



End of the Quest: Rising “Russian Civilisation” Concept In Russian Politics

Araştırın Sonu: Rus Siyasetinde Yükselen “Rus Medeniyeti” Kavramı

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Abstract

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation’s search for a new strategy to replace the ideology-based politics of the Soviet era became a key issue during the post-Soviet period. In the 1990s, Russian politics found itself in turmoil as it struggled to devise coherent and effective strategies. The focus of this study will be on conceptual suggestions, discussions, and the transformation of Russian foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, the ascendancy of the Russian civilisation concept has played a significant role in shaping contemporary Russian politics. Drawing inspiration from the ideas of prominent Russian philosophers such as Danilevskii and Leontyev, President Putin has found powerful arguments in his works. Through the influence of his philosophies and perspectives, Putin has navigated the complexities of Russian politics and brought an end to the quest for a new strategy in Russian politics in the 21st century. Their insights have solidified the importance of the Russian civilisation concept and its integration into the political discourse in Russia. As a result, Russia has found a sense of direction and purpose rooted in its historical and cultural identity.

Keywords: Russia, Russian civilisation, Danilevskii, Putin, Russian foreign policy

Öz

SSCB’nin dağılmasının ardından, Sovyet döneminin ideoloji temelli siyasetinin yerine Rusya Federasyonu için yeni bir strateji arayışı, Sovyet sonrası dönemde kilit bir konu haline gelmiştir. 1990’larda Rus siyaseti, tutarlı ve etkili bir strateji bulma mücadelesi verirken kendini kargaşa içinde buldu. Bu çalışmanın odak noktasını, kargaşa döneminde ve Vladimir Putin sonrasında ortaya atılan kavramsal öneriler, tartışmalar ve Soğuk Savaş’ın sona ermesinden bu yana Rus dış politikasında yaşanan dönüşüm oluşturmaktadır. Putin’in liderliğinde Rus medeniyeti kavramının yükselişi, çağdaş Rus siyasetinin şekillenmesinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Danilevskii ve Leontyev gibi önde gelen Rus düşünürlerin fikirlerinden ilham alan Başkan Putin, bu düşünürlerin fikirlerinde işe yarar argümanlar bulmuştur. Bu düşünürlerin felsefelerinden, bakış açılarından faydalanarak Putin, Rus siyasetinin karmaşıklığı içinde yol alabilmiş ve 21. yüzyılda Rus siyasetinde yeni bir strateji arayışına son verebilmiştir. Rus filozofların fikirleri çağdaş Rus medeniyeti kavramının güncellik kazanmasına ve ülkenin siyasi söylemine entegre edilmesine yardımcı olmuştur. Sonuç olarak Rusya, kökleri tarihi ve kültürel kimliğine dayanan bir yön ve amaç duygusu bulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya, Rus Medeniyeti, Danilevskii, Putin, Rus dış politikası

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Introduction

The governance of foreign policy by states depends on several factors, such as history, social values, civilisation and ideology. States generally use a combination of external and internal factors to direct their foreign policy strategies (Kosolapov, 1999). Russian politics and foreign policy contain some aspects of the history, traditions, and values of Russian civilisation. In recent history, Russian politics has experienced dramatic transformations in its structure, such as; imperial strategy of the Russian Empire, the ideology-based politics of the USSR, and the complicated structure and quest for strategy in the foreign-policy sphere of the Russian Federation. Although Russia has developed different state structures in the last 300 years, the transfer of strategic thought has continued in fundamental aspects. The Soviet Union was founded during a revolution against the Russian imperial regime, but it had carried the traces of some nationalist and imperialist foreign-policy strategies of the imperial regime over time. Finally, the Russian Federation also adopted and implemented some foreign policy strategies from both the imperial and Soviet periods, although not in the same way but with different interpretations.

The Russian Federation has become on the world stage by inheriting a state culture that has been undisputed as one of the leading actors in international relations for the last three hundred years. As a historical and social consciousness, this fact has taken place among ordinary citizens and governmental elites in Russia. This fact stood out as one of the most important factors shaping the political stance and foreign policy of the new Russian state. On the other hand, another historical fact is the special place of European civilisation in Russian social and political values. Organic and subsequently formed ties with Europe are undeniable in Russian history. Andrei Pavel Tsygankov views the European and distinct civilisation structure of the Russian state as historical dualism, which emphasises Russian European and Asian structures in its culture (Tsygankov, 2016). Consequently, historical dualism has always existed since the establishment of the Russian Empire under the leadership of Peter I. In this respect, this historical dualism, which exists in Russian history, forms the basis for domestic and foreign policy debates on the determination of a new political stance and foreign policy understanding of Russia, which has emerged as a new actor in international relations as the heir of the Soviet Union. This leads us to understand and analyse conceptual discussions on Russian politics since the 1990s, to understand Russian politics and evaluate Russian aspirations in the post-Cold War period.

The confusion and quest to adjust the new Russian policy entailed the accumulation of several concepts on the basis of modernist and civilisations suggestions. The core of this study will be shaped by conceptual suggestions, discussions, and its journey from the Atlanticist liberal approach to the Russian civilisation concept in Russian politics since the end of the Cold War. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and abandonment of communist ideology as a form of government and foreign policy strategy have raised a famous question for the new Russian state; what is the Russian Federation? What will be the new political stance and foreign policy strategy of Russia? What types of approaches or philosophy will be included in the new Russian foreign policy strategy? The Russian quest to determine the main directions of a new comprehensive political stance and strategy has contained a quest to respond to these questions. In this study, firstly, what kinds of approaches that have become predominant in Russian politics. Then, as the main

topic of this research, we will examine how the Russian civilisation concept has advanced and ended this quest in Russian politics under the leadership of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

Conceptual Discussions in the Russian Politics throughout 1990s

The non-ideological structure of the new Russian state has confused the construction of a new stance of Russia. The new state had to deal with structural political, economic, social, and security crises. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the modern Russian state and society have experienced the stress of possible disintegration within the Russian Federation, leading to a sense of disorientation and division in terms of worldview. The most significant weakness of Russian society and its political culture has been the absence of a nation-state identity throughout its history. (Nikonov, 2020) To find proper ways to overcome this state of mind, Russia had to decide which policy should be implemented on internal and external issues.

