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## Relations Between Russia and Europe: No Simple Solutions in Sight

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THE CRISIS between Russia and the West is associated with Crimea and Russia's actions in Donbass and Ukraine; in fact, it has deeper roots while its long-term repercussions might prove to be much graver than expected. A large-scale armed clash cannot be excluded even if this possibility is gradually reducing; we should be ready to political confrontation and contracted economic ties. Today, Europe is facing an even greater threat: a civilizational divorce with Russia.

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AS FOR RUSSIA, in which I am more interested, the divorce will dent the key identity of the greater part of Russians. No matter how hard we criticize Europe, no matter how often we fought with some European countries we still consider ourselves to be part of European civilization. Modernization impulses – in technology and, most important, in everyday and social life – mainly arrived from what common people call Europe. We borrowed Christianity from Byzantium, the most advanced part of Europe at that time. We owe our earlier statehood to the Vikings whom we invited to rule; we got our contemporary statehood through the reforms of Peter I and Catherine II. The European nobles and meritocracy (engineers, scientists and the military) invited to Russia found a home from home in our country, a great achievement of the Russians' open nature.

Today, many blame the West for the failure of reforms in Russia; the blame, however, lies with the poorly educated yet impatient Russian elite.

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The Russians have every reason to resent the West that responded to the Soviet Union's self-disintegration with a neo-Versailles policy. It tried to push Russia away from the political and economic markets; to establish its political and military control over the territories indispensable for Russia's security and preserved at a high price of millions of lost lives. A (so far) limited war that has come to Ukraine is a predictable and natural response to the West. In short, the West could have helped but preferred not to help.

As far as I know, Russia was the only one among the former socialist countries that was obligated to pay its debts accumulated in socialist times in full; all others had their debts slashed. The post-Soviet transformations, Russia's course toward liberalism, democracy and closer relationships with the West proved to be very painful for the nation and left a bitter taste in many Russians' mouths. They, however, are responsible for the senseless disintegration of the USSR, for their weakness and for obsequious elites ingratiating themselves with the West thus whetting its appetites.

Having recognized that their European policies have failed, the Russians decided to rush to Asia. I have been supporting the now overdue economic turn to rising Asia for a long time only to be accused of anti-Europe sentiments. In recent years, however, the process, albeit not smooth, began to develop, practically from the start, into a geopolitical turn. There are certain advantages in it, yet certain losses cannot be avoided especially if we demonstrate undue haste. It seems that a large part of the offended Russian elite decided to move away from Europe, making Aleksandr Blok's famous poem *The Scythians* (written in 1918) as relevant as ever.

Russia's determined actions amid the crisis around Ukraine are prompted by its well justified (if overdue) desire to teach the Western partners to respect its vital interests. On the other hand, there is another, less attractive, explanation: confrontation as a substitute for a viable economic program or confrontation as a moving force of an economic

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upsurge. Confrontation is here. An economic upsurge is nowhere to be seen.

Russia's current turn away from Europe might prove to be much deeper than the previous, Soviet one; the main reason should be sought not in Russia's actions or inaction.

For a long time, the Russian and European elites while talking, more or less sincerely, about common values remained unaware that in recent decades the values supported by the majority in Russia and Europe have been evolving in opposite directions. In Russia, the elite and society are moving toward state nationalism (as opposed to the Communist messianic internationalism), to Christianity and other old European values from which the country was isolated far too long. The Europeans meanwhile were distancing themselves from them. Today, we are not closer to Europe than twenty-five years ago – it seems that we have moved further apart. Nobody knows when a reverse movement begins – if ever.

It seems that integration with Europe, the cherished dream of Russian Westerners is much harder to achieve today than a quarter of a century ago. The values have moved too far apart even though along different lines than before. The majority has got what it wanted anyway: "To live like people live in Europe" – personal freedom and no shortages; it has no use for the rule of law and developed democracy, which can wait for several decades, or even generations.

