

“Just give Europe to Russia ...”

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN “EAST” AND “WEST” IN THE 1990S

by Tilo Schabert

abstract

The formula “end of the Cold War” conveyed an erroneous idea. For centuries the relations between “East” and “West” were characterized by antagonism. In the 1990s determined attempts were undertaken to overcome the polarity. Western Europe and the US responded favorably to the desire of Central/Eastern Europe and of Russia to integrate themselves into Western institutions and organisms defined by democracy and market economy. However, the force of existing mental realities — such as the fear of Russia in Central/European states or Russia’s clinging to its imperialist past and failure to handle its economy and finances well — proved to be stronger than the idealistic intentions formed in 1989–90 on both sides of the divide.

KEYWORDS: End of Cold War, “East and West”, 1990s.

An antagonism between two worlds

It is time to admit the unconscious irony of the formula “the End of the Cold War” and all that has been associated with it: The idea of a “New Europe” blessed by a peace spanning the whole continent. Certainly, in the years 1989–1990 the relations between “East” and “West” changed fundamentally. It was tempting to attribute the significance of a watershed to the revolutionary events that occurred in the realm of the Soviet Empire. An ending of the “Cold War”, as it seemed, gave way to “A Europe Whole and Free”.¹

However, we must ask: Had the antagonism between the two worlds really reached “an end”?² It is true, a particular phase of the polarity, under a nuclear-apocalyptic threat certainly a horrifying one, was over. Yet it was precisely a phase that had elapsed, not the polarity itself. The exuberance, manifest in the frequent invocations of the “end of the Cold War”, proved to be premature. But people relied on the idea. The prospect of a congruence between “East” and “West”, patently captured in the project of a “pan-European architecture of peace” (including the Soviet Union and Russia, respectively), was simply too appealing. It became the source of epochal expectations, political



President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin's meeting for a summit on October 23, 1995. The four hour meeting took place privately in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.

SOURCE: FDR PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

as well as economic, cultural as well as social. “East” and “West” would head for a common world.

Nonetheless, the antagonism between *two* worlds – between the “Western” world and the “Eastern” one (the latter represented by the Soviet Union and Russia, respectively) – had not gone away. It remained, to be sure, a matter of fact during the years 1989 and 1990, as well as afterwards. And it was made out, in the midst of the overarching epochal expectations, in the form of blows dealt out, as it were, by reality, blows that caused holes in the luminous cloud of hopes. They were noticed by not a few of the political actors at the time, as has become obvious by now through the evidence of archival documents. Though the actors differed in their reactions, they held one view in common. While they still clung to the habit of using the phrase “end of the Cold War”, they were aware that the antagonism between “East” and “West” had not ceased, the polarity between the Western World and an Eastern World for which the Soviet Union and Russia respectively stood. When one surveys the development of the East-West relations in the 1990s, a continuous up and down becomes apparent, a change from moments when the antago-

nism seemed no longer to exist, to those in which its dynamics dominated. Interaction and rejection alternated with each other. The two sides cooperated for a time and then again, they confronted each other in disharmony.

The purpose here is to evoke that period and to offer an account of it and its complexity on the basis of archival documents. I wish to emphasize that only a blueprint can be drawn here in the limited space of an article.

“I ask you one thing“

“Boris”, said the American President Bill Clinton on November 19, 1999, in Istanbul to the Russian President Boris Yeltsin, “we still have lots to do together”.³ That is how one speaks to a close friend with whom one shares a creative enthusiasm. And, indeed, between the two political leaders a personal rapport had evolved in which both saw the base for acting together, like a duo, as it were, on the stage of world politics. Their rapport made progress, substantial changes concerning the East-West relations seemed possible.⁴ The first and foremost steps thereby were, in Yeltsin’s view apparently, to reveal to his world-political chum his innermost aspirations. That is what Yeltsin did, Europe

in view, when he said in Istanbul – in between remarks on the “conflict in Chechnya” and the “ABM Treaty”⁵ – to his buddy Bill:

I have not ceased to believe in you. I ask you one thing. Just give Europe to Russia. The US is not in Europe. Europe should be the business of Europeans. Russia is half European and half Asian. [...] I am a European. I live in Moscow. Moscow is in Europe and I like it. You can take all the other states and provide security to them. I will take Europe and provide them security. Well, not I. Russia will. [...] Bill, I am serious. Give Europe to Europe itself. Europe never felt as close to Russia as it does now. We have the power in Russia to protect all of Europe. [...] Look, Russia has the power and intellect to know what to do with Europe.⁶

