

BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

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Abstract: The Russian nationalism was and continues to be a catalyst and a major political force in Russia. Its itinerary over the 20th century, the more or less external forms it bears, how it credits itself and what it gives credit to, with what other concepts and social movements it can be associated with and what its weight is, both socially and politically, in contemporary Russia are the matters I have tried to refer to in this essay.

Keywords: nationalism, post-communism, ideology, geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I would like to analyze the nationalist phenomenon in Russia, as well as the forms it embraced, beginning from the last decades of the Soviet era until present times. The hypothesis from which I start is based on the existence of a structural incompatibility between the aggressive and hermetic nationalism, doubled by a *passee* disposition of some large social categories of contemporary Russia and the taking upon of a turbulent history combined with the democratic opening which the “Eastern colossus” is in so much need. The objectives I am trying to accentuate reside in the affirmation and explanation of the increasing xenophobe and isolationist tendencies that the Russian society manifests towards the Western world, along with the factors that make these tendencies possible: the disproportionately large social cleavage between the new oligarchs and the large mass of population, the failure of the economic reforms of the ‘90s (although, after 1998, a gradual growing of the GDP could be noticed), the resentments due to the implosion of the USSR and the losing of the Cold War or the expansion of NATO and of the western type organizations towards the East.

I. RUSSIAN NATIONALISM IN THE SOVIET ERA

1.1. Eurasianism

Having emerged at the beginning of the 1920s, the Eurasianism was the creation of some important names of the Russian exiles of that period: Savistki, Surcinski, Troubetskoi and Florovski, all highly appreciated intellectuals coming from areas such as geography, musicology, economics and theology and which have published together the work „Exodus to the East”. The argument of the book can be encapsulated as follows:

Russia forms a special space anchored between two continents, but having a definite, unmistakable identity. Its particular geographic position should dictate, according to the authors, a distinct politics which should preserve Russia’s identity.¹

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¹ Paul Dobrescu, Alina Bărgăoanu, *Geopolitica*, Facultatea de Comunicare și Relații Publice SNSPA, București, 2001, p. 132

According to this subspecies of the Russian nationalism, what matters when we relate to Russia is exactly its uniqueness, the country having a number of both European and Asian characteristics, but its identity being distinct in regard to these two civilizations. The Eurasiatists' ambition is to transform Russia into a bridge between these two continents, balancing them from a geo-political point of view.

Eurasiatism, just like slavophilism, asserts the perennial and organic character of the Russian nation, insisting on the necessity of a firm central authority and on the opposition between the Western world and the ideas imported from there without responsibility, ideas which only destabilize the Russian collective mind. Communism is an example of such an idea which has infected Russia, severely damaging its political, economical and social infrastructure.² However, Eurasianism, just like communism, had its more or less substantial scientific foundation, inscribing itself "in the trend of the era (of the beginning of the 20th century) of legitimizing the political ideas by placing them on a scientific pedestal or an alleged one."³

At the beginning of the 90s, the Eurasiatist doctrine is revived in Russia, especially thanks to the writings of the geographer and ethnologist Lev Gumilev, who asserted that, in Russia, Asia is predominant in proportion to Europe and that nomadic life is a cognizance of the Russian identity.⁴ For Gumilev,

Eurasia is the natural geographic décor of the characteristic «ethnos» for the Russian people, the continuance of a historical symbiosis between these and the non-Russian inhabitants of the vast steppes, by which a spiritual and cultural unique Eurasiatic identity was formed. (Therefore, a.n.), the adaptation to the West would mean nothing more than the losing of the Russian people of its own «ethnos and soul».⁵

The most well known contemporary Eurasiatist is undoubtedly Alexander Dugin. His research areas include geopolitics, history and philosophy, and his position regarding the Russian nationalism is a very original one, eclectic, and, I might add, less feasible. Dugin argues that the excessive centralism of the USSR led to its implosion, because the peoples of Eurasia have felt oppressed and aggrieved by the Russian domination. The new Eurasiatic state would rather be perceived as a confederation of the peoples of this geopolitical area, each organizing and administering themselves in accordance with their own aspirations and beliefs.⁶

1.2. The twilight of the Soviet Union and the ascension of the national-bolshevism

The Soviet economics has met, for approximately half a century, and especially because of the forced industrialization of the early 1930s, an annual growth of 5 and sometimes even 6 percentages.