The first decade of the Russian Federation has seen many debates, arguments, concepts, and theoretical approaches to find the most appropriate strategy for Russia. From a theoretical perspective, idealism/liberalism/neoliberalism (Zagorski & Slobin & Solodovnik & Khrustalev, 1992), realism and neorealism (Kosolapov, 2002; Kulagin, 2002), procommunism (Zyuganov, 1995; Tsipko, 1996; Sakwa, 1998; Flikke, 1999), and right radical approaches (Barygin, 1995; Kuzmin 2007; Belenkin 1997) were used by political scientists and political figures to explain the new stance of the Russian Federation. In addition, several concepts such as Atlanticism, peaceful coexistence, pluralism, Eurasianism, pragmatism, multipolarity, *derjavnost/derjavniki*, civilised Eurasia, and slavophile arguments were laid down by Russian scholars throughout this period (Sergunin, 2016). Debates on these theoretical and conceptual explanations of the new Russian political stance also contained discussions on a new Russian foreign policy strategy. Throughout the 1990s, some of these conceptual and theoretical approaches dominated each other through the effects of internal and external factors. First, liberal-neoliberal approaches and atlanticism concept had become predominant position (Bogaturov, 2017). Then, realist/neorealist approaches and Eurasianism, *derjavnost*, *veliki dermal* (great power), pragmatism, multi-polarity, and pluralism concepts reached a peak with the rise of Yevgeny Primakov, Sergei Stankevich, and Gennady Zyuganov in Russian politics (Sergunin, 2016). Isolationist, slavophile and civilised Eurasia concepts also grew in this period (Zeleneva, 2023). At the end, the insufficiency of one-sided theoretical and conceptual perspectives entailed increasing constructivist, liberal constructivist theoretical approaches with pragmatic, statist modernisation and pluralist concepts-based strategies during the first term of the presidency of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (Tsygankov, 2016).

Russia's post-Soviet endeavours initiated a process reminiscent of the intellectual debates of the 19th century before the Bolshevik Revolution in the early 20th century. In the 19th century, there had been philosophical debate about Russia's mission, ideals, and character, emphasising modernist/pro-western and conservative/Russian civilisation. In the post-Soviet era, the pre-Soviet era of empires was no longer in effect, and the international system generally embraced the nation-state structure. However, as Nikonov

highlights, Russia had no prior experience of the nation-state structure, nor had it been a part of its political culture. During the Soviet era, any notion that emphasised the Russian identity and concept was rejected, and therefore, Russia did not know how to build a state in the post-Soviet era. This led to a practical re-ignition in Russian politics in the 1990s when the intellectual debate over what Russia was like in the 19th century. This led to a struggle for supremacy in Russia in the 1990s between Atlanticist and liberal views, which viewed Russia as part of European civilisation, or should be part of it, conservative and nationalist views, and Eurasianist, nationalist, and civilisationist views, which argued for the uniqueness of Russian civilisation. At the core of all this turmoil and the struggle for supremacy was the aim to give post-Soviet Russia an identity, ideal, and mission.

Towards the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, discussions revolved around whether Russia was part of Europe, opposed to Europe, or constituted a civilisation distinct from Europe, at the centre of philosophical, historical, linguistic, and literary studies. Leading these debates were philosophers, writers, and intellectuals such as Aleksandr Radishchev, Nikolai Karamzin, Pyotr Chaadaev, Nikolai Danilevskii, Konstantin Leontyev, Alexei Khomyakov, Aleksandr Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Vladimir S. Solovyov, who championed pro-Western/liberal, nationalist, Pan-Slavic, and Eurasianist ideas (Narochnitskaya, 2005)

Modernist and Westernist Conceptualizations of Russian Politics

Liberal modernist and westernism ideas seem to have started with Alexander Radishchev, educated in the French Enlightenment and atheism, who emphasised compassion and humanity. Liberals were in significant numbers in the ranks of Westerners who resented serfdom, autocracy, bureaucracy, backwardness, and ignorance and called for Britain and France to follow their example (Nikonov, 2021). Pyotr Chaadaev was a pioneer of this Westernist ideas of Russian intellectuals.

Pyotr Chaadaev's Philosophical Letters, originally published in French in 1831 and the first of which was published in Russia in 1836 in the journal *Teleskop*, according to Andrzej Walicki, known for his studies on Russian history and philosophy, have an importance that initiated intellectual debates in Russia in the 19th century (Walicki, 2014). In his six Philosophical Letters, Chaadaev discussed Europe, Russia, faith, and the development of societies (Chaadaev, 1969). In the only letter published in Russia, Chaadaev argued that European society stood out as an advanced civilisation compared to Russia and served humanity, whereas Russia had no development or accumulation that contributed to humanity either in its history or at that time (Chaadaev, 1969). Studies and discourses against the ideas put forward by Chaadaev, who was declared a "maniac" and kept under house arrest by the order of Emperor Nicholas I after his article was published in *Teleskop*, also contributed to the intellectual development of conservative and nationalist ideas in Russia (Nikonov, 2021).

However, the Westernisation policies that had begun in Russia under Peter the Great and peaked under Catherine the Great in the 18th century gave way to more conservative and nationalist policies under Nicholas I in the 19th century. The restriction of Chaadaev by the Emperor himself, the closure of the *Telescope* journal, in which the first of his Philosophical Letters was published, and the exile of its editor to Siberia led to a process in which Nicholas I was personally involved (Walicki, 2014). During the reign of Nicholas

I, rather than Russia becoming a part of European civilisation, the concept of Russian civilisation as a distinct and unique entity and its place in the international system was more prominent in Russian politics.