Clinton didn’t say a single word in response to this plea, and Yeltsin didn’t insist on receiving a reply. He abruptly returned to speaking on the issues he had been discussing with Clinton. However, we may ask ourselves what Yeltsin had in mind when he asked Clinton to “just give him Europe”. It doesn’t seem difficult to unravel the plea. Yeltsin wished, with regard to Europe, to make away, in an imperialistic manner, with the polarity between East and West, in the interests of Russia. Europe would be incorporated into the Russian world, as an unconsulted subject of an American-Russian decision. Yeltsin’s words clearly reveal Russian imperialism. And undoubtedly they also display, if we recall the Yalta Conference of February 1945,⁷ a mental stance that could be called the “Yalta syndrome”.⁸

Russia and the West

Mikhail Gorbachev, too, expressed a movement of reaching out into the West when he spoke in Moscow with the American Secretary of State James A. Baker on May 18, 1990, nine years before the Yeltsin-Clinton meeting took place in Istanbul. But it was meant to be anything but the imperialistic wish to incorporate other countries into Russia. Gorbachev’s idea was that Russia would, in a receptive manner, open itself up. He demanded inclusion into the West, into all the world that was to be found westwards.

“By carrying out perestroika and transforming our politics through New Thinking,” Gorbachev said to Baker, “we would like to move towards the West, the United States. We would like to open our country to the world”.⁹

Russia’s yearning for the West – this could be the formula for denoting what both projects disclose, Yeltsin’s on the one hand, Gorbachev’s on the other: A drive to the West, which was articulated, quite evidently, in different if not contrasting forms. Yet each time, a Russian “West” was viewed as a subject of desire in Russia’s political projections. Of course, the West, well aware of its particularity and the meaning of its civilization, had ideas



President Bush meets privately with Solidarity Leader Lech Wałęsa of Poland, in 1989. PHOTO: GETARCHIVE

of its own with regard to Russia and any form its relations with Russia could take. Concerning the relationship between “East” and “West” during the historical period under consideration, much depended therefore upon a culture of understanding or, more precisely, upon the question whether or not both sides were sharing and practicing such a culture. Papers prepared for governmental meetings or conversations between the political leaders, and those conversations themselves, very often served, therefore, the hermeneutical purpose of interpreting the other’s position. One took pains to ensure oneself of a channel of understanding towards the other side in order to make a meeting successful. Yeltsin chose quite a logical method when he told Clinton at the conversation just referred to: “I have not ceased to believe in you.” The efforts to “understand” one another were impeded, however, by the burden of the past. The force of existing mental realities intruded into them. Two such realities have to be considered here: the “specter of Germany” and the “specter of Russia”.

The “specter of Germany” or: the strategic precaution “NATO”, 1st act

In the fall of 1989, there appeared on the historical horizon the possibility of a reunified Germany. In the West the question of the military status of a unified Germany was raised rather soon. And a distinct answer was given: A unified Germany had to be firmly anchored in NATO. This was the unanimous view in Washington, D.C., London, and Paris. It was shared in Bonn too, especially by Chancellor Helmut Kohl. The political leadership in Moscow opposed it fiercely, however. And the Soviet principals kept up their resistance well into the summer of 1990.

But what, we may ask, motivated the West, and eventually the Soviet Union, to solve the issue of the military status of a unified Germany by opting for its membership in NATO? It was the force of a mental reality, we can answer, which by itself determined *a priori* the solution that was chosen and implemented. This was the wide-spread fear of the “specter of Germany” – the prospect of a Germany embarking once again on wrong ways. In 1989–1990, it was just not there yet. Under the premise of a reunification of Germany the fear very much broke out anew.¹⁰ The “specter of Germany” had to be banished. And this could best be achieved by the following strategic precaution: A uni-

fied Germany too would be integrated into NATO. “If Germany is not firmly rooted in the existing security structure,” James Baker explained to Gorbachev at their meeting on May 18, 1990, “there will be an entity in the heart of Europe that will be concerned with ensuring its security by other means. It will want nuclear security, whereas now, this security is provided by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. If Germany remains in NATO, it will have a much easier time renouncing its nuclear, biological, or chemical potential.” Otherwise, Baker added, “conditions could arise” for Germany “to repeat the past”.¹¹ But of course, no one wished to see the “specter of Germany” rise again. Finally, the Soviet Union also deferred to this insight. “Reunified Germany will be a member of NATO. There is no other solution”, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet Foreign Minister, on July 18, 1990, admitted to the French President François Mitterrand.¹²

By agreeing to membership of unified Germany in NATO the Soviet Union also swallowed, however, something else, and therein lay a precedent for future security constellations in Europe: As the guarantor power for a unified Germany, within the framework of NATO, the United States remained militarily present in Europe. The Soviet Union and Russia, respectively, continued to share the European terrain with the other world power, the United States.

