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THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: A WAR FOR MEMORY OR A WAR AGAINST MEMORY?

Abstract

The term 'wars of memory' refers to the Russian specificity of the issues described in the West as 'politics of history' or the 'politics of memory'. The historical arguments which are employed in the Russian Federation in the context of information and cultural warfare, and are identified with the war over the interpretation of history, are being used to achieve the Kremlin's political objectives in both its domestic and external arenas: any visions which conflict with the official one are discredited as anti-Russian and falsifications of the history of Russia.

This text consists of three parts. The first discusses the evolution of the problem in Russian public discourse since the collapse of the USSR; the second describes the historical-cultural standard currently operative in Russia (its pattern of assessments and historical interpretations); and the third, outlines the manifestations of the state's involvement in implementing its specifically understood politics of memory, with particular emphasis on the role of the Russian Historical Society and Rosarkhiv. The 'wars' discussed in this article have become one of the systemic mechanisms for Russia's confrontation with both the external environment and its internal opposition. The memory and historical-cultural identity as disseminated now are leading to a secondary Sovietisation of society and the mobilisation of imperial and nationalist (ethnocentric, ethnically Russian) resentments within the Russian Federation.

Keywords: politics of history, politics of memory, the Russian Historical Society, Rosarkhiv, information warfare, culture wars, historical-cultural standard

Outline of the problem

The issues of historical memory, historical tradition and identity are the subject of heated debate in all the countries formed after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Russia is a special case: it has declared itself to be the legal successor of the USSR, and has thus assumed (along with the benefit of inventory) responsibility for the reversals of fortune which happened to 'national' history during the Soviet period, including those linked to the restriction of civil rights. The logic of the continuity of state and government (from Kievan Rus, through the Muscovite state, the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, the Soviet Union, to the Russian Federation), the continuity of the authoritarian structures without a clear break from the totalitarian inheritance, as well as the long list of so-called 'difficult issues', has dictated a specific attitude to the past as a phase in the Russian state's fight against its internal and external enemies, as well as its 'great victories' during this fight.

The issues discussed herein are associated with the attempts to re-ideologise the society of the Russian Federation. The desire for ideological unification of the Russian people's identity has led to the development of the so-called historical-cultural standard, for example an official version of tradition as the foundation for the teaching of history and the 'defence' of the Russian Federation's civilisational sovereignty. The politics of memory, in the context of the information and culture wars, has in effect been equated with propaganda and historical agitation, pushing any visions which contradict this vision of Russian history to the margin; these are then presented as 'anti-Russian' and 'falsifying the history of Russia'. The 'defence of the Russian people's historical memory' thus understood is translated into 'wars of memory', becoming one of the systemic mechanisms for the Russian Federation's confrontation with its external environment. The presence of this issue on the domestic stage has been conditioned upon the authorities' desire to create a coherent version of the common past of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Russian Federation. It is a subject of interest not only for historians but also sociologists, political scientists, culturologists,

anthropologists, etc. – and above all, for specialists in political technologies, for example the strategies of manipulation which employ historical memory for political purposes.

Setting history straight, Russian-style

After 1991 Russian historiography has faced new challenges. Gone were the restrictions which had previously been imposed on specific subjects and interpretations. The growing interest in the ‘real’ story could not be administratively constrained, or channelled and given the desired shape. During the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, this resulted in the creation of a large number of publications based on declassified sources, which were free of ideological contexts and argumentation. Examinations began of subjects which had previously been banned by the censors (the so-called white spots), and topics which had been intentionally falsified during Soviet times were set straight (the so-called black spots) (Materski 2014). Interest in this new field intensified among historians in the new post-Soviet states as they constructed their own memory projects, recalling their own incorporation by force into the Russian Empire and the USSR, and demanded a settling of accounts with the crimes of Stalin’s regime.

