RUSSIA’S DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE AND HERSELF: TOWARDS NEW SPATIAL IMAGERY

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Introduction

This presentation conceptually proceeds from the idea of the self-reflexive nature of outward-oriented discourses. Through valuing others, we usually tend to implicitly evaluate ourselves. The way one assesses his/her neighbours and interlocutors is indicative of his/her own worldviews and political standpoints.

In this epistemic context, one may start with the stipulation that Russia tends to conceptually define her identity through relating herself – in one way or another - with Europe. Yet paradoxically, in the Russian discourse, Europe is, by and large, a vague and ambiguous entity with uncertain and unspecified features, a kind of collection of spaces with neither a clearly identifiable core/center nor stable borders – a perfect example of an “empty signifier” constituting a playground for meaning-making. As all “empty signifiers”, what we call Europe “can contain everything; within a certain transferential illusion, it is supposed that anything can be inscribed into it. The other side of semiotic emptiness is fantasmatic fullness”1.

Indeed, Europe may be called a territory “lacking its own subjectivity”2 and strongly associated with a multiplicity of perspectives and trajectories3, with a peculiar mix of different vectors and moves inherently open for rethinking and susceptible to multiple redefinitions. The future of the EU, the institutionalized manifestation of the European integration, is questioned by some of the authoritative Russian foreign policy experts4.

The question looming large at this point is how one can venture to identify her/his country – either by contrast or by association - vis-à-vis such an entity in a permanent state of flux, if not decay? The answer to this question constitutes the core hypothesis of this paper, which could be formulated in hermeneutic categories. More specifically, the issue under consideration might be approached from the perspective of the “hermeneutic circle”, a concept presuming that “the interpretation of a given ‘web of meaning'/social practice can never be tested against an objective standard. Rather, the testing and refinement of particular interpretations is always done on terms of other interpretations”5. To extrapolate this approach to the sphere of the European discourse in Russia, one may come up with the following supposition: since Europe lacks an undisputable set of characteristics shared by the bulk of the opinion makers, Russia needs, first, to explain what Europe is, and then – secondly - to define and reposition herself vis-à-vis this reinvented image. Put it differently, Russia uses the alleged emptiness of Europe as a signifier for filling it with a variety of discourses and playing with them afterwards.

1 Stavrakakis 1999, p.79.
2 Kholmogorov 2002.
5 Neufeld 1995, p.81.
What stems from this preliminary observation is that discourses are, on the one hand, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”⁶. Iver Neumann, for example, builds his concept of identity formation on a premise that the “others”

“about whom the self tells stories and who tells stories about the self are … a constitutive part of story telling… Confirmation of stories of self cannot be given by just anybody, but only by those others whom the self recognizes and respects as being of a kind with itself. The others in this set are referred to as circles of recognition”⁷.

On the other hand, one can argue, discourses form the “speaking subjects” themselves. This approach, being in line with some arguments developed by Foucault, Bakhtin and Lacan, has been already applied to the study of European identity by a number of authors. For instance, Pertti Joenniemi ascertains that the U.S. discursive division of Europe into an “old” and a “new” segment is basically an effort “of measuring itself” and “a re-definition of the American self”⁸.

The subject of this paper – the discursive construction of Europe in Russia - is a multi-faced process that develops in different dimensions. Paradoxically, the least turbid is the articulation of Europe in what could be called “public narratives”, i.e. stories attached to cultural milieu and grounded in mass conscience. Thus, for ordinary Russians, the prefix “Euro” undeniably means something of a better quality, like proverbial “Evroremont” (Euro-repairs). There is an endless row of neologisms synonymous of top quality, like “Euro-windows”, “Euro-engines”, “Euro-plugs”, “Euro-wallpapers”, “Euro-style” and “Euro-standard” (to be found literally everywhere, from hairdressers saloons to – ironically - toilet paper).

Not less accentuated – and equally intuitive - is a pro-European drive visible (and laudable) in the Russian variety culture. In the pop music, different artistic representations of Europe top all other geographic images. Among the most recent Russian hit leaders were songs like “London – Paris” and some others with clearly – and positively - pronounced European connotations. “The London rain”, “train Zurich – Geneva”, “the Tower bridge”, “dreams about Majorca”, “walking through Paris”, “on the way to Amsterdam”, “the plane won’t take me to Paris” – these are just a few of the most popular and widely known musical examples of representations of Europe in the Russian scene, along with those featuring Baden-Baden, Nice – Cannes, Riga - Moscow and other cities and their couples. What is interesting is that the United States, another country symbolizing – though in a different way - the West for Russians, is featured, first, much more rarely and, secondly, in predominantly negative modalities (songs with titles like “Good-bye, America” or “America that took you away from me” are evidently self-explaining).

