

# Russian-European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region

The history of Russia's fractured relationship with and in Europe points to the enduring importance of identity. This study offers a rich contribution to the scholarly literature on the role of identity in Russian-European relations, with original and topical research on contemporary developments in the Black Sea and Balkans regions.

— **Professor Roy Allison**, *University of Oxford, UK*

Vsevolod Samokhvalov

# Russian-European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region

Great Power Identity and the Idea of Europe

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This book is the outcome of the past 15 years of my experience as a practitioner, journalist, and researcher of Russian-European relations in the shared neighbourhood. It is difficult to compare the contribution that many people have made to my work on this project. Sometimes a word mentioned in a brief discussion may weigh more in the research process than participation in many hours of training. Therefore, I decided to follow the chronological principle and mention people and institutions in the order in which they appeared in my life and in the life of this research project. It will also shed light on my scholarly standing. Normally, words of appreciation to the family are saved for the last sentences of acknowledgements. But I should start with my parents because—in addition to being loving and supportive caregivers—they have both been great teachers, who prepared me for implementing this research project. My father—Oleg, specialist in the Russian history—to whom I owe my complicated ancient-Slavonic name—lectured me about the crucial moments in the the history of this country. Through numerous conversations and long excursions to the places where the most dramatic episodes of the Russian-Turkish wars had taken place he provided me with rich empirical knowledge and an insider's perspective of Russian history and foreign policy. This immersion into the great power history was well balanced by the education I received from my mother—Vera. She exposed me to the world of the Balkan nations with their traditional gratitude towards, and ironic perception of, Russia's grandeur and messianic deal. This dual perspective—that of agent of Russia's great power policies and its subject—informed my scholarly approach.

While studying international relations in Odessa University I benefited from the guidance of my highly qualified teachers such as Prof. Ihor Koval, Dr. Volodymyr Dubovyk, and Dr. Anita Petroski. However, the idea of the book was born during one of the most unusual encounters with a crowd of culturologists of the Odessa Conservatoire. I am grateful to Professor of Cultural Studies, Alexandra Ovsiannikova, for her genuine interest in my subject and her insightful critique of rational choice theories, which dominated my alma mater at that point. This intellectual experience gained in the mid-1990s pushed me to intuitively seek cultural “sources of the Moscow conduct” well before a constructivist turn made significant impact on the research of Russian foreign policy and appeared on my radar.

My interest in the Balkans was satisfied from the early years of my undergraduate studies through contacts with, and training from, the most knowledgeable representatives of this region. Working with Dr. Galina Milich at the University of Odessa was a permanent intellectual challenge and introduced me to the richest periods in the history of Serbia and Montenegro. The programme of Hellenic studies at the University of Odessa and, later on, in Athens exposed me to the Greek language and its literature. My Greek teachers and friends of varying ideologies from liberals to anarchists—Prof. Teo Couloumbis, Kostas Yfantis, Eleni Samaritaki, Natalia Terentieva, and Nanushka Podkovyroff<sup>2</sup>—prepared me to keep my eyes open to the dynamics on the ground, which often becomes an important intervening variable in great power politics. While working as a policy officer for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, I was fortunate to work with and learn from some of the most experienced practitioners. Ambassadors Yiannis Papanikolaou, Sergiu Celac, Dusan Batakovic, and Evgheni Kutovoi as well as Drs. Ioannis Stribis and Dr. Panagiota Manoli exposed me to practical aspects of multilateral diplomacy in the Balkans and Black Sea region. Working with and learning from Prof. Mustafa Aydin from Turkey helped me to contextualise my Greece-based perspective.

During the same period, I had the fortune of gaining further insight into the Black Sea region and European politics by pursuing one of my hobbies—journalism. There are two mentors in my journalist career whose experience, wisdom, and networks helped me to conduct an important part of my research. My editor-in-chief in the International Media Network in Athens, Inga Abgarova, eye-witness of the Abkhaz conflict, initiated me into the intricate world of the war and conflict resolution in the Caucasus. My “line manager” in the Ukrainian media and my sister

Yaroslava supported me with her knowledge of and contacts in Ukraine. Without her support and help it would have been nearly impossible to conduct fieldwork in Ukraine and complete this book.

I will always remember a number of people in Cambridge with whom I spent the past seven years and who created a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment to write this book. First of all, my PhD supervisor and kindest of teachers, Dr. Geoffrey Edwards, who allowed me to take my project in the directions I wanted to explore. I shall be eternally grateful to my thesis adviser, Dr. Harald Wydra, for his insightful comments and long-standing friendship. Prof. Christopher Hill, Dr. Aaron Rapport, and Dr. Ayse Zarakol, conveners of and participants in the Foreign Policy Analysis reading group, created an environment and helped me to keep in mind alternative explanations of foreign policy and construct a more convincing argument. While pursuing a PhD at the Department of International Studies, I was extremely lucky to interact with a most interesting and diverse group of colleagues from other departments. I should express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Rory Finnin, Head of the Department of Slavonic Studies and an enthusiastic supporter of inter-disciplinary research, whose friendly advice and support were crucial for my research. Dr. David Lane from the Department of Sociology was a kind mentor and great friend in the last years of my PhD studies and initiated me into the world of academic publishing. Dr. Anna Pleshakova organised several extremely important and intellectually stimulating events at the School of Interdisciplinary Eurasian Studies at Oxford where I could learn techniques of discourse analysis and conceptual translation of Russian texts into English.

“But does it make sense at all?”—this is the question that a number of PhD students often ask themselves. I was lucky to get positive feedback and encouragement from a number of professors coming from other disciplines. Historians Prof. Christopher Andrew and Prof. Brendan Simms and anthropologist Prof. Caroline Humphrey encouraged me continue with this research and gave diverse multi-disciplinary feedback that helped me to construct a more rigorous argument. Prof. Richard Sakwa and Dr. Neil Kent helped me to keep in mind numerous factors shaping Russian foreign policy. I am grateful to the colleagues who invited me to share my findings at various conferences and provided insightful comments on earlier drafts of this work: Roy Allison, Derek Averre, Laure Delcoure, Elena Korosteleva, Luk Van Langenhove, Andre Gerrits, Tobias Schumacher, and Simon Schunz.

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audience. My junior, but very promising colleague, Teodor Kalpakchiev, helped me in the tedious work of preparing the text for book publication.

Last, but by no means the least, I owe a number of words of gratitude and thousands of apologies to the woman who has accompanied me in my geographic and intellectual meandering over the past 13 years—my wife Xenia. Her support, patience, and sacrifice, combined with irony and genuine interest for and engagement with this project helped me to stay focused and finish the book. All the shortcomings of the book are solely my responsibility.



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