

Russia's Return as True Europe, 1991–2017

Iver B. Neumann

■ **ABSTRACT:** Since the reign of Peter the Great, Russia has identified itself in opposition to Europe. In the late 1980s, Michael Gorbachev and associates forged a liberal representation of Europe and initiated a Western-oriented foreign policy. Against this westernizing or liberal representation of Europe stood what was at first a makeshift group of old Communists and right-wing nationalists, who put forward an alternative representation that began to congeal around the idea that the quintessentially Russian trait was to have a strong state. This article traces how this latter position consolidated into a full-fledged xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe, which marginalized first other forms of nationalism and then, particularly since 2013, liberal representations of Europe. The official Russian stance is now that Russia itself is True Europe, a conservative great power that guards Europe's true Christian heritage against the False Europe of decadence and depravity to its west.

■ **KEYWORDS:** conceptual history, nationalism, post-Cold War, Russia, Vladimir Putin

Since the state's very inception, and particularly since Peter the Great opened a window on Europe, Russia has been obsessed with its relationship to Europe. It would not be an overstatement to hold that Russia defines itself primarily in relation to Europe and the West. When Michael Gorbachev eased censorship as part of his perestroika politics of the late 1980s, the debate about Europe once again came to the fore. The state, and a whole string of public voices, wanted Russia to be "a normal nation-state," by which was meant a standard European country. Against this westernizing or liberal representation of Europe stood what was at first a makeshift group of old Communists and right-wing nationalists, who put forward an alternative representation that began to congeal around the idea that the quintessentially Russian trait was to have a strong state. The article traces how this latter position consolidated into a full-fledged xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe. During the Vladimir Putin years, this xenophobic nationalist position steadfastly gained ground by largely incorporating another version of nationalism of long standing in Russia, namely, spiritual nationalism. In response to developments in Ukraine, but also to rumblings of discontent among liberals in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the Russian state went on to adopt a xenophobic nationalist position from 2013 onward. The official Russian stance is now that Russia itself is True Europe, a conservative great power that guards Europe's true Christian heritage against the False Europe of decadence and depravity to its west.

Drawing on textual representations of Europe in Russian discourse, this article traces how, since the end of the Cold War, Russia went from pro- to anti-European. I find that a xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe as culturally Other and as a threat, which was marginal in



1991, is now the dominant representation. The rise of the xenophobic nationalist representation had three overlapping phases. First, xenophobic nationalism marginalized spiritual nationalism, by which I mean a Herderian, religious-based, and nature-oriented celebration of the Russian people. Where xenophobic nationalism sees Europe as an Other and as a threat, spiritual nationalism saw Europe as a different yet approachable and overlapping Christian culture, a Christian culture with which Russia could have various relations. Second, xenophobic nationalism was able to even out differences between rightist and leftist bearers and so forge a united alternative to the major representation of Europe in the 1990s, namely, a westernizing or liberal one, which saw Europe as an ideal to be emulated. Third, xenophobic nationalism marginalized westernizers. Since 2013, westernizing representations of Europe are as, if more, marginal to overall Russian discourse as was xenophobic nationalism a quarter century before. I conclude with the observation that the specific markers or diacritica of the xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe as sexually perverse, as decadent and rotten, and as godless are all regurgitations of diacritica that dominated Russian nineteenth-century discourse. Since Europe is a rather different place now than it was 150 years ago, we have here a reminder that this article tells us nothing whatsoever about Europe as such but a lot about Russia and its ongoing efforts to forge an identity for itself in opposition to Europe. My conceptual history of Russia's Europe is simply one way of telling the broader story of the change in Russian identity as it has been brought on by the return of xenophobic nationalism.

“Return to Civilization”

From the attempted August 1991 coup against Gorbachev and until President Boris Yeltsin stormed the State Duma in October 1993, the liveliness of the public political debate in general, and of the debate on Europe and the West, was at a level that had not been seen since before the Soviets came to power in 1917. After Yeltsin used armed force against his own parliament, the debate slowed down and became more of a war of position between liberals on the one hand and spiritual romantic nationalists on the other, with a xenophobic nationalist position building up in the wings.

The declaration of the August 1991 coup leaders is a good place to start the analysis. It drew significantly on a xenophobic romantic nationalist text published a month earlier under the heading “A word to the people” (*Sovetskaya Rossiya* 1991):

A great, unheard of disaster is happening. Our MOTHERLAND, our soil, the great state that history, nature and our renowned forefathers have trusted us with, is going under, is being destroyed, is descending into darkness and nothingness ... [Shall we let the betrayers and criminals] take away our past, cut us off from the future and leave us pitifully to vegetate in the slavery and downtroddenness of our almighty neighbors?

Addressing the army and sundry other institutions and groups, they asked how “those who do not love their country, those who lovingly serve their foreign masters” were allowed to go on ruining and breaking up the country, leading it into a second civil war. The document, the main author of which was Aleksandr Prokhanov, since December 1990 the founding editor of the National Bolshevik newspaper *Den'*, was signed not only by xenophobic romantic nationalists but also by key former Communists and spiritual romantic nationalists. A united nationalist position was congealing around a key common element: the Russian state had to be strong—in the sense not only that it would command and be obeyed, but also that it should be the only real power in Russia, and a great power in the world (Neumann [1996] 2017). For good reasons, this

position was, and still is, often referred to as a statist one. Crucially, statisticians may be found either toward the Right or the Left—that is simply a tactical question of which political and economic models are preferred in order to reach the strategic goal of a strong state.

