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Ideological and political dimensions of Russia's attitude towards the European Union

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Olga Barburska

Ideological and political dimensions of Russia's attitude towards the European Union

Abstract: The aim of the article is to present and analyse the major ideological and political factors shaping the Russian Federation's attitude towards the European Union. The analysis focuses on the main ideological concepts, shaped historically and functioning today in Russia, which influence political programmes and undertakings implemented by the Russian authorities in their relations with the EU. This analysis is based on the assumption that there is a deep-rooted conviction among the Russian élites and society that their system of values and culture are diametrically opposed to that of the West, and especially of Europe, and that this results in a general hostility towards the EU. As a result, this creates enormous difficulties in maintaining normal, stable relations between the two parties.

Keywords: European Union, Russian Federation, EU as a normative power, Eurasianism

Introduction

In relations between actors on the international stage an important role is played by specific ideological and political concepts that they adopt and implement. These concepts not only define the attitude of authorities and societies of one actor towards another, but may also, to a greater or lesser extent, shape specific actions in their mutual relations. Generally speaking, this mechanism is based on the fact that ideology influences political attitudes, which in turn affects the course of action. Naturally, this also applies to relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation. In the context of the issue discussed here, however, these relations are characterised by a certain

specificity, the examination of which can be done by application of the three main research hypotheses.

The first one assumes that both sides have reached a different degree of ideological and political cohesion. On one hand, the Russian authorities and society have long represented a coherent and firmly established attitude towards Europe and the whole West. On the other hand, the Union, which is a very specific and unique entity, has so far not been able to achieve such a high degree of cohesion as to allow all its Member States to always speak with full consistency and solidarity with one voice on the international stage. Nevertheless, the EU has managed to ground its activities in a catalogue of basic norms and values (the so-called European values), which is commonly accepted by its members, and which allows the EU to be treated an ideological and political whole, even though if only in a simplified manner.

According to the second hypothesis, Russia has developed a separate, specific attitude towards the European Union (which in principle coincides with the approach to the whole West), which results in treating the EU in a different way than other foreign partners. Moreover, the attitude of the Russian authorities and society towards the EU is much more dependent on the adoption of specific ideological and political assumptions than is the case of the EU's stance. The third hypothesis assumes that Russians perceive the characteristics of Europeans as being the opposite or contrary to their own characteristics (clearly glorified by them). This is due to the fact that, in general, the Russian view of the world is being built as an antithesis of the paradigms developed by the West and, in particular by Europe, currently identified with the European Union. As a result, the Russian élites and society have a negative opinion of the EU and its system of values, and so their attitude towards the EU is characterised by a relatively high level of aversion or even hostility.

Therefore, the main research objective of this article is to present and critically evaluate both the main ideological assumptions historically shaped and adopted by the Russian élites and society today, as well as selected programmes and political undertakings implemented by the Russian authorities in their relations with the European Union which are based on these assumptions.

In examining such issues, the use of normative and constructivist theories seems to be the appropriate approach. As Charles A. Kupchan

put it succinctly “international order is not just about the distribution of material power and the hierarchy and authority structure”, but is also based “on norms and rules that guide state behaviour and govern their relations with other states”¹. This means that the system of values adopted by an international actor has a great impact on the attitudes and actions of that actor. This system includes ideologies and political views, as well as culture, historical traditions, religion, customs, etc., which apply to individuals and societies as well as to states (such as Russia) and international organisations (such as the European Union). A constructivist approach is not, however, the only one which can be used – at the same time we must take into consideration more realistic approach, which underlines the importance of vital geostrategic interests of both parties, and in this case especially those ones of Russia.

The research methods used in this paper include in particular the method of historical analysis, the systemic method (which treats the EU and Russia as political entities, while internally very diverse, each form a self-contained whole) and the comparative method, which makes it possible to make appropriate comparisons between these entities. The classic research methods were also applied, based on the analysis of the literature of the subject (including analytical materials and source texts) as well as documents and official statements.

1. Axiological dispute about norms and values

One of the fundamental axes of the disagreement between the European Union and the Russian Federation are broadly understood axiological issues. In this context it should be pointed out that, with regard to other issues concerning politics, economics and security, both sides are able to make compromises and agreements, and that the Russians are able to demonstrate far-reaching pragmatism. Even if the Kremlin takes a course towards fierce competition or even confrontation with the EU or the West as a whole, it is still well aware that it needs its Western partners in order to safeguard its country's fun-

¹ Ch. A. Kupchan, 'Reordering Order: Global Change and the Need for a New Normative Consensus', in: T. Flockhart et al., *Liberal Order in a Post-Western World*, Washington: Transatlantic Academy, May 2014, p. 6.

damental interests. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that, in spite of tensions in mutual relations, there is a great deal of economic and trade exchange between the EU and Russia.

However, the situation is different with the sphere of values. There is virtually no room for compromise in this area, as it would require concessions from both sides that would undermine their 'ideological backbone'. For Russians, it is based on the set of various ideas discussed below, which are more or less nationalistic, imperial and anti-democratic in tone, and for Europeans – on a system of democratic-liberal values, the most complete expression of which are the 'European values' adopted by the EU and which constitute a set of fundamental rights that Jan Barcz calls "the common axiological roots of the process of European integration"². These include democracy, the protection of human rights and civil liberties, the rule of law, solidarity, etc., and, in the area of foreign relations, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the preference for diplomatic and economic instruments, and compliance with international law³.