The discursive construction of Europe in the political and academic narratives appears to be more problematic. Even the most liberal authors treat the EU policies towards Russia as a “systemic challenge” aimed at “dislodging Russia via arbitrary inclusion of its regions into trans-national regions, as well as transportation and information flows that are to be subordinated to foreign countries”⁹. Not surprisingly, it is widely believed that

“the state entity with its centers located in Strasbourg and Brussels is not a hotbed for those living in Kiev or Moscow, even if they think of themselves as Europeans… In the Euro-East, Russia is performing as an initiator of new forms of the European unity, and definitely is not a hindrance to it. Ultimately, Russia is in possession of a concept of Europe of her own, a wider one in comparison to what Brussels can offer. This gives us the right to pedantically object to the restrictions advocated by Brussels”¹⁰.

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⁶ Foucault 1972.
This intricacy is, according to the concept framing this paper, grounded in the politically accentuated idea of Russia’s alleged exceptionality, which the above mentioned cultural representations seem to ignore if not efface. Exceptionality elevated to the level of political doctrine exerts powerful influence on the Russian political discourse. References to Russia’s specificity have become a sort of political ritual in the Moscow foreign policy circles, which nevertheless keeps open at least two of the most important questions: what kind of exceptionality Russia is referring to, and what stems from it in practical terms?

The hypothesis which is constitutive for the concept of this paper could be formulated as follows: Russian version of exceptionality is a double-faced phenomenon and comes in two versions. On the one hand, it could be easily (re)interpreted as a form of either distancing or exclusion. Indeed, if Russia herself repeatedly claims that she doesn’t fit in some of the most important mechanisms of cooperation with the EU, she has then to be kept away from the integration. On the other hand, exceptionality could signal a need for special, individually tailored solutions based upon non-standard decisions, those stretching beyond the routine logic of governance.

Generally speaking, Russia is simultaneously longing for an exceptional status in her relations with the EU and, at the same time, does not know how exactly she has to turn it into her advantage. Therefore, exceptionality is both a promise and a challenge, a possible asset and a probable disadvantage. This situation of inherent uncertainty and ambiguity, in fact, constitutes a framework for discursive hegemony which could be understood as a process of carrying “out a filling function”\textsuperscript{11}, i.e. a process of saturation of “empty signifiers” with contextual meanings.

In this paper, I am intended to give an overview of Russian discourses focused on Europe which, on a closer scrutiny, turn out to disclose some of the most important means of telling a story of Russia’s self-assertion in the world. I structure my analysis along the three lines that correspond to three different pathways of looking at Europe from the Russian perspective. In the final part of this study, I will try to compare these three perspectives with each other and draw some conclusions pertinent to Russia’s articulations of herself in a wider European context.

1. **A EUROPE OF COLORS**

The first – and the least obvious - discursive frame that might be useful for understanding Russia’s perceptions of both Europe and Russia’s place in Europe is based on a vocabulary of colored metaphors. They usually are embedded in border-making associations. This is the case of “red lines”, an expression that either delineates the spheres beyond which the compromises between the two parties (Russia and the EU) are impossible\textsuperscript{12}, or delimits the geographic zones of influence (it was said, for instance, that by accepting the three Baltic states into NATO, the Alliance would “cross the red line” established by Russia in her attempts to draw a sphere of its imagined preponderance in Europe).

Some border-drawing connotations are discernible in a metaphor of “gray zone”, which is believed to be located somewhere between the “white” (which, in a figurative sense, equates with the Western democracy) and the “black” (an area of despotism and all kind of illegal activities\textsuperscript{13}). This vision might be interpreted as imposed by Europe, yet presumably, the Russian cultural traditions not only pinpoint but also legitimize similar articulations. For example, as Mikhail Ilyin, a Russian political philosopher, claims, white color was originally meant to connote with the closeness to Europe, as exemplified by “White Russia” (Belarus)\textsuperscript{14}. An opposite signifier is embedded in the “black hole” metaphor to be interpreted as reflecting something

\textsuperscript{11} Smith 1998, p.188.
\textsuperscript{12} Communication from the … 2004.
\textsuperscript{13} Karabeshkin and Wellmann 2004, p.7.
\textsuperscript{14} Ilyin 2003.
irrational, wasteful and incompatible with the Western mentality. Usually, the “black” and “gray” colors are verbally utilized for underlying and singling out some negative features of social reality, most likely related to, correspondingly, stigmatization and uncertainty.

To some extent, this wording could be presented as a spring-off of the “cosmos - chaos” dichotomy that may be used to differentiate between “insiders” and “outsiders” of the European integration. “Cosmos” may symbolize ordering and institutionalization developed through concentric expansion, while “chaos” may be paralleled with “an amorphous Eurasian landmass”.

