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HISTORY AS AN APOLOGY FOR TOTALITARIANISM

Abstract
This article discusses selected publications which reinterpret Russian history in a spirit of rehabilitating the Soviet past and highlighting the USSR's role as a vehicle for Russia's assumed historical role (including Utkin 1993, Utkin 1999a, Utkin 1999b, Solzhenitsyn 1995, Solzhenitsyn 2001–2002, Mel'tyukhov 2001, Narochnitskaya 2005c, Narochnitskaya 2005a, Mitrofanov 2005). In addition to this, it contextualises them with initiatives undertaken by the Russian Federation's government (including the standardisation of history textbooks' content and the activities of the Presidential Commission to counteract attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russian interests). The points of view presented here, which are considered representative for a certain part of the historical discourse in contemporary Russia, integrate Russia's totalitarian period (the USSR from 1917 to 1991) into the course of its broader history, as the basis of an interpretation which accepts *a priori* statements regarding the sense of Russia's history and her role in world history. Among the observed trends, this text highlights the approval of certain features of the communist dictatorship as corresponding to Russian ideology; the adaptation of Soviet ideology to Russia's policy of memory; the emphasis on ideological, political and military confrontation with the Western world as a permanent feature of Russian history; and the reinterpretation of Russian history in such a way as to continuously justify all the actions of the Russian state over the centuries, both externally (interpreting Russian aggression and imperialism as a means of defence against her enemies, liberation, or the reintegration of the Russian community) and internally (presenting terror as a means of defence against an alleged 'fifth column', or as the modernisation of the country).

Keywords: Russia, USSR, Communism, Russian ideology, politics of history, imperialism

On July 19, 1934, Joseph Stalin sent a letter to his Politburo colleagues entitled "On Engels' article »The foreign policy of the Russian Empire«" (Stalin 1941). Therein, Stalin unmasked the founding father of communist ideology as a German nationalist, and a defamer of Russian history and policy in the name of the eternal hatred of the Western powers competing with Russia. Although the letter from the leader of the Bolshevik Party was not published until seven years later – just a few days prior to the outbreak of the German-Soviet war – the moment it was sent marks a turning point in the Soviet system's approach to the history of Russia. A synthesis was proposed, between that which was imperial, that which had served the enlargement of the state and its military and political power in the history of pre-revolutionary Russia – and a new, Soviet identity. The historical synthesis of this new ideology was now being rebuilt around the Russian centre, which in this construction was once more surrounded by a hostile world: the Western powers and their 'agents'. Russia's past, which in previous years the Bolsheviks had generally considered just like the then Russian present – as an area of brutal conquest – evolved from 1934 into a treasury of models of Soviet patriotism, such as Prince Alexander Nevsky, Field Marshal Suvorov, Admiral Nakhimov, and – as finally immortalised in Eisenstein's film – Ivan IV the Terrible himself, who was considered a prototype for Stalin as he battled the state's internal and external enemies. Stalin wiped the dust of the internal enemies from his shoes in the thirties; and he dealt victoriously with the latter from the end of the decade. The war of 1941–1945 (and the achievements made as a result, which extended the Russian reach beyond the farthest borders of the former Empire) disseminated and established a specific type of Soviet-Russian patriotism. In the end, this became his greatest monument.

This is a monument to the Empire and its victims, a monument to the Empire of Victims, a monument to the victims sacrificed to the Great Empire. Russia was the first victim of the Soviet form of totalitarianism; but in fact she became its double victim when she began to identify with the system that had raped her. Along with that profound identification returned the cult of the greatness of the state and

of its separate civilisational identity, which is threatened by the stranger, the West, as well as by internal collaborators – within Russia itself. Russia still falls prey to these enemies, although she defends herself sacrificially against them to this day – as during the Great Patriotic War; the War of 1812 against the French; and in 1941 against the Germans; and four hundred years ago against the Poles. While defending herself, her endangered territory, at the same time Russia takes the brunt of this fight against the greatest evil, which threatens not only her, but the whole world: the dominance of the Western empire of evil: that of the 'Jesuits', of Napoleon, of Hitler (and today, we might add, of USA).

The scheme which I outlined here in simplified form in the introduction revealed all its potency in the celebrations in Moscow of the 60th anniversary of the Victory. At that time one could see the degree to which the synthesis originally proposed by Stalin seventy years ago now forms the framework of state propaganda in Putin's Russia. The characteristic features of the press reports which set the tone for the celebration of this anniversary in Moscow have been discussed on another occasion (Nowak 2005), so here I will refer to them only in the margins of my further reflections on the Russian state's contemporary struggle for history.

Above all, it is essential to recognise the state's involvement in this struggle. It is hard to find direct precedents for the scale and multidimensionality of this commitment – unless we seek them in non-democratic systems, in which the central government is trying to wield, if not total control, then at least the maximum possible influence over the political imagination of its subjects and the external image of the country.

The 'military-patriotic' TV channel *Zvezda* was launched in 2005 (symbolically on April 22, Lenin's birthday), in close connection with the upcoming 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Present at the channel's opening ceremony were the defence ministers of contemporary Russia (Sergei Ivanov) and of the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev era (Dimitri Yazov). Both univocally emphasised that the special patriotic television channel was intended to be a particularly important weapon in the fight against 'those in the West' who were trying to 'belittle our victory' (Varshavchik 2005). The upper chamber of the Russian parliament, the Federation

Council, has organised special meetings of deputies, heads of agencies, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with the minister himself, Sergei Lavrov), who together are developing a strategy to counter the 'efforts to slander Russia' and her history in the propaganda efforts of neighbouring countries (particularly the Baltic republics and Poland) (Bielecki 2005). President Putin's administration has appointed a special committee for cultural ties with Russia's neighbours (from the former USSR), which is colloquially referred to as 'the committee for the prevention of orange revolutions'. And in this institution, according to the words of its leader, the philosopher Modest Kolerov, a very important role were to be focused on the problem of disputes over the interpretation of history – the history of the Russian Empire, which is to be portrayed as the eternal source of freedom and civilisational progress for its former peripheries (Russian: *okraina*), now its neighbours (Kolerov 2005). It was also decided to launch a global, English-language TV channel, *Russia Today*, in order for the Kremlin's vision of Russia to reach an even wider potential audience. It was planned to be broadcast across Europe, most of Asia and North America (Savitskaya 2005).

Memorial to the fallen Soviet soldiers (Stanisław Pomprowicz, 1962). War cemetery. Dukla, Poland. 2012. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

The list of such institutions could go on and on, with the electronic media, today's 'engineers of souls', at its head: these are the people who, at the initiative of Russia's government circles, have currently been appointed to fight for the 'purity' of her past and present image. More striking and more closely related to the issue of the dispute over the memory of the Soviet (and Russian) past, however, are the efforts of the Russian central government to decide the appropriate (in their eyes) canon of national history which should be taught in schools.

The first event shaping the content of Russia's new history textbooks after 1991 was noted by Vladimir Buldakov in his interesting analysis (Buldakov 2003, p. 10–11):

> "After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many former Soviet historians, particularly 'historians' of the CPSU, transformed themselves into historians of the traditional Russian state and 'patriotic' defenders of the Fatherland. They promoted a great wave of xenophobia, ethno-phobia, and anti-Semitism. […] They did not rediscover national history, but the possibility of identifying themselves with the new rulers. Such chameleon-like historians can have a great, although non-articulated, influence, not only on society, but on other historians."

In the 1990s, the state did not set any strict ideological or factual content for its history textbooks. In most of them, the specific common denominator was created from the bottom up, in the process of matching the contents of the former, great-power/Soviet vision of history to the new reality. Ewa Thompson's overview of the books published in this period highlights several specific points of this textbook *consensus* between the 'old' and the 'new'. First, most general idea of these publications is to retain the view of history as an arena of a ruthless struggle waged in the Leninist spirit of '*кто кого*'. The basic instruments of this struggle are military power and technology. For the Russian students who were the audience of these textbooks, the objective of this struggle – and the second assumption – was to maintain their country's position as a superpower. The third assumption can be reduced to a replication of the synthesis which was finally expressed by Nikolai Karamzin: the history of Russia begins in Kyiv and has

maintained a natural unity for twelve centuries. This 'natural unity' renders incomprehensible the existence of such distinct countries as Ukraine, and the inclusion of their territories into the Muscovite state can be called 'reunification'. The Russian Empire's subsequent conquests are generally presented as a continuation of this 'natural' process of 'reunification', or the 'voluntary' association of successive areas to the St. Petersburg-Muscovite centre (Thompson 2000, chapter 7).

