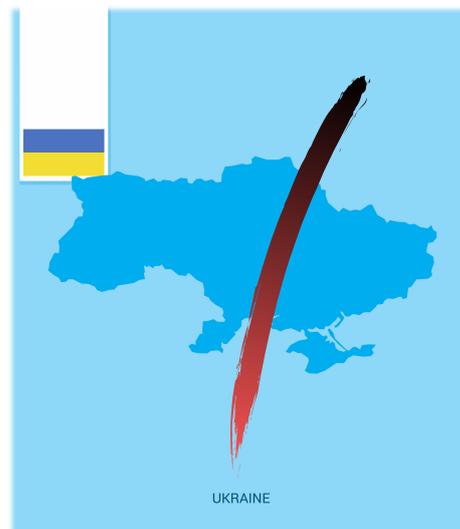


## *CIVILISATIONAL CLASHES IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE*

by Tom Wagenmakers

### **Introduction**

In March 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula. The reasons for this move can be traced back to the denial of the former Ukrainian president Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU). After this denial, protesters took the street in Ukraine. Yanukovich fled from Ukraine to Russia and a new, pro-Western government came to power in Ukraine. Subsequently, Russia annexed Crimea and in the east of Ukraine breakaway republics declared independence and are waging war with the Ukrainian government. The conflict in Ukraine severely set back EU-Russia relations. Right after the annexation of Crimea, the EU introduced sanctions against Russia. NATO responded as well, by suspending cooperation with Russia (BBC News).



This research puts the Ukrainian crisis and the resulting crisis in EU-Russia relations in a broader context, showing that the starting point of the Ukrainian crisis, when put in the context of the Clash of Civilizations, can be pointed out to be right after the end of the Cold War. The framework suited to accomplish this is thus the theory of the Clash of Civilizations, based on research focused on primary and secondary sources. Several scholars like Scuticchio have argued against the existence of a Clash of Civilizations in Ukraine. Scuticchio's argument is that Russian foreign policymakers follow national interests as their guide for foreign policy and that culture does not play that great of a role (Scuticchio, 2014). However, this approach is limiting from the start. This research holds that the Clash of Civilizations can be applied to events much broader than culture alone. The goal of this research is to answer the following research question: "To what extent can the Euromaidan Crisis be considered as a manifestation of a Clash of Civilizations between the European Union and Russia?"

To answer this question, this research will start with an explanation of the theory of the Clash of Civilizations. Accompanying this will be an explanation of why Ukraine is a striking example of a so called "torn country" to which the theory of the Clash of Civilizations applies.

Secondly, the research will show that the EU is a representation of the Western civilisation, whereas Russia, on the other hand, is a civilisation on its own. This is central in applying Huntington's theory.

The last chapter will show how both Russia and the EU are moving closer to each other in the post-Soviet space and the subsequent crisis in Ukraine are manifestations of a clash of civilisations between Russia and the EU.

Concluding, this research holds that the Euromaidan revolution and the subsequent crisis in Ukraine are a manifestation of a clash of civilisations between Russia and the EU, which has been dormant since the end of the Cold War and which the Ukraine crisis shed light on.

## **Chapter 1 – The Clash of Civilizations and Ukraine**

### *The Clash of Civilizations*

Huntington states that the fundamental source of conflict in the post-Cold War world will be cultural, neither primarily ideological nor economic. (Huntington, 1993) He holds that as the Cold War ended, international politics ended its predominantly Western phase and the main focus became the interaction between the West and non-Western civilisations<sup>6</sup> and among non-Western civilisations. (ibid) This would end Western colonialism at the same time, since the non-Western civilisations would join the Western civilisations in shaping history.

Some of the civilisations Huntington states are the following: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African. (ibid) Huntington holds that the most important conflicts of the future would be along the cultural fault lines that separate these civilisations from each other. These fault lines are central. As the Cold War ended, the ideological division of Europe disappeared and the cultural division of Europe between Western Christianity and Orthodox Christianity and Islam re-emerged. (ibid) According to Huntington, this fault line separating the Western European civilisation from the Slavic-Orthodox civilisation goes right through the post-Soviet space and Ukraine, which brings us to the application of the theory to Ukraine.

### *“Torn countries”*

Huntington introduces the notion of a “torn country”. According to Huntington, torn countries are countries that are divided over whether their society belongs to one civilisation or another. (Huntington) Usually, torn countries want to join the West, but their history, culture and traditions are non-Western. A torn country is thus engaged in a kind of identity crisis. To solve this, a torn country has to redefine its civilisation’s identity, and to do this it has to meet three requirements. (Huntington) First of all, the political and general elite in a torn country has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about a move towards the West. Secondly, the people of the torn country have to accept the redefinition of the country. Lastly, the dominant groups in the society to which the torn country wants to move have to accept the torn country.