The “specter of Russia” or: the strategic precaution “NATO”, 2nd act

Consistent with the stipulated membership of unified Germany in NATO, the German Democratic Republic withdrew from the Warsaw Pact on 24 September 1990. On March 31, 1991, the remaining members annulled the military structures of the pact, and finally signed the protocol for the pact’s dissolution on July 1, 1991, in Prague. The Warsaw Pact, then, disappeared from the geopolitical space between Germany (in NATO) and Russia. In the countries “in between” – notably Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia – sentiments of anxiety and disquiet thereon unfurled instantly. What would their security situation be “in between”? Their political leaders explained the uneasiness as the fear that in their part of Europe a “vacuum”, a “void” could ensue.

As early as on June 18, 1990, in a conversation with Mitterrand, the Prime Minister of the GDR, Lothar de Maizière, had already spoken of an “anxiety” felt by members of the vanishing Warsaw Pact. They had the impression, de Maizière reported, that “in Central Europe a great void was about to emerge”.¹³ Increasingly, this idea haunted the minds of political leaders in Central/Eastern Europe, as the two following examples show. In April 1991, the Minister of Defence of Czechoslovakia, Luboš Dobrovský, told the American Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Paul Wolfowitz, that the dissolution of the military structures of the Warsaw Pact had created a “kind of vacuum”.¹⁴ In turn, Hungarian President Árpád Göncz said on May 23, 1991, to American President George Bush: “We are concerned about a central European security vacuum.”¹⁵

This, then, was the new phenomenon: the security “void” where, in the years 1990–90, the countries in Central/Eastern

Europe felt they were likely to end up. And in consequence, a specter appeared in the perception of those countries: the dread of Russia pushing into the void. During one conversation after another with Western political leaders, heads of government from that part of Europe expressed a clearly defined fear:



I don’t know what kind of formation will emerge [out of the Soviet Union], but it will be a great power, and in one or two generations will try again to establish influence.

Hungarian President **Árpád Göncz** on May 23, 1991, to American President George Bush.¹⁶

After decades of Soviet domination, we are all afraid of Russia.

Poland’s President Lech Wałęsa on April 21, 1993, to American President **Bill Clinton**.¹⁷



I guess that Yeltsin will tell you that he alone has the power to guarantee the democratic evolution in Russia. No doubt, one has to help him, but it is necessary to say at the same time that one refuses his project to hold himself the guarantor of security in Central Europe. Russia cannot be the gendarme of my country. (Underlined in the original).

Czech President **Václav Havel** in December 1993, to French President François Mitterrand.¹⁸

We do not want to fall again under the Russian thumb.

Hungarian President Árpád Göncz on September 29, 1994, to French President **François Mitterrand**.¹⁹



The post-communist space needs to be organized. Up to now it is not arrayed and this void can tempt Russia [...] The demands of Russia will increase perhaps tomorrow and one should not wait for this moment.”

Poland’s President **Lech Wałęsa** on April 20, 1995, to French President François Mitterrand.²⁰

The post-communist space needs to be organized – before Russia could establish herself there as the dominating power. In raising this claim, the countries in Central/Eastern Europe first of all rejected any security arrangement in Europe by which they themselves were disregarded, an arrangement, for instance, between the United States on the one hand and Russia on the other, in the manner of a “second Yalta”.²¹ They demanded that the *self-assertion of Central/Eastern Europe* be clearly recognized

on both the “Western” and the “Eastern” side, and it should be known everywhere that the countries concerned insisted on their security interests. At a conference on “The Future of European Security” held in Prague on April 24–26, 1991, “many East European” participants “voiced concern over being isolated or being perceived as a buffer zone between NATO and the USSR”. And what directly followed is surely noteworthy: “Several said NATO and the presence of U.S. troops in Europe contributed to security and stability on the Continent”.²² So it was to NATO (and by virtue of it to the United States) that the countries in Central/Eastern Europe looked as they became aware of their situation in the “post-communist space”. In their eyes, this was a space which could not be accepted as “vacuum” or “buffer zone”, but had to be organized according to their own views and not, as they feared, to those of the Soviet Union.