A similar set of features characterising the majority of syntheses in Russian history textbooks are listed by the above-mentioned Vladimir Buldakov. He draws attention to the fact that they do not mention any turn towards the alternative centre of Russian political tradition – Novgorod the Great, with its democratic parliamentary symbolism; but rather they uphold the scheme which inseparably binds Russia to Kyiv, which at present the latter has been 'detached' from the former. The 'ideal' which emerges from most textbooks can be summarised as follows: "a strong paternalistic state that guides society and defends it from its enemies". This educational ideal was criticised by some liberal circles, just as the consistent pushing of the Empire's non-Russian peoples and their fate to the margins of the textbook syntheses provoked official protests from representations of 20 republics and national districts (Buldakov 2003, pp. 13–15). On the other hand, for the most chauvinistically-inclined part of modern Russia's political spectrum, the choice of history textbooks did not guarantee enough 'patriotic' education, and was also subject to criticism (Tarasov 2000).

The reason for this particular criticism was primarily the fact that there was too much choice. Indeed, in 2002 the number of school textbooks on Russian history exceeded 100 (of which 70 had been approved by the Ministry of Education). So the authorities started to deal with this mess. By October 2000 the government had approved the National Programme for Education, which was intended to support the planned 'restoration of Russia's status as a great power.' In March 2002, President Putin 'informally' met a group of scientists which included Professor A.N. Sakharov, the director of the Institute of Russian History at the Russian Academy of Sciences. The President suggested that the state had finally entered a period of 'post-revolutionary stabilisation' – which historians should

also reflect in their work. Professor Sakharov (who is himself the author, editor and reviewer of many history textbooks) reflected this doctrine a month later, in a speech on TV's channel 1, in which he stated that the stabilisation of a great country with a great history is always linked to the personage of a wise leader… (Buldakov 2003, p. 15–16).

In 2003, the Ministry of Education evaluated 107 history textbooks, in order eventually to reduce the selection to a maximum of three for each grade. When it was pointed out to President Putin that one history book on the twentieth century contained critical comments about his rule, the Ministry immediately removed that textbook from the list of those authorised for use; the President then stated that the teaching of history should expose only those facts that "promote a feeling of pride in one's own country". The Ministry, in turn, responded to this remark by selecting Textbook No. 1 for the teaching of twentieth-century history. With regard to this work, which is likely to become the only one recommended for use, Maria Lipman has written: "[it] makes no mention of Stalin's ethnic deportations (perhaps to avoid a 'distorting' connection with the current then Chechen war), largely reduces the period of the Red Terror to 1936–[19]38 and describes the years of Putin's rule in laudatory terms" (Lipman 2004).

We have already noted the special, top-down efforts to develop a historical synthesis which distinguish contemporary Russia. It is time now to look at the ideological objectives which they serve. Let us then recall two elements of this textbook synthesis as recommended by the Ministry of Education: the apologia for contemporary Russia and the Putin regime itself is closely connected here with the drive to purge Stalin's Soviet Union of its worst connotations. In this reading, Stalin is the builder of a great state, of its status as a superpower. Putin is the restorer. In the name of the principle which is power and the global importance of the state, other reasons must give way. And *vice versa*: anything which weakens the state, regardless of the reason behind it, must be condemned.

A kind of official stamp on this 'philosophy of history' was bestowed by President Putin himself in the concise formula of his annual address to the nation of April 25, 2005, when he called the disintegration of the Soviet Union "the greatest

geopolitical catastrophe of the century". However, few people still remember the words of another address, given 14 years earlier as 'A Word to the People' (after Neumann 1996, p. 179):

> "A great, unheard-of disaster is happening. Our MOTHERLAND, our soil, the great state that history, nature and our renowned forefathers have trusted us with, is going under, is being destroyed, is descending into darkness and nothingness. […] Shall we let the betrayers and criminals take away our past, cut us off from the future and leave us pitifully to vegetate in the slavery and downtroddenness of our almighty neighbours?"

This rhetorical address was given at the end of July 1991 in *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, and served as the ideological inspiration for the coup attempt made a month later in defence of the Soviet Union. Was President Vladimir Putin, in 2005, continuing the ideas that guided then Vice-President Gennadi Yanayev in August 1991? The current president has strongly and repeatedly declared that there will be no return to the Soviet Union. There is no reason to dispute the credibility of those declarations. The communist ideology and the communist one-party system which formed the core of the Soviet Union have clearly been rejected by the Russian president, just as a clear majority of Russian society has rejected it. We compare excerpts from his official statement here with the ideology of Yanayev's putschists in order to draw attention to the fact that the communist content was irrelevant in **both** cases. Both addresses are dominated by references to the heritage which the Great State created. It is a state which became the most powerful during the Soviet period, but which was previously linked to the forces of 'history' – Russian history – and 'nature.'

History and nature, woven together in the greatness and unity of the state, which was given the most complete form by Joseph Stalin: these are very important premises of the specific teaching which the last defenders of the Soviet Union appealed to. The same elements appear in the ideological construction of the Putin regime. They have their logical complement in one more point. As the Great State linked both history and nature, they could only have been violated by malevolent external forces. These are directly referred to in the above-mentioned

'Word to the [Soviet] People' from 1991. When looking at the then 'special relationship' between Presidents Putin and Bush, and then the even more 'special' relations (until recently) between the Russian leader and the then German Chancellor [Schröder] and French President [Chirac], it is hard to imagine any official references to that clearly xenophobic, anti-Western element of the Russian-Soviet synthesis. And yet, it suffices to remember President Putin's first political address to the Federation Council from 2000. With less pathos, the Russian president reiterated what the instigators of the 1991 coup had warned of: "Russia collided with the systemic challenge to the state sovereignty and territorial integrity, it stood face to face with forces seeking the geopolitical '*перекройка*' [rebuilding] of the world" (*Poslanie* 2000). The evil forces are still out there, and they are still seeking to weaken the USSR's geopolitical state-heir, to shrink its territory, to deprive it of its sovereignty and global relevance. As Vladimir Putin began his first term in office as President of the Russian Federation, he made it clear that he could see these forces and intended to deal with them – not through confrontation, but rather by means of a subtler game. This game is still ongoing. Its character and its intricacies are the subject of political scientists' analyses. At this point, it suffices for us to say that whereas Putin's Russia emphasises the element of partnership to his Western partner-rivals in the game, in his ideological teaching addressed to the Russian people themselves, he rather recalls the rivalry, and even the element of permanent external threat.

These themes did not come out of nowhere. They have been continually present in Russian public discourse since the fall of the Soviet Union. They did not come to predominate immediately, but developed gradually. It is worth recalling some of their specific manifestations, even briefly, in order to better understand the historical consciousness which the Putin regime draws upon and which at the same time contributes to its construction.

Immediately after 1991, when Boris Yeltsin was building up his political position by his clear juxtaposition of the new Russia (governed by himself) to the old communist system, positive references to the Soviet Union were limited primarily to nationalist-communist opposition circles. Yeltsin effectively marginalised this current of opinion, represented

by newspapers such as *Den*, *Zavtra*, *Pravda* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, in political life. However, it steadily continued to develop its argument and potency within intellectual circles. The representatives of the academic elite of the recent Soviet period had not lost their scientific positions: they remained members of the Academy of Sciences, directors of institutes, heads of departments, professors of universities. Some of them went in the direction suggested by the new government; some of them continued working for purely scientific purposes. However, some of them carried out intellectual work which involved the adaptation of the old Soviet ideology to the situation faced by the new Russian Federation, then regarded as the heir to the Soviet Union – an heir which was obliged to fight for the entirety of the great inheritance. The 'scientific expertise' created in this spirit quickly brought astonishing results. Researchers at the Institute of General Genetics of the Russian Academy of Sciences discovered a common genetic code among the inhabitants of the Soviet Union – which *Pravda* cited at the end of 1992 as evidence of the natural character of the unity which the disintegration of the Soviet Union had brutally violated (cf. *Pravda* September 9, 1992; Tolz 2001, p. 239). From another sphere of research, some Russian geologists pointed to the fact that the Russian (Eurasian) geological platform reaches to the former western borders of the USSR as proof of the Great State's natural spatial dimensions. (This geological argument was put forward by A. Gubin and V. Strokin; see Gubin and Strokin 1991, p. 7).

