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Moscow – Third Rome as Source of Anti-Western Russian Geopolitics

Moskwa – Trzeci Rzym jako źródło rosyjskiej antyzachodniej geopolityki

• **Abstrakt** •

Moskwa – Trzeci Rzym jest podstawą rosyjskiego myślenia o państwie i narodzie rosyjskim, a także konstytuuje refleksję geopolityczną. Jest solidnym fundamentem antyzachodniej tendencji rosyjskiej geopolityki. Przekonanie o opatrnościowej misji Rosji stanowi narzędzie rozróżnienia między dwoma typami cywilizacji i kultur – „zgniłym” światem zachodnim i tradycyjnym, uświęconym światem rosyjskim, który manifestuje się jako macecznik konserwatywnych wartości, jakie zanegowała indywidualistyczna, materialistyczna cywilizacja zachodnia.

Słowa kluczowe: rosyjska geopolityka, Moskwa – Trzeci Rzym, antyzachodnia, rosyjski świat

• **Abstract** •

Moscow as the Third Rome is the basis of Russian thinking about the state and the Russian nation and also Russian geopolitics. It is a solid foundation of anti-Western tendency in Russian geopolitics. The belief about Russia's providential mission is a tool of differentiation between the two types of civilizations and cultures – the “rotting” western world and the Russian world, which manifests as a cradle of traditional, conservative values that individualistic, materialistic Western civilisation has rejected.

Keywords: Russian geopolitics, Moscow – Third Rome, anti-Western, Russian world

Introduction

The anti-Western idea of Moscow – Third Rome defines a modern, expansive and offensive geopolitical discourse in the Russian Federation after 1991. Moscow – Third Rome is significant part of an expansive tendency in Russian geopolitical thought

that reemerged after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The violent disintegration of the USSR had a significant impact on shaping the anti-Western character of geopolitical perspective. Decline of the Soviet empire led to the disintegration of the bipolar world. The evolutionary trend of Russian geopolitical thinking based on the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome is considered as specifically Russian, anti-Western response to the challenges of progressive globalization and the proliferation of Western European standards.

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome characterizes Russia thinking about politics and geopolitics. It contains still valid characteristics of Russian political reflection. Under Bolsheviks' rule, this idea lost its sacred character. A degenerated idea of Moscow – Third Rome defined Bolsheviks' perception of Russia as a superpower and a forerunner of the socialist-communist revolution. Russia under Bolsheviks' rule kept the idea of Moscow – Third Rome although it has destroyed its sacred, spiritual character. In the face of the dissolution of a transparent, ideologically unambiguous foundations of the Soviet empire the need for a leading idea emerged. Its role should include stabilization of the chaos that followed the collapse of the Communist power. Communist interpretation of the Russian idea based on the concept Moscow – Third Rome, guaranteed Russian citizens a sense of security and certainty about the future. Rapid globalization characterized by constant uncertainty led to devaluation of crucial values. A consistent set of values was a reference point for Russian citizens before the fall of Soviet Union. The new order of the world, which was initiated by dissolution of the USSR, created an urgent need for an anti-Western, originally Russian geopolitical imagination about the outside world. It is worth to mention the diagnosis of Jakub Potulski. According to Potulski, modern Russia experiences an evolutionary renewal of geopolitical discourse. This renewed geopolitical anti-Western thinking finds application as a useful tool of Russian interpretation of the international order and position of Russia (Potulski, 2010).

Methods

The article is the analysis of the idea Moscow – Third Rome as a pattern and source of anti-Western tendency in Russian geopolitics after 1991. The leading thesis of the article is contention that the unique character of Russian civilisation is at the core of contemporary Russian geopolitical imagination, which coincides with the archetypal anti-Westernism of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome.

The actions of Russian authorities and the concepts of modern geopolitics represented by geopolitical expansionism are oriented towards instilling in the gen-

eral social consciousness of the Russian nation the need to fight in order to protect Russian spirituality from the aggressive influences of individualistic, materialistic civilization of the West.

