



RUSSIA AND WESTERN EUROPE: REVIEW OF A COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP

MARIE-PIERRE REY

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AUTHOR

Marie-Pierre Rey is a professor of the University of Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne. A former student of the ENS-Ecole normale supérieure (Ulm-Sèvres), an agrégée in history with a license in Russian, docteur habilité in history of the University of Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, Marie Pierre Rey is a University Professor since September 1998. She holds the chair of Russian and Soviet history at the University of Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, where she is also director of the Slavic Research Center. She is responsible for coordinating the teaching of history in the French University Colleges of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and she chairs the association «Les Amis du Patrimoine russe» [«Friends of the Russian Heritage»]. She twice (2002 and 2011) was a Visiting Fellow of the Nobel Institute in Oslo. Her main research topics are the history of Russia and the Soviet Union (19th and 20th centuries, internal and foreign aspects); the history of Russian-European relations; the history of the Cold war. Marie-Pierre Rey is a Knight of the Legion of Honor.

* Cover illustration: «Foreigners arriving in Moscow, 17th century». Source: oil on canvas, 1901, by S. Ivanov. Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow. Published in «Russia 2013. Insights of the French-Russian Observatory», Paris, Le Cherche midi, 2014, p. 123.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the crisis in Ukraine has led to a tangible deterioration in relations between Russia and Western Europe, which today are characterized by political and economic tensions and a climate of mutual suspicion. For some observers, this atmosphere harks back to the rhetoric and experiences of the Cold War; it suggests that the quarter century that has passed since the breakup of the Soviet Union constituted only a fragile digression that could not permanently challenge the structural mistrust that is the legacy of several decades of ideological and geopolitical confrontation.

This assessment is not lacking in basis or fact — the terms that are used more and more often on both sides to designate «the other», even «the enemy», recall those of the Cold War years. For all that, this analysis alone cannot summarize the complexity of the relations between Russia and Western Europe, which, over the span of centuries, have seen successive periods of rapprochement and phases of isolation, and continual swings between fascination and repulsion, attraction and rejection, against a backdrop of major identity issues¹. To shed light on these complex relations that are inscribed in a long history, we will first look at the tsarist period to show how it gave structure to and built the foundations of perceptions, the imagination, and experiences. We will then examine how the Soviet twentieth century partially overturned this legacy and replaced the former psychological patterns with new evaluation grids. Finally, we will turn to the post-Soviet period to attempt to sketch an appraisal.

¹ For a survey of all these issues, see Martin Malia, «*Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*», Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999, and as a companion to this work, my book «*Le dilemme russe, la Russie et l'Europe occidentale d'Ivan le Terrible à Boris Eltsine* », Paris: Flammarion, 2002.

1. THE SOURCES OF RUSSIAN–WEST EUROPEAN RELATIONS: THE FOUNDING LEGACY OF THE TSARIST PERIOD

Until the late sixteenth century and in the early seventeenth century, European-Russian diplomatic relations were practically nonexistent. There were no permanent ambassadors at the Moscow court, and the tsar did not have more representatives permanently in the West. Therefore, during this period, contact between Russians and Western Europeans occurred indirectly through merchants and traders, of which there were few who ventured to Russia. However, during this period, hostile stereotypes were forming on both sides.

1.1. RUSSIA'S IMAGE IN EUROPE DURING THE MODERN ERA

Until the first third of the eighteenth century, Russia and the Russians in Europe suffered from a negative image that appeared during Ivan III's reign and assumed three components².

The first was cultural: in the psychological geography of the Europeans who went to «Muscovy» — first and foremost, diplomats and merchants from the Hanseatic League — Muscovy, which had experienced neither the Renaissance nor the humanist revolution and whose customs were considered unsophisticated, was not part of Europe. To be sure, Russia was Christian, and in the Middle Ages, this was a key criterion in defining European membership, but as soon as the Middle Ages came to an end and the sixteenth-century intellectual and moral modernity set in, Russia found itself pushed to the sidelines of the European continent. This is illustrated, for example, in the writings of the ambassador Von Herberstein, who through his 1549 memoirs, *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*, played a significant role in constructing the image of a Russia that was non-European because it was mired in barbarism and lack of culture.

There were two additional cultural elements, of a different nature. For a number of sixteenth-century European observers, Ivan III's Russia was a tyrannical, cruel regime that brought to mind the governing style imposed by the Mongol khans. Later, the stories of Russian boyars and cultured people fleeing the regime of Ivan IV (the Terrible) and taking refuge on Polish-Lithuanian soil, along with the Western lampoons that stressed the devastation wrought during the Livonian wars, continued to underscore the image of a Russian tsar depicted as a pitiless monster. This second

² These images are well known to us thanks to the work of a number of historians, some of whom were French. For example, there is the work of Marie-Louise Pelus, who studied the political image of Russia in the sixteenth century, and that of Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, who published several articles on the image of Russia and its tsars in the eighteenth century. However, while these political images of Russia, its regime, and its customs were well defined by historians, it was the cultural, philosophical, and artistic images of Russia that most held their attention. Examples include the historian Albert Lortholary's « *Les philosophes du XVIII^{ème} siècle et la Russie, le mirage russe en France au XVIII^{ème} siècle* », Paris: Bouin, 1951, Martin Malia's « *Russia under Western Eyes* », and Marie-Pierre Rey's « *Le dilemme russe* ».

element was then joined by a third, geopolitical one: deeming Russia to be a threat due to its expansionism, the Europeans now aimed to keep it on the edge of the continent, blocking its westward advance at all costs.

