

# Is Ideological Competition in Europe Necessary?

Written by Nicolai N. Petro

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NICOLAI N. PETRO, JAN 28 2011

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Ideological competition, especially in Europe, was supposed to end with the Cold War. There are two leading explanations for why it did not. The first says that a Cold War mentality persists because former Soviet elites failed to acknowledge their defeat. As a result, they did not embrace modern, Western values. This failure has led to a "values gap" that is preventing progress.[1]

The second explanation says that a Cold War mentality persists because Western elites refused to treat the collapse of the Soviet Union as a "negotiated settlement," to use former Ambassador Jack Matlock's phrase.[2] Western elites have refused to acknowledge Russia's contribution to ending the Cold War in order to assume the dominant position in the relationship. This dominance is manifested in the so-called "values gap" which Western elites use to promote their own political and economic interests.

These two positions seem quite far apart, which supports the idea that ideological competition is with us to stay, despite the end of the Cold War. I would like to suggest, however, that these two perspectives actually have much in common, and that recognizing this commonality opens the door for meaningful dialogue.

The first commonality is that both approaches view ideological competition as undesirable. It is universally decried as a relic of the past that ought to be behind us. The only debate is over "how" to put it behind us. The similarities are even deeper when one looks at the solutions proposed for overcoming ideological competition. According to the first view, more commonly held in the West, the solution is to transform Russian culture through *metanoia*—a repentance of the past. It is anticipated that such repentance will be followed by a cathartic rejection of the past, which will make way for a common European future built on modern Western values.

In the second view, more commonly held in the East, the solution is the transformation of Western culture through *metanoia*—a repentance of its heritage of cultural and religious colonialism. It is anticipated that this will be followed by a cathartic rejection of the assumption that Western development is the only path to human progress, which will allow for a common European future to be built on pan-European cultural values.

Thus, both explanations for the persistence of ideological confrontation acknowledge the need for a profound cultural shift in European society, both reject the past division of the continent, and both seek to establish a common European framework of values.

Why, then, has the values gap between Eastern and Western Europe been growing? The deeper answer probably lies in unaddressed historical and cultural animosities that go back centuries. Sir Steven Runciman once ironically observed that the Fourth Crusade came at the climax of a period when Latins and Greeks got to know each other more and more, and decided that they could not stand each other.

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Despite the heroic efforts of a handful of scholars to cast Byzantium in a slightly more favorable light,[3] James H. Billington's remark that ignorance and neglect of our Byzantine heritage has been "a fixture of all the mistaken conventional wisdom" about Eastern Europe remains as true today as when he wrote it twenty years ago.[4] The cast of influential American academics who have actually written that the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire represent an insurmountable values fault line, reads like a *Who's Who* of US foreign policy advisors, for both Democratic and Republican presidents.[5] We are, to no small extent, culturally conditioned to treat ideological competition as the norm in East-West relations.

But if ending ideological competition were as easy as learning to appreciate our similarities, that would be reason for optimism. Europeans, after all, have faced this situation before. The late Sir Herbert Butterfield recalls that:

"In the days of my own childhood, it was still the English against the French, these latter being the traditional enemy. I can remember even now the schoolbook which said that the English owed all their freedom to their kinship with the Germans, for liberty went back to the Teutons in their primeval forests. The Reformation, the emancipation of religion, came from Martin Luther, and Germany in any case had long enjoyed federal government, state rights and even free, independent, self-governing cities, like Hamburg. The antithesis to all this was to be found in the Latin countries. I still remember how it was all spelt out: Italy stood for the Papacy, Spain had had the Inquisition, while France, twice over, if you please, had chosen to live under Napoleonic dictatorships, an evil which, in my young days, had as yet had no parallel in other countries." [6]

All that would be required is to apply this lesson to Russia, and to the rest of what Sir Dmitry Obolensky called "the Byzantine Commonwealth," recognizing its cultural heritage as our own. If as German Bundespraesident Christian Wulff recently put it, "Islam is part of Germany" [*Der Islam gehoert zu Deutschland*], then surely Orthodox Christianity, the inheritor of the Byzantine tradition, should be an even easier fit.