The revolutionary constitutional ideas that emerged after the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars did not allow Russia to completely isolate itself from the political developments in Europe. On the other hand, Russia did not intend to completely isolate itself from the developments in Europe. During the reign of Alexander II, serfdom was abolished in 1861, and some constitutional arrangements were made under the monarchy (Riasanovsky, 2019). These developments, however, were not implemented in Russia due to the dominance of liberal or Westernist ideas but by political authority following common intellectual and social demands. Nevertheless, the intellectual debate on liberal or Westernist ideas led by Radischev and Chaadaev in terms of the development of Russian politics played an important role in the partial modernisation of Russia in the 19th century.

In the 20th century, Westernist and liberal ideas in Russia evolved into the development of revolutionary and socialist ideas among Russian intellectuals. This process was led by Alexander Herzen and the “Narodniks”, of which he was a part, which emphasised socialist ideas and included many members of the Russian intelligentsia. The Narodniks, who also participated in the process leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, developed socialist views based on intellectual debates that desired Western modernisation, just like liberals (Nikonov, 2021). Another prominent name in this process with respect to Herzen was Vissarion Belinsky (Riasanovsky, 2005). During the Soviet period, which was based on Russian socialism and communist ideology established after World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, liberal ideas did not gain significant ground.

However, the Soviet political model has undergone dramatic changes throughout the last years of the union. Gorbachev was the leader of that historical change in the Soviet political structure and foreign policy strategy, which had severely contained attempts to re-integrate with the West and provided openness to the Soviet political structure to show its goodwill and sincerity to the Western alliance. Gorbachev’s policy conceptualised as “New Thinking” that included great shifts from the classical Soviet nationalist-communist approach.

Symptomatically, New Thinking was not quite new, if it was influenced by American neoliberal interdependence theories. Gorbachev’s and Yakovlev’s foreign policy advisers, such as Nikolai Kosolapov and Georgi Shakhnazarov, read Joseph S. Nye and Robert O. Keohane Transnational Relations and World Politics (1971) applied its basic assumptions to designing the foreign-policy speeches of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. (Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 1999, p. 48)

However, Gorbachev’s manoeuvres had included equal partnership and sincerity to end ideologic conflicts between poles. As a successor to Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin also began his career, as the last President of RSFSR and the first President of the Russian Federation, to pursue and improve integration with the Western political system with the ideas of Gorbachev about counting Russia as an equal partner in the new world order.

Modernisers place the emphasis on Russia’s imperatives of modernisation and associate civilisation with modern human achievements. This approach tends to adjust Russian

cultural values to those of the West, evaluating the West as the pioneer of modernity or the most proper and progressive civilisation in the contemporary world. This means the returning European roots of the Russian Empire which institutionalised with great reforms in the 18th century. In this sense, Modernisers have consistently supported Russia's strong integration with European-Atlantic economic, political, and even security institutions. Throughout the first years of the Russian Federation, President Boris Yeltsin and his ministers and advisers like Andrey Kozyrev, Yegor Gaidar, and Anatoly Chubais thought that the best way to salvage Russia and resolve the tough problems was to form strategic partnerships and cooperate with Western institutions and adapt the West-type state structure and market as soon as possible. (Bogaturov, 2017)

...the new Russian leaders saw their country as an organic part of Western civilisation, whose "genuine" Western identity was hijacked by Bolsheviks and the Soviet system. (Tsygankov, 2007, p. 383)

Prominent historians and philosophers, such as Vasili Klyuchevski and Pavel Milyukov, have argued that the evolution of the Russian Empire is not the same as that of European states, but it would be experienced in a similar process to reach civilised state and society (Tsygankov, 2007). In this respect, practises of the neo-liberal theory were implemented due to its fame as a well-suited approach in the new world order for all states in the world after the end of the Cold War.

The Modernist/Westernist coalition in Russia completely advocated the superiority of the Western capitalist system. In addition to liberal-minded leadership, intellectuals, and human rights activists, the coalition contained some figures from the Communist nomenklatura. By the leadership of the Yeltsin, members of the new elite desired to resolve successfully the problems of the Russian state, but solving these structural problems in the short term was unrealistic. Their aspirations mostly included rapid economic and political change that would provide Russian political and economic standards at the same level as those of the European-Atlantic bloc. Modernisers thought the "Western victory" at the end of the Cold War would direct societies and states to prefer a Western-type liberal and capitalist new world order that would be the sole way for the development of states. In this context, Russia would have solved all its major structural problems in the political, economic, and social spheres with the help of the Western institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Rutland, 2013). Furthermore, European and American banks also provided credits and loans to Russia to establish its market economy with the privatisation of state institutions (Rutland, 2013). This Western-originated theoretical and conceptual approach to Russian policy has not been approved by Russian society. We can see this clearly when we look at the percentage of votes received by the nationalist and communist parties in the 1995 Parliamentary Elections in Russia (Russian Federation Parliamentary Chamber: Gossudarstvennaya Duma, 1995). Under the leadership of Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist Party (KPRF) managed to increase its number of seats in the Russian National Assembly DUMA by 115 compared to the previous election, thereby securing more than one-third of the total number of seats (450). On the other hand, the Democratic Choice of Russia – United Democrats (DVR – OD), led by Yegor Gaidar, known as a pioneer of liberal and Westernist policies, lost 53 seats compared to the 1993 elections and only managed to secure 9 seats (Russian Federation Parliamentary Chamber: Gossudarstvennaya Duma, 1995).

