

THE TRAGEDY OF RUSSIA

Andrius KUBILIUS

Member of the European Parliament

Former Prime Minister of Lithuania

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Summary

- *The European continent is facing a severe geopolitical crisis, caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. This has also revealed a phenomenon worthy of being called the "Tragedy of Russia": a Russia that is failing, rotting from within, defeated, aggressive, and a danger to all those around it, in particular to Ukraine. But at the same time, the greatest danger by Russia is caused to itself, to the fate of its own state. That is the tragedy of Russia. However, the tragedy of Russia is dangerous for the whole world, not just for Russia itself. That is why today we must consider not only how to help Ukraine win the war, but also how to help Russia avoid the catastrophic consequences of its own tragedy.*
- *In analysing the current situation in Russia, we must also take into account the main historical factors that have contributed to the current tragedy of Russia: (a) Russia is a state with the European path of development, albeit Russia is often lagging behind in experiencing turns of the common European history, and this often determines the scale of its tragedy; (b) Russia is currently the last crumbling empire on the European continent, and there is a natural post-imperial nostalgia for the former imperial greatness (which is encouraged to the fullest extent by Mr Putin himself); (c) Russia also differs from other European countries in that the Great French Revolution (as we know it) never happened and was never realised there;*
- *The development of the Russian society today is determined by nostalgia, emotions and dreams. The nostalgic dream of restoring the greatness of the empire, which has led to this tragedy of Russia, is the dominant emotion there today. Putin is constantly and artificially fuelling and encouraging this dream. This helps him to maintain the loyalty of the Russian people to his regime.*
- *However, Putin fears that the Russian people will increasingly begin to dream not so much of the return of the empire, but of a normal, European life within Russia itself. Putin therefore sees the greatest danger to his regime not as the expansion of NATO, but as the success of Ukraine. The democratic, economically strong, future EU member state - such an example from the neighbouring Ukraine can have a very strong contagious impact for ordinary Russians. And this is completely incompatible with the survival of an authoritarian, mafia-like Kremlin regime. The desire to destroy Ukraine's ability to become a model of a successful state was the main reason why Putin launched the military aggression against Ukraine.*
- *The West so far has had no long-term strategy towards either Russia or Ukraine. The geopolitical consequence of this is the war on the European continent. The West must have a long-term strategy for dealing with the tectonic, long-term problem of the "Tragedy of Russia", in other words, how to help Russia transform itself into a normal, non-aggressive, European-type state. This requires, first and foremost, that the West moves away from the "Putin-first!" to the "Democracy in Russia-first!" paradigm in their relations with Russia. Secondly, the West must help Russia to say a final goodbye to the nostalgic dream of rebuilding the empire and must help Russians to acquire a new dream of a normal life in Russia itself. A long-term, ambitious and effective Western strategy towards Ukraine will play a particularly important role in the West's pursuit of these objectives in relation to Russia.*
- *How can the West help ordinary Russians to say goodbye to the nostalgic dream of rebuilding an empire? First of all, such a dream must be completely crushed. Western*

support for Ukraine's military victory therefore at the same time plays a role of supporting Russia's ability to say goodbye to its imperial dreams; the immediate establishment of a Special International Tribunal to investigate the crime of war aggression (the crime of Putin) would play an equally important role, as would the process of Russia's "deputinisation". Moreover, Ukraine's NATO membership would also help ordinary Russians to understand that Russia no longer has a chance of realising its nostalgic imperial dreams.

- *How can the West help ordinary Russians to acquire a new dream of a normal life in Russia itself? The West can do this by first having a clear and ambitious strategy to build on the success of Ukraine, whose example could be the basis for a new Russian dream. The West can build Ukraine's success not only by helping it to win the war against Russia, but also by implementing an ambitious strategy for Ukraine's European integration and the EU membership. Rapid European integration has been the only reason why Central Europe and the Baltic region have laid the foundations for the success of the countries in the region. In the same way, the success of Ukraine, Moldova or Sakartvelo (Georgia) can only be built on the European Union's ambitious European integration strategy for these countries.*
- *The West, in order to give ordinary Russians the dream of a normal life in Russia as soon as possible, must already now also propose a strategy for the future relations between the European Union and the future Democratic Russia. Such a strategy must outline the prospects for the free trade, a visa-free travel, a partnership for modernisation and the implementation of other important EU programmes that are important in creating normal living conditions in Russia. It must be clear to the Russian people already now that the dream of a normal life in Russia is very real and that it will be realised in a democratic Russia together with the European Union.*
- *Democracy in Russia is something that can fundamentally change the security architecture of the entire European continent. The goal of democracy in Russia must therefore be important not only for the Russians themselves, but also for the European Union as a whole. The European Union can effectively contribute to Russia's democratic transformation, but this requires a very significant shift in the balance within the European Union itself between those who "believe" and those who "do not believe" in the possibility of democracy in Russia in favour of the "believers". It is worth remembering for the Europeans that the development of democratic space in the world is taking place in the form of the so-called Huntington Waves, and that the map of democracy in the world today is the result of three such tidal waves of democratisation in the twentieth century and the ebbs that followed them. It is not difficult to predict that a Fourth Global Wave of such democratisation is due to begin in the next decade. And it could start in Russia. The democratic West must prepare for it today.*
- *On the European continent, the phenomenon of the "Tragedy of Russia" is something that the West has so far been unable to solve. This is what is causing today's geopolitical crisis on the European continent. Every crisis is also a new opportunity. The expansion of democracy to the east of the European continent is what must follow this crisis, and democracy in Russia is the best long-term cure for the "tragedy of Russia". At the centre of Russia's healing and recovery procedure is Ukraine and the West's support for its success.*

Introduction

It is not popular these days to speak with pity about Russia and its people.

It is much more usual to find ever more poignant words of indignation and dismay directed at all Russians. Because many of us are convinced that they are all guilty. All of them: for Putin, for the aggression, for Bucha, for Irpyn, for Izyum.

While we understand the reasons for such sincere indignation, we must nevertheless realise that such emotional anger does not relieve us of our own grave responsibility to help Russia to become different.

We are no longer able to help Putin, we are no longer able to help his clique, we are no longer able to help the war criminals, because they are facing defeat in Ukraine and the Hague Tribunal.

