

Russia and Europe: Opportunities and Practical Realizations

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Today's Russian historians and political analysts make attempts to look at the relations between Russian and Europe from the standpoint of a historical alternative. For instance, instead of the Battle on the Ice a possibility of negotiations between the Russian prince and the Teutonic knight is discussed. Having achieved an agreement with the crusaders and then with the Lithuanian Mindaugas, Alexander Nevsky could have opposed the Mongols. Was there a chance for an anti-Mongolian coalition a little later, when the Mongols invaded the heart of Europe: Poland, Hungary, East Bohemia and Moravia having devastated Walachia and Transylvania on their way, the more so that not only were European leaders united by a common threat, but they were also closely allied? The Russian Rurikoviches were relatives to the royal houses of Sweden, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, France and Byzantium. Theoretically, they all acknowledged the idea of a universal Christian realm, the heir to Constantine the Great's Greco-Roman Empire.

If history had developed that way, Eastern Slavs would not have been drawn back for centuries, when Western Europe was already on the verge of its cultural leap.

The rich trading and industrial towns from North and West, with their bright democratic traditions, close links to the free imperial towns and the future Hanseatic League, would have played the leading role in Russian history.

But history went on another way bringing about its dramatic consequences. An abyss broke loose between the Russian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches. Russia, split in two parts, long had to stay outside Europe. Germany and

Italy fell into pieces which were not put together until the 19th century. The irresponsible policy of the Popes ultimately resulted in the Reformation, and the idea of the united Europe remained a utopia for centuries.

Where would history go if, out of the three centers claiming leadership in reuniting the post-feudal fragmentation Russia (Moscow, Novgorod, West Russia¹), Moscow had not won? European lifestyles would have found its way into Russia in the middle of the 16th century instead of the late 17th century. However, Moscow Kremlin takes the necessary measures to put an end to the trend: in 1494, Ivan III closes the last Hanseatic trade settlement in Novgorod, and the Western border becomes almost leak-proof.

Moscow, with its ultra-reactionary isolationism, was unable to transform a semi-Asian country into a European power. That would want a complete revision of the state ideology and transition of the imperial center to a place where a “window to Europe” would be easier to chop. Peter the Great may have understood the importance of a new capital in the context of future Russian integration into Europe. That is why, after Karl XII defeated Russian allies at the outset of the Great Northern War, Peter would several times turn to the Swedish monarch with a plea for peace on any terms. The only thing Peter asked to retain was Saint Petersburg. As is well known, Karl XII did not accept the proposal; the war went on to be concluded with the Treaty of Nystad.

But if we assume that as early as in the 15th century the Russian leader would have become, say, Novgorod instead of Moscow, the notorious “window” may have been unnecessary – the door to Europe through Novgorod would have been wide open.

¹ West Russia (including Volyn, Smolensk, Kyiv, Chernigiv) became part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and then of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Lithuanian prince Vytautas opposed this “integration from the West” to the consolidation of Russian lands “from the East”. Yet he was not patient enough to wait until one of the main obstacles, the Golden Horde, disappeared. He fought the still fairly efficient Mongolian army and was defeated at the River Vorskla (1399), even though the defeat was not really “legitimate”. The historic meaning of the event was that Vytautas basically lost the war for the integration of Russia – and not to Mongols, but to Moscow princes who proved to be more patient, shrewd and lucky.

In my opinion, the best period in Russian-European relationships was the period of the Viennese System rested on the balance-of-power principle and on the existence of the Concert of Europe. The Concert of Europe was formulated in 1815 as a mechanism to enforce the decisions of the Congress of Vienna. Composed of the Quadruple Alliance: Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Great Britain, its main priorities were to establish a balance of power, thereby preserving the territorial status quo, and to protect legitimate governments. The Concert of Europe was one of the first serious attempts in modern times to establish an international society to maintain the peace. This made it a significant event in world history.

We are used to talking about the Concert of Europe as of a reactionary historic event. Indeed, such facts as another division of Poland, the execution of march-in-right, neutralization of revolutions in Spain and Italy, turning a deaf ear towards Slavic genocide in the Ottoman Empire are quite notorious. On the other hand, the Concert of Europe was the first intergovernmental organization that established the Vienna System which maintained peace in Europe for a hundred years. That was the time to build the bases of contemporary diplomacy and the international relations model to survive until now. That was the time when the notion of a 'civilized nation' entered the international relations practices, the slave trade was abolished, Switzerland declared neutrality, the river navigation principles were adopted, and the German Confederation was established. The Vienna System excluded any chances of making up inimical alliances or domination of a single power on the continent.

