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Panrussianism in Russia's great power and imperial identity

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Russian great power traditions in international relations

Russia, like few other countries, has undergone a profound transformation both domestically and internationally in the past quarter century. These processes have received considerable attention in research and comments. It could be said that the world's libraries have been enriched with thousands of new publications on the subject of Russia, whose authors seek to understand the phenomenon of this great power and predict its development trends. The interest in Russia's policy and strategy has increased, especially after the annexation of Crimea and the revival of *Panrussianism* as a form of legitimizing the identity of Putin's Russia.

The country is a villain in media broadcasts, though it should be admitted that due to the strong axiologization of the Ukrainian conflict, the voiced opinions say more about those who propagate them than about the subject they concern. Fortunately, there is an increasing number of objectivized analyses[1], and voices of criticism towards all the sides responsible for the Ukrainian conflict, not just Russia, slowly make it into media reports.

Russian great power traditions date back to the rule of Peter I and the Northern War, which culminated in the victory over the Swedes at Poltava in 1709. The

[1] See, for example, R. Potocki, M. Domagała, D. Miłoszewska (ed.), *Czas EuroMajdanu*, Warszawa 2014; R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine. Crisis in the Borderland*, I.B. Tauris 2015.

term "great power" accompanied Russia from the middle of the XVIII century, although it was used only at the 1815 Congress of Vienna. Russia was included in the *tetrarchy* of the then-giants – Great Britain, Austria and Prussia – and the European *pentarchy* after France rejoined this circle. *Les grandes puissances* were marked by distinct great power attributes. These included: an effective army to protect the country, an extensive bureaucratic apparatus to control the population and the territory, and an increased role of the civic nation which took over legitimacy from the absolute ruler. Russia met the first two criteria thanks to the consistent policy of Catherine II, but developed a system of tsarist autocracy (samoderzhaviye) that contradicted the ideals of the Enlightenment which invoked the social contract and civil rights. But that did not stop it from participating in the European „concert of powers" and acting as one of the stabilizers of the balance of power. The European powers consented to the fact that Russia, citing its tradition and the specific character of its political system, defended the anti-Enlightenment ideas that allowed it to preserve its anachronistic social order in comparison to theirs. Such a stance was aided by the Russian Orthodoxy, which provided the ideological justification for Russia's imperial mission.

Starting with the Congress of Vienna, Russia demonstrated its great power potential on the scale of the entire European continent. Delivering the decisive blow to the hegemonic aspirations of France, it seized the initiative in the creation of the international order at the time. The Napoleonic invasion of Russia gave birth to the tradition of patriotic wars which saw incredible mobilizations of the entire Russian society. Indeed, the 1812 Patriotic War marks the beginning of the apology of exceptional heroism and fervent patriotism of the Russians, and an extraordinary ability to mobilize any means to defeat the enemy. They will become permanently embedded in the great power identity of Russia.

In the XIX century, Russia began to actively participate in the shaping of Europe's territorial order. Through the Holy Alliance, which became the ideological underpinning of the post-Vienna Europe for several dozen years, Russia asserted itself as the guarantor of the values identified with the Christian religion, peace and justice. It was about the creation of a single international system, based on legitimism, the legitimacy of monarchical power, protection of borders and opposition to any revolutionary designs. Monarchs were supposed to bestow constitutions on their subjects, which Alexander did with regard to the Poles, but was unable to do for the rest of the Russian Empire. Other powers did not support Alexander's far-reaching postulates. Great Britain in particular was opposed to the intervention rule, which meant each of Russia's partners saw the functioning of the Alliance in a slightly different way. Regardless of all its weaknesses and downsides (primarily related to the preservation of the *status quo*), that was when the system of international consultations and negotiations

(congresses and conferences), which formed the basis of modern diplomacy, was created. Although it was Klemens Metternich, rather than Alexander Romanov, who sponsored the Vienna system, the odium of being the gendarme of Europe fell on Russia, which was primarily related to the suppression of the November uprising in Poland. From that time, Russia came to be associated with imperialism and repressions against oppressed nations, even though such practices were not uncommon in colonial empires of the Western powers.

As Michał Heller wrote in his *History of the Russian Empire*, „the first quarter of the XIX century was a time of Russia's active participation in European affairs. The country prepared for wars, waged them, concluded peace agreements, which allowed for breathing spaces necessary to recover the strength needed for the next war. Policy underwent rapid changes, enemies became allies, allies – enemies"[2]. Alexander I understood that he led a great empire that not only could, but should decide the fate of Europe and the world. It appears that at the Vienna Congress, the Russian diplomacy experienced the psychology of power that, from then on, would push it to interfere in all affairs involving the entire international system.

