

CIVILIZATIONS AND RUSSIA: ONGOING DISCUSSIONS

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Abstract: In the 1990s, Russia suffered a deep crisis. As a result, arguments about the identity of the country were abundant. Even now Russia is still contemplating its nature and place in the world. But no matter how often you change your glasses, the world stays the same. Change of optical instrument doesn't result in changing of the subject of observation. Only image varies. It is necessary to choose right lens and focus them correctly to see the world in its true colours and volumes. In essence, there is nothing new in present discussions on this subject. After an experiment with the new Soviet civilization, the argument returned (or returned) to a point in the last century – to the argument between Westernizers and Slavophiles. Not long ago, many dreamt to see Russia as part of the West. Now it is popular to see separately not only Russia and the West but also Russia and Europe. The latter is particularly unacceptable for the proponents of the Russia's European identity.

Keywords: Russia, European identity, civilizations, culture.

Discussions about civilizational nature of Russia root deeply in history. They are a story of many chapters telling about various stages in the life of the country. These discussions are of the same importance as reflections on its political, social or economic conditions. The consciousness determines the being of men not less than the being determines consciousness. Attitudes of other nations to Russia are as important for its progress as GDP, inflation or any other indicator of that kind. Civilizational identity of a man, which may be primarily seen as lofty and abstract matter, has in fact a real implication for personal outlook, values, lifestyle and an attitude to other nations, and vice versa.

Until the late 1990s, the subject of civilizations lied mostly in the focus of anthropologists and historians of the Ancient World and lacked the contemporary context. In the bipolar world, nobody described a “first”, “second” or “third” world as a civilization. The term circulated in the day-to-day language during military cataclysms, like world wars (“saving the world civilization from destruction”), or was used by political populism at the international stage (“western civilization against communist threat”). The bipolar, and later unipolar world, promoted images of consolidation and unity, which did not suggest that the world might be fractional and polychrome. Civilizations, as one of the ways to describe and comprehend contemporaneity, were left outside the discourse.

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The world needed to become multipolar, polycentric in order to blow off academic dust of the concept of civilizations and to return it to modern politics, to contemporary social sciences. The heralds of the “end of history” had barely announced the victory of one of the polars, one "true civilization", when the attention was diverted to the idea of the “clash of civilizations”. This idea is more pragmatic and more practical, it looks to the future, not to the past. With ideologies having lost their role as true definitions of most significant identities in the world, former ideas of capitalist West, socialist East and catching-up South have been replaced with studies of what they disguised before – civilizations. The idea of the united West broke into American and European (with the latter not as homogeneous in fact either), the idea of the Third World into Latin American, African and few Asians. The Second World got similarly fragmented.

Interest for this kind of categorizing rose as popularity of Euro-centric and West-centric ideas in general abated, as values (or even their equivalence) for various cultures, systems of values, histories spread, and as the concept of polycentric world settled both in discussions and real life. Despite the terms “West” and “East” (the latter referring to Asia as a whole) being still used, especially by politicians and spin doctors, they are so outdated that have lost any meaning. But the current terminology, adapted from the past and prone to splitting reality into meta-spaces, is also full of clichés. The most vivid example is the term “Europe” which is increasingly being equated with the European Union. The EU and Europe have become synonyms what would not have happened, if new-old border lines both in minds and on maps hadn’t been drawn.

Cultures, values, religion, common history, space, economy have become ideology-replacing benchmarks of the biggest human communities: civilizations. By the 21st century, civilizations have been accepted as historic realities – not just long-dead artifacts. Attempts to categorize and classify civilizations have multiplied. There are now lots of definitions of “civilization”, but most of them are not unique and mainly follow one of the best-known concepts, formulated by N.Ya. Danilevsky, L.N. Gumilev, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee and F. Braudel.

The idea of civilizations, interpreted through the system of religious values, is still broadly popular despite global secularization processes (at least outside the Muslim world). One of the most popular classifications offers us to comprehend the world as a sum of Christian, Islamic, Indo-Buddhist and Confucian-Far-Eastern civilizations. Each of them, in turn, is divided into sub-civilizations, like the Christian into Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant; or the Confucian into Chinese and Japanese. With all controversial nature of understanding civilizations as a religion’s habitat, it has a valuable methodological ground. Firstly, civilizations can neither be downscaled to the

borders of a particular state nor endlessly expanded. Secondly, the structure of a civilization is not monolithic but rather fragmented.

