

After decades of dominant Marxism-Leninism, the post-Soviet Russian political space offers a multiplicity of discourses associated with the contemporary state and its various organs – such as the party, the presidential administration, the bureaucracies and media – or with the different places of ideological production revealing plurality and fluidity within Russian political languages and evoking many of the neo-conservativist ideological constructs promoted by the Kremlin. The apparent demise of Russian notions of Liberalism, its polymorphism, the influence of the Soviet experience, perestroika, the effects of the turbulent 1990s, in addition to the effect of Western thought and foreign policies on Russia's liberal ideas and expectations, determine the role of the remaining institutions and actors that promote political, economic, and constitutional liberalism and manifest an alternative discourse that, although weakened, is still credible. This second volume of the Reset's 'Russia Workshop' collects a selection of the 'State and Political Discourse in Russia' conference proceedings written by Nadezhda Azhgikhina, Alexey Barabashev, Anton Barbashin, Giancarlo Bosetti, Maria Engström, Nina Khrushcheva, Olga Malinova, Andrei Melville and Vladislav Zubok and a theoretical introduction by Mark Kramer.



State and Political Discourse in Russia

ResetDOC

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I libri di Reset DOC

Azhgikhina, Barabashev, Barbashin
Bosetti, Engström, Khrushcheva, Malinova
Melville, Zubok with the theoretical
introduction by Mark Kramer

edited by Riccardo Mario Cucciolla

ResetDOC

*With the Contribution of
Nomis Foundation - Zürich
and of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation*



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Edited by
Riccardo Mario Cucciolla

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I libri di Reset DOC

Director Giancarlo Bosetti

Publisher Reset-Dialogues on Civilizations

Via Tacito 7, 00193, Rome, Italy

First edition March 2017, ISBN 978-88-941869-0-1

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Graphic Project Studio Cerri & Associati
with Francesca Ceccoli
Printed by Actualtype
Completed in March 2017

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Foreword

The 'Russia Workshop,' a Growing Platform
on Contemporary Russia
Giancarlo Bosetti, Reset DOC

In more than ten years of activity, Reset DOC has been able to inspire dialogue across cultural divides and the exchange of ideas through seminars, conferences, publications, and international events. The synergy emerged from networks of intellectuals with different cultural, religious, political backgrounds all around the Mediterranean, American and Asian regions gave impressive results and encouraged us to go ahead.

In the aftermath of the 2014 Crimean crisis, the Western world realized a general lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of a country that had historically been a key protagonist of European culture and that suddenly appeared as an unknown entity: Russia, a huge state that we are still trying to understand in its post-Soviet essence. In this era of tensions, instability and tougher relations between West and Moscow, Reset DOC launched in 2015 – under the scientific coordination of the Italian historian Andrea Graziosi – the *Russia Workshop*, an initiative aimed at attracting some of the foremost international scholars, intellectuals and experts on Russian studies.

The first test of the *Russia Workshop* was the international workshop *The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991* held in Berlin at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP) on June 22-23, 2015. This occasion was the initial stage in a much longer journey and its core significance was in the fact that it unlocked a number of subsequent events, such

as the concomitant roundtable entitled *The Political Culture of Today's Russia. The Power State Is Back?* that was held at DGAP on June 25, 2015. This meeting offered the direct testimony of some prominent European policy makers in approaching Russia's power policy issues. After the Berlin conferences, the *Russia Workshop* initiative had further accreditations, attracting the attention of additional partners and sponsors and the participation of prestigious research institutes. The most relevant results of the first Berliner workshop had been collected in a homonym volume that we have published in the spring of 2016.¹

Therefore, Reset DOC organized in collaboration with the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) the second workshop *Locating 'Conservative Ideology' in Today's Russia* at George Washington University (March 31-April 1, 2016). This event focused on Russian 'conservatism,' defining its language, values and connotations in order to explain its influence on the Russian political system. On that occasion, the debate analyzed the diversity and plurality within the Russian 'conservative' spectrum, its representatives in literature, art, social life and in the Orthodox Church, its geopolitical-ideological dimension (as Eurasianism), its statist approach and its vision of the world order. The Washington workshop gave new impetus to further develop a platform analyzing the Russian political discourse, its features and its cultural influence. Hence, in less than a year, Reset DOC organized a third event of the *Russia Workshop* in a place that has highly represented a bridge between West and East: on June 17-18, 2016 the conference *The State and Political Discourse in Today's Russia* was held in Venice at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

This two-day workshop had a great participation in terms of speakers, discussants and audience, involving more dozens

¹ See Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State Is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991*, Reset, Rome 2016.

of international scholars, experts and students in a context of freedom and open dialogue. The debate focused on the multiplicity of the Russian state political discourses within its various organs, administration, media and party, so as to analyze those concepts and 'sacred' ideological references which are sponsored by Moscow. Finally, the event launched a discussion on the demise of liberalism and its pluralistic approach in Russia, bearing in mind the impact of the Soviet legacy, the expectation and influence of perestroika, in order to discuss the limits and the potentials for the future of democracy in Russia. This second volume aims at collecting a part of the conference proceedings and presenting some of the most relevant debates emerged in that framework.

The intellectual spillovers emerged in Venice encouraged us to go ahead with the *Russia Workshop*, an initiative that keeps getting further accreditations and attracting the attention of additional partners and sponsors, extending its ambitions, increasing the frequency of events and creating an effectively permanent platform on Russian political studies. In fact, in 2017 Reset DOC has already scheduled in Moscow several exploratory meetings aimed at creating greater synergy with Russian partners and a greater involvement of the National Academy, while in October 2017 the conference *Russian Liberalisms and their challenges* will be organized in collaboration with the University of Turin.

The growing participation in these workshops gives us great hope for the future of such events. This ambitious project could evolve so fast because of its dynamic format that inclusively involves partners and respectfully considers every idea and perspective. Our goal is to overcome prejudices and divisions between 'we' and the 'others,' and we still have a great deal of difficult ground to cover. However, the *Russia Workshop* success is definite by the intentional desire for dialogue that has been shown by all the players involved in a game. Right now, the feedback we have had bodes well for future successes.

State and Political Discourse in Russia,
Venice, June 17-18, 2016

The conference has been organized by Reset DOC in cooperation with Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice with the contribution of Nomis Foundation – Zürich and of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The organization of the event involved international partners: Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), George Washington University; the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; the Cold War Studies Program, Harvard University; the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); the Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, College of William and Mary; National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU-HSE), Moscow. *The Russia Workshop* project is directed by Giancarlo Bosetti (Reset DOC) with the scientific coordination of Andrea Graziosi (Anvur, University of Naples Federico II) and a scientific committee composed of Alexey Barabashev (NRU-HSE), Stephen E. Hanson (Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, College of William and Mary), Mark Kramer (Cold War Studies and Davis Center), Marlene Laruelle (European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University); Andrei Melville (NRU-HSE), Alexandra Vacroux (Davis Center), Vladislav M. Zubok (LSE). After the welcoming addresses of Giancarlo Corò (Ca' Foscari University) and Pasquale Gagliardi (Fondazione Cini), the conference had been divided in four sessions: the first session *The State's Political Discourse* was chaired by Giancarlo Corò (Università Ca' Foscari) and involved Alexey Barabashev (NRU-HSE), Anton Barbashin (Intersection) and Olga Malinova (NRU-HSE) as speaker and Mark Kramer (Cold War Studies and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University) as discussant. The second session *Concepts and Ideological References* was chaired by Daniela Rizzi (Università Ca' Foscari) and involved Maria Engström (Uppsala Universitet), Marlene Laruelle (IERES, George Washington University), Andrei Melville (NRU-HSE), Nikolay Mitrokhin (Center for East-European Studies, University of Bremen) as speakers and Stephen Hanson (Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, College of William and Mary) as discussant. The third session *The Demise of Liberalism: Testing the Waters on the Subject* was chaired by Andrea Graziosi (Anvur, University of Naples Federico II) and involved Nadezhda Azhgikhina (Russian Union of Journalists and Vice president of European Federation of Journalists), Nina Khrushcheva (Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy, The New School), Andrey Kortunov (Russian Council of International Relations), Kirill Rogov (Liberal Mission Foundation) and Vladislav Zubok (LSE) as speakers. The fourth session was the roundtable Politics and Culture. The Future of

Democracy in Russia chaired by Giancarlo Bosetti (Reset DOC) and involved Giuliano Amato (Judge of the Italian Constitutional Court and Former Prime Minister of Italy), Nina Khrushcheva (Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy, The New School), Marlene Laruelle (IERES, George Washington University), Andrei Melville (NRU-HSE), Adam Michnik (Gazeta Wyborcza), Sergio Romano (Former Italian Ambassador in Moscow) and Roberto Toscano (Former Italian Ambassador in Teheran and New Delhi). The event has been organized by the Reset DOC's structure: Chiara Galbersanini (Project Manager), Letizia Durante (Project Administrator), Cristina Sala (Event Management) in collaboration with Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (IMT Lucca).

Preface

How Many Political Discourses are in Contemporary Russia?

Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, IMT Lucca

In seventy years of Soviet communism, the only official political discourse in the USSR was necessarily associated with Marxism-Leninism. This narrative appeared at both party and state levels, affecting the political culture of Soviet society. In the USSR, political documents and speeches were forged on a rigid structure that imposed the communist semantic as an introduction to every political discourse; then, they were followed by essential cross-references or quotations of the General Secretary's speeches made at congresses of the Communist party; and finally, references to Marxist-Leninist ideological values were included, defining a party narrative that was often also presented at bureaucratic, cultural and even academic levels.

While communist political discourse appeared to some extent as an 'ornamental' feature, it was a clear and certain ideological manifestation of dogmatic monolithism, concealing a plethora of alternative values and anti-systemic feelings – such as nationalism, religion, tradition, liberalism and individualism – that had been sublimated for decades. During perestroika – with the affirmation of glasnost, the abolishment of the primacy of the CPSU and the emergence of opposition forces – the first attempts to liberalize the Soviet system appeared, while freedom of speech and even freedom of thinking were legitimized after decades of intellectual repression and ideological orthodoxy. Hence, the enthusiasm for democratization was opening a

Pandora's box from which emerged a plethora of alternative ideas – often recalling features of the pre-revolutionary Russian thought – that would inherently influence post-communist Russia. After the Soviet collapse, the fourth wave of democratization seemed to also be an irreversible process for Russia. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of many citizens for a market economy and democratic transitions grew rapidly disenchanted by the unstable 1990s, characterized by internal wars, authoritarian tendencies, oligarchism, economic crises, and radical reforms of the former Soviet system.

This situation inexorably marked Russia's destiny, brought about a decline in living standards, and distorted the process of political and economic liberalization. This period – popularly interpreted in terms of general decay – matured into further despair of an already exasperated population that had lost hope in the future while perceiving insecurity, anxiety and disillusioned promises of prosperity. In parallel, the loss of great power status and the fiasco in fully reforming the system and incorporating Russia into the Western world directed many Russian policymakers to advance the conception of Russia as a particular entity that would follow an alternative path of political transition and socio-economic development.

In the 2000s, the rise of Putin seemed to be a popular response to uncertainty and desire for revenge, while the Russian political discourse acquired more and more heterogeneous and conservative elements, rejecting a liberal alternative that appeared fragmented, unsuccessful, and progressively marginalized. Consequently, Putin continued to consolidate his power through a political narrative that functionally touched some of the innermost feelings of Russians and still appears fragmented, polymorphic and, to many extents, contradictory. In the aftermath of the Crimean crisis, the evident Western underestimation of the Kremlin's power policy

originated from a lack of awareness of the Russian ideological transition. This led many analysts and experts to jump to hasty conclusions of Russia as a backward and imperialist country with all its idiosyncrasies and illogicalities. Hence, Russia – which during the Cold War represented the center of an alternative modernity for a segment of the Western intelligentsia – appeared as an unknown and unfamiliar entity in many aspects, bringing further misconceptions that naively polarized a large portion of Western public opinion between those who approved of the Kremlin's conservative and anti-postmodernist tendencies and those who were against Putin's aggressiveness and authoritarianism.

However the problem is much more complex and does not depend on a mere struggle between conservative and progressive ideological visions. First of all, it is necessary to define how many political discourses are effectively present, who their actors are and how they compete or coexist with one another. With Putin and perhaps beyond him, post-Soviet Russia's state organization appears to be a complex, multi-layered apparatus that is able to shape new discourses and ideologies, interact with old ones, promote a narrative and image of Russia in the world and focus the world's attention and concern on itself.

In order to more clearly understand the problem and to bridge this gap of misconceptions and biases by restoring a dialogue based on understanding and awareness, Reset DOC organized the *State and Political Discourse in Russia* conference devoted to elucidating the many features of the contemporary Russian political discourse. In Venice, Russian and international experts identified the new and old ideological constellations that provide the backdrop for Putin's words and political choices; the cultural and ideological references in Russian conservatism that support Putin and shape his political language; and the origins and the fate of the vanished liberal dreams in contemporary

Russia. Some of the main results of the Venice conference have been collected and edited in this volume.*

In the theoretical introduction, Mark Kramer reconstructs the evolutions of the debate within social sciences and conceptualizes political power, its relations with political thought, their dynamics, the actors involved in the Russian context, their role and how they are affected by the socio-political and time-spatial context in which they are embedded. Hence, the author evidences the limits of the behavioralist and structural theorists, and scrutinizes some of the social-psychological conceptual approaches on power and their adaptations to political power in order to evaluate the distribution of power in the Russian political system. Hence, Kramer detects a conceptual basis for understanding political power in Russia today perceiving it as a dispositional phenomenon rather than a behavioral one.

Following his corollary, in Russia the only political actors who can have a lasting impact on the political discourse are key elites who have the capacity to attain high political office or to exert significant influence on the political system or on other major political actors, thus excluding the broader public and determining a narrower distribution than in the Western democratic countries. In fact, in Russia all the major political actors operate within a specific and limited sociopolitical structure: In the USSR, it was the rigid and exclusive Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) while in Russian Federation it is the President and the presidential apparatus. Despite some limitations during the Medvedev presidency and the major influence of Putin as prime minister (2008-2012), under Putin Russia emerged as a 'super-presidential' political system.

Consequently, Kramer focuses on the power 'resources' – including money and credit, control over employment, control

of mass media, high social status, knowledge and specialized expertise, popularity and public admiration of one's personal qualities, legality, social access to community leaders, commitments of followers, staffing support, and control over the interpretation of community norms and values – that can be marshaled by key elites to exert influence or to achieve political goals. Henceforward, he evidences how these elements must be considered in the Russian context – taking sufficient account of the structural dimension of political power – and defines a methodology to determine whether – and how – these elements specifically fit the Russian context, how its Russian actors possess them and finally how to weigh the relative importance of the resources, figuring out which are likely to be most important in particular situations and for particular actors.

Furthermore, Kramer proceeds his analysis on the limits of the 'reputational assessments' – that become a proxy for experimental assessments of key elites' perceptions of other elites' power in terms of their affiliation power and temporal power – and enunciates the methodological problematics related to measuring them in terms of semi-structured interviews – that could prove misleading results – or also analyzing media and press coverages – considering that these means are controlled by the state and are under the pressure of the authorities. Thus, the author also implies the examination of some representational and symbolic indicators, revealing how in Russia power of key individuals might be reflected in (and strengthened by) their membership on Russia's Security Council, their membership on various presidential (or prime ministerial) commissions and advisory bodies, their roles in key governmental organs, and their positions in the dominant political party (*Edinaya Rossiya*).

As well, Kramer considers the symbolic trappings of influence – such as an official chauffeur and limousine, an official residence, a large staff, frequent appearances or mentions on state television, and the receipt of official commendations

* We thank Sara I. Rohani for the English revision of some parts of this volume.

and awards – in order to estimate the effective relevance of some figures within the political system. Despite these indicators have to be cautiously used, they can be a valuable supplement to other metrics. Hence, Kramer finally enunciates techniques for assessing political power. Above all, he considers the observation of the consequences and the impact on decision-making and other forms of behavior. In this regard, despite evidencing a rivalry of administrative apparatuses, Kramer examines the ‘conflicts’ between Putin and Medvedev during the latter’s interregnum, evaluating the initial divergences and then the final decisions that were mostly in line with Putin initial positions.

Thus, his theoretical preamble on political power – in terms of the capacity to exert political influence or to achieve political outcomes – becomes the key to understand how the national political discourse is shaped in contemporary Russia. Thanks to this necessary premise on how the distribution of political power has changed over time, we can more clearly link those changes to variations in Russia’s prevailing political discourse, defining a set of ideas that become dominant because an extremely power political patron has decided to give them an official imprimatur.

The first part of the essays is dedicated to the State’s political discourse and ideological references in contemporary Russia, exploring the possible existence of a multiplicity of political discourses associated with the contemporary Russian state and its various organs. The discussions concern the plurality and fluidity allowed within the state political language, the relationship between the party, the presidential administration, the bureaucracies, the media, the different places of ideological production, the role played by scholars and other intellectuals, etc. Thus, in the first chapter Alexey Barabashev analyzes the ‘hidden influence’ of bureaucracy on the Russian political discourse and its ‘procedural’ nature. As an example, the author reconstructs the experience of the

non-public ‘working groups’ – the effective area of debates and negotiations among governmental bodies – that involve experts, scholars and the higher managers of the public administration. These groups are involved in long processes of preparation of ‘tables of disagreements,’ a special kind of documents where emerge the limits of the populistic political announcements and their effective implementation at legislative or regulatory levels. Hence, the author evidences the differences between the ‘hard’ (radical) political narratives and their ‘softer’ (moderate) versions within the state apparatus, marking the divergences within a state machine that appears as organic entity rather than a monolithic unit.

In the second chapter, Anton Barbashin investigates the Russian political discourse following the evolutions of Moscow’s foreign policy in Putin’s era. Hence, the author marks the narrative features of Russia that in 2000-2004 considered herself as an allied – not to say a part – of the West; and the rivalries emerged in the period 2005-2012 when Moscow began to pursue a parallel agenda finding hopes within the BRICS front. Thus, the author recalls how in 2012 – with the third presidential mandate of Putin – the Kremlin pursued an agenda aimed at affirming the ‘Greatpowerness’ of the country in the international scenario and how, in the aftermath of the Crimean crisis in 2014, the political discourse changed from liberal to a more realist attitude while assuming much more revanchist tones.

In the third chapter, Olga Malinova surveys the role of the ‘experts’ in determining the path of Russian political discourse. These expert organizations and think tanks are, directly or indirectly, representative of or related to specific political actors and are framed within the policymaking process, competing among each other for affirming their influence. In her historical perspective, the author evidences the multiplicity of these actors in the Russian political scenario and finds the specific features of their relations with state authorities

during the Medvedev-Putin ‘tandem’ period (2008-2011), their role in setting new public agenda over the president election (2011-2013) and after the 2014 Crimean crisis. Hence, the author marks the important role that these groups have, becoming a sort of ‘ideological agents’ that invest in a patriotic narrative functional to the official political discourse of those actors seeking to strengthen their positions.

Therefore, after detecting some of the effective players that contribute in the definition of Russian political discourse, the debate focus on the main ideological constructs sponsored by the current Russian state, their relation to similar notions existing in the West – in terms of mutual influences, adaptations, imitation or rejection – and the possible existence of “sacred” topics closed for discussion, besides the purity of the victory in World War II and the Orthodox Legacy.

Thus, in the fourth chapter, Maria Engström focuses on the neo-conservative interpretation that sets Russia as *Katechon* – a ‘restrainer’ and protective agent – against the forces of chaos in the world. Hence, this interpretation treats orthodoxy as a political religion, emphasizing the connection of the Russian Church with war and building the myth of Russia that imposes its atomic orthodoxy and defends the supposedly ‘true’ Western world resisting to evil by force. This messianic ideogeme is claimed to be a national idea while its actualization and the extensive use of collective cultural memory in contemporary political discourse so become one of the main factors accounting for the popularity of Putin’s politics of ‘ideological sovereignty’ in foreign and security policy among the elite and ordinary Russian citizens.

Additionally, in the fifth chapter Andrei Melville tests neo-conservatism as a solid but controversial national idea for Russia, conceptualizing the ‘fortress Russia’ as the core of the (neo-conservative) ideological consensus between the ‘power state,’ the elites and the population. The author even includes

the return to geopolitics and the new ideological warfare in the multipolar scenario where Russia found its dimension following a neo-conservative narrative; while at domestic level this discourse also become a key source of the domestic support. Nevertheless, despite this political discourse is aimed at legitimizing the current regime and it is functional at keeping the status quo, it can be threatened by certain factors of crisis that may distort the needs of the populations that could choose to ‘replace the TV with the fridge.’