The crisis of Russia's great power identity began in the middle of the XIX century, when the Viennese order collapsed as a result of the Crimean war, where two Western powers – France and Great Britain – clashed militarily with Tsarist forces. It was also when a split emerged between treating Russia as one of the major players in the European scene and censuring it civilizationally. Western liberal circles mythologized the threat from the despotic Eastern power, which began to be "pushed out" of Europe. It was then that the myth of the antinomy of Russia and Europe was born[3]. It contradicted the obvious truth that what we have in the case of Russia is a distinctive variant of the civilization originating from the Byzantium, which is undoubtedly part of the European heritage. The effect of antinomy, however, was also deepened by Russian doctrines such as Slavophilism or Panslavism. In military and economic terms, Russia started to clearly lag behind the Western powers, it was losing its prestige and position of a preeminent power in European politics. As Bismarck's *Realpolitik* arrived in the 1860s and 1870s, Russia found itself on the periphery of the great power rivalry. While it took part in the creation of a coalition with France and Great Britain in order to counterbalance the central powers, it lost its credibility as a country able to wage a great war campaign. Its defeat in the war against Japan confirmed these assessments[4]. It took the great campaigns of World War II to restore the Russian army's victorious reputation.

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2 M. Heller, *Historia Imperium Rosyjskiego*, Warszawa 1997, p. 484.

3 M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horsemen to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Cambridge, MA 1999.

4 N.V. Riasanovsky, M.D. Steinberg, *Historia Rosji*, Kraków 2009, p. 434.

A conscious expansionist policy of the Tsarist Russia covered Eastern Europe, Asia and the Caucasus. In a sense, it resembled the westward expansion of the United States in America. The Russian expansion had its beginnings in the campaigns of Ivan IV the Terrible against the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates. The conquest of the Caucasus in the XIX century was paid dearly with blood, and the consequences of the war against the followers of Islam could be felt as many as 150 years later during the 1990s Chechen war. Of course, it was not uncommon to hear justifications that the brutal conquest of the Caucasian and Central Asian peoples was the fulfillment of Russia's *mission civilisatrice* towards the Orient as a whole[5].

The Soviet era in the history of the Russian empire represented a mixture of imperialism and great power strategy. Stalin's cynicism drove him to an alliance with Hitler and another division of Poland in 1939. As a result of World War II, the USSR became a global superpower, competing with the West, especially the United States, for control over spheres of influence. Unable to match the Western powers in terms of economic potential, the USSR used ideological instruments in its strategy. It is beyond dispute that it imposed imperial domination on many countries (political and ideological diktat), which meant their subjugation. The USSR also supported various revolutionary movements in postcolonial countries economically and militarily, but a deepening atrophy and economic stagnation, growing technological backwardness and a costly arms race resulted in an imperial overstretch that led to the collapse of the empire. Under the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR gave up hegemonism in Eastern Europe, consenting to a "velvet" dismantling of the empire. With regard to Western powers, signals were sent that Moscow was ready to abandon rivalry and return to teamwork. These plans failed to be executed. The collapse of the USSR put on the agenda the issues of the identity of the new Russia and its imperial redefinition[6].

The problem of the identity of the new Russia in international relations

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia became virtually a synonym of its previous imperial incarnation, even though it lost many of the attributes of its past power. It stemmed from a peculiar intertwining of "Russianness" with

[5] D.R. Brower, E J. Lazzerini, *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples 1700–1917*, Indiana University Press 1997.

[6] See more: V. Zubok, *Nieudane imperium. Związek Radziecki okresu zimnej wojny, od Stalina do Gorbaczowa*, Kraków 2010.

"Sovietness"[7]. On top of that, Russia inherited from the USSR the formal attributes of its power status, expressed primarily in its permanent membership in the U.N. Security Council and treaty-based responsibility for post-Soviet nuclear weapons. In reality, however, Russia was significantly weakened both demographically, territorially and economically. It ceased to be the leader of a big bloc of countries situated in Eastern Europe. Its former allies turned towards the West, while some countries in its immediate neighbourhood adopted unfriendly, if not hostile, attitudes. Russia came into contact with various seeds of conflict on its borders, particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a transcontinental country, it came face to face with colliding civilizational flows from Europe and Asia, the North and the South. Terrorism of various kinds (mostly ethnic and national liberation-oriented, like in the Chechen case) became one of the biggest threats[8].

The post-Soviet Russia found itself in a dramatic situation that required its identity to be defined. In the first years of the capitalist revolution, it found it difficult to answer questions such as: "who is it", "what is important for it" and "what does it strive for". First of all, it had no certainty about its destiny and internal stability in the time to come. It became an unpredictable country. This period was not without reason called the "second smuta". Multiple existential problems were compounded by axiological disorientation (anomy) and a feeling of loneliness (the strangeness complex). In a situation where previous institutions collapsed and recognized values became obsolete, while the new ones in their place were yet to take hold, when the image of the country both in the eyes of its own citizens and external observers was shattered, and finally, when it was not easy to face the new challenges and threats, there were difficulties in defining how to consciously implement the concept of itself[9].

