

# Civilizational Indifference

## Can Russia Keep Up Cultural Distancing in Relations with Europe?

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The events of 2022—the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine and the subsequent economic war of the “collective West” against Russia—have aroused speculations that the St. Petersburg period of Russian history is over. According to renowned political scientist Dmitry Trenin, “in fact, the point at issue is the renunciation of part of Peter the Great’s legacy—three hundred years of Russia positioning itself not only as a great European power and an integral part of the balance of power on the continent, but also as an integral part of pan-European civilization” (2022, p. 3). Russia is secluding itself on an “island” and turning towards Asia. The period of

rapprochement between Russia and the West is closing up. The country has chosen its own civilizational path, diverging from that of Europe.

The author of this article shares the approach termed as “Russian paleoconservatism”<sup>1</sup> which holds that the paths of Russia and Europe are really diverging, but this does not mean that before the final disengagement there could not be a short-term rapprochement and the accompanying surge of geopolitical expectations. This rapprochement will turn out to be extremely contradictory, strained and—most importantly—futile. A still more fundamental distancing from Europe—cultural, economic, and diplomatic—will be its end result. But in the short term, Russia’s influence on the state of affairs within the “collective West” may grow.

### **NEW RUSSIAN WESTERNISM**

Let us take as a starting point the hard geopolitical fact: whatever the outcome of the current events, the liquidation of the limitrophe Baltic-Black Sea zone, which since the collapse of the Soviet Union has served as a barrier between Russia and Europe, is almost inevitable. The role of this space in the system of European security has been assessed in different ways. Russian geopolitician Vadim Tsymbursky, the author of the “Island Russia” concept, (1993), believed that the existence of “territories-straits” would be the pre-requisite of Russia’s security in the post-imperial era. He maintained that the final absorption of the Baltic-Black Sea region by competing civilizations would inevitably create the risk of a threat of their direct clash (for more on Tsymbursky’s concept in relation to the current confrontation of civilizations, see Mezhuev, 2017).

Some Western experts shared a similar viewpoint. For instance, both Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, already in 2014, started talking about the benefits of Ukraine’s “Finlandization,” that is, neutralization (Brzeziński, 2014; Mezhuev, 2015). Former U.S. National

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<sup>1</sup> Paleoconservatism is a trend among American conservatives that is opposed to neoconservatism. It criticizes the modern form of constitutional democracy, defends the principles of religious morality, and opposes the strengthening of centralized power. In foreign policy issues, paleoconservatives stand out as staunch opponents of interventionism.

Security Advisor John Bolton represents a different approach. In 2021, he described the non-aligned countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Serbia, and even Finland) as the “gray zone.” With their intermediate status, the countries inside it do not ease the risk of a probable conflict between Russia and NATO, but on the contrary, make it more likely. For this reason, Bolton suggested eliminating the “gray zone” without any fear of “direct contact” between two hostile powers (Bolton, 2021; Mezhuev, 2021).

In a sense Bolton does have a point. At a certain moment the Warsaw Pact and NATO divided Europe almost in half (less several neutral and non-aligned countries), and it will be wrong to say that the borders of “direct contact” between the blocs were less calm than the Russian-Ukrainian border today.

However, the “limitrophe zone,” sandwiched between Russia and the West, left no chance for the Russian cultural and political elites to seriously think about their place in Europe. It is no coincidence that almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR there followed a rise of Eurasianism (which until then had been of interest only to a handful of enthusiasts). Moreover, this trend has remained amazingly popular among various circles of Russian society for the past thirty years. Presumably, the elimination of the limitrophe belt will paradoxically “bring together” our civilizations, making Eurasianism irrelevant again. The geographic rapprochement will entail an attempt at a political rapprochement as well.

In the 1990s, Russia distanced itself from Europe despite the Westernization of the political elite and was predestined to have a special civilizational fate. Today’s Russia, which has literally come closer to Europe as a result of the military operation in Ukraine, will probably position itself primarily as a “European” power again, regardless of its declarative anti-Westernism. As for non-Western ties, Moscow will consider them, above all, as a resource in the geopolitical onslaught on the “collective West.”

