



**Sant'Anna**  
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# Russia's Path for Identity: Ideas, Philosophies, and Discourses

## Author

Kristina Khutsishvili

## Supervisor

Prof. Anna Loretoni



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## Abstract

Identity is one of the concepts that became widely used across different disciplines during the last decades. The work explores the issue of Russian identity, the paths for its development, looking at the text as a main source of the identity-related knowledge. As both the attempts of identity-shaping and the references to the sources of identity formation may be “captured” in contemporary discourse, the apparatus of discourse analysis employed allows approaching the issue. The scope of the work includes the philosophical, legal, and idea-related dimensions. As a result, the work looks on the specificity of the Russian philosophical thought being employed in current political discourse, the issues of value pluralism and female identities, the identity-related aspects of the constitutional change – reflecting on the existing paths for identity formation and the attempts made to shape the identity from the “above.”



## Introduction

Examining the identity of any “level” or scope is an ambitious and time-consuming assignment, which is also may be challenged through, for example, accusations of too broad or too narrow, too peculiar segments taken into consideration. For instance, “why you were examining national identity and not, for instance, purely political aspects?”, may be a legitimate question. Another may sound: “What are the limits of the political?” These are the issues of greatest importance. The explanatory potential of the research on identity may be used not only in foreign policy, decision-making, or other areas where the knowledge on area studies is crucial but also for the broader reasons for understanding the country and its people. It is difficult to separate this understanding from the cultural, historical, linguistic, and other peculiarities that are usually viewed separately from the political. The interdisciplinarity then becomes a key, and the choice of angles, the thematic approaches allowing to “capture,” to reflect on the peculiarities of identity. In this work the aim to outline the path for Russian identity is approached from the perspectives of ideas and philosophies, the discourses then allow to “capture” the identity-related claims, and explore their nature. The method of discourse then gives an opportunity to reflect on the question of how we can describe contemporary Russia’s path for identity. While trying to distinguish certain important aspects of Russian identity, I also argue for the dual, both on a theoretical and a very practical level, nature of identity.

On a theoretical level, we may distinguish “identity” and also “difference” since the questions “who are we?” or “who am I?” may be answered through outlining “who we are certainly not” or “who I am certainly not.” This dualism, identification both through belonging and refusal to belong, or alienation, othering, is rooted in the concept. Hence, the issues of identity, and on a bigger political picture, national identity, are not innocently theoretical. Keeping in mind this dualism, we may assume that misunderstanding on the identity level may be the same factor of the national identity formation. Being misunderstood may turn the nation, the country and its people, away, may sharpen the identification defined through “who we are not.” For this reason, in the first chapter dedicated to the main conceptual and methodological notions, I also argue for the attentive and careful translation, including also conceptual translation.



The frustration on being misunderstood, misinterpreted, has roots in Russian culture, here we may turn to Dostoevsky and his *Writer's Diary, Dnevnik Pisatelya*: “It seems certain that a European of any ethnicity can always learn another European language and enter into the soul of any other European ethnicity more easily than he can learn Russian and comprehend our Russian essence.”<sup>1</sup> While this claim of Dostoevsky is more emotional, rather than rational since it is not supplemented by specific examples or arguments, it is still thought-provoking. Interestingly, he uses the words “soul” and “essence,” and also links the linguistic abilities, mastering the language, with an ability to “enter into the soul.” It is safe to assume that the word “identity” was not used in Russia in the second part of the 19th century but after looking through all the diverse attempts of identity studies, the metaphor from the Dostoevsky’s quote resembles surprisingly with contemporary works, such as reflections on the European identity, “the soul of Europe” by Cerutti and Rudolph.<sup>2</sup> The understanding and misunderstanding part may be of current interest, as the debate on Russia got fierce after the events in Crimea and South-Eastern Ukraine, with, for example, works of Clover and Snyder and their subsequent discussions.<sup>3</sup> Clover’s claim on the rise of Russian nationalism was responded by the scholars such as Laruelle, the same happened with much more radical Snyder’s statement on Russia being a “fascist” country.<sup>4</sup> The understanding and misunderstanding are in relation to knowledge, especially the knowledge on identity. It concerns not only the academic domain but also the broader domain including the media discussions, general public opinion, and such. This is one of the reasons besides the academic interest and the interest of foreign policy, for getting the knowledge on identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by me. In original: “Но всё-таки кажется несомненным, что европейцу, какой бы он ни был национальности, всегда легче выучиться другому европейскому языку и проникнуть в душу всякой другой европейской национальности, чем научиться русскому языку и понять нашу русскую суть”. Source: Dostoevsky, Fyodor M. 2010. *Dnevnik Pisatelya (“Writer’s Diary”)*. Moscow: Institute of Russian Civilization, p.127.

<sup>2</sup> Cerutti, Furio and Enno Rudolph (eds.) 2001. *A Soul for Europe: On the Political and Cultural Identity of the Europeans*. Vol. 1 and 2. Leuven: Peeters.

<sup>3</sup> See: Clover, Charles. 2017. *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Snyder, Timothy. 2018. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Tim Duggan Books.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Laruelle’s reply “*Is Russia really ‘fascist’? A comment on Timothy Snyder*” or Pinkham’s review “*Zombie History: Timothy Snyder’s bleak vision of the past and present.*”





Bringing into consideration questions of national identity instead of political identity is a choice made consciously. While there are pieces of research drawing on a clearly defined notion of political identity, working on a Russian example involves the complexity of a theoretically driven case study. Framing the work on the intersection of theory and practice implies that both pillars should be considered as equally important. Discovering the peculiarities of reality demands an interdisciplinary approach: economic factors influence on the political, and vice versa, historical experience and dominant ideologies and discourses have a certain impact on people's views, our educational system, customs, traditions, the literature we read, but all these also implies the artefacts which carry meanings, the discourses that can tell about the past but also tell about the people. A methodological approach of discourse analysis applied to identity research enables to “capture” the constantly changing object of study. The performance of the analysis demands knowledge in history, cultural studies, linguistics, philosophy, in addition to social sciences, such as politics and economics. The studies on identity are interdisciplinary, they require a well-rounded approach, enabling making connections and reasoning.

Chapter 1 provides considerations on the main debates, concepts, and methodological issues related to the study. The attention is paid to the discourse analysis as a feasible approach to identity studies, the issues of translations are argued, with the references made both to the academic corpus and also broader debate relevant to the case study on Russia.

Chapter 2 explores the constitutional peculiarities while trying to “capture” interrelated Russia's constitutional and broader identities. The identity-related aspects of the recent constitutional amendments are explored, as well as the attempts of identity-shaping being observed in the discourse.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the elaboration on value pluralism and Russian female identities. It proposes to look at the emancipatory movement from a non-Western perspective, which leads to unusual results. The change of the context determines a new fresh view on the issue, where the Russian tradition appear to contain strong emancipatory and feminist ideas. The issue of duality is not escaped, hence the concept of “traditional values” is



explored as being promoted by the official discourse and contradicting the rooted traditions of emancipation.

Chapter 4 explores philosophical references and identity-related claims in the discourse of Vladimir Putin and the issue of the philosophical ideas being instrumentalized in politics.

Chapter 5 analyses the textual artefacts of post-Crimean Russia on the examples of Vladislav Surkov's texts and the Declaration of Russian Identity and their implications.

The work has a strong interdisciplinary nature: a theoretically driven case study employing the methods of discourse analysis, using the conceptual language of political theory while considering a very practical question of identity. The study is situated inside the philosophic frame of fundamentals, such as issues and texts, and is based on standpoint political and cultural discursive practices. Engaging with examples of discourse from political, philosophical, and idea-related domains, I address the question of the patterns in Russian national identity formation, with identity and discourse being in the relation of a double agency. What are the features of identity-related claims that can be found in the discourse and how identity may be formed, negotiated, shaped through such practices?

The duality, often contradictory, may be found in different domains: it starts on a theoretical level with the notion of identity, including both literal “identity,” being similar to, belonging to, being like, and difference, being unlike, different from, other than. Then, it may be observed through the chapters exploring different aspects of Russian identity. It may be found in the history and memory domains: empire versus nation-state; Soviet Empire versus the Russian Empire; atheism versus the Orthodox Christianity; nationalism versus globalism or cosmopolitanism; Europe versus Asia; a particular, European or Asian way, versus so-called special way; totality versus non-totality; feminism, emancipation versus so-called traditional values, and the list can be refined and continued. It is possible to assume that the authentic sources from the past, coming from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, are continuing to compete, and the ultimate winner is not determined yet. We see that the concepts of freedom and human rights are, despite speculations, rooted in the Russian discourse, although totality and unfreedom are present



there as well. Looking through the pieces of contemporary political discourse, initial duality takes a form different from just an ongoing competition: it is a strange mixture of contradictory elements, causing confusion, that may reflect not just a temporarily delayed choice but a choice that is delayed indefinitely, the choice that is not made because choosing one means abandoning the other, and all of the political advantages this other relates to. The confusing mix supplemented with references to different paths, different pasts, is presented then as a new, re-invented, identity, aiming to combine the significant aspects of the past, ignoring the contradictions, and the new question arising at this point can be whether the discovered attempts for identity-making may be successful, and to what extent.



## Chapter 1: On Research and Method

The chapter aims to overview the main theoretical and methodological notions employed in the research and their particular meanings in the case of Russia. The contemporary understanding of national identity is reflected upon, with examples from both theoretical discussions on the notion and more country-specific writings. The methodological tools are defined and their advantages and limitations are elaborated. Finally, the importance of context-specific translation is argued, both as a methodological tool and a tool to avoid conceptual confusion.

### View on National Identity and the Russian Case

Anthony Smith defines a nation as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.”<sup>5</sup> This definition seems to be comprehensive and inclusive, yet the list of elements peculiar for nations may be negotiated and continued. It also gives space for multi- and interdisciplinarity since dealing with a certain number of elements of the bigger picture of nation, the knowledge in the relevant field has to be acquired, as well as the interdisciplinary knowledge, tackling the coexistence and the interplay between the elements. Further in his book, the bigger focus on the symbolic elements is set: the contemporary nation is described as “a cultural artefact of modernity, a system of collective imaginings and symbolic representations, which resembles a pastiche of many hues and forms, a composite patchwork of all the cultural elements included in its boundaries.”<sup>6</sup> The role of imagination is emphasized as well in the work of Anderson: *The Imagined Communities*, a widely referenced work, defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>7</sup>

Imagination in focus allows us to take a more philosophical path, while the distinction between the imaginary and the real may be problematic. The opposite of what could have

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Anthony D. 1999. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.8.  
<sup>6</sup> p.168.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, p.6



come to mind, the imaginary is not something necessarily contrasting the real. Following Lennon's reflection, imagination is not something being in the opposition with the real, but something crucial for how the world is made real for us.<sup>8</sup> Both Smith's and Anderson's definitions involve notions referring to the not fully "feasible": while myths and historical memories may be presented through, for example, a narrative, still it is a question whether such narratives can "describe at all" or whether they live space for other approaches, the space beyond the act of speaking or writing; with Anderson's definition it is even more obvious – while the concepts of imagination and symbolism may be elaborated, also in application to a particular nation and examples coming from this nation's case study, they still leave space to think, to question the limits of the definition, to explore the concept further. While dealing with imagination, there is a space for self-doubt and a question of whether it could be explained "fully" or with the closest approximation.

Greenfeld defines national identity "essentially as a style of thought" and immediately connects it with the notion of nationalism.<sup>9</sup> The creativity of this definition is appealing: while it allows a variety of interpretations and possible questions to be raised, it also reflects the enigmatic, not fully feasible object of research. The enigmatic feature of identity is marked by Fearon: "Within political science, we find the concept of "identity" at the center of lively debates in every major subfield (...) And in political theory, questions of "identity" mark numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (...) Despite this vastly increased and broad-ranging interest in "identity", the concept itself remains something of an enigma," he writes.<sup>10</sup> An "enigma" of identity merged with a nation, being

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<sup>8</sup> See Lennon, Kathleen. 2015. *Imagination and the Imaginary*. London: Routledge, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Greenfeld, Liah. 1990. The Formation of the Russian National Identity: The Role of Status Insecurity and Resentment. In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 549-591.

<sup>10</sup> Fearon, James D. 1999. *What is Identity (Aw We Now Use the Word)?* Stanford, MA: Stanford University, available online at: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf> (accessed on 20 December 2019).



“imagined,” “symbolic,” in the notion of national identity – the precise definition here becomes not an easy task.<sup>11</sup>

Most commonly identity is perceived as a result of an open-ended process: it is by no means static. The matter of identity is not defined easily, and the writers outline not only “enigmatic” status but the immanent complexity involved while dealing with identity.<sup>12</sup> For example, Nancy reflects on the co-existence of the personal, the individual, and the national, while dealing with the issue of national identity: “... each French person is a ‘who’ like any other human subject, and if this ‘who’ could never be reduced to a ‘what’, France itself is another kind of ‘who’ irreducible to any characteristics (population, situation, GNP, wines, cheese, and airplanes). And what complicates the matter is that each ‘who’ of each French person includes something of the ‘who’ of France, and reciprocally.”<sup>13</sup> This is interesting, as it allows to look at the personal and collective in its coexistence, and does not simplify the complex reality. But with this unease to approach, why when we continue to deal with identity questions, in the frameworks of political studies, such as political philosophy, theory, international relations, foreign policy, and also history, anthropology, demography? Maybe because even being an enigma, identity still has its explanatory potential and being not an easy target to tackle, it plays an important role in the framework of the political. In the same work, Nancy writes: “The political processes of all nations are wider and deeper than the formal institutions designed to regulate them; some of the most critical decisions concerning the direction of public life are not made in a parliament and presidiums; they are made in the unformalized realms of what Durkheim called “the collective conscience.”<sup>14</sup> Miller defines national identity through the outline of five elements of nationality as a community and attributes these features to be “sources” for the national identity. These five elements characterize

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<sup>11</sup> Moreover, writers also assign the “imaginary” adjective to the identities itself. See, for example: Pultar, Gönül (ed.) 2014. *Imagined Identities: Identity Formation in the Age of Globalization*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Although there are attempts to approach identity research through assumed to be more “precise” quantitative apparatus. See, for example: Lustick, Ian S. 2000. Agent-Based Modelling of Collective Identity: Testing Constructivist Theory. In: *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, Vol. 3, No. 1, available online: <http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/3/1/1.html> (accessed on 10 June 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. 2015. *Identities: Fragments, Frankness*. New York: Fordham University Press, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.



a community as “constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment,” “extended in history,” “active in character,” “connected to a particular territory,” and “marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture.”<sup>15</sup>

The “applied” writings on a specific subject of national identity are not as much engaged in the debate or divergence of what identity is. Instead, they concentrate on the elaboration of a particular case from the chosen methodological position. Yet, there are different aspects emphasized by these studies. Thus, Kumar equates the exploration of the “making of English identity” to the “exploration of Englishness,” or “what it means to be English.”<sup>16</sup> “It is common enough for nations, as for individuals, to develop a sense of themselves by a process of opposition and exclusion. What they are – French, German – is defined by what they are not – German, French. The ‘content’ of national identity is more often than not a counter-image of what is seen as distinctive in the culture of the other nation or nations,” he writes.<sup>17</sup> This view on national identity partially resembles a philosophical stand of Taylor arguing in *The Politics of Recognition* that “we define our identity always in dialogue with, *sometimes in struggle against*, the things our significant others want to see in us.”<sup>18</sup> This comparison seems particularly important for the understanding of the Russian identity: the predecessors of contemporary Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Empire employed such definitions – the socialist system versus the capitalist system, Russia defined through the question of belonging to the West or the East. The snag of definition through “what we are not” is a dependence on this second entity. In a way, defining yourself through other entities implies the necessity of these entities for your identity. There is also a possibility to distinguish a separate angle on identity: with the identity defined through the questions “who are we?” or “who am I?” and questions “who we are not?” or “who I am not?”, there may be an identity that is forming, willing to be. In a line of works on national identity, we may distinguish the writings on the topics of nation-building, and this is a different way to look at the

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, David. 1995. *On Nationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> See: Kumar, Krishan. 2003. *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, abstract.

<sup>17</sup> p.IX, preface. Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1992. *The politics of Recognition*, available online [http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics\\_of\\_Recognition.pdf](http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics_of_Recognition.pdf) (accessed on 9 November 2018), pp. 32-33.





problem.<sup>19</sup> Nation-building, in turn, may be reflected from different perspectives, as, for example, an organic development or the goal of “social engineers” – such as intellectuals or politicians.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Russia, this angel is very interesting, since the “making” of identity may naturally include the features of the past, or features pre-selected, chosen for identity formation. In the real world, those processes coexist, and while in Russia two bigger “pasts” are present – the legacy of the Soviet Union and Empire Russia – the identity formation process seems to be complex and curious. Curiosity is hidden also in denial: taking the bigger picture, the Revolution of 1917 and the building of the Soviet Union involved the dismissal, alienation, and depreciation of the Russian Empire past in many of its aspects. The dismissal though never was total: if looking through the school curriculum, with an active presence of ideologically driven pieces of literature, the literature and the cultural achievements dated by the times of the Russian Empire were never dismissed. Pushkin, Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky, representing the different times, the times that were alienated and dismissed, were appraised and taken proud in. The ballet continued to hold its place in cultural life. The past was not dismissed totally: the valuable elements were chosen to keep and cherish, and it is not that usual to reflect on what it would be if the choices were made differently. The collapse of the Soviet Union – without an aim to compare it with the Russian revolution – lead to the multiple crises, not only the economic and political but also existential. The crisis of mindsets, values, understandings – and, again, the dismissal of the past. Yet, it is curious to look at the elements maintained from the past, and on the role that they play in the formation of the contemporary Russian national identity.

Another point that is important to make is pluralism, the multi-layered character of identities, when the “exploration of Englishness” may be specified and challenged further, as, for example, “exploration of female Englishness.” Specifications do not seem to be challenging in itself, while they may add to the clarity of the vision. With the Russian case, the unusual kind of complexity is added by the definition of the “Russianness” itself:

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example: Tolz, Vera. 1998. *Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia*. In: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 6, pp. 993-1022.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 994.





as an example, the specificity of “female Russianness” is complicated by the linguistic question, which is: “which Russian do we mean?” This question needs further terminological elaboration, which bases on historical, political, and cultural differences.

The question “Which ‘Russian’ do we mean?” appears when turning to writings on Russia – both scholarly or journalist – in the English language. The problem is that the single word “Russian” relates to two different words in the Russian language, which are *russkiy* and *rossiyskiy* (in application to the certain phenomenon present in Russia), or *russkiy* and *rossiyanin* (in application to the person’s ethnicity or nationality respectively).<sup>21</sup> While making a project for the *New York Times*, aimed to describe what does it mean “to be a Russian,” the author, being a native speaker of Russian language, was asking the heroes questions using the word *rossiyskiy*, rather than *russkiy*: “The first question made many pause, for I didn’t ask what makes someone *russkiy*, a common term that signifies an ethnic designation. After the fall of the Soviet Union, President Boris N. Yeltsin popularized the use of *rossiyanin*, a citizen of Russia, to unite the country of many different nationalities. This is the term I used; it is the equivalent of asking what made someone in the United States an American.”<sup>22</sup> Here is important to specify: while Friedman uses the accurate word “popularized,” speaking about the notion of *rossiyanin* and its use in times of Boris Yeltsin presidency, it is possible to find in the literature the opinion that the notion itself is a creation of Yeltsin. Vera Tolz provides a different account on this matter, referring to the state of the Russian Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “The fact that the state had a multi-ethnic rather than purely Great Russian character was to be reflected in its name: Rossiiskaia (imperii).”<sup>23</sup> The same logic may be seen as persistent: the pluralist, multi-ethnic environment encourages a new notion ensuring the belonging; the *russkiy* notion becomes not enough. “Unlike the word *russkaia*, which denoted the ethnic Russians, *rossiiskaia* had a political connotation. But the new terminology was not applied consistently and the distinction between Russia proper and

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<sup>21</sup> Here and after the transliterations from Russian Cyrillic script into Latin script are made according to the BGN/PCGN standard, with the exceptions of names and surnames that have an established spelling in the English language, such as *Yeltsin*.

<sup>22</sup> Friedman, Misha. 2014. “To Be a Russian.” In: *The New York Times*, 6 July, available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/06/opinion/sunday/exposures-russian-patriots.html> (accessed on 4 July 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Tolz, Vera. 2001. *Inventing the Nation: Russia*. London: Arnold, p. 158.



the whole empire proved to be difficult to sustain. The words *rossiiskii* and *ruskii* were used interchangeably, particularly in the eighteenth century but also later. Moreover, the acknowledgement that the Russian state was an empire did not change the rulers' ultimate goal of assimilating the empire's non-Russian subjects by achieving social and administrative, if not necessarily full linguistic and religious, uniformity within its borders,” writes Tolz.<sup>24</sup>

The difference between *ruskiy* and *rossiyskiy* is important to acknowledge from the beginning when working on the issues of Russian identity. Moreover, the reflection on the *ruskiy-rossiyskiy* dichotomy could be useful in other contexts, such as in the previously ethnically homogenous societies becoming more and more multi-ethnic and pluralists, which provokes the need to rethink or reformulate the meanings, such as being, for example, Italian or Swedish. Here two points may be added. First, surely the “invention” of the notion may not lead to its further success. As stated above, in the Russian case, by the time of popularization of the notion by Boris Yeltsin, the word had already the history of usage during “one of the pasts” – the past of the Russian Empire. From this perspective, it is possible that the successful incorporation, inscription of such a notion and the meaning behind it will need a lot of time. The identities and mindsets will need to “absorb” the notion, to accept it, and to adjust to it. It is also possible that such a notion may never become an organic or immanent part of the discourse, perception, language, and then will disappear. It may need time and it may be either rejected, either may not find its “fit.” The second point is that two different notions, two words, as in *ruskiy-rossiyskiy* example, have a potential not only of coherence, unity and inclusion but of alienation and othering. It is possible that instead of identification of who we are, the emphasis will become of who we are not – with the notions becoming conflicting, mutually excluding, hierarchical.

In the case of Russia, while the success of the *rossiyskiy* concept is sometimes questioned in the literature, the advantages also have to be acknowledged.<sup>25</sup> The identity of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> As an example of the critical perspective, see: Goode, Paul J. 2019. *Russia's Ministry of Ambivalence: The Failure of Civic Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia*. In: *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 140-160.



*rossiyanin*, the notion being inscribed into the political and legal discourse, allows Russians with whatever ethnic or religious background – to be as Russian as everybody else. This is an important conceptual feature for the nation-building, it is also a particularly important existential feature for the country that still may be assessed as an empire, or at least a country with the long empire legacy, including the past of the Soviet Union. In a certain way, the *rossiyanin* notion may be viewed as a substitution of the concept of the “Soviet man,” *sovetskiy chelovek*, unifying and equalizing the Soviet citizens of different ethnic or cultural origin, coming from different republics with their distinct history and traditions. Yet, the concept of the Soviet citizen, while unifying, was complemented with the elements of distinction, if not othering or alienation. Two features of discourse should be kept in mind here. First, the line *natsional’nost’* in Soviet documents such as passports or birth certificates. Second, the images of the other, for example, the “rootless cosmopolitan,” *kosmopolit bezrodnyy* other. The *natsional’nost’* concept will be further elaborated in the following paragraph of this chapter, since its particular meaning and the consonance with the word *nationality* in the English language, can be a source of confusion in the context of writing on Russia in the English language and translating the concepts from language to language. *Natsional’nost’* in the Russian language literally means the ethnic origin, and it had necessarily been mentioned in the Soviet times while receiving the birth certificate and the Soviet passport. While the passport ensured that its holder has a Soviet nationality, the citizenship of the Soviet Union, based, for example, in the city of Novosibirsk, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, or Kutaisi, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, or in Tashkent, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, the *natsional’nost’* graph was asking about the citizen’s ethnic belonging – or self-perception, in case of belonging to the mixed family. Hence, the construct of the Soviet citizen was combined with this obligatory, although the unverifiable notion of ethnicity. Then the unification and nation-building could be challenged, and another, negative identification processes could occur, based on determining, “appointing” the other, finding the alien and the enemy inside. A remarkable tool for such a process was a concept of a “rootless cosmopolitan.”

A “rootless cosmopolitan,” *bezrodnyy kosmopolit*, was a Soviet anti-semitic ideological code for emphasizing someone’s belonging to Jewish ethnicity, which was in the center



of an anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the Stalin's times, predominantly between 1940-50s.<sup>26</sup> It was first featured in Communist party member and Soviet statesman Andrey Zhdanov's speech in 1948: "Internationalism is born where national art flourishes. Forgetting this truth means (...) losing one's face, becoming a rootless cosmopolitan."<sup>27</sup> Further, it could be encountered more and more in speeches shaming the Soviet dissidents, opponents of the regime, some of them ethnically having Jewish roots. For example, Soviet writer Alexander Fadeev put cosmopolitanism as an idea of the "enemy's agents," who may try, by inciting nationalist prejudices and remnants among backward people, to bring ethnic-based discord into the fraternal community of the peoples of the USSR, or to undermine in our peoples the sense of national honour and pride with servile admiration for everything that bears a foreign brand, or with sanctimonious preaching of groundless "cosmopolitanism" emanating from that all people, they say, are "people in the world," and a nation, a homeland, is, they say, an "obsolete concept."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> As Azadovskii and Egorov write, "In the Soviet Union the 'anti-cosmopolitan' campaigns of the late 1940s and early 1950s were a taboo subject for many years afterward. Even during the 'thaw' under Nikita Khrushchev, Soviet publications made no mention of the campaigns. Only with the advent of glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s was the topic finally discussed in Soviet newspapers and journals, beginning with an article in the journal *Zvezda*." See: Azadovskii, Konstantin and Boris Egorov. 2002. From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism. In: *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4, 1, pp. 66-80, available online at: <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/egorov.htm> (accessed on 15 June 2020). On the issue, see also: Grüner, Frank. 2010. 'Russia's Battle against the foreign': the anti-cosmopolitanism paradigm in Russian and Soviet Ideology. In: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 17, 3, pp. 445-472; Goldin, Semion. 2010. Jews as cosmopolitans, foreigners, revolutionaries. Three images of the Jew in Polish and Russian nationalist ideology at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 431-444.

<sup>27</sup> ТВМ. In Russian original: "Интернационализм рождается там, где расцветает национальное искусство. Забыть эту истину – означает (...) потерять свое лицо, стать безродным космополитом". Source: the definition of the "rootless cosmopolitan," *kosmopolit bezrodnyy*, provided in Serov, Vadim. 2003. The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Catchphrases and Expressions ("Энциклопедический Словарь Кратких Слов и Выражений"). Moscow: Lokid Press.

<sup>28</sup> ТВМ. In original: "(...) которые могут пытаться путем разжигания националистических предрассудков и пережитков среди отсталых людей вносить национальную рознь в братское содружество народов СССР или подрывать в наших народах чувство национальной чести и гордости раболепным преклонением перед всем, что носит заграничную марку, или ханжескими проповедями беспочвенного "космополитизма", исходящего из того, что все, дескать, "люди на свете", а нация, родина – это, мол, "отжившее понятие". Source: Fadeyev, Alexandr. 1943. On National Patriotism and National Pride of the Peoples of the USSR ("О национальном патриотизме и национальной гордости народов СССР" In: "*Under the banner of Marxism* ("Под знаменем Марксизма"), No. 11, pp. 34-35.



According to Spector, “under the totalitarianisms of Nazism and late Stalinism, a “rootless cosmopolitan” was a life-threatening epithet aimed at those people, namely ‘the Jews’, criminalized for supposedly lacking national allegiance and affiliating with foreign culture.”<sup>29</sup> This new meaning, with its codification, ideologization, and alienation, was so different from the “normal” meaning of a cosmopolitan, while etymologically the word “cosmopolitan” has Greek roots, deriving from *kosmopolitês*, meaning the citizen of the world.<sup>30</sup> Maybe there was some historical ground for this “misinterpretation,” for this negative meaning the word became assigned with. The reason to suspect so is the use of this world in the Russian Empire. For example, the author of the “Philosophical Letters,” *Filosoficheskie Pis'ma*, Pyotr Chaadaev, expressing strongly pro-European views, was at the same time attacking cosmopolitanism: “The cosmopolitan future promised by philosophy is nothing more than a chimera. First, you need to start to develop the domestic morality of peoples, different from their political morality; they must first learn to know and evaluate themselves, as individuals.”<sup>31</sup>

In the contemporary Russian case, the complication goes even further, as more and more often in the political discourse *rossiyskiy* is being substituted by *russkiy* – not in a literal meaning of ethnicity, but with an assigned symbolic and emotional meaning, possibly aiming to establish a certain metaphysical and spiritual image of Russia and Russians. This “extra” meaning, given to the word *russkiy*, and implying the emotional component beyond to ethnicity, may be a source of another kind of confusion even for authors normally distinguishing *russkiy* and *rossiyskiy*. In general, the choice to give this word a new meaning on metaphysical and symbolic grounds, reflected in the Russian political discourse, cannot be “translated” into the English.

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<sup>29</sup> Spector, Hannah. 2017. The cosmopolitan subject and the question of cultural identity: The case of Crime and Punishment. In: *Crime, Media, Culture*. Vol.13(1), available online at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1741659016634813> (accessed on 4 July 2019).

<sup>30</sup> This is according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/> (accessed on 10 June 2020).

<sup>31</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Космополитическое будущее, обещаемое философией, не более чем химера. Сначала надо заняться выработкой домашней нравственности народов, отличной от их политической морали; им надо сначала научиться знать и оценивать самих себя, как и отдельным личностям”. Source: Chaadaev, Pyotr. 2013. *Filosoficheskiye Pis'ma* (“Philosophical Letters”). Moscow: Lan', p.35.



The identitarian complexity may be also approached through the broader investigation: in 2001, Cerutti and Rudolph attempted to describe identity – in that case, European identity – from the various perspectives, combining literary, judicial, economic, philosophical, and other contributions.<sup>32</sup> The ideas of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity being immanent to identity studies may also derive from the complexity of the notions researched. They seem to be well-reasoned from the perspective of “capturing” the identity, it is difficult to assume we can fully separate, for example, the political from the cultural. The importance of culture for the process of identity formation is also outlined by Geertz, who writes: “Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless.”<sup>33</sup> He unequivocally relates the political to the cultural: “One of the things that everyone knows (...) is that a country’s politics reflect the design of its culture.”<sup>34</sup> Gellner, in turn, defines the nationality through the shared culture, explaining it by the “the establishment of pervasive high cultures (standardized, literacy- and education based systems of communication).”<sup>35</sup> Elder finds the notion of a nation historically rooted in the cultural domain: “When the idea of a nation emerged in early nineteenth-century Europe, it referred to a group of people who had a shared ethnicity, language, and culture – a nation was not a political entity, but a cultural one. Today it is common to link nation and state together to produce the hyphenated term ‘nation-state’. Jointly, this suggests both a political territorial entity and the idea of shared culture and heritage.”<sup>36</sup>

These points are interesting, also from the perspective of national identity formation: the open-ended process of identification relies on a shared culture, which we can point out as something being “objectively” there, but it also can be influenced, “engineered”, by the elites, by the powers having possibilities to influence on the discourse, including cultural discourse, and influence successfully. What in the literature is called “nation building”

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<sup>32</sup> Cerutti, Furio and Enno Rudolph (eds.) 2001. *A Soul for Europe: On the Political and Cultural Identity of the Europeans*. Vol.1 and 2. Leuven: Peeters.

<sup>33</sup> Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, p.50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.312.

<sup>35</sup> Gellner, Ernest. 2008. *Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press, p.49.

<sup>36</sup> Elder, Catriona. 2007. *Being Australian: Narratives on National Identity*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, p.23.





may be coming from “the above” from the variety of methods, such as supporting certain, “patriotic,” kinds of art and discouraging another, or changing the school curriculum in the area of humanities. These actions then need cultural intermediaries, and even then, they may or may not succeed.

In the Russian case then, we may refer to the Soviet past, when culture and artists were employed by the needs of the regime, and ideology was interrelated with all the above. It is also reasonable to assume that the literary, philosophical, broader cultural discourses appraised in the society and re-introduced as features of the curriculum are playing the role of both reflections of identity peculiarities and “reinforcements”, identity-forming elements.

The symbolic part of the notion, as well as Cerutti and Rudolph’s metaphor of identity being a soul, relates to a more literary, philosophical, humanitarian view, which also seems overall positive and expresses the sense of unity and solidarity, identity defined through belonging and not a refusal to belong. At the same time, this metaphor evokes other lines. In the essay *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, Lévinas also mentions the soul, in this case, the German soul, towards which Hitler’s claims were addressed: “The philosophy of Hitler is simplistic. But the primitive powers that burn within it burst open its wretched phraseology under the pressure of an elementary force. They awaken the secret nostalgia within the German soul. Hitlerism is more than a contagion or a madness; it is an awakening of elementary feelings.”<sup>37</sup> This comparison sharply illuminates the possibly dark sides of identity and belonging. The intentional contrast reminds us about moral issues. The same categories of nationalism, imperialism, globalism may get different meanings. The frustration may be immanent for the identity formation process. The globalism, for example, can cause frustration and fear of the disappearance of the national identities. As Pultar writes, “instability, distortion of meaning, and volatile identities seem to be rapidly spreading in the wake of globalization throughout the world in a multitude of forms. In such a scenario, the concept of national

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<sup>37</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel and Sean Hand. 1990. Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism. In: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No.1, pp. 62-71, available online: <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/DisappearingMan/ReflectionsHitlerism.pdf> (accessed on 10 November 2018), p.64.



identity becomes inevitably a most vulnerable notion, subject to reformulations of different nature.”<sup>38</sup>

The frustration part is important, as it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the identity-related process. The globalization may be viewed as a challenge for national identities, evoking a national-globalist debate. There are two elements I would like to underline. The first relates to the immanent part of identity, which on par with the statement of “who we are” is the outline of “who we are not”. The alienation or othering is not necessarily innocent, would it be an alienation of the “collective West,” “collective East,” or group of the people with a certain characteristic of difference. The second relates to the frustration on the level of the national identity, which in certain circumstances may realize itself in the political actions. In the later chapter, we will try to look at Crimean events from the perspective of the Russian national identity.

The issue of Russian national identity appears in the literature inside different contexts – foreign policy studies, regional studies, comparative politics, history, and further. Tolz brings the question of “how successful are intellectuals and politicians in their attempts to form the Russian nation after the break-up of the empire.”<sup>39</sup> Aizlewood approaches the centuries-long debate on Russia being between the East and the West in retrospective analysing the examples of the Russian thought.<sup>40</sup> Through the same debate, Møller aims to conceptualize Russian identity.<sup>41</sup> Neumann, taking a historical stand, finds Russia being trapped “in-between” the attraction to be a part of Europe and the still present empire ambitions.<sup>42</sup> Morozov describes Russian identity as postcolonial and through this defines Russia as a subaltern empire.<sup>43</sup> Tsygankov employs Russia’s identity as a tool

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<sup>38</sup> Pultar, Gönül. 2014. *Imagined Identities: Identity Formation in the Age of Globalization*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p.155.

<sup>39</sup> Tolz, Vera. 1998. Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia. In: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 6, pp.993-1022.

<sup>40</sup> Aizlewood, Robin. 2000, “Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 78 (1), pp.20-43.

<sup>41</sup> Møller, Peter Ulf. 1999. Russian Identity as an East-West Controversy: Outlining a Concept. In: *Slavica Lundensia*, No. 19, pp. 1-19.

<sup>42</sup> Neumann, Ivar B. 1996. *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. London: Routledge.

<sup>43</sup> The “In postcolonial theory, the term ‘subaltern’ refers to disenfranchised individuals and groups, those whose agency is limited and who are deprived by the hegemonic social order of the possibility to





helping to explain its foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> The works on the issue are usually focusing on either the broader political or the cultural aspects, without an aim to determine the interrelations. Another commonality is that the academic manuscripts exploring Russian identity are not often working with contemporary Russian discourse, leaving this source for the articles and book chapters dealing with a very particular issue.<sup>45</sup> In this writing, on the contrary, the boundaries between the political and the cultural are blurred. This is a purposeful choice: while keeping in mind the character and the scope of identity questions, the difficulties with “capturing” identities, it is difficult to claim to be able to overview all of the aspects of Russian national identity, yet, it is possible to go beyond one particular aspect and to take a bigger picture. The absence of the strict limits of the political and the cultural seem enables a more realistic view on how identity is formed over time, with the influence of different factors. Moreover, it gives the opportunity to explore the role of the cultural in the political, which could have been missed otherwise.

The decision to look at the Russian identity in its several aspects assumes the related limitations, yet, the thematic diversity chosen allows to reflect on the commonalities and make generalizations. The employment of the current discourse as the main source of study, viewed inside the context, political and cultural analogies from the past, or, more precisely, multiple “pasts,” allows taking a distinct stand on the identity research. The discourse, a source of identity-related knowledge, may illustrate the peculiarities we are aiming to research but at the same time, the identity-related claims, appeals made, may reinforce the peculiarities, or even “impose” them from “the above.” It is not a typical standpoint, when the narrative is also questioned on its authenticity, with such questions as, for example, “was it authentically rooted there?” or “is it imposed?” We are going to look at the significant pieces of the contemporary discourse, trying to figure out whether the claims there correspond with the “sources” of the Russianness, with the Russian past,

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make their voices heard.” Source: Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.2.

<sup>44</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P. 2013. *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example: Malinova, Olga. 2012. *Simvolicheskoye yedinstvo natsii?* (“The Symbolic Unity of the Nation?”) In: Pro-et-Contra, 16, 3, pp.76-93; Malinova Olga. 2012. *Usage of the Past in the Official Symbolic Policy of Post-Soviet Russia*. In: Symbol w Polityce, ed. by I. Massaka. Torun: Duet, pp.181-201.



its broader context, or whether they are shaping something that is not there but would be beneficial from the perspective of, speaking the Tolz's language, "social engineers."

## Discourse Analysis and Identity Research

The methodological part reflecting on the application of discourse analysis to identity research may start from the statement of identity being not an easy target to approach. As Nancy writes, "identity is not a figure", "identity is something more subtle, more delicate, and more evasive", "Its force lies in displacing, in changing figures."<sup>46</sup> The "evasive" object of study is not easy to capture, and it is not easy to choose the right tools for this. Ainsworth and Hardy describe critical discourse analysis and other kinds of discourse analysis as "regularly used to study identity."<sup>47</sup> Yet, they do not outline the reasons for such a successful methodological application. Identity, being a sort of trendy, fashionable object for a study, if we may use these adjectives in the academic context, still is approached from a variety of standpoints, theories, and views. While they do have commonalities, the question of an "easy" translatability from one context to another may be raised. What is not equivocal is identity being not fully "feasible," easily measurable phenomenon. Discourse analysis enables to look at the identity through the "feasible," approachable parts.

"Identity is to a large extent a discursive phenomenon, as representations of self and other are co-constructed through language and other semiotic resources," write Zotzmann and O'Regan.<sup>48</sup> They find the critical discourse analysis the most suitable method for identity research, referring to the concept of power distinguishing the critical discourse analysis method from the discourse analysis in general, and justifying the suitability, "as identity constructions are imbued with power relations and ideology."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Identities: Fragments, Frankness*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> See: Ainsworth, Susan and Cynthia Hardy. 2004. Critical Discourse Analysis and Identity: Why Bother? In: *Critical Discourse Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p5225.

<sup>48</sup> Zotzmann, Karin, and John O'Regan. 2016. *Critical Discourse Analysis and Identity*. In: Preece, Siân (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*. Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.114.



Wodak's elaboration of Austrian national identity is accompanied by the chapter disclosing the narrative character of the national identity.<sup>50</sup> According to Fairclough, discourse is a social practice in which identity is embedded.<sup>51</sup> Gee then concentrates on the "language" inside the framework of discourse, and argues for it being a consequence of the identity-related exercise: "How we use language – how we put different grammatical resources to use in different situations or contexts – is the way we linguistically enact and recognize socially meaningful identities."<sup>52</sup> De Fina et al. emphasize that "capturing" identity is not an easy task, even while approaching it through the discourse: "Since identity is continuously and constantly produced and reproduced, sketched and designed, and often co-constructed by 'self' and 'other,' we should strive to demonstrate how identities are (re)produced through language (and other media) and how they come into existence through social interaction."<sup>53</sup> While these elaborations confirm the discourse to be an important source for the knowledge on identity, the last quotation confirms the argument already made in this chapter, the argument on identity not only possible to be "captured" through the discourse analysis, with the text containing or referring to identity peculiarities but also identity being influenced, shaped or reinforced through the discourse. Consequently, while exploring the discourse, we can attempt to distinguish both the aspects reflecting the identity peculiarities and the aspects of the identity-shaping, national identity building. This task may be assisted by the reliance on the "sources" of identity, points of reference already rooted, historically, culturally, politically. It does not mean, though, that the changes, including the changes "imposed" or reinforced through the discourse, would never succeed in the attempts to shape the identity. Indeed, the consensus already reflected above assesses identities as the result of the open-ended processes, their ability to change is not questioned. Yet, the attempts for national-building and particular identity building are neither predisposed to succeed: their success or failure may be the result of different factors, while it is also reasonable to think

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<sup>50</sup> See: Wodak, Ruth, de Cillia, Rudolf, Reisigl, Martin, and Karin Liebhart. 2009. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>51</sup> Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.

<sup>52</sup> Gee, James Paul. 2018. *Introducing Discourse Analysis: From Grammar to Society*. London: Routledge, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> De Fina, Anna, Schiffrin, Deborah, and Michael Bamberg (eds.) 2006. *Discourse and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.22.



that the more “authentic” is the identity-related appeal, the more rooted in views, morals, and perceptions of the people, the more possibilities for the success would be there.

### On the Conceptual Issue of Translation

The discourse analysis as a method of identity research assumes the careful and analytical work on the discourse, which is text in our case. Referring to the elements of Russian discourse, the authors of academic or publicist writings on Russia should be careful both performing translations and using the already translated versions. In the academic studies, since the language of international scientific communication is English, the analysis is usually written up in the English language, relying on a discourse authentically in the Russian language. Then, the simplest solution is to provide a translation in the English language, with a reference to the original data in Russian, which can be consulted in a case of doubt or by scholars knowing the language.

This part is clear, however, there is also the other choice to be made, related to the particular type of the text and its translation. For example, the official governmental website Kremlin.ru provides the full text of speeches delivered by the president and the prime minister of Russia in both its Russian original and the English translation so these already prepared English translations can be used directly in the work. In this writing, the choice is made otherwise, and all translations are performed by the author, with a reference to the original text in Russian in footnotes. There are two reasons for such a decision: first, the approach taking the text as the main source of knowledge assumes attention to the word and to the context, with all of the subtle peculiarities that may be omitted in the text; second, the findings of the work by Van Poucke and Spiessens on the translation in the Russian context.<sup>54</sup>

The aim of the authors of this article was to investigate the representation of the foreign press texts, covering the Crimean even and then being translated into Russian on the

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<sup>54</sup> See: Spiessens, Anneleen, and Piet Van Poucke. 2016. Translating News Discourse on the Crimean Crisis: Patterns of Reframing on the Russian Website InoSMI. In: *Translator*, 22 (3), pp. 319-339.



website INOsmi.<sup>55</sup> Assisted by the critical discourse analysis method, they assessed 770 original and 39 translated articles from *The Guardian*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Le Monde*, and *Le Figaro* published in INOsmi. “Translation, which is part and parcel of InoSMI’s work, can also be considered a form of discursive practice, both reflecting and shaping social and institutional structures,” authors write.<sup>56</sup> The conclusion they made states that the website “can hardly be labelled a purely propagandistic news outlet,” since 40 percent of the articles published there is to some extent critical towards Russia’s politics.<sup>57</sup> “The fact remains, however, that the original Western coverage on Crimea is being reframed through selective appropriation, shifts, and omissions in translation,” they state. “Whether these reframing mechanisms constitute traces of intentional manipulations of individual translators or whether they are the outcome of a deliberate, top-down enforced translation policy is difficult to determine, but the data reveal a pattern that illustrates how the process of news translation and (re)presentation by InoSMI is firmly rooted in a particular socio-political setting,” - the conclusion is relevant to this study. With such a precedent, an attentive elaboration made by the author seems preferable, rather than the usage of the prepared official translations.

The other issue is hidden in the conceptual part. In the first paragraph, the notions of nationality and the Russian *natsional’nost’* were briefly discussed but those are not the only notions important while speaking on the issues of national identity. Another example at this point may be the notion of “nationalism.” While the precise definition of nationalism vary from scholar to scholar, with Gellner’s elaboration of “the organization of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous groups, or his definition from the contrary, where nationalism “is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself,” but instead “the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures”, it is difficult to deny the importance of the concept

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<sup>55</sup> Inosmi.ru is the website providing Russian translations of the foreign press articles on Russia (the motto “Everything that is worthy of translation. How foreign media portray Russia. We are translating. You make a choice” / “InoSMI – Всё, что достойно перевода. Как иностранные СМИ изображают Россию. Мы переводим. Вы делаете выбор”), available online at: [www.inosmi.ru](http://www.inosmi.ru) (accessed on 10 September 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Spiessens and Van Poucke, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.16.



while speaking on the issues of identity.<sup>58</sup> As Greenfeld writes: “Nationalism, among other things, connotes a species of identity, in the psychological sense of the term, denoting self-definition. In this sense, any identity is a set of ideas, a symbolic construct. It is a particularly powerful construct, for it defines a person’s position in his or her social world.”<sup>59</sup> The connection between nationalism and national identity is also premised by Smith: “Nationalism, the ideology and the movement, must be closely related to national identity, a multi-dimensional concept, and extended to include a specific language, sentiment and symbolism.”<sup>60</sup> In the Russian case then, a conceptual correspondence needs careful consideration.

The conflict in Ukraine and the Crimean crisis have provoked the wave of academic and media discussions on the possible rise of Russian nationalism.<sup>61</sup> The issue of Russian nationalism was addressed in earlier publications, in works of Oushakine, Klyamkin, Miller, Prizel, Hosking.<sup>62</sup> Russian imperialism was reflected in the works of Kivelson and

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<sup>58</sup> See: Gellner, Ernest. 2008. *Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press, p. 12 and p. 48 respectively.

<sup>59</sup> Greenfeld, Liah. 1993. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, Anthony D. 1991. *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example: Arnold, Richard. 2016. Surveys show Russian nationalism is on the rise. This explains a lot about the country’s foreign and domestic politics. In: *The Washington Post*, from 30 May 2016, available online:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/30/surveys-show-russian-nationalism-is-on-the-rise-this-explains-a-lot-about-the-countrys-foreign-and-domestic-politics/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.78e835fbf91](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/30/surveys-show-russian-nationalism-is-on-the-rise-this-explains-a-lot-about-the-countrys-foreign-and-domestic-politics/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.78e835fbf91) (accessed on 4 July 2019); Clover, Charles. 2017. *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Hale, Henry E. 2014. Russian Nationalism and the Logic of the Kremlin’s Actions on Ukraine. In: *The Guardian*, from 29 August 2014, available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/russian-nationalism-kremlin-actions-ukraine> (accessed on 4 July 2019); Kappeler, Andreas. 2014. Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the Imperial Past and Competing Memories. In: *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 5, pp. 107-115; Laruelle, Marlene. 2019. *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*. New York: Routledge; Walker, Shaun. *Putin’s Quest for Lost Glory*. In: *The Guardian*, from 18 February 2018, available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/18/putins-quest-for-lost-glory> (accessed on 20 June 2019).

<sup>62</sup> See: Prizel, Ilya. 1998. *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Klyamkin, Igor. M. (ed.) 2007. *Posle Imperii (After Empire)*. Moscow: Liberal’naya Missiya Fund. Miller, Alexei. 2005. *Natsionalizm i Imperia (Nationalism and Empire)*. Moscow: Obyedinonnoye Gumanitarnoye Izdatel’stvo; Hosking, Geoffrey. 1998. Can Russia Become a Nation-state? In: *Nations and Nationalism*, 4 (4), pp.449-462; Oushakine, Serguei A. 2009. *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.





Suny, and Beissinger.<sup>63</sup> In some of the works the concept of nationalism itself was not specified, which is understandable for the analytical articles and opinion pieces appearing in the media. While not all of the pieces of polemics were created by the authors fluent in Russian, yet, some of the writers were Russian studies professionals. In both cases, though, the issue of translation and interpretation of nationalism had not been raised, while the narratives, translated back into the Russian language, could cause misunderstanding.

The reason is that the term *natsionalizm* in Russian has an established meaning, which is closer to xenophobia than to nationalism in English. Referring to different types of nationalism, such as more neutrally perceived state nationalism, or ethnic nationalism with a negative connotation, Russian understanding of *natsionalizm* is almost exclusively corresponding with ethnic nationalism. As was mentioned in the first paragraph, during the Soviet times, the passport of the citizen of the Soviet Union contained a graph *natsional'nost'*, the word that sounds very similar to the English “nationality.” Yet, the meaning was completely different: *natsional'nost'* means the ethnic origin, and the Russian equivalent for “nationality” and also “citizenship” is the word *grazhdanstvo*. Due to the consonance, the claim like “Russians are nationalists”, being translated into the Russian language, will be most probably interpreted by Russian speakers as “Russians are xenophobes”. Curiously, while a significant number of works published during the last years is reflecting on the rise of Russian nationalism, none of them questions the notion of nationalism itself and its translatability. Ponarin discusses imperialism and nationalism as possibly contradictory phenomena. It may be symptomatic that this type of reflection is appearing solely in the Russian language, while widely discussed works on Russia written in English, such as Clover’s and Snyder’s, take “Russian nationalism” for granted, and then equate it with imperialism.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See: Kivelson, Valerie A. and Ronald G. Suny. 2016. *Russia's Empires*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Beissinger, Mark R. 1995. Persisting Ambiguity of Empire. In: *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 11 (2), pp. 149-184.