In Russia, the trend towards making history more academic was halted after Vladimir Putin’s rise to power. During the first two terms of his presidency (2000–2008), access to the archives was once again restricted, the period under which documents from the Soviet period remained classified was extended, and above all, the approach to historical issues in the public discourse changed radically. Whereas in the 1990s this had been focused around the questions of which traditions should be identified with and how the symbolic space should be reorganised, in the current millennium they have been replaced with questions of why Russia’s neighbours did not appreciate its civilising role in their history, why they blame her for the policy which resulted from this historical necessity, and whence their ingratitude for the selfless sacrifice of the Russian people. The radical language of these debates, the emotion-filled accusations



and generalisations, has translated into a defensive posture towards the Soviet Union, and an attitude of rehabilitating and glorifying its superpower policy (Koposov 2011a, Koposov 2011b, Leontieva 2015, Miller 2015).

This approach was furthered by the still fresh memory of a deep crisis of state. It seems significant in this context that the demand for historical legitimacy arose from the Russian Federation's new, KGB-derived elite. The coming to power of security officers was explained by the then head of the FSB Nikolai Patrushev as a historical necessity, comparing them to the 'new nobility', thus renewing the ideological image of *Chekism* by use of a metaphor referring to the tradition of the Russian Empire:

Chekists are people of service, the new nobility of our times. Thinking people, educated, who understand the logic of the development of international and domestic political events, of ripening contradictions and dangers. They understand perfectly that a return to the past is impossible, they understand the necessity to develop the country on the basis of a rational combination of liberal and traditional, conservative values (Patrushev 2000; see also Darczewska 2018).

The process of building a new historical identity for Russia had two tracks: on the one hand it relied on emphasising the idea of a strong Russia, and values such as pride in the fatherland, patriotism, heroic struggle and establishing the continuity of the contemporary Russian state with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as a Eurasian superpower, whose rulers were determined by the 'inexorable logic of geopolitical struggle'; and on the other, on rejecting the 'revision of history' undertaken by Russia's neighbours. Their policies of memory have become the object of fierce attacks; the 'wars between historians' have been accompanied by an escalation of tensions, and have often caused those very tensions (Gimelshteyn 2017).

A balanced assessment of the Soviet past has been made difficult by the black and white image of reality based on a chaos/order dichotomy (the metaphor of 'order' is intended to symbolise Putin's rule), as well as the widely exploited myth of the Soviet victory in the Second World War. Stalin, as the architect of this victory, was assigned the mission

of modernising the country. Although the crimes of his regime, including the period of the Great Terror, remained on the agenda of historical debate, they were presented as 'a necessary cost of modernisation' and ultimately marginalised.

Dmitri Medvedev, who at the beginning of his term of office (2008–2012) announced the 'de-Stalinisation' of memory, later added a subtle shade to the term: the victory in World War II was presented as a result of the collective effort of the Soviet nations (Kaczmarek, Rogoża 2010), which was intended to create the image of a Eurasian identity and a triune Russian community (Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian) as a counterweight to Western influence. Medvedev's term also birthed an attempt to institutionalise the state's politics of history, a significant manifestation of which was the Commission under the Russian President to Counteract the Falsification of History, operating from 2009 to 2012 (*Ukaz 2009*, *Ukaz 2012*). This Commission was dominated by politicians and bureaucrats, and included just two professional historians from the Russian Academy of Sciences. It was headed by Sergei Naryshkin, a politician and former KGB man, head of the Government Apparatus of the Russian Federation (2004–2008), a deputy prime minister (2007–2008), head of the Russian Federation's Presidential Administration (2008–2011), chairman of the State Duma (2011–2016), and from 2016 head of the Russian Federation's Foreign Intelligence Service, and the then head of the Russian Federation's Presidential Administration. The Commission's job was to ensure the 'correct' interpretation of the more difficult pages of Russian history; it organised the monitoring of foreign publications and formulated recommendations on how to neutralise them. It became a tool of the state's historical propaganda; it dealt with the 'rectification' of Russian and foreign publications which were allegedly prejudicial to Russia's *raison d'état*. In addition to its propaganda function, the Commission served to discipline historians by having them examine the content desired from the authorities' point of view, and also played the role of patron to these publications. After all, this was clearly marked on the books' title pages as a kind of sign of their quality (see e.g. Matveev, Matveeva 2011). Incidentally, today, the Russian Historical Society's logo serves as a 'mark of quality' for historical publications, according to Naryshkin (see *Istoriya* 2018).

