Russia: “European But Not Western?”

by Nikolas K. Gvosdev

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Abstract: The question whether Russia is part of the Western world has plagued Russian intellectuals and Western observers alike for the past two centuries. The question matters because where Russia “belongs” is part of a larger debate about how one differentiates between “the West” and “the Rest” given changes in the Western family of nations, and because of larger questions of geopolitical alignment. The Slavophile vs. Westernizer paradigm, which suggests that throughout Russia there are two opposing camps engaged in a struggle to determine the course of the country is too simple to reflect the true complexity of post-Soviet Russia. Moreover, an equilibrium may have been reached where not answering the question of Russia’s relationship to the West is desirable for all parties concerned.

In The Charm School, a 1988 pulp spy fiction novel, Nelson DeMille has the U.S. Air Force attaché in Moscow ask the CIA station chief why it is that Russians aren’t more like Westerners:

What is it, Seth? The Tartar influence? The Kazak influence? Why aren’t they exactly like us? I know they can look Scandinavian or Germanic, like Burov, but it’s something more than genetic. It’s a whole different soul and psyche, an ancestral memory; it’s the deep winter snow, and Mongols sweeping over the steppe, and always feeling like they’re inferior to the West and getting shafted by Europe and Cyrillic letters and Slavic fatalism and an off-brand of Christianity and who the hell knows what else.

Is Russia part of the Western world? Tankers of ink and entire forests of paper have been consumed addressing this, one of the “cursed questions” that has plagued Russian intellectuals and Western observers alike for the past two centuries. “Russia and the West” is a theme that never seems to be exhausted—and as a question, one that can never be answered satisfactorily. It seems everyone has an opinion, and the answers (from no to maybe to yes) use a staggering number of criteria to determine Russia’s suitability (or lack thereof) to be counted “Western,” ranging from the geographic and the linguistic to the political and institutional.

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A Google search on “Poland and the West” currently returns 516 matches. When substituting Turkey for Poland in this search—and with the debate about Turkey’s prospective membership in the European Union ongoing and quite heated—some 12,800 matches are returned. The phrase “Russia and the West,” however, returns a staggering 196,000 matches. Certainly some of these are false hits, where the term picked up extraneous subjects, but the vast majority testify to the ease in which both Russian and non-Russian commentators are prepared to juxtapose the idea of “Russia” with that of “the West.”

The “Cursed Question” of Russia’s Belonging

Why does this topic matter so much? In part, uncertainty about where Russia “belongs” is part of a larger debate about how one differentiates between “the West” and “the Rest.” Since the Reformation, the identification of the Occident as those countries and regions which fell under the jurisdiction of the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church as “Patriarch of the West” has been succeeded by the concept of the West as an enlightened civilization defined by common values and experiences rather than jurisdictional alignments. As a result, some of the traditional criteria for differentiating Russia from “the West” could just as easily exclude other countries that are seen as part and parcel of the Euro-Atlantic community and the Western family of nations. Russia’s “off-brand of Christianity” (Eastern Orthodoxy) could just as easily exclude Greece, Romania and Bulgaria; its historical propensity for autocratic or authoritarian governments could encompass Spain and Portugal as well; and the non-inclusion of its lands in Charlemagne’s Empire also applies to most of Scandinavia and east-central Europe, not to mention the Western Hemisphere.

Sometimes the concern about “where Russia belongs” has little to do with Russia itself. This is reflected in the concept of “nesting Orientalisms” in Central and Eastern European and in Balkan countries, countries whose own “Western identity” and orientation are insecure. They have found it useful to promote their closeness with the West by comparing and contrasting themselves to eastern neighbors like Turkey or Russia, often because they fear that the states “further west” are prepared to consign them to the sphere of influence of the “eastern neighbor.” Over the last several years, Ukraine—an East Slav country that uses Cyrillic, the citizens of which, at least nominally, overwhelmingly belongs to the Orthodox Church, the fountainhead of Russian

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There are also larger questions of geopolitical alignment. Does Russia’s destiny lie in eventual integration with the institutions that over the past half-century have helped to define “the Western world?” Both Winston Churchill’s 1957 comment that “in a true unity of Europe, Russia must play her part”—made in the early optimistic responses to de-Stalinization—and Charles De Gaulle’s vision of a “Europe between the Atlantic and the Urals” imply that the European project is incomplete without some degree of Russian participation. In contrast, more recent comments, such as those of Romano Prodi when he was president of the European Commission, imply that “Europe” has a defined border in the east roughly coterminal with that of the old Soviet border, and that a country like Russia is “associated” with Europe in the same way as Latin America is—sharing some cultural, economic, and political links, but otherwise separate and distinct.