In the every possible interpretation of the expansive trend of Russian geopolitical thinking, Russia is presented as a unique civilisational entity, an antagonist of Western civilization. There is a hypothetical relationship between Russia as a unique civilization, natural source of traditional and universal values and the degenerated, individualistic West. According to the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, Russia inherits the idea of a pure, unspoilt Orthodoxy. Russia is a saint. Geopolitical “holiness” of Russia is the specific core of the idea of Moscow – Third Rome. The specificity of the idea derives from the combination of the profane associated with secular authority with the spiritual leadership of the Orthodox Church, which consolidates the anti-Western nature of Russia’s geostrategic activity.

Moscow – Third Rome as a Source of Russian Civilisational Exclusivity

The source of the anti-Western character of Moscow – Third Rome is the belief in the unique, providential mission of the Russian civilization and nation. The Russian people were perceived as saint, marked by Providence with an exceptional mission of salvation, plunged in the moral degeneration of the Western world. According to this idea, Russian people are chosen by God. The unique character of the Russian civilisational code is a result of historical events and it is manifested throughout Russian existence. It is also the main core of anti-Western Russian geopolitical thought (Zubkov, 2004).

Another significant source of the anti-Western character of Moscow – Third Rome is the assumption that between two distinct civilizational qualities antagonisms must exist. The assumption of archetypal antagonism between civilizations allows to characterize Russia as a cradle of humanism, universal values and solid tradition. In contrast, the West is depicted as the epitome of moral decline. In perspective of the existing civilization antagonisms that are accompanied by moral valuation, the Russian people appear to be predestined to fulfill a special role in process of salvation of the world. It is possible due to the fact that Russian nation “carries in itself the pure teachings of Christ” (Lazari, 1995). According to Lazari (1995), the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome is fully expressed in the integral character of Orthodoxy and Russian specifics. The so-called “Russianness” is perceived as a synonym of Orthodoxy. Moreover the Orthodox Church is crucial in

self-identification of the Russian people. Orthodoxy defines Russian cultural code and civilisational identity.

Russianness is presented as a synonym of Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy defines Russian culture. Taking into account the integral, interdependent character of Orthodoxy and Russianness, it should be emphasized that Orthodoxy is a spiritual element that defines the spiritual value of true Russianness. The idea of Moscow – Third Rome was also present during the Soviet period. Nevertheless it has lost its sacred character. However, it was still constituting the basis of Soviet geopolitical thinking. According to the Soviet reinterpretation of the concept, there is a necessity to establish alliance of states connected with the cultural-civilization values. At the head of the alliance should be Moscow. Adapting the variants of the idea of Moscow – Third Rome was a Soviet attempt to counterbalance the role of the Western civilization that was confronted with the USSR. Until 1940 there was no geopolitical thought in USSR. A key element in the nineteenth-century ideology was the West. Russia was defined as shield to protect Orthodoxy from the degeneration derived from influences of foreign cultural influences of the Ottoman Empire. It was not in the interest of the Soviet authorities. If in the nineteenth century the control over the Black Sea was crucial in Russian foreign policy, in the Soviet period the idea of Soviet domination in the Black Sea did not matter much (Klimenko, 2014).

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome as a conception of the unification of the community of Orthodox countries was not crucial until the mid-1940s. Then there appeared a new tendency in Russian geopolitics. The Soviet idea is considered as a new, secular interpretation of Moscow – Third Rome. The Soviet Union inherited the features and functions of the Third Rome. Under Stalin's rule, the idea of Moscow as the center of the Orthodox world – opposition of the Vatican and the West emerged. The Great Patriotic War resulted in bringing the secular authorities closer to the church. The war revealed a great moral and national-patriotic potential of the Orthodox Church. Stalin recognized the role of the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy turned out to be specifically important in developing a specific historical Russian geopolitical idea (Panarin, 2004). In its desecrated form idea was adopted in order to create a counterbalance for the capitalist-imperialist civilization.

The concept of Moscow – Third Rome is incorrectly identified with the first, truly Russian-oriented anti-Western political doctrine. The idea of Moscow as the Third Rome was not designed as the category of official political doctrine or even a geopolitical idea. However, it was a leading idea to justify Russia's imperial policy. In the contemporary Russian Federation the concept of Moscow – Third Rome is

a inspiration and manifestation of the large-scale, anti-Western aspirations (Toumanoff, 1955). Moscow – Third Rome defines the core of Russian idea, which is the core of national identity and Russian national consciousness (Parilov, 2012).

