
NEW IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE?

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Instead of predicted end of ideology and ideological competition due to presumed 15—20 years ago final victory of Western liberalism and democracy the world is sliding into the new ideological struggle.

There are many reasons for it: appeal of the West is declining, the democratization and re-nationalization of international politics push to the fore new leaders and most of them profess traditional and nationalist values. New post-European values did not get hold in Russian society seeking old values it has been cut off during the 70 years of the Communist experiment and also due to the fact that the West pursued a neo-Weimar policy of geopolitical expansion, which provoked defensive reaction to everything coming from the West. The intensity of the new ideological struggle is exacerbated by the moral and ideological vacuum created by modernization, which pushes aside many traditional religious and moral values.

Author concludes that mutual resentment between Russia and Europe is quite strong right now, but it's better to build good-neighborly relations while understanding that we are different. And it's needed to try hard to avoid a new systemic military-political confrontation that is desired by many forces.

Key words: ideological struggle, international relations, Russia, Europe, traditional values, communism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Europe created an illusion that the era of ideologies and ideological struggle was over and the world was moving towards a single system of values and ideas based on liberalism, democracy and capitalism. Europe and America fascinated the world with their freedom, affluence and winning political system [Fukuyama 1992].

The perception about the final victory of Western values was backed up by America's massive military supremacy but most importantly by Western countries' affluence everyone aspired to have, including Soviet and Russian people. This desire was sustained by a widely spread and cultivated but antihistorian view that wealth and prosperity were a result of democracy, not vice versa. Indeed, in the most countries relatively affluence was reached under conditions of very authoritarian rule by modern standards. But almost that success was based on the system of rule of law not political democracy.

Western ideology prevailed in international relations as well.

But new realities came into view in the 2000s.

The success of a new (actually very old) model of capitalism, which leaned in politics on authoritarian and non-liberal leader's democracy regimes of varying degrees, became obvious.

The economic model based on the Washington Consensus lost its appeal after the crisis of 2008—2009, while the Chinese-style model profited. It also turned out that most of the new successful countries had not followed the Washington Consensus recipes.

Flushed with victory, the West started to impose its political positions and values even with the use of military force (in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya) and lost. Its support for the Arab Spring further destabilized the Middle East and made the image of democracy less attractive, if not dangerous.

Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States began to move away from the values they had always offered to the world, at least the Christian world, and started imposing values that were unacceptable for the majority of countries — multiculturalism, excessive tolerance, and unusual sexual and family relations.

The ages long drift from Christianity and Christian values in Europe accelerated dramatically over the past twenty-five years and was codified when the European Union did not mention its Christian roots in the draft EU Constitution that was never adopted and in the Lisbon Treaty, which replaced it. It only left pragmatism, consumerism, democracy, human rights, and law. Essentially, these values are quite attractive but may provoke a degradation of both humans and their values if detached from person's customary devotion to some higher purpose. When the Soviet Union was criticized for godless and amoral communism, it was offending but essentially true, and many people in our country knew it. The communist practice rejected traditional moral values. Now ironically it could be the other way round: Can one trust those who espouse godless democracy and liberalism? Dostoevsky's well-known question put in the assertion of Ivan Karamazov, "If there is no God, everything is permitted"¹ still sounds relevant.

The approach towards international relations, proposed by the Europeans quite sincerely for the most part and more double-heartedly by the Americans, which rejected the use of force and spheres of influence, and appealed to the supremacy of international law, began to falter, too. It first failed when Germany and eventually the EU unlawfully recognized Croatia's and Slovenia's secession from Yugoslavia, triggering a civil war in that country, followed by barbaric bombings by NATO of its remains in 1999. Then there were acts of aggression against Iraq and Libya. Besides, most emerging powers had no intention to follow the EU's example and give up their sovereignty.

There is yet another core value in Western Europe that becomes inadequate in a new, harsher and less predictable world — non-violence and pacifism. The Europeans, who had overstrained themselves in two horrible world wars, not only eagerly and successfully cultivated this value among themselves, but they also tried to offer it to the rest of the world. But the world chose another path to follow and, worse still, began to intrude into the European world through mass migration of people belonging to other cultures, which started quite a few years ago [Clochard 2013; O'Brian 2016]. Europe will have to adapt and pursue a harsher and more right-wing policy, and give up some of its democratic freedoms for the sake of order and security. This process is extremely painful and predictably provokes a defensive ideological reaction.

What makes the issue of values even more acute for Western elites is that they have largely drifted away from majorities in their societies where traditional values

¹ Dostoevsky, F. (1999). *The Brothers Karamazov*. Transl. by C. Garnett. New York: Signet.

are still quite strong. These values also prevail in other countries which are gaining greater independence and freedom to act. The overall impression is that elites in the old West are losing their unconditional dominance in the economy, politics, military power, and ideology, and turning into an almost marginalizing minority [Lukin 2016].

