

PUTIN'S RUSSIA: RUSSIAN MENTALITY AND SOPHISTICATED  
IMPERIALISM IN MILITARY POLICIES

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### RESUMO

De acordo com a minha experiência pessoal, o mundo ocidental falha no entendimento da mentalidade russa, ou interpreta-a mal. No decurso da análise da forma de pensar russa, dediquei a minha especial atenção a examinar a forma de pensar militar russa, relacionando a sua forma de pensar com o imperialismo contemporâneo das políticas de Putin. Tentamos também provar o nível de sofisticação entre ambos, na esperança que possa contribuir com este artigo para um melhor entendimento sobre a forma de pensar russa e assim contribuir para evitar erros conceptuais no entendimento da relação Rússia-Occidente.

**Palavras-Chave:** Imperialismo; Mentalidade; Rússia; Estados Unidos da América; Occidente;

### ABSTRACT

According to my experiences, the Western world hopelessly fails to understand Russian mentality, or misinterprets it. During my analysis of the Russian way of thinking I devoted special attention to the examination of military mentality. I have connected the issue of the Russian way of thinking to the contemporary imperial policies of Putin's Russia. I have also attempted to prove the level of sophistication of both. I hope that a better understanding of both the Russian mentality and imperialism could contribute to avoiding conceptual mistakes in many fields of Western-Russian relations.

**Keywords:** Imperialism; Mentality; Russia; United States of America; West

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## 1. INTRODUÇÃO

„*Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.*”<sup>2</sup> —  
Winston Churchill

The Western world hopelessly fails to understand Russian mentality, or misinterprets it.<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup> During my analysis of the Russian way of thinking I devoted special attention to the examination of military mentality. I have connected the issue of the Russian way of thinking to the contemporary imperial policies of Putin's Russia.<sup>8</sup> I have also attempted to prove the level of sophistication of both. I hope that a better understanding of both the Russian mentality and imperialism could contribute to avoiding conceptual mistakes in many fields of Western-Russian relations.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. THE RUSSIAN MENTALITY

The Western-Russian relationship has severely deteriorated due to both Western and Russian interventions in the crisis in Ukraine. This tendency significantly increased the need to examine a conglomerate of problems. Amongst the systemic reasons, we can find – inter alia – different ways of thinking representative of Western and Russian cultures that at least partially lay the foundations of Russian imperialism. We should not be disturbed by the fact that imperialism is generally based on the assumption of cultural colourfulness and the co-existence of several peoples. The leading power of Russian imperialism is Russia; therefore, the *Russian* mentality is the centre of my examination.

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<sup>2</sup> In: Alessandro Vitale: *Russia and the West: The Myth of Russian Cultural Homogeneity and the 'Siberian Paradox'*, The Telos Press, 25 January 2013, <http://www.telospress.com/russia-and-the-west-the-myth-of-russian-cultural-homogeneity-and-the-siberian-paradox/> (Accessed: 20. 10. 2015.)

<sup>3</sup> Michael Specter: *Dr. Dostoyevsky's Diagnosis, Deep in the Russian Soul, a Lethal Darkness*, The New York Times, 8 June 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/08/weekinreview/deep-in-the-russian-soul-a-lethal-darkness.html> (Accessed: 20. 10. 2015.)

<sup>4</sup> *Opposing 'us versus them' mentality on Russia*, Deutsche Welle, <http://www.dw.com/en/opposing-us-versus-them-mentality-on-russia/a-17355915> (Accessed: 21. 10. 2015.)

<sup>5</sup> Roger Pulvers: *Putin's siege-mentality Russia now firmly in the grip of a 'cold civil war'*, The Japan Times, 9 September 2012, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2012/09/09/commentary/putins-siege-mentality-russia-now-firmly-in-the-grip-of-a-cold-civil-war/#.VknfqkKtK4> (Accessed: 22. 10. 2015.)

<sup>6</sup> Nikolaas de Jong: *Russia And The West*, The Brussels Journal, <http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/5145> (Accessed: 23. 10. 2015.)

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Blank: *Russia's Military Doctrine Reflects Putin's Paranoia and Siege Mentality*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 12, Issue 2, 6 January 2015, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43237&cHash=cf5f42c2c2c25a411960bc1adf004c81#.Vkneh9KtK4](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43237&cHash=cf5f42c2c2c25a411960bc1adf004c81#.Vkneh9KtK4) (Accessed: 23. 10. 2015.)

<sup>8</sup> Guerman Diligensky, Sergei Chugrov: *'The West' in Russian Mentality*, Office for Information and Press, Brussels, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Moscow, 2000, <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/diliguenski.pdf> (Accessed: 23. 10. 2015.)

<sup>9</sup> Anastasia Yermakova: *Opinion: Why sanctions against Russia do not fully achieve the desirable outcome*, The Drayton Tribune, <http://www.draytontribune.com/opinion-why-sanctions-against-russia-do-not-fully-achieve-the-desirable-outcome/> (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

The scientific examination of Russian mentality leads to several difficulties, when it comes to methodology. It requires an authentic analyst who knows the Russian world, way of life etc. well enough. A high level of the knowledge of the Russian language is a must, since most of the original sources are in Russian. On the other hand: any sources translated to other languages are necessarily affected by the foreign interpretation as well, that is clearly not part of the original Russian source in cultural terms. A comparison can be made to help the understanding: whenever we translate something into other languages, the Russian mentality is viewed through glasses that distort the picture. Distortion is not limited to translations: it is part of a different interpretation of the original source, whenever and whatever we analyse. We view the subject of our analysis using glasses that manipulate the view. This is why several Western Russia-experts – even though they spend a lot of time on the subject – fail to correctly understand, or misinterpret Russian mentality. Many of these experts are heavily influenced by their own cultural boundaries.

