

Monism vs. Pluralism

Written by Richard Sakwa

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RICHARD SAKWA, MAY 21 2015

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The focus of this collection has been on the dynamics of developments in Ukraine in the context of Russo-Ukrainian relations, with analysis of internal developments in both countries. A number of intersecting crises have been identified, each of which exacerbates the others while their interactions only intensify the contradictions that provoked the crises in the first place. The first crisis is the one within Ukraine itself, which can be identified as the *Ukrainian* crisis, while the second is the extreme turbulence in international affairs and in particular in the system of European security, which is conventionally labelled the *Ukraine* crisis. This is accompanied by a potential crisis in the Russian developmental model, exacerbated by events in Ukraine since late 2013 and the new era of contentious politics. These three crises feed on each other, but each has distinctive roots. Clearly, there can be no sustainable solution to the challenges of Ukrainian and Russian national development unless the broader crisis in international affairs is also resolved. However, at present there is little prospect of the latter, hence the former are likely to continue for some time.

European Monism

The articles presented in this collection clearly indicate a crisis in European development. The Ukraine crisis demonstrated the triumph of a monist vision of Europe, one in which the European Union (EU) would be the main representative of what it means to be European in the context of the Euro-Atlantic alliance system. On the other side, although the Russian power system is profoundly monistic, in terms of European politics as a whole, the country stands for pluralism in the international system. This paradox is not yet reconciled, and endows the whole subject of study with numerous false windows and contradictory perceptions. The crisis is precisely a struggle over who will get to decide the fate of Europe, accompanied by rhetorical, discursive, and practical struggles over the national and political identity of Russia and Ukraine.

As far as Europe is concerned, two models are on offer, although with different inflections they do not necessarily have to be in conflict. Since the end of the Cold War, the idea of *Wider Europe* has become the predominant one in the West. This is the project of a continent centred on the EU, with European space represented as Brussels-focused, with concentric rings emanating from the centre, although with weakening force as they reach the periphery. The six founding members of the European Economic Community created in 1957 have now been joined to encompass 28 members, with the latest entrants coming from the former communist part of the continent. The Central and East European countries sought liberal democracy, market reform, and, above all, the 'return to Europe', and this has been achieved with significant results. A remarkable public consensus prevailed in these countries, and in an astonishingly short period they joined the expanded Atlantic community. This was an exemplary manifestation of the 'Wider Europe' model of development, and it has undoubtedly delivered substantial (although not always uncontested) benefits to the countries concerned.

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It is these benefits that Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine now seek, although in these contested 'lands in between' there is no longer the same coincidence of domestic aspirations and geopolitical orientations. The 'European choice' is, paradoxically, precisely not European – it is Atlanticist, which is not the same thing at all. Atlanticism entails a combination of the EU's focus on normative, developmental, and governance issues with the hard security concerns of the NATO alliance and issues of Washington's leadership. Thus, the 'European choice' has lost much of its European character, and as far as Russia is concerned, has become far more contentious.

It is no accident that the Ukraine crisis was precipitated by the Association Agreement with the EU. Although negotiations had begun in 2007, before the Eastern Partnership had taken shape (EaP was formally launched in May 2009), the confrontation over the AA and its associated Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) ultimately represented a spectacular failure to establish a framework for inter-regional cooperation and engagement. This is very different from what had taken place in other spheres. Agreements with North African countries and much of Central Europe effectively took place in a regional vacuum. No one questioned the right of Poland and the Czech Republic, or even Slovenia and Croatia, to achieve their 'return to Europe', especially since in most of these countries there was a demonstrable popular consensus in favour. There was no such consensus in Ukraine, and despite the virulence of the monist Ukrainian nationalist assertions in favour of the 'European choice', a significant part of the population sought to retain historic links with Russia. The issue here is not Ukraine's sovereign choice to decide, but recognition that, when it came to the EU, and even more over NATO membership aspirations, society was divided. Equally, the issue is not so much the mere fact of the EU advancing to the East, but the now recognised failure to negotiate the terms of this advance into what is obviously a contested neighbourhood. Several articles in this collection give details of these divisions and different views on integration.

