The end of the Cold War caught many people by surprise on both sides of the infamous Iron Curtain. It bred a euphoria that was not a substitute for sober analysis, which simply seemed to be uncalled for at the time. The awareness came much later that the world had entered an unprecedented transitional period in its development that would obviously result in an intellectual challenge. These moods were summarized in a call to formulate a shared vision of the new historical era. The crisis of U.S. foreign policy, boldly manifested in “war of choice” in Iraq, sent a signal of alarm. It seemed that a country that had emerged victorious from the Cold War should not undergo this crisis. Yet we are now seeing a global financial and economic crisis rooted in the ideologies and practices of how the U.S. financial sector functioned over the past two decades. It shows convincingly that one-sided solutions and actions cannot bring any of the so-called public goods to the international community. On the contrary, solutions are not being found to existing problems and new ones are springing up.

Presumably, the riddle of the current stage of global development cannot be solved unless one gleans the meaning of what happened at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. It would not be an overstatement to claim in this connection that the problem of what the future has in store for the U.S. — which has become the façade of the historical West — will be of key significance.

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AMERICA... WHAT KIND OF AMERICA?
The results of the 2008 U.S. presidential election expressly show that Americans have acknowledged the need for change. The question is what kind of change and how fast it will materialize. There are grounds to believe that the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) factor in the U.S. has reached a critical juncture in its onward evolution that lasted four centuries. Like Russia, the U.S. can only change on its own, but, quite obviously, also by interacting with the rest of the world. All the international partners of the U.S. will have to recognize this reality and display an understanding of the complexity and painfulness of transformations in that great country.

Opinions differ widely over what kind of America the world really needs. For instance, Dominique Moisi, a senior advisor at the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), claims that the world needs the Old America that has been lost. Boston University professor Andrew Bacevich sounds more convincing when he recommends proceeding from the postulation that “transforming the United States was likely to prove an easier task than transforming the world” (Foreign Affairs, July/August, 2008). In other words, the case in hand is to integrate oneself — along with all the others — into a markedly new phase of global development heralded in by the Cold War and its conclusion.

Since the Cold War was not followed by any meaningful international debate that could have helped understand the importance of the changes that had taken place, the U.S. political class came to mistaken conclusions about international affairs and, above all, the economy and finance. The latter sector also witnessed the prevalence of inertia and a willingness for generalization on a global scale. This could be seen, for instance, in an attempt to force the Europeans to pursue a tougher U.S.-style social and economic model through the Lisbon agenda for the EU. It appears that the line of socialization of Western Europe’s economic development during the Cold War had been a tactical stratagem dictated exclusively by geopolitical considerations, above all, the necessity to respond to “the Soviet Union’s challenge.” Moreover, U.S. political leaders embarked on dismantling the balance between the market forces and state regulation of the economy that had taken shape at the end of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. The policy of deregulation
was launched during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and it unavoid-
ably spilled over to other Western countries. The degree to which the bar-
rriers in the way of the free market were eliminated actually largely fore-
told to what extent one or another country was afflicted with the crisis.

As regards structural overhaul of the economy, the U.S. seems to have missed the chance offered by the end of the Cold War much like the Soviet Union missed the opportunity to launch broad social and eco-
nomic reforms in the mid-1970s. For decades, the U.S. transformation-
al potential rested on benevolence, which stemmed from the opportuni-
ty to resolve its problems thanks to its privileged position in the global financial system. This allowed the Americans to live beyond their means — the combined federal budget deficit and the current accounts balance amounted to 8 percent of GDP, or $1 trillion, in recent years. This course ran counter to the foundations of U.S. morals that had emerged from Puritan ethics.

That is why the election of Barack Obama as president could not be something accidental; much like the arrival of the George W. Bush admin-
istration to the White House, which accelerated the complex process of America’s self-destruction, had not been accidental. The shock from the distresses that embraced the finance sector — the most vulnerable for the American consciousness — has set the scene for launching a radical trans-
formation of the country. Everything will depend on how big the revolu-
tionary potential of the new administration really is. The main thing is not to regard these painful shocks as the U.S. having lost the fight. They should be seen as the results of an obsolete system and a hawkish ideology that have outlived themselves and that failed to meet modern requirements. An approach of this kind helped Russia overcome its national disaster after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, recognize the causes of what had hap-
pened, draw conclusions, and rise to its feet again.

