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**Europe as the Idea, Model and Reality:  
complex nature of Europe's significance for Russia**

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# **Europe as the Idea, Model and Reality: complex nature of Europe's significance for Russia<sup>1</sup>**

*Dina Moulioukova\**

Europe and Russia are overlapping entities. Half of Europe is Russia; half of Russia is in Europe.

Vladimir Baranovsky (2000)

We believe that politics is about perceptions and that Russia's historic perceptions of Europe effect contemporary Russia-EU relations.

Nikita Lomagin (2009, p. 55)

## **Introduction**

Throughout history the identity of Russia has been equally puzzling for Russia itself and for its neighbors. By being both a European and an Asian country geographically, Russia has always presented the dilemma of whether it is 'a part of Europe or apart from Europe' (Stent, 2007, p. 393). Therefore, Europe has been and continues to be significant for Russia. Such importance can explain why Russia's relation with Europe might be more complex than Europe's relation with any other state. The goal of this paper is to argue that the complexity of Russian-European relations can be explained by Russia's multidimensional perception of Europe that extends beyond the notion of geopolitics. To understand fully the dynamics of Russian-European relations one should analyze them from three distinct, but interconnected, dimensions of Russia's perception of Europe: Europe as an idea, Europe as a model, and Europe as a geopolitical reality (Stent, 2007, p. 393). The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate some of the complexities of current Russian European relations by applying this three dimensional analysis.

## **Europe as an Idea**

Europe has played the role of Russia's 'significant other' for centuries shaping domestic debates and creating the context in which Russian rulers defined their values (Tsygankov,

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n.d.). Europe as an idea was more a cultural concept and served as an aspiration for Russia's progressive and liberal forces that wanted Russia to become more Western. However it is important to note that idea of Europe for some Russian intellectuals does not equal the notion of the West (Morozov, 2003). For some Russian analysts (Morozov, Karaganov and Kortunov) the idea of Europe is almost never referred to as something alien to Russia, antagonistic to its values. The concept of the West, however, in many instances symbolizes values opposed to what Russia stands for. It can be explained in part by the association of Europe with the 'high' culture version of Western society, with the genius of the Enlightenment, Venice and the uniquely attractive humanistic and democratic model of development (Karaganov, 2007), in contrast to the mass American culture of hedonism and consumerism (Kortunov, 2008, p. 11) with which Russian intellectuals do not see themselves associated. The attractiveness of the European versus the American idea for Russia can also be explained by the supranational nature of European identity itself that for many Russian intellectuals is similar to Russia's own supranational nature, first as a multinational empire and as a supranational Soviet state comprised of national republics (Kortunov, 2008).

It was the idea of Europe that created the major division into Westernizers and Slavophiles within the Russian intelligentsia in search of Russian identity. Westernizers believed that Russia has always been an integral part of the Western cultural mainstream, and separation from it happened as a result of the Mongolian yoke (Pritzel, 1998, p. 160). Therefore, Russia is destined to return to the West's orbit. Westernizers argued that for Russia to realize its potential as a great power it had to overcome its backwardness, adopt Western customs and find ways of integrating with the rest of Europe. Otherwise, Russia was condemned to isolation, exclusion and impotence (Lomagin, 2009, p. 58). For Westernizers the idea of Europe involved post-Enlightenment concepts such as representative government, the importance of the individual, the limitation of the power of rulers, and later the development of capitalism and democracy (Stent, 2007, p. 393).

Slavophiles, who emerged as a response to Westernism, believed that Russia has a unique destiny and has to follow its own path. The uniqueness of Russia was determined by its history, semi-Asiatic heritage, Orthodox religion and communal institutions. They believed in the messianic nature of Russia that was called to heal by the power of its example the social divisions inside Russia and the spiritual wounds of Europe ravaged by revolution and war (Billington, 2004, p. 13). Slavophiles saw all of human history as a struggle between spiritual and material forces. They believed that Russian values could not be reconciled with the individualistic and materialistic values of the Western world (Lomagin, 2009, p. 58).

Europe was also influenced by Russia. However, there was no parallel debate in Europe about whether it should emulate Russia; Russia was perceived neither as a model nor as an idea (Stent, 2007, p. 403). Instead, Europeans viewed Russia as a backward, almost barbaric, society with a repressive political system. For much of Europe Russia was the antimodel, the antithesis of what an enlightened society should be, as noted by Marquis de Custine

If ever your sons should be discontented with France, try my recipe; tell them to go to Russia. It is a useful journey for every foreigner: whoever has well examined the country will be content to live somewhere else. (cited in Stent, 2007, p. 404).

