

Russia: The last keeper of European culture, Christian values and truly European civilisation

The Kremlin is preparing a new culture policy for Russia focusing on its distinctive civilisation and traditional values, which observers say has political ends amid Moscow's standoff with the West.

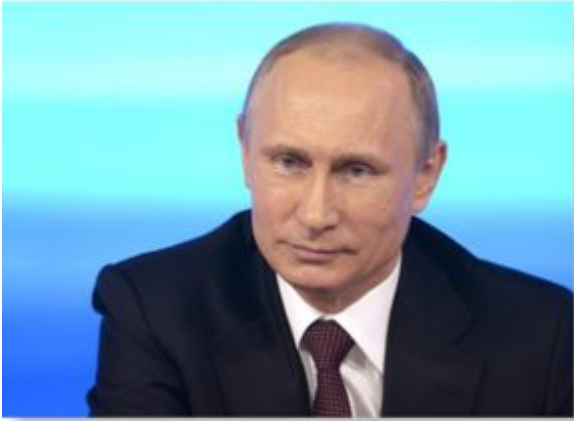
At the end of four hours of questions Thursday in his annual call-in, President Vladimir Putin waxed philosophical on what it means to be Russian.

Russians not only have their own "cultural code," he said, they also have a unique moral outlook – unlike Westerners, Russians are selfless and prone to self-sacrifice.

"These are the deep roots of our patriotism," Putin said.

Tapping into perceived "traditional cultural values" of Russian civilisation, the culture ministry is drawing up a government strategy that observers say has all the trappings of a new state ideology, echoing Soviet legacy.

The authors preparing the document, who are kept secret, believe that such a policy must be based on the thesis that "Russia is not Europe" and generously quote from Putin's speeches.



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The policy states Russia is at a historical crossroads and must make a choice between cultural extinction or the preservation of its unique “moral and spiritual foundations,” which can only be done with a “state culture policy.”

An early version of the document has been leaked to the press and is currently being examined by a Kremlin working group chaired by one of President Vladimir Putin’s closest allies, chief of staff Sergei Ivanov, a former KGB agent recently blacklisted by the United States.

“Russia is an ancient, independent, distinctive civilisation,” culture minister Vladimir Medinsky said at a press conference Wednesday.

In an interview with the *Kommersant* daily, Medinsky further added that Russia “is forced to culturally protect itself” from the what he sees as the depravities of Europe’s contemporary culture.

“Perhaps Russia will be the last keeper of European culture, Christian values and truly European civilisation,” said Medinsky.

“The main idea is that we have to defend ourselves from the West, that the West is evil,” said political analyst Alexei Makarkin.

'Russia is not Europe'

"The Crimea events reinforced this trend" after previous attempts to root out Western influence such as the law on "foreign agents" targeting NGOs, he said.

"We lived like that in the Soviet era," he said. "Conservatives like it, those who want a comfortable, airtight world without irritating things like abstract art."

On Wednesday, philosophy scholars of the usually apolitical Russian Academy of Sciences said that the policy violates Russia's constitution by presenting a "required state ideology."



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A woman walks past a huge state emblem of the Soviet Union displayed in an open air museum in Moscow, on April 9, 2014. The sign reads: "The USSR is the Stronghold of Peace"

A public letter of 25 academy professors said that the concept "Russia is not Europe" was only an opinion that could not be inferred from Russian history.

"Such a free interpretation of ideas... is absolutely

inappropriate in any self-respecting society," the philosophers said, adding that the government should encourage debate and research rather than dictate its views.

Medinsky on Wednesday tried to assuage fears of a return to Soviet-style censorship, where works of art or drama had to be reviewed by Communist party officials.

The Kremlin's new policy will be executed "not by bureaucrats" but by experts and respected culture figures, he said.

One expert sitting on a jury that decides state grants for artists promised to make his judgements based on artistic merit, not political need.

"We're established and independent people, not a military unit," said Eduard Boyakov, founder of Moscow's Praktika theatre who last month surprised many by signing an appeal in support of Putin's actions in Crimea, which was annexed by Moscow in a move condemned by the West.

But Boyakov admitted it remained to be seen how the new culture policy will be implemented.

"If there will be new plays and creative statements, then it means that it's working," he said. "If we all end up writing only about Crimea in iambic pentameter, then that's a different question."

Source: Agence France-Presse