

The construction of a European identity in post-Soviet Russia: another elite project?

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IN HIS WELL-KNOWN STUDY on 'Muscovite political folkways', in which he aimed to 'identify and describe ... the fundamental features of Russian political culture', Edward Keenan (1986, iij) argued that climatic hardship has instilled in the Russian mindset a strong preference for centralisation, communality and—as a consequence of the success of these two features—continuity. Indeed, so he noted when writing in the mid-1980s, the well-tried patterns of political rule have been embraced by the population to such an extent that neither the 'runaway change' of the revolutionary period nor the immense challenges of the post-Brežnev era could undermine their support (ibid., 167ff).

Commenting more specifically on the post-1985 future of the Soviet Union, Keenan (ibid., 180) found the emerging elite to be ill-prepared

intellectually [*and*] experientially to carry out the delicate but fundamental changes in the political system or in its political culture that will be required... [*leading him to conclude that this*] replacement generation ... will not foster ... real change.

Moreover, as he noted (1986,171),

the great bulk of the Russian population shares with its leaders a conviction that only a powerfully centralized and oligarchic government can provide the order which they all crave... [*leading them to*] rely more confidently upon informal and personal relationships than upon those defined by the legalistic niceties [*of democratic electoral constitutionalism*] so admired elsewhere.

Keenan's prediction, essentially a two-by-two matrix showing elite and mass attitudes towards 'continuity' and 'change', respectively, has been strongly challenged by scholars who find that the so-called 'replacement generation' actually introduced reforms in what was a deliberate and highly popular attack on the Soviet sys-

tem.¹ However, even if this criticism is correct, it does not follow that the post-Soviet years have been characterised by a similar congruence between elite and mass attitudes.

As far as the former is concerned, the dominant narrative in this past decade—at least within the powerful executive branch—has been one where both state and nation are placed firmly within the context of a 'European' identity as sketched below (see, e.g., Neumann 1996, ch 8). Thus, addressing an international audience in January 1992, then Russian foreign minister Andrej Kozyrev announced that the new state would be seeking entry into the community of states built on democracy and market forces (*Vnešnjaja politika Rossii...* 1996,197). And only one week later, then Russian president Boris Yeltsin declared that the Russian population would not 'swerve off the road of radical transformations', adding a warning, however, that especially the economic reforms could prove difficult to implement as 'an anti-market mentality ... has taken shape over decades'.² Yet, when summing up the reforms of the 1990s in his millennium address, then Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin (1999) showed no hesitation when declaring that 'our people have accepted... fundamental political rights and human liberties [*and*] value that they can have property and be engaged in free enterprise,' thereby confirming what he sees as the European nature of Russia.

A well-known argument, however, holds that the general population has failed to endorse these elite-promoted changes implemented at the expense of age-old continuity, thereby proving correct El'cin's prediction.³ It is this possible discrepancy between official state objectives and public attitudes which I will be concerned with here. While it may have played a minor role only during the earlier transition, if it really *does* exist and is *widening*, this discrepancy should be expected to have two important effects—one immediate, the other ultimate. First, it may critically impede the present consolidation of the new system (Fleron, Jr. & Ahl 1998,

¹ See, e.g., Stein 1994; Risse-Kappen 1994; Koslowski & Kratochwil 1994; Brown 1996.

² *Radio Majak*, 5 February 1992/BBC-SWB-SU/1298, 7 February 1992, C1/2.

³ It has also been argued of course that members of the elite pay lip service only to the new ideals which Russia is now said to support (see, e.g., Brown 2001a and 2001 b; Shevtsova 2001).

291). Second, and as a consequence of this, it should be expected to impede also the widening of the community referred to by Kozyrev to include Russia.

The paper proceeds in three main sections.⁴ I start by briefly outlining constructivist assumptions and theories. Focusing on norms, I demonstrate how agents may change identities by changing behaviour. The former process, so I argue, can be completed only when fully accepted by the other members already adhering to the norms underlying the particular group identity. The existing 'in-group', in other words, decides whether applicant agents can be allowed to join.

