

■ *Practitioner Paper*

Boisterous Russia in emerging Europe

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Russia is permanently at a crossroads in its history, or standing in exasperation at a fork in the road but failing to resolve a geographical, historical and metaphysical dilemma: is Russia part of Europe or not? Russia holds a key but vulnerable strategic position in the heartland of Eurasia. Its geographical existence within a larger zone of Eurasian civilization meant that Russian culture had been shaped to a not insignificant extent by influences coming from Asia, that Russia was Eurasian and not European not only by virtue of its cultural patterns but also in terms of anthropological–racial considerations as well. The Eurasian Customs Union is clearly seen by Russia as a vehicle for reintegrating the post-Soviet space, including the countries that fall within the sphere of the European Union's (EU)'s eastern neighbourhood.

The Eurasian Customs Union is the vehicle through which Russia increasingly engages in 'normative rivalry' with the EU in the so-called 'shared neighbourhood'. These geopolitical and economic contraptions underpin the strategic calculations that have influenced largely the crisis of Russian Lebensraum escapade in Ukraine and EU's reaction. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Russia is a key actor in the United Nations Security Council and, due to history, geographic proximity and cultural links, is one of the key players in the common European neighbourhood. The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a geopolitical earthquake that redrew the map of Europe and Central Asia. In his state-of-the-nation address, in April 2005, Russia's President Vladimir Putin went so far as to describe it as the 'biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century'.¹ Russia holds a key but vulnerable strategic position in the heartland of Eurasia. Firstly, an arc of instability (a zone of present and inevitably future unrest in the coming decades) runs along its southern border from the larger Middle East

towards northeast Asia. Secondly, its geographical position aggravates the post-imperial crisis of identity. The furtive Russian military intervention into the Crimea is a direct reaction to the uncoordinated 'triple expansion'² of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU) plus American/European defence and political economic interests and military infrastructure into the so-called Russian 'near abroad'. This uncoordinated triple expansion has been countered by Russian efforts to check both NATO and EU enlargement, at the same time that Moscow has been seeking to build step by step a new Eurasian geostrategic and political economic alliance in the aftermath of Soviet collapse. This rebuilding of Russia has involved the formation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasia Customs Union (ECU) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (leading to closer Russian–Chinese security and defence cooperation since 2005).

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¹BBC, 'Putin deplores collapse of USSR', 25 April 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>.

²On the 'triple expansion', see Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and US Strategy in Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST

Russia inherited from the Soviet state a culturally diverse population, with ethnic Russians only making up four-fifths of the country's population. It also inherited an elaborate structure of ethnic federalism that recognised the rights of certain ethnic groups in their officially designated home territories. Another part of the Soviet legacy was a tradition of political and economic centralisation that had tied the fate of distant regions to decision-making in Moscow—a system that had broken down during the final years of the defunct Soviet Union. The collapse of the defunct Soviet Union ruptured Russian conceptions of identity, stimulating and splintering powerful debate on national self-perception. Russian identity had, after all, emerged from the remainder of Soviet territory left behind after the non-Russian republics had gained their independence.

In the 1990s, it arose entangled in the geographical and psychological inheritance of empire, a question barely settled by 2000 and the start of Vladimir Putin's presidency of the Russian Federation. The beginning of a new millennium has prompted many talks, in Moscow and elsewhere, of Russia being at a crossroads in history. In fact, such talk is just another symptom of Russia's troubled quest for a new idea even if the quest itself is anything but new. Oddly, the idea of a 'Russian idea' (*russskaya idea*) predates the Soviet era. Indeed, the arguments of today's nationalists and liberals echo the 19th century debates of Slavophiles and Westernisers. In that sense, Russia is permanently at a crossroads in its history, or standing in exasperation at a fork in the road but failing to resolve a geographical, historical and metaphysical dilemma: is Russia part of Europe or not?

