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"Russia is a European State" – Or Is It?

The reason for citing Catherine II's statement in the title of my remarks is not because I intend to examine the truth of the statement as such. Certainly, there is a case to be made that Russia actually *is* 'European'. In many ways traditional life in Russia (in the heartlands) resembles traditional life in 'Europe' (Ireland, Spain, rural Italy, France...). It is reasonable – if controversial – to perceive Russia as a European culture that has expanded into the Asian steppe. The impact of cultural association with the Mongol Empire (what used to be termed 'the Tatar yoke') can perfectly well be compared with the legacies of Mudejar rule in Spain; and to say 'Spain is part of Europe' would be to state a universally accepted view. But there are counter-arguments to be made as well, the most telling of which is the nebulousness of the term 'Europe' to begin with. Do we mean by this a land mass? A particular association of nation states? A territory shaped by a given set of historical forces? The medieval heartlands of Christianity? The heartlands of Western Christianity? The cradle of 'Western civilisation' (whatever that also is?) The answers are disputed, even in vernacular contexts. I recall a discussion of the issue at a round-table on 'Europe and the Humanities' in Oxford in 2004, when the historian Edward Acton pointed out that, in the post-colonial Africa where he was brought up, 'European' simply meant anyone white. My British students at Oxford now regularly describe themselves as 'Europeans', but in my childhood the locution 'the Continent' was still commonly used. An Italian who first moved to England in the 1950s, Anna del Conte, recalls:

In Holland Villas Road I gradually began to feel more at home in England. I also began to understand the English better, though I still didn't feel I had much in common with them. I realised that we Italians were closer even to the Scandinavians than the English. Continental Europe is a continent, with people sharing quite a few social and cultural habits. Those twenty-two miles of water, the English channel, are far longer than the Atlantic Ocean. The English, I discovered, were not Europeans. And they are still not today.¹

As a denizen of those strange islands, I would point out that this is true only if by 'the English' one really means 'the English'. Things are different in Ireland, and indeed in Scotland – where the social elite traditionally sent its children to study in Europe, rather than London. Further, you can't be brought up as a Catholic in the British Isles, as I was, and think that London is the *only* centre of the world. But Anna del Conte has a point; the character of English Fascism, for instance, has always been parochial – what is known as 'Little Englandism'.

Something of the same kind could be said about Russia, where adherence to 'traditions' is tenacious, but doesn't have much payoff in terms of lasting political allegiances. This may be the legacy of Empire, perhaps. Geoffrey Hosking, in his book, *Russia: People and Empire* has made an argument – with an eye to an implied comparison between Russia and Britain -- that imperial expansion hinders the development of a strong sense of nation-statehood. Imperial identity certainly hinders the development of other forms of *transnational* connection – from the adherence to worldwide religious confessions to the development of affinities with ideal transnational communities such as Europe, or more narrowly, 'the European Union'. Russia's relationship with Europe – whether the country is part of this, or not – has been, for the past two hundred years, a vexed question,

¹ Anna del Conte. *Risotto with Nettles*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2009. Pp. 191-2.

and that is what I want to look at now. As someone brought up during the Cold War, I am very glad that it is now possible to listen carefully to the statements that Russians make about their own culture – as one would with any other country. The nature of Soviet propaganda was such that it would have been foolish to do this – not because these statements had no meaning, but because their pretensions to speaking for universal opinion in the country were so blatantly misplaced.

So let's consider the immediate context of Catherine II's statement. **SLIDE 2.** It occurs in the foreword to her *Nakaz* of 1766-1768, whose title was translated in Mikhail Tatischeff's official English-language rendering of 1768 as *The grand instructions to the commissioners appointed to frame a new code of laws for the Russian Empire: composed by Her Imperial Majesty Catherine II. Empress of all the Russias*. 'Composed' is an honorific way of putting it, since the text was largely dependent on a mélange of materials from Montesquieu and the *Encyclopédie*. To adapt the old saying, 'Punctuality is the politeness of princes', one might say that plagiarism is the flattery of emperors.

