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The judgmental failures of the Western European states towards the Russian Federation by perceiving it through European values

Original article

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this article is to show the Western European judgmental failures towards Russia by perceiving it through European values. These failures have a negative impact on European security and all of them appeared because Russia was considered the European state and the European values were put in Russia. In fact, the Russian Federation is only a geographic part of Europe, but no longer a part of European civilization.

Methods: The research was conducted by analyzing the relationship between Western European countries and the Russian Federation, as well as analyzing the general condition of Russian society and Russian foreign policy.

Results: This article states that Western European countries made a critical mistake by adopting European values to the Russian Federation. This hypothesis was composed by addressing the following question: What is the grand strategy of the Russian Federation? What are judgmental failures and what are their types? What judgmental failures were made by Western Europe towards Russia?

Conclusions: The Russian Federation for the past years has been treated by the Western European states as a strategic business partner, however as it can be seen now, this approach was misleading and was a complete failure in terms of European security. Countries such as France and Germany had not seen Russia as an enemy of the West.

Introduction

The Russian Federation for the past years has been treated by the Western European states as a strategic business partner, however as it can be seen now, this approach was misleading and was a complete failure in terms of European security. Countries such as France and Germany had not seen Russia as an enemy of the West. These countries seem to be rather in love with Russia having some kind of a toxic relationship which in fact undermined the collective European security.

The purpose of this article is to show the Western European judgmental failures towards Russia by perceiving it through European values.

This article states that Western European countries made a critical mistake by adopting European values to the Russian Federation. This hypothesis was composed by addressing the following question: What is the grand strategy of the Russian Federation? What are judgmental failures and what are their types? What judgmental failures were made by Western Europe towards Russia?

The research was conducted by analyzing the relationship between Western European countries and the Russian Federation, as well as analyzing the general condition of Russian society and Russian foreign policy.

1. Russian Grand Strategy and Russism

Understanding the Russian grand strategy is crucial for the entire Europe as it helps to avoid strategic mistakes towards Russia's political, economical and military behavior.

Although there is no united definition of the 'grand strategy' in political science literature, over the past years researches have made several attempts to explain the characteristics the term.

Basil Liddell Hart, who is given pride of place due to his contribution as the supposed originator of the term, separated military strategy from the wider consolidation of all the attributes of national power to reach out the nation's long-term interests during war-time (Liddell Hart 1991, pp. 319-360).

One of the pioneers in defining the grand strategy, Edward Meade Earle in the book 'Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler' called it 'the highest type of strategy' (Meade Earle, 1966, pp. viii).

According to Christopher Layne 'grand strategy is about determining a state's vital interests - those important enough to fight over - and its role in the world' (Layne, 2007, pp. 13).

Another definition comes from Barry Posen who claimed that 'grand strategy is a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself' (Posen, 2014, pp. 1).

'Grand strategy is arguably the highest form of statecraft. In one usual definition, it is the state's 'theory of victory' explaining how the state will exploit its diverse means to advance and achieve national ends' (Balzacq and Krebs, 2021, pp. 1).

In order to understand Russia's grand strategy, it is crucial to be familiar with the thesis of Alexander Dugin, a Russian political activist (Rahman, 2022). He is a supporter and an advocate of extreme nationalist views. He sees Russia as a great Eurasian empire, dominant in the world that creates not only admiration but also fear. According to him, Russia is created to implement great goals and its obligation must be consistently fulfilled (Eberhardt, 2010). Dugin claims that Russians will never change their colonial mindset and they are not simply interested in preserving their state or nation, rather than this they are interested in absorbing others using the pressure. He claims that they are not interested in colonizing as the English had done, but they are into drawing their strategic geopolitical boundaries without even special Russification, although according to him, there should be some Russification involved anyway.

From the perspective of Polish national security, it needs to be highlighted that Russia, in its geopolitical and geographic development, is not interested in the existence of an independent Polish state in any form. It is also not interested in the existence of Ukraine as can be clearly seen recently (Gorny, 1998).