This means that we are dealing here with a huge axiological incompatibility of the philosophies governing the foreign policies of both sides. This incompatibility is underpinned by fundamentally different visions of the world and of the place occupied by the European Union and Russia in this world. As Józef M. Fiszer puts it: "The EU was created in response to threats of nationalism and catastrophic rivalry between European nation states", while for Russia "the most important problems are those resulting from the break-up of the Soviet Union", which "Putin and millions of Russians cannot accept to this day". For the European Union, the main cause of instability in Eastern Europe is the lack of democracy, which is why it is actively trying to promote it by exporting 'European values'. On the other hand for Russia under President Putin, one of the main reasons for this instability is precisely the EU's policy of spreading democracy. Russians believe

- 2 J. Barcz, *Ustrój lizboński Unii Europejskiej. Podstawy traktatowe, struktura i instytucje* [Lisbon system of the European Union. Treaty basis, structure, and institutions], Piaseczno: Wszecznica IJM, 2016, p. 86.
- 3 For more see: O. Barburska, 'Podstawy normatywne funkcjonowania Unii Europejskiej w stosunkach międzynarodowych – ujęcie teoretyczne' [The Normative basis of the functioning of the European Union in international relations – a theoretical approach], *Stosunki Międzynarodowe*, no. 4, 2016.

only “in the power, unilateralism and unrestrained pursuit of the national interest”, and they understand sovereignty only as “economic independence, military power and cultural identity”. As a result, “it was inevitable that sooner or later that those two contrasting views on European order in the 21st century would clash”⁴.

The fact that European Union's activities are based on the principles outlined above – in line with the normative and constructivist approaches presented here – indicates that it uses its *soft power* first and foremost. The author of this concept, Joseph S. Nye, defined it as the ability of a given international actor to influence the external environment through political, legal and economic instruments, but most of all through their own civilisational attractiveness, including, among others, the universally accepted system of values⁵. The use of such instruments makes the EU so-called normative power, which in turn, according to the main author of this theory Ian Manners, makes all the material attributes of the European Union's power as a global actor “secondary to its ability to shape the ideational constitution of international relations”⁶. It should therefore be stressed that this is not only a question of passively presenting its offer to the world, but above all of actively and effectively influencing it, which the EU is doing through, among other things, the promotion of its value system.

It is this aspect of the European Union's international activity that is strongly opposed by Russia, which is accusing the EU of arbitrarily imposing ‘European values’ on the international community. This is said to be demonstrated by the EU's alleged unequal treatment of its partners and its role as a judge to assess the compliance of others with the standards set by the Union itself. According to Russians, this takes place without taking into account the specificity of individual international actors, especially such exceptional ones and those with their own system of values as Russia.

4 J. M. Fiszer, ‘Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina’ [Tasks and goals of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy], *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, no. 1, 2016, pp. 188-189.

5 See: J. S. Nye, ‘Soft power’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 80, 1990. See also: O. Barbarska, ‘Argument siły czy siła argumentów? Unia Europejska w stosunkach międzynarodowych jako *soft power*’ [The argument of power, or power of arguments? The European Union in international relations as a ‘soft power’], *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej*, no. 10, 2016.

6 I. Manners, *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, Manchester: BISA Conference, December 1999, p. 44.

As Russian researcher Tatiana Romanova put it, the very concept of the European Union as a normative power is thought to be an attack on the Russian identity and “conflicts with some of the Russian Federation’s fundamental foreign policy ideas”⁷. This policy is based on an orthodox, realistic paradigm, and also adopts a classic, currently non-modern understanding of international law as a system of norms that do not interfere in the internal affairs of states. Other Russian researchers even speak of the “normative hegemony” applied by the EU to its neighbours, including Russia⁸. The Western political model based on democratic-liberal values is not perceived by the Kremlin as a model that is really popular in many societies, but only as a tool of hegemonism, cynically used to “overthrow the ‘truly sovereign’ (read authoritarian) governments”, especially the Russian one⁹.

2. Past and present of Russian ideological attitudes towards Europe

This approach to the European Union is the result of the influence of many factors that go back to the depths of Russian history. Without going further into this extremely broad issue¹⁰, it should only be pointed out that the prevailing tendencies in this country at present are the final result of the clash of two major trends that have long existed in Russian ideological and political thought.

The first of these is Russia’s desire to open itself up to Western ideas and values. This tendency refers to the tradition present to varying degrees in the Russian state thought at least since the time of Peter the Great, and the supporters of this idea (the so-called *Zapadniks*) postulated the need to maintain close ties with the more developed

- 7 T. Romanova, ‘Normative Power Europe: Russian View’, in: A. Gerrits (ed.), *Normative Power Europe in Changing World: A Discussion*, The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2009, pp. 53, 65.
- 8 I. Gretskiy and E. Treshchenkov, K. Golubiev, ‘Russia’s Perceptions and Misperceptions of the EU Eastern Partnership’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, no. 3-4, 2014, p. 376.
- 9 M. Domańska, ‘Uzależnieni od konfliktu. Wewnętrzne uwarunkowania antyzachodniej polityki Kremla’ [Addicted to the conflict. Internal factors of the anti-Western policy of the Kremlin], *Punkt Widzenia OSW*, no. 67, 2017, p. 18.
- 10 See: W. Materski, *Od cara do „cara”. Studium rosyjskiej polityki historycznej* [From tsar to ‘tsar’: Study on Russian historical policy], Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2017; S. Bieleń, *Tożsamość międzynarodowa Federacji Rosyjskiej* [International identity of the Russian Federation], Warszawa: ASPRA-JR, 2006.