These debates were significant in defining some of the key features of the Russian political discourses and their recent evolutions. Nevertheless, these developments are necessarily correlated with the failure of a political discourse that in the early 90s was welcomed as the only possible solution for Russia. Thus, the second part of the essays is focused on notions of liberalism and its demise, exploring the possible existence of a multiplicity of ‘liberalisms’ in contemporary Russia. The Russian liberal experiments are evident legacies of the historical pre-revolutionary culture and literature and were obviously influenced by the Soviet experience, perestroika and the early 1990s. As well, the impact of Western liberal domestic and foreign policies on Russia’s liberal ideas and expectations – and vice versa – and the role of the remaining institutions and actors encouraging political, economic, and constitutional liberalism are keys for testing the waters on one of the most cryptic subject related to contemporary Russia.

In the sixth chapter, Nina Khrushcheva examines the cultural contradictions of post-communist Russian illiberalism, revealing the cultural legacy and its influence on Russian political thought. In her historical reconstruction, the author finds some key elements as the fear for change, a general subjection to inertia and the perception of crisis in its merely negative connotation in order to find the roots of the trends of ‘undemocratic liberalism’ of the Yeltsin years and to the ‘illiberal

democracy’ of the Putin’s era. Hence, she analyzes Putin under the philosophical traditions of Chicherin and Ilyin, marking the relevance of concepts of ‘liberal-conservatism’ and ‘dictatorship of law’ in a state that would invariably feel threatened by the global challenges.

In the seventh chapter, Nadezhda Azhgikhina gave her personal testimony in discussing the liberal trends – and liberal mythology – in contemporary Russian media. Recalling the early enthusiasm of perestroika and the intellectuals’ expectations for a changing society, for free press and for the first openings after decades of authoritarian regime, the author evidences the 1991 coup attempt as a turning point that undermined the transition towards democracy disillusionment in the latest generation of Soviet intelligentsia. The progressive change of narrative in the political discourse, the authoritarian trends manifested since the early 90s, the situation in Russian media that is sadly well known while the liberal agenda appeared indefinitely postponed lead us to consider a contraction of freedom gained at the end of the 80s while a just smaller group of professional journalists resists in defending the freedom of information and remained aimed at realizing a sustainable democratic regime.

Finally, in the eighth chapter Vladislav Zubok offers his conclusions, in historical perspective, reflecting on the roots of liberal ‘unsuccess’ in Russia. In his analysis, the author examines the role of the elites – comparing groups of 19th and early 20th centuries with those of the early 1990s – from an intellectual-cultural perspective, evidenced in the first ruptures with the 1917 revolutions and the missed opportunities to liberalize USSR. Then, he recalls how the repeated failures of reforms in Russia – especially during the 90s – created a sense of ‘unsuccess,’ a fatal path dependency, and became a discredited set of value identified as ‘American’ ones while the majority of Russians would prefer to sacrifice their civic freedom for the sake of security and stability. Zubok so recalls the reasons

of ‘unsuccess’ of liberalism in its complicated relations with nationalists and with the Yeltsin’s regime; in the Russian elite’s slow adaptability to quick reforms; in its failure in providing the basic ‘check and balance’ instruments and in creating the preconditions for state governability; and in its resistance in learning from its past failures and mistakes. Conversely, since 2013 the Putin version of conservatism has advanced in the face of the cosmopolitan, postmodern, ‘decadent’ liberal practices of the West in a moment when, regrettably, the liberal alternative is particularly weak and under attack in the West.

Theoretical Introduction

Political Power and Political Discourse
in Russia: Conceptual Issues
Mark Kramer, Harvard University

In Russia, as in numerous other countries, political power is closely linked with political discourse. The dominant political figure in Russia over the past seventeen years, Vladimir Putin, has used his political power to shape the prevailing political discourse and to marginalize certain strains of thought and exclude them from the public arena, particularly those connected with liberal democracy, human rights, and free elections. Conversely, some thinkers in Russia have sought to empower their ideas by seeking links with the Putin administration and by putting their ideas into a format congenial to the highest policymakers. This does not necessarily mean that these thinkers suddenly become informal advisers to policymakers or ever have direct contact with them, but their ideas can gain prominence and enter the political discourse because leading officials in the political arena, especially Putin, have chosen to adopt and empower those ideas.

To understand the link between political power and political discourse, we first need to specify what political power is and how it can best be understood in the Russian context. This essay begins by reviewing how the concept of power has been discussed in the social sciences from the early 20th century to the present. This synopsis of different theoretical frameworks allows us to appraise the relevance of particular frameworks to the political context in Russia. The essay looks

at the question of structure versus agency (i.e., how the power of individuals and groups is affected by the social context in which they are embedded) and distinguishes between power, on the one hand, and the exercise of power, on the other.

1. The Concept of Power

The concept of power has preoccupied political philosophers since at least the time of Plato and Aristotle. Almost every major philosopher over the centuries – Machiavelli, Hume, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and many others – pondered the subject at length. Since the early 20th century, scholars in the social sciences – especially political science and sociology – have examined the concept of power in painstaking detail. Yet, despite the immense amount of thought that has gone into the subject, no consensus has emerged about even the most basic aspects of power. Scholars disagree about the nature of power (whether it is a latent attribute of an actor or is inherent to a social relationship), the purpose for which it is exercised (power over someone versus power to achieve a desired result), the extent to which power hinges on the expectations of key actors, and the feasibility of measuring power before it is actually exercised.¹

The definition of power put forth by the great German sociologist Max Weber in his posthumously published classic *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* is still highly influential.² Weber conceived of power as the capacity of a social actor to achieve a

¹ For valuable recent anthologies and overviews of the vast literature, see Stewart R. Clegg and Mark Haugaard (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Power*, Sage Publications, London 2009; Mark Haugaard (ed.), *Power: A Reader*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2002; Martin J. Smith, *Power and the State*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009; John Scott, *Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2002; and Stewart R. Clegg, David Courpasson, and Nelson X. Phillips, *Power and Organizations*, Sage Publications, London 2006.

desired outcome even if confronted by resistance. Specifically, Weber wrote: “*Macht bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel, worauf diese Chance beruht.*”² In the standard English translation of Weber’s works (the version almost always cited by American social scientists), this formulation has been imperfectly rendered as “Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” A more precise translation would be “Power is the opportunity within a social relationship to achieve one’s will against opposition, regardless of what this opportunity is based on.” Key elements of Weber’s definition – the notion that power exists only within a social relationship, is consciously directed toward a goal, and is exercised over others – are still widely invoked today.

Another early contribution to the study of power – albeit one of transitory significance – was made by the British political scientist Harold Lasswell, who in his 1948 book *Power and Personality* defined power as “relations in which severe

² Weber died abruptly of pneumonia in 1920 before he could finish assembling the many different texts that were later published as a single book under the title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Numerous scholars have shown that the wording and organization (and even the title) of the initial German editions of the book (not to mention the English translation) did not fully conform to Weber’s wishes. For convincing analyses demonstrating that the first several editions of the book departed significantly from Weber’s intentions, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Zur Entstehung von Max Webers hinterlassenem Werk Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Soziologie*, *Zeitschrift für Staatswissenschaft und Staatspraxis*, 11/6, 2000, pp. 160-189; Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Webers Beitrag zum Grundriss der Sozialökonomie*, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 50/2, June 1998, pp. 327-343; and Wolfgang Schluchter ‘Kopf’ oder ‘Doppelkopf’ – das ist hier die Frage: Replik auf Hiroshi Oribara, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 51/4, December 1999, pp. 735-743.

³ Max Weber (author) and Edith Hanke, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Thomas Kroll (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächten*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen 2005, p. 128.

deprivations are expected to follow the breach of a pattern of conduct.”⁴ Lasswell’s treatment of the subject, building on the analysis of a pioneering American political scientist, Charles E. Merriam, especially Merriam’s book *Political Power* (1934), influenced the work of the American social scientist Herbert A. Simon, who published an article in 1953 that explicitly addressed the question of how to measure power.⁵ Simon used the terms “power” and “influence” interchangeably – an approach that few analysts would condone today – and offered a strictly logical-positivist conception of power, which he defined as “an asymmetrical relation between the behavior of two persons [in which] a change in the behavior of one [...] alters the behavior of the other.” Simon then considered how to gauge the distribution of power in a particular social unit. He stressed that in a power relationship the participants’ expectations might, in principle, give a good sense of the actual distribution of power, but in practice each actor’s expectations were likely to change in accordance with the others’ anticipated reactions. This process, Simon acknowledged, was bound to complicate attempts to measure power. Simon’s essay was followed by numerous other articles in the 1950s and 1960s that dealt with the question of how to measure power. The surge of publications on this matter reflected the ascendance of “behavioralism” in the social sciences, especially in the United States. Scholars associated with the behavioralist school – Simon, John G. March, Robert A. Dahl, John Harsanyi, William H. Riker, Steven J. Brams, and others – sought to devise rigorous methods of measuring, comparing, and modeling political power.⁶

⁴ Harold D. Lasswell, *Power and Personality*, W.W. Norton, New York 1948, p. 12. The same definition was offered in a book Lasswell co-authored with Kaplan two years later: Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1950.

⁵ Herbert A. Simon, *Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power*, *The Journal of Politics*, 15/4, November 1953, pp. 500-516.

2. Behaviorism and the “Faces of Power”

Arguably the most influential behavioralist view of power was put forth by Robert Dahl, who, in an oft-cited formulation, contended that “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”⁷ This conception of power, unlike Weber’s definition, focuses solely on A’s power *over* someone else, rather than A’s power to *achieve* something desired. Yet Dahl, in his subsequent analysis, departed from his own definition and largely embraced Weber’s. Dahl maintained that the only way to measure the political power of individuals and groups is by looking at their “ability to affect decision-making.” He sought to gauge the distribution of political power in the United States by examining political

⁶ John G. March, *An Introduction to the Theory and Measurement of Influence*, *American Political Science Review*, 49/2, June 1955, pp. 431-451; John R. P. French, Jr., *A Formal Theory of Power*, *Psychological Review*, 63/3, May 1956, pp. 181-194; John G. March, *Measurement Concepts in the Theory of Influence*, *The Journal of Politics*, 19/2, May 1957, pp. 202-226; Robert A. Dahl, *The Concept of Power*, *Behavioral Science*, 2/3, July 1957, pp. 201-215; John C. Harsanyi, *Measurement of Social Power, Opportunity Costs, and the Theory of Two-Person Bargaining Games*, *Behavioral Science*, 7/1, January 1962, pp. 67-80; John C. Harsanyi, *Measurement of Social Power in n-Person Reciprocal Power Situations*, *Behavioral Science*, 7/1, January 1962, pp. 81-91; Steven J. Brams, *Measuring the Concentration of Power in Political Systems*, *American Political Science Review*, 62/2, June 1968, pp. 461-475; and Alvin I. Goldman, *On the Measurement of Power*, *Journal of Philosophy*, 71/8, May 1974, pp. 231-252. For three critiques from varying perspectives, see William H. Riker, *Some Ambiguities in the Notion of Power*, *American Political Science Review*, 58/2, June 1964, pp. 341-349; Stefano Passioli, *On Power, Its Intensity and Distribution*, *European Journal of Political Research*, 1/2, June 1973, pp. 163-177; and Roderick Bell, *Political Power: The Problem of Measurement*, in Roderick Bell, David V. Edwards, and R. Harrison Wagner (eds.), *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research*, The Free Press, New York 1969, pp. 13-28, 353-354.

⁷ Dahl, *The Concept of Power*, pp. 201-215. Dahl modified his definition of power somewhat in later years but did not alter his contention that the only way to measure power was by observing changes in behavior. See, for example, Robert A. Dahl, *Power*, in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan-The Free Press, New York 1968, Vol. 12, pp. 405-415.

decision-making on three “key issue areas” (urban redevelopment, public education, and nominations for public office) in the city of New Haven, Connecticut, which he saw as a microcosm of U.S. society. Dahl found that no single individual or group of elites in the city – not even the wealthiest business executives – regularly held sway on more than one of these three issues and that no group was entirely excluded from having at least some influence.⁸ Hence, in Dahl’s depiction, prominent elites and groups in New Haven could not automatically marshal resources such as wealth to control decision-making. Instead, a multiplicity of individuals and groups vied with one another to influence the outcomes. Definitions aside, the assumption underlying Dahl’s analysis – that the only way to measure political power, at least in the United States, is to explore how decisions are made on “key issue areas” – involves a conception of power as “power to” rather than “power over.” Other scholars have therefore characterized Dahl’s approach to the study of power as the “decision-making approach” or the “decision method.”

Much the same is true about many other social scientists who, to varying degrees, embraced Dahl’s initial formulation about power (the notion that A has power over B if he can force B to do something) but then ended up analyzing how power was exercised to achieve something. In a 1962 article, Richard M. Emerson argued that “the power of actor A over actor B is the amount of resistance on the part of B which can be potentially overcome by A.”⁹ This definition is an even starker conception of power as “power over,” yet Emerson went on to assess how A exercises power to achieve a desired end.

⁸ Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1961.

⁹ Richard M. Emerson, *Power-Dependence Relations*, *American Sociological Review*, 27/1, February 1962, pp. 31-41.

Similarly, Dorwin Cartwright proposed a definition of power as simply the capacity to exert influence over someone: “When an agent, O, performs an act resulting in some change in another agent, P, we say that O *influences* P. If O has the capability of influencing P, we say that O *has power over* P.”¹⁰ Some econometric analyses of power have used this definition, which sees power as being exercised for its own sake. Cartwright himself, however, often treated power as the capacity to achieve goals, not just to exert influence. Dahl’s assessment of power in New Haven was designed in part as a response to sociologists like Floyd Hunter and C. Wright Mills, who insisted that political power and economic power in the United States were highly concentrated in the hands of a small ruling class (what Mills called a “power elite”).¹¹ Dahl, Nelson W. Polsby, and many others pointed out that Hunter and Mills assumed in advance that power in the United States was very highly concentrated and that their analysis was tailored to fit a predetermined conclusion. Dahl and Polsby also faulted the “power elite” sociologists for assuming that the power structure in a community is stable and immutable and for developing an argument that was essentially non-falsifiable.¹² Dahl’s aims were thus twofold: to develop a rigorous way of analyzing political power; and to present evidence that power in the United States

¹⁰ Dorwin Cartwright, *Influence, Leadership, and Control*, in James G. March (ed.), *Handbook of Organizations*, Rand McNally & Co., Chicago 1965, pp. 1-47. See also Dorwin Cartwright, *A Field Theoretical Conception of Power*, in Dorwin Cartwright (ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, Institute for Social Research – University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1959, pp. 183-220.

¹¹ Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1953; C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, New York 1956; Roland Pellegrini and Charles H. Coates, *Absentee-Owned Corporations and Community Power Structure*, *American Journal of Sociology*, 61/5, March 1956, pp. 413-419; and Robert O. Schulze, *Economic Dominants and Community Power Structure*, *American Sociological Review*, 23/1, February 1958, pp. 3-9.

was much more diffuse than Mills and Hunter had claimed.

Dahl's conception of political power initially proved influential but soon came under withering epistemological and ontological criticism. The validity of his "decision-making approach" was challenged early on by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, who, despite agreeing with Dahl's rebuttal of the "ruling elite" thesis, criticized him on two methodological grounds. First, they argued that by focusing exclusively on decision-making, he overlooked the possibility that "some person or association could limit decision-making to relatively non-controversial matters by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals." If key elites were able to entrench their own preferred "social and political values and institutional practices" for their whole community, they could prevent any public consideration of issues that would be "seriously detrimental to [their own] preferences." Bachrach and Baratz averred that this second "face of power" – the ability to set the political agenda, or what they infelicitously described as "nondecision-making" – was more crucial than Dahl's first "face" (decision-making) in reflecting an actor's power. As they put it: "To the extent that a person or group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of political conflicts, that person or group has power."¹² The other objection raised by Bachrach and Baratz is that Dahl failed to provide any "objective criteria for distinguishing

¹² In addition to Dahl's critiques, see Nelson W. Polsby, *How to Study Community Power: The Pluralist Alternative*, *The Journal of Politics*, 22/3, August 1960, pp. 474-484; Nelson W. Polsby, *Three Problems in the Analysis of Community Power*, *American Sociological Review*, 24/6, December 1959, pp. 796-803; Nelson W. Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1963; and Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, *Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York 1960.

¹³ Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *The Two Faces of Power*, *American Political Science Review*, 56/4, December 1962, pp. 947-952.

between 'important' and 'unimportant' issues arising in the political arena" – a shortcoming that magnified the pitfalls of his sole focus on overt decision-making. Although Bachrach and Baratz in their later writings on the topic did not clearly indicate whether efforts to manipulate and control the political agenda were apt to be mostly intentional or unintentional, their epistemological critique of Dahl landed some telling blows.¹⁴ Even scholars who criticized Bachrach and Baratz on various grounds – for supposedly putting forth an untestable and unverifiable thesis, for making unsubstantiated assumptions, or for being methodologically lax – were wont to agree that agenda-setting must be given at least as much weight as decision-making in analyses of power.¹⁵

The Bachrach-Baratz "faces of power" argument was extended by the British political theorist Steven Lukes, who, in a short essay published as a booklet in 1974, averred that Bachrach and Baratz omitted a crucial "third dimension" of power, namely, the ability of actor A to shape the preferences and desires of actors B and C.¹⁶ Borrowing from Gramsci, Lukes argued that A can maintain power over B and C "by shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things."

¹⁴ Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Decisions and Non-Decisions: An Analytical Framework*, *American Political Science Review*, 57/3, September 1963, pp. 632-642; and Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, New York 1970.

¹⁵ For some of the harsher critiques, see Raymond Wolfinger, *Nondecisions and the Study of Local Politics*, *American Political Science Review*, 65/4, December 1971, pp. 1063-1080; Geoffrey Debnam, *Nondecisions and Power: The Two Faces of Bachrach and Baratz*, *American Political Science Review*, 69/1, March 1973, pp. 889-899; and Frederick W. Frey, *Comment: On Issues and Nonissues in the Study of Power*, *American Political Science Review*, 65/4, December 1971, pp. 1081-1101.

¹⁶ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan, London 1974. An expanded 2nd edition of the book, more than three times the original length, was published in 2005 by Palgrave Macmillan.

According to Lukes, this “third dimension” is “the supreme and most insidious” form of power because A exercises it “to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances.” The implication is that A, in exercising power over B and C, necessarily acts in a way “contrary to [their] interests.”¹⁷ Lukes’s three-dimensional view of power came under attack from many quarters, not least because of his insistence on designing an analytical approach that was inextricably bound up with normative questions. James Hyland, among others, argued that Lukes’s claim of being able to discern actors’ “real interests,” as opposed to their “subjective preferences,” underscored the “epistemological relativism” of his conception of power.¹⁸ Some other scholars complained that Lukes’s third dimension of power (preference-shaping) was even more difficult to test than the Bachrach-Baratz notion of agenda-setting.¹⁹ This latter objection lost some of its force, however, after one of Lukes’s former students, John Gaventa, produced a sophisticated study of political power in the Appalachian Valley that seemed to show not only how the dominant local actors were able to affect political decision-making and agenda-setting but also how they could rely on ideological precepts, myths, and symbols to shape and reshape the local residents’ preferences.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸ James L. Hyland, *Democratic Theory: The Philosophical Foundations*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1995, p. 203.

¹⁹ Robert J. Mokken and Franz N. Stokman, *Power and Influence in Political Phenomena*, in Brian Barry (ed.), *Power and Political Theory: Some European Perspectives*, John Wiley, London 1976, pp. 33-54, esp. 45; Barry Barnes, *Power*, in Ralph Bellamy (ed.), *Theories and Concepts of Politics: An Introduction*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1993, p. 200; and Alan Bradshaw, *A Critique of Steven Lukes’ ‘Power: A Radical View,’* *Sociology*, 10/1, January 1976, pp. 121-127.

²⁰ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1980.

3. *The Shift Away from Behavioralism*

Debate about the “faces” (or “dimensions”) of power persisted well into the 1980s, but increasingly the whole paradigm came under challenge from scholars who rejected the behavioralist thrust of the existing scholarship and sought to develop structural conceptions of political power.²¹ The trend toward structural theories had been prefigured as far back as the late 1960s and early 1970s not only in the work of Talcott Parsons, who in his later writings conceived of political power as a facilitating medium in a sociopolitical system (analogous to money in an economic system),²² but also in studies produced by a few scholars who focused on political power in urban settings. In particular, the sociologist Terry N. Clark expressed dissatisfaction with the behavioralists’ focus on “dyadic formulations [that] tend to omit any reference to goals or to the broader structure [...] within which power is exercised.”²³ Clark offered a definition of power as “the potential ability of an actor or actors to select, to change, and to attain the goals of a social system.” This formulation, he argued, underscored the context-dependent nature of power, which he believed should be seen within the social context in which it is exercised. “An individual actor,” Clark wrote, “is considered powerful only in relation to a given social system because it is often extremely difficult for an actor powerful in one system (such as a legislature) to transfer

²¹ On this trend, see Clarissa Rile Hayward, *De-Facing Power*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2000, pp. 22-26.

²² See, in particular, Talcott Parsons, *On the Concept of Political Power*, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 107/3, June 1963, pp. 232-263. See also Talcott Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*, The Free Press, New York 1967.

