

President Putin to Valdai Club: Liberal Ideology Has Changed Beyond Recognition

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Nov. 4—Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the annual meeting of the international Valdai Discussion Club on Oct. 27 in Moscow, titled this year, “A Post-Hegemonic World: Justice and Security for Everyone.” It was the 19th meeting of the prestigious discussion club founded in 2004 near Lake Valdai, midway between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The four days of sessions were attended by 111 experts, diplomats, and economists from 41 countries, as well as by top Russian policymakers from the public and private sectors.

After Putin’s hour-long address, delivered on the fourth and final day of the conference, he answered questions from experts from around the world for nearly three hours. In the course of the session, he developed several major themes: (1) the threat of imminent nuclear war coming from the West is immediate and pervasive, with many leaders in the West engaging in repeated talk of “winning” a nuclear war against Russia; (2) the repeated refusal of the West to negotiate has created a situation today more dangerous than the 1962 Cuban Missiles Crisis; (3) the drive to “cancel culture” in the West—typified by the banning of Tchaikovsky, Dostoevsky, and others—is today’s form of the mass book burnings by the Nazis in the 1930s; and (4) a new international trade system is forming based on settlements in national currencies, and on securing for every nation the right to advanced economic development.

The official transcription of President Putin’s speech and the question and answer session that followed is [available](#) from the President of Russia’s website. Excerpts follow here.

President Putin to the Valdai Discussion Club

We have used the Valdai Club platform to discuss, more than once, the major and serious shifts that have already taken place and are taking place around the

world; the risks posed by the degradation of global institutions; the erosion of collective security principles and the substitution of “rules” for international law. I was tempted to say “we are clear about who came up with these rules,” but, perhaps, that would not be an accurate statement. We have no idea whatsoever who made these rules up, what these rules are based on, or



President Vladimir Putin addresses the final, plenary session of the 19th meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. Moscow, Oct. 27, 2022.

what is contained inside these rules.

It looks like we are witnessing an attempt to enforce just one rule whereby those in power—we were talking about power, and I am now talking about global power—could live without following any rules at all and could get away with anything....

Let me remind you of Russia’s proposals to our Western partners to build confidence and a collective security system. They were once again tossed in December 2021.

As a matter of fact, they always seek to aggravate matters, which is nothing new, either. This includes the stoking of war in Ukraine, the provocations around

Taiwan, and the destabilization of the global food and energy markets. To be sure, the latter was, of course, not done on purpose, there is no doubt about it.

The destabilization of the energy market resulted from a number of systemic missteps made by the Western authorities. As we can see now, the situation was further aggravated by the destruction of the pan-European gas pipelines. This is something otherworldly al-

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together, but we are nevertheless witnessing these sad developments.

Global power is exactly what the so-called West has at stake in its game. But this game is certainly dangerous, bloody and, I would say, dirty. It denies the sovereignty of countries and peoples, their identity and uniqueness, and tramples upon other states' interests. In any case, even if denial is the not the word used, they are doing it in real life. No one, except those who create these rules I have mentioned is entitled to retain their identity: Everyone else must comply with these rules.

In this regard, let me remind you of Russia's proposals to our Western partners to build confidence and a collective security system. They were once again tossed in December 2021.

Current developments have overshadowed environmental issues. Strange as it may seem, this is what I would like to speak about first today. Climate change no longer tops the agenda. But that fundamental challenge has not gone away, it is still with us, and it is growing.

The loss of biodiversity is one of the most dangerous consequences of disrupting the environmental balance. This brings me to the key point all of us have gathered here for. Is it not equally important to maintain cultural, social, political and civilizational diversity?

At the same time, the smoothing out and erasure of all and any differences is essentially what the mod-

ern West is all about. What stands behind this? First of all, it is the decaying creative potential of the West and a desire to restrain and block the free development of other civilizations....

Cancel Culture

Even at the very peak of the Cold War—the peak of the confrontation of the two systems, ideologies and military rivalry—it did not occur to anyone to deny the very existence of the culture, art, and science of other peoples, their opponents. It did not even occur to anyone. Yes, certain restrictions were imposed on contacts in education, science, culture, and, unfortunately, sports. But nonetheless, both the Soviet and American leaders understood that it was necessary to treat the humanitarian area tactfully, studying and respecting your rival, and sometimes even borrowing from them in order to retain a foundation for sound, productive relations at least for the future.

And what is happening now? At one time, the Nazis reached the point of burning books, and now the Western “guardians of liberalism and progress” have



A.O. Bauman



Émile Reutlinger

“Western ‘guardians of liberalism and progress’ have reached the point of banning Dostoyevsky (left) and Tchaikovsky (right), eradicating everything that is alive and creative ... in all areas....”

reached the point of banning Dostoyevsky and Tchaikovsky. The so-called “cancel culture” and in reality—as we said many times—the real cancellation of culture is eradicating everything that is alive and creative and stifles free thought in all areas, be it economics, politics or culture.

