites and the broad public reconcile themselves with the existence of a distinct Ukrainian identity and with the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state (including full acceptance of Kyiv's European choice), will it become possible for Russia to take a more realistic look at its own identity and to slowly start mending fences with the community of European nations. It is in this deeper sense, as Vygaudas Usackas, the former EU ambassador to Russia, has put it, that for Moscow, “the road to Europe goes via Kyiv.”⁴⁰ ■

Endnotes

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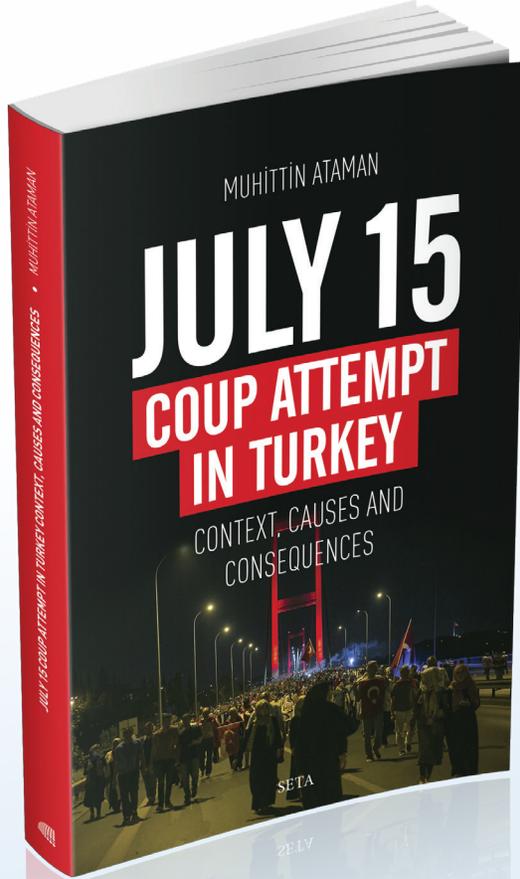
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24. A sense that Russia was “caught unawares” when its “European partners” launched an assault that endangered the age-long “Russian-Ukrainian unity” (*obshchnost*) appears to persist among Moscow policy elite and is reflected in the recent Op-Ed penned by Timofei Bordachev, an influential political analyst. A deep feeling of anxiety within Russian society about developments in Ukraine is quite understandable, he writes, because the two peoples are very close to each other. His conclusion is this: “Ukraine is and will be with us, no matter how things develop.” See Timofei Bordachev, “Svoikh ne Brosaem,” *Izvestiia*, (October 12, 2017), retrieved October 12, 2017, from <https://iz.ru/657156/timofei-bordachev/svoikh-ne-brosaem>.
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July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey: Context, Causes and Consequences

Muhittin Ataman

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