In 1994 the elite of Russian sociologists from the Academy of Sciences presented an extensive study of the reforms and transformation of the country undertaken hitherto. They crowned them with the title 'theses on the future', most of which were associated with a characteristic evaluation of the state's past. In the first thesis, the authors stated that

> "the Empire-Union (Soviet) was not the product of the natural aggressiveness of the Muscovite rulers, but the result of the natural-historical, political and economic integration of the interests of nations which voluntarily and knowingly combined their efforts and sought defence in one of the most developed civilisation on the planet in material and cultural terms – the Rus'ian Russian (*русской российской*) civilisation."

Their seventh and last thesis expressed an almost messianic conviction that not only will Russia reunite the nations of the 'Empire-Union', but it will create a new "epicentre [*sic*] of global economic and spiritual life". This new Eurasian Union will create a model for the whole world of how an industrial society can transition to a post-industrial society of stable development in harmony with nature. "Time is on the side of Russia and the union of fraternal peoples." With these words ends not a journalistic manifesto by an original party, but a nearly 400-page volume of analysis issued by the Institute of Socio-Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (*Reformirovanie* 1994, p. 370–371).

We quote this work not because its theses are so original, but because they are so typical – typical in making the link (common in Russian intellectual practice after 1991) between the 'rubber stamp' of academic analysis and the ideological project of rebuilding the 'Empire-Union' in the name of the noblest slogans. One could list hundreds of such books, analyses, and studies all signed with professors' titles from the most diverse fields, above all the social sciences. The outline of ideological interpretation which emerges from them – what the Russian political community is, what its past was like, how its present state can be evaluated, and what its prospects for the future are – was clearly linked to disillusionment with the results of the political-economic reforms and the collapse of Russia's superpower prestige. In this sense of crisis, ideas returned which had already been tested in a similar situation, earlier in the history of Russian thought – after the defeat in the Crimean War in the mid-19th century, and the shock of the reforms along the Western model which were undertaken at that time. And now once again, Russia (in the interpretation of its intellectual elites) felt deceived by the West, and confirmed in its opinion of its essential civilisational distinctiveness. The 'Empire-Union' was its political fundament, which had been undermined by the attempts to Westernise further.

In characteristic fashion, the synthesis of this feeling with the recent memory of the USSR's rivalry with the 'imperialist bloc' during the Cold War was undertaken by (among others) the director of the Centre for US Research at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Anatoli Utkin. The first chapter of this synthesis was presented in a journal which itself could be

The Russian tricolor and the ribbon of Saint George. War cemetery. Dukla, Poland. 2012. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

regarded as a symbol of this line of thought – the CPSU's theoretical organ *Kommunist*, which in 1992 has changed both its publisher and its name to *Svobodnaya mysl'* ['Free Thought']. Nevertheless, the symbolic title of the article, 'Russia and the West' (Utkin 1993, p. 3–14) signified a return to the tradition of the sharp juxtaposition of the two title characters. Russia cannot become the West. This is an axiom that Utkin exemplifies once again by the results of the reforms of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin era. However, he poses another important question: how can Russia's distinctiveness and its related interests (also geopolitical) be defended against the invasion of the West? And he responds in a way that justifies the need for modernisation, of which Peter I's reforms serve as a model for him. Russia must assimilate the West's institutional and technical achievements into itself, and fight for her interests and preserve her own individuality. Peter's reforms saved Russia from the fate of the peoples of Africa and Asia who were colonised by the West. Modernisation is a game played with the West – against the West itself – for Russia's survival as a separate, sovereign civilisational-political entity. According to Utkin's reasoning, the Soviet period was an effective extension of this game (for 70 years) for the independence of the Russian political community from the 'Faustian' Western model which seeks to control the whole world. In 1991, Russia capitulated to the West, as had done so previously India, China, Turkey, and Japan. However, a return to the game for independence is only possible, Utkin seems to suggest, if Russia rejects the 'blindness' of the contemporary modernisers who have forgotten her fundamental interests and separate system of values.

A few years later, Utkin dotted the 'i's and crossed the 't's on his assessment of the Soviet period, in a volume advertised as 'the new *Viekhi*' – a new manifesto critical of the Russian intelligentsia, 90 years after the first one. In this work, he described Stalin as the greatest master of this game for the greatness and sovereignty of Russia: a master whose diplomatic achievements – led by the post-Yalta global order he devised – should serve as a lesson for contemporary Russian politicians. Utkin also supplemented this example with an open apologia for communism, as the system that made Russia a superpower which displayed both

exceptional scientific and technological performance and had the capacity to provide decent living conditions and spiritual development for its multi-ethnic population (Utkin 1999a, pp. 185–213; Utkin 1999b, pp. 228–239).

Many other authors within the circle of academic political science, sociology, and history have followed the same path – from disappointment at the effects of Gorbachev's '*perestroika*' and the 'democratisation' of Yeltsin's early years toward the rehabilitation of the Soviet period. Many other representatives of the Russian cultural elite have not moved so far, and still unequivocally reject and condemn the Soviet period. At the same time, however, the growing criticism of the latest attempts to 'Westernise' Russia have aroused in them an increasingly visible nostalgia for a 'real' Russia – the older, pre-revolutionary, imperial, tsarist Russia. The symbol of this orientation, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, gave striking examples of such an apologia for imperial Russia in his mid-90s publication *The Russian question at the end of the twentieth century*. Dressed in a semblance of academic argumentation, the great writer's historical rhetoric underpinned several theses which were duplicated in countless variations by other publications at the same time. To mention just a few of them:

Firstly – institutions and political models derived from the West or imposed by the West upon Russia can only be harmful for her. In a striking way Solzhenitsyn puts down the thesis that the medieval merchant republic of Novgorod could have been a systemic alternative to the authoritarian regime in Moscow; in the spirit of nineteenth-century tsarist propaganda, he presents the republican Novgorod model as having in reality been a 'rotten oligarchy', which did not offer its subjects even a little more freedom than the Muscovite system, and instead exposed the state to a fatal anarchy. As Karamzin did before him, Solzhenitsyn discerned salvation in strong tsarist rule, with genuine support from the masses of faithful subjects. The threat to this system comes from the West – and the symbol of this, as Solzhenitsyn put it, was the Time of Troubles in the seventeenth century, which he reduces almost exclusively to 'Polish intervention'. The West, represented by Latin Poland, tried to take away Russia's Orthodox 'soul', its civilisational distinctiveness. The Russian people rose up against the Western invaders

and saved its identity, as Solzhenitsyn reminded his readers. Incidentally, he did this just as Boris Yeltsin was introducing a new holiday in place of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution – National Day, the anniversary of the expulsion of the Poles from the Kremlin [November 7, 1612].

Secondly – the territorial shape of the Russian state was extended in a series of just wars to unify the legacy of Kievan Rus. In this sense, Solzhenitsyn completely justified the partitions of Poland, which Russia carried out with the participation of Prussia and Austria. There was no room in Solzhenitsyn's vision for the separation of these lands – that is, all of Ukraine and Belarus – from Russian statehood.