This is where the second model of European development becomes operative. The idea of a *Greater Europe* has long been advanced as the framework to overcome the division of the continent. One of the most eloquent and resonant visions of such a Europe was the one outlined by Mikhail Gorbachev, in the final period of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev issued the manifesto for this model of Europe when he spoke of the Common European Home in his speech to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989. He outlined a vision of a Europe comprising different social systems (Soviet socialism still existed), but united through respect for sovereignty and political pluralism (Gorbachev, 1989). This would be a continent united in its diversity, since when Gorbachev first advanced the concept he believed that the Soviet Union would develop on the basis of a 'humane, democratic socialism'. Instead of concentric rings emanating from Brussels, weakening at the edges but nevertheless focusing on a single centre, the idea of Greater Europe posits a multipolar vision of Europe, with more than one centre and without a single ideological flavour. Gorbachev's dream of a 'Common European Home' transcending the bloc politics of the Cold War era has resonance to this day, and has recently been the subject of a major study by the Institute of Europe in Moscow (Gromyko (ed.) 2014).

For the partisans of the wider European agenda, however, Russia's advocacy of a greater European agenda taints the whole idea. Even though Gaullist ideas of a broader common European space from the Atlantic to the Pacific have often been addressed, notably in Nicholas Sarkozy's idea of pan-Europa (Sarkozy, 2009), it is Russia which is identified with the greater European project. Among the Greater European plans was the idea of a new European Security Treaty, mooted by Medvedev in a speech in Berlin on 5 June 2008, which called for the creation of a genuinely inclusive new security system to ensure that new dividing lines were not drawn across the continent. The initiative was greeted with polite contempt by the Western powers, although the 'Corfu process' was established to assess the proposal. In keeping with his original strong European leanings, in a speech in Berlin on 26 November 2010, Putin called for the geopolitical unification of all of 'Greater Europe' from Lisbon to Vladivostok to create a genuine 'strategic partnership' (Putin, 2010). As late as January 2014 in Brussels, in what turned out to be the last routine EU-Russia summit, Putin once again referred to the idea of creating a free-trade zone from the Atlantic to the Pacific (Putin, 2014).

The greater European agenda has failed to gain traction, and is now considered as little more than an attempt by Russia to drive a wedge between the two wings of the Atlantic alliance, the EU and the US. In other words, a monist vision of European security identity prevails, and alternative models of European architecture delegitimised. My fundamental argument in this chapter is that this European monism not only found a ready reception among

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Ukrainians, but in fact helped sustain a narrow vision of European national identity. Equally, it has only reinforced the monism of the Russian political order, lacking a benign geopolitical environment to advance a more pluralistic domestic managerial system.

Ukraine between Monism and Pluralism

Narrow representations of Europe found natural allies among the monist nationalists in Ukraine, provoking the greatest threat to European peace since 1945. This is not the place for an extended analysis of the tensions within the Ukrainian state-building project since 1991, nor for a full discussion of the events since 2013 (for a more detailed analysis, see Sakwa 2015, from which this article draws). However, for the purposes of the broader argument, it is necessary to outline the monism within Ukraine that is the counterpart of the monism that has become predominant in Atlantic Europe. Although it is now customary to laud the 'pro-European' choice of the Ukrainian electorate evidenced in the May 2014 presidential and the October 2014 parliamentary elections, the tensions between contrasting Ukrainian state-building models have not disappeared (as several chapters in this collection demonstrate), and will undoubtedly resurface to poison European international relations in years to come.

On the one hand, there is the 'Ukrainising' position that posits a monist vision of the Ukrainian nation, stretching back to the historical break with the Kievan tradition wrought by the Mongol invasions from the thirteenth century. This is the view that instead of a single East Slavic community, the Ukrainian nation evolved separately from its Russian and Belarusian confrères. In the post-communist era, this monism is reinforced by post-colonial ideas about the need to extirpate the baleful consequences of Russian imperial domination. From this perspective, it is quite unacceptable to grant Russian equality as a state language, since this would occlude the natural pre-eminence of the Ukrainian language and inhibit hegemonic interpretations of Ukrainian traditions. Thus, the heart of this model of state building is separation from Russia politically, and intense efforts to build up an alternative cultural foundation to the polity. Any engagement with Russia from this perspective was contingent and forced, until the country could achieve its 'natural' orientation to Europe. It is this monist version that is now supported uncritically by the partisans of wider Europe and the Atlantic powers in general, even though its 'restitutive' assumptions (that there is some primordial Ukrainian nationhood that needs to be recovered and purged of unnatural accretions) are inevitably challenged by other narratives.