For some decades after the Russian Revolution, the Soviet experiment could claim solid economic developments. An agricultural society, semi-feudal, was transformed into an industrial giant. The urbanization developed rapidly,

² Vladimir Maximenko, *The russian-eurasian idea (Pax Rossica)*, in *Russian analytica*, nr. 6, septembrie 2005, p. 10

³ Pierre Lorrain, *Incredibila alianță Rusia-Statele Unite*, Editura Stiințelor Sociale și Politice, București, 2003, p. 121

⁴ Georges Nivat, *La pas prin Noua Rusie*, Editura Compania, București, 2004, p. 51

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah. Supremația americană și imperatiile sale geostrategice*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2000, p. 126

⁶ Dmitry Slapentokh, *Russian nationalism today: the views of Alexander Dugin*, in *Contemporary Review*, iulie 2001

universal education was installed and the way of gender equality at the workplace was established. The Soviet Union managed to develop continuously, despite the unbending opposition of the capitalist occidental states.⁷

In the second half of the 1960s, when the benefits of the forced industrialization began to deplete substantially, Brejnev and his henchmen tried to legitimize communism by continual invocations towards national unity and mobilization against Western decadence. For a second time, communist Russia's leaders appealed to nationalism to justify and strengthen their position in proportion to the society they were governing. Stalin was the first to use this resource, when, during the Second World War, he liberally used national propaganda against the German invader to mobilize "the peoples of the Soviet Union" against fascism and for the keeping of the conquest of the October 1917 revolution. It must be mentioned that, as well as before, and after the war was over, nationalism was a taboo subject, and that political dissidents, and generally every undesirable person to the regime in Moscow, could be arrested and imprisoned only on the basis of nationalist susceptibility, regardless their degree of truthfulness.

Concerning the delegitimation of the communist ideologies and the revigoration of nationalisms, Zbigniew Brzezinski affirms that „once with the decomposition of ideology, the communist elites all-over become tempted to attest and legitimize their power by loud nationalistic calls, increasingly acute.”⁸

In the last years of the Soviet Union, national-bolshevism comes as an unusual hybrid designed to revigorate the consciousness of the Russian unity and uniqueness by transplanting a nationalistic graft on the decreasingly popular communist background. Alexandr Soljenitiin exhibits his stupefaction towards this ideological "graft", vituperating at the same time the intellectuals who have been subdued by the "myth regarding a so-called beginning of a national transformation of communism, which they have already perceived not as a leading ravisher of the Russian people, but as a savior."⁹ Together, communism and nationalism were to fulfill the messianic destiny of Russia, bringing back to life its numbed spirit and giving it as example of a political success to the rest of the world.

The American political scientist James Gregor, trying to give a causal explanation to the nationalistic revigoration of the past years of the Soviet Union, argues that the ideological relaxation began by Kruschev has represented prerequisite of the reinforcement of the Russian nationalism and his recovery of an increasing social space.

Just like «de-Stalinization» has given the first opportunity for the appearance of dissidence against the regime, the downfall of the Soviet empire made room for the proliferation of the Russian nationalistic sentiment. The Russian nationalism, in all its multiple form originality, has, once again, appeared. Etatism, elitism, «the organic collectivism » and a special feeling of the national mission have become the currency of a staggering number of «social patriots».¹⁰

⁷ Edward A. Kolodziej, *Securitatea și relațiile internaționale*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2007, p. 137

⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marele Eșec. Nașterea și moartea comunismului în secolul XX*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, p. 249

⁹ Alexandr Soljenitin, *Rusia sub avalanșă*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2000, p. 161

¹⁰ A. James Gregor, *Fetele lui Ianus. Marxism și fascism în secolul XX*, Editura Univers, București, 2002, p. 139

At this time, more nationalistic groups appear. The most important of them is the „Pamjati” (Memory) movement, self-entitled „Russian nationalistic patriotic front”. Having emerged in the last years of Gorbaciov’s mandate, this association promoted the returning to the traditions and the national fund as a prevention of the decrepitude that had taken control over Russia in the last decades. In that period other movements of this kind have activated, worth mentioning being „Spasenie” (Salvation) and „Otocestvo” (Mother Country).¹¹

In a 1989 text, the Italian author Aldo Ferrari does a structural analysis of the Russian nationalism of the last Soviet years, of the objectives and premises from which it starts. Therefore, the supporters of the Russian neo-nationalism foretell, without being able to indicate its vehicles, a reconciliation of Marxism-Leninism with the Russian cultural tradition, primarily with Orthodoxy, but also with the religious thinkers, such as Homiakov, Leontiev, Soloviov, Berdiaev (...) The neo-nationalists are supporters of the recovery of patriotism and of Russia’s memory itself, of its secular statal and cultural life. They cherish passionately the traditions of the Russian people and its rural essence. The old slavophilian belief in the spiritual and social organicity of the Russian village, even if transferred in Siberia or in the Russian lands of the Extreme Orient, privileged places in which the conservation and revitalization of the national character is still considered possible, relives in this tendency.¹²

Since 1987, the political opposition towards the USSR intensifies. Encouraged by glasnost and perestroika, the ethnic and cultural minorities of the Union openly state their disapproval with Moscow. Over 30 000 of “informal” associations (not officially registered) come out as a result of glasnost and the socio-political relaxation that follows. Few of them will officially register, thus acquiring a political status, but the ones that will do will represent the majority of “over 500 parties that would appear by 1990.”¹³