In discussing these questions, one cannot help but encounter the two political-philosophical schools that grew out of the debates of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals in salons and philosophical journals—the Westernizers and the Slavophiles. In a nutshell, the Westernizers felt Russia is (or should be) a part of the West and that any divergence between Russia and other Western countries—its “off-brand” of Christianity, defects in its legal and political systems, etc.—should be corrected in favor of prevailing Western models to bring Russia into harmony with the rest of the Western world. The Slavophiles celebrated the differences between Russia and the West as proof that Russia was a distinct culture and society (as did their twentieth-century Eurasian successors). But since the 1840s the Slavophile-vs.-Westernizer paradigm has been given a prominence that would suggest that throughout Russia, at all levels of state and society, there are two opposing camps, two well-defined parties, each struggling against the other in an effort to determine the course of the country.

This is not to deny that both schools were influential in shaping attitudes. One of the more prominent of the earlier Westernizers, Pyotr Chaadaev, felt that Russia’s great misfortune had been not to experience the High Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Reformation, and that Russia had to recognize the futility of trying to follow a different path to modernity.

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3 See John McLaughlin’s interview with then-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, broadcast December 10, 2001, where Kuchma contrasted Ukraine not only with Russia but also with Balkan states he felt were being fast-tracked into European institutions, as an example of this approach. Not only should Ukraine be a part of the West and is it Western, in distinction to Russia, it is to Kuchma “more Western” than the Balkan states. The transcript is archived at www.mclaughlin.com.

than the one that had been blazed by Western Europe. His solution, outlined in *Apology of a Madman* (1836), was for Russia to emulate Western European models without reservation—an approach that has clear echoes even in the program of the “young reformers” of the early 1990s. In much the same way, Nikolai Danilevsky, one of the second wave of Slavophile thinkers, argued in *Russia and Europe* (1869) that the values and institutions of Western European civilization (what he termed the Romano-Germanic civilization) were not universal. For him, Russia was not “Western” but was part of a Slavonic-Byzantine civilization separate and distinct from the West, and the task of Russian foreign policy should be to consolidate this civilizational space by liberating its other core territories from Habsburg (Western) and Ottoman (Islamic) rule. This vision has similarly resonated to the present day, especially in the calls for recent years for the emergence of a Eurasian political and economic union distinct from the EU.

But too often we have fallen into the trap of pushing the Slavophile-vs.-Westernizer metaphor far beyond its useful limits to explain developments in contemporary Russia. For one thing, the question that gripped the denizens of both schools—how Russia was to be modernized—has already been answered by seventy years of Soviet rule. Moshe Lewin’s *The Soviet Century* (2004) makes this very clear; in reviewing his work, I myself noted:

> The Soviet Union was not a temporary blip, an unwelcome interruption between a pre-Revolutionary past and post-Soviet future, but a juggernaut that rolled over everything in its path. Nothing was left unaffected, from political culture to economic infrastructure, language, religion, and social habits. This book is a direct challenge to those who believe that the impact of the Soviet period can be minimized or exorcised and that either an utterly new path can be paved from its wreckage or a pre-Soviet path picked up again, like a lovingly restored chapel dwarfed by massive apartment blocks, after 70 years.5

In particular, Soviet policies of industrialization and urbanization “engendered new conceptions of existence . . . light-years away from the rural rhythms of traditional Russia”6—the milieu of both the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. In particular, the Slavophile and Eurasianist vision of Russia as a distinct, separate civilization rested in large part on a way of life that no longer exists and cannot be recreated; certainly not when the Russian village continues to be depopulated and Russians are full participants in a globalized consumer culture. But post-Soviet Russia inherits a legacy of modernization that, while it took as its material inspiration the industrial societies of the developed West, used quite un-Western methods in its construction.