Together, these three images — a barbaric country, a tyrannical way of governing, and a power that was dangerous for Europe — persisted for centuries, and this hostile representation did not change much until the early eighteenth century. Peter the Great's military triumphs, which soon made Russia the major power of the northern part of the continent; his aspirations for acculturation and Westernization, which brought the Russian and European elite closer together; and his calling on European engineers and experts all boosted Russia's image. However, it was not until the reign of Elizabeth I, and to a greater extent that of Catherine II, that Western decision makers started to think of Russia simultaneously as a full-fledged actor on the European stage and as a country that rightfully belonged to the community of civilized nations. Notwithstanding, the reversal of the image was not complete: the Prussian ruler, Frederick II, still referred to the Russians as a «crowd of barbarians» and «proud assassins». Louis XV also stated that he wanted to keep Russia sidelined on the continent. Thus it can be seen that hostility predominated. Yet at the same time, on the Russian side, mistrust, if not hostility, also reigned.

1.2. RUSSIA WITH REGARD TO EUROPE: A STRUCTURAL MISTRUST SUSTAINED BY RELIGIOUS FRAMES OF REFERENCE

At the end of the Middle Ages, although it was still blurry, Russian identity was already appearing inseparable from the Orthodox religion³. Initially received from Byzantium, this faith little by little became «individualized»: even before the fall of Byzantium, it had begun to distance itself from Byzantium and adopt its own structures, and it «nationalized» — Russian bishops and priests soon took the place of Greek ones. This faith quickly helped to unite the Russians, first against the Teutonic Knights (1242), then against the Tatars (1480), and finally against the «papist» Poles who had been driven out of Russia in 1612–1613 during the Time of Troubles. Brought together, Russianness and Orthodoxy thus demonstrated their effectiveness early on, but in doing this, they were tinged with Europhobic accents: concerned with separating themselves from the intruding shadow of Byzantium and with protecting itself from the «papist» Polish-Lithuanian ambitions, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Russians were mistrustful of Europe, which they perceived as a source of danger.

Starting with the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584), a more political depiction eventually appeared against this backdrop of mistrust that was initially fed by religious assumptions. During this time, the Russian government was drawn to the West. On the one hand, the tsar, wishing to make Russia a naval power, grasped the relevance of an advance toward the Baltic Sea and North Sea. On the other hand, he was conscious of the engineering and technological superiority of the European powers,

³ Cf. Michel Heller, « *Histoire de la Russie et de son empire* », Paris: 1999; rev. ed. Champs Flammarion, 2009, *passim*.

and he yearned to catch Russia up in this realm, hence his relatively benevolent welcoming of foreigners who were in Russia. This was evidenced in the incorporation into the Russian diplomatic service of former Livonian nobles who were prisoners of war; the appeal to German mercenaries, who were recruited as artillerymen; and even the permission given to English industrialists to develop a major metallurgical center in the Vologda Governorate. However, at the same time — and as the close correspondence between the tsar and Queen Elizabeth I of England shows — the government also mistrusted this West, the subversive ideas of which were likely to harm the autocratic regime. Later, this ambiguous stance toward European influence became sharper. Admittedly, Peter I wanted to «Europeanize» the Russian government, army, and administration in order to modernize these bodies and make them more effective. Yet at the same time, he continually made sure that the borrowings remained under his close supervision. As for Catherine, although in the first years of her reign she promoted a broad opening to the West — psychological as well as political and cultural — this trend was challenged by the Pugachev rebellion and, even more, the radical movement sparked by the French Revolution, which she did not understand and which scared her. Beginning in 1789–1790, the empire closed in on itself, the Masonic lodges were shut down, and the writers Radishchev and Novikov, after being judged seditious, were imprisoned and even exiled.

Although a structural mistrust of Europe thus emerged early from the Russian church and government alike, it can be seen that the intellectual elites were not to be outdone, for in the eighteenth century, some started to question the meaning of these European «borrowings», which they viewed as damaging to Russian identity. Conducted by forced marches, Russia's Westernization advocated by Peter I⁴ led to a sort of «de-Russification» of the noble elite. Molded by Western frames of reference since childhood, and more comfortable communicating in French, German, and English than in their own language, these elites ended up no longer knowing oral traditions and culture, and were ignorant of customs and folklore — in a word, they cut themselves off from the rest of the population by adopting foreign mores. Yet this development, which some people worried about, started with Peter the Great's own son, the tsarevich Alexei. In the short term, Alexei's execution⁵ for being «guilty» of «treason» silenced the critics. However, beginning in the last third of the eighteenth century, intellectuals such as Sumarokov and Shcherbatov revived the same worries, denouncing the harmful influence of Europe and its values on Russian culture and identity.

Thus in the modern era, Russia and Europe had complex and ambiguous relations imprinted with stereotypes and clichés that were often hostile even though the countries' contact remained limited. In the course of the nineteenth century, this contact

⁴ There is a vast body of work written about Peter the Great and the process of Europeanization. To name just a few books: Lindsey Hughes, «*Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*», New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998; and more recently, Robert K. Massie, «*Peter the Great: His Life and World*», New York: Random House, 1980; and Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, «*Pierre le Grand*», Paris: SPM, Chronos, 2012.

⁵ Cf. Alain Besançon, «*Le Tsarévitch immolé : la symbolique de la loi dans la culture russe*», Paris: Payot, 1991.

increased: permanent diplomatic and consular representations were established, and depending on the conflicts (Napoleonic Wars, Crimean War, Balkan Wars, etc.), Russia and Europe were more directly at odds, alternately allied or opposed. In this shifting context, what happened to the depictions that were inherited from the past?