In the 1990s, parallel processes of identification on national, state and international levels were taking place in Russia. The nation-state identity was being built on the foundation of coexistence of "the old and the new", a combination of some features of the previous systemic formation with elements of the new order, and a search for a new face. Reaffirmation of traditional state symbols played an important role in building an international image of this country. Imperial splendour, historical achievements and civilizational merits were highlighted. At the same time, there was a realization that a new identity could only be built by joining the international community, rather than in opposition to the rest of the world. While ideological missions and historic duties were abandoned, the Rus-

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7 A. Kocho-Williams, *Russia's International Relations in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge 2013, p. 153 and next.

8 A. Włodkowska-Bagan, *Rywalizacja mocarstw na obszarze poradzieckim*, Warszawa 2013, p. 87 and next.

9 See more: S. Bieleń, *Tożsamość międzynarodowa Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Warszawa 2006.

sian state became a battleground for dramatic ideological and policy confrontations, especially between Eurasians and Atlanticists, power policy advocates and pragmatists, whose visions were marked by appeals to the imperial tradition, great power policy and nationalism. Their striking feature is a clash of two tendencies – opening to Western ideas and values, and seeking refuge in the preservation of the "intrinsic Russian civilization". The diversity of views is a characteristic feature of the recovery from the Soviet era, with its domination of one ideology and one theoretical vision of social life.

The Russian Federation is a unique country due to its space, geopolitical location encompassing Europe and Asia, a centuries-old power and imperial expansion, long-standing traditions of authoritarian rule, and also natural resources and nuclear weapons. These things determine its important position in international relations. Russia is, above all, a major global exporter of energy carriers, and possesses one of the world's largest nuclear potentials. It is, therefore, a nuclear and energy power. The nuclear factor works more destructively – it maintains, even strengthens, the world's mistrust towards Russia. The oil factor works in the opposite way – for the growth of constructive interest in Russia from different countries.

The civilizationally European and geopolitically Eurasian identity of Russia is not two different, but rather inextricably linked sides of its general self-definition in the world. Russia is simultaneously "Europe in Asia" and "Asia in Europe". The problem is in how it disposes of this specific character of its immanent "dualistic" identity. The priority of the Russian governing elites is economic growth and civilizational development, while democracy and civil society institutions come second. Modern Russia combines formal democratic institutions with strong political leadership that ensures the omnipotence of the state. This raises concerns about consolidation of authoritarian tendencies.

Destabilization in the post-Soviet area, nostalgia for the lost empire, and also strong economic and security linkages led Russia to grant itself a monopoly on playing the roles of the arbiter and guarantor of stability of the so-called near abroad. Not without importance for the Russian perception of the post-Soviet space were changes in the U.S. strategy after the 2001 terrorist attack. Since then, Russia has treated its regional policy as a counterweight to U.S. hegemonic aspirations. Its government and media circles display the syndrome of "encirclement", as evidenced by further losses in the "near abroad". The accession of the Baltic republics to NATO and the European Union, then pro-Western moves by countries such as Ukraine or earlier Georgia, have caused severe psychological trauma, reflecting a sense of threat to its existential interests. Thus, relations between Russia and the West have been put to the test of time once again. There is much to suggest that the crisis between Russia and the U.S. and the European Union over the Ukrainian conflict and the annexation of Crimea will lead to a permanent shift towards Asia. That's

because Russia treats its Asian policy as a counterweight to its marginalization in European affairs, as well as a counterpoint to the global influence of the U.S. The partnership with China is of special importance, as it ensures correlation of efforts in the international arena, in order to build a common front in a multipower and multipolar world. The Russians recognize the rise of Asia and the Pacific in economic relations, they are also not indifferent to the region's security issues. Russia seeks dealings with Asian countries on the basis of compromise and partnership. It is an attractive neighbour in Asia because of its natural resources and military technologies. Russian involvement in Asian affairs is still hindered by Russia's image as a country with an imperialist and colonial past, which up to now has been unable to settle the contentious issues in a treaty form, especially with Japan.

The Russians are in the process of re-evaluating their involvement in international affairs. Their tragedy is the lack of a clear idea where modern Russia could find its place in the global balance of power. The most important problem boils down to overcoming the deeply embedded complex of playing the role of one of the major decision makers. This requires Russia to give up defining its vital interests in terms of its "omnipresence" in the world. Russia needs self-restraint. The paradox is that modern Russia chooses the role of a regional power, declares a continental activity, but continues to engage in tasks that place it alongside powers with global ambitions.