<sup>64</sup> Ponarin, Eduard. 2016. Imperiya ili krov': kakim budet russkiy natsionalizm (“*Empire or Blood: What Kind of Russian Nationalism It Will Be?*”) In: *Forbes Russia*, from 16 March 2016, available online: <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/tsennosti/314697-imperiya-ili-krov-kakim-budet-russkii-natsionalizm> (accessed on 4 July 2019).



Ponarin's point does not itself contradict the claim of Russian nationalism being on the rise, however, the important difference is hidden in the type of nationalism reflected upon. The summary of Ponarin's article states that "the rise of nationalism in Russia in the near future is inevitable; the question is, what form will it take – imperial or ethnic."<sup>65</sup> He describes "imperial nationalism" (*imperskiy natsionalizm*) as the situation "when people consider themselves to be above others not by ethnicity, but by the fact of belonging to a certain large state – the empire."<sup>66</sup> This point seems to be extremely important while conceptualizing the Russian identity in the English language. The peculiarities of the concept of *natsionalizm* may be better explained while looking at the same-rooted words. The Large Legal Dictionary of the Russian language defines *natsional'nost'* as "a person's belonging to a certain ethnic community of people, distinguished by features of the language, culture, psychology, traditions, customs, and way of life." Consequently, the meanings of nationality in the English language and similar-sounding *natsional'nost'* in the Russian language are not the same.

According to Hale, "There are different types of Russian nationalism and these types do not always fit together comfortably."<sup>67</sup> "One type defines 'Russian' very broadly to include all of the peoples and religious groups that have traditionally lived in the territory of the former USSR or before that, the Russian Empire. The key call of these nationalists is to reintegrate the territory of the former Soviet states," he writes.<sup>68</sup> Hale's point here is clear: Russia, as a former power centre of the two empires – the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, – is still trying to impose its influence on currently independent countries, former parts of the same empires.<sup>69</sup> In Russian, though, such a description would be attributed to the notion of *imperializm*, not *natsionalizm*, while in scientific studies it may

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Hale, Henry E. 2014. Russian nationalism and the logic of the Kremlin's actions on Ukraine. In: *The Guardian*, from 29 August 2014, available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/russian-nationalism-kremlin-actions-ukraine> (accessed on 4 July 2019).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> On the empire essence of the Soviet Union see, for example: Lieven, Dominic. 1995. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as Imperial Polities. In: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 607-636; Zubok, Vladislav. 2007. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.





sound as *imperskiy natsionalizm*. The second type of Russian nationalism, according to Hale, is “a much more exclusive and even racist ethnic Russian nationalism, one committed to a pure Russia free of “polluting” peoples of other ethnicities, or at least those who are not Slavic.” This expression, although emotionally intense, is quite close to the notion of *natsionalizm* in contemporary Russian language and discourse. Further Hale specifies the description by outlining the aim of such Russian nationalists, that is “to prevent immigration of unwanted groups and, for some, to bring Russians or Slavs ‘stranded’ abroad back into the Russian state’s domain.”<sup>70</sup>

Hale’s stand uniting two different notions, two distinct meanings, under the same “umbrella” word, outlines the problem of translation and interpretation of such notions in political and media discourses. The contradiction between these two meanings may be crucial while dealing with related to Russia issues in the English language. Works that came out since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, with a growing concern around the Russian foreign policy and security in Europe, claimed the rise of Russian nationalism, providing the annexation of Crimea as a major argument, but did not specify the notion of nationalism itself, its definitions and application to the context. Claiming that Russia’s political actions and narratives contain imperialistic features would be a more inclusive and dialogue-oriented way of discussion. At the same time, Hale’s approach, bringing ethnic nationalism to the discussion as a subtype of Russian nationalism, has a disadvantage of its own. If the first type of Russian nationalism, that aims to unite former empire co-citizens under the new roof of Russia, is imperialistic but not exclusive, the second type is by definition exclusive, intending to create a new Russia being a nation-state, with all priorities given to ethnic Russians. In this sense, both inclusive – not necessarily in a positive sense, yet inclusive – and exclusive vectors, politics, ideologies are united in one word, one notion, nationalism, that has a high chance to mislead both English-speaking readers and, being translated back, the Russian speakers.

Two different aspects of nationalism were recently outlined by Laruelle: “Ethnic nationalism has never developed in Russia to the extent as it is common for the ‘small’ (in the sense of population numbers) nations, which are much more acutely aware of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



threats to ethnic unity and survival. Ethnic nationalism is weak because it is defeated by imperial nationalism, in which, starting from Moscow's third Rome, through Soviet internationalism and, to some extent, today's Russia with its mission of 'conservative values,' the status of 'Russian' is not maintained through the 'purity,' but with the help of the "civilization mission" not only in relation to the neighbours in the Eurasian space but also on a worldwide scale."<sup>71</sup> In this example, the "umbrella" term nationalism is uniting ethnic and imperial nationalism: both are "nationalisms," one is exclusive and the other inclusive – yet possibly violent and imposing, not based on the will of the people. Laruelle shares an opinion that only the second type of nationalism, imperial nationalism, is present in Russia.

The contradiction between an empire and a nation may be illustrated by the elements of the Soviet ideological narrative such as mentioned in the first paragraph notion of "the Soviet man," the Soviet person, a citizen of the Soviet Union, whose ethnic or geographical belonging, while religion was prohibited, defines his being less than being a citizen of the Soviet Union, a holder of its passport. Internationalism as a crucial rhetorical and ideological tool had been a feature of the Soviet empire narrative, and it is difficult to imagine the success of the Soviet Union as a rather stable construction if lacking the ideology. The rhetoric tools of internationalism, though, has been recently employed by the Russian politicians, while trying to provide a morally grounded justification for the support of the rebels in the South-East of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. As in times of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the term

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<sup>71</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Действительно, этнический национализм никогда не был развит в России столь сильно, как это свойственно "малым" (в смысле малочисленности) нациям, которые гораздо острее чувствуют угрозы этническому единству и выживанию. Этнический национализм слаб, потому что его побеждает имперский национализм, в котором, начиная от Москвы третьего Рима через советский интернационализм и вплоть до некоторой степени до сегодняшней России с ее миссией "консервативных ценностей", статус "русского" поддерживается не через "чистоту", а с помощью "цивилизационной миссии" не только в отношении к соседям по евразийскому пространству, но и во всемирном масштабе". Source: Laruelle, Marlène. 2019. "Nationalism is a 'normal' component of social life and it would be naive to think that it is like a disease that can be cured" ("Национализм является нормальной составляющей общественной жизни, и было бы наивным думать, что он подобен болезни, которую можно лечить"), interview in the Russian language. In: *The Historical Expertise*, No.1(18), p.10, available online: <https://istorex.ru/uDrive/file/963/f0f2bac4f9f75db8b95c3b3090ee7310/%D0%98%D0%AD-19-1.pdf> (accessed on 4 July 2019)



*internatsional'nyy dolg*, the international duty, was used to justify the necessity of such a step, internationalism rooted in the Marxist-Leninist past once again appeared in Russian discourse. The link between nationalism and identity may be a key to review those different meanings under the notion of nationalism, putting the difference in dependence on identity-related peculiarities.

One of the latest texts relevant to this discussion is Bershidsky's opinion piece in *The Moscow Times*, written right after *The Financial Times* published an interview with Vladimir Putin.<sup>72</sup> In this text Bershidky tries to explain to the international audience the peculiarities of the Russian context, for example, its migration situation, assuming that the wrong impression may be formed based on the differences in understanding nationalism, imperialism, right-wing politics, and so on. He writes: "On immigration (...) Putin is, in practice, more liberal than most European leaders. He has consistently resisted calls to impose visa requirements on Central Asian countries, an important source of migrant labor. Given Russia's shrinking working-age population and shortage of manual workers, Putin isn't about to stem that flow, even though Central Asians are Muslims – the kind of immigrants Merkel's opponents, including Trump, distrust and fear the most."<sup>73</sup> Providing a brief overview of the context, Bershidsky quotes Putin on the issue of language: "Putin told the FT that he saw these migrants as something of a problem, but 'at least they all speak Russian'". "Putin is an imperialist of the Old Soviet school, rather than a nationalist or a racist," he adds.<sup>74</sup>

This point captured by Bershidsky is of extreme interest and needs a deeper reflection. With the discussion on Russian nationalism reinforced by the Crimean events, another discussion should not be forgotten – the discussion of the importance of the Russian

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<sup>72</sup> Leonid Bershidky is a well-known Russian journalist and media manager, now living in Germany and writing mostly for the German media.

Vladimir Putin's interview with the Financial Times is available online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36> (accessed on 15 June 2020); the full video version available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60836> (accessed on 15 June 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Bershidsky, Leonid. *Why Putin Sounds Alt-Right Though He Really Isn't*. In: *The Moscow Times*, from 28 June 2019, available online: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/28/why-putin-sounds-alt-right-though-he-really-isnt-a66212> (accessed on 4 July 2019).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



language outside the context of Russian citizenship. The language employed being a factor, a source of Russian identity, being not exclusively national but also transnational. This linguistic argument, supplemented by the argument of the “Russianness” in its new, somehow metaphysical interpretation of *russskiy* and not *rossiyskiy*, were employed in the Russian discourse for the justification of the Crimean events. One more notion difficult for translation stepped into the debate, the notion of *russskiy mir*. *Russskiy mir* may be translated into English as “the Russian world” but “the Russian here” is *russskiy*, the adjective for the Russian ethnicity, ethnic-based belonging, and not *rossiyskiy*, the nation-based belonging. The complication goes further, since *mir* may be translated into English as both “the world” but also “the peace,” and in the Russian language *russskiy mir* may both mean “the Russian world” and “the Russian peace.” *Russskiy mir* is necessarily linked with the consequence of the existence of the Russian Empire and even more the Soviet Union, with the Russian language often spoken in the former Soviet republics, nowadays legally independent states, and the ethnic Russians living in “the near abroad”. According to Zevelev, “the concepts of ‘compatriots abroad’ and the ‘Russian World’ have evolved within two different yet overlapping discourses.”<sup>75</sup> “Each of these concepts has its own intellectual history. However, these ideas have something in common. Basically, they both reflect the tension between actual Russian Federation state borders and the mental maps of ‘Russianness’ that exist in the minds of many Russians,” he writes.<sup>76</sup> This double, *russskiy-rossiyskiy* and the “world” - “peace”, complexity is not typically reflected in the English translations of Russian political discourse. In this context, the unequivocal use of the notion “nationalism” becomes even more questionable, since the concept seems not fully suitable for such particular circumstances unless we focus exclusively on the “empire nationalism.”

Whatever discursive or translatory choice being made here, the importance of this choice should not be underestimated: as it is stated by Baker, “translation and interpreting are essential for circulating and resisting the narratives that create the intellectual and moral

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<sup>75</sup> Zevelev, Igor. 2016. *The Russian World in Moscow's Strategy*. The Center for Strategic and International Studies, available online at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-world-moscows-strategy> (accessed on 10 June 2020).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



environment for violent conflict in the first place, even though the narratives in question may not directly depict conflict or war.”<sup>77</sup> And if hopefully the war, the violent conflict, is possible but not necessary or most common outcomes of “mistranslation,” misunderstanding rooted in the discourse, the importance of translation and the conceptual language used selected for translation, should be considered. The translation itself should be viewed not only as an instrument, as, for example, it may be for the identity research, but also as on the interconnection with the political. As it is outlined in the essay on the “translational turn,” the situation was not always as complex: “It is certainly clear that, compared to just a decade ago, today's situation is much more complex and blurs the boundaries between disciplines to a far greater extent.”<sup>78</sup> “Trends such as globalization and digitalization are shaping a new reality, bringing together diverse narratives, becoming accessible for the public through the efforts of translators. The sphere of the political and the sphere of linguistic are at a certain point merging: language may be instrumentalized by the political, and the political may be seriously dependent on the linguistic choices,” states Bachmann-Medick.<sup>79</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the views on the national identity have been reflected upon, as well as related concepts such as “nation,” “nationalism,” and their peculiarities in the context of a case study on Russia. The attention was paid to the issue of translation, as both the feature of discourse analysis and the possible point for confusion. The discourse analysis is outlined as a feasible methodological approach for identity research, with a review of the debate on the exact correspondence between the identity and the discourse. The two types of identity-related peculiarities possible to be “captured” in the discourse are distinguished: the “authentic” elements being a source of the knowledge on identity, and identity-shaping, or aimed so, claims.

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<sup>77</sup> Baker, Mona. 2006. *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. New York: Routledge, p.2.

<sup>78</sup> Bachmann-Medick, Doris. 2009. Introduction: The Translational Turn. In: *Translation Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 2-16.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



The possible issues of translation are examined: it seems to be necessary while reviewing the concepts related to national identity, and their particular meaning in the context of Russia, but also it is important since the discourse that will be analysed in the study is usually created in the Russian language, so the accurate and not misleading translation is necessary. In the relevant paragraph, the attention is also paid to the pieces of media discourse employing the concepts relevant to the national identity. This picture, extending from the domain of the scholarly outlets, is taken purposefully. Referring to the work of Baker on translation and conflict, the conflict potential of the translation is outlined. With popular media outlets having a potential for opinion leadership, the attention to the use of concepts and careful translation from context to context is needed. The claims of “Russia is fascist,” such as of Snyder, or “Russia is nationalist” may benefit the shaping of the image of the “other” in the Russian context. These examples are also viewed in the context of the studies on Russia, not separating the authentic and “imposed” claims.



## Chapter 2: The Issues of Constitutional Identity

The chapter explores the issue of the Russian constitutional identity and its discursive presentation. The idea of the chapter and its development preceded the appearance of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, however, the fact of amendments has reshaped the writing. It is important to outline that the year 2020 was not the first year when the text of the Russian Constitution was changed: during the lifespan of the Constitution of 1993, it has undergone changes introduced through fifteen laws. As an example, the change of great political importance was an increase of the length of the presidential term – from 4 years to 6 years that was introduced on 30 December 2008.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the process around the amendments in 2020 was so dynamic, with the list of amendments being tense, that it caused a new wave of discussion.

The constitutional identity, according to Rosenfeld, is “an essentially contested concept,” because there is no common and precise definition on what the constitutional identity is. Yet, Rosenfeld sees two areas in which the concept may have its explanatory potential: “Conceptions of constitutional identity range from a focus on the actual features and provisions of a constitution – for example, does it establish a presidential or parliamentary system, a unitary or federal state – to the relation between the constitution and the culture in which it operates, and to the relation between the identity of the constitution and other relevant identities, such as national, religious, or ideological identity.”<sup>81</sup> The later area, the domain of the “identities” and meanings, the view on the text of the Constitution as a source of the knowledge on identity, seems interesting and relevant, and more so in the current situation of the constitutional change, the so-called amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. According to Jacobsohn, constitutional theorizing on identity has deep historical roots.<sup>82</sup> “Constitutions must be viewed as embodiments of

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<sup>80</sup> See, for example: “How the Current Constitution in Russia Has Changed.” In: TASS, from 15 January 2020, available online at: <https://tass.ru/info/7527629> (accessed on 20 August 2020).

<sup>81</sup> Rosenfeld, Michel. Constitutional Identity. In: Rosenfeld, Michel, and András Sajó (eds.) 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, available online at: <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578610.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199578610-e-37> (accessed on 30 July 2020).

<sup>82</sup> Jacobsohn, Gary Jeffrey. 2006. Constitutional Identity. In: *The Review of Politics*. Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 364.





unique histories and circumstances,” he writes.<sup>83</sup> In this way, the possible double agency manifests itself, when the Constitution both reflects the identity peculiarities of the nation and is also influenced by these peculiarities. In this light, the amendments into the Russian Constitution may reflect the effort of identity-shaping from the “above” and describe the relevant direction of the legal system’s development.

### The Preliminary Reflections

It may be important to underline that prior to the discussion on the amendments the intentions of the Constitution being changed were usually denied but in a very subtle way, so the denial itself was not flatly. For example, in 2013 Vladimir Putin made such a statement: “I am convinced that the constitutional framework should be stable, and it primarily concerns the second chapter of the Constitution, which determines the rights and freedoms of man and citizen.”<sup>84</sup>

This statement is characterized by dualism: at first, the necessity of the stability, meaning the lack of change, is outlined, and then the particular chapter is mentioned as the one being especially relevant to the statement. This way of narration suggests that the statement itself is not equally applicable to the different parts of the Constitution, so certain parts of the Constitution are not as sensitive to the change and may be updated. In this way, the assertion allows questioning the inviolability of the Constitution.

The original Russian word translated above into English as a “framework” is *karkas*, it is close by meaning to the “frame” or “framework,” in its physical sense. Keeping the frame stable does not necessarily mean that the changes inside the frame are not going to happen, since it is possible to make significant changes but keep the *karkas*. For instance, it is possible to change particular articles of the Constitution: to exclude them from the text, to introduce the new articles, to change the content of the articles at all or just to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.372.

<sup>84</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Убежден, конституционный каркас должен быть стабильным, и прежде всего это касается второй главы Конституции, которая определяет права и свободы человека и гражданина”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s speech to the Federal Assembly, from December 2013, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/198> (accessed on 15 August 2019).





certain wording, with all of these at the same time it is possible to keep the general frame stable.

The questions on the possibility of changes in the Russian Constitution were appearing regularly. In 2004, during the meeting with his election representatives, Vladimir Putin answered a question on the possibility of the extension of his presidential period. He said:

*You know, I myself also thought about this, and it turns out that we want to achieve stability by undermining the basic law of the state – the Constitution. As soon as we start to edit the Constitution, this is already a path to some kind of unstable situation. One has only to start – then it will not stop. Therefore, it is better not to touch the basic law of the state and work within the framework that those people who worked on this law laid down.*<sup>85</sup>

This is a very interesting statement, with its strong emotional component, such as the description of the period starting after the first change into the Constitution as “a path to some kind of unstable situation,” and with the emotional claim – “one has only to start – then it will not stop.” This excerpt from 2004 is enlightening: the discourse does not give the impression that the claim is not authentic, and then the situation may be approached through the perspective of time, the period from 2004 onwards, during which the view on the matter could have changed.

In 2005 Putin made a similar claim during the interview to the American Fox News, where he said:

*You know, I believe that the most important element in strengthening Russian statehood today is stability. Stability in the country and in society cannot be ensured in any other way than by the stability of legislation and the country's*

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<sup>85</sup> ТВМ. “Вы знаете, я сам думал тоже над этим, и получается, что мы хотим достичь стабильности путем подрыва Основного закона государства – Конституции. Как только начнем править Конституцию – это уже путь к какой-то нестабильной ситуации. Вот стоит только начать – потом не остановиться будет. Поэтому лучше не трогать Основной закон государства и работать в тех рамках, которые те люди, которые работали над этим законом, заложили”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Meeting with His Election Campaign Representatives, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24817> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



*fundamental law – the Constitution. Therefore, I do not intend to change the Constitution under any circumstances.*<sup>86</sup>

The language of this excerpt differs from the language of the one provided above, but the emotional component is still present: the emphasis made by the phrase “under any circumstances” should not be overlooked.

In 2007 he repeated the message during the meeting with the press following the 20<sup>th</sup> Russia-EU summit: “As I have already stated many times, I am not going to change the Constitution ‘for myself’ and in accordance with the basic law of the country I will not run for a third term, I will not change the basic law.”<sup>87</sup> The statement is explicit, not equivocal, and emotional, as it is suggested by the intro “as I have already stated many times” and the emphasis “under any circumstances.” The continuation of this excerpt is curious since from the current standpoint we know that event took the opposite direction, with the possibility of this direction being denied in the discourse. Putin said: “As for my future work, I have not yet decided where and in what capacity I will work. But in any case, I do not think that it is necessary to change the balance of powers within the executive branch in Russia. And if someone thinks that I intend to move, say, to the Government of the Russian Federation and transfer the main powers there, then this is not so. There will be no infringement of the powers of the President of the Russian Federation,

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<sup>86</sup> ТВМ. “Вы знаете, я считаю, что самым главным элементом в укреплении российской государственности на сегодняшний день является стабильность. Стабильность в стране, в обществе не может быть обеспечена другим путем, кроме как стабильностью законодательства и основного закона страны – Конституции. Поэтому ни при каких обстоятельствах менять Конституцию я не намерен”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Interview to the Fox News, from 17 September 2005, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23178> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>87</sup> ТВМ. “Как я уже неоднократно заявлял, я не собираюсь менять Конституцию “под себя” и в соответствии с Основным законом страны баллотироваться на третий срок не буду, не буду менять Основной закон”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Meeting with Press Following the 20th Russia-EU summit, from 26 October 2007, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24624> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



at least as long as it depends on me.”<sup>88</sup> The tandem between prime minister Putin and president Medvedev in the period of 2008-2012 has not proved this statement.<sup>89</sup>

The version of the evolution of the views on the Constitution in time does not prove itself. Much later, in 2018, in an interview with the American NBC channel, Putin said: “There is a Constitution. I have never violated the Constitution and have never changed the Constitution. So, I will work within the framework of the basic law of Russia. Of course, if the voters give me the opportunity to work for another term, I will work, of course, with full dedication.”<sup>90</sup> This statement made in 2018 from the perspective of today seems misleading, as in 2020 the amendments into the Constitution were made.

Not only Putin but also other public figures denied the possibility of the changes in the Constitution. For example, in 2018 the chairman of the Constitutional court of the Russian Federation Valery Zorkin published the article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* with the title *The Letter and Spirit of the Constitution*.<sup>91</sup> The writing starts from a premise:

*We all see that Russia today faces growing external challenges. We have to meet these challenges in the situation of unfavourable social and economic conditions in the country. It is for these reasons the renewed calls for radical constitutional reforms seem especially alarming to me.*<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> ТВМ. “Что же касается моей будущей работы, то я еще пока не определился, где и в каком качестве я буду работать. Но в любом случае я не считаю, что нужно менять соотношение властных полномочий внутри исполнительной власти в России. И если кто-то считает, что я намерен перебраться, скажем, в Правительство Российской Федерации и передать туда основные полномочия, то это не так. Никакого ущемления полномочий Президента Российской Федерации не будет, во всяком случае, пока это зависит от меня”. Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> On the issue of tandem see, for example: Monaghan, Andrew. 2011. The Russian Vertikal: The Tandem, Power and the Elections. In: *Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper 2011/01*, available online at: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/19412\\_0511ppmonaghan.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/19412_0511ppmonaghan.pdf) (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>90</sup> ТВМ. “Есть Конституция. Я никогда Конституцию не нарушал и никогда не менял Конституцию. Так что я буду работать в рамках Основного закона России. Конечно, если избиратели дадут мне такую возможность – работать ещё один срок, буду работать, разумеется, с полной отдачей сил”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Interview to the American NBC channel, from 10 March 2018, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57027> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>91</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Буква и дух Конституции”.

<sup>92</sup> ТВМ. “Все мы видим, что Россия сегодня стоит перед лицом нарастающих внешних вызовов. Нам приходится встречать эти вызовы в условиях далеко не благополучной социально-экономической ситуации в стране. Именно по этим причинам мне представляется особенно тревожными вновь появившиеся призывы к кардинальным конституционным реформам”. Source:



Curiously, Zorkin puts the responsibility for the existence of the talks about the possibility of the constitutional change on the shoulders of the “enemy.” In this excerpt, the “enemy” is not named but its existence is stated as a fact, and the grammar construction helps to accomplish this goal: in the construction “the renewed calls for radical constitutional reforms seem especially alarming to me” it is not clear from where and from whom the “calls” are coming, what is the “radical” in their essence, and so on. At the same time, the image of the “enemy” is brought into the discourse, and the responsibility for the “calls,” for the discussion on the possibility of the constitutional reform, is assigned to the “enemy” as well. The peculiarities of the “enemy” are not specified.

At the same time, the continuation of this article switches the meanings completely:

*Of course, our Constitution has its shortcomings. But such shortcomings are completely correctable by point-focused changes, and the deep legal meaning inherent in the constitutional text allows us to adapt this text to changing social and legal realities within the framework of the doctrine of the “living Constitution” adopted in international constitutional practice.<sup>93</sup>*

In the light of this statement, it seems that the word “radical” was the most important in the previous excerpt, and the possibility of the changes was not denied, just the acceptable “point-focused” changes are contrasted with “radical” changes. Here the discursive problem is that it is not clear where the line between these two corpora lay. The “point-focused changes” may be interpreted broadly. In a tense environment, different – not legal but political – drivers may be hidden under this phrase. The change does not need to be thorough; it can be point-focused, and nevertheless crucial for the political system. In this sense, legal reasoning may serve for the purposes of political reasoning. In this regard, the standpoint of Zorkin is not expressed explicitly in this excerpt. He may be equally

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Zorkin, Valery. 2018. The Letter and Spirit of the Constitution: Valery Zorkin – on Alarming Calls for Radical Constitutional Reforms (“Буква и дух Конституции: Валерий Зорькин – о тревожных призывах к кардинальным конституционным реформам”). In: *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, from 9 October 2018, available online: <https://rg.ru/2018/10/09/zorkin-nedostatki-v-konstitucii-mozhno-ustranit-tochechnymi-izmeneniami.html> (accessed on 10 June 2019).

<sup>93</sup> ТВМ. “Разумеется, у нашей Конституции есть недостатки вполне исправимые путем точечных изменений, а заложенный в конституционном тексте глубокий правовой смысл позволяет адаптировать этот текст к меняющимся социально-правовым реалиям в рамках принятой в мировой конституционной практике доктрины “живой Конституции”. Ibid.



advocating for the change of the Constitution in the aspects crucial for the political life or keeping it as it is.

Further, Zorkin develops his thought but a crucial aspect remains unclear:

*The views that through a radical constitutional reform it is possible to turn the course of events in some more correct direction are not only superficial and short-sighted but also dangerous since they are fraught with sharp socio-political destabilization. Talking that you can change the structure of life by only making legal decisions is naive idealism, if not something worse.<sup>94</sup>*

Zorkin engages in a one-sided debate with, as it seems, the opponents of the Constitution re-writing, although such claims are not articulated in the public space. This is important to underline while trying to understand this text: the idea to rewrite the Constitution is not articulated in the public discourse, it is not the situation where there are known proponents of such an action visible in the public domain. In this sense, the image of the opponent seems to be “constructed” rather than authentic.

This debate with an invisible opponent is curious: in the previous excerpt, Zorkin has shown his opinion about the possibility and, moreover, the necessity of “point-focused” legal decisions, and now he confronts the “radical” Constitutional reform.

The last sentence is also interesting: it explicitly says that legal decisions, legal narration, is not enough to change “the structure of life,” but the question is whether even close to perfect writing, legal decisions and frameworks can be jeopardized by the sphere of the political? It is also symptomatic to hear the Chairman of the Constitutional court undermining the power of law and putting it secondary to what may mean the institutions, or maybe something more, as “the structure of life” (*struktura jizni*) is an unusual and rather metaphysic concept. While philosophy and law are related, with philosophy playing an important grounding role for the legal theory, the equivocal character of

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<sup>94</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Представления же о том, что путем радикальной конституционной реформы можно развернуть ход событий в каком-то более правильном направлении, - не просто поверхностный и недальновидный, но и опасный, поскольку чреватые резкой социально политической дестабилизацией. Разговоры о том, что можно изменить структуры жизни с помощью одних лишь юридических решений – это наивный идеализм, если не что-то худшее”. Ibid.



Zorkin's text may be not accidental but purposeful. The purpose then lays in the area of the political. It is important to notice that the reflection could barely be assigned to the area of the legal exclusively, the questions discussed here are political:

*Within the country, the Constitution is a key factor in ensuring, albeit not unanimous, but clearly predominant social consent and, therefore, socio-political stability. In the international arena, the Constitution is the most important factor in supporting and strengthening national identity, due to the historical, sociocultural and geopolitical features of Russia's development.*<sup>95</sup>

This logical chain of Constitution and national identity is interesting. “The Constitution of the Russian Federation is not just the result of a social compromise reached at a certain historical stage, - he writes. - If this were so, then at each new stage in the development of society and the state, a need could arise for a new social compromise, that is, for quite radical constitutional changes.”<sup>96</sup> It is easy to agree with the first part of this statement, since the Russian Constitution was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the times of great turbulence. There was no social compromise due to the lack of communication, lack of dialogue between the members of society and political elites. The compromise then should be well-informed, that was not possible in the times of the creation of the modern Constitution.

*The Constitution contains in its text the potential for legal transformation, designed for the foreseeable historical future of the country. It allows to a certain extent to clarify the conditions of social compromise in changing social realities, thus ensuring the socio-political stability necessary for further development.*<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> ТВМ. “Внутри страны Конституция – ключевой фактор обеспечения пусть не единственного, но явно преобладающего общественного согласия и, значит, социально-политической стабильности. На международной арене Конституция – важнейший фактор поддержки и укрепления национальной идентичности, обусловленной историческими, социокультурными и геополитическими особенностями развития России”. Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> ТВМ. “Конституция РФ – не просто итог социального компромиссы, достигнутого на определенном историческом этапе. Если бы это было так, то на каждом новом этапе развития общества и государства могла возникать потребность в новом социальном компромиссе, то есть в достаточно радикальных конституционных изменениях”. Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> ТВМ. “Конституция содержит в своем тексте потенциал правовых преобразований, рассчитанный на обозримое историческое будущее страны. Она позволяет в определенной степени уточнять условия общественного компромисса в меняющихся социальных реалиях,





This point may also be reasoned through the abovementioned argument. At the same time, the timeframe mentioned here is significant: from 12 December 1993 when the Russian Constitution was voted on the referendum or 25 December 1993 when it entered into force, up to the time of the article's writing. Since the argument of the historical change, the change of circumstances, the economic stabilization, and political change from the beginning of the 1990s up to nowadays is not the deniable argument, the logic behind this reasoning is still questionable. While the text of the Constitution was developed in specific historical circumstances following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the unstable political, economic conditions, the absence of the institutions – with the previous institutions destroyed and the new that did not appear yet, these all circumstances determined the text of the Constitution reflecting the desirable future, addressing the future challenges and the eventual situation of stabilization. Not only the internal experts added value to the text but also the external consultants that today, of course, may be used in the discourse as the indication of the lack of “sovereignty” and involvement into the internal affairs.

The reasoning of Zorkin resembles one of the explanations given by Putin in the face of Constitutional amendments two years later, as it is the link with the national identity and consolidation. On the meeting with the leaders of fractions of the State Duma on 6 March 2020, Putin said: “And I would like to especially emphasize: while working on amendments to the Constitution, we think together not only about today, but also about tomorrow, because this is the Basic Law. Many of you at different times and in different situations spoke just about the fact that this Basic Law was adopted in special conditions.”<sup>98</sup> This explanation, on the one hand, seems reasonable, since the change is a usual characteristic of the historical process. At the same time, it contains points that may seem contradictory: on the one hand, the claim “we think together not only about today,

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обеспечивая таким образом социально-политическую стабильность, необходимую для дальнейшего развития”. Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> ТВМ. “И что хотел бы особо подчеркнуть: работая над поправками к Конституции, мы вместе думаем не только о сегодняшнем, но и о завтрашнем дне, потому что это Основной закон. Многие из вас в разное время и в разных ситуациях говорили как раз о том, что этот Основной закон принимался в особых условиях”. Source: Vladimir Putin's meeting with leaders of the State Duma factions, from 6 March 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62949> (accessed on 20 July 2020).





but also about tomorrow” reveals the aspiration to reflect the desirable future for the country in its main legal text, to address the future through the text. This logic is not different from the logic of the Constitution of the 1990s: there is no ground to think that the first text was limited by the “present” state of affairs in the country, it was written with the efforts of the internal specialists and external consultants, and there is no ground to contrast two texts as if the first version was limited by the situation of the country in that time and did not look “forward,” while the second looks “forward” and is not trapped in the peculiarities of the “present.”

During this event, Putin also provided the identity-related link as one of the reasons behind the amendments: “It is fundamentally important that the updated Constitution must unite people regardless of political views, level of security, a region of residence, nationality or religion.”<sup>99</sup> This is a strong identity-related claim: it indicates that the meaning of the changes goes beyond the domain of the legal or even political, to the broader domain of belonging. That said, the solidarity may be contrasted by the unification, and the acknowledged plurality may also be contrasted to the common Russian identity. The way of expression, the way of creating the discourse aimed to shape the desirable shared identity, is important. At the same time, the political goals should not be forgotten as they drive the change, but the identity-related claims appear in the list of amendments for a reason.

As it was observed, the discourse on the Constitution has changed over time. This may have affect trust: if in the past the claims on the inviolability of the Constitution had not been so vocal, asserting, and emotional and had not come from Vladimir Putin himself, the reaction today could have been different. The documented discourses on inviolability may play a role of the universal argument – if in application to the main legal text the word of the president showed to be insufficient, and the assertion did not confirm itself, what can be expected in other, lesser cases? At the same time, the universalism of this argument and the decision to introduce amendments itself indicate the importance of the constitutional change, the motivation to this change coming from the “above.” In this

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<sup>99</sup> ТВМ. “Принципиально важно, чтобы обновлённая Конституция объединяла людей вне зависимости от политических взглядов, уровня обеспеченности, региона проживания, национальности или вероисповедания”. Ibid.



light, the essence of the constitutional amendments deserves careful consideration. The nature of the identity-related claims appearing in the text may help to understand the views on identity shaping in the circles of decision-makers.

### The Russian Constitutional Identity

One of the paragraphs of the mentioned above article of Zorkin is dedicated to the issue of the Russian constitutional identity. In this article, Zorkin defines the Russian constitutional identity as “the basis of a citizen's life position, connected with his feeling of belonging to a ‘multi-ethnic people,’ united, as stated in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, ‘by a common destiny on their land.’”<sup>100</sup> This definition links the notions of the national and constitutional identity on the conceptual level, through the notion of “belonging” to the “multi-ethnic people” – the reference to the Russian Constitution but also the description of the nationality. It may be important to mention that the word translated as “multi-ethnic” in this quote originally sounds *mnogonatsional’nyy*. At the same time, if translated as “multinational,” the meaning would be changed since the pluralism by its meaning refers to the ethnicities and the nation itself is supposed to be the one, comprised by the different ethnic and religious groups as if it was discussed in the first chapter.

Another attempt to reflect on the issues of the constitutional identity was made by Zorkin earlier on, in 2017, during the IV BRICS Legal Forum, where he said:

*The Constitutional Court of Russia sees its contribution (...) in theoretically substantiating and introducing into legal practice the doctrine of the country's constitutional identity, which is based on the legal interpretation of the basic*

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<sup>100</sup> ТВМ. “Основу жизненной позиции гражданина, связанной с ощущением им принадлежности к “многонациональному народу, соединенному, как сказано в Преамбуле Конституции РФ, общей судьбой на своей земле”, составляет конституционная идентичность”. Source: Zorkin, Valery. 2018. The Letter and Spirit of the Constitution: Valery Zorkin – on Alarming Calls for Radical Constitutional Reforms (“Буква и дух Конституции: Валерий Зорькин – о тревожных призывах к кардинальным конституционным реформам”). In: Rossiyskaya gazeta, from 9 October 2018, available online: <https://rg.ru/2018/10/09/zorkin-nedostatki-v-konstitucii-mozhno-ustranit-tochechnymi-izmeneniami.html> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



*elements of the socio-cultural identity of the multi-ethnic people of the Russian Federation.*<sup>101</sup>

In this excerpt Zorkin directly links the notion with what he calls “socio-cultural identity.” His definition of the constitutional identity implies that the concept reflects other identities, and is not self-sufficient. In this description the “identity” aspects are primary, and then the legal interpretation of these aspects forms the notion. This is one of the two common views on constitutional identity, first focused on the identity-related aspects and their reflection into the main legal text, and second focused on the peculiarities of the Constitution, its distinctions and points of interest.

The link between the national identity and the constitutional identity may be made on purpose: the constitutional identity, with its legal grounding, refers to the reason and neutrality, although the questions related, for example, to the constitutional change, would get political overtones. The issues of national identity may be easily politicized, for example, through the identity-related tools of belonging versus the refusal to belong. The image of the “other” may be easily brought into the discourse on the national identity that may serve the political purposes, and the parallel then may propose a legal ground for the alienation.

Zorkin’s reflections are not unique attempts to theorize the Russian constitutional identity. Two years later, in 2020, Andrey Klishas, the Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Building and the Co-Chairman of the Working Group on the Preparation of Provisions on Amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, wrote another article on the issue. According to Klishas, the constitutional identity “manifests itself primarily in real social practice, which can be reflected (constituted) in normative legal acts, first of all, in acts of a

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<sup>101</sup> ТВМ. “Конституционный Суд России видит свой вклад (...) в том, чтобы теоретически обосновать и ввести в правовую практику доктрину конституционной идентичности страны, которая опирается на правовую интерпретацию базовых элементов социокультурной идентичности многонационального народа Российской Федерации”. Source: Valery Zorkin’s speech “Just World Order: Modern Approaches,” IV BRICS Legal Forum, 30 November 2017, The website of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, available online at: <http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/News/Speech/Pages/ViewItem.aspx?ParamId=83> (accessed on 20 August 2020).



constitutional nature or in newly emerging social relations.”<sup>102</sup> This definition emphasizing the connection between the “real social practice” and the text of the legal document is important, it may be viewed as an encouragement of the application of the method of discourse analysis to identity research.

The discussion on the issues of Russian Constitutional identity developed in the period of the constitutional amendments. The discourses of Zorkin and Klishas present the view from the “above,” their opinions may be supplemented by the representatives of the “liberal” corpus who were taking a critical perspective on the idea of amendments. For example, Elena Lukyanova gives such a view on the constitutional identity:

*The point is that the preamble, chapters 1 and 2 of the Russian Constitution are not just a set of words and terms. They are concentrated values-aspirations, an identification marker of a particular state at a certain stage of its development. That is, what is called constitutional identity in modern internationalized constitutional law.*<sup>103</sup>

The outline here is interesting since it provides a specification on the particular parts of the Constitution as emphasizing the values of the country. Then, the constitutional change may be viewed not only as the legal change with underlying political reasons, meaning the extension of the presidential period, the concentration of power, and so on, but also as an attempt of the “moral change,” the change of the legal document according to the

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<sup>102</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Она проявляется прежде всего в реальной социальной практике, которая может быть отражена (конституирована) в нормативных правовых актах, в первую очередь, в актах конституционного характера или во вновь возникающих общественных отношениях”. Source: Klishas, Andrey. 2020. Amendments to The Constitution and Constitutional Identity (“Поправки в Конституцию и конституционная идентичность”). In: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, from 10 February 2020, available online at: <https://news.rambler.ru/other/43656548-popravki-v-konstitutsiyu-i-konstitutsionnaya-identichnost/?updated> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>103</sup> ТВМ. “Дело в том, что преамбула, 1-я и 2-я главы Конституции России представляют собой не просто некий набор слов и терминов. Они являются концентрированными ценностями-устремлениями, идентификационным маркером конкретного государства на определенном этапе его развития. То есть тем, что в современном интернационализированном конституционном праве и называется конституционной идентичностью”. Source: Lukyanova, Elena. 2020. Constitutional Identity and Form of Governance (“Конституционная Идентичность и Форма Правления”). In: Rogov, Kirill (ed.) *Deconstruction of the Constitution: What Should Be and What Should Not Be Changed in the Russian Basic Law*. (“Деконструкция Конституции: Что нужно и что не нужно менять в российском основном законе”). Fond Liberalnaya Missiya, available online at: [http://liberal.ru/files/articles/7489/Dekonstruksiya\\_Konstitucii\\_çhto\\_nuzhno\\_i\\_çhto\\_ne\\_nuzhno\\_menyat\\_v\\_rossijskom\\_Osnovnom\\_Zakone.pdf](http://liberal.ru/files/articles/7489/Dekonstruksiya_Konstitucii_çhto_nuzhno_i_çhto_ne_nuzhno_menyat_v_rossijskom_Osnovnom_Zakone.pdf) (accessed on 20 July 2020).



values that seem “desirable” from the political perspective. In this way, the knowledge on identity that may be extracted from the constitutional amendments may be found in the area of “values,” instead of the details on the presidential period.

In the Russian context, the emerging interest to the concept of constitutional identity may be observed having its peculiarities. The constitutional identity then is presented as a unique feature, a factor making it possible for the national law to be supreme to international law. For instance, the judge of the Constitutional court of the Russian Federation Gadis Gadzhiev reflects on the constitutional identity in such a way: “The doctrine of constitutional identity presupposes a non-textual understanding of constitutional changes, the use of the achievements of modern hermeneutics, which has long gone beyond the interpretation of exclusively texts.”<sup>104</sup> This reflection does not deny the text as a primary source of reflection, it outlines that the source may be expanded, and the method – applied broader than exclusively to the text. Then, the view on the practical application of the concept is developed: “European constitutional courts do not necessarily regard every fact of inconsistency between the norms of international law and the national constitution as an attack on constitutional identity. Only specially protected parts of the constitutional text, which constitute the backbone of the national constitutional order, need protection.”<sup>105</sup> This is a “softening” statement: it declares that not “every fact of inconsistency” between two systems is interpreted as “an attack on constitutional identity,” but this may mean that not every but many, or a significant amount. And the word “attack” applied to the constitutional identity and not, for example, in the opposite direction, to international law, is important here. It seems that the statement confirms that not all cases are assessed by the constitutional courts as cases

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<sup>104</sup> ТВМ. “Доктрина конституционной идентичности предполагает нетекстуальное понимание конституционных изменений, использование достижений современной герменевтики, которая уже давно вышла за пределы толкования исключительно текстов”. Source: Gadzhiev, Gadis. 2016. Constitutional Identity and Human Rights in Russia, available online at: [http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/News/Documents/report\\_%D0%93%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B2%20\\_2016.pdf](http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/News/Documents/report_%D0%93%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B2%20_2016.pdf), p.5 (accessed on 20 August 2020).

<sup>105</sup> ТВМ. “Европейские конституционные суды не обязательно каждый факт несоответствия между нормами международного права и национальной конституции расценивают как покушение на конституционную идентичность. В защите нуждаются только особо защищенные части конституционного текста, составляющие системообразующее ядро национального конституционного порядка”. Ibid, p.6



“attacking” constitutional identity, contradicting with the constitutional identity, but implies that such cases exist. This approach in the Russian context of securitization, the construction of the unfriendly foreign “other” in the public discourse, the accent on sovereignty – has a very peculiar meaning. The Russian Constitution, the main legal texts, in this way may be instrumentalized, and the discussion may go beyond the legal domain to the political domain, or even be launched due to the political reasons.

Gadzhiev then tries to distinguish the crucial, the most important, legal traditions, and the traditions of less priority, with the possibility for the latter to be interpreted as inferior to the norms of international law: “Not all legal traditions are included in the specified core. A methodology is needed for recognizing the “core” legal traditions, the destruction of which means the loss of identity and those legal traditions or prejudices, stereotypes of public consciousness, which are an example of legal inertia or even a clear anachronism.”<sup>106</sup> And later the statement that was already prepared and shaped by the previous discourse is made explicitly: “The judicial doctrine of constitutional identity is an important guarantee of national sovereignty.”<sup>107</sup> Here the reasoning comes to the notion of sovereignty appearing in the Russian public discourse in different domains, and the suggestion that the concept of constitutional identity may be instrumentalized and politicized is proving itself. Then, if developed, the notion may play a role of conceptual tool helping to reason the situations when the decisions of the international courts are ignored by the Russian Federation.

This supposition may be supported by the Constitutional Courts’ decree and legal evidence. In 2015, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation issued a Resolution on the case on the applicability of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on the territory of the Russian Federation. “The participation of the Russian Federation in an international treaty does not mean renouncing state sovereignty,” states the

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<sup>106</sup> ТВМ. “Не все правовые традиции входят в указанное ядро. Необходима методология распознавания «ядерных» правовых традиций, разрушение которых означает утрату идентичности и тех правовых традиций или предрассудков, стереотипов общественного сознания, которые являются примером правовой инерции или даже явным анахронизмом”. Ibid, p.6.

<sup>107</sup> ТВМ. “Судебная доктрина конституционной идентичности является важной гарантией национального суверенитета.” Ibid, p.6.





document.<sup>108</sup> “The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the legal positions of the ECHR based on it cannot override the priority of the Constitution. Their practical implementation in the Russian legal system is possible only if the Basic Law of our country is recognized as the highest legal force,” is declared in the intro to the position of the Court.<sup>109</sup> The collision is introduced in such a way: “The Constitution of the Russian Federation and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are based on common basic values. Based on this, in the overwhelming majority of cases, collisions between two documents do not arise at all. However, such a conflict is possible if the ECHR gives an interpretation of the Convention that is contrary to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.”<sup>110</sup> “In such a situation, due to the supremacy of the Basic Law, Russia will be forced to abandon literal adherence to the decision of the Strasbourg court,” describes the document the outcome of such a collision. The practice is presented as being in line with the legal practices of other countries: “This conclusion is consistent with the practice of the highest courts of European countries (in particular, Germany, Italy, Austria, Great Britain), which also adhere to the principle of priority of the norms of national constitutions in the execution of decisions of the ECHR, and the norms of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.”<sup>111</sup> The synthesis statement is aimed to soften the impression of the document: “At the same time, when resolving such conflicts, it is

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<sup>108</sup> ТВМ. “Участие Российской Федерации в международном договоре не означает отказа от государственного суверенитета”. Source: “On 14 July 2015, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation announced a judgment on the case on the applicability of the decisions of the ECHR in the territory of the Russian Federation,” the website of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, available online: <http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/News/Pages/ViewItem.aspx?ParamId=3244> (accessed on 20 August 2020).

<sup>109</sup> ТВМ. “Европейская Конвенция о защите прав человека и основных свобод и основанные на ней правовые позиции ЕСПЧ не могут отменять приоритет Конституции. Их практическая реализация в российской правовой системе возможна только при условии признания за Основным Законом нашей страны высшей юридической силы”. Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> ТВМ. “В основе Конституции Российской Федерации и Европейской Конвенции о защите прав человека и основных свобод лежат общие базовые ценности. Исходя из этого, в подавляющем большинстве случаев коллизии между двумя документами не возникают вовсе. Однако подобный конфликт возможен, если ЕСПЧ даст трактовку Конвенции, противоречащую Конституции РФ”. Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> ТВМ. “Данный вывод соотносится с практикой высших судов европейских стран (в частности, Германии, Италии, Австрии, Великобритании), которые также придерживаются принципа приоритета норм национальных конституций при исполнении решений ЕСПЧ, и нормами Венской конвенции о праве международных договоров”. Ibid.





necessary not to strive for self-isolation, but to proceed from the need for dialogue and constructive interaction. Only in this way can truly harmonious relations be built between the legal systems of Europe, the basis of which will not be subordination, but mutual respect.”<sup>112</sup>

This decree then was supplemented by the cases of legal practice. In January 2017, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation made a decision concerning the possibility of executing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the case “Oil company Yukos v. Russia.” The ECHR ruled that Russia should pay compensation to the shareholders of the oil company Yukos in the amount of 1,8 billion Euro. In turn, the decision made by the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation was to deny the possibility to execute the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. The reasoning provided did not include the notion of constitutional identity explicitly, at the same time, in its essence the position of the Constitutional Court was based on the ideas behind this notion. The position of Court included such statements:

*The Constitution of the Russian Federation has the highest legal force in the legal system of Russia and imposes on everyone the obligation to pay legally established taxes. The Constitutional Court emphasizes that the ECHR judgments do not cancel the priority of the Constitution of the Russian Federation for the Russian legal system. Therefore, when the decision of an interstate body while interpreting the rules of an international treaty unlawfully affects the principles and norms of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia, as an exception, has the right to deviate from the implementation of this decision.*<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> ТВМ. “В то же время, при разрешении подобных конфликтов необходимо не стремиться к самоизоляции, а исходить из необходимости диалога и конструктивного взаимодействия. Только таким путем могут быть построены по-настоящему гармоничные отношения между правовыми системами Европы, основой которых будет не подчинение, а взаимное уважение”. Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> ТВМ. “Конституция РФ обладает высшей юридической силой в правовой системе России и возлагает на каждого обязанность платить законно установленные налоги. Конституционный Суд подчеркивает, что Постановления ЕСПЧ не отменяют для российской правовой системы приоритет Конституции РФ. Поэтому, когда решением межгосударственного органа, при толковании им правил международного договора, неправомерно затрагиваются основополагающие принципы и нормы Конституции, Россия в порядке исключения вправе отступить от выполнения этого решения”. Source: “On 19 January 2017, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation announced a decision on the possibility of executing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 31 July



The denial to follow the ruling of ECHR was reasoned by the supreme role of the Russian Constitution comparing to the judgments of the international courts. This is very important evidence, and although the text states “as an exception,” it is still possible to assume that this kind of reasoning is replicable, and it may employ the concept of constitutional identity. The issue of the instrumentalization of the concept of constitutional identity in Russia needs further attention, and the fact of constitutional amendments may also be viewed from this perspective, with the risks of further “sovereignization” of the country.