## PRACTICAL STEPS

But perhaps because it is so familiar as well as so alien, accepting Byzantium as a core part of Western identity has proved to be quite a challenge. Until it is, it will remain the source of our unacknowledged misunderstandings of each other. To mitigate the deleterious consequences of such misunderstandings, I recommend taking several practical steps:

(1) **Reassure America** over the loss of its influence in Europe. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's interview in *Der Spiegel* last year brings home the importance of NATO as the rationale for America's continued military presence in Europe.[7] And even though the world has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, this basic aspect of American strategy has not. Europeans would therefore do themselves a favor by reassuring American elites, who greatly fear losing their foothold in Europe, that they will not be marginalized in a more multi-polar world. This will hopefully encourage future American elites to take a more collaborative approach on foreign policy issues.

(2) Move quickly to **anchor Russia to Europe** because, to paraphrase former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder: Russia has a China card to play; Europe does not.[8] Back in 2006 Russia's current president, Dmitry Medvedev, suggested a practical mechanism for accelerating Russia's integration into Europe—an "asset swap" of energy resources.[9]

According to Medvedev, allowing more Russian investment in refinery and distribution in Europe in exchange for more European investment oil and gas extraction in Russia would create a "virtuous cycle" that promotes both efficiency and security. Like the visionary French statesman, Robert Schuman, who proposed a similar arrangement involving the strategic energy resources of his day—coal and steel—Medvedev clearly understood that success lies in mutual vulnerability: "The Europeans say that we are putting them in a tight corner because they come to depend too much on deliveries of Russian gas. Let us exchange assets then, and we will be dependent on them too." [10]

Schuman's proposal led to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, which eventually became the

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European Union. If a new generation of Western leaders could embrace something similar for Russia, Cold War thinking would become obsolete.

**(3) Bring Ukraine into play** as Europe's indispensable partner for bringing Russia into the European Union. Replace the misguided strategy that seeks to weaken Russian influence among its neighbors with one that makes Russia the focal point of European integration, with the aim of building what Spain's ambassador to Russia, Juan Antonio March calls, "a vast space of citizenry called integral Europe." [11]

By rejecting the choice between Russia and the West as a false one, Ukraine's new president Viktor Yanukovich has shown that he shares just such an integral concept of Europe. To reach fruition, however, an integral Europe must embrace its Slavic heritage, of which Ukraine and Russia are both vital parts and incorporate it into a new and more comprehensive paradigm of European identity, one that acknowledges Eastern Orthodoxy as part of its core identity. [12]

**(4) Finally, multiply our approaches to modernity.** The current Cold War paradigm was designed to promote ideological competition, and its only major upgrade during the past two decades has been to recast that competition into a "clash of civilizations." I suggest that we re-examine our basic assumptions about modernization and development along the lines suggested by the late S. N. Eisenstadt, professor of sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His path breaking work on India, China, Japan and the Middle East, demonstrates that these societies exhibited many of the cultural and institutional features typical of modern societies much earlier than traditionally thought.

Eisenstadt concluded that there are many different sets of beliefs and many different institutional paths compatible with modernity and he urged scholars to think in terms of "multiple modernities," rather than a single Western path. Recasting modernization from an imposed value to the rediscovery of a native tradition, would also help to eliminate a fundamental source of the tension that it generates between "the West and the Rest," and actually live up to the true heritage of the West—cultural pluralism. Applying the lessons of multiple modernities to Europe itself might suggest that one model of development that has been sorely neglected is that is that of Byzantium.

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Western Europe's alienation from its own Byzantine roots has done much to perpetuate Cold War divisions in people's minds, long after they have disappeared from the political map. The late German chancellor Helmut Schmidt foresaw this very danger when he wrote, "[O]ur concept of Europe will one day have to once again encompass the whole intellectual and artistic life of our Eastern European neighbors if we do not wish to become impoverished." [13]

It would be an added benefit for all Europeans if, as a result of the latest economic crisis, Ukrainian elites realized the pivotal contribution they could make to European security by re-casting Ukrainian identity from that of a border region (Russia's border with Europe; Europe's border with Russia) into a European cultural center bridging its Eastern and Western halves.