²³ Terry N. Clark, *The Concept of Power*, in Terry N. Clark (ed.), *Community Structure and Decision-Making: Comparative Analyses*, Chandler Publishing Company, San Francisco 1968, pp. 45-81.

his resources to a second system (such as another legislature).”²⁴ Although Clark did not systematically develop his framework and left some gaps and ambiguities, his conception of power adumbrated the structural theories that emerged later.

The advent of structural conceptions of political power was heralded in 1984 with the publication of Anthony Giddens’s *The Constitution of Society* outlining his theory of “structuration” and, even more, in 1987 with the appearance of Jeffrey Isaac’s wide-ranging ontological critique of the “faces of power” literature. Isaac argued that “the behavioralist foundations of the debate [over the works of Dahl, Bachrach-Baratz, and Lukes] constrained its participants from conceiving power as anything more than a behavioral regularity.”²⁵ Isaac averred that the quest for “behavioral regularities” had taken scholarship in the wrong direction and that analysts of political power should instead be focusing on “the enduring social relationships that structure” individuals’ political behavior. He emphasized that even though the underlying social structures – institutions, rules, and practices – are *relatively* “enduring,” they are not permanent or immutable. This same point was stressed by Thomas Wartenberg, who, in several publications elucidating the concept of “situated power,” maintained that structural conditions can and do change, albeit very slowly most of the time.²⁶ Isaac, Wartenberg, Giddens, Barry

²⁴ Ibid., p. 46. See also Terry N. Clark, *The Concept of Power: Some Overemphasized and Underrecognized Dimensions – An Examination with Special Reference to the Local Community*, *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 48/4, December 1967, pp. 271-286.

²⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1984; and Jeffrey Isaac, *Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realist Critique*, *Polity*, 20/1, Autumn 1987, pp. 4-31. See also Jeffrey Isaac, *Power and Marxist Theory: A Realist View*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1987.

²⁶ Thomas Wartenberg, *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1990. See also Thomas Wartenberg, *Introduction*, in Thomas Wartenberg (ed.), *Rethinking Power*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1992, pp. xi-xxxvi.

Barnes, and other social scientists explored how structural conditions can affect the exercise of power and entrench the power of key individuals and groups.²⁷ To illustrate the point, Isaac noted that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) wielded great power over the Soviet population. “The CPSU,” he wrote, had “power over the Soviet masses by virtue of the structure of Soviet society in which political power [was] monopolized by a single party.” Scholars who simply embarked on “a search for behavioral regularities,” rather than analyzing “the nature of Soviet society,” would never gain a full understanding of political power in the USSR.²⁸

Although the structural theorists abandoned the behavioralists’ exclusive focus on dyadic power relationships between A and B, they did so without resorting to the structural determinism that plagues the works of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and the structural Marxists. Even as Isaac, Wartenberg, and others took account of the broad social context in which A has power to do something that might affect B, they left ample room for A’s agency. A’s power, they argued, is part of his “inherent nature” (which encompasses his personal traits as well as his social power), but A’s decision whether and how to exercise his power is dependent on his free will as well as on the structural factors that circumscribe his actions. In the USSR, for example, an individual’s political power depended largely on his place in the Soviet social structure, but the individual chose for himself whether and how to exercise his power. In this case and others, as Isaac put it, political power was “distributed by the various enduring structural relationships in society and

²⁷ For relevant work by Barnes, see Barry Barnes, *The Nature of Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1988; and Barry Barnes, *Power*, in Ralph Bellamy (ed.), *Theories and Concepts of Politics: An Introduction*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1993, pp. 197-219.

²⁸ Isaac, *Beyond the Three Faces of Power*, p. 16.

exercised by individuals and groups based on their location in a given [social] structure.”²⁹

Another structural conception of political power was developed in the mid-1990s by Colin Hay, who argued that power “is about context-shaping, about the capacity of actors to redefine the parameters of what is socially, politically, and economically possible for others.”³⁰ Elaborating on this point, Hay emphasized “power relations in which structures, institutions, and organizations are shaped by human action in such a way as to alter the parameters of subsequent action.” This form of power, he argued, “is mediated by, and instantiated in, structures.” Examples of this phenomenon would include the legislature’s power to adopt a law and the president’s power to issue a decree. The ability to do these things – in the first instance a collective capacity and in the second an individual capacity – allows the parliament and president to shape the political context in a way that can influence both current and future action. Although Hay muddled his discussion by introducing what he called “direct power” into his framework and by occasionally conflating power with the exercise of power (the so-called exercise fallacy), his notion of context-shaping adds a valuable dimension to the question of structure versus agency.

The structural frameworks of political power highlighted a distinction that came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s between “power over” (the capacity to influence others, usually coercively) and “power to” (the capacity to achieve desired outcomes). This distinction was mentioned by Dennis H. Wrong in his wide-ranging book on power, first published in 1979, and was then developed much more systematically by Peter Morriss in his important “philosophical analysis” of power published

²⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁰ Colin Hay, *Divided by a Common Language: Political Theory and the Concept of Power, Politics*, 17/1, February 1997, pp. 45-52.

in 1987.³¹ After surveying the diverse forms and uses of power, including political power, Wrong argued that power should be understood as “both a generalized capacity to attain ends that is unequally distributed among the members of a society as a result of the structure of its major institutions, on the one hand, and an asymmetrical social relation among persons manifested directly in social interaction or indirectly through anticipated reactions, on the other.”³² Morriss, Isaac, and other scholars pointed out that Dahl, Bachrach-Baratz, and Lukes had all emphasized conceptions of power that focused exclusively on A’s power over B, even though their subsequent analyses focused on power to do certain things, such as influencing decision-making, controlling agenda-setting, and shaping preferences. Morriss aptly observed that the conceptual discussions offered by Dahl and the others had given the impression that “the subordination of B is the *objective* of A’s power.” This approach, Morriss argued, is “deplorable” because “our ability to kick others around (or to harm their interests, or get them to do things they don’t want to do) can scarcely encompass *everything* we understand as power in social contexts.” Moving beyond Wrong’s point about the ways of conceiving power, Morriss stressed that “power over” should be seen as just a special case of “power to”:

³¹ Dennis H. Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*, Harper and Row, New Brunswick 1979, pp. 218-221, 237-251; and Peter Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1987, pp. 32-35. A second edition of Wrong’s book with a new preface (but the rest of the book unchanged) was published in 1988. A third edition, with another new preface, was published by Transaction Publishers in 1995. A second edition of Morriss’s book with a new foreword appeared in 2002. The distinction between power-to and power-over had been raised previously by some other scholars such as Talcott Parsons, but he conceived of power solely in collective (social) terms. Morriss explores the distinction far more systematically and insightfully, making it a major theme of his book and applying it to individual as well as group power.

³² Wrong, *Preface*, in Wrong, *Power* (1988 edition), p. iv.

If we are interested in the “conflictual aspect” of power, we can very easily look at someone’s power *to* kick others around, or their power *to* win conflicts. Everything that needs to be said about power can be said using the idea of the capacity to effect outcomes – unless we are mesmerized by a desire to get the notion of *affecting* into power at all costs.³³

Most theoretical discussions of political power in recent years have accepted Morriss’s (and Wrong’s) view on this matter. Indeed, Lukes himself, despite having focused solely on “power over” in the original edition of his book, put out a much-expanded 2005 edition that went along with Morriss’s interpretation of the basic point. Power-to and power-over, Lukes said in 2005, “are two distinct variants,” and “the latter [power-to] is a sub-species of the former.”³⁴ What Lukes did not point out, however, is that this key distinction, if properly upheld, would cast serious doubt on the whole framework of his earlier analysis of power.

4. Social-Psychological Conceptions of Power

Over the past several decades, the field of social psychology has generated influential approaches to the study of power that potentially can be adapted for an understanding of political power. The groundwork for this literature was laid by the

³³ Morriss, *Power*, p. 34 (all italics in original).

³⁴ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, revised edition, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2005, p. 94. Despite this concession, Lukes kept his original text intact, reprinting it as the first third of his expanded edition. In a critique of the new edition, Morriss argued that “although Lukes [now] says that ‘power-to’ is the more central concept, and ‘the ability to produce effects’ is the better definition of power, when he develops and defends his account he follows the old three-dimensional approach, which denied both claims.” See Peter Morriss, *Steven Lukes on the Concept of Power*, *Political Studies Review*, 4/2, May 2006, pp. 124-135. See also Steven Lukes, *Reply to Comments*, *Political Studies Review*, 4/2, May 2006, pp. 164-173. For a defense of Lukes’s revised position, see Avery Plaw, *Lukes’s Three-Dimensional Model of Power Redux: Is It Still Compelling?*, *Social Theory and Practice*, 33/3, July 2007, pp. 489-500.

renowned German social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who emigrated to the United States in 1932 and produced a large body of work until his untimely death in 1947.³⁵ Building on Lewin’s insights, John R. P. French and Bertram Raven published a seminal essay in 1959 that laid out what they saw as five distinct “bases of social power.”³⁶ Defining power as a force exercised by O over P, they argued that power is context-dependent and therefore has to be assessed as different “types of power” in separate “systems” (dimensions) of social life. Each of their five types of power entailed a different relationship between O and P and different forms of compliance by P with O’s wishes:

- (1) reward power, based on P’s perception that O has the ability to mediate rewards for him; (2) coercive power, based on P’s perception that O has the ability to mediate punishments for him; (3) legitimate power, based on the perception by P that O has a legitimate right to prescribe behavior for him; (4) referent power, based on P’s identification with O [and]; (5) expert power, based on the perception that O has some special knowledge or expertise.³⁷

The French-Raven essay inspired a great deal of work by scholars who sought to operationalize the fivefold typology (i.e., to develop specific scales for measuring the five types of power).³⁸ Although most of the attempts at operationalization were of dubious validity (in part because the scales were too narrow or included only a single item), numerous researchers sought

³⁵ See, in particular, Kurt Lewin, *Analysis of the Concepts Whole, Differentiation and Unity*, *University of Iowa Studies in Child Welfare*, 18/1, 1941, pp. 226-261.

³⁶ John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, *The Bases of Social Power*, in Cartwright, (ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, pp. 150-167.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

³⁸ Raven later added to the typology a sixth base of power – informational power – which had been discussed in the original essay but was not then regarded as a separate base of power. See Bertram H. Raven, *Social Influence and Power*, in Ivan D. Steiner and Martin Fishbein (eds.), *Current Studies in Social Psychology*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1965, pp. 399-444.

to develop sounder and more sophisticated ways to discern combined effects.³⁹ More recent studies have lent empirical support to the French-Raven typology.⁴⁰ Raven himself put forth a revised and expanded version of the original model in 1992, transforming it into a “power/interaction model of interpersonal influence,” which was more detailed and offered a dynamic conception of power.⁴¹ The revised model took account of how a political actor (O) would weigh the costs and benefits of using a particular type of power to influence a target (P). The revised model also allowed for changes in O’s motivations, changes in O’s assessment of the types of power at hand, and changes in the O-P power relationship resulting from changes in P’s perception of himself or of O.

Subsequent modifications to the French-Raven framework were designed to take account of P’s perception of O’s credibility. The assumption underlying this modification was that “a person with high credibility would be perceived as more powerful than a person with low credibility.”⁴² In addition, other social psychology researchers devised alternative frameworks. Of particular importance was the branch of research that began with the publication in 1976 of David Kipnis’s *The Powerholders*,

³⁹ For a critique of the many attempts at operationalization, see Philip M. Podsakoff and Chester A. Schriesheim, *Field Studies of French and Raven’s Bases of Power: Critique, Reanalysis, and Suggestions for Future Research*, *Psychological Bulletin*, 97/3, May 1985, pp. 387-411.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 6th edition, Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River 2006.

⁴¹ Bertram H. Raven, *A Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence: French and Raven Thirty Years Later*, *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 7/2, June 1992, pp. 217-244.

⁴² Mitchell S. Nesler, Herman Aguinis, Brian M. Quigley and James T. Tedeschi, *The Effect of Credibility on Perceived Power*, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 23/17, 1993, pp. 1407-1425. This point had been raised by earlier analysts, including practitioners of game theory as well as social psychologists. See, for example, John W. Thibaut and Harold H. Kelley, *The Social Psychology of Groups*, Wiley, New York 1959, p. 101.

which used a model focusing on powerful individuals and how they were affected by holding and exercising power over others.⁴³ The model devised by Kipnis stipulated that O’s choice of how to use power would depend on the resources (power bases) O had available and the inhibitions O faced because of the expected costs of using power, the expected resistance from P, the nature of O’s values and attitudes, and the impact of social norms. This model was distinctive in stressing O’s perceptions both of himself and of P, predicting that the stronger the influence exerted by O, the more negative his appraisal of the target of the influence, namely P. Conversely, the stronger the influence exerted by O, the more positive his self-appraisal was apt to be – a phenomenon that Kipnis described as “metamorphic effects.” Although these sorts of effects are best studied in experimental settings, the model is potentially useful in understanding certain power relationships in Russia, such as Vladimir Putin’s full-scale campaign against Boris Berезovskiy and Mikhail Khodorkovskiy.

In a subsequent landmark study based on extensive surveys and investigative work, Kipnis and two co-researchers found eight types of “influence tactics” adopted by O in relation to superiors, to co-workers, and to subordinates: assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, sanctions, exchange, upward appeals, blocking, and coalitions. Kipnis and his colleagues also developed multi-item scales to measure each tactic.⁴⁴ A few years later, Kipnis and Stuart M. Schmidt compiled a Profile of Organizational Influence Strategies (POIS) based on revised versions of the initial scales and items. The categories and scales devised by Kipnis and his colleagues were widely adopted by

⁴³ David Kipnis, *The Powerholders*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1976.

⁴⁴ David Kipnis, Stuart M. Schmidt, and Ian Wilkinson, *Intraorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One’s Way*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65/4, August 1980, pp. 440-452.

other researchers to conduct their own studies and tests, and in 1990 two significantly revised versions of the framework were proposed – one by Chester A. Schriesheim and Timothy R. Hinkin, and another by Gary Yukl and Cecilia M. Falbe.⁴⁵ Schriesheim and Hinkin carried out rigorous analyses that suggested the need to delete some of the subscales devised by Kipnis and his colleagues and to add new ones. Yukl and Falbe undertook a more far-reaching refinement and extension of the framework, an effort facilitated by their decision to draw on reports from both agents and targets of influence (rather than just agents, as in the study by Kipnis et al.). Their new typology of influence tactics comprised pressure tactics, upward appeals, exchange tactics, coalition tactics, ingratiating tactics, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultation tactics. The social psychology literature focuses on behavior in interpersonal relations, groups, and organizations and is not directly connected to the way power is distributed in political systems per se. Nonetheless, the literature does shed valuable light on the way political power is exercised. Moreover, the “bases of social power” laid out in the modified French-Raven framework and the categories of influence tactics highlighted by Kipnis and other researchers can potentially be incorporated into measurements of political power.

⁴⁵ Chester A. Schriesheim and Timothy R. Hinkin, *Influence Tactics Used by Subordinates: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis and Refinement of the Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson Subscales*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75/3, June 1990, pp. 246-257; and Gary Yukl and Cecilia M. Falbe, *Influence Tactics and Objectives in Upward, Downward, and Lateral Influence Attempts*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75/2, April 1990, pp. 132-140.

5. *Political Power in The Russian Context*

From this discussion we can extract eight points about the concept of political power that are worth enumerating here. These points provide a conceptual basis for understanding political power in Russia today.

1. *First*, political power should be thought of as a dispositional phenomenon, not a behavioral phenomenon. It can be defined as the capacity to exert political influence or to achieve political goals. The capacity to do something is not the same as actually doing it, and power therefore should not be confused with the exercise of power – the major fallacy of behaviorist conceptions. Even if we could measure A's and B's power with absolute certainty, this would not tell us how effective A or B would be in exercising it.

2. *Second*, the only political actors in Russia who can have a lasting impact on the political discourse are key elites who have the capacity to attain high political office or to exert significant influence on the political system or on other major political actors. The role of the broader public is excluded. In that sense, the range of relevant actors in Russia is narrower than in Western democratic countries, where the public at election time collectively determines who will hold political office and thereby decisively shapes the distribution of political power. In Russia, national elections have become mostly a formality in recent years. Hence, even though the public does play at least some political role in Russia – a role that stems in part from the potential for mass unrest to break out, as it did in December 2011 and the first few months of 2012, and in part from the weight given to popularity ratings for Putin, which far outdistance those of other political actors – there is ample reason to focus exclusively on key elites.

3. *Third*, all the major political actors operate within a specific sociopolitical structure that plays a crucial role in the distribution of political power. In the Soviet Union, the existence of the Communist system predetermined a great deal about who had political power and who did not. Until the end of the 1980s, no one outside the CPSU had any chance of attaining political power. Even those who belonged to the party often had little if any chance of gaining significant political power. The rigidly hierarchical and highly centralized structure of the CPSU underlay the distribution of power. Although government ministries existed in parallel with the central party institutions, all senior and mid-level officials in those ministries were members of the CPSU and owed their chief loyalties to the party. For a brief while in the spring of 1953, Soviet leaders contemplated making the government more equal with the Communist Party, but any further consideration of this matter ceased after Nikita Khrushchev consolidated his position as CPSU First Secretary in September 1953.⁴⁶ From that point until the late 1980s, the party returned to its customary unchallenged dominance in the Soviet polity. Western scholars who sought to identify the leading political authorities in the USSR had to take account of the CPSU's internal structure, which included the Politburo and Secretariat as the highest executive organs that met regularly. The Central Committee, though nominally higher, rarely met and had little de facto power.⁴⁷ No one in the USSR who was not on

the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat could aspire to become the country's leading political figure. Nowadays, in Russia, the structures in which political action takes place also play an important role. Even now, the structural legacy of the Soviet era remains conspicuous. Russia currently has a political system that gives immense formal power to the president, who is assisted by a large presidential apparatus. The president's role in the system is roughly analogous to that of the CPSU General Secretary in the Soviet Union, and the presidential administration is roughly analogous to the administrative apparatus of the CPSU.⁴⁸ A government headed by a prime minister exists alongside the presidential administration, in much the same way that the Soviet government existed alongside the CPSU. The clear-cut supremacy of the CPSU over the Soviet government has been largely emulated in the Russian polity, which has tended to give the president extensive sway over the prime minister and all other government ministers. The distribution of political power in Russia is thus shaped by a system that provides simultaneously for a president, who possesses vast executive authority on paper and oversees a large administrative apparatus, and a prime minister who heads a cabinet and other government agencies. However, because political institutions in Russia are barely a quarter of a century old, institutions there are far more fluid than in a well-established polity. This means that an extraordinary individual who has attained high office might at times have

⁴⁶ See Mark Kramer, *The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe (Part 1)*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 1/1, Winter 1999, pp. 3-55; Mark Kramer, *The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe (Part 2)*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 1/2, Spring 1999, pp. 3-39; and Mark Kramer, *The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe (Part 3)*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 1/3, Fall 1999, pp. 3-66.

⁴⁷ On this point, see Mark Kramer, *Declassified Materials from CPSU Central Committee Plenums: Sources, Contexts, Highlights*, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 40/1-2, January-June 1999, pp. 271-306.

⁴⁸ Fittingly, in Moscow the complex of buildings in *Staraya ploschad'* (Old Square) that housed the central apparatus of the CPSU are now the site of the presidential administration. The president, like the CPSU General Secretary, has his office in the Kremlin.

power disproportionate to what one would expect from the polity's structure alone.⁴⁹ This was most conspicuously the case when Putin served as prime minister from May 2008 to May 2012 yet was still the most powerful political figure in Russia and was universally seen as such both inside and outside the country. Nonetheless, even in these exceptional cases, the dominant leader is still apt to be bound by the extant political structure and must make maximum use of it, as Putin did when he complied with the constitutional ban on serving more than two consecutive terms as president and became prime minister while designating a loyal protégé to fill in for him temporarily as president.

4. *Fourth*, the amount of an actor's political power depends on the context. Even though a leader might have the capacity to do something at a particular time or in a particular place, this does not necessarily mean that he or she will possess the same capacity to achieve the same results at a different time or in a different place. The results attained by the exercise of political power are necessarily context-dependent.

5. *Fifth*, except in cases of absolute domination, power relationships (dyadic or otherwise) are never one-way. A dyadic power relationship in the real world is inherently bidirectional, albeit unequal in most cases (and extremely unequal in some cases). Colin Hay has claimed that when "actor A may be regarded as occupying a position of domination or power *over* B," this "is not a reciprocal relationship."⁵⁰ Hay's assertion is untenable unless by the term "reciprocal" he means a completely equal relationship.

Short of that, his characterization cannot be sustained. Even in an extremely unequal relationship, as Herbert Simon pointed out long ago, "there is always some feedback from the influencee to the influencer."⁵¹ Consider, for example, a situation in which A is pointing a loaded gun at the head of B, whose limbs are bound. Even in this grossly unequal relationship, B has at least a minuscule amount of what French and Raven describe as "referent power." B's power almost certainly will not prevent A from doing whatever he wants, but even in this extreme case – one of the most extreme imaginable – the A-B relationship is not 100% unidirectional. When we turn from this extreme scenario to more common situations – the types of situations that frequently characterize high-level politics in the Russian Federation – the reciprocal nature of power relationships (even relationships that are very asymmetrical) is much easier to discern.