### The Discourse on the Constitutional Change

As it was reflected in previous paragraphs, the possibility of the constitutional change previously was either denied, as it happened several times in the discourse of Vladimir Putin, either limited to the not so crucial points, while the points itself were not specified. Then lately the discourse changed, and the discussion accompanying this change is interesting in its identity-related aspects. As an example, during the meeting with Vladimir Putin dedicated to the proposal of the amendments, the film-maker Karen Shakhnazarov articulated such the idea “to include in the Constitution a provision stating that the Russian Federation is a continuation of the Russian Empire and the USSR.”<sup>114</sup> He said:

*Twice in this century, we rejected our history: after the 17th year, as they say, the Russian Empire was taken, in the 90s Soviet history, as they say, was pushed aside. It seems to me that it would be right to link our entire history into something single, all the more it is absolutely obvious de facto and from the state point of view, we are the heirs of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It seems to me that it*

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2014 in the case “Oil Company Yukos v. Russia,” the website of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, available online at: <http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/News/Pages/ViewItem.aspx?ParamId=3311> (accessed on 20 August 2020).

<sup>114</sup> ТВМ. “Я предлагаю включить в Конституцию положение о том, что Российская Федерация является продолжением Российской империи и СССР”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s meeting with the working group on the preparation of proposals for the amendments to the Constitution, from 26 February 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62862> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



*would be important for us to clearly and clearly define our identity and our origin.<sup>115</sup>*

This point is interesting, as it is the statement of the importance of continuation in the paradigm of continuation and change. It is also briefly but reasoned: with the history containing collapses, the bifurcation points such as the Russian revolution or the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the history of the past being denied, the identity issues are complex and need the proper address, at least for the sake of sustainable future. At the same time, the factual part of the statement, the proposal itself, seems to be politicized. With the identity definitions and identity-related views explicitly brought into the text of the Constitution, further discussion on the issues of identity may become unnecessary, as if the topic was exhausted. The inclusion in the Constitution the idea of Russia being a successor of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union may be viewed as an ideological choice or indoctrination. In this way, it may serve the purposes of identity shaping from the “above.” It may also play a role of the solution to the problem of “which past to choose” – with a combination of two references in the basic law, certain aspects of the Soviet past may be celebrated on par with the elements of the Russian Empire’s past.

As it was discussed in the previous paragraph, Vladimir Putin himself in previous years several times publicly denied the possibility of the changes applied to the Constitution. Hence, the new explanation, the updated view on the issue is interesting to analyse. For example, during the meeting with members of the working group on the preparation of proposals on amendments to the Constitution on 16 January 2020, Putin described the “meaning” of the amendments, their goal, as “to ensure the further development of Russia as a legal social state, increase the efficiency of the institutions of our country, strengthen the role of civil society, political parties, our regions in working out the most important decisions for the development of our state.”<sup>116</sup> This explanation contains a set of points

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<sup>115</sup> ТВМ. “Мы дважды в этом веке отторгли нашу историю: после 17-го года, как говорится, Российскую империю брали, в 90-е годы советскую историю, как говорится, отодвинули. Мне кажется, правильно было бы связать всю нашу историю в нечто единое, тем более совершенно очевидно де-факто да и по всему, с государственной точки зрения, мы наследники именно Российской империи и Советского Союза. Мне кажется, было бы важно для нас чётко и ясно определить свою идентичность и своё происхождение”. Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> ТВМ. “Смысл этих поправок – обеспечить дальнейшее развитие России как правового социального государства, повысить эффективность деятельности институтов нашей страны,



of reference, such as a “legal social state,” “civil society,” “political parties,” and so on, it also includes the “key words” such as the “development,” the “institutions,” the “civil society.” None of these elements may cause critique on its own, on a theoretical level, while the realistic and practical application of these claims may need a separate discussion. It is important to mention that the discourse here does not involve the foreign actors: it is focused exclusively on the internal economic and political issues, and there are no images of the “other” brought into the discourse.

During the meeting with the representatives of the public in Cherepovets on 4 February 2020, Putin said: “The amendments that I proposed, in my opinion, are dictated by life.”<sup>117</sup> Further, he developed this idea in such a way:

*The same is with the amendments that I proposed. It's just that during my work as president and prime minister, it became obvious to me that some things do not work the way they should. A colleague, for example, asks to remove barriers that he believes prevent more efficient work, and so on.*<sup>118</sup>

This excerpt is interesting by its dualism: the open position of “I proposed” is accompanied by switching the attention from himself first to the objective processes – “some things do not work the way they should,” and then to another person of reference – “a colleague (...) asks to remove barriers...” The initial acceptance of the responsibility is then transformed, with the responsibility being assigned to another person and then to the certain processes as if these factors were more important than the reasons brought in the speeches of Putin claiming that he is not willing to change the Constitution. It is also interesting that only issues that can be called bureaucratic are brought into the discourse.

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укрепить роль гражданского общества, политических партий, наших регионов в выработке важнейших решений развития нашего государства”. Source: The meeting of Vladimir Putin with members of the working group on the preparation of proposals on amendments to the Constitution, from 16 January 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62592> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>117</sup> ТВМ. “Смотрите: поправки, которые я предложил, на мой взгляд, продиктованы жизнью”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s meeting with the representatives of the public in Cherepovets, from 4 February 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62726> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>118</sup> ТВМ. “То же самое с теми поправками, которые я предложил. Просто за время моей работы в качестве Президента и Председателя Правительства для меня стало очевидным, что некоторые вещи не работают так, как должны работать. Коллега, например, просит устранить барьеры, которые, как он считает, мешают более эффективно работать, и так далее”. Ibid.



There is no reference to the foreign policy, no images of the “other,” just a “dry” explanation based on the objective working processes.

The reference to “life” appeared also on 13 February 2020, when Putin said:

*Life has changed, and it requires a certain reaction, including in the Basic Law. This is an obvious fact from the perspective of technology, and from the perspective of the general state of society, and from the perspective of the financial capabilities of the state, our status.*<sup>119</sup>

This idea here resembles the idea from the previous excerpt, and once more, the nature of the explanation that was given by Putin in the past, while denying the possibility of the Constitutional change, is different from the explanation provided here. The political factors, the declared necessity of the change of power may be contrasted by the unclear factors of development and the “state of society.” It is curious why the neutral, bureaucratic, internal societal factors are instrumentalized in the reasoning instead of, for example, the geopolitical factors or global challenges. The explanation is so “dry” that there is not as much material for the extended discussion on this point. Yet, such reasoning being used for the justification of the significant action, the previously continuously denied change in the main legal document of the country, does not seem convincing. These arguments are not strong enough and are difficult to be discussed seriously, in the framework of the political. The negative outcomes of the decision to hold a referendum on the necessity of amendments, the amendments itself in their political dimension are not taken into consideration. In this way, it is difficult to imagine that all of the complexity and the “negative” discussions on the referendum would outweigh the needs of the “state of society,” or “financial capabilities.”

There were more emotionally coloured attempts of reasoning provided too. During the meeting with leaders of the State Duma factions on 6 March 2020, Putin compared

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<sup>119</sup> ТВМ. “Жизнь поменялась, и она требует определённой реакции, в том числе в Основном законе. Это очевидный факт и с точки зрения технологий, и с точки зрения общего состояния общества, и с точки зрения финансовых возможностей государства, нашего статуса”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s meeting with the working group on the preparation of proposals for amendments to the Constitution, from 13 February 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62776> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



contemporary Russia with Russia from the 1990s, the decade in which the text of the Russian Constitution was created, saying that contemporary Russia may be viewed as “another country.”

*And I would like to especially emphasize: while working on amendments to the Constitution, we think together not only about today, but also about tomorrow, because this is the Basic Law. Many of you at different times and in different situations spoke precisely about the fact that this Basic Law was adopted in special conditions (...) This is true, it is. Now the situation in the country has changed dramatically. In fact, we already have a different country in this sense. And of course, the amendments are in demand.<sup>120</sup>*

This excerpt presents an original approach, contrasting with other attempts of explanation. The idea of being a “new country” is itself original, and it could be more interesting if the supplementary arguments were provided. A different country may require a different legal framework – the claim seems quite reasonable. Yet, which elements make a contemporary Russia different from the Russia of the 1990s? This question is not addressed. Whether the text of the Constitution reflects the present time or is directed to the future, is another question. If the latter, then the statement may be interpreted as if the image of the future in the 1990s, the image in the minds of the creators of the Constitution, differed from the image of the future today. This interpretation is also interesting, but then the angle may be changed and the suspicion may appear on who nowadays determines the future for Russia and the proposes to establish a new Basic Law reflecting this future Russia? Are those people the decision-makers and how the goal of keeping the power is inscribed into this context? All these reflections are applicable to the issue of the constitutional amendments, and the closer analysis on the essence of the

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<sup>120</sup> ТВМ. “И что хотел бы особо подчеркнуть: работая над поправками к Конституции, мы вместе думаем не только о сегодняшнем, но и о завтрашнем дне, потому что это Основной закон. Многие из вас в разное время и в разных ситуациях говорили как раз о том, что этот Основной закон принимался в особых условиях. (...) Это справедливо, так и есть. Сейчас ситуация в стране изменилась кардинальным образом. По сути, у нас уже другая страна в этом смысле. И, конечно, поправки востребованы”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s meeting with leaders of the State Duma factions, from 6 March 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62949> (accessed on 20 July 2020).





changes introduced may help to understand the views on the present and future of Russia coming from the “above.”

## Change and its Interpretation

In this paragraph, the essence of the constitutional amendments is discussed being approached through the standpoint of identity research. The new elements, the desirable identity-related images, are brought from the text, and the change is discussed. For the purpose of clarity, the table was created on the website of the Russian State Duma comparing the texts of the older version of the document with the text of the newer version.<sup>121</sup>

Extracting the value-related changes, the identity-related claims from the discourse enables to assess the desirable change in this domain, aimed to be established from the “above.”

First, the new element added to the text of the Constitution is the part 2 remark 1 of Article 67 that sounds: “The Russian Federation ensures the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Actions (with the exception of delimitation, demarcation, demarcation of the state border of the Russian Federation with neighbouring states) aimed at alienating part of the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as calls for such actions, are not allowed.”<sup>122</sup> This element has its identity-related meaning, provided

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<sup>121</sup> See: The comparative table of the current Constitution of the Russian Federation, taking into account the approved law of the Russian Federation “On Amendment to the Constitution of the Russian Federation,” “On Improving Regulation of Certain Issues of Organization and Functioning of Public Power” (“Сравнительная таблица действующей Конституции Российской Федерации с учетом одобренного закона Российской Федерации “О поправке к Конституции Российской Федерации”, “О совершенствовании регулирования отдельных вопросов организации и функционирования публичной власти”), available online in Russian language at: <http://duma.gov.ru/media/files/WRg3wDzAk8hRCRoZ3QUGbZ84pI0ppmjF.pdf> (accessed on 20 July 2020). The full updated text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (with amendments, 2020) is available online in the legal system “Garant”:

<http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/10103000/paragraph/82/doclist/Конституция%20Российской%20Федерации:0> (accessed on 20 August 2020).

<sup>122</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Российская Федерация обеспечивает защиту своего суверенитета и территориальной целостности. Действия (за исключением 2 делимитации, демаркации, редемаркации государственной границы Российской Федерации с сопредельными





through the dimension of space and place. The text reminds about the status of Crimea: in this paradigm speaking about Crimea as a part of Ukraine may be interpreted as an action contradicting the Basic Law. The image of Russia as a “sovereign” entity characterized by the “territorial integrity,” first, somehow refers to the unsaid, unwritten explicitly – the Crimean situation, and second, outlines the importance of this problem. Be the status of Crimea in the Russian discourse more stable and grounded, the need to introduce such an element into the Constitution would not be significant. In addition, such an element of the discourse hints the presence of the opponents that are supposedly causing the problem. These opponents are not named but the certainty of the protection of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as the action of “alienating part of the territory of the Russian Federation” are referring to the “other” or “others,” who may have a potential for such unfriendly actions that should be warned. This element of the discourse also may seem cynical keeping in mind the Crimean events. The aim to “fix” Crimea as a feature of the identity of the Russian Federation may be seen here, and the absence of the explicit discourse on the matter may indicate the importance of the issue in the view of decision-makers.

The new article, Article 67, was added to the text of the Constitution. It is fully dedicated to the identity-related issues, now having their reflection in the text of the Basic Law. The importance of these amendments should not be underestimated, not only in the sense of the ideas provided in the added text but also as a result of the motivated efforts for identity shaping.

The first part of Article 67 states: “The Russian Federation is the legal successor of the USSR on its territory, as well as the legal successor (the successor) of the USSR concerning membership in international organizations, their bodies, participation in international treaties, as well as in relation to the obligations and assets of the USSR provided for by international treaties outside the territory Russian Federation.”<sup>123</sup> This

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государствами), направленные на отчуждение части территории Российской Федерации, а также призывы к таким действиям не допускаются”. Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> ТВМ. “Российская Федерация является правопреемником Союза ССР на своей территории, а также правопреемником (правопродолжателем) Союза ССР в отношении членства в международных организациях, их органах, участия в международных договорах, а также в



statement, on the one hand, is meaningful in the legal domain, and on the other, it has its identity-related meaning. Seeing Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union may have a symbolic and identity-related value, as the fact of the inclusion of this statement into the text of the Constitution. It may indicate the declared continuity, the identity meaning – the reference to power, international influence, geopolitical goals, and the history of the Soviet Union viewed as the past of contemporary Russia, now officially, inscribed into the text of the Constitution.

The next three parts of the new article are less of a legal nature. They refer to the domain of values: “The Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserving the memory of ancestors who passed on us ideals and faith in God, as well as the continuity in the development of the Russian state, recognizes the historically established state unity,” states the second point.<sup>124</sup> The importance of this statement cannot be underestimated, and the inclusion of this statement into the text of the Constitution may cause the amusement or even a shock in comparison with the accents made in the Constitution of 1993.

The version of the Constitution of 1993 and the version of 2020 with the amendments both contain the non-changed part on Russia being a secular state, Article 14, that sounds: “1. The Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion can be established as state or obligatory. 2. Religious associations are separated from the state and equal before the law.”<sup>125</sup> The importance of the statement of secularism should not be underestimated in a diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country. The declared secularism may also be seen as a balance in the part of dealing with the historical past – the atheism of the

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отношении предусмотренных международными договорами обязательств и активов Союза ССР за пределами территории Российской Федерации”. Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> ТВМ. “Российская Федерация, объединенная тысячелетней историей, сохраняя память предков, передавших нам идеалы и веру в Бога, а также преемственность в развитии Российского государства, признает исторически сложившееся государственное единство”. Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> ТВМ. “Статья 14: 1. Российская Федерация - светское государство. Никакая религия не может устанавливаться в качестве государственной или обязательной. 2. Религиозные объединения отделены от государства и равны перед законом”. Source: The latest text of the Constitution with amendments, 2020, available online at:

<http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/10103000/paragraph/82/doclist/Конституция%20Российской%20Федерации:0> (accessed on 20 August 2020); the text of the Russian Constitution before amendments, available online at: <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-3.htm> (accessed on 20 August 2020).



Soviet Union and the role of Orthodox Christianity in the Russian Empire. Besides, the secular character of the state is a feature that became inscribed into the Russian discourse, playing the role of the balance between confessions, on the one hand, and in a way being a continuation of the tradition of atheism. In the excerpt from the updated version of the Constitution, the reference to the history and memory anticipates the introduction of God, from the big letter, into the text of the Constitution. The claim of secularity remains in the text, while the image of God is brought by the amendments, and the coexistence of these claims may seem contradictory. The context also matters: God is introduced into the discourse as the consequence of the past, it is linked with the tradition and framed by the “a thousand-year history.”

The continuation marked here is also playing the role of justification: the view on God as the element of the religious life is changed to the view on God as an element of culture, tradition, traditional beliefs. The “religious” debate in this way may be softened, as the reference to the history and culture may be very powerful. God is mentioned in singular, and this is also an interesting approach, the religious context is not specified. The attempts to promote so-called “traditional values” and religious elements in the Russian discourse will be discussed in the next chapters. Yet, the image of God appearing in the Constitution of the country with a long history of atheism is remarkable. If in the previous amendment the idea to underline the continuity in the history of modern Russia, its direct connection with the Soviet Union, was seen, the image of God brought into the discourse, with a capital letter, may be seen as a mark of continuity with the Russian Empire past. It might be the reason for such a solution. In general, the attempt to mark the continuation line may be seen in the discourse. At the same, the marked continuation of the historical process does not solve the problem of “which past to choose,” it just integrates both that is understandable from the position of identity-shaping coming from the “above” – the decision to “choose” the past to be continued would lead to the lost opportunities of identity-shaping based on characteristics of “another” past. The atheism of the Soviet Union versus the role of the Orthodox Christianity in the Russian Empire, the space achievement of the USSR versus the classical literature of the Tsarist times, the Soviet culture versus the Russian culture, and the list may be continued, while the final choice would deny the opportunity to appeal to the “other” past, to use the features of pride



coming from the past in present discourse. This continuity then is indicating the essential character, the importance of the past for the national identity, at the same time, the duality, duplicity, does not resolve itself. On the contrary, as the introduction of God in the discourse, it complicates the issue further.

The third part of the article states: “The Russian Federation honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, ensures the protection of historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the heroic deed of the people in defending the Fatherland is not allowed.”<sup>126</sup>

This is an understandable point from the historical position: looking at this text, the memories of World War II come to mind, although this is not outlined explicitly. The losses of the Soviet Union during this period cannot be diminished, yet, the inclusion of this statement into the Constitution indicates the importance of the historical memory, the past, for the identity-shaping. The point prohibiting the “diminishing of the heroic deed of the people defending the Fatherland” raises concerns. At first, it seems to resonate with the Law of 2014 prohibiting the rehabilitation of Nazism.<sup>127</sup> The “prohibition” part is worrying since it allows the variety of interpretations and may be used as a method to censor the discourse or close the sensitive discussions with a claim of protection of the “historical truth.” In general, the text of the amendment may be applied to any other, more recent conflict – in this way, it may be instrumentalized as a tool limiting the freedom of speech, the freedom of discussion.

The fourth part of the article is concerned with family and children: “Children are the most important priority of Russian state policy. The state creates conditions conducive to the all-round spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical development of children, the upbringing of patriotism, citizenship, and respect in them to the elders. The state, ensuring the priority of family education, assumes the responsibilities of parents in relation to

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<sup>126</sup> ТВМ. “Российская Федерация чтит память защитников Отечества, обеспечивает защиту исторической правды. Умаление значения подвига народа при защите Отечества не допускается”. Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Federal Law of 5 May 2014 N 128-FZ “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation,” the text available online at: <https://rg.ru/2014/05/07/reabilitacia-dok.html> (accessed on 20 August 2020).



children left without care.”<sup>128</sup> The fact of the inclusion of such a statement into the Constitution may indicate the interest of decision-makers in creating a certain identity-related concept of family life and values. It may suggest the attempt of the state to intervene in the family life in respect of values and images, to try to frame how the modern family in the Russian Federation should look like, or how this family should raise the new Russian citizens. From this perspective, the issue of continuation is also present here, since the need for transfer of values is declared. The notion of “patriotism” brought here may seem worrisome, although this impression is influenced by the fact of authoritarian governance, the events in Crimea, and other circumstances. Taking a bigger picture, patriotism itself mentioned in the text of the Constitution is not something outstanding, but the Russian political pictures as well as the role of ideology in the Soviet past may add to worries on this fact.

Article 68, part 1 was updated with the definition of the Russian language as “the language of the state-forming people, a member of the multi-ethnic union of equal peoples of the Russian Federation.”<sup>129</sup> This amendment is very important. The Russian language is the official language of the Russian Federation, yet, the plurality of entities inside the country, the plurality of languages spoken in the country are the features of reality, as are multi-ethnicity and religious pluralism. In these circumstances, the sudden appearance of the notion of “state-forming people” being a part of the broader group of “peoples” may seem worrisome. Was the need to emphasize the language-based “Russianness” so strong that it overweighed the possible discussions, misunderstandings, or even frustrations? While contemporary Russia is still keeping certain features of the empire, it may not risk its stability and peace between the territorial, ethnic, and religious groups. Singling out one group, even larger in numbers, involves more risks than benefits but it was done

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<sup>128</sup> ТВМ. “Дети являются важнейшим приоритетом государственной политики России. Государство создает условия, способствующие всестороннему духовному, нравственному, интеллектуальному и физическому развитию детей, воспитанию в них патриотизма, гражданственности и уважения к старшим. Государство, обеспечивая приоритет семейного воспитания, берет на себя обязанности родителей в отношении детей, оставшихся без попечения”. Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> ТВМ. The Article 68, part 1, the full text in the new version: “Государственным языком Российской Федерации на всей ее территории является русский язык как язык государствообразующего народа, входящего в многонациональный союз равноправных народов Российской Федерации”. Ibid.



through the amendments. It is difficult to say for sure what reason was behind this choice: it might be the identity-related choice, a turn to more ethnic-oriented self-identification or the choice reasoned not by the ethnical factors but the factor of the Russian language. In this way, the “Russianness” may be continued outside the space of the Russian Federation – due to the Russian language spoken abroad or the ethnic Russians living outside Russia. These links – linguistic, cultural, or ethnic – may further have an explanatory potential for geopolitical reasoning. In any case, the reason seems to be strong enough to make such a choice in face of the risks involved.

The entirely new part under Article 68 is part four. It states: “Culture in the Russian Federation is a unique heritage of its multi-ethnic people. Culture is supported and protected by the state.”<sup>130</sup> This is a rather neutral statement, although the “protection” element may seem to be confusing. It may be interpreted in different ways, and the interpretation of “protection” being close to “censorship” also may be assumed. In general, the involvement of the state into cultural life is a discussible issue. On the one hand, financing cultural projects can be an important feature of the cultural policy of the government. Yet, this amendment brings the risks of the state framing cultural life, shaping it according to a certain vision on “how it should be,” to the views on identity and desirable values coming from the “above.”

The new, added, identity-related points to Article 69 are dedicated to the issues of patriotism and Russians abroad. Part 2 states: “The state protects the cultural identity of all peoples and ethnic communities of the Russian Federation, guarantees preservation of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity.”<sup>131</sup> This is an important point that might have been introduced to balance the amendment on the importance of the Russian language as the language of “the state-forming people.” It seems that it acknowledges the cultural plurality, although the statement is not specified in its details.

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<sup>130</sup> ТВМ. The Article 68, part 4: “Культура в Российской Федерации является уникальным наследием ее многонационального народа. Культура поддерживается и охраняется государством”. Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> ТВМ. Article 69, part 2: “Государство защищает культурную самобытность всех народов и этнических общностей Российской Федерации, гарантирует сохранение этнокультурного и языкового многообразия”. Ibid.





Part 3, also newly added, states: “The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad in the exercise of their rights, protection of their interests and preservation of the all-Russian cultural identity.”<sup>132</sup> On the one hand, all of the issues related to the situation with “compatriots abroad,” ethnic Russian living outside Russia, the Russian citizens, or the broader Russian speakers, in the current political context, including the Ukrainian crisis, may be viewed with the bias of this context. The statement on “exercising the rights” and “protection of their interests” may also be viewed in a different way, if the context was different. The cultural identity – a rather neutral symbol – does not seem to be politically coloured. Yet, the risks of instrumentalization may be there, as the geopolitical context gives the opportunity to interpret such a statement as an attempt to influence the internal affairs of other countries, the countries where Russian speakers are living in significant numbers. From this perspective, the cultural identity, the cultural commonality, may be a factor of the political risk, and this is important to keep in mind why discussing the broader issue of the coexistence of the political and the cultural.

Article 72 was updated: the identity-related claims concerning the family life were integrated into the text. In particular, the newly added point “j1” suggests that “protection of the family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood; protection of the institution of marriage as a union of a man and a woman; creating conditions for a decent upbringing of children in a family, as well as for adult children to exercise the responsibility to take care of their parents” is under the joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and the subjects of the Russian Federation.<sup>133</sup> This is a claim of great importance and it needs careful consideration. The idea of the state intervening the family life may be repulsive. Surely, family life is a part of the legal discourse as well, as it needs to be framed by the laws of the state. At the same time, the amendment of “protection of the institution of marriage as a union of a man and a woman” seems to be more than just an element of the

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<sup>132</sup> ТВМ, Article 69, part 3: “Российская Федерация оказывает поддержку соотечественникам, проживающим за рубежом, в осуществлении их прав, обеспечении защиты их интересов и сохранении общероссийской культурной идентичности”. Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> ТВМ, Article 72, part “j1” (“ж1”): “В совместном ведении Российской Федерации и субъектов Российской Федерации находятся: защита семьи, материнства, отцовства и детства; защита института брака как союза мужчины и женщины; создание условий для достойного воспитания детей в семье, а также для осуществления совершеннолетними детьми обязанности заботиться о родителях.” Ibid.





legal framework. This is an identity-related claim, the claim giving a legal space to the appearing in the discourse of the last years notion of “traditional values.” This statement may be interpreted as denying the rights for the family establishment, at least in the legal domain, but also in the domain of values, to the LGBT couples. In general, the emphasis of the role of the state in the issues of family life made on par with a specification in the main legal document of how this family is allowed to look like may seem reasonably disturbing. It also may indicate the determination of the decision-makers to shape the certain views, their interest to the questions of identity, and ability and persistence to promote this vision even in the legal domain, even with all risks involved, as it is important to remember that Russia has its atheist past, and “traditionalism,” conservatism in the issues of family life, the issues or divorce or, for instance, abortion, was not approached from the conservative perspective. This point is discussed in more detail in the chapter on the female identities and value pluralism. Here it is important to outline that the identity-related claims, claims on the family life, were assessed as crucially important to be included in the list of the constitutional amendments.

The new Article 79 (1) is also interesting from the geopolitical perspective, and perspective of what does it mean – to be “Russian”: “The Russian Federation is taking measures to maintain and strengthen international peace and security, to ensure the peaceful coexistence of states and peoples, prevention of interference in the internal affairs of the state.”<sup>134</sup> The statement is characterized by duality and a certain contradiction. On the one hand, it contains positive, formative claims such as “peace,” “security,” “coexistence,” on the other, the collocations “taking measures,” the verbs “to maintain,” “to strengthen,” “to ensure” indicate the action, not the reaction. The strong phrases such as “prevention of interference in the internal affairs of the state” imply that there is an intervening “agent” involved. In this way, the image of the “other” appears in the text, and while the “other” is not named, the impression that the actions outlined are aimed to confront the “other” is formed. In this way, the maintenance of peace may be seen as a “cover,” as an ethically sound explanation of confrontation. This view, though,

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<sup>134</sup> ТВМ, Article 79, part 1: “Российская Федерация принимает меры по поддержанию и укреплению международного мира и безопасности, обеспечению мирного сосуществования государств и народов, недопущению вмешательства во внутренние дела государства”. Ibid.



is also affected by political reality, the situation of the last years, such as the Ukrainian crisis.

Part 2 of Article 81 proposes new and very curious limitations imposed on the potential runners for the presidential chair. It states: “A citizen of the Russian Federation who is at least 35 years old, has permanently resided in the Russian Federation for at least 25 years, does not have and has not previously had citizenship of a foreign state or a residence permit or other document, confirming the right to permanent residence of a citizen of the Russian Federation on the territory of a foreign state, may be elected as a President of the Russian Federation.”<sup>135</sup> The considerations on the citizenship and permanent residence permit are entirely new. It may be viewed as a step forward in the line of securitization: the image of the powers aiming to influence Russian politics from the outside, to interfere with the Russian internal affairs becomes well-integrated in the discourse, being promoted from the “above.” Such a limitation on the passports and permits may reflect the fear of the “other” aiming to interfere with Russian internal affairs. In practice though, this barrier may be unreasonable, it also limits the rights of the children born in the international families, holding Russian and the second passport as a consequence of the nationalities of their parents. The remark on not holding the citizenship or permanent residence permit also in the past makes it even more complex. These limitations do not seem to be reasonable, they reflect the discourse of the alienation and the “foreign” perceived as a potential source of interference.

Article 81 in its part 3 and part 3 (1) contains the main change. The updated version of part 3 is: “One and the same person cannot hold the office of President of the Russian Federation for more than two consecutive terms.”<sup>136</sup> And in contrast, the part 3 (1) states:

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<sup>135</sup> ТВМ, Article 81, part 2: “Президентом Российской Федерации может быть избран гражданин Российской Федерации не моложе 35 лет, постоянно проживающий в Российской Федерации не менее 25 лет, не имеющий и не имевший ранее гражданства иностранного государства либо вида на жительство или иного документа, подтверждающего право на постоянное проживание гражданина Российской Федерации на территории иностранного государства”. Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> ТВМ. Article 81, part 3: “Одно и то же лицо не может занимать должность Президента Российской Федерации более двух сроков”. Article 81, part 3 (1): “Положение части 3 статьи 81 Конституции Российской Федерации, ограничивающее число сроков, в течение которых одно и то же лицо может занимать должность Президента Российской Федерации, применяется к лицу, занимавшему и (или) занимающему должность Президента Российской Федерации, без учета числа сроков, в течение которых оно занимало и (или) занимает эту должность на момент



“The provision of part 3 of Article 81 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, limiting the number of terms during which one and the same person can hold the office of President of the Russian Federation, applies to a person who held and (or) holds the office of President of the Russian Federation, without taking into account the number of terms, during whom he held and (or) holds this position at the time of the entry into force of the amendment to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, introducing a corresponding restriction, and does not exclude the possibility for him to hold the office of President of the Russian Federation for the periods allowed by the specified provision.” In the discussion on the amendments, this point was informally named as “nullification”: the introduction of the zero point starting from the entry of the amendments into the force, since which the calculation of numbers of presidential terms restarts. This amendment indicates the desire to continue the current political situation, the limits for democracy, the authoritarian ruling.

The updated part 1, point “v” of the Article 114 brings one more the notion of the “family values,” saying that the government of the Russian Federation “ensures the implementation in the Russian Federation of unified socially-oriented state policy in the field of culture, science, education, health care, social security, support, strengthening and protection of the family, preservation of traditional family values, ecology, as well as in the field of environmental protection.”<sup>137</sup> In this amendment, the word “unified” may cause confusion, it may be perceived as a reference to the Soviet state policies, and the ideological framework approaching different spheres of life with the pre-disposed ideological receipt. The universalism in this sense may seem hazardous, and the softening “social oriented” description does not level such an impression. It is also curious that the important spheres such as culture, science, education, ecology are put in line with the sphere of private life, family life, and that also “traditional family values” are outlined

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вступления в силу поправки к Конституции Российской Федерации, вносящей соответствующее ограничение, и не исключает для него возможность занимать должность Президента Российской Федерации в течение сроков, допустимых указанным положением”. Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> ТВМ. Article 114, part 1, point “v” (“в”): “Правительство Российской Федерации: обеспечивает проведение в Российской Федерации единой социально ориентированной государственной политики в области культуры, науки, образования, здравоохранения, социального обеспечения, поддержки, укрепления и защиты семьи, сохранения традиционных семейных ценностей, экологии, а также в области охраны окружающей среды.” Ibid.



separately. These different spheres somehow being equalized, with the public in line with the sphere of private, and while the concept of intervention – through, for example, financial and other types of support – is reasonable in application to science, art, ecology, and so on, the presence of “traditional family values” in this line creates confusion that is also deepened by the “unified state policy” characteristic. This is not a clear and understandable point, and its presence in the Constitution in this form, as well as the fact of the amendment, the change realized in such a form, look worrisome. This amendment is also indicating the direction in which identity-related claims are made: the idea to promote the notion of “traditional values” seems to be persistent, as it is realized on such a high level, in the main legal document, but also in such an unclear and questionable manner.

### Concluding Remarks

In the first chapter of the work, the importance of wording was discussed, with a focus on the sensitive to the context translation. In the discourse analysis, the wording may have an explanatory potential, helping to answer the questions. In the case of the Russian Constitution, the word “amendments,” *popravki* in the Russian language, has its special meaning. The collocation “the amendments to the Constitution” and the collocation “constitutional change” give different impressions: the word “amendments” seems to describe the point-based changes: the change in some parts of the articles, the deleted sentences, the added sentences, the change of wording can be associative examples, when we imagine “making amendments.” Even with the wording of “amendments,” the Constitution being the Basic Law, the main legal text of the country, deserves attention, and the “amendment” also attracts attention for the reason. Yet, the wording of the constitutional “change” gives the additional associations, through the dimensions of significance, radicalism, renewal, the new path. The wording of “amendments” in this sense is more cautious, it carefully reflects the action that was applied to the text of the Constitution and gives the impression that the “skeleton,” the main body of the document remained the same, although the local, point-based additions or deletions were made. This is important since it assures continuity – and not the change in the global meaning but the



amendment. This way of narration is beneficial for the political reasons: if the essence of change is significant and has its political dimension, such as the prolongation of the period of power through the “nullification,” the neutral and limiting wording of “amendments” can be reasonable.

The symptomatic element of the new constitutional discourse is the inclusion of the value-based, identity-related claims, such as the claim on the importance of the “traditional values.” The existence of these claims, the decision to “promote” them despite the potentially negative public outlook, indicates that the ideas behind these statements are chosen, and the aim of identity-shaping according to these ideas is assessed as crucial.



## Chapter 3: Russian Female Identities and Value Pluralism

In this chapter, the emergence of the concepts of “traditionalism” and “traditional values” in contemporary Russian discourse is examined. It is argued that the usage of the “traditional values” concept is purposeful and illustrates the attempt to shape identity from the “above.” The argument is elaborated by looking through the recent by historical measures Soviet past and comparing the elements of the contemporary discourse to the identity claims made on Russia’s historical path to female emancipation.

### The Concept of “Traditional Values”

On 8 March 2019, while congratulating Russian women with the International Women’s Day, president Putin said: “Reaching success is in the nature of our women. You manage to do everything, both at work and at home – and remain beautiful, bright, charming, the center of attraction for the whole family, unite it with your love, which can inspire and support, warm and comfort.”<sup>138</sup> This statement, while giving an overall positive impression, may also raise a question: what does it mean “to do everything both at work and at home”? Does it describe the gender-equal situation or a situation when a woman is expected to both work and take care of the household while a man is expected only to work? The second scenario is by no means describing gender equality but an updated traditionalist conception when a woman is allowed to work or even build a career, nevertheless she is also expected to carry “traditional” duties in the household.

On another occasion, during the Eurasian forum, he provided an equivocal speech that, on the one hand, was embracing the gender equality and emphasizing the role of women in the economy, and on the other, was referring to the concept of “traditional values.” He said:

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<sup>138</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Достигать успехов – в характере наших женщин. Вы успеваете всё: и на работе, и дома – и остаётесь красивыми, яркими, очаровательными, центром притяжения всей семьи, объединяете её своей любовью, способной вдохновить и поддержать, согреть и утешить”. Source: Putin, Vladimir. Congratulations to Russian women on March 8 (“Поздравление российским женщинам с 8 Марта”), from 8 March 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60002> (accessed on 15 July 2020).





*It is in the common interest to solve the problem of gender inequality, remove many unfortunately still existing stereotypes and career restrictions and, which is very important, open the way for girls to receive the necessary education, create comfortable conditions for work and running their own business. To make a woman feel self-reliant and independent, to be sure that guarantees of social and legal protection are working efficiently.<sup>139</sup>*

This statement gives an unequivocally positive impression: it is structured and focused, and the message provided is pro-gender equality. The language of this excerpt is different from the language of the previous one, it is a language of the programme statements, it is more official and “bureaucratic.” Since the occasions are different – the congratulation with the International Women’s Day and the speech on the forum, the distinct language is understandable. At the same time, there is a contradiction in the messages sent in the first and the second speeches: while the second may be interpreted as a supporting the equal rights, the equal pay, and career opportunities, the first is somehow more complex, emphasizing the success of women not in the paradigm of gender equality but more in the context of the Soviet past where the female emancipation was accompanied with the maintenance of the traditional roles of the “housewives” and “mothers,” so the women had the double duties, the traditional roles at home and the professional role at work. The Soviet female identities will be discussed in the separate paragraph of this chapter.

The next part of the Eurasian forum speech, while not fully contradicting with the discourse of gender equality, brings other, more questionable elements, also due to the wording choice and more intense emotional involvement. Comparing to the “drier” bureaucratic language, the claim provided below is emotional and consequently more remarkable, switching attention from what was said previously to itself:

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<sup>139</sup> ТВМ. “В общих интересах решить проблему гендерного неравенства, убрать многие ещё существующие, к сожалению, стереотипы и карьерные ограничения и, что очень важно, открыть путь для получения необходимого образования для девочек, создать удобные условия для работы и ведения собственного дела. Чтобы женщина чувствовала себя самостоятельной и независимой, чтобы эффективно действовали гарантии социальной и правовой защиты”. Source: Putin, Vladimir. Speech at the plenary session of the Second Eurasian Women’s Forum (“Второй Евразийский женский форум. Владимир Путин принял участие в работе Второго Евразийского женского форума: глава государства выступил на пленарном заседании”), from 10 September 2018, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58598> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



*At the same time, it is important to preserve traditional values: the values of the family and motherhood, which do not depend on social structure and technological progress and are common for countries with different cultures, customs, with different codes.<sup>140</sup>*

Here the concept of the “traditional values” appears in the same piece of discourse where the importance of gender equality was outlined a minute earlier. This changes the angle completely, in such a way that the previous statement starts to look as an intro to the claim on the importance to preserve “traditional values.” In the associative row, the “traditional” refers to the patriarchal way of life, here the point of reference may be “traditional societies” and the relevant way of life. “Values,” in turn, fix this position, assign to it the ethical meaning. While the emancipation, gender equality, feminism, are associated with the “advancement” of the society, with the progress, and the path for development, the message here is different. The “traditional” mainly refers to the past, to the older patriarchal structures. The “values,” being a bridge from the past, are aimed to assure the reproduction of the structures. At the same time, the definition of the “traditional values” in the Russian context is somehow problematic. In this excerpt, the specification is provided on what the “traditional values” are meant to be – “the values of the family and motherhood.” At the same time, the thesis of the commonality of “traditional values” for countries with “different codes” may be questionable. The concept of family is also changing in time and space, so do traditions and norms, and this is only the basic argument here that may be supplemented by other elaborations.<sup>141</sup> In general, this piece of discourse gives the impression that the “traditional” here is close to the “patriarchal.” It also resonates with the Women’s Day speech analyzed above: the “motherhood” indicates the traditional gender role, the “values of the family” could be applied to both men and

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<sup>140</sup> ТВМ. “При этом важно сохранить и традиционные ценности: ценности семьи и материнства, которые не зависят от общественного уклада и технологического прогресса, являются общими для стран с разными культурами, обычаями, с разными кодами”. Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example: the OECD report “Families are Changing”, 2011, available online at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/47701118.pdf>; Smolina, Anastasia. 2013. Crisis / transformation of the institution of family / marriage: to the question of syncretization and demarcation of concepts (“Кризис/трансформация института семьи/брака: к вопросу о синкретизации и демаркации понятий”). In: E.V. Anufrieva, T.P. Mashikhina (eds.) *Gender Studies: History, Philosophy, Education* (“Гендерные Исследования: История, Философия, Образование”). Volgograd: VolGMU, pp. 36-57.



women, but here both “motherhood” and the “values of the family” are brought into the discourse as a specification of what “traditional values” include. It also seems that in this interpretation the concept of the “traditional values” refers more to the demographic group of women rather than men. The problem that this excerpt does not solve is the meaning of “tradition” in the Russian context: if the “tradition” refers to the past, then which past is it? These are multiple basic questions to the concept outlined, but there are no proper explanations provided in the discourse. The complexity of the modern history of Russia is ignored here.

In general, the concept of traditional values started to appear in contemporary Russian political discourse quite often, there is no clarity at this point. The very rough and approximate question may be: to which traditions does the narrator refer? are those traditions dating back to the times of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union? This is a symbolic division keeping in mind the continuity of these periods and the immanent variability. It is also not clear how the cultural and religious diversity of the country is reflected in this paradigm, not even mentioning the factor of globalization and individual peculiarities. Another point that can be made is that the notion of the “tradition” does not necessarily imply its positive character, moreover, it may refer to the absence of the “progress.” This sketch already makes it clear that the use of the concept may create great confusion.

Another example of the appearance of the notion in Putin’s discourse relates to the speech made in 2017 at the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, where he said:

*Already today we see how traditional values are being eroded in many countries, and this leads to degradation, mutual alienation in the society, and depersonalization of people. Indifference and coldness, loss of value orientations turn into the growth of radicalism, xenophobia, conflicts on religious grounds, selfishness that destroys a person turns into aggressive nationalism.<sup>142</sup>*

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<sup>142</sup> ТВМ. “Уже сегодня мы видим, как размываются традиционные ценности во многих странах, и это ведёт к деградации, взаимному отчуждению общества, обезличиванию людей. Равнодушие и безразличие, утрата ценностных ориентиров оборачиваются ростом радикализма, ксенофобии, конфликтами на религиозной почве, разрушающий человека эгоизм превращается в агрессивный национализм”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox



While dedicated to the notion of values, this excerpt is by its nature political, it connects political with emotional and appeals to emotions. The statement made is strong: the image of the “other” is shaped, the “other” in its plurality, losing the “traditional values,” with Russia being in a better position but not out of risks to become one of the “other”; the values are taken from the context of family life and put in a broader political context. Now the decline of “traditional values” is stated to be a reason for political instability and the challenge to peace – through the means of “radicalism,” “xenophobia,” “aggressive nationalism.” The danger of the phenomenon covers both levels of identity – collective and personal, and it is also curious that nationalism, *natsionalizm*, is stated as an undoubtedly negative notion, yet, is separated from *xenophobia*, and here we return to the reflections provided in the first chapter. It also seems important that while the speech was made during the event gathering religious leaders, the discourse is not that much focused on the religious aspects, as the boundaries are blurring and the political pours into the religious and the collective merges with the individual. It is very interesting how the line of the negativity is strengthening: “degradation,” “mutual alienation,” “depersonalization” are brought into one sentence, but the images evoked from these words seem not to be enough, and the next sentence brings “indifference,” “coldness,” “loss of value orientations,” “growth of radicalism,” “xenophobia,” “conflict on religious grounds,” then the strong word “destroys” comes and the “aggressive nationalism” closes this line. The general impression is that the discourse aims to draw the picture of the total collapse, chaos, being caused by the “erosion of the traditional values.” At the same time, in the Russian historical context, the “erosion of the traditional values” may describe the post-revolution period in comparison to the Russian Empire past. The religious values may be the example here. Then, the question arises whether the Soviet past should be rejected in turn, as the time of chaos, which destroyed and diminished the traditional values? And does the change fit into this paradigm of continuity? There are questions but the concept introduced does not provide the answers. What is well seen in this excerpt is that the concept is used for alienation of the “other” countries, where the values “are being eroded.” This seems to be an attempt for the identity-shaping from the “above.”

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Church, from 1 December 2017, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56255> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



The negative reference to the “other” countries supplemented by the mentioning of “traditional values” can also be found in the annual speech to the Federal Assembly. There Putin started from a similar statement: “Today in many countries the norms of morality and ethics are being revised, national traditions and differences of nations and cultures are being erased.”<sup>143</sup> The distinction here is in the additional statements on the “norms of morality and ethics” being “revised” and the “differences” between “nations and cultures” being “erased.” The extra meanings brought may illuminate the issue of “traditional values” as the relevant and enhancing. The two aspects may be observed here: first relates to the moral grounds, and traditions here are associated with the higher norms of morality; second reminds about the impact of globalization, and gets the negative outlook. It is interesting that speaking broader, the past is associated with a better outcome, both morally and culturally, and the present – with multiple moral risks and declines. This could seem to be nostalgia, with similar risks – imagining the past in the idealized and embellished way. The source of the discourse hence suggests that this idealized picture is aimed to shape identity from the “above,” with the emphasis on the past, with the notion of the “traditional” referring to the past, and with the higher moral standards assigned to the past rather than to the present.

This speech of Putin continues in such a way: “Society is now required not only to recognize the common sense of the right of everyone to freedom of conscience, political views, and private life, but also the obligatory recognition of the equivalence, however strange it may seem, of good and evil, opposite in meaning.”<sup>144</sup> This excerpt does not describe the female identities or the attitudes on gender equality, yet it may imply the changes in the family as an institution. The articulation of the issues meant here is vague: the issue can be guessed but it is not outlined directly. The “good and evil” comparison is deliberately radical, while the conflict itself is described very broadly and vaguely, with

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<sup>143</sup> ТВМ. “Сегодня во многих странах пересматриваются нормы морали и нравственности, стираются национальные традиции и различия наций и культур”. Source: Putin, Vladimir. 2013. The Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of 12 December 2013, available online at: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_155646/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_155646/) (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>144</sup> ТВМ. “От общества теперь требуют не только здравого признания права каждого на свободу совести, политических взглядов и частной жизни, но и обязательного признания равноценности, как это ни покажется странным, добра и зла, противоположных по смыслу понятий”. Ibid.



the question arising, as which society is it, is it a Russian society or any society, what is meant under the "obligatory recognition," and does the obligatory mean legally binding? These questions are not even attempted to be answered. Nothing "politically incorrect" is articulated explicitly, yet, the unsaid here may be so deliberately.

The speech continues with the non-decreasing degree of antagonism:

*Such destruction of traditional values "from the above" not only leads to negative consequences for societies but is also fundamentally anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, obscure ideas, contrary to the will of the popular majority, which does not accept the ongoing change and the proposed revision.<sup>145</sup>*

Curiously, the president outlines the direction of the "destruction" as "from the above": it matches with the attempt provided here to underline the practices of identity-shaping from "the above." What does it mean? Probably, the problem is assumed to be the consequence of political decision-making and not the will of the people. The "destruction" of values refers to something that is done by the elites without consent of the people, it is interesting though that the same type of reasoning is not applied to the attempts of identity-making coming from the "above." The "majority" is presented as holding the traditional values while the elites determine something different and then impose their view on society. Traditions once more are viewed positively while the "change" and "revision" are viewed negatively. The reference to the processes being "anti-democratic" is curious, yet, it is important to notice that the general description of the processes is vague. The meanings here are not provided explicitly.

In continuation of the passage the concept of "traditional values" is presented in an interesting way, as if Russia was deliberately supporting these values, nurturing them. This seems to be an attempt of the country's mission definition, yet, the one made from the "above":

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<sup>145</sup> ТВМ. "Подобное разрушение традиционных ценностей "сверху" не только ведет за собой негативные последствия для обществ, но и в корне антидемократично, поскольку проводится в жизнь, исходя из абстрактных, отвлеченных идей, вопреки воле народного большинства, которое не принимает происходящей перемены и предлагаемой ревизии". Ibid.





*And we know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on the protection of traditional values, which for millennia formed the spiritual, moral basis of civilization, of every nation: the values of the traditional family, genuine human life, including religious life, life not only material but also spiritual, the values of humanism and the diversity of the world.<sup>146</sup>*

The reminiscence here may refer to the issue of Russian philosophy: the “code,” the reference words suggest it: “spiritual,” “moral,” “civilization,” “religious life.” The vague “we know that there are more and more people...” is not supported by the evidence or specification, and the continuation does not add clarity. For example, to which countries do “for millennia” refer? Does this part aim to describe the Russian historical reality or it tackles to summarize the development of civilization in general? And how we deal with the realities where traditions change, both in time and space? There are no answers to these or related questions provided, no possibilities for the verification. In application to Russia with its dramatic 20<sup>th</sup> century, this reflection is questionable. The position of Russia as a protector of traditional values may be challenged due to the same argument, the argument of the Russian revolution. It seems that the excerpt is not based on the factual ground but on the over-constructed vision, vision of the past “as it should have been.” The reference words allow thinking that the Russian philosophy was a source of inspiration for this argument. In this case, the excerpt illustrates the situation when the ideas are directed toward the past, and the past is “over-constructed” accordingly. Yet, it is curious to see how the traditional values are reclaimed in the attempts of identification.

As it was reflected earlier, the concept of “traditional values” is appearing in the discourse in different circumstances, in speeches both directed to the wider audience, such as Russian women, but also in programme-focused environments. In both conditions, the concept remains unclear, there are either no attempts to elaborate on this concept and to outline it with maximum clarity, either the elaboration lacks historical or factual grounding. One more example of the usage of the concept refers to the Putin’s meeting

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<sup>146</sup> ТВМ. “И мы знаем, что в мире все больше людей, поддерживающих нашу позицию по защите традиционных ценностей, которые тысячелетиями составляли духовную, нравственную основу цивилизации, каждого народа: ценностей традиционной семьи, подлинной человеческой жизни, в том числе и жизни религиозной, жизни не только материальной, но и духовной, ценностей гуманизма и разнообразия мира”. Ibid.



with the “United Russia,” *Edinaya Rossiya*, political party, where Putin claimed: “The party has repeatedly shown its will, proved its rightfulness, proposed a unifying agenda, based on freedom and human well-being, patriotism, our traditional values, a strong civil society, and a strong state.”<sup>147</sup> Here, once more, the “traditional values” are staying self-sufficient, without further explanation and elaboration as if the meaning here was obvious and did not need any reference. This may be a discursive trick: the repeating claim assigning the value to the concept, aiming to shape the meaning rather than reflecting it.