This is at this point that the idea of “grayness” might be interpreted in terms used, in particular, by an Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (and, to a significant extent, inspired by Schmittian traditions). According to Agamben, “chaos must be included in the juridical order through the creation of a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, chaos and normal situation”… This is “a zone that is excluded from law and which takes the shape of a ‘free and juridically empty space’ in which the sovereign power no longer knows the limits fixed by the nomos of the territorial order”.

Presumably, two readings of this alleged “empty space” are possible. The first one is of distinctively negative semantic connotations. In this interpretation, this is uncertainty that is taken as the key signifier of the “gray zone” vocabulary. This approach looks quite consonant with that one tried by some European authors who treat a “gray zone” as one consisted of buffer states, or as an “interim space saturated with crisis and doubts”.

At this juncture some parallels with the “gray” (“shadow”) economy metaphor could be traced (a good example could be the case of the Kaliningrad oblast). The same goes for black-colored metaphors which seem to admit a number of negative connotations they are inscribed in. For example, it may be assumed that “by singling out the Baltic states as the black sheep of the European family, Russia could establish herself as a ‘normal’ European nation”.

“Gray zone”, thus, has to be located “in-between” the core powers in the worst sense of this word, being neither accepted nor denied by the EU. This is because of this indeterminacy and a weak articulation of interests that “gray zones” are perceived as potential sources of conflict. For instance, a Russian diplomat has attributed the “gray zone” metaphor to the Baltic countries due to their non-participation in the Treaty on Conventional Arms in Europe.

Yet Russia may have at her disposal a different set of interpretative tools allowing for taking some advantage of colors-as-metaphors. The gray zone could be understood in a much more positive sense, as being synonymous with experimentation, piloting, and innovations. There is some ground to believe that Russia is used to feel at home with the “gray zone” status and use it as a space open to experimentations and a variety of innovative moves. Thus, for Dmitry Zamiatin, a Russian cultural geographer,

“Enlightenment was always an external trend for Russia, we always found ourselves in a gray area. This voluntary grayness, nevertheless, represents freedom in its original comprehension, as an ability to accept the outside sources of light”.

This is at this point that the “gray zone” metaphor could be related to a theory of marginality developed, in particular, by Noel Parker. Zamiatin’s reading of “gray zone” is, by and large, compatible with Parker’s conceptualization of margins as rather autonomous spaces.
able to develop the strategies of their own, as well as with Karl Schlogel’s assumption that this is in the “gray zones” that the history usually finds its driving impulses. Margins, as well as “gray zones”, usually have a room to maneuver and a meaningful degree of freedom in exploiting their peculiar location. A marginal territory, pretty much the same way as a “gray zone”, may enjoy greater freedom because of the mere possibility that it might exist outside the center’s sphere of influence.

2. A EUROPE OF SPACES AND DIMENSIONS

The second conceptualization of Russia’s perception of Europe started with the appearance of a phenomenon known as dimensionalism. However, the notion of dimensions, semantically, is neither a self-sufficient nor a self-explanatory one, and requires inclusion into a wider set of discursive dispositions. Dimension as a concept seems to be a natural part of a discourse molded in spatial terms. Speaking about dimensions, we inevitably enter an area of spatial representations, which, from their part, need a “dimensionalist” vocabulary to fix the nodal points that structure the spatial discourse.

Chronologically speaking, the idea of dimensionalism, especially in its “Nordic” version, preceded the ideas of the EU – Russia “common spaces”. The very fact that Russia is a country which is directly plugged into both the Northern and – still hypothetical – Eastern Dimensions (ND and ED, correspondingly) of the EU, opened new discursive tracks for repositioning herself in a changing system of “geometries of regionalism”.

The Russian attitudes towards the EU-inspired “policy of dimensions” seem to be in flux. On the one hand, the Finnish and the Polish initiatives were met in Moscow with an interest and reasonable understanding. Yet on the other hand, many in Russia remain skeptical about the practical implications of both “dimensions”. Russia seems to follow a rather critical logic of those commentators who are of the opinion that there is a certain degree of exclusion in both the ND and the ED. Thus, it is noted that “in the aftermath of the 2004 EU enlargement, the ND is more and more confined to blocking the non-military security threats of which Russia is believed to be the main source, and to strengthening the EU external borders”. Yet Russia feels even unhappier to see that Poland’s foreign policy departs from the assumption that the main stimuli for all ex-socialist countries bordering on Russia is to “ultimately separate them from the post-Soviet space”.

Therefore, “the East” – as compared with “the North” – seems to be simultaneously a more traditional and a more conflictual signifier, potentially capable of restoring the East – West divide, though in a different format. It seems, hence, difficult for Russia to recognize the role of Poland as an “intermediary” in communications between Moscow and Brussels (Finland with its ND had no such explicitly articulated ambitions).