It is necessary to note that some scholars regard civilization as the biggest matryoshka of identities (for example, Florentine – Italian – European), that is, a macro-identity is seen as the highest form of identity (Huntington); others say that local civilizations are also worth being investigated (Toynbee, Braudel). Which is why we face a problem of scale and method of research – from the universal to the particular or from the particular to the universal. On the one hand, a problem of excessively big "civilizations" ends up with idealistic models (like Western civilization), on the other, there is a problem of questionable reduction (Spanish, French, etc. civilizations).

A. Guseinov, the academic at the Russian Academy of Sciences, describes the dialectical nature of the universal and the particular in a civilizational model: “Civilization, like culture (if the latter is taken as equal to civilization), has no subjectivity, nor exists as an empirical object... [I]t is a somewhat conventional, ideally proposed outcome that arises from activities of a huge, almost uncountable number of people...”¹

Multi-disciple and multi-factor approach in studying and categorizing civilizations is highly important. For example, to follow it means to see civilizations as “a compressed historical experience of big territorial communities, embodied in lifestyle, household traditions and etiquette, mentality and outlook, patterns of values and priorities.”² It should be clear that multi-factor approach cannot be applied if typology is based only on religion. However, religion as one of the most important factors cannot be either neglected. Religion allows to draw lines between various civilizations.

Obviously, civilization is a high-level generalization, but it should also have some limits. Otherwise, studying civilizations – especially currently existing – will lose any practical sense. An extreme of this kind is to distinguish two macro-civilizations – Indo-Arian and Chinese, which in turn are divided into “cultural zones”: European, North American, African, Arabic and Iranian-Islamic; and Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Asian-Islamic, etc.³

Arguments about civilizations have poured over academic circles and spread across the media. Not only scholars but also politicians pay more and more attention to this subject. They are talking about dialogue of civilizations and about clashes. To raise awareness of the scientific side of the problem is important, however the other side of this popularity is a growing number of loose usage and political speculations. Still civilizational researches, international

¹ Guseinov A. (2008) What We Mean by the Dialogue of Civilizations. *International Affairs (Russia)*. N 3, P. 34.

² Shmelev N. (2007) Vvedenie. In: *Rossiya v Mnogoobrazii Civilizatsiy. Doklady Instituta Evropy (Moscow)*. No 192. P. 7. (Introduction. In: *Russia Within Variety of Civilizations. Reports of the Institute of Europe, 2007*).

³ *Rossiya v Mnogoobrazii Civilizatsii. Doklady Instituta Evropy (Moscow)*. N 192. P. 30.

civilization-based comparative studies are significant means of analysis global processes, trends and forecasts.

It is a good sign that weighted and unbiased attention to civilizational theme has been shown recently by the Russian leadership on foreign policy. “Today, nobody can cope with global challenges single-handedly... What is needed is collective leadership of major powers that should represent the geographical and civilizational dimensions... Spiritual values of all world religions make it imperative to achieve multicivilizational accord and fight manifestations of xenophobia and racism... These are the tasks to be tackled within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations,” – writes Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov.⁴

The renaissance of civilizational studies over the past decades has been followed by the emergence and the increase of numbers of research centers in many countries. In Russia, there are the Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Pitirim Sorokin/Nikolai Kondratieff International Institute, Inter-Civilizational Council at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences to name but a few. Among international bodies, one of the many is the Dialogue of Civilizations World Public Forum. In 2008, the international organization Alliance of Civilizations held the first Forum in Madrid. The Alliance was initiated in 2005 by the former United Nations general secretary Kofi Annan with the support of Spain and Turkey.

Those were the works of Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, with opposite views on the prospects of mankind, that gave rise to the popularity of civilizational discussions, at least in North America and Western Europe. Since their publication in the 1990s, the discourse has much broadened. In the past the same interest to the subject was shown in the first thirty years of the 20th century and associated with the names of Nikolay Danilevsky, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. After the war, the interest was associated with Fernand Braudel and the Annales School.

The term “civilization” was coined by French Enlightenment philosophers who set off progressive forms of the developments of mankind against barbarism. This understanding of human history (common history of human civilization), as getting rid of wildness and barbarism, was articulated by Louis Morgan. The same understanding settled among ordinary people and in everyday life. Today, to be a “civilized person” means to be “polite, well-bred, refined”, as “to join civilized countries” means to become an “advanced society”.