It is also useful to look at situations when the concept is articulated by the other members of the political elite. For example, during the meeting with Vladimir Putin on the proposal of the Constitutional amendments, Alexey Pushkov made a very interesting intervention from which the meanings aimed to be behind the concept may be captured. He started immediately outlining the connection between the “traditional values” and morality:<sup>148</sup>

*I would like to say a few words about the international significance of the amendments to the Constitution, especially about the moral guideline that they convey. The fact is that not only our opponents are looking at Russia very carefully. People who sympathize with us are watching because we defend traditional values.*<sup>149</sup>

The Constitutional amendments here are viewed not as a legal phenomenon but as a moral one. While on the theoretical level the legal aspects are having their philosophical foundations, the immediate linkage of a very particular proposal with the sphere of the

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<sup>147</sup> ТВМ. “Партия не раз проявляла волю, доказывала свою правоту, предлагала объединяющую повестку, в основе которой свобода и благополучие человека, патриотизм, наши традиционные ценности, сильное гражданское общество и сильное государство”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech during the Congress of the “United Russia” party, from 23 November 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62105> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>148</sup> Alexey Pushkov is a former journalist and TV host. During the recent years he held positions of the Parliament member from the “United Russia” party, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Parliament, and Perm Kray senator.

<sup>149</sup> ТВМ. “Я хотел бы сказать несколько слов о международном значении поправок в Конституцию, особенно о том нравственном ориентире, который они передают. Дело в том, что на Россию очень внимательно смотрят, и смотрят не только наши противники. Смотрят люди, которые нам очень симпатизируют, потому что мы отстаиваем традиционные ценности”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s meeting with the working group on the preparation of proposals for amendments to the Constitution, from 3 July 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63599> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



moral is remarkable. Here once more the image of the “other,” the unnamed “opponent” is brought, and this rhetoric hint has an identity grounding. The “sympathizers” are mentioned as well, although as in the previous case the names or countries are not mentioned, the specification is not provided. The statement remains clear, and while there is no clarity in detail, the idea of what Pushkov is saying is understandable. The way of narration reminds certain excerpts from Vladimir Putin when the unsaid can be captured in what was said. Surely, this way of narration is purposeful, it allows to avoid the direct “attacks,” keep streamlined wording, yet, to provide the idea. The statement lacks the factual ground: the claims are being made without the evidence supporting them. The reflection is not developed, only the “diagnose” is articulated. All these may seem to be characteristics of ideological speech. While the speech is supposed to reflect the mindset and the ideas of the speaker, it is interesting how the concepts articulated by Putin then become used by the members of the political elite and get “forwarded” to Putin publicly. It allows to think that these elements of discourse are perceived to be “likable” by the president, and so the elite reproduces them.

Pushkov continues, repeating the statement of Russia being a defender of the “traditional values”:

*The fact is that not only our opponents are looking at Russia very carefully. People who sympathize with us are watching because we defend traditional values. Such people exist even in the citadels of modern ultra-liberal ideology. There are many of them: they are in Italy, in France, in Germany. Even in the United States, where a kind of ideological evolution is now taking place with unpredictable results, a huge number of people are looking at Russia.<sup>150</sup>*

Here the word “conservatism” is not pronounced, instead, the phrase “modern ultra-liberal ideology” is brought into the discourse. Then, the antithesis is assumed to be

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<sup>150</sup> ТВМ. “Дело в том, что на Россию очень внимательно смотрят, и смотрят не только наши противники. Смотрят люди, которые нам очень симпатизируют, потому что мы отстаиваем традиционные ценности. Такие люди есть даже в цитаделях современной ультралиберальной идеологии. Их много: они есть в Италии, во Франции, в Германии. Даже в Соединённых Штатах, где сейчас происходит своеобразная идеологическая эволюция с непредсказуемыми результатами, огромное количество людей смотрят на Россию”. Ibid.



conservative, and this is the reference toward the discourse of Putin. It seems that the thesis is aimed to be empowered through the articulation: the more it is pronounced, the more powerful and realistic it is supposed to be. The identity-related meaning is given to the concept, and then the concept starts to be circulated by the members of the elite.

The method of description of the “other” or the “friend” does not change: we do not hear the names, the titles, the information of the “people” from both groups – “sympathizers” or “others” who do not view Russia in a positive way. We do not get information about these people: are they members of the political elite of their respective countries? or are these people just ordinary citizens shaping their political views through the available sources of information? or, if going into conspiracy since the text allows or even encourages this, are these people the “agents of influence”? The conspiracy language is present here: “There are many of them: they are in Italy, in France, in Germany” – since there are no details on the people Pushkov speaks about specified, it gives an opportunity to think in the terms of conspiracy. It does also resonate with the European and American discourses on Russian interference and involvement, such as interference into the elections, supporting the right-wing political parties, etc.<sup>151</sup> Altogether, this situation does not benefit the goal of mutual understanding, and reinforces the “othering.” The phrase “ideological revolution” is also interesting here: it is symptomatic that in one speech the line of reflections goes from the “moral guideline,” “traditional values,” to the “ideological evolution,” while the ideology cannot be equalized to values. This may be attributed to the accident “let out” or the conscious politics of equalization. The mentioning of ideology also brings here the Soviet reminiscence, and the general impression of the attempt to influence the identity shaping from the “above.”

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<sup>151</sup> See, for example, the media articles and think-tank’s analytics: Weiss, Andrew S. 2020. With Friends Like This: The Kremlin’s Far-Right and Populist Connections in Italy and Austria, The Carnegie Endowment website, from 27 February 2020, available online at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/02/27/with-friends-like-these-kremlin-s-far-right-and-populist-connections-in-italy-and-austria-pub-81100> (accessed on 1 August 2020); Noack, Rick. 2017. The European Parties Accused of Being Influenced by Russia. In: *The Washington Post*, from 17 November 2017, available online at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/17/the-european-parties-accused-of-being-influenced-by-russia/> (accessed on 1 August 2020);



While Pushkov continues his speech, the notion of “traditional values” is repeated, here it is followed by a specification:

*And the fact that we have enshrined traditional values in our Constitution (marriage as a union of a man and a woman, an institution of the family), it seems to me that this actually has a global significance, because now there is a struggle for the future moral orientation of mankind. This gives us very big opportunities, in my opinion: we can directly address the citizens of other countries.<sup>152</sup>*

The meaning behind the “traditional values” concept may be captured here. The examples Pushkov provides are “marriage as a union of a man and a woman” and “an institution of the family.” As was discussed above, the institution of the family is not stale in time and space, and although here the conservative view may be implied, still, it is not clear what type of the family is meant. The first example hence is more enlightening, as it provides a conservative idea. Then, the interpretation of the “traditional values” may be shaped as the values in the domain of morality, where the meaning of the moral is approximated by the conservative; these values are related to the domain of the family life and promote a conservative model of the family. Yet, in the domain of family life, it is only possible to capture that these values do not accept gay marriages but beyond this, it is difficult to say what type of family is promoted. Is this a nuclear family typical for Russia? Or under the “traditional” we mean a common living of different generations together? How many children are meant to be in such a family? These are questions without answers. At the same time, the general impression the text gives is that it is not aimed to describe the Russian reality as it is but to construct the picture, as it seems desirable from the “above.”<sup>153</sup> The authenticity of the claims seems not to be important, as in this framework the facts are not discussed.

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<sup>152</sup> ТВМ. “И то, что мы закрепили традиционные ценности в нашей Конституции (брак как союз мужчины и женщины, институт семьи), мне кажется, что это имеет на самом деле глобальное значение, потому что сейчас идёт борьба за будущую нравственную ориентацию человечества. Это нам даёт очень большие возможности, на мой взгляд: мы можем напрямую обращаться к гражданам других стран”. Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> On the issue of “traditional values” and the Russian reality, see also academic and media sources, such as: Edenborg, Emil. 2020. Russia’s Spectacle of “Traditional Values”: Rethinking the Politics of Visibility. In: *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 106-126; Rudnev, Maksim.



*The position of official structures and governments is not so important in this case. What matters is that it enhances our soft power, our influence. And, in my opinion, this also multiplies our ability to fight against the imposition of alien values on us. It is no secret that many international structures and organizations have already adopted such resolutions, now they will adopt resolutions, trying to impose other points of view on us.*<sup>154</sup>

The appearance of the “official structures” and “governments” as being “not so important” for the goals Pushkov argues, suggests that by the “sympathizers” these strictures and governments are not meant. Immediately Pushkov starts to talk about the soft power and influence, and this may only add to the possible conspiracy thinking on Russia. It seems that there is no aim to debunk this way of thinking but, on the contrary, to encourage and to act accordingly. Such collocations as “fight against,” “imposition,” “alien values” are strong, they are employed to intensify antagonism. They are kept unspecified but may be captured throughout the Pushkov’s speech, it is possible to guess that the gay marriage, the right of gay couples to adopt the children are among these values. The reasoning part lacks here: there is no explanation on why these values are “alien,” the statement is just made as if it was evident. The same way of narration may be observed in some of Putin’s speeches. In the last sentence of this excerpt, the vague formulation is both in “international structures and organizations,” “adoption of the resolutions,” and the “imposition of other points of view on us.” The image of the unfriendly at its best “other” is present, yet, it is not named. The course on the action is seen in the text: the “other” is not just observing the situation in Russia but acts “trying

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2019. Traditional Values and Reality: The Sociologist Maksim Rudnev on the manipulation with “traditional values” (“Традиционные ценности и реальность: Социолог Максим Руднев о Манипуляции Традиционными Ценностями”). In: Vedomosti, from 17 May 2019, available online at: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2019/05/16/801630-traditsionnie-tsennosti> (accessed on 20 July 2020); Hooper, Melissa. 2016. Russia’s “Traditional Values” Leadership. In: The Foreign Policy Center, from 24 March 2016, available online at: <https://fpc.org.uk/russias-traditional-values-leadership/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>154</sup> ТВМ. “Не так важна в данном случае позиция официальных структур, правительств. Важно то, что это усиливает нашу мягкую силу, наше влияние. И, на мой взгляд, это также умножает наши возможности борьбы против навязывания нам чуждых ценностей. Не секрет же, что многие международные структуры, организации уже принимали такие резолюции, сейчас будут принимать резолюции, пытаясь навязать нам другие точки зрения”. Ibid.





to impose other points of view” on Russia, and Russia, in turn, exercises the “soft power” and its “influence,” “fights” against the imposition of “alien” values. The described course of actions is not aimed to soften the situation, is not directed to the establishment of mutual understanding and trust, on the contrary, it reinforces mutual the image of the “other.” A curious logical problem here is that Pushkov, while claiming the “value imposition” situation as unacceptable, at the same time considers the “soft power” and “influence” of Russia as certainly an achievement, a positive phenomenon. It seems as the main difference is in the side that takes a course on the action, and when this side is Russia, there are no ethical problems considered.

*The hanging of the rainbow flag on the facade of the American embassy on the day the vote on the Constitution began is a certain demonstration. Moreover, such a flag has never been flown before. This is the first time. That is, we are told that “we will now aggressively attack you in the ideological and moral spheres.” It seems to me that we gave a very clear answer, we are becoming leaders in the struggle for traditional values around the world.<sup>155</sup>*

This part proves the captured from the speech meaning behind the concept of the “traditional values”: the “rainbow flag” is discussed, as if it was the main issue of the discussion, and the morality is mentioned once more as if it was obvious that the “rainbow flag” cannot “fit” into the moral sphere. It is also amusing to notice how often and in which manner the issue of gay relationship comes in this speech directed to the president as if this issue was bringing the danger to the nation. It is amusing to observe that the issue from the sphere of personal or family life is discussed in such a manner on the highest level, which could have been excused if the framework was legal but the legal discussion is not brought, the conversation avoids any legal or human right claims, it does not “fit” into the domain of the professional or bureaucratic. It is not surprising that such an excerpt being translated for foreign sources could provoke worries on the situation with human rights in Russia, especially for the LGBT population. This also leads to the

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<sup>155</sup> ТВМ. “Вывешивание радужного флага на фасаде американского посольства в тот день, когда началось голосование за Конституцию, – определённая демонстрация. Причём раньше никогда такой флаг не вывешивали. Это впервые. То есть нам говорят, что “мы сейчас будем агрессивно на вас наступать в сфере идеологической, в нравственной сфере”. Мне кажется, что мы дали очень ясный ответ, мы становимся лидерами борьбы за традиционные ценности во всём мире”. Ibid.



deepening of mutual alienation and othering. The claim for the “struggle” for “traditional values around the world” is the claim for action, and once more the statement on the leadership in this struggle, again without any factual grounding.

The speech ends with an appeal to Vladimir Putin that stylistically would not be suitable in a truly democratic society. It reminds the references toward the Soviet leaders or the leaders of the non-democratic regimes:

*I believe that your merit is exceptionally great as a leader who has always defended these values and always spoke about it. So, in my opinion, this will be of great long-term significance and truly global significance. In this sense, Russia is turning into a leader, into a stronghold of traditional values in the modern world. Thank you.*<sup>156</sup>

This statement is amusing in its several aspects. While the contexts in which the “traditional values” were brought into the discourse of Putin were analysed above, there is no enough evidence to conclude that Putin “has always defended these values.” It is possible to analyse the contexts, the speeches, to try to capture the meanings but all the claims were not supported by the factual grounding. How exactly did Vladimir Putin defend the “traditional values”, can be the question here. The broad discursive practices may not be the answer since they are aimed at the same goal of identity-shaping as Pushkov’s speech. Also, on a personal level, Putin had undergone a divorce and his private life was a subject for the talks, so in a certain way, he himself may not be viewed as a representative of the conservative values. The concluding claim fully illustrates the essence of the discussion, its non-substantial character: no evidence of Russia turning into “a stronghold of traditional values” is provided, the question on the comparison with the countries characterized by the official state religion can be asked, and the place Russia holds on the “scale” of conservatism in comparison with countries around the world, the linkage between the promotion of values and becoming a leader is not talked through.

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<sup>156</sup> ТВМ. “Я считаю, что исключительно велика Ваша заслуга как лидера, который отстаивал всегда эти ценности и всегда об этом говорил. Так что, на мой взгляд, это будет иметь очень большое долгосрочное значение и поистине значение глобальное. В этом смысле Россия превращается в лидера, в оплот традиционных ценностей в современном мире. Спасибо”. Ibid.



Hence, it may be proposed that the factual grounding is not important in this discursive practice. Instead, the repetitiveness of the claims may be aimed to “talk them through” the society, to promote the meanings assigned in the public, as if the thesis repeated multiple times on the highest level would “embody” itself into the life.

Looking through the pieces of discourse mentioning the “traditional values,” the question may arise: why this identity-shaping view was selected? The choice does seem curious since the notion of “tradition” itself is problematic for Russia, with its recent by the historical measure dramatic history, the plurality of ethnicities, religions, cultures. The choice of “traditions” as an identity shaping idea seems not to be obvious for Russia: it does not have an “authentic” grounding throughout the country, where the traditions were erased, and is not supplemented by the popularity of the conservative ideas. The only link that may be found here is the link to Russian philosophy with its serious religious outlook. These philosophic works – of Berdyaev, Ilyin, Leontiev, or Gumilev – did not attract significant attention from the Western departments of Philosophy. Yet, it seems that the abstract ideas today are employed in Russia for the purposes of identity shaping from the “above.” It is also curious that this conservative standpoint articulated by the Russian officials and the related discourse appearing resonate with the political and ideological processes happening in other countries such as in Poland. Here it is also important to notice the difference: while the “new conservatism” may be discussed as a trend, Russia is a country that does not have strong conservative grounds, with its revolutionary and socialist past, the atheism based on the denial of the “traditions.” Moreover, the scope of problems accompanying the “traditionalist” concept is broad: in the country that undergone the crush of the system and the painful experience of the 1990s, the economic crises, the disappearance of savings multiple times, and recently the political events related to the Ukrainian crisis, following sanctions and counter-sanctions, the stability is still a desirable but unlikely outcome. In this sense, the “traditional” ways implying the stable institutions, the predictability, the continuity are not resonating with the real day-to-day life of the people. The memories of the crises are also alive, and with all of these identity peculiarities, the ideas of conservatism in Russia are not easy to be promoted. This creates a situation where the discourse aimed at identity-shaping and promoted from the “above” seems to be an “over-construction” of the past. Then the dichotomy of the



authentic discourse and the identity-shaping discourse from the “above” seems to be a characteristic of the processes in Russia. The value pluralism then gets a new meaning: not only the variety of values in the society but also the gap between the values promoted from “the above” and the authentic values in the society.

Here, returning to the importance of opinions on Russia in the West for the development of Russian identity that was discussed in the first chapter, to Europe, being a “significant other” for Russia, it is possible to conclude that if this difference is ignored, and Russia is stated to be “conservative” in its essence, not just in discursive claims of the Russian officials, there are risks of misunderstanding Russia and, in turn, this misunderstanding can impact the Russian identity itself. Over-simplification here is risky, as it may benefit the attempts to present Russia as alienated and different, misjudged and misunderstood by Europe.

### The Spirituality and Religion

In this paragraph, I analyze the appearance of the notion of “spirituality” in Russian discourse, being employed by the members of the elite on par with the notion of “traditional values.” I also argue that religion is instrumentalized in Russian discourse for the reasons of identity shaping from the “above,” with claims lacking the authenticity in the historical context.

The concept of the “traditional values” was discussed above in the framework of the identity claims made by the members of the political elite. At the same time, the concept is already brought into the bureaucratic, if not legal, discourse. For example, the document named “The concept of state family policy in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025” contains a paragraph that describes the functions of the modern family.<sup>157</sup> Among such functions, the authors mention: “birth, upbringing, maintenance and socialization of children, participation in the economic activities of the state, preservation of the physical, psychological and emotional health of its members” and “*the spiritual development of family members and the whole society, preservation and strengthening of the traditional*

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<sup>157</sup> ТВМ. “Концепция государственной семейной политики в Российской Федерации на период до 2025 года”.



*family values.*”<sup>158</sup> “Traditional family values” are appearing in the discourse, along with “the spiritual development,” with both notions being not so clear. The notion of spirituality is discussable itself but spiritual development raises even more questions. If the development implies the change in time, which characteristics can indicate the initial and the latter points of spiritual development? What are the criteria according to which the presence of spiritual development may be identified? Then as if these possible questions would not be enough, the presence of the “family members” in the phrase complicates the understanding further. What the person is supposed to do in order to ensure “the spiritual development of family members”? Supposing that under the “spirituality” religiosity is meant, should the parent impose his or her religious beliefs on the child? Then, how does this correspond with the rights and freedoms, and the secular character of the state? These are just questions first coming to mind, illustrating the obscure character of the message, reminding the way of narration in the excerpts analyzed in the previous paragraph. Here though the genre of the text is different, it is a conceptual policy paper that is supposed to be written in the language of bureaucracy so the confusion it causes is unexpected. It is also possible to think that this text illustrates the way concepts aimed at identity shaping are promoted in the Russian discourse. The initial articulation, the repetitive reproduction of the discourse by the members of the elite, the continuation of the discourse in different contexts, such as public policy. The ideas seem to be “talked through” the different domains with a hope that these efforts would make them authentic.

Spirituality is mentioned several times in this document, also as one of the objectives of the governmental family policy. “The main objectives of the state family policy are: (...) enhancing the value of family life, preserving spiritual and moral traditions in family relations and family education,” it is claimed in the document.<sup>159</sup> Bringing morality into

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<sup>158</sup> ТВМ. “Меры, предусмотренные Концепцией, определены во взаимосвязи с общественно значимыми функциями семьи – рождением, воспитанием, содержанием и социализацией детей, участием в экономической деятельности государства, сохранением физического, психологического и эмоционального здоровья ее членов, а также духовным развитием членов семьи и всего общества, сохранением и укреплением традиционных семейных ценностей”.

Source: the text available online at:

<http://static.government.ru/media/files/41d4ffd61a02c7a4b206.pdf>, p.10. (accessed on 17 July 2019).

<sup>159</sup> “Основными задачами государственной семейной политики являются: (...) повышение ценности семейного образа жизни, сохранение духовно-нравственных традиций в семейных отношениях и семейном воспитании”. Ibid., p. 11.



the discourse allows to interpret spirituality in connection with morality, yet, the confusion remains. Which views on morality are taken here? Since the genre of the text is a policy paper it is reasonable to think that civic morality is meant here but then the presence of the concept of spirituality brings the question of whether morality and spirituality here derive from the religious sources or are they of pure civic nature? This is not clear. Moreover, if they are of religious nature, then, included in the governmental policy concept, the points made do not correspond well with the Constitution claiming the secular nature of the state and the equal recognition of different religions. “1. The Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion can be established as a state or mandatory. 2. Religious associations are separated from the state and equal before the law,” as it is written in Article 14, Chapter 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.<sup>160</sup>

The “spirituality” and the “traditional values” appearing in the discourse seem to be of the religious nature. For instance, in November 2016 in the speech dedicated to the opening of the monument of knyaz Vladimir, being surrounded by representatives of different religious confessions, Vladimir Putin said:

*His (knyaz Vladimir's) era knew many accomplishments, and the most important, decisive, of course, the crucial among them was the baptism of Russia. This choice has become a common spiritual source for the peoples of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, laid the moral, value foundations that define our life today.*<sup>161</sup>

While the view on the baptism of Russia as an identity-defining choice is reasonable, and the importance of Russia's Orthodox Christianity for historical and philosophical analysis

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<sup>160</sup> ТВМ. In original: “1. Российская Федерация - светское государство. Никакая религия не может быть установлена в качестве государственной или обязательной. 2. Религиозные объединения отделены от государства и равны перед законом”. Source: The text of the Russian Constitution (the new version with the amendments under this Article provides the same text as the previous version of the Constitution), the text is available online at: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/> (accessed on 15 August 2020).

<sup>161</sup> “Его эпоха знала немало свершений, и важнейшим, определяющим, конечно, ключевым из них было крещение Руси. Этот выбор стал общим духовным истоком для народов России, Белоруссии, Украины, заложил нравственные, ценностные основы, которые определяют нашу жизнь и поныне”. Source: Vladimir Putin's Speech Dedicated to the Opening of the Monument of knyaz Vladimir, from 4 November 2016, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211> (accessed on 25 July 2020).





on Russia should not be underestimated, the recent history of the atheism is important too, as well as the secular character of the state and the historical presence of other religions in the Russian space. The event itself was quite special, thematic, and this may be a reason for such a statement. The conflict itself may be rooted in the fact of the opening of such a monument that had itself caused controversy in Russian society, and in linking spirituality with religion, with it being one specific religion among several religions present in the country, and in inviting representatives of all of the confessions to the event.<sup>162</sup>

In the last sentence of this excerpt, Putin is bringing post-Soviet countries, such as Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, together, claiming the linkage through “a common spiritual source.” In the past, it could be assessed simply as a rhetoric tool even a decade ago, but 2016 is a year when a military conflict in Ukraine already takes place, and this unifying, uniting by a historical event that took place long ago, the line can be read differently. Historically determined unity as such does not seem to be voluntary, and this involuntary nature, this claim of historical determinism cause this uneasiness, this impression of unfreedom and imposition.

Putin then continued his speech, bringing the “spiritual precepts” and “invaluable traditions” in one sentence:

*It was the solid moral support, solidarity, and unity that helped our ancestors to overcome difficulties, to live and win for the glory of the Fatherland, from generation to generation, to strengthen its power and greatness. And today, our duty is to resist contemporary challenges and threats together, relying on spiritual precepts, on the invaluable traditions of unity and harmony, to go forward, ensuring the continuity of our thousand-year history.*<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> See, for example, the coverage of the issue by the foreign press: Walker, Shaun. 2016. From one Vladimir to Another: Putin Unveils Huge Statue in Moscow. In: *The Guardian*, from 3 November 2016, available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/04/vladimir-great-statue-unveiled-putin-moscow> (accessed on 20 July 2020); Bugorkova, Olga and Natasha Matyukhina. 2015. Medieval Prince Vladimir Deepens Russia-Ukraine Split. In: *BBC Monitoring*, from 28 July 2015, available online at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33689641> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>163</sup> ТВМ. “Именно прочная нравственная опора, сплоченность и единение помогли нашим предкам преодолевать трудности, жить и побеждать во славу Отечества, из поколения в поколение укреплять его мощь и величие. И сегодня наш долг – вместе противостоять



“Traditions” and “spirituality” are linked to each other in this text, while the spirituality has the religious meaning, as the event during which the speech was made suggests. Several images and metaphors are used in this excerpt: glory, greatness, power – referring to the past, then threats – without specification of their source, nature, character (such as global, common for humanity, regional, local; coming from nature or coming from other countries, or people, etc.) These non-defined threats may cause anxiety, and if we keep in mind the history of the Soviet Union, with its permanent alienation of the West and finding more and more enemies inside the society, these rhetoric tools may not be viewed as harmless. Non-definition may be worse than definition: you can find the other in a foreign government or your fellow citizen. The abstract threats in a discourse of the country with a recent history of the great terror may be read in a specific way. A reference to the “spiritual percepts” maintains the confusion, as well as the claim on the “continuity” of “thousand-year history”: the hardship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Russia, the losses happened in this century, were accompanied by the prohibition of religion, by atheism and so-called scientific communism. This part of history cannot be just put aside, as it also impacted the identity of the people. Patriotism could have played its role in this century, but also dual, complex, and possibly tragic: the Red and the White movements, with their views on the world, patriotism, and justice, may be the examples here. The oversimplification and the re-interpretation of the history on a par with mentioning threats seem to be disturbing: the threat obviously has a source, the actor involved, which is not named. The conspiracy, the construction of the “other” while referring to the spirituality and traditions, on the one hand, reminds the discursive practices of the Soviet past, on the other, contradicts with the Soviet past through the factor of religion. It seems that spirituality and traditions, having religious and patriarchal connotations, may be chosen for the reasons of identity-shaping from the “above.”

Another worrisome example of the discourse relates to the speeches made by the president and the Patriarch on 31 January 2019 during the meeting dedicated to the 10th anniversary

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современным вызовам и угрозам, опираясь на духовные заветы, на бесценные традиции единства и согласия, идти вперед, обеспечивая преемственность нашей тысячелетней истории.”  
Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech Dedicated to the Opening of the Monument of knyaz Vladimir, from 4 November 2016, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and the patriarchal intronization. In his speech, Vladimir Putin linked religious beliefs – mainly the Orthodoxy – with identity and values. He defined identity as being built on the values that, in turn, are the same that are proclaimed by the religions:

*But we understand well: to achieve new frontiers, it is important for us to preserve our identity, our unity and solidarity. And they are built on those values that have been revered at all times by Orthodoxy and other traditional religions of Russia: this is mercy, honesty, and justice, this is care for the neighbor and family, respect for parents and children and, of course, love for the Motherland.<sup>164</sup>*

“Preserving identity” is a very interesting collocation here: it does not indicate the duality of the Russian identity determined by its various sources, and also it does not accept the changing character of identity, the change as its immanent characteristic. Instead, the continuity is underlined as needed, as if it was something necessarily and without any doubt good. This approach may be called conservative, but in the case of Russia, as it was outlined above, it lacks its factual grounding. The way how identity, traditionalism, values, and religion are linked, is impressive. It suggests the purposeful line of reasoning, the view where religion is assessed as a strong source for identity shaping, and although the history of Russia makes it difficult to make a focus on religion unequivocally, the religion is nevertheless instrumentalized for the reasons of identity-shaping that may be explained by its assessment as a source with a significant potential even in the context of the atheism.

During the same event, the Patriarch made his intervention. This intervention did not cover the issue of values and traditions but it is illuminating in the sense of how risky it may be to bring the religion into the meant-to-be secular discourse. The Patriarch said:

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<sup>164</sup> ТВМ. “Но мы хорошо понимаем: чтобы добиться новых рубежей, нам важно сберечь свою идентичность, наше единство и солидарность. А они строятся на тех ценностях, которые во все времена почитались и православием, и другими традиционными религиями России: это милосердие, честность и справедливость, это забота о ближнем и семье, уважение к родителям и детям и, конечно, любовь к Родине”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s speech at the solemn meeting on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and the patriarchal enthronement, from 31 January 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59757> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



*Scientific atheism of the Soviet era is a feature of the past, but the ideologists of modern scientism, that is, the belief in the omnipotence of science, the absolutization of its role in culture, believe that any human problem in the modern world can be solved by science. Such an approach significantly goes beyond the boundaries of the possible action of science in human life and artificially contrasts science and religion.<sup>165</sup>*

The first feature of this text that catches attention is the reference to the “ideologists of modern scientism”: as in examples analyzed before, the “names” are not mentioned, the “other” is abstract, it is described through some features, categories but the image is still vague. The names are not pronounced, but the “other” is mentioned and should be confronted. This characteristic of the discourse appears again and again, by different speakers that allows us to think that it is a common feature indicating something more, for example, the attempts of identity-shaping, the self-definition made through the involvement of the “other.” The figure of the “other,” if defined vaguely, may be re-invented or re-interpreted, and in this sense, the obscure way of discourse construction may be beneficial compared with the precisely drawn image of the “other.”

Another curious “alien” image in this excerpt is the image of the “scientist,” deriving from the “scientism.” The negative attitude here is not justified by any rational factor, beyond the classical idea that science diminishes the importance of religion and hence challenges the power of beliefs. That reason, being valid, is not new and the idea of confrontation is itself the one challenging the peaceful pluralist coexistence of values and worldviews. In this excerpt the attempt to construct the other is observed: and hence the othering here may not be explained by any current events, it can be interpreted as an attack. The relation of church and science are historically complex: if the Bible is seen as a primary source of knowledge, a scientific view on the world and scientific method have led to the creation of the new texts, new sources of knowledge, with both narratives now

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<sup>165</sup> ТВМ. “Научный атеизм советского времени ушел в прошлое, но идеологи современного сциентизма, то есть веры во всемогущие науки, абсолютизации её роли в культуре, полагают, что любые проблем человека в современном мире могут быть разрешены наукой. Такой подход существенно выходит за границы возможного действия науки в жизни человека и искусственно противопоставляет науку и религию”. Ibid.



in the position that may be contrasted, contradicted, or interpreted as a competition of narratives. Then, if the situation of competition is normalized, science may be interpreted as a threat to religious discourse. That said, the Russian context has its important peculiarities such as almost a century of denial of any religious beliefs, proclaimed scientific atheism, and violent suppression of the priesthood. The *scientific communism* was less related to the actual science, although the evolution theory was present in the curriculum, but more with a sphere of ideas and ideologies. Presenting the scientific discourse as dominating over the religious discourse is not exactly correct, while the ideology of communism was a suppressor, moreover a violent suppressor, of the ideas of Orthodox beliefs. Then, scientific points and arguments could be picked up to the frame and support the dominant ideology: not the science has a veto on the ideology, but the ideology was picking up the points from science for strengthening its own argument (for example, the well-known saying “Genetics – is a corrupt girl of imperialism” attributed to the Soviet academic Lysenko).<sup>166</sup> In this regard, the scientific view on the world was not an antagonist for the religious beliefs in Russia but the communist atheist ideology was. In this sense, the creating of the other in this text is not justified. There is another curious point in this excerpt, that is a belief “that any human problem in the modern world can be solved by science.” The Patriarch claims that such a belief leads to the contrast between science and religion. The issue of the moral authority is interesting here, although it is not named explicitly: in the country where citizens have diverse religious views, all rooted historically and culturally, and where atheism was proclaimed for almost a century, with the Constitution stating the secular character of the state and equality of religions, the question of moral authority is ambiguous.<sup>167</sup> Then, the view on the current events may

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<sup>166</sup> In original: “Генетика – продажная девка империализма”, the precise source is unclear.

<sup>167</sup> See: “1. *The Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion can be established as state or mandatory.* 2. *Religious associations are separated from the state and are equal before the law*” / “Российская Федерация - светское государство. Никакая религия не может устанавливаться в качестве государственной или обязательной. Религиозные объединения отделены от государства и равны перед законом”. ТБМ. Source: Article 14 of Chapter 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (version before amendments), available online: <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-3.htm> (accessed on 20 August 2019); the latest text of the Constitution with amendments, 2020, available online at: <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/10103000/paragraph/82/doclist/Конституция%20Российской%20Федерации:0> (accessed on 20 August 2020).



be drastically different: the competition of discourses may be present but those are not discourses of science versus discourses of religious beliefs but the discourse of Orthodox Christianity trying to gain the position of moral authority, also through combating the constructed “other” – such as science in this piece. The risks related to the bringing religion into the supposed to be secular discourse may be illustrated by this excerpt: the “othering” going beyond the political grounds, mixing the political issues with the issues of values, religion, traditions, has a potential to sharpen the conflicts or play the role of catalysts.

The examples analysed above are examples coming from public discourse. In the previous paragraph the concept of the “traditional values” was scrutinized, and one of the texts analyzed belonged to the genre of the policy papers. Here the articulation of the link between traditionalism, spirituality, religion, and patriarchy goes beyond the genre of the public speech, with the new perspectives of identity-shaping. The example here may be the law passed in 2017, aiming to decriminalize domestic violence: abuser, according to the law, instead of being accused as a criminal, now becomes a violator of administrative legislation. This law, while on a stage of a draft caused a negative reaction in the society, nevertheless, it passed in the state parliament.<sup>168</sup> The text of the law states that “Beatings or other violent actions that caused physical pain, but did not entail the consequences specified in Article 115 of this Code, committed out of hooligan motives, as well as for reasons of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or for reasons of hatred or enmity in relation to any social group, - shall be punishable by compulsory labor for a term of up to three hundred and sixty hours, or correctional labor for a term of up to one year, or restraint of liberty for a term of up to two years, or

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<sup>168</sup> The text of the law available online in the Russian language at:

<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201702070049> (accessed on 20 July 2020). The examples of academic discussion on the issue: Semukhina, Olga. 2020. The Decriminalization of Domestic Violence in Russia. In: *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 15-45.

See also the examples of the discussion on the issue in foreign media: Spring, Marianna. 2018. Decriminalisation of Domestic Violence in Russia leads to Fall in Reported Cases. In: *The Guardian*, from 16 August 2018, available online at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/16/decriminalisation-of-domestic-violence-in-russia-leads-to-fall-in-reported-cases> (accessed on 20 July 2020); Yurtaev, Alexey. 2020. Inside the Fight over Russia’s Domestic Violence Law. In: *OpenDemocracy*, from 17 February 2020, available online at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-domestic-violence-law/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).





compulsory labor for a term of up to two years, or arrest for a term of up to six months, or imprisonment for a term up to two years.”<sup>169</sup>

Opinions on the underneath reasons of such a law appearing in Russian discourse vary, but surprisingly one of the reasons suggested was a position of the Russian Orthodox church, that was dissatisfied with the previous version of the law, seeing in it the risk for parents being accused of “minor” physical wrongdoing toward the children. The position of the church may be illustrated by the quote from the statement of the Patriarchal Commission on Family, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood made in relation to the above-mentioned law:

*The experience of generations shows that in some cases such actions of parents may include the use of physical punishment. If at the same time parents take care of the child, its present and future, they act rationally and without extremes, do not cause any real harm to the health of the child and his personality – there is no reason to equate such actions and malicious criminal aggression, to expose in this connection parents to any persecution.*<sup>170</sup>

The thesis provided in this statement is questionable on many levels: first, an extremely weak appeal to “the experience of generations,” then acting “without extremes” – a vague

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<sup>169</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Побои или иные насильственные действия, причинившие физическую боль, но не повлекшие последствий, указанных в статье 115 настоящего Кодекса, совершенные из хулиганских побуждений, а равно по мотивам политической, идеологической, расовой, национальной или религиозной ненависти или вражды либо по мотивам ненависти или вражды в отношении какой-либо социальной группы, - наказываются обязательными работами на срок до трехсот шестидесяти часов, либо исправительными работами на срок до одного года, либо ограничением свободы на срок до двух лет, либо принудительными работами на срок до двух лет, либо арестом на срок до шести месяцев, либо лишением свободы на срок до двух лет”. Source: The Federal Law Amending Article 116 of the Criminal Code Russian Federation, from 7 February 2017, available online at: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/Text/0001201702070049> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>170</sup> ТВМ. “Опыт поколений показывает, что в некоторых случаях такие действия родителей могут включать и применение физического наказания. Если при этом родителями руководит забота о ребенке, его настоящем и будущем, они действуют разумно и без крайностей, не причиняют здоровью ребенка и его личности никакого реального вреда – нет никаких оснований ставить знак равенства между такими действиями и злонамеренной преступной агрессией, подвергать в этой связи родителей какому-либо преследованию”. Source: Patriarchal Commission on Family, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood in connection with the adoption of the new edition of Art. 116 of the Criminal Code, available online: <http://pk-semya.ru/novosti/item/5474-raz-yasnenie-pozitsii.html> (accessed on 19 July 2019).



description, written in a language that neither is a language of the law, neither is a language of moral philosophy, then the absence of “real harm” – not justifiable, abstract concept, provided without any context (what is real and what is not real; who is the agent responsible to assess the harm made; what kind of harm is harm, yet not real, these are just examples of issues here), then turning to “personality” – who and how can define an impact of the harm on personal development? These questions can be extended, refined, but the general impression after putting even the basic questions may be described as suspicion. Nevertheless, the linkage of the traditional values – spirituality – patriarchy – the essence of family life seems to be worrisome. As we see, the discussion on these issues goes beyond the identity aimed claims made in public speeches, appearing in the conceptual documents and even influencing the legal framework. The attempts of the government to be involved in family life may be ignored if limited to the claims of public discourse: when these claims lack an authentic grounding, they are not capable to change the reality of family life. Yet, the legislative power and the public policy domain make a difference. The legal grounding, the issues of public policy open another dimension for the claims of traditionalism and spirituality. The discursive practices that could be explained as attempts to invent the ideology, going beyond the genre of the public speeches into the public policy document and the legal texts, bring different risks. While employed for the reasons of identity-shaping, the focus on “traditionalism” and “spirituality” seems worrisome, as the related discursive game may impact the balance of the government’s involvement in issues of family life.

### **Russia’s Complex Relationship with Feminism**

In this paragraph, I argue that the claims on “traditional values” in the domain of the female identities in Russia are not authentic claims but attempts for the identity-shaping coming from the “above.” I do so, looking through the recent in the historical dimension socialist experience, elaborating on the Soviet attitudes on feminism, gender equality, women’s rights. I also suggest that the negative interpretation of the notion of “feminism” in Russia may be rooted in the discursive practices of the socialist past.



The *Kremlin.ru* website accumulating president's discourse pieces suggests that the *feminism* word was used only once: in 2017, during the meeting with students of the educational center for gifted kids, Putin was questioned on the position on feminism (“What is your attitude towards feminism?”<sup>171</sup>). The first part of the answer was referring to the meaning of feminism:

*You know, feminism was born a long time ago, and it was born as a movement to protect the rights of women initially. And in general, there is nothing wrong with that. On the contrary, I believe that this is the right, good direction – the protection of the rights of women.*<sup>172</sup>

In this excerpt the contradiction may be observed: while these three sentences are aimed to be neutral or neutrally-positive in application to feminism, “nothing wrong” collocation switches the meaning and puts “wrong” as a starting point, and that gives an impression that the following text is going to rehabilitate the phenomenon, somehow implying a negative interpretation being common and dominant. This rhetoric tool is used rather often in Russian political discourse of the last years, in application to different issues, but always providing a dialectical signal, containing two opposite meanings in one statement. While this excerpt does not contain a negative assessment, it is characterized by the general impression of the doubt, the impression that the issue is not viewed as crucial: “feminism was born a long time ago,” indicating that the concept is not new, that it was already in work for a long time; “it was born (...) as a movement to protect the right of women initially,” with the “initially” word suggesting that since then the aims of the movement have changed; “in general, there is nothing wrong with that,” with “in general” implying that some elements of the movement may be “wrong,” and with “nothing wrong” depreciating the positive impact and the achievements of feminism. The impression here is as if Putin looked at the movement with condescension.

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<sup>171</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Как Вы относитесь к феминизму?” Source: The Meeting with Students of the Educational Centre “Sirius,” available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55114> (accessed on 10 September 2019).

<sup>172</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Вы знаете, феминизм зародился достаточно давно, и зародился он как движение по защите прав женщин изначально. И здесь нет ничего плохого. Наоборот, я считаю, что это правильное, хорошие направления – защита прав женщин”. Ibid.



Then he continues:

*In many countries of the world, this is a huge problem, girls are not allowed to be educated due to various religious problems associated with cultural traditions in certain countries. And I, for example, talked with one of my colleagues, whom I respect very much, he already retired, he is from a Muslim country, he publicly said: well, what are we doing, we are cutting off, with our own hands, in fact, such a layer of opportunities – not giving to girls and women opportunities to get a good education and so on. But such problems exist in some countries, not in ours.*<sup>173</sup>

In this excerpt, the whole area of problems feminism deals with is reduced to a particular, although important, problem, such as the girls' access to education. This reduction might be a rhetoric tool, a way to alienate the problem of itself, presenting it as irrelevant to the current Russian context. Then, if the problem is not sufficient in the Russian environment, then the solution is not needed. This way of discourse construction may reject the importance of feminism for Russia. The view also is provided from a single perspective and lacks a comprehensive character. The last sentence here brings a positive view of Russia, it switches attention from the issue discussed to the advantages of Russian institutions and culture. The point made is reasonable and truthful, however, looking into the paragraph as a whole entity, gives an impression of using two tools at the same time: first, deduction from the broader to the particular, followed by an emphasis on the particular not being an actual problem on the territory of Russia. Consequently, due to the logical trick, the impression is formed that feminism is not needed in Russia, because relevant problems do not exist in the country. At the same time, speaking about the pay gap, the president has admitted the existence of this problem in Russia:

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<sup>173</sup> ТВМ. “Во многих странах мира это огромная проблема, девочек не допускают до образования в силу различных религиозных проблем, связанных с культурными традициями в тех или в других странах. И я, например, разговаривал с одним из своих коллег, которого я очень уважаю, он уже отошел от дел, он из мусульманской страны, он публично говорил: ну что же мы делаем, своими руками отсекаем, по сути, такой пласт возможностей – девочкам и женщинам не даём возможность получить образование хорошее и так далее. Но такие проблемы в некоторых странах существуют, у нас нет”. Ibid.



*This problem concerns not only us. If we look at the so-called economies, in European countries, EU countries, there is the same. There, the average salary level of women is significantly lower than the average salary level of men; this is a bare statistic.*<sup>174</sup>

Here one of the issues is brought into the discourse, being acknowledged. However, immediately, in the same sentence, the argument of the European Union economies that have the same problems is provided. Then the attention is switched, while the meaning is changed – from the problem observed in the Russian context to the problem brought from other contexts, presented as overwhelming and inevitable. Moreover, Russia itself is seen as a country that is on a similar level of development as the European Union countries.

*Therefore, it is necessary to deal with this issue, the only question is that any sphere of activity does not distort itself, so that no one will go crazy on this basis, and this happens sometimes.*<sup>175</sup>

Here, in one sentence, two different signals are provided: first, the approval, the positive attitude toward the particular issue inside the feminism agenda, and maybe to other feminism issues as well; at the same time, the sentence continues with a point of so-called excessiveness, over-attachment to the feminism values (“so that no one will go crazy on this basis, and this happens sometimes”). Such a dualism inside the discourse, these contradictory signals sent out – make it confusing to assess the situation, to evaluate the discourse, and if broaden to other questions, makes it very difficult to comprehend the real vector and meanings behind. Moreover, the word “distortion” in Russian original – *izvrashenie* – is highly negative (by meaning close to “perversion”, but without any possible jocular use), overall judgmental, rude, and seems to be an excessive feature of

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<sup>174</sup> ТВМ. “Эта проблема характерна не только для нас. Если мы посмотрим на так называемые экономики, на европейские страны, страны Евросоюза, там то же самое. Там средний уровень заработной платы женщин значительно ниже, чем средний уровень заработной платы мужчин, это голая статистика”. Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> ТВМ. “Поэтому заниматься этим вопросом точно нужно, вопрос только в том, чтобы любая сфера деятельности не извращала саму себя, чтобы с ума на этой почве никто не сходил, а так иногда случается”. Source: The Meeting on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchal Intronization, 31 January 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55114> (accessed on 23 July 2019).



the discourse, unless not used on purpose. The existence of such a word makes it difficult to interpret this piece of discourse positively.

The notion of feminism has its complexity in the context of Russia and its Soviet past. This complexity should be understood, otherwise, the peculiarity of Russian female identities may be misinterpreted, with “traditionalism” claimed to be an authentic factor influencing on the identity-shaping.

In the opinion piece titled “Why Russian women don’t need Western-style feminism” that was published on affiliated with *Russia Today* website, stated that “the concept of modern feminism is something alien, even hostile, to most Russian women.”<sup>176</sup> The article, though, provided a realistic picture of Soviet life, and the role of women in the Soviet Union:

*In the Soviet Union, you had to get a job because otherwise you’d be considered a “parasite.” (...) But do you think that women had it easy? They went to factories and research labs every day because there was no such thing as remote online work that could be done from the comfort of their homes. But the fact that you had a job didn’t mean that society forgot traditional gender roles. After work, they still had to cook dinner, clean the apartment, take care of the children, etc.*<sup>177</sup>

This is a quick description of the female life in the USSR, where women, being emancipated, were getting a wide range of jobs, depending on their professional and academic degrees, such as a job of tractor driver, crane operator, night shift worker, but also as a teacher, doctor, university professor. Besides their professional duties, women were also taking care of the household and children: emancipation did not imply gender equality, and traditional unpaid housewife work was still a prerogative of women. The critique of domestic inequality was constantly made in female revolutionary writings, but at this point, writings did not have a significant impact on female lives. It is a very important point that may partially explain the negative attitudes on feminism in contemporary Russia: the meaning of gender equality implies that both women and men

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<sup>176</sup> Lova, Vicky. Why Russian Women Don’t Need Western-style Feminism. In: *Russia Beyond the Headlines* <https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/327529-russian-women-dont-need-feminism> (accessed on 16 July 2019).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.





have opportunities to perform professional activities and also domestic work that previously was perceived as an area for women. In the Soviet Union, the involvement of women in professional activities was corresponding with their remaining obligations to keep the household – what was previously called a work of a “housewife” but now the “housewife” also had the employment-related obligations, so was working on both “frontiers;” at work and at home. This situation could be described by the women’s emancipation brought by the Bolsheviks, but it could not be described as a gender-equal situation, because the perception of the woman dealing with the household keeping – cooking, cleaning, raising children – did not change. Perceiving emancipation inside this framework, women further could become “bitter” towards the status quo itself, and interpret it as a “double work,” both at work and at home.

In 2018, the article *Putin’s War on Women* appeared in *The Foreign Policy*, as a brief overview of the domestic violence decriminalization in Russia, the issue that was discussed in the previous paragraphs. Among current points, the author mentions an existing paradox of getting rights relevantly earlier – as a consequence of the Russian revolution of 1917, but then somehow abandoning them after the collapse of the Soviet Union:

*The right to vote, for example, was granted to all Russian men and women in 1917 in the run-up to the October Revolution. After taking power, the Bolsheviks granted women numerous additional freedoms, some of them unheard of anywhere else, such as the right to abortion. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 declared men and women to be equal and also introduced paid maternity leave and free childcare in the workplace.<sup>178</sup>*

These achievements should be taken into consideration. The detailed elaboration on the recent by historical measures Russian past and its identity-related peculiarities, may confront and challenge the claim on the Russian “traditionalism.” Moreover, the writings on Russia, especially in media, may lack the understanding of the “non-traditionalist,”

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<sup>178</sup> Ferris-Rotman, Amie. 2018. *Putin’s War on Women*. In: *The Foreign Policy*, from 9 April 2018, available online: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/09/putins-war-on-women/> (accessed on 10 July 2019).



non-conservative essence of life in Russia, with the high rate of divorce, a long tradition of viewing abortion as an acceptable option, etc. The lack of this understanding leads to the view on Russia as “traditional,” somehow conservative, with this view coming from the significant European “other.” Then such views reinforce and empower the identity-shaping claims coming the “above” analyzed in the previous paragraphs. In such a way, the non-authentic claims may be empowered in the context of Russian reality.

The Russian Constitution of 1993 states that “Man and woman have equal rights and freedoms and equal possibilities to exercise them” (Chapter 2, Article 19).<sup>179</sup>

The Soviet Constitution of 1977 states that:

*A woman and a man have equal rights in the USSR. The exercise of these rights is ensured by providing women with equal opportunities in education and vocational training, in work, remuneration for it, and promotion in work, in socio-political and cultural activities.*<sup>180</sup> (Chapter 6, Article 35).

Even more interesting is that the Soviet Union was the first country in the world that declared the equality of women and men and their equal rights. Constitution of 1936 stated that “Women in the USSR are granted equal rights with a man in all areas of economic, state, cultural and social and political life.”<sup>181</sup> These were not just words: for instance, in 1917 Soviet women gained the right to vote. At the same time, in the non-democratic environment the right to vote, both for women and men, stayed as a formality.

