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## Contemporary Russian Nationalism between East and West

Khazanov writes that Russia currently lacks a consensus with regard to the concept of nation, and that common identifications are very weak. In these conditions of social and political fragmentation, nationalism has become a very important factor in the country's development.

Contemporary Russian nationalism, one of the most influential ideological and political forces in the country, consists of several trends and varieties. Still, most of them share some remarkably similar characteristics connected with the Manichaeic-type of worldview. The only thing that prevents me from stating that Russian nationalism is nowadays turning away from the West is that its mainstream was always anti-Western. There is nothing new in this respect.

Perhaps more interesting is the notion of the West in general, and of Western Europe in particular, that is emerging in the country. In this notion, Central Europe or East Central Europe, and not infrequently South Eastern Europe, are conspicuous only by their noticeable absence. Central Europe as an ideological and cultural construct does not have an independent meaning to Russians. At best, it is recognized only as a transient political reality, in which they no longer have a part. Actually, the idea of Central Europe always was, and still is, quite alien to pre-revolutionary Russian/Soviet/post-Soviet Russian thinking. To Russians, there were two Europes: Western and Eastern; their cultural contexts to a large extent being defined by shifting political configurations.

Post-communist development in Europe is perceived in Russia as an advancement of Western Europe into the Eastern part of the continent (Yakovenko, 1999: 51–52). Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and even more tacitly the Baltic countries are already considered Western European, or at least West-European-to-be. Even countries like Romania and Slovakia are considered to belong to Western Europe, if not by their actual status then by their cultural affiliation and destiny. One may be rather surprised by how little room the former communist countries are occupying in the thought and concepts of Russian nationalists and in the minds of ordinary Russians. In this respect, there is a kind of consensus in the country that, like it or not, the Soviet external empire has irreversibly disintegrated; this is a *fait accompli*. This is reflected by Russian foreign policy, which considers the Central European region to be insignificant to national interests (Kobrinskaia, 1997: 6). Regrets are of a much more geopolitical than a cultural order, though even the former are rather muted. Russian nationalists blame Gorbachev not so much for allowing the former clients to go their own ways, but for not insisting that

they should pay an adequate price for their freedom.

One might call this a realistic attitude. Some sober people understand that the negative attitude towards the Soviet Union and Russia existing in Central European countries is inevitable.

The Russians vehemently fought for their motherland and liberated it from the Hitlerite aggressors. However, they were unable to liberate anybody else. The state that was not free itself could not deliver freedom. In this respect we were different from our Western allies (Podoprigora and Krasnopevtseva, 1995: 69).

However, accusations towards the former allies of ingratitude and Russophobia that also acquire some credibility in the public eye have only contributed to Russia's alienation from Central Europe. Many argue that since these allies turned their backs on Russia, Russia, in turn, should turn her back on them. It is true that an attempt was recently made to reaffirm Russia's affinity with Orthodox and Slavonic Serbia, but only because that country confronted the West. Nobody ever mentions even the possibility of Russia's solidarity with Orthodox Romania, and very few people now refer to Russia's former affinity with Orthodox and Slavonic Bulgaria. In 2000, I predicted that if the new leadership in Yugoslavia turned to the West, Russian nationalists would soon forget about their brotherhood with the Serbs. It seems that I was right. At the moment, interest in Serbia is rapidly diminishing in the country.

Does the sense of isolation and alienation from the West that may be observed in Russia indicate that the country really turns to Eurasia – whatever that vague term may imply? One should be cautious in this respect, since the speculative constructs of some ideologists of contemporary Russian nationalism often do not correspond with the attitudes and feelings of ordinary nationalists, and even less with the general public. While the ideologists talk and write about the Eurasian character of Russian civilization, about the historical symbiosis of the Slav and Turk peoples, and even about the alliance between Orthodox Christianity and Islam in their struggle against secularist Western ideologies, in everyday life their followers demonstrate hostility towards the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, and towards "Asians" in general. Likewise, a negative attitude towards Islam has become widespread in Russia.

