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RUSSIA AND THE MEGALOPOLIS

Abstract

The text deals with the relationship between Russia and the Megalopolis. Megalopolis is a concept used to emphasize the transformation of Western civilization, which during the Cold War was defined by values such as national identity, democracy, Christianity, and humanism. Megalopolis is a supranational entity defined by post-democracy, post-Christianity, post-humanism, and the breakdown of national identity into transnational and subnational identities. This paper argues that Russia, in reinterpreting its role and purpose in the 21st century, must start from the transformation of the West into the Megalopolis and with the fact that Megalopolis positions Russia as a civilizational rival. This is because Russia has not abandoned its humanistic and Christian foundations. In other words, Russia practically inherits the traditions of European humanism and Christianity, considering these traditions as a combination of the Eastern and Western canons (rooted in the Eastern and Western Roman Empires). Furthermore, the text emphasizes that the epochal intention of the Megalopolis is the transformation of humans into bioparticles, thus replacing sovereign authority with biopower. In this context, media controlled by corporations and transnational oligarchies play a dominant role in shaping human consciousness. The key question raised at the end of the text for contemplation is whether and how Russia and other countries that value

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sovereignty can counter the transformation of humans into bioparticles imposed by the Megalopolis.

Key Words: *Megalopolis, West, Russia, humanism, bioparticle*

CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS, POWER, AND IDENTITY

In one part of the book *The Demise of Russian Communism*, Alexander Zinoviev writes: “The West became an inseparable factor of the internal life [of the USSR], greatly contributing to the weakening of the defense mechanisms of Soviet society as a communist society” (Zinoviev 2003, 46). The status of being a factor in Russia’s internal life was not acquired by the West with the Soviet Union, nor was this status changed when the USSR collapsed.

The narrative of the struggle against communism, which was prevalent during the Cold War, was replaced during the 1990s by the influential narrative of the clash of civilizations, based on Samuel Huntington’s book of the same name. The nature of this book, in addition to its title, is brilliantly illustrated by a subtle yet no less cynical anecdote with which the author opens his thoughts on the clash of civilizations:

“On January 3, 1992, a meeting of Russian and American scholars took place in the auditorium of a government building in Moscow. Two weeks earlier the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, and the Russian Federation had become an independent country. As a result, the statue of Lenin which previously graced the stage of the auditorium had disappeared and instead the flag of the Russian Federation was now displayed on the front wall. The only problem, one American observed, was that the flag had been hung upside down. After this was pointed out to the Russian hosts, they quickly and quietly corrected the error during the first intermission.” (Huntington 1996, 19).

The moral of this anecdote is clear: the Western civilization is superior because it knows what it is, but it also knows what other civilizations are, including the Orthodox one. In contrast, the Orthodox civilization, represented by Russia, still does not know itself.

History, however, ridiculed this triumphant, unipolar anecdote. This happened in the mid-first decade of the 21st century when Huntington published a book titled *Who are we?* Although its theme is not the identity

of Western civilization but only the American identity, it is clear that it reflects the author's deep confusion about the fate of that identity and the extent of different types of identities replacing it. Therefore, what seemed unquestionable in the last decade of the 20th century is no longer so. Like his Russian counterparts in the 1990s, Huntington now asks himself the same question: who are we?

What happened to the American national identity? In short, it erodes and dissipates into transnational and subnational identities of minority groups. This is what concerns Huntington, and sometimes, through the seemingly impersonal and academic style of his writing, one can sense not only concern but even fear: "There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English." (Huntington 2005, 256).

Huntington tacitly assumes that the American national identity was the generator of the USA's power, which is why his book revolves around two questions that are not explicitly stated but permeate the entire work, giving it meaning. These questions can be formulated as follows: How can that power be preserved if the identity that generated it disappears? And can a completely new identity inherit the power that was generated by a previously entirely different-conceived identity?

The American scholar describes this new identity as a blend of transnational and subnational identities (Huntington 2005, 16). The emergence of this new identity is a result of systematic social engineering, at times highly repressive, which *erases* the former West defined by national identities, Christianity, democracy, and humanism. Instead, a new post-national, post-Christian, post-democratic, and post-humanistic social construct is being created.