Next, I continue by turning to the question of the European identity and I argue that this latter has come to rest quite solidly on the twin pillars of democracy and market relations. Thus, following the end of the Cold War, these principles have increasingly been recognised as the yardstick by which the distance between 'us' and 'them' should be measured. Nowhere has this been as pronounced as in Central and Eastern Europe where local regimes have invariably placed the issues of democratisation and economic liberalisation at the top of their respective agendas —either because of a commitment to or a rejection of these ideals.

In this section I also pose the central question of this study: does the construction of a European identity in Russia merely represent an 'elite project' or does it in fact enjoy mass support?⁵ An attempt will be made to provide an answer to this question through a review of some of the literature on mass attitudes published in the years after the introduction of the dual reform programme.

I conclude by offering a few comments on the way in which the European identity may be promoted in Russia, not just through political processes at the domestic level but also through deliberate engineering by the 'in-group'.

⁴ The first section draws generously on Splidsboel-Hansen 2002.

⁵ I follow Harold Laswell, who argued that 'the influential are those who get the most of what there is to get... Those who get the most are *elite*, the rest are *mass*,' in Marvick 1977, 402, note 79. For a much more specific use of these terms, see Miller, Hesli & Reisinger 1997.

Changing identities

Central among the assumptions shared by constructivist writers is the belief that the environment in which agents operate is as much social as it is material (see, e.g., Adler 1997). Consequently, the constructivist research agenda focuses on the task of demonstrating how the institutional or 'social' facts, i.e. facts existing by human agreement only, help shape, and in turn are shaped by, the material world. To do so, and to explain the forces of large-scale change, constructivists turn to the interplay between norms, identities and interests.

The way ahead has been mapped out by Nicholas Onuf (1989, 36), who points to the very first building blocks of a constructivist theory of change—'deeds done, acts taken, words spoken'. As it is a core constructivist claim that human beings turn this world into what it is through their behaviour—physical as well as verbal—the obvious point of departure is action. Building on the material world, by doing and by saying, agents effectively mould social relations to mirror their practices (idem 1998, 59).

The different types of action listed by Onuf are all undertaken within an existing normative framework providing agents with choices of behaviour. Defined as a set of 'collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity' (Jepperson, Wendt & Katzenstein 1996, 54), this normative framework thus serves as the background against which any *meaningful* action has to be viewed.⁶

While some of the deeds, acts and words will fail to correspond with the collective expectations, and thus be norm-violating, others will demonstrate the adherence of the agent to the existing norms. In this case, the behaviour may have one of two effects. First, it may simply confirm the identity—or basic character—already held by the agent and as such it will reflect the use of norms as a medium of social control. Second, if the decision to support the norms in question is in its initial phase, the behaviour of the agent may serve to build up a new identity for the latter and as such its role will be one of social construction.⁷ Such observance of the norms will, in other words, help change the label applied to the agent—at least by the agent itself.⁸ As with any other form of collective identity forma-

⁶ As noted by Onuf (1998, 60), 'only human beings can make choices, because we alone (and not all of us) have the mental equipment to consider the probable consequences of making the choices that are available to us.'

⁷ On identity, see Jepperson, Wendt & Katzenstein 1996, 33.

⁸ On the complex issue of regulative (identity-confirming) and constitutive (identity-building) norms, see *ibid.*, 54 and Searle 1995, 31».

tion, the 'in-groups' in international politics are first and foremost characterised by their quality as self-defined entities; members of the group decide whether applicant agents can be allowed to join—and they do so by assessing the loyalty of the applicant towards the norms regulative of the particular group identity.⁹

If the agent is seen as adhering to these norms, the other members will welcome it into the group, thereby redrawing the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. The behaviour of the applicant, then, allows the 'in-group' to expect the former to act in accordance with the collectively held identity. The implications of this change are far-reaching. By causing certain expectations with regard to behaviour, and thus reducing uncertainty, the collective identity enables members of the 'in-group' to share positive understandings of each other (Wendt 1996, 52). Herein lies, as explained by Alexander Wendt, a critical first step towards a systemic transformation. As behaviour changes to meet the prescribed norms, the collective identity formation makes possible the transition from 'them' to 'us'—and from anarchy to authority.¹⁰