Western countries, including first of all European ones. Such concepts, nowadays called Atlanticism or Occidentalism (Rus. *atlantizm, zapadnichestvo*), were *de facto* the basis of policies pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the last years of the Soviet Union's existence and during the dawn of the Russian Federation.

According to contemporary Atlanticists, the new Russia should find its place in the changing, pluralistic world by taking advantage of the achievements of the West. This is particularly true of Europe, which is seen as a symbol of universalism and a place of dialogue between different cultures. However, adopting the rules of the European Union would not require formal membership of the EU because, as one of the prominent Atlanticists Dmitri Trenin put it, it is essential that Russia does not so much integrate with the West but that it simply becomes the West¹¹. In short, the Atlanticists believe that "Russia needs the West, but the West also needs Russia"¹². However, after President Vladimir Putin came to power, such views were eventually marginalised and do not currently seem to have any significant impact on scientific life, public opinion or, even less so, the ideology and politics of the Russian state.

The second main trend in Russian ideological and political thought is, as Stanisław Bieleń put it, "an escape to autarchy and isolation", which is connected with the search for "some kind of mythical 'third path of development'" allowing to preserve the specific character of the Russian civilisation¹³. This trend is clearly nationalist, imperialist and anti-democratic. This is due to the idea deeply rooted in Russian historical tradition of a strong, centralised state governed by authoritarian rule in accordance with the idea of autocracy, which rejects the Western concept of democracy and human rights. This idea was complemented by the conviction that the best way to strengthen Russia was to continually conquer new lands and subjugate successive nations through constant conquest. The concepts of autocracy and the need for expansion are mutually determining and driving themselves,

11 D. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007.

12 Bieleń, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

which largely explains the existence of such a strong combination of anti-democratic and imperial tendencies in contemporary Russia¹⁴.

Historically, this mindset has been shaped by many different factors, including the development of a concept called the ‘Russian idea’¹⁵. This term was popularized at the end of the 19th century by Vladimir Solovyov, and later developed, among others, by Nikolai Berdyaev in his work *Russian Idea*. It comes down to the conviction that Russia has its own, independent culture and tradition, and at the same time that on this basis Russia should develop an ideal society, which should reject selfish utilitarianism and be based on community identity. In the context of these considerations, it is important to note that the ‘Russian idea’ is based on the juxtaposition and recognition of the superiority of the Russian civilisation over the European one. This is due to the conviction that Russian culture and tradition not only place it on an equal footing with the West, but also make it superior. Moreover, “while Europe has to reject its unfortunate past in order to survive, Russia can draw on its rich heritage without limitations”¹⁶, as it boasts a great continuity of tradition. This heritage includes, above all, a spirituality based on the Orthodox faith, which opposes Western and, in particular, European individualism and materialism.

Another important idea of Russian specificity, known as the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkij mir*), is based on similar assumptions¹⁷. Its origins date back to the mid-19th century and its creators include high tsarist officials: Count Sergey Uvarov and General Mikhail Chernyayev. The idea was to demonstrate Russia’s ideological and moral advantage over its enemies, appealing to the concept of an ‘imaginary community’, i.e. a community based not so much on ethnic criteria but, above all, on a common culture, tradition, identity and, in particular, language. It is

14 As one of the prominent Russian historians, Yuri Aphanasev, notes bitterly: “Our whole history is a history of external annexations, in lieu of internal reforms”, and because of the lack of democratic traditions” it is no coincidence that the historic opportunity of Russia at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s has been completely lost”. J. Afanasjew, ‘Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud’ [Stony Russia, dead people], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-26 January 2009, p. 11.

15 For more see: N. Filipowicz, ‘Dwa chleby – dwa światy. Czy można dziś myśleć o renesansie rosyjskiej idei?’ [‘Two breads – two worlds’. Is it possible the renaissance of Russian idea?], *Przegląd Europejski*, no. 2, 2005.

16 Bielen, op. cit., p. 55.

17 See: P. Kościński, ‘*Russkij mir* – rosyjska polityka sąsiedztwa’ [‘*Russkij mir*’ – Russian policy of neighbourhood], *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 1, 2015.

therefore about a wider category referred to as the 'Russian people' (*Russkij narod*) which also includes Ukrainians, Belarusians and members of other nations who belonged to the Russian state in historical times, or even inhabitants of countries other than Russia¹⁸.

Like the previous concept, the idea of the 'Russian World' is based mainly on anti-Occidentalism and anti-Europeanism. The two in fact constitute its essence: as Piotr Kościński put it, Russian ideologues present this idea as "radically different from the Western ones: peaceful as opposed to warlike; conservative as opposed to radically liberal; recognising cultural differences as opposed to imposing culture on others"¹⁹. Norman Davies also highlighted this aspect, pointing out that the Russian Orthodox Church, the state authorities and various nationalist forces have always opposed a more powerful West, devising theories according to which truth and the future were to belong solely to them. Russians therefore considered the West to be powerful and rich, yet it was the East that was free from moral and ideological corruption²⁰.