When the special military operation ends, NATO’s eastern border will be the western border of an association that is often referred to as the Russian World, that is, Russia’s sphere of geopolitical influence.

Finland has renounced non-alignment and is getting ready to become a full-fledged member of NATO. Belarus, in all likelihood, will continue to move towards even closer integration with Russia. Ukraine will split up into pro-Russian and pro-European parts. Even if the pro-European part of Ukraine does not join NATO, it will undoubtedly continue to interact with it very closely. In other words, from the geopolitical point of view, Island Russia in Tsymbursky's terms, which emerged in 1991 as a result of the country's compression and separation of the western "territories-straits" from it, will not rise to the surface, contrary to what some experts predict, but, on the contrary, will cease to exist.

But could it be that geopolitics misleads us? Could the "direct contact" between the Russian World and the Euro-Atlantic community will result in the restoration of the post-Yalta situation of two worlds separated by an Iron Curtain? Does the Russian political elite predominantly aspire to this, roughly speaking, "isolationist" option—a replica of the 1946-1989 Cold War model?

There are serious reasons to doubt this. If separation or, more precisely, detachment from Europe were really the point at issue, the special military operation, most likely, would immediately be focused on taking over a certain Russia-leaning territory of Ukraine, firmly reluctant to become part of a hostile bloc. If Russia's real intention were to "exit" Europe, it would not matter at all how many Ukrainian cities we would seek to retain. The whole campaign might end with the incorporation of that part of Donbass which belonged to the DPR and the LPR. In this case, too, hostilities would most likely be unavoidable, but they would be limited and mostly defensive on the part of Russia.

The Western countries' reaction could be much more reserved. The Joseph Biden administration, while displaying no readiness to accept all the demands contained in the Russian Foreign Ministry's memorandum of December 2021, did not refuse to discuss the non-deployment of NATO bases and U.S. missile launchers in Ukraine. Also, the U.S. made it clear that, in principle, it did not rule out negotiations on arms limitations in Eastern Europe as a whole. Washington showed no intention to follow the recommendations by Bolton and the like-minded and welcome Ukraine into NATO in the

near future. Also, and perhaps most importantly, even now, waging a “hybrid war” against Russia, the U.S. is unable to give up pressure on China and its policy of containment towards Beijing, including on the Taiwan issue. Had February 21 not entailed February 24, the current tensions in U.S.-China relations would be much stronger and Russia’s position far easier. In other words, the inevitable separation of Russia and Europe, if someone on our side ever set such a task, would proceed far less painfully and by mutual consent among the political elites. The immediate issues of military security, which Russia raised in the late fall of 2021, thus beginning the military campaign, look very complex but negotiable.

Let us now consider another possibility: no one on the Russian side set the task of breaking with Europe. I will formulate it in a seemingly absurd way: the prime task of the special military operation is to secure Russia’s return to Europe as a leading player. In a sense, it is being implemented, and quite successfully. What is happening between Russia and Europe is not a “separation of the platforms” but a new attempt to unite them, however, not by means of friendly interaction, but through a military conflict. It is symbolic that the special military operation began in the year of the 350th anniversary of Peter the Great’s birth and a couple of months after celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the Russian Empire. There has been some fuss over President Vladimir Putin’s comparison of the special military operation with Russia’s 20-year Great Northern War against Sweden (Meeting, 2022). It is common knowledge that that war ended with the victorious Treaty of Nystad in 1721. As a result, imperial Russia took a worthy place among the leading European powers. Thus, the President of the Russian Federation appears as a successor to Peter the Great’s cause, his mission being to correct the failures of his predecessors, who abandoned the empire, sent Russia into exile on an island, or, to use Putin’s metaphor, led it away into “the realm of taiga bears.”