Constructivists (see, e.g., Wendt 1994, 384ff; 1999, 343ff) argue that this development towards an international system of authority—characterised by a sense of 'we-ness'—can be fuelled by a number of different sources. Among these are increasing transaction flows and a growing compatibility of domestic values, both of which increase the potential for positive identification. The former source, often labelled 'dynamic density',¹¹ refers to issues such as 'trade, migration, tourism, cultural and educational exchanges, and the use of physical communication facilities', and overall these quantifiable processes of exchange are seen as 'factories of shared identification' as their combined volume promises to help undermine barriers to the formation of a collective identity (Adler & Barnett 1998 *b*, 7).

⁹ Theories on nation-building provide powerful insights into this issue; see, e.g., Connor 1994, 45-6.

¹⁰ Following John Ruggie, Wendt (1996, 52) defines 'authority' as 'an institutionalized fusion of power and common purpose so that actors identify with and feel bound to act on behalf of some larger collective enterprise'.

¹¹ This phrase was originally coined by Emile Durkheim who explained how changes in communication and transportation had caused 'social relations ... [to] become more numerous, since they extend, on all sides, beyond their original limits' (Durkheim 1964, 257).

Closely related to this is the latter source, where the emphasis is usually placed on the proliferation of democracy and the concomitant liberal peace. Indeed, when dealing with the issue of state attributes and their ability to cause among agents the emergence of a sense of community, certain constructivist writers have argued that this is achievable under conditions of democracy only; 'it is unlikely', so notes Thomas Risse-Kappen (1995,505 f), 'that a similar collective identity and sense of mutual responsiveness could emerge among [*non-democracies*],' adding that 'there is nothing in their values that would prescribe mutual sympathy, trust and consideration.' Indeed, in its original Deutschian notion, the transformation caused by community building was explicitly fuelled by the two core domestic values measured in this study—liberal democracy and market relations (Adler & Barnett 1998 c, 40).¹²

With changes in identity come changes in interests. The redefinition of the basic character requires a redefinition of interests. As pointed out by Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996, 60), agents cannot define their interests before knowing what they represent—'who they are'. Interests, and before that, identities, are dependent variables endogenous to interaction; they are, in other words, affected by the intersubjective knowledge of which the anarchical structure of the state system also consists (Wendt 1999, ff).

By basing their understanding of identities and interests on cognitive structures also, constructivists allow for social practices to change through experience—to be 'learnt anew'. And since the anarchical structure is composed of these ideational elements also, changes in behaviour will eventually affect the intersubjective meaning of 'system'.¹³ Systemic change, to sum up, is made possible by recursive processes where structure is not only reproduced in the policies of the various agents—it is also reconstructed by these same.¹⁴

¹² For a different perspective, see Acharya 1998.

¹³ Onuf (1998,63) suggests substituting 'social arrangement' for 'structure' in the International Relations vocabulary.

¹⁴ Or, as Onuf (1989,41) explains it, 'people and society [*are*] each the product of the other's construction'.

Are the Russian masses European?

As argued above, the new identity promoted by the elite centres on the twin pillars of democracy and market forces, or, as Kozyrev has pointed out, on the very essence of everything 'Western'.¹⁵ These values will also, so even sceptical Russian observers note (see, e.g., Glucharev 1998 *b*, 41), provide the building blocks for the construction of twenty-first century 'Europe', thereby unambiguously outlining the basic requirements for applicant states hoping to join.

These requirements appear at their clearest in the European Union (EU), which is generally recognised, because of its ideational weight, as the most important security organisation on the continent (Wæver 1997,43). Building on the Treaty on European Union, the European Community at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 informed would-be applicant states that entry would be contingent on the establishment of institutions of democracy, the development of a well-functioning market economy as well as the ability to take on all obligations of membership. By completing this transformation, and in particular, by fulfilling the first two requirements, the applicant states should undergo a successful change of their identity to qualify for membership in the apparently ever-wider community of shared European norms (*ibid.*, 45 ff).