1.3. NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

In spring 1814, Alexander I⁶, who defeated Napoleon at the end of the French campaign, aspired to enter Paris to demonstrate his magnanimity, and in doing this, to show Russia's Europeanness⁷. He was keen to give the lie to the Napoleonic propaganda, which constantly painted him as a Northern barbarian leading an Asiatic nation. The tsar's symbolic visit to Paris, the «worldly city», was successful and actually greatly improved Russia's image on the international stage. Henceforth, Russia's Europeanness was no longer doubted, and the Russian empire was well and truly a model of a great European power, on both the diplomatic and military fronts. However, Russia simultaneously continued to arouse fear, and although for a time Alexander I managed to reassure the Europeans, once Nicholas I acceded to power, Russia, which had been promoted to the rank of «watchdog» of Europe, again came to be seen as a despotic and Eastern nation that blocked European liberties. The role played by the Russian army in repressing the 1830 Polish insurrection was central to this hostile portrayal. However, the influence of the Marquis de Custine's book, «*La Russie en 1839*», a veritable best seller of the time, should be highlighted: it contributed to instilling the motif of the Russian «barbarism» hidden under the gloss of civilization. Ten years later, Russia's brutal interference in the Hapsburg Empire to oppose the Hungarian revolution there spurred a new wave of Russophobia in Europe: clichés about Russian savagery and despotism sprouted while the diplomatic and geopolitical power of the empire of the tsars inspired more and more fear, and the Russian social order, which was grounded in serfdom, appeared more and more anachronistic.

The reign of Alexander II gave some respite to these negative portrayals: the abolition of serfdom reconciled Europe with Russia, and in the European imagination, Russia returned to the path of civilization. Hence in Western Europe, and more particularly in France, flattering writing about Russia proliferated at the same time as Europeans were discovering Russian culture through some influential mediators⁸: Ivan Turgenev, who was settled in Paris and was a friend to French writers, publicists, and journalists, among whom he popularized Russian literature; Prosper Mérimée, the author of *Carmen* and translator of some of Pushkin's work; and Louis Viardot, a

⁶ For a view of the entire reign of Alexander I, see Marie-Pierre Rey, «*Alexandre I^{er}, le tsar qui vainquit Napoléon*», Paris: Flammarion, 2009 and 2013; published by ROSSPEN in Russian in 2013.

⁷ Cf. Marie-Pierre Rey, «*1814, un Tsar à Paris*», Paris: Flammarion, 2014.

⁸ On these influential mediators, see the enlightening thesis defended at the Université de Strasbourg by Gianni Cariani, «*Une France russophile ? Découverte, réception impact, la diffusion de la culture russe en France de 1881 à 1914*», Lille: Editions du Septentrion, 2001.

friend of Turgenev's and himself also a translator, in this case of Gogol's stories.

This newfound interest in Russian culture was coupled with a keener familiarity with Russia and its economic, social, and political reality. In this regard, the in-depth work by Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, « *The empire of the Tsars and the Russians* », the first volume of which was published in 1881, followed by two other volumes in 1882 and 1888, had some of the features of a radical change in perspective. Custine's lampooning style gave way to a «clinical» style of a distant analyst concerned with creating the most nuanced portrait possible of contemporary Russia.

Thus in 1914, on the eve of World War I, Russia's image in Europe was radically transformed. Beginning in the second third of the nineteenth century, and to an even greater degree in the last third of the nineteenth century, the depiction of a country doubly perceived on the margins, on the margins of the European continent and civilization, was replaced by that of a nation that legitimately belonged to the European continent through its geopolitical and diplomatic interests as much as through its civilization and culture.

On the contrary, on the Russian side, the questions and doubts that had emerged in the modern era did not subside — far from it.

During the nineteenth century, Slavophiles, Pan-Slavists, and nationalists such as Katkov and Dostoevsky were keen to set themselves apart from the European model, which they viewed as foreign to the Russian destiny. For them, Western European culture and values were only illusory, a source of moral and spiritual decline, while Russia, which was attached to its Orthodox religion and confident in its national genius, should be able to find in itself the spirit of its modernization in order to take its place as an example for the West; they saw in this movement of Russia toward Europe the key to its political and moral salvation. Chaadayev went far in his demand for Russia's Europeanization — in breaking with the Orthodoxy that he viewed as responsible for keeping Russia in a state of backwardness, he ultimately converted to Catholicism.

Starting in the 1860s and 1870s, this major questioning — whether the country should emulate the path taken by Europe or distance itself from it — also permeated the radical movements that were appearing in Russia. It was thus that the partisans of a Marxist graft imported from Western Europe, of which Plekhanov and then Lenin were the heralds, stood in opposition to the supporters of a Russian path to socialism, of which Herzen and then the populist and Socialist Revolutionary circles made themselves the champions.

At the same time, the Russian government also continued to question its relationship with Europe. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, Alexander I played a major role in redrawing the European map that came out of the Congress of Vienna, and under Nicholas I, the autocratic government continued to play an active role in the European arena. But despite this involvement, the government still feared contact with Western Europe. On the military level, the French occupation of 1812 was a source of unheard-of suffering, and in 1853–1856, the catastrophic Crimean War was

a brutal humiliation. On the political level, the government still feared «subversive» ideas coming from Europe. Consequently, the tsarist regime continually vacillated between phases of opening — this was the sense of the liberal period of Alexander I — and phases of closing, which encompassed Nicolas I's xenophobic police state and the stubbornness of a government that refused until 1917 to take steps toward a parliamentary system. So it can be seen that the relationship with Europe remained complex until just before the 1917 revolutions.

2. THE USSR AND WESTERN EUROPE: REJECTION, MISTRUST, AND FASCINATION

While February 1917 marked the start of a political rapprochement between Russia and Europe, October 1917 profoundly altered the relations that had been maintained with Western Europe. For the first time in its history, Russia no longer had to situate itself in relation to a mythologized Western Europe, but rather took its place as an ideological model in relation to which Europe had to shape itself⁹.

2.1. THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION OVERTURNS MIND-SETS

The October Revolution structurally altered the previous relationship with the West, and with Europe in particular. Irrevocably convinced of the superiority of their sociopolitical system over the capitalist system¹⁰, the Soviet elites managed to put an end to Russia's ideological, moral, and intellectual «dependence» with regard to Western Europe. In Western Europe, to the believers who were passionately witnessing the advent of the new Soviet regime and believed in its universality, it was the time of the fellow traveler; in Russia, the Soviet decision makers, who were proud to embody a revolutionary future called on to radiate beyond the national borders, were also conscious of this ideological «reversal». Stalin stressed:

One cannot exclude that Russia will be the country, which will pave the way to socialism. . . . We should put aside the outdated view that Europe will show us our way.¹¹

However, despite this shift in mind-set, the relationship with Europe remained essential. For the founders of the Soviet system — and first and foremost for Lenin — the regime would survive by expanding the revolution into Europe. Therefore, there was no question of being isolated; on the contrary, it was necessary to work toward expanding the Soviet model onto European soil. Hence, on the one hand, the establishment starting in 1919 of the offensive networks of the Comintern, and on the other, the need to protect itself against Europe, which was still viewed as a threat — the Western intervention in the civil war even though the country was already exhausted from four years of conflict, and the support given by the Western European governments to the White armies, broadly gave credence to the idea of this threat.

⁹ On the reversal and the role of Soviet Russia and then the Soviet Union as a model, see Sophie Coeure's work, particularly her book « *La grande lueur à l'Est, les Français et l'Union soviétique, 1917–1939* », Paris: Seuil, 1999. See also her recent biography of Pierre Pascal, « *Pierre Pascal, la Russie entre christianisme et communisme* », Paris: Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2014, and Pierre Pascal's 1928–1929 journal annotated by her, which has also been published by Noir sur Blanc.

¹⁰ It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that some people, often technocrats, started to voice doubts about this superiority and declare themselves in favor of contact with and increased borrowing from the West.

¹¹ Qtd. in Vera Tolz, « *Russia: Inventing the Nation* », London: Arnold, 2001, p. 107.

Yet this perception had major effects on the foreign policy of the young government. It explained in the first half of the 1920s the desire of the Soviet leaders to «best exploit the interimperialist contradictions», and it culminated with the 1922 signing of the German-Soviet Treaty of Rapallo and quickly gained ground in Stalin's views.

2.2. STALIN'S VIEWS

Stalin had nothing but scorn for the West's values and capitalist ideology¹². Yet at the same time, he was fixated on the West's economic modernity and effectiveness, and from early on, he aimed to make the Soviet Union a major industrial power that could enter the international arena and compete with the capitalist nations. In 1931, he expressed worry about the Soviet Union's lag, stressing the country's vulnerability:

*Slowing the pace means to be behind. But those who are behind get beaten. And we do not want to be beaten. . . . We are 50 or 100 years behind the capitalist countries. We need to make up for this lag in 10 years. Otherwise, they will crush us.*¹³

This dual obsession — the obsession with a power that it was a question of constructing and the obsession with the gap that needed to be closed — broadly illuminated the economic priorities of Stalin, who chose a forced-march development of heavy industry and the cruel sacrifice of a farming class deemed recalcitrant to his plans. However, it also explained the nature of his diplomatic choices: in 1937, skeptical about the viability of an alliance with the Western democracies and aware of the Soviet Union's inability to win a war, he outlined the first steps of a rapprochement with Germany, and two years later, he signed the German-Soviet pact.

Right after World War II, the Soviet uneasiness with regard to the West did not dissipate, while Europe remained Stalin's focal point.

Indeed, despite the Soviet Union's acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 and an ideological message with universal aspirations conveyed to the West by loyal Communist parties, the postwar Soviet Union continued to see itself as a regional power that was «naturally» Eurasian through history's lessons and geographic constraints.

This territorial and regional perception of the Soviet government underlay Stalin's postwar diplomacy: it pushed him to claim the principle of spheres of influence in Europe, then to establish in Central and Eastern Europe safe, docile regimes, without regard for nations' rights to autonomy; it was also the source of his policy of expansion toward the Balkans, Turkey, and Iran, and it explained his entire policy regarding Germany¹⁴.

¹² Cf. his statement in 1947, when, before a group of academics, he caustically lashed out against «the unjustified tradition of genuflection before the Western culture» by Russian intellectuals. Qtd. in Rey, « *Le dilemme russe* », op. cit., p. 234.

¹³ *Ibidem.*, p. 237.

¹⁴ See Laure Castin-Chaparro, « *Puissance de l'URSS, misères de l'Allemagne, Staline et la question allemande*,



2.3. THE KHRUSHCHEV PERIOD: BETWEEN DEDICATION TO STALIN'S PERCEPTIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Under Khrushchev, the notion of Europe as a dangerous enemy territory persisted, but the idea that dominated the studies produced by research institutions was Germany's clout in Europe and the dangers it caused during the Cold War and then peaceful coexistence. In the party's internal archives, this German danger is divided into three main components: militarism, which was viewed as a legacy of Nazism; capitalism, which was seen as «monopolistic» and reminded Soviet observers of the interwar coalitions; and revanchism. During de-Stalinization, the view held by Soviet decision makers on European issues therefore remained defined by patterns that were inherited from the Stalinist era. However, changes started to take shape, as the Soviet government globalized and ventured beyond the Eurasian continuum¹⁵.

Admittedly, this globalization was not yet systematically inherent to the actions, and in 1959–1960, the Soviet Union's incursion into America pertained more to a skillful exploitation of the errors and missteps of American diplomacy than to a predetermined plan. But the progression was obvious: following the Suez crisis, which it was able to take advantage of, Khrushchev's diplomacy enjoyed some victories in the Arab world, and its influence grew among some newly independent countries of decolonized Africa, such as Ghana and Guinea.

At the same time, the rhetoric of the Soviet leaders about their country was also evolving: for Khrushchev¹⁶ and his cronies, the Soviet Union was defined as a «European [country] by nature», and Europe remained solidly at the center of the preoccupations of the Soviet decision makers. But henceforth, when the Communist decision makers evoked the Soviet government, the adjective «global» was vital. In the report he presented to the Twentieth Congress in February 1956, Suslov stated characteristically that «there was not one important international problem exciting the peoples of all the world in these years in which the Soviet Union did not put in its own word and did not contribute largely to its [the problem's] solution»¹⁷. Three years later, in January 1959, Anastas Mikoyan's visit to the United States, and then Khrushchev's successful September trip to America, gave precedence to U.S.-Soviet dialogue and helped thrust onto the international stage the image of a Soviet «superpower». Finally, this shift in perspective also pertained to decision-making organizations given

1941–1955 », Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002; and Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War, from Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. See also Mikhail Lipkin, « Avril 1952, la conférence économique de Moscou: changement de tactique ou innovation dans la politique extérieure stalinienne? », *Relations internationales* 2011/3, n° 147, pp. 19–33.

¹⁵ Cf. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, New York: Norton and Company, 2006.

¹⁶ The personal role he played in developing Soviet foreign policy has been stressed by many testimonials by former diplomats and members of the Central Executive Committee. See, for example, the testimonial by Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniya Diplomata*, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnaya Otnosheniya, 1994.

¹⁷ Mikhail Suslov's report to the Twentieth Congress, qtd. in James Richter, *Khrushchev's Double Bind*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 84.

that starting in 1956–1957, the Soviet government had a new tool for analyzing and studying international relations, IMEMO (Institute of World Economy and International Relations), which was specifically charged with studying Third World issues.

Yet this change in perspective, which was obvious in 1956–1957, became stronger during the Brezhnev era.

2.4. FROM BREZHNEV'S SOVIET UNION TO GORBACHEV'S PERESTROIKA

The Brezhnev era (1964–1982) was characterized by the Soviet Union's accession to strategic parity, which was confirmed by the SALT agreements: henceforth, the Soviet strategic power competed on equal footing with the United States, and the buildup of the major crises of the period — the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War — testified to the progression toward a duopoly, or «condominium», that pandered to the Soviet leaders. At the same time, the Soviet leaders kept an eye on the European sphere, as was demonstrated by their persistent desire to reach an agreement that would be likely to validate the temporary borders resulting from Potsdam. But once this process was started — the Helsinki Final Act was signed on August 1, 1975 — Europe was no longer the main subject of their preoccupations. Brezhnev's Soviet Union continued to gain influence in Africa and to consolidate its acquisitions in Latin America and Asia; more than ever, it was well and truly a global power.

During this same period, riding on its international triumphs, the Soviet state no longer seemed to fear contact with Western Europe. The détente even led to the establishment of a genuine economic cooperation with Western European countries such as West Germany and France, which was accompanied by a certain cultural opening. Indeed, when the Soviet leaders began to become aware of the dysfunctions in their economy, they tried, as during the tsarist era, to fix them by resorting to transfers of Western technology.

However, this first attempt at rapprochement with Western Europe turned out to be short lived. In 1977–1978, the Soviet decision makers started to backpedal and challenge the policy of détente and cooperation that had been enacted with Western Europe. For despite the economic and trade advantages that it gained for them, this policy turned out to be costly for the Soviet Union, as the increased contact with the Western European nations provoked in the West repeated and noisy pressures in favor of human rights. However, for the Soviet leaders who viewed them as intolerable signs of intervention in the domestic affairs of the Socialist community, there could be no question of ceding to these «subversive» attacks that were harmful to the security façade that they had built in Eastern Europe as well as to the very foundations of the regime¹⁸. In this context, aware that it was harder and harder for it to effectively protect itself against these new «threats» of ideological contamination coming from the West, the regime hardened its positions toward Western Europe,

¹⁸ Several reports written by Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB, testify to a sharp perception of this danger of contamination and destabilization. Cf., for example, the report he wrote in August 1976. In RGANI, Archives of the CPSU, resolution of the Central Committee, 22/15, August 24, 1976.

and starting in 1977–1978 it chose a policy of pressure, which was illustrated by the Euromissile crisis¹⁹.

At that time, the opening toward Western Europe seemed to have lasted a long time, and the previous portrayals that had been shaped from hostile ideological references seemed to have regained dominance. But in reality, despite its fleeting nature, the rapprochement and good neighbor period between the Soviet Union and Western Europe had positive effects on the depictions that were disseminated on both sides. The direct contacts established between political and economic authorities helped to quell a number of hostile prejudices that were inherited from the Cold War, and they enabled both parties to know each other better, and even to understand each other. Impeded by the return to the Second Cold War between 1980 and 1985, this fundamental progression toward less ideological perceptions was confirmed and accentuated by Gorbachev's perestroika.

Beginning in 1985, and even more so between 1987 and 1988, Gorbachev's Soviet Union embarked on a revolution that was as political as it was psychological and moral, and whose effects were as obvious in diplomatic practices as in the values claimed by the government. Aspiring to a «deideologized» and global foreign policy, Gorbachev and his circle — Eduard Shevardnadze at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anatoly Dobrynin at the head of the International Department of the Central Committee, and Anatoly Chernyaev as foreign policy adviser — committed to an active diplomacy that quickly bore fruit. It suffices to cite the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan or the 1987 signature of the Washington treaty, which for the first time established between the two superpowers a genuine process of disarmament. However, it was in the relations with Europe that the changes were the most distinct.

Until late 1987 and early 1988, the government had not fully done away with the old Soviet practices and depictions, and the concept of the «common European home»²⁰, which was introduced in December 1984 during a trip by Gorbachev to London, reveals the former temptation to separate the United States and Western Europe and over time to chase the Americans off the old continent. But beginning in 1988, things took a different direction and a profound reversal, both psychological and political, started to take shape.

On the political front, Gorbachev's government expected a lot from this common home.

On the one hand, it counted on a new kind of relationship with the former Eastern people's democracies. In this pan-European entity, the revived people's democracies would be able to, alongside the Soviet Union, embody a socialism «with a human face», that is, a socialism that was tolerant and respectful of the principles of renunciation of force and of freedom of choice, two principles that Gorbachev stressed in his speech to the United Nations on December 7, 1988. However, on this front, Gorbachev's

¹⁹ On the Euromissile crisis, see Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother, «*The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*», Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015.