Civilisationist/Statist Conceptualizations of Russian Politics

The Russian Empire's foreign policy approach mostly relied on an idea that included the civilisational and historical distinctiveness of Russians as the heirs of the Roman Empire and Byzantium. The French Revolution in 1789 has created two different camps in the Europe; constitutionalists and monarchists. The Russian Federation was one of the pioneers of the form of monarchy that relied on the strong leadership of Tzar and a loyal society, which was bound by its traditional values and Orthodox Christianity. Russian Emperor Nicholas I was the pioneer of the strong monarchy form (Riasanovsky, 2005). His political vision had risen with strong leadership and the preservation of orthodox values and the autocratic structure of government throughout the first half of the 19th century. However, the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922 brought about a different form of government based on communist ideology. Despite the dramatic change of the form of the government, "socialist fatherland" (Tsygankov, 2016), concept of Joseph Stalin and the nationalist vision of Nicholas I, show a common perspective in Russian foreign policy; isolation from any foreign intervention to the government style and protection of the strong state body with undeniable commitment to a strong and wise leader. In this regard, philosophical debates and quests in Russian politics, especially after the constitutionalist revolutions in Europe, have focused heavily on the identification of Russian political orientation. Nikolai Danilevskii is one of the most important scholars whose arguments are still being used by Russian academicians and officials, even by Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 2013).

A critic of the Russian pro-Western tendency, Danilevskii stood up for internalising and cultivating Russia's indigenous institutions and its capability to progress in a different way from European civilisation. In this sense, Danilevskii could be called the first prominent figure to "systematically" counter-react to the West-centred, universalist approach and to defend the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Russian civilisation that must be recognising as main thinking (Narochnitskaya, 2005). In this regard, his classification of civilisations as "historico-cultural types" rely on this unique feature of civilisations throughout the world. He argued that there is no civilisation (against universality claims of European civilisation) to become universal and homogenise other civilisations and cultures inside it. There are several different types of cultures, and they exchange their values and traditions throughout history. This is the richness of humanity (Danilevskii, 2011). Besides, Danilevskii was the pioneer of the argument that argued that Russia is not part of the European civilisation. Because their history is different at core; European Civilisation is the continuation of the Roman-Germanic Civilisation and Russian civilisation is the continuation of the Orthodox-Byzantium Civilisation (Danilevskii, 2011).

Danilevskii's "all humanity" (vsechelovechestvo/всечеловечество) as a distinct foreign policy concept that could be consubstantiated with the multipolarity-based politics of Russian foreign policy. This generally explains cross-cultural relations, unlike the clash of civilisation theory of Samuel Huntington. His main evaluations about interactions of civilisations were more than Samuel Huntington. In his famous book "Russia and Europe", Danilevskii argues that Slavic civilisation younger and more

energetic than European civilisation and it was still on its way to progress (Danilevskii, 2011). Christianity had already been abandoned by European civilisation, and the statist approach has emerged since the French Revolution in Europe. In this situation, Russia also has to follow policy that should be prioritised protection and integration of the Slavic people and consolidation of state power to struggle with European states in the Eurasian territory. In this regard, he proposed a tough struggle between states on foreign policy issues. (Danilevskii, 2011)

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, his renowned book “Russia and Europe” was edited and published in Russia in 1991, and its first edition had a 70.000 sales volume. It has been a handbook in Russian academic studies. (Woodburn, 2013). In recent Russian academic studies, the most well-known Eurasianist, nationalist, or Slavophil thinkers, such as Gennady Zyuganov, Natalya Narochnitskaya, Andrey Kortunov, and Alexander Dugin, have been dramatically affected by the ideas of Danilevskii, and they do not deny the importance of the ideas of Danilevskii for the current Eurasianist approach (Tsygankov, 2017). Andrey Pavel Tsygankov, a prominent scholar on Russian foreign-policy studies, emphasised the importance of the ideas of Danilevskii to Russian thinkers like Vadim Tsymbursky, Gennady Zyuganov, and Natalia Narochnitskaia. He highlights their praise to the arguments of Danilevskii about Russian civilisation concept in their studies (Tsygankov, 2017).

To sum up, Danilevskii’s philosophy mostly focused on the priority of Russian national and traditional values over Russian policy and the unique structure of Russian civilisation. In the end, this discussion ended because of the rise of communist ideology to the throne of the Russian Empire. Although the communist ideology in the USSR was divergent, discussions over the Western and unique roots of Russian identity and Russian civilisation have continued infrequently throughout Soviet rule on Russian land. “World Revolution” and “living together in peace” Marxist understanding of the Vladimir I. Lenin’s and the “Communism in one nation” strategy of Joseph Stalin even contained parts of the chronic identity and civilisation debates in Russian history. Furthermore, after the death of Stalin, the structure of Russian relations with “Other (West)” became a question that emerged in Soviet history. The abandonment of Stalinist policy caused the essence of the reshaping of Russian policy towards the West and the rest. In the 1970s, Lev Gumilev, a well-known historian and anthropology expert, an exponent of Eurasianist ideas in the USSR, was also inspired by the philosophy of Danilevskii. Gumilev also claimed that European civilisation distinct culture and it is not compatible with Russian civilisation. Therefore, it should not be mixed with Russian civilisation (Bassin, 2016). Pre-Russian Federation period, civilisationist and nationalist concepts and arguments were shaped as stated above in brief. Accumulation of the concepts of that approach has inspired ideas of post-Soviet civilisationist and nationalist new approaches in Russian politics.

The main problem with the Russian Federation during the post-Soviet period was the clear explanation of “what is Russia?” What is its mission and place in the new world? What are the ideals of the new Russian state?”. In his renowned study “The Clash of Civilisations”, Samuel P. Huntington classified the Russian Federation as one of the “torn country” with Turkey and Mexico. (Huntington, 1993) prescribed the “torn country” concept as a nation that “has a single predominant culture which places it in one

civilisation, but its leaders want to shift it to another civilisation.” (Huntington, 1993) Reforms of Peter the Great in Russia and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey could be given as examples of this. While the definition of Huntington has been a controversial issue, growing Russian identity discussions after the dissolution of the USSR have always been a real case. Russian European identity and the unique structure of its roots have been contesting whether one identity can overcome another. The last period of the USSR and the first years of the Russian Federation had met that need.