The quest to justify reintegration projects in the post-Soviet space

Vladimir Putin has not only restored stability in foreign policy, but also started drawing up the doctrinal foundations for a new power status. The past decade has demonstrated that Russia has the potential to consolidate its advantage and dominance in Eurasia, just like the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere. Real ambitions and growing capabilities have formed the basis for the creation of a world vision consistent with its national interests. Russia has started showing the world its soft power, based on a willingness to make efforts to gain the greatest possible prestige and the highest possible status in international relations.

At the same time, it has been claimed that Russia has abandoned its „age-old pattern of territorial expansion", lost its *libido dominandi*, it also doesn't have the power of social motivations, because the Russians are no longer willing to pay a high price for maintaining the empire. Dmitri Trenin has called it the "imperial fatigue" syndrome[10].

[10] D. Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. 2011, p. 142.

Regardless of all the doctrinal formulas and Russian renouncements of the imperial idea, it appears that efforts are being made in present-day Russia to rebuild the empire under the guise of various slogans and reintegration projects in the post-Soviet space. The ideas to create the Eurasian Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Community, or recently the Eurasian Union, are commonly associated with new manifestations of imperialist designs. Russia pushes the slogans of "privileged interests" and "strategic responsibility" in the post-Soviet space, citing "laws of geopolitics". This tendency can be called different names, referred to imperialism, or a phenomenon of the Russian ideology – Eurasianism. But that does not change the crux of the matter, that it has been one of most important components of Russian soft power in the past two decades[11].

A special challenge for Russia's political influence over the countries of the "near abroad" came with the "colour" revolutions, particularly the "orange revolution" in Ukraine. The Russian elites realized that the West was more successful in promoting its political models and it was able to provide more effective assistance in transition processes. Russia found itself in a situation of "ideological void", having nothing to impress or attract the post-Soviet republics, especially Ukraine and Georgia. A response to this "void" was the concept of "sovereign democracy" as an offshoot of the Russian "national idea" in the days of Putin's presidency. Kremlin strategists (Alexei Chadayev, Nikita Garadja, Andrei Kokoshin, Maxim Sokolov, Vladislav Surkov, Vitaliy Tretyakov) dismissed liberal democracy practiced in the West. In their opinion, all the world cannot be arranged according to one model. While the priority for the U.S. democracy is freedom, for the European one – equality, then in the Russian democracy, at this stage, the most important thing is security. The primary objective of the "sovereign democracy" is – as the name suggests – the protection of state sovereignty rather than individual rights. In fact, the aim is to prevent social pressure „from the bottom" and international pressure "from the top", which led to the „colour revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia. According to Kremlin specialists, "attempts at so-called democratization" are nothing else but Western desires to "curtail the sovereignty" of the post-Soviet countries. Russia is also becoming such a target. These efforts are supported in Russia by agents of foreign influence – homegrown liberals, human rights advocates, national minorities[12]. In the view of Kremlin ideologists, sovereignty is not a right enjoyed by a state or a nation, but it means the potential of a country, its economic independence, military power and cultural identity. Another essential element of a sovereign country is an elite with national views. A national character of the elite is the most important factor determining

[11] S. Bieleń, *Oblicza imperializmu rosyjskiego*, [in:] A. Dudek, R. Mazur (eds), *Rosja między imperium a mocarstwem nowoczesnym*, Toruń 2010, p. 25–38.

[12] А. Чадаев, *Путин. Его идеология*, Издательство Европа, Москва 2006.

the strength of a sovereign country. The slogan of "sovereign democracy" is used opportunistically, depending on the current needs of the government. For sovereign democracy is portrayed as a fight against chaos and disorder. It is a kind of state ideology, additionally seasoned with imperial and nationalist sentiments. It forms part of a deliberate strategy by the Kremlin, which strives to make the West believe that Russian democracy has its own specificity[13].

Countering the activity of Western non-governmental organizations in the „near abroad", Russia has started to heavily support and finance its own organizations, as well as various think tanks and foundations, with the involvement of the Kremlin's "political technologists" coming to light (in Ukraine, the Trans-Caucasus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, even the separatist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia)[14]. The Russians have also banked on the activization of their compatriots – Russian language speakers who inhabit the post-Soviet republics, promoting the concept of the *Russkiy mir* that refers to "variously formulated Russian spiritual space, Russian cultural space, or Russian language space"[15]. The *Russkiy mir* has come to be portrayed as a Russian civilizational project[16], with the following features: inter-civilizational "bridge-building", multireligiosity, multiethnicity, tolerance and inter-confessional dialogue[17].

The Russian government controls mass media, which allows it to maintain a relatively coherent interpretation of events, aimed at both domestic and foreign audience. It should be noted here that the Russian media, television in particular, is highly popular in several countries of the "near abroad", as well as the Baltic states, among Russian language speakers. The Russian information space is therefore an important determinant of influence in other areas. The media encourages the cultivation of a certain nostalgia for the Soviet empire, creating an impression that Moscow remains the sole guardian of the postimperial legacy, at least in the psychological and intellectual dimension.