However, the local significance of Catherine's text was enormous. The Grand Instructions, the first Russian legal code for over 100 years, set out a framework for state organisation and legislation that precisely aimed to make Russia an enlightened 'European' monarchy on the model of Prussia or Austria. The historical paradox was that the Grand Instructions entrenched certain social institutions – notably serfdom, and more broadly, the hierarchy of social estates, which were on the point of being discarded as it was written. Russia's 'Europeanisation' would make it look, in the nineteenth century, 'Asiatic'. But in terms of directing the country's self-image – the adherence of the elite to ideal models of 'Western civilisation' – the Grand Instructions were fundamental. Where Peter the Great's relationship with Europe was instrumental and practical – transforming the country required foreign knowledge and technology – Catherine's was also philosophical. Her statement that Russia was a European state had constitutive force.

At the same time, the adherence to 'European civilisation' was a conflicted position. Opponents of Catherine's enlightened despotism could point to 'European' precedent as legitimation for political change – a tendency that of course increased after the French Revolution. Conservatives, on the other hand, condemned change as hostile to the moral fabric of the nation. An example of this latter trend was Mikhail Shcherbatov's *O povrezhdenii nraov v Rossii* (written in 1786 or 1787), **SLIDE 3**, a pioneering example of a national tendency to attribute the country's woes to failed modernisation:

Verily I may say that, though having entered later than other peoples on to the path of enlightenment, we had nothing left to us but to engage our good sense in following the tracks of peoples that had come to enlightenment earlier than us, yet we never the less genuinely had great and astonishing successes in sociability [lyudskost'] and in other things. We took giant steps towards the correction of our external appearances, all the while rushing still more hastily to the ruination of our morals; and thus we soon attained a position where faith and the law of God were destroyed in our hearts, and where the divine mysteries had fallen into contempt. Likewise civil laws had come to be despised. Judges in all things did not so much strive, when expounding a case, to base their conclusions on the law of the land, as to profit by venality and by selling their judgements, or by currying favour with every grandee, to worm their way wherever they would go, while others, ignorant of the laws and making no effort to correct their ignorance, staggered around like madmen, so that neither life, nor honour, nor property were safe from the depredations of such judges.

Shcherbatov also initiated a long tendency in Russian conservative thought of espousing modern, 'European', political and ethical vocabulary (notably, 'enlightenment'), while at the same time repudiating the effects of Westernisation on Russia.

There was also an officially-sponsored version of conservatism. Catherine II's reign, as Richard Wortman has discussed in his authoritative study of court ceremonial, *Scenarios of Power*, saw a significant rise in the sense of national specificity. This went beyond state rituals: in 1783, Mikhail Chulkov published *The Dictionary of Russian Superstitions*, later republished as *The Alphabet of Russian Superstitions*, a pioneering collection of Russian customs and beliefs. One notes, after all, the emphasis on 'customs' and 'climate' in Catherine's own statement in the *Grand Instructions*.

At this period, there was no particular sense that Russia's location to the East was of much significance. The geographical orientation much more often invoked was 'Northern' (as, once again, in the *Grand Instructions*). Larry Wolff's interesting book, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, **SLIDE 4**, has argued that both the concept of 'Western Europe' and the concept of 'Eastern Europe' emerged during the European Enlightenment: to quote him verbatim: 'It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment.' (p. 4). But Wolff simplifies by seeing this as a West-East relationship, when in fact educated people from the East played their part in 'inventing' it too – and also in responding to Western constructs of the 'East', whether by internalising these or by rejecting them.

The way that Russian culture was imagined at this point was very often reactive. Accounts by travellers of their adventures had an explosive effect (Catherine II herself spent time rebutting the remarks of a French visitor), though in fact travellers were much more complimentary than in earlier centuries – a sample comment from the sixteenth century was the poetaster George Turberville's poem beginning 'A people passing rude, to vices vile inclined'. The point was that Russians could now read what was written about them in French, German, and English, and that they measured themselves by the same yardstick. 'Civilisation' and 'Western' were taken to belong together. Equally, by the late eighteenth century a Russian tradition of criticising Western Europeans where they fell below the expected standards of refinement and civilisation had begun (as in Nikolai Karamzin's travelogue, *Letters of a Russian Traveller*).