Ukraine is situated right between the Russian Slavic-Orthodox civilisation and the Western civilisation represented by the EU. Being a part of the Soviet bloc until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine can be considered to have been part of the Slavic-Orthodox civilisation until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, if not only because of the Russification policies pursued by the Soviet Union. (Zbyr, 2015) Considering Ukraine’s political history, with swings between pro-Russian and pro-Western presidents, we can conclude that Ukraine is, in fact, a torn country. Thus, having shown that Ukraine is a torn country, it is now clear that the theory of the Clash of Civilisations is applicable to Ukraine.

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<sup>6</sup> The difference between “civilisation” and “civilization” stems from the difference in American English and regular English. This research is written in regular English, so it will use “civilisation” when not referring to the specific words of Huntington.

## **Chapter 2 – On the Both Sides of the Fault Line: Normative Power Europe and Russia as the Third Rome**

### *Normative Power Europe*

One of the main scholars on the EU as a normative power is Manners. He holds that the EU having normative power means that it is able to “shape conceptions of ‘normal’ in international relations”. (Manners, 2002) The Union’s normative basis has been developed through declarations, treaties, policies, criteria and conditions and can be called the *acquis communautaire* and *acquis politique*. Manners shows five core norms in these *acquis*: peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ferguson, Mansbach, Buzan and Little agree: the EU is a unique actor. (ibid) Manners argues that its uniqueness stems from its difference from pre-existing political forms, which “pre-disposes it to act in a normative way.” (ibid) This implies a deterministic view: the Union acts as a normative power because it is built to do so. According to Manners EU norms can be diffused in several ways, one example being procedural diffusion. Procedural diffusion “involves the institutionalization of a relationship between the EU and a third party”. (ibid) Examples are EU membership in the WTO and EU enlargement. The Union is thus a unique actor, which bases itself on the concept of normative power and the diffusion of that normative power. This makes the EU an important representation of Western civilisation.

### *Russia as the Third Rome*

There are many theories concerning the search for Russian identity after the fall of the Soviet Union. (Ostbo, 2016) however, in light of the theory of the Clash of Civilizations, which is central to this research, Russia as a Third Rome suits best. The idea of Russia as the Third Rome is characterized by Longworth as “a ‘myth’ that ‘was to provide the state with a religious justification for uniting not just the Russians but all Orthodox Christians, whether in Russia, Ukraine, the Balkans or the Levant.’” (ibid) Ostbo identifies four writers on the idea of the Third Rome. All four of them agree on the importance of Orthodoxy for the Russian identity. (ibid) Thus, the Orthodox religion makes the Third Rome unique. It is not only religion that makes Russia unique: the concept of the Third Rome ‘demonstrates’ Russia as unique in general and thus different from all other countries. (ibid) Tsymburskii, for example, stresses that Russia is a civilisation of its own. Another writer, Kholmogorov, justifies Russian expansion with the idea of the Third Rome, stating that the ‘Russian soil’ includes not only the East Slavic regions which are traditionally perceived as the Russian core area, but that it could also include any location inhabited by Russians or governed by the Russian state. (ibid) Hence, the idea of Third Rome justifies Russian expansionism. Dugin’s ideas about the Third Rome rely strongly on bipolarity between Rome and Carthage. (ibid) He identifies a ‘Roman line’ in world history: when the Roman empire fell, Byzantine continued its mission of fighting against the sea power until it was conquered by the Ottomans and after that Russia continued the battle against the sea power, which would now be the United States. (ibid) Dugin thus identifies Russia specifically as the heir of the Roman empire. Dugin’s view of the Third Rome as a clash between two powers while focusing on the uniqueness of Russia can very well be interpreted in line with the theory of the Clash of Civilizations.

Summing up the views in Ostbo’s book, the idea of Russia as the Third Rome is a good theoretical background against which to analyse the Russian policies in the post-Soviet space in light of a



clash of civilisations between the EU and Russia. The idea of Russia as the Third Rome portrays Russia as a civilisation distinct from the West with its own norms, values, traditions, history, religion and uniqueness, justifying Russian expansionism. Considering the fall of the Soviet Union and the wish to expand the 'Russian soil' to include the former Slavic countries, the Russian aims for the post-Soviet space might very well clash with the European policies in that same space.

