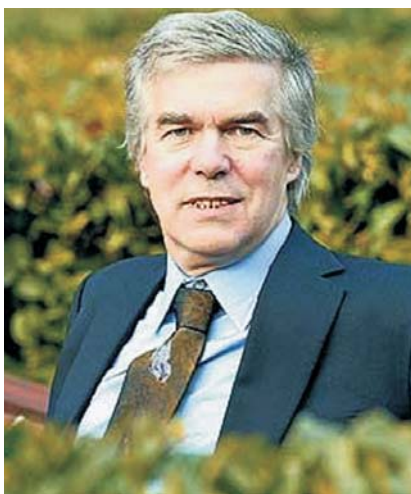


A DUAL IDENTITY IS AN ADVANTAGE

Robert Cooper



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■ *I would like to know your opinion concerning the idea that today, some countries can be described as European, but not Western – the idea of the European non-West, as those countries that have adopted certain European values and institutions, but for various reasons did not become part of the Western establishment. If you indeed agree with such an idea, would you consider Russia and Turkey to be part of the European non-West?*

We have had great debates in Europe about what is Europe and where Europe ends, and these debates have never ended. And there were some points, some debates about what is the West, because sometimes the West has been defined in terms of East-West relations, but that was really a phrase of the Cold War.

Hence, the issue of the Russian and Turkish identities is not that clear. I think of Russia as a European country in one sense, because Chekhov is a part of our literature, as well as yours, and you see it presented on the stage in London. At the same time, the best film ever made of Hamlet is the one made by Kozintsev, so we are part of the same culture. That is a European culture.

But in another sense, Russia is not a European country because you are simply too big, primarily because modern-day Europe is a continent comprised of former great powers, medium and small-sized countries, who share a certain history. But Russia is still, in a way, a great power and is on a different scale from any European country and, therefore, **Russia is European culturally, but not geopolitically.**

For Turkey, that's a different puzzle altogether, because Istanbul is a great European city, but if you go to the East of Turkey, it is notably less European. But then, these things are changing. Turkey is a much more European country now than it was, say, 20 years ago. And Turkish literature is now also becoming more important in the European context. Thus, I don't think that these things are fixed forever, either in terms of time or space.

Russia and Turkey do not represent an exclusion in this case. I was also thinking that may be there are even some people in Britain who define Britain as Western, but not European. You

know, there was said to be a famous headline in the newspaper: 'Fog in the Channel. Europe cut off'. And people in Britain still say, 'Are you going to Europe?' when they actually mean continental Europe. Everybody in Britain will certainly define himself or herself as Western. For me, I think that Britain is a profoundly European country, and our history is entirely a European history.

■ *You have mentioned that 'the West' is a notion of the Cold War era. What exactly did you mean by that?*

'The West' is a Cold war term. I think that the idea of the West was invented by the USA, mainly, during the Cold War, in order to try and persuade the American people that they shared a common fate with Western Europe. As well, in American universities you used to have to do a course at the beginning called 'Western civilisation', which was intended to explain to Americans that the basis of their civilisation began with Ancient Greece and Rome, and that we are all part of the same community, namely because that was contrary to the original American ideology, which used to be based on the idea that 'We are different and separate from Europe, and we are not going to get involved in European wars.'

There was always a deliberate attempt to redefine America as being connected to Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Such a philosophy did not exist in the first half of that century. Thus, this is a concept that was really invented for geopolitical reasons. In the same way, I think that, in those days, the West was very much defined in terms of NATO.

Today the West is primarily a geographic notion, which applies to not just Russia and Turkey, but also some developing Asian countries. **Various public institutions**

and organisations have begun to play a new role in determining what the West actually means. Nowadays, the institutions uniting Europe and Russia are very weak, and they require some more time for their development.