Today, liberal ideology itself has changed beyond recognition. If initially, classic liberalism was under-

stood to mean the freedom of every person to do and say as they pleased, in the 20th Century the liberals started saying that the so-called open society had enemies, and that the freedom of these enemies could and should be restricted if not cancelled. It has reached the absurd point where any alternative opinion is declared subversive propaganda and a threat to democracy....

Fyodor Dostoyevsky prophetically foretold all this back in the 19th Century. One of the characters of his novel *Demons*, the nihilist Shigalev described the bright future he imagined in the following way: “Emerging from boundless freedom, I conclude with boundless despotism.” This is what our Western opponents have come to. Another character of the novel, Pyotr Verkhovensky, echoes him, talking about the need for universal treason, reporting and spying, and claiming that society does not need talents or greater abilities: “Cicero’s tongue is cut out, Copernicus has his eyes gouged out and Shakespeare is stoned.” This is what our Western opponents are arriving at. What is this if not Western cancel culture?

What can one say to this? History will certainly put everything in its place and will know whom to cancel, and it will definitely not be the greatest works of universally recognized geniuses of world culture, but those who have for some reason decided that they have the right to use world culture as they see fit. No one will even remember their names in a few years. But Dostoyevsky will live on, as will Tchaikovsky, Pushkin, no matter how much they would have liked the opposite.

Standardization, financial and technological monopoly, the erasure of all differences is what underlies the Western model of globalization, which is neocolonial in nature. Their goal was clear—to establish the unconditional dominance of the West in the global economy and politics. To do that, the West put at its service the entire planet’s natural and financial resources, as well as all intellectual, human and economic capabilities, while alleging it was a natural feature of the so-called new global interdependence....

If you are democrats, you are supposed to welcome the natural desire for freedom expressed by billions of people, but no. The West is calling it undermining the liberal rules-based order. It is resorting to economic and trade wars, sanctions, boycotts and color revolutions, and preparing and carrying out all sorts of coups.

One of them led to tragic consequences in Ukraine in 2014. They supported it and even specified the amount of money they had spent on this coup. They have the cheek to act as they please and have no scruples about

anything they do. They killed Soleimani, an Iranian general. You can think whatever you want about Soleimani, but he was a foreign state official. They killed him in a third country and assumed responsibility....

Over a thousand years, Russia has developed a unique culture of interaction between all world religions. There is no need to cancel anything, be it Christian values, Islamic values or Jewish values. We have other world religions as well. All you need to do is respect each other. In a number of our regions—I just know this firsthand—people celebrate Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Jewish holidays together, and they enjoy doing so as they congratulate each other and are happy for each other.

Without exaggeration, this is not even a systemic, but a doctrinal crisis of the neoliberal American-style model of international order. They have no ideas for progress and positive development. They simply have nothing to offer the world, except perpetuating their dominance.

I am convinced that real democracy in a multipolar world is primarily about the ability of any nation—I emphasize—any society or any civilization to follow its own path and organize its own socio-political system. If the United States or the EU countries enjoy this right, then the countries of Asia, the Islamic states, the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, and countries on other continents certainly have this right as well. Of course, our country, Russia, also has this right, and no one will ever be able to tell our people what kind of society we should be building and what principles should underlie it....

Development should rely on a dialogue between civilizations and spiritual and moral values. Indeed, the understanding of what humans and their nature are all about varies across civilizations, but this difference is often superficial, and everyone recognizes the ultimate dignity and spiritual essence of people. A common foundation on which we can and must build our future is critically important....

A Dialogue of Civilizations

This is how we understand traditional values, and the majority of humanity share and accept our approach. This is understandable, because the traditional societies of the East, Latin America, Africa, and Eurasia form the basis of world civilization.

Respect for the ways and customs of peoples and civilizations is in everyone’s interest. In fact, this is also in the interest of the “West,” which is quickly be-



Russian Presidential Executive Office

"It is only by taking responsibility for the destinies of all nations and our planet, that we shall create a symphony of human civilization." Shown: Valery Gergiev, Artistic Director of the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2018.

coming a minority in the international arena as it loses its dominance. Of course, the Western minority's right to its own cultural identity—I want to emphasize this—must be ensured and respected, but, importantly, on an equal footing with the rights of every other nation.

If the Western elites believe they can have their people and their societies embrace what I believe are strange and trendy ideas like dozens of genders or gay pride parades, so be it. Let them do as they please. But they certainly have no right to tell others to follow in their steps.

We see the complicated demographic, political and social processes taking place in Western countries. This is, of course, their own business. Russia does not interfere in such matters and has no intention of doing so. Unlike the West, we mind our own business. But we are hoping that pragmatism will triumph and Russia's dialogue with the genuine, traditional West, as well as with other co-equal development centers, will become a major contribution to the construction of a multipolar world order.