Another aspect of the impact of Russia's political culture concerns the Russian language as *lingua franca* of the entire post-Soviet space. About 100 million non-Russians use the language not only in official contacts. Knowledge of Rus-

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13 S. Bieleń, *Powrót Rosji do gry wielkomocarstwowej*, [in:] A. Stępień-Kuczyńska, S. Bieleń (eds), *Rosja w okresie prezydentury Władimira Putina*, Łódź–Warszawa–Toruń 2008, p. 237–238.

14 A. Włodkowska, *Problemy rosyjskiej dominacji na obszarze WNP*, „Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2008, Rok 6, p. 65–83.

15 A. Curanović, *Czynnik religijny w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Warszawa 2010, p. 214.

16 The „Russkiy Mir" Foundation operates with government support, has about 50 centers in 29 countries, including the U.S., Germany and China.

17 A. Wierzbicki, *Russkij mir jako projekt restauracyjny imperium*, [in:] S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek (eds), *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, Warszawa 2015, p. 101–136.

sian helps millions of workers from the "near abroad" to find jobs in Russia, do business, study at universities or communicate at different levels of social life. Russia's language promotion involves support for Slavic schools, e.g. in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russian is the second official language, in addition to the national one, in just a few post-Soviet countries, governments in other post-Soviet republics have knowingly moved to downgrade it and reduce education, which has much to do with building a new identity of nations and states.

Russia realizes the greatness of its remarkable culture, without which it is difficult to imagine the European culture. It has a hugely attractive and rich cultural heritage that draws tourists from different parts of the globe. It is the organizer of many major cultural events, takes part in global festivals, exhibitions and other events. The promotion of the film industry, the flourishing literature or modern music determine the attractiveness of Russia across the post-Soviet space.

Russia's polytethnicity and multiculturalism is its undeniable asset, although it is also a source of contradictions and conflicts. Taking an outside look at Russia's policy, no one really exposes or demonizes the national, racial, religious and cultural mosaic of *Rossijans*, or citizens of the Russian Federation. Russia is considered to be a relatively cohesive state internally, pursuing a strong and assertive policy. A religious revival and the restoration of unity of the Orthodox Church in the country and abroad are seen against this background. If we assume that the religious factor plays an increasingly important role in Russia's foreign policy, then from this point of view religion is becoming a major component of Russian soft power[18]. And by this, we should mean not only the Orthodoxy, but also Sunni Islam. Russia wants to play an important role in fostering dialogue between different cultures and civilizations – as a power which, due to its transcontinential specificity, and also its unique coexistence of ethnicities and confessions, in particular the Christian Orthodoxy and Sunni Islam, can help to narrow the dramatic gulf between the West and Muslim countries.

Russia increasingly turns to the so-called public diplomacy. Until recently, it was wary of using non-governmental organizations, which it saw as competitors rather than allies for political authorities. Its propaganda often lagged behind modern technologies of country brand and image creation in international relations. But for a few years now, Russia has banked on using public relations measures to create a positive image of itself for foreign policy needs. When chairing the G8 in 2006, the Russians used the services of specialist Western companies to aid their lobbying for Western investments in the energy sector, or win support for Russia's efforts to be accepted into the World Trade Organization

[18] A. Curanović, *The Guardians of Traditional Values. Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status*, "Transatlantic Academy Paper Series", February 2015, no. 1.

in the next years. The Russian government makes widesread use of RT (*Russia Today*), an English-language satellite television network that was supposed to become a counterweight to BBC and CNN and the interpretation of events they imposed. Since 2005, it has been showing the world from the Russian perspective and confronting stereotypes about Russia. It broadcasts in English, Spanish and Arabic in more than 100 countries of the world. The Russian government also uses the press to advance its international causes[19].

Improving the efficiency of using soft power in foreign policy makes it easier to better understand the Russian state's arguments among other countries, create information, situation and partnership links, which in turn make it possible to build relationships of normality and stability. Taking advantage of cultural attractiveness boosts mutual attraction, effective persuasion and equal dialogue. To this end, the Russians have taken concrete organizational steps, as illustrated by the establishment of institutions specializing in information influence. This includes the September 2008 decision of the RF president to reorganize the Federal Agency for the CIS, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*). The institution operates outside Russia in the form of branch offices at diplomatic missions and it has taken over the powers of several structures, including the Russian Centre for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation. The scope of its activity includes extending assistance to foreign partners, coordinating the actions of the Russian diaspora, supporting non-governmental organizations in their international activities, and more. The governmental Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad and the Institute of Diaspora and Integration have similar objectives[20]. The Russians now realize that building a positive image of their country in international relations is primarily a consequence of improving the economic condition and ensuring a real leadership that could offer other countries not only „hard" security guarantees, but also attractive cultural and civilizational models. Russia will be respected when it shows its innovative, technological and developmental advantages.