Later, the Enlightenment developed several interlinked approaches: economic-social – Agrarian, Industrial and Post-Industrial (informational)

⁴ The speech of Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly. N.Y. 28 September 2007. P. 2, 7. Available at: <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/62/2007/pdfs/russia-eng.pdf>

civilizations; socio-economic, including the Marxist theory – slave society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism. Similar methodology is used by those who divided states into pre-modern, modern and post-modern ones.

But what is seemingly more interesting and prospective is the part of political discourse which proposes understanding of civilizations as large human communities, bound with common history, mentality and socio-cultural characteristics. The history of these communities spans centuries. For civilizations which are interpreted this way, it is very important to have a long history rooted deep in past epochs. In Fernand Braudel's terminology, the history of civilizations is a “slow history” (history of structures), that is, stable historical realities which do not change for centuries. The essence of the “slow history” is not the same as diplomatic, political, social or economic history; they are just the chapters in a history of civilizations. Which is why a separate state, or a group of states, cannot flip easily from one civilization to another. It is comprehensible but requires profound reasons and decades or centuries to happen.

The idea of civilization as a large historic human community means that, apart from some exclusions (Japan, China), its borders cannot coincide with national borders – even if the state is one of the biggest (like Russia, the US, Australia). At the same time every civilization is diverse and heterogeneous but to some limits, because if centrifugal force were to prevail over centripetal, once united civilizational space would crash and its pieces would be pulled away by “gravitational fields” of other civilizations.

The idea of internal diversity of civilizations allows to assume that from the perspective of the “slow” or “moderate” history, various parts of a civilization can move at different speed or even in different directions what may cause conflicts and clashes (like religious wars in Europe).

With the idea of the “slow history”, civilizations can be described “horizontally” or “vertically”. The former suggests that a single criterion, a unit of measurement, confines the whole methodological ground. For example, in a wide-spread outlook on civilizations as separate states, it is national borders that act as criterion. Form outpaces substance in this case. This interpretation arose from the works of H. Buckle (*A History of Civilization in England*), F. Guizot (*A History of Civilization in France*) and R. Altamira (*A History of Spanish Civilization*), all of whom lived in the 19th century. A civilization is interpreted as the history of the particular people – English, French or Spanish. In some cases, it is in fact true that state borders are the borders of civilization (for example, India or China). But the opposite wouldn't be true for the majority of the countries which are not separate civilizations. To refuse this fact is to downscale civilization to the size of local culture and/or other specifics of the given population. If so, the civilizational science is a merely different name of cultural studies, anthropology or ethnography and thus bears no self-sufficient gnoseological meaning.

The terms “civilization” and “culture” are definitely interconnected and intertwined. Every population, ethnos, nation has its own material and spiritual culture but this doesn't turn it into a civilization, even if it is culture of a big nation. It is important that classical thinkers on civilizations pondered not on traditionally understood culture, that is, not about material or spiritual products of human community, but about “higher culture” (Spengler) or “cultural-historic type” (Danilevsky), that is, about more complicated cultural phenomena which are not attributed to a particular territory or language space. These conceptions assume that cultural phenomena may coincide with the national cultural borders but is not limited by them, spreading far beyond. Besides not been compulsorily linked to any ethnic or national community, cultures of this kind are always as important for the region and the world in general as they are for the country.

In addition to equating civilization and culture (even “higher culture”), conceptual trap is waiting those who accept any given classification, developed in the past historic epochs, as being still up-to-date. This would be a mistake certainly not about the “dead” civilizations (hardly anyone would question the existence in the past of the Ancient or Egyptian civilizations), but about the “living” ones, as they were described by researchers in the 19th – mid-20th century. Oswald Spengler contemplated the Russian-Siberian higher culture in the 1920s and later Arnold Toynbee wrote about Orthodox-Christian and Western civilizations. But should we follow their conclusions and describe these civilizations as “living”? To answer this question, it is necessary to assess critically the approaches developed by the classics of civilizational science.

In addition to variedly-interpreted cultures, the other most cited “vertical lines” of civilizational studies are such criteria as religious, racial/ethnic (referring to mega groups), geopolitical. After culture, the criterion of religion is likely to be the most wide-spread. Religion is certainly part of culture but not all representatives of the same culture belong to the same church, nor the whole flock may belong to one culture. Thus, civilization is not a synonym to religion.

