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# Dialectic Relation between Foreign Policy and Russian National Identity

Dina Moulioukova\*

People do not have to wish to be “like others”.

They have to wish to be like themselves.  
Pietr Savitskii

Know thyself

Socrates

The first rule we have to follow is that of national character: every people has, or must have, a character: if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one.<sup>1</sup>

Jean-Jacque Rousseau

## Introduction

The goal of this paper is to prove empirically that international relations and national identity are two interconnected and interdependent phenomena. The argument presented here is twofold. In the first part of the argument this paper will demonstrate how external factors such as relations with foreign states can influence shifts in the sense of national identity of a state. In the second part it would argue that national identity shaped by the international relations system subsequently affects the international system itself through a state’s behavior. This analysis will be exhibited empirically on the example of Russia through presentation of various transformations that Russia’s national identity underwent after the end of Cold War due to external factors.

I will start my analysis by presenting various definitions that are crucial to understanding the argument such as notions of national identity and the international relations system. Then I will proceed to the study of the complex nature of Russian national identity and an understanding of Russian Creed, as well as different schools inside Russia that have distinct views on what Russian identity is. Following I will analyze how particular foreign factors influenced and continue influencing various shifts in Russian identity after the end of Cold War. Among these factors I will analyze firstly, different stages of the relations between Russia and the West, and how such relations influenced shifts in construction of national identity inside Russia; and

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<sup>1</sup> C. E. Vaughan, *The political writings of Rousseau*, Cambridge, p.319

secondly, I will summarize briefly how other factors in the international system, such as changes in the balance of power and rise of China affect the Russian Creed. As a part of my analysis I will also demonstrate empirically how Russian behavior as an international actor can be explained in different periods from the position Russian Federation takes on its national identity.

### Definitions

There is an array of definitions on what constitutes nation, nationalism and national identity. These terms are closely connected. For the purpose of this analysis I will employ the following definitions. The definition of a nation will be used as a socially mobilized group that wants political self-determination<sup>2</sup>. In the case of Russia though, I would be referring to all ethnic groups and nationalities that reside on the territory of Russia as a state as Russian nation (Rossiiskii narod) rather than purely Russian ethnic group (Russkii narod). When referring to nationalism I will be employing the definition of this term by Kaufman as a belief that socially mobilized group should be politically autonomous and take its rightful place among the nations of the world.<sup>3</sup> Barrington Moore, Jr. according to Ilya Prizel introduces the simplest and thus the broadest explanation of national identity, the cornerstone of nationalism<sup>4</sup>, as a membership in a group that can save an individual from anxieties of carving out his own meaningful place in the world, especially when the realistic chances of doing so are tiny<sup>5</sup>.

There are a few observations of national identity that are worth making. The first is that national identity is subject to constant redefinitions. Even though the process of such redefinitions is mostly gradual, under the situations of stress such identities can be changed at an accelerated rate and people's collective memories can be rearranged quickly.<sup>6</sup> The second is that sources of national identity are unique to each nation<sup>7</sup> and are subject to constant social construction. Such social construction is highly subjective. It is determined by who serves as the custodian of the collective memory of a polity. Since memory is highly selective it is a custodian who determines how this memory is shaped. It is important to note that the change of custodian of national identity brings along the change in perceptions of the past and, as a result, the parameters of national identity and national interest.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, national identity reflects a nation's relationship to "the other", its relations to the outside world.<sup>9</sup> National identity is an outgrowth of contact between distinct groups. However this relation to the "other" is mostly prominent in some parts of the world, such as Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, and less obvious in another, as can be seen on the example of English and American self-identification. While in English and American identification systems are mostly self-contained, in Central and Eastern Europeans identify with ideals almost universally determined by the rejection of "the other".<sup>10</sup> Therefore the relations that some states have with other states have strong dialectical relation to the formation of their national identity.<sup>11</sup>

To truly understand how international relations and national identity influence each other, it is imperative to introduce some notions of international relations system as well. Firstly, the prominent scholar of realist school Hans Morgenthau broadly defined international politics as

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, *They symbolic politics of ethnic war*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 16

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.8

<sup>5</sup> Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, p. 488

<sup>6</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.8

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p 35

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 8

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 26

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

political relations among nations and institutions<sup>12</sup>. Among most important factors of political behavior and international politics he asserted the struggle for power.<sup>13</sup> The essence of power for Morgenthau is in the relations between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised. Therefore power gives the former control over certain actions of the latter through the influence which the former exert over the latter's mind.<sup>14</sup> To expand on the notion of power Henry Kissinger, along with other scholars, notes that balance of power among the states is prime determinant of state's behavior internationally.<sup>15</sup> Under balance of power Morgenthau understands for the most part the notion of equilibrium. This equilibrium of power among states is necessary for maintaining stability inside the international relations system. In absence of such equilibrium in international system one element (state) will gain ascendancy over the others, encroach upon their interests and rights, and ultimately destroy them.<sup>16</sup> Therefore shifts and changes in balance of power can determine largely state's perception of the threat to its interests and rights and subsequently can affect state's behavior as an international actor.