One result of the Commission's activities has been the foundation of what is known as the 'patriotic current of historiography'; the shelves of bookstores are filled by works which are ideological manifestoes rather than academic studies. The defenders of history as a science noted at the time:

In the last decade, the stream of literature explaining the history of Russia in terms of conspiracy has clearly swelled. Against this background, serious historical works are considered only within a narrow circle of specialists, and do not enjoy the public's interest (Teplakov 2011, p. 225).

These historicised ideological projects for the reconstruction of empire which have appeared out of nowhere have acquired a pseudoscientific sheen: the Eurasian Union, the 'Russian World', 'Great Russia' etc. They have strengthened the public's belief in the civilisational uniqueness of Russia. As an entity developing along separate lines and preferring distinct values, Russia is to offer an alternative to the 'rotting' West. The Russian Orthodox Church has proved to be an invaluable ally to the patriotic current in preaching the need for unity, peace and cooperation among the eastern nations which make up 'Holy Rus'; it criticises liberal civilisation as well as Russian liberals for their 'syndrome of historical masochism' (an expression used by Patriarch Cyril: see Miller 2015), and in particular has mythologised Orthodox civilisation and its conservative ethical and spiritual values. This so-called patriotic literature really took off in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea (Zubov 2014, Koposov 2014).



The historical-cultural standard as a new opening in the 'fight against the falsification of Russian history'

The politicisation of history and the historicisation of politics have also stimulated the analysts of information warfare, who identify the Western notions of 'politics of history' and 'politics of memory' with the war over the interpretation of history. They have coined the term 'historical weapon', an idea which has grown into the role

of a universal challenge for journalists and publicists, political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, cultural theorists, and above all the uniformed services, situating the defence of Russian memory in the context of ideological and psychological subversion by the West. This applies especially to the representatives of the Ministry of Defence, which has intensified its work on the so-called patriotic education of youth, or its *de facto* indoctrination and militarisation. During an annual scientific conference entitled 'History of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945: truth and falsehood', held in the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 on Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow on January 24, 2017, the deputy commander of the Russian Federation's General Staff Academy, Gen. Sergei Chvarkov, concluded:

“Russia and its citizens have become the targets of an open information-psychological war conducted by the leading countries of the Western world, some of whom are influencing the historical consciousness of the Russian people, their historical memory, including through the falsification of history.” According to Gen. Chvarkov, these activities were intended to discredit Russia as the heir of the Soviet Union, to weaken its position on the international stage, and domestically “by the denial of its historical values”(see *Uchastniki* 2017).

Participants in the public debate unmasked the aims of the ‘counterfeiters’ of Russian history, and highlighted the essence of their actions – “the construction of destructive myths as the basis of anti-Russian propaganda”; they denounced the

politicisation of history in the West, which not only is not hidden from the public, but is even proclaimed at the official state level.

Upon this, in fact, is based the global tendency to formulate and implement ‘politics of history’ and ‘politics of memory’, for example activities aimed at shaping a desired image of the past,

as, for example, the educator Yevgeni Vyazemskiy wrote (Vyazemskiy 2012). The politics of history of the West, understood as a manifestation of the struggle against Russia, is juxtaposed with the ‘defence’ of the historical

memory of the Russian people (in Russian *россияне*, citizens of the Russian Federation. The name *россиянин* is linked to the adjective *российский*, which characterises concepts connected with the state-administrative sphere and state symbolism. The word *русский* appearing in this context has two meanings in the Russian language: as an ethnic term, and as an adjective describing the material and immaterial artefacts of Russian culture. The English and Polish languages do not make this distinction). Paradoxically, this criticism of the West's politics of history, which was stimulated from the top down, has borne fruit in grafting this concept onto the soil of Russian thought.