Panrussianism as a manifestation of imperial ideology

Russian political leaders tend to express their far-reaching goals and strategic plans in doctrines clad in ideological robes. Thus, the current version of the Russian foreign policy doctrine contains a number of lofty slogans and principles

[19] R. Orttung, *Russia's Use of PR as a Foreign Policy Tool*, „Russian Analytical Digest" no. 81, 16 June 2010, p. 8–9.

[20] G. Filimonov, *Russia's Soft Power Potential*, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/print/number/Russians-Soft-Power-Potential-15086 (27.03.2011).

consistent both with international law and international morality[21]. Between these slogans and principles, however, you can make out the actual *Realpolitik* assumptions. Russia not only expresses its readiness to defend its compatriots abroad, but it is also determined to make real interventions on this issue. The August 2008 episode of the five-day war against Georgia, as well as the Crimean campaign and the war in eastern Ukraine, are a confirmation of this resolve[22].

We are witnessing the birth of a new variety of the imperial ideology, called *Panrussianism*. It means solidarity with the "great homeland", a desire for a political, not only ethno-cultural and linguistic, identification of the population of imperial lineage with Russia. It brings to mind the historical calls of tsar Alexander or Stalin for national reconciliation in times of great war dangers – the invasions of Napoleon and Hitler[23].

Panrussianism harks back to the ideology of *Panrussism*, which was a binder for all the eastern Slavs at the time of the Russian Empire. Its supporters did not recognize the division of the eastern Slavdom into "three brotherly nations", i.e. Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians. *Panrussism* opposed the creation of state borders between the Slavs, invoking such values as: "Russkiy land", "Russkiy mir", "Russkiy faith" and "one Russia". It was connected with the concept of the canonical territory of the Orthodox Church[24].

All these values take on a new meaning in the context of today's glorification of the imperial past. *Panrussianism* does not refer exclusively, though it does not pass over it, to the ethnic identity of "Russkiness", dating back to the old Rus from the Middle Ages. It points more to fondness and respect for a strong Russian state that was a symbol of patronage over many subjected peoples[25]. *Panrussianism* is no original and well-considered project that would justify the restoration of imperial Russia. Rather, it is another incarnation of the idea to subordinate other

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21 M. Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia. Russian Foreign Policy and the West*, Ashgate 2014, p. 39–66.

22 J. Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion. Russia's Influence Abroad*, Chatham House 2013.

23 H. Carrère d'Encausse, *Eurazjatyckie imperium. Historia Imperium Rosyjskiego od 1552 do dzisiaj*, Kęty 2014, p. 272.

24 О. Неменский, *«Панрусизм»*, „Вопросы национализма" 2011, № 3, с. 34–43.

25 Ivan III the Great (1462–1505) was the first to articulate the aspirations for one great Russian state. His reign in the second half of the XV century was about claiming the full Rurik heritage. „Collecting the Russian lands" became an important element of the Muscovite ideology, while the country that assumed the august name of Russia became a symbol of a successful conclusion to this process. The shape of the Russian state's ideology was influenced by the confrontation with the Catholic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which resulted in the consolidation of spiritual and secular power under the tsar. The idea of the „Third Rome" provided the grounds for gathering not only Russians, but also other Orthodox nations, around this country.

nations and a form of additional legitimacy for the claim to rule the post-Soviet space. Russia seeks arguments for strengthening bonds with the Orthodox faith, the Russian nation and the „great homeland".

Panrussianism is a response to emancipatory tendencies in the „near abroad", especially Ukraine's break with the tradition of *Panrussism*. Ukrainian "irrendentism" and their quest for sources of their own historical and geopolitical identity prompt Russia to seek amends by relishing in the "imperial glory of the homeland". *Panrussianism* as an imperial ideology becomes a "substitute source of satisfaction". That's because, by restoring Russia's responsibility for the great postimperial space, the Russians compensate for their various inconveniences and historical humiliations. They crave "national greatness" and a restoration of "Russia's past glory"[26]. In this sense, *Panrussianism* has an undercurrent revanchism and geopolitical revisionism.

Russia's objective is not to rebuild the empire as a form of ruling over other nations. Instead, the Putin project aims to consolidate the Russian state as a state of a multiethnic Russian nation, for whom an imperial form means a way to function or manage the country's vast space. Russia defends its territorial holdings, while keeping its distance from the opposite side, or the West. In this meaning, Russia is keen to keep states with a buffer status around itself, rather than directly incorporate them into the Federation. The Belarus case is very instructive in this respect.