The other important aspect of foreign policy is in the notion of its presumed rationality. As noted by Morgenthau only rational foreign policy can be considered a good foreign policy, due to its ability to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, psychological aspects of foreign policy, such as national identity, have been often overlooked by some scholars due to their subjective and irrational nature. However, as been noted by Max Weber some societies craft their foreign policy in desire to satisfy "irrational" psychological needs instead of rational notions of security or economy.<sup>18</sup> As further noted by William Bloom "identification theory", as a psychological bond that motivates and entire population to support certain external policies even if they cause a great deal of social pain and bring few visible rewards, can be studied as an important element in understanding of foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> Therefore national identity, as previously defined by Barrington Moore, as manifestation of nation's identification can serve as an important lens to understanding some state's international behavior, despite its seemingly irrational nature.

### **Issues of Russian Identity**

Russia serves as an example of such a state where national identity might provide insights into understanding Russian foreign policy. As noted by Regina Heller in her manuscript "Subjectivity Matters: Reconsidering Russia's Relations with the West"<sup>20</sup> from the Western point of view Russia's attitude in its foreign policy appear largely inconsistent and illogical. Russia's behavior as an international actor is characterized by swings that contradict the current trends and dynamics of engagements this makes Russian foreign policy at times highly unpredictable. Heller argues however that psychological aspects that are basic to human decision making should also be applied to the international realm and fill in the gaps left by conventional interpretations of Russian foreign policy by "realpolitik"<sup>21</sup> The author adds that an explanation to Russian foreign

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<sup>12</sup> Hanz Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations, the struggle for power and piece*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p 14

<sup>13</sup> Hanz Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations, the struggle for power and piece*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p. 27

<sup>15</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994

<sup>16</sup> Hanz Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations, the struggle for power and piece*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 156-157

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 7

<sup>18</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.15

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Regina Heller "Subjectivity Matters: Reconsidering Russia's Relations with the West" was kindly provided by Professor Kanet

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

behavior might be found in different irrational factors such as honor, recognition, perceptions, images and historic experiences<sup>22</sup>. In my opinion most of these factors can be perceived as components of national identity.

Unlike the clarity of the American Creed as defined by Anatol Liven in his book “America Right or Wrong” that includes such elements as faith in liberty, constitutionalism, the law, democracy, individualism, cultural and political egalitarianism,<sup>23</sup> the notion of Russian identity seems to be surprisingly conflicting and ambiguous, and yet haunting for intellectuals and scholars alike. As noted by James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress and originator of two major Russian-American bipartisan initiatives in Congress, no nation has invested more intellectual energy in search of its national identity than Russia<sup>24</sup>.

Different scholars, Russian and foreign alike, have distinct views on what comprises Russian national identity. In 1902 Member of British Parliament, Henry Norman, published a book titled “All the Russians: Travels and Studies in Contemporary European Russia, Finland, Siberia, the Caucuses, and Central Asia” – the result as he claimed of over fifteen years’ interest in Russian affairs and a few journeys to Russia. To the question on “what is Russia?” Norman gives a surprisingly ambiguous answer by asserting that “it would be easier to say what is not Russia”<sup>25</sup>. Former Russian Ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Lukin, in giving his definition of Russian identity provided an equally confusing response by stating that Russia is less a choice than a fate.<sup>26</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn proceeds with the notion that national identity in the case of Russia is not determined by blood or geographical boundaries, but rather by spirit or consciousness, and whoever belongs to such spirit and culture by consciousness are Russians.<sup>27</sup> According to Andrei Tsygankov in his manuscript “Honor in International Relations: Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin” the key to understanding Russian identity lies in the sense of national honor that determines Russia’s behavior as international actor. Tsygankov’s definition of Russian identity is of moral nature as well, since he introduces honor as a moral value that is associated with readiness of Self to preserve its dignity and assume moral commitments to the relevant social community.<sup>28</sup>

Along with almost metaphysical notions of Russian identity noted above, some scholars provide a more objective classification of different approaches to understanding the essence of Russian Creed. Ilya Pritzel groups ideas on Russian national identity in the following categories. The first group is linked to the notion of Russia as an empire. There are conflicting views inside this group. The first view advocates that Russia will not retain its integrity without at least a partial resurrection of the empire.<sup>29</sup> The second, alternatively, states that dissolution of the empire has a liberating effect on Russia and will allow it to become a normal nation that pursues its own national interest rather than imperial demands.<sup>30</sup> The other group of analysts, like Tatyana Tolstaya, argues that there are not one but several distinct Russian identities and that it is

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Anatol Liven, *America Right or Wrong*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 49

<sup>24</sup> James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of itself*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, John Hopkins University Press, p.12

<sup>25</sup> Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, *All the Russia...?*, in Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis “National Identity in Russian Culture”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1

<sup>26</sup> Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question, Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist Russia*, Lanham, MD/New York/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, p. xi

<sup>27</sup> *Russkiy Vopros*, 174

<sup>28</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Andrei P. Tsygankov “Honor in International Relations: Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin” was kindly provided by Professor Kanet

<sup>29</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.10

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

historical necessity for Russia to devolve further. Each new Russia consequently will formulate its own foreign policy that will reflect its own distinct needs and identity.<sup>31</sup>

The complexity of defining Russian national identity, in my opinion, does not lie in philosophical broodings of its intellectuals but mostly in objective factors. The first set of factors comes with uniqueness of Russian religion and belief in its messianic nature. As a country that adopted Orthodox version of Christianity from the Byzantine Empire, a religion falling outside the mainstream of a world religion, Russia as one of the major Orthodox countries used its religious uniqueness to define the rest of the Christian world as “the other”. By virtue of being the “true” Christian country, Russia therefore assumed the right to project its influence beyond its frontiers.<sup>32</sup> Therefore Russia assumed its messianic role that gave its state legitimacy for distinct national identity and regime.

