

The Long History of Russophobia, Starting with Its Religious Roots

Russia, for one reason or the other, has always been portrayed as a threat by the West.

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The former editor of the Tribune de Genève, [Guy Mettan-RI] visited Moscow and presented his new book [Russia and the West: A Thousand Year War](#), which reviews the phenomenon of Russophobia: its roots, historical evolution and modern incarnations.

Izvestia had a chance to interview him.

Izvestia What inspired you to write about this?

Guy Mettan: There are two reasons why I began this work. The first is a personal, family reason. In 1994, my wife and I adopted a Russian girl, who now is now 25. Her name is Oksana, and she is from the Vladimir region. After we adopted her, I became interested in learning as much as possible about Russia and becoming familiar with this large country. In the 1990's, one could obtain Russian citizenship after adopting a Russian child. So we did that: my wife and I are citizens of Russia and Switzerland, and Russia became part of our family's life and history. I am a citizen of Russia, but I pay taxes in Switzerland.

The second reason why I started this work is professional. My trips to Russia gave me an opportunity to learn what this country was all about. I understood how big the difference was between the Russia presented in the Western media and the one I saw myself. I just couldn't bear to watch this situation, and decided to investigate the reasons.

What made me actually start this project was the events in Ukraine in 2014. I saw the Western press systematically supporting one side, expressing only one point of view – that of the government that usurped power in Kiev. And I decided to figure out why this happened.

It's important to understand that I wasn't trying to answer the question of who was to blame for the events in Ukraine. I was interested in why the Western media presented this story in their own way. What was at the root of such a heightened negative relation to Russia?

Izv Could you tell us a little about the main thrust of your book?

GM: I looked at history and concluded that all this Russophobia started when Charlemagne created the Western Empire 1,200 years ago, laying the foundation for the Great Religious Split in 1054. Charlemagne created his empire in opposition to the existing situation, when

the center of the civilized world was Byzantium.

The most shocking thing I realized was that everything they taught us in school was wrong. They claimed that the dissidents belonged to the Eastern Church, who split from Rome. Now I know that what happened was just the opposite: it was the Western Catholic Church that dissented from the universal church, while the Eastern Church remained and still is Orthodox.

In order to shift the blame from themselves, Western theologians of that time launched a campaign to justify putting the onus on the Eastern Church. They used arguments that returned again and again as part of the confrontation between the West and Russia. Back then, in the Middle Ages, they began referring to the Greek world, i.e. Byzantium, as a “territory of tyranny and barbarism” in order to disavow responsibility for the schism.

After the fall of Constantinople, when Byzantium ended, and Russia took the place of Byzantium as the Third Rome, all those superstitions, all those lies about the desacralization of the Hellenic World, were automatically transferred to Russia.

It's strange to see the notes of Western travelers through Russia starting in the 15th century: they all describe Russia in the same terms they had used to describe Byzantium. These fabrications, this criticism considerably increased after the reforms of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, when Russia became powerful on the European political scene. And by the end of the 18th century, it had become Russophobia.

Born in France under Louis XV, it was used for a while by Napoleon to justify animosity toward Russia, which stood in the way of France's expansionist policy. The “Will of Peter the Great” was used by Napoleon as a justification for his Russian campaign.

We can compare this with modern times, when in order to achieve their goals, Americans invented the lie that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Russophobia existed in France as a political ideology up until the 19th century, when after losing the Franco-Prussian War, France realized that its main enemy was no longer Russia but Germany, becoming Russia's ally.

As for England, Russophobia appeared there around 1815, when Great Britain, in alliance with Russia, beat Napoleon. Once the common enemy defeated, England reversed course and made Russia its enemy, feeding Russophobia. Since the 1820's, London has used an anti-Russian ideology to mask its expansionist policies, both in the Mediterranean and in other regions – Egypt, India and China.

In Germany, the situation didn't change until the end of the 19th century, when the German Empire was created. It had no colonies, and there was no place to get any from, since England, France, Spain and Portugal had got a head start. All the colonies having been allocated without Russia, a political movement appeared in Germany that sought “expansion toward the East”, i.e., modern Ukraine and Russia. This attempt failed during the First World War, and later, Hitler used the same ideology.

It's no accident that German historians were at the origin of what is known as “revisionism”, the tendency to understate the USSR's contribution to the victory over the Third Reich, overestimating the contribution of the US and Britain.

The third type of Russophobia is American, and it began in 1945. As soon as they defeated Germany through joint efforts with the USSR, at the cost of millions of Soviet lives, the same story born after the victory over Napoleon in 1815 was disseminated. The US reversed course and yesterday's ally became its major enemy. This is how the Cold War started.

The Americans used the same arguments as the English in 1815, claiming that they "fought against communism, tyranny, expansionism", their arguments hardly differing, except for the so-called fight against communism. This turned out to be a gimmick, because when the Soviet Union collapsed, the confrontation between the West and Russia didn't end.

The nineteenth century story is repeating itself: the US keeps talking about a "threat" supposedly emanating from Russia, in order to achieve its own goals, promote its own interests, and pursue its own expansion. Today it demonizes Russia in order to place NATO missiles in Poland, using the same words and arguments that Napoleon used 200 years ago.

Izv Once at an international conference in the mid 1990s, I spoke to a journalist from Denmark. He told me why Europe was so afraid of Russia: *"See how big Russia is, and how small Denmark is. We were always afraid of you. We are still afraid of your aggression."*

GM: If you look at the map, you will see that the territory of Russia dominates all of Europe. So when Europeans look at the map, they feel anxious and concerned, because "such a huge country cannot be anything other than a threat." Besides, European maps deliberately depict Russia as even bigger than it really is, increasing Russophobia. Its immense size is great for European cartoonists, who traditionally draw Russia as a huge bear standing over a tiny Europe.

Izv: Recently, I read the following statement by a French author: *"Europe is a peninsula in Eurasia."* What would you say to that?

GM: Today Europe is frustrated. As a colonial power, it dominated the world for two and a half centuries. Today the situation is totally different, and Europe is uneasy. It's used to playing a different role. That's why it's anxious. On the one hand, the European ego finds itself in this uncomfortable situation; on the other, the European Union has reached the limits of its development and has internal problems. That's why it's easy to blame Russia for everything.

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