It is necessary to say that apart from those who equate any state to a civilization, advocates of the “vertical” approach rarely cling to any single criterion. Usually, they combine several criteria, group them but always promote a dominating one. For instance, Arnold Toynbee applied both geographical and religious (strictly saying, metaphysical) characteristics but particularly stressed the prominence of the latter. He was followed by Samuel Huntington who while speaking about a set of identities within every leading civilization, used religion to distinguish and describe majority of them: western (Western Christianity), Islamic, Confucian, Orthodox Slavic (here a criterion of mega ethnos is added), Hindu and – with only three cases where geographical approach is shown – Japanese, Latin American and African.

The classification, based on the idea of super ethnos, includes such civilizations as Anglo-Saxon, Ancient Greek, Slavic, Chinese, etc. “Blood”

criterion is of the main priority here while territory and religion are supplementary. The most vivid example is Anglo-Saxon civilization which is supposed to have no geographic center but to disperse across different regions: Britain, the US, Canada, etc. Slavic or Chinese civilizations look more compact from geographical perspective, but their identity is not a territory but a community of ethnically interlinked people.

The classification, based on the idea of geopolitics, has a criterion of territory atop; “a meaningful territory”, filled with existentialism, which dictates its fate and formulates its ontological ground. The common terms are “frontier”, “heartland”, “geographic axis”, “Lebensraum”, “metageography”, etc. The world is divided into marine and land civilizations, including Atlantic and Eurasian civilizations, limitrophe intercivilizational structures. Other classifications of this kind includes North American, Latin American, Russian, Chinese civilizations.

Every “vertical” classification has a grain of truth but each of them sees in absolute terms one of the criteria. Of course, civilization cannot be deprived of culture but it is not the same as material or spiritual or “higher” culture. And it is more misleading to equate civilization to religion which is part of the culture, particularly if we talk about the contemporary history. Civilization cannot be formed outside the territory but the territory is just a mold, not a mortar.

“Horizontal” classification is synthetic. It allows a researcher to use not just a single criterion (or any hierarchical set of criteria) but several equivalent units of measurement. This classification is multi-factor by definition. From its perspective, civilizational identity is multi-layer, with its components being loosely interlinked. Developing a new classification, researcher doesn’t choose a single standard because there are as many classifications as standards.

Here is an attempt to compose a list (not comprehensive) of “living” civilizations according to a “horizontal” approach”: European, Islamic, African, Latin American, Chinese, Japanese and Indian. Borders between them are not explicit; there are a plenty of identity shifts and overlaps. Civilization, like every live organism, cannot be autarkic. On the contrary, every civilization is able both to absorb, to accept influence of other civilizations, and to emanate, to expand, particularly by the means of adjustment or adaptation.

There are almost no monolithic civilizations. Every civilization, to different extent, is fragmented. For instance, the European civilization includes Russian, Western European, and North American sub-civilizations (it is also possible to say “European mega civilization”, which in its turn has several components). The same way, the Islamic civilization can be divided into, for example, Persian, Maghreb, Gulf sub-civilizations. Some of sub-civilizations in the course of time may become enough mature to claim a status of civilization. For example, it is popular to state that there is the American civilization in the US or the Russian (other versions: Orthodox, Slavic).

Exploring the development of civilization inevitably poses a question of hierarchy of the criteria or rather importance of any criterion during the evolution of civilization. Moreover, hierarchy is imminent if studying self-reflection of civilizations or how people of any civilization identify it from within. But the main difference of the "horizontal" classification from the "vertical" classification is that this hierarchy is neither fixed nor pre-set once and for all. Civilizations live for centuries and the priority of criteria, which they are based upon changes frequently. Among them, there are some, which can be attributed to any civilization (like territorial or cultural), while others are specific for a few (religious, ethnic, racial). But even the most common principles of different civilizations may be unique: every civilization has its inimitable geography, its unique "higher culture".

For some civilizations, religious criterion may be more important than national or territorial at a particular historical period (which, however, may last as long as we are able to observe it). But it is not necessarily inevitable that this criterion will define its fate forever. For example, nowadays it is more reasonable to speak about the Chinese and Indian civilizations, not about the Confucian, Hindu or Buddhist ones. For more than a thousand years, the European civilization was Christian in its full sense; but religious criterion was swept away in the 18th – 19th centuries as the religious was ousted by secular. Today, the European civilization is the most appropriate name where "European" is not a geographic or geopolitical criterion (since it comprises not only Europe) but a historical and socio-cultural one. For others, in some period, a geopolitical criterion is of main priority (like for the Latin American civilization). A racial criterion is crucial for the African civilizational identity. For the Chinese civilization, super ethnos has become dominant since the 20th century.