But what, we might ask ourselves, had become of the “Charter of Paris”, which had been solemnly adopted by 35 states on November 21, 1990, at a meeting in Paris of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), and with which a “New Europe” and a “new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity” had been proclaimed?²³ Did not the Charter include this essential pledge:

With the ending of the division of Europe, we will strive for a new quality in our security relations while fully respecting each other’s freedom of choice in that respect?²⁴ (Underlined by T.S.).

And was not the Soviet Union among the states that had entered into this commitment?

Yes, it was, indeed. But perhaps it would be better to elaborate and say: the Soviet Union in particular. For the solemn and contractual engagement of his country didn’t prevent Yulii Kvitinskii, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, from trying to counteract the engagement into which the Soviet Union had entered. Simultaneously to the signing of the Charter of Paris, he started background negotiations with Central/East European states that were supposed to lead to bilateral treaties with the Soviet Union.²⁵ In addition to diplomacy, Kvitinskii used economic pressure to impose his project. He had already drawn up a draft for the treaty to be concluded between the Soviet Union and Central/East European states that included a crucial provision. It stipulated that each of the two contracting states would not join a military alliance that was directed against the other state.

Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, quite alarmed by the clause, refused to sign such a treaty. They realized that in this case they would no longer be free, as settled in the Charter of Paris, to make their own choice with regard to questions of security. To hold on to their self-determination they teamed up in

what they called the “Visegrad” group. And they looked to the West, and to NATO in particular.

On April 27, 1991, Václav Havel explained the situation at a conversation in Prague with Paul Wolfowitz. I quote from the *Memorandum of Conversation*:

He [Havel] had received Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Kvitsinskiy that morning and talked about the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty being prepared. The treaty included one item upon which the two countries differ. The Soviets did not want the CSFR to enter into any alliance hostile to the USSR and vice versa. The Czechoslovaks are not willing to agree to such a provision. Who, for example, would judge whether or not an alliance was hostile to the other party? Such a provision would limit our independence and sovereignty. The SSFR wants total sovereignty to make its own security decisions in the future. It does not want to act against the Soviet Union or enter into an alliance directed against the USSR. But it does not want any restrictions on its sovereignty. That boils down to two possibilities in the next 10 years: NATO and the EC.²⁶

Before his conversation with Havel, Wolfowitz had also spoken with Luboš Dobrovský, the Czechoslovak Minister of Defence. And Dobrovský’s words had been even more unequivocal than those of Havel: “Prague was attracted to NATO because it ensured the presence of U.S. troops in Europe.”²⁷

Crossovers, overlaps

Before 1990 a state of rigidity had characterized the antagonism between “East” and “West” in the European space. The lines of division were fixed. After 1990 the rigidity was superseded by a state of movement. When looking more closely one can

discern different movements that began in the “West” towards the “East”, and in the “East” towards the “West”. Some of them continued, others ceased simply for some reason, and still others were purposively pursued further. The movement of Eastern/Central Europe towards the “West”, motivated by a sentiment of self-assertion and a fear as to their security, has already been mentioned. As has also the movement of Russia, nurtured by quite other motives, towards the European space and into the Western world. A movement in the other direction took place when Western attention turned to Russia, with the obvious intention

to support the country as it undertook efforts to fundamentally reform its economic and political structures. In reacting to the “fear” of Eastern/Central Europe and to the resulting aspiration – directed at the West – for membership in NATO, the West on its part performed a movement towards Eastern/Central Europe. All those movements did not occur in isolation from one an-

“AND THE WEST BECAME INCREASINGLY TROUBLED BY NEGATIVE NEWS ABOUT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA.”



Soviet Idr. Mikhail S. Gorbachev (3L) posing w. Group of 7 Idrs. (R-L) Ruud Lubbers, Helmut Kohl, Toshiki Kaifu, Francois Mitterrand, Brian Mulroney, John Major, Giulio Andreotti, Jacques Delors & George H. W. Bush.

PHOTO: DIANA WALKER/GETTY IMAGES

other. They rather intersected and overlapped each other. Their contour is complex. To describe it requires a comprehensive study. The limited text here allows only an illustration.