The ideological basis of revolution included interesting and sometimes eccentric female voices, such as Alexandra Kollontai, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Inessa Armand, and acknowledging them is important for establishing a comprehensive view on the Russian past in the domain of female emancipation. These writings discuss the issues of female

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<sup>179</sup> ТВМ, in original: “Мужчина и женщина имеют равные права и свободы и равные возможности для их реализации”. Source: <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-4.htm> (accessed on 10 July 2019).

<sup>180</sup> ТВМ. “Женщина и мужчина имеют в СССР равные права. Осуществление этих прав обеспечивается предоставлением женщинам равных с мужчинами возможностей в получении образования и профессиональной подготовки, в труде, вознаграждении за него и продвижении по работе, в общественно-политической и культурной деятельности”. Source: [https://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/red\\_1977/5478736/](https://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/red_1977/5478736/) (accessed on 10 July 2019).

<sup>181</sup> “Женщине в СССР предоставляются равные права с мужчиной во всех областях хозяйственной, государственной, культурной и общественно-политической жизни”. Ibid.



emancipation in the Soviet Union, the issues of education, family life, the views on socialism and feminism. In this regard, the reading suggests that the contemporary negative view on the concept of “feminism” may be rooted in the negative discourse of the Soviet times when feminism was contrasted to the socialist female emancipation, and feminist identities were viewed as exclusively bourgeois-related.

In her writing, Alexandra Kollontai shared a positive view on the post-revolution policies for women empowerment. She wrote:

*In a country where there were hardly any women engineers or scientists and where women working as teachers had to accept conditions insulting to their human dignity, there are now 750 000 women teachers, 100 000 women doctors and 250 000 women engineers. Women constitute one half of the student body at higher educational establishments. (...) Women in the land of the Soviets are realizing their political rights in practice. In the Supreme Soviet of the USSR alone there are 277 women deputies. 256 women have been elected to village, urban, regional and republican organs of Soviet power.<sup>182</sup>*

This statistical data, illustrating the progress made by the socialist government on a path to gender equality, are making it confusing to explain a certain traditional, patriarchal perception of modern Russia – comparing, for example, with such countries as Sweden or France. The explanation, though, may be rooted in the absence of the real struggle for women rights: the historical paradox of feminism in Russia is in getting the rights “in a moment,” as an externality of the revolution, with gender equality being inscribed into the broader communist – and Western-rooted – narrative. There was no suffragist movement in the Russian Empire, although, of course, bright young female voices were appearing, mostly heading abroad to pursue official university degrees but on the scale of a bigger discourse those were just individual episodes.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai (ed. and transl. by Alix Holt). 1977. Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill Co, p.316.

<sup>183</sup> See, for example, interesting female writings: Bashkirtseva, Mariya. 2014. *Dnevnik (The Diary)*. Moscow: Zakharov; Diakonova, Elizaveta. 2004. *Dnevnik russkoy zhenshchiny (The Diary of a Russian Woman)*. Moscow: Zakharov.



Kollontai mentions this factor herself:

*It is well known there was never a so-called women's movement, and that the Russian woman did not go through the phase of feminism and the struggle with the suffragists. She never viewed the battle for equality as being separate from the basic task of liberating her country from the yoke of tsarism, because she understood that the woman's question is inseparable from the social and political problems of which it is a part.<sup>184</sup>*

Maybe we do not value enough the gains that just occur, without efforts and sacrifices made, and it is also possible to think that the emancipation of women in Russia should have been prepared before. In any case, contemporary discourses concerning female identities in Russia sometimes are characterized by a conservatism that by no means could be rooted in the Soviet discourse. On the contrary, Soviet female discourse looks in many ways advanced even by contemporary feminist standards.

A point that deserves attention is somehow frequent usage of the word “feminism” in a negative context, that might be rooted in history and perception of feminism as a feature of “Western imperialism.” Even Kollontai avoids calling the emancipation of Soviet women – and formation of the Soviet female identities – as feminism. Feminism was a term attributed to the bourgeois discourse, not compatible with a proletarian revolution. She writes: “For the feminists, the battle to obtain equal rights with men within the limits of the capitalist world is a sufficient aim in itself; for the women of the proletariat this is only a means of extending the struggle against the economic oppression of the working class.”<sup>185</sup> This is not just a denial to equate women’s movements, but also a well-constructed contrast between female identities, drawn on a class base. The whole discourse is manipulated in this manner: speaking about bourgeois women’s movements, Kollontai uses the word “feminism,” while speaking about socialist movements she uses the “women movement.” Othering is used to segregate women and separate women’s goals due to their belonging to a certain class: “if feminists, as it is known, are fighting in

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<sup>184</sup> Selected writings of Alexandra Kollontai (ed. and transl. by Alix Holt). 1977. Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill Co, p.316.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.51.



order to extend to the bourgeois women the privileges, which so far have only been for the bourgeois men, then the working women pursue only a general for their class proletarian goal.”<sup>186</sup>

Inessa Armand in one of the writings states:

*Russian communists did not cease to insist on the need for special work among women (some comrades who had not sufficiently understood these questions accused us of feminism for this – in fact, all our work is a denial of feminism, because feminism seeks to split the labor movement, and we strive to add workers and peasant women to the common proletarian struggle.*<sup>187</sup>

While the proletarian struggle idea lost its meaning in Russia decades ago, it may be possible that a negative attitude toward feminism is rooted in this alienating discourse, in the “denial of feminism” having practical and ideological reasons in the Soviet times, in the choice made by revolutionary female voices to separate proletarian women from any other women and their struggles.

Armand is not giving a chance to the bourgeois feminists in the West, claiming that they are not dangerous anymore – meaning that there was a danger in the past. The absence of solidarity and total alienation on the class basis with time turned into broader alienation – geographic (USSR versus the West), economic (socialist versus capitalist), and so in the absence of further proletarian revolutions feminism persisted in the discourse as a feature of the ideological enemy. It might be the case that this connotation is yet alive, or is remembered and then reproduced by future generations. The level of antagonism toward feminism is high in Armand’s writing:

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<sup>186</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Если феминистки, как известно, борются за распространение и на женщин буржуазных классов привилегий, выпадавших до сих пор лишь на долю мужчин, то работницы преследуют лишь общеклассовую пролетарскую цель”. Moscow: Politizdat, p.94.

<sup>187</sup> ТВМ. “Русские коммунистки не переставали настаивать на необходимости специальной работы среди женщин (некоторые недостаточно разобравшиеся в этих вопросах товарищи обвиняли нас за это в феминизме – на самом деле вся наша работа является отрицанием феминизма, так как феминизм стремится расколоть рабочее движение, а мы стремимся приобщить работниц и крестьянок к общей пролетарской борьбе”. Source: Armand, Inessa. 1975. *Izbrannyye stat'i i rechi / Избранные статьи и речи* (Selected Articles and Speeches). Moscow: Politizdat, p.99.



*In other countries where capital still dominates, feminism may, to some extent, still exist. But even there, feminism hardly presents any serious danger now. The war too clearly revealed to the female workers the abyss that exists between them and bourgeois women, so that they could be easily attracted by the lure of “sweet little sisters” and other sweet phrases of bourgeois women.<sup>188</sup>*

“Still existing” collocation assigned to feminism makes it look as it was old-fashioned and somehow backward by the modern standards of the time set of values. The “danger” key word reflects the extreme hostility toward feminism, and the context of “hardly presenting any serious danger now” is in line with the sloppy and arrogant attitude. The feminism is viewed as an alien movement, a movement that is a part of the bourgeois life. There is not a single positive characteristic of feminism outlined in this excerpt, while at the same time both feminists and socialist ideologies were considering the right and well-being of the women as an essential issue. Looking from the non-ideological perspective, this collision seems to be curious. The haughtiness seen in this discourse, the “sweet little sisters” metaphor, the othering observed in the discourse were not just separate features, methods, appearing solely, but represented Soviet discourse on women’s rights as a whole.

The collision may be also explained in such a way: not the feminist ideas itself seemed unacceptable or wrong in the Soviet Union but they should have been presented as alien, dangerous, and unsuitable in the discourse. And the reason for this was the closeness of the ideas of emancipation, the possible building bridge that could be made in this area. To avoid any comparison, any similarity between the declared socialist and the capitalist systems on their issues, movements, and challenges, feminism should have been denied, heavily criticized, so no doubts should be left on the possibility of finding a common ground and points for collaboration.

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<sup>188</sup>ТВМ. “В других странах, где еще властвует капитал, возможность влияния феминизма, может быть, до некоторой степени еще существует. Но и там едва ли феминизм представляет собой сейчас какую бы то ни было серьезную опасность’. Война слишком ясно показала работницам бездну, существующую между ними и буржуазными женщинами, чтобы их легко можно было привлечь приманкой “милых сестричек” и другими сладкими фразами буржуазных дам.” Ibid., p.100.





The proof of the negative interpretation of feminism being made on purpose can be found in Clara Zetkin's writing, describing her meetings with Vladimir Lenin, during which Lenin, according to Zetkin, said:

*Theses should sharply emphasize that the true liberation of women is possible only through communism. (...) By this, we reliably isolate ourselves from the bourgeois movement for the "emancipation of women." It also lays the foundation for considering the women's issue as part of a social, working issue, and thus makes it possible to firmly link it with the proletarian class struggle and revolution.<sup>189</sup>*

This excerpt provides a reflection that may be found cynical, political, ideological. Yet, it is an illustration of the base for the discourse-making, with the discursive claims preliminary thought about. If we assume that the "alienation" of feminism, which initially had purely ideological reasons, has been reproduced through the generations, and its impact is seen in current Russian discourses on feminism, then we have an amusing example of the identity-shaping from the "above." In this case, it is also possible to project that the same method may be successful in contemporary Russia, then all of the discursive attempts on promoting the "traditional values" and "spirituality" may be seen more worrisome, assuming that they may succeed. The same relates to the discursive construction of the "other," examples of which could be observed in the previous paragraph. At this point, Russia has an authentic tradition of othering, and also, as it was discussed in the first chapter, the tradition to define itself through the European "other."

Inessa Armand constructs the image of the bourgeois feminist unfriendly "other" consistently:

*Beginning in 1870, bourgeois feminism, that is, the movement of bourgeois women, seeking political equality with men, began to develop rapidly. Attracting female workers to their movement, bourgeois ladies pursued two goals: 1) they*

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<sup>189</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Тезисы должны резко подчеркивать, что истинное освобождение женщин возможно только через коммунизм. (...) Этим мы надежно отгородимся от буржуазного движения за "эмансипацию женщин". Это также кладет основание к рассмотрению женского вопроса, как части социального, рабочего вопроса, и таким образом позволяет прочно связать его с пролетарской классовой борьбой и революцией". Source: Zetkin, Clara. 1933. *O Lenine / O Ленине (About Lenin)*. Moscow: Partynoye izdatel'stvo. Ibid., p. 81.



*needed mass support for female workers, without whom they were powerless to achieve anything, and 2) they wanted to split the growing labor movement, opposing the female worker to the workers.<sup>190</sup>*

The “female workers” in this excerpt are contrasting the “bourgeois women,” with the latest having a pre-determined plan, being rational and insidious, taking advantage of the naive “female workers.” The “bourgeois feminism” collocation is brought here, as it is needed to be used together, to immediately remind on the “alien” nature of the movement. Hence, in the Soviet tradition feminism is interpreted solely as a feature of the discourse of privileged class and, speaking in modern terms, a pure Eurocentric and capitalist concept. This is a clear example of the specificity of meaning derived from the historical experience, and it suggests the necessity to check the peculiarities of the meaning of the concepts depending on the context.

The historical and discursive peculiarities of the Soviet past needed to be understood while thinking about contemporary female identities. One more issue that has its specific context in Russia is the issue of abortion. It is important to be considered, otherwise, the trend on conservatism, the “traditional values”, and “spirituality” may be interpreted literally, as if Russia was a deeply religious, conservative, traditional country.

The abortion was not only legal in the Soviet Union but also widely practiced. The Soviet Union was the first country in the world that legalized abortions: The People's Commissariat of Health and the People's Commissariat of Justice on 18 November 1920 issued the resolution on titled “About health of women” (*“Об охране здоровья женщин”*). The text provided there is quite curious: “Over the past decade, both the West and we have an increasing number of women resorting to termination of their pregnancy.

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<sup>190</sup> ТВМ. “Начиная с 1870 года буржуазный феминизм, то есть движение буржуазных женщин, добивающихся политического равноправия с мужчинами, стал быстро развиваться. Привлекая работниц к своему движению, буржуазные дамы преследовали две цели: 1) им было необходимо добиться массовой поддержки работниц, без которых они были бессильны чего-либо добиться, и 2) им было необходимо добиться массовой поддержки работниц, без которых они были бессильны чего-либо добиться, и 2) они хотели расколоть нарастающее рабочее движение, противопоставляя работницу рабочим”. Ibid., p.147.



The laws of all countries fight this evil by punishing both the woman who decided to have a miscarriage and the doctor who produced it.”<sup>191</sup>

From the position of discourse analysis, this intro is interesting: it does not provide an aggressive contradiction between “us” and “them” that could be expected. The fact itself that a rational comparison with “the West” is possible at that time is somehow unexpected, keeping in mind that the revolution happened just three years ago. The text is written in a professional bureaucratic manner although it does not exclude an emotional inclusion, such as “this evil” in this excerpt.

*Without leading to positive results, this method of struggle drove this operation into the underground and made the woman a victim of mercenary and often ignorant performers, who created an enterprise out of such a secret operation.*<sup>192</sup>

The voice of a reason is heard in this text, and the argument is provided clearly. Here we do not see anything ideologically driven, and this is surprising, as the epoch is associated with an intensive ideological pressure and infliction of ideology into all spheres of life.

*The workers' and peasants' government takes into account the evilness of this phenomenon for the collective. By strengthening the socialist system and agitation against abortion among the masses of the working female population, it fights this evil and, widely implementing the principles of the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy, anticipates the gradual disappearance of this phenomenon.*<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> ТВМ. In original: “За последнее десятилетие как на Западе, так и у нас возрастает число женщин, прибегающих к прерыванию своей беременности. Законодательства всех стран борются с этим злом путем наказания как для женщины, решившейся на выкидыш, так и для врача, его производшего”. Source: The People's Commissariat of Health and the People's Commissariat of Justice, 18 November 1920, issued the resolution on titled “About health of women” (*Ob okhrane zdorov'ya zhenshcin / Об охране здоровья женщин*), available online: <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=ESU&n=26749#031871952477066334> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>192</sup> ТВМ. “Не приходя к положительным результатам, этот метод борьбы загнал эту операцию в подполье и сделал женщину жертвой корыстных и часто невежественных абортистов, которые из тайной операции создали себе промысел”. Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> ТВМ. “Рабоче-Крестьянское Правительство учитывает все зло этого явления для коллектива. Путем укрепления социалистического строя и агитации против абортс среди масс трудящегося женского населения, оно борется с этим злом и, широко осуществляя принципы Охраны Материнства и Младенчества, предвидит постепенное исчезновение этого явления”. Ibid.



Employing a well-reasoned language of bureaucracy, the message continues to be free from the ideological elements. Using the word “evil” (*zlo*), it does not appeal to moral reasoning, at least not in the one that is common in anti-abortion rhetoric: that moral reasoning would imply the presence of religious arguments that is not possible in the atheist communist environment. The reasoning in this text, that may be also assessed as moral but also purely rational and practical – it is built around the issue of public health, women’s health. It may be viewed as both a moral argument and a purely practical argument concerned with the physical wellbeing of the female population. It is also important that the issues which could be interpreted as private matters get recognition, and that the female problems – that are not actually exclusively female but closely related to the issue of male sexual education. Women became visible as a group and this achievement cannot be underestimated.

*But while the moral relics of the past and the difficult economic conditions of the present still force some women to decide on this operation, the People’s Commissariat of Health and the People’s Commissariat of Justice, protecting the health of the woman and the interests of the race from ignorant and self-serving predators, and considering the method of repression in this area to be completely unsuccessful decide: It is allowed to perform a free operation on artificial abortion in the setting of Soviet hospitals, where its maximum harmlessness is ensured.*<sup>194</sup>

It is not very clear what is meant under the “moral relics of the past” since the past meant is the Russian Empire past, where religion played a significant role in the society and might be, on the opposite, a counter-abortion factor. The point on “difficult economic conditions of the present” sounds convincing, and again surprising: there is a calm rational statement, free of ideological colouring, while it could be expected that post-

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<sup>194</sup> ТВМ. “Но пока моральные пережитки прошлого и тяжелые экономические условия настоящего еще вынуждают часть женщин решаться на эту операцию, Народный Комиссариат Здравоохранения и Народный Комиссариат Юстиции, охраняя здоровье женщины и интересы расы от невежественных и корыстных хищников, и считая метод репрессий в этой области абсолютно не достигающим цели, постановляют: Допускается бесплатное производство операции по искусственному прерывание беременности в обстановке советских больниц, где обеспечивается ее максимальная безвредность”. Ibid.



revolutionary conditions could be described as prosperous – for ideological and propagandist reasons but it does not happen in this text.

Certain sources suggest that abortion statistics in the Soviet Union was extremely high. The different angle from which the Soviet women could see the abortion debate is interestingly described in the recent interview of the Russian writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, where she contrasts the views of American feminists and the Soviet women, on the same issue of abortion: “For the first time, I came across this, on the verge of the comic, misunderstanding in the 80s, when American feminists came to the USSR and began to talk about the issues that worried them, but ours did not understand them at all.”<sup>195</sup> She recalls the misunderstanding caused by existing in two different frameworks, different situations, and the inability to comprehend the difference:

*Those feminists demanded that abortion should be allowed (it was forbidden there), insisting on the woman’s freedom to have a baby when she wants, and the Russian girls sat and nodded: “Yes, abortion is terrible, there is no pain relief, it’s just an ordeal.” Questions and answers were directly perpendicular to each other, and the problems did not coincide in anything: they were worried about one thing, our women about another.*<sup>196</sup>

This excerpt from Ulitskaya is enlightening, not only in regards to the issue of abortion: the ability to learn about the context, to understand it well, and then form the judgment; otherwise, the debate, especially such a persistent and hot debate as abortion debate may become a platform for non-corresponding monologues.

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<sup>195</sup> ТВМ. “Впервые я столкнулась с этим, на грани комического, непониманием в 80-ые, когда американские феминистки приехали в СССР и стали говорить о том, что их волнует, а наши их вообще не поняли”. Source: Source: Ulitskaya, Lyudmila. *Perebit' drug druga – uma mnogo ne nado: o Nobelevskoy premii, feminizme i peremenakh v Moskve* (“To Destroy Each Other Does Not Require Much Intelligence”: *About the Nobel Prize, Feminism and Change in Moscow*), available online: [https://www.pravmir.ru/lyudmila-ulitskaya-perebit-drug-druga-uma-mnogo-ne-nado/?fbclid=IwAR1kig9y8-28UfW\\_HvNQ4SFggT\\_CTTYXadnCjaBXO2oN0cluaxoZ2rmu3O8](https://www.pravmir.ru/lyudmila-ulitskaya-perebit-drug-druga-uma-mnogo-ne-nado/?fbclid=IwAR1kig9y8-28UfW_HvNQ4SFggT_CTTYXadnCjaBXO2oN0cluaxoZ2rmu3O8) (accessed on 10 September 2019).

<sup>196</sup> ТВМ. “Те феминистки требовали разрешить аборт (там они были запрещены), настаивая на свободе женщины заводить ребенка, когда она хочет, а русские девочки сидели и кивали: “Да-да, аборт – это ужасно, обезболивания никакого, просто по живому дерут”. Вопросы и ответы были прямо перпендикулярны другу, а проблемы практически ни в чем не совпадали: одних беспокоило одно, других – другое”. Ibid.



The essential relativism of the problem, the importance of knowing the context before going to conclusions, and the value of the context itself in shaping the concepts are seen in this text. This is a very curious example that brings together different contexts and in general questions our views on things. It may be useful to be informed on the difference of the contexts, and to be able to take unusual perspectives on the very sound questions, questions that still evoke harsh debates, contrasts ideologies, and political stances.

The following excerpt from the article published in *The New York Times* in 1984 is in line with Ulitskaya's reflections. The author, Soviet feminist who was allowed to leave USSR, describes the situation with abortions in the country, giving a voice to the young Soviet woman:

*"I'm not against abortion," Miss Mamonova said, "but since it's the primary method of birth control, it does have an effect on women's health." She said that some Russian women she knew had had as many as 15 abortions, and that they were usually performed in clinics by unsympathetic doctors who do abortions on several women simultaneously and do not use anesthetics.*<sup>197</sup>

Another article in the same media outlet sketched the debate in Soviet society, which happened in the latest Soviet period: "Abortion – widely accepted here (*in the Soviet Union*), and performed in assembly-line conditions – has become the target of a lively and unusually frank debate." The author describes obstacles of the Soviet reality: "Unlike the abortion debate in the West, which has focused on the rights of the unborn and the woman's right to choose, the Soviet debate is on women's health care – the right to adequate supplies of reliable contraceptives, to sanitary conditions, anaesthetics and the respect of medical workers, 'stone age equipment'"<sup>198</sup> The intro turns to be powerful: "The 29-year-old woman was nervous as she arranged the hospital appointment for her

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<sup>197</sup> Klemesrud, Judy. *Émigré Talks About Feminism in the Soviet Union*, available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/06/17/style/emigre-talks-about-feminism-in-the-soviet-union.html> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

<sup>198</sup> Cooper, Ann. 1989. Women Fault Soviet System for Abortion. In: *The New York Times*, from 18 February 1989, available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/28/world/women-fault-soviet-system-for-abortion.html> (accessed on 20 July 2019).





fifth abortion recently, remembering the nightmarish pain when she ended an earlier pregnancy.”<sup>199</sup>

It is curious to look at the current abortion debate from the perspective of the Soviet women, to contrast the view on abortion as being a right and the possibility of the legal abortion indicating the more advanced situation with women's rights in the country with the situation where abortion is basically playing a role of some substitute of poorly accessible means of contraception. This is an interesting angle that could be integrated also in the abortion debate, as the knowledge of the country-specific developments adds value to the discussion being comprehensive and inclusive. In the context of contemporary Russia, this knowledge is needed for a well-informed assessment of the trend promoting the “traditional values” and “spirituality,” as this knowledge in the context of the Soviet atheism and prohibition of the religious life encourages to look at the current trend of the promotion of “traditional values” with a doubt.

### Concluding Remarks

The concept of “traditional values,” as well as the concept of “spirituality,” seems to be promoted in the public discourse for the reasons of identity-shaping from “the above.” Moreover, these concepts start to appear in the legal documents and public policy papers, which may seem worrisome from the perspective of keeping the reasonable balance in the government's involvement in the sphere of the family life. At the same time, from the perspective of Russia's socialist past, the claims of traditionalism do not seem to be authentic, since the framework of atheism, female emancipation, and even the acceptance and commonality of abortions in the private life do not suggest the strong traditional, conservative source for identity-shaping. Yet, the lesson that can be learned from the Soviet past is in the successful promotion of ideas, views, and ideology. As an example, in this chapter, the Soviet discourses on feminism are discussed, and the connection is proposed with the views on the issue in contemporary Russia. The discourses of the past are analyzed as having a purpose to alienate the Western movement, and if the suggestion on the persistence of the views on feminism is correct, the example illustrates how the

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



**Sant'Anna**  
School of Advanced Studies – Pisa

claims from “the above” may shape the views and perceptions successfully. From this perspective, the emphasis on traditionalism and spirituality seem even more worrisome.



## Chapter 4: The Role of Philosophy in Vladimir Putin's Discourse

The scholarship on Russia has referred to the philosophical ideas as possible sources for understanding and explanation of the country. For instance, Laruelle, Bassin, Glebov, and colleagues made several attempts to discuss the philosophical ideas of Russian Eurasianism.<sup>200</sup> The more general works on ideas also attempted to theorize Russia, such as, for example, the works of Berlin, who himself had the roots coming from the Russian Empire, or the work on Russian thinkers by Leatherbarrow and Offord.<sup>201</sup> As examples of conceptualization, works of Morozov, Clowes, Duncan, and Neumann may be consulted.<sup>202</sup> This chapter, in turn, aims to illuminate the peculiar issue of the role of philosophy in the discourse of Vladimir Putin. It elaborates on the contexts where philosophy and philosophers are placed, the ideas that are borrowed and referred to, the related identity claims, and the possible contradictions.

### Ivan Ilyin and his Problematic Views

In 2014, during the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin quoted a Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin. He said:

*I will bring one quote in this regard: “The one who loves Russia should wish for her freedom; First of all, freedom for Russia itself, its international independence*

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<sup>200</sup> See possible sources to consult on the issue of Russian Eurasianism: Laruelle, Marlene. 2008. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press; Laruelle, Marlène. 2009. *In the Name of the Nation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Bassin, Mark, Glebov, Sergey, and Marlene Laruelle. 2015. *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press; Bassin, Mark, and Gonzalo Pozo. 2017. *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>201</sup> See: Berlin, Isaiah (ed. by Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly). 1978. *Russian Thinkers*. London: Penguin Books; Berlin Isaiah. 2013. *The Power of Ideas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Leatherbarrow, William, and Derek Offord (eds.) 2010. *History of the Russian Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>202</sup> Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Clowes, Edith W. 2011. *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and post-Soviet Identity*. New York: Cornell University Press. Duncan, Peter J.S. 2000. *Russian Messianism*. London: Routledge; Neumann, Iver B. 1996. *Russia and the Idea of Europe*. London: Routledge.



*and self-sufficiency; freedom for Russia – as the unity of the Russian and all other national cultures; and, finally, freedom for Russian people, freedom for all of us; freedom of faith, the search for truth, creativity, work, and property.” Ivan Ilyin. This is a great meaning and good advice for all of us today.<sup>203</sup>*

This curious quote may seem unexpected for Putin, especially in the international arena: the defence of freedom is not the discourse expected from the leader who is commonly perceived as authoritarian. The reference to a philosophical thought to elaborate and justify the concept of freedom in Russia may also seem unusual: it suggests a certain preparation, consultation with the sources, preparation, and, in sum, the importance of the provided idea for the speaker, the motivation to present it in a sound and convincing way bringing into the discourse the reference to the thinker. The curious part is that the thinker Putin refers to was never widely known in Russia.

Ivan Ilyin is an interesting figure: a White émigré who escaped his homeland after the revolution, political and religious philosopher, and according to certain views, nationalist or even fascist. A better opinion about his ideas can be acquainted by taking a closer look at the primary source, that is his writing.

For instance, in the book *O gryadushchey Rossii*, “*On Future Russia*,” he writes: “Western Europe and America, which do not know Russia, have no reason to impose on us any political forms — neither democratic nor fascist... We are ready to repeat this a hundred times: Russia will not be saved by any forms of Westernism, nor by the old ones, nor new.”<sup>204</sup> This idea is not new, but in the context of Ilyin’s biography, it looks curious: after leaving the country, he lived in Berlin and then in Switzerland, where he died in

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<sup>203</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Приведу в этой связи одну цитату: “Кто любит Россию, тот должен желать для неё свободы; прежде всего свободы для самой России, её международной независимости и самостоятельности; свободы для России – как единства русской и всех других национальных культур; и, наконец, – свободы для русских людей, свободы для всех нас; свободы веры, искания правды, творчества, труда и собственности”. В этом огромный смысл и хороший наказ всем нам в сегодняшнее время”. Source: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>204</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Западная Европа и Америка, не знающие Россию, не имеют ни малейших оснований навязывать нам какие бы то ни было политические формы, - ни демократические, ни фашистские... Мы готовы повторить это сто раз: Россия не спасется никакими видами западничества, ни старыми, ни новыми”. Source: Ilyin, Ivan. 1993. *O Gryadushchey Rossii / O gryadushchey Rossii (On the Future Russia: Selected Essays)*, Moscow: Voenizdat, p.205.



1954. He was fluent in the German language and did not acquire knowledge about the foreign countries exclusively from the books. Even before leaving the country, he studied in Europe. Certainly, the emigration from Russia was not voluntary, at the same time, physically being in the European space does not imply being culturally inscribed into this space. On the contrary, possible alienation in the new living circumstances may trigger not only nostalgia, which is quite an organic part of the immigration but also forming an idealized image of the past and the homeland.

Communism – the ideology that led to Ilyin's emigration, is described in his writing without a sentiment:

*We need to think carefully and imagine everything clearly. Thirty or forty years in a row by hunger, fear, and torture – people were weaned from independent thinking, from the political and economic initiative, from a responsible decision; and from morning to evening, from birth to death, people's souls have been filled with dead and false schemes of vulgar Marxism and the vulgarities of 'diamat.'*<sup>205</sup>

While this text presents a political emotion, it is not unreasonable and does not illustrate the presence of bias or hatred. Referring to theory, it is possible to link political emotions with identities on a theoretical level. Starting from the point that both corpora have a somehow problematic character, it is possible to determine a connection between them: while the scientific value of political emotions is often underestimated in political science due to their (possibly) “irrational” nature, that implies practical challenges of dealing with the issue, identity research does not have a unified methodology, with identity itself being questioned as a concept, due to related ambiguities. Both concepts, though, have become widely used during the last years in application to the political practice and its current challenges, such as populism, fake news, hate speech, and so on. It is possible here to take

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<sup>205</sup> Diamat - Dialectical materialism. ТВМ. In original: “Надо вдуматься и представить себе все отчетливо. Тридцать-сорок лет подряд голодом, страхом и пыткой – людей отучали от самостоятельного мышления, от политической и хозяйственной инициативы, от ответственного решения; и с утра до вечера, от рождения до смерти людям забивали души мертвыми и ложными схемами вульгарного марксизма и пошлостями “диамата”. Source: Ilyin, Ivan. 1993. О Gryadushchey Rossii (On the Future Russia: Selected Essays), Moscow: Voenizdat, p.34.



a stand of political or practical philosophy, with references to the works of Nussbaum, Taylor, Anderson, and other philosophers.<sup>206</sup> Two main conceptual and methodological links can be found here: first related to narrative representation (Foucault, Stanley, Wodak, Zahavi), second – to the area of imaginary and imagination (Anderson, Bottici).<sup>207</sup> Those two possible links enable us to clarify the conceptual interrelation of emotions and identities, such as the impact of emotions on the continuous identity-formation process, the possibility of identity politics employing the sphere of emotional, and so forth. The presence of Ilyin's political emotion in this sense is linked to identity: being a Russian “white” emigrant, an enemy of the communist regime, being put in the circumstances where leaving the country was the only possible way to survive – political emotion here seems to be justified. However, this emotion does not override reason.

*What kind of citizens, what democrats did the communist government prepare for this? Not citizens, but slaves of a totalitarian state; not politicians, but to the death frightened careerists; not activists, but informants and sycophant — the Soviet regime was preparing; people completely devoid of state horizons and honest – yes, namely, honest, experienced and independent, yes, just independent, thinking.*<sup>208</sup>

Criticizing the regime, Ilyin's observations here are based on reason: there are no elements of blind hatred – that could be, keeping in mind the dramatism of the epoch. The author tries to be objective, and, having a place for political emotions, limits its.

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<sup>206</sup> See, for instance, Nussbaum, Marta C. 2013. *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. Cambridge: Belknap Press; Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

<sup>207</sup> See: Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Self Writing*. In: *Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1 Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: The New Press; Zahavi, Dan. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014; Stanley, Jason. 2007. *Language in Context: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Wodak, Ruth, de Cillia, Rudolf, Reisigl, Martin, and Karin Liebhart. 2009. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Bottici, Chiara. 2014. *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>208</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Каких граждан, каких демократов готовила этим коммунистическая власть? Не граждан, а рабов тоталитарного государства; не политиков, а до смерти напуганных карьеристов; не деятелей, а пролаз и доносчиков – готовил советский режим; людей совершенно лишенных государственного кругозора и честного, - да, именно, честного, опыта и самостоятельного, да, именно самостоятельного, разума”. Ibid., p.34.





Commitment to the country is not equated to the views on its regime. Such a phrase as “slaves of a totalitarian state” is indicating emotion, personal attitude, yet it is more an application of a literary tool, being employed inside the reasoned text. But there are other examples of Ilyin’s writing that are not as well reasoned.

The following excerpt contains a claim which is very close to the claims widely used in current political discourse in Russia: the idea of “bad intentions” of the West, trying to destabilize Russia, having its own agenda. The excerpt starts from a more neutral statement of the necessity of the organic way of Russia’s development:

*It is useful to know and correctly understand all the political forms and means of mankind. But a creative combination of them and of other, still unknown, should be chosen and created by Russia itself, should be prompted by its own tasks, in addition to any other people's prescriptions or our own prejudices and doctrines.<sup>209</sup>*

The idea here is quite close to the contemporary thought about economic and political development cooperation when a relation of imposition is now re-assessed as wrong, and approaches of the previous decades now considered as “too Eurocentric.” Ilyin’s point is still reasoned and the role of emotions is limited, it is reasoned thinking implying that cultural, historical, economic peculiarities matter, he allows “creative combination” of concepts, institutions, and ways of life formed by other countries, emphasizing that the system should be formed by Russia itself. This logic is clear, although a question may be asked: how technically may the choice and creation be realised? In democracies, voting is a tool, but what we do in Russia with a history of absolutism and present at Ilyin’s time totalitarianism? Is the way chosen by Russian leadership without consultancy with its people better than a certain Western imposition? The list of such questions can be expanded. In a way, Ilyin contradicts with himself, previously saying that there is no culture of democracy in Russia and no preparation possible with its totalitarian

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<sup>209</sup> ТВМ. “Мы готовы повторить это сто раз: Россия не спасется никакими видами западничества, ни старыми, ни новыми. Все политические формы и средства человечества полезно знать и верно разуметь. Но творческая комбинация из них и из других, еще неизвестных, должна быть избрана и создана самою Россией, должна быть подсказана ее собственными задачами, помимо всяких чужих предписаний или своих предрассудков и доктрин”. Ibid., p.205.



government, and then stating that foreign influence and imposition is a negative factor: how then you can learn something new for yourself, if not consulting the best foreign practices?

*We must understand and remember that all pressure from the West, no matter where it comes from, will pursue not Russian, but goals alien to Russia, not historical interest, not the good of the Russian people, but the interest of crushing power and extorting organization...<sup>210</sup>*

This statement is highly emotional and not reasoned. Ilyin employs the discourse practice of othering, alienates Russia from the other world, and draws a picture of unfriendly, evil-minded *other* people, powers, and foreign organizations. It is not clear what does the expression “goals alien to Russia” means, as well as what is meant by the Russian historical interest. This whole statement is very close to the Bolsheviks ideology of isolationism, although Ilyin was an absolute enemy of Bolshevism, at the same time the elements of his discourse are appearing in current politics.

Russian president does not quote Ilyin’s statements of such a type, preferring more neutral excerpts. For example, in the speech given during the honour reception of the graduates of military universities in June 2013, he said:

*Nobleness, respect for the personnel, has always been a strong point of Russian officers – as the famous philosopher Ivan Ilyin said, “the Russian army will never forget the Suvorov tradition, which claimed that a soldier is a person.” So it was and will be in the future.<sup>211</sup>*

The quote here is neither radical, neither provocative. It is a rather neutral statement, with a military theme in the centre and a certain humanistic position on the cover. This is not

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<sup>210</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Мы должны понимать и помнить, что всякое давление с запада, откуда бы оно ни исходило, будет преследовать не русские, а чуждые России цели, не исторический интерес, не благо русского народа, а интерес давящей державы и вымогающей организации”. Ibid., p.205.

<sup>211</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Благородство, уважение к личному составу всегда были сильной стороной российского офицерства – как говорил известный философ Иван Ильин, “русская армия никогда не забудет суворовской традиции, утверждавшей, что солдат есть личность. Так было и будет вперед”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s congratulations addressed to the graduates of military academies and universities on their successful graduation, available online at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18410> (accessed on 23 August 2019).



a quote that could provoke controversy or an engaged discussion. In this case, the name of the philosopher may attract more attention than the content of the reference itself.

Curiously, not only the president quotes this philosopher. Svetlana Medvedeva, the wife of Dmitry Medvedev, did the same. In the speech dedicated to the opening of the XIV World Russian People's Council, she said:

*Fortunately, the times of oblivion of our roots and origins are in the past. Today, a national spiritual revival is built on the return of eternal values, one of which is rightfully considered a strong and friendly family. As the philosopher Ivan Ilyin said, “every real family arises from love and gives a person happiness.”<sup>212</sup>*

This piece may restore the image of current Russian political or even cultural realms, with one remark, that is, whether the piece is aimed to describe reality, to sum it up briefly, or whether the text answers a question “how should it be” for Russia, drawing a desirable image of the societal development – probably, from the perspective of the ruling elite. The phrase “national spiritual revival” is extremely strong: the *nation* itself is a strong notion, with an identity-driven dimension, with a mark of collectiveness.

Being quoted by the members of the Russian political elite, Ilyin’s legacy started to attract additional attention: there was even information that Ilyin’s works, as well as works of several other philosophers, are forming a reading list recommended for the bureaucrats in the regions. “The power vertical instills love to Russian classics. The officials and the United Russia (*the mainstream pro-governmental political party*) are recommended to read the president’s favourite philosophers: Ilyin, Solovyov, and Berdyaev,” claimed the respectable Russian media outlet *Kommersant Vlast*, referring to its sources in Kremlin.<sup>213</sup> “For the New Year holidays, the officials and United Russia left with

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<sup>212</sup> ТВМ. In original: “К счастью, времена забвения своих корней и истоков – в прошлом. Сегодня национальное духовное возрождение строится на возвращении вечных ценностей, одной из которых по праву считается крепкая и дружная семья. Как говорил философ Иван Ильин, “всякая настоящая семья возникает из любви и даёт человеку счастье.” Source: Svetlana Medvedeva’s speech dedicated to the opening of XIV World Russian People's Council, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/misc/7859> (accessed on 20 August 2019).

<sup>213</sup> Surnacheva, Elizaveta. 2014. *V poiskakh mudrosti: Chinovnikam veleno poduchit' filosofiyyu* / В поисках мудрости: Чиновникам велено подучить философию (*In Search of Wisdom: Officials Ordered to Learn Philosophy*). In: *Kommersant Vlast* / Коммерсант Власть, from 20 January 2014, available online: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2383840> (accessed on 20 June 2019).



homework: the leadership of the Kremlin and the United Russia party handed literature to the governors and party members for the winter evenings. As regional authorities and party members told *Kommersant Vlast*, among the gifts from Moscow are Nikolay Berdyaev's *Philosophy of Inequality*, Vladimir Solovyov's *Justification of the Good*, and Ivan Ilyin's *Our Tasks*. The power vertical was supposed to devote to the study of the philosophers and publicists often quoted by president Vladimir Putin,” the journalist writes.<sup>214</sup>

Interestingly, Ilyin was mentioned during the meeting of the Board of trustees of Lomonosov Moscow State University under the chair of Vladimir Putin, on 25 January 2017:

*In 2006, another historical value was transferred to Moscow University: a personal archive (this is 100 thousand sheets) and a library (630 publications) of Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin, a famous philosopher, a graduate of Moscow University. For over 40 years, this library has been kept at the University of Michigan, in the United States. More recently, it was transferred to the university because a testament of the philosopher was discovered. We have accepted this gift. Ivan Alexandrovich left his homeland in 1922. He became a major philosopher, remained a patriot of Russia and Moscow University.*<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> ТВМ. In original: “На новогодние каникулы чиновники и единороссы ушли с домашним заданием: руководство Кремля и партии “Единая Россия” вручило губернаторам и партийцам литературу для проведения зимних вечеров. Как рассказали “Власти” региональные чиновники и партийцы, среди подарков из Москвы — “Философия неравенства” Николая Бердяева, “Оправдание добра” Владимира Соловьева и “Наши задачи” Ивана Ильина. Предполагалось, что зимние каникулы властная вертикаль посвятит изучению часто цитируемых президентом Владимиром Путиным философов и публицистов”. Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> ТВМ. “В 2006 году в Московский университет была передана еще одна историческая ценность: личный архив (это 100 тысяч листов) и библиотека (630 изданий) Ивана Александровича Ильина, известного философа, выпускника Московского университета. Больше 40 лет эта библиотека хранилась в университете штата Мичиган, в Соединенных Штатах. Совсем недавно была передана университету, потому что обнаружилось завещание философа. Мы приняли этот дар. Иван Александрович покинул Родину в 1922 году. Он стал крупнейшим ученым философом, остался патриотом России и Московского университета”. Source: Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Lomonosov Moscow State University under the chair of Vladimir Putin, available online: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53770> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



It may be quite symptomatic that the event that took place eleven years ago was emphasized during the meeting: the possible explanation may be laid in the trends of Russian political discourse, and their recognition by a broader community.

Looking through the Ilyin's writings where he, among other things, reflects on fascism allows to judge about his views basing on the primary source, which is rarely done in Russian discourse since works of Ilyin were never widely read or well known in Russia. In the first paragraph of a chapter "fascism" Ilyin writes: "Fascism is a complex, multilateral phenomenon, and, historically speaking, it is far from obsolete. There is healthy and sick in it, old and new, state-guarding, and destructive. Therefore, in its assessment, calm and justice are needed. But its dangers must be thought thoroughly."<sup>216</sup>

Here it is necessary to emphasize that the memory of the II World War, in its Great Patriotic War dimension, is a significant part of the Russian narrative. Fascism, then, has a very particular and extremely sensitive meaning. Neutral reflection on fascism is alien for Russian discourse, neither contemporary, neither in historical retrospective. As an example, to which we will return later, fascism and fascist-related metaphors were used in practices of othering during the Ukrainian crisis. Beyond that, the phrase "worse than fascists" is a phrase from Russian – and maybe broader, post-Soviet, at least to a certain extent – discourse, meaning extreme cruelty and the absence of humanity.

In this light, quotes of Ilyin, provided by public figures in Russia, although not concerning this particular issue, do create a contradiction and duality inside the discourse. In Ilyin's reflections "fascism arose as a reaction to Bolshevism, as a concentration of state security forces to the right,"<sup>217</sup> he writes. Although the statement is doubtful itself, the author also demonstrates a somehow Russia-centric approach, where Russian discourse and historical peculiarities are put ahead of other discourses and peculiarities of, for instance, German history. It is also understandable that for any forced emigrant the country of

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<sup>216</sup> ТВМ. "Фашизм есть явление сложное, многостороннее и, исторически говоря, далеко еще не изжитое. В нем есть здоровое и больное, старое и новое, государственно-охранительное и разрушительное. Поэтому в оценке его нужны спокойствие и справедливость. Но опасности его необходимо продумать до конца." Source: Ilyin, Ivan. 1993. *O Gryadushchey Rossii ("On the Future Russia: Selected Essays")*. Moscow: Voenizdat, p.67.

<sup>217</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Фашизм возник как реакция на большевизм, как концентрация государственно охранительных сил направо". Ibid, p.67.



origin and its fate may be not less or even more important than the country of immigration. Another factor is a destructive impact of the Bolshevik ideology and its application to Russia for Ilyin himself, his personal life that completely changed. Nevertheless, some points of his writing are very specific and may be contradicting Russian law against the rehabilitation of fascism. For example, such a statement of Ilyin: “During the onset of left chaos and left totalitarianism – this was a healthy, necessary and inevitable phenomenon” – may be assessed as extremist, according to Russian law.<sup>218</sup>

Ilyin’s next point is highly disturbing: it is an attempt to make a prediction, unlike the previous description of his perception of reality:

*Such a concentration will continue to be carried out, even in the most democratic states, at the time of national danger, the healthy forces of the people will always concentrate in the direction of protective-dictatorial. So it was in ancient Rome, so it was in the new Europe, it will be so in the future.*<sup>219</sup>

This disturbing text surely is not among quotes from Ilyin used by the Russian officials.

*Opposing left totalitarianism, fascism was further right, as it sought fair social and political reforms. These searches could be successful and unsuccessful: it is difficult to solve such problems, and the first attempts might not be successful. But to meet the wave of socialist psychosis – by social and, therefore, anti-socialist measures – was necessary.*

It is difficult to imagine such a text being articulated nowadays, neither in Europe neither in Russia. Legally speaking, it contradicts with current laws outlining explicitly the danger of fascism rehabilitation. It is important to emphasize that on average people in Russia are not familiar with Ilyin’s writing as a primary source: before the phenomenon of continuous quoting of Ilyin has started, he was not well heard of outside the

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<sup>218</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Во время наступления левого хаоса и левого тоталитаризма – это было явлением здоровым, необходимым и неизбежным”. Ibid., p.67.

<sup>219</sup> ТФР. In original: “Такая концентрация будет осуществляться и впредь, даже в самых демократических государствах, в час национальной опасности здоровые силы народа будут всегда концентрироваться в направлении охранительно-диктаториальном. Так было в древнем Риме, так бывало и в новой Европе, так будет и впредь”. Source: Ilyin, Ivan. 1993. *O Gryadushchey Rossii* (On the Future Russia: Selected Essays), Moscow: Voenizdat, p.67.





professional circles. This phenomenon led to attention coming from the foreign-based scholars, mentioning or analysing the case in their writings, both academic and aimed to the broader audience.<sup>220</sup>

The problematic views of Ilyin, along the appearance of the references to him in political discourse, create a dual situation. On the one hand, the notion of *fascism* was intensively appearing in Russian discourse during the last years, also being used as an *antifascist* justification of Russian politics in Ukraine. The memories of World War II and the war itself were brought into the discourse and became its immanent part. From this perspective, the justification of fascism of any kind seems impossible and unprecedentedly dangerous to appear in public space. Yet, Ilyin is quoted extensively, that was also noticed by the scholars of Russia, and although potentially ‘problematic’ parts are not brought into the discourse, they are mentioned by the scholars and journalists, aiming to reflect on the issue.

Ilyin’s views on fascism from a certain perspective look problematic, it is even possible to encounter opinions labelling him a “fascist philosopher.” This, in turn, creates discursive inconvenience: in the country that annually widely celebrates the Victory day of the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, with the experience and the result of the World War II being a serious part of identity discourse, referrals to the “fascist philosopher” do not seem logical or suitable. Moreover, not on a national level but on a level of personality, Putin’s admiration of Ilyin’s ideas seems confusing for multiple reasons. First, the accusations toward the post-Maidan Ukrainian regime of being “fascist” were made during the last years being employed in Russia in the discourse of justification of the events in South-East Ukraine and Crimea. Second, on a personal level Putin holds a family story related to the events of the World War II: not only both of his parent participated in it, but also survived their time in the hardships of the Siege of Leningrad – but Putin’s two-year-old brother did not survive. As Putin writes in the recent article dedicated to the issues of the World War II: “It is common to say: the war left a deep mark in the history of every family. Behind these words is the fate of millions of people, their suffering, and pain of loss. Pride, truth, and

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<sup>220</sup> See, for example, Snyder’s article *Ivan Ilyin, Putin’s Philosopher of Russian Fascism* in NYR Daily, from March 16, 2018, available online: <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



memory.”<sup>221</sup> This reasonable generalist statement is then specified with more personal thoughts that bring a different level of sincerity:

*For my parents, the war is the terrible torment of besieged Leningrad, where my two-year-old brother Vitya died, where my mother miraculously survived. Father, having a reservation, volunteered to defend his hometown – he did the same as millions of Soviet citizens did. He fought on the Nevsky Pyatachok bridgehead and was seriously wounded. And the further these years, the greater the need to talk with the parents, to learn more about the war period of their lives. But it is already impossible to ask anything, so I sacredly keep in my heart conversations with my father and mother on this topic, their meager emotions.*<sup>222</sup>

Earlier, in 2015, Putin published an article in the literary magazine *Russian Pioneer* (“*Russkiy Pioner*”) titled “Life is such a simple and cruel thing,” where he described the war memories that were shared by his parents and mentioned the death of the brother.<sup>223</sup>

He wrote:

*And then the child was taken away from her.*<sup>224</sup> *They did this, as she later repeated, in a confidential manner in order to save young children from hunger. Collected in orphanages for subsequent evacuation. Parents were not even asked. He fell ill there – my mother said that he had diphtheria – and did not survive. And they were not even told where he was buried. They never found out. And last year,*

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<sup>221</sup> ТВМ. “Принято говорить: война оставила глубокий след в истории каждой семьи. За этими словами – судьбы миллионов людей, их страдания и боль потерь. Гордость, правда и память”. Source: Putin, Vladimir. 2020. *75 Years of the Great Victory: Shared Responsibility to History and the Future*, from 19 June 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63527> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>222</sup> ТВМ. “Для моих родителей война – это страшные муки блокадного Ленинграда, где умер мой двухлетний брат Витя, где чудом осталась в живых мама. Отец, имея бронь, ушёл добровольцем защищать родной город – поступил так же, как и миллионы советских граждан. Воевал на плацдарме «Невский пятачок», был тяжело ранен. И чем дальше эти годы, тем больше потребность побеседовать с родителями, узнать более подробно о военном периоде их жизни. Но уже невозможно ничего спросить, поэтому свято храню в сердце разговоры с отцом и мамой на эту тему, их скупые эмоции”. Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Translated by me. In original: “Жизнь такая простая штука и жестокая”. Source: Putin, Vladimir. Life is such a simple and cruel thing (“*Жизнь такая простая штука и жестокая*”). In: *Russian Pioneer*, from 30 April 2015, available online at: <http://ruspioneer.ru/cool/m/single/4655> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>224</sup> Meaning: from the mother.