## **Analysis & Conclusion – A Geopolitical Civilizational Clash**

### *Moving closer to the fault line*

The EU as a representation of a Western civilisation tried to integrate and influence the post-Soviet space by persuading states to harmonize their legal system to that of the EU. This worked out when in 2004 ten countries joined the EU, of which eight were post-Soviet states. (Murphy, 2006) The negotiations for the enlargement started in the 1990s, at the same time when Russia made a first try at reintegrating the post-Soviet space by launching the CIS. The CIS as an integrationist project failed, partly because the newly independent countries had to search for an identity and most of them chose to be part of the Western civilisation represented by the EU, (Smith, 2016) Russia conceded, hoping that EU enlargement would strengthen the EU politically and hence balance against US hegemony. (Gower, 2000) However, Russia gradually found out that EU enlargement was not entirely positive, negatively affecting the general EU policies towards Russia. (DeBardeleben, 2013) This became even more clear when the EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), policy frameworks designed specifically to influence the countries in the post-Soviet space. (Bruns et al., 2016) By trying to integrate countries with no perspective on EU membership, the EU created dividing lines between the EU itself, the countries inside the ENP and the EaP and Russia, which remained outside of the policy structures. (ibid) We can thus see that the 2004 enlargement and the subsequent policies created the first unequal balance in EU-Russia relations concerning the post-Soviet space. It expanded the Union's normative power deep into the post-Soviet space, while Russia had no feasible integration project of its own.

This is the moment Russia changed its policies to the EU. The case of the colour revolutions demonstrated this clearly. During the colour revolutions, Russia actively supported pro-Russian regimes, trying to win back influence in the post-Soviet space. In the case of Ukraine, after the Orange Revolution, Russia can be considered successful, since in 2010 the pro-Russian candidate Yanukovich won the presidential elections. (Mearsheimer, 2014) Russian attempts to try to undermine Western influence in the post-Soviet space thus started during the colour revolutions.

Still, Russia did not have an integration project of its own capable to compete with the EU. This changed in 2010, when Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia formed a customs union, which was later transformed into a full-fledged economic union: the Eurasian Economic Union. (Khitakhunov et al., 2017) This integration project is more successful than the CIS. With the EEU, Russia managed to lure Armenia away from integration with the EU and instead, it got Armenia to join the EEU. (Vasilyan, 2017) This shows the attractiveness the EEU has towards some countries in the post-Soviet space.

Considering all these events, we can see two civilisations moving closer to each other in the post-Soviet space simultaneously. Both the EU and Russia are trying to influence and claim the same area. The crucial element which makes this process a clash of civilisations, is the fault line described by Huntington.

According to the theory of the Clash of Civilizations, conflicts would erupt along the fault lines. This is exactly what happened. The EU has gradually moved closer towards the fault line and at one point tried to diffuse its normative power over the fault line: all countries on the east of the fault line except Russia

are in the ENP and the EaP. The EU is thus trying to influence countries which are not part of its own civilisational sphere, but which according to Huntington's fault line are part of Russia's civilisational sphere. Russia accordingly took steps to prevent the EU from influencing those countries and conflicts emerged along the fault line, as was visible in the case of the colour revolutions, and as was visible in the case of Armenia joining the EEU. The most striking example of a clash however, is Ukraine. The fault line cuts right through Ukraine, separating Catholic western Ukraine from the Orthodox east. (Huntington 1993) It is in Ukraine where the most severe crisis since the end of the Cold War facing Europe is happening now. The Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine is a manifestation of the two civilisations trying to exert their influence on the country. The EU, moving closer to the fault line, wanted to sign an Association Agreement with Ukraine. Russia, also moving closer to the fault line, pressured the country not to do so. After this, the Euromaidan revolution started, Yanukovych was ousted and a pro-Western government came to power in Kiev. (Cadier, 2014) Russia used this moment to intervene and annexed Crimea from Ukraine and supported the breakaway republics in the east of the country. (ibid) This conflict completely follows the theory of the fault lines in Huntington's Clash of Civilizations. The Euromaidan revolution occurred along a cultural fault line and the subsequent events are thus a manifestation of conflict as predicted by Huntington. Since the fault line which cuts through Ukraine is the same as the one dividing the post-Soviet space, the Euromaidan revolution is thus a manifestation of a broader conflict involving the entire post-Soviet space. Russia and the EU have both been trying to expand their civilisation and their influence in the post-Soviet space and conflicts between the civilisations started to emerge when they got closer to each other along the fault line. After the events in Ukraine EU-Russia relations got severely strained and both sides acknowledged that the status quo which once was, is now gone. (Pasatoiu, 201) Therefore, it is the Euromaidan revolution which woke the dormant clash of civilisations and made it discernible for the whole world.

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