The fullest manifestation of this type of ideological and political thought is the main trend – and the one that clearly prevails – known as Eurasianism (Rus. *Yevraziystvo*)²¹. It is based on the key principle that there is a separate civilisation created by Russia as a state of exceptional character. It combines the historical, political and cultural traditions of two continents: European and Asian, but at the same time it does not belong to any of them in terms of civilisation. Russia is therefore a unique entity, one of the essential features of which is its role as both a great global empire and a messianic one in the history of the world, in accordance with the concept of 'Moscow as a third Rome'.

18 This is consistent with the Russian language distinction between an ethnic Russian (*Rossijanin*) and a member of the Russian people (*Russkij*), which is often ignored in foreign language translation.

19 Kościński, op. cit., p. 73.

20 N. Davies, *Rozprawa historyka z historią* [A historian's dissertation with history], Kraków: Znak, 1999, p. 87.

21 For more see: L. Sykuliski, 'Integracja polityczna Eurazji we współczesnej rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej' [Political integration of Eurasia in contemporary Russian geopolitical thought], in: P. Eberhardt (ed.), *Prace Geograficzne nr 242. Studia nad geopolityką XX wieku* [Geographical Studies no. 242. Studies on the 20th century geopolitics], Warszawa: IGI PAN, 2013; R. Paradowski, *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji. Studium idei* [Eurasian empire of Russia. Study about idea], Warszawa: Elipsa, 2003.

The idea of Eurasianism has been developed intensively since the first half of the 20th century and had its main supporters, including, among others, Peter Savitsky, Nikolai Trubetzkoy and George Vernadsky. These researchers drew their inspiration from various historical sources, including the tradition of tsarist imperialism, the idea of Orthodox Messianism, Slavophilic and pan-Slavic concepts, as well as from the works of artists promoting national ideas, such as Lev Tolstoy or Fyodor Dostoyevsky. However, the most important here were the ideas of earlier thinkers of the nationalistic trend, especially Nikolay Danilevsky, who in 1871 published a monumental work *Russia and Europe*. This work was soon called the catechism of Russian nationalism, and its theses were further developed by many successors, including Ivan Dusinsky. According to Piotr Eberhardt, both of these authors “dreamt of a great Russia dominating both Europe and the world”, in which they saw not only imperial power, but also a great civilization²².

Just like the earlier ideas, Eurasianism from the very beginning had a clear anti-Western and therefore anti-European face, so its supporters focused on emphasizing the differences between their country and the West. As Andrzej Szabaciuk put it, the Eurasians attributed to Russia “a unique leadership role in the anti-corruption movement brought about by Western postmodernism, globalisation, ultra-liberalism”, which are supposed to undermine “all traditional forms of identity, the significance of the state, religion, nation, ethnos, family and, ultimately, man himself”. In this perspective, “Western civilisation is a civilisation of death with clear destructive features”²³.

The ideas presented above have had a significant impact on Russian ideological and political thought since their inception. However, they began to play a particularly important role in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with their true renaissance beginning with the coming to power of President Vladimir Putin in 2000. He considered such ideas to be a very convenient tool for the implementa-

22 P. Eberhardt, ‘Konceptcje geopolityczne Iwana Dusieńskiego’ [Geopolitical ideas of Ivan Dusinsky], *Studia z Geografii Politycznej i Historycznej*, vol. 1, 2012, p. 41.

23 A. Szabaciuk, ‘Eurazjatycki projekt integracyjny Władimira Putina: szanse i zagrożenia’ [Eurasian integration project of Vladimir Putin: chances and dangers], *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2014, pp. 83-84.

tion of his foreign and internal policies. This was particularly the case with the measures aimed at consolidating the Russian society, which was suffering a great trauma as a result of losing by Russia its status as a superpower, and which the Russians felt painfully as an insult to their national pride. This consolidation was facilitated by the promotion of the 'Russian idea', the most important element of which is "opposition towards anyone who would like to humiliate Russia"²⁴. This idea can also be used as a tool of Russian foreign policy, just because it is addressed to a large Russian diaspora in post-Soviet countries and to all other people who feel a connection with the Russian civilisation. This could be a convenient pretext for the Kremlin to interfere in the domestic and foreign policies of neighbouring countries.

Of utmost importance here, however, is the use of the idea of Eurasianism. In modern times, this idea has been and is being intensively developed by, among others, the late Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (who in the West is not widely known as a fierce Russian nationalist), Elgiz Pozdniakov, Igor Panarin or Lev Gumilyov. However, the most famous and influential representative of Russian Eurasianism is currently Alexandr Dugin²⁵. He presented his views in numerous publications, especially in his extensive work *The Basics of Geopolitics. The geopolitical future of Russia* published in 1999. As both a researcher and a *de facto* politician, he has gained considerable influence as an advisor to President Putin and plays an important role in the scientific and analytical communities²⁶.

Dugin's ideas are largely based on the concepts put forward by one of the founding fathers of geopolitics Haldor Mackinder. Of interest to us is primarily his main thesis about the existence of a 'world island' composed of Asia, Europe and Africa, and its north-eastern part called the Heartland. According to this thesis: who governs Heartland, rules the 'world island' and who governs this island – rules the whole world.

24 Bielań, op. cit., p. 57.

25 See: B. Gołąbek, *Lew Gumilow i Aleksander Dugin. O dwóch obliczach eurazjatyizmu w Rosji po 1991 roku* [Lew Gumilov and Aleksandr Dugin. About two faces of Eurasianism in Russia after 1991], Kraków: UJ, 2012; P. Eberhardt, 'Koncepcje geopolityczne Aleksandra Dugina' [Geopolitical ideas of Aleksandr Dugin], *Przegląd Geograficzny*, no. 2, 2010.