²⁰ On the history of the concept of the common home, see Marie-Pierre Rey, «*Europe Is Our Common Home: A Study of Gorbachev's Diplomatic Concept*», *Cold War History* 4, n°2 (2004), pp. 33–65.

hopes turned out to be in vain because as soon as the people's democracies gained their freedom and independence, they — first and foremost Czechoslovakia and Poland — hastened to break with socialism, opting to embark on the transition to a capitalist regime.

On the other hand, and even more critically, Gorbachev's government expected new relations with Western Europe.

Henceforth, the Soviet desire to get closer to the nations of Western Europe focused less on destabilizing U.S.-Western Europe relations than on instilling a true partnership with Western Europe. To show its concrete desire to progress toward a rapprochement with the European community, the Soviet government stated that it favored the establishment of official relations between Comecon and the EEC. This was the sense of the first «common declaration», which was adopted in June 1988 between the two economic bodies, and of the first cooperation agreement, which they signed in late 1988.

Moreover, also shifting in his own convictions, Gorbachev asserted that he favored a gradual rapprochement that would be done on the basis of Western Europe's values — with respect for human freedoms and human rights, democracy, and political pluralism at the forefront. Far from being seen as threatening, hostile, and foreign, as in the Soviet past, Western Europe thus appeared as the carrier of a civilization that should be aspired to.

The extent of the goals, the concrete accomplishments in which they culminated with the November 1990 signature of the first major disarmament agreement in Europe, and the Soviet Union's accession to the Paris Charter for a New Europe — ultimately, the presupposition on which they lay, that is, Russia's fundamentally European character — were all factors that attested to a radical shift in the relations with Europe. However, in this period of recovered freedom of expression, this shift sparked animated debate and virulent criticism, and there could be seen a rift between those who believed in this common European home and those who rejected it in the name of Russian identity and Russianness. Journals such as *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaya gvardiya* unleashed diatribes, lashing out at the «Western contamination» against which there was being conducted a new «battle of Stalingrad»²¹. Likewise, in January 1991, *Paradigmy* published an article stating that «never before has 'Westernism' taken such a barefaced aggressive form in this country, rejecting everything Russian»²².

The adoption of these stances provoked responses that were just as strong on the part of the «Westernists». In 1990, V. Dashichev pedantically defended Gorbachev's arguments in *Moskovskie novosti*, and in March 1991, Shevardnadze, who was no longer the minister of foreign affairs, vehemently stated that he favored the «European choice», stressing that:

²¹ Vera Tolz, «Russia: Inventing the Nation», op.cit., p. 123.

²² *Idem*.

*If we manage to settle our national, economic, and political problems and continue the construction of a law-ruled and democratic state we will continue to participate in the creation of an integral European economic, legal, humanitarian, cultural and ecological space. Its foundation has already been built. . . . If we want to be a civilized country we should have the same laws and standards as all other civilized countries.*²³

Starting in 1985, perestroika therefore endeavored to offer a new response to Russia's European dilemma: with the gradual refocus on European issues, the original «common European home» concept, and the promotion of a large-scale rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the various Western European nations, Gorbachev's government strove to «get on Europe's path», and it went far on this course by supporting in late 1988 the principles that were cherished by Westerners — hence the right given to the people's democracies to freely exercise their sovereignty, and restraint from using force within the Socialist community, and then accession to the Charter for the New Europe in late 1990. However, misunderstood by part of public opinion and the elites who had remained attached to former frameworks, this movement that was occurring at a time when the country was suffering from various types of difficulties turned out to be full of pitfalls and was soon incompatible with maintaining a Soviet structure, which ultimately imploded in December 1991.

Perestroika therefore constituted an important stage in Russia's return to Europe. However, since then an essential question has arisen: did the foundations laid by Gorbachev pertain to a structural change or an epiphenomenon? Looking closely at the changes over the last twenty-five years makes it possible to outline a few answers.

²³ E. Shevardnadze, interview with Fiodor Burlatsky, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, April 10, 1991. Qtd. in Neil Malcolm, «*Russia and Europe: An End to Confrontation?*», New York: Inter Pub Ltd., 1994, p. 160.

3. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE EU: BETWEEN RAPPROCHEMENT, PARTNERSHIP, AND MISTRUST

Tracing in a few paragraphs the full complexity of Russian-European relations over the last twenty-five years is a challenge given the extent to which the fluctuations, hesitations, crises, and lulls have not stopped following one another based on changes in the international context as well as the vagaries of Russian domestic policy.

3.1. BORIS YELTSIN'S PRESIDENCY, THE ERA OF THE "RETURN TO EUROPE"

In January 1992, the young Russian Federation established itself as a sovereign state, the heir of the Soviet state from which it had inherited diplomatic involvements and the status of nuclear power. However, this continuity was only superficial: *de facto*, the post-Communist Russia that could not call up any intellectual or historic models²⁴ painfully lacked frames of reference: «neither geography nor history could help its transformation; the models it tested and the borders that surrounded it were fundamentally foreign to it»²⁵.

When he became head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1990, and even more so after the fall of the Soviet Union, Andrey Kozyrev immediately sought to situate himself in the Gorbachev school of thought, and he gave the impression of being realistic: for him it was no longer the time to dream of hypothetical global plans of influence, and Russia, which no longer had the means of its former planetary ambitions, had to appraise the changes in its status. In August 1992, the Council of Foreign and Defense Policy, which was influenced by Kozyrev's outlook, stated tellingly:

*According to most factors, and not counting its area and nuclear arsenal, Russia became an average power.*²⁶

In this context, and while the country was going through a major economic, social, and identity crisis, between 1992 and 1995 Russia's foreign policy followed that of the Gorbachev period and it pursued three key goals: maintain the most peaceful relations possible with the various members of the CIS; rejoin the global international community — in April 1992, the Russian Federation acceded to the IMF and two months later joined the World Bank; and, in the wake of the common European

²⁴ See James Richter, «Russian Foreign Policy and the Politics of National Identity» in Celeste A Wallander, *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), p. 69.