'In Europe, Russia must of course ally itself with Germany, to which Dugin pays particular attention. Presented as the heart of Europe, Germany should dominate all of Central Europe as well as Italy, in accordance with the theories of 'centrality' developed by the Nazi geopoliticians as well as 19th century Prussian militarism. In Asia, Russia should ally itself with Japan, appreciated for its Pan-Asian ideology and the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis during the Second World War. Within the Muslim world, Dugin chooses Islamic Iran, admired for its moral rigorism. He presents Iran as one of the few real forces of opposition against American globalization, and invites it to unify the entire Arab world, as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan, under its leadership. Dugin characterizes this quadruple alliance Russia-Germany-Japan-Iran which would react against the thalassocracies (the United States, Britain in Europe, China in Asia, Turkey in the Muslim world) as a 'confederation of large spaces,' since each ally is itself an empire that dominates the corresponding civilizational area. Unlike the Eurasianists of the

1920s, Dugin does not talk of an irreducible and romantic opposition between East and West; in Dugin's theories, both Asia and Europe are destined to come under Russian-Eurasian domination. As the maritime and democratic enemy allegedly has a 'fifth column' in Russia, Dugin calls for a restoration of the Soviet Union and reorganization of the Russian Federation. He is the only Neo-Eurasianist to include in his political project not only the Baltic States, but the whole former socialist bloc' (Laruelle, 2006, pp. 7). In the book 'Foundations of Geopolitics: the Geopolitical Future of Russia' he claims that it is necessary to break NATO, and then tear apart the European Union (Dugin, 2000, pp. 213).

Dugin's ideology is not just an ideology of an ultra-national empire-oriented futurist. It mirrors the national sentiment of the entire Russian society. 'The combination of Russian nationalism and imperial consciousness is conducive to the development of special phenomenon in Russia that may be called 'imperial nationalism'. [...] in the Russian setting, an imperial nationalism that supports imperial aspirations really does exist' (Pain, 2016, pp. 46). It has manifested itself previously in the Chechen wars (Maciejak, 2018, pp. 571-575), in the Syrian conflict, in the annexation of Crimea, and recently in the full-scale war in Ukraine (Żownirenko, 2018).

However the radicalization of the Russian imperial nationalism under Putin turned the Russian society into Russism – the new Russian fascism (Dragas, 2021, pp. 6-17).

According to Orhan Dragas, 'The glorification of Russian culture, proclaiming Russia as an alternative civilization and at the same time absolute biased and militaristic criticism of western countries by Russian propaganda left no doubts that the Russian doctrine of so called "Russian world" is nothing but modern-day fascism.[...] This new Russian fascism (Russism) similarly worships the dead (fallen soldiers during the World War II), has made a cult from the victory itself and managed to unify this cult with the Russian Orthodox Church'.

Russism is extremely dangerous for the entire democratic society around the world.

As it was noticed by Timothy Snyder, Vladimir Putin was influenced by the fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin – who gave the superiority of the force and pressure over the law. Ilyin's mindset was recommended by Dmitry Medvedev to Russian youth (Snyder, 2018, pp. 17-20) who already was influenced by one of the most popular Soviet puppet cartoon, 'Dear Goblin' (Uvazhayemyy leshiy /rus. Уважаемый леши) (1988), which was based on Russian folk tales. The cartoon illustrates the Russian way of thinking in terms of gaining respect through fear – "Fear means respect" (Boyatsya — znachit, uvazhayut /rus. Боятся — значит, уважают).

At this point, it can be certainly stated that Russia's policy towards other states is a mix of a resulting sense of fear of humiliation, the feeling of supremacy over others, and revanchism (Applebaum, 2014).

In Russian culture, there is no win-win solution. The only perception that is present in the Russian mindset is the win-lose outcome which is summed up by the phrase: I am strong. You are weak (Crawford, 2015, pp. 127-129).

2. Western European Failures and Biases of Judgment

There are many categories of failures and biases of judgment mentioned in specialist literature. 'Judgment refers to our ability to make a good decision about what should be done after giving it careful thought' (University of Florida, 2014). Some of them are:

- Worst-case analysis (the Cassandra principle) – an extreme skepticism. It reflects a pessimistic approach based on negative experiences from the past. It may result from the interests and preferences of the evaluating institution;
- Best-case analysis - an optimistic evaluation based on the belief of acquaintance of human behavior or the preferences and interests of the evaluating institution;
- False analogy - the mistake of using an argument from analogy in which the basic similarity is not relevant. It is the perception of the event/behavior through the prism of the past;
- Misconceptions - the belief affecting the perception of the invariability of a certain situation or the state being described;
- Lack of empathy - inability to understand other people's perceptions. Underestimating the importance of their role and interests;
- Deliberate disregard of new evidence – the rejection of information contradictory to the previous one, caused by the pursuit of consistent acknowledgment of the earlier assumptions;
- Ethnocentrism - transferring patterns of one's own culture, ideology, beliefs, and views to others. This error often leads to mirror imaging and wishful thinking;
- The rational actor model - the assumption that others will act rationally, like the evaluator. This error is often related to the assumptions of mirror imaging;
- Conservative thinking - a tendency to evaluate new phenomena in the context of past experiences and to confirm previous evaluations;
- Wishful thinking (the Pollyanna principle) – a tendency for people to use or remember pleasant items more accurately than unpleasant ones;