The employment of the terminology of “spaces” opens a number of other interesting insights. There is no single tradition of using the “spatial” glossary in the academic discourse. It is definitely tempting to equate “space” with something open, de-bordered, indefinite, uncontested and indivisible. In this context, spatiality could be contrasted with territoriality and a variety of its derivatives (like “zones”, “areas” and “spheres”) that are basically interest-driven and territorially-based conceptions (for example, “spheres of influence”). Therefore, spatiality and territoriality, as two concepts, may be seen as opposing and contrasting each other: space appears to be a symbol of universality, while territory is a collection of regional singularities.

Yet in the meantime, these two notions may at certain point converge and overlap, forming – paradoxically – a single mode of conceptualization. For example, Gilles Deleuze used to speak about “spaces of isolation” and “closed spaces”, those split by sectors, while some of

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the geopolitical thinkers interpreted space as a “framework of expansion”. Spatiality, being a part of post-structuralist discourse, presupposes a kind of “topological” thinking which hinges on such categories as ruptures, lines, surfaces, dimensions, etc. It is at this point that the space-centric discourse generates the necessity of “road maps” as symbols of this “topological” approach.

Given the variety of semantic fillings, one may admit that space has to be viewed as another “empty signifier”, permanently open for (re)interpretations and infusions of new meanings. Semantically, spaces are just a mere vague substitute for something common and shared, a catchword borrowed from academic milieu and implanted in a highly politicized soil. In this sense, the way spaces are understood in the sphere of the EU – Russia relations, appears – though paradoxically – to be rather close to a Foucauldian reading of space as a communicative, mental and semantic construct, a field where discourses are being formed and meanings are being produced. Spaces could be understood as laboratories that accumulate and spread ideas expressed as discursive constellations, identify points of incompatibility and equivalence of their elements.

The specificity of the deploying of the “spatial” terminology within the EU – Russia context stems from the fact that each of the four common spaces is, in a way, an inter-subjective construct. To put it differently, all of them are bi-centric (if not bicephalous) spaces, instituted by both Russia and the EU. Therefore, the whole problematic of spaces has to be dealt with as a pattern of inter-subjective relations based upon a formulae nicely described by Slavoj Zizek as “include me out”29. In terms of Giorgio Agamben, the exceptional nature of the Four Spaces could be described as “inclusive exclusion” which serves “to include what is excluded”. In other words, “what cannot be included in any way is included in the form of the exception”30. This is exactly what the whole conception of the Four Freedoms is about. It certainly has much to do with the “ordering of space that is, according to Schmitt, constitutive of the sovereign nomos” in the form of “taking of the outside”, namely Russia.

At any rate, the Four Spaces, being a compromise achieved in the aftermath of Russia’s refusal to join the European Neighborhood Policy, may be tackled through the prism of the category of exception. Bilateralism in this sense is a form of exceptionalism pointing to a privileged status of Russia and individual, specific, if not unique, arrangements standing apart from the others31.

However, it seems unlikely that Russia feels absolutely happy about reaching this kind of compromise based on her exceptionality. Intuitively, Russia anticipates that the “New Neighborhood” idiom might in the nearest future efface the semantics of “Near Abroad”. Yet more important sources of Russian criticism are grounded in disagreements with the basic ideas of the Four Freedoms. Perhaps, the most intransigent position was taken by the Moscow-based Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP) which lambasted the Four Freedoms for unilateral concessions from the Russian side, lack of legal precision, arbitrary interpretation of key terms used in the road maps, and procedural opaqueness. In SVOP’s opinion, Four Freedoms are merely an intermediary stage in the EU – Russia relationship and reflect the lack of long-term vision in both Moscow and Brussels32. It appears that the philosophy of the four spaces, understood as a “package deal”, may be countered in the future by a philosophy of “concrete, specific projects” advocated, in particular, by a task force led by Sergey Karaganov.

To a certain degree, the exceptionalism embedded in the Four Freedom scheme is due to the fact that the whole idea of the Four Spaces was initiated by France and Germany and, therefore, may be viewed as an “Old Europe” project33. The “new European’ nations (including the Visegrad4 and the Baltic states) are expected to “strengthen the political demands of the

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29 Zizek 1999, p.108.
31 Joenniemi 2005.
32 Rossiya i Evropa...
Union within the four common spaces”34, by now almost absent in the communications between Moscow, on the one hand, and Berlin and Paris, on the other. This opposition between the two patterns of Europe (the “old” and the “new” ones) brings us closer to the third conceptualization to be analyzed further.