This new opening coincided with the start of Putin's third term (2012–2018). The year 2012 saw the celebration of the Year of History, a concept which clearly tied together two ideologically marked 'great' dates in history: 1612, the expulsion of the Poles from the Kremlin and the end of the Time of Troubles; and the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon. In 2012, the Military Historical Society and the Russian Historical Society (RHS) were reactivated. The latter was headed by Sergei Naryshkin (a mechanical engineer by training, and the holder of a PhD in economics), who during the commission's work on combating the falsification of history had already gained the nickname of 'the country's chief historian'. Under the tutelage of the RHS, a plan entitled 'A concept for a new pedagogical-methodological complex of national history' (*Osnovnye* 2015, *Kontseptsiya* 2015) was drawn up and promulgated as the historical-cultural standard (a factual compendium which codified the message in textbooks and historical publications). The task of creating a mandatory standard has resounded repeatedly in President Putin's speeches (Malinova 2017); the President also accepted this 'canonical' version of history during a meeting with its creators on January 16, 2014. The accepted standard resolves the difficulties for Russian history textbooks in situations where the previously advocated concept of a single textbook was discredited. The real problem, however, was caused by the textbooks used in the national autonomies such as Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, which bring elements of national and regional identity into education, in opposition to Russian identity (Miller 2015).



The Soviet Memorial
(Lev Efimovich Kerbel,
Vladimir Efimovich Tsigal,
1945). Tiergarten, Berlin,
Germany. 2019.
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The historical-cultural standard confirms that the Russian authorities wish to 'regulate' the historical facts, their evaluations and the concepts used therein. For example, the standard introduces a new historical period called 'the great Russian Revolution.' This includes both the revolutions of 1917, February and October, as well as the period of Soviet Russia (until the USSR was created), and is then followed by the period of 'the Soviet road to modernisation.' Analysing the Soviet period in the spirit of the theory that the country underwent modernisation 'under the conditions of a besieged fortress' has helped, on the one hand, to relativise the assessment of the Stalinist period, and on the other, to justify the role of the authoritarian leader in contemporary Russia (Miller 2015). Events on the Eastern Front during World War II have been raised to the rank of a clash of civilisations: the victory over the Third Reich, in this perspective, is proof of the invincibility of the Russian state and its triumph over totalitarianism. This illustrates the myth-creating potential of the 'Great Patriotic War', which since 1945 has continually remained the most important historical pillar of the authorities of the Soviet Union/Russian Federation; it also forms the basis of the modern 'Russian ideology' (Koposov 2011b).

A separate part of the 'Concept' is the list of difficult topics from the point of view of the Russian authorities (such as the causes and effects of the rise and fall of the USSR, on whose ruins were founded modern Russia, the Stalinist repressions, the single-party dictatorship and the cult of personality, et al.). Scientists supporting the official approach (history is to serve as a sticking-plaster on the tormented Russian soul, and it should heal the consciousness, unite, and not divide) highlight it in the spirit of Orwellian doublethink. For example, Vladimir Shevchenko, a philosopher at the Russian Academy of Sciences, has written:

In order to change the civilisational matrix of the Rus'ians/Russians, the Western informational opponent strikes above all at the 'painful places' of the Russian people's historical memory. In fact, these become painful as a result of a premeditated falsification" (Shevchenko 2015).