The Russian alternative even if yet weak and not totally compelling appears to be particularly challenging against this Western background.

The biggest part of the Soviet elite and people, tired of scantiness and lack of freedom during the era of real socialism, were yearning to be in Europe while being quite unaware of what democracy and capitalism were really like. Private ownership was promptly introduced without protection by law. This led to the emergence of oligarchic capitalism and large private holdings, morally illegitimate and not protected and legitimized by law. That became the main cause of systemic corruption and moral degradation of many. Democracy was introduced from above, slowing down reforms and precipitating the near disintegration of the country by the end of 1990s.

And yet, even unsuccessful economic and political reforms gave the majority of Russian people what they generally associated with “Europe” — abundance of goods in shops and personal freedom and freedom to travel.

But things did not go any further. Deep-rooted values and habits of Russian society came into play: almost unconditional striving for independence and security, consolidated by Vladimir Putin as “patriotism”², and the aspiration for justice with disrespect for formal rules and laws; as well as the feeling of belonging to a great-power embraced after reforms and military successes of the 18th—19th centuries. Add to this the drive for centralization of power, induced by centuries of fierce struggle for survival. This fear was amplified immensely by the 1990s which became a time of losses for everyone but the new bourgeoisie and a small part of the intelligentsia. Most groups of Russia’s population and elites, including the meritocratic ones — scientists, engineers, teachers, military officers — lost everything.

And yet, further movement towards European democracy and some of its values was still possible if it had not been for two major circumstances.

First, the West saw itself as a victor and started to pursue what could be called a “Weimar policy in velvet gloves”, pushing Russia off the political, security and economic stage. The enlargement of the Schengen Area even reduced visa-free travel opportunities for Russians. The interests and objections of the temporarily enfeebled great power were ignored.

NATO’s expansion was a symbol of that policy. But eventually it became clear that the European Union’s enlargement did not benefit Russia either as it was not accompanied, as had been promised and expected, by efforts to create a common and equal human and economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Western geopolitical expansion reduced possible gains for Russian people from relations with Europe and weakened pro-European feelings in the political class. The logic that eventually became

² The speech of the President Vladimir Putin at the Meeting with the core group of the Leaders Club on 3 Feb 2016. URL <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51263> (accessed: 06.06.2016).

dominant was that the West was using Russia's weakness to take away its centuries-old gains and make it even weaker.

Defense reflex prevailed.

The second circumstance was even more unexpected. Russians were eager to join the Europe of nation states, Christianity and traditional values, from which they had been separated for seventy years, the Europe of Churchill and De Gaulle, Adenauer, knights, and great leaders and great ideas. Russian people were arduously regaining religious values and faith that had been eradicated and virtually banned for decades. But Europe had changed. Most importantly, since the 1980s—1990s it had taken one more giant leap from old to new values and started to impose them stubbornly.

The majority of Russian society and elite and a considerable part of European elites simply diverged in their cultural development [Karaganov 2015] and until recently did not even want to discuss their differences. And began to trade recriminations when these differences came to the surface.

In addition, unsuccessful reforms in Russia required an external enemy. From the start of the multi-dimensional crisis of the European project in the early 2010s, European elites, too, began to look for an enemy in a bid to consolidate member countries and their societies and turn their energy within to save the project.

Judging from the intensity of anti-Russian propaganda, truly unprecedented since the 1950s, it seems that some European elites need an enemy even more than Russia does. Before long, propaganda went further and nearly demonized Putin. At first, Russia's ruling elite did not retaliate geopolitically and responded with counter-propaganda against Western values being imposed, but then used its muscles.

What makes the Russian challenge so strong for European elites is probably that Russia, currently seeking its new-old identity and desiring to regain its own self, might be offering an attractive model of behavior and set of values to the rest of the world [Lukin 2016].

In international relations, this means all-round support for state sovereignty, cultural identity and political pluralism, which objectively comes into conflict with the policy of Western universalism and single ideology that has been imposed over the last couple of decades.

Russia puts emphasis on such notions as national dignity and moral courage. To many Europeans these values seem obsolete, as they are perceived as part of their dangerous past — from the wars they unleashed and lost. But Russia won them at an enormous cost and is ready to protect its sovereignty and values even by force, if needed. In “the Putin world” it would be unthinkable for most men not to defend women as was the case in Cologne during migrants' assaults in winter of 2015. But Europeans are apparently afraid of this new harsh world, which is largely represented by today's Russia.