And finally, thirdly – the great Empire which Russia eventually built in the nineteenth century differed fundamentally from all others, in particular the Western empires. It was built in a way that benefited the nations attached to it, and actually handicapped the Russian centre. Some nations, like the rebellious Poles, did not appreciate these blessings (as Solzhenitsyn stated with some regret), confirming one more *cliché* from the most primitive tsarist propaganda (see Solzhenitsyn 1995, p. 5–9, 25–31, 38–46, 64–65; see also his other fundamental apologia for the Russian Empire, combined with his accusation against its '*инородские*' elements ['of foreign origin'] – the history of the Russian and Jewish peoples' coexistence in one state later published by Solzhenitsyn [Solzhenitsyn 2001–2002], and the no less fundamental criticism of this history by Semyon Reznik [Reznik 2003]).

Russia, a separate civilisation, threatened by the political and cultural aggression of the West, which is willing to exploit every Time of Troubles the Russian state experiences; Russia, a great state, created in justice and for the good of the nations 'connected' within it: these themes, which found an authoritative defender in Solzhenitsyn, were widely read as confirmation of the diagnosis that the Russia of the 1990s was once again enduring a Time of Troubles, a new threat; and the West (or at least some of its politicians) was cynically exploiting this situation to finally reduce the importance of the Russian political-cultural community. More and more representatives of the Russian elite came to share this view – even those who had shared the hopes the decade had begun with, for the rapid 'normalisation' of Russia, understood as assimilation

of the many fields of Russian life to the living standards of the most advanced Western states (see Billington and Parthé 2003; Billington 2004).

When Russia pulled herself up extremely quickly by her own strength after the financial crisis of 1997 – thanks to the rising prices for the raw energy materials she exported – her sense of the possibilities of achieving such a solution began to grow rapidly. When NATO expanded in 1999, to include the USSR's former satellites (Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and with the Baltic states already in the queue) and used its forces in a military strike on Orthodox, Slavic Serbia (which was generally perceived in Russia as its natural client), it strengthened the feeling that the conflict between Russia and the West was definitely something real, and that Russian politics had to face this reality. Russia, the 'natural defender of truth and justice', was once again ready to appear on the global stage in this role, while at the same time preparing to defend her interests effectively in her (also 'natural') sphere of influence. That was the moment when Boris Yeltsin handed power to Vladimir Putin.

It was also the moment when the historical apologia for the Russian Empire – as a talisman of Russia's 'separate path' in history – was able to meet the rehabilitation of the Soviet system, or at least those aspects of it which could be interpreted as signs of Russia's strength as a superpower. Almost a decade had passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The memory of the humiliation and hardships during the last decade of 'reform and democratisation' had already begun to outweigh the memory of the 'inconveniences' of the old system. As this distance increases, nostalgia for the bygone symbols of the state's greatness will begin to prevail over the memory of the victims whom the state had consumed. After the destruction of the monuments to the Soviet executioners, it was time to rebuild them, or at least to hold ever more open discussions about the need to rebuild them (here the renewed attempts to rebuild the monument to Feliks Dzherzhinsky in front of the NKVD's former HQ at the Lubyanka in Moscow are of symbolic importance).

The time had come to construct a new historical memory. From among the innumerable examples of those which appeared at the fringes of academic history and popularisation

as professed in Russia, one may choose an expression which is extreme in its openly ideological overtones – the work of the Dean of the History Department at the University of Saint Petersburg, the eminent medievalist Igor Froyanov (who joined the CPSU only after it had been officially dissolved). He presents Russian history as a perennial war against a foreign, Jewish (the 'Judaising' [*жидовствующие*] sect active at the turn of the sixteenth century) or Vatican (starting from 'the Pope's pupil' Zoe Palaeologou, wife of Ivan III) agency. According to this author, this war, in which not only the greatness of the state is at stake, but the very survival of the Russian nation, intensified during the Soviet period – then the role of Russia's saviour against foreign influences was assumed first by Lenin and then Stalin, who gradually eliminated the importance of the anti-Russian, Jewish elements in the Soviet system (whose representatives were firstly Marx himself, then the 'merchant of the revolution' Helfand-Parvus in 1917, and finally the Jewish members of the Politburo of the Bolshevik party's Central Committee). In this approach, the peak of this success for Russia's *raison d'état* was the conquest of all Central and Eastern Europe after 1945, when – as Froyanov interprets it – Stalin succeeded in realising the vision of Nikolai Danilevsky: a powerful Slavic bloc under the aegis of Russia. This bloc was able to resist the onslaught of the West's evil forces and realise the great ideals of Russian civilisation. Unfortunately, the infiltration of foreign influences which began after Stalin's death lead to open treachery and to the catastrophe symbolised (according to the author) by the Yeltsin period (Froyanov 1997; Froyanov 1999).

An example of the 'creative continuation' of such thinking may be found in a historiosophical book from 2005 by Aleksei Mitrofanov. He is a politician (i.a. he was the deputy chairman of Zhirinovsky's 'Liberal Democratic Party' [and since 2007 is a member of 'A Fair Russia']) who has apparently been inspired by the thoughts of professional historians such as Froyanov. He presents not only an extensive analysis of the genius of Stalin as Russia's greatest geopolitical strategist, but also a thorough justification of all the purges he committed: the ethnic cleansing in the second half of the 1930s (for example, the liquidation of 'potential centrifugal forces' was, after all, the same thing as Roosevelt had done to the Japanese in the

US after 1941); the liquidation of the old Bolshevik cadres in 1937–1938 ("according to most historians," Mitrofanov writes, "was based on annihilating a potential fifth column while on the brink of war"); and the trial of the 'cosmopolitans' in the so-called Leningrad case in the late 1940s (St. Petersburg-Leningrad is a perennial source of Western plague and the nests of foreign spies in Russia). Immediately after Stalin's death the crisis begins, which only Yuri Andropov tried to stop. Betrayal won out. Now it can only be stopped by Stalin's methods, such as a crackdown on the 'oligarchs', as Mitrofanov updates his history lesson (Mitrofanov 2005, pp. 134, 154, 158–159 and many others).

The same direction is taken in the encyclopaedia of the Stalin era which was published under the auspices of an editorial committee including the names of famous professors (such as Aleksandr Panarin and the above-mentioned Anatoli Utkin) and literary critics (such as Lev Anninsky). This work aims to do justice to the "activities of J.V. Stalin – the prominent politician, wise national and international activist, victorious commander and deep thinker". We can see what it looks like in detail by looking up keywords such as 'GULAG' (the most humane form of punishment for the real enemies of socialism), and 'Katyn' (where the Germans murdered 22,000 Polish officers, and the document revealed by Gorbachev and Yeltsin with Stalin's signature ordering the execution is nothing more than a political forgery). "Anti-Soviet slanderers will not get far. The truth of socialism, the truth of Stalin's epoch is stronger," as the encyclopaedia concludes (Sukhodeev 2004, pp. 3, 98, 128–129).

We may highlight examples of seemingly more subtle apologias for the Empire and its conquest, combined with a rejection of all the arguments of its victims and critics. Some of these examples resemble academic monographs as closely as possible, such as the impressive (to judge by its size and source base) work of many years by the director of the Foreign Ministry's archive, P.V. Stegniy, which is dedicated to the role of Russia in the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. This work comes to exactly the same conclusions as did Solzhenitsyn and the previous work by the historian-propagandists of nineteenth-century Russia: Catherine the Great only took what was Russian; the division of weak states

into zones of influence is standard political behaviour; and there is no room for independent political actors between Russia and Germany (Stegniy 2002; see also the critique of this book's neo-imperial tendencies as presented in a review by Larissa Arzhakovaya, a researcher at the University of St. Petersburg: Arzhakovaya 2005).

This same trend was expressed more brutally in a book by Mikhail Mel'tyukhov, another professional historian in Moscow, which was dedicated to Polish-Soviet conflicts in the twentieth century. For Mel'tyukhov, these were just a fragment of the West's eternal aggression against Russia. When Russia (in this case, Soviet) goes on the counter-offensive, it does so only in order to take back what rightfully belongs to her. Stalin appears as the brilliant continuer of Catherine II. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet Union's participation in the invasion of Poland in September 1939 are therefore presented as purely defensive moves, expressing the necessity of the Russian *raison d'état*. These measures were marked not only by Stalin's profound realism, but by historical justice, and even – as Mel'tyukhov stated – by humanitarianism. In this context, the mass deportations of over half a million people from the lands occupied by the Red Army in 1939 to camps in the depths of the Soviet Union are presented as a 'peace operation', which avoided the murder by vengeful Ukrainians of Polish people by transporting the latter to Siberia (Mel'tyukhov 2001: see a comprehensive review of this book by A. Nowak, indicating in more detail the most important of the shocking falsehoods it contains; Nowak 2004, pp. 258–271).