Although diplomatic contacts with the non-West, i.e., Asian, African and partly Latin America states, are on the rise, Russia has not displayed—either culturally or at the informational level—any genuine interest in the state of affairs in “friendly” countries. The attention of

Russian journalists and bloggers, as before, is riveted to Europe and, to an even greater extent, to the United States. Russian official media stay focused on the economic and political crises in the U.S. and the EU, while the internal events and problems of China, the diverse political life of India, let alone the specifics of what is happening in Iran, remain without attention.

There is yet another important factor. If Russia really wished “separation” from Europe, it would not have reacted so worriedly to the so-called “cancellation” of Russian culture and everything Russian in the West. There would have been no emotional comments regarding the bans of Tchaikovsky and Dostoevsky, the demolition of monuments and the removal of Russian thought from university curricula. In the meantime, such discussions are high on the Russian propaganda and diplomatic agenda.

The “new Russian Westernism” is easy to understand. It was in 2022 that Russia fully regained the status of a European power, precisely in the sense it first materialized three centuries ago. From now on, Russia has every reason to believe that the internal political and, especially, economic situation on both sides of the Atlantic largely depends on its own actions or actions directed against it. Domestic experts have keenly reacted to the resignations of heads of governments in some European states. Many think that the underlying reasons lie in the “hybrid war” against Russia. The line-up of political forces in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is largely determined today by the attitude of governments towards Russia and participation in the “sanctions war” against it. There is a possibility that in some countries the anti-Russian elites, strongly antipathetic towards Russia due to ideological contradictions with it, will eventually give way to leaders who are more favorably disposed to interaction with our country.

A political crisis is also possible in the United States. Donald Trump remains the most popular of all Republican presidential candidates. It is quite possible that by the end of 2024 (or even earlier) the specter of Trumpism will awaken or revive its populist “twin brothers” in Europe. A serious rotation of the European political elite, avoided in 2016–2020 only thanks to political manipulations, may be a natural consequence

this time. Russia's external pressure, aggravated by the burden of Europe's internal political and economic problems, will make a change almost inevitable. Philosopher Alexander Dugin noted recently that Russia was fighting with the West for an alternative West (which, however, he also calls the non-West in his writings). Indeed, there are reasons to believe that Russia still hopes for integration with the West (but only on conditions it finds acceptable) and not subordination to what Dmitry Drobnitsky (2021) has dubbed as the "Global Boss." It would be wrong to say that the entire Russian foreign policy elite shares Dugin's hopes, but objectively Russia is getting involved in the intra-Western game again as a proponent of an "alternative West."

To put it in a nutshell: Russia does not separate itself from the West but presses for its transformation to suit its own needs and preferences. This is happening not because it is the conscious choice of some statesmen, but by virtue of the logic of events. The farther Russia advances on the "Ukrainian front," the more likely it is to activate a policy of "geocultural offensive" on the West, which will be based on a growing internal consensus. As it gradually emerges from its previously isolated position, Russia will begin to move towards a point of "geopolitical maximum"—the maximum degree of its influence on the continent's future. Both the current and next generations of the political elite will find this "neo-imperial" temptation difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, we proceed from the assumption (let us call it for convenience "isolationist") that the projected period of geopolitical "unity" between Russia and the West will not yield any benefits for our country, and the outlook for such a paradoxical rapprochement should be avoided, if possible.

### **WHY WE SHOULD NOT SEEK TO ENTER EUROPE**

Why do we call the "neo-imperial temptation" a "temptation to be avoided" in favor of more moderate goals and objectives of the special military operation and foreign policy strategy as a whole?