Originally formulated by the Orthodox monks – Zosima and Filotheus, the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome is the most unambiguous archetype of Russian, anti-Western nationalism and defines the nature of Russia's interpretation of the world as well as specifies the tasks Russia is obliged to implement. As a peculiar combination of religious and political ideas (Rojek, 2014), the idea of Moscow – Third Rome defines the expansive trend of modern Russian geopolitical reflection. As the determinant of the anti-Western Russian geopolitics course, the idea forms the basis for justifying the assertive foreign policy of the Russian Federation.

Originally, the idea of Moscow – Third Rome was a messianic, religious doctrine whereby Russia was perceived as a defender of pure Christianity – unspoilt by European rationalism of true Christianity. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the common knowledge was that God himself had appointed Russia as the inheritor of the Byzantine tradition. The marriage of the Russian tsar Ivan III with Sophia Paleologus – sister of the last ruler of Byzantium – in 1472 played a significant role in consolidating Russia's unique destiny. Marriage was a confirmation that God rewarded "Saint Russia" (Lazari, 1996). According to the original version of the idea, the Muscovite State was the one and only last Christian state (Kozhayev, 2009).

Over time, the idea of Moscow – Third Rome transformed into an effective geopolitical doctrine that also defines the imperial course of contemporary Russian policy. According to the messianic concept of Moscow – Third Rome, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire Moscow took over the role of "mother of the empire of true faith". The entire Russian state took up the challenge of continuing the Byzantine mission. The particular value of the Byzantine, messianic, as well as holy Russian mission seems to also define the geopolitical imagination of contemporary Russia. There is no doubt that this idea is an integral factor of Russian thinking about the present situation of Russia and its priorities.

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome is not outdated and can not be treated only in terms of ideological relics that belong to the past. As it was pointed out by Andrej Lazari, the idea of Moscow – Third Rome is not only one of the fundamental historiographical concepts that have established and defined the character of the Moscow State, but also crucial in identification of sources of contemporary Russian activity in international relations (Gerdt, 2012). The idea of Moscow – Third Rome is a great part of the Russian anti-Western ideology. Russian anti-Westernism assumes that the Russian nation expresses a great, special and providential

idea. Its main sense is derived from the concept of Saint Russia. Nikolai Bierdiayev (1999) stated that Russia's mission is to be "the bearer and guardian of true Christianity, the Orthodox".

Regarding the context of Russian anti-Western imperial geopolitical reflection, the concept of Moscow – Third Rome contains the imperial temptation, manifested in the ambition to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Religious legitimacy gives the concept a mystical and spiritual character. In line with the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, the main task for Russia is to realize a cultural and religious mission that requires constant confrontation with other world powers (Alekseyeva, 2001). Russia is more than a rational-based state. The main orientation of Russian geopolitics is to struggle against Western colonialism in the era of rapid globalization. In the new, post-Cold War world, Russia's opposition to the values associated with Western civilization significantly sharpened.

The geopolitical code of Moscow as the Third Rome implies the need to have a spiritual enemy confronted with Russian civilizational code. From the perspective of the sixteenth-century idea world is a space of irreducible antagonisms between two distinct cultural-civilizational types. On the one hand we have Western materialism and the cult of individualism, on the other we have Russia – state representing traditional and spiritual values. Traditional values and references to specific Russian culture are the core of recent statements made public by President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. Particularly important are those addressed to the Federal Assembly. They confirm the validity of the archetypal idea of Moscow – Third Rome.

The idea of Moscow as the Third Rome rejects the acceptance of materialistic, liberal-democratic values of the West. Rejection of European rationalism derives from a strong value of religious factor in the state. The idea of Moscow – Third Rome implies the symphony of secular authorities and the Church. In the past, the Orthodox religion legitimized the power of the Prince of Muscovy as the successor of the Byzantine emperors. According to Bakulov, the ruler could not have opposed the Orthodox Church (Bakulov, 2002). In the past, as well as today power in Russia is perceived as a protector of the tradition, faith and morals of the Russian nation. In his recent address to the Federal Assembly Putin frequently emphasized this feature.