3. DICHOTOMIES OF A NORMATIVE EUROPE

The third frame of reference to characterize Russia’s attitudes to Europe is grounded in a set of normative discursive distinctions. The most important among them is, presumably, the “false” vs. “true” Europe binary opposition that contains a number of other related “pictures of Europe”. The “False – True Europe” dichotomy plays a special role in a normative type of the Russian discourse because it consists, to a certain extent, of the nodal points (i.e. “the privileged discursive points … of reference, signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain”35) in relation to other adjacent conceptualizations (“traditional Europe vs. post-Europe” and “Old vs. New Europe”). Due to that, this dichotomy turns into a discursive frame allowing Russia to give her own marks and assessments to other European nations thus stressing the Russian subjectivity in the European affairs. By discursively molding a “true Europe”, Russia, in the meantime, strives to overcome and displace her own fears of being isolated from the European culture and values36.

«False Europe», as understood by some of Russian intellectuals, includes countries with strong anti-Russian sentiments and those having lost the «genuine European values», while the «true Europe» is arguably populated by friendly to Russia nations adhered to what Russia considers as “the original spirit of Europe”. In the process of reinventing “the true Europe”, the “real relics of antiquity” (exemplified in the heritage of prominent European intellectuals) are respectfully valorized and cherished37.

Two brief points have to be made at this juncture. Firstly, what is telling is a logical nexus between the two different parameters identifiable in the Russian vision of the “true – false” dichotomy: presumably, this is the evaporation of the national spirit that leads some of the European countries to Russia’s “black list”. In other words, some of the nations could be placed in a “false” category exactly because they have deviated from what Russia treats as the European cultural mainstream.

Secondly, the gist of this binary conception might be traced back to the notion of alleged “Russian Europe”, historically exemplified by Novgorod’s and Pskov’s inclusion into the Hansa trade network and these cities’ commitment to a set of democratic procedures38. Put it differently, through articulating the idea of “true Europe”, Russia tries not only to exhibit her own European identity but also to identify her own “circle of friends”.

One possible type of reaction to the “false – true” distinction within Europe is an accentuation of the European weakness, a denial of Europe's attraction to Russia and presenting the EU as an exhausted entity lacking political will and an identity of its own39. Some of the Russian analysts jump to overgeneralizations, asserting that “Europe is dying… It is a purely virtual notion, a gigantic dead museum… The degeneration of the European idea is shocking”40. “Europe is an image of the past century, it is a remembrance… Europe is reminiscent of an aged hypocrite and a coquette which conceals the smell of putrefaction”41.

As a gesture of symbolic retaliation, the theme of possible dismantling of the EU is not rarely debated among Russian experts:

35 Stavrakakis 1999, p.79.
37 Rossiya kak Novaya Evropa…
40 Nifontov 2002.
41 Remizov 2001b.
“Ultimately it is in Russia’s interest to let the ambitious though rather elementary in its intrinsic foundations (in comparison to Japan and the USA) European monster get trapped in unsolvable conflicts across Russia’s periphery. As a compensation for temporary victims in Georgia and Moldova, Russia has to reward herself in Lithuania and Poland”42.

The discourse focusing on an alleged degeneration of Europe leads to a rather interesting twist in the reasoning of some of the Russian thinkers who conclude that the genuine “European project” could be implemented by Russia herself43. The rhetoric of this sort has reached its peak in Dmitry Rogozin’s proclamation of Russia as being a “real Europe”, free of homosexuals, punk culture and other detested by Russian conservatives elements of today’s European lifestyle. This is at this point that the othering of Europe frames and conditions the discursive construction of Russia herself. “Russia’s relations with the current Europe are not geographic but temporal” in the sense that Russia is imagined as a “real” Europe, a heritor of the century-long European culture. This type of discourse, almost unknown beyond Russia, not only makes Europe a poorly self-articulated entity with weak or even non-existent political will, but concomitantly questions the strategy of Russia’s integration with Europe44.

The “false - true Europe” concept, as I have noted earlier, could be viewed as a discursive container of some other binary oppositions. One of them seems to be a contradistinction between “traditional Europe” and “post-Europe”. In the interpretation of some of the Russian scholars, what is considered to be a “post-Europe” embodies the growing self-denial of the national interests and identities, a tendency dating back to the end of the Second World War and the American military preponderance all across Western Europe which, in the interpretation of some of the Russian thinkers, is a “late”, or “former” Europe45. As an authoritative political analyst Sergey Karaganov puts it, “Russia hardly needs to give up her longing for traditional European values for the post-European ones”46. Russia, then, seems to denote what Europe itself is proud of – both the refusal of national egos and valorization of supranational integration.

Russia’s lack of chances to get accepted into the EU, on the one hand, and fears of finding herself at the European outskirts, on the other, almost inevitably push Russian discourse into the realm of contrasting the EU as a supra-/post-national entity with Russia as a nation state. Being a nation state spells, in Russian understanding, a greater ability to autonomously act in the international arena.