In 1991, the new Russian state adopted a liberal position as its own. Already in his previous incarnation as the foreign minister of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, Andrey Kozyrev had pushed the line that Russia should join the community of civilized countries and learn from the great powers of Europe. This line he reiterated from his new rostrum at the first possible occasion:

Our active foreign policy, our diplomacy, are necessary to guarantee the entry into the world community ... and thereby to help meet the internal needs of Russia. ... The developed countries of the West are Russia's natural allies. It is time finally to say firmly that we are neither adversaries nor poor little brothers who are following the orders of a rich and malevolent West intending to buy up Russia. (*Izvestiya*, 2 January 1992)

However, the idea of a “return to civilization” lost the tug-of-war over the state's position on its relationship with Europe. This became evident already in January 1993, when Yeltsin remarked:

Russia's independent foreign policy started with the West. It started with the United States, and we feel that this was justified. We had to lay the main foundation—that is, to prepare a detailed treaty on the global reduction and elimination of strategic nuclear weapons, on the basis of which it would be easier, afterward, to build relations with any country, be it from the West or East, Europe, or Asia. (Crow 1993: 76)

Given this new state of play, Kozyrev turned to face the much more fundamental opponent of nationalism. The Eurasianism of the romantic nationalists sprang from a view of Europe as being morally inferior to Russia (see Laruelle 2008, 2015). Moreover, whereas the relationship proposed by the liberal Eurasianists was one of balanced good relations, the romantic nationalists saw it as one of clear-cut confrontation, for example, in the formerly Yugoslav theater. As a new Eurasianist journal, edited by a young and as yet unknown activist by the name of Aleksandr Dugin, put it:

Yugoslavia is Europe in miniature ... Serbia is Russia ... In order to precipitate a “Yugoslav” situation that would take on enormous proportions and end in a bloodbath, a Russian continental strategy must be worked out. This strategy must take into consideration Russia's political traditions and the fundamental geopolitical tasks of Russian Eurasia, the “geographical axis of history.” ... The international sanctions that threaten Serbia is a warning to the Russians: The [Russian] colossus is temporarily weakened because it has been betrayed from within. The Russians must not leave their former allies viciously to be turned into somebody else's lackeys. They must not leave their compatriots, sons and daughters of the greatest people world history has ever seen, to be derided. (*Elementy* 1992: 71)

The romantic nationalists had wasted little time in hibernation after their failed coup attempt the year before. In a conversation with Aleksandr Yanov, the main author of “A word to the people,” Aleksandr Prokhanov declared himself as “a traditional imperialist and statist” and took the view that Europe

is a fake machine, a stupid one, created by great Germany, with its motivation embedded in history; I will not be surprised if the Fourth Reich arises in twenty years ... I sense the world as a continuous struggle, as an enormous, gigantic conflict, in which thousands of other conflicts are embedded. (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, 2 September 1992)

Prokhanov's solution for Russia was to impose "authoritarianism, which will make it possible to begin to stabilize chaos, blood and insanity, and then, through strong authoritarian power, the cultivation of democracy will slowly begin, not through the creation of insane parliaments, but corporative democratism." When his interlocutor protested that this was the program of Benito Mussolini, Prokhanov shot back that it certainly was the program of Mussolini, and of Pinochet, but that "Mussolini did not have the possibility of reaching democracy because it all ended too quickly." The nationalist position's affinity with interwar Fascism was made explicit.

The main drama of the Russian debate about Europe from the autumn of 1992 onward lay Fascism exactly here, in the ability of the romantic nationalists to attract uncommitted or lapsed liberals, and how success on this score began to force the government to shift its position away from the liberal and further toward the romantic nationalist. The year 1993 saw nothing less than an armed confrontation over the issue. Communists and nationalists had joined hands in a National Salvation Front, often referred to as the red-browns, and ensconced themselves in the Duma, first politically, then physically. Yeltsin took it upon himself to clear out parliament by armed force in October 1993. Once again, the state resorted to violence in order to redefine public political space, shooting dead a number of parliamentarians in their offices and meeting rooms, banning newspapers and censoring others. "There will be no more leniency to Communist-Fascism in Russia," Yeltsin concluded in his TV speech to the nation on 6 October. And if the clash itself was part and parcel of the Russian debate about Europe, so were the reasons the state gave for the crackdown. After the October events, Yeltsin's press spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov referred to European ideals in order to justify the state's actions (*Rossiyskie vesti*, 19 October 1993).

This setback notwithstanding—helped by the results of the parliamentary election in December 1993, where candidates loyal to this alliance took almost half the votes cast for candidates to the Duma or lower house—the nationalists came bouncing back much as they had after the attempted coup two years before. The state in Russia under Yeltsin simply was not strong enough to bring about the needed stable configuration of political space. The enthusiasm about Europe as a model that characterized the state's position on Yeltsin's coming to power had clearly dissipated at the end of 1993, leaving an insistence on partnership on equal terms (Clunan 2009: 60–72). The struggle between the liberal position and the romantic nationalist position continued unabated. Nationalists of all stripes were on the offensive, and the state adjusted its position accordingly. From the mid-1990s, top state officials increasingly stressed Russia's Eurasian character. When Primakov became foreign minister (1996–1998), he made it his main task to do away with a Western-oriented policy in favor of a multipolar orientation (Thorun 2009: 31–41). It was, as Russians say, no coincidence that "Eurasia" became a keyword for the state at this time.

In the second half of the 1990s, xenophobic nationalism emerged as an ever more dominant representation of Europe. Quite fittingly, the name under which it appeared turned out to be neo-Eurasianism. It is also fitting that the person who had founded first a journal called *Elements: Eurasian Review* and then a movement called neo-Eurasianism had named the first political party that he founded the National Bolsheviks.¹ That person was Aleksandr Gelevich Dugin (Bassin 2015).