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome matches modern Russian anti-Western idea. Its existence is confirmed by numerous references in public statements of Vladimir Putin. In many of them Putin refers to the significance of Russian civilizational specifics which are met with opposition. Moscow – Third Rome does not belong to concepts whose interpretation is clear. The idea consists of at least two

dimensions. First of all, Moscow – Third Rome is the concept of religious messianism; secondly it is the ideological-religious legitimacy of political imperialism. The idea of Moscow – Third Rome is particularly characteristic of the expansionist direction of geopolitical thinking in Russia. The pattern of modern geopolitics is neo-Byzantine. It simply justifies imperialism. The idea of Moscow – Third Rome is not only the archetype of modern Russian nationalism, but also an integral part of all geopolitical narratives based on eschatological concept of the reconstruction of the Russian empire. The idea of Moscow – Third Rome defines both – the geopolitical narrative of the leading neoeurasianist Alexander Dugin as well as views of Vladislav Surkov. The idea is also reflected in the philosophy of Konstantin Leontiev, who conceived of emphasizing the need to liberate “saint” Russia from hegemonic Western influences (Walicki, 2005).

Leontiev’s suggestion about returning Russia to the Orthodox-Byzantine heritage is not the only motive for the contemporary expansive, anti-ideological trend of geopolitical thinking in Russia. Anti-Western neo-Byzantinism depicts the idea of Moscow – Third Rome as an intrinsically contradictory idea. It is due to the fact that it implies two different styles of perceiving the mission of Russia. The dualism of the idea included in the concept of Moscow – Third Rome proves that multiple different interpretations of archetypal conception are possible. The source of the first possible reading is the conviction that Russia is marked by Providence and therefore is obliged to propagate traditional, universal Russian values. Another possible interpretation is the isolationist tendency. Isolationism in the idea of Moscow – Third Rome manifests itself in the pursuit to preserve the unpolluted character of Russian civilization (Tolstikov, 2017). In order to neutralize or eliminate the destructive influence of Western civilization, Russia should definitively isolate itself from the world of Western values. Isolationism, which is included in the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, is a necessary condition to preserve the traditional character of the Russian values as well as the uniqueness of Russian civilization. The project of the expansion of Russian, universal code of values is accompanied by Russian aspiration to defend the unique character of Russian culture. This combination determines the contemporary geopolitical concepts of neo-Byzantinism.

The geopolitical significance of the 16th century idea is manifested in the still active in Russian geopolitics antinomy of the East and the West. The radical criticism of Western solutions, emphasizing the inadequacy of Western liberal values to Russian reality, is a rudiment of thinking about Russia as a sacred space marked by the mission of defending tradition. Russia is endowed by Providence with the mission of saving the world in line with Byzantine culture and values (Ivanova, 2006).

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome is present throughout Russia's history. In the transformed form it also characterized the ideological landscape in the Soviet period. It is worth to mention the diagnosis of Jakub Potulski (2010). Potulski argues that in the messianic theories of the Soviet Union, Orthodox tsarist ideology was replaced by communist ideology, and the Messianic idea with Marxism, which was connected with the mission of the proletariat and was identified with the Russian messianic idea.

Over the centuries, the idea has undergone numerous transformations, but in each period its core was highly anti-Western. Moreover, it defined the ideological landscape of modern Russia. The contemporary Russian Federation is still perceived as "Saint Russia and Moscow is the Third Rome" (Abramov, Klimentiyev, 2017).

In the context of the contemporary meaning of anti-Western orientation in Russian geopolitical thinking, the idea of Moscow – Third Rome is based on the religious factor. Orthodoxy appears to be an integral part of the Russian national identity, and thus influences the way the world is interpreted. Dissemination of conviction about the messianic role of Russia, which is portrayed as the last guardian of true faith and traditional values, has led to the consolidation of a negative, even hostile attitude towards the Western world, as well to identification with the great Byzantine empire which is reflected in the Russian Federation's international activity.