On the other hand, the more pluralistic reading of Ukrainian history is advanced by parts of the Russophone population, and endorsed by Vladimir Putin and a large part of the Russian elite. This is the view that Ukraine is a fundamentally pluralistic community, not in the multicultural sense of adapting to the arrival of different nations, but in the fundamental sense that the country, like Russia, is pluricultural, comprising a number of autochthonous communities. Thus, Valentin Yakushik (2005) argues that Ukraine is bicivilisational, with Ukrainians and Russians as co-equals in the state, together with a rich variety of other peoples, notably Ruthenians, Gagauze, Hungarians, Jews, Romanians, and Crimean Tatars. Nicolai Petro in this collection refers to the Russophone population as 'the Other Ukraine', and stresses that the current tension goes back generations. Mikhail Pogrebinskii and his colleagues have explored the features of Ukraine's inherent pluralism (see, in particular, Pogrebinskii et al. and Kiryukhin in Pogrebinskii and Tolpygo (eds), 2013). From this perspective, it is the failure to give constitutional expression to this pluralism that provoked the crisis of 2014.

The debate focuses on who has the right to decide what it means to be Ukrainian. Both monists and pluralists united in the early stages of the 'revolution of dignity' from November 2013 in their condemnation of the corruption and degradation of Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, but they differed in the model of the Ukrainian state that they wished to see emerge from the crisis. The restitutive model, when applied in Estonia and Latvia, provoked endless tensions which are still not resolved, despite the two countries being members of the EU, but when applied in Ukraine, it has deeply polarising consequences. Numerous surveys demonstrated that secessionism hardly figured in the early ambitions of the pluralists, yet with the victory of a particularly narrow and aggressive form of monist nationalism in the February Revolution of 2014, it is hardly surprising that there was a counter-mobilisation in favour of pluralism and insistence that the 'other Ukraine' was a legitimate partner in rebuilding the Ukrainian state. Instead, this voice is now harried and persecuted.

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The Ukraine Crisis: Geopolitics at Home and Abroad

The divisions within Ukrainian state building have now become internationalised. On the one side, the Atlantic community has lined up with the Ukrainian monists, while Russia supports the pluralists. Even though the idea of 'federalisation' within Ukraine elicits a sharply negative reaction among the Ukrainian monists, the necessity of some sort of substantive decentralisation of authority and responsibility to the regions commands a great deal of support. Just as the idea of greater Europe is tainted by its association with Russia, so too is the idea of Ukrainian federalism, for the same reason. Elements of the European bipolarity of the Cold War years has been restored, with Russia now once again ranged against the rest, although now lacking the bloc of allegedly friendly states in Eastern Europe. This in part helps explain why Russia has been so keen to recreate the functional substitute for the old Comecon states in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union.

The Ukraine crisis is ultimately only a symptom of a much deeper failure to establish an equitable and inclusive post-Cold War international order. In the absence of peace conference, an asymmetrical peace was imposed in Europe. Both NATO and the EU expended considerable effort to mitigate Russia's alienation. Russia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994; in 1997, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Co-operation and Security was signed, which created a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC); and in 2002, a new NATO-Russia Council (NRC) with greater authority replaced the PJC. However, regular political and military dialogue between the partners at times of crisis, as in 2008 during the Russo-Georgian war, were suspended, only highlighting that these bodies were indeed mitigatory rather than substantive. From the Atlanticist point of view, this was only natural: Russia was only half the former Soviet Union, and in certain respects a failed economy and polity, so why should it be treated as an equal in geopolitical terms? At the same time, it was only natural that the perceived security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe should be filled by a defensive alliance, which, by reducing insecurity and risks, would in the end enhance even Russia's security.