- Excessive mystery – relying on a selected group of arguments towards the fear of violating safety regulations. It reduces the possibility of seeing alternative solutions;
- Over-trusting towards the object of evaluation - optimism caused by premature termination of the cause or ignorance;
- The reluctance to comply with the probability – a tendency of avoidance evaluation of particularly high or especially low probability;
- Ignorance – a lack of knowledge about a given problem or phenomenon;
- Denial of rationality - assigning an irrational action to others;
- Limitations and organizational parochialism - a selective concentration or appeal to previous judgments based on loyalty and attachment to the organizational structure. It results in excessive trust in one's own professionalism and group thinking. Uncritical analysis of concepts and expressions and their generalization on the basis of conclusions, successes, and failures described in history;
- Proportionality belief - the expectation of efforts being proportional to the results, and that intention being synonymous with consequences;
- Tautological theorems - sentences of which veracity is guaranteed by the meaning of the terms used;
- Defensive avoidance - refusing of seeing and understanding particularly dangerous signs, and avoiding difficult choices - leading to wishful thinking;
- Previous formulated point of view - a tendency towards simplification of views and leads to premature conclusions drawn from previous statements;
- Mirror imaging - perceiving others through your own prism;
- The assumption of uniformity of operation and organization - the presumption that the behavior of others is planned and coordinated while in fact it is not;
- The assumption that one hypothesis excludes others;
- A priori justification - a dominance of thinking in context of previous data or experience; uncritical rejection (Minkina, 2014, pp. 160-162).

The unlawful aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, exposed the ineptitude of the Western European leaders in perceiving the policy of the Russian Federation. Shock, disbelief, and voices of condemnation towards the Russian ruling elite emerged after the disclosure of the massacre committed by the Russian army on civilians in Bucha, Irpin, or Hostomel (Reuters, 2022).

The 'Russian world' (Russkiy mir/rus. Русский мир) that is currently being exposed in Ukraine is not something new for the nations that have been struggling with Russia's imperial aspirations for centuries but it is allegedly new for the western European leaders who used to prefer not to see these aspirations.

The biggest judgmental failures within states such as France and Germany are mirror imaging and ethnocentrism. For many years Russia has been perceived through the prism of its Europeaness (Bret, 2000) together with the European values (Chirikov, 2015) however the country is far behind Europe in terms of human values (Gorbunova, 2021) and social development (Smirnov et al., 2020, pp. 565).

Many of Western Europeans associate Russia with the splendor of Moscow or Saint Petersburg, however Russia is not only a country of Pushkin and Tolstoy with paintings by Kandinsky or the Swan Lake by Tchaikovsky or even the Russian Waltz by Shostakovich. The Russian Federation is a backward country, as according to Statista.net (2022), the largest statistical database in the world, in the 2022, nearly 18 million people in Russia live under poverty line (Tarar, 2022), where hazing (dedovshchina/rus. дедовщина) within the armed forces is still common and deadly (Getto, 2021) as it is reported by the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (2022). The penitentiary system is also repulsive and inhuman (Gulag.net, 2022). As proved by Gulag.net, an independent internet project against corruption and torture in Russia, beating, tying up upside down, leaving in extreme cold, depriving of food, then refusing any medical assistance is everyday life for Russians prisoners. It is important to highlight that rape is not rare in Russian prisons. Until 2021, Russian prisons were relatively well-known for their torture methods, not for their human experimentations, however the journalist in July 2021 (The Moscow Times, 2021), created a pattern from the stories, data, and diagrams combined suggesting that Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights is far from respected in the Russian Federation, regardless of whether the individual in question is a criminal or a political activist (Manucharian, 2022). Additionally, it should be bear in mind that on daily basis the Russian Federation changed its law towards domestic violence in 2016 making violence against relatives no longer a crime, but an administrative offense (Ivanitskaya, 2016). 'The state continues to view domestic violence not as a crime, but as a centuries-old tradition in the Russian family, in which it should not interfere' (Stewart, 2021). An important role is played here by the Russian Orthodox Church which finds the fight against domestic violence and the promotion of gender equality to be 'anti-family' in practice (Afrikiya, 2021). The role of this institution should be highlighted in the context of the mobilization as well, as the Russian Orthodox Church calls for Russian women to give more birth and not to be afraid

to send their sons to die in the name of defending the motherland. The firstborn children can be replaced with newborns without any hesitation (The Moscow Times, 2022).