26 See: R. Paradowski, *Idea Rosji-Eurazji i naukowy nacjonalizm Lwa Gumilowa. Próba rekonstrukcji ideologii eurazjatyizmu* [Idea of Russia-Eurasia and scientific nationalism of Lev Gumilov. An attempt to reconstruct ideology of Eurasianism], Warszawa: SGH, 1996.

Dugin naturally identifies the Heartland with the Russian state, which first existed in the form of the tsarist empire, then the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation. He supplements Mackinder's ideas with the theory of Carl Schmitt, who juxtaposed two mega-civilisations: one based on maritime power and the other based on land power ('Sea' versus 'Land'). According to Dugin, Eurasian Russia should rule the Heartland while building a great land power, which would allow it to achieve the basic geopolitical goal: defeat the Atlantic world, based on maritime power of first the United Kingdom and now the United States. This means that the conflict between Russia and the West is inevitable in the long term, which makes absolutely necessary to rebuild the Russian empire – as Dugin put it: "Russia either will be great or it won't exist at all"²⁷. Proper preparation for the future clash will first require the dissolution of NATO, that is, the break-up of the alliance between the USA and Europe, and then the weakening and, preferably, the break-up of the European Union.

This would create a powerful Eurasian empire that could transform the existing international order. The present one is characterised by unipolarity, manifested by the hegemony of the Atlantic world (with the USA as its centre) and the subordination of the Third World to it, with the simultaneous existence of a strategic 'black hole', that is Russia being the last bastion holding out against Western domination. According to Dugin and other Russian Eurasianists, an optimal global order should be based on the emergence of a multipolar system, consisting of four mega-zones: Anglo-American, Euro-African, Pacific and Far East, and Pan-Eurasian that would comprise Russia, a part of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Near and Middle East, as well as Central and South Asia²⁸. This would guarantee the stability of the new international order, the establishment of which is one of the fundamental objectives of Russian foreign policy under President Putin²⁹.

27 As cited in: Szabaciuk, op. cit., p. 83.

28 Sykulski, op. cit., pp. 354-356.

29 For more see: A. Visvizi, 'Pozycja Rosji w stosunkach międzynarodowych' [Russia's position in international relations], in: K. A. Kłosiński (ed.), *Rosja: ambicje i możliwości w XXI wieku* [Russia: ambitions and possibilities in the 20th century], Lublin: KUL, 2010; S. Bielań and M. Raś, *Polityka zagraniczna Rosji* [Foreign policy of Russia], Warszawa: Difin, 2008.

According to Alexandr Dugin, the ideological basis for this policy is to be a new, purely Russian political idea, which should replace the existing paradigms: first communist and fascist, and now liberal-democratic, propagated by the West. This new idea is therefore, as Dugin once again stresses, to be the opposite of Western ideology (and thus also of 'European values'), that is to say, based on the achievements of Eurasianism, social Bolshevism, collectivism, egalitarianism, Orthodoxy, and Russian statehood and ethnicity³⁰.

3. Ideological aspects of Russia's foreign policy

Although the views of Alexander Dugin and other Russian Eurasianists are not officially adopted by the Kremlin authorities, they *de facto* form the conceptual basis for the principles of Russian foreign policy. These are based on the conviction that Russia should hold a dominant position in the world, and that it should not only inspire admiration, but also – and this should be emphasised – fear (the use of fear as an instrument of both foreign and domestic policy is part of the centuries-old tradition of Russian statehood). This is accompanied by the conviction that "Russia is created by providence to achieve great goals, and this duty must be consistently fulfilled"³¹. As Roman Bäcker put it: "It is a programme of expansive imperialism which [...] in fact is, first and foremost, a rather overt programme of conquering if not of the world, then at least of a large part of it"³².

Alexandr Dugin and his followers speak directly about the necessity of achieving such goals. According to Elgiz Pozdniakov, "only the complete dominance of the Eurasian continent by Russia guarantees balance and stability of the world"³³. Dugin himself goes even further, stating openly: "We Russians [...] think in terms of expansion and we will never do otherwise. We are not simply interested in preserving our own state and nation. We are interested in drawing our strategic

30 Eberhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

32 R. Bäcker, 'Współczesny antyokcydentalizm rosyjski' [Contemporary anti-Occidentalism in Russia], in: Z. Anculewicz and J. Sobczak (eds), *Europa a Rosja. Opinie, konflikty, współpraca* [Europe and Russia. Opinions, conflicts, cooperation], Olsztyn: UWM, 2003, p. 267.

33 Eberhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

geopolitical borders”³⁴. Calling Poland and other Central European countries the derogatory name of ‘sanitary cordon’, Dugin believes that Eurasia’s task is to destroy this ‘cordon’³⁵. Such views to a large extent shape the stance taken by the Russian authorities and society towards the West and, in particular, towards Europe.