II. FROM THE USSR TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. ECONOMICAL-POLITICAL ASPECTS

2.1. The new oligarchy and “the privatization of the state by the state”¹⁴

How did it come to the enormous social and economical discrepancy between the new capitalists and the majority of the Russian population? Beginning with the 1980s, Gorbaciov and the Soviet nomenclature have noticed the economic bankruptcy in which the Union struggled and have began, strictly in conformity with the Marxist ideology, an economic decentralization program. The sub adjacent idea of this project was that certain local economic groups would administrate state properties on behalf of the PCUS. The attempt did not have the anticipated success, because the Russian peasantry displayed a profound disbelieve towards the individual production and had not forgot the way in which the wealthy peasants (kulaks) had been treated, in the third and fourth decade.

¹¹ Aldo Ferrari, *A treia Romă. Renașterea naționalismului rus*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1999, p. 60. Beside them, groups like the National Social Union, the National Russian Union, or the National-Republican Russian Party completed the landscape of nationalist and neofascist movements in the early post-soviet period. A. James Gregor, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140

¹² Idem, pp. 62-63

¹³ Leslie Holmes, *Postcomunismul*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2004, pp. 181-182

¹⁴ The syntagm was borrowed from Georges Nivat, *op. cit.*

As a result of this failure, they went on to another approach. Promising young men from the COMSOMOL and the KGB were intensely trained in Economics and Finance, on the state's expense, so they could go on and take over sections from the industry and from businesses that they would later on modernize and, implicitly, make them efficient. Gradually, a new economic class emerged that became more and more independent and threatening for the conservatory wing of the PCUS. After the soviet collapse of 1991, the former treasurers awoke to be the new owners of the Russian economy, a communist party which could challenge this status being as of now non-existent.¹⁵ A small part of the present oligarchy is made up of the former soviet bureaucrats who found themselves, during Gorbaciov's regime, in key positions. In the last years of Gorbaciov's regime massive embezzlements have happened, in the main Western funds, and, in exchange for the facilitation of these operations and for discretion, the referred to bureaucrats have cashed in substantial commissions.¹⁶ Practically, between 1991 and 2000, Boris Elțin's successor, Vladimir Putin, assessed that in each one of these years anything between 18 and 20 billion dollars have illegally left Russia making for the West.¹⁷

Of course, after the extinction of the communist regime, the privatizations were undergone swift, onerous and without taking into account the stark economical situation in which the new Russia found itself in. In 1992, the prime minister Egor Gaidar liberalized prices in the absence of the systematic demount of the state monopolies over the economy, an action which came as a true shock for Russia, leading, among others, to the exponential growth of inflation and the accentuation of the economic discrepancies between the new class of the enriched and the great majority of the population. Bernard Guetta said that the prices were liberalized before crushing the monopolies, the economic circuits of the former Union were allowed to be broken without creating any new ones, and it has been forgotten that the Russian do not have, or no longer have, a tradition in enterprising.¹⁸

The consequences of these economical politics soon arose:

The industry was going down yearly; large sums of money were being spent for the whole, enormous industrial military complex, ineffectual and virtually useless. Fundless, the government would gather debts of months' of back payments in compensations and this lack of money ingulfed the whole economy. The most suffered the retained. The situation was even worse because the Soviet Union never had a strong social assistance system, if we are to exclude the social services of the enterprises that were going into bankruptcy.¹⁹

These economic failures have led to the intensification of hostilities with which the Western world was perceived and to the refill of nationalistic and protectionist outbursts which were pushing through more and more frequently in the Russian society. It seems that "Russia (has become) capitalist in the same way it had become communist, savagely."²⁰

¹⁵ Marius Oprea în dialog cu Vladimir Bukovski, *Chipul morții. Despre natura comunismului*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2006, pp. 135-137

¹⁶ Pierre Lorrain, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 și urm.

¹⁷ Vladimir Fedorovski, *Istoria Kremlinului de la Ivan cel Groaznic la Vladimir Putin*, Editura Lucman, București, 2004, p. 179

¹⁸ Bernard Guetta, *Geopolitica. Rațiune de stat*, Editura Aion, Oradea, 2000, p. 48

¹⁹ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *O istorie a Rusiei*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2000, p. 627

²⁰ Bernard Guetta, *op. cit.*, p. 57

2.2. Vladimir Putin and „the state nationalism”²¹

After Boris Eltin’s resignation in December 31st 1999, Russia’s new president had become Vladimir Putin.²²

Unlike his predecessor, which had sharpened his political teeth in the struggle for leadership from within the Communist Party, Putin came from the world of secret police. His ascension in this secret world implies a strong nationalistic commitment and a sharp, analytical mind.²³