*people I did not know, on their own initiative, worked in the archives and found documents for my brother. And this is really my brother.*<sup>225</sup>

Both of these excerpts do not seem as an attempt to “construct” the discourse: on the contrary, they look sincere, although the second text came out in 2015, the year when Ukrainian events were already happening and this context should nevertheless be kept in mind.

It would be reasonable to think that such a personal discourse added to the public discourse makes it confusing to choose Ilyin as an intellectual guide due to possibly not “fascist” but somehow problematic views. Yet, in the Russian context, this reason shows to be not applicable. It may be also important to underline that Putin’s interest to the philosopher dates at least to 2010 when he laid flowers at the tombstones of Ilyin, White general Denikin, and philosopher Shmelev.<sup>226</sup> Hence, another contradiction is illuminated.

Not only Ilyin’s reflections on fascism but also on nationalism seem problematic. The difference in the use and interpretation of the notion of nationalism was elaborated in the first chapter. In this regard, the language plays a significant role, with a predominantly negative understanding of nationalism in the contemporary Russian language in a sense of “xenophobia.” Ilyin was having hopes on the revival of Russian nationalism against the Bolshevik forces. He wrote: “The Russian people have endured humiliation for thirty years; and it seems that they have no end and edge. For thirty years dark and criminal people trample his hearths and altars, forbid him to pray, beat his best people – the most faithful, the most persistent, the bravest and nationally devoted.”<sup>227</sup> The revival of

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<sup>225</sup> ТВМ. “А потом и ребенка у нее забрали. Делали это, как она потом повторяла, в явочном порядке с целью спасения малолетних детей от голода. Собирали в детские дома для последующей эвакуации. Родителей даже не спрашивали. Он там заболел — мама говорила, что дифтеритом, - и не выжил. И им не сказали даже, где он был захоронен. Они так и не узнали. И вот в прошлом году не знакомые мне люди по собственной инициативе поработали в архивах и нашли документы на моего брата. И это действительно мой брат”. Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> See: Putin Laid Flowers at the Tombstones of Denikin, Ilyin, and Shmelev. In: RIA Novosti, from 24 May 2009, available online at: <https://ria.ru/20090524/172145585.html> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>227</sup> Meaning the period of Bolsheviks being in power. ТВМ. “Тридцать лет терпит русский народ унижения; и, кажется, нет им конца и края. Тридцать лет попирают темные и преступные люди его очаги и алтари, запрещают ему молиться, избивают его лучших людей – самых верующих, самых стойких, самых храбрых и национально преданных...” Source: Ilyin, Ivan. *O russkom natsionalizme*



nationalism, in his view, will accompany the emancipatory movement: “The first awakening may be passionate, immoderate, and even bitter; but what follows will bring us a new Russian nationalism, with its true strength and in its true measure. This nationalism we must now pronounce and formalize.”<sup>228</sup> There is no equivocation here, for Ilyin the nationalism, spiritual revival, and also freedom, such as freedom to believe in God, to pray, are close to each other and connected. It is possible though to switch the attention to the language since this “nationalism” does not share the meaning with “xenophobia” or, at least, xenophobia is not a necessary condition for the spiritual revival of Russia.

In contrast, it is possible to look at Putin’s articulated opinion on nationalism. In 2019, in the interview given to Oliver Stone, Putin says: “In general, nationalism is a sign of a limited mind.”<sup>229</sup> On the CIS informal summit, he claims: “Aggressive nationalism always blinds, erases any moral boundaries. Those who have embarked on this should not stop at anything, but in the end, it gets them themselves, and this has happened more than once.”<sup>230</sup> “I look forward to your prompt work to suppress any calls for aggression and violence, any manifestations of nationalism and religious enmity must be suppressed,” Putin emphasizes during the meeting of the FSB board in 2020.<sup>231</sup> In all of these examples the understanding of nationalism, *natsionalizm*, as it was outlined in the first chapter, is negative. In this regard, the choice of Ilyin as a point of reference seems confusing.

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(“*On Russian Nationalism*”). In: O gryadushchey Rossii (“*On the Future Russia: Selected Essays*”), Moscow: Voenizdat, p.263.

<sup>228</sup> ТВМ. “Первое пробуждение, может быть, будет страстным, неумеренным и даже ожесточенным; но дальнейшее принесет нам новый русский национализм, с его истинной силой и в его истинной мере. Этот национализм мы и должны ныне выговорить и оформить”. Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> ТВМ. “Вообще национализм – это признак ограниченности”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Interview to Oliver Stone, from 17 July 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61057> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>230</sup> ТВМ. “Агрессивный национализм всегда ослепляет, стирает любые моральные грани. Вставшие на этот путь не останавливаются ни перед чем, но в конечном итоге это достаёт их самих, и так было не раз”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech on the CIS Informal Summit, 20 December 2019, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62376> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>231</sup> ТВМ. “Жду от вас оперативной работы по пресечению всяких призывов к агрессии и насилию, любые проявления национализма и религиозной вражды должны быть пресечены”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech During the meeting of the FSB Board, 20 February 2020, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62834> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



In the first chapter, the Russian views on cosmopolitanism were discussed, and it is interesting that Ilyin also employs this concept and interprets it negatively:

*In contrast to all kinds of internationalism, both sentimental and ferocious; as opposed to any denationalization, everyday and political, - we affirm Russian nationalism, instinctive and spiritual, we confess it and raise it to God.*<sup>232</sup>

This is such a curious interpretation: while it is somehow expected that a White émigré living in Switzerland would be more open to the cosmopolitan views rather than a Bolshevik, the discourse illuminates that it is not true. He also demonstrates the religious thinking, dismissing the Bolsheviks' atheism. This discourse demonstrates the religiosity, the “humiliation” of being deprived to believe that meant being deprived of a rooted tradition, an “authentic” part of identity. The thinking of Ilyin in this sense is reflecting the truthful identity claims of the time, but in contemporary Russia, this “truth” is supplemented by the more recent and also authentic history of atheism. It is also interesting to look at this issue from the perspective of the personal narrative of Vladimir Putin who praises Ilyin's insight on the future of Russia but was himself to a certain extent influenced by the professional identity, work in the KGB structure where religion was not suitable. Hence, the confusion may be found on different levels. In the public discourse, the recurring reference to the White emigrant philosopher may also seem contradicting with the sentiment toward the Soviet past that is also a part of the discourse. This is another example of the duality of the Russian discourse when mutually exclusive, contradictory fundamentals seem both valuable and are brought together.

### Nikolay Berdyaev: The Great East-West

Nikolay Berdyaev is another philosopher quoted by Vladimir Putin. In his writing, Berdyaev focused on political and religious issues that was quite common for the Russian philosophers, with the dominance of the religious philosophy, which is not well-known in the West. As well as Ilyin, Berdyaev was a White émigré. One's more, it is very

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<sup>232</sup> ТВМ. “В противоположность всякому интернационализму, - как сентиментальному, так и свирепому; в противовес всякой денационализации, бытовой и политической, - мы утверждаем русский национализм, инстинктивный и духовный, исповедуем его и возводим его к Богу”. Ibid.



interesting how the ideas born in exile by the Bolsheviks' antagonists are employed in the context of contemporary Russia on par with the discourses of the glorious elements of the Soviet past. According to Tarasov, the philosophical legacy of the White movement became illuminated in the beginning of the 1990s: "For a very long time, the philosophical culture of the "first wave" of Russian emigration was discarded as a White emigre culture. This determined the negative attitude in the Soviet Union, both to all the philosophers of the Russian diaspora and to all their works," writes Tarasov.<sup>233</sup> The strong religious vector of these philosophical works is reflecting the Russian Empire's identity. Looking at this from the current time's perspective, the religion-related claims may seem both outdated and refreshing, in both cases due to the atheist Soviet past.

In 2013, Putin mentions Berdyaev during the annual message addressed to the Federal Assembly. The context for this reference was a discourse "traditional values," where was stated that Russia aims to protect traditional values, "which for millennia have formed the spiritual, moral basis of civilization, of every nation."<sup>234</sup> The values mentioned are "the values of the traditional family, genuine human life, including religious life, not only material life but also spiritual life, the values of humanism and the diversity of the world."<sup>235</sup> Then, this position is specified as being conservative, and the reference to Berdyaev is made:

*Of course, this is a conservative position. But, in the words of Nikolai Berdyaev, the meaning of conservatism is not that it hinders forward and upward movement, but that it prevents backward and downward movement, towards chaotic darkness, a return to a primitive state.*<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> ТВМ. "Философская культура "первой волны" русской эмиграции в течение очень долгого времени отбрасывалась как белоэмигрантская. Это определяло отрицательное отношение в Советском Союзе, как ко всем философам русского зарубежья, так и ко всем их произведениям". Tarasov V.E. 2012. Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyaev o Russkom Filozofskom Soznanii / "Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyaev on Russian Philosophical Conscience." In: Aktual'nyye problemy gumanitarnykh i estestvennykh nauk / Actual problems of the humanities and natural sciences, No. 1 (36), p.69.

<sup>234</sup> Source: Putin, Vladimir. 2013. The Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of 12 December 2013, available online at: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_155646/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_155646/) (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> ТВМ. "Конечно, это консервативная позиция. Но, говоря словами Николая Бердяева, смысл консерватизма не в том, что он препятствует движению вперед и вверх, а в том, что он





This excerpt is very interesting since it names the position as conservatism, and deriving from this, a separate work can be made reflecting this view with what is meant by the notion of conservatism in different contexts. At the same time, this word raises new questions, similar to the questions raised by the use of the concept of “traditional values.” It is not clear to ‘which’ past the conservative idea in Russia refers, to which tradition, and how conservatism can coexist with the Soviet legacy. Then, in reference to Berdyaev, a powerful description is provided, with the words “chaotic darkness,” “primitive state.” The thought comes to mind: is this a description of liberalism? Does this picture draw liberalism as opposition to conservatism, and its image in Russia, or the image the “social engineers” want to disseminate? The philosophical ideas of Berdyaev here might be just employed for the purposes of justification as a reference to authority, yet, it is still interesting to follow the logic of the philosophical inscriptions of such a kind.

It is also curious that the same reference to Berdyaev is repeatedly made by Putin, now during the press conference in 2013. It is difficult to be certain but the reappearance may indicate the significance and relevance of the quote to Putin’s views. The context of the second appearance is the reflection on the so-called traditional values, with a remarkable comparison of the Soviet ideology and religion, which came as a reply to the question of the CNN correspondent Jill Dougherty who asked: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, I worked here in the late 1990s and early 2000s. And when I returned here, I noticed that much attention is now paid to religion and moral values. I don't remember that. I would like to know why it became so important to you? And why is criticism of Western values so important to you?”<sup>237</sup> The question of the journalist is very precise: the reference toward the “traditional values” in the Russian discourse is a rather new phenomenon. Putin replies on this question in such a way:

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препятствует движению назад и вниз, к хаотической тьме, возврату к первобытному состоянию”.

Source: Putin, Vladimir. 2013. The Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of 12 December 2013, available online at:

[http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_155646/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_155646/) (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>237</sup> ТВМ. “Владимир Владимирович, я здесь работала в конце 1990-х и в начале 2000-х. И, вернувшись сюда, я заметила, что большое внимание сейчас уделяется религии и нравственным ценностям. Я такого не помню. Хотела бы узнать, почему Вам это стало так важно? И почему Вам так важна критика западных ценностей?” Source: Press Conference of Vladimir Putin, 19 December 2013, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



*It is known that one ideology dominated in the Soviet Union. And no matter what we think about it, there were also quite understandable, essentially quasi-religious, values. The code of the builder of communism, if you read it, is a pitiful copy from the Bible: do not kill, do not steal, do not covet your neighbour's wife. In the code of the builder of communism, everything is there, only set out in primitive language and shortened terribly.<sup>238</sup>*

This bold statement uniting the ideology and religion and somehow equating them needs further discussion. The equation is itself questionable: while the moral foundations of religion may be reproduced by the civic discourse, the religious component is not as easy to be supplemented. It may exceed the paradigm of morality and be a significant feature of identity. The thought that comes to mind here: is this equation just an easy way to solve a difficult problem of 'which' past is more relevant to the current time and, even more important, the future, - the past of the Soviet Union or the Tsarist Empire, the atheism or the Orthodox Christianity? Yet, it seems that the question is more complex and such an equation is unlikely to solve a complex problem. It is understandable though that Putin underlines the need to have a certain moral 'code' in the society, with an example of the "code of the builder of communism":

*This code has already died in Bose, it does not exist. The new generation of Russian citizens, young people do not know at all what it is. And it can only be replaced by the very traditional values that you mentioned. Without these values, society degrades. Of course, we must return to them, understand their value and move forward on the basis of these values.<sup>239</sup>*

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<sup>238</sup> ТВМ. "Известно, что в Советском Союзе доминировала одна идеология. И как бы мы к ней ни относились, но там были и достаточно понятные, по сути квазирелигиозные, ценности. Кодекс строителя коммунизма, если почитаете, это жалкая копия с Библии: не убей, не укради, не пожелай жены ближнего своего. В кодексе строителя коммунизма всё есть, только изложено примитивным языком и сокращено до безобразия". Source: Press Conference of Vladimir Putin, 19 December 2013, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>239</sup> ТВМ. "Этот кодекс уже почил в бозе, его не существует. Новое поколение граждан России, молодые люди вообще не знают, что это такое. А ему на смену могут прийти только те самые традиционные ценности, о которых Вы сказали. Без этих ценностей общество деградирует. Безусловно, мы должны к ним вернуться, понять их ценность и на базе этих ценностей двигаться вперёд". Ibid.



If not returning to the question itself, this answer seems confusing: the “code” of the communism builder is outdated, so we need to switch to the older traditional values? What is the reason for this? Is it related to the idea that there should be some values uniting the people? And “the very traditional values” are supposed to have a certain authenticity that is needed for the identity shaping? Then, if we look at the question toward which the answer was given, the question refers to, the values journalist mentioned were formulated as “religion and moral values” and were contrasted to the “Western values.” While it is not specified what is meant under the umbrella of the moral values – especially if contrasting with the “Western values,” the religious aspect is clear. The excerpt may be even interpreted in such a way: the revival of the religious tradition is needed for the identity shaping purposes in the conditions of the absence of the ideology, and since the religious tradition had its deep roots in the past, this tradition can be brought back.

In this speech the reference to Berdyaev comes in such a way:

*This, of course, is a conservative approach, but let me remind you once again that Berdyaev said that conservatism is not something that prevents movement forward and upward, but something that prevents movement backward and downward. This, in my opinion, is a very correct formula. I propose this formula, in essence.<sup>240</sup>*

It seems that this excerpt contains a claim for conservatism in Russia. At the same time, the meaning is still blurred. The notion may be “not enough” to explain what is meant by Russian conservatism: if, for example, in the American context we may understand the meaning behind the context, in the Russian case this does not happen. It is possible, though, to think on the Russian conservatism in a less “practical” but more idea-related framework: then, we return to the thinkers such as Berdyaev and Ilyin and try to “apply” their ideas to contemporary Russia instead of attempting to find the examples of the conservative politics in Russian history. At the same time, the practical “application” of the ideas to the Russian ground is not a new phenomenon and may be seen worrisome.

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<sup>240</sup> “Это, конечно, консервативный подход, но напомним ещё раз слова Бердяева, что консерватизм – это не то, что мешает движению вперёд и вверх, а то, что препятствует движению назад и вниз. Вот это, на мой взгляд, очень верная формула. Эту формулу я и предлагаю, по сути”. Ibid.



The identity-shaping attempts made in such a way may simply never succeed: too much time has passed; the popularity of the conservative ideas should not be overestimated as well.

Then Putin specifies, and the accent is switched again:

*There is nothing unusual for us here. Russia is a country with a very ancient and deep culture. Not only focusing on the future but also relying on this tradition, on this culture, we can feel confident, confidently move forward and develop.*<sup>241</sup>

Here the emphasis is made on the cultural traditions, and this makes it even more difficult to interpret than conservatism: to which culture do we refer to? To which particular elements of the culture, to which traditions? If summarizing it further, the idea of the culture being a point of return illustrates the appeal to determine a rather authentic identity source and to shape the identity from “the above.”

Another occasion when Berdyaev was mentioned refers to 2014, the year of the Crimean events. On 24 November 2014, Putin gave an interview to the head of the Russian information agency TASS Andrey Vandenko.<sup>242</sup> Here the quote of Berdyaev was made by Vandenko and not by Putin. Yet, it is likely that the appearance of this philosopher in the discourse was not just an accident. The excerpt from this interview is also interesting since it concerns identity-related questions:

A. Vandenko: *Another quote. Nikolai Berdyaev: “A Russian person loves Russia, but he is not used to feel himself responsible in front of Russia.”*

Vladimir Putin: *This is a genius man, respected.*

A. Vandenko: *His words can be addressed to Russian bureaucrats and businessmen.*

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<sup>241</sup> ТВМ. “Это, конечно, консервативный подход, но напомним ещё раз слова Бердяева, что консерватизм – это не то, что мешает движению вперёд и вверх, а то, что препятствует движению назад и вниз. Вот это, на мой взгляд, очень верная формула. Эту формулу я и предлагаю, по сути. Ничего здесь необычного для нас нет. Россия – страна с очень древней глубокой культурой. Не только ориентируясь на будущее, но и опираясь на эту традицию, на эту культуру, мы можем чувствовать себя уверенно, уверенно идти вперёд и развиваться”. Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> The English version of the media: may be accessed at <https://tass.com/>.



Vladimir Putin: *There is no such ethnicity – an official and a businessman, these are types of activities. And the mentality of the people, of course ...*

A. Vandenko: *The lord will come, the lord will judge us.*<sup>243</sup>

Here in the original Vandenko speaks about *russskiy* and not *rossiyskiy*: he refers to Berdyaev's quote that contains the word meaning ethnicity. At the same time, from the context we may understand that Berdyaev's usage of this word goes beyond the meaning of ethnicity, and even does not emphasize ethnicity as such but certain spiritual and cultural characteristics of being Russian. It is very interesting that on par with Berdyaev's thought appearing in the political discourse, the word *russskiy*, as it was outlined in the first chapter, is used more often, with the same "added" meaning referring not even to ethnicity but the spiritual aspects of the nation.

This is not an ultimate philosophy and identity-related point made in this interview. For example, Putin explains his definition of patriotism:

*(...) but you brought a quote from Berdyaev, and I will allow myself to be insolent and to argue with the classic. I repeat again: the simpler and closer to the earth is the person, the more responsibility he has for his homeland. I will even say why. He has no other homeland, he will not take a plane, a train, or a horse and will not leave, he will not roll away from here. He knows that he will stay here on this earth, there will be his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He must take care of them. If he doesn't, nobody will. This is the basis of statehood and the patriotism of an ordinary Russian person. Yes, and a person of any ethnicity living here.*<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> ТВМ. In original: "А.Ванденко: Еще цитата. Николай Бердяев: "Русский человек любит Россию, но не привык чувствовать себя ответственным перед Россией". В.Путин: Это гениальный человек, уважаемый. А.Ванденко: Его слова можно адресовать русским чиновникам и бизнесменам. В.Путин: Не существует такой национальности – чиновник и бизнесмен, это виды деятельности. А ментальность народа, она, конечно... А.Ванденко: Приедет барин, барин нас рассудит". Source: Vladimir Putin's interview to the journalist of the Russian news agency TASS Andrei Vandenko, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47054> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>244</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Вы привели цитату из Бердяева, и я позволю себе набраться дерзости и поспорить с классиком. Повторю еще раз: чем человек проще и ближе к земле, тем больше у него ответственности за Родину. Скажу даже почему. У него другой Родины нет, он не сядет в самолет, в поезд либо на лошадь и не уедет, не отвалит отсюда. Он знает, что останется жить здесь, на этой



Here in the original Putin himself does the same: says *russskiy* instead of *rossiyskiy*, adding then “and a person of any ethnicity living here.” This is a good illustration of the thesis above on the new identity-related meaning that *russskiy* is getting, the meaning exceeding ethnicity yet displacing the usage of *rossiyskiy*. If thinking in a practical way, Putin could use the well-established neutral *rossiyskiy*, causing no questions from the Russians of any ethnicity. Instead, he chooses *russskiy* in a very distinctive positive context, with the key words such as *homeland*, *responsibility*, *care* mentioned. Using *russskiy* instead of *rossiyskiy* in such a positive context, outlining the identity-related features, is only reasonable if the advantages of this use outweigh the risks. If such a choice was made, it seems that the use of *russskiy* with its new meaning assigned, outweigh the risks. Hence, the meaning assigned to *russskiy* seems important for the identity-shaping purposes, and here the works of Berdyaev may be sources for this identity-related interpretation. The reference to the philosopher’s authority also helps to “share” the responsibility, if the idea is met with critique.

Putin’s statement in general is clear, with the best qualities attributed to the “simple,” and by the best patriotism is meant. Then, if continuing this logic, the “complex” turns up to be associated with something negative: over-complexity, over-thinking, less “patriotic” and hence probably less reliable. Here serious questions may arise: how “simple” relates to such characteristics as the level of education or how people’s decision to emigrate is interpreted in this paradigm. This attribution may be an accident, a rhetoric tool, or may be purposeful. In any case, it may create negative associations. When the best qualities are assigned to the “simple,” the “complex” may be othered and alienated. With the elements of the Russian past, such as the Soviet “Philosopher’s ship,” on which, for instance, both Berdyaev and Ilyin were forced to leave the Soviet Union, the negative associations may arise with such a glorification of the “simple.”<sup>245</sup>

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земле, тут будут его дети, внуки и правнуки. Он должен о них позаботиться. Если сам не сделает, никто не сделает. В этом основа государственности и патриотизма рядового русского человека. Да и человека любой национальности, живущего здесь”. Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Under the well-established expression the “Philosopher’s Ship” (*filosofskiy parokhod* in Russian) two ships are meant, on which the Russian thinkers were forcefully made to leave the Soviet Union. The “Philosopher’s Ship” was an idea of Vladimir Lenin, with events taking place in 1922-1923. Among the passengers were Nikolay Berdyaev and Ivan Ilyin. See, for example: Gregory, Paul R. 2009. The Ship of





Another very interesting point – by its essence, the discourse on cosmopolitanism and Russian identity – is characterized by duality. At first, Putin denies the applicability of cosmopolitanism to the Russian ground:

A. Vandenko: *You are talking about a simple person as if separating the elite ...*

Vladimir Putin: *No, no, I said: the average person has even more of this, but in principle, it's about the general mentality of the Russian people. Yes, those with billions feel themselves to be citizens of the world. They are especially free if the money is placed offshore. Drove abroad and sit there, feeling good ...*

A. Vandenko: *Is it bad?*

Vladimir Putin: *I think so. Of course, it's bad. Torn from the roots, a person eventually begins to regret it. There is nothing dearer than your land, friends, relatives, the culture of the people in which you grew up.*<sup>246</sup>

Then, cosmopolitanism is drawn as a characteristic of elites but not intellectual or cultural, having a demanded and applicable worldwide skill, but financial. In this sense, cosmopolitanism is viewed as something for people with more than sufficient financial means. The discourse around the roots is by its essence an identity discourse. The cosmopolitan stand here is denied without any connection to obstacles, financial and other means: the statement provided is universalized, it does not indicate the difference in circumstances as a factor. Moreover, the previous point on the “simple” equal to patriotic, denotes the cosmopolitan as the other, an alien. This negative vision may overlap with the old Soviet negative view on cosmopolitanism that was elaborated in the first chapter.

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Philosophers: How the Early USSR Dealt with Dissident Intellectuals. In: *The Independent Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 485-492.

<sup>246</sup> ТВМ. In original:

А.Ванденко: Вы говорите о простом человеке, как бы отделяя элиту...

В.Путин: Нет-нет, я сказал: у рядового человека этого еще больше, но в принципе речь об общей ментальности русских людей. Да, те, у кого миллиарды, ощущают себя гражданами мира. Особенно им свободно, если деньги размещены в офшорах. Укатили за границу и сидят там, чувствуют себя хорошо...

А.Ванденко: Это плохо?

В.Путин: Считаю, да. Конечно, плохо. Оторванный от корней человек в конце концов начинает об этом жалеть. Нет ничего роднее, чем твоя земля, друзья, близкие, культура народа, в которой ты вырос. Ibid.



In that sense, it should be seen as rooted in the Russian discourse, shaped from the “above” in the past and consequently may be viewed as “authentic.” The reinforcement of such an understanding in the contemporary discourse may indicate a desire to alienate the “cosmopolitan” once more and by these means to emphasize the distinction of “our” and “not our,” similar and different, Russian or Western.

Another episode where Berdyaev’s legacy was brought up was during the ceremony of the Russian state awards provided to the foreign citizens on 4 November 2015. There president Putin said:

*(...) the outstanding Russian thinker Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyaev believed that Russia is the Great East-West, that it is a whole big world. As such, he spoke about the mission of Russia to be a strong, independent, country that upholds truth and justice, seeks to bring harmony and the spirit of partnership in relations between states, between people of different traditions and different cultures.*<sup>247</sup>

This excerpt provides the idea on the Russian special “mission,” messianism, with the “key” words such as “truth,” “justice,” “harmony.” This reference to Berdyaev has an overall positive meaning – “partnership,” “relations between states,” “people of different traditions and different cultures.” Here we do not see the elements of alienation and othering, just the opposite. At the same time, the disturbing element of the discourse is the idea of the “mission” itself: in the Russian history, the abstract ideas already had been turned into practice, and while Berdyaev’s writings are curious, the reflections on socialism and communism also had their theoretical and imaginative merits. The risky part is also in the mission of upholding “truth and justice”: for example, such an idea may be integrated into the political discourse and play a role of the moral justification of the participation in different conflicts around the world or other political actions. Does the political system in Russia need such justifications? Apparently yes, since the turn to

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<sup>247</sup> ТВМ. “Так, выдающийся русский мыслитель Николай Александрович Бердяев считал, что Россия есть Великий Восток-Запад, она есть целый огромный мир. По большому счету он говорил о миссии России быть сильной, самостоятельной, страной, которая отстаивает правду и справедливость, стремится привнести гармонию и дух партнерства в отношения между государствами, между людьми разных традиций и разных культур”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Ceremony of the State awards provided to foreign citizens, from 4 November 2015, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50627> (accessed on 15 September 2019).



philosophy itself is the search for the authority capable to provide a sound explanation, projection, justification. In a situation when the justification is not needed, there would be no attempt for incorporating the philosophical and moral content into the political discourse. In this sense, it is difficult to say that the public opinion does not matter in Russia: at least in the identity-related aspects, the attempts are made to determine and then reinforce the meanings chosen inside the philosophical discourse.

Putin continued:

*Understanding this historical role is the basis of the self-consciousness of the people of Russia and in many respects determines the ideals, views, beliefs of the citizens of the country, determines our present, and even more so, our future.*<sup>248</sup>

The place and the occasion create curious conditions where the image of Russia is provided to the ‘foreign’ audience. In this sense, metaphysical Russia is built, and Putin chooses to describe it through the language of Berdyaev. This choice itself is interesting and suggest to go deeper into Berdyaev’s work. Enormously interesting is the spatial image of Russia provided as “the Great East-West.”

The spatial dimension enriched by meanings, including identity-based ones, may be viewed through the standpoint of the theoretical debate on space and place and their presence in the discourse. The Great East-West as a Russian space, that is or is not characterized by the homogenous identity – is it space by its definition? Augé defines an anthropological place as a “concrete and symbolic construction of space, which could not of itself allow for the vicissitudes and contradictions of social life, but which serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position.”<sup>249</sup> From the standpoint of symbolism, images, and imaginary, the “Great East-West” be classified as a place, since it is filled with images and is itself in a way a consequence of the imagination process. Continuing, Augé describes a place as a principle of meaning for the people who live in it. This point is very important: “meaning” is a feature of the language of recognition that belongs to

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<sup>248</sup> ТВМ. “Понимание этой исторической роли – в основе самосознания народа России и во многом определяет идеалы, взгляды, убеждения граждан страны, определяет наше настоящее и ещё в большей степени наше будущее”. Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> See: Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. New York: Verso, p.51.



identity discourse. According to Taylor, recognition is possible only in interaction with the “significant others,” this does not contradict also with Bakhtinian stand declaring the crucial importance of dialogue for moving on from being fundamentally incomplete.<sup>250</sup>

Then, these are arguments explaining the “East-West” as an anthropological place. But there is a dialectics though: making a distinction between places and non-places, Augé writes that if a place “can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity”, space that cannot be described by these characteristics will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places. At this point, “meaning” may be related to the non-places too, and the difference lays exactly in the identity-related line: to solve the issue of the place/non-place nature of the “great East-West,” we have to understand in which type of relationship we find ourselves while dealing with it – is it an identity-shaping dialogue with “significant others,” just realized through the special means, or a process of othering in which we may be alienated ourselves, or this relation does not have an identity nature. Answering these questions will lead to a reasonable anthropological description of the nature of this entity. Working on the issue, several preliminary questions arise, one of them is a definition of the “great East-West.” If it is possible to agree this term relates to the *area* broader narrative, then this area is noticeably filled with information. Geometrically approaching, an area should have its limits, which can be stricter or vaguer but are needed for giving its definition. The East-West in this respect does not give a feeling of limits, borders, is in a way unlimited, being on the crossroad. Nevertheless, if approached from the perspective of anthropology, this space may be described and categorized. Among theorists reflecting on space from the anthropological point of view, it is possible to outline Bollnow, Norberg-Schultz, Tuan, and contemporary philosophers such as Augé.<sup>251</sup> There is also a corpus of works that comprises distinctive intellectual theory and – partly architectural – phenomenology that discusses ideas of

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<sup>250</sup> See: Taylor, Charles. 1992. *The Politics of Recognition*. An essay, available online at: [http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics\\_of\\_Recognition.pdf](http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics_of_Recognition.pdf) (accessed on 20 July 2020).

<sup>251</sup> See: Bollnow, Otto Friedrich. 2011. *Human Space*. London: Hyphen Press; Norberg-Schulz C. 1979. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli; Tuan, Yi.-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001.



place. Examples here can be Seamon, Casey, Pallasmaa, or classical texts dealing with the imaginary and oneiric dimensions of space like Bachelard's.<sup>252</sup>

Spaces and places are also theorized from the position of geography: Keith and Pile come up with spatial metaphors and characteristics widely used, such as position, location, mapping, center-margin, impossible space, the city.<sup>253</sup> In such studies surprisingly borders between physical and abstract are becoming less and less visible. "It is rarely clear – they write – whether the space invoked is "real," "imaginary," "symbolic," a "metaphor-concept" or some relationship between them or something else entirely."<sup>254</sup> Boundaries of physical and imaginary, tangible and intangible are dynamic, they are not fixed or static. Concepts from traditional architecture as the area of knowledge enter the field of geography and imaginary geography. The space-place relation and its identity dimension in application to Russia may also be viewed through the Huntington's lens.<sup>255</sup> A review of Russian writing made above reflects a very complement to Huntington's idea of Russia being a territory, space, where the collision of civilizations is happening. The idea of identity implies the idea of space, and then a question of borders or limits is also brought up.

As it was elaborated in the excerpts above, Berdyaev is brought into the discourse either by Vladimir Putin himself, either by people who hold conversations with him, for example, by the interviewers. There are also curious examples when Berdyaev's figure and his ideas also appear in the Western discourse when the attempts to reflect on Russia are made. These views, views from "the other" side, are also important for the elaboration

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<sup>252</sup> See: Seamon, David. 1979/2016. *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*. New York: Routledge Revivals. Seamon, David, and Robert Mugerauer (eds.) 1986. *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Casey, Edward S. 1998. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Holl, Steven, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Perez-Gomez. 2007. *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*. San Francisco: William Stout Publishers. Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2005. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Boston: Beacon Press. Bachelard, Gaston. 2000. *The Dialectic of Duration*. Manchester: Clinamen Press.

<sup>253</sup> Keith, Michael, and Steven Pile (eds.) 1993. *Place and the Politics of Identity*. New York: Routledge, p.1.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>255</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. The Clash of Civilizations? In: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49.



of the Russian identity: as it was discussed in the first chapter, the image of the European and broader, Western, “other” was historically important for Russia’s self-understanding and self-definition, and the opinions and imaginings of the West on Russia were a significant matter for guesses and reflections. The media discourse being able to reach a wider and more diverse audience than the academic works is significant here as it may impact the views on Russia in the broader public.

“If the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave us Russian literature and arts, and the 20<sup>th</sup> science and a fatally flawed ideology of totalitarian socialism, 21<sup>st</sup> century Russia has little to offer beyond subversion of Western democracies and revanchist forays along its borders. Stuck between apocalypse and revolution, in the words of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, fragile Russia is still searching for a sense of national identity,” writes professor of Loyola University Michael Khodarkovsky in the opinion piece for *The New York Times*.<sup>256</sup> The “fragile Russia” is an interesting and unexpected collocation brought here. With all of the multiple references to strength and independence, the “fragility” characteristic may even be interpreted as an insult, if taking the geopolitical pro-governmental stand. At the same time, the word may have explanatory power in the case of Russia, if we assume that all of the geopolitical actions and the discourse surrounding them with its identity-related claims are hiding this internal “fragility.” Being fragile is not necessarily a negative thing, although “fragility” is somehow opposite to the resilience, the ability to encounter the challenge and nevertheless develop. Fragility may bring positive characteristics into the discourse, it may imply sensitiveness, value pluralism, rejection of totality – that are not negative characteristics for the post-totalitarian and post-absolutist Russia. From this perspective, the word is chosen with sensibility. It is also interesting that while reflecting on the issue “who are we,” who are Russians, the author finds the reference to Berdyaev relevant to describe contemporary Russia.

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<sup>256</sup> Khodarkovsky, Michael. 2017. *Russia’s Age-Old Question: Who Are We?* In: *The New York Times*, from 18 May 2017, available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/18/opinion/russia-putin-national-identity.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer> (accessed on 20 June 2019).





## Konstantin Leontiev and Lev Gumilev

While Ilyin and Berdyaev, both passengers of the “Philosophers’ ship,” appear in Vladimir Putin’s discourse repetitively and throw-out the years, the thought of other philosophers such as Konstantin Leontiev and Lev Gumilev, is also brought to the public. Konstantin Leontiev was born in 1831 and died in 1891, so in contrast with Ilyin and Berdyaev, he did not encounter the Russian revolution. His views may be summarized as conservative: Leontiev despised liberalism, he also had a strong religious ground. “A little believer at the beginning of his life, poisoned by the influences of his era, he approached Christianity as an aesthetician, he first felt its beauty, and then its deep vital and mystical meaning,” wrote Govorukha-Otrok in the obituary for Leontiev.<sup>257</sup> In the foreword to Leontiev’s collected works, Belov writes: “Four decades before the *Decline of Europe* by O. Spengler, Leontiev recorded ‘the accumulation of fatigue,’ ‘decrepitude in everything,’ the extinction of the vital energy of European states and their citizens. He was one of the first to see that Europe renounces its ‘noble’ past and begins to hate its own thousand-year-old culture; and this hatred being transmitted to Russia terrified him.”<sup>258</sup> Spirituality, the critique of Europe and liberalism, the depiction of the “declining” Europe, these are shared characteristics of philosophers Putin refers to.

“One thing is clear: Europe in the 19th century stepped over the fatal 1000 years of state life (...) What have the European states done over themselves, crossing the fatal 1000th anniversary? They have all spoiled in themselves, more or less in particular, the state form that they developed during the period of blossoming complexity,” is the example of

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<sup>257</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Мало верующий человек в начале жизни, отравленный веяниями своей эпохи, он подошел к христианству как эстетик, он сперва почувствовал его красоту, а потом уже его глубокое жизненное и мистическое значение”. Source: Govorukha-Otrok, Yuriy. 2015. A few words on the death of K.N. Leontiev / Несколько слов по поводу кончины К.Н. Леонтьева. In: *Konstantin Leontiev: pro et contra* / “Константин Леонтьев: pro et contra”, Saint Petersburg: RHGA, p. 17.

<sup>258</sup> ТВМ. “За четыре десятилетия до “Заката Европы” О. Шпенглера К.Н. Леонтьев зафиксировал “накопление усталости”, “дряхлости во всем”, угасание жизненной энергии европейских государств и их граждан. Одним из первых он узрел, что Европа отрекается от своего “благородного” прошлого и начинает ненавидеть собственную тысячелетнюю культуру; и эта ненависть, передающаяся России, страшила его”. Source: Belov, A. 2010. Foreword. In: Leontiev, Konstantin. *Slavyanofil’stvo i gryadushchiye sud’by Rossii / Slavophilism and the Coming Fates of Russia*. Moscow: Institut russkoy tsivilizatsii, p.13.



Leontiev's thought on the fates of Europe.<sup>259</sup> The explanation he provides to this thesis is complex: "They are all gradually changed by the system of abstract, outside the personal subjective pleasure of the established ideas, which developed in them in the morphological era and ascended over them like a banner, like a great guiding shadow."<sup>260</sup> It seems that the change is the characteristic indicating the further decline of Europe, the change, and "the mix." His writing is emotional and not easy, sometimes turning to conclusions leaving the arguments behind, as it is here: "Now let's see if Europe itself would confirm our opinion through the words of its most famous writers. All these writers in different ways confirm our opinion; everyone agrees that Europe is in reality mixing and, ideally, simplifying."<sup>261</sup> A common characteristic of thought of philosophers Putin chooses, and the common identity-related historical feature of the Russian philosophical and literary discourse, is the accent on Europe, the dedication to describe Europe, to reason and predict it, and in this way to define Russia in this narrated negotiation.

Leontiev's views on liberalism may be summarized by one of the chapters in Leontiev's writing that is called *Liberalism as the disruption of Christian culture*, where he writes: "Everything that is creative, everything that protects what is once created by the history of the people, has a character that is more or less isolating, distinctive, opposing one nation to another... Everything liberal is colourless, generally destructive, meaningless in the sense that it is equally possible everywhere."<sup>262</sup> Liberalism is described as a characteristic of commonality, the distinctiveness that is opposing it is described in an identity-related way, with the definition through the difference rather than similarity. The

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<sup>259</sup> ТВМ. "Ясно одно: Европа в XIX веке переступила за роковые 1000 лет государственной жизни. (...) Что же сделали над собою европейские государства, переступая за роковое 1000-летие? Они все испортили у себя более или менее в частностях ту государственную форму, которая выработалась у них в период цветущей сложности". Ibid, pp. 142-143.

<sup>260</sup> ТВМ. "Они все постепенно изменили той системе отвлеченных, вне личного субъективного удовольствия постановленных идей, которые выработались у них в эпоху морфологическую и вознеслись над ними как знамя, как великая руководящая тень". Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>261</sup> ТВМ. "Теперь посмотрим, не подтвердит ли наше мнение сама Европа устами самых знаменитых своих писателей. Все эти писатели на разные лады подтверждают наше мнение; все согласны в том, что Европа смешивается в действительности и упрощается в идеале". Ibid, p. 198.

<sup>262</sup> ТВМ. "Все созидательное, все охраняющее то, что раз создано историей народа, имеет характер более или менее обособляющий, отличительный, противопологающий одну нацию другим... Все либеральное — бесцветно, общеразрушительно, бессодержательно в том смысле, что оно одинаково возможно везде". Ibid, p.25.



Orthodox Christianity is important for Leontiev but also the autocracy: “God save the majority of Russians to reach what, step by step, many French have already reached, that is, to the habit of serving every France and every France to love ... Why do we need Russia not autocratic and not Orthodox?”<sup>263</sup> This reflection is illuminating since the praise for autocracy is not common in the Russian philosophical and literary discourse. Autocracy viewed in a positive light, as a tradition and not as an unfortunate circumstance – this idea has a potential to be referred to, as a possible philosophical justification of the further necessity of the personified regime for Russia.

Vladimir Putin quoted Leontiev in the speech made during the Valdai forum gathering the participants from around the world:

*Russia, as the philosopher Konstantin Leontiev figuratively said, has always developed as a “blossoming complexity,” as a state-civilization, held together by the Russian people, the Russian language, Russian culture, the Russian Orthodox Church and other traditional religions of Russia.*<sup>264</sup>

The “Russian” here is *russkiy* and not *rossiyskiy*, with the meaning exceeding the meaning of ethnicity, aiming to describe the spirituality. The “state-civilization” notion coming from the Leontiev’s thought is somehow resembling with Berdyaev’s messianism: it reveals the special role, the unique status, and outlines the reason for Russian to be different from the other states. The state-civilization implies self-sufficiency: being a civilization, you may not need to develop strong connections with other states, you may be separate and have access to everything inside the framework of “your own” civilization. Yet, this “special status” may cause pride, the feeling of superiority toward the other states, a situation of self-alienation and othering, and eventually – separation and loneliness.

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<sup>263</sup> “Избави Боже большинству русских дойти до того, до чего, шаг за шагом, дошли уже многие французы, т. е. до привычки служить всякой Франции и всякую Францию любить... На что нам Россия не самодержавная и не православная?” Ibid, p.708.

<sup>264</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Россия, как образно говорил философ Константин Леонтьев, всегда развивалась как “цветущая сложность”, как государство-цивилизация, скреплённая русским народом, русским языком, русской культурой, Русской православной церковью и другими традиционными религиями России”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 19 September 2013, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



*It is from the model of the state-civilization that the peculiarities of our state structure follow. It has always sought to flexibly take into account the national and religious specifics of certain territories, ensuring diversity in unity. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, other religions are an integral part of the identity and historical heritage of Russia in the real life of its citizens. The main task of the state, enshrined in the Constitution, is to ensure equal rights for representatives of traditional religions and atheists, the right to freedom of conscience for all citizens of the country.<sup>265</sup>*

In this excerpt, as it happened in the excerpts analysed above, the accent on *rusский* is “softened” by the immediate emphasis on diversity in Russia, on a basis of ethnicity and religion. The unity in diversity is outlined as a motto, as a characteristic of the country that should maintain itself in any possible conditions. “Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, other religions are an integral part of the identity (...) of Russia in the real life of its citizens” is a very interesting statement. It underlines the role of the religious aspects, while for Russia with its continuous history of the Soviet atheism, the religion is not the obvious identity-related choice. Even on a personal level, in the discourse of Putin the authenticity of the religious claims may be challenged, doubted, since Putin himself was also influenced by the Soviet KGB system where he worked, and by the atheist society he was raised in. Although the next sentence brings plurality on the issue of religion and atheism, where Putin stresses the importance “to ensure equal rights for representatives of traditional religions and atheists,” the impression this excerpt is giving is that the benefits of religion for the identity-shaping outweigh the doubts, from the position of the “above.”

*However, identification exclusively through ethnos, religion in the largest state with a multi-ethnic composition of the population is certainly impossible. The*

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<sup>265</sup> “Именно из модели государства-цивилизации вытекают особенности нашего государственного устройства. Оно всегда стремилось гибко учитывать национальную, религиозную специфику тех или иных территорий, обеспечивая многообразие в единстве. Христианство, ислам, буддизм, иудаизм, другие религии – неотъемлемая часть идентичности и исторического наследия России в настоящей жизни её граждан. Главная задача государства, закреплённая в Конституции, – обеспечение равных прав для представителей традиционных религий и атеистов, права на свободу совести для всех граждан страны”. Ibid.



*formation of a civic identity on the basis of common values, patriotic consciousness, civic responsibility and solidarity, respect for the law, involvement in the fate of the Motherland without losing contact with their ethnic, religious roots is a necessary condition for maintaining the unity of the country. How politically, ideologically, conceptually the ideology of national development will be framed - a subject for broad discussions, including with your participation, dear colleagues.*<sup>266</sup>

This is an extremely interesting continuation. Looking throughout this speech, it seems that Putin's reasoning is directed not to the audience but to himself as if he was reflecting on the preferable ways and aspects of shaping the national identity. The dualities, the dilemmas are outlined here: the strength of religion as a possible identity source but also the religious plurality and the "authentic" roots of atheism; the strength of common ethnicity but the danger of overemphasizing the ethnicity in the multi-ethnic country. This negotiation between the possible sources and their advantages and disadvantages is seen in the discourse, with the conclusion, whether preliminary or not, to shape a so-called "civic identity" based on the sources different from the religious or ethnic. The basis for this "civic identity" is named as "common values," "patriotic consciousness," "civic responsibility and solidarity," and "respect for the law." Yet, this list lacks the precise and strong identity characteristics: the "common values" is quite a broad notion, it is not specified which values are more important than the others, which values may hold the construction of identity, for it to be distinct from the other identities. The other elements in the list lack a specified description as well, they look like neutral substitutes for the possibly stronger but more risky sources. The end of this excerpt is also interesting: speaking about the identity consensus, the phrase "ideology of national development" is used instead. This indicates that the national identity is seen as something that can be

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<sup>266</sup> ТВМ. "Однако идентификация исключительно через этнос, религию в крупнейшем государстве с полиэтничным составом населения, безусловно, невозможна. Формирование именно гражданской идентичности на основе общих ценностей, патриотического сознания, гражданской ответственности и солидарности, уважения к закону, сопричастности к судьбе Родины без потери связи со своими этническими, религиозными корнями – необходимое условие сохранения единства страны. Как политически, идейно, концептуально будет оформлена идеология национального развития – предмет для широких дискуссий, в том числе и с вашим участием, уважаемые коллеги". Ibid.



shaped from “the above.” The theory on identity contradicts with the idea that the final consensus on the identity is even possible since identity is viewed as a temporary “result” of an open-ended process. The word ideology may seem disturbing in this context, as it reminds the role that ideology played in the Soviet Union. However, it does not seem that the Russian leadership assumes that the national identity may be easily influenced by the ideology. The whole excerpt elaborating the issue reflects the unsolved dilemma, the search for the “authentic,” rooted sources, and the understanding of the risks involved.

Another philosopher Putin quoted is Lev Gumilev. Gumilev born in 1912, was the son of the great Russian poets Anna Akhmatova and Nikolay Gumilev. His father died of hardship in the Soviet labour camp, and Lev Gumilev spent his time under arrests and in the labour camps as well. The theory he is known the most in Russia is a theory of passionarity.<sup>267</sup>

In 2018, Vladimir Putin’s quoted Gumilev in the speech made during the celebrations marking the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia. He said:

*As the thinker and philosopher Lev Gumilev noted, “baptism gave our ancestors the highest freedom – the freedom to choose between good and evil, and the victory of Orthodoxy gave Russia a thousand-year history.”<sup>268</sup>*

This is a strong quote, and although Gumilev represents the Soviet epoch and the thought developed in the Soviet Union, it relates strongly to the religious traditions and gives an identity appeal. It is interesting that instead of the Russian religious philosophers Putin chooses Gumilev’s thought to illustrate the importance of Orthodox Christianity. It may be a purposeful reference to build the bridge between the Soviet atheism and the religious life, providing an idea of the “immortal” hidden life of the Orthodox Christianity, presenting it as nevertheless remaining even in the conditions of persecution.

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<sup>267</sup> See, for example: Shnirelman, Viktor, and Sergei Panarin. 2001. Lev Gumilev: His Pretensions as Founder of Ethnology and his Eurasian Theories. In: *Inner Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-18.

<sup>268</sup> ТВМ. “Как отметил мыслитель и философ Лев Гумилёв, “крещение дало нашим предкам высшую свободу – свободу выбора между добром и злом, а победа православия подарила Руси тысячелетнюю историю”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech at the Celebrations Marking the 1030th Anniversary of the Baptism of Russia, 28 July 2018, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58123> (accessed on 15 July 2020).





*The peoples who accepted Christian truths as their own, as their native, were able to reach unprecedented heights in politics, art, literature, in the sciences and economic activity, received a colossal experience of unity, which more than once saved, strengthened and supported our Motherland at the most severe historical changes.*

*This greatest spiritual heritage is timeless. Our sacred duty is to preserve and increase it for future generations.<sup>269</sup>*

The philosophers Putin refers to, the thinkers who emphasized the religious identity of Russia, may represent this part of the discourse where the achievements, the “heights,” are mentioned. The “timeless” adjective and the “heritage” noun are providing are shaping the idea of continuity of the Russian religious identity, with the temporary “interruption” during the Soviet period, and maybe not even an interruption since the prohibition in the public space may have not reached the personal space and did not disrupt the deep internal spirituality. This way of reasoning allows to “continue” the religious traditions as if the decades of atheism have not deeply impacted the nation. The authorities brought from the Soviet past with the religious ideas into the discourse are making this way of reasoning convincing.

On another occasion, in 2012, Putin quoted Gumilev during the Annual Message to the Federal Assembly. First, Putin outlined his vision of the global processes, and then he referred to the theory of passionarity Gumilev is known for:

*Global development is becoming more and more uneven. The soil is ripening for new conflicts of an economic, geopolitical, and ethnic character. Competition for resources is increasing. And I want to assure you, dear colleagues, and emphasize: not only for metals, oil and gas but above all for human resources, for intelligence. Who will get ahead and who will remain an outsider and will*

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<sup>269</sup> ТВМ. “Народы, принявшие христианские истины как свои, как родные, смогли достичь небывалых высот в политике, искусстве, литературе, в науках и хозяйственной деятельности, получили колоссальный опыт единения, который не один раз спасал, укреплял и поддерживал на самых суровых исторических переломах нашу Родину. Это величайшее духовное наследие неподвластно времени. Наш священный долг – сохранять и приумножать его для будущих поколений”. Ibid.