WAR OF MEGALOPOLIS AGAINST RUSSIA

To emphasize this difference, I named it Megalopolis. With this term, I intend to highlight the discontinuity with the former West on one hand and to indicate that the foundations of Megalopolis lie in the interconnectedness of global cities rather than in the interconnectedness of nation-states. The transition from the West to the Megalopolis is, therefore, a shift from national to urban identity, which is trans/subnational.

In my opinion, Megalopolis is a concept necessary for understanding not only the events in Ukraine but also much broader tectonic shifts that the world is currently facing.

If we say that there is a war between Russia and NATO, we have narrowed that war down to its military and economic dimensions. If we say that there is a war between Russia and the “collective West,” then the term “collective West” conceals the essence of that war, as it excludes the change in the West itself, as noted by Huntington’s question, “who are we?” which leads to the meaning of Megalopolis.

Therefore, the most accurate way to put it is that there is a war between the Megalopolis and Russia, or countries like Russia, which still perceive their foundation as a national identity and sovereign authority.

To briefly describe the Megalopolis, let us focus on one of the many terms with the prefix post- that are used today, both descriptively and normatively. That term is post-truth.

What does post-truth tell us about the Megalopolis?

American sociologist David Riesman, in his well-known book *The Lonely Crowd*, distinguishes three types of characters: the tradition-directed character, the inner-directed character, and the other-directed character (Riesman, Glaser, and Denney 2001, 3–30). In the mid-20th century, when Riesman conducted his research, the inner-directed character still dominated, which was characteristic of a production-oriented society and a psychology of scarcity. However, the book also foreshadows the time of the other-directed character’s dominance, which characterizes a consumer-oriented society and a psychology of abundance.

To explain the connection between post-truth and the Megalopolis, it is necessary to pay attention to the difference between the inner-directed character and the other-directed character.

The individual who is inner-directed adopts a set of values from their parents and authorities during their youth and strives to maintain it throughout their life, harmonizing the modernity they participate in with the set of inherited values. In stark contrast, the individual who is other-directed does not possess any permanent set of values but instead adopts the values that are current in the present; therefore, instead of a continuity of values, the other-directed individual only knows their constant *change*. The inner-directed individual seeks continuity of values; the other-directed individual accepts the discontinuity of values.

As a result, truth holds some significance only for the inner-directed individuals who strive to *discover* the truth of the contemporary world

to *compare* it with their inherited set of values. In this way, they attempt to determine their own stance towards modernity: they may accept it if the truth of the contemporary aligns with their inherited values, or they may reject it if it contradicts them.

For the other-directed individuals, truth holds no importance because this type of character *automatically* adopts the values of their contemporaries without questioning whether those values are based on truth or not. Thus, truth no longer influences the actions of individuals whose character is directed towards others.

Riesman's observation that the other-directed character develops in large cities on the east and west coasts of the USA, among the youth and the elite, is interesting. This gives this type of character the form of an *urban identity*. The expansion of an urban identity, devoid of the need for continuity, leads to the erosion of national identity and the adoption of contemporary transnational and subnational identities that are no longer rooted in historical memory. The dominance of urban identity leads to the emergence of the Megalopolis, which is determined, among other factors, by post-truth, because truth, as well as history, are no longer necessary for urban identity.

A whole series of post-prefixed concepts – post-democracy, post-Christianity, post-humanism – which theory in Megalopolis abundantly uses today – testify to the discontinuity in the very essence of the West. Megalopolis erases the humanistic canon of the West – the collection of the most significant philosophical, artistic, and literary works – claiming that the nature of that canon is allegedly racist and misogynistic, and that canonical works cause traumas. In place of the humanistic canon, cultural industry products now step in, representing subnational and transnational identities and values. They do not build a new canon, as the idea of the permanence of human achievements in the post-anti-humanistic Megalopolis is no longer considered valuable – instead, they appear and disappear, making way for new products of the same provenance.

What are the effects of social engineering used to build the Megalopolis? Firstly, it involves the de-homogenization of society. A society that was once divided into classes but united by identity is now fragmented into minority groups based on sexual orientation, gender, and racial identity, among which a silent civil war persists. National identity and class affiliation are thus suppressed.