The list of Dugin's collaborators down the years reads like a who's who of xenophobic nationalists in Russia. He joined the nationalist organization Pamyat' as a 25-year-old in 1988. He worked with Prokhanov on the newspaper *Den'* (from 1993, *Zavtra*), the key press organ of the xenophobic nationalists to this day. He worked closely not only with Prokhanov and his friends at the High Command, but also with the leader of the revamped Communist Party, Zyuganov, to the point where Stephen Shenfield found that he "probably played a significant part in formulating the nationalist communist ideology that was Zyuganov's hallmark" (2001: 192).

Dugin's rise as the unifier and standard bearer of the xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe in Russian debates from the end of the 1990s onward was partly due to his impressive

networking and his good military contacts, but it is our good fortune that it was also due to his prolific written output. Dugin translated European Fascists, republished European Eurasianists, and, most importantly for the Russian debate about Europe, wrote a string of monographs. The basic one in order to understand his view of Europe is also his major work, *Foundations of Geopolitics: Russia's Geopolitical Future* (Dugin [1997] 1999).

Dugin's protagonists are masses, leaders, and topography. Except for leaders and the thinkers who provide them with operational schemes, or theory, as Dugin calls it, individuals as such have no place in politics. The basic confrontation is between Land and Sea. Eurasia is Land; the United States and the United Kingdom are Sea. Civilizations, or "super-ethnicities," are the key political entities. Like all ethnic groups, they mystically emerge out of the soil and, equally mystically, exude a quality that Dugin, following the Eurasianist Lev Gumilev, calls passionarity. Passionarity is understood as the process whereby organisms absorb biochemical energy from nature (Laruelle 2006, 2008), but behind this mystical view, what seems to be denoted is something like realized collective will. Note the voluntarist focus here. Dugin resembles interwar geopoliticians like Rudolf Kjellén in treating politics as organic entities, but he is much more insistent than they were on the importance of will and, by the same token, on the irrelevance of material resources.

For Dugin, the Land, or Heartland, is Eurasia. It is a civilization, a "super-ethnos." It follows that Land's basic enemy—it is important to have enemies—is Sea and its ideological guise, which is Atlanticism. The Sea, that is, the United States and Atlanticism, conspired to execute the Soviet Union (Dugin [1997] 1999: 367). The historical task ahead of Russia at the present juncture is, consequently, to gather all of the Eurasian Heartland around the messianic Russian state and mobilize for a war on the United States and Atlanticism. This is in keeping with Russia's historical destiny, for Russia's passionarity remains high. Russia's destiny is therefore to build a giant state or empire out of Eurasia. To Dugin (251–253), such an empire will be a grander Soviet Union. Such a program can only be realized through war. Europe is—and most particularly the parts of Europe that once belonged to the Soviet Union—in this neo-Eurasianist or xenophobic nationalist scheme simply land to be conquered by Russia to serve as auxiliaries in a future war with the United States, the common enemy. Dugin (228) sees three particularly important axes of alliance for Russia in this coming war, the most important of which is Germany, with the other two being Tokyo and Tehran. He then goes into high levels of specificity about how these axes will be formed (Germany is, for example, to receive Kaliningrad back).

As pointed out by Andrei Tsygankov (1998), Dugin's is a "discourse of war." Dugin's celebration of having enemies and of waging war on them, his celebration of the strongman model for politics, his anti-Semitism, his religious mysticism that cohabits with his techno-optimism, his railing against American consumerism and materialism, his backing of an anti-enlightenment conservative revolution, his explicit building on European Fascist thinkers such as Julius Evola (1898–1974) and Jean Thiriart (1922–1992), and his contacts with the extreme Right in France, Greece, Serbia, and elsewhere have led many observers to classify him as a Fascist (Umland 2008). This is warranted, and in fact, Dugin himself embraces Fascism. The name he chose for the party he launched in 1993 was the National Bolsheviks, a name that historically specifically denotes Communist-Fascist collaboration. The main point where views on Europe is concerned, however, is that Dugin stands in a solid Fascist tradition that puts stock not only in fervent nationalism on behalf of one state but also in the building of a Fascist Europe. Fascist all-European movements thrived all through the interwar period. The alliance between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany lasted until Mussolini's fall from power. In most if not all interwar European parties, there was a key ideological debate between those who would draw the line of the nation according to spoken language (say, High German) and those who would draw it around a wider cultural community (say, pan-Germanism or Eurasianism). The latter built a fairly strong

international Fascist movement. Dugin and his neo-Eurasianist movement is heir to the latter tradition. The neo-Eurasianist or xenophobic nationalist position in Russian discourse, as resuscitated by Dugin and associates, also rests firmly on the Russian xenophobic nationalist position as it evolved during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. As an even more distant anchor, Dugin ([1997] 1999: 255) alludes to the state's position of official nationalism as it looked from 1825 onward, by stressing how Russian nationalism is a question of *narodnost* (people-mindedness) and *pravoslavie* (orthodoxy). Recall that the third concept of the official nationalism of the Russian empire as defined 190 years ago was *samoderzhavie*—autocracy. Dugin's embrace of the strong leader in general and, as we shall see, of Putin in particular in effect means that today's xenophobic nationalist representation puts itself forward as an heir not only to Gumilev and older Eurasians but also to the pan-Slavic nationalism of the late nineteenth century and the official nationalism of the early nineteenth century.