In the early years of his leadership, Putin was ready to accept these arguments, and worked hard to improve relations with both the EU and NATO, although he, no less than Boris Yeltsin, insisted on Russia's great power status. The puzzle to be explained, then, is why relations with both organisations deteriorated so spectacularly, to the point that today outright military conflict is not to be excluded. All sides undoubtedly bear their share of responsibility, but ultimately it was the failure to grasp the realities of the new geopolitics of Europe and the failure to imagine a different future for Europe that has created the new dividing lines.

In the end, NATO's existence became justified by the need to manage the security threats provoked by its own enlargement. At the Bucharest NATO Summit in April 2008, Georgia and Ukraine were promised eventual membership, although Membership Action Plans (MAPs) were deferred because of German and French concerns that moving to Russia's borders and encircling the country could provoke a dangerous reaction. From Russia's perspective, there was no security vacuum that needed to be filled; from the West's perspective, who was to deny the 'sovereign choice' of the Central and Eastern European states if they wished to enter the world's most successful multilateral security body. The former Warsaw Pact and Baltic states joined NATO to enhance their security, but the very act of doing so created a security dilemma for Russia that undermined the security of all. This fateful geopolitical paradox – that NATO exists to manage the risks created by its existence – provoked a number of conflicts. The Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 acted as the forewarning tremor for the major earthquake that engulfed Europe over Ukraine in 2013-14.

Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakdown of European Order

One of the main narratives of the current crisis is that Russia has become a revisionist state. The takeover of Crimea in March 2014 can certainly be interpreted in this light (for example, Allison, 2014). However, the Putinite view is that Russia's actions were a response to the prior breakdown of the system of international law (notably in Western intervention in Iraq and recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2008), and then the breakdown of the Ukrainian state order. The associated debates are well covered in this collection. The key point is that the Ukraine crisis is both a symptom and the cause of the crisis in international politics. It is also an indication of the inability to establish what would pass for 'normal' relations between Russia and Ukraine in the post-Cold War period. Indeed, relations

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between the former Soviet republics throughout the Eurasian region are characterised by distrust and the failure to establish a genuinely new post-Soviet community based on sovereign equality and shared security institutions.

The Ukraine crisis and the drastic breakdown in relations between Russia and Ukraine are thus, in the old Marxist parlance, 'over-determined'. By this I mean that there are a multiplicity of causes, any one of which may well have been sufficient to provoke a crisis, but taken together a veritable 'perfect storm' has engulfed the two countries and Europe as a whole. It may be useful to summarise these factors, although no attempt will be made to examine them in depth here. I will start from the general and then move to the specific, recognising that each issue is highly controversial. Nevertheless, for clarification of the fundamental issues at stake, such an exercise is useful.

Above all, it is now clear that no effective system of European security and political order was established in the post-Cold War era. It is not helpful to look for people to blame for this lamentable state of affairs, but instead we should look to the structural causes. Undoubtedly, Putin has now challenged the established system, but it should be remembered that he came to power as one of the most committed Europeans that Russia has ever had as a leader. For a variety of reasons, his attempts to achieve the integration of Russia into European and Euro-Atlantic structures failed, and instead he became increasingly alienated from these institutions. Russia as always was facing fundamental domestic problems, including the second Chechen war, regional fragmentation, and much else. His responses were typically robust, and in many cases accompanied by egregious human rights violations, but overall they were legitimate, although perhaps disproportionate, responses to real challenges, and were recognised as such by the Russian population, as reflected in consistently high opinion poll ratings. These were not simply manufactured through media manipulation (although there was plenty of that as well), but reflected a deep current of popular support for his policies and achievements, which included until recently a spectacular rise in living standards.

Thus, the common trope of arguing that Putin's lack of connection with reality is to blame for the current crisis results too often in scapegoating, and excuses a more fundamental failure to examine the structural roots of the crisis. These lie in the asymmetrical end of the Cold War and the failure to create an inclusive and equitable system of European security, and this in turn arose from the inability to accept Russia as it is – a great power with legitimate interests in Europe and Eurasia, although accompanied by some profound governance problems. Recognition of this, of course, does not entail a repudiation of values or the occlusion of the sovereignty of neighbours, but it does suggest that a more realist and less ideological approach would have established an environment in which differences could have been resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. Instead, now the very notion of dialogue is discredited, while the practices of diplomacy have degenerated into name-calling and sanctions. All the European and Atlantic powers bear their share of responsibility for this.