The mentioned low-intensity civil war is intended to serve as a buffer zone that conceals the increasing economic disparities within

the Megalopolis. Currently, these differences manifest as disparities in wealth. However, they can easily transform into unequal access to future biotechnologies, which will not be available on the open market, effectively turning them into privileges.

From this, one can conclude that the Megalopolis annuls the *intellectual* achievements of both great revolutions: the French bourgeois revolution, which promises the legal dignity of man embodied in the values of equality, brotherhood, and freedom, and the October Bolshevik revolution, which adds to the legal dignity the demand for the economic dignity of man.

The outcome of the Megalopolis is, therefore, a regression into a neo-feudal society, divided between a minority biopolitical authority and a majority biomass, with no mediation between them: neither political, in terms of democracy and a common national idea, nor philosophical, in terms of an all-encompassing Truth and a humanistic foundation that unites both groups.

To truly achieve such an outcome, it is evident that *every* civilization alternative to the Metropolis based on the humanistic and Christian heritage of Europe must be erased. By the term “European heritage,” I refer to Europe as a synthesis of Western and Eastern canons, although *such* a Europe, unfortunately, never had a chance to exist as a specific historical and political entity.

My main thesis is as follows: for the Megalopolis, Russia is not primarily a geopolitical challenge like China, but above all, a civilizational rival. Such a status arises due to Russia’s paradoxical relationship with Europe. If we equate the concept of Europe with the Western canon, which stems from the foundations of the Western Roman Empire, then Russia is not truly Europe. However, if we include the Eastern, Byzantine canon as an integral part of the concept of Europe, then things change. In that case, Russia becomes a full-fledged member of this East-West, or West-East Europe. Russia’s national humanistic canon, on the other hand, becomes the place where this common Europe emerges.

To illustrate this, we will provide examples from the realm of literature, as it holds a special significance and reputation in Russia. We will mention just two key names: Pushkin and Dostoevsky. The renowned novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*, is, in fact, Pushkin’s conversation with Richardson (whom Tatyana Larina reads), then Byron (whom Onegin comments on), and German Romanticism (which Lensky is obsessed with). On the other hand, Dostoevsky writes his novels as concealed polemics with Balzac and Stendhal.

The direction of ideas is not only from the West to the East, but also the other way around: as it is well-known, Nietzsche reads Dostoevsky, as does Freud, while Spengler has Danilevsky in his library, though he forgets to mention him in *The Decline of the West* where he talks about the organic nature of cultures (or rather, cultural-historical types, as Danilevsky would put it).

These are just some of the points where the movement of ideas from the East to the West, and *vice versa*, is recognized, thereby outlining the contours of a politically never fully achieved Europe of the Eastern and Western canons.

The Megalopolis has destroyed the European humanistic heritage of the Western canon, but as we can see, that heritage has been preserved in the form of the *backlight* of Russian culture, which represents a component of the Eastern canon of European culture. Thus, even unintentionally, Russia has become the only sovereign state where the European humanistic heritage of the Western canon feels secure. Figuratively speaking, Shakespeare is an emigrant who feels safer in Moscow than in London.

From this, the following position arises as long as Russia exists, the realization can emerge that Megalopolis is not any “Europe” or “West,” but an entity that has destroyed the European heritage. That is why, contrary to geopolitical logic that turns it towards the Pacific, Megalopolis cannot turn away from Russia.

If the Megalopolis recognizes in Russia the potential embryo of a new European renaissance, how can Russia envision itself in the 21st century?

The answer to this question must reconcile two different vectors: the first is the economic-geopolitical one that turns Russia towards Asia; the second is the cultural-identity vector that keeps it in Europe. To reconcile these two vectors, it is not enough for Russia to define itself merely as a Eurasian country because such a designation says nothing about the *meaning* of Eurasian identity. The redefinition of Russia in the 21st century would likely have to begin with a systematic redefinition of the “West,” with a clear awareness that the West, as it existed until 1989, no longer exists. There is only Megalopolis, and that is crucial. If Russia does not systematically recognize this discontinuity, Megalopolis will radiate within it as the (liberal) “West,” condemning Russia to ideological defensiveness and entrenching the exhausting pattern of dividing between liberals and sovereigntists. In short, in that case, Russia will remain trapped in a time that has long passed.