These views reflect the specific ‘genetic code’ of Russian foreign policy, which is fully embodied in the current political concepts and activities of the Russian Federation. After a period of deep crisis of Russian statehood following the collapse of the Soviet Union, under President Putin’s rule attempts were made to overcome this crisis and rebuild Russia as a power with not only regional but also global ambitions³⁶. The problem is, however, that, according to what Maria Domańska calls the “imperial-power complex”, Russia’s understanding of power means, first and foremost, its ability to stand up to the rest of the world by having the potential to destroy and destabilise it, mainly through its military force with nuclear weapons at the forefront. In this perspective, such important attributes of contemporary international actors as economic power and especially *soft power* – so important for the European Union! – which allow them to act on the principles of cooperation and not confrontation, are definitely not appreciated by the Kremlin. Russia’s main imperative is to strive for its own security without taking into account the interests of other states, which necessitates that Moscow dictates conditions from the position of power. According to the Russians, this is fully justified, because in their vision of the world international relations have a hierarchical structure in which states have different rights and “full sovereignty is an attribute only of the great powers”³⁷.

This is supposed to authorise Moscow to put forward a firm demand for the introduction of a multipolar order, in fact a global concert of powers determining inviolable spheres of influence among the

34 Ibid. p. 235.

35 K. Nieczypor, ‘Aleksander Dugin – eurazjatycki głos w twoim domu’ [Aleksandr Dugin – Eurasian voice in your home], 6 February 2017, <http://www.eastbook.eu> [2017-06-04].

36 For more see: M. H. Herpen, *Putin’s Wars. The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014; S. Bielen, ‘Oblicza imperializmu rosyjskiego’ [Faces of Russian imperialism], in: A. Dudek and R. Mazur (eds), *Rosja między imperium a mocarstwem nowoczesnym* [Russia between empire and modern state], Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010.

37 Domańska, op. cit., p. 13-18.

strongest players. What is important, the actions of the powers in these spheres should be exempt from the assessments of the international community, which would *de facto* give them a free hand in the areas of domestic and foreign policy. Any criticism of the Russian authorities for not respecting the democratic-liberal values is elevated to the rank of an existential threat to the very existence of the Russian state and society. This means that Russia also needs conflict with the West for internal political purposes – even, as Andrew Wilson points out, “regardless of whether such conflict actually takes place or not”³⁸. It also allows the boundaries between internal and external threats to be blurred, which in turn blurs the contours of inter-state conflicts by allowing Russia to participate in armed conflicts where it is not officially a party, such as in Georgia and Ukraine.

In this way, the Kremlin resuscitated the Soviet tradition of legitimising the authorities on the basis of confrontation with the West, eventually overcoming the legacy of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who referred, as indicated earlier, to the idea of Atlanticism promoting cooperation with the Western world, including Europe. Everything seems to indicate that due to the specific nature of the Russian political system, it is not in Russia's interest to cooperate with the EU in accordance with the logic of mutual benefit, but rather it is beneficial to take the path of confrontation and conflict. At the same time, this means that the Russians' zero-sum game thinking is not based on the Kremlin's current temporary needs and interests, but is “the foundation for the Russian élite's view of the world”³⁹. Such a view has therefore become firmly rooted in the political culture and hence the international strategy of the Russian state. Moreover, it is precisely because of such systemic conditions that even a possible change of Russian leadership is unlikely to lead to a change in the Kremlin's anti-Western stance.

The existence of such views is very important as they greatly condition the attitude of the Russians to the European Union. The ideas discussed here serve to discredit the activities of the EU in Eastern Europe carried out both within the broad framework of the European

38 A. Wilson, 'Partners for Life: Europe's Unanswered "Eastern Question"', *Brief Policy*, ECFR, October 2017, p. 5.

39 Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Neighbourhood Policy and within the framework of the EU Eastern policy⁴⁰. This applies in particular to the flagship initiative of this policy, namely the Eastern Partnership (EaP)⁴¹. The Kremlin treats the EaP not only as a kind of ‘sanitary cordon’ serving to separate the EU from Russia, but above all as an instrument that threatens Russia’s vital geo-strategic interests, so it has tried from the start to combat the Eastern Partnership with all available means. The President at the time, Dmitri Medvedev, spoke of attempts to use this structure against Russia, and the Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the EU of building its own sphere of influence in the East at the expense of Russian interests. As Alexander Sergunin put it, the European Union has made efforts to “withdraw the EaP countries out of Russia’s sphere of influence” and establish a kind of “European protectorate” there⁴².

All of this means that Russia’s imperial ambitions are in direct conflict with the interests and objectives of the European Union’s foreign policy⁴³. However, the Kremlin’s response is not to seek agreement and respect for the will of the peoples concerned, but to push hard for its own vision of international relations, including accusations of violations of Russia’s sphere of influence against the EU – as if the existence of such spheres was a fundamental principle in international relations... Some researchers explicitly say that Russia’s current policy is the realisation of the concept of a ‘new containment’ (following

40 For more see: A. Visvizi, ‘ENP as a mechanism of “soft export” of influence? Testing the limits of Europeization and “empowering”’, in: K. Żukrowska and A. Visvizi, J. Stryjek, M. Zajączkowski (eds), *European Neighborhood Policy: (multi-level) governance, the reform process and prospect of enhanced cooperation in the region*, Warszawa: SGH – Poltex, 2017; D. Milczarek, ‘More gains or losses? Review of the European Union’s Eastern policy’, in: B. Góralczyk (ed.), *European Union on the Global Scene: United or Irrelevant?*, Warsaw: CE UW, 2015; O. Barburska and D. Milczarek, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej: porażka czy sukces?* [Eastern policy of the European Union: failure or success?], Warszawa: CE UW, 2014.