But the Napoleonic invasion put an end to this: now, it became questionable whether civilisation and the West could be identified at all. There was an enormous revolt, particularly against French culture, as expressed in an upsurge of political cartoons – this period saw the first flowering of the Russian caricature. **SLIDE 5, SLIDE 6**. Often, the visual assaults on Westerners were of an explicitly scatological kind – for example, one cartoon of the period represented a French cosmetic shop as a place where an assistant sat triumphantly on a commode, while others sold what she had produced in the form of face-cream. Thus began a national practice of using deliberately coarse expression and behaviour in order to undermine the pretensions of Western refined culture.

The euphoric aftermath of the Congress of Vienna saw a new self-confidence in Russian culture. At the same time – as in the aftermath of victory in the Second World War – contact with the West also generated insecurities. The most famous expression of these was Petr Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters* (1826-1831), an early example of *samizdat*, which excoriated the superficiality and rootlessness of Russian life, and accused the culture of lacking memory and respect for tradition. **SLIDE 7**. The *Letters* remain the most potent statement of the case of the prosecution – many of the most hostile critics of the Russian 'national character' over the years have been Russians. While regarded as the foundational text of 'Westernising' thought, Chaadaev's collection of letters was equally resonant in

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terms of what later came to be called the 'Slavophile' movement – the doctrine that Russia had her own specific path, to which she must return if dignity were to be restored.

According to a paradox that has often been pointed out, Russian thinkers asserted national specificity using intellectual frameworks that come from the West. For example, when Ivan Kireevsky, pupil of Hegel and Schelling, asserted the centrality of samobytnost' (the particular character of Russia), he was drawing attention to something akin to what German thinkers called the Sonderweg.

But whatever the means used to argue, the fact of Russia's separate destiny was widely accepted. From the 1830s, the Tsarist regime began to identify itself much more explicitly with national traditions. The ideological architect of the new style was Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov, who, in a circular of 21 March 1833, named the purpose of popular education as 'Orthodoxy, autocracy, national-populism [the original word is narodnost', which is close to Volkstümlichkeit]. **SLIDE 8.** In the same year, royal ceremonial was also 'nationalised'. Court dress in the 'Russian style', which remained in use till 1917 (these images are from the 1903 costumed ball in the style of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich's court in the mid-seventeenth century). **SLIDE 9** The sense of Russia's particularity as a culture was enhanced by the widening of study of pre-Petrine Russia, for so that the reign of Peter himself came to represent a historical break.

As a result, what one could term a sort of 'smorgasbord' attitude to Europe developed. It is possible to combine pickled fish and fruit compote on the same plate, though this might surprise the person who had set out the food. Equally, Russians might, say, repudiate Western education, but not Western medicine and sanitation – as in the case of the Slavophile writer Ekaterina Avdeeva. They might repudiate all these things, but not Western philosophy (as in the case of Tolstoy).

How, one might ask, did *Eastern* Europe fit in? This was of more or less no interest in the eighteenth century – there is no evidence that Catherine's predatory attitude to Poland was in any sense directed by the idea that the Poles and the Russians were close. But with Romantic interests in the origins and innate characteristics of language and culture came a new interest in cross-border affinities. For Pushkin, the Poles were a source of irritation, but also naturally close allies. The analogy used in his famous polemical poem of 1831, 'To the Slanders of Russia', was that of the 'domestic' relationship – that between man and wife:

SLIDE 10

What is this noise about, orators of the people?

Why do you threaten Russia with anathema?

What has made you indignant? The stirrings of Lithuania?

Leave off: this is a quarrel of Slavs among themselves,

A domestic, old quarrel, weighed up by fate,

A question that you will never solve.

In the draft of a letter written in the summer of 1831, Pushkin lamented: 'Embittered Europe now attacks Russia not with weapons for the meantime, but with daily, rabid slander', thus pointing to a polarisation between 'Russia' and 'Europe' that would have been considered very odd in the 1760s. **SLIDE 11.**

In time, this desultory sense of the Slavonic 'family' - 'a quarrel of Slavs among themselves' - became converted into the officially sponsored doctrine of Panslavism, reaching its apogee in the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. It should be said that such views always had fierce opposition. For example, a poem by the prominent salon hostess and

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talented poet Countess Evdokiya Rostopchina, written in 1845, represented the suppression of Poland in terms of an 'unequal marriage' between an ingénue and her despotic husband.