To Western readers who are unfamiliar with European interwar Fascist thinking and the Russian tradition, Dugin may sound idiosyncratic. That would be a weak reading. One might rather think of Dugin and today's xenophobic nationalist representation of the enemy as false, Americanized Europe that must be rid of its consumerism and Atlanticism in order to reemerge as a true Europe under Russian suzerainty as the last installment of Russian antimodern thinking about Europe. Dugin's line, that Russia is true Europe because it has remained true to pre-Enlightenment and premodern values, is firmly rooted in Russian tradition (Neumann [1996] 2017). Dugin's discursive work is impressive, in that he actually succeeded in telling a story of Russia and its relationship with Europe that brought seeming continuity to the three periods of tsarist, Soviet, and Putin rule, under the rubric of "strong state." Given that history is the chronological aspect of a polity's identity, such a national narrative is potentially productive, and not only nostalgic, and so highly potent political stuff. This became increasingly clear in the 2000s, as the political debate as such became ever more stylized, even frozen, and the xenophobic nationalist position came ever more to the fore.

Enter the Strongman

The 2000s saw the return of a political landscape dominated by a strong leader—President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. Following the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, there was a passing opening to the West. This was when Putin's immediate entourage included staunch liberals like Andrey Illarionov. Still, the key development of the new millennium so far has been a further weakening of the westernizing representation toward an overhauled and consolidated nationalist representation, and the state's decisive embrace of the latter position in Putin's third election period (2012–2018).

The overall change may be readily grasped by juxtaposing two incidents. In the autumn of 1999, when Putin was prime minister, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a "Medium-Term Strategy for the Russian Federation's Development of Relations with the European Union (2000–2010)," where the EU was named Russia's strategic partner (Mankoff 2009: 153). The EU was not Russia's sole partner—Primakov's policy of multipolarity had done away with that—and it was no longer an entity to be emulated as a matter of course but rather an entity on a par with Russia itself. The state took up a position between a westernizing representation of Europe and a nationalist one, but closer to the former. This may be compared to the debate as it has stood in past last two years, epitomized by an exchange between former imprisoned oligarch (2003–2013) and present exile, Mikhail Khodorkovskiy; colonel in the Russian

intelligence service (FSB) and commander during the insurgency by ethnic Russians against the Ukrainian government in Donbass in 2014, Igor Strelkov; and xenophobic romantic nationalist Aleksandr Dugin.

The occasion was the publication of three newspaper articles in which Khodorkovskiy argued that the number one priority for Russia should be to get its economy in order. The “inevitable” way to do this would be to integrate Russia with the “Euro-Atlantic world.” If Russia does not “go West,” as he puts it (in English) in the title to one of his Russian texts, then it will not get out of the “blind alley” in which it now finds itself, but rather will sink deeper and deeper into economic and political isolation. The long-term goal should be entry into NATO and the EU. It follows that the “increase in authoritarian rule” by Russia in 2011 and 2012 was a historical mistake, for it solved nothing and only held inevitable liberalization back (Khodorkovskiy 2015). As will readily be seen, this was basically the state’s position in the early 1990s, and in the autumn of 1999, this basically liberal stance would still have been one of the two major representations in the debate.

By 2015, however, it had become a marginalized view. Igor Strelkov, a *nom du guerre* for Igor Vsevolodovich Girkin, who had in-depth field experience from various theaters and is a mainstay of the Novorossiia movement that works for the expansion of Russian state territory, took up the cudgels. Strelkov had already at a number of occasions written about the aggressive West and a fifth column of westernizers, naming their leaders as “the president’s liberal friends, all these Grefs, Kudrins, Shuvalovs, Medvedevs” (Fateev and Mikhailovskaya 2015). Strelkov now identified Khodorkovskiy as a key fifth columnist, and the fifth column as the most immediate threat to Russia. The title of the piece refers to them as “the circle of treason, cowardice and deception,” which is, quite fittingly for a Russian monarchist, a 1914 quote from tsar Nicholas II where he described “definitely not the people,” Strelkov (2014) explains, “but the political, military and economic elite that surrounded him.” The implication seems to be that tsarist Russia fell not because of a popular insurrection but because of the treacherous weakness of the decadent political class. A century on, the situation remains the same: “Liberal ‘values’ that are foreign to Russia and the Russian people” are threatening Russian pride. Like Joseph Goebbels, “Napoleon, the British lords Palmerston and Disraeli, ... Winston Churchill and the American President Ronald Reagan” before them, liberals are bent on attacking Russia. They will fail, however, for their very liberal “Euro-Atlantic values” are corrupting and weakening Western national pride, and so the West itself. Therefore,

Today, it is not about Europe, but about Russia. Our path leads back to ourselves. We need to return to Russia, to our history, to our culture, to our mission. That mission was always and still remains the same: to carry the light of Christian faith, the ideals of good and of social conscience to the nations of the world, to “be enduring of” evil, as Peter the Apostle put it.

The attempt by Khodorkovskiy and other liberals to “help the West once again to destroy what Putin began to rebuild in the 2000s” will not succeed, Strelkov concludes, for “God is with us, the Russians!” Strelkov is of interest here not primarily as an intelligence officer and a Communist turned monarchist and Orthodox Christian, but as an outlier who discusses with another outlier—the exilant Khodorkovskiy. Where 15 years ago, Khodorkovskiy’s representation of Europe was one of the two dominating representations, at the time of writing, Khodorkovskiy and Strelkov are the bookends of the debate. This made it possible for Aleksandr Dugin to comment on the exchange as a microcosm of the debate at large. Dugin highlighted how Strelkov was a Russian warrior and patriot “from a simple background [*iz prostoy sem’i*],” whereas Khodorkovskiy was a “westernizer” who had sold out to the Rothschilds—read: a Jew (Dugin

2014). As a fighter and outspoken monarchist, Strelkov is the action man to Dugin's thinker, and he is a talking action man.