But after Putin is gone, we must find it in ourselves to help Russia to become something different: a non-aggressive, non-mad, normal European-type state, or at least a country beginning to move towards such a change. Because not only does Russia's future depend on it, our security depends on it. A "normal" Russia in our neighbourhood would lead to a major change in the security architecture of the entire European continent. That is why today, when we talk about both the Russia of today and Russia of the future, we need to talk not only about deterrence of and defence from the aggressive Russia of (what NATO and Ukraine have been doing), but also about the transformation of the Russia after Putin. And for this, we need to move away from the paradigm of "Putin first!" to a completely new strategy of "Democracy in Russia - first!" in all the thinking of the West.

We have no obvious proof and no answers on whether Russia, after losing the war against Ukraine, will be able to transform itself into a democracy, whether we will find the right ways to help its transformation. But not to try to help Russia after Putin to transform itself, not to make every effort to make such a transformation happen - we simply do not have such a right.

Alexei Navalny writes about Russia after Putin in his latest piece in *The Washington Post* a few weeks ago in a very reasoned way, still out of prison, but firmly believing in Russia's democratic, parliamentary future, believing that the majority of Russians do not want some new territories, but just a normal (European) life: *"Too many people in Russia are interested in normal life now, not in the phantom of territorial gains. And there are more such people every year. They just don't have anyone to vote for now."*¹

Navalny asks for Western help to transform Russia after Putin. Because people in Russia want a normal life, and they need and will need Western support. Despite the fact that Putin's Russia has now declared war not only on Ukraine, but on the entire West.

However, for the West to move towards a strategy of "Democracy in Russia - first!" in its relations with Russia we, those of us who are closest to Russia, must first of all have a much better and more rational understanding of the historical processes behind Russia's development, of the root causes of where Russia is today. And only after we have understood

¹ *Alexei Navalny: This is what a post-Putin Russia should look like.* The Washington Post, 30.09.2022. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/30/alexei-navalny-parliamentary-republic-russia-ukraine/>

this, will we be able to offer the West a strategy to support Russia's transformation. This requires rational thinking in the West, not just emotions. Especially our own (Lithuanian) rational, strategic thinking on Russia is needed, because the West has already started to listen to our thoughts on Russia. That is why we (and not someone else) must propose the draft strategy: because for us it is a vital issue of our own security, while for others it is something far away from their comfortable lives, where "geopolitical laziness" has become a habit that is difficult to change.²

Putin Is The Tragedy Of Russia

Today, it is quite obvious to all the sanely thinking people, including in Russia itself, that Russia is in a tragic state. This tragic state of affairs is only deepening. Putin's aggression against Ukraine has become a huge problem not only for Ukraine but also for Russia itself. Russia is losing the war it started, Russia is revealing itself as a completely backward country that is rotting from within; and Putin is behaving like a rabid rat cornered in a corner, threatening the World with nuclear strikes. But the prolonged stay of Putin in power threatens Russia itself with the further rapid collapse of the entire state and the complete disintegration of the country.

One of the Putin's current henchmen, the Speaker of the Russian Duma, V.Volodin, once famously proclaimed: "If there is Putin, there is Russia; if there is no more Putin, there will be no more Russia"³. It is now becoming increasingly obvious that Putin is one of the main causes of the current tragedy of Russia, and one of the main symbols of that tragedy. This is why Volodin's famous words have to be rephrased: "If Putin is there, Russia may not exist; if Putin is gone, Russia may recover".

However, it would be frivolous to think that, with Putin himself gone, all of Russia's problems, which have led to today's tragedy, will be solved very easily and spontaneously. Russia's problems today are also the result of objective historical patterns, which Putin has exploited for the benefit of his regime and has himself fallen hostage to. Russia's history in the 20th century is also full of tragic historical twists and turns, which are now echoing with existential challenges for Russia.

A couple of these fundamental historical problems in Russia are worth discussing separately, because only by understanding them can we better understand how we can help Russia.

Post-Imperial Nostalgic Seizures

Historians have noted that Russia's historical development has largely followed the historical trajectories of Europe, but usually with a significant delay. And this delay has often had tragic consequences for Russia itself and the wider World.

² More: *Andrius Kubilius. Ukraine and Europe tired of being itself*. The Lithuania Tribune. 18.06.2022. Available at: <https://lithuaniatribune.com/andrius-kubilius-ukraine-and-a-europe-tired-of-being-itself/>

³ *Володин: "Есть Путин — есть Россия, нет Путина — нет России"*. МК.ру. 23.10.2014. Available at: <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/10/23/volodin-est-putin-est-rossiya-net-putina-net-rossii.html>

Russia is now the last collapsing empire on the European continent, having begun to crumble only in the 1990s. The disintegration of an empire is not a one-day process, and it certainly did not end the day the Belovezh Accords were signed. The longest time the crumbling of an empire takes is in the mind of the imperial nation. It is still happening in Russia.

We in Lithuania are lucky that we managed to escape from that collapsing Soviet/Russian empire almost without the bloodshed.

Even though the Russian Empire began to crumble only in the 1990s, the other great empires of the European continent, France and Great Britain, began to say goodbye to their imperial grandeur immediately after the Second World War. Such a farewell was nowhere easy: nostalgia for the fading “glorious” imperial grandeur played a prominent role in public consciousness everywhere. By the mid-1950s, the French were so deeply nostalgic for the loss of Algeria and other colonies in North Africa that it was only de Gaulle’s return that saved French democracy from the complete collapse.

A tormented nostalgia for the past is common to all societies undergoing the revolutionary change. We in Lithuania, too, experienced a strong wave of nostalgia for the past immediately after the Sąjūdis revolution, when the Lithuanian public elected a majority of former communists during the 1992 parliamentary elections, and then later elected the last General Secretary of Lithuanian Communist Party A. Brazauskas as the President of Lithuania. Even in 2004, when Lithuania became a member of the EU and NATO, in a poll commissioned by our party, when asked whether life was better under the Soviets or in the Independent Lithuania, 54% of the respondents answered that life was better under the Soviets. Lithuanians were no strangers to nostalgia for the past, for the Soviet past, and our democracy was only saved from the disastrous effects of such nostalgia by the fact that the European Union opened its doors to us at the same time.