The idea of Europe as geographic and cultural concept first started influencing the Russian political class with Peter the Great in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Stent, 2007, p. 397). His policy was quite revolutionary, since Pre-Petrine Russia had internal antipathy to the Western World as a whole (Kluchevsky, 1991, p. 4). During Peter's rule Europe came to symbolize economic, political, and cultural predominance and superiority. Peter saw his task as emulating the European model and believed that only then would Russia become more powerful. He imported European political and economic ideas to Russia and promoted Russia's role as European diplomatic power. However, Peter the Great's policy did not Europeanize Russia for two distinct reasons. First, as a result of his pro-Western policy Peter I created a state that did not perceive itself either as a part of Europe or as a country of the East, but, rather as one divided over the merits of its past and bifurcated into two social worlds (Legvold, 2007, p. 83). Moreover, he created a gap between national identities exercised by the Russian elite that was linked to the extra-national entity of the West and the distinct non-Western identity that was shared by the masses on the popular level (Legvold, 2007, p. 83). Second, when Peter the Great ascended the throne he was determined to modernize Russia and implement European ideas through the emulation of its institutions, but not its values (Stent, 2007, p. 398). The challenge that successive Russian rulers faced was to graft European institutions onto the Russian triad of 'autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality' by imitating the model without embracing the ideas on which the model was based (Wallace, 1961). Like modernizing leaders who succeeded him, including Vladimir Putin, Peter the Great was primarily concerned with making Russia a more efficient and productive country, not with the liberalisation of its authoritarian political system (Stent, 2007, p. 410). The idea of Europe therefore was a means to the goal of becoming a great power, not adopting the European value system.

It would be erroneous to state, however, that Russian society and leaders have not attempted to adopt Europe as an idea through emulation of its value system. In the 1960s the idea of Europe – Europe as a harbinger of democracy and human rights – once again inspired the Russian intelligentsia, when renowned physicist Andrei Sakharov wrote about the overriding need for peaceful coexistence with the West (Stent, 2007, p. 411). When Gorbachev came to power in the 1980s the idea of Europe and Russia's European destiny once again became a subject of open discussion. Toward the end of Gorbachev era, it had become possible to advocate Russia's renouncing its Soviet-style political system and moving toward a European democratic system with private property as a foundation.<sup>2</sup> 'We are Europeans' summarized Michail Gorbachev in his book on perestroika and new thinking (Gorbachev, 1988).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister – liberal Westernizer Andrey Kozyrev – included in their essential goals that of putting an end to decades of Russian isolation from the West (Kanet with Birgeron, 1997, p. 337) and accepting the idea of Europe (Stent, 2007, p. 417). As a result the Russian leadership implemented a list of reforms intended to introduce democracy and decentralize power in the Russian state. They officially promoted the idea of Europe through democracy, markets and pluralism (Stent, 2007, p. 419). Therefore, Russia was looking to abandon its messianic ideology and replace it with aspiration to become a 'normal power'

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the attraction of the West during the Gorbachev reforms see English (2000).

by progressing according to the generally accepted rules, ideas and values invented by the West (Kozyrev, 1992).

However, as in the case with Peter the Great, the quest of the first Russian President to introduce European ideas was not destined to succeed. There are several reasons for this. The first set of reasons is of an external nature. As argued by well-known Russian analyst Dmitry Trenin, even though the West invited Russia to join its club, it left the door half-open (Trenin, 2006, p. 87), which consequently led to the rejection of the Western value system by the Russian population. To start with, the promised economic aid to Russia was not delivered as expected. In Russia that was perceived as a sign that a former great power had been reduced to the humiliating level of begging the West for minute handouts and caving in to IMF policies (Kozhemiakin and Kanet, 1998, p. 47). Moreover, NATO expansion to the East that included former Warsaw Pact countries, along with a number of other actions by the West (such as handling of the conflict in Yugoslavia) was considered counterproductive for Russian interests. In other words, for the first decade of its existence Russia was not taken seriously as a major actor in European politics and was treated much in the same way that the Western states dealt with developing countries – on Western terms only (Kanet, 2009, p. 148). In addition, the West-supported shock therapy economic reforms brought devastating results to Russian society (Kozhemiakin and Kanet, 1998, p. 19). Many Russians blamed this situation on the shift in Russian internal and external policy, in particular on Russia's "Westernization". As a result, a survey of residents of the European part of the Russian Federation conducted only a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union indicated a change in public preferences from democratic euphoria based on the acceptance of the Western value system to support for a more authoritarian rule of government (Kozhemiakin and Kanet, 1998, p. 19).