UKRAINIAN CRIMEA AND RUSSIAN EXPANSIONISM/RECOLONISATION CRUISE

Upon gaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine had several distinct regions and a number of significant ethnic minorities, most prominent of which were Russians. The only part of Ukraine with a Russian majority was the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Historically, Crimea had for about 168 years been an integral part of imperial Russia and after 1921 of the Russian Federation. Crimea is psychologically much closer to the hearts of many Russians and particularly of the Russian military than any of the four other ex-Soviet territories (Belarus,

Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan). Since the break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, political tensions between the two neighbouring states of Ukraine and Russia have continued on many issues. These had included those related to the status of Crimea, the division of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet between the two states, the basing rights of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, the Russian use of military facilities in Crimea, number and status of Russian military personnel in Ukrainian territory and so on. Russian contingency plans for the annexation of Crimea were probably prepared and regularly updated for at least two decades. In 1997, a prominent Russian geostrategist Sergei Karaganov wrote about the possible disintegration of Ukraine and the absorption of its parts by Russia (Karaganov, 1997: 300). Yulia Timoshenko, a former Prime Minister of Ukraine, publicly warned the West in 2007 of Russia's policy of destabilising the Ukrainian government, particularly in Crimea.³ Launched into action on 28 February 2014, Russian forces, assisted by armed 'self-defence' militias, swiftly seized the strategically important Perekop Isthmus, blocked or cut off all land, sea and air connections of Crimea with the rest of Ukraine, took over all Crimean ports and airports, radio and TV stations, blocked and occupied all installations of the Ukrainian Army and Navy and illegally expropriated practically all their stocks of arms and ammunition.

Immediately after the takeover on 28 February 2014, Russian security personnel shut off all Ukrainian television channels, imposed a tight blockade on the land border with the mainland Ukrainian territory, closed the Simpheropol airport to flights from Ukraine and thus prevented the diffusion in Crimea of Ukrainian-printed media (which still mostly appear in the Russian language). The population of Crimea was thus subjected to one-sided information and often outright disinformation by the Russian state-controlled mass media. At a press conference on 4 March 2014, Putin defended intervention in Ukraine on the grounds of the alleged crimes committed against the Russian-speaking population: 'When we see this we understand what worries the citizens of Ukraine, both Russian and Ukrainian, and the Russian-speaking population in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. It is this uncontrolled crime that worries them. Therefore, if we see such uncontrolled crime spreading to the eastern regions of the country, and

³Foreign Affairs, no. 3, 2007 and in *Rossia v globalnoy politike*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2007, pp. 104–105.

if the people ask us for help, while we already have the official request from the legitimate President, we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people. We believe this would be absolutely legitimate. This is our last resort.⁴

A referendum on Crimea reuniting with the Russian Federation was hastily called on 27 February 2014, with insufficient notice. The time pressure very probably did not allow for, and more importantly, the Crimean secessionist authorities were not interested in updating the voter registers and in assuring that multiple voting (obviously by the proponents of secession) would be prevented. The referendum held on 16 March 2014 reportedly proceeded peacefully and orderly but in several important respects did not conform to high democratic standards. The ballot contained two questions, and only one positive response was considered valid: (1) Do you support Crimea rejoining Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation? (2) Do you support restoration of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Crimea and Crimea's status as part of Ukraine? The ballot omitted two other possible choices—remaining part of Ukraine under the current constitutional structure, or Crimea's independent statehood. The shortage of time did not allow for any real and substantive public debate on such a momentous issue. According to the Crimean authorities, 81.36% of registered voters took part in Crimea's referendum, and 96.77% of them voted for its separation from Ukraine and for reunification with Russia.⁵ However, the official figures on voter participation and on the approval rate could not be verified by impartial international observers.

THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION/EUROPEAN UNION VERSUS WARSAW/EURASIA CUSTOMS UNION LINK

For many observers, the crisis in Ukraine has marked the end of the era that started with the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia has been described as a revisionist power, which intends to roll back the order that was established by the USA and its allies

after the end of the Cold War.⁶ In Putin's view, the US hegemony after its victory in the Cold War was a historical mistake, which can only be corrected by a multipolar world with Russia being one of its major powers: 'After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability.'⁷ Putin's famous statement about the demise of the Soviet Union as *the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century* has also to be understood in this context and not as mere nostalgia. But the quest for a new, multipolar world order and concomitantly the fight against Western, in particular USA, hegemony had shaped Russian foreign policy long before the crisis in Ukraine. In fact, Russian strategic planning since 2008 has stressed Russia's role as an independent power wielding influence on the world stage, in particular in the post-Soviet states (A. Monaghan, 2013, p. 1230). NATO was established under the North Atlantic Treaty (4 April 1949) by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the USA. Greece and Turkey entered the alliance in 1952, West Germany (now Germany) entered in 1955 and Spain joined in 1982. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined 5 years later, and Albania and Croatia joined in 2009, bringing the membership to 28. NATO maintains headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The treaty, one of the major Western countermeasures against the threat of aggression by the defunct Soviet Union during the Cold War, was aimed at safeguarding the freedom of the North Atlantic community. Considering an armed attack on any member an attack against all, the treaty provided for collective self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The treaty was also designed to encourage political, economic and social cooperation. The organisation was reorganised and centralised in 1952 and has undergone subsequent reorganisation.