Defending its holdings and claiming guardianship over the *Russophony* (the primacy of the interests of Russian language speakers over territory), Russia by no means admits it is a revisionist state. But objectively, through fait accompli, it has brought about the „reunification" of Crimea with the motherland. This nomenclature, the Russians say, is not just about a "terminological error", but the essence of the changes that have taken place in Ukraine. In their diagnosis, the Russians emphasize the lack of constitutional legitimacy for the events that led to the Ukrainian crisis and its escalation in the form of the conflict in Donbass. In their opinion, the "forced change of power" in Ukraine was an about-face in the West's attitude towards international law. The takeover of Crimea was only a consequence of the events in Kiev, where an unconstitutional coup took place. Moreover, the return of Crimea to Russia occurred with due regard for the right of self-determination by the residents of the Peninsula. Their will was expressed in a plebiscite, with 96.77% of participants supporting the Crimea takeover by Russia[27].

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[26] M.H. Van Herpen, *Wojny Putina. Czeczenia, Gruzja, Ukraina 2014*, Warszawa 2014, p. 67.

[27] Т. Гомар, *Последствия раскола между Россией и Западом*, „Россия в глобальной политике" 2015, № 3, http://www.globalaffairs.ru.

Pondering over what is and what isn't revisionism, it needs to be emphasized that any such phenomenon is a consequence of specific geopolitical changes which are not accepted by the population of the disputed area. It is known that the breakup of the USSR produced borders that did not necessarily correspond to the aspirations of the Russian language speaking population, administratively incorporated into the new states. No one really cared much about it at the time, just like there were no discussions over who had the right of self-determination. On the basis of *uti possidetis iuris*[28], the Russian language speaking population spread across the empire was denied the right to freely choose the country it wished to belong to. The arbitrary division of the USSR into new geopolitical units resulted in the shelving of the problem that needed to be dealt with in the case of Crimea. When, as a result of the delegitimization of the political authorities in Kiev, separatist sentiments surged in Crimea, it was difficult to expect a different attitude from Russia. Any other country would do a similar thing in its place. The past examples of various interventions by the United States, also to defend its own citizens, are not necessarily an excuse for the show of force by Russia, but cannot be overlooked in objective analyses. The fate of Crimea has thus been sealed. The population of the Peninsula can hardly be criticized for supporting its return to Russia, which, in turn, could not turn its back on its compatriots calling for protection. In the face of threats of discriminatory practices by the new Ukrainian authorities, such behaviour was understandable and justified.

Russia's control over Crimea is one of the basic assumptions of the Russian strategy. It makes it possible to deny access to the Bosphorus for Ukraine and Georgia and to block the Kerch Strait for Ukrainian shipping. The Ukrainian Azov Sea ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk practically resemble the location of Elbląg, which is connected to the open sea by the Russian-controlled Strait of Baltiysk. By taking over Crimea, Russia has also made it easier for itself to communicate with and supply the breakaway Transnistria. For these reasons, it is difficult to imagine a return to *status quo ante*. Control over the Crimean Peninsula, especially the military base in Sevastopol, allows Russia to avoid strategic encirclement. As Dariusz Bugajski from the Naval Academy in Gdynia points out, the "previous lease of the base and military installations in Crimea did not give the Russian Federation the freedom to use the forces stationed there, due to international law limitations. (…) The Black Sea does not have more convenient,

[28] *Uti possidetis, ita possidetis* – as you possess, so you may possess; in Roman law, a means to protect property ownership; in international law, the basis for settling territorial issues in some parts of the world (Latin America, Africa); also the basis for territorial settlements when peace agreements are concluded; means a definitive resolution of a given territorial issue, recognition of the legal title to a territory.

deep and large bays than those at Sevastopol. Their advantages are obvious from all points of view: geopolitical, geostrategic, operational and tactical. In Sevastopol, there is 10 km of wharf, there are basing, command, defense, operational support and logistical support systems. The Black Sea Fleet and its air force can control all the directions of deployment and operation of enemy forces, first and foremost the exit points from the Bosphorus Strait, and the western and central part of the Black Sea"[29].

The incorporation of Crimea and the support for the separatists in Donbass indicate that Russia is ready for a fierce confrontation with the West, which is currently burdened with responsibility not only for the further course of the conflict, but also keeping Ukraine "alive". Many opinions echo the claim that Russia's goal is to create *quasi*-state structures in Donbass modelled on Transnistria and South Ossetia. This is facilitated by the continuing crisis situation in all of Ukraine. Analysts also stress that the costs of running the war in Donbass – despite Western sanctions – are sustainable in the long run for Russia, which means it is geared for a prolonged conflict. Its result is supposed to be the West's return to normalization and a defeat for the "Ukrainian cause". Thus, Russian support for the aspirations of separatist regions has taken on a character independent from any other considerations. The point is to show determination to defend "compatriots" on the one hand, and to use leverage to have permanent influence over the situation on the other hand. "Giving up" Novorossiya would mean a prestigious defeat and a "loss of face", furthermore, Russia would lose an important instrument of political and strategic influence over the situation[30].