From Russia towards the West

“The distinction between East and West – it is finished”,²⁸ declared Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, at the G-7 meeting 1992 in Munich, in front of the other heads of state and government. A more decisive statement could hardly have been made. In a similar way Yeltsin had remarked in a conversation with President Mitterrand on January 31, 1992: “Our military doctrine has changed radically. Europe, America, are no longer our adversaries.”²⁹ Shortly afterwards, on February 5, 1992, another talk with Mitterrand followed at which Yeltsin stated: “Our relationships with the United States, with Europe are not those of foes. And even less with France. To wage a war is out of question.”³⁰

Documents of the year 1994 show that this positive attitude with regard to the East-West relations remained up to then. Not without an aspect that, viewed from today, appears to be astonishing. For as the Hungarian President Árpád Göncz and Mitterrand spoke with each other on December 5, 1994, Göncz reported that Yeltsin had not given him the impression that “he would interpret our wish for an extension of NATO as Hungarian animosity.”³¹ Against the background of a long letter that Yeltsin had sent to Mitterrand on January 26, 1994, the Russian President appeared to act consistently. “We have”, he wrote, “founded and still found our foreign policy on

the basis of the universally recognized principles and norms of international law. We respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial inviolability of other states, our neighbours quite evidently included.” For this reason, he was deeply worried about the spread of suppositions regarding a “resurgence of the Russian imperialism”. One should not allow the “enemies of the rapprochement between Russia and the West to force upon us any pause here.” On the contrary, one should “act”, and this meant, Yeltsin concluded, transforming the group of “7” into one of “8”, that is with Russia becoming the eighth member.³²

In the 1990s Yeltsin persistently – and not infrequently in an exigent way – pursued the project of the integration of Russia into the international economic and financial organisms and institutions which had been built up through initiatives of the West. Western states, in particular the United States, were the gate for an entry of Russia into those organisms and institutions. The West undertook efforts to accommodate these wishes, but the various processes of integration by no means proceeded with the tempo imagined by Yeltsin. The extension of the G-7 to a G-8 by the integration of Russia took place only in 1998. And the West became increasingly troubled by negative news about economic and political developments in Russia.

From the West towards Russia

According to an account given by the British Prime Minister John Major on February 23, 1996, at a WEU meeting, the West saw

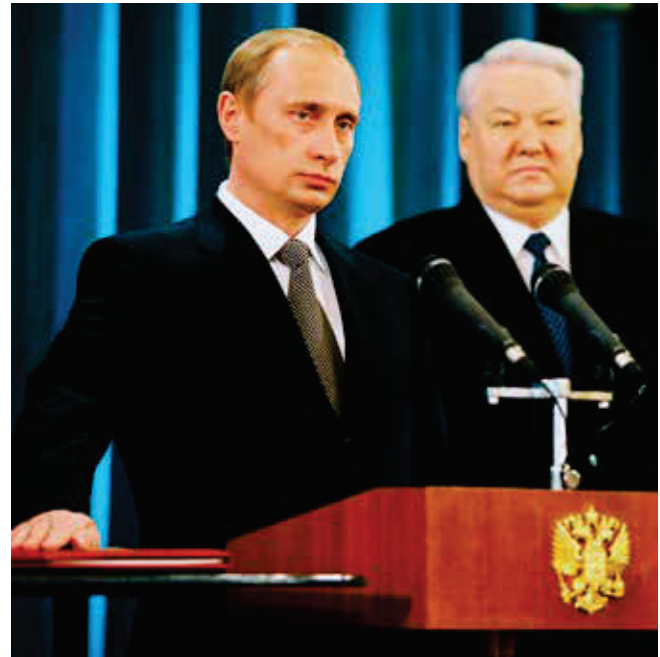
itself engaged in a civilizational mission. “We have,” he said, “at this time and in this generation of politicians in Europe, an opportunity that has not occurred before – an opportunity to extend the democratic and free-market institutions, the way of security and peace that is endemic to us in western Europe, across central Europe and towards eastern Europe.”³³ The expansion thus defined was not thought to be unconditional, however. In a British memorandum produced in June 1991 for the preparation of an upcoming Anglo-French summit, a “recognition” of the “Soviet Union’s desire to be integrated into [the] world economy” was clearly acknowledged. But this appreciation came with precise requirements. The “economic assistance” by the West, the memorandum pointed out, was not “a question of some ‘grand bargain’ between the West and the Soviet Union, but of ‘help for self-help’”. It “can only happen on basis of confidence in continuation of reform [in the Soviet Union].”³⁴ In Washington similar ideas prevailed. “Russia remains at the centre of the President’s [Clinton’s] concerns”, the British Embassy informed London on May 26, 1994.³⁵ Soon after, on June 12, the Embassy also apprised: “Clinton accepted from the start that the US should do all it could to help reform in Russia succeed. [...] The Americans are realistic about the recent hardening in tone and substance of Russian foreign policy. Their response is to draw Moscow further into a web of cooperative relationship with the West, and avoid new dividing lines in Europe.”³⁶

