Diplomatic Cultures: Comparing Russia and the West in Terms of a ‘Modern Model of Diplomacy’

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Summary
Diplomacy is an international institution, although national and regional diplomatic services keep their own intrinsic identity. Existing differences occasionally interfere with mutual understanding as an essential requirement for overcoming today’s instability. Comparative analysis of Western and Russian diplomacy enables deeper insight into some essential reasons for existing differences. The modern model of diplomacy was formed because of the Renaissance, which was characterized by a process of secularization. In Russia this process was delayed by the Byzantine tradition of ‘symphony’. From Tsar Peter’s era, however, a gradual rapprochement can be observed between the two systems of diplomacy — Western and Russian. However, within new parameters, the ghost of Byzantium appeared now and again. Even under Soviet-imposed atheism, diplomacy was viewed as a tool for a new Messianic universalism (as it was in pre-Petrine times), expressed in terms of ‘proletarian internationalism’. New and dramatic events placed an urgent need for a qualitatively new type of diplomacy on the agenda: the European experience, with its emphasis on a solid juridical basis, rationalism and human rights; and the Russian experience, with its universalism that is attentive to existential problems and traditional values. Diplomacy of the future should be based on a synthesis of both European and Russian historical experiences.

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Keywords
Diplomatic traditions and cultures, Russia, the West, modern model of diplomacy, state-building, ‘symphony’, secular state, Byzantine inheritance.

Introduction
Diplomacy is always a difficult business. In a world facing transformations associated with globalization and the culture-based conflicts associated with the ‘war on terror’, the task of managing relations between states
peacefully has become doubly difficult. To make matters worse, however, diplomats themselves are the products of not only different national, ethnic and ideological traditions and cultures, but also different diplomatic traditions and cultures. They may share a common preference for the peaceful resolution of disputes, but their sense of how to achieve this or, indeed, what may properly be regarded as in dispute, are shaped by their respective diplomatic cultures. It is important to realize this, for it helps to explain why, for example, Russian and Western diplomats, despite their best intentions, on occasions find it difficult to reach agreements. It may not just be a matter of the diverging interests of their respective countries, nor even the different world outlooks of their political masters. The possibility exists that difficulties arising from these considerations are compounded by differences in the way that their respective diplomats see their own diplomatic craft. Western European diplomatic culture, for example, has become infused by concerns for democracy, human rights and respect for the rights of minorities, while its Russian counterpart continues to be formulated in the language of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. To what extent, therefore, are difficulties in relations between Russia and the West attributable to differences in their respective diplomatic cultures? This article considers the question by analysing the development of Russia’s diplomatic culture and comparing it with the more familiar story of the development of what will be called a ‘modern model of diplomacy’ in Western Europe.

There has been much research in Russia on the development of both pre-Petrine and post-Petrine diplomacy. Most authors acknowledge the role of Peter the Great’s reforms in transforming Russia’s diplomatic institutions, but restrict their accounts to a chronological summary of events.1 Contrasting views may be expressed on the significance of these reforms. For instance, V. Pohlebkin concludes that prestige and vanity, rather than interests or the quest for information, drove Peter’s diplomatic reforms. Thus, he claims, relations were established with ‘everybody who had ever asked him to or who had happened to be one of his acquaintances, including a crowd of petty German monarchs and other rubbish such as senile Genoa republic or the puppet Kingdom of Sardinia or the tiny island of

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Malta’. Relations such as these ‘could only tickle Peter’s vanity, while they were unnecessary, unfruitful and even damaging national interests of Russia’.

In contrast, N. Molchianov maintains that ‘previous to Peter the Great, principal events of world politics had not been known to Muscovite diplomats, while only a decade after Peter had travelled in the West, new Russian ambassadors were brilliantly performing in the West, yielding to no European skilled diplomat in this respect’. Similar important differences may be found in accounts of the development of diplomacy in the West. For example, C.H. Carter identifies a shift from the preoccupations with achieving a Christian peace in the Middle Ages to those of securing state interests by the time of the Renaissance, while M. Mallett, in contrast, is sceptical about generalizations of sweeping changes such as this. My own work in the Russian case tends to confirm this scepticism. By developing a model of medieval diplomacy in Russia and comparing it to the new, more secular, diplomatic culture that emerged in Europe — my ‘modern model of diplomacy’ — an account is given of the two that reduces the role of value judgements and sheds light on the role of changing modes of state-building and evolving international structures in accounting for the differences between them.

Russian Diplomacy and the Byzantine Inheritance

As many scholars emphasize, Moscow evolved a pattern of institutional and political life that mainly drew on its Byzantine inheritance and that clearly distinguished it from both Asian and European medieval traditions and practices. The Russians borrowed the concept of ‘symphony’ from the
Byzantine legal system, and the most important clauses of the first Russian statute book, known as *Kormchaya Kniga,* represented a word-for-word translation of the Preamble to the *Codex Justinianus VI Novellae.* This Preamble reaffirms the ‘symphony’ of two powers — the state (Imperium) and the church (Sacerdotium) — both derived from the same divine source. As a result, the relationship between church and state powers was so close that in Moscow, even in the sixteenth century, there was still a habit of Friday joint sittings of the *Osvijashenny sobor* (Holy Synod composed of the church hierarchy’s representatives) together with the *Boyarskaja Duma* (a sort of a parliament composed of the feudal lords). During those joint meetings, the most important state affairs were discussed and decided. 