The present crisis between Russia and the West/Europe stems, among other things, from the deep-laying processes unfolding in the Old World.

In the last seven or eight years, we were watching how the EU, a seemingly magnificent and victorious structure, the most comfortable and humane place in the world and an example of post-historical international arrangement, was tumbling down. This Europe is still a promised land for the poor and ill-adjusted countries and nations. Look at Ukraine or, at least, part of its population. Europe, torn apart by numerous crises, will be gradually losing its attraction for Russia as well to finally become a problem, rather than a solution.

Today, when the relations are at their lowest a mere enumeration of European problems looks malicious, yet their analysis has become a must.

These are the main causes and symptoms of the present crisis:

- The majority of the EU countries lost their competitiveness to the rising "new centers," partly because of the obsolete and cumbersome social systems. The majority of countries, Germany, the Netherlands and

Sweden being the only exception in the 1990s and 2000s, ignored the overdue reforms;

- Driven by political euphoria, the EU spread too far and too wide beyond the borders of the “autochthonous” EU members to the economically and culturally more backward countries; the European “south” destroyed the balance;

- Transfer to the Euro for political rather than economic reasons and not supported by a de-facto federal alliance and economic management from a single center made the present crisis inevitable;

- The course became determined by political logic rather than economic imperatives; this explains why many of its members got the feeling that the EU was becoming less profitable;

- The failed attempt to arrive at a common external and defense policy tied down the great European powers hand and foot and deprived the EU of a great deal of its foreign policy weight. Many pluses added up to a minus. This policy proved efficient in the old context of confrontation with Russia yet the first cracks have already appeared; the process will go on. It became clear that any attempts at a constructive policy will be cut short by Poland, the Baltic countries and the United States, their patron;

- The European elites have moved too far away from the people; today, amid the “democratic deficit” in the EU, they cannot explain to their citizens the logic of their actions;

- The policy of multiculturalism and open doors for immigrants failed;

- The geopolitical situation in the EU closest periphery and elsewhere in the world has aggravated beyond the EU structural or institutional ability to cope. The world is moving away from the liberal multisided world order, the foundation of the EU foreign policy philosophy, toward revived nationalism and reliance on force. (The harsh response of the European elite to Russia’s policy in Ukraine is explained, to a great extent, by the blow it delivered at the concept of Europe and the world promoted by the European Union);

- And, finally, probably the main factor: disappearance of confrontation. European integration was started with two aims in view: to prevent another war and stem the influence of the Soviet Union and communism. The EU lost these aims together with its *raison d’être*; today, the European elites are trying, deliberately or intuitively, to fill the gap.

The combination of the snowballing crisis phenomena made the EU a difficult or even unpredictable partner. Unable to cope with the crisis,

the European elites are trying to revive an external threat as a unifying factor to rely on restored unity to resolve internal problems. Internal weakness pushes the elites to the still strong United States that, however, is gradually moving away from Europe. With more trump cards at its disposal, Washington fans confrontation and widens the split on the continent.

Theoretically, the crisis can be settled through federalization by setting up de facto if not de jure the United States of Europe. In practice, the past errors and objective barriers make this option next to impossible; the crisis will survive or even deepen.

In its present state, Europe of the European Union cannot be a subject (which it was in the last few decades) able to widen the zone of its economic, legal and political influence and control its “empire” (the term used by its ill-wishers) or the sphere of “democracy and law” (as it is called by Euro-optimists). The enlargement potential, Brussels’ main instrument has been exhausted. It seems that an invitation extended to Ukraine, partly foolhardy and partly in an attempt to convince itself and the rest of the world that the European project was still alive, will become its “swan song.” This explains the animosity with which the European elites responded to the failure of their Ukrainian gambit.

Today, there is an obvious desire to create and preserve tension and a no less obvious fact that the values have moved far apart. The mutual economic interests have lost much of their previous attraction because of parallel systemic stagnation in Russia and the majority of the EU members.