However, always concurrently with its hopes and expectations concerning a “new Russia”,³⁷ actors in the West could not avoid the experience of also becoming disappointed, discouraged, even annoyed. From a visit to Russia in the early summer of 1991, Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, had returned, British officials noted, in quite a negative mood, namely “depressed”. Those officials further reported that in Russia, he was struck by the impression that the “Soviet leadership had no grasp of what a market economy really is.”³⁸ In addition, the views that the French government held on Russia were noticed at that time in London. “Publicly”, the British officials wrote, “Mitterrand’s money is still on Gorbachev, but French officials see no obvious middle way [in the Soviet Union] between a descent into chaos and an authoritarian clamp down.” Their British colleagues not only took up this view with evident interest, but strongly emphasized, too, a particular assessment regarding Russia upon which they fully agreed with their counterparts in Paris: “The French have much in common with us. They are worried about indications of Soviet CFE [Agreements regarding Conventional Armed Forces] cheating, and privately regard Russia as a continuing, if temporarily reduced, threat.”³⁹

Equally unhelpful was what was noted furthermore in summary form at the WEU meeting in February 1996: Over the past years Russia had not been implementing the security agreements that it had agreed upon with the West.⁴⁰

Moreover, the state of Russia’s finances became the source

“IN COMPARING THE ERA OF PUTIN WITH THAT OF YELTSIN, A CONTINUITY CAN BE DISCERNED.”



Vladimir Putin taking the Presidential Oath, May 7, 2000. Yeltsin in the background.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

of a continuous and sustained irritation in the West throughout the 1990s. The West had granted the Soviet Union, later Russia, one credit after another, to shore up the country’s economy and, more generally, to lend its support for establishing in Russia a stable financial and economic system. However, all “macroeconomic help” seemed to be “wasted”, an adviser of the British Prime Minister put down in a memo on March 24, 1993, if the “lack of monetary discipline in Russia” were to continue.⁴¹ Indeed, over the time an impatience

set in among the Western actors. When a severe crisis of the Russian currency occurred in 1997, officials in Washington and London agreed on the analysis “that no amount of western cash will save the ruble unless the Russians take urgent steps to get their own house in order”.⁴² According to the British Embassy’s assessment of the mood in

Washington at that time, “Clinton will use this opportunity to point out to Yeltsin that Russia’s future lies in partnership with the West; and that this brings responsibilities as well as cash benefits.”⁴³ A British governmental note of December 5, 1997 on “Russia – Current Situation and Issues”, expressed the policy to be adopted with regard to Yeltsin more drastically: “The carrot/stick approach would be particularly helpful.”⁴⁴

Two years later, as set forth at the beginning of this text, Boris Yeltsin disclosed to Bill Clinton in Istanbul his Eurasian dream: “Just give me Europe [...]”. At the end of his conversation with

the American President, the Russian President, in the process of leaving office, freely responded to Clinton's question: "Who will win the [presidential] election [in Russia]?" He said:

Putin, of course. He will be the successor to Boris Yeltsin. He's a democrat, and he knows the West. He is tough. He has an internal ramrod. He's tough internally, and I will do everything possible for him to win – legally, of course. And he will win. You'll do business together. He will continue the Yeltsin line on democracy and economics and widen Russia's contacts. He has the energy and the brains to succeed.⁴⁵

Afterthoughts

Putin didn't prove to be a democrat. However, he indeed proved to be tough and to have an internal ramrod. He has ramrodded Russia into a tyranny, and he is on the warpath to accomplish with force his ideas on Russia's standing in the world. While reading this article Putin's name, his views, and his actions are likely to appear in the reader's mind. But a caveat should be added at once. The evolution of Russia from Gorbachev to Yeltsin and from Yeltsin to Putin naturally might have taken a course different from the one that it did. As the article emphasizes, relations between the Soviet Union/Russia and the West during the 1990s were characterized by crossovers and overlaps of diverse movements between "East" and "West". Within the dynamics of these movements decisions were made and courses of actions were chosen that could have been made and chosen in another and different manner.