Following the 1993 Copenhagen European Council, the Central and East European states in general continued and intensified their efforts to meet the EU accession criteria—a process which (for most of these states) came to an end at the 2002 Copenhagen European Council. The protracted enlargement process has led Moscow to shelve, at least temporarily, its former plans for Russian EU membership, yet the relevant efforts have been undertaken in Russia notwithstanding. An important reason for this, so I have argued elsewhere (Splidsboel-Hansen 2002), has to be found in the hope of the elite of seeing Russia recognised as part of 'Western normalcy'.

One question follows naturally from this, however: Does the public also support this search for a European identity, or does it rather prefer the traditional values identified by Keenan? This question has been the topic of innumerable studies in the post-1992 years—and the result generally has been less than clear-cut. The dif-

¹⁵ *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 20 August 1992/FBIS-SOV-92-167, 27 August 1992, 20

ference in perspectives is well-demonstrated by the fact that even when relying on the same set of numerical data, scholars have arrived at radically different conclusions.¹⁶

Despite the uncertainty caused by conflicting polls, surveys and studies, a relatively clear overall pattern still emerges.¹⁷ First, as far as the democratic institutions are concerned, recent studies suggest that the Russian public has developed a rather robust support for these.¹⁸ In her 1998 and 2000 interviews with ordinary Russians, Ellen Carnaghan (2001) has discovered that while many of her respondents may be unhappy with their own elected leaders, in general they support the political institutions of democracy. Using data collected in the cycle of parliamentary and presidential elections in the years 1999-2000, Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul (2001, 7) have found that 'about two respondents in three endorsed the concept of democracy', leading them to conclude that 'Russians overwhelmingly embrace democracy'. And James Gibson (2001, 112), relying on panel studies 'initiated in 1996, continued in 1998, and concluded in 2000', in a similar way notes that 'two-thirds of the Russians in [*his*] panel expressed at least as much support for democratic institutions and processes in 2000 as they did in 1996,' adding that 'democrats should take at least some comfort from these findings.'

The latter findings, indeed, are important as they suggest that the Russian public has developed a promising degree of sophistication—and one which shows itself in two ways. First, even when faced with a poor performance on the part of the national economy, Russians do not abandon their political ideals; economic hardship, in other words, does not translate into an erosion of the pro-democratic movement (see, e.g., Gibson 1996, 120; Carnaghan 2001, 341).¹⁹ Second, and closely linked to this first issue, the Russian public is also reported (Carnaghan 2001, 35 ff.; Duch 1995) to distinguish quite sharply between incumbents and institutions; put differently, unsuccessful policies are blamed on incompetent politicians, not on political freedom.

¹⁶ Contrast, e.g., Finifter & Mickiewicz 1992; Miller, Hesli & Reisinger 1994; Brym 1996.

¹⁷ Fleron & Ahl (1998, 321) note how these different findings 'may well be the result of the timing of surveys, the types of questions asked, and the nature of the sample populations'.

¹⁸ A balanced review of some of the more important earlier studies can be found *ibid.*, 297ff.

¹⁹ For a different perspective, see Fleron & Ahl 1998, 319.

Moreover, as Carnaghan (2001, 340-1) has pointed out,

turnout has been high for most elections, and people have abided by the results. Even in highly contentious times during which many people have suffered severe economic hardship and dislocation, public demonstrations have been mostly orderly.

In sum, she concludes,

even if many Russians do not have the right ideas to be democrats, they act as if they do.