The anti-Western nature of Moscow – Third Rome allows for clear identification of the enemy. The search for guilty entities characterized a stormy period that came after the collapse of the USSR. The reforms of the Russian state based on the Western model were an attempt to implement foreign, Western values into the Russian soil. The failure of the project of Westernization in Russia has accelerated crystallization of reluctance or even open hostility towards the West. There was intense demand for one, consolidating idea that appeared in Russia after 1991. The ideological void was filled up with expansionist geopolitical projects – based on justification of the unique character of the Russian civilization. Russia is perceived as a unique country that realizes a world-wide, even planetary mission to instill the traditional values in a morally degenerated Western world. Russia is considered as a unique civilization that defends the traditional values. According to the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, expansion dictated by the dream of rebuilding the Russian empire is the main goal of Russia. Russia's activity in the post-Soviet area is an attempt to recreate the so-called "Russian World".

Neobizantism as an anti-Western trend in geopolitical thinking, the source of which is the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, is Russia's response to globalization.

Russia is rejecting Westernization because it is incompatible with its unique character, traditions and values that are rooted in Orthodoxy.

From the perspective of Moscow as the Third Rome, globalization is an aggressive attempt to unify the heterogeneous character of the world. The West is perceived as a modern colonizer, whose purpose is to destroy the spiritual characteristics of Russia (Nikolayev, 2009).

In light of the contemporary pragmatic interpretation of Moscow – Third Rome, Russia should not only defend Russia and the Russian World, but should also neutralize the influence of Western civilization and focus on developing an attractive counterbalance to globalization as a universal idea. Western rhetoric, lifestyle, values are incompatible with the spiritual, traditional character of the Russian civilization.

In the perspective of the contemporary interpretation of the anti-Western character of Moscow – Third Rome, the West appears as an enemy – external force, which is focused on reducing role and position of the Russian Federation in the modern world. The West strives to destroy the unique character of the Russian soul. In the neo-Byzantine version, this idea is not only an opposition to globalization and Western unification, but above all it is a manifesto of disagreement over the implementation of Western values in Russia. The particular value of Russian culture can be only preserved by rejecting and negating secular liberalism (Cymburskiy, 2016).

One of the sources of the anti-Western orientation of Russian geopolitical culture and ideas is Orthodoxy. The neo-Byzantine reconstruction of Russia's power implies the need to return to the spiritual Orthodox faith, which is the foundation of Russian moral attitudes. Thus, the idea of Moscow – Third Rome is the theoretical, mystical and religious foundation of the Russian Federation's international efforts, and is a guarantee of the survival of Russian spirituality in a globalizing world. According to the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, the West is the main enemy of Russia and a threat to moral standards of Russia. The rejection of Western European nihilism as a manifestation of the resistance to Western culture mark specific nature of Orthodox geopolitics. According to the concept of Moscow – Third Rome, the Eastern Orthodox countries may find a natural ally in Russia (Rastorgujev, 2015). In the neo-Byzantine perspective, the religious factor is basis of alliances that constitute the Russian World that recognizes anti-Western idea of Moscow – Third Rome.

In the realization of the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, Russia is seeking to build a block of pro-Russian states. The union of Orthodox states accelerates the consolidation of pro-Russian sentiments and attitudes. The concept of the Russian World is mainly promoted by the Orthodox Church. As such, it presupposes unity

of the Orthodox and Russian-speaking population regardless of national divisions (Astakhova, Astakhov, 2011).

The idea of Moscow – Third Rome implies the role of Russia as a hegemon in the post-Soviet space and influences Russian doctrine of foreign policy, as well as security. This is the geostrategic basis of the Russian Federation's activity. The foundation of the concept of the Russian World is the distinctiveness of Russia's civilization and the cultural, linguistic and religious community that characterizes the countries of the post-Soviet region. According to the idea of Moscow – Third Rome, Moscow is marked by the role of the hegemon and the supreme leader of the Russian World. The Russian World is a civilizational entity, and thus morally different from the atomized world of the West. As Marek Menkiszak claims, Russia acts as a guarantor of rights and a defender of the Russian people even outside of the Russian Federation and it does not exclude the use of armed forces to defend their compatriots (Menkiszak, 2014).