The article, I should wish to underline, lays stress on the self-assertion of Central/Eastern Europe in face of the "specter of Russia", and in fearing a "second Yalta". It was from *there*, from the East, that a movement towards the West began early on in the 1990s and that NATO became a goal towards which Central/Eastern states looked. The evidence of this movement is found in archival documents. They are the guides, the article shows, for the historian's work.

In comparing the era of Putin with that of Yeltsin, a continuity can be discerned from one era to the other of most of those mental, cultural, and political constituents of East-West relations upon which this article dwells. The historical and deep-seated antagonism between "East" and "West" has grown into an openly acknowledged and vehemently expressed enmity of the Putin regime against the West. It has elevated Yeltsin's Eurasian yearning to the highest possible status: An official "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" approved by Putin, where on the "European part of Eurasia" it is said that Russia should "help European states take their proper place in the Greater Eurasian Partnership".⁴⁶ ✖

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- 2 The antagonism between the two worlds has existed for centuries: The polarity between the Byzantine/Greek-Orthodox Christendom and the Roman-Latin Christendom, the origin of which dates from the Council of Nicaea in 325, was increased by the schism in 1054, and had, with the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, a consequence that until today has not been forgotten in the Orthodox world, and in Russia in particular. By its own understanding, the "East" represents the true Christian civilization, whereas the "West" is a world of heresy and decadence. In the "West", on the other hand, the view is held that the "East" has missed the civilizational progress towards modernity. – In a study that I have taken up on the subject of this article I shall dwell on the antagonism in detail.
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- 4 On February 21, 1997, the American Secretary of State, Madelaine Albright, accompanied by advisers, met in the Kremlin with President Yeltsin and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jewgeni Maximowitsch Primakow. In the course of their conversation the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton was also raised. "I bring you greetings from your friend, President Clinton", Albright said. "When the two of you decide an issue," she continued, "that is when something happens. I had a meeting with the President before I left and he said that, when Boris and I do things together, that is when things happen." Yeltsin responded in saying: "When we [he and Clinton] meet together, we always make such decisions that leave no problems outstanding; we do not put things aside. We seek compromises that suit the interests of the United States and Russia. We each have a role as two great nations and are responsible to our people. We make a decision and have it resolved." (*Memorandum of Conversation, The Secretary's Meeting with President Yeltsin, Friday, February 21, 1997*. Source: U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc. No. C06702883).
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- 8 On December 22, 1993, Warren Christopher, Secretary of State in the Clinton Administration, wrote for President Clinton a memo whose subject was the trip of the President to Europe in January 1994. In this memo Christopher warned: "Our engagement with Russia has led to perceptions of a "second Yalta", in which Russia has a determining voice in the security choices of Europe. <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101271>
- 9 Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker (with delegations), Moscow May 18, 1990. Accessed on April 6, 2024, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=3402678-Document-16-Gorbachev-Baker-memcon-May-18-1990>
- 10 See Tilo Schabert, *Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird. Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit*, [How world history is made. France and German unification] (Stuttgart: Klett, 2002), 152–168; Tilo Schabert, *Vom Geschehen zur Geschichte. Sechs Kapitel zur Historiographie der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands*, [From events to history. Six chapters on the historiography of German reunification] (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2023), 111–118.