This impression of consolidation, that is the acceptance of democracy as 'the only game in town', has been reinforced by the results of the December 1999 Duma elections, largely marking the return of the political centre and thus the weakening of the fringe parties, as well as by the March 2000 presidential elections in which Putin, then acting president, clearly outdistanced his rivals on the extreme left and right.²⁰

Having noted these positive patterns, however, it should be added that since the introduction of the reforms one element in particular has been conspicuously absent from the average Russian understanding of 'democracy', namely a willingness to accept the political rights and activities of unpopular minorities (Gibson 1996: 400).²¹ While recent studies have not only suggested that this situation has improved but also questioned the severity of the problem on methodological grounds,²² there is little doubt that this area still represents a less-developed feature of Russian civic culture—as is also illustrated by the extensive support given to the federal authorities in their military campaign against Chechen secessionists.²³

Turning, second, to the market economy, the support of the Russian public is reported to be considerably weaker.²⁴ Using data collected in 1995, that is, at a point when the economic decline had not yet been reversed, Robert Brym (1996, 756) explains that 'fully 92 % of Russians wanted to see more responsibility for the individ-

²⁰ See www.russiavotes.org, the introduction to sections 1 and 11, respectively.

²¹ This study uses data collected in 1992.

²² Miller, Hesli & Reisinger 1997, 177; Colton & McFaul 2001, 177.

²³ Colton & McFaul (2001 *a*, 16) note that 'there are undemocratic parties and movements in Russia that, were they to exist in the United States, most Americans would probably want to proscribe.'

²⁴ Again, a balanced review of some of the more important earlier studies can be found in Fleron & Ahl 1998, 298 ff.

ual's welfare vested in the state', adding that this figure represented a 'massive shift away from individualism ... since 1989'. A similar development has been reported by Arthur Miller, Vicki Hesli and William Reisinger (1997, 18if), who find that in the mid-1990s opposition to the free market was growing. Thus, in an earlier study this same research team had discovered a relatively high level of support for individualism, as opposed again to a state-sponsored welfare system, leading them to conclude that the '70 years of society-wide Soviet indoctrination' had left a smaller impact than otherwise assumed by many observers (idem 1994, 399ff).

These observations suggest the existence of an almost obvious correlation—that economic perceptions have a considerable influence over the level of support for market principles. Again, however, the Russian public is reported to be relatively sophisticated, as sociotropic perceptions, that is views on the national economy as a whole, are said to carry almost—or, perhaps, even—the same weight as egocentric perceptions, that is views on the individual household economy.²⁵

While this distinction may seem artificial, observers do explain that 'many Russians are willing to accept the idea of a market economy, even if they are not very enthusiastic about many (if not most) of the details' (Gibson 2001, 113). Put shortly, on the one hand, Russians are reported to like the freedom of private ownership, the possible rewards for doing hard work or for having certain skills, as well as the range and availability of goods, while, on the other hand, they are not willing to endorse the increase in individual responsibility and the widening income gaps. This in turn suggests that recent years should have witnessed an increase in the support for marketisation, thereby reflecting the overall improvement in the performance of the Russian economy recorded in the post-1997 years. Yet, when using data collected among Russian university students in early 1999, Susan Linz (2000,15) has found that

after nearly a decade of transition from plan to market, there does not appear to be widespread acceptance of market outcomes among young Russians living outside of Moscow.

²⁵ See, e.g., Miller, Hesli & Reisinger 1994,404; Gibson 2001, 119ft. 348

It should be noted, however, that the timing of this survey study may have coloured the findings, as in general the respondents were likely to be still suffering from the effects of the August 1998 financial collapse, possibly causing them to reject market *outcomes*.

Following the recovery of the Russian economy from its August 1998 collapse, studies have indicated that a growing number of Russians are willing to accept not only the abstract idea of a market economy but its actual outcomes also. When viewed in a socio-tropic context, this would seem logical, as there has indeed been a significant increase in production—a trend which is expected to continue in future years also (The World Bank Group 2001). And when viewed in an egocentric context, these reports seem to suggest that the economic improvement has benefited the masses rather than just the elite. Thus, Gibson (2001, 114) finds almost 61 % of his respondents surveyed in 2000 to favour a continuation of the reforms 'even if it means hardships', and in an August 2002 survey 49 % of the respondents announced that they had already managed to adapt to the changes introduced since 1992, while another 22 % expected to do so 'in the near future'.²⁶