Strelkov's very existence is part of the explanation for why Dugin's xenophobic nationalism now comes across as less extreme than it did a decade ago. Dugin's view of Europe is no longer that far removed from the state's position, and Dugin may point to representations like Strelkov's when attempting to nudge the state's even closer to xenophobic nationalism. For example, on 7 August 2015, a Russian newspaper covered Dugin's interview with *The Washington Times*, where he was quoted to the effect that "Russian patriots" were coming close to turning away from Putin over his failure to "use military force" in eastern Ukraine (*Gazeta* 2014). The key question that presents itself where the Russian debate in the 2000s is concerned must be how westernizing liberalism was shunted to one side by xenophobic nationalism not only in the overall debate, but also as a state position.

On the eve of the new millennium, Putin published an article to the nation that presented a broad overview of Russia's place in the world. The distinctive ambiguity of the 1990s between seeing Europe as something else and as something to be emulated in one respect or the other dominated the article:

The main thing is that Soviet power did not let the country develop a flourishing society that could be developing dynamically, with free people. First and foremost, the ideological approach to the economy made our country lag increasingly behind [*otstavanie*] the developed states. It is bitter to admit that for almost seven decades we traveled down a blind alley, which took us away from the main track of civilization ... The experience of the 1990s vividly shows that ... the mechanical copying of the experiences of other states will not bring progress. ... Russia will not soon, if ever, be a replica of, say, the US or Great Britain, where liberal values have deep-seated traditions. For us, the state, with its institutions and structures, always played an exclusively important role in the life of the country and its people. For the Russian [*rossiyanin*], a strong state is not an anomaly, not something with which he has to struggle, but, on the contrary, a source of and a guarantee for order, as well as the initiator and main moving force of any change. Contemporary Russian society does not mistake a strong and effective state for a totalitarian one. (Putin 1999)

This is the typical positioning of a politician: there is a nod to the liberal representation—Europe constitutes "the main track of civilization"—and a nod to the xenophobic nationalist representation—Russia must have a strong state and its own path. Similarly, throughout the 2000s, Putin took turns insisting that Russia was a European power, and a Eurasian one (Thorun 2009). The most striking thing about this speech, however, is that the head of state speaks about the state he rules as having a discontinuous history. A polity—any polity—must by definition have some we-ness that is shared, at least by its elite. We-ness must indicate that a number of relevant identities are all tied together in the concept of a we or a self with some degree of permanence in time and space. It runs against this root metaphor of a polity's unity in time to admit that the contemporary version of one's state being an other to previous versions of the self. When it nonetheless happens—as it did in Putin's millennium article, at that time prime minister of Russia—a problem is evident, and resources will be used to address that problem. In other words, we should expect discursive change. And indeed, change appeared fairly quickly. By 2005, at the beginning of his second presidential period, Putin's representation of Russia's relationship to Europe had gained temporal cohesion, as here in his "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation":

Above all else Russia was, and of course is and will be, a major European power. ... For three centuries now, we—together with the other European nations—passed hand in hand through

reforms of Enlightenment, the difficulties of emerging parliamentarianism, municipal and judiciary branches, and the establishment of similar legal systems. Step by step, we moved together toward recognizing and extending human rights, toward universal and equal suffrage, toward understanding the need to look after the weak and the impoverished, toward women's emancipation, and other social gains. I repeat we did this together, sometimes behind and sometimes ahead of European standards. (Putin 2005; Tsygankov 2007: 385)

Suddenly, Russia no longer has a discontinuous history. Its history is rather like a continuous, as opposed to a discontinuous, march; it happens "step by step." A key phrase where Europe is concerned is "we moved together"; Russia and Europe emerge on parallel tracks. Note, furthermore, that where, in 1999, Putin stressed how Russia has a history of "lagging behind" Europe, by 2005, Russia and Europe are more like two marchers taking turns in being the field's hare. In only five years, the representation of centuries of Russian-European relations has been thoroughly rearranged. Putin's famous Munich speech of 2007, which sent the by then clearest signal of discontent with Western policy toward Russia, ended by Putin (2007) wryly noting that:

We very often—and personally, I very often—hear appeals by our partners, including our European partners, to the effect that Russia should play an increasingly active role in world affairs. In connection with this I would allow myself to make one small remark. It is hardly necessary to incite us to do so. Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy.

Russia, a cover term for a temporal and discontinuous string of different polities, has become not only an entity with unity across an entire millennium, but also one that has had a coherent foreign policy.

Putin's speeches evolve at the same pace as the Russian debate at large. In 2003, one of the leading self-proclaimed westernizers in Russia, Anatoly Chubays, had stated that Russia's destiny was to be an empire, but it should be a liberal empire. This was something new for the period, for the wish to see Russia as a "normal country"—read, a European-style nation-state—had been a constitutive element of a westernizing representation, articulated in direct opposition to the nationalist idea that Russia had always been and should always be an exceptional and imperial great power. The westernizing representation was, in other words, eking closer to the nationalist position. This was indicative of how the bandwidth of the Russian debate about Europe shrunk. A second characteristic of the westernizing or liberal position of the period was its failure to produce any new elements that could have compensated for the moving closer to nationalism and set it firmly apart from it.

There is, however, a crucial exception to this, and it has to do with statements and actions that demand free elections. Particularly after the 2008 presidential elections, Moscow and Saint Petersburg saw demonstrations and rallies featuring a broad range of self-proclaimed oppositional figures, but dominated by liberals. State officials repeatedly compared these activities to the run-up to the so-called color revolutions in the former Soviet Union, particularly to the "orange revolution" in Ukraine in 2004, which ushered in a liberal president. On 6 May 2012, during a mass demonstration in Bolotnaya Square, Moscow, the state decided to put a stop to these activities and staged a crackdown. Long prison sentences were doled out. Almost four years later, more than two dozen people are still in prison, waiting for their sentences. Aglaya Snetkov (2012: 534; see also Snetkov 2015) has suggested that this movement took over from terrorists as the perceived number one threat to the regime and internal security, and that the demonstrations were crucial in pushing the state further toward a nationalist position on Europe.