Books like these which offer such interpretations of the history of Russia and the USSR, in titles like the works of Froyanov, Stegniy or Mel'tyukhov, can be found in abundance on the shelves of Russian bookstores. Of course, we cannot examine here all the titles which express this tendency, but nevertheless we can look more closely at one publication in particular which has the ambition to synthesise the whole of this broad trend. Its author is Natalia Narochnitskaya, a PhD in history, a senior researcher at the prestigious Institute for International Economics and International Relations at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and at the same time a deputy to the State Duma and vice-president of the Foreign Affairs Committee (from 2003–2007); from 2009–2012 she was

a member of the Presidential Commission to counteract attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russia; and since 2008, she has been the director of the Russian *Institut de la Démocratie et de la Coopération* in Paris. For many years (1982–1989) she worked as a Soviet representative at the UN Secretariat in New York; she has had the opportunity to encounter not only Western publications on Russia and the Soviet Union, but also the propaganda methods used to counteract their findings and theses. The skills which Natalia Narochnitskaya acquired in the Soviet diplomatic service could have been used in the service of the ideals expressed by her father Aleksei, a member of the USSR's Academy of Sciences who owed his position in Soviet historical research to his comprehensive analysis of Stalin's letter condemning the anti-Russian tendencies in the classics of Marxism (Narochnitsky 1951). The confrontation of the Cold War was thus fused with the vision of the West's eternal enmity towards Russia.

The twentieth-century section of this synthesis was recalled by Professor Narochnitskaya in a particularly impressive book published in 2005, *За что и с кем мы воевали* [For what and with whom we were fighting?]. It was the historical publication given most coverage by the Russian media during Moscow's celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Victory. Published in an edition of 30,000 copies (the average historical monograph in Russia has a circulation of 1000 copies), the work was entirely dedicated to an apologia for Stalin's policy during World War II – from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to Yalta and Potsdam – as the model of the Russian statesman's policy, wise and benign for all mankind (Narochnitskaya 2005a; see Narochnitskaya 2005d; Narochnitskaya 2005b).

But it is not this book which contains the most comprehensive and at the same time consistent image of the entire history of Russia as a country perpetually threatened with annihilation by aggression from the West, the country which most effectively defended itself against this aggression in the time of Joseph Stalin. That honour belongs to a volume of more than 500 pages, published by the same author in the same year, entitled *Россия и русские в мировой истории* [Russia and the Russians in world history].

The author begins her historical analysis almost exactly the same as Nikolai Danilevsky did 135 years before, and

cites the Russian historiosophist of Panslavism as her greatest authority. The introductory thesis posited by Danilevsky and Narochnitskaya consists of two premises and their ensuing logical conclusion: 1. The West rejects Russia and its specific historical and spiritual experience. 2. The West is in a stage of fatal crisis in its civilisation; *ergo* Russia following the West's path is a suicidal step. And not only for Russia; saving the whole world depends on saving her own political and spiritual sovereignty in the face of the West's inevitable destruction (Narochnitskaya 2005c, pp. 7, 21–23).

Narochnitskaya has therefore set herself an extremely ambitious task: to cleanse the history of Russia of the slander with which the last few centuries of hostile Western enemy propaganda has burdened it. This must be done so that the Russian people may regain their faith in the greatness of their homeland – so that they will rescue her, and so, once again, save the world. First of all, says Narochnitskaya, one must reject the Western spectacles through which Russian historians looked at their country's past, starting with Sergei Solovyov himself (in fact, Narochnitskaya accused the elder statesman of Russian 'state' historiography of the sin of Orientalism, i.e. of interpreting his country's history and achievements only in terms of foreign, Western categories, seen as somehow 'higher'). Russia has its own distinct paradigm of historical development, which Nikolai Karamzin understood before Solovyov, and which Narochnitskaya wishes to recall. Only when one accepts this Karamzin-perspective one can appreciate the qualities of Russia's distinctiveness, those very things which the West criticises her for. Following here in the footsteps of the Slavophiles, the former Duma deputy (i.e. the lawmaker) highlights the Russians' distaste for rigid standards and legal institutions, to which Russia has since the beginning (since the time of Alexander Nevsky) preferred the love of truth itself.

For Narochnitskaya, the essence of this truth is the statement that historically Russia has always been the victim of aggression, and never the aggressor. As she states, whatever may have been written about Russian imperialism, from the eleventh to the twenty-first century it has been the West – with its Eastern European Catholics (Poles and Hungarians) as its spearhead – which was constantly pushing eastwards.

It was only the Yalta-Potsdam system, achieved by Stalin, which changed this position, albeit for a mere 45 years (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 506). In this way, Narochnitskaya accomplishes not just an apologia for Stalin's policies and the superpower achievements of the Soviet Union, but also a denial of such 'details' of history as the Russian Empire's conquests under Peter I, Catherine II (who after all eliminated Russia's huge state-rival, the Polish-Lithuanian Republic) and Alexander I (who shifted the boundaries of the Russian Empire beyond the Warta, just 200 kilometres from Berlin). The author is fully aware of this fact, since she calls the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic in the eighteenth century "a notorious *cliché* of alleged Russian expansionism" (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 87). And so, in Narochnitskaya's historiosophic interpretation, Russia has been struggling for eleven centuries with a constant '*Drang nach Osten*' by the Latin West, the Vatican and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as she writes elsewhere (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 402). In a polemic with Richard Pipes, one of the 'slanderers of Russia' whom she most roundly condemns, Narochnitskaya says that in contrast to Western rulers, Moscow did not take a single square metre from the local landowners during the expansion of its rule (because this was not an expansion) [*sic* – Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 139; Narochnitskaya apparently does not want to consider what almost everyone, including Russian historians, has written about the mass expropriations and deportations of the local elites after the annexation of successive territories to the Muscovite centre…].

By only defending herself against aggression from the West, Russia has saved the West more than once, and Russia has also taken the fatal blows dealt against the West on her own breast: starting from the wars against the Mongols, through the wars against Turkey, and ending with the Great Patriotic War. The West, however, has always been ungrateful. Why? Because the West's aim has always been to exploit and destroy Russia. To confirm this discovery, Narochnitskaya discusses the broadly anti-Russian writings of Engels, only condemned by Stalin in 1934 (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 163–164). She also finds confirmation of this thesis in two maps, one published in a British journal (a satirical periodical, but

Monument to a Soviet soldier. Park at the Historical Museum – Mniszek Palace. Dukla, Poland. 2012. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

Narochnitskaya does not emphasise that) from 1890, and the second quoted in an anti-Masonic pamphlet in 1920. In the author's opinion, both maps reveal the West's serious and consistent plan to create a geopolitical desert in the area where Russia now stands (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 188–191). Like the columnists in *Pravda* or *Den*, who since the early 1990s have found hundreds of similar maps partitioning Russia, Narochnitskaya sees a plan to implement them in the condition of the Russian state after *perestroika* and the collapse of the USSR.

Like her immediate predecessors, she also mentions the end of World War I and the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution as the West's most important attempt to break Russia before 1991. For her, the central issue of this period is the interpretation of President Woodrow Wilson's policy – based on the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination – as essentially an act of anti-Russian geopolitical sabotage. Lenin and Trotsky were the executors of the same, anti-Russian policy, in line with the proclivities of the founding fathers of Marxism. The beginnings of the Soviet state mean not only the depletion of the territorial Empire, but also the humiliation of the Russian element, which was persecuted as part of the first Bolsheviks' policy of '*коренизация*' ['nativizating' Bolshevism] among the non-Russian ethnic elements. At that point, Russia was threatened with death.