Actually, the so-called "Eurasianism" is popular only among a small but vocal segment of the Russian nationalists. While some "Eurasianists" insist on the historical and cultural unity of all peoples of the former Soviet Union, others assign to Russia the role of the main stronghold of continental Eurasian civilization against the Atlantic one (i.e. Dugin, 1997). In any case, the history of "Eurasianism" proves its "crisis ideology" character. Before the Revolution, very few Russian thinkers proclaimed the Eurasian character of the Russian Empire; the majority conceived of it as a European state. The Eurasian school of thought first emerged in some Russian émigré circles in the 1920s. It was an attempt at suggesting an ideology for the restoration of the Russian Empire in another garment. In fact, this ideology was not very original and borrowed generously from different sources: the Russian messianic religious philosophy, the pessimistic criticism of Western capitalist civilization (Spengler), and even fascism. This mish-mash was seasoned with a romanticized historical mythology. Thus, the early Eurasianists insisted on almost eternal enmity and antagonism between the continental Eurasian and Western Atlantic

civilizations. They argued that for ecological and cultural–historical reasons, all peoples from the Hingans to the Carpathians shared the same destiny and should have a common statehood. They also claimed that autocratic rule in Russia, which, incidentally, they praised, was a Mongol contribution to Russian development (for recent reprints of the most important publications by the Eurasianists see Isaev, 1992; Novikova and Sizemskaja, 1995; Tolstoi, 1997; on ideology of Eurasianism see Tsimbursky, 1998).

Very soon, some Eurasianists discovered that many of their attitudes and goals, namely the rejection of the capitalist West and especially the restoration of the empire, were not so different from the Soviet communist ones. The result of this discovery was far from glorious. Some Eurasianists became agents of the Soviet secret police (later, when their usefulness expired, they were imprisoned in the Soviet Union, but this is already another story – see Ashnin and Alpatov, 1996). Others became disillusioned in the ideology or in its practical applications.

Only since the 1970s have some ideas of the Eurasianists, especially the thesis about the cultural and political symbiosis of the Eastern Slavs and the Turko–Mongol nomads, been revived, though for a time in a somewhat less extreme form, by their *epigonus*, the Soviet historian Lev Gumilev (1970; cf. 1989; on Gumilev see Brudny, 1998: 186–189; Shnirelman and Panarin, 2000). It is true that Gumilev was a maverick in Soviet academia, whose unprofessional treatment of many historical problems was matched only by his unbridled fantasy. However, during the *perestroika* period, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasianism has been reborn and is once again in demand.

Still, its influence on contemporary Russian nationalism should by no means be overestimated. Sometimes I get the impression that Eurasianism attracts more attention in the West than in its own country. In Russia, it remains the domain of a narrow circle of ideologists and quite often is disjunctive from the practical demands of Russian nationalists. Eurasianism is inseparably linked with nostalgia for the lost empire and the vain dream of reversing the course of history. As such, it is a nationalist ideology with a strong imperial accretion. In a way, it is an inconsistent attempt to somehow overcome a narrow ethnic Russian nationalism, or rather to make it more attractive to non–Russian peoples. However, in this capacity it does not make a sufficiently strong appeal to either Russians or to non–Russians.

This brings me to other trends in contemporary Russian nationalism. One historical circumstance that has made a strong impact on all its varieties is that the Russian state, in all of its history, was never a nation–state; and even at present nation–state building in the country is more of a project than an accomplishment. Just as in the past, at present Russia in historical, ethnic, and cultural respects is more, and at the same time less, than the Russian state. I have to begin not with history, but with philology and linguistics. This may be difficult for those who do not know Russian, however it is important for understanding the current situation in the country.

The fact is that there are two different nouns in Russian, and consequently two different adjectives, for the country and for the people. The nouns are *Rus'* (an archaic word that nowadays is used mainly in a poetic, elevated fashion), and *Rossia* – Russia in English. Correspondingly, there are two different adjectives, *russkii* and *rossiiskii*. The first adjective is also used as a noun to designate ethnic Russians as a people. In English, both adjectives are translated

as Russian or Russians.