It is important to remember that the Soviet Union and the U.S. had much in common during the Cold War: their foreign policies were equally ideologized; they both put emphasis on official propaganda, conformism and patriotism; and they both abided by the same categories of political rationality. I trust the correctness of claims that history elim-
inates — one after another — the extremes of social development repre-
sented by various products of Western liberal thought. One such extreme
was Soviet ideology, manifested in the rejection of private ownership, the socialization of property and command management of the economy. The U.S. represented the opposite extreme — the boundless freedom of private enterprise. This means that the current crisis in the U.S falls into the same category as the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The U.S. will probably emerge from its deep transformation as a basically new country, one that it has never been seen before, with the exception of the ingenuous glimpses of people like Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower or John F. Kennedy. They all recognized a multipolar world as something inescapable and realized the danger stored in the militarization of foreign policy and the economy, and this understanding put them closer to the Europeans, whose outlook had been shaped by the end of the Cold War.

It would be the least desirable to see “the Americans’ instinctive wish to be left alone” (Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft. America and the World. Basics Books, New York, 2008, p. 35). prevail in this situation. Zbigniew Brzezinski’s vision of the U.S. leading role as a catalyst of collective action that the international community is ready to undertake appears to hold water. This role will require a considerable renovation of U.S. society towards “greater enlightenment.” This prompts the conclusion that tangible changes in U.S. policies can only result from America’s own genuine transformation.

RUSSIA AND THE WEST

The pivotal point in global development inevitably makes one turn to the philosophy of history; otherwise the essence of current events will be impossible to understand. A superficial analysis leads to mistaken strategies. This is graphically illustrated by the calls for the West’s civilizational solidarity for “the defense of Western values and lifestyle,” although one can clearly see that the global financial crisis is, first and foremost, a crisis of the Western lifestyle no longer supported by intellectual or other resources.

“The 500-year global domination by the Atlantic powers is coming to an end,” Zbigniew Brzezinski believes (International Herald Tribune, December 17, 2008). It is here that the fundamental issue of Russia and the West comes into the spotlight. In essence, we shared all the tragedies
that swept Europe in the 20th century – the continent’s “twilight period” when the Western part of the continent set the tune for the development of all European civilization. An opportunity has arisen with the end of the Cold War for genuine collective decision-making in the Euro-Atlantic region, but this is inconceivable without Russia’s equal participation.

Back in 1918, Oswald Spengler spoke about “the decline of the West,” implying the final stage of existence of the West-European/American culture. He linked this stage of the transformation of culture into civilization to imperialism and presumed it would follow the Roman-Puritan-Prussian line.

Yet history has proven the essential bankruptcy of the claims of Greater Prussia – which Germany turned into through Bismarck’s will – for imperial leadership. In reality, a united Germany became a tool for the destruction of Old Europe and this was convincingly shown by the outcome of both World Wars. In actual life and in the conditions of democracy, German heroism (as opposed to English mercantilism) combined with the Prussian spirit eventually bred Nazism – which Spengler could witness himself.

In fact, Nietzscheanism, which advanced the cult of the Übermensch (Superman, or Overman), and declared the “death of God,” could not produce anything else. The Russian writers Fyodor Tyutchev and Fyodor Dostoyevsky foresaw the stalemate of Western anthropocentrism. Remarkably, they did so even before Spengler, whose analysis was torn off – and not by accident – from the Christian roots of European civilization. As for the fruit born of European civilization, it has become obvious that the entire range of current global problems is a product of the five centuries of Western dominance in politics, the economy and finance. Incidentally, Spengler’s skepticism caused an allergic reaction among Russia’s Bolshevikist leaders as well. They had their own ideas of what concerned breathing new life into European civilization and making it more universal – along the lines of a “world revolution.” Here lies the deep-rooted commonality of Bolshevism and the idea of “the historical West,” which permits a view of the Cold War as a method of Europe’s global domination.

The problem of the historical West is especially acute on the other side of the Atlantic because the burdens of politics grounded in the
instincts and prejudices of the past have proven to be the heaviest there. It is hard to escape the conclusion that we have been witnessing the Spenglerian “internal destruction” of the failed Western global empire. Even though the unipolar world existed at the level of mythology, it had an influence on international relations. Many countries were spellbound by the image of the only hyperpower, believing that it actually existed, and that is why the empire did exist, albeit in a sketch drawing.

Spengler’s theory is still relevant merely for the fact that it helps to understand a lot in European and world history. Without intending to make accounts to the West, one nevertheless has to admit the huge costs of the Western freedom from moral imperatives — Nazism, two World Wars, the Cold War, and the current global financial crisis. Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize winning economist, said that this crisis has been bred by “the toxic mix of special interests, misguided economics and right-wing ideologies,” as well as the faith that investment banks and ratings agencies had in the “financial alchemy” (The Guardian, September 30, 2008), which differed little from the one practiced by financial pyramids in England and Holland in the early 18th century. In other words, liberal capitalism has gone full circle. That is why it is really difficult to believe in the possibility of a return to the state of affairs “as before,” or as if nothing has happened. At any rate, the uniqueness of the first crisis in the era of globalization calls for greater caution in forecasts.