Another pathway of conceptualizing Russia’s European discourse is through the “Old - New” debate. Of course, there is a group of Russian opinion- and policymakers who are distrustful to France and Germany due to their alleged ambitions to monopolize the European identity. Yet an opposite viewpoint seems to dominate, that one eager to shoulder responsibility for degenerating relations with the EU to Russia’s neighbours (“junior Europeans”) that try to impose their policies/visions upon “senior Europeans” in order to worsen the EU – Russia relationship47.

In the Russian media, Poland is presented as a country striving to demise the current elites in Ukraine and Belarus, to hinder the EU – Russia rapprochement, and to play the role of a peace-keeper in the CIS48. Some of the Russian experts relegate to Poland the responsibility for the emergence of new dividing lines between the West and the East49. In Filip Kazin’s reasoning, «the Poles … are prone to strictly fix the 'weight categories' and put one of players (Russia. – A.M.) beyond the competition, while the EU bureaucracy wants to place everybody in the same

42 Pereslegin 2004.
43 Chto takoe Evropa (What is Europe), http://udod.traditio.ru/euro.htm
44 Remizov 2001a.
45 Rossiya kak Novaya Evropa…
46 Karaganov 2004a.
stadium, have a training exercise and see what comes out of it»50. There exists a wide spread feeling that Poland is reluctant to accept the common «rules of the game» offered by the EU to all its adjacent countries and is eager to distinguish Ukraine (and potentially Moldova and Belarus) from all eastern neighbors51.

Polish commentators partly confirm these Russian fears by suggesting that relations with Moscow should not dominate the EU foreign policy agenda and ought to develop in direct dependence upon Russia’s approximation of its political and legal norms with that ones of the EU. Polish experts seem to be selective in offering partnership arrangements to the eastern countries. Some of authors in Warsaw even try to make the procedure of “granting the EU neighbor state” status dependent upon a list of normative criteria52. In the meantime, Russia seems to be willing to explore the vulnerability of Poland presuming that “almost nobody would take seriously a country that, on the one hand, has pretensions for a leading role in designing and coordinating the eastern policy of the EU, and on the other hand, proves incapable to maintain normal relations with the main country”53 of the region to the east of the EU.

Within this discursive stream, Russian commentators make efforts to deploy the complexities of Russia’s relations with the “New European” countries in, at least, two wider contexts. The first one is related to the EU which is expected, in Russian reasoning, to bear responsibility for the behaviour of its newcomers. In its statement of October 22, 2004 the State Duma has declared that in the aftermath of Latvia’s and Estonia’s accession to the EU, these two countries have reinforced their anti-Russian attitudes through promulgating a number of initiatives aimed at laying material and political claims to Russia, as well as reconsidering the outcomes of the Second World War (meaning by that an alleged tendency of rehabilitation of the Nazi combatants)54. Even more eloquent was Sergey Yastrzhembskii, President Putin’s aide on European affairs, who accused the EU newcomers in exposing political radicalism and “fairly primitive Russophobia”. These countries, in his assessment, are trying to actively “complicate the dialogue between Russia and the EU”, which appears to contradict the interests of the EU “old residents”55.

The second context has to deal with the United States, since the new EU members are gloatingly depicted by some of the Russian commentators as “America’s fifth column in Europe”56. “Congratulate Adamkus and then America” 57, - this is how some of the Russian policy commentators assessed the results of 2004 presidential election in Lithuania. This argument seems to be meant for both German and French consideration.

All in all, a significant part of Russia’s elites tends to suspect «New Europe»’s countries of undermining the Russian positions58, which resonates quite well with the opinions of some of the European policy analysis that “three Baltic republics and Poland will definitely turn into a complicating factor in the EU-Russia relations. Nevertheless, the political elites of France and Germany willing to keep working with Russia won’t allow the small countries to significantly spoil the work done before»59. In Putin’s vision, it is Chirac and Schroeder who could bring Russia closer to Europe, “particularly if they would agree to avoid unpleasant topics” like Chechnya, or the democratic deficit in Belarus60.

This way of reasoning is well complemented by voices assuming that the Russian-German alliance is a key factor of all-European stability. In particular, Alexander Dugin treats the French-German Europe as a historical chance for Russia to provide its security: “we have no
right to miss this opportunity and plug into this process at any conditions". In his reasoning, Russia is to offer herself as a logical extension of Paris – Berlin alliance to the east. “It is in this sense that the Russian patriots can proclaim: To Europe!"61. In this context, “the Old Europe” could be articulated as – and paralleled with - “the main Europe” (Mark Urnov’s enunciation62), or “an old good Europe”63, preserving its cultural roots and resisting to the America-led globalization.