If in the place of the former West now stands the Megalopolis, as a negation of the tradition and identity of the West, including Western liberalism, then Russia has the right to define itself as a country that simultaneously defends Russian Orthodox Christianity and the *common* European humanistic canon. The Asian component of Russia would involve the need to connect that European experience in a new way with the Asian one, thereby strengthening the conflict against the Megalopolis. Eurasia would thus become a working project for Russia, capable of fostering Russian national mobilization and bolstering Russia's positions.

This geo-philosophical positioning of Russia between Europe and Asia, or for Europe and Asia, must, however, be accompanied by an understanding of the depth and direction of Megalopolis's influence on Russia. For the redefinition of Russia as a country that guarantees the shared (Eastern and Western) heritage of Europe to be politically sustainable, it will be necessary for Russia to prevent the crucial influence of the Megalopolis on its population. To achieve this, it is essential to answer the question of the various ways in which the Megalopolis impacts the populations of those countries that are politically and economically opposed to it.

The significance of pointing out the transformation of the West into the Megalopolis should be understood, first and foremost, as a change in the way individual consciousness is shaped. This paper, of course, does not claim to present a history of how a community shapes the worldview of its members but aims to highlight the key transformation that the Megalopolis brings in this context. We have seen that Riesman's investigations point to a shift in the dominant type of character in America: an inward-directed character replaces an other-directed character. This is not just a change that determines the transformation from a "production society," where an inward-directed character dominates, to a "consumer society," where an other-directed character prevails, but it also indicates a shift in the entity shaping an individual's consciousness. In the case of the inward-directed character, it is parents and the (national) educational system or the church. In the case of the other-directed character, it is peers, namely, the media controlled by corporations led by the transnational oligarchy that governs the Megalopolis.

The change in the dominant type of character signifies, therefore, a change in the dominant entity shaping an individual's consciousness, but it also signifies a change in the concept of the individual. The transformation of the "West" into the Megalopolis does not simply

mean that the individual adopts a different set of knowledge instead of another; it means that the very concept of humanity is changing: Megalopolis' post-humanistic (and actually anti-humanistic) paradigm seeks to replace sovereign authority with biopolitics and transform humans into bio-particles, reducing them to the level of shallowness and superficiality that Hannah Arendt hinted at in her essay "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?"

Although Hannah Arendt, of course, does not mention the Megalopolis or biopolitics, her anticipation of technical uniformity and the elimination of national cultural or identity differences makes her anticipation a very valid description of today's transformation of sovereign nations into biomass, which takes place within the territory of Megalopolis:

"From a philosophical viewpoint, the danger inherent in the new reality of mankind seems to be that this unity, based on the technical means of communication and violence, destroys all national traditions, and buries the authentic origins of all human existence. This destructive process can even be considered a prerequisite for ultimate understanding between men of all cultures, civilizations, races, and nations. Its result would be a shallowness that would transform man, as we have known him in five thousand years of recorded history, beyond recognition. It would be more than mere superficiality; it would be as though the whole dimension of depth, without which human thought, even on the mere level of technical invention, could not exist, would simply disappear. This leveling down would be much more radical than the leveling to the lowest common denominator; it would ultimately arrive at a denominator of which we have hardly any notion today" (Arendt 1968, 87).

So, Megalopolis today does exactly what Hannah Arendt feared in the quoted passage: it does not simply transform a person's knowledge or strictly speaking, their (national) identity, but the very concept of humanity and the concept of authority over humans. Sovereign authority is replaced by biopower. As a result, the earlier entities that shaped humans, such as the educational system, families, or religious authorities, in Megalopolis either become subservient (educational system) or lose their authority (religious authorities), or their direction is changed. Thus, the relationship between parents and children takes on a reversible character. In other words, it is no longer parents who raise their children, but children who educate their parents. Accepting children as authorities becomes the only

way for most parents to maintain any connection with their children after the Megalopolis, through the change in character type, effectively takes away their right to raise children themselves.

Russia and all those countries that wish to resist the Megalopolis must be aware of the depth of Megalopolis's influence on their population. During the Cold War, the West offered citizens of the USSR the possibility of a different everyday life, one that would be defined by an abundance of attractively packaged goods, images, and stories, with the condition of demobilizing and "liberating" themselves from communism. As we know, it turned out that the "liberation" from communism did not lead to a consumer paradise but rather to a phenomenon that Sergey Kara-Murza described as the dismantling of the nation (Kara-Murza 2015, 15).