The Islamic civilization is one of the biggest and most commonly discussed. But a growing interest since the past decade in its nature has been followed, consciously or unconsciously, by large-scale distortions and emasculations of its essence, history and current status. This happened as a result of complete politization of civilizational discourse. Academic voices have drowned in political hubbub. After bipolar world collapsed, part of the world political establishment either was unable or refused to seek for other way of consolidating its electorate but to exploit the image of the other, an external source of threat. For other politicians, it was expedient to withdraw the question mark at the end of Samuel Huntington's "*Clash of Civilizations?*" study.

A Foreign Policy Review, prepared by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2007, says on the matter: "It cannot be excluded that making an enemy of Islam may bear a purpose of consolidation, which the West [now] lacks to reassume subjectivity at the international stage". In Russia, we have a proverb: Haste makes waste (Pospeshish lyudei nasmeshish). But at the beginning of the 21st century, haste of politicians, especially those with great

power, has made the world to tremble with fear. Under the flag of the clash of civilizations, immeasurable damage was done to inter-civilizational dialogue.

The Islamic civilization today is evidently the only one formed and maintained by religion. Most of other civilizations are secular or religion is not playing a central role. But even in the most secular of all the civilizations, European, spiritual, axiological and cultural heritage of Christianity remains to be one of the fundamental characteristics. Thus, religion is still one of the most important spaces where relationships between civilizations are built. And this is where the foundation of their dialogue – not clashes – is. For example, a lot of ideas from the Koran coincide with those from the Books of the New and the Old Testament, and that is sign of kinship of the three monotheistic religions – Islam, Christianity and Hinduism.⁵

Relationship of the Muslim civilization with the West were already active thousand years ago. Muslims were the first who inherited Greek philosophy and science, which Europe discovered only centuries later. In addition, Islam had relationships with India and China. Since its appearance, Islam had such level of civil and religious tolerance that had been unfamiliar to the Europeans until the Renaissance. Muslims never knew some social barriers, which existed in Europe in the Middle Ages. Even the rights of women were in many aspects broader in the countries of Islam than in Christian countries.⁶

Definitely, religious factor was present in hundreds of military conflicts. Holy books of almost all religions contain not only commandments of good and love but also appeals of quite a different kind. But in many cases not the church was a starter of war, and religious beliefs were not a reason but a cause. The trend of broader ecumenic dialogue and closer positions of two main world religions, Christianity and Islam, strenghtened long ago. Attempts of changing this trend are highly dangerous and lead to miseries, which can (and could have been) avoided.

For the Russian foreign policy and diplomacy, inter-civilizational dialogue has become highly important. In the 2007 Foreign Policy Review, it is noted that “intercivilizational tensions are provoked by terrorists and those who is strongly promoting ideology-laden approaches in international relations. A threat of civilizational split of the world is increasingly becoming one of the main challenges of our time.” Another important idea: “eastern civilizations as main part of the cultural legacy of mankind are still to play their positive role in setting up progressive trends for the whole world.”

The two main tasks, which Russian diplomacy has accepted for the near future, are the following: “to see the problem of intercivilizational dialogue and

⁵ Krasikov A. (2007) *Civilizatsii, Kultury i Religii*. In: *Rossiya v Mnogoobrazii Civilizatsiy*. Doklady Instituta Evropy. N 192. P. 62. (Civilizations, Cultures and Religions. In: *Russia Within a Variety of Civilizations*. Reports of the Institute of Europe. 2007)

⁶ D.E. Furman (1999). *Reforma islama*. In: Krasikov A.A. *Na puti k islamskoi reformatsii*. P. 274.

partnership, measures against civilizational split of the world as being among the most important in foreign policy...” and, second, “to expand cooperation with the Islamic world, including activities within the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by means of broader engagement of our partner Islamic countries in various international formats.”

In addition to the abovementioned criteria, most civilizations are characterized by something that made their birth possible: history and historic memory. It is insufficient to live at a particular territory, to belong to a dominating church, to learn local culture or to belong to a super ethnos or race. It is necessary to see yourself as part of the history of this civilization and be a bearer of those events which happened in “your land” long time ago. Because of this long-lasting common history and memory of generation, such meta-communities as civilizations have peculiar psychological and mental characteristics.