²⁵ Cf. Laetitia Spetschinsky, « Une politique étrangère à l'épreuve de la transition, contribution à l'étude de la politique russe à l'égard de l'Union européenne (1992–2000) », thesis, Université de Louvain la Neuve, 2010, p. 175.

²⁶ Qtd. in Catherine de Motlibert-Dumoulin, « Acteurs et mécanismes de décision de la politique étrangère russe » in *Les relations entre l'Union européenne et la Fédération de Russie*, ed. Tanguy de Wilde and Laetitia Spetschinsky, Louvain la Neuve: Institut d'Etudes Européennes, 2000, p. 98.

home, affirm Russia's European character — this could be seen in May 1992 with Russia's application to the Council of Europe and in November with the beginning of negotiations with the European communities on a plan for a partnership and cooperation agreement. For Boris Yeltsin, as for Kozyrev, based on the shared values of democracy, respect for human rights, and freedom to do business, this privileged partnership was meant to serve as a favored tool of democratization of a country that saw and defined itself as European. This was also seen in Yeltsin's statement before the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where he expressed his intention to correct a seventy-year-old injustice and return Russia to Europe. But because it did not end in any tangible result, the concept of the common home was abandoned — first and foremost, the Russian government was focused on being practical and pragmatic in its relations with Europe.

However, this foreign policy that gave the impression of being regional was accused of being unambitious, hence the debates in the Duma and public criticism just as the Yugoslavia crisis was provoking in Russia pro-Serbian, anti-Western feelings that ultimately cost Kozyrev his position in December 1995.

During these years of transition, trusting relations nonetheless were woven between the European Union and the new Russia. They took on various aspects. The first was an aspect of assistance: between 1990 and 1994, particularly thanks to the TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) program, which was established in 1991, the European Community supplied 60% of the total amount of international aid given to the new Russian state²⁷, thus becoming an indispensable, understated spokesperson for Russian modernization. Also during this period, the European Union was a leading trading partner for Russia: between 1992 and 1995, in value it represented a bit more than one-third of Russia's foreign trade²⁸. Finally, it started to become a political partner: the partnership and cooperation agreement signed on June 24, 1994, in Corfu underscores this.

Thus it is evident that the period from 1992 to 1995 coincided with a Russian-European honeymoon marked by the influence of «Westernist» trends. However, the partnership and cooperation agreement that was signed in Corfu did not enter into force for two and a half years — on December 1, 1997. This was because in the interim, subjects of tension and crisis continued to multiply in a context that was, moreover, changed.

3.2. BETWEEN DISILLUSION AND MISUNDERSTANDING: RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AMID NEW CONCERNS, 1996–2000

In January 1996, Yevgeny Primakov became minister of foreign affairs; his nomination was an attempt to pacify the nationalist elites as well as the Communist elites who

²⁷ Cf. Andrei Zagorski, «Russia and European Institutions», in *Russia and Europe, the Emerging Security Agenda*, ed. Vladimir Baranovsky (Stockholm: SIPRI, 1997), pp. 519–540.

²⁸ That is, 36,4% in 1992, 32,9% in 1993, 35,1 percent in 1994, and 32% in 1995. Cf. Silke Machold, «*Europe and Russia's External Economic Relations: An Assessment*», *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, n°. 35 (1998), p. 14.

were more and more sickened by Kozyrev's «blind conformity» and «indulgence» toward the West. Primakov, who was sixty-seven years old, graduated from the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow in 1953, held a doctorate in history, and spoke several languages, including Arabic and French. He initially established himself as an academic specialist on Asia and the Middle East. He worked at *Pravda* (1962–1965) and then served as a Middle East correspondent for the paper from 1965 to 1970. Promoted to the rank of academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1975, he then headed IMEMO from 1985 to 1989 before Gorbachev made him a member of the Presidential Council in 1990–1991. It was in this capacity that he was sent three times to Iraq to try to convince Saddam Hussein to accept the United Nations' ultimatum²⁹ while Hussein was shaping the Gulf War. In December 1991, Primakov was named head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, a post he held until he became minister of foreign affairs.

When he became head of the ministry, Primakov drew up a critical assessment of Russian diplomacy. In his view, Russia's goodwill toward the West, its desire to join the community of liberal democracies, and the rapprochement that had been outlined between Russia and the West since 1992 had only ended in a sucker deal: not only had Russia not been fully reincorporated into this international community, and not only had it failed to lift itself to the rank of equal negotiating partner with the United States, but even worse, from the economic perspective, the hoped-for Western help had not been enough to avoid the deep crisis Russia fell into in 1992–1993. In addition, on the geopolitical front, Russia saw its spheres of influence shrink at the expense of the unilateral advance of American diplomacy, and the subjects of resentment and bitterness multiplied. Thus in handling the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, NATO kept Russia on the fringes of the process, connecting it only formally to the Dayton Accords. In addition, starting in 1993, the prospect of NATO's expansion to the former satellite states of Eastern Europe provoked visceral hostility in Russia, which perceived in this step direct harm to its security.

Confronted with these critical issues, Primakov thus sought to make his mark by reorienting Russian diplomacy and stressing three cornerstone ideas.

The first stemmed from Russia's status: in his view, although Russia had gone through a difficult period that had weakened it, it remained no less a nation whose essential features would not be able to reduce it to being merely an average European power; by virtue of its geographic location, history, and culture, it remained a Eurasian power that was indomitably exceptional and whose natural reach could be only Eurasian. These ideas echoed arguments that had already been formulated in the Russian empire in the late nineteenth century and revived in the early 1920s by the Eurasianists³⁰. The second concept pertained to a geopolitical analysis: the end

²⁹ For these biographical elements, see Caroline Ibos-Hervé, «*Les diplomates russes et la politique étrangère*», *Les Etudes du CERI*, n° 32, October 1997, p. 13.