*Firstly*, there is no certainty that the national-populist West, that is, the Trumpist United States, Eurosceptic France, and Germany that has freed itself from "post-Nazi" political correctness will not

resemble post-Brexit Britain. Nothing will prevent these countries from becoming extremely aggressive states, ready for the riskiest adventures, including those against Russia. What makes some experts in our country so certain that populists are necessarily Russia's friends? It would be more logical to assume that in the event of the collapse of the "Collective West" project, we will be confronted with a number of Russophobic states similar to nationalist Poland. Of the large EU countries the most cautious ones towards Russia are now those where globalists, like Emmanuel Macron, prevail in the political leadership. A Europe divided into sovereignized nation-states, each in pursuit of its selfish interests, will not necessarily be benevolent towards Russia. Suffice it to recall, for example, that the U.S. under Donald Trump began supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine, something Barack Obama had refused to do. The Republicans in Congress will pursue a much more aggressive policy towards Russia, and, of course, they will not have the slightest reason to ease the sanctions stranglehold, especially related to the oil and gas sphere and the technological complex. The Republicans are unlikely to agree to resume the dialogue on strategic stability and renegotiate the New START, which Biden extended for five years.

If Russia's influence on the fate of Europe does increase, its peoples will hardly agree to tolerate the presence of an outspokenly non-European power, such as Russia, in their sovereign space. The final deliverance from energy dependence on Russia will become Europe's civilizational idea for the next decade. As soon as they feel Moscow's growing role, the European countries will eventually try to find a common language in a project aimed at pushing our country out of the geopolitical space of their civilization, the way it happened every time Russia's influence in Europe reached its peak (suffice it to recall the Crimean War of 1853-1856 or the first years after the Civil War of 1918-1920). In other words, Russia's predicted "geopolitical maximum" will almost inevitably bring about the Western countries' new anti-Russian unity, perhaps much harsher and more challenging than ever before. Here it would make sense to turn to the ideas and conclusions found in *Russia and Europe* by philosopher and historian Nikolai Danilevsky,



who pointed to the exceptional ability of the Romano-Germanic world to unite politically in the face of a Russian threat.

*Secondly*, let us ask ourselves how natural the current divergence of the paths of Russia and the West is. Should we see a deeper civilizational and even religious background behind it? It is no coincidence that the West is discarding the last biblical taboos, legalizing not only the right to same-sex cohabitation, but also the change of sex and, in general, radical experiments with one's own body. Since the 18th century, the Western civilization's mainstream trends have proceeded within the secularization project. All attempts by religious conservatives to reverse this project have suffered a political fiasco. If Russia is sincerely committed to Christian values, if it is really keen on rejecting the path taken by Europe, it should stay away from it at arm's length—if not literally, then culturally. In fact, the answer to the question how real Russia's claims to the status of a state-civilization are depends on whether it is capable of keeping up this cultural distancing. Russia can, of course, try to push the West towards a "conservative turn," but all its previous attempts to "save" Europe or "set it right" ended in the strongest wave-like rollbacks, one of which, by the way, was German National Socialism. So there is no reason for Russia to try to stage such an experiment with a predictable ending once again.

*Thirdly*, there is the geo-economic factor that we should not ignore. The main contradiction of the post-Soviet era was that the country's isolated geopolitical position lacked the required economic self-sufficiency. Russia completely relied on the outside world in everything related to high-tech and, in general, commodity supply. As a result, while remaining a raw materials provider of industrialized Europe, it tried to challenge its humiliatingly low position in the world economic system with military might. Meanwhile, right now there has emerged, at last, a demand for changes in the economic policy in order to develop industries that have been sacrificed to globalization. Any new geo-economic symbiosis with continental Europe, or with any other civilizational center, will send the country back to an extremely comfortable position of a raw materials donor for rising industrial and post-industrial nations.

*Fourthly*, there is one more, perhaps the main reason for strategic reserve towards Europe: the “collective West’s” globalist project, being implemented by the Biden administration, is amazingly beneficial to Russia. By trying to “bolster” Western unity, Biden has unwittingly alienated almost all non-Western countries from the United States, which has come as our safety net in the sanctions war. Biden has failed to mobilize for struggle against Russia the Gulf monarchies (back in 2014 they were still ready to meet the U.S. halfway on the issue of increasing oil production, but in 2022 they actually ignored this request), as well as India (ostensibly accepted into the “coalition of democracies”), right-wing populist-ruled Brazil, and Turkey, which continues to play its own game while remaining a member of NATO and having more than uneasy relations with Russia. At some point, the West was actually “isolated” within its boundaries of one-third of humanity, losing leadership over the other two-thirds. As Fyodor Lukyanov notes, “the reaction of the majority of people across the globe shows a high degree of their irritation with the West as a whole. It is seen as a hegemon that traditionally abuses its powers. But these powers are shrinking now ... and this allows countries to express their genuine attitude towards the West by refusing to follow the highly recommended anti-Russian policy. ... The reason is not the support of Russian policy, but opposition to the West’s attempts to impose its approach on others, which often harms their own interests” (Lukyanov, 2022, p. 6).