The state also broke up a number of nationalist demonstrations, including so-called Russian marches. This notwithstanding, the xenophobic nationalist representation remained dynamic, in at least three senses. First, it continued to gain ground in the overall debate, forcing some westernizers to adopt some of its elements in order not to be marginalized as the center of the debate shifted closer to nationalism. Second, it continued to subsume spiritual nationalists, so it remained the stronger of only two major representations, as opposed to three. Third, it was able to spawn elements that appeared to be new. I write “appear,” for the two most important elements were not historically new but rather regurgitated from older and by now half-forgotten Russian representations of Europe. The two most important elements are closely intertwined, and concerned, first, how contemporary Europe is rotting, and, second, that the rot implies that contemporary Europe is a false Europe. True Europe, on the other hand, is still alive, first and foremost in Russia itself, but also in the Russia-friendly European Far Right movement.

The representation of Europe as “rotten” (*gniloy, gnilyushchiy*) came back from a 150-year-long hibernation with a vengeance in the second half of the 2000s. The specific practices that were evoked to demonstrate the rottenness were once again sexual in nature. In 1869, commenting on the popularity of cancan and operettas, the populist Mikhaylovskiy was reminded of Europe in the days “when the Popes lived in incestuous relations with their mothers and sisters, and maintained brothels,” and “when Roman Caesars had public weddings with men” (Billington 1958: 77). This focus on sexual practices again came to the fore. Homosexuality was singled out in particular,² but there was also transsexualism, pedophilia, incest, and so on. These practices heralded the “Decline of Europe,” as an *Izvestiya* (2007b) headline had it.³ The Russian Orthodox Church has been particularly active in arguing that only by fighting the emerging European norms that accept homosexuality and same-sex marriages can “Russian civilization contribute to building a peaceful and civilized life on the planet,” as the then metropolitan Kirill put it in 2006 (*Izvestiya* 2006). Indeed, the patriarch himself chose this as a main theme when he spoke to the Council of Europe the following year (*Izvestiya* 2007a). President Putin took up this representation in 2013, and it has since been part of the state’s representation of Europe.

The entire point of the metaphor of rottenness is that there is no future other than decomposition. What, then, may come of a rotten Europe? Logically, there can only be one answer: Europe must be restored or renewed. Rotten, decadent Europe is a Europe that has left its true character behind. It is a false Europe. What, then, can be more logical than that Russia, with its social conservatism, is actually the last true European nation standing and will bring restoration? This idea, which was the entire basis of Bolshevik views of Europe (true, vital proletarian Europe was chasing out false, rotten bourgeois Europe), now came to the fore once again. Gleb Pavlovskiy (2004) argued that Russia is a “better European than Europe itself” (see also Tsyganov 2007: 394). Dmitriy Rogozin, then Russian ambassador to NATO, wrote in the nationalist newspaper *Zavtra*, “Russia indeed is also Europe, without ‘gay’ rule, pederast marriages, punk mass culture and the lackeying to the United States. We are indeed the true Europeans” (quoted in Strada 2010: XX; see also Tarasyuk 2014; White and Feklyunina 2014: 112–114). To Rogozin (2010: 397), the final proof of Europe’s decadence seems to be that Europeans see Russians not as European, but as something from outer space, as “cosmonauts.”

If we ask how this metaphor of Europe as “rotten” returned, we once again run into the main xenophobic nationalist, Aleksandr Dugin. In a 1994 book aptly titled (in Russian) *The Conservative Revolution*, he argued, “The liberalization of sex, pornography, feminism, homosexuality, and the fashion for Freudianism and psychoanalysis are part of the process of forced Westernization of the world. This ‘era of gynecocracy’ heralds the ‘castration’ of men and, along with it, the disappearance of traditional society” (quoted in Laruelle 2008: 134). As noted in the previous section, the xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe was forged into a coherent rep-

resentation from various bits and pieces, most of them gathered from Fascist and Communist traditions, by Dugin and others in the turbulent 1990s.⁴ Under Putin, as exemplified by what happened to the official adoption of the representation of Russia as “True Europe,” it became ever more dominant. For a period, Dugin himself even became an advisor in Putin’s entourage.

In 2012 and 2013, the state followed up on its steady slide toward a xenophobic nationalist position by embracing such a position wholeheartedly. One consequence of the state’s shift was actually a further radicalization of the xenophobic nationalist representation of Europe. As noted in the introduction to this section, key carriers of this representation came out with a critique of the state for not being decisive enough in its support of what was essentially a war. The state did not respond to these calls, but in February 2016, Russia’s prime minister, Dmitriy Medvedev, stated that Russia and the West was sliding into “a new Cold War” and that he sometimes wondered “if this is 2016 or 1962” (as reported worldwide, e.g., BBC 2016).

In line with the general view that the state is an institution that mediates between social forces, the state must be seen as both reflective of societal debate and as a constitutive force in these debates. During the Putin years, the state moved closer and closer to the xenophobic nationalist representation.⁵ Following what was seen as a Western takeover bid against Ukraine in 2013, the state landed decisively on this representation. For example, on 10 January 2014, the newspaper *Izvestiya* published the entire text of the Ministry of Culture’s basic draft for an overall Russian cultural policy. The document stressed Russia’s uniqueness and vitality, and, evoking Russian thinkers like Danilevskiy and Gumilev, but also Arnold Toynbee and Samuel Huntington, contrasted it with Europe by stating that Russia “must be seen as a unique and autonomous civilization that belongs neither to ‘the West’ (‘Europe’), nor to ‘the East.’ The position may be summed up in a pithy formulation: ‘Russia is not Europe’” (Russian Ministry of Culture 2014). It should be noted, however, that the state did not get the last word on this key formulation. In a statement signed by all 27 members of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences (2017), the Ministry of Culture’s draft was said to be not only below student level but also positively false.⁶ As a result of the critique, the phrase “Russia is not Europe” was removed from the document. The Russian debate on Europe goes on.