Many scholarly books were written about the nostalgia for the past as an inevitable and dramatically important social phenomenon in young democracies. The two most memorable of such books for me personally were published by the famous Samuel P. Huntington: *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) and *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991).

Russia in the late 1990s was also undergoing a major revolutionary change. Inevitably, a wave of nostalgia for the past also swept throughout Russia. Only it was even more poisonous than in Lithuania, because alongside the natural nostalgia for the Soviet past, the Russian society was also suffering from the nostalgia for the former imperial “glory and grandeur”.

The FSB took advantage of this by re-installing in 2000 to the power one of their own, Vladimir Putin. Putin and his circle in the Kremlin quickly realised that it was easy to score cheap popularity points by stimulating the nostalgia of ordinary Russians for the Soviet, imperial past. For the mafia, with its pyramid of power (if to use famous words of the late Senator J. McCain: “*Russia is a gas station run by a mafia that is masquerading as a country.*”⁴), that Putin had created, the most important objective has been personal gain from easy oil and gas money and the preservation of the regime’s pyramid of power. It was for the preservation of this pyramid that the public had to be fed ever greater doses of nostalgia-inducing global zombification. Putin has been very successful in creating (or restoring) an imperial dream for ordinary Russians, and the narrative “Krym nash” (“the Crimea is ours”) has become a volcano

⁴ From the John McCain interview in „*Late Night With Seth Meyers*“, NBC. 22.04.2014.

of such a nostalgia and imperial dreams. Putin had to simultaneously worry about how to maintain the society's nostalgia for the imperial past, and about another problem: how to prevent a democratic, pro-Western Ukraine from becoming a successful state, because such an inspiring example could also make ordinary Russians want to live like Ukraine, and such a dream of Russians would very quickly destroy the foundations of the Kremlin's mafia pyramid. Thus was born the Novorossiya plan, a mixture of nostalgia for the imperial past and jealousy of Ukraine's success.

Such the mix led not only to the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine, but also to the tragedy of Russia and the threat to its existence. Nostalgia for the imperial past is the dynamite beneath Russia's foundations; it is one of the root causes of the tragedy of Russia. It is clear that Putin deliberately stoked the fire under this dynamite for a long time, and finally, for reasons known only to him, decided to light the fuse that leads directly to that dynamite.

The process of the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the nostalgic storms of the public in recent decades are different from the post-war dismantle of the other empires on the European continent in a way that Putin personally encouraged the growth of nostalgia for the imperial past, then became a hostage to such nostalgia himself and thus killed off the young democracy of Russia. This is the opposite to other European leaders like de Gaulle who had the courage to contain the post-imperial nostalgia of their societies, and thus saved French democracy.

In order to help Russia to transform itself after Putin, the West must help Russian society to say a final and irreversible goodbye to the dream of the imperial nostalgia. In particular, Russia's painful defeat in its own war of aggression against Ukraine would contribute to that. Western arms for Ukraine are therefore also the Western aid for the Russia's transformation. Even Ukraine's NATO membership would positively contribute to the Russia's transformation, because it would demonstrate to ordinary Russians that Ukraine no longer remains in some grey area of Russian imperial interests. And that this is being established for ever.

When Will The Great French Revolution Happen In Russia?

Another historical difference between Russia and the Old Europe is that the Old Europe (Western Europe) has been undergoing major social changes since the end of the 18th century (and in some places, since much earlier), best symbolised by the Great French Revolution: the revolutionary transition from feudalism to modern capitalism, with the concomitant development of modern constitutional democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Some historians argue that in France itself, the Revolution, with all its iterations of the Terror, the Restoration, the repeated revolutionary upsurges (1830, 1848) and the ebb and flow of the tides, lasted until the war of 1870, which was lost to Bismarck and to a reunifying Germany. It was only this painful defeat that finally consolidated the revolutionary transformation in France.

In his fascinating book *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution: 1891-1924* (1998, 2017), the world-renowned contemporary historian, Orlando Figes, details the tragedy of the 19th-century Russian Empire and how the Russian elite, in the wake of the French revolution, tried many times to replicate this revolution in Russia (starting with the Decembrist uprising of 1825), and never succeeded in any way. In the end, it was only the February Revolution of

1917 that succeeded, but this was followed by the Bolshevik coup in October of the same year, with Lenin at the forefront. In Russia, the “French” transition to capitalism (with the democracy that is characteristic of capitalism) did not take place, but ended with the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks and the terror of Stalin. Throughout the 20th century, Russia may have said goodbye to feudalism, but it never got to the classical capitalism. The 1990 revolution in Russia may have started Russia’s journey in this direction, but nostalgia for the past and the weakness of democratic institutions determined that the anti-democratic restoration that often afflicts young democracies has also happened in Russia. But such a restoration has not so much brought back times of the Soviet-era Central Committee of the Communist Party, but has rather created a completely new structure - the power of the mafia in the Kremlin and the rampant terror of that mafia.

For Russia to become a “normal” state, it is necessary, at the outset, to replicate the Great French Revolution. Russia is more than 200 years late in doing so, and this is another reason for the tragedy of Russia. Russia needs the institutions that are necessary for the functioning of a normal state, of a normal democracy. Currently, such institutions simply do not exist, beginning from the Duma, to regional self-government and to the Constitutional Court. And in order for them to appear, it will be necessary in a democratic Russia, first of all, to destroy institutions such as the FSB, which genetically cannot coexist with the institutions of democracy.

How Can The West Contribute To Russia’s Transformation?

First of all, the West, and the European Union in particular, must finally wake up from the sleep of “geopolitical laziness” and realise that Russia’s transformation is not only necessary for Russia itself, but that it is also of equal strategic importance for the European Union. For such a transformation of Russia would facilitate the creation of a completely different security architecture across the European continent. That is why the European Union must have a clear strategy to assist such a transformation.