The Ukrainian crisis is forcing a re-evaluation of the existing order in international relations. In light of Russia's confrontation with the West and the international isolation of the country, the risk of large-scale armed conflict has increased[31]. In this situation, there is a reasonable need to work out a new compro-

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[29] D. Bugajski, *Krym na zimno*, „Para Bellum. Niezależny Magazyn Strategiczny" 2015, no. 1, p. 40.

[30] The responsibility for extinguishing the Ukrainian conflict lies with each of the parties. Restraint should be expected both from Putin and Western politicians. Any withdrawal of Russian forces must go hand in hand with the cessation of active support for Ukraine from the U.S. and EU. After all, an escalation of the Ukrainian conflict is not in the West's interest, as it faces a dramatic immigration crisis. Long-term isolation of Russia in the Euro-Atlantic world also makes little sense, since Western sanctions have proven to be ineffective. Putting Russia at a distance gives Western strategists hope not so much to weaken it, but to find time to recover from the losses and regain strength. It is not clear where it will end for the existing international order. P.D. Feaver, E.B. Lorber, *The Sanctions Myth*, „The National Interest" , July-August 2015, no. 138, p. 22–27; *The Sanctions on Russia*, "BOW Group Research Paper", August 2015, www.bowgroup.org.uk

[31] Sensitivity and the literary imagination of recently deceased German Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass leads him to the conclusion that we have witnessed the beginning of the

mise between all the participants in the conflict, but primarily between the West and Russia. The West needs to review its policy based on "conceited sacralization of its own culture" (in the words of Pope Francis), which breeds fanaticism and risks new ideological crusades[32].

Russia demands a recognition of its political subjectivity as one of the major powers who have the right to articulate and freely pursue their interests. If this phenomenon is seen by the West, particularly the United States, as an aggressive challenge and a source of threats, then what we have here is either malice or an aberration in mutual perception. Back in Barack Obama's first presidential term, an image of Putin was formed as a XIX-century adherent of *Realpolitik*, perceiving relations with the West in "zero-sum game" terms, striving to rebuild the Russian empire through Eurasian integration. Consequently, all the acts of Russian interventionism, called aggression in the case of Georgia or Crimea, are seen in a purely negative light. However, the problem should be looked at from the perspective of both sides, arguing that each of them has a case. On the one hand, the West sees Russian behaviour through the prism of an aggressive strategy, aimed at further territorial expansion. On the other hand, Russia considers its acts of armed interventions as a defensive reaction to threats and sources of destabilization that spring up in its immediate environment. Until each side defines its real interests and the criteria for their evaluation are aligned, peaceful coexistence between them will be impossible in the long run.

On the one hand, Russia expressly declares that it does not seek to overhaul the existing international order, but it expects all the powers to uniformly apply the mutually agreed rules, concerning both respect for sovereignty of countries and their international affiliations. President Putin often poses the question why the West is allowed to integrate in different forms, while Russia is denied this right. The Russians demand their vital interests be respected and their power status be recognized, citing great historical traditions, cultural and civilizational achievements[33]. They are extremely determined in this respect, showing readiness for tenacity and incurring high costs. The West has to reckon with such a stance.

On the other hand, Russia challenges the West's advantage, moulded after the "Cold War". In this sense, its demands have a revisionist character. It is not

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third world war, which is a war to divide the world's resources. http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1356,title,Gnter-Grass-trzecia-wojna-swiatowa-juz-sie-rozpoczela,wid,17121993,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=11404b

[32] P.C. Phan, *Papież, który nie przyszedł nawracać*, „Gazeta Wyborcza" from 27–28 September 2014.

[33] A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press 2014.

about a return to *status quo ante*, but rather recognizing its position balancing (if not counterbalancing) the United States. The latter sees it as a return to confrontational and competitive motivations, it is unwilling to accept an accommodative and cooperative strategy, which would force it to give up its hegemonism and expansionism. Sticking to its resolve, this way it saves its reputation as the leader of the West and the only power able to exert influence on a global scale. Russia clearly stands in the way of this[34].

Stanisław Bieleń

***Panrussianism* in Russia's Great Power and Imperial Identity**

Against the background of its rich great power history, the modern Russia is seeking its new identity. There is a clash of two tendencies in this process – opening to Western ideas and values, and seeking refuge in the "intrinsic Russian civilization". As part of the quest to justify its restoration (neoimperial) and reintegration projects in the post-Soviet space, Russia invokes the idea of *Panrussianism*. It means a desire for a political, not only ethno-cultural and linguistic (*Russkiy mir*), identification of the population of imperial lineage with Russia. By restoring Russia's responsibility for the great postimperial space, the Russians compensate for their various inconveniences and historical humiliations. They crave "national greatness" and a restoration of "Russia's past glory". In this sense, *Panrussianism* has an undercurrent of revanchism and geopolitical revisionism.

Key words: *Russia, great power traditions, imperial identity, panrussianism*

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