From an Eurasianist and conservative perspective, the answer to that question is clear; Russia is a unique civilisation with its European and Asian roots and multi-ethnic/multi-religion structure, which has been governed by consolidated executive power like the regime in Tzarist/Imperialist Russian times. In this sense, there should not be any confusion about what Russia is about or its character. Slavophil arguments also share similar approaches, with some exceptions (Hughes, 2000). In some resources, the Slavophil approach in the 20th and 21st centuries has also been classified from an Eurasianist perspective. However, they were separated from each other by the modern, democrat, or new Eurasianist perspective and radical Eurasianist perspective (Walicki, 1975). The main separation between Slavophil arguments and modern Eurasianists is civilisation. According to Slavophiles, Russia is neither European nor Asian state. She has its unique civilisation and must isolate herself from the European civilisation to protect its uniqueness. Distinctive discourses on the Russian state and civilisation have also been used by Neocommunist and right radical components of the Russian state and society. The main and common arguments in this regard are sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and self-limitation when using one’s own resources (Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 1999)

At the end of the USSR, Russians’ main expectations from the drastic transformation of the state structure were the resolution of economic collapse and poor living conditions. However, unlike the recovery of the structural problems of the Russian state, predomination by the wild capitalist, neoliberal Atlanticist approach has caused a worsening of the conditions of society. Furthermore, the loss of the great power statue of the Russian state and Western attitude towards the Russian state and the Russian statue as defeated, weak, and needy were perceived by most of the Russian people as humiliation of Russia by the West (Trenin, 2006). Immediate and disproportional integration of Western values with ignorance of Russian traditional and civilisational values met counter-reaction from society, security, and political elites.

Throughout the first years of the 1990s until the anti-Yeltsin Parliament case in 1993, some radical right groups like Memory of the Nation (Pamiat Naroda - память народа) and the National Salvation Front (Front Natsionalnogo Spasenia - Фронт национального спасения) had emerged in Russian politics. These groups also had some supporters in parliament, but their influence in Russian politics had diminished sharply after the parliament shelling incident in 1993 (Blakkisrud, 2022). However, counter-reactions of these groups to Westernist/Modernist perceptions during the first years of the new Russian politics with the predominance of liberal perceptions established by Prime Minister Andrei V. Kozyrev served as Minister of Finance and then First Deputy Prime Minister, Yegor T. Gaidar drastically affected President Yeltsin’s perceptions (Arbatov, 1993). Rising nationalist and traditionalist demands from Russian society was raising in the pre-

election process. In addition, the continuation of uncertainties about the adjustment of the new Russian state flag, national march, or symbol in the post-Soviet period were also substantial issues in Russian politics in the 1990s. There was a search for a new national idea. Nikonov describes an interesting development in this search process as follows:

A special review page was opened in the government newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta, and I was also there. (Nikonov,2021)

Boris Yeltsin issued an order to his advisors to solve these issues and create a new, consistent Russian national strategy after the 1995 parliament elections in Russia. However, their suggestions about creating a nation-state or federal multi-ethnic and multi-religion structure in Russian politics and governance were not placed in consistent and solid ground at all. However, these attempts gained national and traditional values and civilisations approaches in Russian politics and government elites. Therefore, as an opposite argument of the Western-based theoretical-conceptual approach, Eurasianist, neo-communist, Slavophil, and right radical discourses have risen with growing nationalist feelings of the society after the sharp failure of Western-supported approaches, in Russia. The victory of the communist party in the 1995 parliament elections and the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as a foreign minister has proved that Eurasianist leaning in the Russian politics.

Throughout the last years of the 1990s, the predominance of Eurasianist, Neocommunist, and Slavophil arguments in Russian society and Russian politics has reflected and echoed the return to the imperialist policy of the Russian Empire. However, it did not correspond to the entire strategy of the Russian Empire. The Russian political stance and strategy has mainly relied on the regaining of the deserved Russian great power statue in international relations, consolidation of the integration with former Soviet republics (CIS countries), promoting the multi-polar structure of the world in the post-Cold War period, balancing the hegemony of the US by gaining cooperation with non-Western countries such as China, India, and the Muslim world, and putting forward the great history of the Russian state (Zonova & Reinhardt, 2014). Although some positive responses from society were received, these perspectives did not remedy the chronic problems of the post-Soviet Russian state. In particular, continuation of the rising economic discrepancies with the skyrocketing effect of shock therapy, the quest for new concepts, paradigms, and methods resurfaced in the Russian Federation. The concrete results of this can be seen in the fact that in the 1999 elections, the Communist Party led by G. Zyuganov, the biggest winner of the previous elections in 1995, lost 44 seats in the Duma; the party of V. Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the nationalist wing, lost 34 seats, and Y. Primakov's reputation in Russian politics came to an end (Russian Federation: Parliamentary Elections Gossovudarstvennaya Duma, 1999). New figures like Sergei Shoigu's Unity Party (was supported by Yeltsin and Putin) and unknown independent candidates took 178 of the 450 seats in Duma. That was the clear prove of the quest of the society for new figures and approaches in Russian politics. The lack of new political figures was also one of the main problems for Russia's salvation in this ideological and structural turmoil.

The gradual shift from the idealist/liberal paradigm to the Eurasianist/realist approach has contained several internal and external factors. However, the change and emergence of Russian policy cannot be separated from the expectations and sensitivities of Russian

society and Russian statuses in international relations (Tsygankov, 2022). Throughout the last decade of the 20th century, Russian political stance and foreign policy strategy were in a complicated situation and that had entailed the destabilisation of the Russian politics for both of the internal and external cases. It might be called a “try and fail” method, which involves a reflexive and uncertain strategy that generally shows itself with critical changes and unpredictable turns. Therefore, none of these theoretical and conceptual approaches could not explain and direct Russian politics throughout the 1990s. Because Russian political, economic, and social problems are still ongoing. Russia’s political, economic, and social problems continue. Following the economic crisis in 1999, living standards in the country had plummeted, and NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia against Russian opposition and without UN Security Council approval had dealt a major blow to Russia’s “great power” narrative. In addition, the most important issue was that Russia’s identity, mission, and ideals in the new world order had not yet been established on a concrete basis. Leading Russian intellectuals, such as Yuriy Mamleev (Mamleev, 2020), Andrei Kokoshin (Kokoshin, 2012), Vyacheslav Nikonov (Nikonov, 2014, 2019) and Vadim Medzhuev (Medzhuev, 2001) argued that the Russian people must first be convinced of a mission and ideals. If the Russians are convinced of this, they will have the wisdom to endure all kinds of economic and political difficulties.