The second set of factors stems from the complexity of Russia’s identification with East and West. By its geopolitical location Russia combines both Eastern and Western parts of Eurasia bridging two distinct political and cultural worlds. Historically, as noted by Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, the important factor in the establishment of the Russian the monarchy and state was played by the conquest of Russia by Genghis Khan, an Asian leader, who subjected the Muscovite state to the rule of Mongol-Tatar Empire for centuries. This control by Asian power affected Russia both culturally and politically. In particular in terms of the construction of the state, as argued by Trubetskoi,<sup>33</sup> as in the case with the Orthodox Church, where Russia became a successor of Byzantine Empire, the Muscovite state became a successor of the Mongol empire and continued its quest. Therefore, the Asian element played an important role in the formation of the Russian state and its culture. In addition, many ethnic groups that reside in Russia are from the East (Tatar, Bashkir, etc). This further contributed to Asian nature of Russian identity.

Relations with the West have been an important element of the Russian Creed, as well. Peter the Great in the eighteenth century and later on Catherine II by force and political will promoted Westernization of the Russian State. Exposure to the West did initially create an enthusiastic emulation of the West European model. However, Peter’s reforms faltered over short period of time, since he was working with the grain of Muscovite society, perpetuating, even intensifying its archaic feature<sup>34</sup> that was incompatible with more liberal Western model he was trying to implement. However, if Peter failed to free Russia entirely of its old customs and institutions, what he created is a torn Russia of the last three centuries.<sup>35</sup> Peter I constructed a state that did perceive itself neither as a part of Europe nor the country of the East, divided over a merit of its past and bifurcated into two social worlds.<sup>36</sup> Such confusion about Russian Creed can be seen in a gap between national identities exercised by Russian elite that was linked to extra-national entity of the West and was not shared by masses on the popular level, creating a permanent schism between the identity of the elites and that of the masses.<sup>37</sup>

The third set of factors contributing to complexity of Russian national identity lays in the notion of Russia as an empire. In Russia consciousness of an empire came before idea of a nation. The early imperial expansion of Russia started in sixteenth century when Ivan the Terrible captured Tatar cities of Kazan and a few years later Astrakhan and incorporated the large number of people who neither shared the same religion nor spoke the same language as Russians. This

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid p 11

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 33

<sup>33</sup> Nikolai Trubetskoi, *Heritage of Genghiz Khan*, in *Heritage of Genghiz Khan*, translated from Russian, p 307

<sup>34</sup> Robert Legvold, *Russian Foreign Policy during Periods of State Formation*, in Robert Legvold “Russian Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century & Shadow of the Past”, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 83

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.3

resulted in formation of imperial identity in Russia before its national individuality.<sup>38</sup> Russia's drive to acquire new territories and new peoples, the constant process of defining and building an empire, left establishment of Russia as a state and a nation in a state of perpetual change that consequently led to sense of incompleteness.<sup>39</sup> As a result the multitude of different ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultural traditions and religious beliefs that were annexed to Russia due to its expansionist aspirations further complicated the definition of Russian identity. However, it is argued by some scholars that the decision to become an empire was a reaction by Russian state to its almost constant state of war, since Russia "was invaded more often and with more force than any other early modern empire". Therefore it was the logic of competition that made Russia wage war and forced it to expand its territory.<sup>40</sup>

Different aspects of conflicting Russian identity were employed by different schools of thought in attempts to construct different scenarios of Russia's future and its role in international system. Ilya Pritzel, along with others, lists them as Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists. The ideological distinctions between the views of these three major schools of thought can assist in understanding of the shifts in the nature of Russian national identity after the end of Cold War.

Westernizers put the emphasis on Russia's similarity with the West and viewed West as the most viable and progressive civilization in the world.<sup>41</sup> The emergence of this school could be traced back to Peter the Great reforms. However, some authors argue that Russia's deep cultural connection to the West began from the times it adopted Orthodox Christianity and became a student of Byzantium's faith.<sup>42</sup> Europe, according to Tsygankov, has always been Russia's "significant other", figuring prominently in domestic debates and created the context in which Russia's rulers defended their core values<sup>43</sup>. Like Tsygankov Westernizers believed that Russia had always been an integral part of Western cultural mainstream, the separation from it happened as a result of Mongolian yoke.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Russia is destined to return back into West's orbit. In their core values Westernizers stressed the desirability and inevitability of individual freedom, legal accountability in government, and greater openness to the outside world through international commerce.<sup>45</sup>

As a school of thought Slavophilism emerged in response to Westernism.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Westernizers Slavophiles saw Russia as a unique civilization that combines the virtues of Orthodox faith, Slavic ethnicity, and communal institutions. They believed in messianic nature of Russia that was called to heal by the power of its example both the social divisions inside Russia and spiritual wounds of Europe ravaged by Revolution and War.<sup>47</sup> Slavophiles saw all of human history as a struggle between spiritual and material forces. Broadly speaking they argued that Russian identity and destiny lay in faith and family and in the spiritual institutions of rural Russia. They advocated internal change rather than imperial or hegemonic politics abroad as Russia's

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 177

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Andrei P. Tsygankov "Honor in International Relations: Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin" was kindly provided by Professor Kanet, p 23

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Andrei P. Tsygankov "Honor in International Relations: Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin" was kindly provided by Professor Kanet, p 3

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.160

<sup>45</sup> James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of itself*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, John Hopkins University Press, p.14

<sup>46</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez: *Russian Nationalism Since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy*, Lanham, MD/New York/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, p. 63

<sup>47</sup> <sup>47</sup> James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of itself*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, John Hopkins University Press, p.13



high priority.<sup>48</sup> Slavophiles supported autocracy as the legitimate expression of Russian political power, since it was founded on mutual trust between the sovereign and its subjects.