Further, the breakdown in Russo-Ukrainian relations has long been in the making. On the one side, the consolidation of a distinctive type of Russian political economy and public sphere became increasingly incognisant of the interests and concerns of neighbours. In other words, the Russian power system itself in the Putin years moved away from the riotous, and in many ways damaging, pluralism of the Yeltsin years in the 1990s towards a far more monist system. There remains significant freedom of debate in the public sphere, but the political expression of pluralism is tightly controlled. In addition, it would be inaccurate to describe the Putin system as 'nationalist' in the classic sense, since Russia remains a deeply pluricultural society, in ethnic, religious, and indeed in political cultural terms, and any attempt excessively to privilege one community over the others would threaten the stability of the whole. This is why the Putin system has tried to remain so resolutely 'centrist', drawing on the power of all factions and communities, but not allowing any to predominate. Nevertheless, reflecting the alienation from the existing international order and the political struggles of the period of contentious politics in 2011-12 accompanying Putin's return to the presidency, the regime has become somewhat radicalised. This is a radical centrism that is ready to challenge the hegemonic powers abroad, to reshape the political relationships in Eurasia and Europe, and to advance a revivalist conservatism at home (Sakwa, 2014).

At the same time, the Ukrainian national project also became radicalised, as reflected in several of our contributions. Already, the Orange Revolution of Autumn 2004 had propelled a radical nationalist to power, and although the administration of Viktor Yushchenko was torn by factional conflicts with others from the Orange camp, notably Yulia Tymoshenko, his leadership represented a breakout from Kuchma-style multivectorism. The repressive and abusive

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presidency of Yanukovich served further to radicalise not only the Ukrainising tendency, but this was now complemented by the strengthening of the militant radicalism of the inter-war and wartime years. This was accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the 'European choice'. The Association Agreement offered by the EU in the framework of the Eastern Partnership proposed a lifeline to break out from the corruption and economic degradation in which Ukraine had been mired for so long. The original idealism of the Maidan protests was based on the profound repudiation of the failures of the past, but its idealism was not rooted in a substantive real political constituency. It was not able to sustain a political formation that could institutionalise its idealism. Instead, the protest movement became radicalised, and in conditions of external threat, it took extreme Ukrainian nationalist forms that was then instantiated in the power system created in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2014. In short, the Ukrainian polity assumed extreme monist forms. This monism, as noted above, is reinforced by the monism of the Euro-Atlantic system.

How to escape from this cycle of intensifying monism, which has created a situation where a full-scale war in Europe is no longer inconceivable? The refusal of the Kiev authorities to negotiate, let alone recognise, the insurgent forces in the Donbass leaves only the military solution in play. The EU and the Atlantic community have failed to provide a framework for a negotiated settlement, although the brave and important work of certain institutions, above all the OSCE and the UN, should be recognised. The anti-Russian monism of the US Congress has long been acknowledged as a problem (Tsygankov, 2009), and this certainly does not create a benign environment for a settlement of European problems. As for Russia, it is obvious that the Putin administration cannot abandon the insurgents. This would be considered a betrayal that would resonate down the ages. Russia was reluctantly drawn into the Donbass conflict, reflected in Putin's pleas not to stage the 11 May 2014 referendums in Donetsk and Lugansk, but it cannot now abandon the 'separatists' (although initially it was not separation from Ukraine that was sought, but only a more pluralistic form of Ukrainian state-building). The stalemate is complete. Only after the intensification of the multiple crises will the fever break, and the healing process begin – if there is anyone left to do the healing.

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About the author:

Richard Sakwa is professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent, an Associate Fellow of the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House, and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. His main research interests are Russian domestic and international politics, European international relations, and comparative democratization. Recent books include *Russia Against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order, The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism, and the Medvedev Succession* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), *Putin and the Oligarch: The Khodorkovsky-Yukos Affair* (I. B. Tauris, 2014), *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (Routledge, 2014), and *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (I. B. Tauris, 2015). He can be contacted at: R.Sakwa@kent.ac.uk.