6. *Sixth*, the quantification of a given actor's political power – whether power to do something or power over someone else – lends itself to comparison. Unless A and B have identical capacities and are equally situated to use them in the same way, A is either more powerful or less powerful than B and is more or less able to shape the prevailing political discourse. To be sure, judgments about their relative power are far from straightforward if – as is likely – we find that A has the capacity to achieve some political outcomes B cannot achieve and B has the capacity to achieve some things A cannot achieve. In such instances, a comparison of their overall power will depend on the researcher's assessment of the importance of the respective outcomes that A and B can achieve. Another researcher might appraise these outcomes differently, leading to a

⁴⁹ On a few occasions in Communist systems, especially in China during the final years of Deng Xiaoping, this same pattern arose. Even though Deng had given up all of his major posts by the end of the 1980s, he was still widely (and correctly) regarded as the paramount leader.

⁵⁰ Hay, *Divided by a Common Language*, p. 50 (emphasis in original).

⁵¹ Simon, *Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power*, p. 504.

different judgment about whether A in moist cases is more powerful than B or vice versa.⁵² Hence, comparisons of A's and B's overall power can be misleading unless analysts clearly indicate how they evaluate the importance of the outcomes that A and B are able to achieve.

7. *Seventh*, the expectations and perceptions of those who have political power and those who might be affected by that power are crucial. This point has been highlighted by numerous scholars who have thought about how to measure power. Herbert Simon in his 1953 article repeatedly emphasizes that assessments of power are complicated by the "rule of anticipated reactions."⁵³ A's preferences, Simon argues, are apt to be shaped not only by what B has done previously but also by what A expects B to do in the future. Conversely, B's preferences will be affected by his expectations of what A will do. Simon notes that if A's and B's expectations are perfectly congruent, their relationship will not be affected because each will already have made all necessary adjustments. In such a case, neither A nor B would actually exercise power, and scholars would not be able to assess A's and B's relative power through direct observation. But if either A or B misjudges the other's power or intentions, A or B (or both) will be inclined to act. Scholars in this case can watch what happens and thereby appraise A's and B's relative power. The importance of actors' expectations in power relationships has also been stressed by Jeffrey Pfeffer, who points out the complications that arise for efforts to measure power: "The less

⁵² On the intricacies of comparing overall power, see Morriss, *Power*, pp. 86-97.

⁵³ Simon, *Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power*, pp. 505-506, 510-511, 515-516. The concept of a "rule of anticipated reactions" comes from Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston 1941, pp. 589-591.

powerful social actor may and, in fact, probably will take into account the likely response of the more powerful in framing action in the first place. Thus, an attempt to assess power must try to account for the extent to which initial expressions of preference already reflect the power of others."⁵⁴ The role of expectations in power relationships has been equally salient in social-psychological conceptions of power, starting with the French-Raven framework and the pioneering work by John W. Thibaut and Harold H. Kelley on the social psychology of groups.⁵⁵ In the French-Raven typology, A's perceptions of B's abilities and attributes are intrinsic elements of B's bases of power, and power is essentially equivalent to perceived power. That basic point – the notion that the amount of A's power prior to his actual exercise of his power is equal to the amount of power that other actors believe or expect that he has – is largely in accord with Herbert Simon's approach. Simon argues that "we can use such expectations, so long as the situation remains stable, to estimate where power lies." In this sense, as he points out, the power dynamic can at times become a self-fulfilling prophecy:

Suppose we are able to ascertain that the people of Argentina really believe that Peron [Juan Perón, the strongman president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955] is dictator. It follows that they will expect sanctions to be applied to themselves if they do not accept the decisions of the Peron regime. Hence, so long as these expectations remain, they will behave as if Peron *were* dictator, and indeed he will be.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, Pitman Publishing, Marshfield 1981, p. 46. See also Wrong, *Power*, pp. 7-9.

⁵⁵ Raven and French, *The Bases of Social Power*, pp. 150-167; and Thibaut and Kelley, *The Social Psychology of Groups*, pp. 100-125 (especially 122-124).

⁵⁶ Simon, *Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power*, p. 511.

Similarly, if people expect that A (e.g., Dmitry Medvedev when he was president) is mostly a figurehead and that “real power” lies with B (Vladimir Putin, who was then “only” prime minister), A is apt to become a figurehead over time even if he did not start out that way. This is because other prominent individuals, believing that A is a figurehead, will come to treat A as such and will look to B as the real authority, as often happened during Medvedev’s tenure. Unless A convincingly demonstrates that he is not a figurehead, he will likely find it harder and harder to avoid becoming one. In other words, until A’s exercise of power shows that expectations and perceptions of A’s power were wrong, those expectations can serve as a rough indicator of A’s power. But this does not mean that such an indicator can be reliably produced in most cases. As I will discuss below, efforts to discern key political actors’ expectations are often highly problematic. Methods that rely on measures of reputation or expectations are commonly used, especially in studies of political power in local communities, but the pitfalls can easily outweigh the benefits.

8. *Eighth*, a few notes of caution should be mentioned here about attempts to see which political actors in Russia are powerful enough to shape the prevailing political discourse. The tallying of A’s and B’s resources can provide useful indirect evidence of A’s and B’s capacity to act, but such evidence must be used with great circumspection. Even the most detailed cataloguing of A’s and B’s resources does not necessarily tell us how well A or B will actually exercise power. Similarly, the temporal and contextual dimensions of power are crucial when we try to gauge power from the exercise of power. If we look at instances in which A has exercised power at time t_1 , this can serve as useful evidence of the amount of power A possessed at t_1 , but it does not necessarily tell us anything about the amount of power

A possesses at t_2 , especially if t_2 is a long while after t_1 . (Even if t_2 and t_1 are close, we cannot confidently gauge A’s power at t_2 . The greater the difference between t_2 and t_1 , the more severe the inferential problems become.) For one thing, A’s exercise of power in some cases might result in the accretion of more power for A, but in other cases it might result in the squandering of power and the rise of alternative discourses. Moreover, A’s exercise of power in one context at t_1 does not necessarily reveal anything about A’s power in a different context at t_1 (much less in a different context at t_2) and capacity to shape the country’s political discourse. Temporal and contextual factors crucially influence measurements of power.

6. *The Limited Utility of Scales of Presidential Power*

Various metrics have been devised to quantify presidential power. These sorts of indices, which trace their roots back to an analysis of the French Fifth Republic published in the late 1970s by the French sociologist Maurice Duverger, have been applied to authoritarian as well as democratic polities.⁵⁷ The first systematic index of presidential power was constructed by Matthew Søberg Shugart and John M. Carey in their 1992 book on executive-legislative relations.⁵⁸ The Shugart-Carey index has been widely adapted (and in certain cases refined) by other political scientists, some of whom have specifically tailored their versions of the index to measure the formal

⁵⁷ Maurice Duverger, *Échec au roi*, Albin Michel, Paris 1978.

⁵⁸ Matthew Søberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1992, pp. 130-155.

powers of chief executives in the former Communist world.⁵⁹ In most instances, these metrics have been used in studies comparing presidential, mixed, and parliamentary systems on the basis of as many as thirty-seven criteria (e.g., their possible impact on democratization, their potential connection with macroeconomic liberalization and stabilization and economic growth, their relationship to government expenditures, their correlation with mortality rates).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See, for example, Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (eds.), *Semi-Presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2008; Doreen Spörer, *Regierungssysteme und Reformen: Politikökonomische Analysen der exekutiv-legislativen Beziehungen im postkommunistischen Raum*, Springer-Verlag, Heidelberg 2006, pp. 7-34; Oleg Ivanovich Zaznaev, *Indeksnyi analiz poluprezidentskiikh gosudarstv Evropy i postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Polis, 2, 2007, pp. 145-164; Mikhail Beliaev, *Presidential Powers and Consolidation of New Postcommunist Democracies*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 39/3, April 2006, pp. 375-398; Elgun Taghiyev, *Measuring Presidential Power in Post-Soviet Countries*, *CEU Political Science Journal*, 1/3, April-May 2006, pp. 11-21; Doreen Spörer, *Ausmaß, Strukturen und Implikationen präsidialer Macht im postkommunistischen Raum*, *Swiss Political Science Review*, 10/2, July 2004, pp. 157-179; Oleg Ivanovich Zaznaev, *Indeksnyi analiz prezidentskoi vlasti (na primere Rossii)*, *Vestnik Samarskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 38/4, 2005, pp. 20-26; Oleg Ivanovich Zaznaev, *Izmerenie prezidentskoi vlasti*, *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Gumanitarnye nauki*, 147/1, 2005, pp. 4-22; Alan Siaroff, *Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-Presidential, and Parliamentary Distinction*, *European Journal of Political Research*, 42/2, 2003, pp. 287-312; Andre Krouwel, *Measuring Presidentialism of Central and East European Countries*, Working Paper 2/2003, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam 2003; Lee Kendall Metcalf, *Measuring Presidential Power*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 33/5, June 2000, pp. 660-685; Ole Nørgaard, *Economic Institutions and Democratic Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Post-Communist Countries*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton 2000, pp. 152-161; Gadis Gadzhiev, *Power Imbalance and Institutional Interests in Russian Constitutional Engineering*, in Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 1: *Institutional Engineering*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001, pp. 269-292; William A. Clark, *Presidential Power and Democratic Stability under the Russian Constitution: A Comparative Analysis*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 28/3, Summer 1998, pp. 620-638; Timothy Frye, *A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 30/5, October 1997, pp. 523-552; Ray Taras (ed.), *Postcommunist Presidents*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1997; Kurt von Mettenheim (ed.), *Presidential Institutions and Demo-*

The various scales of presidential power differ in the types of formal authority they cover and in the scoring methods they employ. The Shugart-Carey index uses ten categories of dichotomously scored variables, whereas some other indices (notably Ole Nørgaard's Index of Presidential Authority) have incorporated as many as thirty-seven variables and have scored them on an ordinal scale of three or more gradations.⁶¹ Although most of the indices of presidential power yield roughly the same

cratic Politics: Comparing Regional and National Contexts, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1997; Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Politicians, Parties, and Presidents: An Exploration of Post-Authoritarian Institutional Design*, in Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart (eds.), *Liberalisation and Leninist Legacies: Comparative Perspectives on Democratic Transitions*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1997, pp. 40-90; Joel Hellman, *Constitutions and Economic Reform in the Postcommunist Transitions*, *East European Constitutional Review*, 5/1, Winter 1996, pp. 46-53; Thomas A. Baylis, *Presidents versus Prime Ministers: Shaping Executive Authority in Eastern Europe*, *World Politics*, 48/3, April 1996, pp. 297-323; Christian Lucky, *Table of Presidential Powers in Eastern Europe*, *East European Constitutional Review*, 2/4, Fall 1993, and 3/1, Winter 1994, pp. 81-94, and Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Of Presidents and Parliaments*, *East European Constitutional Review*, 2/1, Winter 1993, pp. 30-32.

⁶⁰ In addition to the studies cited in the previous footnote, see Robert Elgie, *The Perils of Presidentialism: Are They Exaggerated?*, *Democratization*, 15/1, February 2008, pp. 49-66; José Antonio Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2007; Robert Elgie, *Semi-Presidentialism: Concepts, Consequences, and Contesting Explanations*, *Political Studies Review*, 2/3, September 2004, pp. 314-330; Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson, *The New Institutional Politics: Performance and Outcomes*, Routledge, London 2000; Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Intentives, and Outcomes*, 2nd edition, Macmillan, London 1997, chap. 7; Timothy J. Power and Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Institutional Design and Democratic Consolidation in the Third World*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 30/2, 1997, pp. 123-155; Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (eds.), *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1994; Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, *Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism*, *World Politics*, 46/1, October 1993, pp. 1-22; Arend Lijphart (ed.), *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, Oxford University Press, New York 1992; and Juan J. Linz, *The Perils of Presidentialism*, *Journal of Democracy*, 1/1, Winter 1990, pp. 51-69.

⁶¹ For an explication of the coverage and scoring of the Index of Presidential Authority (IPA), see Nørgaard, *Economic Institutions and Democratic Reform*, pp. 152-161.

general ranking of countries, a few notable discrepancies arise both with the ordering of results and with specific scores. Each tabulation method has advantages and disadvantages, and no broad consensus exists about the tradeoffs. The metrics that provide more detailed coverage of types of formal power have been problematic in the weighting they assign to particular categories. For example, in a scheme proposed by Joel Hellman and Timothy Frye, the president's power to dissolve the legislature is given only one-tenth of the weight assigned to various aspects of the president's appointment powers.⁶² Similarly, the president's ability to appoint a cabinet minister is given the same weight as the ability to appoint the prime minister. Some efforts have been made to overcome these problems, and scholars who analyze the peculiar features of presidencies in Russia and other former Soviet republics have tried to come up with more widely applicable metrics. Thus far, however, no fully satisfactory scale of presidential power has been devised.⁶³ The Shugart-Carey index and its offspring are all based on a tallying of the formal powers of presidents. In that sense, the indices are focused more on the nature of the polity (the formal role it accords to the presidency) than on the person who serves as chief executive. The indices do not take account of the presidents' political/social networks and personal traits, which often play a crucial part in their political power.

The drawbacks of focusing solely on formal powers are illustrated by the situation that emerged in Russia from May 2008 to May 2012. Until that time, especially during Putin's initial two terms as president, Russia had often been described

⁶² Hellman, *Constitutions and Economic Reform in the Postcommunist Transitions*, pp. 46-53; and Frye, *A Politics of Institutional Choice*, pp. 523-552.

⁶³ Spörer, *Ausmaß, Strukturen und Implikationen präsidialer Macht im post-kommunistischen Raum*, pp. 157-179; Taghiyev, *Measuring Presidential Power in Post-Soviet Countries*, pp. 11-21; Zaznaev, *Indeksnyi analiz prezidentskoi vlasti*, pp. 20-26; and Metcalf, *Measuring Presidential Power*, pp. 660-685.

as having a "super-presidential" political system.⁶⁴ Nothing changed in the formal powers of the Russian presidency after May 2008, but the office was clearly not as dominant during the four years of Dmitry Medvedev's tenure. The reason is simple: Putin was serving as prime minister alongside Medvedev, creating a duumvirate and giving temporary preeminence to the office of prime minister. Surveys conducted by the Levada Center from 2008 to September 2011 consistently showed that a large majority of Russians (upward of 75-80%) regarded Putin at the top of "the most influential people in Russia."⁶⁵ When Putin and Medvedev jointly announced in September 2011 that Putin had decided to return to the presidency in 2012 – a decision he claimed to have made "several years" earlier – any lingering doubts about who was the supreme political leader in

⁶⁴ See, for example, Hans-Henning Schröder, *What Kind of Political Regime Does Russia Have?* in Stephen White (ed.), *Politics and the Ruling Group in Putin's Russia*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, pp. 1-26; Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006; Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, 2nd edition, Routledge, New York 2008; Richard Sakwa, *Putin's Leadership*, in Dale R. Herspring (ed.), *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 2nd edition, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2007, pp. 13-36; Timothy J. Colton and Cindy Skach, *The Russian Predicament*, *Journal of Democracy*, 16/3, July 2005, pp. 113-126 (especially 120); Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2004, pp. 310-312; M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2005; John T. Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy, *Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53/8, December 2001, pp. 1177-1191; Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, rev. ed., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. 2003; Lilia Shevtsova and Mark H. Eckert, *The Problem of Executive Power in Russia*, *Journal of Democracy*, 11/1, January 2000, pp. 32-39; and M. Steven Fish, *The Executive Deception: Superpresidentialism and the Degradation of Russian Politics*, in Valerie Sperling (ed.), *Building the Russian State: Institutional Crisis and the Quest for Democratic Governance*, Westview Press, Boulder 2000, pp. 177-191.

⁶⁵ See the monthly data in the Levada Center's report: Levada Center, *Samye vliyatel'nye rossiyane*, September 2010, Moskva (based on nationally representative samples of 1,600 respondents in all of Russia's regions).

Russia were dispelled. When Putin once again became president in May 2012, the office regained its erstwhile dominant position, but the downgrading of its status under Medvedev, despite the lack of any change in its formal powers, shows why a meaningful assessment of presidential power must take account of the officeholder's informal as well as formal powers. An assessment that looks only at formal powers can be highly misleading, as in the case of the Russian presidency after May 2008. Even if scholars up to now have felt that measuring the formal powers of each country's presidency was sufficient, the situation in Russia in 2008-2012 highlights the need for metrics that focus at least as much on the officeholders as on the office itself.

7. Power "Resources"

Terry Clark and other scholars who have studied political power in urban settings have enumerated "resources" that can be marshaled by key elites to exert influence. Because political power has been defined here as the capacity to exert political influence or to achieve political goals, these resources can be thought of as power resources. In principle, a tabulation of them – if they are deemed sound – could offer a rough gauge of an actor's power. The resources often mentioned include money and credit, control over employment, control of mass media, high social status, knowledge and specialized expertise, popularity and public admiration of one's personal qualities, legality, social access to community leaders, commitments of followers, staffing support, and control over the interpretation of community norms and values.⁶⁶ All of these resources can

⁶⁶ This list is adapted, with some modifications and compression, from Clark, *The Concept of Power*, pp. 57-58. For a similar compilation, see William A. Gamson, *Reputation and Resources in Community Politics*, *American Journal of Sociology*, 72/2, September 1966, pp. 121-131.

enhance an actor's capacity to shape the country's prevailing political discourse. Clark sought to compare how easily each of these resources could be converted into the others and vice versa. To do this, he weighed the "buying power" and "selling price" of each resource to determine its "exchange value." Resources with a low exchange value were likely to be "valuable to only a narrow range of persons" or could be "exchanged only in restricted markets," whereas resources with a high exchange value would permit "more complex relationships and extensive exchanges." Clark found that knowledge/expertise had the highest "exchange value," followed by money/credit and control of mass media.⁶⁷ He argued that "an actor commanding large quantities of any of these [three] resources [would be] in an excellent position to convert them into other resources," creating the potential for greater influence.⁶⁸

Clark acknowledged that "all of the resources have meaning only with respect to a given social system" and that his own "basic reference [had] been the local community and community-wide decisions in Western societies." But he claimed that when he made "an attempt at reclassification" for other (presumably non-Western) contexts, this had "led to relatively similar results – which would seem to offer further evidence for the general tendencies of our conclusions." However, he offered no specifics about this reclassification and conceded that his categories of resources "are to some extent arbitrary."⁶⁹ He also affirmed that "the prestige value of a resource" – the direct or indirect contribution a resource can make to the prestige of anyone who possesses it – is apt to "vary with the social system." But he argued that there was "enough

⁶⁷ Clark, *The Concept of Power*, pp. 59-62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62. On a related theme see Parsons, *On the Concept of Political Power*, pp. 232-263.

⁶⁹ Clark, *The Concept of Power*, p. 60.

similarity to permit an approximate classification,” at least in the industrial countries.⁷⁰ In an appraisal of the utility of the various resources in enhancing an individual’s political power, Clark found that the same three resources plus two others – legality and control over the interpretation of norms and values – were especially important. He also evaluated the durability/expendability of resources, arguing that some were apt to prove transitory, whereas others were likely to be durable. This question is often complicated because if resources are used skillfully, they can result in a net increase in one or more types of resources. By contrast, if they are used poorly, they can mitigate other basic resources such as popular esteem. The quantity of resources at any given time is therefore likely to be in flux.

In thinking about what this means for the measurement of political power in Russia, we can posit a three-step process.⁷¹ The first step is to determine whether and how the list of resources needs to be modified to be appropriate for the Russian context. The second step is to look at each of the key political actors in Russia and calculate how much of each resource he or she possesses. The third and final step is to weigh the relative importance of the resources and figure out which are likely to be most important in particular situations and for particular actors. In some circumstances a single specific resource might be both sufficient and indispensable, whereas in other cases a combination of most of the resources might be required. Each of these steps poses complications. Most of the resources specified by Clark are relevant to Russia, but in some cases they need to be made clearer or more precise, and certain other factors need to be added. Clark’s list, for example, does not take sufficient account of the structural dimension of

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

⁷¹ For a similar approach, see Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, pp. 48-49.

political power. Among the resources one might list are A’s position and authority in the sociopolitical system, the scope and nature of A’s responsibilities, A’s social and political networks, and A’s control of vital information. Among the individual traits that might be added are A’s energy, physical and mental stamina, charisma, and toughness and willingness to confront challenges head-on.⁷² A full compilation for Russia, showing how they affect ability to shape the political discourse, would comprise up to 15-20 items.