It is also important that the “collective West” checks risky game attempts by those who are ready for more radical actions against Russia. Apparently, under pressure from Washington (and partly from Brussels), Lithuania had to backtrack on the issue of Kaliningrad’s trade blockade, and Norway had to do the same on a similar issue of food supplies to Spitzbergen. On the other hand, the need to negotiate with the countries of Central Europe makes the “collective West” more receptive to economic arguments from the continental powers: however low the current stakes of Europe’s economic priorities, Trumpist America, freed from “European influences,” will be far less inclined to take them into account than “globalist” America.

If Russia stopped viewing itself as a potentially European power, unfairly rejected by Europe itself, and began to position itself as a fundamentally non-European power, the conclusion would be quite logical: the farther away the West is from us in socio-cultural terms, the easier (potentially) it will be to do business with it. It is no coincidence that it was easier for the Soviet leaders to interact with the ideologically alien rightist Republicans. For the same reason, “sovereign” Russia finds it easier to have relations with “globalist” America, while common topics for a discussion with its national-populist version are unlikely.

Thus, despite the favorable geopolitical situation, Russia should refrain from ambitious strategic plans, give up hope for a political reformatting of the “collective West,” and discard as a false temptation the dream of rebuilding Europe “in its own image and likeness.” On the contrary, we should use the situation of an apparently inevitable major U.S.-Chinese clash to establish our country as a special civilizational center with its own security imperatives, its own vision of the future, and a domestic market-oriented economy. If Russia sets this more moderate goal, without any ambition to influence the fate of the West, it will avoid involvement in a big conflict, create a local sphere of influence, and win a distant future for itself. But should it succumb to the temptation (which is more likely) to seek rapid geopolitical success and get involved in “somebody else’s game,” then after a series of delights and disappointments it will end up in front of a broken trough of frustrated imperial dreams.

### **MAIN PRINCIPLES OF RUSSIAN PALEOCONSERVATISM**

What are the political and cultural foundations of that part of the conservative movement which is described as “Russian paleoconservatism”? This term refers to the U.S., that is, to the self-description of public figures, philosophers and publicists who took an anti-interventionist stance back in the 1990s. They argued that the United States, after winning the Cold War, should drastically reduce its participation in international affairs and, in a sense, seek seclusion on an “island,” that is, on the American continent. U.S. paleoconservatives

insisted that the U.S. should dissociate itself from liberal Europe in terms of values. They feared, not without reason, that America, if it tries to remain the center of a “globalist empire,” would have to be ideologically reformatted, for example, in accordance with the “cult of minorities.” U.S. paleoconservatives were stark opponents of most of the United States’ military campaigns since the collapse of Communism: the bombing of Yugoslavia, the invasion of Iraq, and the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. Almost all of them objected to NATO’s expansion (and often to its very existence), and to provoking “color revolutions” in the post-Soviet countries. The anti-Russian rhetoric of the U.S. administrations after the end of the Cold War never enjoyed their support.