As Mr Borrell, the EU’s “Minister for Foreign and Security Affairs”, admitted very openly in the last plenary session of the European Parliament, the European Union’s deep dependence on gas and other energy resources from Russia has so far prevented the European Union from having a clearer strategy for its relations with Russia⁵. And, by the same token, a strategy towards Ukraine. Now that the volume of Russian gas on EU markets has fallen from 41% (before the war) to 7.5% (in September), according to Mr Borrell, there is also a room for an independent strategy towards Russia:

“This [radical cuts in EU imports of Russian gas after the war has started] is something extraordinary that will lead us to free ourselves from the energy dependence on Russia, which was the major constraint of our foreign policy towards Russia and, consequently, of our foreign policy, which included Ukraine. In fact, we have not had a foreign policy towards Ukraine, because it was subsidiary to our policy towards Russia, and [policy towards] Russia was, in turn, subsidiary to our energy dependence - and was conditioned by it. Now we will have a clear policy towards Ukraine, which is dominated by the will and the desire for Ukraine

⁵ Minutes of the European Parliamentary plenary session, 05.10.2022. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-05-ITM-002_EN.html

to become a member of the European Union. A policy with clear objective, which will be possible because we will no longer suffer from this dependence on Russia”.

This frank and courageous acknowledgement of the EU’s past strategic mistakes, coming from Mr Borrell, gives us hope that the EU will be truly capable of moving from the “Putin-first!” strategy in its relations with Putin to finally turning towards “Democracy in Russia-first!” strategy. As well as towards a strategy on how to help Russia transform itself.

This strategy to support the transformation must be based on a number of principles:

- There can be no return to *business as usual* with the authoritarian Kremlin regime, regardless of who is the master of the authoritarian Kremlin - Putin or some other FSB general. The continuous returning to *business as usual* with Putin regardless of what criminal acts has the regime committed – be it the open poisoning of his opponents or the occupation of South Ossetia and the Crimea – has been a huge mistake on the part of the West. This has only increased Putin’s imperial aggressiveness and has ultimately led to the current tragedy of Russia. The EU must now have a clear strategy for the development of relations with democratic Russia, and this strategy must clearly define the criteria that will be required from the Russian democracy in order to recognise it as a functioning democracy and for cooperation to be built on entirely new foundations⁶.
- The European Union must overcome its division into those who “believe” and those who “do not believe” in the possibilities and prospects of democracy in Russia, because it is only by believing that democracy is possible in Russia that we will be able to help this transformation to happen. Putin has for long time been trying to prove to Western leaders that democracy in Russia is not possible. All the poisonings of Litvinenko, the Skripals, Navalny, where the Kremlin has made no effort to hide the traces of its involvement, have been suitable for this. This was simply aimed at frightening the West and at demonstrating what the Russian reality is, which the West would not be able to change. The Kremlin’s aggression, both internal and external, was also suited to this, by constantly communicating to the West that this is what Russia is: aggressive, savage, oriental, with a nuclear bomb in its hands, ready to take revenge and punish anyone who tries to explain the prospects for democracy in Russia, and to punish those who are unwilling to adapt to the kind of Russia that Putin’s regime has created. Western leaders have succumbed to this Putin “influence” and have tried to adapt to such a Russia, believing themselves that Russia will never become a democracy. Hence the whole “Putin-first!” doctrine, with successive Western leaders rushing into dialogue with Putin, regardless of how Putin himself behaved.
- With the outbreak of Russia’s war against Ukraine and the overwhelming evidence of the criminal, inhumane behaviour of the Russian soldiers in Bucha or Izyum, for many ordinary Europeans such testimonies of the brutality of the Russian soldiers were also the evidence of the collective guilt and collective responsibility of the entire Russian nation as well as proof that Russia will never have a chance of becoming a democracy. However, it would be a major strategic mistake for Europeans to give in to their

⁶ More: *The EU’s Relations With a Future Democratic Russia: A Strategy*. Andrius Kubilius, Vladimir Milov, Roland Freudenstein and Sergei Guriev. Wilfried Martens Centre, 2022. Available at: <https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/the-eus-relations-with-a-future-democratic-russia-a-strategy/>

emotions and to attribute collective guilt to all Russians and to disbelieve in the prospects of democracy in Russia⁷. Simply, it is difficult to devise any strategy for the EU support for Russia's democratic transformation without believing in the prospects for democracy in Russia.

- Therefore, despite all the understandable emotions, I have to urge Europeans again and again to return to a rational assessment of the situation and prospects in Russia: despite the tragic state of Russia and its society today, there are no rational arguments to explain why democracy is possible in Ukraine, why the Belarusians are fighting for it, and why the prospect of a normal European life and of democracy should be of no concern to ordinary Russians. The attempt to explain that Russia is essentially an Asian state and that it inherited its state structure and many of its traditions primarily from the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and that it will therefore supposedly never be able to become a democracy, is undermined by the simple fact that today's Mongolia, which was once the homeland of the Tatar-Mongol invasion, is now one of the model democracies that is ranked highly in all the global democracy indices.
- It is obvious, that any transformation of Russia will only be realised by Russians themselves. By those who will begin to understand that the Putin's regime is the Russia's greatest tragedy. Putin is pursuing a scorched-earth strategy with regard to such opposition to his regime. It is therefore not surprising that protests against the war, against the mobilisation, are not becoming a mass phenomenon in Russia. However, this does not mean at all that the transformation in Russia will not begin in the near future. It may depend on a number of factors, the most important of them being whether ordinary Russians will be assisted to create for themselves a new dream of their future, of a normal European life, instead of the collapsed dream of a return to the past, to the "glorious" days of the Empire. The European Union can play a particularly important role in helping Russians to return to such a dream and to work towards its realisation through the fundamental transformation of Russia. The European Union is capable of playing such a role because many members of the Russian opposition, its intellectual leadership, have now largely emigrated to various European Union countries. The European Union, by extending the hand of intensive cooperation to this opposition, could help it to unite and to work together with the EU institutions already now on joint strategic cooperation programmes that could be implemented as soon as Russia's transformation into a democracy is realised. This would also help the EU to mobilise its institutional resources to launch a completely new phase of EU policy towards Russia right away, in a real move away from the strategy "Putin-first!" to the strategy "Democracy in Russia-first!". This, unfortunately, has still not happened.