These numerous factors have brought the continent to the lowest, in the last 40 or 50 years, since the beginning of détente in Europe, level of mutual confidence. The age of information and the much lower standards of political morals created an information background unheard of even in the late Cold War years. At that time, lies were not so massive and so brazen and the countries kept themselves and their press from insulting the leaders of the opposing countries.

If aliens could sample the portion of today’s information flow that has to do with foreign policy (almost all of it negative, and absolutely negative in relation to Russia) they would come to the conclusion that the sides are at the stage of psychological preparation for war. I am still convinced that this is not so, yet against the background of accumulated mistrust this flow makes accidental escalation much more possible. Compromises and retreats have become politically hazardous.

We, however, should seek compromises. The majority of Europeans and, I hope, the majority of Russians, does not want confrontation let

alone military-political escalation. The first two years of the new confrontation have shown that there is no way out of the internal dead ends.

We should and can start looking for a new *détente* because the sides have already got much of what they wanted to get. Russia wanted to teach her partners to respect its interests by force, since persuasion and appeasement had failed. Europe likes this even less than before yet, I hope, will respect it. The West wanted to prove that it is not a “paper tiger” and that it can deliver heavy blows. It has succeeded. The plummeting oil prices helped as well.

The way out should not be sought for along the old lines that lead nowhere. The Europeans have learned this once more in the East and in the West. After the Cold War they, blinded by avarice, stupidity and weakness, let the unique possibility of building up in Greater Europe a strong and fair world order (of which the best Europeans had dreamed for many centuries) slip between their fingers.

### **Looking for a Solution**

THE PESSIMISTIC APPRAISALS mentioned above might reduce to daydreaming everything what is said about the ways and means of disentangling from the crisis.

Yet, first, sooner or later, nearly all crises are either settled or lead to a war. The latter, hardly possible because of the sobering nuclear potential, should not be ignored.

Second, the search for a solution is going on and might lead us into another impasse or in an even worse situation.

Third, Europe, with the exception of part of the Brits, the Poles and the Baltic peoples who dislike Russia, does not need confrontation. The Germans are still pumping up confrontation, although being aware of the highly adverse effects on their positions in the long run; this way, they are trying to add efficiency to their leadership in the European project that is falling apart. Russia, on the other hand, has the Eurasian alternative, no matter how vague. Deprived of its Eastern vector, Europe, and Germany in the first place, will find it hard to defend its interests in the world.

Fourth, even the situation in the United States, where the confrontational feelings so far predominate, will probably change in the long-term perspective. These and other changes can and should be influenced.

And the fifth point which is central: Russia does not need long confrontation for historical-spiritual considerations of which I have written

above and for practical reasons. Good relations with neighbors are even better than normal relations. This fully applies to the neighbors with whom Russia is and will be, under all conditions, connected with a big, even if no longer the biggest, part of its foreign trade.

Finally, sixth, it would be unwise for Russia to stay away from the new bout of struggle for Europe (by peaceful means) and leave the battlefield to rivals or even opponents. Two last decades have taught us that conciliation or reliance on the off-chance does not work.

So far, there are supposedly four variants on the table (there is also an unacceptable military solution). The first is, let's say, Baltic-American, which recreates a structural military-political confrontation to the east of the old front.

It is gradually realized: arms and armaments are moved closer to Russia's borders and military activity is on the rise. According to this scenario, the struggle for Ukraine will be waged "till the last Ukrainian." This is bad for Russia, something that the other side also knows: this perpetuates the year 1914 or, at best, the end of the 1940s and the 1950s with their policies on the brink of war.

Structural confrontation is invariably accompanied by invitations to start or continue talks on the reduction of nuclear and conventional armaments to make it safer or deeper. This is a tested, albeit not recognized as such, method of remilitarization of politics and thinking.