Direct attack on Europe was not always the preferred response. There was also the possibility of withdrawal into one's own preoccupations, and the emergence of a determination not to be interested in the outside world, as an anecdote repeated by the great semiotician Yuri Lotman humorously illustrates: **SLIDE 12.**

It's characteristic that in Russia you can be a 'Westerniser' without ever having been to the West, without knowing any languages and even without taking any interest in the real West. Turgenev remembers walking with Belinsky [the famous literary critic] round Paris and being struck by the latter's complete indifference to the French life going on round him. 'I remember him seeing the Place de la Concorde for the first time and saying, "It's true, isn't it? It really is one of the most beautiful squares in the world?" And when I confirmed this he replied, "Well, that's wonderful, so now I know – so let's go somewhere else! Basta!"

And with that Belinsky started talking about Russian literature.

Petersburg was itself held to be a 'European' city, as opposed to the 'Asiatic', or 'true Russian', or both, Moscow (this binary opposition is extensively developed in an essay by the very same Vissarion Belinsky). It became increasingly common for Russians to feel that knowing Petersburg meant knowing Europe. Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* recollected jadedly how the writer had arrived, most uncomfortably, in Berlin, and decided the trip wasn't worth it in any case **SLIDE 13:**

And whence came my fatal mistake? Without doubt from the fact that I, a sick man, suffering with my liver, galloped for two days on the train through rain and fog to Berlin and, arriving there with too little sleep, bright yellow, worn out, a broken man, discovered that Berlin is more like Petersburg than you would believe. The same espaliered streets, the same smells, the same... (but I won't repeat the whole list!)

The sense that Petersburg was 'European', and uncongenial because of this, was widespread. Turgenev's 1864 story 'The Phantoms' had the narrator carried all over Europe by a mysterious female companion, 'Ellis', who showed him the beauties of Rome and Lago Maggiore, and also a Russian provincial town, topped by its church domes and belltowers. And then eventually they came to Petersburg:

SLIDE 14

'Who goes there?' a long cry rang in my ears.

'Who goes there?' resounded in the distance, apparently despairing.

'Who goes there?' – the sound froze somewhere at the edge of the world. I shuddered. A tall gold spire thrust itself into my sight. I recognised the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The northern, pale night! And was this night? Was it not some sickly, pale day? I have never liked the Petersburg nights, but this time I took fright; the image of Ellis vanished completely, melting like morning mist in the sun of July, and I could see my entire body hanging heavy and alone, level with the top of the Alexander Column. So this was Petersburg! Yes, this was certainly it. These empty, wide, grey streets; these greyish-white, yellow-grey, grey-mauve, plastered and smeared houses, with their sunken windows, their bright signs, the metal awnings over their porches and the wretched vegetable stalls, those facades, inscriptions, kiosks, packs of cards, the gold dome of Isaac's, the useless bright stock exchange, the granite walls of the fortress and the wrecked wooden pavement, the barges with hay and firewood, the smell of dust, cabbages, sacking and stables, those

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yardmen turned to stone in their sheepskins by the gates, those cabbies twisted in deathly sleep on their downtrodden carriages – yes, none else but our Northern Palmyra.
(Turgenev, *The Phantoms*, ch. 22)

Notably, the first thing that Turgenev's narrator sees as he approaches St Petersburg is a *prison* – the place was defined in the Russian literary imagination by its places of incarceration as surely as ancien régime Paris by the Bastille, or Stendhal's imaginary Parma by its *chartreuse*. But this was in radical contrast to the 'real Russian' city, where church and kremlin dominated.

This did not of course mean that the relationship with Europe always had to be depressive. In Panslavism, Russian ideologues created an alternative map of Europe – one split down the middle on grounds of language and culture, and dominated, in its Eastern part, by Russia. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of an increasingly bullish attitude to the relationship with the rest of Europe, driven both by imperial expansion and by enhanced prosperity. Expansion into Asia was to produce a new sense of steppe-wide affinity – which in time developed into the influential movement in political thought known as Eurasianism. It is amusing to note, however, that once again Russian 'separatism' bore the traces of Western influence. Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Westens* represented Russia as an exception from the general trend of European decline. His ideas were later to be particularly important for the late Eurasianist Lev Gumilev, whose treatise *Old Russia and the Great Steppe* has important echoes of Spengler.