⁷ More: '*Collective guilt' — the dilemma of penalising Russia's opposition*. Radek Sikorski, Andrius Kubilius, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Bernard Guetta, Sergej Lagodinsky, Anders Aslund, Roland Freudenstein. EU Observer, 27.09.2022. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/156141>

How Can The EU Help Russians To Achieve A New Dream Of Normality?

In politics and geopolitics, we tend to look only at the actions, motivations, and emotions of the national leaders, because many feel that this is what determines the development of countries and the internal or external actions of the particular country. This is not unimportant, but it would be a mistake to forget other relevant factors: the general public, its nostalgia, its expectations, its beliefs or its dreams. Dreams lead to change in democracies, but they also affect possible transformations in authoritarian systems. Even authoritarian regimes have to be concerned with the loyalty of their citizens, which depends on the prevailing dream in the society. Authoritarian regimes cannot remain in power for long by relying or sitting on the bayonet alone. It is simply not comfortable to sit at the point of a gun for long. In Belarus in 2020, it was clear that the loyalty of Belarusians to the Lukashenko regime is coming to an end, because the Belarusians had the opportunity to see, by electing Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, that the majority of Belarusian citizens are in favour of the dream of Belarus' transformation. This is what mobilised the citizens to go to mass protests. It was only at the point of a bayonet that Lukashenko was able to temporarily maintain his illegitimate power, which is clearly a short-term way of stopping the inevitable transformation.

In Russia, too, change can only begin when the majority of Russians will start to believe in the dream of a new, normal life, and will have the opportunity to see, in some way, that such a dream is believed in by the majority.

How can the European Union help Russians to achieve such a new dream of normality?

There are three actions on which the West should concentrate its efforts to help the Russians to achieve a new dream: (a) the West must help the Russians to immediately and definitively rid themselves of the false nostalgic dream of regaining the supposed "greatness" of the empire, as such a dream leads only to a deeper and deeper tragedy for Russia; (b) the West must politically and economically invest in the success of Ukraine, so that the example of such success encourages the Russians to pursue a new dream of a normal life in Russia; (c) the West must work already today with Russian opposition intellectuals to map out a strategy for future relations between the West (including the European Union) and a future democratic Russia. Such a strategy would explain to ordinary Russians how a new "normal" dream would be realised in a democratic Russia together with the West.

How Important Is Ukraine's Victory And Ukraine's NATO Membership For The New Russian Dream?

To help the Russian people to get rid of the old "imperial" dream, it is necessary that this dream is completely crushed on the battlefield. Ordinary Russians need to see the tragic consequences of this false dream for themselves, including sanctions against Russia and Russia's international isolation. Only a clear understanding by Russians that this false dream is the root cause of the current tragedy in Russia will not only bury this "imperial" dream, but also open the door to a new dream of a normal life in Russia. Therefore, Western arms supplies to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia are important not only for Ukraine to be able

to defend itself and win the war, but also for this false “imperial” Russian dream to be finally crushed, and thus for ordinary Russians to be able to free themselves from the tragic trap of such a nostalgia.

It is worth recalling once again the words of Alexei Navalny, already quoted earlier: *“Too many people in Russia are interested in normal life now, not in the phantom of territorial gains. And there are more such people every year. They just don’t have anyone to vote for now.”*

The Russian opposition is well aware of how important it is for ordinary Russians to believe in the dream of a new, normal life in Russia. The West has a duty to help Russians to believe in the reality of such a dream. This requires, first of all, helping Russians to finally rid themselves of their belief in what A. Navalny called “the phantom of territorial gains”. Instead, Russians must be helped to believe in what Mr Navalny himself has described as the dream of “a wonderful Russia of the future”⁸.

A new dream requires that Putin’s imperial dream of Novorossiia not only be crushed, but also prevented from recovering, even when the inevitable post-revolutionary wave of nostalgia for the past once again sweeps over the newly revitalised young Russian democracy. This requires that even the Russian imperial hawks finally realise that Ukraine is no longer within their reach. It must therefore be in the West’s interest to grant Ukraine NATO membership in the near future. This is important not so much because it would increase Ukraine’s security (Ukraine itself is doing just fine without the NATO membership), but because it would help the Russians to stop succumbing to the imperial nostalgia.

NATO was created to enable the West to resist the imperial expansion of Russia/Soviet Union; Ukraine is now doing just that, with its military capabilities exceeding all NATO membership criteria; NATO’s admission of Ukraine would not only strengthen NATO military capabilities, but also help Russia to say goodbye to its “imperial” dream for good: Russia’s imperial return to Ukraine by military force would become impossible, and such dreams would become unreal.

Ukraine’s EU Membership Is A Cornerstone Of The European Union’s Strategy “Democracy In Russia - First!” Axis

Like Ukraine’s membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Ukraine’s membership of the European Union is important not only because it is the only way in which Ukraine’s democratic and economic success can be built, but also because it is another way to help Russia free itself from the grip of “imperial” nostalgia. Ukraine’s becoming a full member of the European Union would be a crushing and final knockout blow to Putin’s long-standing “imperial” dream, the realisation of which the Kremlin has concentrated in Ukraine.

The main pragmatic objective of Putin’s “imperial” dream has always been the same: to prevent Ukraine from becoming a successful state, because such a contagious example is dangerous for Putin’s mafia regime, while in the post-Soviet space, the only tried and tested way in which a country can become a success story is very well-known: it is the country’s integration into the European Union and its subsequent EU membership.

⁸ *Прекрасная Россия Будущего*. Available at: <https://2018.navalny.com/post/492/>

In the same recent text, A.Navalny highlights the same reasons for Putin's aggression against Ukraine: jealousy of Ukraine and its potential success, hatred of Ukraine's pro-Western choices and the desire to turn Ukraine into a "failed state" are the dominant features of Putin's "Ukraine strategy":

"First, jealousy of Ukraine and its possible successes is an innate feature of post-Soviet power in Russia; it was also characteristic of the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin. But since the beginning of Putin's rule, and especially after the Orange Revolution that began in 2004, hatred of Ukraine's European choice, and the desire to turn it into a failed state, have become a lasting obsession not only for Putin but also for all politicians of his generation."

Exactly the same is observed not only by the leaders of the Russian opposition, but also by the most prominent Western experts. For example, a few days before the war broke out, the former US ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, together with Robert Person, published a valuable text entitled "What Putin Fears Most?"⁹. The authors' answer to the question they had formulated was unequivocal: what Putin fears most is not Ukraine's membership in NATO, but Ukraine's membership in the European Union. He is panic-stricken about Ukraine's success, and Ukraine's success can only be created if the West is interested in and helps Ukraine to become a member of the European Union. Because the whole of Central Europe and the Baltic States only became success stories when, immediately after the democratic revolutions in the late 1980s, these countries were given the opportunity to integrate rapidly into the European Union. This is what the authors of the text say:

"Forget his [Putin's] excuses. Russia's autocrat doesn't worry about NATO. What terrifies him is the prospect of a flourishing Ukrainian democracy. (...) Putin may dislike NATO expansion, but he is not genuinely frightened by it. Russia has the largest army in Europe, now much more capable after two decades of lavish spending. NATO is a defensive alliance. It has never attacked the Soviet Union or Russia, and it never will. Putin knows that. But Putin is threatened by a successful democracy in Ukraine. He cannot tolerate a successful, flourishing, and democratic Ukraine on his borders, especially if the Ukrainian people also begin to prosper economically. That undermines the Kremlin's own regime stability and proposed rationale for autocratic state leadership. Just as Putin cannot allow the will of the Russian people to guide Russia's future, he cannot allow the people of Ukraine, who have a shared culture and history, to choose the prosperous, independent, and free future that they have voted for and fought for."

Putin's "Ukraine strategy" has always been clear and unambiguous - to prevent Ukraine from becoming a successful state. This has been cloaked in various slogans of imperial nostalgia, but in fact Putin's main objective has not been the annexation of the new territories of Novorossiya, but the destruction of the success of Ukraine. "Novorossiya" was, and remains, only an instrument for achieving this strategic objective, because the survival of the Putin regime depends on Putin's ability to prevent the success of Ukraine. That is why Putin is fighting against Ukraine's success. And this is the axis of his entire geopolitical strategy in recent decades.

Unfortunately, the West (including the European Union) until the beginning of the war did not have a clearer "Ukraine strategy", it did not have a strategy to counter Putin's "Ukraine

⁹ *What Putin fears most?* Michael McFaul, Robert Person. Journal of Democracy, 22.02.2022. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/what-putin-fears-most/>

strategy". It had no strategy to help build Ukraine's success with the ambitious EU enlargement strategy.

This was one of the reasons why Putin was tempted to go to war against Ukraine, because it seemed to him that the West would continue to have no strategy for Ukraine and would therefore very quickly return to business as usual with Putin.

Why the West has not yet had its own "Ukraine strategy", was, as has already been mentioned, very openly and significantly acknowledged in recent days by Josep Borrell, the EU's "Minister of Foreign and Security Affairs", in a speech during the European Parliament plenary debate on Russia's war against Ukraine. There was no strategy only because the European Union has hitherto been very significantly dependent on Russian gas. Mr Borrell openly admits that the European Union has not had its own "Ukraine strategy": "We have not had our own foreign policy towards Ukraine" - the most frank and courageous admission by EU leaders of the EU's past mistakes, these mistakes having contributed to the fact that the whole of the European continent is now in a profound geopolitical crisis.

There is only one way out of this geopolitical crisis: the European Union must have an ambitious and effective "Ukraine strategy". This must be a strategy for Ukraine's rapid integration into the European Union and full EU membership. Such a strategy must be realised by the end of this decade. The first right steps in this direction have already been taken: Ukraine has been granted the candidate status. But for Ukraine to become a member of the EU by the end of the decade, membership negotiations in Brussels must start as early as the beginning of 2023, rather than be delayed in the traditional bureaucratic way.

EU bureaucrats and political leaders must remember that Ukraine's EU membership is not only necessary for Ukraine's own success, but also for Russia's transformation and the EU's strategy of "Democracy in Russia - first!". It is therefore clear that Ukraine's membership of the European Union is, above all, necessary for the European Union itself, because it is the only way for the EU to implement a strategy that will lead to peace and security finally taking root on the European continent. The extension of the dream of democracy, of normal life, to the East of the European continent is the only way to ensure that the basic dream of Europeans, "Europe - whole, free and at peace", is finally realised, because democracies do not usually fight with each other. And the European Union can realise this, first and foremost, by building on Ukraine's success, which will have a huge positive impact on Russia's transformation.

The European Union's Strategy For Future Relations With Democratic Russia – The Basis For A New Dream Of Normality In Russia

It is worth remembering again and again that the success of countries and people on the European continent is only built on their integration with the European Union. The European Union has enormous "soft power" to positively influence and change the lives and policies of its neighbours, but often the European Union itself forgets about this special power. Or sometimes it does not dare to use it, as Mr Borrell openly admitted.

It is worth talking about this formula for success, not only in terms of the success stories of Central Europe and the Baltic States, not only in terms of how the success story of Ukraine

can be created, but also in terms of how the dreams of a normal, European life in Russia can be realised in the future.

Although the European Union will certainly not offer Democratic Russia the prospect of the EU membership, the European Union must already now propose a strategy for future relations with Democratic Russia, this strategy providing for a strong future relationship of free trade, visa-free travel, economic partnership in the name of modernisation, with a clear perspective that would allow ordinary Russians to believe today in a new dream - the possibility of a normal, European life in Russia. This EU strategy would be important not only because it would help to shape such a new Russian dream, but also because the implementation of such a strategy would be essential to protect the young, resurgent Russian democracy from the destructive force that the inevitable post-revolutionary nostalgia for the past brings with it.

The importance of such a strategy for the EU's future relations with the Democratic Russia was underlined by the European Parliament in its special report on the EU's strategy for relations with Russia, adopted in September 2021¹⁰. What such a strategy for the EU's relations with Democratic Russia could look like, and why it is important to develop it today, was set out in detail in the above-mentioned special study "The EU's Relations With a Future Democratic Russia: A Strategy", drafted by experts on the European Union and on Russia and published by the Martens Centre in July 2022¹¹.