The international community has been idly watching the frustration of balances in the global system for too long. Crises and instability will continue to plague the world while the general rules of the game are absent. A smooth landing is only possible if all the players that have the considerable potential and resources necessary for implementing coordinated decisions become engaged in the game. The legitimacy of any system of global governance will be determined by its efficiency — in counteraction to the new challenges and threats common for all countries.

If this is the case, all of European civilization will be rejuvenated, not decline, on a truly collective basis. Anyone can see plainly that the tragic experience of the 20th century has transformed Western Europe into something compatible with other cultures and civilizations. This shows through in the integration processes within Europe; its apparent reluctance to wage wars outside its borders (this is proven by Washington’s
endless complaints against its NATO allies); and the desire to consolidate international legitimacy. This mild non-aggressive worldview unites Russia with the vast majority of European countries and one may expect that the U.S. will choose this path as well, after it draws conclusions from its political experience of the past few years. Interesting enough, even a politician as pro-Atlantic as former British prime minister Tony Blair has developed an understanding of the need for “peaceful coexistence of the global society in which we live” on the basis of a broad spectrum of values that would include, apart from democracy and the market, “the common good, compassion, and justice” (*International Herald Tribune*, December 18, 2008).

But the most optimistic factor is that in the greenhouse conditions of the Cold War, the greater part of Europe has elaborated a socially-oriented model of economic development and a broad representative democracy relying on a sizable middle class. Russia, too, has opted for this path. America’s middle class rose out of the post-World War II demobilization programs and FDR’s New Deal aimed at attaining the same objective. As *The Economist* magazine wrote, state regulation had existed in the U.S. economy even before the George W. Bush administration launched its latest measures, specifically the government’s sponsorship of the system-building mortgage corporations Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Therefore, the biggest danger posed by this crisis is the potential blow to this class and, consequently, to all the achievements of European civilization that laid the groundwork for domestic peace in postwar Europe. Maintaining the middle class and the achievements of European civilization can provide the only guarantee to prevent the materialization of Spengler’s forecast for an “inward decline of the nations into a formless population” and a “slowly thrusting up of primitive human conditions into the highly-civilized mode of living.” Elements of this can easily be seen in Europe’s 20th-century history.

The systemic nature of the crisis of the historical West is acknowledged by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He believes the extolment of neo-liberal individualism has proven that there is a “historical impasse” and that the future lies in developing the theory of democracy along the European path. In any event, this is not the end of the road, as we are dealing with a radical transformation capable of giving a new lease on life to
European civilization at a new stage of historical development while maintaining the fundamentals of the market system and democracy.

This scenario requires a return to the Westphalian principles of international relations. One should remember that the 17th century exodus to America by the Puritans and other bellicose Protestants — unwilling to accept the compromise offered to them at the end of the revolution in England — imparted Europe with an opportunity to live by the Westphalian rules, which placed value-related and religious distinctions outside the interstate format. The return of the U.S. to European politics made it extremely politicized during the Cold War. Now it is time to part with this aberration and to begin living by European rules of tolerance.

History means too much to neglect its lessons today. Of genuine interest in this respect are the documents related to the Munich Agreement. Seventy years have passed, but these documents still remain classified. Is there really something worth concealing? These documents could shed some light on the degree to which efforts by London and Paris to appease Hitler were motivated by an unwillingness to go to war and the ideology behind the Agreement; i.e. the eagerness of the ruling classes to channel Nazi aggression to the East and thus avoid finding a solution to the overripe problem of the transformation of European society. This transformation became possible only after World War II and took the form of a geopolitical imperative of the Cold War.

HISTORIC MISSIONS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Every great nation — and Russia and the U.S. in particular — has its own mission in history, with national crises and disasters sending the signal if the mission is accomplished. It is important to consider not only the missions that have been accomplished, but also those that will follow suit. If one looks at Russia’s role in European construction — that is, its mission in Europe — one cannot but help agreeing with Pyotr Stegny who says that Russia’s inclusion in the Westphalian system was prompted by its growing relevance in European affairs on the geopolitical, economic, cultural and civilizational planes (Pyotr Stegny. Comprehending a Shared History. Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn, 10/2008).
Russia and the Soviet Union accomplished a mission of a historic scale, at least in what concerns the shaping of the political map of Eastern Europe where all the countries, including the former Soviet republics, have acquired clear-cut borders. This is in addition to the main mission — the disruption of two attempts to unify Europe by force that were made by Napoleonic France and Hitler’s Germany. This accomplishment made it possible to build today’s Europe. Who else could counteract Napoleon and Hitler on the ground as efficiently? In other words, in all previous eras, including the Cold War, Russia had the mission of cutting short “the flight of the Faustian soul into Limitless Space” in international relations.