Ideological competition is not only unnecessary, it is a dead end. Still, envisioning an integral Europe that includes Russia has proved to be no easy task. It can be made somewhat easier, however, by regarding it as process of mutual rediscovery. Seen in this light, the ending of Russia's cultural isolation from Europe could also help to revitalize Western identity and, as German president Roman Herzog put it, lead to the healing of Europe's soul. [14]

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[1] Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow, was one of the first to highlight the significance of the "values gap" in Russian-American relations. See his "Human Rights, Civil Society and Freedom of The Press." *Izvestia* (December 10, 2003), cited in Johnson's Russia List #7469; and his "U.S.-Russian Relations After The

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Duma Election: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (January 8, 2004), cited in Johnson's Russia List #8008. It has remained a concern of U.S. foreign policy makers during the "reset." See Nicolai N. Petro, "Mired in a Yawning Divide." *The Moscow Times* (July 13, 2009), cited in Johnson's Russia List #2009-#131.

[2] Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Super-power Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray – And How to Return to Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. ix.

[3] Among them are Helene Ahrweiler, Judith Herrin, Edward Luttwak, Agostino Pertusi, Silvia Ronchey, Warren Treadgold, Sergei Ivanov as well as, more classically, Sergei Averintsev, Steven Runciman and Robert Byron.

[4] James H. Billington, "Looking to the Past," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1990, p. A11.

[5] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993; Michael Mandelbaum, *Democracy's Good Name*. New York: Public Affairs, 2007; Richard Pipes, "Why The Bear Growls." *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2006. Frank Fukuyama,

[6] Herbert Butterfield, *Writings on Christianity and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 54-55.

[7] Condoleeza Rice, "'I Preferred To See It as an Acquisition'." *Spiegel Online (Germany)* (September 29, 2010). Available online at: <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,druck-719444,00.html>> (accessed 10/3/2010).

[8] Gerhard Schroeder, "'Serious Mistakes by the West'," *Spiegel Online (Germany)* (August 18, 2008). Available online at: <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,572686,00.html>> (accessed 9/22/2008).

[9] cit\_bf"Russia's Medvedev Says Western Reaction to Gazprom Aspirations Natural," ITAR-Tass (June 3, 2006)cit\_af ref\_bf( ref\_num14434)ref\_af. A model often cited in the asset swap in April 2006 concluded between German chemical company BASF and Gazprom that gave BASF a 35 percent stake in the Yuzhno-Ruskoye natural gas field in exchange for 50 percent minus one share in Wingas, giving Gazprom access to selling and marketing natural gas in Europe. cit\_bfcit\_af ref\_bf( ref\_num15658)ref\_af

[10] Valery cit\_bfFadeyev, "Everyone's Interests Should Be Taken Into Account for The Sake of Prosperity of All: An Interview With Senior Deputy Premier Dmitry Medvedev," *Ekspert* No 28 (522), (July 24-30, 2006).cit\_af ref\_bf(Fadeyev, ref\_num14767)ref\_af

[11] "Hemos a llegar a un gran espacio de ciudadanos que se llame la Europa integral," cited in Eva Peruga, "Juan Antonio March: «Rusia es de la familia de Europa»." *El Periodico (Spain)* (June 21, 2009). Available online at: <[http://www.elperiodico.com/default.asp?idpublicacio\\_PK=46&idioma=CAS&idnoticia\\_PK=623166&idseccio\\_PK](http://www.elperiodico.com/default.asp?idpublicacio_PK=46&idioma=CAS&idnoticia_PK=623166&idseccio_PK)> (accessed 6/23/2009).

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[12] See Nicolai N. Petro, "Reversing Field: A Ukraine-Russia Relationship America Can Love," *The American Interest*, vol. 6, No. 2 (November-December 2010), pp. 37-42.

[13] Helmut Schmidt, "Byzantium and the East Is Part of Europe and It Should Be," *European Prospect* (1979). Available online at: <[http://www.ellopos.net/politics/eu\\_schmidt.html](http://www.ellopos.net/politics/eu_schmidt.html)> (accessed 2/21/2007).

[14] Roman Herzog, "Europe Needs Russian Soul." *RIA Novosti* (September 2, 199[7]).

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**Nicolai N. Petro** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Rhode Island. He received his PhD in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia in 1984. During the collapse of the Soviet Union, he served as special assistant for policy in the US State Department. He is the author or editor of eight books and has written about Russia and Ukraine for many publications, including *The American Interest*, *Asia Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Nation*, *The National Interest*, and *The New York Times*. In 2013-2014, he was a Fulbright Research Scholar in Ukraine working on his latest book, *Blessed Is the Kingdom: The Orthodox Church and the Struggle for the Soul of Modern Russia*, which is under contract to Stanford University Press.