The European Union wants good, mutually beneficial relations with Russia, but this depends on Russia's ability to transform itself from an authoritarian, aggressive state into a democratic, normal, European state. This is one of the European Union's most important strategic interests, and for this the European Union must have a clear strategy on how the EU can help Russia to achieve this transformation. It must also have a strategy now for future relations with Democratic Russia, because that is the way to help Russia's transformation.

This must be a strategy for assisting Russia. Not the Putin regime, but Russia and the Russian people. This must be a strategy on how to help the Russians to avoid a "tragedy of Russia", on how to help avoid the catastrophic consequences of such a tragedy for Russia itself. Because it is not only Russia itself that would suffer from a catastrophic "tragedy of Russia", but also the whole of Europe and the whole world.

It would therefore be simply irresponsible to say that the "tragedy of Russia" is a matter for the Russians alone.

The Tragedy Of Russia As An Impetus For Change: Self-Reflection And International Justice For Russia

Russia is not the first nation to find itself at a tragic crossroads in its development, when the main narratives of national identity, the nostalgia and dreams that prevail in society, bring

¹⁰ *European Parliament recommendation of 16 September 2021 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the direction of EU-Russia political relations.* Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0383_EN.html

¹¹ *Supra*, fn 6

the nation to the brink of total catastrophe, of total collapse. Global history is full of cases where such a moment comes for a nation due to the state suffering a crushing defeat. For some nations it has been a tragedy that has completely ruined them. However, the global history also provides many convincing examples where the painful defeat of a state has been a radical incentive for the nation of that country to rethink its way forward and to rebuild itself from the roots.

In his book “Upheaval: how nations cope with crisis and change”, the renowned historian Jared Diamond describes how some nations have succeeded in radically recovering from the tragedies they have suffered through, using the examples of Finland, Japan, Chile, Indonesia, Germany, Australia, Chile and the United States. Diamond convincingly develops the theory that nations in such a crisis must behave in the same way as a person in the deep personal crisis. Psychologists know of as many as 12 essential actions and factors that lead to the recovery of such a person, starting with the person’s own admission that he or she is in the deep crisis and that he or she has to take action to get out of the crisis. Diamond transforms these principles of personal psychology into 12 rules for nations in crisis, ranging from the national consensus and the recognition that the nation and the state are in crisis and that the nation itself must find a new way out, to studying the experience of other similar nations, to rejecting established geopolitical constraints and to accepting support from other countries. Global history provides many compelling examples where a painful defeat has been a radical incentive for a nation to rethink its way forward.

What would Jared Diamond’s book “advise” Russia to do? Russia that is defeated in the war in Ukraine? Russia that is after Putin?

First of all, he would advise them to see the inevitable painful defeat in Ukraine not only as a national tragedy for Russia, but also as a defeat that opens up the possibility of a fundamental change of identity and the possibility of saying goodbye to Putinism and to the dream of the restoration of the Empire that has brought Russia to the tragic situation it is in today. Just as the painful defeat of Germany and Japan during the imperial wars of their time helped both of them to go into the deep self-reflection and to reorient themselves towards the dream of a normal life.

Mr. Diamond would also say that the Russians themselves need first of all to come to a fundamental national understanding that the state and the nation are in a deep crisis and that they themselves need to find new, strategic solutions. Secondly, the Russians themselves will have to admit that the root cause of the crisis is that they have allowed themselves to believe in the dream of rebuilding the empire that has been “infected” into them by Kremlin propaganda. By relying on such an artificially exalted nostalgic dream, Putin has guaranteed the loyalty to his regime of a large part of the Russian society. At the same time Putin has created a mafia-like power structure; and the mixture of mafia-like power propaganda and the dream of rebuilding the empire has become the basis of the ideology of the new, Russian Nazism. Same as during Hitler’s time, this type of Nazism is capable of generating the loyalty of a significant part of the people (even the educated German people). Hitler enjoyed this loyalty in his time, and Putin has been enjoying it up to now.

The Russians themselves will have to find the strength to say goodbye to Putinism. For an example of how to do this, one need not look far: once upon a time, as far back as 1956, Nikita Khrushchev had the courage to openly name and condemn Stalin’s crimes at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. Thus, at least for a time, the Soviet Union farewelled

with the Stalinism. And now someone, perhaps even from within the current Kremlin elite, will have to take on the same role, just to talk about the crimes of Putinism. This would be the first step towards a national understanding that the state and the nation are in the deep crisis.

The international community can play a particularly important role in this inevitable path of self-reflection and self-examination in the post-Putin Russia if it urgently establishes a Special International Tribunal to investigate Putin's crimes of war aggression. All the crimes of Russia's war in Ukraine are and will continue to be investigated by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, but Putin's crimes need attention of a special tribunal that can give an answer on Putin's guilt not in ten years' time, but in the foreseeable future. This would also help Russia to say a final goodbye to the imperial dream.

For Russians, the road from the imperial dream to the dream of a normal life will not be easy: it will not be enough for the Russian public to recognise that Putinism is evil. Nor will the decisions of the International Tribunal established by the international community on Putin's crimes be enough. Russia itself, after Putin, will have to take decisions on reparations and damage repayments to Ukraine. Such will be the price of transformation.

And, above all, Russia after Putin, as well as the changes that have taken place in it, will be judged first and foremost in terms of its relations with its neighbours. Only the complete disassociation of the new Russia from its aggressive, neo-imperialist policy towards Ukraine and other neighbours, and the liberation of the occupied territories, not only in Ukraine, but also in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, will be the main criteria by which the Western democracies will judge the results of Russia's transformation towards democracy. No one will believe in "change" in Russia if those changes do not meet the minimum criteria listed here. Even if Putin is gone.

The Inevitable Fourth Wave Of Democratisation And Russia

In his seminal book "The Third Wave: Democratisation at the End of the Twentieth Century", published in 1991, the renowned American scholar Samuel P. Huntington made a clear case for a clear historical pattern: in the global world, democracy is spreading like the tides of the ocean: eventually, a wave of democracy is sweeping across the globe, and democratisation is sweeping across more and more new countries. However, not all new countries flooded by a wave of democratisation can establish a stable democracy, so when the tide turns, some new democracies, especially those that were flooded for the first time, revert to an authoritarian rule, and wait for a new wave of democratisation.