Boris Eltin’s successor began his professional carrier at the former KGB’s counter-intelligence school.²⁴ After a routine mission in GDR, he becomes, in 1989, Anatoli Sobceak’s second-in-command, the mayor of Leningrad (city, which after the disappearance of the USSR, would go back to its prior name Sankt Petersburg). The anti-Gorbachev putsch of August 1991 catches him in this phase of his career. As a consequence of the failure of this action, “the main organizer of the putsch”, KGB leader Vladimir Kriucikov is removed from power and USSR’s secret service is reorganized, being divided into three main structures and going down from 700 000 to 80 000 employees.²⁵ Vladimir Putin is named, in 1998, by Boris Eltin director of FSB (Federal Security Service), the main ramification of the late KGB, and, in 1998 replaces Evgheni Primakov as prime-minister. After Eltin’s resignation, justified by a more and more precarious state of health, Vladimir Putin, his protégé, wins in March 2000, as far as the first vote, the presidentship of the Russian state.²⁶

Educated at the political police and Soviet espionage school, Putin has always manifested an affinity towards the so-called siloviki (members of the army, the police, Federal Security Service or of the Prosecutor’s office)²⁷, which led to the amplifying of the “GI” component from within the political elite. So that, during Eltin’s mandate the balance between the military and people with military studies was of 11.2%, respectively 6,7%, while during Putin’s mandate (until 2002) these percentages rose up until 25.1%, respectively 26.6%.²⁸ In the first years after 2002, “50% of the presidential administrative personnel” came from the former KGB’s structures.²⁹ Also, according to a 2003 study of the Sociology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 77% of the members of the political elite had been appointed as early on as Brejnev’s regime.³⁰

²¹ The syntagm was borrowed from Janusz Bugajski’s work *Pacea Rece. Noul Imperialism al Rusiei*, Editura Casa Radio, Bucuresti, 2005

²² For a detailed presentation of this subject, and also the corruption scandals in which president Eltin and its entourage were involved in, see Ariel Cohen, *După Elțin: corupția, ajutorul economic și viitorul Rusiei*, în Beaumarchais center for international research, Puteri și influențe, Editura Corint, București, 2001, pp. 42-47

²³ Henry Kissinger, *Are nevoie America de o politică externă? Către diplomația secolului XXI*, Editura Incitatus, București, 2002, p. 60

²⁴ Vladimir Fedorovski, *De la Pasputin la Putin. Personajele din umbră*, Editura Vivaldi, București, 2003, pp. 191 și urm.

²⁵ Idem, pp. 204 and the following. The KGB reorganization operated by Gorbachev had a single major objective: to politically cripple the strong information service in order to prevent a new *coup d’etat* attempt.

²⁶ Vladimir Fedorovski, *Istoria Kremlinului...*, p. 191

²⁷ Laurențiu Constantiniu, *Vladimir Putin și evoluția elitei ruse*, în Revista de politică internațională, anul I (2006), nr. 3, p. 62

²⁸ Idem, p. 63

²⁹ Vladimir Fedorovski, *Istoria Kremlinului...*, p. 200

³⁰ Mihail E. Ionescu, afterword at Pierre Lorrain’s work *Incredibila alianță Rusia-Statele Unite*, pp. 299 și urm.

The leader in Kremlin does not hesitate to reinstate Russia's sympathies and partisanship to the European civilization, but, at the same time, warns about the repercussions that might happen as a result to his country being excluded from this civilization:

...Russia is more than a diverse country, but we are part of the European Eastern culture. And, actually, our value rests just in this. Wherever our people might live, whether be it in the Far East or in the South, we are Europeans. (...) We will try to remain where we are from a geographical and spiritual point of view. And, if they throw us out of Europe, then we will be under the necessity to search for new alliances, we will have to strengthen ourselves. How else? Just like this.³¹

During Eltin's first two mandates, crooked privatizations, endemic corruption and, generally speaking, the economic drift were the characteristic elements of the Russian transition. This socio-economic scenery seems to largely have changed after Putin's two mandates. But is this change real? If in Eltin's time the interest groups and the great oligarchs had practically confiscated the state and were frequently acting against the political-economical interests of the Kremlin, Putin managed to subdue the Russian tycoons by creating a strong apparatus, therefore, by coercion, but also, as much as possible, by corresponding the administration's priorities with those of the interest groups.³² He managed to accelerate the rhythm of the economic reforms, concurrent with the acute enclosing of the civil rights; the new "iron fist" leadership, even if it did not improve considerably the standard of living, it created the semblance of a real internal amelioration.