The second step is even more problematic. Although some of the resources (e.g., popularity and public esteem) would be easy to quantify, others would defy simple measurement. For at least some of the latter group of resources, ordinal metrics could presumably be devised, but such metrics might entail analytical drawbacks of their own. A more serious pitfall is the prospect of deception. Some key actors in the Russia might feign having a high level of expertise or other desirable traits or might falsely claim to have control over valuable information. Close study of these actors over time might expose acts of deception, but scholars seeking to gauge the distribution of political power could find it difficult in some cases to separate reality from exaggerations and fabrications. One further complication is that even if we could accurately measure how much of each resource A possesses, this would not necessarily mean that A was fully cognizant of his own resources or would be inclined to use them. In such a case, the resources would not really contribute to A’s power, and measurements of them would give a misleading tally of A’s power.

The third step also poses significant challenges. Political power, by its nature, is context-dependent, and efforts to

⁷² For an alternative list, see Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston 1992, pp. 43-45.

measure it will be especially intractable if they must be done indirectly by quantifying resources that, like power itself, are apt to vary with the context. As noted above, a single resource (e.g., high popularity ratings) of a particular figure (e.g., Putin) might be sufficient in some contexts to outweigh almost any combination of resources that possible rivals might command. For example, the fact that Putin's approval rating as prime minister (i.e., during Medvedev's presidency) held remarkably steady at around 75-80% in the Levada Center's monthly surveys – invariably above the approval rating of Medvedev and far above the rating of anyone else⁷³ – gave him formidable authority on all matters and enabled him to decide (more or less on his own) whether to reclaim the presidency in 2012.⁷⁴ In other contexts, however, the same resource might be of relatively little importance or might be easily frittered away. One of the ironies of Putin's return to the presidency in May 2012 is that his assumption of the office was followed by a steady decline in his popularity ratings – the very resource that had propelled him back to the top in the first place.⁷⁵ Not until after the Sochi Olympics in February 2014 and especially his decisive action in annexing Crimea the following month did his popularity ratings return to the stratospheric levels of the past, where they have remained ever since. Hence, the precise weight of the resource is difficult to gauge. This problem is not necessarily insuperable, but it does suggest that appraisals of power “resources” should be used only in conjunction with other indices and metrics.

⁷³ The closest the two men came was in October 2010, when Medvedev rose to 76% in the Levada Center's ratings, just one point below Putin. But that was the only time Medvedev came so close.

⁷⁴ Levada Center, *Reitingi odobreniya i polozheniya del v strane*, monthly surveys, May 2008-September 2011, based on a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents.

⁷⁵ NG, *Obschestvo otlozhennoi otvetsvennosti: Gotovo li 'putinskoe bol'shinstvo' k ukhodu Putina?*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 August 2012, p. 3.

8. Reputational Assessments

For well over half a century, scholars attempting to assess political power have relied on numerous techniques – targeted interviews, panel discussions, focus groups, randomized, large-n surveys, and, in more recent years, systematic perusal of databases of media coverage – to determine who in a community is reputed to be a “top leader” or “influential figure.” Reputational methods date back to the sociological studies of community power in the early and mid-1950s, which came under extensive (and often well-founded) criticism during the pluralist-power elite debate in the late 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁶ One of the objections raised about the early reputational studies was that the questions biased the results. When respondents were asked who was at the top of the local power structure, the question presupposed that such a structure existed with a tiny group at the top. By shaping in advance the types of likely answers, the sociological researchers essentially created the very phenomenon they were supposed to be searching for. The criticism eventually spurred methodological improvements and rewording of questions that did not as readily predetermine the results, but critics of the methodology also complained about the lack of clarity regarding the number of people who should be deemed “influential” or “top leaders” (should it be 5 or 50 or 500 or some other number?) and the frequent impracticality

⁷⁶ In addition to the studies cited in footnotes 11 and 12 supra, see overviews of the literature in Nelson W. Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory*, 2nd edition, Yale University Press, New Haven 1980; Bachrach and Baratz, *Power and Poverty*, pp. 11-24; Douglas M. Fox, *Methods within Methods: The Case of Community Power Studies*, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 24/1, March 1971, pp. 5-11; M. Herbert Danziger, *Community Power Structure: Problems and Continuities*, *American Sociological Review*, 29/5, October 1964, pp. 707-717; Raymond Wolfinger, *Reputation and Reality in the Study of Community Power*, *American Sociological Review*, 27/5, October 1960, pp. 636-644.

of distinguishing the “top leaders” from those a rung or two below. Such problems were mitigated once researchers acquired in-depth knowledge of the community’s dynamics and were able to examine how people understood what they were being asked about, but even the most finely honed survey results could occasionally blur these distinctions.

Another objection raised by skeptics was the tendency of researchers, especially those from the “power elite” school, to emphasize community leaders who wielded “general influence,” that is, people who had power on a wide range of issues. The pluralists argued that, in fact, prominent individuals tended to be influential on only a relatively small number of issues within their community. Critics also expressed concern that at least some of the people being interviewed (or taking part in panels or focus groups) were apt to merge attributes, confusing “influential” with “well-known” or “of high social standing.” This last problem was at least partly remedied by including suitable explanations with survey questions or in introductory remarks to the community panels, but occasionally a degree of confusion still cropped up. Nowadays, long after the pluralist-power elite debate has petered out, sociologists and political scientists have come to give new emphasis to reputational variables when assessing key actors’ political power. One of the chief reasons that the pluralists were so dismissive of reputation as an indicator of power is that they were preoccupied with behavioral metrics. The decline of behavioralism by the early 1970s changed the situation considerably.⁷⁷ Other analytical schools that have gained ascendance in recent decades, such as rational choice theory and constructivism, have stressed the importance of reputation.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For an early, albeit not fully successful, attempt to retool the reputational approach, see James F. Torres, *A New (and Partial) Approach to Measurement of Political Power in Latin America Countries*, *Western Political Quarterly*, 26/2, June 1973, pp. 302-313.

Keith Dowding and his coauthors have pointed out that “in a wide range of rational choice-influenced work, ‘reputations’ are identified as a key power resource for actors engaged in strategic interactions with others.”⁷⁹ Bargaining theory, game theory, and Bayesian economics are among the social science fields that stress an actor’s reputation, especially in situations in which information is imperfect and asymmetric.⁸⁰ Many studies in these fields have shown that leading actors have a stake in developing a reputation for toughness, persistence, and trustworthiness, among other positive qualities. This finding bears directly on the point mentioned earlier about the role of perceptions in political power. Perceptions and expectations, whether well-founded or not, are crucial to understand in their own right because they help to shape reality. If we were to depict A’s power as a function of relevant variables, one of the most important variables would be A’s reputation as measured by other actors’ perceptions of A’s

⁷⁸ Jason Campbell Sharman, *Rationalist and Constructivist Perspectives on Reputation*, *Political Studies*, 55/1, February 2007, pp. 20-37.

⁷⁹ Keith Dowding, Patrick Dunleavy, Desmond King, and Helen Margetts, *Rational Choice and Community Power Structures*, *Political Studies*, 43/2, June 1995, pp. 265-277 (especially 272-274). The quoted passage is from p. 273.

⁸⁰ George J. Mailath and Larry Samuelson, *Repeated Games and Reputations: Long-Run Relationships*, Oxford University Press, New York 2006; Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin, *The Killing Game: Reputation and Knowledge in Non-Democratic Succession*, CEPR Discussion Paper 5092, Centre for Economic Policy Research, London, June 2005; George J. Mailath and Larry Samuelson, *Who Wants a Good Reputation?*, *The Review of Economic Studies*, 68/2, April 2001, pp. 415-441; Oded Shenkar, *Reputation, Image, Prestige, and Goodwill: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Organizational Standing*, *Human Relations*, 50/11, November 1997, pp. 1361-1381; David M. Kreps and Robert Wilson, *Reputation and Imperfect Information*, *Journal of Economic Theory*, 27/2, August 1982, pp. 253-279; Fritz W. Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research*, Westview Press, Boulder 1997; Paul Milgrom and John Roberts, *Predation, Reputation, and Entry Deterrence*, *Journal of Economic Theory*, 27/2, August 1982, pp. 280-312; Michihiro Kandori, *Repeated Games Played by Overlapping Generations of Players*, *The Review of Economic Studies*, 59/1, January 1992, pp. 81-92; and Jeffrey C. Ely and Juuso Välimäki, *Bad Reputation*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 118/3, August 2003, pp. 785-814.

power. The new emphasis on reputational research has also been fueled by the advent of large on-line databases of press coverage. Dowding and his coauthors have stressed that the existence of these databases means that

it is possible to extract an objectively defined set of reputedly influential policy makers in any functional area, or across all areas. The scale of any actor's reputation can be mapped quantitatively in the scope and character of press coverage. Of course this coverage does not constitute the full measure of each actor's reputation, and [supplementary] analysis can be generated through semi-structured interviews in order to discover important actors screened from media purview. Nevertheless, the media do have an extensive coverage of certain types of issues, and the fact of being reported brings a certain reputation. This reputation is itself a power resource.⁸¹

A major virtue of this approach is that it yields data that can be scrutinized and tested by other scholars, who can attempt to reproduce the results in other settings. Monitoring the press coverage over time also allows researchers to discern trends in individuals' reputations, rather than simply obtaining a snapshot of the current situation. All of this can be done with a simplicity and ease that would have been impossible in the past. Thus, even though reputational research in earlier decades was disparaged by the behavioralists as methodologically unsound, it has now come to be seen as "theoretically legitimate and important."⁸²

Nonetheless, one should note that some important obstacles to these techniques would likely arise in Russia, where the most popular media outlet, national television, has been controlled by the state since shortly after Putin came to power, and where journalists come under many forms of direct and indirect pressure, including the prospect of being sued, imprisoned, beaten, or murdered.⁸³ More than 350 journalists in Russia have

⁸¹ Dowding et al., *Rational Choice and Community Power Structures*, p. 274.

⁸² *Ibid.*

been killed or have disappeared in mysterious circumstances since the early 1990s, and many others have been severely beaten.⁸⁴ The heavy hand of the state is bound to affect what journalists write, inducing a form of self-censorship, even if only sub-consciously. Russia has consistently ranked near the bottom of the roughly 175 countries covered in the annual "World Press Freedom Index" compiled by Reporters Sans Frontières, declining to 146th place in 2016.⁸⁵ Moreover, even though the Russian authorities still permit relatively lively newspaper coverage and website discussions (and clamp down mainly on television broadcasts), the Russian security agencies have increasingly been coercing bloggers as well.⁸⁶ Moreover, many journalists are accustomed to accepting bribes from officials and other individuals who want to plant a story or shape the coverage of a particular issue. For all these reasons, scrutiny of the press and other media outlets in Russia might produce skewed results. In Western societies, as Dowding and his coauthors argue, "reputations for influence" as reflected in the media "constitute important power resources

⁸³ For an overview, see Christopher Walker, *Muzzling the Media: The Return of Censorship in the Commonwealth of Independent States*, Freedom House, Washington D.C., 15 June 2007. See also Reporters without Borders, *World Press Freedom Index 2011*, Paris, December 2011. Of the 175 countries ranked, Russia comes in at 153 and Uzbekistan at 160.

⁸⁴ International Federation of Journalists, *Partial Justice: An Investigation into the Deaths of Journalists in Russia, 1993-2009*, IFJ, Brussels 2010; and Committee to Protect Journalists, *Anatomy of Injustice: The Unsolved Killings of Journalists in Russia*, United Book Press, New York, September 2009, with updates to 2015 from the Journalists in Russia database (journalistsinrussia.org), listing individually every Russian journalist murdered since 1993.

⁸⁵ Reporters Sans Frontières, *2016 World Press Freedom Index*, RSF, Paris, August 2016.

⁸⁶ Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russia's Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries*, Public Affairs, New York 2015. See also Mark Kramer, *The Clampdown on Internet Activities in Russia and the Implications for Western Policy*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo n° 350, George Washington University, Washington D.C., September 2014.

in their own right.”⁸⁷ But in post-Soviet Russia, the relationship between media coverage and individuals’ reputations for influence is less clear-cut.

Similar problems are likely to arise if researchers attempt to conduct “semi-structured interviews” in Russia. The interviews could prove misleading unless the respondents accurately understand the distribution of political power in their community and are willing to talk openly about what they know.⁸⁸ Neither of these conditions is a foregone conclusion in Russia. Even in democratic countries, individuals responding to questionnaires or participants in a focus group might have only a tenuous grasp of the dispersion of political power in their local or wider community. Even the most expert of observers at times are apt to misjudge where power lies. This problem is bound to be far more acute in Russia, where the precise distribution of political power is nearly as opaque as it was under the Soviet regime, especially during the Putin years. Even the most knowledgeable observers in these countries often can do no more than hazard a well-educated guess. Moreover, even if certain people in Russia do possess a thorough and accurate understanding of the actual mechanisms of political power and are willing to be interviewed, the task of getting them to speak candidly about what they know is likely to be daunting. Not only might they fear for their own safety and well-being if they disclose sensitive information that could be traced back to them, but they might also be reluctant to divulge information that could prove beneficial to their rivals.⁸⁹ Despite these potential glitches and complications, researchers should do

⁸⁷ Dowding et al., *Rational Choice and Community Power Structures*, pp. 273-274.

⁸⁸ Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁹ On a related point, see David Krackhardt, *Assessing the Political Landscape: Structure, Cognition, and Power in Organizations*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 35/2, June 1990, pp. 342-369. Krackhardt argues that knowledge of the actual distribution of power is itself a source of power.

their utmost to pursue reputational assessments of political power in Russia. If such methods prove to be feasible in some or all of the countries, they will be an invaluable supplement to, and cross-check on, other means of gauging the distribution of power and will facilitate a better understanding of which political figures are able to shape the prevailing political discourse. The careful use of reputational techniques will also give a fillip to attempts to operationalize several of the power bases from the social psychology literature, as discussed below.

9. Representational and Symbolic Indicators

Efforts to assess political power can be based in part on looking at who is represented on key political bodies and who possesses the symbolic manifestations of power. During the Soviet era, Western analysts knew that the members of the CPSU Politburo and CPSU Secretariat were the most powerful figures in the USSR. They also knew that symbolic rituals such as the positioning of party leaders on top of Vladimir Lenin’s mausoleum during holiday parades, the placement of leaders in official photographs, and the sequence of names in non-alphabetical listings of Politburo members, usually revealed the pecking order of the highest elites. Similarly, Western scholars were aware that certain honorifics in the USSR, such as the conferral of military (or state security) ranks on senior political officials, the bestowal of various Communist awards (Hero of Socialist Labor, Hero of the Soviet Union, etc.), and the naming of city districts or naval vessels or military units after high officials, were another reliable indicator that the recipients were politically strong. In addition, Western experts on the USSR developed elaborate means of gleaning clues from the Soviet press about the relative standing of key elites in Moscow, and some analysts also attempted to gauge the distribution

of political power in one or more of the 15 union republics.

These representational and symbolic indicators began to disappear during the final two years of the Soviet regime, and the situation changed still further after the breakup of the USSR and the formation of an independent Russian state. Nowadays, the power of key individuals might be reflected in (and strengthened by) their membership on Russia's Security Council, their membership on various presidential (or prime ministerial) commissions and advisory bodies, their roles in key governmental organs, and their positions in the dominant political party *Edinaya Rossiya*. Such positions "provide their occupants with power because of the control over information, resources, or other decisions that is inherent in these positions."⁹⁰ Moreover, the power linked with key positions is usually self-reinforcing:

In most cases, positions which are given to powerful social actors as a consequence of their power also provide those actors with additional power due to the information and decisions that are within the purview of these positions. If these roles can be identified, then by observing the affiliations of the role occupants, one can diagnose the distribution of influence.⁹¹

The power and political standing of key elites in the Russian Federation might also be manifested through symbolic trappings of influence such as an official chauffeur and limousine, an official residence, a large staff, frequent appearances or mentions on state television, and the receipt of official commendations and awards. During the Putin era, the margin of victory a candidate achieves in presidential elections also has come to be a symbol of power. The greater the margin of victory, the more powerful

⁹⁰ Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, p. 57.

⁹¹ *Ibid*

an individual is thought to be. In Russia's 2008 presidential election, for example, the official tally showed that Putin's protégé, Medvedev, received 71.25% of the votes, slightly lower than the 71.31% that Putin himself officially received in 2004. Although Putin's vote tally in the 2012 presidential election was "only" 63.6%, that almost certainly was because the election was held soon after mass political protests in Russia had erupted as a result of fraud in the parliamentary elections. According to the *Golos* election monitoring group, the real vote tally for Putin was probably closer to 50%, and the 63.6% thus represented the maximum tolerable inflation.⁹² In democratic countries, free elections are vital in shaping the distribution of political power, whereas in Russia, which has not held fair and meaningful national elections since June 1991 for president and December 2003 for parliament, votes play a largely symbolic function, revealing the size of the popular following a candidate supposedly enjoys.⁹³

The importance of representational and symbolic indicators as metrics of political power should not be overstated. It would be too simplistic to suggest that these criteria are perfectly correlated with political power. As Jeffrey Pfeffer has noted, "there are lags and imperfections in the use of such symbols as guides to the power distribution," and a similar caveat applies to representational indicators of power.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, if the indi-

⁹² *Golos, Doklad po itogam nablyudeniya khoda vyborov Prezidenta Rossii, naznachennykh na 4 marta 2012 g.*, *Golos*, Moskva, March 2012.

⁹³ For further discussion of the role of local and national elections in non-democratic countries (focusing mostly on China, Mexico, Egypt, and a few other non-CIS countries), see Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, *Elections under Authoritarianism*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, June 2009, pp. 403-422. See also William Case, *Manipulative Skills: How Do Rulers Control the Electoral Arena?* in Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder 2006, pp. 95-112.

⁹⁴ Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, p. 52.

cators are used cautiously, they can be a valuable supplement to other metrics, just as they were in Soviet times. A full tally of them can be incorporated into a composite gauge of political power.

10. *Adapted Metrics from Social Psychology*

The six types of power in the French-Raven framework – reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power, and information power – have been evaluated mostly in experimental settings, but scholars can devise alternative ways to measure the distribution of these types of power in Russia. The most obvious approach is to adapt the various techniques discussed in the earlier section on reputational metrics, using them as a proxy for experimental assessments of key elites' perceptions of other elites' power. To accomplish this task, we first need to determine which power bases we want to evaluate and the specific indicators to look for in each category. We then need to decide which measurement techniques (press surveys, interviews, etc.) are appropriate for the frequently inhospitable research environment in Russian regions. Even if one or two of the power bases can not be satisfactorily measured, assessments of even a limited number would be a valuable supplement to other metrics.

For the purposes of this essay, the original five (and later six) categories proposed by French and Raven are more suitable than the categories laid out in most of the alternative social psychology frameworks, including those developed by Kipnis and Schmidt, Schriesheim and Hinkin, and Yukl and Falbe, all of whom focused mainly on tactics rather than forms of power. But if we want to gain a more complete sense of political power in Russia, we need to supplement the six French-Raven power bases with two other categories, one of which was put forth in 1986 by Robert Benfari, Harry E. Wilkinson, and Charles

D. Orth: namely, affiliation power.⁹⁵ Affiliation power refers to A's capacity to wield influence based on his/her affiliation with B, whom Benfari, Wilkinson, and Orth characterize as an authoritative figure. They say that A might, for example, be an executive assistant or chief of staff acting on behalf of B, who is a high-ranking official. For such cases, principal-agent theory would lead us to expect that A might occasionally seek to use affiliation power for his/her own ends, rather than acting solely in strict accordance with B's wishes.⁹⁶ Hence, A's affiliation power is dual in nature. In a modification of the Benfari-Wilkinson-Orth concept, we can propose that B, too, has affiliation power based on his/her ability to count on B's loyalty and performance. That is, affiliation power need not apply only to the subordinate actor. Both A and B possess affiliation power by virtue of their affiliation, albeit for different reasons and in different ways. What we want to do is measure how much of it each of them is generally perceived to have.

The other category we need to add – temporal power – is a new one that has not been mentioned in the social psychology literature. It is included here to take account of the claim put forth in a 1991 book by two political scientists, Henry Bienen and Nicolas van de Walle, regarding the longevity of political leaders in non-democratic countries.⁹⁷ After surveying the tenures of 2,256 top leaders in 167 countries (democratic as well as non-democratic) from 1900 to 1987, Bienen and van de Walle conclude that “the risk for leaders of losing power declines the longer that they have been in power.” Although

⁹⁵ Robert C. Benfari, Harry E. Wilkinson, and Charles D. Orth, *The Effective Use of Power*, *Business Horizons*, 29/3, May-June 1986, pp. 12-16.

⁹⁶ The literature on principal-agent theory is immense in both economics and political science. For a concise overview, see Gary J. Miller, *The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8, March 2005, pp. 203-225.

⁹⁷ Henry Bienen and Nicolas van de Walle, *Of Time and Power: Leadership Duration in the Modern World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1991.