As a result of the defeat in Crimean War and feeling of the humiliation Russian elite felt because of betrayal of European powers, panslavism emerged as an external projection of Slavophile ideas. In a nutshell, panslavism advocated for unity among Slavs with ideological and political center in Russia. Panslavs formulated their image in contrast to “the other” collective West or greater European powers.<sup>49</sup> They characterized Russian imperialism as generally benign by arguing that Russia absorbed other groups not with violent conquest but by advancing these groups’ interests and thereby obeying higher laws toward the establishment of the ultimate civilization.<sup>50</sup> Russian panslavs saw the purpose of Russian nation in unifying all Slav people under one Slavic federation through establishment of strong state and enhancing Russia’s power on the international stage.<sup>51</sup>

Eurasianism or Civilizationism depicts Russian values as different from those of the West. The essence of this movement was in uniqueness of Russia. Eurasianists considered Russia more of a civilization rather than a nation. Such uniqueness they argued is reflected in Russian geographic, linguistic and historic background.<sup>52</sup> Their motto articulated by Petr Savitskii was in comparison of any nation to uniqueness of individual person. Therefore Russian nation does not have to aspire to be like others, but rather has to be like itself.<sup>53</sup> Due to its uniqueness Russia has to build its own different Russian-Eurasian world.<sup>54</sup> To preserve distinctness of this world Lev Gumilev, a prominent Russian philosopher and Eurasianist, stressed the importance of maintaining a culturally non-threatening union with the Turkic people or face cultural annihilation inflicted by the West.<sup>55</sup> As one of the important features of Russian identity Eurasianists saw in strong concentration of centralized power in Russia.<sup>56</sup> They argued that such state construction was inherited by Russia from nomadic empires, and in Russia everything is to be done from the name of the state, in particular its ruler<sup>57</sup>. Therefore Eurasianists contribute a great importance to statism and see in it the foundation of Russian history<sup>58</sup>.

In their view of the West, Eurasianists are largely skeptical of its importance for the future of Russia. They argued that despite West’s might in political and cultural sense Russia’s integration into Europe has always been followed by the sense of inferiority, where Russia was treated as European periphery with the sense of disdain from Europe to its European backyard.<sup>59</sup> The question that Eurasianists post therefore is not how to become like Europe and catch up with it, but rather how to “catch up” and “surpass” Europe and America, with the emphasis on the idea of “surpassing” the West.<sup>60</sup>

Despite distinctness of these approaches all of these schools seem to have common features on what constitutes Russian identity and what is to be present in social construction of

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<sup>48</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez: *Russian Nationalism Since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy*, Lanham, MD/New York/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, p. 65

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p 71

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p 72

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p 74

<sup>52</sup> Petr Savitskii, *Eurasianism as Historic Design*, in *Heritage of Genghiz Khan*, translated from Russian, p 20

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p 23

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>55</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.230

<sup>56</sup> Petr Savitskii, *Eurasianism as Historic Design*, in *Heritage of Genghiz Khan*, translated from Russian, p 24

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p 20

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*

Russian nation. Moreover even though they originated in the past they have demonstrated considerable consistency in their analysis and historic continuity which makes them applicable to understanding of Russian identity in present day Russia. Following the language of Anatol Lieven, I would address these commonalities as Russian Creed, the notion that Andrei Tsygankov calls historical constructions of Russian Honor.<sup>61</sup>

I would argue that historically the first notion of Russian Creed is in strong Russian state. In pre-revolutionary times strong state manifested itself in Russia through Monarchic Autocracy. In Soviet times it was replaced by equally strong Single Party state with strong monopoly on power. In contemporary Russia this notion has been constructed in unique definition of sovereign democracy that according to Andrei Tsygankov, reflects distinct nature of Russian culture.<sup>62</sup>

The second notion of Russian Creed is in its spiritual freedom<sup>63</sup> or as I would call it ideology. Ideology has always provided substance to Russian national identity and unified Russian (Rossiiskii narod) people. The messianic ideology of the third Rome as a feature of Orthodox Christianity got replaced in 1917 by equally messianic Communist ideology that was called to save the world from grip of capitalism and social inequality. One of the issues that today's Russia faces can be seen in inability of its elite to construct solid and appealing ideology that would be shared by the whole population of the country. However the efforts of such social construction can be seen in notion of Russian Civilization, revived state strength and support for Russian and pro-Russian communities abroad.<sup>64</sup>

Under the third notion of Russia Creed Tsygankov lists cultural alliances of Russia that I see as Russia's zones of influences or its geopolitical priorities<sup>65</sup>. The definition of cultural allies of Russia changed in time. In Russian Empire, Tsygankov argues Russian state felt responsible for livelihood of co-religionists that resided outside of Russian state. Therefore Russia fought multiple wars with Turkey in part to protect the rights of millions of Christians within the Turkish Empire, such as ethnic Armenians.<sup>66</sup> With replacement of Christian ideology with Socialist dogma Soviet Union was no longer committed to defending Christians or Slavs, and instead provided international assistance based on socialism and egalitarian ideology to communism inspired parties and socialist states around the world.<sup>67</sup> After the disintegration of Communist system, Russia went through various shifts in its cultural allies. While still the work in progress it includes countries that have historically gravitated toward Russia. The example of such redefined cultural allies can be seen in position of high-profile Russian official, such as former Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgenii Primakov's support the idea of Eurasianism and enhanced integration on post-Soviet space.<sup>68</sup>