Russia's second ideological message to the world, which is at odds with many of Russian realities but which becomes increasingly obvious, is that consumption is not a goal in itself. Human and national dignity and commitment to fulfilling some higher than one's own purposes are more important. Internal development, not external suc-

cess matters. Hence the broad support for religions and especially Orthodoxy, and readiness to defend Christians in other countries, like in the Middle East.

The third message is readiness to follow traditional foreign-policy principles, including protection of national interests by force, especially if it is seen as morally justified.

This set of messages and values provides Russia with potentially strong “soft power” even though the country is relatively poor and unfree [Sergunin, Karabeshkin 2015].

The current ideological clash may become even fiercer. It involves the West, which has won at first but is now beginning to lose, and Russia, which has taken on the burden of being the symbol of non-Western policy and which appeals to the majority of people, including perhaps those in the West. This fight is going on not only between countries, but inside them as well. Russia also has a minority that shares new European values.

The intensity of this confrontation is implicitly but strongly amplified by the mounting feeling that the current model of development based on growing consumption, inequality and declining morals is pernicious for the planet. A moral vacuum is expanding. The purpose of the fight is to fill this vacuum or prevent others from doing that.

The conspicuous “non-Western” Russian policy and ideology may be temporary, necessitated by the need to stop the West’s geopolitical expansion and its attempt to export “democratism” in such an aggressive manner. (Remarkably, a like policy was practiced by the Soviet Union which exported its model to the controlled and subsidized socialist camp, countries of “socialist orientation” and other states through communist parties, NGOs of the past).

Russia does not seem to be making plans for purposeful export of its ideology. But it is happening *de facto*. Meanwhile, messianism is strong in some Western countries and they feel defeated after their victory and want to take revenge.

Russia’s alternative I have outlined is not final. It clearly comes out of the past, out of modernity, and the Westphalian or Vienna interstate systems. Yet it appeals to the majority, while the European and Western post-modernity, although looking more humane and progressive, is losing. This is possibly because its model leads nowhere or because the majority of countries are not prepared to accept it.

Following Russia’s forceful actions against Western expansion in Ukraine, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was said to have accused the Russian leader of living in an unreal world. It seems, however, that it was the German chancellor who was living in such a world and has now received a harsh wakeup call. It would probably be better for everyone to live in a world of post-modernist, humane, non-violent and tolerant unreality, but it seems it has failed to materialize.

History does not go along linear paths but makes turns and spirals. At any rate, it will keep going if no thermonuclear catastrophe occurs. Values evolve and change and there are many more turns ahead.

As regards relations between Russia and Europe, this means that we have unfortunately but predictably missed each other. We have missed the chance to create a common space from Vladivostok to Lisbon. Mutual resentment is quite strong right now, but

we'd better keep it at bay and build good-neighborly relations while understanding that we are different. And we should certainly try hard to avoid a new systemic military-political confrontation that is desired by many forces possessed by demons of the past or by old geopolitical fears of the emergence of a truly united and peaceful Greater Eurasia. This is the geopolitical, geoeconomic and geoideological grouping Russia with China and other countries of Eurasian continent has started to form³. Greater Eurasia will, of course, be open to the Western tip of the continent — Europe. But this new structure will not be based on any universalist system, but to respect of cultural, ideological and political pluralism.

Our societies may change again a decade from now, with Europeans becoming more nationalist and realistic, and Russians more tolerant. And if we try to learn more about each other in a respectful way, we may get a chance for a new rapprochement.

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НОВАЯ ИДЕОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ БОРЬБА?

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Вместо предсказываемого 15—25 лет тому назад конца идеологий и их соревнования, окончательной победы западного либерализма и демократии мир скользит к новой идеологической борьбе.

³ Press statements following Russian-Chinese talks on 25 June 2016. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/52273> (accessed: 30.08.2016).

Среди причин — падение привлекательности Запада. Демократия и ренационализация международных отношений выводит на передний план новых лидеров. А они, как правило, придерживаются традиционных и националистических ценностей.

Новые европейские ценности не прижились в России не только потому что россияне стремились к традициям, от которых они были отрезаны семьюдесятью годами коммунистического эксперимента, но и потому что западная идейная экспансия сопровождалась нео-Веймарской геополитикой, вызвавшей жесткое отторжение. Интенсивность новой идеологической борьбы подстегивается тем, что модернизация теснит старые ценности, образуется вакуум, за заполнение которого разворачивается соревнование.

Автор приходит к выводу, что взаимное недовольство России и Европы достаточно сильно в настоящее время, однако необходимо стремиться к добрососедским отношениям, принимая во внимание тот факт, что мы разные. Но прежде следует приложить немало усилий, чтобы избежать новой системной военно-политической конфронтации, в которой заинтересованы многие силы.

Ключевые слова: идеологическая борьба, международные отношения, Россия, Европа, традиционные ценности, коммунизм.

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