*inevitably lose their independence will depend not only on the economic potential, but above all on the will of each nation, on its internal energy; as Lev Gumilev said, from passionarity, from the ability to move forward and to change.*<sup>270</sup>

“Get ahead” and “remain an outsider,” two poles are outlined as if it was nothing in-between, the “losing independence” as the greatest fear is in this line, as a consequence of “remaining an outsider.” The thinking elaborated here is the thinking in the categories of “losers” and “winners,” reminding a competition for the influence in the world during the Cold war. The extremes, the win-or-lose conception of the world makes it problematic to focus on the internal development and well-being of the nation, the need to constantly re-evaluate Russia’s position in the world, to compare it with the other global players in the terms of win-or-lose may be exhausting.

The foreword to the Gumilev’s work summarizes the passionarity theory: “The link between passionarity and behaviour is very simple. Usually, people, like living organisms, have as much energy as is necessary to sustain life. If the human body is able to ‘absorb’ energy from the environment more than necessary, then the person forms relationships with other people and connections that allow you to apply this energy in any of the chosen directions.”<sup>271</sup> Then, from a personal level the reasoning goes to the broader collective level: “It is also possible to create a new religious system or scientific theory, and to build a pyramid or the Eiffel Tower, etc.”<sup>272</sup> The passionarity theory is

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<sup>270</sup> ТВМ. “Глобальное развитие становится всё более неравномерным. Вызревает почва для новых конфликтов экономического, геополитического, этнического характера. Ужесточается конкуренция за ресурсы. Причём хочу вас заверить, уважаемые коллеги, и подчеркнуть: не только за металлы, нефть и газ, а прежде всего за человеческие ресурсы, за интеллект. Кто вырвется вперёд, а кто останется аутсайдером и неизбежно потеряет свою самостоятельность, будет зависеть не только от экономического потенциала, но прежде всего от воли каждой нации, от её внутренней энергии; как говорил Лев Гумилёв, от пассионарности, от способности к движению вперёд и к переменам”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Annual Message to the Federal Assembly, 12 December 2012, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>271</sup> ТВМ. “Механизм связи между пассионарностью и поведением очень прост. Обычно у людей, как у живых организмов, энергии столько, сколько необходимо для поддержания жизни. Если же организм человека способен “вобрать” энергии из окружающей среды больше, чем необходимо, то человек формирует отношения с другими людьми и связи, которые позволяют применить эту энергию в любом из выбранных направлений”. Source: Gumilev, Lev. 1998. *Ot Rusi do Rossii* (“From Rus’ to Russia”). Moscow: Svarog, p. 6.

<sup>272</sup> ТВМ. “Возможно и создание новой религиозной системы или научной теории, и строительство пирамиды или Эйфелевой башни и т.д.” Ibid.



personalistic, it reasons the importance of a certain kind of people, personalities with a particular common characteristic distinguishing them from the crowd. In this theory, the actions of these personalities may lead to the wide-scale change: “At the same time, passionaries act not only as direct performers, but also as organizers. By investing their excess energy in organizing and managing their fellow tribesmen at all levels of the social hierarchy, they, albeit with difficulty, develop new stereotypes of behaviour, impose them on everyone else and thus create a new ethnic system, a new ethnos visible to history.”<sup>273</sup>

This vivid theory brought into the Putin’s discourse may also have a purpose in the current circumstances: being personalistic and persona-driven, it suggests the enormous role that people with characteristics of passionarity may play in the history. It distinguishes the “special” group of people, who may accomplish a bigger task. In a way, it may be employed as a justification of the personalist regime.

### Concluding Remarks

In the essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Isaiah Berlin wrote: “Over a hundred years ago, the German poet Heine warned the French not to underestimate the power of ideas: philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor's study could destroy a civilization.”<sup>274</sup> The Soviet Union had its Marxism-Leninism but It is important to remember that the socialist and communist ideas had their roots in the European discourse, while the Soviet Union became a ground for the experiment, the application of the abstract ideas in reality. Why did this happen and is it possible that the “ideas” will shape the future of Russia once again, is a matter of another discussion. In the day-to-day life of the Soviet man, the ideology substituted the ideas on the practical matters. In contemporary Russia, impacted by the globalization, international travelling, the Internet,

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<sup>273</sup> ТВМ. “При этом пассионарии выступают не только как непосредственные исполнители, но и как организаторы. Вкладывая свою избыточную энергию в организацию и управление соплеменниками на всех уровнях социальной иерархии, они, хотя и с трудом, вырабатывают новые стереотипы поведения, навязывают их всем остальным и создают таким образом новую этническую систему, новый этнос, видимый для истории”. Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Berlin, Isaiah. *Two Concepts of Liberty*. In: *Four Essays On Liberty*, p.1, available online: [http://cactus.dixie.edu/green/B\\_Readings/1\\_Berlin%20Two%20Concpets%20of%20Liberty.pdf](http://cactus.dixie.edu/green/B_Readings/1_Berlin%20Two%20Concpets%20of%20Liberty.pdf) (accessed on 24 August 2019).



it is difficult to imagine the successful re-appearance of the “authentic” ideology. Putin himself admits this: “We also understand that identity, a national idea cannot be imposed from above, cannot be built on the basis of an ideological monopoly. Such a structure is unstable and very vulnerable, we know this from our own experience, it has no future in the modern world.”<sup>275</sup> Not only ideology but also all attempts of the identity shaping from the “above” are assessed as “unstable,” “very vulnerable” here, so in essence inefficient. The alternative proposed is “historical creativity”: “We need historical creativity, a synthesis of the best national experience and ideas, an understanding of our cultural, spiritual, political traditions from different points of view with the understanding that this is not something frozen, given forever, but a living organism. Only then will our identity be based on a solid foundation, will be turned to the future, not the past.”<sup>276</sup> Essentially, the description of the notion of identity is provided here, and while the attempts to propose the ideology seem to be rejected, the importance of ideas is emphasized. The duality of reasoning is still there, as immediately in the next sentence the notion of ideology appears again, as if it was not rejected a moment ago: “This is the main argument in favor of making sure that the issue of the ideology of development should be discussed among people of different views, who hold different opinions about what and how to do in terms of solving certain problems. We all: the so-called neo-Slavophiles, neo-Westerners, statisticians and so-called liberals – the whole society will have to work together to form common development goals.”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> ТВМ. “Мы также понимаем, что идентичность, национальная идея не могут быть навязаны сверху, не могут быть построены на основе идеологической монополии. Такая конструкция неустойчива и очень уязвима, мы знаем это по собственному опыту, она не имеет будущего в современном мире”. Source: Vladimir Putin’s Speech on Valdai forum, from 19 September 2013, available online at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>276</sup> ТВМ. “Необходимо историческое творчество, синтез лучшего национального опыта и идеи, осмысление наших культурных, духовных, политических традиций с разных точек зрения с пониманием, что это не застывшее нечто, данное навсегда, а это живой организм. Только тогда наша идентичность будет основана на прочном фундаменте, будет обращена в будущее, а не в прошлое”. Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> “Это главный аргумент в пользу того, чтобы вопрос идеологии развития обязательно обсуждался среди людей разных взглядов, придерживающихся разного мнения о том, что и как нужно делать с точки зрения решения тех или иных проблем. Нам всем: и так называемым неославянофилам, и неозападникам, государственным и так называемым либералам – всему обществу предстоит совместно работать над формированием общих целей развития”. Ibid.



Russia has its tradition of literary-centricity, with a blurred line between the exercise of philosophical thought and literary writing. In this sense, the cases of bringing philosophy into the Russian discourse are very interesting. The extent to which philosophical ideas influence the decision making is difficult to determine precisely, and also it is possible that the ideas are purposefully employed by the discourse and the references to thinkers are playing the role of the added reason, the appeal to authority aimed to back up the identity claim made. In both cases though, the discourse analysis and the investigation on these chosen ideas may add value to the more clear and precise understanding of what is going on inside Russia. As it was observed, the main points of discussion, such as the dilemma of religion versus atheism, both rooted in Russian history, are constantly negotiated. Yet, there is no final point in this discussion, and the excerpts stating the necessity and “authenticity” of the religious claims are always supplemented with a note on the multi-confessional environment and the rights of atheists. Yet, the attempts of reasoning and revival of spirituality are observed, with the political interconnected with the religious, and both backed up by the excerpts from the history of ideas and Russian philosophy.



## Chapter 5: Russian Discourse after the Crimean Crisis

In previous chapters, the attention was drawn to the Russian discourse aiming to share the vision from “the inside,” with translation being the practical tool to make the source of knowledge on identity reachable for the debate in other languages. It was also reflected that the image of Europe has been historically important for the definition of Russian identity, and while this fact is not always reflected in the contemporary debate on Russia, it is necessary for the better understanding of the current situation and a possible explanation of Russian politics and relations with the West. At the same time, the view on itself “from the other side” is important for Russia. Here looking through the flow of media and academic discourse, it is not difficult to outline the Crimean events as a crucial point for the new European debate on what Russia is. In the first chapter, some remarkable works on Russia were mentioned, including the widely discussed *The Road to Unfreedom* by Timothy Snyder were mentioned, yet the wide range of discussion was provoked, both with discussions in media outlets and the academic domain.<sup>278</sup> With a various range of explicitness, these works marked the events in Crimea as a turning point dividing “before” from the “after.” The most explicit examples here may be in monographs, scientific articles, and policy papers that incorporated the view on Crimea in their titles such as *Russia Before and After Crimea*, *The Co-Construction of Authoritarianism: Engagement and Politics after Crimea*, *Putin after Crimea*, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, *The Kremlin Emboldened: Putinism after Crimea*, *After Crimea: The Future of Nordic Defence Cooperation*.<sup>279</sup>

While these works were trying to comprehend what has happened, the part that is not always thought about is how were these discourses perceived in Russia. Thinking in the terms of system analysis with Russia being an example of a system, these works aim to

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<sup>278</sup> Snyder, Timothy. 2018. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Tim Duggan Books.

<sup>279</sup> See: Kolstø, Pål, and Helge Blakkisrud (eds.). 2018. *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity, 2010-2017*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Grigas, Agnia. 2016. *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Aron, Leon. 2017. *The Kremlin Emboldened: Putinism after Crimea*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 76-79; Saxi, Håkon Lunde and Friis, Karsten. 2018. *After Crimea: The Future of Nordic Defence Cooperation*. In: NUPI Policy Brief, 6, 2018.





understand the system from the outside, shocked by the action of a system, to reflect on what has happened within it and what further processes may be expected. The discussion on, on the one hand, how these reflections are “retranslated” into the system, how they are perceived in Russia, is uncommon, while this is important from the perspective of identity-shaping. Reflections on Russian imperialism may attempt to explain the Crimean events but would be always behind the current condition. What is not included in the debate is how the events are reasoned inside the discourse, which identity-related claims are provided, and how they may impact the shaping of the new Russian identity in the future. As was argued in the first chapter, in retrospect, the image of Europe, the European “other,” was important for shaping Russian identity. The reflection on how the current European discourse provoked by the Crimean events, may interact with the processes of identity formation, is somehow absent. Yet, it seems reasonable to think about the next step and the risks of encouraging the process of alienation further. The presence of these risks does not mean that the actions of the Russian government should not be revealed and outlawed, yet taking the look on identity-related claims, may clarify the picture. These claims as an empirical observation may not only clarify the current standpoint but also help to make a further prediction.

In this chapter, the analysis is based on the remarkable discourses of Vladislav Surkov and the document issued by the World Russian People’s Council, *Vsemirnyy Russkiy Narodnyy Sobor*, with a title *Deklaratsiya russkoy identichnosti, Declaration of Russian Identity*.<sup>280</sup> While Surkov’s figure is nowadays familiar for the scholars specializing on

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<sup>280</sup> The text of the document is available online at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html> (accessed on 20 July 2020). The World Russian People’s Council, *Vsemirnyy Russkiy Narodnyy Sobor*, is described on its website in such a way: “The World Russian People’s Council is the largest Russian public forum. It has existed since 1993, during these years it has been a public platform and a meeting place for people who, regardless of their political views, are united by a common goal – concern for the present and future of Russia, and plays a significant role in the formation of civil society. Its meetings are traditionally attended by representatives of all branches of government, leaders of public associations, the higher clergy of traditional religions of Russia, military leaders and servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and representatives of other law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation, teachers and students of the country’s largest educational institutions, scientists and cultural figures, delegates of Russians communities from near and far abroad, numerous representatives of youth. According to the charter of the VRNS, the head of the Council is His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, with the blessing and chairmanship of which annual council meetings are held.” (ТВМ, in original: “Всемирный Русский Народный Собор является крупнейшим российским общественным форумом. Он существует с 1993 г., на протяжении этих лет он является



the region, as according to Pynnöniemi, he is “a Kremlin insider,” “an ideologist of sovereign democracy,” the strengthening quasi-religious entities are not often mentioned.<sup>281</sup> These two entities, Surkov and the World Russian People’s Council, with Russian here being *russkiy* instead of *rossiyskiy* and creating the confusion outlined in the first chapter when *russkiy* get a new “spiritual” emotional meaning above the literate meaning indicating the ethnic belonging, are both sources of the identity-related knowledge. These discourses may or may not contain appeals to “authentic,” rooted features of identity but the appeals itself are very interesting since they indicate the “explanation” of the Crimean events from the “above,” aiming to be somehow philosophically inspired or inspired from the history of ideas. If interpreting identity from the dialogical positions, these discourses may be viewed as elements of continuing “dialogue” with Europe, continuing negotiations of the positions referring to the concepts from the world of ideas.

## Vladislav Surkov’s Texts

### Putin’s Long State’

In February 2019, Vladislav Surkov, the author of the concept of *sovereign democracy*, published the article titled *Putin’s Long State*.<sup>282</sup> “The illusion of choice is the most important of illusions, the crown trick of the Western way of life in general and Western democracy in particular, that is already for a long-time committed to the ideas of Barnum

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общественной площадкой и местом встречи людей, которые, независимо от политических взглядов, объединены единой целью – заботой о настоящем и будущем России, играет немалую роль в формировании гражданского общества. В его заседаниях традиционно принимают участие представители всех ветвей власти, лидеры общественных объединений, высшее духовенство традиционных религий России, военачальники и военнослужащие Вооруженных сил Российской Федерации и представители других силовых ведомств РФ, преподаватели и студенты крупнейших учебных заведений страны, деятели науки и культуры, делегаты русских общин из ближнего и дальнего зарубежья, многочисленные представители молодежи. По уставу ВРНС главой Собора является Святейший Патриарх Московский и всея Руси, по благословению и под председательством которого проводятся ежегодные соборные заседания”. Source: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/77467.html> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>281</sup> Pynnöniemi, Katri. 2019. *Surkov and the Three Pillars of Putinism*. In: Aleksanteri Insight, from 24 April 2019, Issue 2.

<sup>282</sup> In original: “Долгое государство Путина” / (*The Long State of Putin*) in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (“Independent Newspaper”), from 11 February 2019, available online [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5\\_7503\\_surkov.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html) (accessed on 24 August 2019).



rather than Klisfen,” Surkov writes.<sup>283</sup> It is not clear though to whom he refers to in this quote: it seems as an attempt to impress by intellectual curiosity but somehow fails apart as a construction lacking a passion of knowledge-seeking and proceeding well-established texts in order, while instead employing the unknown texts. It is a curious feature of this piece of writing, that makes us think what the nature of the reference is. The reference usually an indicator of the pre-assumed knowledge, of the knowledge that is recognized, through both critique and appreciation. Making a reference, the one illustrates the framework willing to work within. The reference is not only a pre-assumed knowledge but the sign of the corpus one got acquainted with. Referring to the unknown authors, whose identities are not easily recognizable may be then compared to the introduction of the simulacrum knowledge.

Surkov is known in Russia as a grey cardinal attempting to create a certain ideological accompaniment, the curator based in the President’s Administration. In the article for Bloomberg, Leonid Bershidsky introduces Surkov as “an aide to president Vladimir Putin,” “known for his ability to formulate the concepts that drive the thinking of the Russian leader’s inner circle.” “Now, as the regime appears stuck without new ideas or much political space for bold action, he’s done it again,” writes Bershidsky.<sup>284</sup>

In this text, Surkov does not express his ideas clearly enough: descriptions are vague, the text contains references, but they are not specified. Interestingly, his writing from the beginning employs the same tools of identity formation: the European *other* is described in a manner confirming the uniqueness of the Russian entity. As an example, describing European patterns, he uses the word *chimera*. There are several ways to construct the regional other in a discourse: it is possible to diminish all of the achievements and positive qualities of the other, describe it as a degrading and even dangerous in its degradation, to

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<sup>283</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Иллюзия выбора является важнейшей из иллюзий, коронным трюком западного образа жизни вообще и западной демократии в частности, давно уже приверженной идеям скорее Барнума, чем Клисфена”. Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Bershidsky, Leonid. 2019. “Putin Ally’s ‘Deep State’ Twist Is Deep Russian People: A Kremlin ideologue says the secret of Putin’s resilience is an openly acknowledged system that will survive him.” In: *The Bloomberg*, from 12 February 2019, available online at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-02-12/russia-has-its-own-deep-state-it-s-called-deep-people> (accessed on 24 August 2019).



agree with a certain achievement as formal, not substantial, not real, to present the other as an initially hostile entity, a source of danger.

The text draws an image of a superficial, hypocritical European *other*, contrasting with an image of an authentic Russian entity. “The ways of free state-building were opened, directed not by imported chimeras, but by the logic of historical processes, by ‘the art of the possible,’” he writes.<sup>285</sup> Here the notions are switched: “imported” from the West “chimeras” are linked to unfreedom, and the situation of the latest years, in contrast, is associated with “the logic of the historical process.” The whole discussion about the freedoms and their limitation in Russia is turned upside-down, in a manner when unfreedom is marked as an authentic and natural feature, and freedom – as a hypocritical unnatural entity.

“And now – the state of Russia continues, and now this is a state of a new type, which we have not had,” he writes.<sup>286</sup> This statement acknowledges the continuity of the Russian state, but also a change, such as the change the Russian Empire undergone transforming into the Soviet Union, and then the Socialist Republic of Russia becoming contemporary Russian Federation:

*It took its form by the middle of the 2000s, it has not been studied much yet, but its originality and vitality are obvious. The stress tests that it passed and passes show that just such an organically formed model of the political system will be an effective means of survival and exaltation of the Russian nation in the coming years, as well as decades, and most likely for the whole coming century.*<sup>287</sup>

This is a brief statement that contains several points of interest. First of all, the ending of the statement indicates a prediction for the way of development of the Russian state. That

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<sup>285</sup> In original: “Открылись пути свободного государственного строительства, направленного не импортированными химерами, а логикой исторических процессов, тем самым “искусством возможного”. Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> ТВМ. In original: “И вот – государство Россия продолжается, и теперь это государство нового типа, какого у нас еще не было”. Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Оформившееся в целом к середине нулевых, оно пока мало изучено, но его своеобразие и жизнеспособность очевидны. Стресс-тесты, которые оно прошло и проходит, показывают, что именно такая, органически сложившаяся модель политического устройства явится эффективным средством выживания и возвышения российской нации на ближайшие не только годы, но и десятилетия, а скорее всего и на весь предстоящий век”. Ibid.



is: the state is going to follow the path that is determined now in the future, even with changing leadership, the trend will possibly last. This prediction could be based on the idea of path dependence, however, Surkov does not back up his statement by theory or evidence. The logical switch is present in this excerpt too: the claim that a system that passed stress tests is proved to be good is not valid if the system itself creates the stress.

“Putin’s big political machine is only gaining momentum and tune in for a long, difficult, and interesting job,” he continues.<sup>288</sup> A sound initial objection to this may be: the statement, not being backed up by a careful elaboration, in fact, any elaboration at all, remains just a statement. The continuous repetitive exercise does not make a description real. The statement may be interpreted as reality, as it is seen from the perspective of the elites – or, reality, as it is desired by the elites. Surkov mentions vitality, but his descriptions itself lack vital details of a truthful life.

*Its full capacity is far ahead, so that in many years Russia will still be Putin’s state, just as modern France calls itself the Fifth Republic of de Gaulle, Turkey (even though the authorities there are now anti-Kemalists) relies on Atatürk’s Six Arrows ideology, and the United States are still turning to the images and values of the semi-legendary “founding fathers.”*<sup>289</sup>

Comparison of Putin to de Gaulle, Atatürk, or “founding fathers” is not supplemented by the evidence or accurate explanation. The aim here could be to draw attention, using the names as triggers, on purpose provoking discussion. That version pre-supposes a certain ironic attitude to the text, with its content and claims made not being taken seriously. Another version would suggest the claim being serious: it means that the author sees the current political process and historical process in a comparative perspective in such a way. Also, the text may be viewed as an attempt to take a dogmatic approach, to follow Soviet traditions in a certain way. All versions then have in common the idea that a certain

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<sup>288</sup> “Большая политическая машина Путина только набирает обороты и настраивается на долгую, трудную и интересную работу”. Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Выход на полную мощность далеко впереди, так что и через много лет Россия все еще будет государством Путина, подобно тому как современная Франция до сих пор называет себя Пятой республикой де Голля, Турция (при том, что у власти там сейчас антикемалисты) по-прежнему опирается на идеологию ‘Шести стрел’ Ататюрка, а Соединенные Штаты и поныне обращаются к образам и ценностям полуполулегендарных ‘отцов-основателей’”. Ibid.



view on the world may be presented as ultimate reality, that beliefs may be presented as truth. There is no rigour in this writing, the attempt to provide a solid argument is not made, however, it is a curious example of discourse.

“Meanwhile, the interest of foreigners to the Russian political algorithm is understandable – there is no prophet in their fatherland, and Russia has already prophesied everything that is happening to them today,” writes Surkov.<sup>290</sup> The ambition and grotesque of this statement brings multiple questions: what is the audience to which the author appeals, does he believe in the claims he makes, what purposes does this text have? The idea of prophecy is a link to sacralization. The prophet is always ahead, his or her actions are not judgeable in the same way as others, the prophet’s actions are morally justified because the prophet sees the bigger picture. At this point, Surkov’s mythologization and sacralization of the Russian power rings a bell and relates to Slezkine’s view on Bolshevism as a sect.<sup>291</sup>

Analysts of foreign policy also noticed the sacralization of power as a part of the political process and its legitimation. “Putin's move in close coordination with the Russian Orthodox Church to sacralise the Russian national identity has been a key factor shaping the increasingly authoritarian bent of the Russian government under Putin, and strengthening his public support, and must be understood in order to understand Russia's international behaviour,” writes The Forbes contributor Paul Coyer.<sup>292</sup> Surkov’s text provides one more evidence in favour of the Coyer’s claim.

Interestingly, Surkov articulates openly, without any constraint of diplomatic courtesy, a narrative that is indicating the satisfaction from the current challenges of populism, the rise of the far-right and nationalist movements around the world. His words, though, are contradicting even with Russian reality, where the borders with many post-Soviet states

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<sup>290</sup> “Между тем интерес иностранцев к русскому политическому алгоритму понятен – нет пророка в их отечествах, а все сегодня с ними происходящее Россия давно уже напорочила”. Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> See Slezkine, Yuri. 2017. *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>292</sup> Coyer, Paul. 2015. *(Un)Holy Alliance: Vladimir Putin, The Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Exceptionalism*. In: Forbes Russia, from 21 May 2015, available online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/05/21/unholy-alliance-vladimir-putin-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/#774a264127d5> (accessed on 26 August 2019).





are still open, including the states of Central Asia, being sources of labour migration flows. He writes: “When everyone still was adoring the idea of globalization and was loud about a flat world without borders, Moscow clearly reminded that sovereignty and national interests’ matter.”<sup>293</sup> Here several different things are brought together: the debate about borders, nationalist-globalist debate, and more popular, populist sovereignty discourse. These not necessarily connected foundations create a wrong dichotomy of safety that is pre-assumed through mentioning “sovereignty” and globalization. In addition, the construct created here does not illustrate a real immigration situation in Russia. It gives the impression that reality does not matter: discourse is created not to share a real experience, not to tell the truth, but for the reasons that stay separate from reality itself.

*Then many accused us of a ‘naïve’ attachment to these old things, supposedly long out of fashion. They taught us that there is nothing to hold on to the values of the nineteenth century, but we must boldly step into the twenty-first century, where there would be no sovereign nations and national states. In the 21st century, however, it turned out in our way.*<sup>294</sup>

This excerpt lacks reflection upon the future, but also upon the past: it does not have a reflective dimension, but appeals to emotions, to being “right” or “wrong.” It somehow looks as the country was misrecognized, and its collective identity suffered from this misrecognition, so it is very important to gain recognition in the aftermath. The presence of the emotional part and the absence of analysis gives a strange impression as if the work has not been written by a person close to the ruling elites. The possible answer here can be the desired audience for this text. If Surkov wished, he could publish this text in the foreign press, in the English language, but he was not interested in this. It might be that

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<sup>293</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Когда все еще были без ума от глобализации и шумели о плоском мире без границ, Москва внятно напомнила о том, что суверенитет и национальные интересы имеют значение”. Source: [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5\\_7503\\_surkov.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html) (accessed on 27 August 2019).

<sup>294</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Тогда многие уличали нас в “наивной” привязанности к этим старым вещам, якобы давно вышедшим из моды. Учили нас, что нечего держаться за ценности XIX века, а надо смело шагнуть в век XXI, где будто бы не будет никаких суверенных наций и национальных государств. В XXI веке вышло, однако, по-нашему”. Ibid.



the discourse is created for the “internal use” in the country, for the development of the national identity in a desirable direction:

*The English Brexit, the American ‘#greatgain,’ the anti-immigration enclosure of Europe are just the first items on a long list of the ubiquitous manifestations of deglobalization, re-sovereignization, and nationalism.*<sup>295</sup>

Interestingly, while Russia on a governmental level denies any kind of involvement and interference in other countries’ political affairs, this text explicitly indicates the interest in foreign politics and a certain malevolence towards the challenges the Western countries face. At the same time, following the previous hypothesis, the text may be designed for the Russians, with an idea to provide a detailed image of the declining West, and in this way to diminish a possibility of failure when the comparison is made.

#### ‘The Crisis of Hypocrisy’

This text is not the first published text of Surkov. In 2017, on the website of *Russia Today* the text titled *The Crisis of Hypocrisy. “I Hear America Singing”* had appeared.<sup>296</sup> The article is concerned with an issue of hypocrisy, exactly as the title suggests. The critique, though, is addressed not to Russia, but the collective West:

*People massively and increasingly make strange choices. The exclusion of the political landscape is observed everywhere in the West. Distrust of everything ordinary is growing. The familiar is perceived as false, fake. Unusual is encouraging. A normal person loses popularity, a freak gains it.*<sup>297</sup>

This excerpt gives an impression of a somehow philosophical background behind it, it looks like an attempt to create a metaphysical justification of the political. If the West is

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<sup>295</sup> “Английский брекзит, американский «#грейтэгейн», антииммиграционное огораживание Европы – лишь первые пункты пространного списка повсеместных проявлений деглобализации, ресуверенизации и национализма”. Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> ТВМ. In original: *Krizis litsemeriya. “I hear America singing.” / Кризис лицемерия. “I hear America singing.”* Available online (in the Russian language): <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/446944-surkov-krizis-licemeriya> (accessed on 30 August 2019).

<sup>297</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Люди массово и всё чаще делают странный выбор. Остраннение политического ландшафта наблюдается везде на Западе. Недоверие ко всему обыденному нарастает. Привычное воспринимается как фальшивое, ненастоящее. Непривычное обнадёживает. Нормальный человек теряет популярность, фрик обретает её”. Ibid.



“bad”, hypocritical in this context, then there are no other ways to go, we should stick with the idea of Russia, as it is, without modernization because there are no benchmarks, just a coverage, hypocrisy. It is very interesting that the former ideologist, coming from the Kremlin, brings up the article aimed to criticize the West. The metaphysical stand and conceptualization are inside the Russian traditions – literary, cultural. Surkov tries to other the West, and it is somehow understandable that hypocrisy is contrasted by sincerity, with Russia, being not so logical and much more problematic, having a sincere Russian soul. Sincerity, which is not articulated, but is meant underneath.

The distinctive characteristic of Surkov’s text is an attempt to practice the “moral” language. “Hypocrisy is blamed, but to investigate it, it is necessary, as in the study of all blamed and at the same time widely practiced things, such as war, infidelity, overeating, to consider the issue outside of moral coordinates,” he writes.<sup>298</sup> This sentence in its Russian original sounds as if it was translated from a foreign language: the words and the sentence itself are not sophisticated, they could be written by a foreigner who learnt the Russian language yet did not master the writing. This creates an impression of falsehood – opposite to sincerity.

*The double standards, bigotry, duplicity, triple standards, political correctness, intrigue, propaganda, flattery, deceit are widespread not only in politics. Society is stable if all its elements have found a common language with each other – a language in which it is convenient to lie. And not only to others but to oneself.*<sup>299</sup>

This piece gives a feeling of perplexity: it employs the language that is not usual for the bureaucrat’s writing. In this a bit arty piece, reasoning does not play a significant role. For a person who for years was involved in the political issues, this text looks either as an attempt to articulate a certain “philosophy” beyond the political in Russia, either an exercise in opinion-forming writing. The fact itself that the article is signed by the name

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<sup>298</sup> “Лицемерие порицаемо, но, чтобы исследовать его, нужно, как при исследовании всех порицаемых и при этом широко практикуемых вещей, таких как война, неверность, переедание, рассмотреть вопрос вне нравственных координат.” Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> “Двойные стандарты, ханжество, двуличие, тройные стандарты, политкорректность, интриги, пропаганда, лесть, лукавство широко распространены не только в политике. Социум устойчив, если все его элементы нашли друг с другом общий язык – язык, на котором удобно лгать. Причём не только другим, но и себе”. Ibid.



of Surkov that is known to the broader public, implies a certain programme character of the points made. Of course, there is a possibility that it is just a personal Surkov's opinion, his reflection on the world trends made in the spare time without any connection to professional activities but in this case, it might be suitable to publish it under the pseudonym. If a person affiliated with the government publishes something in media, it is logical to expect that the writing will be perceived as if it was something bigger than a personal narrative.

*The language of hypocrisy is woven from allegories, understatements, euphemisms, puzzles, metaphors, magic formulas, tricks of taboo and verbiage, cliché, slogans, ambiguities, and labels. It serves as a material for the industry of popular arts and political programming, as well as for communication at the household level and even for silence.<sup>300</sup>*

The concepts from the literary theory are brought here, and this is a first reference in the text that has scientific meaning. It is not evidence, not an attempt to conceptualize – it is a scientific vocabulary, which is usually studied during the schooling programme in Russia, incorporated inside the narrative. It is an interesting way to make the text sound, to show your mastery – at the same time, that all concerns exclusively the coverage. The coverage cannot substitute the absence of argument: for the well-educated Russians, familiar with the basics of literary theory, this enumerative sentence is not impressive. In contrast, it provokes a thought that the audience of the text is pre-assumed to be impressed by such tools, which means that it is treated not as educated and well-rounded.

*To say one thing, think another, do the third seems to be bad, but almost no one else succeeds. Hypocrisy in the rationalistic paradigm of Western civilization is inevitable for two reasons.<sup>301</sup>*

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<sup>300</sup> “Язык лицемерия соткан из иносказаний, недосказанностей, эвфемизмов, загадок, метафор, магических формул, приёмов табуирования и словоблудия, клише, слоганов, двусмысленностей и ярлыков. Он служит материалом как для индустрии популярных искусств и политического программирования, так и для общения на бытовом уровне и даже для молчания”. Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> “Говорить одно, думать другое, делать третье вроде бы нехорошо, но по-другому почти ни у кого не получается. Лицемерие в рационалистической парадигме западной цивилизации неизбежно по двум причинам”. Ibid.



Here the scope of the generalization is emphasized: the reflection concerns only the Western civilization, and there are several interesting points related to this fact. First, this outlook is not justified, no points defining the difference between Russia and the “hypocritical” Western civilization are provided. Second, it is presumed that Russia is not part of Western civilization. The absence of any sentence indicating the Russian-Western connection may be interpreted as if it was obvious that those are two different entities. The *rationalistic paradigm* implies that there is a philosophic foundation on which the narrative is based. That said, no further evidence is obtained.

There is also an obvious cognitive puzzle in the first sentence of the excerpt: how can one be sure that his or her assumptions about the thought of others are true? How can we know what other people – may it be political officials or normal citizens – think? While other actions in this line – “speaking” and “doing” – are feasible and can be analysed.

*Firstly, the very structure of speech, at least connected, ‘intelligent’ speech, is too linear, too formal, to fully reflect the so-called reality. Hegel rightly asserted that a consistent statement cannot be true.<sup>302</sup>*

Now the author tries to develop a philosophical argument. The claim about Hegel as the one who “rightly asserted...” is curious in its construction. The *rightly asserted* collocation indicates that the narrator assesses himself as superior to – in this example – Hegel because he reserves for himself a position of authority. It somehow a double use of the reference: making the work sound more authoritative through referring to the philosophical corpus and at the same time justifying your authority while assessing the work of big names.

*What seems logical is always more or less false. Language is a two-dimensional space, all expressive means, all the “richness and diversity” of which is reduced*

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<sup>302</sup> “Во-первых, сама структура речи, по крайней мере связной, “разумной” речи, слишком линейна, слишком формальна, чтобы полноценно отражать так называемую реальность. Гегель справедливо утверждал, что непротиворечивое высказывание не может быть истинным”. Ibid.



*to innumerable repetitions on different scales and different topics of the simplest meaning-forming pair “yes” / “no.”* <sup>303</sup>

This excerpt also contains a philosophical dimension: it may be viewed as an attempt to theorize linguistics, to work on the philosophy of language. Such an impression is made on a first glance, without a deep reading of the text. If diving deeper into the text, the questions appear. “What seems logical is always more or less false” – the statement is more than questionable. Plenty of examples when it is wrong can come to one’s mind while reading it. What is the base of such a statement? If it is a philosophical argument made, what is the reasoning behind it?

*This switch-on / switch-off of any word and any phrases – from the request to transfer mustard to the “Brothers Karamazov” and the theory of superstrings – clicks a thousand times a day in billions of goals. But no matter how much he clicks, he cannot shove an oversized, multidimensional world into flat human thinking.* <sup>304</sup>

This excerpt gives the impression of immersive writing: when the person produces a narrative without any particular analysis or deep thought in aspiration to catch emotions or bright ideas straightaway from the writing. Waves of narrative not backed up by the evidence or a specific goal to achieve. Surkov does not aim in this sense to prove his claims, neither does it look as if he aims to be understood. This is a curious point from the Foucauldian perspective since self-writing contains the idea of understanding. Here the possible solution of the puzzle may be in an attempt to follow the ‘new sincerity’ discursive patterns, to be – or to pretend – sincere, spontaneous, emotional, acting in a manner that is different from the typical behaviour or discursive practice of politician or governmental official. “The very structure of speech, at least reasoned, ‘intelligent’

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<sup>303</sup> “То, что кажется логичным, всегда более или менее ложно. Язык – это двухмерное пространство, все выразительные средства, всё “богатство и многообразие” которого сводится на самом деле к бесчисленным повторам в разных масштабах и на разные темы простейшей смыслообразующей пары “да”/”нет”. Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> “Этот включатель/выключатель любого слова и любых словосочетаний – от просьбы передать горчицу до “Братьев Карамазовых” и теории суперструн – щёлкает тысячу раз в день в миллиардах голов. Но сколько бы он ни щёлкал, он не может впихнуть негабаритный многомерный мир в плоское человеческое мышление”. Ibid.





speech, is too linear, too formal, to fully reflect the so-called reality. Hegel rightly asserted that a consistent statement cannot be true,” turns to Hegel Vladislav Surkov.<sup>305</sup>

The non-typical immersive behaviour may be also a mask imitating sincerity: the whole argument made in the article is about ‘untruthful,’ ‘fake’ Western civilization, and then it seems reasonable to contrast it with a wave of ‘sincerity,’ that may be a new mask for advanced lies. Surkov does not say anything about Russia: is Russia also ‘fake,’ or it somehow managed to escape the oblivion of hypocrisy? Moral claims, or claims masked as moral, are only applied to the ‘collective West,’ and in particular America, that is clear from the title. In the end, he draws a pessimistic, dark future of the West. First, he suggests revolutions and wars be possible in the West:

*An interesting and dangerous time. The collapse of semantic constructs releases a huge amount of social energy. Will the Western world be able to dispel its excesses through virtual games, violence series, sports, economic bubbles, rap battles and rock concerts, electoral shows, local wars, and television news? Or will the system heat up to the temperature of revolution and a great war? Who knows.<sup>306</sup>*

At the same time, no prediction on Russia is provided. In the next excerpt, the possibility of dictatorship is outlined:

*Perhaps tomorrow, from ‘all this chaos and all these lies,’ the bewildered crowds will be withdrawn with a strong hand. The king of the West, the founder of the digital dictatorship, a leader with semi-artificial intelligence has already been predicted by prophetic comics. Why don't these comics come true? Also an option.<sup>307</sup>*

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<sup>305</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Сама структура речи, по крайней мере связной, “разумной” речи, слишком линейна, слишком формальна, чтобы полноценно отражать так называемую реальность. Гегель справедливо утверждал, что непротиворечивое высказывание не может быть истинным”. Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> ТВМ. “Интересное и опасное время. Распад смысловых конструкций высвобождает огромное количество социальной энергии. Удастся ли западному миру рассеять её избытки посредством виртуальных игр, сериалов о насилии, спортивных соревнований, экономических пузырей, рэп-баттлов и рок-концертов, электоральных шоу, локальных войн и теленовостей? Или произойдет нагрев системы до температуры революции и большой войны? Кто знает”. Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Возможно, и завтра из “всего этого хаоса и всей этой лжи” растерянные толпы будут выведены сильной рукой. Царь Запада, основатель цифровой диктатуры, вождь с



The image, the process of imagining here demonstrates a specific vision, providing the idea of the co-existence of the postmodern with what is not perceived as “advanced” – dictatorship as a form of governance and power-sharing. This eclectic picture of the future with the “digital” – yet dictatorship, “semi-artificial intelligence” accompanied by comics that are referred as “prophetic” (and, again, “prophecy” and “prophets” are not typically associated with the advanced postmodern society), the words declaring the concentration of power, such as “the king” and “the leader” – strengthened by the connotation ‘the king of the West’, unbelievable in its unity and the concentration of power. The strange thought comes to mind at this point: naivety and idealism seem to be corpora associated with the current state of the European affairs, in Surkov’s view; the democratic values, egalitarian structures are not sustainable, according to him – and in the end, in the future he imagines, the opposite to naivety, the “real” is going to take a place. The “real” is described by the concentration of power, by provocative yet vital past coming back – by no means “the bewildered crowds” are something Europeans agree to be now. The slides of the images vary: the “dictatorship” in the conditions of post-modernity reminds dystopian pieces of literature, but switching the attention to contemporary Russia the pattern remains. Yet having the major issues with the concentration of power, democracy, civic liberties, and so on, many advancements, including services and technological solutions, are widely available. Not necessarily the non-democracy does look as its archaic predecessors. The continuity of times is preserved here not only through the corpora of power but through the language used – “prophetic,” “bewildered crowds,” “strong hand,” “the king of the West.” Old and new at the same time, old vocabulary being used in a new postmodern context – preserving in this manner continuity but also creating a strange impression of the epos. The choices in vocabulary determine this text to aim beyond a normal text of the political or publicist genre. It is assigned to have a certain philosophic meaning, and also to be conceptual, standing out.

It is also possible to assume the intentionality of creating the text in such a manner: while it is difficult to categorize such a text into a certain group, the literary-philosophical aspiration is seen there through the linguistic choice. That choice is intentional. This text

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полуискусственным интеллектом уже предсказан вещими комиксами. Почему бы этим комиксам не сбыться? Тоже вариант”.



does not look analytical, in a sense of political analysis – causal relationships are not indicated properly, the statements are not clearly backed up by the arguments. It does not look as an opinion piece as well, and this is an interesting point. In the opinion pieces, the authorship is what provides an authority. Surkov's text does it differently: the authority could have been assigned to the texts with elements of analysis, interesting due to the fact that Surkov played a role in Russian foreign policy and internal 'ideology-building' initiatives. But he incorporates the literary-philosophical, or, more precisely, literary-philosophically looking elements – that might assign the authority of the 'prophecy' that is even stronger than any authority of the authorship. The wisdom of philosophy may be viewed as even a stronger source of authority, than the political background. Another reason for such a choice may be a certain letter-centricity of Russian discourse. Being a politician does not imply prophecy, being a philosopher gives a better choice.

#### 'Half-Blood Loneliness'

"Russia for four centuries went to the East and another four centuries to the West. Neither rooted there. Both roads are covered. Now the ideologies of the third path, the third type of civilization, the third world, the third Rome, will be in demand..." – writes Surkov in the article published in April 2018 in the journal *Russia in Global Affairs*.<sup>308</sup> The idea of "the Third Rome" is not Surkov's invention: the statement "Moscow is a Third Rome" is rooted in 15-16 centuries and has an Orthodox Christianity connotation.

"Though the idea has sixteenth-century roots, it was not widely known before the second half of the nineteenth century when Russian historians, philosophers, and publicists began to argue – erroneously – that their ancestors believed they had inherited the mantle of "Rome" and, as a result of this belief, set about building a huge empire," Marshall Poe

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<sup>308</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Россия четыре века шла на Восток и еще четыре века на Запад. Ни там, ни там не укоренилась. Обе дороги пройдены. Теперь будут востребованы идеологии третьего пути, третьего типа цивилизации, третьего мира, третьего Рима". Source: Surkov, Vladislav. Surkov, Vladislav. *Odinochestvo Polukrovki* ("Half-Blood Loneliness"). In: *Rossiya v global'noy politike* ("Russia in Global Politics"), from 9 April 2018, available online at: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/odinochestvo-polukrovki-14/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



writes.<sup>309</sup> The phrase “had inherited the mantle of “Rome” together with the word “believed” creates associations, such as messianism, or maybe a sectarian idea. Messianism, sectarianism – without a direct connection with facts, just with beliefs. “The mantle” emphasizes it even more. Messianism, in turn, does encounter the evidence, such as the importance of Orthodox Christianity, or the dogmatism of the socialist ideology and the worldwide proletarian revolution.<sup>310</sup> Messianism-related themes may be found in Russian literature and philosophy.

*The 14<sup>th</sup> year of our century is remembered by important and very important accomplishments, which everyone knows and everything is said.<sup>311</sup> But the most important of the events of that time is only now being revealed to us, and the slow, deep-rooted news about it only now reaches our ears. This event is the completion of Russia's epic journey to the West, the cessation of repeated and fruitless attempts to become part of Western civilization, to intermarry with the “good family” of European peoples.<sup>312</sup>*

This excerpt attempts for a ‘higher’ language: we observe elements of a pompous style. “The fourth year of our century” – could be said in an easier, lighter manner, without pomp. Which everyone knows and everything is said’, apparently is appealing to the events around Crimea. ‘Everyone’, ‘everything’ brings unnecessary and unjustified totality: by the presumed acceptance, exhaustion of the issue is declared, which is far from being true. “Important” and “very important accomplishment”, used in one sentence together, one by one, indicate the tendency for a magniloquence. This trend continuous

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<sup>309</sup> Poe, Marshall T. 1997. “Moscow, the Third Rome” the Origins and Transformations of a Pivotal Moment.” The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, Harvard University, available online at <https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/1997-811-25-Poe.pdf> (accessed on 16 January 2020).

<sup>310</sup> See also Murvar, Vatro. 1971. Messianism in Russia: Religious and Revolutionary. In: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 277-338.

<sup>311</sup> Apparently, Surkov refers to the Crimean events.

<sup>312</sup> In original: “14-й год нашего века памятен важными и очень важными свершениями, о которых всем известно и все сказано. Но важнейшее из тогдашних событий только теперь открывается нам, и медленная, глубинная новость о нем теперь только достигает наших ушей. Событие это – завершение эпического путешествия России на Запад, прекращение многократных и бесплодных попыток стать частью Западной цивилизации, породниться с “хорошей семьей” европейских народов. Source: Surkov, Vladislav. Half-Blood Loneliness (“Одиночество полукровки”). In: *Russia in Global Politics (“Россия в Глобальной Политике”)*, from 9 April 2018, available online at: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/odinochestvo-polukrovki-14/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



by “the most important event of that time”, which employs the superlative degree. In addition, the voice, the narrator, the evaluator giving such a characteristic to the event is interesting. Both personally and due to the criteria used for this evaluation. “Being revealed to us”, “only now reaches our ears”, phrases aiming to reach a higher point of pathos. This may be a linguistic outreach, a way to assign a meaning to a phenomenon, to emphasize its significance.

“Russia’s epic journey to the West” is one more example of such a meaning devoted. “Epic” as an adjective assigned to “journey”, and the “journey” itself as a noun aimed to describe the relationship between Russia and the Western world. “The cessation of repeated and fruitless attempts” demonstrates an amplification: the picture of continuous actions bringing no result is drawn easily. “Epic” itself suggests longevity, the unusual and planned connectivity, reference to myth, heroic narrative of the past. “European civilization” as an umbrella term is emphasizing alienation: European cultures aggregated in such a way, taking aside differences between them, put Russia aside, as the one having differences so dramatic, making it impossible to connect with Europe.

*From the 14th year onwards, an indefinitely continuous new time extends, the age of 14+, in which we have to spend one hundred (two hundred? three hundred?) years of geopolitical loneliness.<sup>313</sup>*

“An indefinitely continuous new time extends” contains three overlapping expressions of time – “indefinitely”, “continuous”, “extends”. Continuity, intensified linguistically, creates a framework of a new time. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, the amount of years, in any case, extends the typical lifetime of a person. The horizon is too significant for a living person and hence seems as continuous as if it was forever. “Geopolitical loneliness”, in turn, is a combination of a ‘serious’ vocabulary of politics, international relations, with certain narrativity, emotionality, the sphere of feelings. Brought together, the literary narration is drawn.

*The Russian army fought victoriously and sacrificially in all the major wars of Europe, which, according to experience, can be considered the most prone to*

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<sup>313</sup> ТВМ. “С 14-го года и далее простирается неопределенно долгое новое время, эпоха 14+, в которую нам предстоит сто (двести? триста?) лет геополитического одиночества. Ibid.



*mass violence and the most bloodthirsty of all continents. Great victories and great sacrifices brought the country many western territories, but not friends.*<sup>314</sup>

In this excerpt, the same logic is observed. “Victoriously” and “sacrificially” stay together for the amplification. Not challenging the claim, “all major wars of Europe” is constructed in a manner that implies plurality, and maybe the quantity that exceeds the real historical data. The effect of amplification is achieved through the “great victories” and “great sacrifices”. The accusation of Europe being “the most prone to mass violence” and “the most bloodthirsty of all continents” is strange: while the history of colonialism is known, every nation is, unfortunately, dealing with its own moral issues. At this point, the statement is not backed up, being just ‘thrown’ into the narrative. Here also a linguo-psychological factor matters: when the accusation is serious, although arguments are not provided, it seems that the accusation itself assigns authority. That is a curious method Surkov uses, it is also the genre of writing with its literary style that allows it, while diplomatic or scientific languages would never allow.

*Then the euro-values changed to the opposite; in Paris and Berlin, Marx came into fashion. Some residents of Simbirsk and Yanovka wanted it to be like in Paris. They were so afraid of falling behind the West that had been obsessed with socialism at that time. They were so afraid that the world revolution as if led by European and American workers, would bypass their “outback.”*<sup>315</sup>

The use of “euro-values” is certainly ironic and depreciating, and the phraseology, such as “had been obsessed”, “came into fashion”, “falling behind the West” indicates sarcasm. The irony or sarcasm here does not bring any philosophical reference. With its unkind irony, the excerpt gives an impression of fragility and at the same time an emotional connection to the West. Is it necessary to be ironic when you do not preserve any interest

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<sup>314</sup> ТВМ. “Русская армия победоносно и жертвенно сражалась во всех крупнейших войнах Европы, которая по накопленному опыту может считаться наиболее склонным к массовому насилию и самым кровавым из всех континентов. Великие победы и великие жертвы приносили стране много западных территорий, но не друзей”. Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> ТВМ. “Потом евроценности сменились на противоположные, в Париже и Берлине в моду вошел Маркс. Некоторым жителям Симбирска и Яновки захотелось, чтобы было, как в Париже. Они так боялись отстать от Запада, помешавшегося в ту пору на социализме. Так боялись, что мировая революция, будто бы возглавляемая европейскими и американскими рабочими, обойдет стороной их “захолустье”. Ibid.





in the object of irony? The act of writing here in its chosen manner indicates increased emotionality, increased sensitivity to the issue. The narrator would not plunge in such emotion, without a strong relation to the subject developed. This small excerpt once more emphasizes the non-neutrality of the perception of the West, the complexity and emotions involved while bringing Russia into the European context.