At present, *russkii* is an ethnic definition, while *rossiiskii* is mainly a political and territorial, and only potentially a civic definition. The word *rossiiskii* was first introduced in 1718 by Feofan Prokopovich, an associate of Peter the Great. At that time, and much later as well, it was used mainly in the official lexicon, and aimed at designating all subjects of the Russian Empire, nothing more. Thus, it had a strictly political meaning, and, in fact, was rarely used at all. I may be wrong, but I could not find even one case when, in the pre-revolutionary period, the word *rossiiskii* was applied to the non-Russian populations of the Caucasus, not to mention Central Asia. In the official lexicon, the former were usually identified as Armenian, or Georgian, or Muslim, or as other subjects of the Russian Empire, that was all. At the turn of the century, only a few liberals occasionally used the word *rossiiskii*.

In the Soviet period, the word *rossiiskii* was either used interchangeably with the word *russkii*, or, in some cases, as pertaining to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, for example, to its territory, resources, administration, et cetera. Inasmuch as the Soviet concept of nation was based on the primordialist approach, there was no place in it for a civic nation. It is true that the Soviets initiated a much more ambitious project: the creation of a single Soviet people. However, this supra-national community was called Soviet, not Russian, although it implied a linguistic and cultural Russification.

Thus, the very idea of a civic Russian nation is basically a new phenomenon. It began to be propagated by liberal-minded people in Russia only in the late *perestroika* period, and for political reasons it was taken up by Yeltsin. At that time, Yeltsin was fighting with Gorbachev for Russia's sovereignty, and in order to undermine his position Gorbachev tried to instigate the non-Russian Autonomous Republics against the central authorities of the Russian Federation. In turn, Yeltsin made a proposal to their leaderships that he would later prefer to forget: "Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow."

Just at that time, those who were more or less acquainted with the Western theory of nation began to talk about a multiethnic and civic Russian nation. In the New Speak of the Russian democrats, the archaic and rarely used noun *rossiiane*, a derivative of *rossiiskii*, had acquired a new and different meaning. First, it implied not only citizenship, but also common interests, values, cultural characteristics, history, and fate that the Russian and non-Russian citizens of the Federation supposedly shared, as well as the bright future that they would share together. On a more implicit level, it also suggested that all citizens of the Russian Federation, irrespective of their ethnicity, are or should become its patriots, although the word "patriotism" was not popular in democratic circles. At that time, many democratic-minded intellectuals made mention of it in another context. They liked to quote a famous saying about patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels (I must recall that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Russian liberals considered the Russian nationalists, along with the communists, to be their enemies. Only during the 1995–1996 election campaigns did the parties of democratic orientation begin to stress their patriotism and allegiance to the Russian nation).

However, it is not enough to construct identities. In order to be successful these identities have to be accepted. In this respect, the stories of failure are much more numerous than success stories. It soon became evident that there was no consensus in the country with regard to the civic Russian nation. Post-Soviet Russia remains not only a multi-ethnic, but to some extent a

multi-national state, which retains the principle of ethno-territorial autonomies inherited from the Soviet Union. Many members of non-Russian nationalities are suspicious of attempts at imposing upon them any common identity with ethnic Russians, with the exception of citizenship. Many opinion polls and surveys indicate that among members of territorialized non-Russian nationalities, loyalty to their own nationality, republic, or small homeland is stronger than loyalty to the Russian Federation in general (Khazanov, 1997: 135–136). On the political and cultural levels, the negation of the idea of a civic Russian nation is most clearly expressed by non-Russian political elites and nationalist-minded intellectuals. If the concept of civic nation implies, at least in theory, ethnically neutral policies and the equality of all citizens everywhere in the territory of the nation-state, then this is precisely what they want to avoid. They insist that members of indigenous nationalities should have the right of preferential treatment in their titular republics.

Apparently, a civic nation implies something more than citizenry. It should have some shared political, historical, and cultural symbols acceptable to the multi-ethnic majority. It is almost surprising that even after living in the same state for centuries, members of Russia's different nationalities have so few uncontested common identities, so few common sentiments and symbols indispensable for linking individuals into a nation. Russian history lacks a George Washington or Abraham Lincoln as symbols of civic nationhood acceptable to all, without regard to their ethnic background. Lenin and Stalin are already discredited in this capacity to the majority of the population. Members of different nationalities in Russia have quite different attitudes to the past and different ethnocentric mythologies.