The other problem is that the paradigm has been so abused as to increasingly lose all relevance. Alexander Kerensky, the moderate

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6 Ibid.
socialist who headed the Provisional Government, has been described as a Westernizer, and Vladimir Lenin, the Bolshevik who overthrew him, labeled a Slavophile, notwithstanding Kerensky’s observation that Lenin’s brutality was formed in large part because of the many years of exile away from Russia. Hedrick Smith and other journalists who reported from the Soviet Union contributed to this problem by describing different factions in the 1970s and 1980s Soviet leadership in Slavophile or Westernizer terms, even though the traditional Slavophile thinkers—for example, with their emphasis on the importance of religion, freedom of the press and civil society—might have found it odd to have a faction of a party dedicated to militant atheism and the dictatorship of the proletariat characterized as their philosophical heirs. In the dying days of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev was the Westernizer and Boris Yeltsin the Slavophile, who then was transformed into a Western-leaning reformer, opposed by a neo-Slavophile alliance of communists and nationalists. I have found contrasting reports from 2000, some describing Vladimir Putin as a Westernizing reformer and others as a neo-Stalinist Slavophile reactionary. Increasingly, Westernizer is just being used as shorthand for “liberal reformer” and Slavophile for “nationalist” or “anti-American” (in a geopolitical sense) rather than referring to the partisans of particular lifestyle orientations. When I took part in the February 2006 installment of the U.S.-Russia Dialogue in Moscow, one of my interlocutors espoused a very “Eurasian” perspective in terms of foreign policy (the necessity for Russia to forge a closer political, economic, and military relationship with China and India to “offset” the global dominance of the United States), but in terms of his lifestyle and cultural patterns he was indistinguishable from other continental Europeans. Very few of those espousing a “Eurasian” or “eastward orientation” for Russia in foreign policy have argued that Russia’s culture or political institutions should be restructured on Asian lines. At the same time, a figure like Grigori Yavlinsky, often identified as the doyen of Russia’s Westernizing liberals, is a faithful adherent of the “off-brand of Christianity” that the earlier Westernizers precisely identified as one of Russia’s impediments to full membership in the Western community of nations.

European, But Not Western

The continued use of the Slavophile-vs.-Westernizer paradigm also obscures the fact that a general consensus now exists among Russians—and, it seems, among many Europeans—as to Russia’s “place” vis-à-vis the West, the type of state and society that is seen as best suited to Russia, and Russia’s relationship to Europe. Based on analysis of both the policy positions of the political elite and polling data, Alexander Lukin has concluded that “most Russians believe their country to be culturally closer to the Western world.
while not yet ‘Westernized’ enough economically and psychologically.” This is what I would term “conditional” or “qualified” membership in the Western community.

Conditional membership takes the position that Russia is at its core culturally a part of Europe and in its genesis part and parcel of European civilization, but for reasons of geography and history forms a special subdivision of the European world, because it is on the territory of Russia that Europe meets and blends into the worlds of the Middle East and Asia. Thus, Russia’s political and economic institutions have evolved differently than those of the purely Western countries. There is a distinct “Russian path” that does not completely coincide with the West European and North American experiences. Lukin terms this “the balanced policy” position and characterizes it as the belief that “whilst Russia is a part of the West, it has different needs and interests given the peculiarities of its history, its size and geographic position as well as the fact that it is still behind the West in many aspects.” In a meeting our group had with President Putin in September 2004, the president expressed these sentiments in discussing his policy agenda for Russia; he has also done so publicly on a number of occasions, contrasting Russia as a cultural part of Europe but not part of “institutional Europe.” In practical policy terms, this means, as Dimitri Trenin has observed: “If one skips the usual banalities about geography, history and culture, today a European Russia means a more modern Russia, compatible with the EU, with an eventual institutional arrangement between Brussels and Moscow that falls short of full membership. . . . [It] would result in integration with, as opposed to within, the European Union.”

The “conditional membership” view also takes the position that there are “two Wests”—the “far West” of the United States and the “near West” of the EU. The “near West” and the “far West” may form the Euro-Atlantic community, but the “near West” and the post-Soviet space create “greater Europe.” Sometimes this is reflected in a division of the world in which “the West” as the Euro-Atlantic community consists of the United States and Western Europe but “Europe” (“the near West” plus the “East of Europe”) by definition excludes the United States but includes Russia. In our group’s 2004 meeting with