³⁰ On this topic, see the work of Marlène Laruelle, especially: «*L'idéologie eurasiiste russe ou Comment penser l'empire*», preface by Patrick Sériot, Paris-Montreal: l'Harmattan, «*Essais historiques*», 1999; and more recently: «*La quête d'une identité impériale. Le néo-urasisme dans la Russie contemporaine*», Paris: Éditions Pétra,



of the Cold War had to promote the emergence of a multipolar world in which foreign policy would show balance. Of course, cooperation with the West, and Europe in particular, remained a priority of Russian foreign policy, but it was no longer a time for an unconditional Westernism. Finally, in the third key concept, Primakov highlighted the «near abroad», and thus gave Russia privileged supervisory power over the former Soviet republics, which were home to 25 million Russians.

Far from the Europhilia of the transition years of 1992–1993, starting in 1996 Russian-European relations entered a more complex period that also stemmed from the development of the international context itself.

Western Europe remained a top economic and trade partner and a natural and consensual political interlocutor. Fearing the expansion of NATO toward the former people's democracies, and even toward some former Soviet republics, Russian diplomats then spoke out for an alternative, that is to say, «the transformation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) into a central element of the future architecture of European security»³¹. This bet on the OSCE and on Europe, which was viewed as a lesser evil compared to NATO, which still constituted an obsession and an unattractive entity, simultaneously explained Russia's relative goodwill toward the expansion of the European Union in the direction of its former satellites. For all that, the Russian authorities were no less worried: due to the enlargement of Europe, they feared that Russia would end up being relegated to the fringes of the continent and that the incorporation of these new entrants would toughen the EU's positions toward it and serve to marginalize it even more. At the same time, unease was also perceptible on the Western European side: in 1996, Russia entered the Council of Europe, and in 1999, a new impetus was given to the cooperation and partnership agreement, but Europe did not stop blaming the Russian government for its repeated breaches of the principle of the rule of law and human rights and its handling of the conflict in Chechnya. On both sides, mutual bitterness, resentment, and lack of understanding were already showing on the surface. They continued to grow when Putin took office.

3.3. RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE PUTIN ERA

Relatively unknown by the Western media when he took power in late 1999–early 2000, and then viewed as rather drab and even lacking in charisma, Vladimir Putin, the prime minister who was promoted to interim president and then full-fledged president, quickly got down to reforming Russian diplomacy, assisted by his foreign affairs minister, first Igor Ivanov until 2004 and then Sergei Lavrov.

In the early 2000s, Russia and the West seemed to share a desire for rapprochement, which the events of September 11 strengthened. The Russian government then

« Sociétés et cultures post-soviétiques en mouvement », 2007.

³¹ Cf. Isabelle Façon, « La Russie, l'OTAN et l'avenir de la sécurité en Europe », *Politique étrangère*, n° 3, August 1997, p. 295.

aspired to regain geopolitical influence and take advantage of the economic energy of the Eurozone in order to stimulate national development just as the European Union, which was more and more concerned about diversifying its energy supplies, turned to Russia. In just a few years, Russia became one of the main trading partners of the EU, which at the same time rose to the rank of Russia's main trading partner. In addition, this jump in economic trade was occurring within a renewed institutional framework that seemed to bode well. In May 2003, the EU-Russia summit in St. Petersburg launched the development of «four spaces»: a common economic space; a common space of freedom, security, and justice; a common space of external security; and a common space of research and education.

However, despite these apparent successes, these shared aspirations toward rapprochement soon encountered difficulties, and beginning in 2002, more and more palpable tensions. Of course, these tensions are less severe than the Russian-American tensions, which after the lull following the events of September 11 are currently experiencing a severe crisis, but they are no less real.

On the Russian side, resentment toward Europe has increased due to two major issues: first because of the European Union's eastward expansion — in 2004, the EU accepted ten new members, eight of which were post-Communist countries. This contributed to the Russian government's paranoid fear of being contained in the East. Second, there were the «color revolutions» that proliferated on the former Soviet territory (Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004, Kyrgyzstan 2005, Moldova 2009). To the Russian authorities, these color revolutions did not pertain to spontaneous processes reflecting a legitimate yearning for more rights and freedom, but were subversive processes whose purpose was first to reshuffle all the geopolitical cards in the «near abroad» and in the end discredit Putin's regime and overturn it.

Unease has also increased on the part of the European Union. This is first because since Putin's second term, and even more so his third, Brussels has been watching with a disapproving eye an increasing number of breaches by Russia of human rights and civil liberties, and it is worriedly witnessing the rise in power of an authoritarian regime that every day is drawing further away from the rule of law. Second, in recent years, Russia's tendency to use energy supplies as a political weapon has made the EU feel insecure toward a Russia that is perceived as less and less reliable when it comes to its energy strategy.

CONCLUSION

It was in this already-tense context that the painful crisis in Ukraine started a year ago. Very early fed by mistakes, provocations, and mutual missteps, the crisis that every day brings a new set of suffering and violence, a new set of disinformation, and passionate reactions on par with the identity issues it is evoking, now seems deeply entrenched. As for European-Russian dialogue, it is having a hard time leading to convincing results because the positions seem so irreconcilable. For the West, the annexation of Crimea and the active military support given by Moscow to the Donetsk separatists constitute an unacceptable violation of international law, hence the policy of sanctions that Europe implemented after the United States. For the Russian government, the Western stance only reflects the structural inability of both the United States and European Union to understand the nature of Russia's strategic interests and to take them into account.

Twenty-five years after the signature of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, this muffled dialogue and these tensions testify to the fact that Gorbachev's idealism, which called for a common European home based on shared values and principles, has failed in the mission that it set for itself — it is no longer the time of the Westernists. In full identity turmoil, Putin's Russia is looking for models that encompass, in a rather muddled and sometimes contradictory way, imperial, Eurasian, nationalist, anti-Western — even xenophobic — accents. Is this refocus going to continue, and does it herald a lasting phase of closing and turning inward, like the one the centuries-long history of Russian-European relations has already experienced? Or is it only a temporary crisis? The coming months should bring answers to this critical question.