Civilizational identity is the most latent and the least popular one compared to others (gender, ethnic, familial, national, and regional). In everyday life, apart from philosophers and contemplators, a few have enough time to think of themselves in terms of civilizations. Naturally, identity is a result of comparison but most people compare themselves only to representatives of their habitat and thus do not look beyond ethnic, territorial or national limits.

Representatives of various civilizations come across with each other much more rarely than with other people of their circle. This kind of encounters happens more frequently along the borders of civilizations and involves a comparatively small number of inhabitants of neighboring territories. Only two civilizations usually border with each other. But there are lots of civilizations, some of them lie far away from each other. There is nothing odd to ask a citizen of Russia: are you a Russian or a Tatar? Are you from Moscow or from St Petersburg? Are you a Russian or a Ukrainian? All these questions lie within the same civilizational identity. However, a question about civilizational identity would confuse many. Even if a person contemplates his or her differences from an African, Japanese or Chinese, he or she primarily has in mind not civilizational but language, behavioural, ethnic differences.

Broad interest to civilizational identity is well expressed when big lumps of population of different civilizations come into close contact, mix, produce intercivilizational migration which in turn leads to inter-penetration of civilizations. For example, migration to Western Europe and the US reached a record high in the beginning of the 21st century, and intensity of civilizational discourse has risen accordingly.

From our point of view, civilization is a consistent human community based on the four equally important principles: time and place, cultural (“higher cultural”), ontological and axiological. In regard to its human components, civilization can only be a large community with the structure that evolves according to the laws of the “slow history”. It cannot be completely virtual, that

is, existing only in people's minds. It should be settled to a particular territory and time-frame. Yet the opposite is also true: civilization is impossible if it lacks mentality. Geography is just a shape. Civilizations are like empires. They are not viable without large territories, human and other resources.

Few words about axiological component of civilization. To make culture ("higher culture" as autochthonous and not imitation cultural-historical type) compatible for the status of civilization, it should have, along other features, its own philosophy of life, which would provide an outlook and real implication, that is, a system of values, different from any other. For example, the European civilization rests upon a system of values derived from Christianity and the Enlightenment. In the 20th century, there were several attempts of creating new systems of values or radically reforming the old ones. Those were the Socialist dream and the American dream; but both the USSR-Russia and the US have remained on the European ground in regard to their basic, civilizational values. In the beginning of the 21st century, Western European intellectual elites introduced the idea of the "European dream" which differs substantially from the outlooks of Russians and Americans.

Will the European dream be strong enough to settle as a main system of values of the European civilization? The answer lies in the "slow history". Today, with all contradictions between the three branches of the European civilization, the values of the European dream are certainly interesting to our country. The European dream, as an ideal to aspire to, is a postmodern supranational system of values. Among its main components, there are: universalism (equality of historic subjects, absence of Utopian, Messianic projects and meta-narratives), public domain and stakeholder economy, soft power, secularism, prevailing quality of life over material wealth, social market, sustainable development, multiculturalism, priority of social aspect of human rights, multilateralism (desire for consensus in domestic and foreign affairs), inter-dependency at the international stage, a "sovereignty pool" within the European Union.

The American dream was formed in the Modern Age and is a combination of Christian eschatology and Enlightenment utilitarianism. Among its components: particularism (messiahism, meta-narratives), individualism, anthropocentrism, hard power, religiosity, acquisitiveness, material, straight-line progress, assimilation (melting-pot), emphasis on private ownership, unilateralism, autonomy ("coalitions of the willing" in the broad sense).

Russia's system of values substantially coincides with both the European and American ones. With Western Europe, it has common values of soft power, secularism, multilateralism and multiculturalism. With the US, contemporary Russia shares values of particularism, acquisitiveness, material progress, autonomy and individualism. While some European values (particularly multiculturalism and multilateralism) align Russia with Western Europe, American values (like autonomy), on the contrary, pulls Russia apart from the

US. The current in-between status of Russia may be explained from an axiological perspective: the country is still placing itself within the coordinates of Modernity. Values, which have emerged after 1991, align Russia with the US; while Soviet or pre-Soviet values paradoxically drives it closer to the European dream (for example, such components of the Russian mentality as universalism, in Soviet terminology – internationalism, and collectivism).

