

## Canada and Russia: We Look Alike, but Still We Are Different.

There is no denying Canada and Russia do have a lot in common: both states are on the top-five list of the world's hugest countries. Both Canada and Russia have always been and still are the 'gatekeepers' of the Arctic, boasting the honour of making one of the most feasible contributions to the exploration and conquest of the Northern pole area. Not only do our countries exercise their sovereignty over millions of square kilometers, but also they qualify as world's most reliable natural resources suppliers, with the goods they export ranging from oil to rare-earth metals. Words are just too trite and simple to describe the beauty of the landscapes that cannot be found elsewhere but in Russia and Canada: deep rock-bound lakes alternate with infinitely vast plains, which, in turn, lead to hilly areas, that are covered with hundred-year-old pines. Finally, the two states enjoy a unique cross-culture experience: Canada and Russia have achieved and maintained harmony between the 'newcomers' (that is, the British and the French to some extent in Canada and Russians in Russia) and the Native Peoples of the respective territories.

The foregoing list of common points seems comprehensive and reasonable, and this is true. Just for a minute one can believe that Canada and Russia may even be referred to as 'sister countries', the cliché sometimes regarded as a part and parcel of the Soviet heritage. However, there exist a few major differences between our two countries and they do deserve attention.

Firstly, one of the most important features that differs Canada from Russia is its history that has had a profound influence on the contemporary situation. It took centuries for Canada to evolve gradually from a colony though the status of dominion into an independent parliamentary democracy, though technically it continues to be a constitutional monarchy with the British Queen as the Head of State. On the other hand, at the beginning of the previous century Russians opted for more radical way of establishing a new form of government which, in the long run, did not contribute to its political stability over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This stark contrast explains the fact why Canadians are, just like Americans, more in favour of political compromise and evolution, while Russians, unfortunately, have not managed to cultivate the love for gradual change through constant political dialogue and mutual concessions in everyday political life.

Secondly, the economic systems, which the two states are based on, are very different. While Canada is widely regarded as the pioneer of the so-called 'settler capitalism' and boasts an enduring free market and capitalist economy machinery, Russia stepped on this way of development merely two decades ago. Corruption, unjust distribution of goods and profits, imperfect legislation and so on and so forth are the most visible obstacles on the way to creating a modern market economy in Russia that complies with all its standards. It is necessary to underline the fact that though both states are largely natural resources exporters, the contrast between the Canadian and Russian societies, especially in terms of social equality and fair distribution, are unprecedentedly sharp.

Another distinctive feature of Canada that does not correspond to the contemporary reality in Russia is its approach towards the issue of immigration. Russia is known to have adopted long time ago quite a specific model of managing ethnic minorities and foreign nationals, that is, the concept of designated autonomous regions. When speaking about foreign immigrants in present-day Russia, there is a clear feeling of the governmental bodies', as well as public's frustration with this issue: numerous are those who urge to restrict the immigration legislation. Conversely, Canada seems to continue championing the so-called 'salad bowl' approach in its immigration policy. Indeed, Canadians are special in this respect: on the one hand, they refute the American concept of assimilation, which is figuratively described as the 'melting pot', but on the other hand, Canada shows much more loyalty to the doctrine of multiculturalism than the Europeans, who actually have articulated and launched this policy. Hence, Canada retained its position as the multiculturalism advocate, while Russia is stepping backwards from building a more ethnically pluralist society.

Overall, the two giants of the Western and Eastern hemispheres, that is Canada and Russia, have both major similarities and differences. However, that should not be regarded as an obstacle to our cooperation and true interstate friendship. Apparently, the contrast between these points facilitates the process of mutual exchange of experiences and values. Personally, I am firmly convinced that the enhanced cooperation and dialogue between our two nations, however different they might seem, will bring mutual benefits for the peoples of Canada and the Russian Federation.