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8 See, e.g., Putin’s press conference in Paris in October 2000 after the EU-Russia summit, drawing a distinction between Russia as a possible member of the EU (with what that implies from a political and institutional point of view) and Russia as a part of Europe “from a cultural and economic point of view.” “Russia, It is Not Time for Joining EU Yet,” Prawda, Oct. 31, 2000. During Putin’s visit to Scotland in 2003, he again proclaimed, “Russia is a part of European culture. European culture would be incomplete without Russia. Russia is a part of Europe.” Quoted in “Russia’s Putin retraces historic links with Scotland,” AFP, June 25, 2003.
10 I draw on Trenin’s schema here, ibid.
President Putin, Dr. James Billington asked him to compare the diversity of the populations of the United States and Russia. Putin expressed his view of the United States as an immigrant society, a transplant of European civilization that then followed its own course of development in North America, in contrast to Russia, an eastern branch of European civilization which, because of its geographical position and historic experience, had learned to coexist with non-European cultures “side-by-side” within the framework of a common state. Indeed, a number of both Russian political and intellectual leaders make the point that Russia’s attempts to develop a workable synthesis between European and non-European cultures provides the rest of Europe with a workable model of “inter-civilizational” tolerance, a theme that was heard once again after the riots in France of fall 2005.

Sometimes Russia’s “conditional membership” is expressed by the phrase “Russia is European but not Western.” This distinction between “the West” and “Europe” has been often discussed by one of Russia’s most prolific public intellectuals, Metropolitan Kirill (Gundiaev), one of the leading hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. Drawing on concepts earlier elucidated by scholars like Dimitri Obolensky, he identifies the genesis of European civilization with the Greco-Roman-Semitic synthesis of the first half of the first millennium, and in the emergence of a “common Christian tradition” transmitted to both the emerging nations of eastern and western Europe, for example via the legal code of the Emperor Justinian. At a lecture delivered at the University of Perugia on October 2, 2002 (“The Future of Europe and the Eastern Christian Tradition”), he opened by saying:

The theme of Europe is especially important in the process of the formation of the Eastern European way of life and philosophy of life. Byzantium, and the Orthodox Slavonic world through it, inherited Greek wisdom, Roman law and state traditions, which had already been transformed by the light of Christianity. Russia joined the family of European nations through Christianity. This common tradition, however, has evolved differently in what Kirill, drawing on Obolensky, terms “Western Europe” and “Eastern Europe.” Addressing a pan-European interreligious dialogue in Oslo in fall 2002, he observed about “West Europe”:

11 Not only is the Metropolitan the chief spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill has a weekly television program which reaches millions of viewers, both religious and non-religious.

12 See his interview in Diplomatie, September–October 2005; an English-language version is available at www.orthodoxytoday.org.

13 “Eastern Europe,” in this context, is usually understood not in terms of the post-World War II Soviet bloc but to refer to those countries of Europe which looked to the Byzantine Empire and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, an interesting point is that Kirill, in his Diplomatie interview, identified both Greece and Cyprus as “Western” Orthodox countries, in part because of their postwar trajectory into the Euro-Atlantic community.
A particular standard of civilization has been established there as a result of the philosophical, social and political development which began with the Reformation and continued during the epoch of the Enlightenment and the revolutions in Europe. This standard is based on the so-called liberal principle, which proclaims individual freedoms as the highest value. The structure of society as a whole is arranged in a way to ensure the maximum possible realization of the individual rights and freedoms.14

He identifies this as the guiding principle in “West European and North American social development,” but contrasts this with a more conciliar approach that defines “Eastern Christian/Eastern European” societies. This, in turn, has an impact on how democracy is defined and understood; for Kirill, democracy is best understood as a system which enables individual citizens to harmonize their interests within a framework of mutual self-support.15

Like Putin and other leading Russian figures who also have identified Russia as part of a larger European civilization, Kirill nonetheless rejects the idea that the “Western lung” (to use the formulation of the late Pope John Paul II) sets the unquestionable norm:

> Eastern Europe does not want to blindly follow the rules developed some time ago by someone without its participation and without the consideration of its inhabitants' philosophy of life simply because these rules are applied at present in the materially prospering countries of the West.16

Kirill has sketched out a vision for pursuing European unity that takes as its starting point the importance of the Eastern and Western European approaches’ providing balance and complementarity. In his Diplomatie interview, he declared: “We are convinced that the Orthodox tradition is called to make its own contribution to the development of united European space,” and in his Oslo address he seemed to endorse a version of convergence theory, by which Western individualism and Eastern conciliarity could be synthesized into a pan-European approach.17 Moreover, in his interview and in other sources, he has maintained that with some degree of convergence, “then the

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14 “International Integration and Civilizational Diversity of Humanity,” an address to the European Council of Religious Leaders, Nov. 11, 2002, Oslo, Norway. The text can be found at [www.religionsforpeace.net](http://www.religionsforpeace.net).