Stalin saved Russia from such a death. He merely realised what Danilevsky had laid out before him: the essence of world politics is not class struggle, but rather the struggle between the West and Russia. The Russian people began to build their nation-state when their political leadership definitively adopted the vision of an inevitable confrontation with the West, and at the same time chose the ideal of a universal mission for its state – this had happened when the state of Ivan III adopted the doctrine of Moscow as the 'Third Rome'. Stalin returned to this concept – and from the mid-1930s, Russia began to revive. The prescient leader began to prepare Russia forcibly for the inevitable upcoming war: the processes of industrialisation and militarisation entailed costs, but without them Russia would not have endured into the next decade. The spiritual elements of these preparations were Stalin's restoration of pride in Russia's national greatness; the crackdown on the

historical school of Mikhail Pokrovsky, which had diminished this pride; and above all, the crackdown on the 'old guard' of Bolsheviks, with their anti-Russian objectives and (in the best cases) their dyed-in-the-wool anti-Russian prejudices. As Narochnitskaya states, the terror of 1937 was a lesser evil than what would have threatened Russia if Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin had won the struggle for power. The author even states that this group were dependent on the US's "Judeo-Masonic" policy (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 247–250). Along the way she reveals the true essence of the term 'Stalinism': 'This is a historiosophical axiom of an interpretation of world history within which Russia's great-power nature ceases to be an insult" (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 240).

Stalin therefore prepared Russia to fight to regain and maintain her great-power status. In Narochnitskaya's interpretation, the late 1930s revealed Stalin's strategic genius and his consistency in pursuing this goal. At that time the West was split. The greater danger to Russia (i.e. the USSR) came from the Anglo-Saxon camp, which wanted to drag her into the war against Germany. Stalin used the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to masterfully evade the traps which had been laid for Russia. Under this pact, Russia received only that which was 'rightfully' hers. According to Narochnitskaya, Stalin's attack on Poland in September 1939 was only an anticipation of the aggression that Poland was supposedly about to unleash on Soviet Ukraine, as the 'hyena' to Germany's policies. Stalin anticipated this and punished the 'Polish hyena'. However the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact is demonised today, continues Narochnitskaya, because in fact it represented the biggest defeat for the Anglo-Saxon strategy in the twentieth century – the defeat of the strategy of weakening Russia (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 259–264). Whenever Russia and Germany come to a *modus vivendi*, as happened in August 1939, it becomes a 'nightmare' for Anglo-Saxon interests. Stalin's pact with Hitler was only condemned because the propaganda of the Anglo-Saxon world imposed its perspective on the world – a perspective not of any objective morality or justice, but that of the interests of Washington and London (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 267).

The pact was broken by Hitler in 1941, but Russia did not demur from defending her interests. Not only

did the soldiers of the Red Army fight heroically for them, but Stalin above all took care to do so as well. As Narochnitskaya emphasises, continually appealing to the ideals of Orthodoxy – this was the time when the Soviet state underwent its historic unification with the Church and restored the activity of the patriarchate, to serve that same ideal which Stalin had undertaken – the greatness of Russia. In the heat of the Great Patriotic War a patriotic synthesis was forged. Stalin defended this spiritual booty in Yalta and Potsdam, where he was not fooled by his Western partners, but ensured the recovery of pre-revolutionary Russia's territory. In this way Russia became an obstacle to the Masonic plans for global unification which the Anglo-Saxon powers had been implementing. By adopting a tough stance in the negotiations over the future form of the U.N. at Bretton Woods in 1944, Molotov saved the world from global government (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 269–293).

Stalin not only rebuilt the geopolitical heritage of the Russian Empire, but he also secured it with a broad belt of satellite states, with Poland centrally located within it. This strong fortification of Russia, which Stalin provided her with, was the reason why the Anglo-Saxon powers declared the Cold War. The essence of the conflict was by no means the struggle against communism, but rather the traditional fight between the West and Russia, Narochnitskaya authoritatively declares, once again confirming the validity of Danilevsky's historiosophical forecasts (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 314–324).

In this conflict, Russia was forced to defend the natural zone of influence she had obtained by the same methods which her opponents used: in this perspective, "the USA's attack on Cuba" (as Narochnitskaya defines the Bay of Pigs incident of 1961) comes in response to the USSR's intervention in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 334–342). Stalin had no plans of aggression towards the West; he just wanted to retain what he had won for Russia in 1945. It was the logic of the Cold War which drew Khrushchev and Brezhnev into taking action on a global scale. The West conducted its great sabotage during this war under the banner of the so-called battle of democracy against totalitarianism. This is where Narochnitskaya most firmly opposes any

attempts to associate the Soviet Union (under Stalin) with the term 'totalitarianism' by comparing the Soviet system, which she defines simply as the hypostasis of Great Russia, to Hitler's criminal system. Totalitarianism is a propaganda concept, which in fact serves the struggle between the West and Russia, says Narochnitskaya, thus returning to the definitions from the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* of half a century before (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 343–344).

The second tool which the West used in its deadly sabotage of Russia's power was its solidarity with the 'captive nations' of all the non-Russian republics of the USSR and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this way, Western liberalism began once again to tighten its geopolitical forceps around Russia. Now the aim was not only to detach what Stalin had won at Yalta and Potsdam, but also the whole area of the West's traditional expansion and its principal tools in the east (Poland and the Vatican). This referred to Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Baltic republics. The slogan of independence for these countries was, and remains, only a cover for the West's anti-Russian policies. Narochnitskaya then presents the situations of these countries in turn. Of course Ukraine is a key country for her. Western strategists have also long understood this, and they have been working to artificially create a Ukrainian nationality, thus continuing the Uniate policy of the Vatican's anti-Russian aggression and the concepts of the nineteenth-century Polish rebels (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 429–443). While the policy of artificially creating the Ukrainian nation against Russia has borne some fruit, it has fortunately failed completely in the case of Belarus. At this point, Narochnitskaya advocates for Belarus to join Russia as soon as possible: it is a question of strengthening the Russian 'common element' by adding 12 million 'non-Westernised' Slavs who are free from those complexes about the West which have so weakened the Russian intelligentsia (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 443–446).

With regard to the Baltic states, Narochnitskaya's solution is a purely geopolitical argument: "either Russia or Germany was always the organiser of Eastern Europe" (Narochnitskaya 2005c, p. 476). The Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians received their states on the basis of a contract between the Second Reich and Soviet Russia in Brest in 1918, and so these

same powers had the full right to remove their statehood 21 years later under the pact between the Third Reich and the USSR (note that Vladimir Putin himself repeated this thought of Narochnitskaya's in an interview with German ARD/ZDF television on the occasion of the celebrations in Moscow in May 2005; *Intervyu* 2005). These states have now formally gained independence as part of the Anglo-Saxon *cordon sanitaire*, but in fact this happened completely illegally. As an argument supporting the thesis discrediting the Baltic countries, Narochnitskaya maintains (again, as Putin did so a year later during the May celebrations in Moscow and the propaganda clashes around Estonia's absence from and Latvia's protests at these ceremonies) that in the interwar period they were allegedly ruled by "fascist cliques", and during World War II they collaborated directly with the Third Reich (apparently only superpowers like the USSR had the right to cooperate with Hitler in an appropriate manner). In fact, the author adds as an example, that Lithuania was founded by Soviet Russia, despite the efforts of Poland and the West in 1920 – and it was awarded Vilnius by the USSR under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (pp. 490–493). With regard to Estonia, Narochnitskaya goes even deeper in order to refute that country's right to independence from Russia: she recalls that, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Nystad, which ended Peter the Great's victorious war against Sweden in 1721, Russia received the territory of present-day Estonia for a round sum of two million silver thalers. Since no-one has ever abrogated the Treaty of Nystad, the separation of Estonia from Russia is not only a violation of political justice, but a matter of the sacred right of property acquired (p. 495).

At the end of the book the author returns her attention to the fatal role Poland has played throughout the region. In the twentieth century, from Piłsudski to 'Solidarity', it has been directed in its successive uprisings not by anti-communism, but by its traditional policy of anti-Russian aggression which, so Narochnitskaya says, it has been ceaselessly conducting since the eleventh century. The author's words in summarising the topic are menacing: "The continual, centuries-old persistence of the anti-Russian policy of Eastern European Catholics, of independent Poland, impels one to deal with it seriously" (p. 507).