Bienen and van de Walle note that the downward trend in the risk of being ousted is not monotonic over time, they repeatedly stress that “once leaders are in place, they are difficult to remove.”⁹⁸ Their analysis is impressive as far as it goes (and is commendable in treating time as a variable in its own right), but it suffers from omitted-variable bias. The validity of their argument is thus uncertain. A much more detailed econometric model will be needed to verify their findings, but no one has yet undertaken such a massive follow-on project (not least because of the daunting challenge of data-collection).⁹⁹ That said, the results obtained by Bienen and van de Walle seem solid enough that they should be taken seriously, albeit circumspectly. Bienen and van de Walle adduce several possible reasons for the importance of the “duration effects” they find in authoritarian leaders’ tenure. One reason might be that unskilled leaders are apt to lose power relatively quickly, leaving only the most skilled leaders in office. The leaders who remain in power not only are more skilled but are also better able, as time passes, to build political patronage networks, accumulate and distribute resources, rely on organs of repression, and develop a loyal following. In addition, leaders who stay in power are bound

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 9, 98.

⁹⁹ The only partial effort to re-test the Bienen-van de Walle finding about time – James E. Alt and Gary King, *Transfers of Governmental Power: The Meaning of Time Dependence*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 27/2, July 1994, pp. 190-210 – adds no new variables and looks only at some of the democratic countries covered by Bienen and van de Walle. Scholars who have considered why and how *authoritarian* leaders stay in power for many years have taken the Bienen-van de Walle finding as a given. They have not gone back and re-tested it. See, for example, Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, *Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 40/11, November 2007, pp. 1279-1301; Shale Horowitz, Karla Hoff, and Branko Milanovic, *Government Turnover: Concepts, Measures, and Applications*, *European Journal of Political Research*, 48/1, January 2009, pp. 107-129; and Maria Gallego and Carolyn Pitchik, *An Economic Theory of Leadership Turnover*, *Journal of Public Economics*, 88/12, December 2004, pp. 2361-2382.

to become increasingly familiar with the nuts and bolts of their political system, enabling them to maneuver more adeptly against rivals and to forestall any potential challenges to their authority. Alternatively, what may be happening is simply that “populations become more accustomed to leaders with whom they get more acclimated” and are therefore “more apathetic about leadership change.”¹⁰⁰ All of these explanations seem eminently plausible, but the limited scope of the Bienen-van de Walle analysis means that none of the suppositions can be validated directly.

However, it is worth noting that in social psychology the notion that people would become accustomed to having a particular leader in power and would be increasingly unable to imagine what it would be like without such a leader has been amply borne out in experimental settings and focus groups.¹⁰¹ Moreover, some of the other explanatory factors posited by Bienen and van de Walle also are relevant in the Russian context. In these respects, the element of time deserves to be regarded as a power base. Leaders do not automatically accumulate temporal power, and they can certainly fritter it away. But the evidence suggests that, on average, a leader can benefit from the passage of time. Scales of temporal power can be designed to indicate that time can help leaders in some circumstances and damage them in others.

¹⁰⁰ Bienen and van de Walle, *Of Time and Power*, pp. 11-12, 98-99.

¹⁰¹ Joseph E. McGrath and Franziska Tschan, *Temporal Matters in Social Psychology: Examining the Role of Time in the Lives of Groups and Individuals*, American Psychological Association, Washington D.C. 2004; Joseph E. McGrath and Janice R. Kelly, *Time and Human Interaction: Social Psychology of Time*, Guilford Publications, New York 1986; and Joseph E. McGrath and Janice R. Kelly, *Temporal Context and Temporal Patterning: Toward a Time-Centered Perspective for Social Psychology*, *Time & Society*, 1/3, December 1992, pp. 399-420.

11. *Assessing Power by Observing its Consequences*

One of the most common, but also problematic, techniques for assessing political power is to observe its impact on decision-making and other forms of behavior. Because the conception of power used in this essay has been dispositional rather than behavioral, the monitoring of behavioral indicators is only an indirect and retrospective means of gauging power. However, as discussed earlier, such indicators can be a valuable proxy for measurements of current political power if Δt (i.e., the difference between the time of the observed behavior, t_1 , and the current time, t_2) is small. *Ceteris paribus*, the smaller that Δt is, the greater the connection is likely to be between the behavioral metrics and the actual distribution of political power.

Some of the pitfalls of relying on decision-making analyses to determine who the most powerful elites are have already been discussed. Approaching this task nowadays in the way the behavioralists did in the late 1950s and 1960s would be untenable. Indeed, it is not even clear that decisions should be a focus for this type of research at all. The vast literature on political decision-making indicates that many decisions are products of complex interactions, tradeoffs, and bargaining and do not necessarily reflect the relative power of the participants.¹⁰² Even when decisions are directly shaped by the power of individual actors, tracing how those decisions were

¹⁰² For varying perspectives, see R. Harrison Wagner, *The Concept of Power and the Study of Politics*, in Roderick Bell, David V. Edwards, and R. Harrison Wagner (eds.), *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research*, The Free Press, New York 1969, pp. 3-12 (especially pp. 4-6); Ronnie Harding, Carolyn M. Hendriks, and Mehreen Fahuji, *Environmental Decision-Making: Exploring Complexity and Context*, Federation Press, Sydney 2009; Hannu Nurmi, *Rational Behavior and the Design of Institutions: Concepts, Theories, and Models*, Edward Elgar, Northampton 1998; and Deborah A. Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making*, rev. ed., Scott, Foresman/Little Brown, Glenview 2002.

actually made might well be infeasible until the closed records become available many years later. The behavioralist studies of decision-making gave the impression that scholars can promptly discover how important decisions are made, keeping Δt very small. Anyone who has gone closely through formerly closed government records in archives knows that this is simply not true. In most instances, scholars who lack access to secret records cannot accurately determine the weight of particular individuals in decision outcomes.¹⁰³ This point is particularly germane to countries in which political mechanisms are exceedingly opaque, as in the Soviet-bloc countries in the past and Russia now.

Other behavioral outcomes that have been proposed for scholarly scrutiny – agenda-setting and preference-shaping – pose problems of their own, many of which have been discussed earlier in this essay. Attempts to evaluate the distribution of political power by monitoring these indicators or by analyzing decision-making presupposes that key actors disagree about what should be done and that their relative power determines the outcome. But in fact this is often not the case. On many issues a rough consensus is apt to exist, or powerful individuals will not care enough about the matter to try to sway the outcome. Jeffrey Pfeffer has pointed out that “the only cases in which relative power can be observed” are “those instances in which preferences conflict” and in which the actors care enough

¹⁰³ For a few examples, see Mark Kramer, *The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine*, in Vladimir Tismaneanu (ed.), *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, Utopia*, Central European University Press, Budapest 2010, pp. 276-362; Mark Kramer, *Soviet Deliberations During the Polish Crisis, 1980-1981*, Cold War International History Project, Washington D.C. 1999; Mark Kramer, *Soviet Policy During the Polish and Hungarian Crises of 1956: Reassessments and New Findings*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33/2, April 1998, pp. 163-215; and Mark Kramer, *Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1): New Evidence from the Diaries of Petro Shelest*, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 10, Spring 1998, pp. 230-246.

to try to impose their will.¹⁰⁴ But these instances may well be hard to assess. If the “winning” actor believes that power “is exercised most effectively when it is exercised unobtrusively,” efforts to learn what happened will be difficult.¹⁰⁵

Pfeffer acknowledges the myriad hazards of attempting to gauge the distribution of political power from the apparent results of the exercise of power, but he argues that “if one knows the initial preferences, the attempts at influence undertaken, and then the final decision, [the distribution of] power can be more reliably diagnosed.”¹⁰⁶ This may well be true in some instances, but the potential pitfalls of these sorts of measurement techniques have been highlighted by the Putin-Medvedev relationship in Russia from May 2008 to May 2012. By all indications, Putin’s choice of Medvedev as his interim successor in 2008 was based on the assumption that he and Medvedev were “of the same blood type” (i.e., that Medvedev’s views were essentially identical to his own) and that Medvedev would faithfully comply with Putin’s wishes.¹⁰⁷ In an interview with Danish journalists in April 2010, Medvedev himself endorsed this view, insisting that he and Putin “represent the same political force, and our approaches to the country’s general political development are very similar.” Although Medvedev acknowledged that the two “might at times have different views on certain nuances” of particular issues, he stressed that he and Putin “share the same political convictions” and “do not represent what you might call a left and right flank.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ When Putin used this phrase in his remarks to the Valdai Club in September 2009, he described himself and Medvedev as people “of the same blood type and the same political views” (“*odnoi krovi, odnikh politicheskikh vzglyadov*”). See Aleksandr Minkin, *Gruppa krovi*, Moskovskii Komsomlets, 18 September 2009, p. 3, as well as IF, My ‘*odnoi krovi*,’ Interfax, 21 September 2009, Wire Item n° 1447.

These proclamations of similar outlooks and values were partly intended for public consumption, but they also help explain why attempts to evaluate the distribution of political power in Russia during the Medvedev interlude were so difficult. No doubt, Putin and Medvedev worked in harmony most of the time during Medvedev’s tenure as president. Pfeffer’s approach to the measurement of power would require us to focus on the few notable occasions when Putin and Medvedev seemed to disagree about major issues. During the war against Georgia in August 2008, observers noticed that Medvedev – who was formally commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces – was contradicted several times by Putin on operational and strategic questions.¹⁰⁹ In June 2009, Putin suddenly announced that Russia would no longer seek entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) on its own and would instead seek to join as part of a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan – a stance directly at odds with Medvedev’s oft-stated position that Russia should pursue membership on its own.¹¹⁰ In late December 2009, Putin unexpectedly announced that a new strategic arms reduction treaty with the United States would not be consummated unless the Obama administration agreed

¹⁰⁸ Dmitry Medvedev’s *Interview to Steffen Kretz, Danish Broadcasting Corporation’s Senior International Editor and Anchor of TV News and Current Affairs Programme*, Moscow, 26 April 2010 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/7559>).

¹⁰⁹ Anatolii Dmitriyevich Tsyganok, *Voyna na Kavkaze, 2008: Russkii vzglyad – Gruzino-osetinskaya voyna 8-13 avgusta 2008 goda*, AIRO-XXI, Moskva 2010; Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010; Council of the European Union, Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, *Final Report*, 3 vols., IIFMCG, Brussels September 2009; and Stéphane Lefebvre and Roger McDermott, *Intelligence Aspects of the Russia-Georgia Conflict*, Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 22/1, January 2009, pp. 4-19.

¹¹⁰ Aleksei Shalovalov, Oleg Salozhkov, and Igor’ Sedykh, *VTO poluchila optovoe predlozhenie: Rossiya prekrasbaet odinochnye peregovory s organizatsiei*, *Kommersant*, 19 June 2009, p. 1.

to forgo deployments of missile defenses in Eastern Europe.¹¹¹ This announcement seemingly contradicted a joint statement Medvedev had signed with U.S. President Barack Obama in July 2009 that imposed no such requirement for a treaty. The most important divergence between Putin and Medvedev came in March 2011, when Putin spoke scornfully about a proposed United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution authorizing military action to protect civilians in Libya against the brutal crackdown by Muammar Gaddafi's forces. After Putin argued that the resolution was "defective" and "deeply flawed" and was reminiscent of "medieval calls for crusades," Medvedev publicly rebuked him for "unacceptable" comments that "could lead to a clash of civilizations." At Medvedev's behest, Russia abstained in the UNSC vote on the resolution, allowing it to pass.¹¹²

At first glance, all of these would seem to be "instances in which [the two leaders'] preferences conflicted." But in fact the situation in each case, with the probable exception of Libya, is too murky to know for sure one way or the other. During the August 2008 war, most of the policies ended up being in line with what Putin said, giving the impression that he was still the de facto commander-in-chief. In July 2012 the Russian military commanders who oversaw the war effort alleged in public that Medvedev had been irresponsibly diffident during the initial clashes with Georgia and that Putin had saved the day by taking charge.¹¹³ Even if these

¹¹¹ Ekaterina Kuznetsova, *Menyayushchiysya golos Moskvyy v mire*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29 December 2009, p. 3; and IZ, *Rossiia budet razvivat' nastupatel'nye sistemy*, *Izvestiya*, 30 December 2009, p. 2.

¹¹² Vladimir Solov'ev, Maksim Ivanov, and Dmitrii Kozlov, *V Rossii nazrela resolyutsiya: Prezident i prem'er razosblis' v otsenke situatsii v Livii*, *Kommersant'*, 22 March 2011, p. 1; and Aleksandr Gabuev and Vladimir Solov'ev, *Gnet svoyu Liviyu*, *Kommersant'*, 21 March 2011, p. 1.

¹¹³ These accusations were made in a 47-minute documentary film titled *Poteryannyi den'* (Lost Day), which was widely posted on the Internet in July 2012, shortly before the fourth anniversary of the war. *Studiya Al'fa, Poteryannyi den'. Vsyia pravda o voyne 08.08.08 g.*, Tver 2012.

allegations are true (which is unclear), they do not necessarily mean that Putin and Medvedev were ever in disagreement about the war. Instead, what may have happened is that a fast-developing situation engendered uncertainty and abrupt changes of policy. On the basis of available evidence, we cannot truly say whether their preferences conflicted and, if so, whether each sought to get his way.

Much the same is true about the WTO issue. A few weeks after Putin made his announcement, the Russian government indicated that it would resume membership talks on its own with the organization.¹¹⁴ Although ambiguity about Russia's position on WTO entry persisted into 2010 and 2011 (and was not fully dispelled until Russia finally entered the WTO in August 2012), the revival of negotiations on Russian membership without links to other Eurasian countries seemed to go against what Putin had declared in June 2009.¹¹⁵ But this does not necessarily mean that he and Medvedev were at odds or that either man backed down. On the contrary, most experts in Russia interpreted the whole episode as a bargaining tactic to gain better terms for Russia's entry into the organization.¹¹⁶ Events in 2010 and 2011, when both Medvedev and Putin tried to elicit U.S. support for Russian membership in the WTO, lent further credence to this interpretation. The crucial final push in joining the organization occurred after Putin announced in September 2011 that he would be returning as president. Even as he announced the formation of a so-called Eurasian Union in October 2011, he stepped up his

¹¹⁴ Petr Netroba and Dmitrii Butrin, *Na troikh ne vkhoditsya: Rossiya vozvrashchaetsya k samostoyatel'nym peregovoram s VTO* *Kommersant'*, 11 July 2009, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ On the continued uncertainty about Russia's position, see NG, *Gud-bai, VTO! Da zdavstvuet tamozhennyi soyuz*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 December 2009, p. 4; and Anders Åslund, *Why Doesn't Russia Join the WTO?*, *The Washington Quarterly*, 33/2, April 2010, pp. 49-63.

¹¹⁶ Igor' Sedykh, *Rossiia dast VTO memorandum: Tamozhennyi soyuz voidet v organizatsiyu ot del'nym dokumentom*, *Kommersant'*, 7 December 2009, p. 3.

efforts to facilitate Russia's admission into the WTO.¹¹⁷ Putin was the one who, in July 2012, signed the legislation formally ratifying Russia's entry into the organization. All of this suggests that the June 2009 declaration was mostly a bargaining tactic rather than a genuine difference of views about the merits of joining the WTO.

Bargaining tactics also seem to be the most plausible explanation for the apparent divergences on strategic arms control. Medvedev himself in early 2010 doggedly sought a joint statement banning missile defenses in Europe, precisely as Putin had urged. When an arms treaty was finally completed in late March 2010 with some linkage to U.S. plans for missile defense – a direct link in the preamble and indirect link in Article 5 – the Russian government issued a declaration reserving the right to withdraw from the treaty if U.S. missile defenses posed a threat. Experts in Russia such as Dmitry Trenin surmised that Putin and Medvedev had actually been working in sync during the final phase of the negotiations, hoping that “Obama could be put under pressure and concessions could be extracted from him” at the last minute.¹¹⁸

Only on the question of Libya did some genuine differences of views seem apparent, at least for a while. But if a divergence existed initially, it rapidly disappeared when the Western countries that spearheaded the intervention (France, Great Britain, the United States) changed the de facto goal of the operation to the removal of Gaddafi, not just the protection of civilians. Russian political leaders were united in their opposition to this expanded mission, and memories of what

¹¹⁷ NR, *Rossiia vstupaia v VTO posle 18 let peregovorov*, Newsru.ru, 22 July 2012, Item 16; and Vladimir Putin, *Gruppa dvadtsati i global'nye vyzovy ekonomiki*, 18 June 2012 (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15686>).

¹¹⁸ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Rossiia i Amerika udarili po raketam: Yadernye arsenaly sokratyat estestvennym obrazom*, *Kommersant*, 29 March 2010, pp. 1-2; and Peter Baker, *Twists, Turns, and Anger on Way to Arms Pact with Russia*, *The New York Times*, 27 March 2010, p. A4.

happened in Libya after Russia declined to veto the UNSC resolution helped to harden Russia's position on Syria from 2011 onward.¹¹⁹ Having been “hoodwinked” once (as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov put it), Russia was determined to block any UNSC resolution that might be “hijacked” to authorize the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.¹²⁰ Putin had warned in March 2011 that the UNSC resolution would “allow anything,” and in many ways he proved to be right. Medvedev's decision not to veto the resolution seems to have been at variance with Putin's wishes and may have been an important contributor to Putin's decision later in the year to reclaim the presidency. A good deal of murkiness remains about Russian decision-making vis-à-vis Libya, but the March 2011 episode seems to be the one time when Putin and Medvedev did not see eye to eye.

None of this is meant to imply that Putin and Medvedev were fully in accord on all other issues. The available evidence does not exclude the possibility that the two men's preferences did in fact conflict in each case discussed here. Nor does it exclude the possibility that each leader's staff sought to eclipse the other's staff – a “rivalry of administrative apparatuses” (*sopernichestvo apparatov*) – even when the leaders themselves agreed.¹²¹ Nonetheless, what these episodes illustrate is that any attempt to infer the distribution of political power by monitoring decision-making and assessing policy outcomes is fraught with complications. Such indicators should be given significantly less weight than other metrics proposed here.

¹¹⁹ Mariya Khodinskaya-Golenishcheva, *Pobeditelei ne sudyat? Vliyanie operatsii NATO v Livii na metody uregulirovaniya regional'nykh krizisov*, *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, 7, July 2012, pp. 64-74. See also RBK, D. Medvedev: *Rossiia skorrektrirovala podkhod k situatsii Sirii posle liviiskogo stsenariya*, RBK, 30 July 2012, Item 4.

¹²⁰ KP, *Lavrov otkazal NATO v 'appetite' k 'liviiskoi avantyure' v Sirii*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 28 June 2012, p. 3.

¹²¹ On this point, see Aleksandra Samarina, *Medvedev sdelaet strategicheskie khod*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 May 2010, p. 1.

12. Conclusions

For both analytical and practical reasons, the task of evaluating political power is an important one, especially if we want to understand how the national political discourse is shaped. As Jeffrey Pfeffer has emphasized:

In the first place, the exercise and use of power is [sic] facilitated by an accurate diagnosis of the political situation confronted by the social actor. Strategies ranging from coalition formation to cooperation require an accurate diagnosis of the political landscape. Second, the measurement and assessment of power is [sic] important for those who would do research on this topic. If we are to assess whether or not power is correlated with other attributes, is stable over time, and [is consistent] across decision issues, then power will have to be measured. Third, [...] one way of understanding what power is, is to consider how the concept can be examined and used. Thus, the assessment of power will help in the understanding of the concept.¹²²

Admittedly, as Peter Morriss and others have shown, attempts to quantify power have often been flawed, especially when scholars use indices and variables that do not actually measure what they purport to measure or measure nothing at all. Nonetheless, this essay has demonstrated that certain techniques and criteria, if used judiciously, can be helpful in understanding the distribution of political power in Russia over time and the capacity of various political figures to contribute to and shape the country's political discourse.

Several points emerge from the discussion:

1. *First*, any attempt to evaluate political power presupposes a definition of power that can be applied in different geographic and temporal settings. A review of the decades of cumulative scholarship on this subject indicates that the

¹²² Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, p. 35.

definition of political power used here – the capacity to exert political influence or to achieve political outcomes – is the most suitable from both a scholarly and a practical standpoint. The definition is simple, but it has far-reaching implications not only for the broad approach to take in evaluating power but also for the specific techniques to use. The importance of linking conceptual issues with the actual assessment of political power was stressed more than forty years ago by Roderick Bell, who argued that “we can never know that we have correctly assigned numbers to empirical phenomena until the results are useful to explain things... Measurement is not a process [that] takes place independently of theory.”¹²³ More recently, this same point has been developed at greater length by Robert Adcock and David Collier, who contend that measurements of power should “never [be] examined in isolation; rather, they [must be] interpreted and given meaning in relation to the systematized concept [of it].”¹²⁴

2. *Second*, the structure of the Russian polity is not all-determining, but it does have a crucial impact on the distribution of political power. The basic structure in recent years has been one of a largely impotent parliament subordinated to a very strong executive. This pattern might change over the long term, but the existing arrangement means that the only elites with the capacity to shape the prevailing political discourse are those in the highest positions of executive authority (especially Putin), those in proximity to the highest executive, and those who have a realistic chance of one day attaining the highest office.