National mentalities are quite difficult to grasp in strict scientific terms, therefore subjective elements of the analysis can easily gain too much weight. Those who debate the conclusions of the analysis might also question the scientific methodology. Another difficulty arises since the understanding of the Russian mentality – similarly to all other, foreign mentalities – requires openness, empathy and receptivity from people representing different cultures. Such empathy and receptiveness are often non-existent. We will examine some attributes of the Russian mentality in connection with the Western-Russian relationship, thereby narrowing the focus of our investigations. Whenever we talk about the Russian and Western mentalities, their nature is examined in a *concentrated* and *generalised* way. I use certain expressions independently of possible beliefs of the individual reader, i.e. the “soul”, “spirituality” etc. They could be viewed and interpreted both literally, or in a much broader sense. That depends on the faith or beliefs of the reader.

*“The Westerners are a people of smartness. They value superficial material gains the most. The notorious ‘American Dream’ proves that. High social ranking, influence, richness and glory – the Westerners live for such goals. These are the goals that they want to achieve with all their energy. The Russians are a people of the soul and heart.<sup>10</sup> It is not a coincidence that the classics of Russian literature paid such attention to exploring and stretching the ultimate issues of human existence.”<sup>11</sup>*  
*“(For the Russians – the auth.) the most important thing is to unfold their inner creative potential<sup>12</sup> (in various spheres of the human existence).*

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<sup>10</sup> Юрий Черепакхин: Как преодолеть конфликт между Западом и Россией, Antifashist, 18 July 2015, <http://antifashist.com/item/kak-preodolet-konflikt-mezhdu-zapadom-i-rossiej.html> (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

<sup>11</sup> Elena Bobrova: Great Russian literature ‘probes the ultimate questions of human life’, Russia Beyond the Headlines, 19 June 2015, [http://rbth.co.uk/literature/2015/06/19/great\\_russian\\_literature\\_probes\\_the\\_ultimate\\_questions\\_of\\_human\\_li\\_47025.html](http://rbth.co.uk/literature/2015/06/19/great_russian_literature_probes_the_ultimate_questions_of_human_li_47025.html) (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

<sup>12</sup> This should not be mistaken to “individualism” and “self-realisation” that are so fashioned in the Western world – the auth.

*What do the Russians dream about? They dream about ancient beauty and the possibilities of becoming one with it.<sup>13</sup> They live for constructive, creative activities. This certainly does not mean that Western people are less talented, or that Russians are less ambitious. No. Only their goals of life differ. For the Western people the creative potential is a tool to enhance their career. For the Russians it is the opposite: enhancements in career are a tool to utilise their creative potential. We can say that their values are the same, but the order of priorities is entirely different.”<sup>14</sup>*

A key issue of the Russian mentality – in spite of all semblance that people representing different cultures could view as “simple” or even “primitive” – is that it is especially complicated,<sup>15</sup> even when it could appear simple on the surface. The Russian mentality, like all other mentalities, has advantages and disadvantages, both having their own difficulties. A special attraction to be “philosophical” is a quite well known phenomenon that could be viewed by Western people as an unbound, useless dreaming that is disconnected from real life. „In order to be truly Russian (to be in harmony with our own nature) an enormous, inner spiritual source is necessary. The Russians permanently need to work on their inner spiritual peace. Otherwise Russians can easily be dragged into problems as because of their nature. These problems are mainly passivity on the surface and a tendency towards dependency („someone will come and do everything for me”), exalted dreaming, naivety and a passion to consume alcohol (in order to have a “spiritual flight” that requires no effort).”<sup>16</sup> It is common that micro level connections that apply to Russian individuals also apply at the medium level, furthermore: at the macro levels as well. In this case they also apply at the level of Russian imperialism. The thoughts quoted below are originally applied to the Russian people, but they can equally, literally be applied to the entire Western-Russian conflict as a whole.

*„Western people treat Russians in two ways. On the one hand they consider Russians less developed and weaker. In a relatively good case Western people feel a desire to achieve some sort of leadership above the Russians. In a worse case Westerners want to subordinate Russians and force them to work for the benefit of Western people (the first case*

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<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Buck: *The Prettier Sex: Understanding Gender Roles in Russia*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 25 October 2012, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/letters/the-prettier-sex-understanding-gender-roles-in-russia> (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

<sup>14</sup> Юрий Черепухин: Как преодолеть конфликт между Западом и Россией, *Antifashist*, 18 July 2015, <http://antifashist.com/item/kak-preodolet-konflikt-mezhdu-zapadom-i-rossiej.html> (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

<sup>15</sup> Aphorisms and jokes about true Russian mentality, *The Green Lea*, <http://greenlea.ru/True-Russian-Mentality/> (Accessed: 26. 10. 2015.)

<sup>16</sup> Юрий Черепухин: Как преодолеть конфликт между Западом и Россией, *Antifashist*, 18 July 2015, <http://antifashist.com/item/kak-preodolet-konflikt-mezhdu-zapadom-i-rossiej.html> (Accessed: 25. 10. 2015.)

*does not exclude the second). On the other hand Western people sense the unknown, mysterious power in Russians – the power of the heart and soul. Just as if they could sense the permanent “asymmetric response” of the Russian people. This frightens Westerners and strengthens the desire not necessarily to destroy, but to subordinate the “strange Russians”, to force them to play according to the Western rules. At the same time the feeling of superiority prevents the Western people from analysing the “strange” attributes of the Russians that would be necessary to understand them.”*  
*„When Russian people come under moderate pressure, they tend not to recognise it. In this case it is easy to fool the Russians, furthermore: they could even be forced for some time to work for the aggressors. This can only last for a while, within certain boundaries. When pressure grows and reaches a particular pain threshold the Russians change and show enormous power and activity. (This is why the totem animal of the Russians is the brown bear from the taiga which is in certain cases slow and shows little response to the environment, but it is strong and angry in extreme situations.)”*<sup>17</sup>

### 3. THE RUSSIAN MILITARY MENTALITY

In this chapter we will briefly analyse the Russian military mentality that is – as an important part of Russian mentality – also interconnected with the great power status of Russia, thus with Russian imperialism. A superior article has appeared in the Russian press<sup>18</sup> that provides an excellent summary of the origins of extraordinary toughness and bravery that ignores death and that appears so many times in Russian history. All this has become a source of Russian pride also generating fear and incomprehension amongst the enemies of Russia.