Naturally, the paleoconservatives’ consistent anti-interventionism was the reason why the U.S. neocons systematically accused them of lacking patriotism. Quite telling in this regard were the public charges of anti-patriotism voiced by neo-conservative publicist David Frum, a speechwriter for George W. Bush, against conservatives Patrick Buchanan and Robert Novak for their opposition to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 (Frum, 2003). The liberals and left-wing intellectuals stigmatized the traditionalists and proponents of conservative values as outspoken fascists. Many well-known paleoconservatives, like Patrick Buchanan, a former adviser to Ronald Reagan, opposed growing migration to stand in defense of the grassroots Americans’ right to preserve their ethnocultural core. Some paleoconservatives were opposed to economic globalization, considering the deindustrialization of America as the greatest threat to its future (in this respect, as it turned out later, they saw eye to eye with the economic nationalists in President Trump’s team of experts). Russian paleoconservatives are also under fire today from two sides—Russian “neocons” (neo-imperialists of various kind) and “liberals” (who strive for ideological integration with Europe).

What distinguishes the supporters of Russian paleoconservatism from Russian “neocons” is their rejection of armed interventionism, in other words, the unacceptability of the cult of war. In some situations, war is inevitable and necessary, but, of course, it should not

become the country's main cause. Consequently, Russia should not set the task of "restoring the empire" by regaining all the territories that drifted away from it as a result of the 1991 catastrophe. An isolated position on the continent would be much more advantageous in various respects, including for economic and cultural revival. The West brought Russia out of this comfortable isolated position by launching an aggressive expansion of Euro-Atlantic structures such as the EU and NATO, which left Russia overboard, but kept the door widely open to its western and even southern neighbors. Nevertheless, paleoconservatives believe that even in the context of final geopolitical "encirclement," civilizations have a chance to return to a situation of keeping a distance equally acceptable to all. To restore this state of affairs, it is necessary for the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia to begin serious negotiations on the "demilitarization" of the Baltic-Black Sea space. Clearly, it can be started only after the end of hostilities in Ukraine and the establishment of a fixed border between the Russian and Euro-Atlantic zones of influence, and in such a way that would ensure a relatively logical and militarily stable demarcation line. The split of Ukraine between civilizations is inevitable, but today we should think about how to defuse tensions between the two parts, and not about which part is bigger. Of course, such an approach is possible only in case of mutual renunciation of civilizational expansion, something both Russian and American paleoconservatives insist on.

A reasonable question arises: What can persuade the West to give up such expansion? After all, centuries of its history testify that expansionism is an integral feature of Western culture and civilization and the basis of its success. Global shifts in the balance of power and outstanding internal problems are forcing the West to moderate, even if reluctantly, its systemic expansion attempts, at least for the next period. The experience of previous decades has shown that even the capabilities of the most powerful actors have limits. So Western powers will have to reduce the list of their priorities.

Russian paleoconservatives will always differ from Russian liberals by their attitude towards Europe. Paleoconservatives, both

Russian and American, postulate that a value-based rapprochement with liberal Europe is not only impossible for their countries, but also harmful. Europe has chosen a historical path that we, along with like-minded people in the U.S., consider false—it is a path of a radical break with the past, with the heritage of our ancestors, with the patriarchal principles that are deeply rooted in our religious monotheistic tradition.

Russian and American paleoconservatives share strong disagreement with the economic realities of globalization. In the context of confrontation between civilizations, globalization loses its meaning. Each civilization will seek economic self-sufficiency. The goal of the Euro-Atlantic community is to end industrial and investment dependence on China, as well as energy dependence on Russia. The issue of technological sovereignty will certainly become a priority for our country. This sets the task of restoring those branches of domestic science and industry that were ruined after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to create new ones, necessary for technological re-equipment. Once again a strong imperial Russia will have to look for ways to engage its intellectual class in the country's civilizational development. This class, if correctly positioned, will largely determine Russia's future in the 21st century.

It is time to abandon primitive interpretations. As it takes over parts of Ukraine, Russia by no means seeks seclusion on an island. In seeking mandatory “denazification” of Ukraine, that is, replacement of the Kiev regime by a pro-Moscow one, the “war party” in Moscow is not guided by an imperative of Russia's geopolitical or “civilizational” concentration. On the contrary, the point at issue is another imperial breakthrough, the desire to break into Europe, having drawn its elites and population close to our values. Like any previous “Euro-abduction” agenda, the current one, so influential in the patriotic camp, will lead to the most negative consequences.