¹²³ Bell, *Political Power: The Problem of Measurement*, pp. 13, 26.

¹²⁴ Adcock and Collier, *Measurement Validity*, p. 531. On a related point, see Bollen, *Structural Equations with Latent Variables*, pp. 197-198.

3. *Third*, reputational metrics are crucial to include in composite measures of political power, despite the pitfalls. The reputation-based techniques not only are important in their own right but can also be adapted to evaluate the power bases derived from social psychology. Because of the convincing experimental evidence supporting the expanded French-Raven typology, measurements of the various power bases through non-experimental means should prove to be a valuable addition to the more standard reputational metrics.

4. *Fourth*, the exercise of political power in Russia yields results that in some cases can shed valuable light on the relative standing of key political figures. For example, the ouster or demotion of a prominent official usually (though not always) clarifies the distribution of power at the top. In most instances, however, assessments of political power that rely solely on scrutiny of the exercise of power are likely to be deficient. Serious, and potentially fatal, methodological problems hinder this type of analysis. Even though meticulous appraisals of the exercise of political power can serve as an important cross-check on other techniques, they should be only as a supplement to – not a substitute for – these other methods.

5. *Fifth*, once we understand how political power is distributed, we can explore how the most powerful actors choose which ideas to latch onto. The relationship between leaders and thinkers is at times reciprocal and formal, but more often than not it is informal and involves no little or no direct contact. Neo-fascist thinkers such as Aleksandr Dugin were of minimal political influence in Russia until recent years, but Dugin suddenly found his ideas being reflected in political discourse after the start of the Ukraine crisis. Putin's speech on 18 March 2014 announcing the annexation of Crimea, for example, used phrasing in some places very similar to Dugin's own phrasing. This is not because Putin directly consulted with Dugin (he never has, according to

insider accounts) but because Dugin's brand of Eurasianist philosophy became convenient for Putin in justifying his policies vis-à-vis Ukraine. Although Dugin himself has been critical of what he sees as Putin's failure to go anywhere near far enough in Ukraine, Dugin's ideas – with or without his blessing – have been empowered and incorporated into the prevailing political discourse because the most powerful figure in the country has chosen to embrace them.

6. *Sixth*, econometric models derived from game theory and bargaining theory are useful for thinking about some stylized aspects of the exercise of power and of the calculations that go into the use of power, but they do not give us any metrics that are useful for evaluating the political power of key political elites in Russia. By the same token, measurements of formal power are insufficient. The Russian case underscores that a metric of executive power that looks only at formal powers is apt to prove misleading.

7. *Seventh*, a review of different ways to evaluate political power has underscored both the strengths and the weaknesses of the contending approaches. To ensure maximum reliability of our overall evaluation, we must design a composite based on a convergence of various indicators. If the metrics discussed here are of any validity, we presumably should find a strong correlation between the power rankings we derive from them, suitably adjusted. If that proves to be the case, a composite metric that incorporates all of these indicators should yield a reasonably solid estimate of the distribution of political power.

To apply this composite metric to Russia, we must proceed in several steps.¹²⁵ First, we need to calculate all the indicators relevant to Russia, adapting the scales as needed for the specific structure of the polity. Second, after tabulating the individual metrics, we need to calibrate the results to permit comparisons. Third, we must then test for correlations between the metrics.

Fourth, if one or more of the indicators do not show high correlations with the others, we need to figure out why. Is there something wrong with that metric, or is there a deeper flaw in the whole framework? Fifth, if we find that all the metrics are strongly correlated, or if we can resolve any anomalies that arise, we can then combine the different indicators to produce a vector. Finally, we need to weight the individual elements in the vector to take account of the country's political structures. The specifications for this composite vector then need to be clearly laid out so that we can understand how the distribution of political power in Russia has evolved.

Finally, once we see how the distribution of political power has changed over time, we can more clearly link those changes to variations in Russia's prevailing political discourse. At any given moment, many ideas and strands of thought are competing for influence in society. Ideas that become politically influential, even dominant, in Russia at any given moment attain that status not so much because they are self-evidently correct but because an extremely powerful political patron has decided to give them an official imprimatur.

Part I

The State's Political Discourse and Ideological References in Contemporary Russia

¹²⁵ The process specified here is similar to that outlined in Adcock and Collier, *Measurement Validity*, pp. 529-546. See also Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Social Research*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994, pp. 25 ff.

Chapter I

The Discourse of Russian Bureaucracy and its Influence on the Political Discourse *Alexey Barabashev, NRU-HSE*

The general problem of bureaucratic over-influence in governance is that sometimes – and perhaps too often – political goals and proposals announced by top authorities are “corrected” by the apparat. Indeed, the apparat finds ways to cleverly mask and ‘replace’ these political decisions with other conclusions that often appear far from the original ones announced by the political elite, even in their general goals and ideas. The issue of this bureaucratic ‘hidden influence’ on the political process is reflected not only in academic sources, but also in popular books¹ and even in television series.²

1. *The Theoretical Debate*

With regards to administrative theories of bureaucracy, civil servants have often been viewed as a separate social group guided by their own interests, occupying a special role in governance for their own personal benefit. Every administrative

¹ Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, *Yes, Minister: The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 3 volumes, BBC, London 1981-1983; Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, *Yes, Prime Minister: The Diaries of the Right Hon. James Hacker*, Salem House, Topsfield 1986-1988.

² Antony Jay v Jonathan Lynn (creators), *Yes, Minister*, TV Serial for BBC 2, 1980-1984; Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn (creators), *Yes, Prime Minister*, TV Serial for BBC 2, 1986-1988.

paradigm has its own explanation for the enormous influence that the bureaucracy exerts on decision-making. Indeed, Weberian-style explanations of bureaucratic influence on decision-making appeal to meritocratic foundations of the apparatus: civil servants, as far as being professionals of politics (along the ideal-type of bureaucracy and rational bureaucrat) try to embed the decisions into existing reality. It is the 'organizational power' of government bodies and the sequence of rational technique, embodied in specialized bureaucratic forms of organizational behavior³ that follow the rules of the government.⁴ Thus, we see a 'paradox of bureaucratic domination' controlled by a relatively small political elite.⁵ More recently, the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm of the mid-70s explained the attempts of bureaucrats to influence decision-making in order to maximize their resources, including functions and responsibility for their own public sector roles.⁶

The influence of bureaucracy on decision-making manifests in multiple forms and components, such as the limitation of the access to operative administrative and social information for political authorities (culminating in direct disinformation), the drowning of problems in oceans of useless details during reporting, postponing of decision-making through time-wasting

³ Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology. Bureaucracy*, Oxford University Press, New York 1946, pp. 196-244.

⁴ Margaret Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1974, p. 33.

⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Bedminster Press, New York 1968, pp. iii, 953.

⁶ William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, Aldine Atherton, Chicago 1971; William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy: Servant or Master?*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London 1973. The theoretical discussion within the NPM context can be revealed in Lee Sigelman, *The Bureaucrat as Budget Maximizer: An Assumption Examined*, Public Budgeting and Finance, 6/1, 1986, pp. 50-59. André Blais and Stéphane Dion, *Are Bureaucrats Budget Maximizers? The Niskanen Model & Its Critics*. Polity, 22/4, Summer 1990, pp. 655-674.

tricks, or, in contrast, fabricating the need for urgent decisions by simulating a necessity to act on a problem immediately despite a lack of information or other factors. Among the aforementioned forms and components, the most significant is the leading role of 'bureaucratic discourse' as an instrument of influence. The bureaucratic discourse can be understood as the significant influence exerted by the bureaucracy on the decision-making process. However, this task has an independent value and can be analyzed in terms of homogeneity/heterogeneity, of variants, of administrative procedures that formed the discourse, and more.

2. *The 'Procedural Discourse' of Russian Bureaucracy*

Russia has a strong and deep history of bureaucratic dominance and its influence in the spheres of policy making and everyday life. In order to better understand the specificities of the Russian bureaucratic discourse, we must consider the real constraints that exist for political discourse and decision-making in the contemporary Russian Federation. Hence, we should accept the bureaucratic discourse as a 'way of doing things' consisting of three parts: vocabulary, meanings, and procedures. My key hypothesis is that the specificities of the Russian bureaucratic discourse lay in the area of procedures.

First, we must compare political discourse in Russia to bureaucratic discourse. Indeed, the procedures of public political discourse consist of a broad spectrum of oral and written entities. In terms of the schematic content of political discourse procedures – and the forms they manifest in – I believe that there used to exist no great difference between Russia and other (Western) countries. Over time, oral procedure – such as press-conferences, interviews, official round tables, presentations of politicians at socially significant events, screenings of official governmental proceedings, an array of

populist politicians in TV channels, etc. – became a common occurrence in the everyday political discourse of Russia. Remarkably, the vocabulary of Russian oral political discourse in recent years (beginning in 2011 with the events of Bolotnaya ploshchad) has migrated toward increasingly ‘patriotic’ and anti-Western patterns. The repeated use of ‘sharp’ words – such as ‘sanctions and anti-sanctions,’ ‘national interests,’ ‘national idea,’ ‘import-replacement’ (*importozameshcheniye*), ‘social unity,’ ‘foreign agents,’ ‘NATO pressure,’ ‘orange revolutions,’ ‘belt of instability’ around Russia etc. – is of particular significance.

All of these ideologically tinged terms are transmitted daily through the mass media apparatus, especially by state TV channels. Some of them clearly reinforce the intensification of a sharp ‘anti-Westernization’ political discourse in internal and external political events such as Russian elections, negative economic trends, the war in Ukraine, the military exercises in the Baltic, etc. However, despite the sharpening of oral political discourse in recent years, the vocabulary of written political discourse presents a much ‘softer’ approach in its ideological contents. Press-reviews usually attempt to palliate speeches and acts of political discourse such as legislation, Presidential decrees, resolutions of the Russian government, and ministerial orders (excluding orders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). These acts appear more ‘balanced’ – sometimes by reaching entirely opposing meanings or using neutral terminology – and are certainly less ideologically refined. We can identify the reasons for this process in the ‘hidden influence’ of a Russian bureaucracy that acts according to ‘genre’ traditions.

Russian bureaucratic (non-public) procedures are the capstone to understanding these changes and replacements in both the vocabulary and policy-making of the government. This conclusion does not arise due to a Russian bureaucracy that stays separate from politics and attempts to correct politicians. Rather, this process is the result of some specific ‘rules of

bureaucratic internal game’ that occur in every decision-making process of Russian governmental bodies and have their roots in the Soviet and Russian past. Existing administrative paradigms, with their general explanations of bureaucratic influence on decision-making in terms of their attempts to maximize resources or in defense of their normative reality, fail to properly explain the practice of everyday administrative life in Russia. In Russia – most likely in other countries as well – the essence of bureaucratic influence and its purposes differs from the Weberian and NPM general explanations and instead follows the specificity of its discourse.

I would like to note that the socio-cultural roots of Russian bureaucracy – as well as its tradition-oriented discourse and general manner of operation – heavily influence the political decision-making process. Hence, I would like to present some examples of substitution in the terminology/discourse of bureaucratic procedures from the preceding years, and in so doing demonstrate the radical discrepancy between the initial oral and written (in the drafts of documents) narrative and the final policy in documents produced by the Russian government, focusing on administrative and public service reforms (my professional field of research). My specific areas of research concern staff optimization, remuneration of civil servants, the resolution of conflicts of interest, support for and restrictions of NGO’s, the terminology of ‘open government’ compared with existing political terminology, and their role in bureaucratic influence on the political discourse and, ultimately, on policy-making.

3. The 'Hidden Influence' of the Working Groups (WGs)

As previously mentioned, the essence of the influence of bureaucratic procedures on the Russian political discourse – that provides the transition from the sharp ideological constructions toward some 'softer' final formulas – is the Russian tradition of bureaucratic decision-making. This process is determined through the co-operative efforts of government bodies – traditionally organized collectively – and can be traced back to the Soviet era, to the Russian Empire and perhaps even earlier to pre-Empire epoch and its Council of the Tsar with his Nobles.⁷ This is the result of special administrative creations – the so-called 'working groups' (WG) established within governmental bodies.⁸ The WG decision-making processes (*prinyatiye resheniy v rabochikh gruppakh*) is based on a research of consensus and a sort of 'informal veto' of any governmental body. This condition is effective when the political intention does not completely prevail on other interests, defining an almost common situation since a condition of 'last option' is a quite rare event. In fact, this latest circumstance happens when there is not an internal struggle – for resources and for legislation purity – among different bodies and centers of decisions, and the quest for unity of state executive bodies succeeds. Thus, we can describe the mechanism of cooperative decision-making, concerning the Russian governmental WGs (*mezhdedomstvennye rabochiye gruppy*) and the specific bureaucratic consensus-procedures of the WGs' activity (the so-called 'Tables of disagreement' – *tablitsy raznoglasii*) that are the heritage of the Imperial/Soviet past.⁹

⁷ In Russian, *Soviet tsarya s boyarami*. For example, we can mention the *Sobornoye Ulozbeniye* a set of legal norms introduced by Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich in 1649, defining for the members of Duma (higher nobles) the right to make state decisions by themselves or with a final approval by Tsar, based on the consensus collective procedures.

⁸ In Russian, *rabochiye gruppy gosudarstvennykh organov*.

WGs are established under the initiatives of the top authorities and their apparatus (such as the administration of President of Russian Federation or the Apparatus of Government, etc.), are tasked with producing drafts of documents (such as decrees, resolutions, and orders) and simultaneously involve the specific areas of responsibility of various governmental bodies. Hence, following the practices, a joint committee of 'interested' (*zainteresovannykh*) bodies is temporarily created as long as a final version of the document is accepted. The numerous WGs are thus created in all areas of policy-making – from education to civil service reforms and to the state federal programs elaboration, etc. – becoming a remarkable force of Russian Government activity.

Every 'interested' body, and some selected leading expert organizations – such as think-tanks and universities under the government of Russian Federation (NRU-HSE, RANEPa and the Finance University) and national universities (MSU and the SPbU) – are represented in the WGs by their top managers: the deputy ministers are directly nominated members while rectors, vice rectors, and directors of institutes are appointed by approbation (*po soglasovaniyu*). This is the highest managerial level represented in the WGs.

The order of nominating the list of WG members is usually signed by the higher Russian authorities, such as the Prime Minister of Russian Federation, the head of the presidential administration, or (rarely) the President himself. Thus, the WGs are usually headed by a representative of the presidential administration (who is at the very least ranked as a 'head of the management') or a member of the government (who is at the very least ranked as a 'deputy prime minister' or a top

⁹ When we read in historic documents formulations such as "*Priказы posoveshchalis' i resbili*," we can definitely make analogies with the contemporary Russian WGs.

manager of the government apparatus). In parallel with the WGs, Expert Groups (EGs) are also commonly – but not necessarily – created. The EG is guided by the secretary of the WG and is nominated by the same directive that appoints the head of the WG. Thus, the EG is aimed at preparing the documents for the WG sessions. Thus, the initial draft of the document (in the form of decree, order of government, etc.) then passes to the WG and is distributed among its members. In the next phase, the WG members formally request to their experts (from the government bodies or from the involved think-tanks) to prepare comments and even arguments against some positions on the initial draft. The secretary of the WG – possibly supported by the EG – collects those comments and combines them in a ‘table of disagreement.’

4. *The ‘Table of Disagreement’*

Hence, the ‘table of disagreement’ combines the different positions of the ‘interested’ government bodies and expert organizations, and is usually structured on (at minimum) three columns that report the name of the organization and its representative (together with her/his position); the description of the draft’s part (including its number of paragraph) that is disagreed on; and the new formulation that proposed by the WG. After preparing the table of disagreement, the date of the meeting is decided. The activities of the WG are certainly kept private and out of media attention because of their potential danger: the leaks of alternate decisions variants – that heavily touch some actors’ interests – can lead to counteractions aimed at blocking unwanted results from those actions. In fact, the initial draft is just a working document and the positions of the different government bodies can be slightly dissimilar. Thus, a confidential approach – rather than revealing the lack of unity in

the government – is preferable, announcing a unified (a priori) position of the government as a whole entity. Information is sometimes leaked to the media, but the texts of tables of disagreements almost never are. This ‘kitchen cabinet’ is the hidden procedural phase of the bureaucratic discourse in Russia.

The specificity of the WG meetings remains in the (sometimes relatively strong and harsh) tones of the discussions and disagreements on the tables. This process follows a scheme of progressive acceptance and rejection of local disagreements; every member of the WG potentially has an informal veto and is able to block the approval of the document. In fact, if some government body argued the impossibility of finding resources for a task – or declared that such assets could not be put toward implementation of their federal programs – it would be effectively impossible to accept the document in that very form. Thus, only in very rare circumstances can the top political authorities insist and push the WG to accept a draft without reserves. However, such a situation could seriously undermine the existing administrative consensus.

Hence, this is usually a long process – implying many sessions of the WG and the resulting difficulties/delays in scheduling meetings that involve all the (usually busy) participants in a unique event – that is led by consensus-oriented procedures which elaborate a final version of the document (in the forms of decrees, orders, etc.) that is slightly different from initial drafts. Another result of this type of procedural discourse is that sometimes government agencies are able to change their positions and reconsider positive responses (acceptance) toward certain formulas proposed by other bodies. Thus, it is clear why the WG process takes an extensive period of time and sometimes produces delayed final outputs. This is the result of a bulky and slow administrative machine. However, this is also the essence of a machine that analyzes issues and grasps onto them as a bulldog holds the throat of its prey.

In these consensus procedures, some government bodies have a key role inasmuch they have the ability to influence the consensus and contain any ‘sharp’ variants. This role is mostly assumed by the apparatus of the government, the ministry of finances (more generally, even by the ministry of economic development and the central bank of Russia), and some of the security and law enforcement agencies of the Russian government. Certainly, this practice is the heritage of the Soviet past – with its Politburo consensus-decisions – and even of the older Russian Empire.

Hence, we can observe how this mechanism works at the administrative and civil service reform levels in Russia. The differences between the initially proposed political ideas/terminology¹⁰ and the final formulation of the documents¹¹ transformed during the WG process can be seen in the following table.

¹⁰ Concept of the Russian Federation Public Service System Reform, approved by President of Russian Federation (15 August 2001), n° Pr-1496 (*Kontseptsiya reformirovaniya sistemy gosudarstvennoy sluzhby Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiyskoy Federatsii 15 avgusta 2001 g. Pr-1496*).

¹¹ Decree of the President of Russian Federation n° 1336 (19 November 2002) “About the Federal Program “Reforming the Public Service of Russian Federation (2003-2005)” – *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii n° 1336 ot 19 noyabrya 2002 goda «O federal'noy programme «Reformirovaniye gosudarstvennoy sluzhby Rossiyskoy Federatsii (2003-2005 gody)»*»; The Federal Program “Reforming and Development of the System of Public Service of Russian Federation (2009-2013).” Approved by the Decree of the President of Russian Federation n° 261 (10 March 2009) – *Federal'naya programma «Reformirovaniye i razvitiye sistemy gosudarstvennoy sluzhby Rossiyskoy Federatsii (2009-2013 gody)»*. Utverzhdena Ukazom Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii 261 ot 10.03.2009.

Initial political idea/formula	Final bureaucratic idea/formula
To cut the number of servants	To optimize the number of servants
To introduce a full-scale change in terms of compensation of servants based on effectiveness of their work	To introduce partial - change for some positions (<i>osobyi poryadok oplaty truda</i>)
To start a process of selection based on merit	To select the cadres along the recommendations of the heads of the government bodies (the ‘best officials select the best candidates’)
To fight corruption in the government	To set income declarations; to create conflict of interest commissions; to introduce the ethical norms; etc.

From this example, we can see how every case is affected by the bureaucratic discourse procedures, leading toward some more balanced, ‘softer’ and more rational variants. This is the essence of the bureaucratic ‘hidden influence’ on the Russian political discourse aimed at strengthening the state executive power rather than encouraging possible challenges from the political elite. The destruction of the Russian bureaucracy in 1917 and the replacement of its bureaucratic discourse – for example, nominating the exclusive responsibility of some single governmental body for the implementation of each decision – probably meant the destabilization of the governance rather than a simple replacement of the political elite (with its system of preferences) with another one. To follow this idea, we can mark the challenges for the existent bureaucratic discourse in Russia. To improve the quality of Russian bureaucracy utilizing the public instruments of objective evaluation to measure its effectiveness and establishing personal responsibility for managerial outcomes of professional activity could be crucial in transforming it from a ‘stabilizing’ force charged with eliminate politically risky movements.

Russia needs a new bureaucracy that is a sufficient and productive social driver; a force able to provide more qualified decisions for the sake of its people, not just based on the balance of government interests. In continuing the above proposed ‘path of political and administrative discourse research,’ one can trace the historical dynamics of the Russian bureaucratic ‘hidden influence’ and its ‘mitigating’ effects on the Russian political discourse. Also, it is important to research the “hidden bureaucratic discourse” procedures from a theoretical perspective – as a part of the administrative paradigms of hierarchical subordination, of state services provisions, of government interactions with the community of experts and with civil society – and to realize the bureaucratic discourse from the administrative – everyday reality, involving into the research a new sort of administrative sources that are stored in the administrative bodies, in the administrative think-tanks and in the hands of WG experts.