The Ascendancy of Vladimir V. Putin’s Impact on Russian Politics

The predominance of any specific conceptual and theoretical perspective on Russian policy has led to the need for new perspectives that can ensure the sustainability and stability of the Russian state across all spheres. Andrei P. Tsygankov, a well-known Russian scholar, has conducted extensive research on post-Soviet Russian studies. According to Tsygankov, one of the main reasons for the failure of liberal and realist perspectives and concepts in Russian foreign policy is the lack of a comprehensive approach to critical issues within the field of new Russian studies, as well as a misinterpretation of the aspirations of Russian society. The dominance of any singular perspective often results in a lack of well-rounded arguments that consider contrasting ideas (Tsygankov, 2022). In this context, it became necessary to establish more comprehensive and robust perceptions and concepts to foster a consistent political understanding and form of governance. The late 1990s witnessed the continuation of the crisis in the post-Soviet era. Under these circumstances, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was appointed Prime Minister by President Yeltsin, and subsequently, on 31 December 1999, Boris Yeltsin resigned in his traditional New Year’s speech as the Russian President. Russia held presidential elections on March 26, and then President Vladimir V. Putin served as the second president of the Russian Federation.

Interestingly, one day before Boris Yeltsin’s resignation, Putin’s article titled “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium” was published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a renowned Russian newspaper. The article outlined Putin’s perceptions and approaches, which largely focused on the unity of Russia’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious population under the rubric of a strong Russian state (Putin, 1999). Vladimir Putin’s personal trajectory offered some indication of his potential nationalist inclinations. However, he also expressed certain some Westernist positions, such as advocating for strong cooperation with Western powers and highlighting the European roots of Russia during his speech in the Bundestag

of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2001. Putin's stance on cooperation with the West depended on the principle of equal and reliable partnership.

Within the Russian political landscape, Putin's political vision and career took various approaches. This presents an opportunity to establish consistent political methods for the Russian Federation both domestically and in foreign affairs. The key to resolving existing problems and restoring Russia's reputation is the creation of a systematic working system. This study argues that a systematic approach involves a clear and proper definition of current problems in order of importance, identification of the most suitable solutions, and successful implementation of those solutions. While theory-based organisational models in the social sciences affect the rule of a state, like in the communist ideology-based regime era under the USSR, the systematic working style in Russian politics under Putin primarily focused on rational and pragmatic solutions (Afanasieva & Bitieva, 2019). These solutions were often based on threat perceptions, consolidating central administrative power, and addressing economic issues during his first eight years in the Kremlin. The need for a systematic political vision emerged from the failures of attempts to develop paradigm-based policies throughout the 1990s. The prevalence of conflicting modernist and civilisationist concepts and approaches intensified the consequences of the USSR's disintegration rather than remedying them. Various theoretical and practical forms were attempted within short intervals of less than 10 years, resulting in the emergence of new chaotic problems.

The new government, led by Vladimir Putin, has primarily focused on correct diagnosis of Russia's problems. The priority was to resolve national values, the anthem, and identity for the satisfaction of Russian society. The reintroduction of the double-headed eagle from the Byzantine Empire as the symbol of the Russian army and the USSR anthem as the Russian national anthem with updated lyrics came to the fore (Baker & Glasser, 2005). Second, the Russian language and culture acquired a global and regional mission, especially in the field of post-Soviet geography. In this context, the Rosstrudnichestvo organisation was founded in 2008, and its work was initiated to promote and teach Russian language and culture abroad (Portal gosudarstvennykh uslug Rossiyskoy Federatsii - Портал государственных услуг Российской Федерации).

Third, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious heterogeneous structure of Russia has been analysed and care has been taken to ensure that no ethnic or religious identity is subjected to positive or negative discrimination in politics and social life. In Putin's articles, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* contains this sensitive issue. Fourth, the sanctity of the concepts of sovereignty and independence is emphasised. In the 1990s, Russia failed to implement its national budget in Duma without approval from the IMF due to joint economic programmes (Nikonov, 2014). Therefore, one of the first things that the Putin administration did in its first two terms was to reassert its economic freedom and sovereignty by settling its IMF debts earlier than planned in 2006 (Sakwa, 2007). In addition to economic freedom, the perception of political sovereignty based on strong military power and historical victories was also brought to the fore, and victory against the Nazis in World War II, also known as the Great Patriotic War, was considered a symbol of national pride and sovereignty (Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii - Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации, 2023).

Fifth, under Putin’s administration, the problem of population declines in Russia and the need to restore the Orthodox Church’s reputation in the eyes of the public at an institutional level have been observed. In this context, with the law enacted in 2007 on population, child incentives and allowances were put into effect, and the political and traditional reputation of the Russian Patriarchate was acknowledged, and the political and social realm was given to turn it into one of the unifying elements of Russian society that has existed throughout history. Finally, regarding the debates about the construction of the current regime and political values in Russia, Vladimir Putin emphasised in 2005 that Russia should find its own path through its own values and history to build a democratic, free, and fair society in the Russian Federation (Poslaniye Federal’nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii - Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации, 2005). During this period, Vladislav Surkov, one of Vladimir Putin’s advisers, also claimed that Russia could develop its own understanding of democracy around the sovereign state authority and put forward the concept of “sovereign democracy” (Krastev, 2006).