### **IN EUROPE'S EYES WE ARE ALIENS**

What attitude should we take to the “collective West”? What feelings should we have for it and what actions should we take? If Russia fails

to make a “breakthrough” into Europe again and remains outside of the “collective West,” it will have most complex feelings towards this association—from resentment and hatred to the desire to prove its Europeanness by all means possible. In both cases the effect will be the opposite.

The “collective West” will never agree to grant us an entry pass, because should we get it in the end, the “collective West” would have to be renamed. Russia’s westernization *perestroika* style will lead to socio-cultural transformation so painful that in comparison with it the events of the 1990s will be no more than just a warmup. In this case, we will have to not only remove the red color from the tricolor national flag, which is precisely what the domestic political emigration calls for. We will have to radically reduce the armed forces and thereby doom hundreds of thousands of men to unemployment, and their families to poverty. A whole bulk of Russian literature will have to be removed from the schoolbooks as politically incorrect, and almost all Russian philosophy will have to be canceled. Any imperial-oriented political discourse will be banned, and the economic policy will be reoriented again towards inclusion in the Western production chains. Of course, all this would be possible only under a pro-Western authoritarian regime because such anti-social measures would inevitably spark popular protest. This scenario is conceivable only in case of a total military defeat, which, hopefully, does not threaten Russia.

As has been stated above, equally disastrous for Russia would be to try to make the “collective West” fall apart in order to get integrated—if not with it as a whole, then with some of its breakaway parts, say, with the very same continental trio. The direction of the West’s development seems already predetermined, and Russia will have to coexist with a civilizationally alien bloc, with no chances of seeing its favorable transformation.

What is to be done?

We must develop a feeling of “civilizational indifference” to the West. A kind of feeling that we have towards India, China, and the Arab countries (indifference does not necessarily mean enmity or

lack of practical interest—it is about unwillingness to interfere). At some point, the inner destiny of the Western world became our own inner destiny. The realization of the inevitability of our civilizational separation was the reason, of course. After a long relationship, any breakup is painful. Alas, we will have to accept the fact that we are aliens to Europe, and that our desire to join it is considered by the local elites, to use the terms of historians Arnold Toynbee and Mikhail Rostovtsev, the “external proletariat’s” pressure on the core of civilization. The Europeans, primarily the Britons, have long seen the palaces and yachts of our oligarchs as a kind of encampments and chariots of nomads on the move.

We felt concern about Europe flooded with migrants from the “Third World,” while staying unaware that it is far less afraid of impoverished refugees from the Middle East than of billionaires from Russia. Euro-Atlantic unity means, first of all, the confiscation of toxic capital from its raw materials periphery. This civilizational contempt for Russia, which has fully manifested itself in the context of the so-called “sanctions war,” is still to be lived through and comprehended.

Will Russia be able to live in the necessary isolation from the “collective West” that rejects it? Will we be able to stop resenting Russophobia in Poland and the cancellation of Tchaikovsky and Dostoyevsky in the Netherlands? To finally take care of ourselves, without trying to look at ourselves through the Europeans’ eyes? And at the same time to avoid sliding into primitive savagery, “ridding ourselves” of good manners as the Western civilization’s colonial legacy?

This is the focal question of our historical existence. Talking about the need to regain sovereignty is foolish. We do have sovereignty. The task is to fill it with real civilizational content. But for this it is necessary to get out of the military conflict, which, alongside the motives of the parties involved in it, is steadily pulling us towards Europe and fueling false and equally dangerous hopes of “returning” into its history as the successors of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great and their cause.



Currently the most promising scenario is to maintain a certain degree of “isolation” from the West, even in case of the inevitable geopolitical convergence of the two civilizational platforms. While ending its isolation as “Island Russia,” our country can avoid pegging its fate to that of the “collective West.” This “non-rapprochement” will enable us to solve our geo-political, geo-cultural and geo-economic tasks, while distancing ourselves as much as possible from other civilizational centers and not counting on strategic alliances with them.

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