These 'painful places' are mostly located in the Soviet period of history. The very appearance of the USSR was a symptom of

the search for an alternative to the Western path of development, and its collapse was

the result of a psychological-historical war waged by the Anglo-Saxon circles of the West,” whereas “the victory of Russia/USSR in the Great Patriotic War, which remains at the centre of the falsification, is of enormous importance for the Russian people, not only from the point of view of maintaining their own historical memory, but also for the defence on the international stage of their own sovereignty, and of their right to choose their own path of development” (Shevchenko 2015).

Giving the information war a historical and cultural dimension has made history a universal tool. On the domestic scene, it serves as an apologia for contemporary Russia and Putin’s regime. It is a convenient instrument of indoctrination, of social teaching, the patriotic education of youth, the patriotic mobilisation of society, etc. It strengthens the sense of danger to their society (‘the West rejects Russia, its unique historical experience and civilisation’), which allows Western cultural values to be called into question (‘the West is rotting’), and also offers the Russian Federation as an alternative to countries dissatisfied with the dominance of Western civilisation (‘Russia will save the world’). The historical and civilisational diversity of the so-called ‘Russian World’ (*Русский Мир*) has become the basis for creating a long-term strategy of confrontation, which encompasses tactical, situational ‘victories’ (such as the informational campaign ‘Crimea is ours!’ which accompanied the peninsula’s annexation).

The historical-cultural standard and the participation in the wars of memory today define the predominant, mainstream approach to history (Gimelshteyn 2017), downgrading historical argument to a set of compelling axioms and dogmas that do not require evidence. In this approach there is no room for dialogue with opponents or for any critical reflection on history. A model example of this is a text published on the website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Warsaw, written by Vyacheslav Nikonov and entitled ‘*The Russian historical tradition*’. Nikonov, a grandson of Vyacheslav Molotov, holds a PhD

in history, and is a state and political activist, chairman of the Education Committee in the State Duma, dean of the Faculty of Public Administration at Lomonosov University, and president of the Russkiy Mir Foundation. He is the author of a great many publications popularising historical issues, including books such as *The Russian matrix* (2014), *Russia is to be understood with mind* (2014), *The destruction of Russia* (2015), *The code of civilisation* (2015), *Understanding Russia* (2016), *Molotov* (2017), *October 1917* (2017) and others. As a so-called opinion-leader, he cooperates with current affairs programmes on Russian state television. His work is a typical manifestation of the specifically conceived 'historical correctness' which consolidates the conviction that Russian tradition is unique and Russia as a state-civilisation is self-sufficient (Nikonov 2015, Nikonov 2015b):

(...) there [...] are many Russias. There is a large plurality of ethnic groups, ideologies, geographical areas. Russia is a single organism, coherent in its pluralism. At its core lies a civilisational, cultural genetic code, which forms the basis for a common Russian matrix.

(...) Russia is a self-sufficient cultural and civilisational phenomenon, a huge, unified and unique world with its genetic code of history, its own system of social archetypes, culture, spirituality, its specific way of surviving in history, and history itself.

Our Homeland has a great past. A branch of the Aryan tribe descended from the Carpathians, peacefully settled the great Russian plain, the coldest part of the planet, reached the Pacific Ocean, founded Fort Ross, absorbed the essence of the richest cultures of Byzantium, Europe, Asia, smashed the greatest enemy of humanity – Nazism – and showed mankind the way into space.

The nature of Russian territorial expansion was determined not in the accompaniment of the destruction of ethnic groups or cultures, or the transformation of new subjects into slaves (...). The system of national domination by the 'imperial nation' – the Russians – was completely absent, as it was the Russians themselves who were subjected to the most severe forms of exercise and discrimination – from serfdom to conscription, up to repression and the lack of

ethnic statehood. The ruling class has always united many nations, and represented the interests of the native Russians to a disproportionately small extent.