As has been the case since its inception, the Russian debate about Europe is a debate about what Russia itself should be. Viacheslav Morozov (2016) sums up well what it means now that Europe is one of Russia’s constitutive outsides when he writes about the domestic repercussions of the state’s subscription to the xenophobic nationalism position since 2012 and 2013:

The Kremlin’s entire conservative turn comes down to nothing more than an offensive against “the fifth column.” This label lumps together all “freaks”—the Pussy Riot punk band, NGOs, intellectuals, scholars supported by foreign funding[, homosexuals, feminists]. They are all stamped as Western collaborators, whose main goal is to undermine Russian traditional values. At the same time, the values that are being championed tend to recede in the background, while center stage gets occupied by the epic fight against forces of evil; for pro-government forces, of whatever stripe, the national interest is reduced to anti-Westernism.

Conclusion

Russian history since Peter the Great—and, arguably, since Kievan times—has seen a cyclical movement between periods of wanting to emulate Europe on the one hand, and using Europe as the Other against which everything Russian has to be delineated on the other (Neumann [1996] 2017). The quarter century from the fall of the Soviet Union until today displays a full, if temporally truncated, example. In 1991, the thrust was all Russia taking its place as a member of

Europe—a “return to civilization,” as the saying went. Today, Europe is a degenerate cesspool that can only be salvaged by following Russia’s shining example (Østbø 2016). Being a piece of conceptual history, the article has presented the discursive work that has brought on this inversion.

If we step back and look at the past quarter century’s contests about how Europe should be represented within a wider time frame, two things stand out. They are, first, the degree to which the current dominating representation of Europe leans on tropes that were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century Russian discourse and, second, the degree to which this resuscitation of old tropes serves as a glue that may lend Russian history a semblance of continuity.

Nineteenth-century Russian discourse famously turned on the debate between Slavophiles and westernizers. As movements, they may only have emerged in the 1840s, but as ways of representing a Europe in relation to which Russia should identify itself, they certainly envelop the century as a whole (Neumann [1996] 2017). Slavophiles stressed Europe’s degenerate nature, understood as its turn away from Christian values toward sexual depravity and social rot in general. For Slavophiles, modernity was a threat to Russia, and modern Europe was a false Europe. Only Russia, with its orthodox religion, its autocracy, and its time-honored folkways, remained as an example of what the old regime, of what Europe, once was. As Europe left itself behind and became False Europe, Russia remained the True Europe. As demonstrated above, the tropes marking Europe as degenerate and rotten have returned, as has the idea that Russia is True Europe.

The one element that anchors this return—and the one element that contemporary Russian representations of the tsarist period, the Soviet Union, and contemporaneity share—is the concept of a strong state. It is, the Russian state now insists, the strong state that guarantees historical continuity, Russian agency in the world, and indeed Russian identity itself. True Europe is authoritarian Europe. Russia is authoritarian, as are the sundry populist parties throughout Europe with which Russia now cooperates, be that formally (Austria’s Freedom Party), by dint of financial support (e.g., France’s National Front), or simply in the form of debate and mutual admiration (e.g., the UK Independence Party). Nineteenth-century liberals and Socialists, perhaps most famously Karl Marx, often complained that Russia’s support of European conservatives everywhere was a key hindrance to change. Russia was “the gendarme of Europe.” The gendarme seems to be back.

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The funding for this article was provided by the Norwegian Research Council under the project title “Evaluating Power Political Repertoires (EPOS),” project no. 250419.

■ **IVER B. NEUMANN** is Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the outgoing Montague Burton Professor in international relations at the London School of Economic. His latest book is *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (2nd ed., Routledge, 2017).

■ NOTES

1. The title of *Elementy: Evraziyskoe obozrenie* (1992–1998) was also an explicit nod to the European Far Right, for the journal of its ideological leader, the Frenchman Alain de Benoist (1943–), is called *Éléments*.

2. For a 2007 example, see Mozhegov 2007; from 2008, see “Gomoseksualizm pokhoz na Rak Obshchestva?” <https://otvet.mail.ru/question/12765280>.
3. For a full discussion, see Riabov and Riabova (2014).
4. An authority on Russian nationalism like Alexander Verkhovsky (2016: 76) even identifies the national “mainstream” as “typically oriented towards various neo-Fascist ideas and racist violence.”
5. Andrei Tsygankov (2015: 295) suggests, “Although Putin’s rhetoric is indeed increasingly nationalist, it is designed more to reach out to traditional critics of the state, than to faithfully follow their recommendation.” This kind of intentional analysis rests on the idea that the analyst may observe mental processes. This is a psychological approach diametrically opposed to the social approach of conceptual history.
6. I thank Sverre Rustad for directing me to this source.