The following tables of Andrei Tsygankov will further assist in understanding of the essential elements of Russian Creed and their distinction from Western values<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Andrei P. Tsygankov "Honor in International Relations: Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin" was kindly provided by Professor Kanet, p 27

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p 25

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p 27

*Table summarizing some of Russia's values in comparison with those of the West*

Part of the West	Distinct from the West
1. Christianity	Orthodox Christianity
2. Absolutism	Autocracy
3. Europe's system of alliances	Special relations with the East
4. Social Democracy	Communism

*Table summarizing three distinct constructions of Russian Creed (Honor)*

	19 <sup>th</sup> century	Soviet	Contemporary
Spiritual Freedom/ ideology	Orthodox Christianity	Communist ideology	Russian Civilization
Strong State	Autocracy	Single Party System	Sovereign Democracy
Cultural allies/geopolitical priorities	Orthodox and Slav People	Communist Parties and Socialist States	Russian and pro- Russian communities (with focus on former SU republics)

### **The shifts in Russian National Identity**

In this part of paper I will demonstrate how Russia's relations with the West influenced the shifts in Russian Creed after the end of Cold War. Andrei Tsygankov identifies four distinct shifts in Russian national identity in the last few years after the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to power as the leader of Soviet Union.<sup>70</sup>

The first shift happened with initiation of New Thinking policy that was a part of Perestroika project. As an autocratic state with strong concentration of power in highly centralized government Russia experienced shift in its internal and external identity from top to bottom. The essence of the shift was in Gorbachev's ideas on Soviet Union's relation to the West. With the Cold War the world was divided into opposing power camps with two distinct

<sup>70</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 221

ideologies and set of values. Novelty of New Thinking was in its perception of the world as socially diverse and yet united by common human values as well as common fundamental threats, such as nuclear catastrophe, ecological devastation, etc.<sup>71</sup> The solution to the common world problems was seen by Soviet leader in cross-national communication and acknowledgement that national interests could be pursued in close contact with other members of the world, predominantly countries of the opposite camp. For the Soviet Union this meant starting the dialogue with the countries of the West.

Additionally, Gorbachev was looking to improve the functioning of domestic economy through closing the technology gap, revitalizing the economy and turning the Soviet Union into fully competitive global power.<sup>72</sup> Such idea of integration of two opposite camps was followed by active measures exercised by Soviet Union in hope of their reciprocation from the West. Such measures included disproportionately large cuts in conventional and nuclear arsenals and proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons, withdrawal from Afghanistan and abandonment of “Brezhnev doctrine”.<sup>73</sup>

The initiatives introduced by Gorbachev could be perceived as the beginning of the shift in Soviet national identity. Following the rationale of Tsygankov’s Russian Creed, Soviet ideology was being replaced with almost utopian ideas of harmony of interests in international relations. Western states from the adversary in bi-polar world seemed to be transferring by Soviet elite into the camp of allies. However, it would be erroneous to claim that Gorbachev’s idea was to completely reshape the notion of Russian national identity. Due to pressing economic and political factors it could be argued that Gorbachev’s motives were to restructure and reform Soviet society without major changes in the core of Soviet Creed, such as preservation of strong, however more open, state through single party system and maintaining of Soviet Union’s geopolitical priorities through alliance with Communist Parties and Socialist States.

However, due to several internal and external reasons Idea of New Thinking was soon replaced with Idea of Integration with the West. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new Russian state, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev saw one of their essential goals to put an end to decades of Russian isolation from the West.<sup>74</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the major power in bi-polar world, the only viable option for development seemed to follow the example of the powers that prevailed, the powers of the West. Like Peter the Great that introduced Russia to the West after centuries of isolation, Russian elite was looking to repeat his example. As Westernizers Russian leaders saw the future of their country in establishment of effective institutions that would support and nurture introduction of democracy and market economy to a new Russia.<sup>75</sup>

Russian President and his Foreign Minister emphasized desire for Russia to abandon its messianic ideology and become a normal great power.<sup>76</sup> The geopolitical priority of Russian Creed was shifted from Socialist States and Communist Parties to Western International Institutions and Western States, in particular United States and European countries. Russia no more exhibited interest in developing relations with non-Western nations either in Asia or in the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Roger E. Kanet, with Suzanne M. Birgerson, *The Domestic-Foreign Policy Linkage in Russian Politics: Nationalist Influences on Russian Foreign Policy*, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, vol.30, no.4, p 336

<sup>73</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 221

<sup>74</sup> Roger E. Kanet, with Suzanne M. Birgerson, *The Domestic-Foreign Policy Linkage in Russian Politics: Nationalist Influences on Russian Foreign Policy*, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, vol.30, no.4, p 337

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

Muslim world and quickly joined the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>77</sup> It announced its openness to Western economic activities, but placed considerable economic restrictions on dealing with ex-Soviet Republics.<sup>78</sup> In terms of Ideological part of Russian Creed Russia seemed to abandon its Soviet Ideological aspirations for desire to be admitted to the Western club.