The state's involvement

Historians like Nikonov have highlighted the modest arsenal of symbolic resources available to the Russian Federation:

the coat of arms with the double-headed eagle, borrowed from Byzantium by Ivan III; the three colours taken from the Netherlands by Peter I; Aleksandrov's anthem from the time of the Great Patriotic War; and the Victory Banner as the symbol of the Armed Forces.

The controversial myth of the organic unity of Russian history – from Kievan Rus and the Republic of Novgorod to the USSR – provokes negative reactions from Ukrainian historians. To this one should add the weakness of the effectively silenced traditions of democracy, freedom, human rights and equality which were developed in the West after the eighteenth century. The myth of the Bolshevik Revolution, omnipresent in the Soviet era, has been deconstructed as threatening the government. Significant in this context is the replacement of the Soviet Union's main national holiday (the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution) by National Unity Day (celebrated on 4 November to commemorate the expulsion of the Polish invaders in 1612). The name of Independence Day, established by Boris Yeltsin and initially celebrated on 12 June, was changed in 2002 to Russia Day by Putin, who justified the move by citing the lack of a relevant tradition. The most important Russian national holiday is Victory Day, which has been celebrated since 1945. Domestically this makes up for constant appeals to the heroic deeds of Aleksander Nevsky, Minin and Pozharsky, Kutuzov, Suvorov and Stalin as the architects of the nation's 'great victories'. In Russia's confrontations with 'the abroad', however, this modest resource translates into a rather sparse basis for argument; in addition, most of the arguments used (such as

Obelisk at the Mausoleum of the Soviet Soldiers Cemetery in Warsaw (Bohdan Lachert, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Stanisław Lisowski, 1950). Warsaw, Poland. 2019.
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not acknowledging Russia's liberating mission, or rejecting the thesis of 'the voluntary incorporation of the nations to Russia') takes on the form of accusations against other states of falsifying history, Russophobia, rivalry with Russia, etc.

The state neutralises this type of shortcoming by creating historical discourse, encouraging a top-down direction of historical research, imposing a rigid pattern of interpretation, censoring any artefacts which contradict the official version of history, monopolising the media, schools and archives, penalising historical incorrectness, etc.

The issue of the falsification of history is the subject of constant interest by the information security section of the Russian Federation's Security Council (*O roli* 2016). The current lists of difficult themes prepared by the Council's experts serve to make researchers, experts and politicians sensitive to the anti-Russian potential of dates and anniversaries commemorated in the countries surrounding the Russian Federation. The need to 'fight the historical lie' is constantly recalled by the President at the annual meetings of the heads of diplomatic missions, meetings with youth groups, parliamentarians, or the military. Historical, cultural and spiritual security have all been raised to the rank of significant areas of national security, as is now reflected in official documents. In the *War Doctrine* (2014) "undermining the historical, spiritual and patriotic tradition" is included on the list of external threats (*Voennaya* 2014; see Darczewska 2015). This concept is covered more broadly in the *National Security Strategy* (2015) and the *Information Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (2016), where it is listed among the risks in the field of the defence of culture and cultural sovereignty (*Strategiya* 2015, *Doktrina* 2016; see Darczewska 2016). The list of threats was expanded as follows:

erasing traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, weakening the unity of the multi-ethnic people of the Russian Federation as a result of external cultural and informational expansion (including through the promotion of low-quality products of mass culture), as a result of propaganda of violence, racial, national and religious intolerance, and also the debasement of the role of the Russian language in the world,

the quality of its teaching in Russia and abroad, attempts to falsify the history of Russia and the world, and unlawful attacks on objects of culture.

The state is constantly expanding its infrastructure of influence, including by funding historians and coordinating their work. During the RHS's annual meeting in 2016, its statute was expanded to include a record of individual and collective membership, which opened up its doors to the Military Historical Society, the Association of the Special Services' Native Researchers, the 'Knowledge' and 'Victory' Associations, the 'Two-Headed Eagle', the Historical Perspective Foundation, university chairs of history, museums & archives and other bodies. The RHS's projects (books, competitions, films, exhibitions and historical monuments) are also financed from the state budget (including the Foundation's 'History of the Fatherland'), as well as by private sponsors.