15 See the segment of his interview with the Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published on July 20, 2006. The full text is posted on the server of the Moscow Patriarchate, at [www.mospat.ru](http://www.mospat.ru).

16 Kirill, “International Integration.”

17 He also makes this point in his paper, “The Universal and the Distinctive in the Human Rights Concept” which he delivered at the “Conference on Religion in the Modern System of International Relations” (Sept. 30, 2005, St. Petersburg). He stated, “The contribution of Russia to the development of human rights can consist in affirming a balance between individual freedom and social conciliarity.” An English text is available at [www.orthodoxytoday.org](http://www.orthodoxytoday.org). At a lecture he delivered at Moscow State University, he noted that such a convergence would help to anchor “values as the free market, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and many others” in a way that would not lead to the erosion of traditional values. (Press Service of the Department of External Church Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, Apr. 4, 2000).
European integration will be a success. If it does not happen, this grand geopolitical project will collapse.”

Some who have followed Kirill’s statements would argue he is a latter-day Slavophile (or perhaps more accurately, a Eurasianist). However, in contrast to the traditional Eurasianists and second-wave of the Slavophiles, who sought to accelerate and emphasize the divorce between Russia and Europe, Kirill is committed to a vision of European integration in which, following Churchill’s dicta, Russia must play its part. And in contrast to the traditional Westernizers (and those few remaining contemporary disciples in Russian politics) for whom Russian integration with the West is predicated on Russia undergoing a process of Westernization, Kirill’s approach is not to accept the idea of Europe as being the “Romano-Germanic” civilization of the High Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment (where it can be argued Russia was peripheral at best). Rather, he sees Europe as having been generated from the Christian Roman Empire, whose seeds were planted in the emerging nations of Europe from the Franks and Angles in the West to the tribes of Rus in the East. For him, just as Russia benefits from its encounters with Western Europe, so too Europe would benefit from how the common European tradition has evolved in Russia and other parts of “Eastern Europe.”

Kirill’s positions resonate within some circles in the Vatican and have been considered by some observers as a potential basis for improving relations between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

**Does Any of This Really Matter?**

The debate about “Russia and the West” in academic salons across Russia, in the pages of journals and newspapers, and on Russia’s talk shows is more than an elite parlor game. Continuing uncertainty about Russia’s relationship to a larger Western world is reflected at the highest levels of the leadership. Putin’s interview with David Frost of the BBC of March 5, 2000, as president elect, encapsulates the overall ambivalence that still exists about Russia and the West. Asked about NATO’s eastward expansion and Russia’s possible membership, Putin replied:

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18 Kirill’ presentation at the St. Petersburg conference (ibid.) follows this pattern, by discussing how “the problem of freedom itself became relevant for all Churches without exception after Christianity acquired the status of state religion in the Roman Empire” but how divergences emerged due to differences in ecclesiology and historical experience between Eastern and Western Christians.

19 See, e.g., Gianni Valente, “More Power and Less Believers,” 30giorni (September 2003), at www.30giorni.it. Kirill himself has argued that a successful Orthodox-Catholic dialogue has positive implications for the European project; cf. his statements of May 26, 2004 at the Moscow conference, “Orthodox Byzantium and the Latin West.”
Russia is a part of European culture. And I cannot imagine my country in isolation from Europe. . . . Russia strives for equitable and candid relations with its partners. . . . We are open to equitable cooperation, to partnership. We believe we can talk about more profound integration with NATO, but only if Russia is regarded as an equal partner. . . . The situation that was laid down in the founding principles of the United Nations—that was the situation that obtained in the world at the end of World War II. All right, the situation may have changed. Let’s assume there is a desire on the part of those who perceive the change to install new mechanisms of ensuring international security. But pretending—or proceeding from the assumption—that Russia has nothing to do with it and trying to exclude it from this process is hardly feasible.”

His ambivalence was again on display this past July, in his address to the Seventh Conference of European Prosecutors-General in Moscow, where, on the one hand, he insisted that “Russia is an integral part of a democratic Europe” but, on the other hand, he called for dialogue between “West” and “East.”