In terms of state dimension as defined in national Creed the country was implementing reforms that were called to introduce democracy into previously highly centralized authoritarian state. To sum up, at the beginning of Yeltsin's Presidency there was a substantial shift in the notion of Russian Creed. It manifested itself in the following: firstly, through attempts to decentralize power of Russian state, secondly, by abandoning its messianic ideology and replacing it with aspiration to become a "normal power" and lastly, through change in geopolitical focus from countries Russia had influence over, such as Newly Independent States and countries of the Muslim and Asian world, for the West. Therefore it can be argued that in the newly emerged Russian state the shift in its national identity was caused predominantly by external factors, in particular Russia's desire to become the part of the Western Community.

However the enchantment with the West did not last for long. To some extent unrealistically high expectations of the Russian leadership are to blame. Russian elite envisioned that their accelerated rapprochement with the West will result in blossoming of trade and massive financial aid.<sup>79</sup> Western states as well contributed to the change in their relations with Russia. To start with the promised economic aid was not delivered due to West's assessment that Russian progress in economic performance was unsatisfactory.<sup>80</sup> Internally, however, it was perceived in Russia that a former Great Power has been reduced to the humiliating level of beginning the West for minute handouts and caving in to IMF policies.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, the changed in balance of power in international system left United States as uncontested hegemony and a number of actions that have been taken by the United States and other Western countries have prompted Moscow to complain that the West had tendency to dictate its own terms in international arena.<sup>82</sup> As Dmitri Trenin argues the West invited Russia to join it, but left the door half-open.<sup>83</sup> Therefore the project of Russian integration into Western Institutions was still born from its interception.<sup>84</sup>

There are numerous example of such flawed integration. In case of NATO, while other former Warsaw Pact countries were being drawn into expanding West, Russia was offered new arrangements but it was kept at arm's length.<sup>85</sup> NATO-Russian Council was supposed to harmonize security agendas and to promote military reform in Russia. However it turned out to be a mere low-key technical cooperation workshop operating at NATO's side.<sup>86</sup> The EU-Russia "common spaces" were designed to "Europeanize" Russia socially and economically and promote its political association with Europe. In reality however this agreement that was meant to enhance cooperation on the basis of greater mutual compatibility offered only a set of very

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<sup>77</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 223

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Alexander V. Kozhemiakin and Roger E. Kanet, *The Impact of Nationalism on Russian Foreign Policy*, in William E. Ferry and Roger E. Kanet, *Post Communist States in the World Community: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies*, London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, p 47

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia Leaves the West*, *Foreign Affairs*, Jul/Aug 2006, Vol. 85, Iss. 4; p.87

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

general objectives with no hard commitments.<sup>87</sup> Therefore there was a unified sentiment of deceit in dealing with the West in Russian society that was quite damaging to the image of the West.

However, unlike New Thinking, and course for Western Integration taken at the very beginning of Yeltsin's Presidency the shift away from Westernization in Russian Creed did not happen from the top, but was rather constructed by the whole Russian society. To start with, the shock therapy economic reforms that West seemed to support so strongly brought devastating results to Russian society. All indicators of Russian economy dropped drastically during the first three years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union<sup>88</sup>. It became quite common for Russians to complain that government policy of economic liberalization had more devastating effect on the country's economy than did four years of the war against Nazi<sup>89</sup> – a shocking statement for the nation that lost over 20 million people and was severely destroyed as a result of Hitler occupation. A survey of residents of European part of Russian Federation conducted only a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union indicated a change in public preferences from democratic euphoria to support for more authoritarian forms of government.<sup>90</sup> In the same survey 78 per cent of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the political situation in the Federation.<sup>91</sup>

The frustration of the people was shared by Russian political elite, who either sincerely or in desire to capitalize on public dissatisfaction favored modification or complete rejection of President Yeltsin's reform policy. Therefore it can be argued that Western policy of half-open doors to Russia, along with West supported economic reforms that humiliated and devastated Russia contributed to the unrest inside Russian society and need for change in the idea of Westernized Russian Creed.

Only after a few years of pro-Western policy whole Russian society seemed to mobilize advocating for the change in Russian national and international policy. This change has come in part with the appointment of new Foreign Minister, pragmatic and realist Yevgeny Primakov. Unlike his predecessors, Eduard Shevardnadze and Andrey Kozyrev, Primakov had no illusions about Russian integration with the West. As a committed Eurasianist<sup>92</sup>, instead he concentrated his focus on re-establishment of relations with non-Western states, former geopolitical zones of interest of the Soviet Union, particularly China, Iran and India and intensified relations with the former Soviet Union Republics by drawing them into a tighter Union (Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine).<sup>93</sup> In relation with the China Russia shared China's vision of world politics and threat to a "multi-polar world" posed by the United States. In this regard if analyzed from the matrix of Russian Creed Primakov attempted to shift the concentration in its international dimension from Western states to former allies. However, many of Primakov's visions remained on paper only and this contributed to the replacement of his vision of Russian Foreign policy and Russian Creed with the vision of Vladimir Putin.