The “slow history” approach also poses a question of an age and name of civilization. For example, does the name “European civilization” match the idea of the “slow history” if it was invented after the First World War? Perhaps, yes, because giving a name to some objective process is not the same as a process itself. From the perspective of present knowledge, it is hard not to agree with the idea that since the Middle Ages, Europe as a subcontinent has been an interrelated political, social, economic, and cultural organism whose citizens have felt belonging to a single space, even if it was full of dangers and contradictions. Speaking about the “European civilization”, we bear in mind a two-thousand-year history which has merged of the three ancient civilizations (or proto-civilizations), i.e. Greek, Roman and German.

The term “Soviet civilization” was also coined in the 20th century. The term doesn’t apparently match the criterion of the “slow history”. Unlike the “European civilization”, which has become an expression of a centuries-long phenomenon, it pretended to be something new and different, with a centuries-long history rooted not in the past but in the future. Definitely, the “Soviet civilization” carried a grain of a new quality because it was based on expectations of quality transformation of people’s identities. With hindsight we can say that the “Soviet civilization” was an experiment, partly successful, with the eastern branch of the European civilization, rooted in the early Middle Ages.

In the intercivilizational research done at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the study of civilizational identity of Russia follows several paths. Firstly, Russia is seen as an inherent part of Europe, as a natural part of the European civilization. This idea doesn’t contradict the fact of Russia has its own, vividly expressed identity and specifics which are seemingly resisting being dissolved in the European milieu. In other words, Russia is a different Europe. Interestingly, the same can be said about identities of other large countries of Europe – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc. Moreover, the sense of local identities is growing as Europe is increasingly comes in contact with other civilizational communities. The idea of a single European civilization has both its adepts (idealists) and pragmatists. Criteria of attributing Russia to Europe vary greatly. For example, scarcely anyone questions common cultural-historical aspects but many think the subject of political economy contains principal differences.

Secondly, “civilizationally, Russia is neither a western part of the East nor an eastern part of the West. It is a self-sufficient civilization, and the

European one is its closest analogue.”⁷ This opinion is apparently the most wide-spread and popular in Russia. One of its characteristics is to endue Russia with qualities of several civilizations: “Russia is too large and original civilization to be fully integrated into Europe. It was, is, and will be a country, which is simultaneously European, Asian and Euro-Asian, preserving persistent differences from Europe,”⁸ that is, Russia is seen as an inter-civilization symbiosis.

Some proponents of this route in civilizational studies draw conclusion about the split within the Russian civilization, that is, its “double personality” formed back in the years of Peter the Great: the split as a factor stimulating internal development, or a cancer corroding it from inside. A variation on this point was offered by a famous writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky and a famous poet Fyodor Tyutchev in the 19th century. Both of them thought that a tragic split occurred between Russia and the West when the latter “started falling off the Christ”. But they both hoped that some day, sooner or later, the European civilization would restore its unity. Tyutchev saw Russia as an “other side of the great entity”, spoke about Russia and Orthodox world in terms of a second Europe.⁹

Thirdly, by origin and by historical development Russia is part of Europe, but this doesn't result in ending up with Russian (Eurasian) and Western European (or Eastern European) civilizations. Russia has never been boxed between the West and the East. Neither was it a civilizational rolling stone. Russia has been an entire Eurasian (not Euro-Asian) civilization, which after its highest in the 20th century is currently declining and thus facing existential challenges. The concept of Eurasianism is popular both among Russian political establishment and intellectuals. But from a scientific (theoretic and empiric) perspective, it is the least convincing one.

Despite the fact that the majority of Russians (though not so clearly in academic circles) see their country as a self-sufficient civilization, the national political establishment prefers to see Russia as an organic part of the European civilization. This is an interesting observation especially taking into consideration that recently the national-patriotic, “sovereign” component of the state ideology has acquired considerable clout. It shows that the Russian political establishment is not homogeneous, and proves that there is a realistic vision of the future of the country which, with all its foreign-policy multi-vector approach, regards Western Europe – not only the EU – as a key partner and competitor.

⁷ Belchuk A.I. (2008) Rossiya: Vostochnaya Chast Zapada ili Zapadnaya Chast Vostoka?, in Rossiya i Evropa: Voprosy Identichnosti. Doklady Instituta Evropy. N 214, P. 135.