■ *During the era of the Cold War, Turkey was perceived to be part of the West, but today more and more doubts are voiced regarding this issue... Why do you think this is happening?*

In the case of Turkey, I see the Cold War as also having liberated Turkey in a number of different ways; - it liberated Turkey of its military, because the place where the military are positioned in society today is very different from how it was in the 1980s. With that, Turkey now has a party in power, which has much stronger roots in Islam. And Turkey is now like a hero in the Middle East, and it is probably even the most admired country in the Middle East region. For instance, if you ask the more progressive people in Egypt 'What do you want your country to be like in 20 years' time?', they would probably say something like, 'Our dream is to be like Turkey'. They would never have made such a statement twenty years ago. In this respect, Turkey has rediscovered its connections in the Middle East. I am not saying that it has become less Western, but simply that it has rediscovered another dimension.

■ *How might Turkey be affected by statements made by the leaders of some large European states about the failure of the multiculturalism project in Europe? Will this exacerbate the problem associated with a 'dual identity'?*

I am actually perplexed about this. Now this seems to be some kind of popular slogan. I noticed that it is largely a view that comes from the politicians, the Christian Democrats, the conservative parties, who are proclaiming the failure of multiculturalism. I don't really know what it means. In many European countries, we have people who are good Muslims, but I hope that they are

also good citizens of England and France at the same time. Now there is a law in France, which says you cannot wear burkas in public buildings. We clearly have a much higher degree of multiculturalism than we have ever had before.

If you go to any of the great European cities, including Moscow, you will find that there are many different cultures living there together. And that's what cities are for. **The cities exist exactly in order to bring people from different cultures together.** Previously there was a big cultural difference between people from the north of France and people from Provence, for instance, and that seemed like a big difference for that particular point in time. Their languages were always different. Now nobody seems to notice that, but we do have other cultural differences, and, in this context, cities tend to bring cultures together. For me, if I look at a place like London or Istanbul for that matter, I see the fact that there are many cultures living side by side as an indication of strength. Thus, I don't completely understand this rejection of the concept of multiculturalism and, equally as much, I do not understand Prime Minister Erdogan, when he makes a statement in Germany to the effect that Turks living in Germany should learn Turkish first and German second.

■ *Actually, this is the essence of the problem of a 'double identity': on the one hand, the Turks believe their country to be Western, and probably the most Western country of all in the Middle East. On the other hand, Turkey maintains its own specific traits... Is it possible to resolve this issue?*

For me, I think that people who have a double identity are fantastically lucky. I mean, you can choose. He is especially lucky if he has many identities.

I think everyone should have as many identities as possible. It gives everyone a choice, as it adds more dimensions to your life. So I don't see this as a problem at all. I think that, for me, this represents the

growth of civilisation. And a party who is locked into a single identity, well that's a really narrow view of life. Growth and development consisted, first and foremost, of people living in villages, and all they knew was their village. Then, somewhere around the 19th century, people realised that they were not just villagers, but that they were also citizens of a country and that they had a wider identity. Now in Europe, some people, at any rate, feel that they are not just from Yorkshire and Britain, but they are also European. I think this represents a kind of personal growth, while reflecting a sort of social growth as well.

■ *Do you think the problem of exclusion from the Western club could potentially push the elites of Moscow and Ankara closer together on the basis of a particular sense of frustration?*

I don't think that history will come to an end at any particular moment. It takes time to overcome such divisions. I think that Turkey today is more European than it was twenty years ago, and the same is probably true of Russia. I will tell you the thing that, for me, defines European institutions, and which does not exist in Turkey and in Russia at the moment: it is a sense of not being a great power. I don't think I could imagine Russia in the European Union, **not just because of the country's large size, but because it sees itself as a great power. And maybe there is a little bit of that in Turkey as well.** Everything changes, though the future is ours.

Those who want to see Turkey in the European Union and argue strongly in favour of this, tend to do so precisely because they say: 'Here is a country, which is both European and Islamic, which is also a part of Europe and the Middle East. And that's an advantage for Europe.' And those who argue against its inclusion use exactly the same argument. So, I don't think that we have an answer yet to these questions. ■

Yulia Netesova exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum