The Discourses of St. Petersburg and the Shaping of a Wider Europe: Territory, Space and Post-Sovereign Politics

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Viatcheslav Morozov
Associate Professor of European Studies
School of International Relations
St. Petersburg State University
Universitetskaya nab., 7/9
199034, St. Petersburg, Russia
Tel. +7 (812) 276 6856
Fax +7 (812) 276 1270
e-mail: morozov@dip.pu.ru

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Introduction[1]

St. Petersburg enjoys the image of being the most European of Russia's cities. The stories about the past and the present of Russia's northern capital resonate with such concepts as 'the new Hansa', the Baltic Rim or the Northern Dimension of the EU. However, the image of St. Petersburg – the capital of imperial Russia – might also be conducive to processes preserving or (re)creating dividing lines in the Baltic Sea region and in Europe as a whole. The present-day St. Petersburg certainly finds itself in search of new discursive departures that could show the way out of the present situation, that is generally regarded as unsatisfactory. This search is developing along various paths, some of which remain embedded in 'traditional' discourses, whilst others dare to step into the unknown.

My aim here is to evaluate these attempts, using the distinction between the modern politics of sovereignty and post-modern, post-sovereign political developments as signposts. This distinction may be also expressed in terms of territorial vs. spatial politics. I use these two notions – territory and space – as metaphors that are useful for grasping the ontological differences between the modern and post-modern approaches to international politics. Although the dichotomy builds upon the concepts of territory and space developed in political science (see e.g. Ruggie 1993, Featherstone et al. 1995, Paasi 1996, Newman 1999, Sassen 2000), I take the liberty of interpreting the terms in my own way, as metaphors not necessarily corresponding to the definitions elaborated by others. Accordingly, this paper is by no means to be taken as a study in territoriality or spatiality.

Sergei Medvedev (1998:50–52) introduces a distinction between space and territory in order to conceptualise some fundamental differences in societal developments in Russia and Europe. It may seem that he tends to reify this distinction as a sort of

[1] This paper is part of a joint project with Pertti Joenniemi, Senior Research Fellow at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI). For a great part, it is a result of my long conversations with Pertti, which have taken place in St. Petersburg, Copenhagen and elsewhere around the Baltic Sea. He is to be credited for his detailed and insightful comments on the earlier versions of the text. The paper has also benefited from comments provided by Christopher Browning, Barry Buzan, Olya Gayazova, Stefano Guzzini, Ulla Holm, Ian Manners, Vibeke Schou Pedersen, Stefano Procacci and Ole Wæver. All the possible shortcomings, however, are the sole responsibility of the author.

civilisational divide separating Russia from Europe. In Medvedev's account, Russian space is constructed in a binary opposition to authority and order: it is chaos and anarchy rather than freedom, and, quite naturally, 'it possesses a great destructive potential' (1999:50)[2]. However, this dichotomy may be prone to a rather different interpretation if one assumes that in the post-modern, post-sovereign world, politics develops in space rather than being territorially bound. A post-modern actor can have multiple identities and belong to different, often overlapping, communities that are spatial rather than territorial. As pointed out by Ole Wæver (1997:300–301) in his often quoted article about the Baltic Sea region, while in a modern setting the only choice for a region wishing to establish itself as an actor is revolt aimed at elevating the region to the status of sovereignty, regionalism is one of the post-sovereign processes, which 'do not follow the structures of sovereignty, and […] multiply authorities and identities in modes that overflow sovereignty – they create a multiplicity where the order of sovereignty becomes one reality among many' (1997:301).

In terms of the territory/space dichotomy, Wæver's argument may run as follows: during the modern era, political identity was chiefly territorially defined, with state borders being crucially important markers of identity, and all interaction across the borders took place between states (either directly between the central governments or under their strict control). In the post-modern environment, territory is still there, as are state borders, but their significance is not – or not always – decisive. Post-modern actors open new political spaces and work out new identities based on historical narratives, geographical images, shared cultural values, etc. While for a territorially defined actor national identity is supreme, a community operating in political space may be defined by reference to history and geography (the Baltic Sea region), to cultural/ethnic proximity (cooperation between states and regions populated by people of common descent, e.g. Finno-Ugric), or to common principles and shared values (international human rights movement), but any such list is by definition an open one. Such communities may operate as networks with no clear centre and open membership (cf. Wæver 1997:308–309, 312), or may tend

[2] This assessment was initially given in Medvedev's earlier article (1997), published before he came out with the territory / space dichotomy. However, his position in the revised 1999 version remained unchanged.

towards centralisation and/or closeness (ethnic and religious communities, criminal groups etc.).

My key starting point is that at the present moment Russia as a whole, and in particular St. Petersburg, is facing a new situation which has no historical analogies – one might describe it, for example, as Russia having a need to integrate into the post-modern globalising world, while at the same time going through the still incomplete process of modernisation (Solovei 2000). I proceed from the assumption that some discourses are better able to cope with this task than others. It seems to me that inclusive, 'accessible rather than closed' (Neumann 1998:42), de-bordered identities are better positioned in the current environment. I therefore prioritise those discourses that promote openness and diversity and that construct identities as operating in political space rather than those that are anchored in a national or any other territory. This inevitably means that some other discourses are rejected, and therefore diversity can never be absolute. This is, however, an old paradox inherent in the very idea of democracy, and it is not to be treated here.

Although historically and culturally Russia perhaps may be equated with 'space proper' (Medvedev 1998:51), if one employs a different lens, other agendas become possible. One may argue that contemporary Russian foreign policy is mostly about territory and territorial demarcations. This is particularly manifest in the fear of separatism that is constantly expressed by Russian politicians and diplomats, not least in the case of Kaliningrad. ***Internally***, Russia may interpret itself as a multiform and inclusive culture, emphasising its ethnic and religious diversity, the long tradition of tolerance, etc. While interacting with the ***outside*** world, however, Russian society feels vulnerable if deprived of a clear dividing line between 'us' and 'them': the dominant discourse tends to treat the blurring of the inside/outside divide as a threat to societal identity. Identity thus becomes securitised, with Westernisation identified as the main threat that is going to blur all boundaries and, consequently, to obliterate all identities (see Morozov 2002). This territorial self-entanglement prevents Russia from finding its place in a Wider Europe, and we should look for ways to transform the discourse to avert increasing isolation.

The need to look around for qualitatively new discursive resources is implicitly demonstrated by Sergei Medvedev himself. His story is about the circular nature of Russian history, about

Russia being 'doomed to a vicious cycle of change between destruction and construction, […] of expansion and hardening in space' (1999:48). By studying how the discourse actually operates we can always hope to find an opening that could help us to transform the territory/space dichotomy and to break this vicious circle. This may sound like wishful thinking in comparison with Medvedev's description of a centuries-old recursive development, but knowledge of how history works in a specific case can be no less revealing and is probably more empowering, than sweeping generalisations made from a distance.

My approach is not meant to be a substitute for the search for other, more structural explanations and solutions. However, it is my contention that 'hard' structure (economic and geographical factors, interests, etc.) does not provide sufficient ground for moving forward. From Andrey Makarychev's analysis of 'hard' structural factors determining the ability of the Russian regions to take part in globalisation, it may follow that the regions should, by now, be fully prepared to embrace globalisation and to avail themselves of its advantages: after all, they 'are not overburdened with tough geopolitical legacies and are pursuing mainly economic goals' (Makarychev 2000:27). Put another way, their concern is 'geoeconomics', not 'geopolitics', and it might therefore be understood as 'natural' for them 'to concentrate on the strategy of economic survival in a wider international context and to endorse the concept of "civic security"' (2000:29). Moreover, '[t]he major cities have at their disposal all the basic prerequisites for joining the family of international actors' (2000:33). Why is it then that 'geoeconomic thinking is not yet an overwhelming characteristic of the regional elites in Russia' (2000:30)? Why are there such obvious differences between regions in their ability to grasp the reality of globalisation? These questions cannot be answered without bringing in language as a distinct reality, without analysing the role of discursive practices in reproducing and reshaping our world.

I claim that St. Petersburg in particular possesses rather powerful discursive resources and a heritage that can be employed to break away from the confines of territorial politics. One should not, however, ascribe some immanent merits to St. Petersburg identity as being, for example, ***a priori*** 'European', 'open' or 'progressive' by virtue of its history, geographical position or socio-economic potential. As any other identity, it is constantly reproduced and reshaped by competing discourses, which use history,

geography etc. as building blocks in this process. In order to conceptualise the interpretative politics around St. Petersburg, I introduce the term narrative to denote the stories which are firmly associated with the city and shared by several or all of the rival discourses. The narratives are less contested as such, but their meaning is often ambiguous, with every narrative being subject to diverging interpretations from within different discourses: the stories are the same, but every time they are told differently, with a changed emphasis and a new emotional load. The narratives open a vast range of possibilities, but only some of them are actualised in discourses. The narratives thus are equivalent to raw material which every discourse processes in its own way, and apparently the same stories are used to construct very dissimilar identities.

I start my analysis with a brief overview of the existing narratives, but then stay mostly at the level of discourses, since there is nothing in any story about St. Petersburg that could, in itself, ensure or prevent a break-away from territorial politics. One can argue that such a break can happen, or is happening, only if some of the existing discourses can be interpreted to that effect. It is therefore important for the analysis to be primarily focused on discourses: otherwise there is always the risk of sliding back towards a search for some essential, intrinsic features of St. Petersburg that make it 'more European' than the rest of Russia. This would not only be questionable in methodological terms, but would actually contribute to the continuing othering of Russia as 'non-European' and 'non-civilised'. The task of the present paper is therefore to investigate the discourses of St. Petersburg from the point of view of the territory/space dichotomy, and not to promote any kind of ideal solutions that are not based in the discursive reality. I suggest some additional stories that arguably could fit certain discourses only when I conclude that the discourses exist in the first place.

As already mentioned, the first section of the paper summarises the main narratives. The official discourse is evaluated in the second section, and the need for a 'softer' history for the city is substantiated afterwards. The attempts to elevate the status of St. Petersburg in the internal Russian hierarchy and its uneasy relationship with Moscow is the subject of the fourth section. Finally, I examine existing post-sovereign discursive departures and assess the obstacles and possible traps that these discourses face. The conclusion sums up the discussion and suggests the discursive

moves that are necessary, or at least desirable, to bring the city out of its present territorial predicament into the wider European space.

1. ***The stories told about St. Petersburg: a tentative inventory***

St. Petersburg is one of the few Russian cities whose past and present are prone to numerous, often mutually contradictory interpretations, based on the rich and diverse narratives of the Russian northern capital. The openness of St. Petersburg, caused by the ambiguity of its own situation, is perfectly described by Sergei Smirnov:

> Built not only on the edge of the country, but on the fracture of cultures, Petersburg has never been able to boast with Moscow's complex of great-Russian full-bloodedness [_____ _____], neither have the Petersburgers ever felt themselves genuine Europeans. Hence – the constant desire to find themselves through the close observation of others. St. Petersburg […] immediately became encrusted with the epithets characteristic of a city uncertain of its own identity and young – 'the Northern Venice', 'the Northern Palmira', 'the Northern Amsterdam', etc. Even today, the appearance of Petersburg constantly raises the question, which building was the prototype of some [local] edifice, what some [local] ensemble is reminiscent of. A clone city, it seems an illusion and an ambiguity exactly because it represents a quaint combination of different and other images, calls for a dialogue with them (2000:7–8).

What is perhaps most striking about this description, is that it reveals the nature of St. Petersburg identity as a city-identity, not a nationally embedded one. It contains many stories and images that would not correspond to Russian national identity as it is usually presented. And, despite all its eccentricity and contradictory nature, this city-identity is today less problematic than the national identity, which is generally recognised to be in a deep crisis (cf. Tulchinskii 2000).

As I see it, the discourses of St. Petersburg rely upon at least five separate stable narratives, not all of which are present in or important for every existing discourse. Each narrative is subject to diverging interpretations in different discourses, which fill it with emotional load and normative concerns. Thus, I would argue that

such emotional oppositions as devilish/divine, officious/brilliant, proletarian/intellectual and the like, singled out by Zhukov (1999, see also Tulchinskii 2000) as separate 'myths', would better be characterised as interpretations of the key narratives within different discourses. The early isolationist discourse would tend to describe St. Petersburg as devilish and officious (cf. Duncan 2000:15), while the advocates of modernisation would call it divine and brilliant. Zhukov is, however, absolutely right in pointing to the central role that the state played in promoting specific interpretations within the dominant discourse (e.g. the 'brilliant St. Petersburg' of the nineteenth century).

The first narrative that should be mentioned here is, of course, St. Petersburg as a capital of imperial Russia, which, by the very fact of being founded on the 'primordial Russian lands' that were re-taken from the Swedish 'conquerors', tells about the determination to continue with ***territorial*** expansion (epitomised by the famous Pushkin's line 'from here shall we threaten the Swede'). This is a 'golden age' narrative: it refers to the imperial past of Russia, to the time of its domination over the Baltic Sea and its shores, when many currently independent peoples came under Russian rule. It is based on the very powerful image of an eternally hostile West and ranks the establishment of St. Petersburg among such events as the Neva battle of 1240, the Livonian War of 1558–1583, etc. This narrative is thus explicitly about ***territorial*** politics, about command over lands and seas, it insists on the sovereignty and distinctiveness of Russia as a great power. There is certainly a link between the great power discourse and the second narrative about the European and Europeanising destiny of St. Petersburg, but there should be no illusion as to the fact that this narrative links Russia with Europe as a territory, that is, a Europe of the balance of power torn apart by conflicts over the location of borders (see, for instance, Sobchak 1999:12–13).

Secondly, St. Petersburg is a 'window on Europe', 'the only European city' in a half-Asian country, a city that is charged with a civilising mission of Europeanising Russia, converting it into a 'normal' country – i.e. depriving it of its uniqueness. The persistence of this narrative within the Russian discourse speaks of Russia's readiness to abandon its distinctiveness in favour of some other goals – for example, democracy and prosperity. However, it is incorrect to treat this as an indication that Russia (or St. Petersburg) is prepared to enter the terrain of post-sovereign politics. It would be

very easy to prove by a vast number of quotes that in the dominant Russian discourse Europe still figures as first and foremost the Europe of sovereign states. A rejection of distinctiveness as a value in cultural terms does not equal a denunciation of sovereignty as the key principle of political life. Besides, it has been repeatedly observed that the image of the window does not presuppose real, grassroots-level interaction between Russia and Europe: a window can be used to stare out at the neighbours whose habits we would not mind to imitate, but one can hardly use it for going in and out in a normal way. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the late Anatolii Sobchak, the first and the only mayor of the city, prefers to describe St. Petersburg as 'a widely open ***door*** to the world' (1999:31), and a new image of 'Russia's international ***gate'*** has appeared in the 'Strategic plan for the development of St. Petersburg' (Zhukov 1999).

In the third narrative, St. Petersburg or, to be more precise, Leningrad, figures as 'the cradle of the proletarian revolution', the city of Lenin and the ***Avrora***, a city-hero, 'a city of workers' glory', one of the centres of the Soviet military industry. This narrative is present first and foremost in the New Soviet Russian[3] discourse, which favours a return to the past associated with flourishing industry and science, strongly enforced order and so forth. Needless to say, this is an entirely modernist setting. It can be useful as a point of departure for a post-sovereign discourse, where it may figure as a historical Other, as a kind of past which has to be overcome and a negation of which can give us an impression of what the future should look like. Yet this discursive path, if seen as the only one, leads to a dead end, directly into the pitfall where both official Russian and official St. Petersburg discourses ended up by the mid-1990s. The unsophisticated and unconditional negation of the Soviet past makes one interpret the Soviet period as a deviation from the 'normal' course of history, and a return to the pre-revolutionary Russia becomes the only way to the future.

This is a kind of 'abduction of Europe' story, which brings us back to the first narrative with all its narrowness and shallowness. Creativity is sacrificed in favour of imitation, which is especially obvious in the case of St. Petersburg, where 'fellows made up as Peters I'[4] and shouting '***Vivat*** Russia! ***Vivat*** St. Petersburg!' (Lurie

[3] I use the label 'New Soviet Russian' after Ted Hopf (2002, ch. 4).

[4] '[_]_____, _____ ___ _____ I'. Cf. Ostrovskii (2002a): '_____ _____ _____ _____ I – _ ____ _____'. Meaning of this Ostrovskii's comment is

2002b) have become an inevitable banality at any public celebration. Such bodily proliferation of the copies of the first Russian emperor is the best evidence of the shallow and imitative nature of this 'back to the future' discursive move. Another dead end to which this discursive path may lead is manifest through the reification of the 'European spirit' of the city as a confrontational position vis-à-vis Moscow – allegedly, a source of Asiatic influences. A perfect example of this unfortunate journey may be found in Anatolii Sobchak's book (1999, see in particular pp. 36–37, 41–43, 83, 160, 198–199, 210).

The 'abduction of Europe story', however, cannot be integrated into the imperial discourse, which emphasises continuity between the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, without a fundamental tension that threatens to break the picture into pieces. This tension is epitomised in the reinstallation of the music mechanism of the clock of the Peter and Paul Cathedral – starting from May 2002 it will, as between 1858 and 1917, play Kheraskov's eighteenth-century religious hymn ('____ _____ ___ _____ _ _____') and 'God save the Tsar' (Izvestia 2002). The incredible irony of the situation consists in the fact that between 1952 and 1991, the clock played the melody of the Soviet anthem, which is now the state anthem of the Russian Federation… Yet the tension remains unnoticed amid the overwhelming eclecticism of the city's general image – probably because one needs to work out new concepts in order to cope with it, to go beyond the existing narratives, which is always a difficult move.

Fourthly, St. Petersburg is often presented as a dissident city, a 'great city with a regional destiny' (another famous catchphrase, this time coined by Daniil Granin), a city of 'Petersburgian elegance' counterpoised to 'Muscovite haughtiness', the most 'democratic' city in Russia. The well-known opposition between the two Russian capitals to a great extent stems from this narrative. As evidenced by the Moscow vs. St. Petersburg discourse, however, this narrative is the trickiest one, since it easily changes sides and turns from positive into negative. It is enough to mention that in the nineteenth century it was Moscow that played the role of the centre of opposition, and that most of the dissident movement in the post-Stalinist USSR also was concentrated in Moscow, since dissent was

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basically the same, and both express the local intellectuals' annoyance about this cheap carnival trick with untranslatable bitter irony. See also Zhukov (2001:143).

often much more harshly suppressed in Leningrad (for details, see S. Smirnov 2000). In order to prevail over the anti-liberal versions of the city's history, the discourse of the democratic St. Petersburg turns towards the 'window on Europe' narrative, but this in itself does not secure a victory. Nevertheless, the repeated reference by various authors to the democratic features of the 'Petersburg mentality', which have been 'conceived in suffering by many generations of Petersburgers', is evidence that this narrative is very much alive (Zhukov 1999, see also Sobchak 1999:41–43, 83; Khudoley and Tkachenko 2001:54–55).

Fifthly and finally, St. Petersburg/Leningrad is the city of the Siege. Not surprisingly, this narrative, in as much as it has any relevance for current politics, is almost entirely controlled and used by the new Soviet Russians, who argue that Russia has been for centuries, and still is, blockaded by the West (in Russian the term ***blokada*** is used for the siege). The most recent manifestations of this western blockade, according to an article in ***Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti***, a newspaper close to the St. Petersburg City Hall, have been the campaign around the question of freedom of speech, the 'anti-Russian inflammatory itch at PACE, whose countries have not tasted terrorism at home yet, but are zealously imposing on Moscow contacts with "President" Maskhadov', and the US military deployment in Central Asia (Yurkov 2002). Thus, the narrative of the Siege functions as part of the broader narrative of Leningrad, but I would disagree with Dmitri Zimine's (2002) presentation of this association as unproblematic and inevitable. The potential of the story is certainly much greater. For example, such topics as the ability of the people to endure enormous suffering and nevertheless preserve the essential features of humanity, the responsibility of Stalin's leadership for the Siege and its consequences, even possible parallels with the Holocaust could be revisited (see S. Smirnov 2000:154–155, Pipiya 2002 for possible starting points). This is not to say that these themes are absent from the public debate, but they could be productively reconceptualised within the post-sovereign discourse as having universal significance for the humanity, nad not just for the history of Russia.

A significant story that brings most of the narratives together is the renaming of St. Petersburg, which finds its place in nearly all existing discourses. Pertti Joenniemi (1996, 2001) sees the return of the name St. Petersburg as an important move in itself, since it may stimulate other departures in the direction of the Wider Europe and

the Baltic networks. Europeanisation, opening up, building bridges, and so forth was apparently the motivation of Anatolii Sobchak and his co-workers when they pressed for a referendum on the return of the name and then for official recognition of its result in 1991 (see Sobchak 1999:8–9, 152). However, Joenniemi recognises that the return to St. Petersburg does not automatically strengthen 'images of an open and a rather Europe-oriented Russia, or [augur] measures such as the joining of a network of urban spaces' (2001:77). Within the dominant discourse, the renaming is no more than part of the golden age narrative and as such offers scant openings with regard to embracing post-sovereign space. The disregard of the renaming in the contemporary pro-European discourse may look surprising, but I would tentatively explain it as evidence that the old new name is perceived as something natural by the majority of non-communist observers. It is indicative that the only discourse in which the change of the name figures prominently is the xenophobic pro-Soviet one, that decries the imminent loss of Russian distinctiveness and denounces Petersburg for being instrumental for this loss:

> Petersburg appeared in Russia as its utmost want, but realised itself in the form of Russia's self-negation. […] ***Sankt! – Piter! – Burg!*** For a Russian ear some three hundred years ago it sounded just about the same as today – ***snickers! tampax! bounty! marketing!*** […] It turned out, that it was not Russia that moved out closer to Europe, but instead Europe entered Russia through Kronslott, Kronstadt, Monplaisir, Peterhof, Oranienbaum… (Kuraev 1996:36, 53, 55–56; cf. Boym 2000:311, 313–314).

Anatolii Sobchak (1999:28) recalls that at the communist demonstrations in the early 1990s, one of the key slogans was: 'Sobchak succeeded where Hitler failed: he erased the name of Leningrad from the world map!'. The rejection of the new name by the isolationists is indeed a sign that the renaming was a victory for those who want to see Russia part of a Wider Europe. However, this does not mean that there is no need for conscious and far-reaching attempts to (re)conceptualise the renaming, for example, by integrating the narrative of the siege into the history of St. Petersburg, as distinct from Leningrad. In this respect, the renaming is still an unfinished project; besides, St. Petersburg lags far behind Moscow in getting rid of the Soviet-era street and square names (Zonin 2002).

It should be clear at this stage that the main narratives of St. Petersburg may provide building blocks for a new post-sovereign discourse, but none of them serves as a firm foundation in this case. Hence, the rest of this paper will be devoted to investigation of how these building blocks are used within different discourses to construct the social reality of St. Petersburg. Let us start with the official discourse, which these days is increasingly concentrating on the upcoming anniversary of the city.

2. ***The official discourse***

St. Petersburg is preparing for its 300th anniversary, to be celebrated in May 2003. This event will indeed be a chance to draw the attention of foreign investors, to turn 'St. Petersburg cultural events […] into a tourist product', and to make St. Petersburg 'a centre of attention of world public and business' (Administratsiya Sankt-Peterburga 2000a:88–89). The international dimension of the upcoming festivities is recognised both in official documents and in public discussion, although no real signs of post-sovereign departures can be discerned. The key official document, the ***Concept of Preparation for the Celebration of St. Petersburg's 300th Anniversary***, opens with a very characteristic paragraph, that deserves to be quoted in full:

> St. Petersburg was founded by Peter I in 1703. During the 18–19th centuries, it was developing as the capital of the Russian Empire. As a result, a unique city was created, with an inimitable appearance and regular planning, harmoniously placed into the landscape of the Neva's delta and of the Gulf of Finland. The city has absorbed the experience of West-European culture and architecture, which has been immortalised in the faultless architectural complexes of the streets, squares and palace ensembles, united with a single architectural and planning idea. The fortuitous position of St. Petersburg at the exit to the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea has played an immense role in Russia's development. The city has become for Russia a 'window on Europe', and opened extensive possibilities for its integration into world trade, economic and cultural relations. New progressive ideas in all spheres of science, culture and art have been realised in St. Petersburg. For years, famous scholars, great artists and

> architects have been living here, and have left after themselves an invaluable legacy which has enormous significance for the entire world community. The historical destiny of St. Petersburg, its economic and cultural potential have global significance (Administratsiya Sankt-Peterburga 2000a:88).

Apart from the last two sentences, St. Petersburg figures here not as a distinct entity of independent value, but as a unit within Russian territory. It does not have a (pre-)history of its own ('founded by Peter I', 'was developing as the capital of the Russian Empire'), and has at best worked as an interface between Russia and Europe, Russia and the world (the 'window on Europe' narrative). Most disturbing, perhaps, is the grammatical tense that is being used throughout the quote. Russian language does not make a distinction between different forms of referring to the past typical for English, so the above citation can easily be converted into past indefinite (once upon a time, St. Petersburg was a European city) or even past perfect (before the Bolsheviks destroyed the Empire, St. Petersburg had been a European city). My translation in present perfect is the most optimistic one, but it can not remedy the usage of the past as a constant reference point. The only opening towards the future is the last sentence (present tense), which, however, talks about a potential which, one may assume, is yet to be realised. And this potential, again, is generated by the past, by the unique history of the city. How to realise it today, remains unclear.

One should perhaps not read too much into the official documents. After all, various programmes and concepts for the anniversary make a number of solid practical points. Most promising are perhaps the programmes for the development of tourism, academic and business exchanges and efforts at publicising the celebrations both in Russia and abroad, which included, ***inter alia***, listing the anniversary on the UNESCO calendar (Administratsiya Sankt-Peterburga 2000b, Pravitel'stvo RF 2000). A small but important detail was the decision to prepare road and metro signs both in Russian and in English during 1999–2000 (Administratsiya Sankt-Peterburga 2000c). (However, in 2002, any foreign visitor still had better learn the Cyrillic alphabet before going to the city, where 80% of signs and inscriptions (and close to 100% of those in the underground) are in Russian.) In general, the political decision made during the time of Anatolii Sobchak to develop the city into a major tourist centre, which was at the time contested by the leftist

industrial-era ideologues, now seems to have become a matter of consensus, and questions remain only as to the effectiveness of the adopted programmes (see Panchenko 2002).

The St. Petersburg authorities seem to pursue a more open policy towards the outside than the federal and other regional governments. Governor Yakovlev, for instance, has repeatedly called for simplified procedures and reduced costs of obtaining the visa for foreign tourists, in particular for nationals from the Nordic countries (Kovalyev 2001). President Putin's new practice of holding summit meetings in St. Petersburg is a significant step forward for the city, which as a result, ***inter alia***, has become home for the 'Petersburg Dialogue' between Germany and Russia (Khudoley 2002:336). Roman Catholic Metropolitan Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz finds it easier 'to talk to the city authorities in St. Petersburg' than in Moscow, and it is not a coincidence that there are 6 Roman Catholic churches in St. Petersburg compared to just 2 in Moscow (Kondrusiewicz 2002). On the other hand, St. Petersburg television, which is controlled by the City Hall, has a reputation as being the home of various kinds of conspiracy theorists, with its regular broadcasts devoted to exposing the alleged American-sponsored plot against Russia (there are also numerous hints that the Jews and freemasons are involved, although no open allegations of this kind are made).

At the level of day-to day politics, the city authorities have deliberately tried to reduce the significance of ideological contradictions to a minimum, exploiting the image of the Governor as a manager who prefers to keep a distance from political squabbles. Initially, such strategy helped Vladimir Yakovlev to defeat Anatolii Sobchak at the gubernatorial elections of 1996, and to secure re-election in 2000.

Yet the lack of ideology, and the deliberate nature of this depoliticisation, are still evident, and the city authorities increasingly have to face the possibility that their strategy might backfire. New competitors are knocking on the door of Smolny, and some of them rely on the remaining embodiments of the city's identity – such as a very popular football club ***Zenit***. '[I]n a situation of the effective absence of city ideology', ***Ekspert Severo-Zapad*** writes, 'the ***Zenit*** banner has turned out to be a symbol quite capable of successfully competing with all the officious city attributes put together, including the institute of the Governor' (Kotsiubinskii and Smirnov 2001:25). The conflict between ***Zenit's*** president Vitalii Mutko (who, as well as

Yakovlev himself, used to be Sobchak's deputy) and the governor has lead the former to threaten that he will leave St. Petersburg and transfer the club to Novgorod (B.M. 2001), and the latter to insist on the purchase by the city of a share in another local football club, ***Dinamo*** – despite a recommendation to the contrary from the City Property Management Committee (Baletov and Smirnov 2001).

This example serves as an indication that a search for new symbols and, accordingly, a new identity for St. Petersburg is a process that is not only necessary but inevitable. As noted by sociologist Konstantin Zhukov (1999), '[a]n absence of some shared and living "Petersburgian idea" has an extremely negative impact on the city's life, the clinging mythological treacle fetters every promising move in politics, economy, social life'. However, any official discourse tends to play with the narratives that are well-established and therefore secure, and St. Petersburg official discourse is no exception. For that reason, one should bring in a broader perspective and look how the old stories are being (re)interpreted and new spaces opened in a wider discourse.

3. ***Peter the Great and the need for a 'softer' history***

Having established a need for a new city ideology, Zhukov (2001) proposes to turn towards one of the key 'cultural heroes' of St. Petersburg – Peter the Great. He notes how in previous periods the state managed to integrate the image of the first Russian emperor into different ideological platforms and to use it to support the official position. In the nineteenth century, the image of Peter the Great was even reinterpreted in favour of the doctrine of official nationality (autocracy, Orthodox religion, populism), in spite of the fact that most people at that time as well as now would rather associate this figure with putting the state above religion and taking little care of the 'human material' for his great designs.

Zhukov believes that for any new liberal discourse, it would be impossible to compete with the identity-creating power of Peter's image or even to ignore it, and therefore suggests emphasising the democratic features apparent in the image of the Great Tsar – his 'pragmatism and rationality, religious and national tolerance, inexhaustible aspiration for self-perfection, simplicity of everyday behaviour and intercourse. And most importantly – his respect for the intellectual values of the West, the desire to imitate it'

(2001:144). It remains unclear, however, whether this discursive move can have any chance of success, since the image of Peter the Great has already been appropriated by the official discourse, which is certainly based on much deeper discursive structures. Any attempt of reinterpretation will most probably be opposed by the state and the city authorities, whose overwhelming resources will enable them to neutralise such attempts and to redirect them in support of the dominant (post)imperial discourse. Other (re)interpretations are possible as well: thus, 'pragmatism and religious tolerance' easily turns into cynical disrespect of religious feelings, 'simplicity of everyday behaviour and intercourse' converts into mere ill-breeding and tyrannical treatment of one's closest associates (see Kuraev 1996:78–87). Zhukov's reading of Peter's efforts to set up working administrative structures and 'a for the time advanced industry' as an example of 'supereffective management' (2001:144) may play into the hands of both contemporary bureaucrats and the new Soviet Russians, since the degree of penetration by the state of all societal and economic structures at Peter's time is universally known (and perhaps still not overcome). Peter's desire to learn from Europe is important indeed, but if overemphasised, it projects and perpetuates the image of Russia as a learner (cf. Neumann 1999:107–112) that the most part of Russian society would reject as humiliating.

Moreover, the emphasis on Peter as ***the*** 'cultural hero' for St. Petersburg could not but cause discontent on the part of some of the main participants of the post-modern Baltic project: in Estonia, for example, the official history is about 'the oppression of the Baltic peoples by the Russian Emperor' (Shesternina 2002) – a narrative that is, in turn, absolutely unacceptable for the great majority of Russians. Promoting Peter as a sort of local saint for St. Petersburg would certainly bring this controversy into the forefront, which could only strengthen the already strong mutual othering of Russia and the Baltic states in their respective discourses.

Even the image of St. Petersburg as a 'window on Europe' may be questioned without necessarily downgrading Peter's role and thus confronting the power of the existing discursive structure. According to Vitalii Tretyakov (2000), the then editor-in-chief of the Moscow-based ***Nezavisimaya gazeta***, Peter transferred the capital to the North-West for transport reasons and not for the sake of any 'European' reforms. 'Besides, Petersburg of course became the bridgehead for Russian expansion in the entire Baltic region,

neglected and destitute'. These are, again, territorial images of sovereign entities trading with each other across the Baltic Sea and competing for the possession of the surrounding lands. It refers to such present-day projects as the Baltic Oil Pipeline System, whose main purpose (political at least) is to export oil through 'our own' terminals, not through Ventspils and Butinge (cf. Morozov 2001:31).

Thus, while the image of Peter the Great is certainly an important (perhaps the most important) part of St. Petersburg's identity, this historical narrative has somehow to be softened in order to become acceptable both for Russia and its partners in the Wider Europe. The legacy of traditional state-centred history, still taught in schools as a matter of course, needs to be overcome. A typical textbook story about 'the banks of the Neva' is strictly territorial: it is based on the widespread narrative of re-conquering, getting back the native lands once lost to an enemy, taken over by a hostile Other. This narrative belongs to one of the deepest levels of the discursive structure of Russian society, a common sense that is not only impossible to question, but even needless to substantiate by any kind of historical evidence (examples of this textbook story may be found in Rybakov and Preobrazheskii 2000:191; Chernikova 1999:179, 230). Nevertheless, the diversity of stories being told about St. Petersburg and the inevitable tensions between different components of the official discourse make writing a new history an exercise worth trying.

First of all, the above discussion is not to be read as a case for rejecting the image of the Great Tsar completely. I agree with Zhukov that this would be impossible and even counterproductive, but I would argue that Peter's image alone could not serve as the pivot for the post-sovereign discourse either. It should be put into a broader historical context, and there should be a conscious search for parallels between Peter's civilisational effort and today's developments in the Baltic Sea area. On the other hand, the distinction between the ***modernisation*** undertaken by Peter the Great and the need for ***post-modernisation*** that is obvious today should be not only kept in mind, but explicitly articulated.

One possible way to soften the historical narrative of St. Petersburg is to go beyond the self-evident truth of the above official quotation that 'St. Petersburg was founded by Peter I in 1703', and that before that, as Tretyakov asserts, the area was 'neglected and destitute'. A discussion about 'Petersburg before Petersburg' is by now well under way. The radical proponents of the

pre-Peter Petersburg want to make the city several centuries older – as possible starting points, they offer the building of the Swedish Nyenskans fortress with the city of Nyen (1611), the establishment, also by the Swedes, of the Landskrona fortress (1300), or the emergence of Staraya Ladoga (eighth century), now considered to be the first Russian capital. It is persistently emphasised that human settlements, including urban ones, existed on the banks of the Neva regardless of these lands' belonging to any state, and pointed out that 'the extension of the city's chronological limits strengthens its natural connection with Europe, with its Baltic neighbours' (A. Smirnov 2001). This idea very nicely fits into the new historical narrative of the Baltic Sea region, where the Hanseatic period and the significance of the Baltic Sea as the major trade route between the East and the West play a prominent role, with the unifying features being stressed as a counterbalance to the history of wars for the domination over the coast. If the Russians today, the argument could continue, perceive the Swedes not as their former enemies, but as partners in a joint Baltic project (which is very much the case), if the new identity of St. Petersburg as a Baltic city, which shares a common destiny with Stockholm, Turku, Riga etc., is accepted, then the Swedish, as well as the Finno-Ugric, past of the Neva delta becomes part of ***our common*** past. In this new history both the Stolbovo Peace of 1617 and the Nystad Treaty of 1721 should be treated with no more sensitivity than, for example, Moscow's suppression of Novgorod in 1478. St. Petersburg and Stockholm have previously been centres of two hostile political units, but today they – like Moscow and Novgorod – are part of the same political space (although not of the same state territory).

This understanding is starting to take shape and to be spelled out by some Petersburgian intellectuals, in particular by the proponents of a North-Western identity, whose key ideas are discussed in section 5. Introducing the masterminds of the 'North-West' section in the local ***Nevskoe vremia*** newspaper, the ***SeverInform*** agency sums up their platform in the following way:

> [T]heir city is not at all a certain artificial formation, erected by Peter the Great's will on the conquered Swedish lands. On the contrary, it has naturally and organically sprouted from the history and culture of the Russian North, from Finno-Ugric settlements, on the Great Novgorod lands, at the shore of the

> sea that had at one time brought 'from the sunset' the founding fathers – the ***variags***[5] (SeverInform 2002).

And the upshot of this natural synthesis is quite striking and encouraging: according to Viktor Nikolaev, '[i]t is not a window on Europe here, it is ***Europe itself***' (SeverInform 2002, emphasis added).

One should note that this logic is not entirely alien to the city authorities. Since the time of Anatolii Sobchak, who saw in the intercultural character of St. Petersburg no less than 'a remote prototype of the future united Europe' (1999:12), it has become almost commonplace to talk about the 'international character of the city', which is due to 'the tolerance towards others' belief, culture, the unification of entrepreneurial traditions' (Yakovlev 2001). For Sobchak (1999:12), St. Petersburg was still built in a no-man's land, but the current administration has made a major step forward in their understanding of the city's (pre-)history. Thus, speaking at the opening of the Baltic Development Forum in September 2001, Vladimir Yakovlev mentioned, as evidence of the reviving unity of the Baltic Sea region and Europe as a whole, the fact that 'we simultaneously celebrate the 300th anniversary of the foundation of St. Petersburg by Peter the Great, the 700th anniversary of the small Swedish fortress Landskrona and the 1250th anniversary of the first capital of the Old Rus', the town of Ladoga, where Rurik was a prince' (Yakovlev 2001). In 1999, in the course of preparations for the St. Petersburg anniversary, a sign in memory of Nyenskans was installed in the present-day Malaya Okhta municipality (Administratsiya Sankt-Peterburga 1999). It is interesting that the municipal officials there cherish and publicise the depth of history of the Okhta area as 'the oldest locality of St. Petersburg' (TUKAR [s.a.]) and quite consciously use their location as a resource in their search for partners in Northern Europe.

On the other hand, it is perhaps quite understandable that the idea of moving the ***formal*** date of the creation of St. Petersburg is met with little enthusiasm on the part of the city government officials. They see it as endangering their plan of gaining additional attention and resources from both the federal authorities and foreign investors. The objections from Smolny are reasonable as such, but their argumentation sometimes raises anxiety, since it proceeds along strictly territorial lines, assumes the nation/state as the only

[5] That is, the Swedish noblemen who, according to the annals, founded the first Russian dynasty.

basis for identity, and tends to reify state borders as dividing lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘Under the scarcity of resources – both material and intellectual – the society needs consolidation, which is impossible without a uniting idea’, deputy chairman of the Committee for External Relations of the city Administration Vladimir Tchurov insists. ‘To try and split this idea means to do harm’ (quoted in A. Smirnov 2001:39). The calls for ‘consolidation’ around a single dominant idea presuppose that there is only one dominant worldview present in society, which clearly divides the world into the inside and the outside, ‘us’ and ‘them’, and where the ‘national’ approach to history prevails. At the same time, Tchurov himself is not blind to other interpretations of St. Petersburg’s history: in another speech, he applies the ‘golden age’ narrative not only to Peter’s period, but also to the times of the Novgorod Republic, ‘whose well-being and prosperity rested upon trade and economic development, upon the gradual development of the surrounding territories’ (Tchurov 2001).

One more potentially highly valuable historical narrative that is right now being reinterpreted in post-territorial terms is the Finnish-Soviet Winter War of 1939–40. The reinterpretation started with a symbolic act of President Putin when he laid flowers on General Mannerheim’s grave during his visit to Finland in September 2001 (Khanbabian 2001). Now there seems to exist a general consensus in Russia that the war on the part of the Soviet Union was unjust, and St. Petersburg newspapers run headlines like ‘We were adversaries, but we have never been enemies’ (Glezerov 2002).

Another interesting departure, which has not yet been explored at all, is the fact that Peter’s St. Petersburg was located for most contemporaries in the ***North*** of Europe, rather than in the West or in the East: the latter mapping was simply irrelevant for the time. It was, indeed, the very dominance of Russia in the North that ‘set in train a re-presentation of the coordinates of Europe that was to result in the forging of the East/West divide’ (Neumann 1999:77, see also Joenniemi and Lehti 2001:19–20). This story would not only allow St. Petersburg to link up with the present-day discourse of the North – a very powerful alternative to the East/West dichotomy (Joenniemi and Lehti 2001), – it also warns against staging new power-political games with regard to the Baltics as this would only lead to the continuing isolation of Russia as the alien and threatening East. Finally, there is an obviously under-researched history of the relatively free northern edges of the Russian Empire,

that contain such tales as the one of Vygoretsia – a semi-independent community of Old Believers that existed in contemporary Karelia until the nineteenth century (Shtepa 2001).

To sum up, one may say that history is obviously treated as one of the main resources that St. Petersburg can use for its development, but the power of the textbook narrative is too strong to be overcome without a conscious effort. So far, most of the statements in the historical discourse are constantly balancing between territorial and spatial understandings of the past, they offer an uneasy mixture of two opposite endeavours – to demonstrate the heritage of diversity ***and*** to prove that 'our' people always came first, and were the most successful and progressive. In my view, this latter ambition should be given up as both hopeless and damaging. The Baltic Sea region today is one of the most peaceful in Europe, but our historical legacy is quite traumatic if told in national terms (see Morozov 2001 for a detailed discussion). The only way forward is by moving to post-national history, which would allow us to emphasise unity and diversity, not war and dominance. And if we want to prevent dangerous nationalistic hiccups, this move should be a conscious one, explicitly proclaimed and substantiated. The danger of nationalist self-assertion is often overlooked by those arguing for a central status of St. Petersburg either within the Russian Federation or even beyond its borders.

4. *Concentric or eccentric? St. Petersburg as a capital*

One of the basic features of the current St. Petersburg discourse is what I would characterise as complacency. When a Petersburger talks about his/her city, the case is all too often presented in such a way as if all the creative work has already been done by our predecessors, and what is left to the present generation is rather a matter of stock-taking, preservation, and at the very best, proper management and marketing. Hence, Sergei Sementsov (2001) claims that St. Petersburg is one of the global capitals by virtue of its unique intellectual as well as architectural and spatial environment. St. Petersburg, the story goes, was conceived by Peter the Great and created by him and his followers in such a way as to include and surpass everything progressive that could exist in the world. Its layout, with its 'unique, for the European town-planning of that time, five radii from the Neva', was superb; it contained 'new

for the European architecture types of ensembles'; its suburban parks outrivaled 'their celebrated English predecessors'. In the nineteenth century this superiority 'demonstrated itself for the most part in literature, music, ballet, sculpture': 'the entire contemporary world ballet either remains in line with the Petersburg ballet school, or has been created by the disciples of this school'. 'The creation of artistic interiors on such a scale is known to no other city in the world', and contemporary St. Petersburg still generates 'intellectual products having no analogues in the world'[6]. Everything was however destroyed by the communists, who tried to turn Moscow into the world proletarian capital, and therefore their policy 'was constantly directed at destroying the global status of Leningrad as an obvious rival for Moscow'.

Sementsov's story is founded on the narrative of the imperial golden age and the 'abduction of Europe', but it adds one more dimension to it. His version of the city's history constantly puts St. Petersburg in the centre of Russia and, indeed, in the centre of the world. He emphasises the role of Staraya Ladoga and Novgorod as the first capitals of the Russian state and as precursors of St. Petersburg, and elevates the nineteenth-century St. Petersburg to no less than a capital of Europe. This central role is interpreted both in cultural and in power-political terms, but in either case it is an imperial discourse: it is the ability to ***concentrate*** cultural values (Voltaire's library, the biggest collection of Rembrandt's paintings etc.) instead of creating them, and to ***intervene*** into the affairs of the entire subcontinent (e.g. during the Napoleonic wars) that is most appreciated[7]. And despite the fact that Sementsov never ceases to stress the 'multilingual, multiethnic, multiconfessional, multicultural' unity, that was forming in the golden age St. Petersburg, the external Other is always present in his story as threatening, expansionist and exclusive. The Swedes come in the sixteenth century as conquerors, who immediately start 'squeezing out the Orthodox Russian population and replacing with the ***foreign*** Finnish one' (in his oral presentation, according to the verbatim record, he even used the term 'genocide'). Peter's reclaiming of the Neva lands, on the other hand, signifies a return to normality, 'a

[6] See Lurie (2002d) for a more post-modern interpretation of the latter claim.

[7] Sergei Smirnov (2000:38) also links the elevation of St. Petersburg to the status of one of the world capitals to the Russian victory over Napoleon, but he is very careful not to project this linkage into the present.

resumption of the original line of development' (Sementsov 2001, emphasis added).

It is not really a habit in St. Petersburg to openly claim a position in the centre of Europe or the world – even Sementsov never spells it out, and I would doubt he is conscious about these implications of his statements. However, the trend is certainly there: a remarkable trait of contemporary St. Petersburg life, the strive to copy absolutely all the forms of cultural activity present in Europe, can also be interpreted in this light. St. Petersburg endeavours – sometimes with great pain – to organise not only countless music and film festivals, but also sand and ice sculpture competitions, sailing regattas and scooter races, ice-cream and beer festivals, fashion design contests and so on. Most of these events are quite parochial as to the level of their organisation and achievement, and do not get much publicity outside St. Petersburg (sometimes even within), but the intention is most remarkable. The omnivorous zeal of St. Petersburg's cultural managers turns the city into an ironic equivalent of the hundred-language dictionary that was, according to Sementsov, compiled by St. Petersburg scholars by order of Catherine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century.

This imitative openness of St. Petersburg as a 'hundred-language dictionary' certainly creates a potentially unlimited space for interaction with the outside world, and makes it much easier to cope with the past. Thus, the bitter nation-wide discussion about whether or not to take the body of Lenin out of the Mausoleum and to lay it to rest, in St. Petersburg turns into a proposal to treat the mummy 'as a prodigious avant-garde artefact' (Lurie 2002a), to put in on display: 'there is an Egyptian mummy in St. Petersburg museums, there is a Scythian one – why should not there be a Soviet one as well?' (Tulchinskii 2000).

However, there is a world of difference between these post-modernist intellectual exercises and the desire to seriously prove that St. Petersburg is the best in the world – as between one really spontaneous carnival described by Svetlana Boym as 'an alternative medicine' (2000:321) and the endless 'cultural' events organised and sponsored by the authorities. The powerful anchoring of the city's identity in the Russian national discourse, manifest in the constant othering of outsiders through historical narratives and in the importance of the imperial past, opens up another interpretation of this imitative space, which is closer to the original one offered by Medvedev. If the image of St. Petersburg is exploited as a source of

national pride, the political space turns into a centralised, empire-like structure with St. Petersburg as a grotesque 'Third and a Half Rome' in the centre. Anatolii Sobchak is right to point out that the only capital of imperial Russia was St. Petersburg. But his claim that, for that reason, 'the comparison of St. Petersburg with Rome […] is better founded and more trustworthy than the analogous linking of Moscow' (1999:32–33) does not work in the discursive reality. It is hardly a coincidence that the formula 'the Northern Rome', used by Sobchak, is far less widespread in everyday language, despite the parallels so obvious even in the name of the city of Saint Peter and pointed out by experts (see Lebedev 1993:47, S. Smirnov 2000:7).

The image of St. Petersburg as an imperial centre today is certainly more of a caricature, since St. Petersburg lacks both financial and discursive resources to compete with Moscow: not only can it not afford projects of Moscow's scale, but, most importantly, its uncertain identity as both Russian and European, 'divine' and 'devilish' etc. provides quite shaky ground for any project with universalist aspirations. Being an obviously ***eccentric*** city, it does not bear ***concentric*** imperial images, which are at home in Moscow (Tulchinskii 2000). The grotesque nature of this metropolitan ambition is well captured by Viktor Nikolaev, who compares it to the attempts of Ellochka the Cannibal to compete with millionaire Vanderbildt's wife[8].

In this respect, St. Petersburg is definitely a territorial city: as argued by Sergei Smirnov (2000:32), it was the emergence of St. Petersburg that put an end to the practice of identifying Moscow with Russia. The old Russian space had its centre in Moscow and then slowly faded towards the borders of the ***Moscow*** Tsardom. Moreover, this Muscovite space actually included the entire Christian world as Moscow claimed the position of the 'true Rome'[9]. By transferring the capital, Peter the Great actually promoted a ***Russian*** political identity that from now on could exist independently of Moscow and the spiritual, Orthodox values the latter embodied. He completed the task of curbing the political ambitions of the

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[8] '_____ _ _____ _____ _____-_____ _ _____'. This is a reference to a classical 1928 satire ***The Twelve Chairs*** by Ilya Ilf and Evgenii Petrov. One of its secondary but popular characters is Ellochka the Cannibal – a benighted creature with a vocabulary of 30 words, whose existence is devoted to the futile efforts to dress like Mrs. Vanderbildt while living in the Soviet Moscow.

[9] Note that this argument does not contradict Medvedev's (1997:528) description of the ***emergence*** of the Russian space with the conquering of Kazan. Cf. his account of Moscow's position (1997:533).

Orthodox Church, initiated by Alexei Mikhailovich, and, although establishing the Empire, rejected the title of 'Christian Emperor of the East', offered to him by the Senate in 1721 (Duncan 2000:13–14). With his relentless attempts to move the Russian ***border*** westwards, he made his compatriots appreciate the significance of territory for the modern world. And by establishing Russia as ***one*** of the equal players on the European stage, he rejected the universalist religious model of the Third Rome. St. Petersburg certainly is a much more mundane city than both Moscow and Rome: its emblem, for example, openly quotes that of the Vatican, but instead of the keys to heaven it shows two anchors – the keys to paradise on earth. A great majority of its inhabitants, including politicians and officials, would find it difficult to remember that the city was named after Peter the Apostle – to such an extent the mundane, even pagan, cult of Peter the Emperor has replaced any Christian religious identity (Tulchinskii 2000).

Characteristically, the transfer of the capital back to Moscow was carried out by the adherents of another universalist project, and in the Soviet ideology from Stalin's time on, Moscow was increasingly again identified with the entire Russia and acquired the status of the capital of the world. At the first Congress of Architects in 1937, Shchusev declared that Russia was 'the only successor to [ancient] Rome' (quoted in S. Smirnov 2000:144) in the construction of public buildings. After the completion of the system of channels between the main Russian rivers, Moscow was nonsensically named 'a port of five seas', and during the celebrations of Moscow's 800th anniversary in 1947, Stalin called it a model for all the capitals in the world. The eclectic style of Moscow architecture, the desire to embrace 'all architectural achievements of the humanity' were a natural consequence of this spatial configuration (S. Smirnov 2000:145–147).

Thus, the claim that St. Petersburg is unique due to its superb architecture, planning etc. is in its complacency closer rather to the Soviet universalist concentric worldview than to the post-sovereign, post-territorial understanding of political space. I would like to stress this distinction between the two types of spatial politics, which seems to me a crucial one. The pre-modern, or rather pre-territorial, understanding of political space is different from a post-sovereign, post-territorial conception, first of all as regards self-assertiveness and the desire to impose one's values upon others. The centralised imperial space of Muscovy or of the Soviet Union was based on the

notion that ‘we’ are the best in the world, since we know the right way, and was arrogant, sometimes hostile, in its attitude to outsiders. There can be a compromise interpretation: Grigorii Tulchinskii (2000) argues that ‘Petersburg identity is not a nostalgia for the empire, [but] an appeal to […] the imperial culture – inter-ethnic, superethnic, multicultural, superconfessional, etc., etc.’ There is, however, an obvious parallel between this line of reasoning and the Eurasianist ideology, which in the end is quite prone to advocate national superiority. It is not surprising that Tulchinsky’s argument elicited instantaneous protests on behalf of the minorities (Ulyanochkin in Tulchinskii 2000) and uneasiness on the part of those people promoting the North-Western identity (Nikolaev in Tulchinskii 2000).

To be fair, Sementsov is far from being complacent about the current situation as regards the city’s development, and insists that St. Petersburg would need new ‘superprojects’ in order to keep its status as one of the global capitals and not to turn ‘into a somewhat-successful dullish regional city with no right to a global future’. The nature of those ‘superprojects’, however, remains unclear, and as far as one can judge from the concrete examples he offers, it is still all about ***competition*** with other countries in the industrial sphere (shipbuilding, aircraft building etc.), about the desire ‘to overtake and surpass America’, if one uses Khrushchev’s famous slogan. This ambition to be the first in the world, very much encouraged by the ‘golden age’ narrative, can be devastating for the city’s resources and would hardly bring any returns.

The idea to compete for the status of a capital within the Russian Federation is from this point of view even worse. One has to agree with Anatolii Sobchak that the intellectual and cultural phenomenon of St. Petersburg has been able to survive throughout the twentieth century because it was not identical to the city’s position as a capital (Sobchak 1999:9), while an attempt to regain the latter implicitly deprives St. Petersburg of its wider heritage. It firmly locks St. Petersburg within Russian territorial politics by providing such incentives as budget transfers and upward social mobility for the local elite. It discourages creative approaches to politics, since everything one needs in this case is effective lobbying in order to get more and more from the centre – thus, efforts are being concentrated on redistribution, and not on making the pie bigger. It prevents local decision-makers from looking in any other direction than Moscow in the search for partners, or at least

downgrades ‘external relations’ to a secondary level in the hierarchy of administrative tasks, very much like it was during the Leningrad era. And, last but not least, it makes the establishment in Moscow and in the regions even more suspicious about the role of the ***piterskie*** (people from ***Piter*** – a colloquial name for St. Petersburg) in Russian politics. The talk about the ‘Petersburg Mafia’ taking over all important positions in Moscow has obviously made some regional politicians uneasy: thus, Saratov governor Dmitrii Ayatskov has allegedly promised to establish a quota for his fellow countrymen in the Kremlin (Gavrilov 2001), while Saratov’s representative to the Federation Council Ramazan Abdulatipov later put forward a proposal to spread the capital functions even further by moving some ministries to Krasnoyarsk, Vladivostok and maybe to other cities (Abdulatipov 2002). St. Petersburg’s claims for a central position within Russia quite naturally leads to the increasing interference of the federal authorities in local affairs: the anniversary PR campaign, for instance, has been placed under Moscow’s control, with Sergei Yastrzhembskii’s press-centre being located in some of the most valued historical rooms of the St. Petersburg House of Radio (Nikolaev 2002), likely to stay there even after the anniversary and to critically influence the 2004 gubernatorial elections (Dramaretskaya 2002). This interference, in turn, is perceived as a sort of aggression and causes irritation in the city, with St. Petersburg – Moscow relations deteriorating as a result. The news that Federation Council chairman Sergei Mironov had prepared a bill on assigning a capital status to St. Petersburg in January 2002 provoked a wave of mutual recrimination on the TV channels controlled by the Moscow and St. Petersburg governments (Ostrovskii 2002b). These developments, apart from being detrimental for the political climate in Russia, undermine the credibility of St. Petersburg as an actor and a discursive asset, and thus reduce the chances that it could sooner or later play a role in bringing Russia closer to European post-modernity. It is not a coincidence that the people most conscious about the existing spatial openings feel awkward about these metropolitan ambitions, first of all because they damage the image of St. Petersburg in the neighbouring regions. Thus, Viktor Nikolaev confesses that he has always been depressed in observing ‘the artificial rivalry with Moscow in the sense of being a capital’. Commenting upon the title of the regular column in ***Nevskoe vremia*** – ***View from Petersburg***, – Nikolayev says: ‘[W]e hope that this view is not arrogant, not down

[at the surrounding regions] (and we do not have the right to look down), this is just such an angle' (SeverInform 2002). Petr Trenin-Straussov, the initiator of another project discussed in the next section, is also careful to stress that 'Petersburg cannot become the capital of Russia', and that 'the freedom from government functions gives Petersburg an opportunity to concentrate on other things' (2002).

The problem of St. Petersburg as a capital of Russia is, however, not limited to proposals of moving the central bureaucracy or part of it to the banks of the Neva. It is well-known that St. Petersburg ***is*** recognised in this status in two important respects – as the cultural capital and as the criminal capital of Russia. Lev Lurie is right to observe that '"[c]ultural capital" means no more than "northern Venice" or "the city of tree revolutions"', but I would argue that all the three labels are far more than just 'complimentary figure[s] of speech' (2002c). They reflect the special position of St. Petersburg in the respective discourse, and, despite its negative emotional load, 'criminal capital' belongs to the same list. There is a puzzle common to both 'capital' labels, which consists in the fact that both have been accepted as something natural, despite being problematic if put against the hard facts. Moscow could have at least the same claims for the status of 'cultural capital', and even greater if one measures existing creative potential, and not the historical grandeur or the treasures produced by past generations and being watchfully kept in museums. Likewise, criminal statistics for St. Petersburg do not show anything exceptional compared to other Russian cities: in 1999, it occupied the 36th position among the 89 Russian regions, with the per capita number of crimes just above the national average (Goskomstat Rossii 2000:260). However, both labels have been accepted by insiders, as well as by outsiders, to reflect the actual state of affairs.

My explanation would be that the position of St. Petersburg in political space, in the sense of being simultaneously Russian and European, central and marginal, always in-between, not only justifies claims for a special status within Russia ('cultural capital'), but also makes St. Petersburg more vulnerable to various kinds of criticism, since this frame sets a higher standard for judgement. What can be excusable in any regional city, and even in the 'half-Asiatic' Moscow, is often interpreted as a disgrace in St. Petersburg.

This higher standard is the source of the discourse of shame, that has many facets in local as well as in national context. Some of

its manifestations are by no means unique to St. Petersburg, but the ironic discourse about St. Petersburg as a fake European city – too Russian (in a bad sense) to deserve the privilege to be called European – is very distinctive. It possesses its own defaults and system of signification which would make no sense in any other place. It is enough to provide an article with a headline like 'Grimy Venice' (_____ _____) (Boitsova 2002) in order to ridicule the municipal services' failure to clean the streets properly. Even the alleged massive diversion of resources from improving the living conditions of St. Petersburgers towards façade repairs in connection with the anniversary may be put in the context of the tradition of building Potemkin villages, characteristic for this 'first proto-postmodern city in the world' (Boym 1999:149, cf. Joenniemi 2001:72). I would, however, be careful with irony in this case, since the debate on the degree of disappointment and irritation expressed in the press seems to be growing with every new publication (see Timchenko 2001; Milkin 2002). This ironic discourse of shame has culminated in one of the quite popular online cartoons featuring a rolicking girl with the funny name of Masiania, who takes unsuspecting tourists on a trip around the city of the 'delightful wrecked architectural ensembles', 'through wonderful prospects packed with beggars, drunkards and the homeless', and into 'the legendary well-yards, filled with crap up to the roofs' (Kuvaev 2002). What makes me treat this cartoon as a culmination, however, was neither its wit nor its popularity, but the fact that Masiania has recently been at the centre of a nervous broadcast produced by the conspiracy theorists from St. Petersburg TV, which argued, in a clear securitising move, that the cartoon was created by some hostile outsiders to undermine the position of the governor (Kantor 2002a). It was, indeed, Smolny's reaction that made Masiania's story complete and turned it from a mere joke into a full-fledged satire.

This vulnerability of St. Petersburg when it puts forward centralist ambitions and claims a place at the top of some hierarchy, its tendency towards irony and grotesque, is also an important discursive resource. On the one hand, it undermines the imperial discourse by questioning its credibility: whenever the city is trying to put on a serious face and claim a central position, other stories immediately come forward, ranging from pragmatic cost-benefit calculations to jokes about the city's inescapable provincialism. On the other hand, however, any alternative discursive strategy should

also take this feature into account. It seems that a marginal position could prove to be more advantageous than the attempts to insist on centrality because of the 'unique heritage' and the like. As the example of the Finnish Northern Dimension initiative has demonstrated, by exploiting marginality in the grey area between sovereign and post-sovereign politics one can succeed in turning territory into space, thus blurring the notions of centre/periphery and disposing of marginality in a smart way.

5. ***The wider world: fear and temptation***

The previous analysis concentrated more on the limitations of the current discourse, on its embeddedness in the imperial past or in territorial politics. The picture, however, would obviously be incomplete without specific examples of what I mean by a post-sovereign understanding of political space. Fortunately, such departures do exist in the current discourse, and will be analysed in the present section.

One interesting opening came about in the discussion concerning the future reconstruction of the Mariinsky Theatre in early 2002. Although no official competition for complete projects had yet been announced (only the general concept for the development of the Theatre and the surrounding area had been under consideration), the St. Petersburg architectural community was suddenly presented with a ready-made project by the American architect Eric Moss, who, according to an ***Izvestia*** journalist, had proposed 'to instil into the long-settled, canonised Petersburg historical context new architectural forms and conceptual solutions' (Kabanova 2002). 'Eric Moss' project', according to ***Kommersant's*** critic Grigorii Revzin (2002), 'represents a radical variant of Californian deconstruction. […] The main complex of the theatre is an absolutely paradoxical view of three gigantic glass sacks dumped upon each other. [But] the form of these piled-up sacks has suddenly turned out to be not an avant-gardist gesture, but a thoroughly calculated programme for a most elaborate theatre complex'[10].

[10] For those familiar with this part of St. Petersburg, it is perhaps important to note that both projects presuppose that the old theatre building remains in place. The idea is to completely remake the so called 'Lithuanian district' across the Kriukov Channel by building there a new scene for Mariinsky.

Local architects, led by Oleg Romanov, also presented a concept for the reconstruction, which was characterised by Revzin as clear evidence of a profound failure of contemporary Russian architecture. Their project was described as mean almost across the board (Kabanova 2002, Revzin 2002), but its key advantage consists in preserving 'the spirit of the city' – which basically means that new buildings will be designed in 'classical' forms. 'One would not even have to think which project to choose, but for one thing – Petersburg', writes Revzin. Despite the fact that Moss' project was supported by the Theatre's head, Valerii Gergiev, and by the officials at the State Construction Committee in Moscow, that the impossibility to keep St. Petersburg's 'eternal virginity' (Evgenii Ass in NG 2002) is widely recognised in the Russian professional community, it had little chance for success. St. Petersburg, Kabanova (2002) explains, 'longs for the fate of Venice', 'whose centre has been for centuries kept intact and is quietly, but inevitably dying. For this, the entire world adores the consumptive beauty'. 'Petersburg, of course, does not want to become a new Moscow, for which it has invented an insulting name – ***Luzhkovgrad***' (Luzhkovtown), after the Mayor Yurii Luzhkov who has become infamous for, among other things, his zealous refurbishing of the city with pseudo-classical architectural objects.

Most of the local response to Moss' project has been far less sympathetic. The discussion has once again demonstrated the grip of one of the most powerful ideologies of St. Petersburg – the cult of the restoration and preservation of monuments (Fedchin 2001:48–49). 'The preservation of St. Petersburg's heritage' is, for most participants of the discussion, an axiom that needs no proof, and it is challenged only from the margins. The need for the city to develop in order to create better living conditions and business environment is by all means a secondary task, despite the fact that more than 30 per cent of St. Petersburg's dwelling space is considered to be unsafe, and that decay is contributing to the 'ghostly' image of the city (Kapger and Timchenko 2002). The area around Mariinsky, the so called Kolomna, is exactly the best illustration of the blinkered nature of this view: it is one of the most depressed areas in the city, with a decaying infrastructure and with the majority of inhabitants living in ***kommunalki*** (apartments shared by several families) in houses that have not received any significant repairs for, in some cases, more than a century.

Mariinsky itself ***is*** trying to make its way out of the nineteenth century, which until recently had been its spiritual homeland, into the twenty-first one. 'In the last century', ***Izvestia*** writes, 'Mariinsky truthfully played the role of a guardian of the relics, having deserved the reputation of Petipa's Home. Having entered the twenty-first century, the theatre was the first in Russia to feel that it is time to let the new art in, lest one is late forever. Petipa is not banished, there is now simply place in his home also for his heirs, who had by that time become new classics' (Borisova 2002). The fact that one does not have to travel to New York any more to see the greatest works of Balanchin is not only welcome in itself, it is also an indication that Mariinsky has found its place in the global cultural space. Yet the theatre is suffocated by its territorial belonging to the 'historical St. Petersburg', manifest in the lack of space: in order to stage a technically advanced version of ***War and Peace***, for example, it had to be closed down in total for almost a month.

While the needs of the theatre are recognised by everyone, and the reconstruction will go on in one way or another, the need for city development is rarely associated with new projects. Instead, all worries are about the 'austere, orderly view'[11] of the imperial capital that would be destroyed by the 'global' and 'aggressive' Moss' project 'as [by] a disaster, a flood' (Rybakova 2002). Chairman of the St. Petersburg Committee for the Protection of Monuments, Nikita Yavein, was quoted as saying that in Moss' project, 'contemporary architecture behaves like a vampire in relation to the old, destroying it and raping' (quoted in Leusskaya 2002). The city was portrayed as being attacked by hostile outside forces: 'Petersburg public held all-round defence, [while] Moscow was squeaking and grinding through the project it wanted' (Leusskaya 2002). The constant press references to Moss' project as an American one were also clearly supposed to resonate with the xenophobic and defensive mood of the majority of Petersburgers: only the local people, a group of architects asserted in an open letter, 'feel the city' and cherish its 'inimitable style' (quoted in Bogoslovskaya 2002).

Yet, as Kabanova (2002) notes, there is a paradox in this preservationist thinking. If the reconstruction goes in accordance with the local project, 'in which historical architectural forms are literally repeated, St. Petersburg will exactly go the way of Moscow. After all, a blind or uninhibited copying of historical forms erases the

[11] Quote from Pushkin's ***The Bronze Horseman*** ('_____, _____ ___').

border between a monument and a newly-made construction [***novodel***]'. It is also important to point out that the political effect of the preservationist ideology is not subject to doubt: it clearly refers to the 'old Russia' which is imperial first and democratic (Fedchin 2001:50) only in the sense that the image is built upon a mere negation of the Soviet past, with no strategy for the future.

The end result of the debate was a competition for a reconstruction project that is to be announced by the Ministry of Culture (Kantor 2002b). However, Grigorii Revzin (2002) seems to have the point when he argues that the value of such a competition is highly doubtful: no architect of Moss' level would take part 'because we [the Russians], starting from the competition for the Palace of the Soviets [in the 1930s], demonstrate to the Western architects, that they are called upon only to be defeated by their Russian colleagues'.

It is not for the author of this paper to make judgements about the architectural value of all the projects discussed, but the topic itself is more political than architectural. It is clear that St. Petersburg, even without proper 'marketing', is interesting for the outside world as a possible building ground, as a place where creative architectural thought can find sources for inspiration. Consequently, at least a possibility to turn St. Petersburg into a part of the global architectural ***space*** is there. However, the general tone and structure of the debate reveals the profound parochialism of St. Petersburg identity. It claims to be a city of European architecture and readily puts itself in opposition to Moscow in this respect, too (cf. Gerasimov 2001:13). Yet when faced with a need to open up towards the global, it immediately turns defensive and quotes its 'unique heritage' as a pretext for closing up. It perceives itself, and is perceived by outsiders, as 'a city that was one time made once and forever' (Malinin 2001), and therefore 'preservation' is the word which expresses 'the spirit of St. Petersburg' in the dominant discourse (see Golubeva 2001). Foreign architects are unwelcome to say the least. For example, Mario Botta's project of the Swiss Cultural centre was accused of violating 'the spirit of the city' and repeatedly relocated until the investors gave up (Popova 2002:79). Even a Russian project that appears 'revolutionary', such as Lev Savenkov's proposal for the development of the Yelagin island (Golubeva 2001), is doomed from the start. The city, 'proud of its authenticity', (Kabanova 2002) constitutes an architectural environment ***as a territory***, a single homogenous whole.

There is no question that St. Petersburg's heritage, and especially its architectural monuments, are unique and that due resources should be directed towards their maintenance and preservation. After all, it is the very fact that downtown St. Petersburg looks like a single architectural ensemble that draws to it the attention of the entire world and brings in millions of tourists. My contention is, however, that the role of the city-museum is both beyond and below its capabilities. The city budget just cannot afford the cost of keeping in order the entire historical part of the city, which is perhaps the biggest in the world. And private investment will never go into this sphere unless allowed to develop and rebuild some parts of the historical centre. The optimal solution in this respect would perhaps consist in preserving the real treasures, such as the Nevsky and the Admiralty, the Peter and Paul's fortress, the Smolny and the like, while allowing contemporary architecture to intrude on such grounds as Kolomna. Any admirer of old St. Petersburg architecture, having taken a stroll westwards from the Mariinsky on a busy winter weekday, when the omnipresent mud and slush are pounded up into the air by heavy trucks and then settle down on the grim peeling buildings, would perhaps be more prepared to accept the point[12]. The same applies to many other parts of the historical centre, such as Peski, a great part of Ligovka and even part of the area around the Nevsky: once we step aside from a tourist route, the images of poverty and decay leap into the eye.

On the other hand, to preserve the main markers of St. Petersburg is imperative also for the reason that they provide a very important link with history, while the importance of historical narratives in the case of St. Petersburg can hardly be overestimated. Yet the ambiguous nature of those narratives should be emphasised once again. As such, the architectural treasures of St. Petersburg fit much better into the imperial golden age discourse, and any post-modern reinterpretation would raise tensions not so easy to overcome. Contemporary architecture, bringing St. Petersburg closer to the level of an international city, could be an important ally in this activity of re-writing. It could

[12] The problem is that such admirers, with a rare exception, visit the area no more than two or three times in their lives, and all their images of 'romantic Kolomna' come from quick walks down to the metro station late in the evening, after enjoying ***Aida*** or ***The Swan Lake***. Strictly speaking, in such a case they don't even enter Kolomna, which begins on the western bank of the Kriukov Channel.

provide for diversity while at the same time exhibiting tolerance by staying away from the most precious areas of the old city, and even more importantly, it would constitute an environment conducive to creative work, not just imitation, more comfortable and at the same time more intellectually challenging. In this sense, St. Petersburg can and should aspire for more than just the role of a museum under the open sky.

Though the fear of losing even a small part of the stone heritage is so far much stronger than the temptation to try something new, in other fields, connected more with words than with stones, Petersburgers display more intellectual courage. One of the most ambitious projects, initiated and managed by Petr Trenin-Straussov in cooperation with the students and teachers of the St. Petersburg State University, is aspiring for establishing St. Petersburg as 'the symbol of the Russian national idea'. As distinct from most other versions of the search for a national ideology, the proponents of this project do not securitise national identity: 'specific [national] features', they maintain, 'are like a person's surname, which does not change if written with Latin letters' (Trenin-Straussov 2002). In this respect they belong to the tradition, personalised by such figures as Anatolii Sobchak, that emphasises the role of St. Petersburg as 'the cradle of reforms', as a possible 'model of Russia's democratic development and reform' (Sobchak 1999:159–160). They declare that '[t]he only contemporary way for Russia is to become part of Europe', and that this 'way to Europe runs through St. Petersburg' (Trenin-Straussov 2002). What is especially promising in this project, from the point of view presented here, is that it emphasises the historical links of St. Petersburg with Estonia and Latvia, and insists on Russia's integration into Europe through 'real work' (____ «_____ ___»): concrete projects bringing together the peoples of the Baltic Sea region. The most valuable achievement to my mind, though, is the claim that '[t]he main task is to live out the past and through this to become people of today [_____ _____]', that 'to build an ideal past in the future means inevitably to deprive oneself of the future'. In the context of the document, this statement is to be interpreted as a call for Russia to break its remaining ties with the USSR (cf. Morozov 2001:26), which is important in itself. However, against the background of the above analysis of St. Petersburg as trapped in its own glorious past this claim may be brought even further, as a call against complacency and 'preservationism', for a more forward-

looking, development-oriented strategy. This interpretation, on the other hand, should be complemented with a deeper and 'softer' historical vision which is so far lacking in the document.

Another fascinating step into the unknown is the attempt to develop a new North-Western identity, and one in which St. Petersburg plays a prominent and formative role. The reform of the federation, undertaken by President Putin in 2000, was aimed at strengthening the state's 'vertical of power' which, towards the end of Boris Yeltsin's second term, was increasingly undermined by the growing influence of the regional elites. One of the key steps in this reform was the creation of seven Federal Districts, each including several of the 89 'subjects of the Federation' and controlled by a plenipotentiary representative of the President[13]. This, in line with usual bureaucratic logic, spawned a range of identity-enhancing practices, such as sporting competitions and even honorary titles like 'Dignitary of the North-West of Russia' ('_____ _____ _____-_____ _____', see NV 2001)

As distinct from some, if not most, of the other Districts, the North-Western one had already developed some sense of common purpose before being institutionalised – not least by taking part in the activities of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Northern Dimension of the EU. However, this sense of shared identity has been significantly strengthened with the creation of the institutional framework.

In terms of conceptual development, the idea to convert the North-West into a testing ground for economic and social reforms was the first outcome of this institutionalisation t. The idea certainly originates from and reproduces the perception that the region is ahead of the rest of Russia, more European, more 'progressive' (cf. Khudoley 2002:338). This, apparently, was the ground for the attempt to put forward a strategy for the development of the North-Western region, that could in time be used as a model for bringing prosperity to Russia. A local branch of the Moscow-based think tank ***Centre for Strategic Research*** (CSR) was established in St. Petersburg, the money was spent, and a document entitled 'Doctrine for Development of North-West of Russia' (CSR [2001]) was produced with the only result that the Federal District authorities

[13] It is interesting to note that a territorially similar amalgamation existed in the North-West in 1918–1919 under the name of the 'Union of Communes of the Northern Area' ('____ _____ _____ _____'), with the centre in Petrograd (Darinskii and Startsev 1997:77).

'took a note' of it. A new commission was subsequently formed to work out a new strategy (Voskresenskii 2001), and has produced a 500-page draft which even few of the governors have read, although they have eventually agreed 'to accept it as a basis', to abridge and to send to the President (Semenov 2002). According to the available information, the draft sets very ambitious goals, but stops short of laying out how to achieve them (Gritskova 2002). Grotesque as it may sound, these developments are nevertheless an indication that the need to adjust to post-sovereign developments is recognised both in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. It is an encouraging sign that the CSR Strategy acknowledges the deterritorialisation of political and economic developments in the contemporary world, but this is rather unfortunately set in a securitising framework of the 'struggle for the future of Russia' (CSR [2001], pt. 3). In trying to make a stronger point (this is, after all, what security is about – see Buzan et al. 1998), the authors of the Strategy actually end up missing the point completely, for securitisation is, as a rule, hardly conducive to deterritorialisation.

At present, however, we are witnessing a new stage of the 'North-Westernisation'. One may confidently say that now, amid this vague feeling of 'sameness' shared by everyone, a common identity is being consciously constructed by a group of intellectuals. According to the story the group tells about itself, this project started in September 1999 with an article by Vladislav Shinkunas (1999). It postulated the need for the North-Western region to distance itself from the Russian state and the post-communist elite that had 'replaced the slogan of building communism with the slogan of restoring the empire' and to become a buffer zone between 'the ungoverned Russia and the countries of the Western Europe'. Most importantly, it rejected as 'obviously imperialistic' and 'imposed', the alternative of separatism vs. taking part in the process of 'creation of a dirty, poor and criminal Renascent Russia', and suggested remaining ***above*** this alternative, to rely on civil society structures and to create 'a third, after the collapse of the socialist camp, belt of integration into the world community' (Shinkunas 1999, cf. Semashko 1999).

Soon afterwards, the group became institutionalised as the 'West-West Club', holding regular meetings with proceedings published on the Internet. Recently, however, an even more important outlet has been created in the form of a weekly 'North-West' page in the ***Nevskoe vremia*** newspaper. The identity that is

being expressed here is based on some kind of poetic attachment to the region, and as far as one can judge, it is an open identity, not locked within either state or other borders. ***Nevskoe vremia*** commentator, Svetlana Gavrilina, describes her own experience with this new emerging identity in the following way:

> [W]hen [talking to different people] I pronounced the magic word 'North-West', I physically sensed that I had struck a right note. […] The old runes and famous ballads [***byliny***] came into being in the same territory, […] the 'decorated sleigh of the Sami' comes in one song next to 'Swedish pearls', […] we routinely learn Lermontov's: 'the sons of snow, the sons of Slavs […]' (about the Great Novgorod) […]. To be a native in one's own land - this is fabulous. Especially if you feel that this is indeed a living land, not just stones of the roadway. It is a shore, it is the horizon. It is pines and waterfalls. It is huts and road-forks. It is annals and drafts of poems. It is new factories and old post stations. It is, after all, that very politics and economics. Our, our own (Gavrilina 2002d).

This new approach to the 'spirit' of the Russian North-West emphasises the distinctiveness of the area: 'Northern ***Rus'*** is not simply a territory. It is an ancient land with its own traditions, secrets and immense potential for further development' (Gavrilina 2002c). At the same time, it celebrates diversity and openness: St. Petersburg, for example, has 'organically absorbed the culture of the North-West' (Gavrilina 2002c), it is 'impossible to imagine without surrounding oblasts, republics ***and countries***' (Gavrilina 2001, emphasis added), and the Russian Sami people, together with their fellow countrymen in Finland, Norway and Sweden, are congratulated on their cultural holiday (Gavrilina 2002b). There is a talk about creating a 'common information space' in the North-West, and even a 'common economic space' is mentioned (Smirnova 2002). Interestingly, again, this common information space is supposed to include, apart from the Russian neighbouring regions, also countries such as Finland and Estonia, whose news should not be brought to Petersburgers exclusively 'via the Ostankino tower' (SeverInform 2002), i.e. by the central media.

Strangely enough, the liberating potential of today's developments in the Baltic Sea region is not really explored either by the West-West Club or by other proponents of spatially-shaped ideas. The Baltic Sea region as an idea certainly has positive connotations and is mentioned regularly (see e.g. Vovk in West-

West 1999, Tulchinskii 2001, Gavrilina 2002a), but one can hardly observe any deliberate attempt to work out a distinct and up to date Baltic identity for either St. Petersburg or the North West.

Despite the fact that the original impulse of the project was to rise ***above*** separatism, many participants in the discussions initially came up with strictly territorial proposals in favour of an independent St. Petersburg (Zhukov, Delgiado, Voitenkov in Semashko 1999). If this was the mood of the insiders, one should have no doubt that the territorially-minded establishment, both in Moscow and St. Petersburg, will sooner or later charge the 'North-Westernisers' with promoting separatism. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to develop conceptual tools to effectively cope with these accusations. Another challenge, however, is even more formidable: taking into account that their identity is to a great extent framed in romantic and sometimes nostalgic terms, will they be able to stay away from sliding into the beaten track of nationalism? In other words, until we free ourselves from the modern way of thinking, there is always a risk of ending up in a situation of revolt, where the local identity substitutes the national one, or in a situation of submission, where the national identity and the border between 'us' and 'them' is supported and strengthened by local patriotism (cf. Sementsov quoted above). The attempts to ground the North-Western identity in some 'objective' phenomena, such as 'the northern mentality' (Pivoev 2002), or to overemphasise certain collective identities as more freedom-loving than others (cf. Shtepa 2001 and Malinovskii in NV 2002) are not particularly conducive to post-modernisation. What can help to avoid this dichotomy is again an explicit and conscious recognition of the post-sovereign nature of the project, perhaps even a declaration, a ***profession de foi***, which could fix the main starting points of the argument. This could help the discussion to remain above the territorial divisions, in the common political space that is being created. On the other hand, however, the more explicit the statements are, the greater are the chances for a conflict with the securitising discourse about identity, strict territoriality, sovereignty and other modern values.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated some unique and contradictory features of the St. Petersburg discourse. On the one hand, the mainstream discourse still remains embedded in modern territorial understandings of politics, as evidenced in its heavy dependence on the imperial narrative, in its persistence in emphasising national identity over all other alternatives, and in its still strong feeling of historical enmity between peoples of the Baltic Sea region. On the other hand, the inevitable intrusion of the 'window on Europe' narrative, even in its simplistic form of nostalgia for the 'golden age', produces tensions and inconsistencies that make this imperial identity far less stable than the identity of Russia as a whole, firmly based on the notion of continuity between the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation.

An interesting feature of the St. Petersburg discourse is that it suggests two possible interpretations of political space, which makes us modify the space/territory dichotomy, initially developed in this paper. There is, firstly, a notion of a centralised, hierarchically structured imperial space, epitomised by the image of pre-Peter the Great's Muscovy with its doctrine of the Third Rome, claiming the position in the centre of the world, and often hostile and arrogant towards outsiders[14]. This pre-territorial (although perhaps not necessarily pre-modern) space is much closer to Medvedev's concept of Russian space as a burden. St. Petersburg, the city of Saint Peter, the only capital of imperial Russia, may seem to fit into this borderless, although centred, imperial space, taking over the role of the Third Rome from Moscow, but only at a first glance. There is too much irony in this concentric image, and the territorial connotations of St. Petersburg, deeply rooted in European modernity, finally make it unsuitable for the current discourse.

However, the original openness of St. Petersburg as an eccentric and ambiguous city, a 'hundred-language dictionary' ready to imitate and borrow, makes territorial discourse no more stable than the pre-territorial one. It is at this juncture between territory and space where post-sovereign spatial interpretations can squeeze in and take root. The attempts to conceptualise St. Petersburg within any modernist discourse inevitably produce tensions and

[14] This is not to say that sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Russia was in reality so xenophobic and aggressive: what we are discussing here are contemporary ideal-type models, not the actual history or even present-day historical narratives.

inconsistencies – something that post-modernity welcomes and celebrates. These tensions can undoubtedly be exploited in the construction of a new discourse, which would present St. Petersburg as a city with multiple identities, simultaneously Russian, Baltic, European and global, and firmly anchored ***both*** in Russia and in the Wider Europe. The vast and still largely unexplored resources for such a new discourse can be found in city's history, in its eccentric, in-between geographical and cultural situation, and in its strengthening links with the entire Russian North-West, that seems to bear such interpretation as a land of openness and diversity.

There are, as it seems, two main obstacles to overcome in the process. The first is the burden of history, which in the case of St. Petersburg is not only particularly heavy, but also very peculiar. The development of St. Petersburg seems to be hampered by the greatness of its history: too much has been achieved by the previous generations, the results of their efforts are too visibly present, which creates an illusion that we can create a perfect future by going no further than preserving our 'heritage', cleverly managing and marketing it. This desire to ride into the future on the back of Peter the Great is one of the main impediments for a creative approach to the city's really enormous resources. The feelings associated with it are not only complacency but also fear to lose the uniqueness of St. Petersburg's urban environment, its position as the first and the only capital of imperial Russia, and other similar assets, that are increasingly converting into liabilities. The absolutised requirement to preserve 'the heritage' puts unbearable strains on the city's finances and deprives it of new sources of revenue, while the imperial past is a burden in dealing with partners in the Wider Europe.

As the above analysis indicates, the solution is more history, not less. Historical narratives must be explored both extensively – by searching for deeper, pre-Petersburgian roots of St. Petersburg, – and intensively, by re-writing historical narratives in order to 'soften' them, to make them more open and inclusive. Unlike most of the 'back to the roots' moves, the deeper story of 'St. Petersburg before St. Petersburg' links the city with its neighbours and thus opens new spaces for interaction across various kinds of borders, instead of rooting the northern capital more firmly in the native soil. This would also help to overcome the preservationist attitude to St. Petersburg's heritage, for an open identity will be less conducive to complacency

and arrogance, but more conducive to addressing the needs of the city as a living organism.

Another obstacle is the lack of conceptual clarity, of brave and conscious distancing from territorial politics. Until we openly state that St. Petersburg, while remaining a Russian city with a certain mission within Russia, at the same time belongs to other communities and cherishes other identities, there will be a possibility of sliding back into nationalist discourse, where all the greatness of St. Petersburg is employed to confirm the greatness of the Russian state. And as long as the greatness of the Russian state is measured by comparison with the Soviet Union, this would inevitably mean playing securitising games about national territories and spheres of influence.

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