By remaining a tool of the West's strategy to weaken and destroy Russia, Poland, like the former Soviet republics, has not – notes Narochnitskaya – in any way gained independence in exchanging alleged totalitarianism for alleged democracy. Today, they are subordinated to the NATO system, just as they once were to the Warsaw Pact (p. 505). This swap will not be of any greater benefit to Russia, contrary to the illusions held by the pro-Western part of Russia's intelligentsia. The year 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union meant not only the collapse of Yalta and Potsdam, but also of the achievements of the whole of Russian history since the sixteenth century (p. 520).

To be reborn yet again, Russia must recognise this truth, which (as so often) is best expressed by Danilevsky, as the author reminds us: the Russians will never be accepted by the people of the West into a community of equal rights with them. Russia must once again prepare itself for harsh confrontation with enemies of its own size (in her polemic with the Eurasianists, on this occasion the author rejects the temptation to ally with Asian countries in the fight against the West, if that were to involve making any territorial concessions, such as returning the Kuril Islands to Japan, pp. 524–525). Quoting President Putin's address to the nation in 2000, which spoke about the need for Russia to confront the "systemic challenge" to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Narochnitskaya ends her work with an appeal to the religious foundations of Russian spirituality: Russia must defend its superpower position in order to redeem its God-given identity, and through that – as the only country able to resist the wave of global nihilism – to save the world.

One might just shrug one's shoulders at this – why discuss one book in such depth? Would it not be better just to ignore it and it's original theses? Well, let us repeat; the reason why it is worth paying so much attention to her is not that the book was published by one of the most prestigious publishing houses (*Международное Отношения*), nor because it had a relatively high print run for a history book (5000 copies of the 1st edition were printed). The reason is primarily that the theses contained in this book are not at all original, but typical: typical of hundreds of similar works, which in other prestigious publications often bear the names and titles of scholars from the finest academic institutions in Russia.

Natalia Narochnitskaya's book represents the eye-catching crest of a wave of such 'reinterpretations' of Russian history. Unfortunately, the truly great achievements of Russian historical research since 1991, which often enter into polemics with the theses that we have been discussing here, have been lost within this wave. In bookstores, in the media, in the size of their readership – today is the time of works like these mentioned above, the prime example of which is Narochnitskaya's book, and not of those by her critics.

We may also say: but after all, the wave of similarly megalomaniacal publications aimed at compensating for various national complexes is also sweeping through the other countries of the former Soviet Bloc, and is even beginning to rise in Germany. However these publications, while similar, are not the same. At the end, let us ask: what is the dangerous difference in the Russian publications we have discussed here, in which this 'totalitarian potential' can be perceived, but which is not so apparent in the works from other countries of Eastern and Central Europe from the last ten or twenty years which likewise prey upon history?

The difference lies in a combination of several factors. The first is the sheer size and potential – not so much totalitarian, but simply political and military – of the country involved in the phenomenon described here. As its size grows, so does the scope of the responsibilities and the scope of the risks – not only to the country itself, but to its neighbours in the region. Secondly, as we have indicated, the involvement of the country's political authorities in shaping the image of national history is very relevant. Of course, there are some elements of government influence on the popularisation of history in many countries – in the frameworks given to school textbooks, or the public celebrations of certain anniversaries, or the commemoration of selected heroes from the national past. However the fact is that in recent years, Russia has made a truly 'qualitative' jump in this respect.

In the end, though, what is more important is the choice of the values which one wants to promote and the heroes whom one wishes to put on a pedestal. In this respect, the situation in Russia is the most disturbing: the wave of historical 'revisions' concerns the choice of great-power values at the expense of individual freedoms, which

have been identified with 'oligarchic' lawlessness and the weakening of a great and just state. And it is not just anyone who is being put onto the pedestal – it is Stalin himself. It is a matter of justifying the greatest crimes of the Soviet system in terms of Russian history: both the crimes committed against the Russians themselves (such as the terror of 1937), as well as – and perhaps especially – those that the Soviet state committed against their non-Russian subjects (for example the Great Famine in Ukraine or, more broadly, ethnic cleansing of the late 1930s), and finally against the neighbouring countries – the crimes symbolised by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Katyn, the Yalta system, the interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It is a matter of the justification, or even the apologia, for totalitarianism in a country which has come to share the sad fate of one of the two main incubators of this terrible system.

The scale of this problem can be illustrated differently if we recalculate the ideological consequences of the Russian-Soviet revision of history. First, they are determined by the conclusion that the essence of the relationship between the great political communities is conflict, deadly conflict – as in Marx's class struggle, or the racial struggle as proclaimed by the philosopher from Trier's younger colleagues. Russian ideologues of history bring the core of this conflict down to a clash between Russia, Russian civilisation, and the West (the USA), which is unlawfully usurping the role of the model for global development. Since this struggle sums up the whole (or at least the most important) sense of reality, it is worth expending many individual freedoms, as it is not the individual alone, but only a powerful, centralised state which can be victorious in that fight. In this great conflict, there is no room for any independence for the countries situated between Russia and the West (whose border state is Germany). Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and especially Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia and Georgia – these are not political communities that can exist independently. They are inevitably pawns in the game of the great players – the opponents in the global conflict. If they are not with Russia, they become tools (prostitutes, as some Russian politicians prefer to say) of the West. After all, as Narochnitskaya – and Putin after her – says, the organisers of Eastern Europe can only be either Russia or Germany. This

brings us to the final conclusion: as the cause which Russia represents is just, every manifestation of her new expansion will essentially be a just form of *reconquista*.

The success of the Nazis in the Weimar Republic cannot be explained by anything better than resentment and its ideological exploitation, as its source was the sense of defeat in the First World War: a defeat interpreted as a great betrayal. During the Yeltsin period, which saw fluctuations between the sense of Russia's liberation from the shackles of the Soviet system and an increasingly strong sense of humiliation (geopolitical, prestigious, and even material) caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the latter sentiments started to prevail in the official statements of Russian politicians: the floodgates of historical resentment were opened – as in the Weimar Republic. Russia was identified as the victim of a great conspiracy by the West's evil forces, the deceit of *perestroika* and the betrayal of Russia's imperial periphery (*окраина*). The objects of organised envy and hostility, and in the end of hatred, the symbols of unattainable success, are the 'oligarchs', and beyond Russia – the countries of the former Soviet camp and the republics of the USSR, strongly supporting independence and the decisive adoption of a quicker way to the Western model of development: from Poland, via the Baltic countries, to Georgia and Ukraine. Stopping those states in their tracks, and confirming Russia's right to govern them by the 'old methods': this is precisely the 'call to retribution' which resounds so strongly in the new praise of Stalin, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta system which these revisions of history contain. Is all this enough, in order to define the visions of history described here as an element of totalitarian potential? Well, that depends on the definition of totalitarianism. The one closest to me is that used by Richard Pipes in his comparison of the three totalitarian regimes. The American historian pointed out that the most significant relationship between these systems can be found in the field of – psychology:

> "Communism, Fascism and National Socialism exacerbated and exploited popular resentments – class, racial, and ethnic – to win mass support and to reinforce the claim that they, not the democratically elected governments, expressed the true will of the people. All three appealed to the emotion of hate."

Remnants of the State Emblem of the Soviet Union on the pediment of the house at 15 Poznańska Street in Warsaw (the seat of the legation and then of the embassy of the USSR in the years 1924–1939) (ca. 1930). Warsaw, Poland. 2019. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

This, after all, is not a new way of interpreting the phenomenon of totalitarianism; it was intensified by the English philosopher Roger Scruton, who defined totalitarian ideology in the following way:

> "a pseudo-science that justifies and recruits resentment, that undermines and dismisses all rival claims to legitimacy, and which endows the not quite successful with the proof of their superior intellectual power and their right to govern […] Nothing is more comforting to the resentful than the thought that those who possess what they envy possess it unjustly. In the worldview of the resentful success is not a proof of virtue but, on the contrary, a call to retribution."