The Warsaw Treaty Organization (also known as the Warsaw Pact) was a political and military alliance established on 14 May 1955 between the defunct Soviet Union and several Eastern European countries. The former formed this alliance as a counterbalance to the NATO. By the 1980s, the Warsaw Treaty Organization was beset by problems related

⁴Website of the President of Russia, 'Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine', 4 March 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6763>.

⁵The percentage of »yes« votes on Crimea in 2014 was about 3 points lower than the official results of the Austrian plebiscite on Anschluss in 1938.

⁶W. R. Mead, 'The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers', 17 April 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141211/walter-russell-mead/the-return-of-geopolitics>.

⁷V. Putin, 'Address by President of the Russian Federation', 18 March 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>.

to the economic slowdown in all Eastern European countries. By the late 1980s, political changes in most of the member states made the Pact virtually ineffectual. In September 1990, East Germany left the Pact in preparation for reunification with West Germany. By October, (former) Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland had withdrawn from all Warsaw Pact military exercises. The Warsaw Pact officially disbanded in March and July of 1991 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty on 1 November 1993. It is a political and economic union between European countries that makes its own policies concerning the members' economies, societies, laws and to some extent security. The EU was not created in one go by the Maastricht Treaty but was the result of gradual integration since 1945, an evolution when one level of union has been seen to work, giving confidence and impetus for a next level. The forerunner organisation of the EU was founded by six member states: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined, followed in 1981 by Greece and in 1986 by Spain and Portugal. This gave rise to the Europe of 12. Then, in 1995, Austria, Finland and Sweden acceded to the EU, forming the Europe of 15. In 2004, the European family expanded considerably when 10 new member states joined: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the organisation, followed by Croatia in July 2013, bringing the total number of member states to 28. Five more countries have also applied for membership: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidates. In this way, the EU can be said to have been formed by the demands of its member nations. Over half a century after its establishment, the EU is adapting to its successive phases of enlargement by inventing a new way of formulating policy, in a bid to make its workings simpler and clearer. The Lisbon Treaty sets out the course for EU integration in the 21st century in line with the concerns of its citizens and people around the world.

Membership lists of NATO and the EU seem initially so similar with 78% of EU members also belonging to NATO, while 75% of NATO members belong to the EU.

Since the end of the Cold War the 'institutional debate' on European security has implicitly concerned the issue of whether, eventually, the EU would coalesce into a sufficiently strong and stable political actor such that it would replace NATO as the

preeminent European security institution. This discussion has been mirrored by a series of much broader politico-ideological debates over US 'decline' and 'the rise of Europe' in the 21st century.

On the former, see, for example, Kagan R (2002) *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf), Nye J S (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs), Vedrine H (2007) *History Strikes Back—How States, Nations and Conflicts are Shaping the 21st Century* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), Darwin J (2007) *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin), Kagan R (2008) *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (London: Atlantic Books) and Chua A (2009) *Day of Empire—How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance, and How They Fall* (New York: First Anchor Books). On the latter, see also Reid T R (2004) *The United States of Europe* (London: Penguin), Rifkin J (2004) *The European Dream—How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (Cambridge: Polity Press), McCormick J *The European Superpower* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan), Leonard M (2005) *Why Europe will Run the 21st Century* (London: Harper Collins), Cooper R (2007) *The Breaking of Nations—Order and Chaos in the 21st Century* (London: Atlantic Books) and Youngs R (2010) *Europe's Decline and Fall—The Struggle against Global Irrelevance* (London: Profile Books).