Finally, the “True – False Europe” couple can be viewed through a different but conceptually rather promising frame grounded in a Lacanian vocabulary. There is some potential for (re)interpreting the discursive tug-of-war between the “True Europe” and “False Europe” as a particular case of the wider opposition between the Real, on the one hand, and the Symbolic, on the other. To uncover the hidden meaning of this peculiar opposition, let me refer to Slavoj Zizek whose interpretation of the Real seems to be rather compatible with the conception of the “True Europe”. The Real is “the starting point, the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolization”, claims Zizek and then goes on: the Real “precedes the symbolic order and is subsequently structured by it”64. Having extrapolated this broad methodological observation to the field of our interest in this paper, one can (re)interpret it in a sense that the process of symbolization has to start with what is considered as true, genuine, real in a given system of thought. More specifically, this is the “True Europe” which can and has to be symbolized, and for this symbolization it needs a contrast, an opposite vision of Europe.

Coming back to Zizek, the symbolic relation is “differential: the identity of each of the moments consists in its difference to the opposite moment. A given element does not fill in the lack in the other, it is not complementary to the other but, on the contrary, takes the place of the lack in the other, embodies what is lacking in the other: its positive presence is nothing but an objectification of a lack in its opposite elements. The opposites, the poles of the symbolic relation, each in a way returns its own lack”65. On a different occasion he claims that “the Symbolic emerges from the very imaginary mirroring: from its doubling, by means of which … the real image is substituted by a virtual one… Within the Imaginary itself, there is always a point of double reflection at which the Imaginary is, so to speak, hooked on the Symbolic”66. This is exactly through this theoretical background that one may tackle the collision between the “True Europe” (as an incarnation of the Real in the mentality of the Russian foreign policy elites) and the “False Europe” (as a product of its negative symbolization).

An interesting move here is that this inevitable and constitutive symbolization of the Real turns it in “a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order – it is a lack around which the symbolic order is structured… The Real is … a product, a leftover of symbolization… the void, the emptiness created, encircled by the symbolic structure”67. In a radical version, the Real is “an entity which does not exist but has nevertheless a series of properties… If we get too near it, it loses its sublime features and becomes an ordinary vulgar object – it can persist only in an interspace, in an intermediate state, viewed from a certain perspective, half-seen. If we want to see it is the light of day, it changes into an everyday object, it dissipates itself, precisely because in itself it is nothing at all”68.

Isn’t this provocative though stimulating description a good frame for understanding the nature of discursive construction based upon the notions of “True” and “False” Europe? On a closer scrutiny, the “True Europe” turns into a product of mental imagination. This observation is partly confirmed by a German author Herfried Munkler who assumed that “it is impossible to

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61 Dugin 2003.
64 Zizek 1989, p.169.
single out a kind of ‘genuine’ notion of Europe and then to separate it from falsifications… Moreover, each attempt to redefine a “true” and “false” Europe through contradistinction between the two turns into an element of a political struggle”69.

Two points have to be made at this stage of my analysis. Firstly, this observation brings us to Zizek’s assumption that this is “only in dreams that we encounter the real of our desire… The social reality then becomes nothing more than a fragile symbolic tissue which can be torn at any moment by the intrusion of the real”70. To rephrase this statement, Russia needs a “bad dream” about “False Europe” in order to reinstall her European credentials and feel at home with what she considers as a “True Europe”.

Secondly, Munkler makes a good point in discovering a political dimension in the gesture of opposition between the two patterns of Europe. This discovery of a considerable Schmittian background in the Russian debate on “false” and “true” Europe makes it possible to interpret it as an act of power manifested through discursive means.

The approach inspired by Lacan and picked up by Zizek gives us an almost Derridean example of the deconstruction of the binary opposition grounded in “False – True Europe” debate. The mentally constructed “True Europe” could – paradoxically – be described in terms pertinent to the opposite pole of the pair, namely as composed of “the post-Germans”, “the post-French”, etc. “The True Europe” turns out to be even more “un-European”, with strong influx of alien cultural flows and steady penetration of terrorist networks inside Europe. Another paradox could be found in the fact that the countries belonging – in Russian eyes, at least – to “False Europe” are in possession of some characteristics supposedly attributed to their imaginary opponents, like the (hyper-)valorization of national identity as manifested in highly restrictive citizenship legislation.