The second group of reasons is of an internal nature, corruption in the Russian leadership, its controversial privatization policies and the inability of government to control or administer its territory made adoption of European ideas of limits to the power of rulers, rule of law, and development of democracy an uncomfortable paradigm for Russian elite by which to rule. Therefore, it can be argued that both external and internal factors undermined the support of the Russian population and made it inconvenient for the Russian elite to adopt Europe as an idea in Russia after the end of Cold War.

Instead of adopting European values and Europe as an idea, Russia constructed its own set of values and ideas. One of them is 'sovereign democracy'. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'sovereign democracy' is understood by the Russian elite to be morally the equal of Western democratic models, whose emphasis on liberal concepts of human rights have no roots in Russia's historical development (Herd, 2009, p. 3). Vladislav Surkov defined the concept as 'maintaining sovereignty without damaging democracy and without losing one's identity' (Surkov, 2005). The concept of 'sovereign democracy' is as much defined by what it is not or what it prevents, than what it promotes. For Russians sovereign democracy prevents a return to Yeltsin's attempt to introduce the Western idea of democracy that is perceived as chaos and disorder, 'capitulation', 'disintegration' and 'paralysis' (Herd, 2009, p. 6). The idea of sovereign democracy is based on a unique fusion of conflicting elements: of tradition and postmodernity; of autocracy and democracy; of market and state control;

of partnership with the West and rejection of Western values.<sup>3</sup> But mostly, as Masha Lipman of the Carnegie Endowment argues sovereign democracy projects two messages: 'first, that Russia's regime is democratic, and, second, that this claim must be accepted, period. Any attempt at verification will be regarded as unfriendly and as meddling in Russia's domestic affairs' (Johnson, 2007).

The different sets of ideas by which Russia and Europe operate are reflected in tensions over different normative issues. The increased obstacles posed by contrasting governance structures and different conceptions of basic political norms, such as democracy and human rights, have become recurrent issues between the Russian Federation, the European Union and its member states, particularly the United Kingdom (DeBardeleben, 2009, p. 103). It seems that ideologically and normatively Russia and Europe operate according to two distinct value systems and communicate in two different languages. For example, human rights protection during the Chechen War was not on the Russian agenda at all, although the restoration of order was (Nygren, 2009, p. 127). This state-centric Russian societal thinking stands in sharp contrast to the articulations of the 'individual' found in Western thought (Nygren, 2009, p. 127). These differences are linked to other complex issues, such as the treatment of political opposition, non-governmental organizations, and the fairness of elections, political intervention on high profile cases, and the like (DeBardeleben, 2009, p. 102). The prospects of coming closer in ideas is bleaker, although here, too, the Russian tendency to rely on the state as the true holder of the public good, together with the lack of an effective civil society and the general popular reliance on a strong hand is alien to European notions of the state. Moreover, in the Russian view, the state is the only true interpreter of the correct societal order, the judge as well as the prosecutor and police against unruly popular forces.

The role of the state plays an important part in Russia's social construction of 'sovereign democracy' versus the European understanding of the term. As noted in his work on Russian national identity and the role of globalization, Sergei Kortunov sees Russian identity as supranational, a civilization unity of cultural diversity where a great organizational effort on the part of the state has historically been required to hold together vast geographic boundaries in tough climatic and geopolitical conditions. Therefore according to Kortunov the enforcement of the state has always been perceived as organizational requirement of Russian society called to provide territorial integrity, security and social construction of norms that would hold varied ethnic and religious groups together. In addition, Russian society as well historically gravitated to state protection and oversight (Kortunov, 2008; see, also, Trenin, 2006). Because of these specifics of Russia's historic development the interests of the state have always been put over the interests of individual and society and service to the state has been proclaimed since Peter the Great as essential to any Russian citizen.