Russian diplomatic culture also owed much to the Byzantine model. Some Western researchers, as well as some Russian scholars, emphasize the negative aspects of Byzantine diplomacy. For example, H. Nicolson notes that:

> When in the last centuries of the Empire the importance of power politics declined, the less creative type of diplomacy reappeared in Byzantium […] Cooperation gave way to division, unity to disintegration, reason to craftiness, moral principals to dexterity.10

This may be so, but such shortcomings are not confined to the practices of Byzantine emperors and governors. Others shared them also. In fact, the main features of Byzantine diplomacy were determined by the type of state that it represented, one in which the ideology of ‘symphony’ and the close relationship between church and state and faith and politics permeated the life of the empire. Thus, one of Justinian’s advisers addressed a deputation of Persian ambassadors with what amounted to a Christian sermon:

> […] to the uncertainties of war you should prefer the weal known to all people. This common weal is called peace. The winner is always unhappy because other people shed tears.11

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The Church is frequently highly active in the conduct of state foreign policy, so much so that it might be said that Byzantine diplomacy was primarily inspired by missionary concerns. Promoting an orthodox Christianity based on ‘symphony’ between secular and ecclesiastical power was intended to create favourable conditions for achieving the Byzantine empire’s foreign policy objectives, just as the alphabet of Cyril and Methodius was intended to convert the Slavs to Christianity.

Relations between the Byzantine empire and the nascent Russian state provide a good illustration of the former’s approach in this regard. It is likely that even before Prince Vladimir ordered Russia’s adoption of Christianity in 988, there were significant groups of baptized people because of some Byzantine missionaries’ persevering activities in Russia. That is why, for example, Princess Olga (Vladimir’s grandmother) had already been baptized in 947 in Byzantium, and that was not an unusual occurrence.12 Russia’s conversion to Christianity coincides with the flourishing of the Eastern Roman Empire. By that time, Byzantium had managed to ward off Arab attacks, to block Bulgarian attempts to seize the imperial throne, and to overcome internal theological challenges. The ‘New Rome’ on the Bosphorus, with one million inhabitants, regarded itself as the uncontested centre of the civilized Christian world. The rule of the Macedonian dynasty (867-1056) is remarkable for the expansion of imperial possessions in the Near East region, the Apennines, Sicily and the Balkans.

It was in this context that Russia became an object of constant attention on the part of Byzantine diplomacy. Constantine VII’s Porphyrogenitus ‘De administrando imperio’ provides evidence of an interest in strengthening relations with the Russians.13 An important reason for this was that the Russians exercised control over the commercial routes from the Varangians to the Greeks. With the expansion of Arab power in the Mediterranean, these routes became even more important for the Byzantine empire’s contacts with Western Europe. In Byzantine eyes, a Christian Russia was as good as part of the empire, and many Russians came to accept this as being so. By the middle of the eleventh century, armed Russian incursions into Byzantine territory had ceased, and Byzantine influence in Russia had taken a firm hold, with great consequences for Russian culture in general.

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and the form that the state would eventually take in Russia. A major conduit for this influence was the Russian Orthodox Church, headed by a Metropolitan appointed by the Constantinople Patriarch. Until the middle of the fifteenth century, the Church’s management system in Russia, covering all Russian territories from Carpathians up to the Upper Volga, from the Baltic Sea down to the Caspian Sea, came under his supervision. Significantly, during the disintegration of ancient Russia into rival principalities and three competitive centres (Suzdal, Gallich and Kiev), which occurred during the eleventh century, the Church attempted to maintain a single administration under the ‘Metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia’. The Metropolitan was referred to as ‘Kievan’ even after his residence was established in Moscow in the fourteenth century. At the same time, dynastic marriages and the constant circulation of clerics, diplomats, mercenaries, dealers and pilgrims between Constantinople and its extensive northern provinces, all created a strong network of cooperation between Russia and the empire. And as the empire encountered more and more difficulties, its increasingly impoverished governors often sought the help of newly rich Moscow princes and the Russian Orthodox Church for replenishing the Byzantine treasury.

This help, of course, came at a price in terms of influence, and it was under such conditions that the rise of Moscow began to take place. As the western and south-western parts of Russia became increasingly subject to the expansion of Western Christianity, the Byzantines came to regard them as ‘unreliable’. Thus their diplomats sought to strengthen the Russian north-east by developing friendly relations with the khans of the Golden Horde and increasingly by building up Moscow as a shield for the failing Byzantine empire. They welcomed the victory of Muscovite Prince Dmitri Donskoi over the Golden Horde and its Genoese supporters in 1380,14 and contributed to the great victory over the tatars at Kulikovo through the diplomacy of Metropolitan Cyprian, which was directed at preventing Lithuanian Prince Jagajlo from entering the struggle on the side of the Golden Horde.15

14) The Genoese republic, since the crusades presented in Byzantium, possessed large settlements in Crimea. The Mongol empire did not intend destabilizing that region and maintained, up to a certain time, good relationship with Crimea.

Russian principalities’ insecurity and weakness, coupled with the way in which Byzantine diplomatic assistance sought to preserve the Orthodox administrative structures, headed by the Moscow Metropolitan, made it difficult to establish the sort of reciprocal relations that had emerged in Italy between the medieval Russian governors. Instead, what emerged and was strengthened was the impulse towards super-centralization, which became the hallmark of future Russian state-building. Thus when the diplomacy of the Russian state emerged, it exhibited many of the characteristics of its Byzantine mentor and patron. For all the latter’s operational flexibility and representational sophistication, it did not recognize the idea of independent secular authorities or its pluralist implications, such as the need for a system of representation through permanent missions. Its central telos remained missionary in character, and its preoccupations with integrating pagans and barbarians and reintegrating apostates and heretics into the world of orthodoxy all left their imprints on its Russian successor.16

The Russian annexation of the Komi and Perm, as well as other ethnic groups living in Siberia and in the Steppes, provide examples of typically Byzantine conduct. When extending their power to other territories, the Russians too began by building monasteries and converting the locals to Christianity.17 Saint Stephan of Perm, for example, who at the end of the fourteenth century was preaching Christianity in the Komi’s land, became the very first Bishop of a newly created eparchy. Imitating Cyril and Methodius, St Stephen too composed his famous *Permskaja Azbuka*, a unique alphabet for the Komi language. He also translated books and established schools for local clergy. Stephen’s political and diplomatic activities contributed to the incorporation of all the Komi ethnic groups into the Great Principality of Moscow. At the same time, on the western borders of Russia, the tsars’ policy was justified as protecting local Christian Orthodox inhabitants from falling under the influence of Western Christianity.18 After the fall of Constantinople, Moscow assumed the role of its heir and was presented as the ‘Third Rome’ — that is, as the new centre of the Christian orthodoxy. And this claim secured even a measure of Western

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recognition when, in 1473, the Venetian Senate acknowledged ‘the rights of Ivan III to the Eastern Empire’ because of his matrimony with Zoë Paleologue, a niece of the last emperor of Constantinople.\(^{19}\) The first to formulate the ‘Third Rome’ concept was Phylotheus, an aged hermit from Pskov. In his *Reasoning on the History of the Roman Kingdom*, he asserts that that kingdom had neither space nor time but rather a particular ‘historical mission’. To his mind the capitulation of Constantinople gave Moscow the opportunity, and conferred on it the duty, to be the new ‘Roman kingdom’. Phylotheus stressed that Russia was the only Christian Orthodox kingdom that had not been conquered by the infidels. He prayed that ‘the Russian Caesar listen to the Lord’s words and unify all Christian Orthodox kingdoms into a single one’.\(^{20}\) That was the real meaning of the ‘Third Rome’ idea, and expansion in its name was quite different from that of later ‘imperialist patterns’.\(^{21}\) Thus, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Russian Weltanschauung [world philosophy] was absorbed by the idea of ‘the perpetual kingdom’, and senior Russian statesmen of the period thought, like F.I. Karpov, in terms of the ‘eternity of the Russian kingdom’.\(^{22}\)

Throughout the Middle Ages, Russian diplomacy was permeated with such missionary visions, which shaped both the character of relations and, indeed, decisions about the people with whom relations were needed and those with whom they were ‘needless’. The latter were denied the honour of diplomatic relations with Moscow.\(^{23}\) Nevertheless, a study of the historical archives demonstrates the existence of very efficient diplomatic machinery in medieval Russia.\(^{24}\) Thanks to the rise of the Moscow principality, the Boyar Duma of feudal lords gained a unique and important

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\(^{23}\) Pokhlebkin, *Vneshenaja politica Russii*, p. 228.  
position in Russian diplomacy. In the fifteenth century the Duma had become a permanent consultative board, and its role is evident from diplomatic documents going back to Ivan IV (1462-1505). Meetings with foreign diplomats, negotiations, documentation relating to embassies and ambassadors, all of these matters fell under the authority of the Duma. However, as the centralization of the Russian state proceeded, the Duma became more of an obstacle than an aid to the Tsar’s authority. To remedy this situation, Vasily III set up the so-called Particular Council, a kind of cabinet of ministers, which became known as the ‘Neighbouring Duma’. That upper chamber prepared resolutions and proposed them for ratification to the Boyar’s Duma. The members of the ‘Neighbouring Duma’ were frequently mentioned during negotiations with foreign diplomats, and on such occasions were referred to as ‘confidential persons’ of the Tsar. This practice was maintained unchanged into the seventeenth century. As Ordin-Naschekin, the powerful head of Tsar Aleksey’s diplomatic office (1667-1671), expressed in an address to the monarch, ‘From time immemorial, in the Muscovite state, as well as in all other states, in charge of foreign affairs are persons of the Secret Neighbouring Duma’. Besides the two Dumas (that of the Boyars and the Neighbouring Duma), there were other offices involved in foreign affairs. The most notable was the Treasury Yard. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the Treasury Yard was located in the Moscow Kremlin. It was the first office to deal with foreign relations and held the first Russian diplomatic archive. It was also at the Treasury Yard that the Boyars received ambassadors.

Byzantine influence on Russian diplomacy is also apparent in the formal style of treaties negotiated at the time, with their references to ‘mutual love’
or ‘everlasting peace’, for example, and in the procedures for greeting foreign embassies at the borders and conveying them to the capital and housing them there. Embassies were located in ‘ambassadorial yards’, and were fully maintained in terms of transportation, accommodation, and provisions at the expense of the Russian state.26 The complexities, rigidities and inefficiencies of the Russian bureaucracy (like its Byzantine predecessor)27 often led to complaints by foreigners. It was often difficult, for example, to secure definite answers from Russian diplomats to direct questions. They would reply, rather, with some variant of the following formula: ‘We will tell that to his imperial majesty as soon as God will give us a chance to see his light eyes’.28 Not surprisingly, being very limited in terms of plenipotentiary powers and the right of initiative, Russian embassies devoted considerable attention to protocol issues, for which they also enjoyed a reputation for being very rigid.

The Emergence of Diplomatic Institutions in Russia

As both the internal and external power of the Russian state grew and its relationships with other European countries developed, a new institution emerged in Moscow, similar to the Italian Cancelleria, called the Posol’skij Prikaz (the Embassy Board). The majority of historians date the creation of the Posol’skij Prikaz to 1549. One archive document says ‘in 1549 Ivan Mikhajlovič Viskovatij was appointed as a head of the Posol’skij Prikaz despite his low position of Pod’jačij’.29 However, one can assume that the Posol’skij Prikaz was already in existence before that. The archives testify to an earlier development of the hierarchy in charge of Russian diplomatic conduct, and the functions of Viskovatij’s predecessors were probably sim-

26) See Adam Olearius, Opisanije puteshestvija Moskoviju (Moscow: Rusich, 2003); Richard Chancellor, Kniga o moguchestvennium i velikom ture Rossi i velikom krayse moskovkom (Angli-iskije puteshestvenniki v Moskovkom gosudarstve v XVI veke (Moscow: Sotsegis, 1937); Siegmund Herberstein, Zapiski o Moskvi (Moscow: MGU, 1988); and G.K. Kotoshihin, O Rossii v tsarst-vo- vstanye Alekseya Mihailovitcha (http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/kotoshih.htm).
27) It is interesting to recall the book written by Professor Kazhdan, when he illustrates the Byzantine sluggish bureaucratic machinery. The book was a great success among Russian readers as a sort of veiled criticism against Soviet bureaucracy. See A.P. Kazhdan, Vizantijskaja kultura (Moscow: Nauka, 1968).
29) Belokurov, O Posol’skom prikaze, p. 51.
ilar to his own as the new chief of the Russian foreign office. It might be noted in this context that all West European attempts to organize competent foreign offices, with the exception of those in Italy, are generally agreed to have been failures. In Russia, in contrast, this undertaking was successful, and efficient D’jaks and Pod’jačie competently ran the Posol’škiy Prikaz. In the late sixteenth century the Russian D’jaks had been delegated wide powers. They accepted credentials and were even permitted to conduct preliminary negotiations. They attended receptions given in honour of foreign diplomats, verified drafts of diplomatic notes, drew up instructions for ambassadors as well as for police officers, and were usually sent to meet foreign ambassadors at the borders. Furthermore, those D’jaks who were members of the Tsar’s Duma could head embassies.

The ‘Italian system’ by which a diplomat’s salary was paid by his own state’s treasury was considered the norm in Russia. In the early seventeenth century the average salary of ambassadors to Russia was 100 roubles upon his departure and 50 roubles after his return home. In addition, the ambassador enjoyed extra money as well as different tax advantages. In contrast, the system existing in many Western countries (except Italy), by which the ambassador maintained the mission with his own money, provided stories of many difficulties.

By the sixteenth century all of the standard diplomatic documents were known in Russia — for example, credentials, letters of recall and permits for free departure and return. Russian nakaz are analogous to Western instructions explaining the aims of a diplomatic mission, as well as suggesting possible answers to difficult questions and themes for welcoming speeches. The Stateynye spiski (diplomatic reports) were also professionally executed. Every item of the report was supposed to be reviewed and summarized.

Russian diplomacy attached particular importance to its own archives. The best archives in the West were those in Rome and Venice, and Russian

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33) N.M. Rogozhin, Posol’skiye knigi i drugoye istochniki XVII veka o socialnom sostave i imushchestvennom polozhenii chlenov russih posol’stv 1613-1616 (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), p. 64.
archives, like their Roman and Venetian counterparts, are an excellent source of information on matters not just confined to diplomacy and foreign affairs. Records were poorly made and maintained in many European countries, and documents, indeed copies of treaties on occasions, might become lost. For example, in 1528 British diplomats could not find papers concerning a Spanish princess who was to marry an English prince.\(^{35}\) Some Western missions also seemed to ignore the practice of transmitting files to successors. Ambassadors hired secretaries who, contrary to their Italian and Russian colleagues, were not civil servants and, having spent their own money on ink and paper, took all of their documents with them after their retirement.\(^{36}\)

In Russia the early appearance of a state bureaucracy contributed to very accurate and quite efficient record keeping. By the early sixteenth century diplomatic documents were systematically organized. Originals and their copies were kept first in the Tsar’s Treasury and then in the Posol’skiy Prikaz. The most common form of diplomatic records were *stolbcy* — vertical strips of paper attached one to another with special glue — and were signed by an official in order to avoid forgery. Documents were organized chronologically, geographically and regionally in so-called Posol’skie knigui (embassy books). When in archives, the embassy books and *stolbcy* were placed in special oak boxes that were decorated with velvet and bound with iron cramps aspen, while some less important documents were kept in simple canvas bags.\(^{37}\) These documents remain the most informative early archive sources available today.

Russian diplomacy also employed a system of ranking. As early as the sixteenth century, documents attest to the existence of velikiye posly (great ambassadors), legkiye posly (light ambassadors), poslanniki (envoys), goncy (messengers) and poslanye (commissionaires).\(^{38}\) Officials of the Posol’skij Prikaz were arranged in order of importance. There were young, middle-aged and veteran Pod’jačji and D’jaki. The senior Pod’jačji were heads of *Povytija* (territorial departments). Three territorial departments were assigned to Europe; the other two were in charge of Asia.

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\(^{35}\) Hamilton and Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*.

\(^{36}\) Hamilton and Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*.

\(^{37}\) Rogodzin, *Oko vsey velikoy Rossii*, p. 56.

\(^{38}\) Sergeyev, *Russkaya diplomaticheskaya terminologiya XI-XVII vekov*, pp. 54-55.
As in the rest of Europe, the formation of the diplomatic service as a special branch of the civil service did not occur immediately. In addition to its external responsibilities, the Posol'skiy Prikaz had a number of strictly internal assignments, such as the supervision of foreign merchants and the ransom and exchange of prisoners of war. It also concerned itself with the postal service, certain legal matters, customs duties and taxation. It was with good reason, therefore, that Ordin-Naschokin, the head of the Posol'skiy Prikaz, complained about ‘that absurd mix of foreign affairs with tavern duties’.39 It is useful to recall at this point that at the same time in France, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had been set up in 1626 by Cardinal Richelieu, had a special board for controlling some developments of internal affairs.

From the very beginning the Posol'skiy Prikaz had an excellent foreign languages department. Interpreters were called tolmach and translators of written texts were known as perevodčik. Often they were foreigners in Russian service or former prisoners of war. At the end of the seventeenth century there were fifteen translators and 50 interpreters of Latin, Italian, Polish, Romanian, English, German, Swedish, Dutch, Greek, Turkish and Georgian. For the purpose of learning foreign languages, Boyars’ sons were usually sent to study abroad.40 As Hamilton and Langhorne note, by the eighteenth century only Russia, with its strong translation service, had fully addressed the problem of preparing diplomatic personnel to the standards of what would become near universal best practice in the future.41

The Posol'skiy Prikaz was also a centre of cultural life in the Russian state. In the seventeenth century, A.S. Matvejev, head of the Posol'skiy Prikaz from 1671-1676, took the lead in writing an official history of Russia. He was responsible for the Titularnik, a handbook on diplomacy. The Titularnik consisted of information about various events in the foreign relations’ field. Instructive examples of diplomatic letters written by foreign monarchs were abundantly reproduced for instruction.42 Also in the

39) Belokurov, O Posol'skom prikaze, p. 49.
40) A.V. Arsen'ev, Istoriya posylki pervyx russkix studentov za granicu pri Borise Godunove (Saint Petersburg: Spb, 1887).
41) Hamilton and Langhorne, The Practice of Diplomacy.
seventeenth century, the Posol’skiy Prikaz began subscribing to foreign newspapers and journals, and itself published the Letučije Listki and Vestovje Pisma (weekly and monthly newsletters), a kind of digest of foreign press that was translated into Russian and distributed to subscribers of the Posol’skiy Prikaz. The Russian Foreign Office published Kuranty (The Gazette), an important mouthpiece of the Russian high society. The Gazette also reported news about military and political events abroad. There was a lot of information concerning diplomatic negotiations. Russian diplomats were required to send their regular reviews of the European press to Moscow officials. Thus Russia became a member of the European news pool, providing information on current events and receiving news from abroad. Indeed, interest in the West was such that V.V. Golicyn, the head of the Posol’skiy Prikaz from 1682-1689, introduced a European fashion dress code for diplomats. Imitating the European style, Golicyn decorated his office with statues of the cardinal virtues and installed a gigantic terrestrial globe at the entrance to his headquarters. Nevertheless, in spite of all these innovations, the Russian diplomatic institutions of the period cannot be properly described as ‘modern’ in the Western sense.

The ‘Modern Model of Diplomacy’ in Western Europe

What I call the ‘modern model of diplomacy’ appeared in Europe during the Renaissance. The Renaissance revolution prompted a radical change of thought in Europe about international relations. As a consequence, a more secular political order emerged in Western Europe, both within and between its states. In this new order, the Pope was no longer the only spiritual sovereign, nor the Holy Roman Emperor his only temporal rival. The latter’s success opened the way to the demands of others, who soon claimed an equal standing before God. In the early sixteenth century, Henry VIII of England solemnly declared his kingdom to be an empire. He sought to secure his claim through recognition both at home and abroad, and recognized no power above him in authority other than God.

His claims, and the claims of others in this regard, transformed ambassadors into the representatives of sovereign powers. The principle of obligatory, reciprocal, regular and, if possible, equal exchange of permanent diplomatic residents became established. Special foreign policy institutions were formed, and new patterns for diplomatic correspondence and diplomatic archives, as well as a new class of professional functionaries on the payroll of the State treasury, became typical features of this new system of inter-state relations.

In his famous book on Renaissance diplomacy,44 G. Mattingly emphasizes what he calls the functional capacity of the new foreign service, necessary for it to meet the requirements of the new type of state. He supposes that a permanent foreign service was set up in the Renaissance state in order to assure a permanent flow of intelligence revealing the real intentions of neighbours. In this respect Mattingly refers to the new rules of war, which appeared around the same time. According to Mattingly, this new code was more civilized and rational. A diplomat hence became preferable to a warrior. War became a sanguinary business for mercenaries, while diplomacy was seen as a business for governments.

M. Mallett, D. Queller and G. Berridge also emphasize the important and complex relationship between conflicts and diplomacy. Some of them assume that permanent embassies were partly motivated by the scarcity of suitable people willing to go abroad for a long sojourn and their unwillingness to take upon themselves burdensome responsibilities. The scholars also underline the advantages and efficiency of permanent embassies compared to ad hoc diplomatic missions. They point out that permanent missions were more able to assure a regular and reliable flow of political intelligence.45 It is important to note, however, that initially only the Italians instituted a system of reciprocal resident ambassadors.46 Even a statesman of Louis XI’s resourceful-ness never approved of the new ways of diplomacy practised by Italians. His difficulties were captured in a

46) See, for example, A.R. de Maulde la-Clavière, La Diplomatie en temps de Machiavel (Paris: PUF, 1892); and T. Dupré-Theseider, Nicolo Machiavelli diplomatico (Como: Marzorati, 1945).
discussion between Filippe de Commin and Maletta, his Italian colleague, when discussing differences between the French and Italian services.

De Commin noted the strong suspicion that surrounded every resident envoy in France. Was it not enough, he wondered, to have ambassadors only on special occasions? Ambassadors, he said, were supposed to come and leave, not to stay permanently in his country.47

Why then did permanent embassies appear only in Italy? The division of Italy into small states, Rome’s authority and thus ability to set trends in diplomatic practice, together with the preoccupations with their internal affairs of the other great powers of the time, were all contributory factors. However, the humanism of the Renaissance, with its expansive cultural and philosophical movements, was also important. Vital centres of this movement stimulated public life in Florence, Milan, Rome, Naples, Venice, Ferrara, Mantua, Bologna and other Italian cities. Humanists formed a new secular intellectual milieu. Out of self interest as well as philosophical conviction, many humanists endorsed the emerging state bureaucracies. They performed as magistrates, chancellors, secretaries and diplomats. Secular and rational principles of a new way of life inspired political theories and social practice. The civic humanism that emerged in the early fifteenth century conferred great significance on the principles of liberty, equality, justice, civic responsibility, patriotism and reputation, and sought a harmony between ethics and politics. And all this profoundly affected thinking about diplomacy.48

The highly developed juridical base of Renaissance society was of great importance for this new diplomatic discourse. Canon law and the Roman law ‘born anew’ gave birth to Usus Modernus Pandectarum. In the realm of international relations, Usus Modernus stressed sovereignty, responsibility, keeping the peace, the rights of neutrals and non-combatants and other rules of war, including punishment for those who broke their promises to refrain from violence. Under such circumstances the Apennine peninsula represented an ideal workshop for the new diplomacy.

A quest for a new secular authority to avert wars in international relations occupied the minds of many Renaissance theorists and politicians. Thucydides’ conclusion that the Peloponnesian war had occurred because

47) Filippe de Commin, Memuary, Kniga III, g. VII, see http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/ru2/Kommin/.
Athens violated the existing balance of power inspired the Humanists to seek new ways for preserving peace. The conviction that only equilibrium could be helpful for avoiding conflicts among states began to emerge. The balance-of-power system was supposed to be based on flexible alliances and coalitions. Enlightenment thinkers later viewed the system as a manifestation of natural laws and a kind of self-regulating device. A main task for diplomacy was hence supposed to be that of the watchdog over the existing balance of power. Ad hoc medieval envoys were no longer often requested. Resident ambassadors, constantly gathering intelligence, gradually replaced them all. This early Italian system of equilibrium reached its apogee in the latter half of the fifteenth century when Rome and Venice, Milan and Florence, Naples and minor states joined the balance and were thus always ready to change an ally in order to prevent hegemonic claims by any other member. According to G. Volpe:

[... the system of balance is a result of three centuries long historic development characterized by the unification of scattered political entities, the creation of small states and accurate differentiation of spheres of influence and delimitation of territories. All these small territorial entities [...] are composing a political whole, aiming at reinforcing peace and providing guarantees of territorial integrity while facing internal and external threats.]

The maintenance of balance required flexibility of coalitions and alliances, but, above all, a certain amount of reliable intelligence as to the intentions and potentials of foreign rulers. This demand could be satisfied only with a well-developed and professionally organized system of mutual and permanent embassies. Thus, ‘On the one hand the balance of power policy accelerated the evolution of organized and permanent foreign services, while on the other hand the effective diplomacy made possible a rational implementation of this policy’. After the Italian wars (1494-1559) waged by France, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire for hegemony in Europe, the search for a balance became of paramount importance for European countries eager to apply the experience of Italian diplomatic conduct, which, in their opinion, had achieved good results. By the eighteenth century the Italian model of diplomacy had been adopted by many European countries. These

developments went along with the further secularization of European society, and finally it chose a new universal ground for progress — that is, a set of contractual relations between sovereign contracting parties.

The Rise of the ‘Modern Model of Diplomacy’ in Russia

In Russia the rise of the modern model of diplomacy goes back to the eighteenth century. Peter the Great reformed the state system that had been based on the Byzantine ‘symphony’. He abolished the Patriarch institution and, following the example of Protestant states, he made himself head of the Russian Church and subordinated it to the State Synod. The primacy of temporal power was also emphasized by a new ceremonial. For example, in the past when the Tsar had travelled to Moscow, he had been met by a solemn religious procession led by the Patriarch. The new ceremonial looked more like an imperial Roman triumph. So-called ‘Drunk Councils’, thought up by the young Tsar Peter, and Tsar’s carousals under the command of Peter’s close associate Nikita Zotov, who supervised the ceremony in sacerdotal robes and was surrounded by jesters, were intended to have a major influence upon local minds.

By establishing his own absolute rule, Peter could adopt all of the patterns of the new European diplomatic system in Russia. In 1717, P. Shafiroff, one of the most distinguished Russian diplomats and a member of Peter’s entourage, published his *Dissertation on the Juridical Grounds for War between Peter the Great and the Swedish King Karl XII, in 1700*. This is considered to be the first Russian tract on international law. The book was conversant with the Enlightenment ideas of Hugo Grotius and Samuel Puffendorf. As in Western Europe, the new concept of sovereignty required a new system of diplomatic institutions. Indeed, a few years later a vast network of permanent Russian ambassadors appeared in Austria, England, Holland, Spain, Denmark, Hamburg, Poland, Prussia, Mecklenburg, Turkey, France and Sweden. The Russian foreign office sent diplomatic agents to Amsterdam, Danzig, Braunschweig and the Duchy of Kurland, as well as to China, Bukhara and Kalmykia. In the course of the reforms, the ancient

52 O.V. Suhareva, *Kto byl kto v Rossii ot Petra I do Pavla I* (Moscow: AST, 2005).
Posol'skiy Prikaz was replaced by the Kolleghiya Inostrannyh Del (College of Foreign Affairs). Which was set up on the Western (primarily Swedish and Prussian) model that 'required officials capable of acting on the basis of formal, general, rational regulations within the framework of a highly organized bureaucratic hierarchy'.\(^{54}\) Under Peter's rule, European protocol regulations and diplomatic rankings were introduced. Now Russian ambassadors could consider themselves full members of the European diplomatic corps. The reforms of diplomatic conduct incorporated Russia into the European diplomatic system and contributed to transforming the Russian empire into an important player within the European balance of power.

Beginning with Peter’s era and the proper beginning of Russian imperial history, a gradual rapprochement can be observed between the two types of diplomatic system — Western and Russian. In her foreign policy, Catherine II embraced three very European-looking Enlightenment principles: state interests; rational calculation; and conjecture.\(^{55}\) In 1784 she decided to send a large group of diplomats to Paris to study French diplomatic practice. In 1802, by the decree of Alexander I, Russia’s first Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established (and lasted until October 1917). But within the new parameters, the ghost of Byzantium appeared now and again. Consider, for example, the so-called ‘Greek Project’ set up by Catherine the Great, which aimed at ‘the re-establishment of the ancient Greek monarchy upon the ruins of the fallen barbarian state’.\(^{56}\) Constantine, her grandson, was supposed to sit on the imperial throne in Constantinople, and some years later her son Paul I developed even more mystical plans aimed at a reunion of the churches, with himself as the head of a new universal church and emperor in a new theocratic monarchy.\(^{57}\) The same thoughts preoccupied Alexander I when he wrote his copy of the Holy Alliance Act. The text reflected his aspiration to unite European monarchies on the basis of Christian commandments and religious precepts under the guidance of Russia.\(^{58}\) Shades of the past system kept appearing like unbidden guests. In the nineteenth century Slavophile ideologists advocated the Byzantine principles (autocracy and orthodoxy) in politics and called for

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54) Raeff, *Plans for Political Reform in Imperial Russia, 1730-1905*, p. 8.  
56) *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva inostrannyh del Rossii*, p. 204.  
58) *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva inostrannyh del Rossii*, p. 268.
the rebirth of the Byzantine world under the aegis of Russia. This was a call that fitted fairly well with the emergence of a newer European ideology in Russia, that of nationalism. Russian governments seemed to be well aware of the utopian aura of such projects and resisted the idea of pan-Slavism becoming an official doctrine directing its foreign policy. Nevertheless, Slavophile slogans, which sometimes sounded aggressive and militaristic, fuelled anti-Russian feelings in the West. In addition, the Slavophile aspiration of consolidating the Russian autocracy as a world power drew the positive attention of the Russian ruling class, to whose conservatism it appealed — the Byzantine inheritance thus mixed with the European experience of ‘well-ordered police state’. This manifested itself through the hypertrophied role of an autocratic head of state and a centralized bureaucracy in foreign policy, which very weak public opinion was unable to counter effectively.

Particular Features of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Diplomacy

Soviet diplomacy after 1917 may be understood in terms of the themes discussed above, especially if Marxism-Leninism is understood as a secular religion. The Soviet leadership, at least in part, viewed diplomacy as a tool for a new Messianic universalism (as it was in pre-Petrine time) expressed in terms of ‘proletarian internationalism’. The first chief of the Soviet foreign policy department, Leon Trotsky, had no doubt that the ‘bourgeois’ institution of diplomacy was doomed to decay. He considered his own diplomats to be instruments for communist propaganda: ‘As soon as

59) See, for example, N.J. Danilevsky, Rossija i Evropa (Saint Petersburg: Kniga, 1871); K.N. Leontijev, Vostok, Rossija i slavianstvo (Moscow: Kniga, 1885).
60) See V.M. Hervolina, Problemy vneshej politiki Rossii v obshchestvennoyi mysli strany (Moscow: Mezdunarodnyje otnosheniya, 1987).
63) See VA. Jemets, Mehanizm prinjatiya vneshepolitichekikh resheniy i Istoria vneshej politiki Rossii: konets XIX-nachalo XX veka (Moscow: Mezdunarodnyje otnosheniya, 1997), pp. 50-89.
64) It is curious to observe that in medieval Russian texts the Greek word symphonija was translated as ‘soviet’. See N.V. Sinitsina, Symphonija sviaschenstva I tsarstva / Istorichesky vestnik, no. 9-10, 2000, p. 48.
as the peace treaty is signed we will close down this shop’.\(^\text{65}\) As usual, however, ideology was to be contradicted by reality, and the resulting tensions are clear for all to see in the archives, where antagonisms between the ‘Narkomindel\(^\text{66}\) and the ‘Komintern\(^\text{67}\) are much in evidence. Consider, for example, recently revealed letters written by Georgy Tchitcherin, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1918-1930, who replaced Trotsky. Tchitcherin wrote:

Between our ‘internal enemies’ (our well-known playful expression) the first one is named Komintern. Up to 1929 there had been a lot of troubles caused by the Communist International, but in general we managed to settle them while overcoming millions of torments. But from 1929, the year when doping initiated, the situation became absolutely intolerable, and it was the death of foreign policy.\(^\text{68}\)

There is no doubt that the requirements of realpolitik compelled Soviet diplomacy to take into consideration the alignment of forces on the international scene and to strive for a balance of power that ultimately became a nuclear balance of fear. Contrary to its initial appeal for open diplomacy, it soon resorted to secret negotiations. At the same time, Soviet ideology inevitably led to a simplified division of the world into ‘forces of progress’ and ‘forces of reaction’, recalling the atmosphere of medieval religious confrontations between Russia and the West. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Russian leadership attempted to assure a complete de-ideologization of diplomacy. It was necessary to plot a new course in the stormy seas of world politics. And it is clear that this was not an easy mission. The vacuum produced by the collapse of messianic communist universalism was filled with scenarios conceived by diverse political circles in search of an old or new ideology to replace what had been lost. One remarkable example — which recalls the pan-Slavism of the nineteenth century — was the resolution of 16 April 1999 on the ‘Federal Republic


\(^\text{66}\) Narkomindel is an acronym for *Narodny Komissariat inostrannyh del* (the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1917-1946).

\(^\text{67}\) Komintern is an acronym for the Third Communist International (established in Moscow in 1919).

\(^\text{68}\) Arhiv vnesheiny politiki RF, fond 08, opis 11, papka 47, delo 63, list 81-83, Inormazionny bulleten IDD MID RF, 1999.
of Yugoslavia joining to the Union of Belarus and Russia’, which was approved with an overwhelming majority by the State Duma (Russian parliament).69

At the beginning of the twenty-first century a new rapprochement can be observed between the Russian state (looking for a unifying national idea) and the Russian Orthodox Church (looking to recover its past prestige) for the sake of mutual support. In the Church’s recent documents this type of relationship is called so-rabotnichestvo (collaboration).70 Russian diplomatic institutions also emphasize their support for the Church’s politics. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, in his address to the World Russian People’s Council, stated: ‘We attribute particular attention to our collaboration with the Russian Orthodox Church […] This collaboration corresponds to one of the oldest and most profound traditions of our diplomacy’.71

The decision of Russian authorities to open a new orthodox church within the walls of the Russian ambassador’s residence in Rome is one example of this tradition. The official site of the Russian embassy underlines that this decision is ‘a very important moment in Russian-Italian relations and will favour their further development […] as well as the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Holy See’.72 The rapport between Russia and the Holy See seems to be another manifestation of the impact produced by the old ‘symphony’ tradition. In 1990, when both parties exchanged representatives, it was decided that their relations should not be considered ‘diplomatic’ but no more than ‘official’, because of the well-known attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church towards some Roman Catholic policies and positions on doctrine. That is why Russia is still one of the few states that do not want to call their relations with the Holy See ‘diplomatic relations’ and whose representative in the Vatican is not considered to be a full ambassador.73

69) The text is available on the official site of the State Duma, at http://www.duma.gov.ru/
70) See Osnovy socialnoj kontseptsii Russkoj pravoslavnoj tserkvi (13-16 August 2000), at www.mospat.ru. The word so-rabotnichestvo is an archaic expression and is not current Russian.
71) See this address on the official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at www.mid.ru.
Conclusions

The emergence of the modern model of diplomacy in Russia was conditioned by the particular circumstances of Russian history and the formation of the Russian state system. Russia today is a modern state with its diplomacy largely free from any compulsory ideology (be it ecclesiastical or Soviet). However, an obvious paradox of the current situation is that while trying to meet the demands of the modern model of diplomacy, Russians sometimes overlook the transformational consequences of globalization for international affairs in general, and diplomacy in particular. The problem is that such challenges as the breakup of the traditional system of balance of power, changes in the meaning and content of sovereignty, processes of integration and regionalization, as well as the emergence of new actors on the world arena, all confront diplomacy with severe challenges. Armed conflicts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of international terrorism put diplomatic institutions to a severe test. In this framework there are certain limits to what diplomacy can achieve, while power politics and military actions often replace it.

New and dramatic events put an urgent need for a qualitatively new type of diplomacy on the agenda. Diplomacy of the future should be based on a synthesis of both European and Russian historical experiences: the European experience with its emphasis on a solid juridical basis, rationalism and human rights; and the Russian experience with its universalism attentive to existential problems and traditional values. Only this qualitatively different diplomacy might be able to give rise to a new diplomatic model. The age of globalization — on the condition that this globalization is not one-way traffic — can offer more opportunities for such a synthesis between different cultures and diplomatic traditions.

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