I am convinced that the nations of the world will not shut their eyes to a policy of coercion that has discredited itself. Every time, the West will have to pay a higher price for its attempts to preserve its hegemony. If I were a Western elite, I would seriously ponder this prospect. As I said, some political scientists and politicians in the United States are already thinking about it.

In the current conditions of intense conflict, I will be direct about certain things. As an independent and distinctive civilization, Russia has never considered and does not consider itself an enemy of the West. Americophobia, Anglophobia, Francophobia, and Germanophobia are the same forms of racism as Russophobia or anti-Semitism, and, incidentally, xenophobia in all its guises.

It is simply necessary to understand clearly that, as I have already said before, two Wests—at least two and maybe more but two at least—the West of traditional, primarily Christian values, freedom, patriotism, great culture and now Islamic values as well—a substantial part of the population in many Western countries follows Islam. This West is close to us in something. We share with it common, even ancient roots. But there is also a different West—aggressive, cosmopolitan, and neocolonial. It is acting as a tool of neoliberal elites. Naturally, Russia will never reconcile itself to the dictates of this West.

In 2000, after I was elected President, I will always remember what I faced: I will remember the price we paid for destroying the den of terrorism in the North Caucasus, which the West almost openly supported at the time....

We thought it was in everyone's interest. Russia, thank God, had survived all the difficulties of that time, stood firm, grew stronger, was able to cope with internal and external terrorism, its economy was preserved, it began to develop, and its defense capability began to improve. We tried to build up relations with the leading countries of the West and with NATO. The message was the same: Let us stop being enemies, let us live together as friends, let us engage in dialogue, let us build trust, and, hence, peace. We were absolutely sincere. I want to emphasize that. We clearly understood the complexity of this rapprochement, but we agreed to it.

What did we get in response? In short, we got a "no" in all the main areas of possible cooperation. We received an ever-increasing pressure on us and hotbeds of tension near our borders. And what, may I ask, is the purpose of this pressure? What is it? Is it just to practice? Of course not. The goal was to make Russia more vulnerable....

A New System of Equal, Sovereign States

What else can I add? Russia is not challenging the Western elites. Russia is simply upholding its right to exist and to develop freely. Importantly, we will not become a new hegemon ourselves. Russia is not suggest-

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ing replacing a unipolar world with a bipolar, tripolar or other dominating order, or replacing Western domination with domination from the East, North or South. This would inevitably lead to another impasse.

At this point, I would like to cite the words of the great Russian philosopher Nikolai Danilevsky. He believed that progress did not consist of everyone going in the same direction, as some of our opponents seem to want. This would only result in progress coming to a halt, Danilevsky said. Progress lies in “walking the field that represents humanity’s historical activity, walking in all directions,” he said, adding that no civilization can take pride in being the height of development.

The significance of today’s historical moment lies in the opportunities for everyone’s democratic and distinct development path, which is opening up before all civilizations, states and integration associations. We believe above all that the new world order must be based on law and right, and must be free, distinctive and fair.

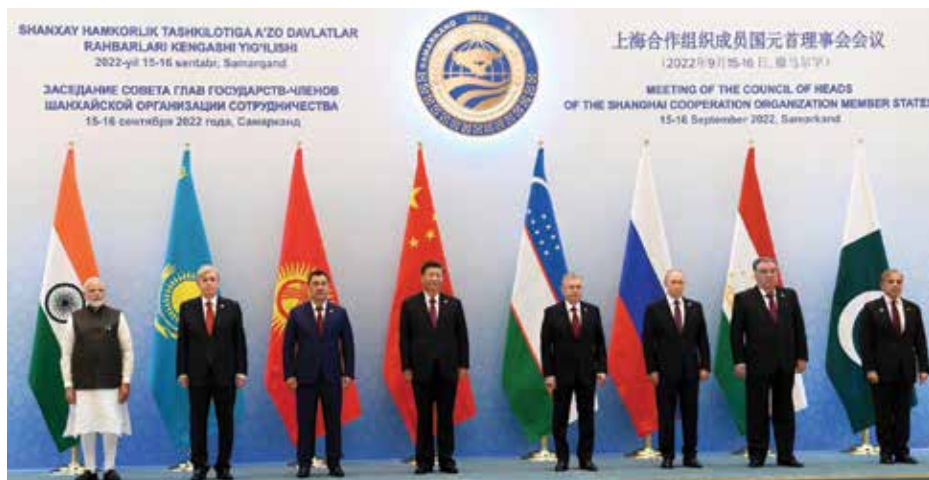
The world economy and trade also need to become fairer and more open. Russia considers the creation of new international financial platforms inevitable; this includes international transactions. These platforms should be above national jurisdictions....