The analysis of the Russian author is remarkable because using a high level generalisation we can come to conclusions without the need to analyse the heritage of particular historical leaders, coming to conclusions each time, through debates etc. The Russian author distinguishes two main types of war: the war for *occupation* (acquisition) and the war for *destruction* (annihilation).

Several examples of wars for *occupation* have occurred in medieval Europe. Societies having the same or very similar social orders fought these wars against each other. Allowing some degree of generalisation and simplification: the winner occupied the territory of the looser, also taking some goods from the enemy. However: since both parties had the same or very similar social orders – as both parties were European medieval powers – the losers had to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> „Как закалялась сталь, или Откуда есть пошёл русский характер”, Topwar, <http://topwar.ru/75638-kak-zakalyalas-stal-ili-otkuda-est-poshel-russkiy-harakter.html> (Accessed: 26. 10. 2015.)

pay taxes to a different warlord. Here comes the essence: the life of the losers remained worth of living even after the defeat. Thus the military defeat was not the “end of life”. The looser had a chance to surrender and had good reasons to hope for a liveable life. For such reasons European medieval powers did not normally fight wars to the end when the last soldier with the last drop of blood was consumed by war. This resulted in far reaching consequences when affecting European mentality in its attitude towards wars.

Several examples of wars for *destruction* can be found in Russian history. Feudal Russia fought several wars against the nomads who had an incompatible social order. When the nomads won, Russian soldiers either died or were captured, thereby enslaved. This was clearly *not a liveable life*. The nomads most often destroyed the basis of the Russian feudal economy and used the occupied lands for their livestock rather than agricultural production. After defeats Russian families were either killed or enslaved.

Thus in theory the Russians had to choose between two options. The first is to *migrate* far enough to prevent the nomads from being able to follow them. This option was unrealistic for most Russians and could not become the behaviour of the majority. It could not be considered as a solution to serve the interests of feudal Russia either.

The other option was to fight the nomads to the death. Once a Russian soldier was injured but still capable to carry on fighting, he had to keep fighting. The death of Russian soldiers was meaningful only if they could also take nomad enemies to death with themselves.

*The Russians were not in position to have a real choice: they had to fight* against the nomad enemies *to the death*. A Russian mentality matured throughout centuries that was about reckless wars, continuation of fighting after being injured and self-sacrifice ignoring death. This is not accidental: it happened because of the deep historical reasons described above.

According to my experiences, contemporary Western cultures assume a different explanation for this that does not honour Russian traditions. On the contrary. According to the Western way of thinking the life of Russian soldiers is simply expendable, since there is no value of human life in Russian society.<sup>19, 20</sup> Such an explanation paints a very negative picture of Russian morality, furthermore: about the entire Russian society. I have observed this mentality many times during my college years. Most of my colleagues that have a master’s degree in

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<sup>19</sup> David Satter: Russia Needs to Learn the Value of Human Life, Hudson Institute, <http://www.hudson.org/research/10482-russia-needs-to-learn-the-value-of-human-life> (Accessed: 26. 10. 2015.)

<sup>20</sup> Georgi Gotev: Polish MEP: Russians have no respect for human life, EurActiv, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/polish-mep-russians-have-no-respect-human-life-312996> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

history think of these Western ideas as evident and commonplace. They think that “amongst the Russians human life has no value”.

The toughness, the endurance and last but not least the capability of Russian soldiers to sacrifice themselves has an enormous impact on Russia as a great power and its imperialist ambitions. Such a military mentality enhances Russian military capabilities that could become a firm basis for Russian imperialism in the future as well.

In Putin’s Russia a major turn had occurred regarding the value of human life, that can be proved by facts and that has several dimensions. The shift from *mass armed forces* that were based on the service of wide layers of the population towards *professional armed forces* where quality matters rather than quantity has already partially occurred Russia, and this transformation is rapidly continuing. Professional armed forces are more effective, flexible and mobile than their predecessors. There is a growing need for well-trained personnel and the growing complexity (sophistication) of military technology increasingly serves the survival of both soldiers and the technology itself. Since professional armed forces are smaller than mass armed forces, the need to retain fighting capabilities thereby improving the chances of survival becomes a necessity. This tendency continues to gain importance.

In order to preserve the life of Russian soldiers in wars several methods and technical solutions have been implemented. Many of them have no parallel at all elsewhere in the world. A classic example is the T-14 tank developed on the basis of the “Armata”. It is the only technology in the world that ensures the survival of the crew not only when the tank is destroyed,<sup>21</sup> but even if the tank’s own set of ammunition explodes (!) during the destruction of the tank.<sup>22</sup> This is a very big deal: the survival of the crew is ensured by a heavily armoured capsule, where the crew is located, physically separated from the fully automated tower. The capsule also separates the crew from the ammunition store of the tank. The survival of the crew is facilitated by the modern, heavy armour of the “Armata” base. The lightly armoured tower (!) – unique for tanks with no equivalent in the world – is also a necessity for the survival of the crew. It is possible to have light armour protection for the tower because the tank has advanced, active defences against shells and missiles. In case of an explosion of the tank’s ammunition store, the pressure generated would “throw off” the light tower relatively easily. This prevents pressure accumulation which would occur in the case of a heavily armoured tower. For such reasons the survival of the tank crew can be ensured.