Differences between cultures, mutual antagonisms, characterize the face of modern politics. The Russian Federation's interpretation of the Crimean annexation can be considered as an element of the struggle to establish a collectivist, Byzantine-type civilization. Collectivist and spiritually orientated, the East struggles with the colonialism of a unified Western civilization. This specific attempt to defend the status quo of Russia opens the way for the expansion of the collectivist values into post-Soviet states and is an integral part of the concept of the Russian World.

From the perspective of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, the concept of the Russian world is anti-Western and based on the premise of reconstruction of the unity of the Russian people. It is also an integral part of Vladimir Putin's rhetoric of civilizational confrontation. In the modern Russian identity discourse, the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome is a fundamental inspiration of thinking about Russia as well as an element that defines the geostrategic priorities of Russian activity in the post-Soviet area. Often in his political speeches Vladimir Putin confronts the collectivist-traditional civilization of the Land to individualistic civilization of the Sea represented by the West. The anti-Western character of the contemporary Russian ideas is proved by the words of Vladimir Putin: "The basis of American self-consciousness is the individualistic idea. Russian basis is collectivist. [...]" and further – "Our consciousness, the consciousness of the Russian people, suggests different tasks. Russia is something spiritual. Something associated with God. You need to understand, we have different philosophies of life and it is not easy for us to understand each other" (Lazari, 2014).

The Russian idea appeared in the public discourse in 1999 and its core elements are the greatness of the Russian state and patriotism. In 1999, the Russian

idea was a combination of universal and indigenous values. In the following years of Vladimir Putin's presidency the Russian idea was consolidated. Its anti-Western nature became more and more radical. In 2004 there was a shift. Areas such as creativity, love, or convictions of citizens was excluded from state jurisdiction. The main change occurred in 2011. Russia's task is to preserve the nation, to keep it from the detrimental effects of the individualist-oriented Western civilization. In 2012, Vladimir Putin described patriotism as the basis of the Russian idea. Moscow's patriotism is seen as an important element of the consolidation of Russian people, as well as an accelerator for achieving Russia's strategic goals. Other important elements of the Russian idea is the meaning of the Russian nation and culture that represent the uniqueness of Russian civilization. In subsequent speeches, Vladimir Putin focused his attention on the Russian mission, which is the integration of civilization. From the Russian perspective, a variant of self-reliance and the maintenance of spiritual sovereignty is important. It excludes the imitation of Western cultural patterns in Russian cultural code. According to anti-Western Putin's rhetoric, the West rejected Christian values and all moral principles and thus lost its ideological vitality. Based on anti-Western variant, Moscow as the Third Rome seems to be a cradle of traditional values, spirituality, as well as humanism.

In the concept of the Russian World, the Russian idea, based on the anti-Western code Moscow – Third Rome, is a decisive factor for the community of post-Soviet states that are connected by moral principles and fate (Wasilik, 2009). The Russian World is therefore both a spiritual entity and a civilization. A permanent and defining character of the Russian world is derived from hegemonic position of Russia and Russian-speaking or pro-Russian community. The geopolitical meaning of the concept of the Russian World defines the character of modern interpretation of the idea of Moscow – Third Rome as a main code of geopolitical thinking. It is worth to emphasize the international character of this concept. The Russian World encompasses all pro-Russian-oriented individuals regardless of their nationality or ethnic origin. A viable, still-present threat to the reconstruction of Russian influence in the area of former USSR is the West pursuing the Euro-Atlantic ideals of liberal democracy.

The geopolitical character of the idea of Moscow – Third Rome or the concept of the Russian World is rooted in the conviction of the antinomial nature of the two civilizations, and as such are fundamental concepts of the anti-Western tendency in Russian geopolitics. Different cultural background, differences in values, the realization of different development models influence the perception of the West in terms of threat to Russian interests in the post-Soviet area. Both the religious-political idea of Moscow – Third Rome and the concept of the Russian

World define the anti-Western character of the Russian expansive geopolitical tendency and is legitimacy of the potential interventions of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet area.

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