This wave of resentment expressing itself through the medium of history is, perhaps, the only real similarity between the Republic of Hindenburg and the state of Putin. Certainly it is not enough to draw conclusions about the imminent return of totalitarianism in Russia. However, it suffices as a warning to historians, or at least to the people who formally occupy this role. When one begins to treat the past instrumentally, to completely misrepresent some facts and silence others, in order to subordinate the need to seek truth to serve what one judges to be the superior imperative of political ideas, then one does not become an apostle for a just cause. One is nothing more than a jester. And it matters in whose court one serves. When one presents oneself as an apostle of the renovation of Russia, but proves to be nothing more than a jester at Stalin's court – then the matter is not only ridiculous; it is also, unfortunately, dangerous.

Among the many institutions created in successive years to determine the only correct vision of the history of World War II, one deserved special attention: the Presidential Commission to Counteract Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russian Interests (*Комиссия по противодействию попыткам фальсификации истории в ущерб интересам России*), which was established by presidential decree and operated between 2009 and 2012. At the same time, to increase its effectiveness, the ruling party in Russia prepared an interesting project for a federal law entitled 'On the prevention the rehabilitation of Nazism, Nazi

criminals and their collaborators in the new independent states on former Soviet territory'. In accordance with this law, "the Russian Federation – the continuer of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" arrogates to itself the right to ensure "historical correctness" on the territory of all "former republics of the USSR". The Russian project for this 'historical' law made this ambition more precise, by listing the countries that were to come under the historical and legal jurisdiction of Moscow. The project lists them in alphabetical order (of the Cyrillic alphabet), in an unexpectedly eloquent fashion: from Abkhazia to South Ossetia (*Южная Осетия*) – and between them, countries such as Ukraine on the one hand and Uzbekistan on the other, as well as three EU member states: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. In all these countries, the Russian administration and the Russian prosecutor's office were to have the right to fight for "the preservation of, and counteraction of slander to the memory of the victims who fell in the Great Patriotic War". What would have happened, had such a law come into force, to a Polish historian who tried to publish an article in a Russian historical journal, in which he discussed the subject of the two Molotov-Ribbentrop pacts (August 23 and September 28, 1939), and how the USSR cooperated as an ally with the Third Reich over the next 20 months? Since he is not a national of any of the countries of the former USSR, it is probably only the editors who would have run the risk of criminal sanction under the new law. But if a colleague from Lithuania had wanted to write a similar article – for example, concerning the liquidation of the Lithuanian state in 1940 as a manifestation of the Third Reich's alliance with the Soviet Union – he would already have had to consider whether the prosecutor's office of the Russian Federation would take an interest in the matter or not. In light of this proposed law, writing about the Soviet Union as an ally of the Third Reich could very likely be considered an 'extremist activity', and certainly as 'slandering the memory of the Great Patriotic War'. Although the 'historical law' project hung over the heads of researchers into the history of World War II for several years, in the end it did not come crashing down. However, the Russian authorities still find ways to prosecute such 'falsifiers' in criminal law. For example in September 2009, the FSB knocked on the door of Professor Mikhail Suprun, dean of

the faculty of national history at the Pomorye University in Archangelsk. He was charged with 'disclosing private data' in connection with a list of the victims of Stalinist persecution in the northern camps in the 1940s which he had drawn up as part of an international research grant.

The individual 'historical wars' being waged with Russia's neighbours (especially Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, previously Georgia, and now Ukraine) by Russian propaganda – as presented in hundreds of books, propaganda documentaries and feature films, the dozens of websites dedicated to these tasks, and the millions of posts online – is a topic for a separate, very extensive study. There is no room for them here. Let us summarise these considerations, albeit provisionally, by recalling a scene from reality. It was January 16, 2014. The 'Ukrainian crisis' had entered a decisive phase. The *Verkhovna Rada* controlled by President Yanukovych had adopted the so-called dictatorial act, which was intended to substantially curtail the freedoms of speech and assembly. Ukraine was supposed to return to the 'Russian world' (*русский мир*). But what is this Russian world based on? What is its essence? Is it in fact based on this kind of legislation – systematic, top-down, restrictive to freedom?

The most effective tool we can use to answer this question is, indeed, history. Vladimir Putin himself declared this; on that same day, January 16, 2014, he dedicated more than two hours of his precious time to meeting the representatives of a group which was drawing up a plan for the 'new educational-methodical complex for national history.' Put simply: he convened a meeting which discussed a new, uniform model for teaching history to all schoolchildren in Russia. He held several meetings on this issue with successive directors of the Institute of History at the Russian Academy of Sciences, including the Kremlin's 'court historian' (since Gorbachev's time), Aleksandr Oganovich Chubarian, as well as 'history officials' of lesser importance. Finally the time had come to resolve these matters once and for all. One textbook for all classes – divided into chronological sections for grades 5 to 11, in which history would be taught. Eighteen guests were invited to the meeting aimed at sealing this multi-year effort. They included the ministers of education and science and culture, the rectors of major universities, the heads of television stations, and

even President Putin's personal chaplain Tikhon Shevkunov, the archimandrite of the Sretensky Monastery. The clerk to the working group was the 'second person of the state', the speaker of the Duma and the chairman of the renewed Russian Historical Society – Sergei Naryshkin. He emphasised how great the scale of public consultation had been in developing the new, unified concept of Russian history – almost as great as the debate over the Stalinist constitution of 1936. This, of course, would refute the objections claimed by those who say that the new textbook will resemble the old '*Short Course of the History of the CPSU(b)*', noted chairman Naryshkin. To which came Putin's characteristic retort: "So why did you say 'the CPSU(b)' [short course] in a whisper? Are you afraid of it, or are you afraid that we'll be afraid?" (*Вы сами боитесь или боитесь, что мы испугаемся?*). This is a key remark: don't be afraid of comparisons with Stalinist times, don't be afraid of anything. After that remark, academician Chubarian expounded the essence of the new synthesis: we must show how the country "overcame difficult problems". He then enumerated these problems: the woeful and inglorious 'Polish intervention' at the beginning of the seventeenth century, then the Napoleonic invasion in 1812, and finally the most important of all – the Great Patriotic War, from 1941 to 1945. In short, the mandatory teaching of Russian history is to be based on a history of threats in the form of successive invasions from the West – and on the lessons of sacrifice that led to these threats being 'overcome'. The 'difficult issue' of Stalin's rule can be explained by – the need to 'overcome' the threat of foreign invasion in World War II. Academician Chubarian thus called the Stalinism of its most criminal period in the 1930s 'a dictatorship of modernisation'. So, yes, it was a dictatorship – but nothing special, not totalitarianism at all: for example, in Poland there was a dictatorship at that time too – that of Piłsudski; it was the same in Lithuania, Hungary, and Romania. But in the Soviet Union, dictatorship brought about the invaluable, effective process of 'modernisation'. However, there is one problem – the connection of successive countries to Russia/the USSR. "Some [neighbouring] countries believe that this was a colonial period," lamented the chairman for drafting the new textbook (although he reassures us that the Ukrainian,

Belarusian, Armenian, Tajik and Kyrgyz peoples do not think so). But he immediately suggested an appropriate response to those unjust accusations: Russian students will learn what the consequences of joining Russia, then the Soviet Union, really were, and how much the associated nations have benefited from doing so.

President Putin thanked Chubarian for the vision he had presented. He once again expressed his irritation at how long the system for certifying school textbooks had permitted "things that are absolutely unacceptable", which were like "being spat at in the face". Putin was most irritated by the ambiguous evaluation of the USSR's participation in World War II. Referring to the "unfair" interpretations of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, any mention of the strategic cooperation between Stalin and Hitler, the invasion of Poland, and the annexation of the Baltic republics, the Russian president railed against "the deliberate undervaluation of the Soviet people's role in the struggle against fascism" and, using the beautiful language of Joseph Stalin, called such phenomena "*это просто безобразие, это просто какой-то идеологический мусор*" ("this is just a disgrace, it's just some kind of ideological garbage"). "And this is what we have to liberate ourselves from" – this was the final conclusion of the historic meeting. And this 'liberation' is taking place right now – through other wars, and not just on paper; 'historical' wars, and also entirely real ones.

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