Furthermore, one of Vladimir Putin’s significant achievements, along with his colleagues during his first term, was the development of a presidential programme that appealed to both elites and ordinary citizens. This programme involved synthesising existing concepts and paradigms that emerged in the 1990s. For instance, while emphasising Russia’s European identity for modernisation and integration with the West, Putin also highlighted the unique structure of Russian culture, which encompasses various ethnic and religious elements. Additionally, Putin defined the status of the new Russian state as a “normal great power” (Tsygankov, 2007). Indeed, Putin’s approach corresponded to the desires of Westernist/Modernist elites who supported integration and cooperation with the West, as well as his aspirations to be recognised as a “Great Power” by using the term “normal” to define Russia. This appeal to the concept of a great power also resonated with ordinary Russian citizens and statist/civilisationist elites, expressing their national pride and attachment to Russia’s historical identity (“Memory and Pride”, 2020).

Strengthening the Concept of “Russian Civilisation” in Political Discourse

After the 2012 presidential election, Vladimir Putin reclaimed the presidential seat he held from Dmitry Medvedev. An analysis of Putin’s final days in his initial years in the Kremlin, as well as some developments during Medvedev’s presidency, can help us understand the reasons and aspirations behind the rise and consolidation of Russian civilisation in Russian politics. The Russian presidential election occurred amid various local, regional, and global events. These included massive protests in Russian cities against the government’s rule, allegations of fraud in the Duma (Russian Parliament) elections, the Arab Spring, NATO’s controversial intervention in Libya, and disagreements with the West regarding the new European security concept and the continued enlargement of NATO and the EU.

Throughout his presidency from 2000 to 2008, Putin’s Russia has mainly tried to adopt a non-aggressive policy towards the West and focused on consolidating sustainable economic development and central power. He also sought pragmatic cooperation with Western powers in certain areas and established new partnerships with non-Western states and organisations. Russia could not pose itself against globalisation trend in material

sphere, unlike ideational trends (Safranchuk & Lukyanov, 2021a). However, this does not mean that he had never voiced Russian grievances regarding Western politics. Especially globalisation trend in the ideational sphere for the promotion of neoliberal values has become the centre for Russian counter-stance towards US-leading Western powers. This ideational resistance of Russia has come forward for Russian desires regarding a transition to a multipolar world order from the US-led unipolar world order (Safranchuk & Lukyanov, 2021b). Therefore, in the last years of his second term, Putin has begun to adopt a more assertive stance towards the West, embracing nationalist, realist, and security-based policies in the field of foreign policy. This shift was characterised by increased investments in the defence industry, the promotion of Russian national and traditional values on both domestic and regional scales, following the creation and consolidation of non-Western regional and global initiatives like BRICS, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the delivery of notable speeches criticising Western attitudes towards Russia. One prominent example is Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he expressed strong opposition to the US-led Western centric unipolar world order, NATO expansion, and Western violations of state sovereignty and international law in favour of its interests and concerns (Выступление И Дискуссия На Мюнхенской Конференции По Вопросам Политики Безопасности, 2007). An understanding of Putin's critics and concretisation of theoretical Russian resistance towards the US-led Western hegemony might be observed in Russian attempts for leading BRICS with organising first ministerial and extended agendas in 2006 and 2009 in Russia (Denisov & Kazantsev & Lukyanov & Safranchuk, 2019).

If we analyse Putin's first eight years as the Russian President, one of his main goals can be seen as reaffirming Russia's position and status as a European great power. However, his beliefs and mindset began to change at the beginning of 2008 due to reasons mainly outlined above, despite his support for Dmitry Medvedev, who was perceived as having a more Western-oriented and liberal policy approach, during the presidential elections in March. This development has generally been interpreted as Putin's last attempt to give the West a chance to shape Russian position in cooperation with Western powers. However, during his subsequent four years as prime minister, he also tried to strike a balance with Medvedev's rule.

Before his first presidential term, Putin wrote another article that was published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* two months before the 2012 presidential elections (Putin, 2012). This article focused on various issues, including the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Russian society and the concept of Russian identity. Putin expressed concern about the potential rise of ethnic nationalist aspirations, even if they were based on Russian ethnicity.

During the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, the most prominent national security challenges for Russia were as follows:

- Internal and external migration and the risk of increasing ethnic Russian nationalism.
- The potential threat posed by radical Islamic movements, which have been

gaining momentum during the Arab Spring in the Middle East. There was concern that these movements could pose a threat to Russian territories and neighbouring regions.

- The apprehension that the Arab Spring movements might extend to Russian territories, potentially serving as a new colour revolution threat.

These issues were significant considerations during that period.

In the midst of these circumstances, highlighting Russian identity as a diverse, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious society and preserving its traditions within a changing world became a paramount political issue for the Russian state under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. At the end of 2013, Putin delivered an annual speech at the Valdai Club, where one of the main outcomes was the need to move away from the idea of Russia as the successor of the USSR and instead embrace the concept of Russian civilisation as the guiding principle of Russian strategy.

During his speech, Putin acknowledged the rapidly evolving global landscape and its impact on states, societies, and cultures (Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 2013). He emphasised the importance of developing a new strategy to safeguard Russian interests, values, traditions, and the diverse nature of Russian society. In this context, he introduced the concept of the “state-civilisation,” drawing on the arguments of Russian philosophers and authors such as Nikolai Danilevskii, Konstantin Leontyev and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. These thinkers provided insights into the character of the Russian state and its harmonious relationship with Russian society. Overall, Putin’s aim was to assert Russia’s unique identity and position in the world while adapting to the challenges and changes in the contemporary international system and the new character of the Russian state. (Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 2013).