Today the Russian Historical Society is the principal moderator of domestic historical debate (it has 33 regional branches, including 2 in Crimea), and of international cooperation among historians (it runs a permanent international commission and 12 bilateral commissions). In 2017 it was the co-organiser of the General Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences in Moscow (see Naryshkin's interview, *Istoriya* 2018), as well as the moderator of the celebrations of the centenary of the 'Great Russian Revolution' (Miller 2018).

The RHS's more dynamic activity as witnessed in recent years was enabled by its facade of a public association and the political empowerment obtained. An important element of this activity is its social-engineering project of 'spanning historic bridges', for example the *de facto* creation of platforms to influence international public opinion. It is becoming the main addressee of information campaigns which amplify historical controversies in bilateral relations (including between Poland and Lithuania, Poland and Czechia, Ukraine and Russia). In their direct relations, the Russians are not in a position to convince (for example) their Polish opponents that the occupation of the territory of the Republic of Poland on 17 September was an operation of liberation, nor to



convince the Balts of their 'liberation' in 1944–1945, or the Ukrainians of the existence of the 'triune Rus'ian nation'. Nor will their attitude to the Great Famine of 1932–1933 change by recalling the argument that the Ukrainian grain which Stalin sold to the 'Western imperialists' went to the modernisation of their country.

An important part of the state's involvement is the archives: access to them allows the management of historical knowledge and the war with memory of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, especially since a significant part of those nations' archives were taken to the Soviet Union during the Second World War and have not been returned. The Russian archive system is a bureaucratic, hierarchically structured mechanism. Its activities are coordinated by the Federal Agency for the Archives (Rosarkhiv), which since 2016 has been a presidential ministry (it had previously been supervised by the Ministry of Culture). The individual archives of state (the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), like those separated (the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian Military Archive, the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service, the Foreign Intelligence Service Archive, the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation), operate autonomously, but work closely together in the field of declassifying documents. Indeed, the selective declassification of documents has become an important instrument in the 'wars of memory'. In the case of the Central and Eastern European countries, they are distinguished by the search in them for 'dark pages' of history (such as collaboration with the Nazis and participation in the Holocaust).

The key role of the archives in this field is emphasised by Andrei Artizov, the head of Rosarkhiv, who treats the declassification of documents as 'an operational response to the anti-Russian campaigns of historical falsification and slander' (Artizov, and Seregin 2012). In announcing the acceleration of the process of digitising source documents, the organisation of virtual exhibitions and excursions to memorial sites, Artizov focuses on the publications of source

documents in which he personally has participated. Under his editorship has appeared, among others, a collection entitled *The Soviet Union and the Polish military-political underground. April 1943–December 1945*, published in August 2016 (Artizov 2016; see Ivantsova, and Orlova 2015; Yurasov, Zanina, Ivantsova, and Orlova 2014). This publication serves as a specific case study; it is dedicated to the fight against the Polish memory of the so-called ‘Accursed Soldiers’ [the designation of post-war anti-communist insurgency in Poland], and was financed by the Moscow Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. While promoting the work in an interview with the government daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Artizov demonstrated the typical approach of Russian historians (confrontational rhetoric and the illusion of objectivity):

The war of historical memories is not our choice. It was not us who started this war. The Russian people as heirs to the Victory are self-sufficient. Also because we do not deny different, so-called ‘inconvenient’ facts, we know how complicated the situation in Poland was, and that the Polish people suffered first from Nazism; and as a result of the occupation by the Reich more than 4 million Poles were killed (Novoselova 2015).

The promotion was joined by the sponsor of the project, which posted information about the publication on its website and reproduced the above-mentioned interview. The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding has continued to publicise Russian ‘memory counter-projects’, including an anti-Katyn project (Matveev 2017).