Janusz Bugajski considers that Putin's pro-Europeanism is not authentic, but rather geo-politically circumstantial. During his mandates, Russia's external politics had been reoriented from the liberalization path to the one of statal authority reinforcement and the reconquer of the international prestige. Ethnic nationalism is not a major component of this geo-political equation; instead the Pan Slavic "Rossyan" nationalism is, because it bares more accentuated imperial nuances.

Putin tried to develop a stronger national identity, as a strategic purpose which would have had to fill in the void left by the eradicated Soviets. He said that his mission was to revive the state, to support and promote the Russian "national idea", to fight separatism and to save his country from disintegration.³³

Vladimir Putin is an appreciated president by the Russian society, even if he gradually narrowed down the freedom of the press and of the civil society: the party whose member he was, United Russia, got at the parliamentary elections of 2007 over 60% of the Russian's votes. Despite the increasing number of accusations of autocracy towards the present government, Putin has undoubtedly managed to accomplish significant economical reforms; furthermore, his highly nationalistic speeches are meant to offer The Russian society compensations of a psychological order for USSR's defeat during the Cold War and for the economic depression that Russia is still in. Giving a certain temporary stability instead of the liberty that most of the Russians do not know and can not understand, the current president of Russia manages to be in front of the electoral ratings.

On a long-term, however, Vladimir Putin's political strategy bares certain deficiencies:

³¹ Natalya Givorkian, Andre Kolisnikov, Natalia Timakova, *La persoana întâi. Convorbiri cu Vladimir Putin*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2000, p. 151

³² Janusz Bugajski, *op. cit.*, p. 36

³³ Idem, p. 35

Putin's current politics (...) bring back the uncertainty and prevent the ascension, not doing very much for setting the basis of a succession of stable politics. He rather endows a society with higher and higher inequities and with a smaller and smaller responsibility, in which ownership remains still uncertain and in which arbitrary justice prevails.³⁴

At the beginning of March, this year, Dimitri Medvedev, designated by Putin as his successor for governing Russia, has won the presidential elections with 70% of the votes in his favor, being followed by the communist candidate Ghenadi Ziuganov, with 17.8% and the nationalist Vladimir Jirinovski, with 9,4%.³⁵ Medvedev said that he will continue the political line of the former leader in Kremlin, Vladimir Putin (whose political objective, the prime-minister seat, has been fully fulfilled), but how he will continue is until now uncertain.

III. RUSSIAN NATIONALISM IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

3.1. New Russia's sealing with reference to the Western world

At the beginning of 1992, relationships between the main exponent of former USSR, the Russian Federation, and the USA had changed dramatically. Instead of hostility, a friendly, relaxed attitude was installed, and the US welcomed Russia into the great family of democratic states. However, the dialogue between the two was not carried out from equal positions, Russia not being, as its predecessor the USSR, a superpower, and the American goodwill, not doubled by economic or political concrete actions, has led in time to the derailment of the former superpower from the democratic route on which it so enthusiastically had embarked in 1991.

The Russian-American dissonance from the second half of the 90s fundamentally had the expansion of NATO towards the East and the hesitation of President Bill Clinton on not clarifying the relationships with Moscow on this matter. Although the Russian president Boris Eltin had endorsed Poland's nomination to NATO, the US did not launch any signals that it would like to begin the adherence treaties with Russia. These American throw-backs in recognizing post-Soviet Russia's status as a superpower have led to the estrangement between the two protagonists of the Cold War to enclosure and a continual raising hostility of Russia towards the Western world.

Zbigniew Brzezinski claims that there have been three stages in post-communist Russia's external politics, stages which can be interpreted as exacerbation of nationalism, radicalism and a gradual unfriendliness of Kremlin's politics concerning America and Western Europe. The first stage consists of a "strategic partnership" that Russia was supposed to have with the US, partnership that had to have led to the idea of a "global condominium". The second stage was fixed on "vicinity" and on the trials (mostly failed) of economical reintegration of the former Soviet space. Finally, in the third stage, Russia is preoccupied by an Eurasiatic alliance, either with China or Iran, or with China and India, in order to counterbalance the American hegemony in Eurasia.³⁶

The Russian-American relations have met a vivification after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 2001, but have deteriorated soon after, when the US exited the ABM Treaty (Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty), - a commitment dating from the Cold

³⁴ Andrew Jack, *Rusia lui Putin. Toamna Oligarhilor*, Editura Bic All, București, 2006, p. 305

³⁵ Armand Goșu, *Ce urmează după Putin*, în *Revista 22*, anul XV (939), martie 2008

³⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah...*, pp. 113-114

War era which implied impedance of nuclear proliferation – and have decided to start a second Gulf War, which was contravened blatantly with the Russian economic interests in the region..³⁷ The “patriotic” forces and the non-communist ones were impressed, after Putin’s 9/11 speech regarding the reinforcement of the Russian state, but, although the president seized the geo-political opportunity to continue the war in Chechnya in the name of anti-terrorism, they firmly opposed Russia’s adherence to the anti-terrorist war began by the US. The explanation given by the extremists of the terrorist attack was a typically Marxist one, starting from the more and more accentuated cleavage between the rich and poor countries which would lead in turn to the appearance of phenomena such as terrorism.³⁸

In 2007, the US’ intentions to build an anti-missile shield that would convey through Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as Russia’s backing down from the Conventional Force Treaty of Europe as a reaction towards the American intentions, have fully led to the downward path on which the Russian-American relations have entered, also giving way to the tensions and animosities between the Western world and Russia.

3.2. Nationalism and neo-communism in the backwash of the Soviet collapse

The downfall of communism has meant a shock for the nomenclature of former USSR, while also being repercussive within the Russian society. The short euphoria that led the political, economical and social liberalization ended abruptly and disappointed the majority of the public opinion. The harsh reality of the market economy, to which the new Russia was in no case ready to cope with adequately, reinforced the Russian fears and animosities regarding the Western world. The ideological emulation between the USSR and the US ended, for the first, in a dramatic and unpredictable way for most of the observers. The axiological and ideological void that made way through post-communist Russia began to be filled up with a highly tessellated mélange of nationalism and neo-communism.

In the socio-political turmoil of the early 1990s some characters and movements heavily inspired by nationalism and geo-politics stand out. Alexandr Dugin (or Dughin), a name which has appeared before in this paper, is one of them. Founder of the far right magazine *Elementi*, Dugin is in favor of a polarization between “atlantism”, on one hand, and Eurasianism, on the other. The Western values are viewed as decadent, intrusive and destabilizing for the Eurasiatic space. The solution rests in the making of a common front to all the peoples in this geo-political area and, at the same time, permanent surveillance of the US, the main representative of atlantism.³⁹ Mackinder theses on Heartland and those of Haushofer on the “anaconda politics” are repeated: the “the maritime powers” of atlantism, based on liberalism and democracy, find themselves in a hard-shell contradiction with “the continental powers” of Eurasia, based on traditional, organic vales. The geo-political breach between the two is not only ideological, but also cultural.⁴⁰

³⁷ Andrew Jack, *op. cit.*, p. 251

³⁸ John O’Loughlin, Gearoid O Thuatail, Vladimir Kolossov, *Russian geopolitical storylines and public opinion in the wake of 9/11: a critical geopolitical analysis and national survey*, in *Communist and post-communist studies*, nr. 37, 2004, pp. 293-294

³⁹ Pierre Lorrain, *op. cit.*, pp. 210 și urm.

⁴⁰ Idem, p. 211

Vladimir Jirinovski, the founder of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (the denomination does not reflect at all the extreme nationalistic character of the group), predicated at the same time the idea of the restoration of the Tsarist Empire in its period of maximum expansion, namely the 19th century. Moreover, Jirinovski “was endorsing the Tsarist strategy in regard to an opening to the warm seas, dreaming to see the Russian soldiers washing their boots in the Indian Ocean.”⁴¹ Even though Jirinovski had a significant electoral support in the early 90s – which he knew how to politically manipulate, backing up, whenever he could get benefits, the groups which had the power⁴² – his ideas on the necessity of a war with Turkey concerning the geo-political anchoring of Russia in the South and obtaining access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits – an age-old objective of the external Russian politics- have obstructed his ascension within the exclusivist Moscow political circles.

The leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Ghenadi Ziuganov, embraces a very uncommon and equally very little feasible geo-political position. Overcoming the communist abhorrence towards geo-politics, CPRF’s leader claims that all peoples that bring forward traditional values are incidentally socialist, too. The Western world is responsible for the East-West polarization, because it articulates the so-called inferiority of the traditionalistic peoples – which do not accept the bourgeois values and ideas – by trying to exploit them economically, considering them as nothing more than “simple providers of raw materials.”⁴³ Considering nationalist integrism and extremism as a prophylactic manifestation of traditional values, Ziuganov suggests an alliance with the Islamic fundamentalist forces in trying to counterattack the American hegemony in the Eurasiatic area. Only the alliance between the Russian and the Islamic peoples can lead to “the winning of the class struggle worldwide” which is fought between these two, on one side, and the Western world, on the other.⁴⁴

3.3. Two forms of nationalism in contemporary Russia: “nativism” and “panslavism”

This dichotomy of the Russian nationalism is suggested by Ilya Prizel, in the study *„Nationalism in post-communist Russia. From resentment to anger.”* The first type of nationalism brought forth by this author is “nativist” or “moderate” nationalism. The followers of this form of nationalism perceive the identity of Russia exclusively through the Russian ethnic group, which they define loosely within the parameters of language and culture. The political decentralization is condemned, moderates suggesting instead “the making of a unitary ethno-national state.”⁴⁵

In regard to the Western world, the moderate nationalists – category in which Soljenitin is also included – advocate the necessity of a cooperation, at least until Russia’s position in economy will strengthen and this relationship will become equitable for the Russian state and society. The moderate nationalists may be considered, regarding this view, the followers of the inter-war Eurasiatists.