However, 'Europe' was not just a component in ideology. The sense of a European location was also fundamental in the arts. Vladimir Nabokov quite rightly insisted that all educated Russians were at home in European culture as much as they were in Russian culture – sometimes, in fact, more at home. Of his own childhood he remembered, '

During one of his short stays with us in the country [my father] ascertained, with patriotic dismay, that my brother and I could read and write English but not Russian (except for KAKAO and MAMA). [Speak, Memory, p. 24].

The doubling of the letters themselves speaks as the doubling of consciousness and sensibility. This little sketch is, one might say, a work of conceptual art – a visual pun with philosophical significance. And many great Russian works of art arose from a comparable doubling – so that Anna Karenina, for example, is the alter ego, or perhaps one should say, polemically re-imagined double, of Emma Bovary, but still more strikingly, a much more richly imagined after-image of Lady Glencora Palliser, the vibrant younger woman married to a dry husband in Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865).

In the visual arts, links were even closer. From the eighteenth century onwards, most serious Russian artists trained in the West, or at the very least, by copying Western paintings and sculptures. Their work was for the most part distinguished from that of their Western counterparts more by thematics than by technique. And when Russian artists did begin looking beyond the academic tradition, this was at first under the impact of art movements outside the country, such as Fauvism and Cubism – helped by the imaginative purchasing of collectors such as Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov.

It was at this period, the start of the twentieth century, that two 'Russian styles' were invented which have kept coming back since. One of these was a swashbuckling 'Moscow' style derived from peasant handicrafts and costume, and also from the street art of early twentieth-century Russian cities – broad-brush-stroke, busy with impasto. The other was a more restrained, flat, almost prim manner of handling that was much closer to

traditional icon-painting. Both styles are recognisably 'Russian' even when the subject-matter is not. Both have allegiances to the colour palette and decorative traditions of Russian folk art, commercial art, and icon-painting. (Prokudin-Gorskii, **SLIDES 16-21**). The resonance can be seen not just in the first generation of Russian modernists, but also in later ones, such as Grisha Bruskin or (as here) Viktor Pivovarov.

The Revolution led to a fundamental break in the previous relationship with Europe. Within the Soviet Union, interest in Europe was muted. During the 1920s, internationalism ruled. In the words of the proletarian poet Il'ya Sadof'ev:

People-brothers! I have come to you,
Waving my scarlet silk...
With the echo, the ring of new language
To report the Red news,
People-brothers, of all dialects,
Of all tribes and all places,
Of giant cities, of towers,
Of streets like vaults and tunnels,
Of tumbledown huts and peaceful pastures,
Of all heights and valleys and ravines,
Of South, West, and East...

(Il'ya Sadof'ev, 'The World Comrade' [Vsemirnyi tovarishch], *Dinamo*, Petrograd, 1918)

The ultimate internationalist style, free of all local connotations, was abstraction – whether in the form of constructivism or of suprematism, as shown here in a design by Suetin **SLIDE 22**.

In the late 1930s, however, the emphasis shifted to 'socialism in one country' and 'the friendship of Soviet nations'. Now, the attempt to create a new society with a new national identity made America seem a more striking parallel for the state's endeavours. The Soviet Union's international ambitions were far larger than establishing any connection with 'Europe'. The popular culture of the Soviet Union started to be driven by US-style advertising techniques. Take the artwork for the famous Stalin-era cookbook, *The Book of Tasty and Nutritious Food* (first produced in 1939, but constantly reprinted in the post-war years, and in the post-Stalin era, with print-runs of half a million copies). **SLIDE 23, SLIDE 24**. 'Serious' Soviet art of the postwar years might be 'Western' in a technical sense, but bore little relation to contemporary art norms elsewhere in the world, except, again, America – compare Alexander Laktionov's *Summer* with Norman Rockwell's *Freedom from Want* (1943) **SLIDE 25, SLIDE 26**.