*At the end of the last century, the country became bored with being “taken separately”; it again approached the West. At the same time, apparently, it seemed to someone that size matters: we do not fit in Europe, because we are too large, frighteningly sweeping. So, we need to reduce the territory, population, economy, army, ambition to the parameters of some Central European country, and then we will definitely be accepted.<sup>316</sup>*

This text illustrates the intentional change of meaning. The phrase “it seemed to someone that size matters” contains two elements indicating uncertainty, “seemed” and “to someone, and they are also accompanied by. This is an easy way to make a statement or a guess without the evidence backing it up. There is also a logical trick, a literary mean of hyperbola applied: in reality, it is difficult if not impossible to prove the thesis that “it seemed to someone that size matters: we do not fit in Europe” – “seemed”, “someone”, complimented with a previously mentioned “apparently” does not allow this. The mix of genres, the deliberate insertion of the literary methods may be assessed as a mean. The othering is seen in this text, through the choice of words “someone”, “too large”, “frighteningly sweeping”, “some Central European country” – no precise indication of what and who is meant, an unclear or at least not fully clear direction of accusation, the accusations itself that are not so transparent. The alienation is enabled and enforced by this unclearness, and the unclearness itself allows us to alienate with an easy, to blame the unnamed for the unspecified wrongdoing.

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<sup>316</sup> ТВМ. “В конце прошлого века стране наскучило быть “отдельно взятой”, она вновь запросилась на Запад. При этом, видимо, кому-то показалось, что размер имеет значение: в Европу мы не помещаемся, потому что слишком большие, пугающе размашистые. Значит, надо уменьшить территорию, население, экономику, армию, амбицию до параметров какой-нибудь средневропейской страны, и уж тогда нас точно примут за своих”. Ibid.



*Reduced. They believed in Hayek as fiercely as they once did in Marx. Demographic, industrial, and military potentials were halved. They separated with the Union republics, they began to separate with the autonomous republics ... But even such a diminished and undermined Russia did not fit into a turn to the West.*<sup>317</sup>

“They believed in Hayek as fiercely as they once did in Marx” – in this sentence the same method is used, the same unclear unspecified “we” being guilty. “Diminished”, “undermined” – these strong words are aimed to draw a derogatory picture. Both in Russian original, *umalennaya, prinizhennaya*, and their English translations these words are characteristics gained being an object of an action. The idea of the ‘powerful somebody’, of the ‘other’ being a subject of the action, is linguistically reinforced. A pre-supposed derogatory situation, a condition of humiliation is also interesting since it indicates imperialistic thinking: the separation with the territories is drawn in dark colours, it creates “diminishness,” nothingness, Russia is undermined. This logic is the logic of the centre of the empire, Russia, losing other Soviet republics, but not the logic of Russia getting freedom, abandoning the path of the Soviet Union. The “diminishness,” then, may imply the phantom pains of the lost empire. It is also interesting that these characteristics are given from a single perspective, the perspective of imperialism. The dissolution of such an empire as it was the Soviet Union, could not occur painlessly. At the same time, the perspective shown in this text is a perspective of the empire, not a perspective of the citizen of the empire – and this fact seems to be vital for the understanding. “Diminished and undermined Russia” is not equal to diminished and undermined Russian citizen. Notable as it is, the perspective of power, imperialism, centrism, territorialism is given, while the perspective of the ordinary citizen’s wellbeing is not even mentioned. In the last sentence of this excerpt, the feeling of bitterness can be read (“But even such a *diminished and undermined* Russia did not fit into a turn to the West”).

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<sup>317</sup> ТВМ. “Уменьшили. Уверовали в Хайека так же свирепо, как когда-то в Маркса. Вдвое сократили демографический, промышленный, военный потенциалы. Расстались с союзными республиками, начали было расставаться с автономными... Но и такая, умаленная и приниженная Россия не вписалась в поворот на Запад”. Ibid.



*Finally, it was decided to terminate diminishing and belittling and, moreover, to claim rights. What happened in the 14th year became inevitable.*<sup>318</sup>

This sentence contains a very important claim for understanding the events of 2014, with the Ukrainian crisis and annexation of Crimea. Specifically, the excerpt gives a single but extremely curious perspective of “taking back”: national pride, respect, territory – and the list can be extended. This perspective is very interesting in its ethical aspect: it is written up by the means of phrases, as “to terminate diminishing and belittling,” “to claim rights,” which draw a picture of the situation of 2014 as being just, being not an extension but returning to the just position. It is curious, how indirectly the moral justification is constructed, it is also interesting that the need in moral justification is understood. The final claim of “inevitability” is closing in this line of justification. Again, the perspective given in the text focuses exclusively on the state and does not consider its people.

*So, Russia for four centuries went to the East and another four centuries to the West. Rooted neither. Both roads are behind. Now the ideologies of the third path, the third type of civilization, the third world, the third Rome, will be in demand...*<sup>319</sup>

Here Surkov appeals to the well-known idea of ‘the third way’: neither European, neither Asian, a ‘special’ way unique for the Russian civilization. This being a repeat, an old idea refreshed and renewed – and re-used in the current circumstances. The logical error in this reasoning is related to the “now”, it simply does not correspond with a philosophical idea of ‘the third way’. The “will be in demand” ending could refer to the language of marketing or advertisement, and it adds to the diversity of the linguistic tools used in the text.

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<sup>318</sup> ТВМ. “Наконец, решено было умаление и принижение прекратить и, более того, заявить о правах. Случившееся в 14-м году сделалось неизбежным”. Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> ТВМ. “Итак, Россия четыре века шла на Восток и еще четыре века на Запад. Ни там, ни там не укоренилась. Обе дороги пройдены. Теперь будут востребованы идеологии третьего пути, третьего типа цивилизации, третьего мира, третьего Рима...” Ibid.



*And yet we are hardly the third civilization. Rather, two-fold and dual. Covering both East and West. Both European and Asian at the same time, and therefore not Asian or European in particular.*<sup>320</sup>

These statements are legitimate, yet not supplemented by reasoning. Without the back up of reason, the voice of the author may be assumed to be fluent only due to some source of authority, such as expertise in a certain area, or, easier, being a philosopher. The philosophy here is not the one that is used in the class, it is not even an attempt to exercise as a public intellectual, but more an attempt to ‘philosophize’ the political text, to create a certain textual fusion with literary, philosophical, futurist, political sources. The text itself, the meanings it brings, may be interpreted as unrooted or too superficial but, beyond the content, the attempt of philosophizing and literary-writing is interesting. It may also prove a literary- and philosophy- centricity of Russian discourse, literary and philosophical sources being historically essential for the formation of Russian identity and hence – for appealing to the nation united in its identity.

The two paragraphs of Surkov, summarizing the view on Russian identity, sound melancholic, they are examples of the political language due to the criteria of the issues discussed, but it is not purely a political language as well, being a strange mix of what a more narrow, non-holistic approach would determine as non-political:

*Our cultural and geopolitical belonging resembles the wandering identity of a human being born in a mixed marriage. He is a relative everywhere and native nowhere. Belonging among strangers, being alien among your own kind. Understanding everyone, being understood by no one. Half-breed, metis, somehow strange.*<sup>321</sup>

So, the meaningful words, as written by Surkov, are in translation *wandering, mixed, half-breed, half-breed, metis, strange*, and what is not written directly but could be read –

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<sup>320</sup> ТВМ. “И все-таки вряд ли мы третья цивилизация. Скорее, сдвоенная и двойственная. Вместившая и Восток, и Запад. И европейская, и азиатская одновременно, а оттого не азиатская и не европейская вполне”. Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> ТВМ. “Наша культурная и геополитическая принадлежность напоминает блуждающую идентичность человека, рожденного в смешанном браке. Он везде родственник и нигде не родной. Свой среди чужих, чужой среди своих. Всех понимающий, никем не понятый. Полукровка, метис, странный какой-то”. Ibid.



misunderstood and lonely. And then surprisingly, after all of the narrative of power, domination, and strength, the loneliness, being misunderstood, misplaced appears. But those are not the last elements, there are more, such as being a *two-headed statehood*, having a *hybrid mentality*, *bipolar history*, characterised as charismatic, talented, beautiful, and lonely:

*Russia is a west-eastern half-blood country. With its two-headed statehood, a hybrid mentality, intercontinental territory, bipolar history, it, as it should be for a half-blood, is charismatic, talented, beautiful, and lonely.*<sup>322</sup>

This image hence contains the whole parade of dualities: not on a single side, not concentrated in one single area, but multiple dualities of identity, being here, there, in-between, not here and not there. The dual does not mean difficult – in contrast, it can be easier to be both, but extremely difficult to choose (with) whom to be, if even possible. The dualities here are multidimensional, they are related to different aspects. The first duality is spatial, *West-East*, and relates to the century-old debate on Russia's belonging but also proposes a simple dual answer – West-East, no need to continue the debate. While two elements in this piece are objective, which are “two-headed statehood,” referring to the coat of arms of contemporary Russia also having historical roots, and intercontinental territory.<sup>323</sup> More subjective elements are *hybrid mentality*, and appearing in this brief

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<sup>322</sup> “Россия это западно-восточная страна-полукровка. С ее двуглавой государственностью, гибридной ментальностью, межконтинентальной территорией, биполярной историей она, как положено полукровке, харизматична, талантлива, красива и одинока”. Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> The article 1 of the Federal Constitutional Law of December 25, 2000 N 2-FKZ (as amended on December 20, 2017) “On the Coat of Arms of the Russian Federation” states: “The coat of arms of the Russian Federation is the official state symbol of the Russian Federation. The state emblem of the Russian Federation is quadrangular, with rounded lower corners, a red heraldic shield pointed at the tip with a golden double-headed eagle that raised its spread wings. The eagle is crowned with two small crowns and - above them - one large crown, connected by a ribbon. In the right paw of the eagle is the scepter, in the left is the orb. On the eagle's chest, in a red shield, is a silver rider in a blue cloak on a silver horse, striking a black dragon overturned and trampled by a horse with a silver spear” (ТВМ, in original: “Государственный герб Российской Федерации является официальным государственным символом Российской Федерации. Государственный герб Российской Федерации представляет собой четырехугольный, с закругленными нижними углами, заостренный в оконечности красный геральдический щит с золотым двуглавым орлом, поднявшим вверх распущенные крылья. Орел увенчан двумя малыми коронами и – над ними – одной большой короной, соединенными лентой. В правой лапе орла - скипетр, в левой – держава. На груди орла, в красном щите, - серебряный всадник в синем плаще на серебряном коне, поражающий серебряным копьем черного опрокинутого навзничь и попранного конем дракона”). Source: The legal database Consultant Plus,



excerpt twice *half-blood*. The *Hybrid mentality* is not by itself a negative collocation: it indicates complexity and distinction between the parts but not necessarily the confrontation between them. In this way, a hybrid entity is not necessarily disharmonic, there are no battles going, the constituting parties have already negotiated, and the result of this negotiation is what we see, the hybrid mentality. This mentality may be truly harmonic, sustainable, and resilient that suggests an interesting answer to the question of how the continuous struggle for the post-Soviet identity space will resolve. Since the hybridity and duality are not necessarily referring to the unstable or vulnerable entities, and, instead, the consensus between the different parts, the different sources, is reached, then the complexity of the identity after the dissolution of the Soviet Union may be resolved in the same way, the way of stable duality.

At the same time, there are elements in this discourse that indicate “unhealthiness,” the situation that is not stable in its essence, or at least not all of the time. One of these elements is *bipolar*, although it is supplemented with a neutralizing word *history*. The *bipolar*, unlike the *hybrid*, involves poignancy, the struggle between, the possible harshness and unpredictability of reactions. We may allow ourselves to think that the Crimean events could find the place in this framework. The interesting point that can be made is that being *bipolar* determines the perception of the others on how responsible you may be. This psychological factor influences the assessment, the perception, the level of responsibility, and it has an explanatory potential. Claiming *bipolar* may also be a trick to get sympathy and avoid responsibility for your actions. The *charismatic*, *talented*, *beautiful*, and *lonely* adjectives are subjective, yet, they describe the uniqueness of the entity, with *lonely* also allowing possible misunderstandings, inability to be understood in the discussion with somebody. Being *half-blood*, *polukrovka*, may have several connotations, one retrospective, with allusions to the mix children being not recognized by both ‘tribes,’ another related to the issues of self-identification, reflection on “who am I?” and “where do I belong?”, the connotation of ‘half-blood’ in contemporary culture

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available online at:

[http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_29674/c41c70f20e06e363bebf1c663ad3ed3259b27c57/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_29674/c41c70f20e06e363bebf1c663ad3ed3259b27c57/) (accessed on 15 July 2020). See the image at: <http://en.flag.kremlin.ru/emblem/> (accessed on 15 July 2020).





such as “Harry Potter,” the allusion to the not-fully-acceptance, as if it was with illegitimate children. It is a remarkable element in the discourse. It is also curious to assume that the discourse of Surkov on what Russia is overlapping with his personal known life story, as being ethnically mixed, changing both the name and the surname from Aslambek Dudaev to more ethnic Russian sounding Vladislav Surkov, and also having creative aspirations such as writing novels. Surely, this might be a coincidence, yet, the interconnection of the ‘collective’ and the ‘personal’ while discussing the issue of identity is an interesting path to explore.

*The wonderful words, never spoken, by Alexander III, "Russia has only two allies, the army and the navy" are perhaps the most intelligible metaphor for geopolitical loneliness, which is long overdue to accept as fate.<sup>324</sup>*

The idea of geopolitical loneliness may seem cynical keeping in mind Ukrainian events that were perceived by the West in general and Europe in particular as an aggressive and active statement undermining the preliminary arrangements and agreements. Crimea’s situation was not only the challenge to international law but also the precedent, the challenge of agreements and predictability. And in this situation, the words on *geopolitical loneliness* appear creating confusion: an active and aggressive position somehow is supplemented by a reflective narrative, reflections on being misunderstood geopolitically. So, was Crimea not an action by itself but the claim to be understood? This is indeed not very clear. Was Crimea a preventive action motivated by a perceived challenge, or a perceived threat coming from the West such as the inclusion of Ukraine in the European Union’s area of influence? This is not clear too but what is seen in this excerpt is almost narcissist elaboration of the idea of being misunderstood.

*How will the loneliness ahead of us look like? Would it be a single man on the outskirts? Or the happy loneliness of the leader of an alpha-nation that has gone*

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<sup>324</sup> ТВМ. “Замечательные слова, никогда не сказанные Александром Третьим, “у России только два союзника, армия и флот” - самая, пожалуй, доходчивая метафора геополитического одиночества, которое давно пора принять как судьбу”. Source: Surkov, Vladislav. *Oдиночество Polukrovki* (“Half-Blood Loneliness”). In: *Rossiya v global’noy politike* (“Russia in Global Politics”), from 9 April 2018, available online at: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/odinochestvo-polukrovki-14/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).



*wild, in front of which “other peoples and states are trying to give it their way”?  
It depends on us.*<sup>325</sup>

This is a very curious excerpt: the *single man on the outskirts* part is difficult to translate, originally it sounds *bobyl' na otshibe*, where *bobyl'* is an older colloquial word for a male who never married and lived alone. In this comparison of Surkov, obviously *bobyl' na otshibe* is a negative possibility but *the happy loneliness of the leader of an alpha-nation that has gone wild* is a positive one. *Alpha-nation* implies strength as a characteristic to be proud of, it undermines the idea of compromise or win-win solution. *Alpha-nation* is associated with an initiation of a challenge, with a certain aggressiveness. *Going wild* ironically may be a precise summary of the impression Crimean events could leave for the European ‘other.’ *Going wild* does not provoke sympathy, the irrational behaviour based on the choice to behave in such a way is not justified. The ‘positive’ possibility continues with *other peoples* who are *trying to give it their way*: it seems like acquiescence, the absence of the desire to confront, is interpreted as weakness, and the ability to get away with such behaviour is presented as a positive scenario and interpreted as respect. If broadening this analysis to the bigger political picture, the outlook is unpromising.

*Russia, no doubt, will trade, attract investment, exchange knowledge, fight (war is also a way of communication), participate in collaborations, be members of organizations, compete and cooperate, evoke fear and hatred, curiosity, sympathy, admiration. Only without false goals and self-denial.*<sup>326</sup>

Here the image of *war* is disturbing, especially the *war as a way of communication*. Even in the list of feelings possibly evoked by Russia, the connecting line of ‘greatness,’ ‘importance’ gained by all means including fear seems in line with the Soviet past, with totalitarianism accompanied by the status of the superpower. In this regard, Surkov does

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<sup>325</sup> “Каким будет предстоящее нам одиночество? Прозябанием бобыля на отшибе? Или счастливым одиночеством лидера ушедшей в отрыв альфа-нации, перед которой “постораниваются и дают ей дорогу другие народы и государства”? От нас зависит”. Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> “Россия, без сомнения, будет торговать, привлекать инвестиции, обмениваться знаниями, воевать (война ведь тоже способ общения), участвовать в коллаборациях, состоять в организациях, конкурировать и сотрудничать, вызывать страх и ненависть, любопытство, симпатию, восхищение. Только уже без ложных целей и самоотрицания”. Ibid.



not propose anything new: the situation is very much in line with the description of the past.

This excerpt and the previous are drawing a picture of a disheartened nation that thinks about itself as being a victim, whether a victim of misunderstanding, misjudgement, a wrongful imposition of something unsuitable, not fitting, and not authentic. The text in general is somehow worrisome since it unites a certain frustration, bitterness, a memory of being mistreated with a glorification of an 'alpha' active and aggressive behaviour, which together do not provide a ground for the optimism. In this context, it does not matter whether the reason behind this bitterness is real, or whether it is a pure interpretation and individual perception, the image of a victim of misunderstanding is there, and there are no obvious ways to resolve the situation since the former victim finds a new aggressive 'alpha' image suiting well, and the diplomatic negotiations and compromises in this paradigm will be perceived as weakness. The frustration of such a kind is never a good sign, and it would be beneficial to resolve it but in the current situation on Crimea this paradigm of perceiving a compromise as weakness, on the one hand, and the consequence of geopolitical actions, the 'punishment' reinforcing this idea of being misunderstood and misjudged, seem like a deadlock.

#### The Shorter Interventions for *The Russian Pioneer*

Vladislav Surkov had also contributed to the literary journal *Russkiy Pioner (Russian Pioneer)*.<sup>327</sup> It may also be important to mention that appearance in a literary journal, although specialized in the collaborations with non-professional authors (politicians, businessmen, governmental officials, etc.) is just one of the examples of self-presentation or self-realization of Surkov in the domain of culture. During his period of engagement in governmental affairs, he also expressed himself as a fiction writer, the author of lyrics written for one of the famous in Russia rock-groups.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> The online version available at: <http://ruspioner.ru/> (accessed on 4 July 2020).

<sup>328</sup> Under the pseudonym Natan Dubovitskiy, deriving from Surkov's wife name, Natalia Dubovitskaya: novels "Okolonolya" ("Around the Zero", *tbm*), 2009, "Mashinka i Velik" ("A Small Car and a Bicycle", *tbm*), 2012, and "Dyadya Vanya" ("Uncle Ivan", *tbm*, with the title being the allusive repetition of Anton Chekhov's famous play), 2014. Under his name: the music and lyrics co-author of the legendary Russian



Some of his texts appearing in this journal can be seen as curious from the political and cultural perspectives. The text published in 2014 and titled as a “Reply by Vladislav Surkov to an Estonian writer” may be an example here.<sup>329</sup> The Estonian writer to whom Surkov is addressing is Kaur Kender.<sup>330</sup> The initial open letter of Kender to Surkov published in both Estonian and Russian versions on the Estonian website includes such reflections as: “No one in Crimea knew, did not want or dared to compare Crimea with Estonia. It’s strange. The same people, in fact, started from one place at the same time, why is there such a different hope? They believed that together with Russia they could be like Russia, but they never believed that they could become like Estonia”; “Now it is the year 2014. Here we have been as an independent state for a quarter of a century. And I want to say that we understand you. We understand Russia. And I want you to understand us too. Here, we decided that we want to be an independent state. This is our will. We, of course, we croak and grumble, show off one’s intelligence and get noisy, sometimes hooligans, but despite this, we do not need anything except our own state, where we can do whatever we want. We tied ourselves with allies who, a little out of our own interests, a little out of humanism, a little in the name of higher values support us. And we are grateful to them. But we still want to build the state ourselves.”<sup>331</sup>

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rock group “Agata Christy”. Sources: Dubovitskiy, Natan. 2009. *Okolonolya*. Moskva: Russliy Pioner; Dubovitskiy, Natan. 2012. *Mashinka I Velik*. Moskva: Russkiy Pioner; Dubovitskiy, Natan. 2014. *Dyadya Vanya*. Moskva: Sinergiya; “Vladislav Surkov's album “*Poluostrova*” (“*Peninsulas*”, *tbm*), <http://surkov.info/teksty-pesen-s-alboma-poluostrova-stixi-vladislava-surkova/>; Stott, Michael. 2009. Has Kremlin mastermind given game away in novel? In: *Reuters*, from 13 August 2009, available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-novel/has-kremlin-mastermind-given-game-away-in-novel-idUSTRE57C3CR20090813> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>329</sup> Source: Surkov, Vladislav. 2014. Vladislav Surkov's answer to an Estonian writer. In: *Russian Pioneer*, from 31 March 2014, available online at: <http://ruspioneer.ru/honest/m/single/4159> (accessed on 4 July 2020).

<sup>330</sup> The website of the Estonian writer Kaur Kender: <http://kenderbooks.com/pettygod/#kaur> (accessed on 4 July 2020).

<sup>331</sup> Translated by me from Russian into English. In original: “Сейчас 2014 год. Мы здесь уже четверть века как независимы. И я хочу сказать, что мы понимаем тебя. Мы понимаем Россию. И я хочу, чтобы ты нас тоже понял. Мы здесь с народом решили, что хотим быть независимым государством. Это наша воля. Мы, конечно, каркаем и ворчим, умничаем и шумим, иногда и хулиганим, но несмотря на это нам не нужно ничего, кроме своего государства, где мы можем делать всё, что сами хотим. Мы связали себя узами с союзниками, которые, немного из собственных интересов, немного из гуманизма, немного во имя высших ценностей нас поддерживают. И мы им благодарны. Но государство дальше строить мы все-таки хотим сами”. Source: Kender, Kaur. 2014. A Letter to Vladislav Surkov. In: *Russian Pioneer*, from 30 March 2014, available online at: <http://ruspioneer.ru/honest/m/single/4158> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



Surkov, in turn, replies in an even more informal way:

*Hi bro Kaur. Thank you for the invitation to Estonia. You write that I can come to visit you as soon as the ban on my entry into the EU is lifted. And this will happen, as you put it, “at least when Russia is in the European Union.” I understand your words as wishing me good health and long life. Very long. However, I have been to Tallinn. Have you been to Moscow? If not, come. If it was not interesting for the second time, we can meet in Grozny.*<sup>332</sup>

*Bro* here being in original Russian text, a shorter version of ‘brother’: this intro underlines the close and informal character of the relationship and consequently promises the sincere conversation. This may be a thoughtful act of writing to give a reader the impression of honesty of the words that follow. Then, two interesting points may be outlined. First, the assumption that Russia does not belong to the European Union and that obviously this is not going to happen, at least in any reasonable perspective. The second is the mentioning of Grozny, the center of the Chechen Republic, that may refer to the diversity of Russia but also to a personal narrative because Surkov’s father has Chechen roots.<sup>333</sup>

This is one more example when a personal discourse pours the general discourse on Russia. The image of *Grozny* here may also accommodate the reference to a more traditional way of living, with the concept of honour, dignity historically playing an important role. It may be also a reference to “law beyond the law,” the unwritten law of values and traditions transmitted through generations. With all of these interpretations, it seems unlikely that this image occurred in the text of the letter just by accident.

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<sup>332</sup> ТВМ. “Привет, бро Каур. Спасибо за приглашение в Эстонию. Ты пишешь, что я могу приехать к тебе в гости, как только будет снят запрет на мой въезд в ЕС. А это произойдет, как ты выразился, “по крайней мере когда Россия будет в Евросоюзе”. Понимаю твои слова как пожелание мне крепкого здоровья и долгих лет жизни. Очень долгих. Впрочем, в Таллине я бывал. Бывал ли ты в Москве? Если нет, приезжай. Если был и второй раз неинтересно, можем встретиться в Грозном”. Source: <http://ruspioner.ru/honest/m/single/4159> (accessed on 15 July 2020).

<sup>333</sup> In 2013, the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* published an interview with Vladislav Surkov’s father under the title *Vladislav Surkov's father does not advise his son to join the opposition* and the lead “*Izvestia tracked down the father of ex-Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Dudaev, who spoke about his fate, relationship with his son and family secrets of the Surkov-Dudaevs*” (ТВМ, in original: “Отец Владислава Суркова не советует сыну уходить в оппозицию: “Известия” разыскали отца экс-вице-премьера Юрия Дудаева, который рассказал о своей судьбе, отношениях с сыном и семейных тайнах Сурковых-Дудаевых”). Source: <https://iz.ru/news/552844> (accessed on 15 July 2020).



*How, for example, do you see the time when “Russia will be in the European Union”? Russia is very big. Therefore, when and if it “will be in the European Union,” the question may arise, is it in the European Union, or the European Union in it?<sup>334</sup>*

While the point made is not meaningless, thinking on the size of Russia, it also looks a bit relevant to the Crimean events, and may also be interpreted as an idea of geopolitical expansion. In addition, it may indicate the emphasis on the importance of Russia, the impossibility to imagine it being ‘inside’ some managerial structure, and even a certain sense of superiority and mild irritation as the idea to be included in some other entity seems annoying.

*Or you write that Russia “learned a lot from Estonia” and express the hope that my country “can be as successful and free as Estonia.” But when I see yours and mine on the world map, it seems to me that our peoples should have rather different ideas about luck. And about freedom. So, it will be interesting to chat.*

*Thank you for your support, for your benevolent attitude, for the fact that your children learn in Russian.*

*Come with your children. It is good here. You won't want to leave. See you.<sup>335</sup>*

Here the feeling of superiority is expressed based on the size of the country and its geopolitical role. This is a rather symptomatic statement, illustrating the priorities where geopolitics matter and being a worldwide political player is a priority. Influence, power, and recognition on the map are viewed as being characteristics of success. This is a very

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<sup>334</sup> ТВМ. “Как, например, ты видишь время, когда “Россия будет в Евросоюзе”? Россия ведь очень большая. Поэтому когда и если она “будет в Евросоюзе,” может встать вопрос, это она в Евросоюзе, или Евросоюз в ней?” Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> ТВМ. “Или вот ты пишешь, что Россия многому “научилась у Эстонии” и выражаешь надежду, что моя страна “может быть удачной и свободной, как Эстония.” Но когда я вижу твою и мою страны на карте мира, мне кажется у наших народов должны быть довольно неодинаковые представления об удаче. Да и о свободе.

Так что пообщаться будет интересно.

Спасибо за поддержку, за благожелательное отношение, за то, что твои дети учатся на русском.

Приезжай с детьми. У нас хорошо. Уезжать не захочешь. До встречи.” Ibid.





interesting point made: it allows to think that having “just” a good economy, a peaceful life, being a well-developed country might never be “enough” for Russia due to its size, history, identity. The excerpt aims to provide the idea that the views on things of Russians and Estonians are different, the perceptions and priorities are different as well. This might be both an ‘authentic’ claim or the claim aimed for identity sharpening.

The mentioning of “freedom,” implying that from both countries, Russia and Estonia, Russia is more “free,” is also very important. The concept of freedom in this case, most probably, refers to independence in the sense of non-inclusion in entities such as the European Union. The opinion on joining the EU being supplemented with losing the autonomy, sovereignty, is intended here.

Surkov’s writing seems to be an example conceptualizing the Russian state of affairs, and it is especially interesting because of the “hybrid,” the word that Surkov uses, nature of the writing. On the one hand, it comprises some thoughts on Russian history, identity, but on the other, it also aims to provide the justification for Russian politics, and implicitly its leaders. The construction that Surkov draws, the images, are somehow postmodern – these are not purely political, cultural, or philosophical writings. These are short easy written sketches not aiming to provide an accurate historical or philosophical argument. Arguments in this sense do not matter, the reality is already drawn. Yet, these writings are curious and they help to understand better the image built for the justification of the very real events of current politics. What is also important to conclude is that the justifications and the references matter: these writings with the identity claims would not be necessary if the public opinion would not matter. The counterargument here may be the reference to ideology being an immanent feature of totalitarian regimes. It is difficult to imagine ideology in that sense in contemporary Russia influenced by globalization, international travelling, the Internet. Surkov’s texts are different from the Soviet denouncing ideological pieces. These may be examples of some different genre: an exercise inspired by Russian literary-centricity, the culture of the debate “on the fate of Russia.”

Another interesting aspect, also applicable to the previous chapter, is the interconnection between the personal narrative and discourse on what Russia is. While there is a common



classification of identities being individual and collective, there are insightful reflections relating the individual and the collective, such as Miller's, who writes: "to have a national identity is to take part in a continuing process of collective self-definition."<sup>336</sup> Such an elaboration may be a fine bridge made while thinking on Russian national identity and an individual discourse, such as Surkov's or, if referring to the previous chapter, president Putin's.

### Declaration of Russian Identity

In 2014, the Russian Patriarchy had accepted a document titled the Declaration of Russian identity. The case itself is quite curious: the Russian Constitution emphasizes the secular nature of the state and equality of the religious association in front of the law, but one of the confessions, that is Orthodox Christianity, introduces the concept of Russian identity, identity for a whole Russia, implicitly suggesting the Orthodox Christianity ideas to be expanded to the followers of other religions and atheists<sup>337</sup>. Such a way of thinking can be indicative, as an attempt to change the secular status quo of the country. The content of the document is a matter of interest.

"Each nation is a complex dynamic phenomenon. Belonging to it cannot be described with the use of a narrow set of criteria. The larger the people, the more active the role they play in history, the wider their genetic and social diversity," with these words the document starts.<sup>338</sup> The intro brings a claim that is not supported by examples and elaboration, moreover, it may be viewed as imperialistic. "The Russian people originally had a complex genetic composition, including the descendants of the Slavic, Finno-Ugric,

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<sup>336</sup> Miller, David. 1995. *On Nationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.172.

<sup>337</sup> See Section 14 of Chapter 1 of the Russian Constitution, available online in the Russian language at <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-3.htm> (accessed on 28 August 2019).

<sup>338</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Каждая нация — сложное динамичное явление. Принадлежность к ней невозможно описать с помощью узкого набора критериев. Чем крупнее народ, чем более деятельную роль в истории он играет, тем шире его генетическое и социальное разнообразие". Source: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html> (accessed on 28 August 2019).



Scandinavian, Baltic, Iranian and Turkish tribes,” – a rather neutral statement, but can be put in a bigger “imperialistic” context.<sup>339</sup>

*This genetic wealth has never become a threat to the national unity of the Russian people. The birth from Russian parents in most cases is the starting point for the formation of Russian identity, which, however, has never ruled out the possibility of joining the Russian people by immigrants from other national backgrounds who have adopted Russian identity, language, culture, and religious traditions.*<sup>340</sup>

Here a part of the meaning is lost in translation. The title of the document in Russian original is *Deklaratsiya russkoy identichnosti*, which means we are encountering *russkiy-rossiyskiy* dichotomy, with *rossiyskiy* referring to nationality and *russkiy* – to ethnic belonging, being ethnically Russian. At the same time, sometimes *russkiy* is used as a somehow bigger reference, as a cultural supra-entity, going above ethnic boundaries. For instance, it can be an emphasis on the ‘Russian spirit’ or upbringing in the ‘Russian culture’ (*russkaya kultura*). Russian identity as it is used in this document – *russkaya identichnost* – probably should be interpreted in the same manner. The line of Russian identity-language-culture-religious traditions, provided in the last sentence of the excerpt, may have an indicative character. Every religious group is aiming to sustain and if possible, expand the number of followers. However, bringing religion or several religions in the same line with language and culture can be symptomatic, as well as the title of the document created by the Patriarchy.

*The uniqueness of the ethnogenesis of the Russian people lies in the fact that over the centuries such an acceptance of Russian identity by nee representatives of other ethnic groups was not the result of forced assimilation of certain ethnic*

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<sup>339</sup> ТВМ. In original: “Русский народ исконно имел сложный генетический состав, включая в себя потомков славянских, финно-угорских, скандинавских, балтских, иранских и тюркских племен”. Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> ТВМ. “Это генетическое богатство ни разу не стало угрозой для национального единства русского народа. Рождение от русских родителей в большинстве случаев является отправной точкой для формирования русского самосознания, что, однако, никогда не исключало возможности присоединения к русскому народу выходцев из другой национальной среды, принявших русскую идентичность, язык, культуру и религиозные традиции”. Ibid.



*groups (“Russification”), but a consequence of the free personal choice of specific people who linked their lives and fate to Russia.<sup>341</sup>*

This idea can be opposed by multiple historical evidence, with the Caucasus war of 1817-1864 being one of the examples. A rather successful assimilation of different ethnic and religious groups in Russia is a historical fact, however, the complexity of the historical process and its usually violent character – for example, the prohibition of religion by Bolsheviks – should not be diminished or simplified. It would be beneficial to bring complex questions into consideration, such as contemporary secularism being a consequence of the violent Bolsheviks politics towards eliminations of religion.

“In the formation of Russian identity, the Orthodox faith played a huge role. On the other hand, the events of the twentieth century showed that a significant number of Russians became unbelievers, without losing their national self-perception,” document states.<sup>342</sup> It should be kept in mind while dealing with the English translation of the document, that here and throughout the text the word *russkiy* is used, rather than *rossiyskiy*. At least linguistically, it appeals to the ethnic-based identity, instead of the nation-based identity. It is important to constantly underline the authentic word hidden beside the English word ‘Russian,’ since the lack of awareness undermines the meaning dramatically. At first, the whole statement seems reasonable, then certain particular features make it sound problematic. The *Russian* here is *russkiy*, an ethnic Russian, and the meaning and intention of the sentence is not clear: the first contradiction is that not only ethnical Russians but also other ethnicities recognize themselves as Orthodox Christians in Russia; second, not only ethnic Russians became atheists during the Soviet period, and then national self-consciousness is not particularly related to being ethnically Russian. The confusing conceptualization of the difficult notions, such as nation, ethnic belonging,

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<sup>341</sup> ТВМ. “Уникальность этногенеза русского народа заключается в том, что на протяжении веков подобное принятие русской идентичности урожденными представителями других национальностей было не результатом принудительной ассимиляции тех или иных этнических групп (“русификации”), а следствием свободного личного выбора конкретных людей, связывавших с Россией свою жизнь и судьбу”. Source: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html> (accessed on 28 August 2019).

<sup>342</sup> ТВМ. In original: “В формировании русской идентичности огромную роль сыграла православная вера. С другой стороны, события XX века показали, что значительное число русских стало неверующими, не утратив при этом национального самосознания.” Ibid.



religious belonging, illuminates a question – why the document is addressed to one particular ethnic group? It may be explained by the fact that ethnic Russians are the biggest group among Orthodox Christians in Russia, so the Orthodox church in this writing appeals to the major group of its followers, according to the factor of ethnicity. But why is there a need to classify according to this factor? Isn't the church open for all and interesting in accommodating followers from diverse groups? This is a question. At the same time, the emphasis on the ethnicity of the group in such a document may be interpreted negatively, even if the intentions were different. In a multi-ethnic and complex country, as Russia is, religious separation for the purposes of identity determination, measurement or projection can be dangerous.

The problematic nature of the text continues further:

*Nevertheless, the statement that every Russian should recognize Orthodox Christianity as the basis of his national culture is justified and fair. Denial of this fact, and even more so the search for a different religious basis of national culture, indicates a weakening of Russian identity, up to its complete loss.<sup>343</sup>*

This is an excerpt containing two problematic statements. There are no arguments in favour of the first statement provided and no illustrations or further elaborations. At the same time, a reasonable question can be risen of whether it is suitable or even politically correct to underline a superior character of one religion in comparison with others, in the situation of a secular state and population with diverse religious beliefs. From a certain perspective, this statement may look disturbing, and the second part of the excerpt proves it, narrated in a questionable alarmist manner, with a possibility to be interpreted as hostile by the religious groups other than the Orthodox Christians. Moreover, the excerpt may be read as challenging – for both the secular nature of the state fixed in the Constitution and the equality of religions. It also true that every religion is interested in expanding the number of its followers, here Orthodox Christianity is not an exception but in the Russian

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<sup>343</sup> ТВМ. In original: “И все же утверждение о том, что каждый русский должен признавать православное христианство основой своей национальной культуры, является оправданным и справедливым. Отрицание этого факта, а тем более поиск иной религиозной основы национальной культуры, свидетельствуют об ослаблении русской идентичности, вплоть до полной ее утраты”. Ibid.



case, the religious question is specific due to the important role of Orthodox Christianity in times of the Russian Empire, and socialist atheism. The re-vitalization of religion in Russia that might be aimed to fill a certain identity emptiness may be interpreted as, on the one hand, understandable, but also – as a part of a bigger picture of empire-oriented revival:

*At the same time, national identity inevitably means solidarity with the fate of its people. Each Russian feels a deep emotional connection with the main events of the country's history: the Baptism of Russia, the Battle of Kulikovo and the defeat of the Smuta, victories over Napoleon and Hitler. We emphasize that pride in the 1945 Victory is one of the most important integrating factors of the modern Russian nation.*<sup>344</sup>

In this text it is possible to underline two foundations: first relates to the emotional connection with the historical events, second – to the memory of World War II as a connecting point for Russians, that may be expanded to post-Soviet space. The problem is that all of the events in line, besides World War II, are not resonating with Russians much due to the objective historical distance. They are studied at schools, but “deep emotional connection” is somehow an excessive characteristic. In turn, World War II with its Great Patriotic war part does make this connection, mostly because of the closeness of narratives. As an example, if taking into consideration the generation of 30-40-year-old, their grandparents usually participated in the war and grandchildren remember the conversations they had with their grandparents. Linkage and reference here are personal, related to familiar ancestors and family as a whole, in this sense it makes a significant emotional difference, that simply cannot be applied to the battle of Kulikovo or other distant events learnt from the history textbooks.

In the final paragraph the authors of the document conclude:

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<sup>344</sup> ТВМ. In original: “При этом национальное самосознание неизбежно означает солидарность с судьбой своего народа. Каждый русский чувствует глубинную эмоциональную связь с главными событиями своей истории: Крещением Руси, Куликовской битвой и одолением Смуты, победами над Наполеоном и Гитлером. Особо отметим, что гордость за Победу 1945 года является одним из важнейших интегрирующих факторов современной русской нации”. Source: The Declaration of Russian Identity, available online: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html> (accessed on 30 August 2019).





*Based on the program theses of this document, the following definition of Russian identity is proposed: Russian is a person who considers himself Russian; not having other ethnic preferences; speaking and thinking in Russian; recognizing Orthodox Christianity as the basis of national spiritual culture; feeling solidarity with the fate of the Russian people.<sup>345</sup>*

The main remark here should be made concerning the word “Russian,” which is *russskiy* in this text, so, the focus of the excerpt is on the ethnic Russian identity, or, more rightfully, supra-identity based on cultural and spiritual characteristics of *Russianness*.

While reading this short text, several concerns can arise. The first is: what does “not having other ethnic preferences” mean? Does it mean that having Russian (*russskaya*) identity implies a condition of abandoning any other identities, including ethnic (for instance, feeling of belonging – and being – “Tartar,” “Russian Jew,” “Ethnically mixed Russian,” “Russian Ukrainian,” “Russian Armenian,” “Dagestani,” “Buryat,” and so forth. The second point, not less disturbing, is “recognizing Orthodox Christianity as the basis of national spiritual culture.” This statement may be interpreted as not correct – and in simple not fair to atheists, agnostics, followers of other religions, keeping in mind the point mentioned before, that is a Constitutional status of the secular state and equal position of different religions inside the state. The statement brings together several concerns: concern of de-secularization, an attempt of the Orthodox church to expand its sphere of influence, an attempt to deny “multiple identities.” This document as a whole did not provoke a serious discussion in the society: it might be due to the moderate publicity it got, or to the certain disinterest in public life and multiple texts appearing to have an ideological dimension.

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<sup>345</sup> ТВМ. “На основе программных тезисов настоящего документа, предлагается следующее определение русской идентичности: русский – это человек, считающий себя русским; не имеющий иных этнических предпочтений; говорящий и думающий на русском языке; признающий православное христианство основой национальной духовной культуры; ощущающий солидарность с судьбой русского народа”. Ibid.



## Concluding Remarks

Ideas may be manifested through the ideology, and Russia has the relevant historical experience and memories of such a manifestation coming from Soviet times. Contemporary Russian “social engineers,” theoretically speaking, may try to aim to establish its new ideology again but practically it would be difficult. While it is possible to come with a plan and discourses, in the times of globalised culture, the Internet, worldwide travelling it is extremely difficult to reproduce the working ideological system in contemporary Russia. Yet, it is possible to formulate the national ideas, to try to shape identities. With all of the peculiarities of the authoritarian regime or “hybrid” regime, it does not seem like people’s opinions, views on Russian politics, Russia itself, do not matter. On the contrary, these observations suggest that the ideas are employed to convince people, to justify, explicitly or implicitly, the events on the global arena through the discourses on ideas. This may also be interpreted as a continuation of the Russian tradition of literary centrality and somehow idea-centrality, as noticed by Isaiah Berlin. “Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that ideas were taken seriously, and played a greater and more peculiar role in Russian history than anywhere else. (...) And yet there is a paradox here, for few of these ideas were born on Russian soil.”<sup>346</sup> He also suggests that the writings on different Russian ideas “can explain more on Russian behaviour than a similar compilation applied to other peoples.”<sup>347</sup> The example here may be the ideas of socialism and communism, their “winning” character and an attempt for realization.

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<sup>346</sup> See: Berlin, Isaiah. 1966. *Introduction*. In: Raeff, Marc (ed.) *Russian Intellectual History: an Anthology*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, p.5.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.



## Conclusion

Through the five chapters of this writing the issue of Russian identity was discussed, being approached from different perspectives. The complexity accompanying the notion of identity has not been understated, however, the advantages of the concept and its explanatory potential, both academic but practical, outstood those complexities. The discourse and the identity were viewed as having the relation of what I call the double agency, with discourse reflecting the “authentic,” rooted, identity peculiarities but also containing claims aimed to shape the identity that may or may not be “rooted” in cultural, philosophical, historical, political and other contexts of Russia. It seemed that the current debate was lacking such an approach tending instead to outline the identity-related claims made in the context of different political events as being “authentic” by definition. This could lead to greater confusion, when, for example, the claim on Russian “traditional values” is being perceived as a description of identity-related peculiarity without analysis, and the perspective is switched to the statement not focusing on the reasons the claim was made, with the identity-shaping ambitions left without interest. Basically, the question that was undermined, is whether the claims on Russia and the Russians were authentic, meaning the identity as it is or the identity the “social engineers” would like to shape, for the political or other reasons. Reflecting on identity by means of the discourse implies a very careful elaboration of such claims, and the apparatus that allows distinguishing one from another is necessarily multi- and interdisciplinary, since these claims may appeal to the elements from historical, cultural, philosophical, and other domains.

Then, the other factor of complexity of the case is the Russian past itself, with its Empire legacy and the legacy of the Soviet Union, and while the Soviet past cannot be looked upon as somehow similar from the period to period and decade to decade, this oversimplified view on “two pasts,” with their distinctive symbols and remarkable points of reference, may still be used for the purposes of looking at the current Russian state. What may be observed in the discourses, is that none of the “pasts” is abandoned or dismissed, and none of the “pasts” is chosen instead of the other. Instead, the events, points of reference, are “cherry-picked” or re-invented, re-introduced in the declarative context, with an aim to shape the “desirable” identity.



The contradictions and the painful relations between the historical periods in these attempts are addressed. Instead, the continuity is claimed, as it is done in the new version of the Constitution, after the recent amendments. Then, several questions arise. If we agree that the collapse of the Soviet Union has led to the dissolution of the Soviet identity with the emptiness left, implying the continuous struggle between the different sources to fill it, for how long then this process will last? And will be there an ultimate winner? Is it possible that a renewed, different Russian identity will be formed, being distinct from the paths of the past? In particular, is it feasible that the claims on the somehow conservative, traditionalist, religious Russia made in current discourse will become “internalized,” rooted, will determine the path for the new Russian identity?

These questions relate to the existing dualities: the religious traditions of the Orthodox Christianity and the atheist Soviet past, the Soviet emancipation and more conservative views on women and gender, the commonality of values and value pluralism, and so on. In the updated Russian Constitution, the image of God is brought into the discourse, and at the same time, the secularity is declared. The concept of “traditional values” is appearing, but it is not clear to which “tradition” it refers to. The claims made on the basis of “cherry-picking” or, as in the example of “traditional values,” re-invention, re-interpretation of the past, are not aimed to reflect on the past in its complexity, and hence on their basis, a true reconciliation with the past is not possible. This happens when the authentic conversation on the complex matters is substituted by the declarative claims aiming to shape the “desirable” identity.

The “cherry-peaking” or re-invention allows referring to the elements of different “pasts,” different paths. For the purposes of nation-building and identity shaping, it is not beneficial to see one discourse “winning,” because it would mean that the elements of other discourses would not be employed further so easily. It is easy to praise the achievements of communism, such as the exploration of space, and at the same time to be nostalgic about the culture of the Russian Empire. With the attempts of nation-building, identity shaping from the “above,” a question remains on whether the identity may be formed in this way. Where is the line determining will the attempts for the identity shaping be successful or not? The answer may be hidden in Russia’s Soviet past, with the



new Soviet identity built on the past being dismissed. The Soviet history itself is a strong argument that allows assuming that even today's clumsy, declarative attempts of identity-shaping may have the to determine a further path for Russian identity.

Looking at Russia from the Western perspective involves an issue itself. As it was reflected in this writing, Russia's self-definition, its self-reflection, has a strong connection with the image of Europe, with the idea of how the European "other" may view Russia and the Russians. The historical importance of Europe for Russia should not be understated, as it is the century-long debate on "who are we?" and "who we are not?" The risk related to defining yourself through the other entity is that with a loss of connection with this entity, your own identity is threatened. In this sense, it does not matter whether the image of the "other" is painted in the dark or in the light colours – this "other" still remains crucial. That is why in the debate on Russia going in the Western, and, in particular, European domains, the understanding of the necessity and importance of Europe for Russia is needed. The lack of such understanding will only reinforce the alienation, and add to the present complexity. For the illustration the quote from Dostoevsky's *Dnevnik Pisatelya* ("The Writer's Diary") may be suitable: "All this suggests our longer and sad solitude in the European family of peoples; longer future mistakes of Europeans in their judgments on Russia; their apparent inclination to always think the worst of us, perhaps, explains that constant, universal, based on some strong immediate and disgusting feeling, Europe's hostility toward us; its disgust toward us as to something contrary, partly even some superstitious fear of us and its – eternal, well-known, long-standing judgment about us: that we are not Europeans at all..."<sup>348</sup>

The reinforcement of alienation and mutual "othering," the possible internalization of identity-shaping discourses, may shape a path, playing the role of a certain "proof" of the

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<sup>348</sup> ТВМ. In original: "Все это намекает на долгую еще, может быть, и печальную нашу уединенность в европейской семье народов; на долгие еще в будущем ошибки европейцев в суждениях о России; на их видимую склонность судить нас всегда к худшему и, может быть, объясняет и ту постоянную, всеобщую, основанную на каком-то сильнейшем непосредственном и гадливом ощущении враждебности к нам Европы; отвращение ее от нас как от чего-то противного, отчасти даже некоторый суеверный страх ее перед нами и – вечный, известный, давнишний приговор ее о нас: что мы вовсе не европейцы..." Source: Dostoevsky, Dostoevsky, Fyodor M. 2010. *Dnevnik Pisatelya* ("Writer's Diary"). Moscow: Institute of Russian Civilization, pp. 127-128.



discursive claims being authentic. The essentiality of Europe for the self-definition of Russia is an authentic feature on which the identity shaping strategy may be based.

The argument for understanding the identity peculiarities does not imply that the critical attention to Russia and its politics is not necessary. At the same time, the necessity to distinguish the action in the political arena – the foreign policy or the internal politics of the Russian state – and the Russian nation with its people. The difference here may be illustrated not only by opinions and statements but also by linguistic choices. As the paragraph on the issues of translation states, there is a nuance and it may be reflected, while the claims “Russia is fascist” are not adding to the debate from the perspective of understanding, on the contrary, being translated back into the Russian context, they may deepen the alienation. The importance to distinguish a country as an actor on the political arena and its people is not a unique feature of the Russian case: the same may be applied to other states that now demonstrate authoritarian tendencies – Turkey, Iran, the Eastern European countries. With all of the complexities of these countries, the negligence to draw such a line may reinforce the alienation and othering. Returning to Dostoevsky’s words, it is important not to deny for the peoples of these countries a possibility to “enter the European family of nations.” This argument may also be viewed in the light of the economic sanctions: while current research answers the question of the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed relying on the economic variables, it is important to remember about the identity-related consequences of such decisions.





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