One may read in the history textbooks used in Russian-language schools that the conquest of the Kazan' Khanate in the mid-16th century was a great achievement of the expanding Russian state, beneficial to all of its ethnic groups, including the Tatars. But in Tatarstan, in the post-Soviet period, the day when Kazan' fell began to be commemorated as the greatest tragedy in the history of the Tatar people, and who knows, perhaps we are witnessing the emergence of another Kosovo myth. In the official Russian historiography the Mongol invasion and the consequent Golden Horde period are labeled as "the three hundred year Tatar yoke." However, the President of Tatarstan, Mintemir Shaimiev, claims that without the Golden Horde there would be no Great Russia, since only due to the patronage of the Golden Horde's khans were the Moscow princes capable of uniting the other Russian kingdoms. All Russian children know that General Yermolov was a hero of the 1812 Patriotic War. In the Northern Caucasus, nobody cares about this war. There, children are told that General Yermolov was a bloody colonizer of the Caucasus. In almost all non-Russian republics of the Federation, Yeltsin's decree restoring the old Russian two-headed eagle as the official state emblem was met with resentment, because historically it was associated with the Orthodox faith and with Russian imperialism and colonialism.

Even a common citizenship is under dispute, and some republican leaders insisted that priority should be given to republican citizenship over federal. Things have gone so far that the Russian government's decision to remove the notorious *piaty punkt* (fifth point), the clause in internal passports that fixed ethnic identity and virtually made it ascriptive, is resented and even resisted in some non-Russian republics. It is perceived there as another attempt at Russification or as a desire to deny non-Russians privileged status in their homelands. Interestingly, Russian nationalists also resent this decision, though for wholly different reasons.

But this is only one side of the coin. The other is that the concept of a civic nation is not appealing to many ethnic Russians as well. It seems that nationalism as a post-imperial syndrome is quite different in stable and prosperous countries from those that experience political uncertainty and economic hardships. The Russians have still not overcome the crisis of identity caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Now, they are afraid that even some parts of the Russian Federation may also be taken away from them. In the early 1990s one could witness the almost paranoid mood in the country. Many people were convinced that Russia was in danger of immediate disintegration. Even in 1994, 12 to 15 percent of ethnic Russians considered the disintegration of their country to be quite likely. In addition, the growth of ethnic nationalism among the non-Russian peoples of the former Soviet Union and of the Russian Federation resulted in a Russian backlash. In the late 1980s and early 1990s only Russian nationalists used the bugaboo of Russophobia; nowadays almost all political movements use it.

Thus, the ideological space in Russia became open to only one variety of nationalism: ethnic nationalism. At present, the Russians are seeking out a new base for their identity as a nationality and a nation; hence the ongoing debate about the character of the Russian Federation and about the status of ethnic minorities there. Curiously enough, however, even the problem of an ethnic Russian nation is far from being solved. Who is an ethnic Russian remains a matter of heated debate. Many still argue that ethnic affiliation is hereditary and is defined by blood or genes. Among other things, ambiguity is reflected in the new terminology in the Russian official and public lexicon, which stresses the difference between genuine Russians and Russophones – acculturated members of other nationalities who have Russian as their first or even only language. This distinction is the direct consequence of the Soviet practice of ascriptive and hereditary ethnic identity. However, the Orthodox Church and clerico-nationalists are propagating an even more restrictive concept of Russian-ness. They argue that only an Orthodox Christian can be a true Russian.

A more circumspect trend in Russian nationalism is advocating a more inclusive approach to the problem: the gradual assimilation of the members of non-Russian nationalities into the ethnic Russian nation. However, it does not provide a clear answer to the question of how to achieve this goal. Apparently, it pins its hopes on voluntary assimilation, but this seems dubious at the moment, at any rate with regard to territorialized nationalities in the Russian Federation.

Perhaps the most remarkable moment in the ongoing debate between various kinds of Russian nationalists is their intellectual poverty. Their debate does not contain anything new. The ideas and approaches under discussion go back to pre-revolutionary times. This is despite of the fact that one of the main concerns of pre-revolutionary Russian nationalists had been the preservation of the empire, while the post-Soviet nationalists had to experience its dissolution.