In the post-Stalin years, things changed again. On the one hand, this was a time of much Soviet boosterism and once again, competition with America. Yet for many intellectuals, it was precisely European culture – the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger, the cultural theory of Lévi-Strauss, the linguistics of Saussure – which appealed. There was also a strong consumerist appeal in European culture. In the days of the Warsaw Pact, Eastern Europe, the 'fraternal nations', and the Baltic States came to have the allure of the old European ideal. Indeed, a superior allure, since these countries were, in the term often used by Soviet Russians, 'ours'. Their citizens were thought not to radiate the arrogance that was common to the countries of the actual West, or what were then described as *kapstrany* ('cap', or capitalist, countries). Among the *sotstrany* (socialist countries), highest up the hierarchy came those of Eastern Europe, and top of these, in terms of European allure, was Poland. Polish cuisine was not specially admired, but otherwise Poland was, where Russians

were concerned, the France of Eastern Europe. It had sophisticated writers and film-makers, intelligent cultural theorists and critics, attractive café-lined boulevards, lively universities, beautiful and sexually alluring women... yet at the same time, Russians suspected that they were more creative, braver, and just better at managing things. At any rate, in the Soviet period, Eastern Europe and the Baltic States were places that Russian intellectuals aspired to. As the literary scholar and folklorist Georgy Levinton remembered about his first visit to Tartu in Estonia: **SLIDE 27:**

'Uncle Misha' [...] ran an eponymous bar right by the university. What 'Uncle' had on sale was mostly wine, and for someone from Russia, the question 'Want it chilled?' sounded like the Declaration of Independence, Blok's 'Nightingale Garden', and the Bach Chaconne all at one go.

More ordinary Soviet citizens dreamt of filling their flats with Finnish furniture and bathroom technology, and the best Soviet hotels, such as the Primorskaya in Leningrad, were often foreign-designed. A satirical representation of this – from the post-Soviet period – is the Moscow writer Lev Rubinshtein's sketch about the Finnish lavatory pan treasured by a Moscow family – 'How they cared for it and pampered it. How they wiped it down five times a day with a damp cloth, and then a dry one, but above all, gazed at it with rapt admiration.' When their interest slightly subsides after a couple of weeks, the device takes its revenge by getting blocked. The plumber got in to fix the situation, and rewarded for his efforts by vodka with salt herring, takes a suitably down-to-earth attitude: **SLIDE 28**

*'Actually I don't much like those Finnish lavatory pans,' said the plumber, chomping rhythmically. 'But why not?' asked the host, all attention. 'Because,' said the plumber, taking another piece of salt herring, 'because their throats (and here he, still chewing energetically, put down his fork and ran his right hand down his own throat)... 'because their throats are too narrow, so **big turds** get stuck.'*

(Lev Rubinshtein, 'Krupnaya kala', *Pogonya za shlyapoi*, (M.: NLO, 2004), p. 130).

This little vignette revives once more the *scatological* assault on European refinement that has been so typical. The fact that Russian intellectuals of the late Soviet period were extremely well read also gave them a strong sense of pride in the Russian heritage – not to speak of a textbook knowledge of anti-European sentiments, as expressed by Slavophile and neo-Slavophile thinkers. There was thus a high level of self-consciousness about the relationship to Europe, and a modicum of defensiveness too.

In the post-Soviet period, 'Europeanisation' came to be seen, once more, as a desirable model, by the Russian authorities, and by society at large. At a trivial level, this was demonstrated by the use of *evroremont*, or by the decision to phase out Russian minibuses in favour of 'European transport' (the replacement buses were in fact Chinese, but that was not the point). More seriously, 'Europeanisation' was shown by the use of foreign architects, often Europeans, for the most prestigious projects, by emphasis on 'Europeanisation' as a synonym for 'improvement' (for example at the Moscow Station in St Petersburg), and by the increasing interest among 'new Russians' in buying European artefacts. Rising intolerance towards 'Asiatics' was another widespread development.