It is too early to declare an end to Russia’s geopolitical mission — as it is equally inappropriate to speak of the “end of history.” However, the radically changing globalized world will force all leading countries to reformulate their missions. Russia continues to shoulder the burden of maintaining strategic stability — a carryover mission of the Cold War era. Tyutchev’s idea that “Russia’s very existence denies the future of the West” has gained a new meaning. Whatever role Russia had in disrupting the West’s project of a global empire/world revolution after the end of the Cold War, its foreign policy independence makes any dominance on the Euro-Atlantic or the global scale impossible. The alternatives promulgated by Russia — equal interaction with the EU and the U.S., the general political unity of European civilization and the collective leadership of the world’s leading powers — make up the content of this country’s historic mission at the new stage. The demand for such changes was proven at the G-20 Washington Summit, which is widely regarded as a de facto expansion of the financial G7.

The crux of the matter is bigger than what Martin Gilman said about the importance for donor countries, including Russia, to set the tune in the current financial system in the same way that the U.S. did during the rise of Bretton Woods institutions (Vremya Novostei, November 11, 2008), although he is right too. A collective effort by all the main players towards reforming the present architecture in order to secure the world against similar crises in the future has much more importance now than the wish to emerge from the crisis ahead of everyone else.

The missions of other leading global players, like the U.S., have not been exhausted either — they are simply undergoing a reformulation. If
“the promulgation of freedom and democracy” implies a historic mission, then the best way to accomplish it would be to set one’s own example. It would be a good thing if the U.S. fought global poverty, developed alternative sources of energy, and resolved the entire spectrum of human problems, thus creating conditions for the normal internal development of all countries. One can hardly disagree with Fyodor Lukyanov when he said that the idea of democracy should be defended against efforts to transform it into a tool to serve geopolitical ambitions.

Renouncing the official revolutionary mythology would bring benefits too, not least because the latter blesses political violence. How should one fight terrorism if it picks up slogans of terror from the annals of European and North American history? Russia has renounced these myths and European countries are doing so in one measure or another as well, but the U.S. is taking its time. Is it because the entire exclusiveness of America’s global mission is rooted in the myths of its War of Independence?

As Roger Cohen writes, “it has been hard to grasp in Washington that the same forces […] that helped deliver the United States to the post-Cold-War zenith of its power […] have now democratized power” (International Herald Tribune, December 16, 2008). An ever-growing number of countries are becoming engaged in the creation of history — independently or as part of various forums or integrating associations like the G8, the G-20, the EU, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Objective conditions are taking shape for a new moment of convergence in the Euro-Atlantic region — on the basis of civilizational products that can be proudly offered to the world. The same goes for the task of establishing collective leadership of the European civilization in global affairs (Sergei Lavrov. Face-to-Face With America: Between Non-Confrontation and Convergence. Profile, October 13, 2008).

Standing in this line is the settlement of differences over the patchy architecture of European security. The idea of a European Security Treaty allows the security interests of the entire Euro-Atlantic family to be drawn together. Attempts to preserve the status quo will only produce gleaming new holes, the same way it happened with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe or may happen yet unless Russia and
NATO manage to rebuild trust in their relations. Sergei Karaganov was quite correct in asking if Russia should continue to help the alliance by keeping up the pretence of good relations with it (Rossiiskaya Gazeta, December 9, 2008). And what will happen to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) if Moscow withholds its interested participation in that forum? Will many European organizations not lose a greater part of their meaningfulness in the absence of close contacts with Moscow? Discussion about the treaty could help clear up these issues and, above all, tap a general answer to the main question of our time — the one about its meaning.

It is very unlikely that Russia’s recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia produced a bigger crisis in its relations with the EU and the U.S. than the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo, which the Europeans and Americans supported. If anyone should refer to a crisis, this is most obviously a continuing crisis of misunderstanding that calls for joint handling on both sides.

A clear indicator of this is Washington’s propensity to cite China’s cautious conduct as an example for Russia to follow. However, unlike Russia, China is not a member of the Euro-Atlantic community and is not bound to the U.S. by a strategic stability relationship — the latter sphere contains all the points of Russian-U.S. contradictions. Moscow simply cannot overlook the issues that Beijing can keep silent on, since Russia’s vital interests are at stake.

Implementing opportunities for collective action could play a decisive role in restoring the governability of global development in its current critical phase after the financial and economic crisis cleans the Augean stable of the entire international system inherited from the past and makes the rise of a new system inevitable.