⁴¹ Idem, p. 208

⁴² Idem, p. 208

⁴³ Idem, p. 213

⁴⁴ Idem, p. 213

⁴⁵ Ilya Prizel *Naționalismul în Rusia post-comunistă. De la resemnare la furie*, în Sorin Antohi, Vladimir Tismăneanu (coord.), *De la utopie la istorie. Revoluțiile din 1989 și urmările lor*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2006, p.523

The panslavic nationalism and the imperial attitudes will strengthen after the economical crisis of 1998, this being also a consequence of the intensification of Russians' negative perceptions regarding Muslim minorities from within the Federation. This type of nationalism has a profound imperialistic nostalgia, regretting also the Soviet era and the prestige brought by it to the whole Slavic community. Panslavic followers are recruited from amidst the former communists, the army and the Orthodox Church⁴⁶: a heteroclitic component, which fully reflects the paradoxes and ambiguities of the contemporary Russian nationalism.

The problematic of these two types of nationalisms is discussed also by Janusz Bugajski, however starting from a political, rather than social approach and considering nationalism focused on the Russian ethnicity as being an extremist one, also being marginal in proportion to panslavism:

During the 1990s, nationalism and etatism have become ideological and mobilization mechanisms highly important for the Russian leaders. Only marginal extremist groups worked with the premise of an exclusivist ethnic nationalism. As for the rest, a pan ethnic etatism dominated, being centered around Moscow, by which Russia was portrayed as an important power, which should rebuild its influence zones.⁴⁷

3.4. The anti-Semite dimension of the Russian nationalism

Anti-Semitism is almost inherent to any form of aggressive nationalism. The allogene, depicted best in this type of discourse by the image of the stateless Jew, corrupts and undermines the nations in which he carries out his activities, thus national mobilization must be firstly directed towards the subversions and strangers from within and only then towards external dangers.

During the Soviet era, after the year 1960, anti-Semitism had become a requisite of the all finer refined Russian nationalism, reaching all the way to the roots of the October Revolution. Therefore, the true Bolshevik heroes were only Lenin and Stalin, Troțki and his partisans being only a subversive clique oriented towards the divergence of the Revolution so it would benefit the global Jewish establishment. The Zionist movement⁴⁸ was blamed for repeated tentative of destabilizing and compromise on worldwide communism, Fascism and Zionism being considered equal.

Dozens of books, hundred of articles have confirmed (...) that Judaism had no other goals than to install a worldwide Fascism. Jews were portrayed as the everlasting aggressors, chauvinists, assassins, parasites. Their aim? To dominate the world through astuteness, corruption and murder. Pioneers of capitalism, they were accused of being the source of all historical plagues, being on top of the fight against communism, especially against Russia, which they were trying to destroy. History had been rewritten. (...) Hitler and his Nazis were depicted as puppets in the hands of the Jews. In 1941, they pushed the Fuhrer into attacking the USSR. Their complicity with National Socialism went up until encouraging the extermination of the poorest of the lot in the death camps.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Idem, pp. 525-526

⁴⁷ Janusz Bugajski, *op. cit.*, p. 17

⁴⁸ Even from the late XIXth century, when they first appeared, The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion were proven to be a fake created for manipulating the anti-semitic attitudes lurking in the Tzarist Empire.

⁴⁹ Thierry Wolton, *Roșu-Brun. Răul secolului*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 2001, p. 320

From the manifestos of the Pamjati national movement, active only in the late 80s, we find out that in the first government of the Soviet Union, made up of 22 members, only two were Russians, the rest being “nationalistic Jews”. These would have contributed actively to the demolition of churches and of worship houses and of the deportations of intellectuals in camps. Even in Gorbachev’s time, the Jews were accused of occupying the best places in the Russian economy and that they had access to higher education in a much larger proportion than the rest of the population.⁵⁰

Among the diseases of the Russian nationalistic sentiment after 1970, anti-Semitism is a constant presence. Everything that goes on in Russia, and also all around the world, and is not agreed by the extreme nationalists, must necessarily be corollary of Jewish or freemason intrigues.⁵¹ Not even today, at the beginning of the 21st century, does the anti-Semitism in Russia show any signs of fading. Moreover, the concept has been reinforced, and the consequences it has triggered at a social level are unsettling: the numbers of neo-Nazi groups and their victims are increasing day by day. Only in 2004 the neo-Nazi organizations, among which The Movement for Russia’s National Unity stands out, have killed 44 people, a considerable figure which says a lot about the radicalization of the Russian nationalism.⁵² A frequently met tendency of the Russian neo-Nazis is to organize “squads” made up of volunteers that will act out at the outskirts of large cities so as to fight against the crimes caused by Asian or Muslim immigrants.