REFERENCES

- Bassin, Mark. 2015. “Lev Gumilev and the European New Right.” *Nationalities Papers* 43 (6): 1–26.
- BBC. 2016. “Russian PM Medvedev Says New Cold War Is On.” *BBC News*, 13 February. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35569094>.
- Billington, James H. 1958. *Mikhailovskiy and Russian Populism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clunan, Anne L. 2009. *The Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Crow, Suzanne. 1993. *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia under Yeltsin*. Munich: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.
- Dugin, Aleksandr. 1994. *Konservativnaya revolyutsiya*. Moscow: Arktogeya. <https://archive.org/details/KonservativnayaRevolutsiya>.
- Dugin, Aleksandr. (1997) 1999. *Osnovy geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe budushchee rossii*. Moscow: Arktogeya.
- Dugin, Aleksandr. 2014. “Duel’ ideologiy: Pervyy tur.” *Svobodnaya pressa*, 17 October. <http://svpressa.ru/politic/article/101292>.
- Elementy. 1992. “Evraziyskiy analiz: Geopolitika yugoslavskogo konflikta.” *Elementy: Evraziyskoe obozrenie* 2. Abridged text reprinted in *Osteuropa* 44, no. 2 (1994): A70–A71.
- Fateev, Alexander, and Anastasia Mikhailovskaya. 2015. “Igor Strelkov: ‘Victory is any case ours!’” [In Russian.] Interview, *Svobodnaya pressa*, 4 July. <http://svpressa.ru/lookat/sptv/126595>.
- Gazeta. 2014. “Skandal’nyy professor Dugin rasskazal *The Washington Times* o strakhakh ‘storonnikov Putina.’” *Gazeta.ru*, 8 August.
- Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. 2017. “Zayavlenie chlenov Uchenogo Soveta Instituta Filosofii PAN o kontseptsii osnov kul’turnoy politike.” http://iph.ras.ru/cult_polit.htm (accessed 15 June 2017).
- Izvestiya. 2006. “Ustanavlivat’ ugovnoe nakazanie za evtanaziyu—nepravil’no, zayiavil mitropolit Kirill.” 4 April. <http://izvestia.ru/news/375872>.
- Izvestiya. 2007a. “Patriarkh vseya Rusi [Aleksiy II] prizval PACE ne pooshchryat gomoseksualizm.” 2 October. <http://izvestia.ru/news/410121>.
- Izvestiya. 2007b. “Zakat Evropy.” 11 October. <http://izvestia.ru/news/329597>.
- Khodorkovskiy, Mikhail. 2015. “Go West: Kak vyvesti Rossiyu iz tupika.” *PBK*, 16 June. http://www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/16/06/2015/557fcfdc9a79477ac18d95bc_
- Laruelle, Marlène. 2006. *Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?* <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/OP294.pdf>.
- Laruelle, Marlène. 2008. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Laruelle, Marlène, ed. 2015. *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

- Mankoff, Jeffrey. 2009. *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2016. "What Is the Meaning of 'National' in the Russian Debate about the National Interest?" PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 414. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm414_Morozov_Jan2016.pdf.
- Mozhegov, Vladimir. 2007. "Kakaya-to v derzhave Datskoi gnil? Dva nachavshis', pravoslavno-katoli cheskiy dialog razvalivayetsya na glazakh." *GlobalRus.no*, 6 November. <http://www.globalrus.ru/opinions/784449/news>.
- Neumann, Iver B. (1996) 2017. *Russia and the Idea of Europe*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Østbø, Jardar. 2016. *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*. Stuttgart: Ibidem.
- Pavlovski, Gleb. 2004. "Rossiya vse eshche ishchet svoy rol' v mire." *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 31 May.
- Putin, Vladimir. 1999. "Rossiya na Rubezhe Tsyacheletii," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 December. http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html.
- Putin, Vladimir. 2005. "Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobranuyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii." www.kremlin.ru (accessed 8 January 2016).
- Putin, Vladimir. 2007. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." 10 February. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.
- Riabov, Oleg, and Tatiana Riabova. 2014. "The Decline of Gayropa? How Russia Intends to Save the World." *Eurozine*, 5 February. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-02-05-riabova-en.html>.
- Rogozin, Dimitriy. 2010. *Yastreby mira: Dnevnik russkogo posla*. Moscow: Al'pina non-fikshn.
- Russian Ministry of Culture. 2014. "Materialy i predlozheniya k proektu osnov gosudarstvennostoy kul'turnoy politiki." *Izvestiya*, 10 January. <http://izvestia.ru/news/569016>.
- Shenfield, Stephen. 2001. *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Snetkov, Aglaya. 2012. "When The Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia's Security Policy." *Europe-Asia Studies* 64 (3): 3.
- Snetkov, Aglaya. 2015. *Russia's Security Policy under Putin: A Critical Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Sovetskaya Rossiya. 1991. "Slovo k narodu." 23 July.
- Strada, Vittorio. 2010. "Posle imperii: Staraya i novaya Rossiya." *Vtoraya Nayigatsia: Almanach* 10. <http://library.khpg.org/files/docs/1293605762.pdf>.
- Strelkov, Igor. 2014. "Krugom izmena, trusost' i obman': Igor Strelkov polemiziruet s Mikhailom Khodorkovskim." *Svobodnaya pressa*, 21 October <http://svpressa.ru/blogs/article/101665>.
- Tarasyuk, Eugene. 2014. "Est' i drugaya Evropa." *Zavtra*, 16 October. <http://zavtra.ru/content/view/est-i-drugaya-evropa>
- Thorun, Christian. 2009. *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct towards the West*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsygankov, Andrei. 1998. "Hard-Line Eurasianists and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives." *East European Quarterly* 32 (3): 315–334.
- Tsygankov, Andrei P. 2007. "Finding a Civilizational Idea: 'West,' 'Eurasia,' and 'Euro-East' in Russia's Foreign Policy." *Geopolitics* 12 (3): 375–399.
- Tsygankov, Andrei. 2015. "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31 (4): 279–303.
- Umland, Andreas. 2008. *Theorizing Post-Soviet Russia's Extreme Right: Comparative Political, Historical and Sociological Approaches*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Verkhovskiy, Alexander. 2016. "Radical Nationalists from The Start of Medvedev's Presidency to the War in Donbass: True till Death?" In *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–15*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, 74–99. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- White, Stephen, and Valentina Feklyunina. 2014. *Identities and Foreign Policies in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus: The Other Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.