Ever since the break-up of the defunct Soviet Union, various initiatives seeking to (re)integrate the newly independent republics have been launched. Just 2 years prior to joining World Trade Organisation (WTO), Russia formed the ECU with Belarus and Kazakhstan pointing to a more regionalist approach, accompanied by rising tariffs in the partner countries. Because the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan was ratified in November 2009, regional integration within this institution has proceeded at a rapid pace. A common external tariff was implemented in January 2010 and was able to harmonise more than 85% of tariff from the outset. This meant, on average, small external tariff declines for Russia and Belarus, while increases for Kazakhstan were very pronounced.⁸

⁸Estevadeordal *et al.* (2008) analyse the impact of the customs unions of Latin American countries and find no tariff complementarity of preferential liberalisation on external tariffs/Estevadeordal, A., Freund, C. and Ornelas, E. (2008). Does regionalism affects trade liberalization toward nonmembers? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(4):1531–1575.

There are far reaching plans to further develop the customs union into a common economic space modelled after early European integration policies. There are current attempts to extend the membership of the Customs Union to other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, in particular Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine and possible associated revision of bound tariffs for these countries.

PERSPECTIVE ON THE FUTURE EUROPE AND RUSSIA IRREDENTISM

Post-Soviet Russia opened itself to integration with the rest of the world. In the traditional, 19th century world order, nationalism was a domestic affair: it was about building one's nation-state through a process of internal homogenisation and maybe territorial conquest. In the post-1989 world, nationality policy was internationalised. It is no longer solely, or even mainly, an issue of domestic politics. It is about managing borders, defining citizenship, handling migration flows and generally adhering to international norms regarding protection of ethnic minorities. While the Russian state drifted through the 1990s without a coherent ethnicity policy, it was forced to explain its actions to an alphabet group of international organisations—the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe and its Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and so on.⁹ This forced it, willy-nilly, to articulate a set of policies, in response, for example, to the report of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities.¹⁰

The way in which ethnic politics sits astride and is connected to domestic and international policy and to Russian state goals is most vividly illustrated by the situation in the Caucasus. Russia's backing for secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1992 drew Moscow very directly into ethnic politics south of the Caucasus mountains.

The Chechen rebellion in turn drew support, psychological and practical, from the south Caucasus, and Islamist radicals sought to spread the

insurgency into neighbouring Dagestan, Ingushetiya and North Ossetia. This cycle continued into the Putin era.

The Kremlin's encouragement of Abkhazian and South Ossetian secession as a tool to advance Russian state goals in the region eventually culminated in Russia's war with Georgia in the summer of 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition of the sovereignty of those two break-away republics. Putin brought stability and order to the Russian political system but made little progress in trying to clear up the ambiguities in Russian ethnic policy. Rather, he tried to restructure state institutions to limit any possibility for using ethnicity to challenge Moscow's political power. Putin preferred a 'statist nationalism' that served his interest in consolidating power at home and projecting it abroad while keeping potential ethnic conflicts in check. In this, he was fairly successful, more through guile than through direct confrontation. But Putin largely failed to articulate a clear vision for the future of Russian national identity and the place of the non-Russian peoples within it.

In the EU circuit, the Russian Federation is one of the most important partners. A key priority of the EU is to build a strong strategic partnership with Russia based on a solid foundation of mutual respect. Russia is the largest neighbour of the EU, brought even closer by the Union's 2004 and 2007 enlargements. The 2003 EU Security Strategy highlights Russia as a key player in geopolitical and security terms at both the global and regional levels. Russia is also a major supplier of energy products to the EU. Russia is a large, dynamic market for EU goods and services, with considerable economic growth. The EU's market, on the other hand, is by far the most important destination for Russian exports. Companies from the EU are the main investors in Russia.

Underscoring the nexus of Russian and European continent's survival and destiny, Putin wrote, 'I strongly believe the full unity of our continent can never be achieved until Russia, as the largest European state, becomes an integral part of the European process. (...) Today, building a sovereign democratic state, we share the values and principles of the vast majority of Europeans. (...) A stable, prosperous and united Europe is in our interest. (...) The development of multifaceted ties with the EU is Russia's principled choice.'¹¹

However, since 2008, Russia and the EU have been negotiating a new agreement on partnership

⁹See, for example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports on Russia, at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/countries/ru/index.htm>.

¹⁰For the Russian government's response to the Committee's assessment of Russian policy early in the Putin era, see http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_1st_Com_RussianFederation_en.pdf.