**Conclusion**

Two general conclusions might stem from the analysis undertaken above. Firstly, the different conceptualizations of Europe, due to their discursively constructed nature, considerably overlap. This can be shown through a rather simple exercise of finding some common grounds between different combinations of Europe’s images:

- “Europe of colors” and “Europe of dimensions”. What is common for these conceptualizations is that both ND and ED are aimed at reducing the uncertainty immanent to the “gray zone” image;
- “Europe of colors” and “Old – New Europe”. These two interpretations are related by the fact that a significant part of the “New European” countries used to be described as having their “gray” past which was meant to be left behind due to the EU enlargement;
- “False - True Europe” and “Europe of Dimensions”. Presumably, Finland – with its ND - is much closer to Russia’s concept of “true Europe” than Poland which, most likely, could be relocated to a “false Europe” group of countries;
- “Europe of dimensions” and “Old – New Europe”. The ED has to be approached as the first political product of the “New Europe” as articulated by Donald Rumsfeld. In the meantime, the ND stands close to the vision of “New Europe” as seen from the perspective of the New Regionalism vocabulary.

Secondly, in concluding remarks, let me come back to the hypothesis briefly introduced in the beginning of this paper. Each of the three conceptualizations of Europe which were identified within the framework of the Russian discourse, in one way or another is grounded in the idea of exceptionality represented in its different modalities.

As we have seen, a “Europe of colors” offers a rather controversial picture which could be interpreted, on the one hand, as a substantiation of Russia’s exclusion from Europe based on

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69 Munkler 1996.
70 The Zizek Reader 1999, p.21.
an alleged Russian dissimilarity with the EU countries. Yet on the other hand, this logic could be reversed by arguing – perhaps, paradoxically – that the “gray zone” metaphor could be read as a variant of in-between marginality, possessing of a constructive force of its own.

The Russian discourse on “Europe of spaces” and, concomitantly, “Europe of dimensions” looks more certain. Both conceptualizations, being logically interconnected, are composed of a series of inclusive moves offering a playground for innovative thinking. Therefore, Russia’s exceptionality (as exemplified, for example, by her reluctance to consider herself a part of the EU neighborhood policy) is semantically associated with a form of inclusion. The experimentation discourse is rather strong in its “spatial” and “dimensionalist” modalities, which, nevertheless, leaves open the question of practicality and efficacy of the “spatial” and “dimensionalist” arrangements. In the same vein, an interpretation of “dimensions” and “common spaces” as tools of exclusion is also feasible, though in much less pronounced modalities.

Within the framework of the “Old – New Europe” debate, Russia comes up with her own understanding of exceptionality. Being politically attached to “Old Europe” (as exemplified by Germany and France), Russia underlines her “special” relations with the strongest EU founding members. What is interesting is that this manifestation of the Russian exceptionality transforms into a tool of Russia’s own “policy of exclusion”, turned, in particular, against some of the EU newcomers. Russian debates on the possibility of the Latvian’s President participation in the Moscow-based celebration of the 60 anniversary of the end of the Second World War, as well as a non-invitation of the leaders of Poland and Lithuania to the celebration of the 750 anniversary of Kaliningrad/Königsberg, are the most visible symptoms of this emerging policy.

This is at this point that the “Old – New Europe” problematization overlaps with the discursive division of Europe into “true” and “false” components. By practicing such a divide, Russia tries to mark by her own discursive means the European cultural landscapes and offer her own version of what is a (positive) norm and a (negative) exception in Europe. In fact, the construction of a dichotomy “false – true Europe” is an indication of Russia’s vision of what is a dominating pattern of Europeanness and what is, on the contrary, a deplorable deviation from otherwise indisputable socio-cultural standards.

Russia seems to be rather conveniently positioned within much of the discursive spaces given above. She may not only easily live up with some of the binary oppositions representing Europe, but also to deconstruct some of them for her own avail. If needed, she might be attacking the “New Europe” concept as one pointing to a group of pro-American countries. Yet on different occasions, a drastic re-signification is possible, that one turning Russia herself into an organic part of the “New Europe”. Furthermore, the claim that Russia is a New Europe is a peculiar example of discursive deconstruction of a dichotomy borrowed from the outside.

The same goes for the “gray zone” concept which can also instantiate the deconstructivist possibilities embedded in Russia’s European discourse. The “gray zone” metaphor makes the East – West opposition less rigid and more flexible. Being neither East nor West, Russia may present herself as a peculiar type of a borderland between these two geographic poles.

All this leads to assume that Russia, metaphorically speaking, constructs multiple images of Europe, all of them tailored for her own convenience and according to her own predispositions. Europe appears in the Russian discourse either as a contrast to Russia herself, or as a model to be closely associated/identified with. In both cases, the way Europe is (re)invented meets the Russian needs for either “the Big Other” or a site of positive impulses and incentives. This is only through relating – in a positive or negative sense – herself with Europe that Russia is capable of uncovering and exposing her own identity. Therefore, Russia uses Europe – repeatedly constructed and reconstructed in her own discourse – for the purpose of shaping the space convenient to live in.
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