⁸ Batalov Yu.E. (2007) Vmesto Zaklyucheniya: Chto Vpered? In: Rossiya v Evrope. Doklady Instituta Evropy. No 184, P. 150.

⁹ See: Kudryavtsev M.I. (2008) Russia and the West: from F.I. Tyutchev to nowadays. International Affairs. No 1-2, P. 3-33.

During his first visit to Germany, soon after presidential election, Dmitry Medvedev delivered a programmatic address in Berlin, where he said: “I am certain that we cannot resolve Europe’s problems until we achieve a sense of identity and an organic unity between all of its integral components, including the Russian Federation... The end of the Cold War made it possible to build up genuinely equal cooperation between Russia, the European Union and North America as three branches of European civilization.”¹⁰ He is echoed by the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved in July 2008: “Being the biggest European State... Russia stands ready to play a constructive role in ensuring a civilizational compatibility of Europe...”¹¹ Following the president, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov contemplated on the same idea: “The space from Portugal to the Russia’s Far East has become a “field” of entire European civilization.”¹² This was close but, of course, different from what Vladislav Surkov proclaimed in 2006: “the Russian civilization is part of the European civilization.”¹³

In January 2009, Vladimir Putin visited Germany for the first time as prime minister. Several months before, there were the events in Transcaucasus, followed by the vociferous propagandist campaign aimed at Russia. Proponents of the new Cold War raised their heads. Notably, the topic of the European unity, however, did not disappear from the view of the Russian leadership. “Russians and Germans live in one house, have common values, and bear the common cultural traditions from their birth,” prime minister said during his speech in Dresden. “Russia and Europe have always been a part of the common civilizational space.”¹⁴ Russia considers the United States part of the same space, either. “The USA is an inherent part of the European civilization,” – wrote Sergey Lavrov. “[L]ogic of history suggests necessity of the unity of the European civilization. Both Russia and the US have grown up within it and dealt considerably with spreading it to other parts of the world. <...> Building equal cooperation between Russia, the EU and the US would be the greatest contribution of the European civilization to the formation of the collective leadership of the world’s leading countries.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Speech by President Dmitry Medvedev at the Meeting with German Political, Parliamentary and Civic Leaders. Berlin. Jun 5 2008. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/06/05/2203_type82912type82914type84779_202153.shtml

¹¹ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Part IV (Regional Priorities). July 2008. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

¹² Lavrov S.V. (2009) On the Prospects of the relations between Russia and the European Union. Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. January 16.

¹³ Surkov V. (2006) Soverennaya Demokratiya i Edinaya Rossiya. Strategii Rossii. No 3.

¹⁴ Cit. in Kompas. January 22, 2009. P. 7.

¹⁵ Lavrov S.V. (2009) Vneshnyaya Politika i Novoye Kachestvo Geopoliticheskoi Situatsii. Diplomaticheskii Ezhegodnik 2008. Moscow. P. 24, 27–28.

In the 1990s, Russia suffered a deep crisis. As a result, arguments about the identity of the country were abundant. Even now Russia is still contemplating its nature and place in the world. But no matter how often you change your glasses, the world stays the same. Change of optical instrument doesn't result in changing of the subject of observation. Only image varies. It is necessary to choose right lens and focus them correctly to see the world in its true colours and volumes. In essence, there is nothing new in present discussions on this subject. After an experiment with the new Soviet civilization, the argument returned (or returned) to a point in the last century – to the argument between Westernizers and Slavophiles. Not long ago, many dreamt to see Russia as part of the West. Now it is popular to see separately not only Russia and the West but also Russia and Europe. The latter is particularly unacceptable for the proponents of the Russia's European identity.

Russia gains not only illusive but also real confidence in its strength. As this confidence rise, Russia will get rid of its inferiority complex (underestimation of its strength) and of its superiority complex (overestimation of its strength). They are double-faced Janus of internal spiritual and perceptual disorientation, which has affected Russian since 1991. Both of them are destructive for the success of the country. Underestimation after the USSR's collapse meant a willingness of many people to refute their own identity and to accept Western or other one. Overestimation means another extreme when Russian identity is not only accepted but becomes Thing-In-Itself.

From the perspective of the “slow history”, the question of civilizational identity of Russia is open for discussions. If ever, it will be resolved not in the foreseeable future. From the perspective of everyday history where we all are placed, another point matters: do we use civilizational discourse to seek civilizations to clash or to solve ontological and practical problems of peaceful cooperation and fruitful competition of large human communities?