It is important to note, however, that recently well established Russian analysts like Sergey Karaganov (2007) consider Russia's coming together with Asia as another part of its

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<sup>3</sup> According to Shevtsova (2006, p. 307) the central operating principles of this new system of governance consist of 'the subjugation of all branches of government to the executive, the merger of political power and corporate ownership; the combination and incorporation of incompatible governing principles, thus preventing the formation of political alternatives to the regime; consensus between the political class and a portion of society on the need to maintain the status quo; political expediency as the driving force behind the regime's actions; and aspirations to great power status as a substitute for ideology'.

identity and idea, as a shortcut to being accepted by Europe. The attractiveness of coming close to Asia is in the fact that one is dealing with partners who, unlike European states and the EU, do not require implementation of their ideas in Russia, in particular the idea of democracy, and in Russia's opinion are more pragmatic in their policy orientations. Besides, Russian analysts see Europe as going through the crisis of the European Union with the difficulties of integration that weaken Europe as an international actor, while Asian states exhibit strong economic growth (Kortunov, 2008). According to Kortunov coming closer to Asia will demonstrate to Europe that Russia has a choice of taking different from European route that will ultimately enforce its position in dealing with Europe (Kortunov, 2008).

### **Europe as a Model**

Europe as a model has a different meaning for Russians than Europe as an idea. The Russian elite has admired Europe as a model for modernization, advanced societies whose economic achievements were to be emulated, even if their political systems were considered to be inappropriate for Russian conditions. Therefore, Europe as a model has appealed to Russian leaders who wanted Russia to become a stronger and more prosperous state without necessarily wanting it to become more democratic (Stent, 2007, pp. 393-394).

Europe as a model for modernization has a profound importance for Russia's future. The choice of a modernization paradigm means for Russia which developmental way it will select and which identity it will adopt in the current absence of clarity in Russia's self-identification. The codependence of modernization and identity is of extreme importance since successfully implemented modernization influences culture and, therefore, the identification of a nation (Kortunov, 2008, p. 5). Moreover, the success of the modernization itself in large part depends on its coherence and acceptance by the nation's culture and, therefore, its identity (Kortunov, 2008, p. 5). For that particular reason Peter the Great, Russia's first Westernizer ruler, chose to import the British technique of shipbuilding into Russia, while rejecting the institution of the Parliament, because he believed that it undermined the power and dignity of the royal crown (Wittram, 1973, p. 49). From Europe Peter also brought manufacturing and handicraft techniques to Russia; and introduced military and social reforms (Stent, 2007, p. 401) 'to bring Muscovy's universal service system to its culmination by recasting it in the European mold' (Malia, 1999, p. 31).

Like Peter the Great today's Russian leadership is fully aware of the structural vulnerabilities of Russia. The Russian elite is aware of the need to diversify the economy from resource production and encourage economic development. Some Russian analysts see these goals attained by emulation of the valuable European experience of collective protection of common economic interests, European investments and technologies and valuable European management experience (Bordachev, 2009, 2010). As stated by Presidential First Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov 'the more money, knowledge and technology we can get from the advanced countries the stronger and more sovereign our democracy will be' (cited in Secriery, 2010, p. 13).

There seems to be a clear consensus in Russian intellectual elite in favor of pro-European way of modernization as the most appropriate for Russia (Trenin, 2006, p. 19;

Karaganov, 2007; Kortunov, 2008, p. 18). As summarised by Kortunov history itself makes choice in favor of European modernization and development taking into consideration Russia's technological backwardness, geopolitical vulnerability and difficulty of exploring its natural resources along with increasing advancements of the role of Islam, increasing role of China, etc. Some analysts go a step further and propose the integration of Europe and Russia with the goal to create a world independent 'power center' (Bordachev, 2009) to balance off China and the United States (U.S.). Creation of such a political and energy union with Europe in Sergey Karaganov's view is a strategic goal for Russia (Karaganov, 2007) and will provide it with needed internal modernization: Russian energy resources in exchange for access to joint institutions, European investment, technology and collective security, as well as valuable administrative experience (Bordachev, 2010).

However, today's Europe is valuable for Russia not only as a way of internal modernization, but also as a model for an inspiring integration project. Russia perceives European integration as a success story that brought peace and prosperity to the continent which had been torn apart by wars. Therefore, Moscow considers the experience of building the European Union as a model to emulate in the reconstruction of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As stated by one of Russia's top diplomats, Russia regards the EU as an example for regional integration and urges to make use of the rich European experience in the CIS space. In practice, Russia's multilateral integration initiatives in the economic field can be seen as an attempt to follow the EU example. During the opening ceremony of the Customs Union (with Belarus and Kazakhstan) Russian President explained, using EU jargon that 'this really will result in a completely new freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labor'. In addition, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, in his plea for deeper economic integration with Kazakhstan and Belarus, argued for the introduction of a common currency, taking the Euro as an example (Secriery, 2010, p. 13).