Russia was the important subject of this system and took part in designing and constructing of a new European house. During this period Russia had been integrated in Europe more than ever before.

One of Russian foreign policy priorities was the idea of the united Europe. The concept included establishment of a European Federation, general adoption of constitutions, launch of a collective security system, and parity cooperation of countries. Both the attempt itself and the entire foreign policy were for Europe's best interests, and seemingly on behalf of Europe. This may explain Emperor

Alexander's international policy in which the national interests (as he saw them) gave way to European interests having caused a great public response followed by general misunderstanding in Russia, as well as in Europe.

Each Russian foreign policy event shows its strife for being a truly European country, not just a member of the European Club. Entering Paris on a white horse, Emperor Alexander was not a barbarian who conquered France but a European-Liberator. "Russia, not long before that a strange and weird name to conceal an infinite wild vast, championed the center of Europe, proud and generous", and the crucial question, 'Is Russia Europe?' was finally responded affirmatively to confirm a proud statement made by Catherine II at the beginning of her 'Mandate', "Yes, Russia is a European power".²

A. Saint-Simon underlined an exceptional role of Russia in building the European communion. Emperor Alexander "sees himself as the founder of the European federation", states a publicist and a prominent politician of the time Frederic Genz, "and wants to be seen as its leader. For two years (1816-1818) not a single memoir or a diplomatic paper written by his hand failed to mention it as the glory of the age and the world's rescue".³

The Russian Project of the European Federation was based on Christian morale to eliminate any possibility of war or revolution in Europe. The European Communion had to be equilibrated, which was possible only by seeing it in the interests of all states. Preservation of a legitimate power was not the project's *conditio sine qua non*, the European countries were supposed to gradually enforce the octroyed constitutions. The Russian Project on a European state union was aimed at instituting an anti-revolutionary, anti-expansionist and anti-reactionary system. Conventionally, the majority of papers on the topic emphasized the anti-revolutionary part of it. However, ripped off the other elements, the essence of the

² <http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2002/4/sshcik.html>

³ Nikolai Mikhailovich (Romanov), Great Duke. Emperor Alexander I, v. I, p. 220.

Russian Project twists dramatically to the point of misrepresentation. Russia proposed to have the constitutional issue posed on the European scale⁴. Emperor Alexander, as the master of Russian foreign policy, was absolutely sure that the new Europe wanted constitutional reforming: “the governments lack required respect these days, their entire prestige can quite reversely rest on the power of liberal regulations they give to their nations”⁵. Russian tsar Alexander I wanted all European states were constitutional. Russian Project of the European Union included: ecumenical Christianity, parity cooperation of the states, the European constitution, proportional disarmament. “He instituted the first discussion for international disarmament ever seriously made amongst European statesmen. He gave to Poland a constitution far in advance of the age. He discussed, and even put into practice, emancipation of the serfs”⁶. He insisted on ratification of the Constitutional Charter in France, made Prussian King Friedrich-Wilhelm III and the German princes avow to initiate the constitutional reforms. Alexander patronized sovereignty and constitutions of the German princes against the Habsburg court. From 1815 to 1821 Russia recommended and supported public representation bodies established in Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, Hessen-Darmstadt with three Saxon duchies of Sachsen-Weimar, Sachsen-Koburg and Sachsen-Meiningen.⁷

Russia did not champion the reactionary Carlsbad Decrees and restrained from recommending it to German sires. Russia also keenly protested against

⁴ REFPA, f. Chanc., d. 124, p. 65.

⁵ RFP, v. XI, p. 153- 162. Emperor’s Ideas on German Affairs.

⁶ Webster Ch. K. The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh. 1815-1822/Ch. K. Webster. - London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1925, p. 89-97.

⁷ O.V. Goncharova. Russian Foreign Policy in 1816-1820: Summary of the thesis for the degree of Candidate of History/Oxana Valentinovna Goncharova. – Voronezh, 2003.