Figures like these have, together with the record of structural reforms implemented since early 2000 when Putin assumed the presidency and Michail Kasjanov was appointed head of the government, led experts (see, e.g., Åslund 2002) to conclude that Russia is moving in the direction of an 'East Asian economic system of low taxes and low social transfers', thereby also suggesting that market outcomes are in fact a still more acceptable part of everyday life in Russia. Less drastically, however, other observers predict that Russia may eventually opt for a welfare system that is predominantly state-sponsored—or, as has been aptly described, for 'socialism that works' (Gibson 1996&, 966). This view is supported by Russian scholars (see, e.g., Kul'kov 1998, i22ff) who argue that not only is the establishment in Russia of a so-called 'West European' welfare system possible, it is even *necessary* if state and society are to overcome the challenges of, for instance, geography and climate. Whatever the specific future contours of the Russian market economy, in sum these studies seem to suggest, however tentatively, that with the recent improvements in the economy comes increased support for market principles.

²⁶ See www.russiavotes.org, section III/QI.

Promoting the European identity

Despite these possible changes, the new identity will clearly need to be further promoted if it is to be, first, accepted more widely and, second, consolidated. However, our understanding of the way in which these processes operate at the *domestic* level is still rather rudimentary and as such there is a tendency simply to reduce agents to structures (Checkel 1998).

A new body of literature is now emerging to address this relationship between norms and domestic change. However, while these studies are all capable of explaining change on an instrumental basis, few aim beyond this in an attempt to explain the formation of identities and interests without the use of a rationality-assuming approach of costs and benefits only. The majority of these studies may, in other words, explain the decision in Russia to suspend the use of capital punishment (to win recognition from various international organisations) but they do not inform us of the processes through which people actually start believing in the validity of this norm (see, e.g., Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999).

Some of the more promising work within this field has been undertaken by Jeffrey Checkel in his studies on the diffusion and adoption of norms. Focusing on the developments which bring new norms to the attention of domestic actors—a process termed 'empowerment'—Checkel (1997,476) argues that in the initial stage individuals will often play a pivotal role; elite decision-makers control the political agenda and are therefore uniquely positioned to introduce new behavioural standards. For subsequent diffusion to be successful, however, social learning involving larger groups of domestic actors will have to take place. If the norms fail to take root outside elite circles, behaviour will remain unchanged as will also the identity of the agent (idem 1999,552).

This has been recognised among the international organisations. Thus, both the EU and the Council of Europe, for instance, now target a broad range of societal actors in the hope of reaching beyond the narrow elite circles focused on in the initial phases (idem, 484-5). By sponsoring and hopefully furthering social learning among various segments of the Russian public, these international organisations may help increase the staying power of the new norms, thereby securing their eventual internalisation within society. If

successfully executed, this strategy will lead to a strengthening in Russia of the organisation of social interests and it may therefore improve the prospects of norm empowerment 'from below'.

Checkel sees a clear need for this in 'statist' Russia where, so he argues, elite decision-makers are largely insulated from societal pressure and therefore free to roll back—or to 'disempower' — norms otherwise supported by the Russian electorate. This development, so he claims in an argument radically different from the one presented here, has actually taken place in post-Soviet Russia; the pro-democracy and pro-market reforms implemented by then Soviet leader Michail Gorbačëv have, in other words, been dis-empowered by a backward-looking elite operating more or less at will (idem 1997,482; 1999, 552).

While this study will not be assessing the actual *quality* of today's Russian democracy, it should be noted of course that if Putin is really striving to lower democratic standards through the introduction of a so-called 'managed democracy' (Åslund 2002), surveys on mass attitudes towards the reforms should be complemented by studies discussing the ability of the Russian public to overcome executive opposition to norm empowerment. What these studies will measure, then, is the ability of the electorate to coerce politicians into supporting certain norms, thereby demonstrating the obvious relevance of the rationalist approach.