According to Huntington, the world experienced three waves of democratisation in the twentieth century: the first began after the First World War and lasted until the end of the 1920s; the second began after the Second World War and lasted until the 1960s; and the third began in the second half of the 1970s and lasted until the 2000s.

We, Lithuania and the whole of Central Europe, are also products of this third wave. We are fortunate that the global wave of democracy that washed over us did not retreat from Lithuania when the wave of democratisation was followed by its natural ebb. The European integration process that began in the early 1990s also contributed to preventing the tide from

destroying our young democracy. In Russia, meanwhile, the ebb of democracy in the 2000s returned the country to Putin's authoritarian rule. In Belarus, the ebb came even earlier. According to Huntington, this is the fate of countries with no previous experience of democracy - their first attempts at democracy are relatively short-lived.

It is clear that the convincing scientific arguments of Huntington's theory of the three waves of democratisation, based on many concrete facts, including the history of change and transformation in our region over the last 30 years, also lead to conclusions about what we should expect in the future and allow us to be optimistic about the future of democracy in our region, including in Russia and Belarus: if the world experienced three waves of democratisation in the 20th century with the interval of roughly 20 years, now is the time to start preparing for a fourth wave of democratisation, since the third wave ended around 2000.

And this fourth wave, the first signs of which appeared in 2020 during the revolution in Belarus, and were at that time temporarily halted by repression, will inevitably sweep across Russia. This is a historical pattern.

The Tragedy Of Russia And Western Responsibility

Russia is currently living through one of the most tragic pages of its history, which is also bringing many tragedies to its neighbours, especially Ukraine.

Ukraine will win this war and will have every chance to recover and become a successful European country.

Meanwhile, Russia is at a historical crossroads. If imperial dreams continue to dominate in Russia, it will probably end in total disaster for the Russian state and the Russian people. Defeat in the war could open the door to the transformation of Russia, to deep self-reflection and to the deputinisation of the Russian society. Such a transformation of Russia is not only necessary for Russia, but also for the whole of Europe. The EU must have a strategy to help Russia in this transformation.

As Mr Borrell has recently openly and courageously admitted, the EU has so far been constrained by its dependence on Russian gas supplies and has had no policy strategy either towards Russia or Ukraine.

It is time for the West to realise that an instant, short-term or reactionary policy to the Kremlin's actions is no longer sufficient. The West needs a long-term, proactive policy towards Russia based on a clear and inclusive philosophy.

The West took a similar approach during the Cold War when it pursued a long-term strategy of containing Russia. The famous US diplomat and analyst George Kennan gave birth to this strategy with his philosophical doctrine of containment of Russia, which he explained in 1946 in his "Long Telegram". This doctrine was based on a thorough analysis of Russia's internal processes and the prevailing mentality of Russian society. This doctrine gave rise to the famous Truman Doctrine, which shaped Western behaviour during the Cold War. The latter doctrine consistently led to the 1947 Marshall Plan for Western Europe, which influenced the creation of the European Union and NATO. That way, the West not only resisted Stalinist and later Soviet plans to extend its influence throughout the Western Europe and the rest of the

World, but were also able to overcome one of the long-standing tectonic conflicts on the European continent, that caused the First and the Second World Wars.

This conflict was linked to the early 20th century disputes between Germany and France over the dominance of the entire European continent and the inability to share the economic power of the Ruhr region's industrial steel and coal resources. This long-standing tectonic conflict only ended when the Americans proposed the Marshall Plan to both countries and to the whole of Western Europe, calling for the integration of the coal and steel industries, thus starting the process of unification of all the Western economies. This long-term strategic move not only ensured an end to the conflicts over the riches of the Ruhr, but also brought sustainable peace to Western Europe.

However, Europe and the West continue to struggle with the second tectonic conflict on the European continent. In the 20th century, this conflict contributed to bloodsheds in large parts of Europe. As a result, large parts of the European continent had been denied the benefits of democracy, freedom and prosperity for decades. It was and still is a tectonic conflict involving imperial Russia and continental Europe. Between the end of the war in 1945 and the beginning of the 1990s, the Stalinist and expansionist policies of the Russian Empire were at the root of this conflict. After 1990, the causes of the conflict were the post-imperialist nostalgia and sentiment, in which Russia was trapped. This also bred Putin's kleptocratic, autocratic and increasingly aggressive regime, which eventually led to the war.

Although Russia is at the root of this tectonic conflict, the West needs to propose a long-term strategy for resolving this conflict. This strategy must be of the same scale and systemic nature as the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan or the strategy for containing Soviet Russia.

The changing nature of the conflict calls for new means of dealing with it. However, the cost and damage of a failure could be extremely high, as could new wars on the European continent.

Unfortunately, the West has not yet developed a long-term strategy to resolve this conflict and to help Russia to overcome its tragic trajectory. Because only democracy in Russia is a proper and lasting solution.

It is in Lithuania's best interest that the West has such a strategy and implements it systematically, because Lithuania's geopolitical security depends on whether Russia eventually becomes a pro-European, democratic and peaceful country.

We cannot just sit on our hands and wait for the West to come up with a strategy (if it has one) towards Russia. We should be more active in seeking such a strategy ourselves. We should go beyond just asking for NATO battalions to be reinforced in Lithuania, and not just look for ways to punish Putin or support Ukraine. We need an ambitious and comprehensive Western strategy towards Russia, and we need to offer its draft, instead of wasting our time just reminding the West about how wrong it was not to listen to us or to call us "Russophobes", and just to look for new ways to return to business as usual and to increase dialogue with Putin.

We are most interested in good relations with Russia. However, we are convinced that only democracies are not at war with each other. That is why we need fundamental and deep changes in Russia, and not just new personalities in the Kremlin, in order to be able to enjoy good relations with Russia. The West could help to bring about such changes. But this requires a long-term Western strategy towards Russia, and we must help such a strategy to see the

light of day. In order to develop such a strategy, we first need to understand the causes of the phenomenon we call the “the tragedy of Russia”.

This text is an attempt to look deeper into the tragedy of Russia and into how we can help Russia to avoid a tragic catastrophe.