Indeed, with the onset of the Ukrainian crisis at the end of 2013, Russia’s stance became more aggressive, protective, and firm. The gradual deterioration of Russian-US relations after NATO’s beyond authorised intervention to Libya and the end of the reset policy between them in 2012 has served as catalyst for adoption of civilisation-based politics in domestic and foreign affairs by Russia (Safranchuk, 2018). Colour revolutions, NATO enlargement, and the potential membership of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO have not been viewed as national security concerns by Russia. They have consistently been seen as threats to the erosion of the Russian civilisation in Eurasia. While Huntington expected a clash of civilisations in his well-known article, he did not anticipate the emergence of the Russian civilisation concept. From the Russian perspective, Western policy towards Russia also has perceived Russia from this perspective, and it has been one of the reasons for their reckless, irrational, and pervasive approach towards Russia since the end of the Cold War.

As a result, the Russian civilisation concept has significantly influenced security approaches in Russian politics, particularly following the Ukrainian crisis. Russia has adopted a tough and assertive political stance in its neighbouring regions and has actively sought to reshape certain aspects of the international order with the aim of creating a more balanced and multipolar structure. Examples of this include the annexation or in Russian context “accession” of Crimea, Russia’s involvement in Syria and various conflicts in

the Middle East, the deepening of ties with China and other emerging powers, and the establishment of clear red lines in the name of national security and the protection of national and traditional values against external interventions. Instead of continuing the quest for political stance, identity, and mission of Russia in the post-Soviet period, the Russian decision to follow strategy that centred Russian civilisation concepts and values entailed a more decisive and assertive foreign policy understanding, which is summarised above.

In a 2021 article published on the Kremlin's website, Vladimir Putin made statements that were interpreted by different parties. Some perceived it as reflecting Russia's emergence of imperialist desires, while others argued that Putin was emphasising the historical ties and common values between Russia and Ukraine. Putin highlighted the unique structure of Russian civilisation and its historical connections with Ukraine and Belarus. He also claimed that Ukraine and Belarus were part of the same Russian state civilisation and should be reunited (Putin, 2021). This signalled a more assertive Russian political attitude and a stronger protectionist attitude against Western involvement in Russia's neighbouring regions.

Russia provided similar signals before the pro-Western protests in Ukraine emerged in 2013. However, Western disregard for Russian aspirations, combined with the growing Russian assertiveness, eventually led to Russia's large-scale military intervention in Ukraine. In his well-known speech on February 24, 2022, just before the intervention, Putin highlighted the erosion of the Russian civilisation in "Russian historical lands" and the vulnerabilities faced by Russian people beyond Russia's borders as some of the most significant threats to Russia (Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 2022). The instrumentalization of the Russian civilisation concept has generally corresponded to a more assertive policy and new aspirations in Russian politics. The direct state-to-state conflicts in Ukraine cannot be seen merely as an issue of identity; they encompass various complex factors.

Indeed, the concept of "Крепость Россия - Крепость Россия" (Russian fortress) was derived from the studies of Konstantin Leontyev and has gained prominence in Russian discourse. This concept was invoked by Sergei Karaganov, a notable Russian scholar, in his explanations of the Ukrainian Crisis. Karaganov argued that the conflict in Ukraine represents a confrontation between Western liberal civilisation and Russian Orthodox civilisation. He defined Russia as the last fortress protecting the national traditional values of Orthodox Christianity, asserting that the preservation of Russian civilisation was crucial for the moral progress of humanity ("Крепость Россия". Skol'ko Let Prodlitsya Konfrontatsiya s Zapadom? – "Крепость Россия". Сколько Лет Продлится Конфронтация С Западом?, 2022).

These new concepts and perceptions help to explain the underlying logic of Russian politics in the 21st century. Attempting to understand Russian politics solely through concepts originating from the West will hinder a comprehensive understanding of its motives and strategies. The emergence of these concepts reflects the distinct perspective and aspirations of the Russian state and its role in preserving its cultural, religious, and historical identity.

Conclusion

The identity and mission confusion experienced in Russia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union reminded the intellectual debates in the 19th century of Russian history, and this reminder and intellectual accumulation played a key role in ending the quest for a new strategic mind in contemporary Russia. Although the Westernist/modernist and Civilisationist/conservative debates that took place in the 1990s were weaker than the 19th century in Russia in terms of intellectual accumulation, their impact on Russian politics was more intense and short-lived due to a lack of central and undisputed authority like Russian Empire. However, the rise of Vladimir V. Putin with accurate diagnosis and effective resolution of Russian critical problems and consolidation of central power, Putin created a unique method that was formulated with the synthesis of intellectual and political discussions of the Westernist and Civilisationist arguments in Russian politics. Throughout Russia’s ongoing quest for a new strategy, the gradual rise of escalations with the West and the gain of cooperation with the rest have also been key components of this transition and transformation period in Russian politics. However, pointing out that intensifying disagreements with the West and diversifying partnerships towards the rest as the sole or most important aspect of the mounting Russian civilisation concept in Russian politics is a reductionist approach. It’s historical experiences and build ups in Russian elites and ordinary citizens must not be ignored. Therefore, some key developments on the deterioration of Russian and Western relations are mentioned in brief in this research; in order to focus historical and intellectual aspects of rising Russian civilisation concept under the leadership of Vladimir V. Putin.

This study claims that the rise of the Russian Civilisation concept in Russian politics has put an end to the search for ideals, identity, and missions in Russian politics. However, the effort to create a unique understanding of strategy, civilisation and culture through the concept of Russian civilisation is not a completed process; on the contrary, it is still in the developmental stage. Nikolai Danilevskii posited that European civilisation had reached its pinnacle following the Renaissance, Reformation and Industrial Revolution, but it had entered a period of decline marked by cultural and moral erosion. He further suggested that Russian civilisation, in contrast, was in the nascent stages of ascent and poised to achieve greatness (Danilevskii, 2011). According to civilisationist academic and political figures in Russian politics, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet Era disrupted this trajectory, halting the developmental course of Russian civilisation and even regressing it under a materialist ideological framework. Nonetheless, contemporary Russia endeavours to reassert its distinct values and aspirations through tangible approaches and concepts. Thus, there is potential for a resurgence that aligns with Danilevskii’s foresight regarding the continued maturation of Russian civilisation and political thought.

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