Yet *anti-European* feeling remained pervasive. Internet sites continued to lambast 'the slanderers of Russia', and to use the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars as illustrations of the age-old hostility of the perfidious Western European. More seriously – an extreme sensitivity about national history developed. The international press, certainly in Britain, tends

to report this in terms of what is *not* discussed, accusing Russians of ignoring or suppressing the Great Terror. But this is unfair: there are many people collecting and publishing material on this period with impunity, and rehabilitation of Stalin at this level is not evident. More characteristic is emphasis on the centrality of the Second World War, and the unblemished nature of Soviet participation in this. There was also an increasingly 'patriotic' understanding of pre-1917 Russia – as shown, for instance, in a widespread sense of discomfort, even among younger, liberal scholars, over the use of the term 'colonialism' with reference to the Russian Empire. There was a return of the messianism which had been found in nineteenth-century Russia. While on the one hand civilising the East, Russia was also saving the West from the worst.

SLIDE 29:

In terms of the composition of its population, its culture, its dominant religions, Russia is a European country. But two thirds of its territory and the main part of its economic potential are in Asia. Therefore we proceed from the assumption of Russia's Eurasian situation, its role as a natural bridge between Europe and Asia, between two civilisations, which our country has been fulfilling for many centuries. [...] Terrorism is a worldwide disease, and the involuntary analogy comes to mind that Russia, which is now on the frontline of the struggle with international terrorism in Chechnya and Central Asia, is saving the civilised world from the plague of terrorism as it saved Europe from the Tatar-Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century at the cost of its own suffering and deprivation (Speech by Vladimir Putin at the summit on international security in Prague, 2001).

For Putin, 'Eurasia' is not a political and cultural ideal (as for the 'Eurasian' thinkers mentioned earlier), but a geopolitical reality. Striking here is the range of metaphors he uses: Russia is both a 'bridge' to Eurasia and a force that 'saves the civilised world from plague' – a barrier and a gate. The understanding is ambiguous, and so too is the relationship with the wider world that is understood. At the same time, one abiding feature remains the anxiety about how Russia is perceived, and the conviction that it is under threat – condemned to *deprivation* and *suffering*. One might compare the centrality of international prestige in the recent rumpus about representation of the Second World War. The remit of the committee charged with arraigning 'falsifiers of history' includes, at point number one, the protection of the international reputation of the Russian Federation. **[SLIDE 30]**

Yet Russia has been most conscious of, and most defensive about, its relationship with Europe at the periods of greatest openness. Political sabre-rattling stands alongside a great deal of real contact and a significant amount of convergence in a creative sense. The country, in its current transitional stage, is quite one of the most interesting places that one could possibly visit. This makes me, as a European who loves Russia, optimistic for the future. I also think that, in a current intellectual culture where 'hybridity' has come to express a positive force, Russians' history of uncertainty about where their country belongs can only be positive. One simply hopes that the metaphor of 'Russia as bridge' will prevail over the metaphor of 'Russia as fortress' or indeed 'Russia as a sanitising facility for the microbes of dangerous ideas'. Whichever way, artists and writers will surely continue to come to their own conclusions. The one significant advantage of the current chronic underfunding of the arts and cultural enterprises is, after all, the fact that he who does *not* pay the piper has no right to call the tune.

I would like to thank the participants in the Arts Forum for their stimulating and delightful company, and for suggesting further thoughts and texts to follow up.

Suggested Further Reading

- Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London, 1978, and many reprints).
- Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia, 1676-1825* (London, 1999).
- _____, *Catherine the Great* (London, 2009).
- Rosalind Polly Gray, *Russian Genre Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000).
- Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia – People and Empire* (London, 1997).
- Felix Ingold, *Russische Wege* (München, 2007).
- Nikolai Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller*, trans. and ed. Andrew Kahn (Oxford, 2005).
- Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia* (Oxford, 2001).
- _____, *Russian Literature, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2001).
- Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).
- Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of Europe in Classical Russian Travel Writing* (Dordrecht, 2006)
- _____, and William Leatherbarrow, *A Documentary History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, Ann Arbor, 1987..
- Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, *Socialist Spaces* (Oxford, 2002).
- _____, and Polly Blakesley (eds.), *Russian Art and the West* (DeKalb, 2007).
- Andrei Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Oxford, 1975).
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- Andrei Zorin, *Feeding the Double-Headed Eagle* (translation forthcoming, Oxford; Russian version, Moscow, 2001).

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