Putin came to power in Russian Federation during the times of great instability. He applied a tough hand and reaffirmed preeminence of his presidential power over oligarchs and other powerful groups, proclaiming as his goals domestic stability and cooperative position in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Alexander V. Kozhemiakin and Roger E. Kanet, *The Impact of Nationalism on Russian Foreign Policy*, in William E. Ferry and Roger E. Kanet, *Post Communist States in the World Community: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies*, London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, p 49

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p 48

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 146

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p 224

foreign policy.<sup>94</sup> New leader had differences and similarities in his vision of international system with his predecessors. Like Gorbachev, Putin was mostly preoccupied with world's instabilities such as terrorism and some new economic opportunities.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Primakov, he was not preoccupied with unipolarity of the world but rather saw the need to engage West in joint projects. However, unlike Gorbachev and Kozyrev that started shift to Westernization in Russian internal and external policy mostly on Western terms, Putin visualized Russia as a great power and sought Western recognition of Russia's regained status.<sup>96</sup> Therefore new cause of Putin politics was in redefined national interest as that of Great Power Pragmatism, rather than balancing United States power.<sup>97</sup>

In his policy Putin seemed to achieve what Gorbachev failed to do: he attempted to open up to the West but as a prudent statesman with pragmatic and driven by calculations state power.<sup>98</sup> In his dealing with the West he offered the United States far reaching intelligence cooperation in aftermath of 9/11. Equally he was energetic in promoting of political and economic ties with Europe. In the former Soviet Union he abandoned Primakov's integration project in favor of less costly bilateral relations. Putin valued Eurasian region's political and geostrategic significance, but he replaced purely political goals with emphasis on economic competition.<sup>99</sup> In re-establishment of bilateral economic ties Putin reasserted control of many of the ex-republics' strategic property and transportation, in particular electricity and energy pipeline facilities.<sup>100</sup> Putin's policy can be the best described as serving the purpose of modernizing Russia, rather than developing strategic diplomatic alliances or cultural affinities.<sup>101</sup> Therefore Putin's contribution in redefining Russian Creed could be seen in replacement of ideology (Westernization with Kozyrev and Eurasianism with Primakov) by rational pragmatism an inclusion of Western and Eastern countries alike into the sphere of Russian geopolitical interests.

However the honeymoon of Russia and the West was short lived in this instance as well. With implementation of Bush doctrine that openly stated that American sovereignty was to remain absolute and unqualified the relations between two countries seemed to shift more into realm similar to the one of the Cold War. The sovereignty of other countries, under Bush doctrine, was to be heavily qualified by the United States, and no other country was to be allowed a sphere of influence, even in its own neighborhood. The clear intention of this policy was to be so powerful that other states had no choice but to join the US, concentrating all real power and freedom of action in the hands of United States.<sup>102</sup> Such attitude toward international relations with almost complete elimination of the notion of balance of power was predestined to increase tensions Russia experienced with the West.

As a prudent international player, new Russian leadership was promoting its own political agenda in defense of its international interests. This position however was not welcomed by the United States. For example Russia's technical aid to Iran has caused serious discontent in Washington.<sup>103</sup> Adding to difficulties was NATO expansion policies and deployment of its

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<sup>94</sup> Maria Raquel Freire, *The Russian Federation and the CIS*, Kolodziej & Kanet: From Superpower to Besieged Global Power: Restoring World Order after Failure of the Bush Doctrine, Georgia: the University of Georgia Press, p 157

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p 225

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p 148

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p 146

<sup>102</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 12

<sup>103</sup> Maria Raquel Freire, *The Russian Federation and the CIS*, Kolodziej & Kanet: From Superpower to Besieged Global Power: Restoring World Order after Failure of the Bush Doctrine, Georgia: the University of Georgia Press, p 163

military forces close to Russian borders.<sup>104</sup> When Georgia and Ukraine expressed their desire to join the organization this added substantially to the Russia's sense of strategic insecurity.<sup>105</sup> As well Russia was highly disappointed with U.S. announcement of its intention to withdraw from Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. In the words of Deputy Chair of Russian Parliament's (Duma) Foreign Affairs Committee, "the United States has always followed its own political course and has such a dominant position in the world in every way."<sup>106</sup> One of the most serious blows to Russia's relation with the West however was in West's support of color revolutions in the former Soviet Union Republics that have been perceived as highly destabilizing by Russia and directed against Kremlin's power and security<sup>107</sup>. Such support was perceived by Russian public and elite alike as direct encroachment on Russia's geopolitical interests in its periphery.

The frustration with the Western policy towards Russia, once again, as in case with Yeltsin was shared by Russian population. Seventy four percent of Russians polled in March 2008 said that Ukraine's possible accession to NATO poses a threat to national security of Russian Federation, and seventy seven per cent expressed similar feelings to the Georgian membership in the organization.<sup>108</sup>

Russian domestic conditions have changed dramatically. Due to increase in oil prices Russian economy caught up and continued growing about 7 per cent annually – drastic difference after lacking economic indicators during first years of Yeltsin's Presidency. Russian population became more financially stable as well attributing their well being to a strong power exercised by new Russian leadership. The economic recovery provided Russia with stronger and less dependent voice as an international actor.