It should be noted at this point that controversial issues in Polish-Russian relations have been examined by many contemporary Russian historians: Natalia Lebedeva, Inessa Yazhborovskaya, Mikhail Narinsky, Aleksandr Guryanov, Arseni Roginsky, Nikita Petrov et al. However, their presence in the field of popular humanities in Russia is imperceptible. The media space is dominated by historians who are soldiers in the wars of memory, such as Natalia Narochnitskaya, Oleg Nemensky, Stanislav Kuniayev and Stanislav Morozov.



Summary

The terms ‘politics of history’ or ‘the politics of memory’ are inadequate to this phenomenon as described, although traditionally the arguments and historical disputes concerning the perception of historical events and processes are of great importance in both the domestic and foreign policies of the Russian Federation. They are used in the information war, which is presented as the fight against the falsification of Russian history, as a historical-cultural war, and more recently, as a war against the memory of the Russian people. These terms have caused acute tension in Russia’s relations with its neighbouring countries, and over the last decade – even some having become permanent in nature.

Russia’s ‘setting history straight’ has nothing to do with research as it is usually presented. Based on misinformation, manipulation and other techniques to distort the image of historical events and processes, it is a key element of the ‘political technology’ (*Antypolska* 2005) used by the Kremlin in order to build the state identity of the society of the Russian Federation, to fuel its belief in the hostility of the outside world, in the supremacy of Russian traditions and values, to undermine European integration and the Euro-Atlantic community, and to build a favourable climate for the Kremlin in international relations, at the expense of discrediting other countries and exposing controversial topics. The ‘Russian matrix’ of argumentation is built up in opposition to the mythical ‘anti-Russian matrix’, filled with ideological-political counter-arguments and disseminated by special channels of communication.

This determines the approach adopted by pro-Kremlin historians: they feel obliged to strengthen the impact of the Russian Federation’s informational activities. Consolidated around the Russian Historical Society, the Military Historical Society and many other so-called front organisations of the so-called Russian civil society, they are an element of the ‘agitprop front’, like many other formal and informal entities authorised by the state to provide ideological exegesis of the historical issues.

Moreover, history has become an instrument to legitimise the power and apparatus of the state, to demonstrate their effectiveness, and which serves to implement the state's current policy objectives both domestically and internationally.

Opponents of this politics of memory, despite their various attempts (*V Rossii* 2014), have not succeeded in devising their own ways to influence public opinion or creating formal non-government expert groups. The only exception to this has been the Memorial International Association, which has in recent years come in for harassment on the basis of a 2012 law entitled 'On foreign agents', here used to refer to foreign-funded non-profit organisations. Aside from assigning the discrediting classification of 'agent', this law has created laborious procedures for financial verification, and results in financial sanctions.

Historians demanding to make history more academic are rarely heard; their voices are scattered and lack any broader public resonance (*Anti-Medinsky* 2012, Zubov 2014). It is becoming an increasingly common opinion that the politics of memory and the policy of identity in post-Soviet Russia is presently in its deepest crisis (Malinova 2014).

The task of creating a new concept of state ideology, imposed by the Kremlin at the beginning of this millennium, has not yet been completed, although many elements of it have already been internalised. It is an eclectic, incoherent ideology. The historical-cultural standard which was introduced in order to improve its coherence, for example the pattern of obligatory diagnoses, assessments and historical interpretations, is also bringing about the secondary Sovietisation of Russian society, mobilising imperial and nationalist resentments. Disseminated on a wave of anti-Western and anti-liberal mobilisation of Russian society, memory and historical-cultural identity are essentially ethnocentric, 'ethnically Russian.' The '*Russkiy Mir*' [*Russian World*] is also an ethnic-oriented concept of the community beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. This is pushing Russia in the direction of, if not chauvinism, then of ethnocentrism.

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Obelisk at the Mausoleum
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