One of the remarkable features of Russian nationalism is that since the 19th century it has always acquired, and still acquires, illiberal, anti-Western, and authoritarian characteristics (I am writing now not about individuals, but about political movements, although there is little difference in this respect). Nationalism has many facets and varieties. It may be a political movement, or an ideology, or just a sentiment, or all of these together. Whatever one may have thought, nationalism does not necessarily belong to either the left or the

right of the political spectrum. It is compatible with different political systems, from totalitarianism to democracy; and with different ideologies, from fascism and communism to conservatism, liberalism, and even social democracy. However, different varieties of nationalism are always connected with specific historical and political circumstances.

We used to think that nationalism strives for the congruence of political, linguistic, and ethno-cultural borders (Gellner, 1983). This was never the aim of Russian nationalism. In the pre-revolutionary Russian context, nationalism was always aimed at preserving and extending the Russian Empire and at maintaining the dominant position of ethnic Russians in the Empire. If these aims were provided with any ideological justification at all, then references were usually made to Orthodoxy as the only true Christian faith, to the messianic mission of the Russian people, and to similar arguments that has once again become popular in the country. Thus, this kind of nationalism might be called imperial nationalism. However, it was also quite contradictory.

With regard to the non-Russian subjects of the empire, only two options were discussed: either their assimilation into the Russian people, or their subjugated minority status. However, even assimilation was a matter of debate: who might be allowed to assimilate and who should be prevented from it? In any case, the Russian nationalists considered linguistic and even cultural assimilation insufficient. To them, the *sine qua non* of assimilation was conversion to Orthodoxy. Even the last Romanovs and their ruling elite were increasingly trying to legitimize the existing order by identifying autocracy with the Orthodox Russian people at the expense of the imperial transnational identities and pretensions (von Hagen, 1997: 63). All this made Russian nationalism exclusive.

Thus, in the Russian political and ideological space the boundaries between nationalism and other movements were quite different from those in many other European countries. It was possible to be simultaneously a nationalist and a liberal in England because there was a clear distinction between England, or even Great Britain, and the British Empire. In Russia this was much more difficult, because to the Russian nationalists, the territorially contiguous Russian Empire and Russia itself were at once single and indivisible. Ethnic Russia to them extended to the entire empire, but at the same time they denied its non-Russian subjects civic equality and strongly opposed the very idea of their administrative or even cultural autonomy.

After the suppression of the 1905 revolution, a large part of the main liberal party in the country, the Kadet (Constitutional-Democratic) Party, began to move towards statism with regard to the nationalities question (on the evolution of the Kadets' views on this question, see Shelokhaev, 1996: 71 ff.). Some of its influential members, such as P. Struve, S. Bulgakov, and N. Berdiaev, also began to claim that Russians were a *Staatsvolk* and that the Russian Empire was their national state. But they continued to insist on granting the non-Russians equal civil rights with the Russians, and this made them ideological and political opponents of the nationalists. Other liberals, like P. Miliukov, who wanted to transform the Russian Empire into a multiethnic nation-state in which ethnic Russians would not occupy a politically dominant position, were considered by the nationalists to be their archenemies (Weeks, 1996: 24ff). Incidentally, Miliukov was known to sometimes use the word *rossiiskii* as opposed to *russkii*.

The history of the Second International has proved that it was possible to be simultaneously a socialist and a nationalist. In Russia, this was possible only for members of ethnic minorities. There were Polish, Georgian, Jewish, and Latvian socialist parties with strong nationalist agendas; however there was no Russian (*rusaskaia*) socialist party.

In tacit or overt forms, Russian nationalism continued to exist in Soviet times and remained empire-centric. One of its remarkable characteristics was the identification of Russia with the whole Soviet Union (Khazanov, 1995: 87ff). However, I will skip over the Soviet period and turn directly to the post-Soviet time. In spite of some differences, there are remarkable similarities between pre-revolutionary and post-Soviet Russian nationalisms. Indeed, Russian nationalism remains anti-modernist, anti-Western, anti-democratic, illiberal, authoritarian, and offensive, although nowadays sometimes in a defensive disguise. Steady screams on the threat to the Russian people from numerous external and internal enemies have become commonplace.

During the last few years I have devoted a lot of time to reading the growing number of Russian nationalist publications. I must say that it is not very exciting reading. To a large extent, all nationalist ideologies are based on mythologies, and the Russian nationalist mythology, just like any other for that matter, pretends to be a self-evident truth that does not require proof. Favorite phrases of the Russian nationalists are: "It is evident," "It is well known." But there is an additional circumstance that makes the writings of Russian nationalists so boring. They are extremely verbose, bombastic, monotonous, declarative, repetitive, and simply very bad, stylistically speaking.

This should not be surprising if one takes into account that many of the ideologists and proponents of Russian nationalism can best be characterized as *lumpen-intellectuals*: poorly educated and professionally incompetent people who became unnecessary and expendable with the political change in the country and the transition to a market economy. To satisfy my curiosity, I inquired as to what some of these people were doing during the Soviet period. The results were quite beguiling. In the recent past, many of them were Marxist philosophers, or were teachers of the so-called scientific communism. Others were *komsomol'* or Communist Party functionaries, or KGB officers, or occupied in other such "noble" professions. Now, the Sauls have become Pauls, or, perhaps more accurately, the Pauls have become Sauls.

There are also quite a lot of poets, writers, and journalists among the ideologists of Russian nationalism. Two or three are good or were good. The rest are very bad. In the Soviet Union they were protected from competition, patronized and fed, and fed quite well, by the Soviet government for their loyalty to the regime. Nowadays they cannot compete and want to protect themselves by any means possible. Some years ago, one of them, the poet Vladimir Sorokin, made a remarkable statement: "I admit that Joseph Brodsky's poems are as good as mine" (This is a very bold statement indeed, to compare one's self with a Nobel Prize winner and the greatest contemporary Russian poet). But then he added: "However, I am Russian, and Brodsky is not. He does not have the right to write in Russian."

Although at present the Russian nationalist movement is politically fragmented and consists of many parties and groups that are often competing with each other, it is not difficult to summarize the common characteristics of their mythology and political program. Let me start with mythology. It is almost disappointing in its lack of almost any new and original traits. In many

respects, the contemporary Russian mythology repeats the myths of Soviet historiography and propaganda, or goes back to pre-revolutionary nationalist myths.

In accordance with this mythology, we are now witnessing a clash of civilizations, a global struggle between the materialistic, individualistic, consumerist, cosmopolitan, corrupt, and decadent West led by the United States and the collectivist, idealistic, spiritually and morally superior Eurasia led by Russia. Russia is more than a country and a state, it is a civilization in which high spiritual qualities prevail over materialistic factors. Russians are the chosen people, who have a self-sacrificing mission to enlighten and save humankind (this claim goes back to the Russian religious philosophers, to Soloviev, Berdiaev, Fedorov, and others, and even to the "Russian idea" formulated by Dostoevsky in the 1870s).

Likewise, the Russian Empire was unique: it was the most humane in the history of the world. All peoples enjoyed peaceful coexistence and equality within her borders. Non-Russians joined it voluntarily. Russia never conquered and subjugated them, but if it did conquer them it was only for their own good, in order to protect them from external and internal enemies (this is a direct continuation of Soviet mythology).

So, what or who prevents Russia from fulfilling her messianic mission? Of course, the West, and at present the U.S. in particular. Russia has always been a besieged fortress, surrounded by enemies to the East and the West. For many centuries, the West has wanted to force Russia to her knees. The collapse of the Soviet Union is the result of this plot. Nowadays, America wants to break up Russia, to turn her into a source of raw materials. And so on and so on. Conspiracy theory and the clarion call of Russophobia have become an indispensable part of contemporary Russian nationalist mythology.

There are two almost eternal Russian questions: *Kto vinovat?* (Who is to blame?) and *Chto delat?* (What is to be done?). The mythology of Russian nationalism provides an answer to the first question; its political program answers the second one.

I will describe the political program of the Russian nationalist mainstream, not those of the extreme, overtly fascist organizations, such as Russian National Unity, which already claims to have about 150 thousand members and wants to establish a system of apartheid in Russia (Shenfield, 2001). So, then, what about the program of the Russian nationalist mainstream? Russia should become the state of the Russian people, and the Orthodox faith should be proclaimed the state religion. Russia is single and indivisible and should become a unitary state, in which ethnic minorities will at best enjoy cultural autonomy, but no political or territorial autonomy whatsoever.

The Russian people must reject democracy and liberalism for the sake of a new and organic political and social order based on the so-called *sobornost'*. It is very difficult to translate this word, because even in Russian it has many different and vague meanings. The Old Russian word *sobor* that until recently was only rarely used, meant an assembly, whether ecclesiastical or lay. In the current nationalist parlance, *sobornost'* implies communitarian mentality and simultaneously an alleged ethnic unity in which the interests of the Russian people as a whole should prevail over those of individuals. *Sobornost'* is allegedly based on the spirit of self-sacrifice and stresses the priority of the national community. In the lexicon of Russian nationalism, *sobornost'* also

acquires a similarity with some concepts of fascist corporatism.

The purport and reason for the very existence of the Russian nation is a strong and mighty state (*derzhava*). The state, and by no means civil society, is the bearer, protector, and guarantor of national interests. The most immediate and urgent goal of the Russian people is the restoration of the mighty Russian state in its historical borders (in practical terms, the restoration of the Russian Empire). Since the West in general, and the United States in particular, strive to prevent Russia from achieving this goal, Russian foreign policy should become anti-Western and anti-American. In all, the political program of Russian nationalism is not only anti-democratic and illiberal, it is also revanchist.

Now, the final question: what role is the nationalist factor now playing in Russia's political life? Some observers point out that it is hardly likely that radical nationalists, especially neo-fascists, will come to power in the country in the near future. I tend to agree with them. However, there is a danger of a different order.

First, some power structures and their officials are becoming increasingly receptive to the nationalist agenda. It is no secret in the country that extreme nationalist Russian organizations have many sympathizers in the Ministry of the Interior, in the judiciary, and in some regional administrations, not to mention in the secret services. In direct violation of Russian law, the procurator's office and judicial bodies are sabotaging all attempts to prosecute those that are instigating and propagating ethnic and national hatred. Second, and perhaps more important, is that other political movements are becoming increasingly receptive to nationalist programs and slogans. Nationalism in the country has become fashionable, and most of the political movements and parties are striving to advertise themselves as adequate defenders of national interests.

The main Western, especially West European, patterns of ideological and political orientation, conservatism, liberalism, and social democracy, are still not applicable to Russia. Instead I would single out four major forces of the Russian political spectrum: nationalists, communists, what is called in Russian political parlance "the party (or parties) of power," and those democrats and liberals who, at the moment, are in opposition to the government, or, at any rate, are not in the government (I refer to parties such as the Yabloko of Yavlinsky and, with some reservations, the Union of Right Forces of Gaidar, Chubais, and Nemtsov). It may be revealing to trace the extent to which these forces are becoming receptive to nationalist ideology.

One of the peculiar and intriguing elements of contemporary Russian political life is that it lacks a strong social-democratic movement. There are only a few tiny groups of social-democratic orientation, and this in a country with a very strong socialist tradition! There are several reasons for this state of affairs, but I can only dwell upon one of them now. While in many East Central European countries the communists are gravitating towards social democracy, their Russian counterparts are not. Instead, they are gravitating towards nationalism. It is true that at the moment there are several ideological trends in the Russian Communist Party, including a traditional or internationalist one (Urban and Solovei, 1997). But most conspicuous by far is the nationalist trend.

Let me summarize the main points of some books by Gennady Ziuganov, the leader of the Russian communists (see, for example, Ziuganov, 1996;

Ziuganov, 1997. Ziuganov, who evidently has a team of ghostwriters, is a very prolific author indeed). Russia is a unique, continental, Slavic, Orthodox civilization. At the same time, Russia is the legitimate successor to the empire of Jenghiz Khan. Russia continued Jenghiz Khan's mission of uniting the Eurasian geopolitical space (Ziuganov is an assiduous student of the Eurasianists). The main achievement of the Soviet period was that the Russian state became even stronger; the main deficiency was that the Russian-ness of the Soviet Union was played down. Stalin understood this and wanted to strengthen the Russian character of the Soviet Union; but unfortunately he died too early.

Many Marxist ideas and doctrines contradict the Russian mentality and need revision. Thus, at present the struggle of states is substituted for the class struggle. Russia was always and still is opposed by the predatory Western civilization, which is negatively affected by Judaism. The current goal of the West is to destroy Russia and Russians once and for all. There are too many non-Russians in science, culture, mass media, and the state structure. This proves that Yeltsin's leadership remained pro-Western and thus anti-Russian.