The second, no longer realizable scenario was offered by Russia: a Union of Europe, a common human and economic space stretching from Vladivostok to Lisbon, potentially part of a common treaty-based security space. It cannot be revived; it was squashed by the burden of accumulated mistrust and the sanctions that have undermined, for a long time to come, Europe's trustworthiness as a partner. I think that a "softer" variant of a common economic space, which Russia put on the table, realized through a dialogue and a gradual movement toward integration of the EU and EEU stands no chance either. At first, Brussels refused to discuss it and forced Ukraine to choose between the two options. Today, after the catastrophe it reappeared on the agenda. However, it is unrealizable: Brussels will never reach a consensus, necessary for the talks to begin, with Poland, the UK and the Baltic countries.

Russia's economic and political orientation has moved from European to Eurasian and there is no way back. At best, Russia might find a way to combine both.

Continental Europeans, Russian traditionalists and part of the diplo-

mats are discussing the third variant tentatively described as OSCE Plus. The political role of OSCE should be reanimated, nobody knows how after two decades of its emasculating; more money should be poured into it; it should acquire a permanent anti-crisis center, an institute of armed peacekeepers, a new charter which should be approved, a new legal status, and wider rights of its secretary general.

This can be accepted for a transitory period, if the conditions included a permanent neutrality status for Ukraine and other countries of the "grey zone," an object of geopolitical struggle.

This, however, will not solve the problem: the organization is burdened with its institutional tradition of servicing confrontation; when confrontation was formally ended, it became one of the seats of tension maintained through mutual accusations of violations of its principles.

The principles registered in the 1975 Helsinki Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990 lost their relevance. They were adopted at the time when it seemed that Europe would become not only united but also politically uniform; the mere reading of these repeatedly violated "commandments" leaves one embarrassed. They, and many others of the same sort, should remain in the textbooks on the history of diplomacy. However, those who support the OSCE Plus variant are not retreating; nobody knows what to do. It is clear that the Organization cannot operate on the principles that are violated by all and everyone. Hypocrisy might be useful in foreign policy yet it cannot serve as its basis. Any formal revival of OSCE, new confidence-building measures in the military-political sphere will help to gain time needed to get out of the present psychological and political confrontation; it is not a long-term decision by any means.

If the solution lies outside formal frameworks we should get out of them. Today, the accumulated errors, mistrust, inertia of bureaucracies, the institutes that failed and yet continue to fight for self-preservation, and, most important, new geopolitical realities demand that we should go beyond the old European frameworks. Here is an objective argument: Russia is qualitatively strengthening its Asian and Eurasian vectors; China is moving to the West with its Silk Road Economic Belt policy; Europe needs Eurasian markets to develop efficiently. The new split and destabilization of the Greater Middle East, the main challenge to Europe's security, cannot be stemmed without close cooperation with China, Russia, and other Eurasian countries; the SCO is getting new members; Central Eurasia is developing into a new logistic hub. It seems that we are

moving toward a community of Greater Eurasia that will need a political security infrastructure probably through the Forum for Cooperation, Development and Security in Eurasia, the Vienna Congress of our times, to which the Western countries of the Eurasian continent will be also invited. The problem of European security will thus acquire a wider context. In the past, the Europeans relied on the United States to resolve their security problems. The partial withdrawal of one of the superpowers (the Soviet Union) from the system was left unbalanced due to irresponsible policy and led to a crisis. The system might regain part of its former balance with the help of China and other Eurasian countries.

The emerging Eurasian community and the still existing yet weakening Euro-Atlantic community can be complemented with a Pacific Community of which Henry Kissinger wrote in his book *On China* several years ago. So far, Washington's refusal to follow the advice of its genius has led to a system of containment in the region and the revived military-political split in Europe. The Rubicon has not yet been crossed. The interconnected Eurasian, Euro-Atlantic and Pacific communities will create the prerequisites for a relatively harmonious development which the world needs so much.

The idea that the problem of European security could be solved within the Eurasian context formulated several months ago and rejected outright with a lot of hostility is now discussed more and more frequently if not becoming popular. This helps me remain an optimist.

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