Despite the fact that both are regional integration projects, the EU and the CIS have some essential differences. First, unlike the European Communities that were called to bring together the war stricken countries of Europe, the CIS's initial goal was more to establish an instrument of civilized divorce in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding this difference, the most important achievements attained by both the CIS and the EU are quite comparable in the sense that both integration projects serve as a forum that allows leaders to keep open channels of communication among themselves. In addition, integration in Europe as well as in post-Soviet space prevented conflicts from erupting on the territories of their member states. In the case of the CIS, it assisted in preventing the Soviet Union from following the path of former Yugoslavia by recognising existing Soviet administrative borders of the member republics, some of which had no historical foundation (Secriery, 2010, p. 92). Secondly, members of the CIS are some of the republics of the former Soviet Union<sup>4</sup>, parts of what used to be the same country united by a common language, culture and traditions, social networks and informal communication

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note however, that not all former Soviet Union Republics joined the Commonwealth of Independent States. For example three former Soviet Union Republics Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia never joined the Commonwealth. Georgia joined the organization and consequently withdrew from it. Neither Ukraine nor Turkmenistan ratified the founding charter of the CIS. For a complete list of member states please go the official web page of the CIS Executive Committee at <http://www.cis.minsk.by/index.php?id=2>

channels.<sup>5</sup> To some extent there is still a possibility of speaking about the 'shadow' of common regional identity in the post-Soviet space (Libman, 2007). Unlike CIS member states, the first members of the European integration project were rival European states that had a long history of wars and hostility toward one another. Thirdly, unlike the CIS integration that was more of a channel to create sovereignty through statehood in the republics that lacked independent governance institutions, the EU with time became a way of 'pooling' the sovereignty of its member states, sharing it rather than ceding or losing it (Libman, 2007, p. 15).

The biggest difference between the European Union and the CIS, however, is in their viability. While some analysts, like Alexander Libman, say that the CIS is merely 'imitating integration activity and is doomed' (The CIS, 2007), it can be argued that the EU enjoys impressive health, just half a century after its foundation (Roy, 2007, p. 8). Among the reasons to blame for the failure of the CIS integration projects Libman lists the following. First, post-Soviet regionalism does not succeed, because it fails to provide additional advantages for participating countries. Second, CIS integration might lock participating countries into a Soviet-like matrix and, therefore, there is a low level of trust among post-Soviet elites that prevents the establishment of cooperative equilibrium. Third, there is an attractive alternative of integration with other regional blocs, such as the EU for the European countries (Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus) and China and the Middle East for the Central Asian Republics. The choice between post-Soviet and European integration makes the first less attractive. The reason for that is Russia's failure to invest creative efforts in providing post-Soviet states with more attractive integration project (CIS, 2007). Besides, the current Russian elite seems to some analysts to be ambivalent about the notion of geopolitics and concentrates exclusively on rational economic formulae in dealing with CIS states. This rationality does not justify investments to preserve unity and coherence in post-Soviet space (CIS, 2007). However, according to Alexander Libman, competition between integration projects creates a social dilemma, a 'trap of integration illusions, when countries that are hopeful of EU accession are not ready to enter post-Soviet integration projects, even if European Union integration is less realistic in the short- and medium-term and there are possible gains from deeper cooperation with immediate neighbors (CIS, 2007). Fourth, the problem of hegemony has been one of the central issues of integration in the CIS. Russia is the largest country in the region with substantial economic potential. There is a fear of Russian hegemony on the part of the other republics that leads to bilateralism instead of multilateral integration. In addition, Russia cannot attract other republics as a center of integration by uniting them around itself unless it has a clear vision of its doctrine and its role in post-Soviet space, until it is ready to provide with an answer on what Russia is and how it sees its future and goals. Finally, the other reason is psychological and is directly linked to emergence of nationalistic elites (CIS, 2007) in former Soviet Republics where post-Soviet nations are developing their own identity. The process of self-identification and integration with Russia, which is perceived by many as the heir of the Soviet Union, can hardly be combined. In addition to these above listed reasons, Dmitry Trenin adds the following causes for the lack of successful integration in

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<sup>5</sup> For example, according to the estimates of the Barometer of Eurasian Integration, 35% of the Russian population, 57% of the Ukrainian and 69% of the Belorussian have relatives in neighbouring CIS countries (*Ekonomika i vremya*, 2005).

post-Soviet space, such as the general lack of mutual interest, the paucity of resources, and the absence of political will. In particular, at the initial stages of integration political elite resisted any supranational organizations despite longing from the population in former Soviet Union Republics (Trenin, 2002, p. 91).