I think that this is enough to create a clear picture of the contemporary ideological trend of the Russian communists. Whatever one calls them, they have ceased to be Marxists. We are now witnessing a merger of radical right wing extremism with renascent anti-capitalist populism on the conservative nationalist agenda.

Let me now turn to the party of power. One should keep in mind that a significant part of the Soviet/Russian establishment, including the Party, the military, and the secret service, had been indoctrinated with ideas of Russian nationalism even before the *perestroika* period (Solovei, 1994: 58 ff.). Many of these people remain in power today. In the new situation, they are additionally attracted to nationalism, because it can provide them with a new legitimization of power. To other members of the Russian political elite, nationalism has become a matter of expedience.

Since 1994, *derzhavnichestvo*, statism, has almost become its official ideology, just like a little later its demonstrative anti-Americanism. For various reasons anti-Americanism is growing in the country, and in this respect the Russian leadership is following and at the same time instigating the public mood. Many Russians cannot forgive America for winning the Cold War and especially for the consequences of defeat, which they consider a national humiliation. The Russian leadership considers the U.S. and NATO to be the forces that prevent Russia from reestablishing her hegemony in East Central Europe and even within the CIS.

Actually, the Russian political elite is trying to sit on two chairs simultaneously, but not very successfully. In principle, the propagated state patriotism and allegiance to the strong and mighty state can be ethnically neutral. In Russia it is not. In some respects, the propagated ideology of *derzhavnichestvo* is a more circumspect nationalism, but it is still ethnic Russian nationalism. Remarkably, the name "Russian Federation" has been almost dropped from the official lexicon.

When the incomplete break with the Soviet past is accompanied by a growing desire to associate with the Russian imperial past and its symbolism, which non-Russians in the country completely reject; policy cannot be ethnically blind. When the state provides one of the many denominations in the country

with the *de facto* status of state religion, policy cannot be ethnically neutral. When the new law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Affiliations promulgates that Orthodoxy is an inseparable part of the all–Russia historical, spiritual, and cultural legacy, this law cannot be neutral with regard to non–Russian and non–Orthodox citizens of the country.

In Russia, all ideas of *derzhavnichestvo* imply two assumptions. First, that the interests of non–Russian nationalities should coincide with the interests of ethnic Russians. Second, that the Russians have special responsibilities for the preservation and strengthening of the state, and are acting in the interests of all Russia's people. To pursue this line of argumentation to its logical end, one may say that the one hundred thousand victims of the Chechen wars were slaughtered for their own sake.

For several years, Yeltsin's leadership was striving, although without great success, to work out a new national idea for the country. These attempts have not only revealed a deeply rooted authoritarian mentality, but also a specific vision of the post–Soviet Russian state. In a society which is already somewhat pluralistic, such an ideology can be promoted and disseminated only by the state and inevitably would be a statist ideology with strong nationalist and anti–liberal accretions. However, everything indicates that the new leadership in Russia is not going to abandon this endeavor. The policy of authoritarian centralism that President Putin is imposing upon the country is to a large extent influenced by many concepts of Russian nationalism. The claim to Russia's uniqueness is now officially confirmed by the words of the old / new: "You are unique in the world, one of a kind."

And what about the liberals? They also contributed to the growth of pro–empire sentiments, because in their struggle with the communists and their negative attitude towards the Soviet period they began to appeal to the idealized pre–revolutionary past. What is more important, however, is that at present even the liberals have different attitudes to ethnic nationalism in the country. There are still staunch liberals and Westernizers who disdain all forms of nationalism, especially the Russian variety; but there are also growing numbers of other, so–called liberal statist or liberal imperialists, who are ready to make concessions to Russian nationalists. A few years ago, many of these supported the first Chechen war, and many more now support the second. In private conversations, some of them explained to me that they had to bow to the public mood. According to a poll taken by the Moscow Humanitarian Academy, 61 percent of Russians favor the restoration of a unitary state of the kind that existed in pre–1917 Russia (*Russia Today*, January 4, 2001).

To sum up, at the moment Russia lacks a consensus with regard to the concept of nation, and common identifications are very weak in the country. In these conditions of social and political fragmentation, nationalism has become a very important factor in the country's development, and, unfortunately, it could not be otherwise.

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