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<sup>21</sup> Западные СМИ с тревогой и восхищением обсуждают показ «Арматы», Warfiles, <http://warfiles.ru/show-87329-zapadnye-smi-s-trevogoy-i-voshischiem-obsuzhdayut-pokaz-armaty.html> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

<sup>22</sup> Что представляет из себя танк Т-14 «Армата»? Warfiles, <http://warfiles.ru/show-87599-cto-predstavlyayet-iz-sebya-bashnya-tank-a-t-14-armata.html> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)



Furthermore, besides tanks other vehicles have been developed on the basis of the “Armata”: such as heavy armoured personnel carriers, air defence units, flame throwers, military engineer vehicles etc. “Armata” serves as a multipurpose basis for them in a wide range of possible utilisations. For these reasons “Armata” is designed for efficient and economic usage and requires minimum capabilities to be maintained. There are various other technical solutions that save life of Russian soldiers, i.e. modernised individual equipment or various modernisations or vehicle armours and other defences.<sup>23</sup>

There are solutions when not only individual weapons or equipment provide greater survivability, but – due to their effectiveness – complex weapon systems as a whole.<sup>24</sup> The Russian defence budget continues to grow and will probably reach 5,34 percent of the GDP in 2015.<sup>25</sup> This is despite the oil prices that appear to stay low and the Western sanctions implemented against Russia. The defence budget is at a record high since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is also worth noting that such a high rate of defence spending is sustainable without causing major difficulties for the Russian budget for years even if the current, negative economic effects remain. All this allows the implementation of an ambitious defence reform part of which is the modernisation of Russian military capabilities to top international standards, massive production of new weapon systems and their wide application for military service.

*“«We cannot fully grasp Putin’s intent,» the alliance’s top military commander, U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, told Congress in April (2015 – the auth.), according to the Defence Department’s website. «What we can do is learn from his actions, and what we see suggests growing Russian capabilities, significant military modernization and an ambitious strategic intent. »”<sup>26</sup>*

It is remarkable regarding the development of the Russian military capabilities that qualitative and quantitative parameters are enhanced *simultaneously*. This is uncommon in the Western world. “While uniformed manpower has declined in every Western nation since 2011, the number of Russian personnel increased by 25 percent to 850,000 between 2011 and mid-2014”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Секретный “Урал”: от чего убережет бойцов бронекабина “Торнадо”?, Warfiles, <http://warfiles.ru/show-96128-sekretnyy-ural-ot-chego-uberezh-et-boycov-bronekabina-tornado.html> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

<sup>24</sup> Российская САУ 2С19М2 “Мста-С” превосходит американскую САУ М109А7 “Паладин”, Warfiles, <http://warfiles.ru/show-91021-rossiyskaya-sau-2s19m2-msta-s-prevoshodit-amerikanskuyu-sau-m109a7-palladin.html> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

<sup>25</sup> Mark Adomanis: Russian Military Spending: Drawing Blood From A Stone, Forbes, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2015/05/19/russian-military-spending-drawing-blood-from-a-stone/> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

<sup>26</sup> The Secret Money Behind Vladimir Putin’s War Machine, Bloomberg, 2 June 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-02/putin-s-secret-budget-hides-shift-toward-war-economy> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



#### 4. PUTIN'S RUSSIA

*„On 7-8 December 1991 in a hunters' lodge in the Belovesh Forest in Western Belorussia, leaders of three Slavic republics: Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine made a decision to dissolve the imperium. At the same time they founded the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was later enlarged by a further nine republics. On 25 December 1991 Gorbachev resigned and the same day the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Russia has become the successor of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>28</sup>*

*„After the demise of the imperium Russia got 76 percent of the territory of the former Soviet Union, meaning that Russia remained the biggest country in the world. Meanwhile Russia inherited only 51 percent of the population, 60 percent of the economy and approximately 50 percent of the scientific and research capabilities of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>29</sup>*  
*It is enough to take a look at the map of the Soviet Union and Russia and it becomes obvious that Russia had inherited very much.*

The dissolution of the entire “socialist block” – including the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and the Warsaw Pact – created new conditions in Russia as well. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the embarrassed ambitions of a great power, the failed imperialism and the political, economic shock of transformation had created uncertainty, an identity crisis and a search for the better in Yeltsin's Russia. After the mostly negative social and economic trends of the Yeltsin period, following the failure of Russian attempts to open towards the West, Putin's rise to power resulted in a new era characterised by consolidation and development.

*“At the very end of the second presidency of Yeltsin, on the eve of the New Year in 1999 he unexpectedly resigned, asking Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin to assume the duties of the president. Putin was elected president in spring 2000 and he was the second Russian president since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. That time Russia faced significant challenges in both foreign and internal policy. The biggest internal threats were separatism and the oligarchs. The expansion of NATO posed a serious external challenge. For these reasons, Putin spent his first presidency by the restauration of external and internal sovereignty and the eradication of internal erosion. The recentralisation of the state was the basis of the consolidation that included the strengthening of strategically important sectors from the governance point of view as well as bringing them back under government control.”<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> Virág Attila: Elgázolt szuverenitás, Politikatudományi Intézet, PhD értekezés, 116. old., [http://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/745/1/Virag\\_Attila.pdf](http://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/745/1/Virag_Attila.pdf) (Accessed: 03. 10. 2015.)

<sup>29</sup> See *ibidem* on p. 117

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem* p. 129

Laying the basis of a sophisticated national ideology, the strengthening of the great power status and the abandonment of former CIS-policies – which became the new, main characteristics of Russian foreign policy – generated the need in the Western world to re-evaluate the place and role of Russia in the international system. Former Western stereotypes were still alive in the circles of the political elite, the media and public opinion. According to those Russia remained a pitiable, declining, disintegrating country in a permanent state of crisis. A retrograde, neo-imperialistic former great power that suffers from identity crisis. Even if Russia achieves some development, she would still be an aggressive “little power”. All these stereotypes have become obsolete.

The reality shows that we need to regard Putin’s new Russia as an increasingly ascending great power in international relations that – based on an ever more mature identity and a strengthened economic basis – will defend her interests better and more effectively than before.

In spite all of this the previously described stereotypes in the Western world survived, maybe partially retreating at later stages. Furthermore: the Western stereotypes – that are based on a general assumption of a “weak Russia” – were given a new basis for revival by the low oil prices and the implementation of Western sanctions against Russia. Western stereotypes revived in spite of the fact that the Western sanctions have neither achieved their political goals (i.e. Russia ceases her intervention in Ukraine, Putin becomes unpopular and might even be forced to resign etc.), neither their economic goals (loss of economic balance in Russia). Putin’s popularity is greater than ever before. The Russian economy resists the consequences of the pressure of sanctions “unexpectedly” well.<sup>31</sup>

### **The imperialism of Putin’s Russia**

The West often views contemporary Russia as an obsolete, imperialist power. The “label” of being an imperialist power usually sounds negative in contemporary Western culture and Hungarian culture as well. However, in Russian culture it is usually not negative at all. One of the meanings of imperialism for the Western people suggests that there is a strong country, the imperialist country that forces its will on peoples within the empire and also outside the imperium. It is common to associate imperialism with a lack of boundaries and expansionism as well.

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Adomanis: Russian Military Spending: Drawing Blood From A Stone, Forbes, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2015/05/19/russian-military-spending-drawing-blood-from-a-stone/> (Accessed: 27. 09. 2015.)

We find a special, sophisticated version of czarism in case of Putin's Russia. No matter whether Putin is the president and Medvedev is the head of government, or the other way around, the "real boss" is well known. The head of the „tandem" is evidently "the czar of all Russians", Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. He plays this power game because he wants to avoid Western accusations of a dictatorship, when the president has unlimited time to remain in power, until his death. Of course, everybody knows that that is what is really going on, but Putin mostly meets formal democratic requirements. To be more precise: he fails to meet all requirements, because technically the number of his possible returns as president or head of state are unlimited, since there is no legal boundary.

Russian imperialism has an important aspect. The truly superb leaders of the state and the military usually find their way to power: this is the "natural" condition of Russia. Of course, we have examples for the opposite, even for the duration of historical periods. As Russians say: "the forest recreates itself". We can quote several famous leaders, i.e. Kutuzov who even made the decision to give up Moscow (!). We can also refer to Zhukov who served at the utmost difficult war fronts with success. The former Soviet Union had several talented and successful generals. For example during World War II, however they had only one general with the qualities of Zhukov. Similarly: imperial Russia also had several talented and successful generals, but they had only one general with the qualities of Kutuzov (e.g. his generals opposed his genius decision to give up Moscow even though in that position that was the right decision etc.). It is common knowledge that Putin rose to power from below, from the unknown: but he is another good example that he found the way to power as a truly great and successful leader. The West fails to understand Putin in many cases, but lists him amongst the most influential leaders in the World. There is also a tendency to assume that Putin does not have a "politically heavy weight" opponent at all. If we analyse the political palette of contemporary Russian leaders, there is much truth in such a conclusion. At the same time, if it is true that "the forest recreates itself", then it is likely that the next truly great leader will also rise to power in Russia. That is a necessity. I cannot personally see such a successor for Putin yet, but it does not mean that he does not exist at all. It is a subsequent detail whether the new, truly great leader would rise to power right after Putin, or there would be a kind of a transition period, when Russia would lack the "true czar".

Conventional and modern Russian imperialism can be summarised as show below:<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Virág Attila: *Elgázolt szuverenitás, Politikatudományi Intézet, PhD értekezés, p. 109, [http://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/745/1/Virag\\_Atila.pdf](http://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/745/1/Virag_Atila.pdf) (Accessed: 03. 10. 2015.)*

<b>Conventional Russian imperium</b>	<b>Modern Russian imperium</b>
Unpredictably huge territory	Unpredictably huge territory
Doctrinal boundlessness	Directions for expansion are based on doctrines
Ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity	Preference of ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity based on doctrines
Universal conception	Variability of doctrines instead of universal conception
Centrum vs. imperial periphery	Imperialism vs. nation states
Unchanging quality, timelessness, lasting existence	Lasting existence of imperialism coupled with competition of changing doctrines

Source: Virágh Attila: *Elgázolt szuverenitás*, 2014

The ideological basis of contemporary Russian imperialism – Alexander Dugin  
The most significant ideologue of contemporary Russian imperialism is probably Alexander Dugin, who views himself as the Russian equivalent (opponent) of Zbigniew Brzezinski. He agrees on the basic rules of geopolitics with Brzezinski, however their goals and intentions oppose each other. Dugin believes that Russia is the “land” opposing the US that is the “sea”. These two powers pursue their goals against each other, at the expense of each other.

„Dugin in his publications [...] meets the requirements of intellectual criticism and a thorough analysis of the world as well.”<sup>33</sup> Amongst his analyses we can find the contemporary crisis in Ukraine, including the possibilities of a Russian intervention.<sup>34</sup> He believes the coup in Ukraine – when the power of former president Janukovich was overthrown – was organised in order to turn Ukraine and Russia against each other permanently. He finds that the Atlantist takeover in Kiev got a symmetric answer from Russia when Crimea was re-taken. Dugin has also analysed the layers of Russian society based the criteria patriotism, thereby their opinions concerning the crisis in Ukraine as well.

## 6. THE CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM – VALERY GERASIMOV

We can find several key components of the Gerasimov-doctrine in Russia’s interventions in Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine in the post-Soviet region.

<sup>33</sup> Horváth Róbert: *Érdemek és végzetes tévedések: Alexandr Dugin, Isteni város*, <http://www.istenivaros.hu/ro-berthorvath/dugin.html> (Accessed: 4. 10. 2015.)

<sup>34</sup> Александр Дугин: *О Новороссии и вводе войск. Геополитический анализ*, *Novorossia*, <http://novorossia.su/ru/node/3321> (Accessed: 04. 10. 2015.)

*„When the crisis in Ukraine dramatically heated up [...] I was impressed by the ability of the Russian state to mobilize so many different tools in its bid to destabilize its neighbour. It became clear very quickly that Russian politicians, journalists, purportedly nongovernmental organizations, state companies, think tanks, the military, the courts, government agencies and the Duma were all working from the same instructions for the same goals. At the time I remarked [...] that the crisis showed the tactical effectiveness of the “unitary state” Russian President Vladimir Putin has been building since 1999.”*<sup>35</sup>

General Gerasimov – the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces – provides an interesting analysis concerning the conflicts and wars of the 21st century in an article.<sup>36</sup> Before we ignore the article of general Gerasimov saying that whatever he wrote was his personal opinion that differs from the official view presented in Russian strategic security and defence policy documents, approved by the leadership of the Russian state, we need to briefly examine the relationship between the two “genres”. The official, strategic documents contain developed and clear visions, analysis, tasks, conclusions etc. presented in a “politically correct” way, approved by the state bureaucracy. Some of them are intended to be used at both national and international levels. Others are classified. The article of the present day Russian Chief of Staff can be considered a *semi-official* Russian position. As such, the author is allowed to be more honest than the open source strategic documents. If Gerasimov was not in function when he published the article, the contents would be *more unofficial* than semi-official. In reality the official and semi-official genres are a good combination that provide added value to each-other.

In the article general Gerasimov analyses several contemporary crises at the theoretic level. He paints a good picture of the “*Gerasimov-doctrine*”, *that is in reality not an exclusively Russian theory and practice. It has many parallels and similarities to Western logic and methodology affecting other countries, or regions.* We need to note that the parties involved in conflicts typically do not state their intentions, goals, and methods honestly. They rather hide their real intentions. Information warfare often takes place to hide the involvement of parties in a conflict, which parties could officially deny. As an example: Western politicians and state leadership do not normally admit, that the so called “coloured revolutions” e.g. in Ukraine were designed, organised and financed by the West in order to oust the legitimate leadership and install a pro-Western, nationalist and anti-Russian regime to weaken Russia. Or: Russian leaders talk about Ukraine as a “friendly state” and also stress that Russia is not involved

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Coalson: Top Russian General Lays Bare Putin’s Plan for Ukraine, Huffington Post, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-coalson/valery-gerasimov-putin-ukraine\\_b\\_5748480.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-coalson/valery-gerasimov-putin-ukraine_b_5748480.html) (Accessed: 02. 10. 2015.)

<sup>36</sup> Валерий Герасимов: Ценность науки в предвидении, Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий, VPK News, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632> (Accessed: 02. 10. 2015.)

in the crisis in Ukraine (!). In case it emerged that Russia destabilises Ukraine on purpose because of its anti-Russian, pro-Western and nationalist policies (as viewed by Russia), Russian leaders would deny destabilisation efforts.

The *framework* of the Gerasimov-doctrine is based on the following recognition:

*„The blurriness of the boundary between peace and war is a typical tendency in the XXI century. War is not declared any more, and if there is war already, it does not follow patterns to which we are used to. The experiences of military conflicts, amongst them those that are connected to coloured revolutions in North Africa and in the Middle East, confirm that a relatively well functioning state can become an arena of reckless military conflict, could become a target of intervention, could fall into the abyss of chaos, could develop a humanitarian catastrophe and civil war within a few months or even days.”*<sup>37</sup>

Without attempting to provide a complete picture about the Gerasimov-doctrine, some of its most significant *conceptual elements* are the following:

- Conflicts not recognised as wars can have equally devastating consequences as wars in the classic sense.
- The non-military means and the hidden application of military interventions have an increased role in achieving political and strategic goals.
- Amongst the widely used, non-military tools political, economic, informational, humanitarian interventions play the most significant role.
- The role of mobile, multi-branch military formations has increased in the common (unified) informational space.
- Advanced information technologies significantly reduced the importance of physical space.
- The concept of fronts where huge military formations fight each other is increasingly obsolete.
- The main method of modern warfare is to affect the distant enemy without tactical engagement (contact).
- The boundaries between tactical, operational and strategic levels are blurred
- The destruction of the enemy goes on simultaneously in the entire depth of the theatre of war.
- The dynamism of wars increases.
- The role of the most modern weaponry (robotised, precision guided, based on newly discovered mechanisms etc.) increases.
- The role and the significance of asymmetric warfare grows.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## 7. THE LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM IN SOME CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS

We will analyse some conflicts that can be considered contemporary. They prove that the Russian leadership can make the right decisions even in complex situations. Furthermore: these decisions are not “stereotyped” as they could be based on the Russian – economic and more importantly, military – superiority within the post-Soviet region. An example of a “stereotyped” decision would be military action that would force a “regime change” leading to the installation of a pro-Moscow leadership ruling the entire country that has been conquered. Russian imperialism has learned plenty of experiences. Russian leadership usually makes decisions based on a deep understanding of the concrete situation finding the right strategies to serve Russian interests, allowing efficient and successful solutions. We will illustrate this in the next few chapters when analysing some contemporary conflicts.

### 7.1 ESTONIA

A series of Russian cyber-attacks took place against Estonia in 2007, lasting for a few weeks. They were inspired by the Russian resentment and indignation at the replacement of the “bronze soldier”, a Soviet monument for the remembrance of World War II.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Russia got an excellent chance to test her electronic warfare capabilities against a NATO member state (!).

Estonia has proved to become an ideal target since the country is one of the most digitalised states that extensively relies on electronics in governance, banking systems, etc. The Russian cyber-attack targeted Estonia as a whole: especially the ministries, banks, private companies, political parties etc. Important aspects of the cyber-attacks were deniability and ambiguity that are typical during Russian interventions.<sup>39</sup> Experts suggest that Russia could have inflicted more damage had that been the political will.

### 7.2 GEORGIA

We could have an endless debate to determine who provoked whom first and to what extent before the Russian intervention in Georgia in August 2008. However, the war was initiated by Georgia. The EU Fact Finding Mission concluded in 2009 that the cause of the war was Georgia’s illegal attack on Chinvali, the “capital city”

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<sup>38</sup> Russia accused of unleashing cyberwar to disable Estonia, Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/17/topstories3.russia> (Accessed: 02. 10. 2015.)