Another distinct feature of post-Soviet integration is an array of competing integration projects. The absolute majority of them are formed by Russo centric structures with similar functions, underlying ideas and strategies but different memberships: the CIS itself, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurasEC), the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), etc. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is the political and security arm of these overlapping projects and is closely affiliated with EurasEC. These projects represent different attempts to establish an economic and political union that resembles the EU and is based on a sophisticated institutional network. In 2005 the CIS only included eight statutory bodies, 67 sectorial bodies (ranging from disaster prevention to library exchanges) and nine affiliated public and private institutions such as Inter-State Bank, the Agricultural Union and the Leasing Confederation.

Interestingly enough, there seem to be more similarities between Latin American integration processes and integration in post-Soviet space than in some cases between the CIS and the EU project. In their essence both Latin American and post-Soviet integration could be characterised by 'presidential syndrome' that is perceived as an obstacle for other integration projects, such phobia towards integration manifesting itself in strong belief in sovereignty (Roy p.15). In post-Soviet space it is not without merit though considering the common Soviet past of the CIS member states and Russia's aspirations for hegemony in its near abroad. Another factor closely associated with the 'presidential syndrome' is the lack of juridical respect for norms and codes. The presidential power, both in Latin American countries and in the Newly Independent States, is so strong that it sidelines integration stipulations as well as the principles of international norms (Roy, p. 15).

Despite a variety of integration projects in the world, the EU can be considered as the most successful and ambitious accomplishment of voluntary integration and cooperation in world history. Today what has evolved into the EU, despite weaknesses and setbacks, is a successful experiment which fuses supranational governance with inter-state cooperation. There are several reasons for the EU success as an integration project. First of all, there has been a pragmatic political consensus on the benefits of integration. The success of European integration is in its solid foundation that implies that the institutions and member states of the EU would eventually overcome a variety of difficulties facing the integration project. Secondly, the successful evolution of European integration suggests that political commitment is a basic precondition that must be fulfilled, in order for the integration scheme to achieve a positive effect (Rueda-Junquera, p. 104). Regional integration requires a strong political dedication on the part of the participating governments to advance towards common objectives. It is not enough to have strong motivation in the initial stages of integration; there must be a strong commitment and it must be sustained over a long period. The most remarkable feature of the European integration project has been the irreversible nature of its progress achieved through strong and sustained political engagement. Thirdly, another important aspect of European integration is the EU's viable and functional legal system. The functionality of Community law is ensured by principles of primacy and direct applicability. The principle of primacy ensures that Community law has supremacy over national legislation and cannot be altered

on the national level. The principle of direct applicability signifies that community law is binding. Having the force in member states Community law is fully and uniformly applicable through member states. However, the significance of Common law is important only because Member States have a culture of rule of law that ensures that they proceed in accordance with law, complying with commitments signed in the Treaties which constitute primary law and binding rules (Rueda-Junquera, p. 105). The network of functional Common institutions, as well, assisted the European integration project. These institutions acquired a supranational character due to the pooling of sovereignty from Member states making it possible, therefore, for these institutions to function appropriately. Moreover, decisions of these institutions have binding effect on Member states, which is essential for the functioning of any integration project. In addition to the creation of a functional institutional framework, the European Union as well succeeded in working out the system for financing these institutions on a joint basis, providing them with relative budget independence that allows them to carry out their activities without depending entirely on the will of Member States (Rueda-Junquera, p. 106). Finally, some analysts note that it is the institutional framework and common law that provided the necessary flexibility of the Union to adapt to changing historic circumstances safeguarding the EU to go faster than the historic circumstances would. Lastly, it can be argued that a set of common actions and policies encouraging integration is essential for European success as well. The EU has pursued the social and economic development of the Member states by means of the integration of their national markets, the establishment of a single currency and the implementation of measures reducing the internal differences in the integrated market. Common actions and policies taken in this area have aimed at economic liberalization, introduction of common currency and internal cohesion (Rueda-Junquera, p. 107).