3.5. Messianism, religion, nation

The messianic component of the Russian nationalism has been highlighted ever since the 19th century by authors such as Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy. In the first half of the 19th century, Eurasiatists have used it fully to justify their beliefs about Russia’s position and uniqueness as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The messianic upsurges are inextricably tied to a certain nation and culture, which they try to elevate as high as possible, thus capitalizing its whole social and political potential.

The messianic destiny of a major culture is, at the same time, a prophetic destiny, which ties the past of the chosen people to the future of humanity (...). As a human phenomenon and as a historic destiny, messianism is at the same time religious and ideological: religious so far as it claims a salvation within the boundaries of a culture and ideological, because a messianic culture is, foremost, a national culture.⁵³

Today, messianism does no longer have the popularity and adherence it had in the past. However, several authors, such as Soljenitiņin, Gumilev or Dugin, still pronounce themselves on it.

Orthodoxism, however, was and still is a fundamental part of the Russian nationalism; the Russian Patriarchate is constantly supporting political actions with a nationalist character. In the post-communist era, religion has become a fundamental component of the Russian ethos, but, nevertheless, the Russian Church is facing both internal and external difficulties. The problems from

⁵⁰ Aldo Ferarri, *op. cit.*, p. 84

⁵¹ Alexandr Soljenitin, *op. cit.*, p. 162

⁵² R.J.Price, *Russian Nationalism: creating a civic identity*, University of Glasgow, <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3726/>, 2007

⁵³ Bogdan Silion, *Rusia și ispita mesianică. Religie și ideologie*, Editura Vremea, București, 2004, pp. 12-13

within the Church can be summed up mainly to one: the social way it should adopt and, more exactly, the choice between the nationalistic enclosure or the opening towards the West. The external problems are represented by the compromises the church had made with the communist regime through time, compromises which have an impact on its image and reputation.

The radical and xenophobe far right draws most of its legitimacy out of the consonance that it has in proportion to Russian orthodox values: belief, tradition, spirituality. The ultra-nationalists' speeches, myths and imagery mostly include references to the Orthodox Church.⁵⁴

The downfall of the communist ideology in Russia has created a void of ideas, and the church has affirmed itself on this background and came as one of the few "identity" references of the Russian nation, which, even with this, does not have so many.⁵⁵

CONCLUSIONS

A very interesting particularity of the political scape from present Russia, and, in general, of all the states which have met with the communist experience, is the proximity between the neo-communist and nationalist groups. Guy Hermet argues that these groups all share a very close language and symbolism. They all express themselves in the name of "ours" (nașii) afore "the others", of the agents of outlandishness.(...) They all exploit the term *norod* (people) and its derivatives, transforming, at the same time, the word "democrat" into an insult which has a similar strength as the epithets "fascist" or "Jew" had in the past. And all, including the communist ones, place equally foremost in their populist message the religious orthodox element, implying it visibly, although quiet.⁵⁶

It is expected that, after the recent NATO summit that took place in Bucharest, between the 2nd and 4th of March, the nationalistic forces and attitudes in Russia know a new rebirth. This anticipation is fueled by the fact that the transatlantic partnership initially wanted to co-opt Ukraine and Georgia, besides Albania, Macedonia and Croatia. Putin's unbendingness concerning Ukraine and Georgia's incorporation – two ex-Soviet republics, out of which the first is highly important from a geo-political point of view to Russia – has led to their exclusion from NATO's immediate expansion agenda which can be considered a real diplomatic success for the end of the mandate of the current president. However, beyond the official rhetoric, the event has restrained the political relation between Moscow and the Atlantic community, and its contribution to a new refueling of a nationalistic bursting in Russia is not at all excluded.⁵⁷

In accordance with the ideas and arguments brought for their support throughout this article, it can be asserted that nationalism represents a major social and political force in contemporary Russia. Having occurrences that vary from moderate to aggressive, nationalism remains still a very strong identity matrix for this cultural area.

⁵⁴ Zoe Knox, *Russian orthodoxy, russian nationalism and Patriarch Aleksii II*, in *Nationalities Papers*, nr. 33:4 (2005), pp. 1-2

⁵⁵ Georges Nivat, *op. cit.*, p. 191

⁵⁶ Guy Hermet, *Sociologia populismului*, Editura Artemis, București, 2007, pp. 246-247

⁵⁷ This hypothesis has become more credible after Georgia, already and wrongly perceiving itself as a NATO member, invaded South Osetia. Triggering Moscow's combativity, the situation quickly deteriorated and another war broke up in the already tensioned ethnic mosaic which overlaps the Caucasus area. As a result, Russia's relations with the western powers are once again worsening.

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