Austrian policy of interference with German home affairs⁸. Russia acknowledged the revolutionary government of Spain despite adoption of the constitution through revolution and the predominantly radical character of the constitution. After the Italian Revolution (1820) and on the eve of the Congress of Troppau, Russia did its best to prevent Austrian interference with Italian affairs and use the Congress to settle the Naples Revolution problem peacefully. The St. Petersburg Cabinet planned to reiterate the European Union and European Constitution issues. Also, Russia's proposal of 1816 regarding the proportional disarmament is worth mentioning. Finally, Russia did not intervene into the Sublime Porte home affairs with no pre-consideration or formulation of cooperative actions with the allies⁹ despite the fact that it ran contrary with its national interests. Sometimes at the expense of its own interests, Russian European policy reflected the European identity recognition process.

Europeanization or Westernization of those times was not denationalization. Quite the opposite, that was the period of the national boom when Russian mentality first came to see itself as European, or at least inseparably linked to Europe. Russia was trying to reconcile the Orthodox and Western churches through a kind of ecumenical or over-confessional Christianity. This can be proved by the domestic religious policy and the organization of the Holy Alliance on the European level. The Holy Alliance founded by the monarchs of Austria, Prussia and Russia was a sort of an association of three Christian confessions, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. "Russian society witnessed and participated in a global ecumenical experiment"¹⁰. The Holy Alliance is largely evaluated today as a "defamed and still underestimated project of a united Europe",

⁸ Russian Empire Foreign Policy Archive (REFPA). Russian Foreign Ministry Chancellery Fund, inv. 468.REFPA, f. Chanc., d. 11840, p. 52; д. 756, pp. 561-562.

⁹ Webster Ch. K. The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh. 1815-1822/Ch. K. Webster. - London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1925, p. 89-97.

¹⁰ Ye.A. Vishlenkova Caring about the Subjects' Souls: Russian Religious Policy in the First Quarter of the 19th Century, <http://www.conservatism.narod.ru/vishlen/vishlen.html>, p. 31.

a global project to be misunderstood by the contemporaries and descendants. The Holy Alliance was not intended to resolve Russian foreign problems. It was a reflection of governmental cosmopolitanism multiplied by the general romantic spirit of Alexander's epoch"¹¹. "The design of the Holy Alliance was a new Christendom where Kings were brothers and their subjects their children"¹².

Russian foreign policy in the Concert of Europe is characterized as the most liberal and international policy than ever before or ever after. The Concert of Europe became the first example of constructive peaceful cooperation. As British Foreign Secretary R. Castlereagh put it: "...during that eventful Period the Quadruple Alliance, formed upon Principles altogether limited has had, from the presence of the Sovereigns, and the unparalleled unity of design with which their cabinets have acted, the power traveling so far out of the sphere of the immediate and primitive obligations, without at the same time, transgressing any of the principles of the law of Nations or failing in the delicacy which they owe to the rights of other States ..."¹³.

World War I was rather a consequence of a fatal error made by some European governments than an irreparable failure of the Concert. After the War, the Concert could have been restored, had two superpowers not dropped out. The first one was Germany who saw way less generosity in Versailles than Napoleon in Vienna. The other was Russia where the Bolsheviks, who seized power as a result of the 1917 Revolution, directly challenged the entire system of values and lifestyles of all other superpowers, which brought the country to the decades of isolation and self-isolation. The least controllable Versailles-Washington system

¹¹ Ye.A. Vishlenkova Caring about the Subjects' Souls: Russian Religious Policy in the First Quarter of the 19th Century, <http://www.conservatism.narod.ru/vishlen/vishlen.html>, p. 31.

¹² Webster Ch. K. The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh. 1815-1822/Ch. K. Webster. - London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1925, p. 89-97.

¹³ Temperley H. W., Penson L. Foundation of British Foreign Policy..., p. 39-46.

symbolized by the hapless League of Nations came to an end in the fire of the bloodiest war ever.

The Viennese System and the Concert of Europe (or the concert of superpowers) has always stirred a lot of interest. The contemporary Russian historians and political analysts believe that it is necessary to reinstate. Some researchers tend to assert that this concert should be purely European (the Union of Europe), others reckon that the concert has to be global to include today's international major powers – the US, EU, Russia, India, China.