<sup>39</sup> Besenyő János: Újfajta háború? Internetes hadviselés Grúziában. Sereg Szemle, December 2008, Volume 6, Issue 3, pp. 61-63.



of South-Ossetia.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Georgian artillery fired upon a Russian peacekeeping base hoping that the Russians could not retaliate against the Georgian Armed Forces since the Russian peacekeepers – being equipped only with small arms and light weapons – lacked heavy weaponry. (The Georgians were wrong, because the Russian Air Force reached them.) Since Russian peacekeepers have died and were injured as a result of the Georgian shelling, Georgia provided a classic „*casus belli*” for the Russian military intervention.

It would be interesting to know what the Georgian leadership hoped for. Especially after several warnings from the Russian deputy foreign minister by phone, prior to the breakout of the war. The Russians warned the Georgian minister responsible for reintegration that Georgia should not start a war: otherwise, Russia would definitely not stay away. The South-Ossetian “president” warned his public on TV that he had “undeniable” evidence that the Georgian invasion would take place soon. It was obvious that Russia knew about the war in advance. It is logical since major Georgian war preparations were not possible to be kept hidden from Russian intelligence due to their extensiveness.

It would be interesting to know what the Georgian leadership hoped for against the *strong*, remerged Russia of Putin, since the relatively *weak* Russia expelled Georgian troops from Abkhazia and South-Ossetia at the beginning of the 1990s. We need to note that at that time there was neither a word about Georgian aspirations to become a member of NATO, nor about a possible gas transit corridor that would bypass Russia. This gas pipeline could have been a business worth of billions of USD if it was possible to force Russia into such a competition. We can conclude that no matter what bargaining would have taken place between Russia and the West, the West would not have been in position to offer anything that would compensate Russia for letting Georgia in NATO thus making the alternative gas transit route on land, bypassing Russia safely. The Russian military intervention led to victory within days in August 2008. Sophisticated Russian imperialism proved to be successful in many ways. Russia did not bombard the Georgian Ministry of Defence, neither the infrastructure of the secret services that would become number one targets of military actions in a “normal” war. The Russians did not target civilian infrastructure and they let the Georgian Armed Forces run away. They did not occupy the entire Georgia, only the two breakaway regions: Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. The Russian troops occupied land that is considered to be part of Georgia by international law even today, restricting occupation only to areas where there was firm public support. Russia did not implement a “regime change” at all.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts, CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/2008-georgia-russia-conflict/> (Accessed: 02. 10. 2015.)

<sup>41</sup> „Regime Change”

Georgian NATO membership aspirations are effectively blocked by Russia since the aspirant country has a territorial dispute with Russia that is not possible to bring into NATO. The Russian State Duma officially acknowledged the independent statehood of the two breakaway regions unanimously (!) and Russia guaranteed their independence by military power.

A question would arise: which Georgia NATO would like to become its member. The “*small*” Georgia (without Abkhazia and South-Ossetia) or the “*big*” Georgia (based on the internationally recognised borders). If NATO takes “small” Georgia the Alliance would *de facto* acknowledge the new geopolitical realities that would go against the official positions of both NATO and the EU. According to their position they “support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within the internationally recognised borders”. A further question would arise: what would happen if Georgia – as a member of NATO – would start a “holy war” to reunite the country. In this case if they suffer a military defeat from Russia, and there is no major war between the Alliance and Russia, the whole world would conclude that the Article V mechanism of the Washington Treaty is not serious. A precedent would be made according to which Article V operations take place depending on who the enemy are. In other words: there are no Article V operations against Russia. If NATO intervened, Russia and the Alliance would inflict enormous damage on each other and then they would most likely use nuclear weapons. This is clearly in nobody’s interest.

Another possibility is that NATO might take “big” Georgia into the Alliance together with the breakaway regions and the Russian Armed Forces stationed there to guarantee their independent statehood. This is absurd. Furthermore, it would not resolve the possibility of an armed conflict with Russia that was described above.

We come to a general conclusion that sophisticated Russian imperialism successfully prevents Georgian NATO membership without overstressing Russian occupied territories. It proves the “professional” nature of Russian foreign policy. As a contrast Georgian foreign policy can be considered “dilettante”, at least regarding the war with Russia.

### 7.3 UKRAINE

Very similar dilemmas arise in the case of the Ukrainian crisis where Ukraine is engaged in territorial disputes with Russia.

According to the official Russian position Russia is not part of the Ukrainian crisis. Putin once said in a TV interview that “there is not a single Russian military advisor in Ukraine”. In reality, without Russian political, economic and last but not least military intervention neither the “self-determination” of Crimea unacknowledged by international law, nor the *de facto* independent

statehood of breakaway regions in Eastern Ukraine could have been realised. Several elements of sophisticated Russian imperialist policies can be noted. When Russia took Crimea back and provided substantial support for the breakaway regions in Eastern Ukraine she generated territorial disputes with Ukraine. The Russian intervention in Crimea when Russian troops operated without badges and took all the Ukrainian military installations without a single shot (!) can truly be considered a masterpiece. Russia must have had precise operations plans for the intervention in Crimea for years, but these plans are secret, therefore it would be difficult to prove their existence. Russia had those plans and executed them in a historical moment when it was needed, with unusual success. According to Moscow's interpretation Russia provided historical justice when she took Crimea back – because it is Russian land. Russia also corrected the historic mistake of Khrushchev, who donated Crimea to Ukraine. Ukraine was punished for anti-Russian, pro-Western and nationalist policies. Russia prevented Ukraine from withdrawing from the Fleet Agreement and made it impossible for NATO warships to harbour in Sevastopol. If the Alliance's naval presence ever becomes a reality – it would be very difficult for the Russians to “smoke NATO out”.