- 11 Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker (with delegations), Moscow May 18, 1990. Accessed on April 24, 2024, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/22563-document-16-gorbachev-baker-memcon-may-18-1990>
- 12 *Entretien avec M. Chevardnadze, Ministre Soviétique des Affaires Étrangères*, July 18, 1990 (AN [=Archives Nationales, Paris] -AG/5(4)/CD/76).
- 13 *Entretien François Mitterrand – Lothar de Maizière*, June 18, 1990 (AN – AG/5(4)/JLB/87).
- 14 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C., *Memoranda of conversations between USDP Wolfowitz and President Havel and MOD Dobrovsky*, 7 June 1991, Accessed on April 9, 2024, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16143-document-29-paul-wolfowitz-memoranda>
- 15 Meeting with President Arpad Goncz, May 23, 1991. Accessed on April 9, 2024, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/memcons-telcons>
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Declassified Documents Concerning President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic and President Lech Walesa of Poland, Clinton Digital Archive. Accessed on April 9, 2024, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101110>
- 18 *Compte-rendu, Visite du Président Mitterrand en République Tchèque, Déjeuner du jeudi 9 décembre 1993* (Presidential Archive of President Mitterrand, Élysée, in the following abbreviated as “Pres. Arch.” – By permission the author had access to this archive).
- 19 *Compte-rendu de l’entretien avec le Président de la République d’Hongrie, M. Arpad Goncz, Jeudi 19 septembre 1994* (AN – AG/5(4)/CD/72. Dossier 1). – Mitterrand on his part stated at the conversation: “Yeltsin wants to maintain his leadership over the former Russian sphere.”
- 20 *Entretien entre le Président de la République et M. Lech Walesa à l’Élysée, le jeudi 20 avril 1995* (AN – AG/5(4)/CD/72. Dossier 1).
- 21 See endnote 8.
- 22 “Paul Wolfowitz Memoranda of Conversation with Vaclav Havel and Lubos Dobrovsky in Prague”, National Security Archive. Accessed on April 9, 2024, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16143-document-29-paul-wolfowitz-memoranda>
- 23 “Charter of Paris for a new Europe (Paris, 21 November 1990)”, University of Luxembourg. See: Accessed on April 17, 2024, https://www.cvce.eu/de/obj/charte_of_paris_for_a_new_europe_paris_21_novembre_1990-en-27f6d664-4466-4fd6-9e23-cd2d84f72cde.html
- 24 Ibid., 5. – To have such a free choice in matters of security had already been settled by the OSCE Final Act in 1975 at Helsinki.
- 25 See: Kimberley Marten, “Reconsidering NATO expansion: a counterfactual analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s”, *European Journal of International Security*, vol. 3, no 2, June 2018: 135–161.
- 26 See <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16143-document-29-paul-wolfowitz-memoranda> – On May 23, 1991 Árpád Göncz said to George Bush: “I saw a danger a few weeks ago regarding the new security arrangement they wanted us to sign. They are very suspicious. They see the image of the enemy in NATO, and they worry any contact we have with Poland and Czechoslovakia.” (Source: See footnote 15). – Russia did not abandon its plan to push the Central/East European states towards entering into contractual agreements that suited its own geopolitical interests. See for instance the following passage in the report on the “Extraordinary Session” of the “Assembly of Western European Union” in London at February 22–23, 1996: “In Munich, at the beginning of February, Andrei Kokoshin, Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, once again tried to promote the concept akin to the “Finlandisation of Central and Eastern Europe.” (National Archives, Richmond/England, PREM 19-5603_2).
- 27 <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16143-document-29-paul-wolfowitz-memoranda> (accessed on April 18, 2024). – On February 26, 1991, at a telephone conversation with President Bush, Havel declared: “Along with the Polish and Hungarian Presidents, we agreed to cooperate together with the European Community and NATO.” “Memcons and Telcons”, George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed on April 24, 2024, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/memcons-telcons>
- 28 Note by Mitterrand’s adviser Anne Lauvergeon, with specification of date and time: *Lundi, 6 juillet 1992, 14h19* (Pres. Arch.).
- 29 *Entretien du Président de la République avec le Président Eltsine, 31 janvier 1992* (AN – AG/5(4)/CD/70).
- 30 *Entretien avec le Président Eltsine, Mercredi 5 février 1992 à 17 h* (AN – AG/5(4)/CD/70).
- 31 *Entretien avec le Président de Hongrie Arpad Goncz, Lundi 5 décembre 1994* (AN – AG/5(4)/CD/92).
- 32 *B. Eltsine, Moscou, le Kemlin. Le 26 janvier 1994. Message remis le 29/01/94 par M. Orlov* [Alexander Orlov, Minister-Counselor at the Russian Embassy in Paris]. French translation made at the Élysée. (Arch. Pres.).
- 33 PREM 19-5603_1.
- 34 PREM 19-3346.
- 35 PREM 19-5114_3.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 “A new Russia was born”, declared Yeltsin, still in 1997, at his conversation with Madeleine Albright (see endnote 4).
- 38 See PREM 19-3346.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 PREM 19-5603_2.
- 41 PREM 19-4499_1.
- 42 Report of the British Embassy at Washington, D.C., December 22, 1997 (PREM 49-160_1).
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Russian President Yeltsin, November 19, 1999. Accessed on April 2, 2024, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101610>
- 46 “The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation”, *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union*, no. 229, March 31, 2023. Accessed on May 14, 2024, <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/concept-foreign-policy-russian-federation>