The use of similar tools, only now within an international context, has been strongly advocated by commentators. Thus, Colton and McFaul (2001z», J4f), for instance, recommend 'putting democracy on the agenda', and Sarah Mendelson (2000, 7f) complements this by arguing that anti-democratic behaviour should have consequences. 'Western leaders', so she continues, 'should stress that if Russia wants to become part of the global community, it must tolerate certain ideas, practices, and norms.' Again, however, these recommendations to put constraints on elite behaviour relate to a situation where the quality of Russian democracy is lowered and a 'reverse' elite-mass dissonance therefore created.

Returning to the non-rationalist approaches, as already noted, pro-democracy movements should be given international support so that the new political norms may hopefully be diffused across and internalised by still more segments of the Russian population. Prior to this, however, members of the 'in-group' should welcome and reciprocate *real* changes in behaviour; any failure to do so may

jeopardise the future of the reforms as the population is not being rewarded for its efforts but rather exposed to a "sucker" payoff from its unilateral concessions (Wendt 1992,422).

The problem is, as Ted Hopf (1998, i78f) explains, that as a consequence of the self-definition of the 'in-group', the agent is

not even able to act as its identity until the relevant community of meaning... acknowledges the legitimacy of that action, by that actor, in that social context.

The EU took an important step towards a full recognition of the new identity when in May 2002 it announced that it would finally initiate the procedures necessary to extend a market status to the Russian economy. In practical terms, this step promises to increase the Russian exports into the EU market and thus to help improve the economy, but it also —and this is of equal significance—moves the Russian population closer to becoming part of 'Europe'.

Turning to internal measures instead, in order to increase support for democracy, reforms should also be implemented to improve the quality of what is being presented in the name of this ideal. While democratically inclined voters are highly unlikely to support non-democratic alternatives, we should expect those Russians who remain sceptical of democracy to reconsider their position if political performance improves. A critical area within this field is local self-government, where, so Steven Fish notes (2001, 73), 'most abuses of power' occur. Large-scale reforms are now targeting this area and the eventual outcome may be one of increased transparency and accountability at the local and regional levels— and this could in turn lead to an increase in the support for democracy (Fish 2001, 73).

Finally, to bridge the possible gap between support for the market economy and support for market outcomes, the executive and legislative branches should work to cushion the impact of the economic transition and to ensure a distribution of income that is more in keeping with popular Russian perceptions of 'fairness' (Linz 2000). Again, while Russian supporters of the market economy are likely to find that their political preferences have simply been confirmed by recent growth rates, sceptics may perhaps reconsider their opposition to the market. Long-term surveys of perceived living standards show a significant improvement in the years 1998-2002 and this clearly suggests, as noted earlier, that the post-1998 recovery is an all-Russian and not just an elite phenomenon.²⁷

²⁷ www.russiavotes.org, section 111/Q3, long trend.

Conclusion

The study has two key findings. First, while the general Russian population has clearly not adopted in full the 'European' identity as denned here, there are reasons to speculate that 'they' are becoming still more like 'us'. Thus, support for democratic ideals is reported to be quite high already and, with a combination of international assistance and domestic reforms, it may increase in coming years. As far as support for the market economy is concerned, the present level is found to be considerably lower, yet current growth rates and policies of income distribution all suggest that this may also rise. It therefore seems, as Colton and McFaul (2001 54) have summed up in what could be a direct response to Keenan, that Russian culture, 'having been generally antidemocratic and antiliberal for centuries', has 'finally ... undergone an important transformation'.

Second, this development improves the prospects of creating a sense of 'we-ness' based on shared norms. Indeed, even if not yet fully matured, it may already be observed. Thus, for instance, following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, an overwhelming majority of Russians found this to 'concern all humanity', thereby indicating that the attacks were seen as strikes against an identity believed to be commonly held—at least by this part of the Russian population.²⁸ Most of the Western studies used here have painted a similar picture—the Russians are becoming more like 'us'—and the much-wanted recognition by the 'in-group' therefore seems to be steadily approaching. This development in turn promises to foster community building and thus to help create a world—or part thereof—that is less conflictual.

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²⁸ See www.russiavotes.org, section VII/Q I, long trend.

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