According to Andrei Tsygankov Russia under the Presidency of Putin has not left the West. Tsygankov notes that Putin reasserted the West that Russia is moving in the direction of freedom and democracy with Europeans but does so at its own terms and pace.<sup>109</sup> Kremlin ideologists constructed concepts of "sovereign democracy" and "sovereign economy", by which they defended internally determined path to political development and indicated that the state was determined to have an upper hand in deciding conditions on which Western companies were to participate in Russian economic development.<sup>110</sup> Unlike Andrei Tsigankov, Dmitri Trenin is not so confident about Russia's affiliation with the West. In his article of 2006 Trenin claims that if until recently Russia saw itself as Pluto in the Western solar system, very far from the Center but still fundamentally a part of it. Now it has left the orbit entirely: Russian leaders have given up on becoming a part of the West and have started creating their own Moscow-centered system. Russia's approach to foreign policy has changed as well, like the United States, Russia is essentially friendless; no great power wants strong Russia, which would be an unwanted competitor, and many would prefer to see Russia as a weak state that can be exploited.<sup>111</sup>

Trenin claims that substantial shift in Russian Creed has happened with Presidency of Vladimir Putin. Russia has started acting like the great power it was in tsarist times. It conducted its military exercises with China and India, welcomed Hamas leaders<sup>112</sup> and strongly asserts its policies in CIS. Based on Russian Creed description it can be argued that due to Bush doctrine

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 172

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p 160

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p 177

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p 178

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p 176

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p 177

<sup>111</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia Leaves the West*, Foreign Affairs, Jul/Aug 2006, Vol. 85, Iss. 4; pg.87

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p 177



and its antagonistic policy towards the rest of the world, Russia in particular, Russian has yet again shifted the focus of its national identity due to the influence from the West. Firstly, due to outside pressures and internal political situation Russian President reasserted strong centralized power. Secondly, Russia re-established its ideology through projection of its messianic role in the region by getting more actively involved in integration with former Soviet Republics and assuming leading role in the region. As Tsygankov notes, Russia-by virtue of its size and capabilities- is seen by Russian leadership in a special position to greatly contribute to providing the collective goods of security, sovereignty, and stability in the region.<sup>113</sup> . As well a newly introduced idea of Euro-East, fusion of Western and Eurasian identities of Russia<sup>114</sup>, adds a new dimension to the ideological part of Russian Creed.

At the end it is worth mentioning however, that other factors along with Russia's relation with the West have influenced Russia's position on its identity. Among these factors it is important to note the newly emerging multi-polarity in international system and the rise of China. In his article on Modernity and Russia's chances in the post-American World Dmitry Yefremenko argues that there are ample manifestations noted by important political analysts, such as Fareed Zakaria, on decline of American Century and approaching of post-American multi-polar world.<sup>115</sup> He notes that the new world opens the range of opportunities before Russia and they should be used to create favorable conditions for internal development, and not complicating them in involvement in strict alliances. The freedom of choice author notes is a truly precious asset to have in the era of multipolarity.<sup>116</sup>

The other important factor is the rise of China. The global economic crisis proved resilience of Chinese model that is increasingly looked at as an alternative to the Washington Consensus. The growing rivalry between China and the West appears as an inevitable clash of civilizations and ideologies. The value of Chinese experience is mostly important to Russia. Comparison of historical experiences of these two countries provides additional arguments in favor of modernization under strict governmental control for Russian elite.<sup>117</sup> China's achievement could in my opinion be attributed in part to Russia's adoption of "sovereign democracy" and "sovereign economy" doctrines. Chinese success is changing the scale of political values, since success and effectiveness stop to be unequivocally associated with liberal democracy only.<sup>118</sup>

Following please find the table introduced by Andrei Tsygankov that can assist in explanation of Russian Foreign Policy after Communism. This table explains how interrelation between local conditions and behavior of Europe/West shaped different stages of Russian foreign policy.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Dmitry Yefremenko, *Forced or Desired Modernity*, in *Russia in Global Affairs*, 15 October 2010

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

Local Conditions					
		National Democratic Revolution	Economic Depression/ Political instability	Economic Recovery/new security threats	
Behavior of Europe/West	Support	Integration with the West			
	NATO expansion		Great Power Balancing		
	Renewed support			Great Power Defensiveness	
	Regime Change				Great power assertiveness

### Conclusion

This paper attempts to demonstrate that Russian sense of national identity largely depends on Russia's relation with the outside world, in particular the West. Shifts in the notion of Russian Creed consequently determine and shape Russia's behavior as an international actor. Such co-dependence proves the importance of Russian identity for stability in international system and significance of the relations with the foreign states to the notion of Russian national identity.

Importantly, both Russia and the West should draw lessons and rethink their approaches to each other. In my opinion, Russia should once and for all attempt to define for itself what constitutes its National Identity Creed. Constant shifts in search of acceptable paradigm are not only turbulent internally but present Russia as unpredictable and unreliable international partner. This can largely damage Russia's international reputation. The key to lasting Russian identity in my opinion is in Russia's unique balance between East and West. This equilibrium can be seen as a true advantage that allows Russian Federation to bridge and communicate to these distinct powerful worlds and cultures. It is imperative however, not to stress one side of Russian historic identity at the expense of the other, but rather fuse them instead. Russia's strength is in its uniqueness that does not imply its destiny as an isolationist state.

For the West, it seems important to rethink the fundamental notions of its approach to Russia. As noted by Dmitri Trenin Russia's transformations will not follow the course of Poland by means of its EU integration, nor should the West bank on historic shortcut in the case of Russia: no democratic, pro-Western Tsar will suddenly emerge from some color revolution to hitch Russia to the EU-US wagon.<sup>119</sup> Instead West needs to calm down and take Russia for what it is: an external player that is neither an eternal foe nor automatic friend. Russia will continue to change but at its own pace. Therefore it is very important for the West to understand and respect the notions of honor that drive the essence of Russian Creed and engage with Russia based on the notion of mutual self-interest.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia Leaves the West*, Foreign Affairs, Jul/Aug 2006, Vol. 85, Iss. 4; pg.87

<sup>120</sup> Ibid