41 See: T. Stępniewski and A. Visvizi, ‘Shifting emphasis of the ENP: is the EaP less sexy?’, *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2016; O. Barburska, ‘Blaski i cienie Partnerstwa Wschodniego Unii Europejskiej’ [Successes and failures of the EU’s Eastern Partnership], *Studia Europejskie*, no. 4, 2015.

42 A. Sergunin, ‘EU and Russia: an Eastern Partnership Muddling on?’, 28 October 2010, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alexander-serunin/eu-and-russia...> [2013-11-25].

43 See: O. Barburska, ‘Relacje Unia Europejska – Federacja Rosyjska: kryzys partnerstwa strategicznego’ [Relations Between the European Union and the Russian Federation: Crisis of Strategic Partnership], *Studia Europejskie*, no. 4, 2014.

the Western ideas from the Cold War period), but this time directed against the alleged infiltration of Russia by the West⁴⁴.

It should be stressed that this is not only a matter of verbally underlining the existing ideological differences. The incompatibility of the EU-Russia relations' visions is reflected in the political practice, including the contents of important programme acts. This is the case of the document called *The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, which is prepared every few years. Its latest version, published in 2016, shows a dangerous evolution of the Kremlin's position towards the West and the EU compared to previous documents of this type⁴⁵. With regard to the European Union, there is a clear shift in focus: the EU is no longer perceived as the "main" partner but merely an "important" one, and only in the economic sphere. In the new document, there is no longer a mention of many former elements of the political cooperation, such as the conclusion of another agreement on strategic partnership. Moreover, it is not the entire Union that is identified as a potential partner, but its individual Member States. This not only shows a change in the approach to relations with the EU, but also reflects the strategy adopted under President Putin to weaken or even break down the unity of the EU. (It is to be implemented i.a. through diversification of policy towards various EU countries, which is already showing some results).

The rationale behind this new approach is the fact – strongly underlined in the Concept – that the relations between Russia and the West are in a deep crisis, supposedly caused by the geopolitical expansion of not only the United States and NATO (which has been the standard assessment so far), but also of the European Union. Exerting a range of pressures on Russia, for example in the form of sanctions, is presented as completely ineffective and only leading to the destabilisation of international relations. According to the Kremlin, they are currently undergoing an evolution aimed at changing the global balance of power based on Western domination in favour of greater multipolarity. It is supposed to foster the efforts of Russia, which wants

44 Ch. Walker, 'The New Containment. Undermining Democracy', *World Affairs*, no. 1, 2015, pp. 43-44.

45 'The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)', <https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign-policy/document/> [2017-17-03].

to replace relations with the Western world with much closer relations with the new Asian powers: China and India, as well as other non-Western partners. In short, the aim of the part of the Concept dealing with relations with the EU is to make the impression that Russia's revisionist policy in Europe is purely defensive and that the anti-Russian policy of the West is doomed to failure due to its inconsistency with the evolution of the world balance of power⁴⁶. The authors of this document do not hesitate to exert political pressure on the European Union, suggesting that maintaining tensions in relations with Russia will be very harmful to it i.a. because of the lack of Russian aid in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

Conclusions

As the above considerations show, ideological and political issues are a very important factor shaping relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation. The research hypotheses presented in the introduction – assuming a varying ideological and political cohesion of both sides and a relatively greater significance of ideology in the case of Russia – seem to be justified. Practice shows that under Putin's rule the Kremlin does indeed have a coherent ideological and political message, strongly supported by Russian society, which denies 'European values' and, at the same time, glorifies the 'Russian way of life'. This message is used not only as an argument for ideological confrontation with the EU and the West as a whole, but also as an important instrument of Russian foreign policy.

This is reflected, among others, in the lively and extensive propaganda activities directed at foreign countries. In recent years such activities have been intensively developed, with the emphasis placed not only on the post-Soviet region⁴⁷, but also on Western societies, especially those of nearby Europe. In this respect Russian propagan-

46 W. Rodkiewicz, 'Straszenie zwrotem ku Azji – nowa koncepcja polityki zagranicznej Rosji' [Scaring a turn towards Asia – a new concept of Russian foreign policy], *Analizy OSW*, 7 December 2016, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/publikacje/analizy...> [2017-12-06].

47 Propaganda is treated by Russia as a very important element of the so-called hybrid war with Ukraine, see: T. Stepniewski and J. Hajduk, 'Wojna hybrydowa Rosji z Ukrainą' [Hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine], *Studia Europejskie*, no. 4, 2015.

da serves, on the one hand, to increase acceptance of Russia's great-power politics (which is not a difficult task in many countries, such as Greece, Italy, Austria, Hungary or the Czech Republic). As Andrei Soldatov put it: "It is simply about convincing people that Russia is big and omnipotent"⁴⁸. On the other hand, equally important is the attempt to weaken the morale and values of European societies. This is done, for instance, by praising the advantages of nationalistic worldviews (along the lines of the Great Russian chauvinism), as well as by denying the idea and practice of European integration. Thus, according to Russian analysts, "due to structural reasons and general 'historical fatigue' the role of the EU is rapidly diminishing" and "the process of European integration is in a phase of prolonged stagnation ('eurosclerosis')"⁴⁹. It is no coincidence that the most radical and populist forces in Europe, officially proclaiming anti-EU, chauvinistic and anti-democratic slogans, have become great supporters of Putin. After all, representatives of such groups explicitly say that "without Russians we cannot think of a great, strong Europe of independent nations"⁵⁰.