Today, the Megalopolis no longer offers an abundance of goods, images, and stories, as Russia, along with China and other countries that exist in opposition to Megalopolis, can provide those to its citizens on its own. Instead, the Megalopolis now offers something else to the citizens of the resisting states: a seductive concept of reducing humans to "free" bio-particles. Becoming a bio-particle means "liberating oneself" from religious and national identity, as well as from humanism, so that one descends to the level of a bio-particle from which the Megalopolis, allegedly, will never demand anything but will supposedly allow it to indulge in unrestricted freedom to fulfill its bodily instincts and psychological variations. This takes the place of the idea and practice of humanistic self-improvement or the idea and practice of Christian (Orthodox) communion with God. Of course, when a person becomes a bio-particle, they thereby accept liberation from anything that could enhance their personal power and connect them with others. As a result, they willingly subject themselves to absolute powerlessness in relation to the Megalopolis, which creates opportunities for biopolitical practices that regulate the population density of the planet.

EPOCHAL INTENTION AND LIBERATION

In short, it is not enough to merely define a different geo-philosophical concept that opposes the Megalopolis; it is essential to provide techniques and resources for the state to confront Megalopolis' *epochal intention* of transforming people into bio-particles. To counter the Megalopolis effectively, the state, including Russia, cannot isolate itself from the Megalopolis, as that would acknowledge the defensive

nature of the concept of human in relation to the concept of a bio-particle. Instead, it is necessary to create an everyday collaboration between family (parents' authority), state (educational system), and media or (national) cultural industry to close off any channels through which the Megalopolis can operate. The case of the USSR showed that military parity alone is not enough to ensure the durability of a state entity, and ideological parity can be undermined in the practices of daily life. This means that Russia, like any other state, must base its defence against the Megalopolis, among other things, on the creative superiority of its daily life, in which the concept of human will triumph over the concept of a bio-particle. To achieve this, in addition to the authority of the family and the national educational system, it will be necessary to create a modern, skilled, and artistically talented cultural industry that can fill everyday life with images and stories that celebrate the concept of human over the concept of a bio-particle.

In conclusion, the future of Russia will depend on whether a critical mass of its citizens will choose to remain humans or succumb to becoming bio-particles. The answer to this question will largely depend on Russia's ability to transform its relationship with the Megalopolis into an internal energy generator that convinces people that life is more than just fulfilling base natural instincts anywhere and with anyone.

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РУСИЈА И МЕГАЛОПОЛИС

Апстракт

У тексту се бавимо односом Русије и Мегалополиса. Мегалополис је појам који смо употребили како бисмо нагласили промену природе западне цивилизације, која је у доба Хладног рата, била дефинисана вредностима као што су национални идентитет, демократија, хришћанство и хуманизам. Мегалополис је наднационална творевина која је одређена пост-демократијом, пост-хришћанством, пост-хуманизмом, те распадом националног идентитета на транс-националне и суб-националне идентитете. У раду се заступа мишљење да Русија, у реинтерпретацији своје улоге и свог смисла у XXI. веку, мора да пође од преображаја Запада у Мегалополис, и чињенице да Мегалополис Русију позиционира као цивилизацијског ривала, будући да се Русија није одрекла својих хуманистичких и хришћанских темеља. То значи да Русија практично бацитини традиције европског хуманизма и хришћанства, ако се те традиције схвате као спој источног и западног канона (утемељених на Источном и Западном римском царству). У тексту се даље наглашава да је епохална интенција Мегалополиса преображај човека у биочестицу, а самим тим, и замена суверене власти биовлашћу. У том контексту, доминантну улогу у обликовању свести човека добијају медији у власти корпорација и транснационалне олигархије. Кључно питање које се поставља као тема за размисљање на крају текста јесте да ли и на који начин Русија и све друге земље којима је стало до суверенитета,

*могу да парирају преображају човека у биочестицу
на коме институира Мегалополис.*

Кључне речи: *Мегалополис, Запад, Русија, хуманизам,
биочестица.*