The Russian military intervention in Crimea took place without Russian soldiers wearing badges, however the rest of Russian equipment remained exactly the same as what Russia has in service. With the absence of badges and other means of identification the presence of uniquely Russian pieces of equipment made Russian intervention both obvious and still, deniable. The Russians had to keep all equipment in place because they had to make it clear for the Ukrainian Armed Forces that they were not facing “scrappy armed gangs”, but mostly Russian Special Forces against whom the Ukrainians do not stand a chance. This is exactly why the Ukrainians gave up their military installations without firing a single shot.

Russian soldiers in Eastern Ukraine are equipped differently. They wear Ukrainian uniforms that were taken as trophies, reproduced in order to look like Ukrainian uniforms, or purchased in hunter shops etc. Russian soldiers have false documentation identifying them as Ukrainian residents and their weaponry are also carefully selected to seem possibly Russian made, but Ukrainian. The separatists usually have cover stories as an explanation for how they got the Ukrainian weaponry (as trophies, or by occupying Ukrainian military repair bases etc.) The Russian lead separatist even simulated that they were on the brink of losing a war when they gave up Slovyansk. Besides these Russia destabilises Kiev with a wide range of methods mentioned in the Gerasimov-doctrine.

Such practices allow Russia deniability and ambiguity, meanwhile they allow the implementation of a wide range of actions in the fields of foreign, economic and security policy.

## 7.4 SYRIA

During our previous examples we analysed some conflicts within the post-Soviet space, or as the Russians call it, the “close-abroad”. Some analysts categorise Russia as a “regional middle power”, based on nuclear weapons possessed by Russia (these analysts do not even want to take into consideration the Russian conventional weapons and capabilities that they label as “outdated”). The same analysts regularly attempt to narrow Russian economic output to income from exporting fossil fuels. Putin’s intervention in Syria against the will of Western powers – primarily the United States – proves that Russia is both capable and ready to enforce her national interests with military power, not only in the post-Soviet “close-abroad” but in other regions of the world far away from Russia.<sup>42</sup>

## 7.5 ARCTIC

Climate change has created a new reality by the increasing degree of ice melting in the Arctic, which allows exploitation of fossil energy sources where it was not possible before. It also allows utilisation of new transportation routes that were previously blocked by thick ice. Russia entered the game between great powers when she officially claimed territories in the Arctic. In this case, the centre of the disputes is the exact location of the continental shelf that forms a basis for claims of territorial waters. Russia supports her national interest by the increasing militarisation of northern Russian territories.

## 8. RUSSIAN MILITARY AND MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION WITH SEVERAL COUNTRIES ALL OVER THE WORLD

Not as an exclusive list, we could mention the Russian military industrial cooperation outside the post-Soviet region with China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The importance of the countries listed in the contemporary world order and the fact that Russia is number two in the global list of arm exports<sup>43</sup>, allow us to come to the conclusion that we have to take into account the great power status of Russia – as well as Russian imperialism – as a global player.

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<sup>42</sup> Syria is essentially important for Russia not only because of strategic, but also due to national security reasons. Since many Russians and citizens from post-Soviet countries (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ossetia, Turkmenistan etc.) are Islamist radicals fighting on the side of ISIS. Putin has learned from the overly permissive European migrant policies – which allowed the entrance of several Islamists with terrorist background to Europe. Putin does not want to let them travel to Russia, or the Eurasian Union and wants to eradicate them in Syria. - Besenyő János: Not the invention of ISIS: Terrorists among immigrants, *Journal of Security and Sustainability Issues*, (2015) Volume 5, Issue 1: 5–20.

<sup>43</sup> US and Russia remain world’s biggest arms exporters – study, *Russia Today*, <http://www.rt.com/business/241005-russia-second-arms-exporter/> (Accessed: 03. 10. 2015.)

## 9. THE RANKING OF THE RUSSIAN CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN THE WORLD

Russian military capabilities are considered to be the second most powerful after the US. The ranking based on the analysis of Global Firepower is particularly interesting since it does not take into consideration Russian nuclear military capabilities (and nuclear military capabilities of any other states) at all “*as that would defeat the purpose of the comparison*”.<sup>44</sup> We need to note that Russian nuclear military capabilities are often taken into account as the only source of *Russia* being a great power, at least in military terms. The policy of Global Firepower analysis “*is based strictly on each nation’s potential conventional war-making capabilities*”<sup>45</sup> Since Russian conventional military capabilities are the second most powerful in the world (not even mentioning the nuclear military capabilities) it is difficult to argue that Russia is only a medium power. The quoted examples prove that Russia is capable and ready to confront great powers, including the US itself that can be considered as the lone superpower. Such confrontations with limited objectives take place not only in the post-Soviet space but globally as well. This means that Russia acts a great power that goes beyond regional interests in the post-Soviet “close abroad”. Russian imperialism is therefore present at great power level with limited global ambitions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Western civilisation needs to take into account the imperialism of re-emerging Russia in all spheres of contact. Russian imperialism is both based on long tradition and successful.

The lack of Western understanding of Russian mentality has deep historic routes. Bridging different mentalities requires more empathy, openness and readiness for compromises from both sides.

Most of the problems in the world cannot be resolved without or against Russia that is a member of the UN Security Council.

Russia acts as a great power with imperial ambitions and regained self-confidence. Russian imperialism utilises her capabilities with increasing efficiency.

Any attempts to force Russia into Western subordination are fundamentally mistaken Western policies. Neither Russian mentality, nor historic traditions or Russia’s place amongst the great powers in the world support that. Based

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<sup>44</sup> „The: GFP top 10”, Global Firepower, <http://www.globalfirepower.com/> (Accessed: 02. 10. 2015.)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.

on the qualities of the Russian leadership under Putin we have no reason to assume that Russia will give up the foundations of her form of existence and become subordinated to the will of the Western world.

If the Western world would somehow achieve subordinating Russia that could only be done by a serious destabilisation of the country as we know today with unforeseen consequences. It would lead to several disastrous consequences not only for Russia, but for the Western world as well.

The Western – primarily US – efforts to destabilise Russia could potentially be seemingly successful, though it contradicts the fundamental interests of the world, especially Europe. Genuine European interests require cooperation with Russia.

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