In the opinion of the global concert advocates, the restoration of the Concert after World War II was quite realistic on the global, not just European, scale, given the anti-Hitler coalition experience, establishment of the UN, transformation of the USA into a worldwide player, successful reintegration of Germany, Italy and Japan in the international system. However, the Soviet Union, which dominated a good few of humanity, ended up outside that system which gave rise to the bipolarity of the world securely disunited by a huge curtain.

The fall of the “iron curtain” was the decisive factor for the establishment (re-establishment?) of non-confrontational interaction among the major powers.

The first Concert was instituted against the common enemy, the Napoleonic France. Today we all face common universal threats, which the states cannot stand up to by themselves.

The supporters of the global concert idea assume that the World is coming and will come to an actually global Concert. Only the Concert may help resolve panhuman problems, be it terrorism, or non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or conservation, or poverty, or epidemics.

The adherers of a purely European Concert presume that Russia and Europe (EU) have to work out a long-term goal, the establishment of a Union of Europe. It may be based on a short agreement, a Declaration of the Union, which all

European countries may join as soon as they are ready (the foundation of a similar union already was one of the Russian foreign policy priorities in the post-Napoleonic times). It is the union, not a feeble bureaucratic strategic partnership, which we all must strive for.

In addition to the major agreement mentioned above, we suggest conclusion of four agreements setting up the four primary spheres of collaboration and, possibly, the execution of a large number of minor, “sectorial” agreements.

The first major agreement could concern the arrangement of a common strategic area presupposing close coordination of foreign policies. The agreement could resolve the problem inherited from the “Cold War” era, the problem which left the War unfinished: the politico-military fragmentation of Europe. This idea is being realized in actual politics. During the last Russia-Germany summit in June, A. Merkel proposed D. Medvedev to initiate foreign policy coordination meetings between Russian and EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs almost on the monthly basis. Russian President supported the idea.

Another key covenant could be the energy agreement launching a unified European system with the same rules, equal access to mining, transportation (what the EU wants) and, of course, energy distribution (what Russia wants) for all national corporations. For Greater Europe, such unified system may become what European Coal and Steel Community was in its time: out of it the Common Market and the European Community emerged. The idea was voiced by German Federal Chancellor G. Schroeder more than ten years ago.

The third agreement would introduce a common European economic and technological area with clear common rules and freedom of capital flow, product flow and migration with a view of a prospective Customs Union. In fact, that would ultimately lead to a common Greater European economic and energy market, which can be more than just simply competitive in relation to the old and new colossi.

And the last but far from being the least: a common human, cultural, educational area – visa-free migration, massive student exchanges, and potentially a common job market. Being formalized, such a prospect will need transition to similar political institutions and equal respect for human rights.

A certain balance of power already works in the contemporary international system. In his “Diplomacy”, Henry Kissinger wrote: ‘Of course, in the end a balance of power always comes about de facto when several states interact. The question is whether the maintenance of the international system can turn into a conscious design, or whether it will grow out of a series of tests of strength’.

The collapse of the USSR initiated the emergence of national states – the process which is definitely underestimated in the West. Never before 1991 had the planet seen such ethnically organized sovereign countries as Ukraine, Byelorussia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation. Always a multinational community or an empire, Russia (USSR) had been the country where Russians were a minority governed by non-Russians (the House of Romanov was essentially German starting from Catherine II onwards; Stalin was Georgian, and Khrushchev and Brezhnev came from Ukraine). For the first time Russians have become not just a majority, but the great majority (up to 85%) of the national population. This phenomenon required not only a painful and still unfinished quest for the national identity. The search of the new identity and the national idea remains on top of Russian public discussion today.

Russian foreign policy of today is dependent on a lot of factors, including the right use of the historic experience. Restoration of the continuity of Russian foreign policy broken by the October Coup of 1917 is the primary goal of those involved in international affairs of the Russian State. The solution of the task will be the formulation of the national idea which the politically active and patriotic segment of Russian society needs, and which would make a solid basis for the national consensus in fundamental foreign policy issues.

Today, Russia and the EU are once again going through a momentous stage the right outcome of which will determine whether Russia will integrate into European structures or choose another way to go. And that other way, in the opinion of many national political analysts, can be tragic for both Russia and Europe.

The prospects of positive cooperation between Russia and Europe have been historically acknowledged and are objective. They must be manifested both for Russia and the European Union.