¹¹Vladimir Putin's letter to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the European Union, 25 March 2007.

and cooperation. Notwithstanding, progress on this path was sluggish. The negative attitude towards Russia fuelled by countries that recently had become members of the EU ('new Europe') constituted a substantial obstacle on the way of improvement of the Russia-EU relations. In particular, Poland, Lithuania and some other East-European countries seemed to have a conflicting potential due to the history of their relations with the Russian Empire, the former Soviet Union and also the Russian Federation. The diaspora in Western countries with origins from Eastern Europe counting millions of people also played a very crucial role in terms of the respective opinion-making activity.

Russia's WTO accession has slowed the progress of negotiations. At the suggestion of the EU, talks were frozen in order to understand the conditions under which Russia would enter the WTO.¹² Since its accession in 2012, informal expert consultations resumed.

Russia became the third (after the USA and China) trading partner of the EU. The European import of Russian energy accounted for more than a half of Russian foreign trade; more than two-thirds of the foreign investments into the Russian economy also came from Europe. Bilateral relations, primarily in the economic dimension, developed successfully with Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and several other European countries. Russia also suggested elaborating an EU-Eurasian Union agreement on the free trade zone. At the Sochi summit (2006), Russia and the EU agreed about the necessity to work out a new basic agreement on strategic partnership.

Negotiations on a new basic agreement with the EU highlighted other numerous disagreements. Problems of visa-free regime and energy policy also kept the stage for confrontation. The Council of Europe (Russia joined it in 1996) criticised the Russians for human rights violation and the use of energy supplies as an instrument of political pressure as well as for other issues. The Third Energy Package (2009), aimed at weakening energy suppliers' control over the pipelines and distribution network, was of particular concern for Russia. Russia regarded this Package a 'discriminatory measure', first of all against Gazprom, which is the Europe's main gas supplier.¹³ Minister Lavrov claimed that 'attempts to retrospectively apply the

Third Energy Package were not in line with the standards of international law'.¹⁴ At the Russia-EU summit (January 2014) when relations became tense because of the Ukrainian crisis, the parties managed to agree only upon one document 'Joint EU-Russia statement on combating terrorism'.¹⁵

The situation worsened after the annexation of Crimea and the imposition of sanctions. In April 2014, Russia filed a complaint at the WTO against the EU's energy market laws enacted in 2009, claiming that they violate international rules. These laws ban suppliers from owning transit facilities such as gas pipelines and would force Gazprom to allow third-party gas producers to use the South Stream pipeline. On 1 December 2014, during his state visit to Turkey, Putin announced that Russia was withdrawing from the South Stream project, blaming Western sanctions and the lack of construction permits on the territory of the EU.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The developments of Russia-EU relations belong to the global interdependence agenda. That is why it seems that constructive partnership with countries included in the European Neighborhood Policy and in the Eastern Partnership programme as well as qualitative improvements of the Russia-US relations should be an important precondition for a successful advancement in the Russia-EU cooperation.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Olatubosun Matthew Aihonsu studied Political Science between 1990 and 1994/1995 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Thereafter, he did his Master's (MSc) degree program in Political Science with the University of Lagos, Nigeria. These universities are ranked very high in academic coursework and research in Africa. Aihonsu, Olatubosun is an outstanding scholar with high research qualities. His overall BSc performance and grade point average at the undergraduate level was among the best in his class. The quality and result of Mr. Aihonsu's Master's degree program was excellent in the Nigerian context. It was actually among the top 5% of all the departmental results in the year of his graduation. His result is comparable with 80%+ of the

¹²Interview by vice-minister for foreign affairs, A. Meshkov, 6 February 2014. http://www.mid.ru/bdcomp/brp_4.nsf/fa711a859c4b939643256999005bcbbc/02bfe3f89658fdca44257c7700480286!OpenDocument.

¹³<http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=4555>

¹⁴http://www.mid.ru/bdcomp/brp_4.nsf/sps/001AA34D8D8CACED44257D0F00530B8D

¹⁵http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/140835.pdf.

full marking and grading spectrum of a standard international university. Olatubosun's scholarly pedigree and teaching experience are exceptionally resourceful and invaluable to the body of knowledge in International Relations particularly regional cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa. He worked as a Resource Person, Public Administration, Political Science and History and International Relations at Lagos State University External System,

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