The war crimes done by the Russian army on Ukrainians were shocking for many in the West, but the strategy of constant terrorizing civilians is known from the Russian past. During the Second Chechen War, the unimaginable torture of Chechen civilians (Traynor, 2000) and clearing operations (*zachistka*/rus. *зачистка*) often carried out by drunk or purposely drugged Russian soldiers (Maciejak, 2018, pp. 373-381) were revealed by Anna Politkovskaya (Politkowska, 2011, pp. 45-47).

The brutality of the Russians comes down to a simple mechanism: the army is a mirror image of the entire society (Bryc, 2022). The example comes from the top where it is commonly recommended to use ‘rape’ as a tool to raise soldiers’ morale (John et al., 2022). While the army has the real tool to commit war crimes, the Russian propaganda gives the background to it by calling for burning and drowning Ukrainian children (Youtube.com, 2022).

On 21 September 2022, Vladimir Putin announced ‘partial mobilization’ and within a few hours, Russian men began fleeing the country (Revell, 2022). As it could have been seen, only a few of these men were against the war, most of them simply just did not want to die on Ukrainian soil and were against the mobilization (Otte, 2022). While as a consequence of the Russo-Ukrainian war Poland and the Baltic States closed their borders to Russians, some Russian activists such as Maxim Katz (Twitter, 2022) were mourning that not Europe, which Russia had always been focused on, but Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Georgia have opened their borders and let these ‘refugees’ in. In light of this attitude, it can be seen that even Russian activists have a demanding approach towards all European states.

Keeping in mind the above, it can be clearly stated that what is not accepted in Europe is accepted in Russia. Taking all into consideration the Russian Federation has excluded itself from the European civilization as it is a socially fallen state and it no longer can be considered European in any aspect.

The above aspects lead to the Pollyanna principle and a defensive avoidance as well which are clearly visible here. Countries such as France or Germany had chosen not to see the violations caused by the Russian regime, but they prefer to see Russia in terms of its financial capabilities. ‘In Germany, an exporting country par excellence, Russia was long seen by both political and economic actors as a large emerging market that was attractive to German investors and which presented an opportunity to sell German products. [...] German investments in Russia reached record highs in 2017–19, although insecurity caused by the pandemic accounted in large part for the collapse of these levels in 2020. [...] A strong lobby

exists in Germany to support companies working in and with Russia, especially via the German Eastern European Economic Committee (Ostausschuss der deutschen Wirtschaft)' (Marange and Stewart, 2021, pp.17-18).

France faces similar situation. France is a leading foreign employer in Russia with its companies operating in the energy, automobile, agri-food sectors, transport, finance and aerospace (Otte, 2022). 'In short, as regards policy towards Russia, France is much more concerned with security-related issues, while Germany has been strongly focused on economic cooperation, including in the energy domain. In both France and Germany a certain understanding – even sympathy – for the Russian foreign policy approach can be found in some parts of society, not only among the elite but also within the general population' (Otte, 2022).

Russia did not just violated norms of behavior when it invaded and seized Crimea in 2014, it also broke international law and its own treaty commitments, but after awhile France was pushing again for improved relations with Russia (Deni, 2020). However Russian regime did not changed toward locals. In 2016, the Supreme Court of Crimea banned the representation of the Crimean Tatars, the Mejlis, recognizing it as an extremist organization, thus the local population was subjected to repression (Koscinski, 2016).

Over-trusting Russia appears in the Franco-Russian relations as well. As the war in Ukraine began the president of France, Emmanuel Macron had called Vladimir Putin several times hoping that he may achieve a solution by the diplomatic channels (Sabbagh, 2022). However, as it could have been seen later on, the Russian officials did not keep their words as one was done the other was said (Gessen, 2022).

Within the Western European judgmental failures the lack of empathy can be pointed out as well. For years, Poland warned of the Russian threat and its imperial aspiration, but the West did not want to listen calling it the polish Russophobia (Lovett et al., 2022). Only in September 2022, Ursula von der Layen, the president of the European Commission admitted that Poland and the Baltic states were right to warn the rest of the EU against Putin (Stolarczyk, 2022).

Conclusion

As it was stated above many judgmental failures in perceiving Russia in Western Europe were made. All these failures have a negative impact on the collective European security and all of them appeared because Russia was considered the European state and the European values were put in Russia by the naive Western Europeans who were hoping to see Russia as a part of Europe despite all the destructive signs. In fact, the Russian Federation is only a geographic part of Europe, but no longer a part of European civilization.

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