The Kremlin's emphasis on this type of activity is evidenced by the intensive development of various Russian media directed to the foreign arena⁵¹. These include, in particular, the TV channel Russia Today (relatively popular in the West), which is "hostile to the democratic élites, publicising Eurosceptic tendencies and fuelling transatlantic contradictions"⁵², as well as extensive internet instruments such as the pro-Russian trolls. These media played a disgraceful role in assisting Russia's interference in the political and social life of European countries. This was the case, for example, with the campaign prior to the

48 As cited in W. Radziwinowicz, 'Kreml wszystkich strachów' [Kremlin of all fears], *Gazeta Wyborcza. Magazyn Świąteczny*, 28-29 October 2017, p. 25.

49 As cited in A. Harasimowicz, 'Europejska polityka sąsiedztwa – pechowa pierwsza dekada' [European Neighbourhood Policy – the first unlucky decade], *Studia Europejskie*, no. 2, 2016, p. 29.

50 As cited in J. Kuraś, 'Chcą rozwalić Unię z pomocą Rosji' [They want to smash the Union with the help of Russia], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20-21 February 2016, p. 9.

51 For more see: I. Reichardt, 'Russian propaganda in the West', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2016; P. Pomerantsev, 'Beyond Propaganda: How authoritarian regimes are learning to engineer human souls in the age of Facebook', *Foreign Affairs*, June, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/23/beyond-propaganda...> [2016-08-22].

52 K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, *Jak uniknąć rozmów ponad naszymi głowami? Polska wobec Rosji w dobie konfrontacji* [How to avoid conversations over our heads? Poland towards Russia in the era of confrontation], Warszawa: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, October 2016, p. 8.

UK referendum on Brexit in 2016 and the French presidential elections in 2017, with all indications that such interventions will continue or even intensify. All these activities are intended to dissolve the European Union's sense of community of values and interests.

Generally speaking, Putin's Russia, using all the above ideological and political instruments, wishes, as Edward Lucas points out, to create a new European order based on spheres of influence. Within this order, the Kremlin would have "a veto right not only in the former territories of the Soviet empire", but also outside them. At the same time, the European Union would not have the right to "set the rules of the game", especially with regard to energy issues that are crucial to the interests of the Kremlin⁵³. Józef M. Fiszer assesses Russia's aspirations in a very similar way. According to him, the conditions that the Russian authorities impose on the EU is the agreement to establish a new world order by means of a concert of powers (i.e. without taking into account the interests and views of individual states and societies) in connection with "the recognition Russian 'specificity' in the sphere of values and non-interference in the internal policy of Russia", neutralisation of NATO and opening the EU to Russian economic and social penetration⁵⁴.

Analysts' and politicians' statements contain words that are even more harshly critical. For instance, Dominique Moïsi believes that Russia is only interested in dispatching "power of nuisance". This means that Moscow "does not want to build anything, it does not want any permanent order. Quite the opposite, it is building its short-term strength on the damage done to the West"⁵⁵. According to Guy Verhofstadt, Russia's policy leads, if not to provocation, then to at least a strong incitement of the majority of the main crises affecting the European Union. These include "violent actions in Ukraine", followed by granting political and financial support to populist and Eurosceptic groups, and the escalation, through the military intervention

53 Interview with E. Lucas, 'Sojusz się sypie' [The alliance is falling apart], *Newsweek* (Polish edition), 23-30 September 2014, p. 12.

54 Fiszer, op. cit., p. 183.

55 Interview with D. Moïsi, 'Apokalipsy nie będzie' [There will be not an apocalypse], *Newsweek* (Polish edition), 17-23 July 2017, p. 44.

of Russian forces in Syria, of conflicts in the Middle East, which have resulted in a refugee crisis threatening the EU⁵⁶.

All this may justify a general assessment that the objectives and tasks of Russian foreign policy “are dangerous for Europe and the world, as they pose a threat to the current international order and security”⁵⁷. This is particularly true for the European Union, which (alongside the USA) is the most notorious stronghold of Western civilisation for the Russians. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the EU to pursue a normal policy towards the Russian Federation based on the principles of mutual respect and equality. The European Union is not indifferent as to what kind of main partner it has to deal with in the East of the continent. The combination of neo-imperialism in foreign policy and authoritarianism in Russia's internal policy may constitute a potentially dangerous explosive mixture, threatening the stability and development of the EU's relations with whole Eastern Europe.

In order to tone down such pessimistic assessments, it should be pointed out that, despite all the current turmoil, the European direction of foreign policy must, however, remain one of the priorities of Russia's *raison d'état*. Russia simply cannot afford to give up cooperation with the West and, in particular, with the European Union. At the same time, the Russian Federation is and will remain one of the main EU partners on the international stage, on whose economic, political and social stability can largely depend the security and development of the whole of Europe, as objective political and economic conditions indicate. In this respect, ideological and political differences should not constitute insurmountable obstacles to the establishment of mutually beneficial cooperation.

56 G. Verhofstadt, 'Europa wobec Rosji. Były premier Belgii radzi, co należy robić, aby wspólnie sprostać kryzysom, które podsyca Władimir Putin' [Europe towards Russia. The former Prime Minister of Belgium advises what to do to jointly cope with the crises that Vladimir Putin is fueling], *Project Syndicate. A World of Ideas – Świat Idei*, 26 February 2016, p. 1.

57 Fiszler, op. cit., p. 167.

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