To conclude, Europe as a model is of remarkable importance to Russia both as a domestic and external projects. By adopting European modernization paradigm Russia seeks to overcome its technological backwardness and institutional inefficiency. In addition, through European model Russia has a choice to commit itself to follow European way of development which may lead Russia to consequently self-identify as a part of Europe. Externally, European regional integration can serve as an inspiring example for efficient and functional cooperation on post-Soviet space. The key however is not merely to mimic the institutions but to follow the essence of supranational commitment that is crucial to the success of the EU.

### **Europe as a Geopolitical Reality**

Europe as a reality has always been important for Russia. The Concert of Europe, in which Russia played a significant role, embedded Russia into European state system from 1815 to 1914. Russia rose to prominence internationally through the European interstate system, whose rules it had to accept, but whose evolution it was unable to influence, since the system was created by the other great powers (Stent, 2007, p. 394). Issues of relations with Europe dominated Russian foreign policy throughout the centuries and were key elements in Soviet foreign policy, as well. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of Putin's major goals when he came to power was to restore Russia's role in the European state system. As he admitted in 1999: 'I only regretted that the Soviet Union had lost its place in Europe,

although intellectually I understood that a position based on walls and dividers cannot last. But I wanted something different to rise in its place. And nothing different was proposed. That's what hurt' (Putin, 2000, p. 80).

It can be argued that today Russia and Europe have managed somewhat to put the past that divided them into two ideologically opposing camps behind and managed to construct a new different relationship with one another. This relationship can be characterised by their close interconnectedness and interdependence as economic partners. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Statistics of Russian Federation Member states of the European Union are Russia's largest trading partners – its significance as a geopolitical neighbour is difficult to underestimate<sup>6</sup>. Russia is significant to Europe mostly as an energy provider. Russia is the European Union's largest provider of oil and gas imports. It will soon be supplying fifty percent of some European countries' energy, including Germany and Italy. Finland, for example, imports 70 percent of its gas and 70 percent of this import comes from Russia. This economic significance of Russia as an energy provider for Europe will likely grow over the next decade (Stent, 2007, p. 425).

Russia utilizes this energy dependence of Europe as a tool for political ends and attaches high value to its energy resources as a means of promoting its policy goals (Secriery, 2010, p. 14). The energy strategy of the Russian Federation released by the Russian Ministry of Energy in 2003 underlines the connection between how Russia positions itself on the energy markets and its geopolitical influence. Even though, according to analysts, Russia has never openly used Europe's energy dependence as a political or economic lever in the time it has been exporting energy to Western Europe, it has used energy as a form of political leverage in the post-Soviet space, as in the conflicts over transit with Ukraine and Belarus (Stent, 2007, p. 425; see also Nygren, 2008). Eighty percent of Russia's gas comes to Europe via Ukraine, and Europe was affected by the cutoff, causing some countries to question Russia's reliability as a future supplier (Stent, 2007, p. 426).

It is not only Europe, however, that depends on Russia as a geopolitical player for its energy supplies, Europe as a consumer is extremely important to Russia, as well. Europe's dependence on Russian energy dates back to the times of Cold War, when the Kremlin built pipelines to Europe, despite ideological differences to earn hard currency and create a wedge between Europe and the United States (Mankoff, 2009, p. 176). Since the bulk of Russia's existing pipeline infrastructure leads to Europe and construction of diverting pipelines to Asia and other consumers will take time, the situation has created somewhat paradoxical effect making Moscow dependent on the Europeans as consumers of their energy as much as it has left Europe little choice but to use Russia as a supplier (Mankoff, 2009, p. 178).

The other important aspect of Europe as a reality is its policy of craving for a 'sphere of interest' in the Euro-East that Russia has historically considered its domain. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) that aims to strengthen the EU's relations with Russia's western and southern neighbours is perceived by the Kremlin as an attempt to pull the rug from under Russia's feet in the post-Soviet space – as it was bluntly put by the Russian Foreign Minister the EaP is an 'attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence (Secrieru, 2010, p. 160). In

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<sup>6</sup> For the more comprehensive information on Russian external trade consult the official webpage of the Ministry of Statistics of Russian Federation [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/free/b04\\_03/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/31.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/free/b04_03/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/31.htm)