The transition to transactions in national currencies will quickly gain momentum. This is inevitable. Of course, it depends on the status of the issuers of these currencies and the state of their economies, but they will be growing stronger, and these transactions are bound to gradually prevail over the others. Such is the logic of a sovereign economic and financial policy in a multipolar world.

Furthermore, new global development centers are

already using unmatched technology and research in various fields and can successfully compete with Western transnational companies in many areas....

Technological development should not increase global inequality, but rather reduce it. This is how Russia has traditionally implemented its foreign technology policy. For example, when we build nuclear power plants in other countries, we create competence centers and train local personnel. We create an industry. We don’t just build a plant, we create an entire industry.



Multilateral cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, among other institutions and projects, shows “the beginning of a new era, a new stage in the development of Eurasia.” Shown, the eight members of the SCO’s Heads of State Council, meeting in Samarkand, Sept. 16, 2022.

In fact, we give other countries a chance to break new ground in their scientific and technological development, reduce inequality, and bring their energy sector to new levels of efficiency and environmental friendliness.

The transition to transactions in national currencies will quickly gain momentum. It depends on the status of the issuers of these currencies and the state of their economies, but they will be growing stronger, and these transactions are bound to gradually prevail over the others.

Let me emphasize again that sovereignty and a unique path of development in no way mean isolation or autarky. On the contrary, they are about energetic

and mutually beneficial cooperation based on the principles of fairness and equality.

If liberal globalization is about depersonalizing and imposing the Western model on the entire world, integration is, in contrast, about tapping the potential of each civilization for everyone to benefit.

In this regard, Russia believes it is important to make wider use of mechanisms for creating large spaces that rely on interaction between neighboring countries, whose economies and social systems, as well as resource bases and infrastructure, complement each other. In fact, these large spaces form the economic basis of a multipolar world order. Their dialogue gives rise to genuine unity in humanity, which is much more complex, unique and multidimensional than the simplistic ideas professed by some Western masterminds.

Unity among humankind cannot be created by issuing commands such as “do as I do” or “be like us.” It is created with consideration for everyone’s opinion and with a careful approach to the identity of every society and every nation. This is the principle that can underlie long-term cooperation in a multipolar world.

In this regard, it may be worth revising the structure of the United Nations, including its Security Council, to better reflect the world’s diversity. After all, much more will depend on Asia, Africa, and Latin America in tomorrow’s world than is commonly believed today, and this increase in their influence is undoubtedly a positive development.

Europe and the Development of Eurasia

Let me recall that the Western civilization is not the only one even in our common Eurasian space. Moreover, the majority of the population is concentrated in the east of Eurasia, where the centers of the oldest human civilizations emerged.

The value and importance of Eurasia lies in the fact that it represents a self-sufficient complex possessing huge resources of all kinds and tremendous opportunities. The more we work on increasing the connectivity of Eurasia and creating new ways and forms of cooperation, the more impressive achievements we make.

The successful performance of the Eurasian Economic Union, the fast growth of the authority and prestige of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the large-scale One Belt, One Road initiatives, plans for multilateral cooperation in building the North-South transport corridor and many other projects, are the beginning of a new era, a new stage in the development

of Eurasia. I am confident of this. Integration projects there do not contradict but supplement each other—of course, if they are carried out by neighboring countries in their own interests rather than introduced by outside forces with the aim of splitting the Eurasian space and turning it into a zone of bloc confrontation.

Europe, the Western extremity of the Greater Eurasia, could also become its natural part. But many of its leaders are hampered by the conviction that the Europeans are superior to others; that it is beneath

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them to take part as equals in undertakings with others. This arrogance prevents them from seeing that they have themselves become a foreign periphery and actually turned into vassals, often without the right to vote.

Now this historical period of boundless Western domination in world affairs is coming to an end. The unipolar world is being relegated into the past. We are at a historical crossroads. We are in for probably the most dangerous, unpredictable and at the same time most important decade since the end of World War II. The West is unable to rule humanity single-handedly and the majority of nations no longer want to put up with this. This is the main contradiction of the new era. To cite a classic, this is a revolutionary situation to some extent—the elites cannot and the people do not want to live like that any longer.

This state of affairs is fraught with global conflicts or a whole chain of conflicts, which poses a threat to humanity, including the West itself. Today’s main historical task is to resolve this contradiction in a way that is constructive and positive.

The change of eras is a painful albeit natural and inevitable process. A future world arrangement is taking shape before our eyes. In this world arrangement, we must listen to everyone, consider every opinion, every nation, society, culture and every system of world outlooks, ideas and religious concepts, without imposing a single truth on anyone. Only on this foundation, understanding our responsibility for the destinies of nations and our planet, shall we create a symphony of human civilization.