This does have an impact on policy. In the early 1990s, the “Atlanticist” orientation in the Russian government believed that the end goal of policy should be Russia’s full inclusion into the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic world, including NATO and the EU. Not only would this require “the West” to expand fully to encompass Russia, but also there was an understanding that, in order to become full members of Western institutions, Russia would have to undertake a thorough overhaul of its political and economic systems.

In contrast, the “conditional membership” approach—reflected in Russia’s engagement with the EU in the “wider Europe” process—has served the interests of both Brussels and Moscow—although one could argue that it has been much less successful with regard to NATO. From the European side, it took off the table the prospect—even if remote—of having to integrate a country the size of Russia into the Union; it also permitted a “blurring” of the lines that differentiate Europe from “not Europe” by introducing concepts of “European spaces” (in the economy, security, culture, etc.).

From the Russian perspective, it liberated the government from having to implement the acquis communitaire and has allowed Russia, in essence, to pick and choose which European standards and institutions it wishes to adopt. Russia can be “as European” as it and the rest of Europe want it to be. Some Russian officials privately expressed to me their satisfaction with this approach and contrasted it with the “humiliation” experienced by their Turkish and Ukrainian counterparts, who, having committed themselves to seeking full

21 Putin’s remarks, delivered on July 5, 2006, are available at www.kremlin.ru.
23 See former Greek Minister of Defense Ioannis Varvitsiotis’s proposal for a “European Commonwealth” as an example of this trend, as outlined in his article, “Let’s Build on Neighbourhood Policy,” Europe’s World, Summer 2006, pp. 113–15.
membership in the EU, must accept Brussels’ *diktat* in a whole host of policy areas without receiving any firm guarantees of eventual inclusion.\(^\text{24}\)

A related point has been Russia’s continuing efforts to redefine the Group of Eight from being a “Western” institution to a “global” one, in part to respond to criticisms, particularly from U.S. sources, that Russia should not be part of the Group. Russian television commentator Alexey Pushkov offered a spirited defense of Russian membership this past July, arguing that the criteria for membership is not shared values or democracy, but the ability of a country to contribute to solutions to pressing economic and political challenges (such as energy and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction).\(^\text{25}\)

**But Does Any of This Debate Resonate with the Average Russian?**

There has been a marked shift in Russian attitudes since the late 1980s, when “Western models” were seen as the norm and political figures routinely promised a swift transition to “normality.”\(^\text{26}\) This was the period of greatest interest in Western (usually U.S.-based) forms of Christianity, often U.S.-based evangelical denominations, on the grounds, as sometimes also observed in Latin America, that Western Protestantism was the key to successful markets and a stable democracy. Since then, however, the popularity of unambiguously pro-Western political movements in Russia has sharply declined. Today, with the exception of the Yabloko party (which receives mid-single-digit levels of support in polls), no Russian party advocates Russian membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. And we have seen among Russians—particularly among the first post-Soviet generation of Russians—much less tolerance for Western criticism of Russia’s political and economic choices.\(^\text{27}\) Polling data suggests that most young Russians feel they want the same things as their counterparts in Western Europe (62 percent), but that Russia should not try to become just “another” European country (54 percent) and that it would be better off if foreigners ceased from trying to “impose their ideas” (72 percent)—a theme very consistent with the comments of Metropolitan Kirill. Moreover, a general consensus is emerging that sees Russia as both European and an exception; rightfully part of the European world and therefore associated with

\(^{24}\) One very noticeable impact of the “conditional” approach has been the development of a two-tiered visa regime, with most of Russia’s political, business and cultural elite now able to receive long-term multiple-entry visas which enable them to travel throughout Europe as if they were EU or U.S. citizens, giving the appearance of equality in treatment.

\(^{25}\) Pushkov’s July 14, 2006, comments at St. Petersburg can be downloaded as an audio file from [http://en.g8russia.ru](http://en.g8russia.ru).

\(^{26}\) In a review of Andrei Shleifer’s *A Normal Country*, I observed that the use of that phrase by Russians all too often referred to “a fairyland—usually Western—characterized by efficient governance, prosperity and political civility.” *Moscow Times*, Apr. 22, 2005.

the West in a general sense—especially when compared with the Middle East or East Asia—but distinctive within that world.

Nikolai Zlobin penned an essay for the Harvard International Review in which he described Europe and Russia as “together but separate.”28 This might just as well sum up the popular attitude to this question. A certain equilibrium seems to have been reached where, for the foreseeable future, not providing an exact answer to the question of Russia’s relationship to the West is the preferred position of all parties concerned.