Russia's perception the partnership could change unfavourably the behaviour of Russia's immediate neighbours and strengthen their bargaining power in relations with Moscow. Through exercise of its 'soft power' the EU's aspiration is perceived as pulling the post-Soviet states under its supranational governance in various fields (Secriery, 2010, p. 160). The integration of different sectors through the absorption of the *acquis communautaire* and the creation of a free trade area will consequently embed eastern states in the EU's legal system and, therefore, will undermine Russia's influence. This process will run against the Kremlin's plans to assemble free trade area and harmonize economic legislation in the CIS (Secriery, 2010, p. 16). Therefore, Russia perceives the EU as a competitor in Eurasia, challenging what the some of Russian political elite considers Russia's spheres of interest (Stent, 2007, p. 434). Moscow is concerned that the ex-Soviet Union states therefore will have to choose between 'either bright future with the EU or dark past with Russia' (Secriery, 2010, p. 16) and the choice will not be in Russia's favor.

Lastly, the European Union itself as a geopolitical player has undergone certain transformations that affect Russia's perception of it as a reality. I would say 'some' or 'many' Russian analysts consider the recent enlargement as the 'importation of issues of tension between Central European countries (most notably Poland and the Baltic states) and Russia in the EU-Russia relationship' (DeBardeleben, 2009, p. 96). Simply speaking, the Baltic states and Poland, together with other Central European countries, have recently emerged from decades, in some cases even centuries, of Russian and Soviet domination and have an agenda toward Russia that differs from that of states that have been EU members for a longer period (Stent, 2007, p. 431). For example, Poland effectively asserted its influence in the EU by vetoing the initiation of negotiations for a new Partnership Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia in response to a Russian embargo on meat imports from Poland (DeBardeleben, 2009, p. 100). Besides, Polish leaders became strong advocates of Ukraine's NATO and EU aspirations – a touchy issue for Russia which sees the West's support of the color revolutions as highly destabilizing and directed against the Kremlin's power and security (Tsygankov, 2008, p. 172).<sup>7</sup> The complexity of the various agendas of different member states in regards to Russia can be seen in Stanislav Secriery's insightful classification of based on their perception of Russia into 1) 'psychologically compatible partners' (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Cyprus and Greece); 2) utilitarians (Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovakia and Slovenia); and 3) neighbours with the 'phantoms of the past illness' (the UK, the Baltic states, Sweden, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Denmark) (Secriery, 2010, pp. 18, 21-22). Such striking divisions inside the Union make it difficult for the EU to build internal consensus and come up with coherent policy on Russia. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Kremlin sought 'refuge' for itself in bilateral dialogues predominantly with its preferential and utilitarian partners, most of which are Western European states (Secriery, 2010, p. 13). Such complexity can also explain the lack of a unified position in Russia on dealing with the European Union and its member states. The incoherence of institutions inside Russia on European policy also adds to the complexity of dealings with the EU. As noted by Timofey Bordachev (2009), institutions

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that there has been a substantial improvement of relations between Poland and Russia since 2009.

inside Russia are like members of a poorly managed soccer team, where each player takes both offensive, defensive and goalkeeper positions with predictably poor results.

## Conclusion

Historically Russia's relationship with Europe has been quite complex. In the past Russia demonstrated the tendency toward defensive reactions to the Western world. When Russian rulers were not successful in achieving their international objectives and in their opinion were not receiving sufficient support from their Western partners, they occasionally retreated into periods of relative isolation (Tsygankov, n.d.) and strong rhetoric and focused on their Asian side (Stent, 2007, p. 433). Can the current reconsideration of Europe as a model, an idea and a reality represent a return to this historic pattern by Russia? Russia's rejection – at least for now – of Europe's ideas of the rule of law, democracy, and a transparent market economy can be in part perceived as signs of this reversal. Europe as a model has at times been embraced by pragmatic officials in Russia, but mostly in its shallow form of institutional imitation without embracing the essence of the model itself which is embedded in European values as can be seen in the case of the CIS. The reality of the new European Union that internally speaks in many conflicting voices on the issue of Russia further deepens complexities of Russian-European relations. However, the existing debates about Europe and Russia's place in it suggest that Russia yet has to decide where it belongs (Stent, 2007, p. 433). One thing is clear, though, that Russia is determined to make that decision at its own pace and on its own terms and that it might be helpful for Europe to understand the internal complexities that Russia faces in taking these decisions.

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