Chapter II

Post-Crimean Political Discourse and Russian Foreign Policy Narratives *Anton Barbashin, Intersection*

March of 2014 marked the most significant change in Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy. Not only a Rubicon for Russia’s relations with the West, it also marked a profound shift in the structuring of Russia’s foreign policy discourse. The annexation of Crimea profoundly altered political, economic, social and historical realities for Russia, changes that ultimately required coherent explanations: paradigms and narratives that made these groundbreaking changes part of a consistent plan. In the search for these explanations, explanations that held the possibility of outlining the trajectory of future development in the country, the Russian political class – state-affiliated agents and foreign policy groups – have created symbiotic narratives that employ both traditional *realist* discourses and many features of *revanchist* discourses ultimately preventing an unbiased discussion that separates Russia’s national interest from foreign policy realities. In order to properly qualify and quantify the dominant foreign policy discourses in today’s Russia, we must first look at the political context in which these discourses have evolved and competed, shaping to some extent the worldviews of the decision makers in Russia. Naturally, we must look to the rule of President Putin, who made the decision to annex the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. This sixteen year period from 2000 to 2016 can be divided into three sub-periods, which I have outlined below.

1. *Russia As Part of The West (2000-2004)*

The decade preceding Vladimir Putin's rule was mostly defined by Russia's determination to build a strong relationship with the West – a desire to integrate with Western political and economic institutions and find common ground for military cooperation. Still, the second half of the 1990s was a time of various dissatisfaction with the West that effectively destroyed any illusions that existed directly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the potential to build lasting relationships was extremely high during this period and the sheer readiness to integrate was enough to make significant progress.

When Putin became president in the year 2000, Russia was only beginning to recover from the 1998 economic crisis. Oil prices that would later change Russia's economic and geopolitical realities were still relatively low at the time, and United States dominance as the sole global superpower was not threatened or questioned by any other state. With the legacy of president Yeltsin behind him, Vladimir Putin was eager to pacify Russia domestically, centralize the state, and bring Russia's economy closer to the West all the while acquiring Russia a 'say' in global affairs. Both in domestic and foreign rhetoric, Russia was viewed as a part of European civilization and, more broadly, as part of the West. In 2000 Putin called to provide the Russians and the Germans with a new perspective, contribute to the well-being of our peoples, and the unity of Europe on the basis of common values of progress, democracy and freedom... Of course we accept common European values... Today basic European values are becoming an integral part of the Russian way of life.¹

¹ Vladimir Putin's interview to the German newspaper, 11 June 2000 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24202>).

In this address, Putin discussed not only the financial importance of Russian integration with the West, but also stressed a shared history and set of values – something that was never seen before and would never be repeated in the future. In the aftermath of 9/11, Putin had his chance to act and was the first foreign leader to call Washington and propose assistance and support. This marked a brief period of active partnership and even 'friendship' between the United States of America and Russia. Given that the fight against terrorism was named as the primary goal of these joint efforts, both parties had a shared need to overlook their differences and prior disagreements in order to cooperate on mostly U.S. efforts to wage a war on terrorism.² Moreover, it was relatively easy to sell this narrative to audiences in both Russian and the United States: Russia was waging war against terrorists in Chechnya and across the Northern Caucasus while the United States was fighting similar battles in Afghanistan and across in the Middle East.

Russia's leadership was confident that this partnership would bring the U.S. to appreciate their role, thus granting Russia a special status in the global order, with its interests and needs valued and respected. But as the war in Afghanistan progressed and the United States began to plan the Iraq campaign, Russia's leadership shifted from its full support of American foreign policy plans to a closer relationship with France and Germany, opposing the U.S. campaign in Iraq³ and deeming it dangerous and illegitimate. At that time, the Kremlin's hope that the United States would allow Russia a leading role in global affairs had been dashed; ushering a short Moscow – Berlin – Paris axis served as a second chance to 'join

² See Mark Galeotti, *Russia's War in Chechnya 1994-2009*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 2014.

³ See the Joint declaration from Russia, Germany and France, 10 February 2003 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3662>).

the West.’ But as had happened with Washington, Moscow eventually became disappointed with this western pivot. In 2004, when the Orange Revolution took place in Ukraine, the governments of France and Germany supported the movement. Seen as a threat to Russia’s national interests, the Kremlin read the support of the Maidan by Paris and Berlin as an anti-Russian stance which rendered a further pivot to the West impossible. This entire period can be characterized by a two-sided misconception: Putin’s Russia believed that if it played by the Western rules it would be able to acquire a seat at the table alongside the world’s most powerful liberal democracies that would in turn afford Russia preferential conditions, particularly regarding the treatment of the post-Soviet space. In a similar manner, the West believed that Russia had accepted the dissolution of its empire and was ready to act as a ‘normal’ liberal democracy, respecting both former colonies and former parts of its empire as fully sovereign, independent states. Nevertheless, both positions were wrong.

2. Rivalry of ‘Partners’ and Hopes for the BRICS (2005-2012)

After the Ukrainian Maidan, Russia’s discontent with the West began to formalize. This is best illustrated in Putin’s Munich speech,⁴ which summarized the Kremlin’s assessment of the world in 2007. In the speech, Putin declared that Russia had been mistreated, her interests had been neglected while the United States – which had failed to deliver a unipolar world – was unilaterally breaking international laws and avoiding

⁴ Vladimir Putin participated in the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>).

responsibility for its actions. Instead of seeking a role in the Western order, Russia moved to fashion a so-called multipolar world, which was described best by Yevgeny Primakov, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996-1998) and Prime Minister (1998-1999). According to Primakov, Russia – along with China, India and Japan – deserved a much larger voice in defining global governance and, due to their growing economic might, needed to have more political weight in the world order. Accordingly, as the unipolar world was now seen as incapable of bringing global peace (i.e. the military operation in Iraq in 2003), only a multipolar world could guarantee a more just and inclusive order of which Russia had to be one of its pillars. However, this approach did not dictate Russia as the enemy of the West, but rather as a rival, a competitor.⁵

Moscow has nevertheless continued to increase its economic interdependence with European nations, especially as growing oil prices have allowed the country to drastically increase imports of European goods. While Russia was building economic bridges with Europe and remaining in ‘partner’s rivalry’ mode with the United States, it was also attempting to find a formula of how BRICS could change the governing world order, despite the fact that no member of the BRICS was politically or economically stable.⁶

This period was only briefly paused during the Georgian war when, for a relatively brief period of time, Russia – West

⁵ Yevgeny Primakov, *Mir bez Sverbderzav*, Rossiya v Globalnoi Politike, 3, 2003 (http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_1560).

⁶ See Anton Barbashin, *How Russia sees the multipolar world*, Intersection, 30 August 2016 (<http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-world/how-russia-sees-multipolar-world>). Andrey Makarychev, *Russia in a multipolar world: Role identities and “cognitive maps,”* Revista CIDOB d’afers internacionals, 96, December 2011. Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia in Global Governance: Multipolarity or Multilateralism?* in Dries Lesage and Pierre Vercauteren (eds.), *Contemporary Global Governance: Multipolarity vs New Discourses on Global Governance*, Peter Lang Publishing Group, Frankfurt-Brussels 2009, pp. 51-62.

relations suffered a tremendous blow. Nevertheless, there was a conceptual decision among western nations to pacify the conflict and quickly reengage with Russia. The most vivid example of this was president Obama's "reset" – a set of measures directed at de-escalation with Russia with the stated goal of beginning Russia-U.S. relations anew. In a sense, this appeasement policy postponed the Russia – West confrontation based on Russia's interventionist foreign policy in its 'near abroad' until 2014. Medvedev's presidency was a significant contrast to Vladimir Putin's rule, although only in rhetoric. In practice, Medvedev, safeguarding the presidential seat, continued to look to the multipolar world, cautiously building up some reputational trust with the West that would be entirely lost only a few years later.

3. *The Return to 'Greatpowerness' (2012-present)*

Russia took a hard turn when president Putin came back to being president in 2012, after spending a required four years of intermission as the prime-minister of Russia. Highly dissatisfied with the events now known as the 'Arab Spring,' which the Kremlin blamed in some part on the West, Putin shifted towards revanchist rhetoric, pointing fingers at the West as the cause of most of the troubles the world was currently experiencing. A large part of his distrust with the West came from fears of political unrest inside Russia. The mass protests of 2011 and 2012 came as a shock to Russia's political elite; despite an initial push to liberalize political life in the country, Putin's return to the office brought blunt measures that were directed at marginalizing protest groups by significantly shortening the legal space of political protest. For two years, most of the developments were restricted to domestic affairs, restrictive laws, and a hard strike against NGOs promoting democracy and human rights. But by 2014, the Kremlin had tremendously altered the rules

of the game. Once again in Russian history, anti-Americanism proved to be an effective justification of repressive measures.

In late February 2014, Russian troops entered the territory of Ukraine from a Russian military base in Sevastopol, seized control of several key government outposts, and by the middle of March secured the referendum that granted the Crimean Peninsula independence from Ukraine and subsequently ushered its annexation by Russia. The Crimean success – an almost bloodless annexation of a large segment of foreign territory – spawned the creation of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, separatist formations in the East of Ukraine that de-facto meant military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This unprecedented episode, assessed by International Criminal Court as "international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and an ongoing state of occupation of Ukraine's territory"⁷ still determines Russia's objective geopolitical realities. Western response – in the form of limited sanctions and partial isolation – determined the Kremlin's attempt to pivot to the East, bringing Russia politically and economically closer to China, which has so far failed to prove successful.⁸ Russia is also now deeply engaged in the ongoing Syrian civil war, its first major military conflict outside of the post-Soviet sphere since the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989). This entire period, currently ongoing, is characterized by ever-growing mutual accusations between the West and Russia; media disinformation campaigns and an ongoing debate regarding the resurgence of a Cold War '2.0.'⁹

⁷ The ICC's report on preliminary examination activities, 14 November 2016 (https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-PE_ENG.pdf).

⁸ Alexander Gabuev, *Russia and China: Little Brother or Big Sister?*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 5 July 2016 (<http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=64006>).

⁹ James Stavridis, *Are We Entering a New Cold War?*, Foreign Policy, 17 February 2016 (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/17/are-we-entering-a-new-cold-war-russia-europe>).

In looking at the evolution of Russia's political regime, particularly in the realm of foreign policy, it would appear that one can draw a direct line from being a 'friend of the West' to being an 'enemy of the West,' a gradual progression over the course of the last sixteen years. In fact, it is a bit more complicated than that.

4. Three Discourses of Russian Foreign Policy

In order to understand how the foreign policy discourse has changed since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, we must first outline three major narratives that have existed in one form or another throughout the entirety of Putin's duration in power.

The Liberal Discourse

The liberal discourse – also described as the pro-European, pro-Western, globalist approach to foreign policy – is a complex of political, historic-philosophical explanations for Russia's positioning that highlights Russia's desired status as a liberal democracy, a member of the Western institutions with high economic interdependence. Dating back in its current form to the late 1980s and anti-communist movements, it rejects Russia's imperial legacy which calls for post-imperial development, and demands full recognition of sovereignty of former 'colonies' and dependent territories. It views the Soviet collapse as a highly positive moment that allowed Russia to develop as a liberal democracy, fully rejecting any revision of global framework formulated in 1991. This discourse views Russia as responsible for its flaws or successes, demanding economic and political modernization that would grant the country a satisfying place in the world order. This approach views foreign policy as a tool to advance economic development and guarantee a transparent environment that attracts foreign investment, thus stimulating broader engagement with the global community.

The Realist Discourse

The *derzavniy* (state oriented) or realist approach is based on the so-called Russian national interests and is directed at advancing Russia's economic might and political influence in the world using Russia's strategic advantages as well as the other's strategic disadvantages. In this capacity, the West is viewed as a possible partner when it benefits Russia, but should be contained if it threatens Russian interests. Values as such are not a priority for this line of thinking, as long as they do not threaten or strengthen particular aspects of national interest. The collapse of the Soviet Union is viewed as a given fact, while revisionism regarded this episode as harmful and claimed Russia's authority to protect its interest in the post-Soviet space, seen as Moscow's special sphere of influence. It also dictates Russia to prioritize regional integration projects over global economic involvement and views Russia as an economic and political bridge between Europe and Asia that dictates balances between the two.

The Revanchist Discourse

The imperial approach views the loss of the empire as the biggest issue of the last quarter century: it is acknowledged as an unjust fact and Russia's main goal is to reconstruct its empire in one way or another. The West is viewed as an 'eternal' enemy that is destructive on levels of policy, goals and values – thus destruction of the West is regarded as the primary goal, by all means possible. This approach is values-based and requires Russia to promote and be guided by so-called traditional values based either in Russian orthodoxy or an alternative symbiotic version like Eurasianism. According to this approach, foreign policy serves the goal of pursuing a historic mission and is accordingly not a subject of compromise of any kind.

5. *The Discourse Change in Post-2014*

If we look back at the Russian foreign policy context it becomes quite obvious that there exists a certain correlation between specific periods and certain discourses. Indeed, the first period was a combination of liberal and realist discourses and allowed for a great freedom and competition between the two. Especially in regards to questions of economic development, much of the rhetoric voiced by higher officials on all levels was a direct product of the liberal discourse.

Contrary to what many of today's Russian liberals might claim, liberal narratives have existed in the state discourse all throughout the second period up until 2012. The presence of the discourse was most obvious during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency. Generally speaking, the further Russian development grew the country away from 'transitional democracy' and moved towards authoritarianism, the more the liberal discourse grew limited and eventually became confined to the matters of economic developments, especially with regards to investment seeking and participation in international organizations such as the WTO.

Still, until the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin, the revanchist discourse was considered marginal, with headliners such as Alexander Dugin or Alexander Prokhanov, and remained on the outskirts of the political debate. Their ideas although could be traced back to Slavophile discourses (in case of Prokhanov) or the original Eurasianism of 1920-30s. Its current shape and form and shape can be traced to the late 1980s. Its ideas were never present on the scale of academic debates nor were they considered part of the larger discourse of the foreign policy agenda since they were based on the belief that Russia must revise the post-1991 order. By 2012, this narrative had become non-negotiable. Nevertheless, conservative ideas – characteristic to the revanchist discourse – were first introduced as part of the domestic discourse of the

so-called 'conservative' (traditional terms). Apparently, its very core was the contraposition of 'Russian' values of collectivism, solidarity, traditional Christian family and community values, and the love for the "homeland" in contrast to Western individualism, selfishness, secularism, moral decadence and cosmopolitanism, reaching new levels of anti-Americanism in no time at all. Broadly speaking, it was impossible to somehow separate domestic discourse from one related to foreign policy, since the link between the two is extraordinarily strong in Russia. So it occurred in 2014, when the Kremlin used the opportunity presented by the revolution in Ukraine to boost the president's popularity to new heights, removing the possibility of debate on economic development.

The phenomenon of Crimea – the annexation of territory of another state – never existed as part of a liberal or pragmatist discourse; neither of those discourses were suited to explain it or respond to it. Thus, the events of March 2014 have created an unprecedented demand for new narratives to fill a vacuum in discourse, addressing issues of domestic development and international relations. Crimea has to some extent pushed Russia into the hands of previously marginalized revanchists who have viewed the annexation as the beginning of their time in power, misinterpreting the Kremlin's actions. For a short period of time – from the annexation to the introduction of the concept of 'Novorossiya'¹⁰ and a total oblivion to the Ukrainian affairs on Russian state television – the revanchists had free reign to penetrate public discussions and irreversibly change the dominant foreign policy discourse.

The realists' discourse, the most dominant discourse of the last decade, was forced to acknowledge some of the narratives

¹⁰ Putin at the press-conference referred to the so-called "Novorossiya" as the territories that were never part of the Ukrainian state (18 April 2014). See the video *Putin pro Novorossiyu* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXr-oLbT8Qc>).

promoted by the revanchists in order to accommodate certain global political realities that occurred after 2014. First of all, it had to include anti-Americanism not just as a reaction to certain political events – as it was before – but as inherent trait, a logical explanation of Moscow's positioning. Secondly, it had to justify the act of aggression against Ukraine, in light of international law, and prove that Crimea, and the new confrontation with the West that it brought, was a part of a consistent foreign policy strategy as opposed to opportunism. Thirdly, it had to include value-based reasoning into its actions, justifying the need to domestically and globally endorse conservative values and to prove its superiority over Western liberal values, posing them as universal values. And finally it had to explain Russia's pivot to the East away from the West as the sole winning strategy consistent with Russia's foreign policy, going back to the mid to late 2000s search for multipolarity and the pivot away from the Western governed world to a more just and balanced global order.

In a sense, this development – a *de facto* state forced alteration to the discourse – ended a period of relatively free debate on Russia's national interest and foreign policy objectives, ultimately leading to a form of national ideology related to international relations. Although it still allowed for fluidity of opinions, variations and interpretations, post-2014 the discourse became inherently hostile towards any liberal interpretations of the events, since they first attacked the legitimacy of the annexation of Crimea. To some extent, the liberal discourse switched places with the revanchist discourse, in turn becoming fully marginalized.

This forced evolution created a new version of the realist discourse that now employs many of the narratives that formerly solely belonged to the revanchists. This symbiosis is neither coherent nor sound, but it desperately attempts to both justify and legitimize Russia's actions of 2014 and beyond.

It could be best illustrated by new foreign policy concepts and proposals emerging from traditionally realist think tanks such as SVOP.¹¹ It builds upon recent Kremlin rhetoric rather than theoretical basis or rational analysis, neglecting issues of economic development or Russia's economic decline for that matter. Certainly, this approach poses great risks for Russia's foreign policy as well as for the future of honest discussion of foreign policy matters.¹² The problem is that while remaining a subject of political will rather than theory or fact-based analysis, it loses its logical and discursive soundness, producing illogical recipes and practical recommendations. In this regard, this is a specific type of crisis which is not limited to Russia alone.

¹¹ Sergei N. Karaganov, *Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya vneshnyaya politika: konets 2010-kh – nachalo 2020-kh godov*, Sovet po Vneshney i Oboronnoy Politike, 2016 (http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ы_23_sm.pdf).

¹² Anton Barbashin, *Expensive Dreams of Great Power Status*, Intersection, 1 June 2016 (<http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-world/expensive-dreams-great-power-status>).

Chapter III

‘Experts’ and Pluralism of Political Ideas
in Russia (2008-2016)
Olga Malinova, NRU-HSE¹

The role of policy experts in Russia and their relations with authorities (and to a lesser extent, society) have been studied in various approaches and disciplines.² Nevertheless, it is still possible to observe these dynamics from an unusual perspective. In fact, I consider policy experts as both participants of a symbolic ‘struggle over meanings’ and active players in public discussions about the present conditions and further perspectives of Russian society. This aspect of their activity might be properly named ‘ideological.’³ Indeed, this ideological dimension is indispensable for experts’ activity as soon as it enters a public sphere. Essentially, any public statement of a policy expert has an ideological dimension in so far as it occurs in a structured realm of meanings where the struggle for power and domination takes place. It does not mean that the ideological aspect of the experts’ activity is a dominant one.

¹ The paper results from the research project of the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences, supported by the Russian Foundation for Humanities (grant n. 13-03-00553). The author is grateful to Valentina Efremova for her assistance in collecting the materials for this paper.

² Nina Beliaeva (ed.), *Analiticheskie soobshchestva v publichnoi politike: global'nyi fenomen i rossiiskie praktiki*, Rosspen, Moskva 2012; Aleksandr Yu. Sungurov, Nikolay P. Raspopov and Aleksandr Yu. Belyayev, *Instituty-mediatory i ikh razvitie v sovremennoi Rossii*, Polis, 4, 2012, pp. 99-116.

³ We accept ideologies as shared sets of beliefs about the social world that shape its competing visions.

However, under certain conditions policy experts might become noticeable players of the symbolic/ideological field. As we will see, this dynamic has effectively characterized the Russian political discourse since 2008.

Hence, we must analyze the public activity of some Moscow based experts’ organizations and the role of ‘experts’⁴ in setting the political agenda during the presidencies of Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) and Vladimir Putin (2012-2013). Thus, we will analyze media coverage and public reactions to series of reports produced by the leading think tanks in 2008-2016, in order to define the evolution of political communication in Russia. According to my hypothesis, since 2008 the leading experts’ centers pivoted and became significant articulators of competing approaches to urgent political problems. Thus, they intentionally – or unintentionally – contributed to a demarcation of the ideological spectrum. After Vladimir’s Putin re-election in 2012, the pool of experts’ organizations was enlarged, establishing new think-tanks with clearly evident ideological orientations and thus facilitating a further proliferation of the ideological functions of (some) ‘experts.’

*1. Political ‘Experts’ and State Authorities
during the ‘Tandem’ Period (2008-2011)*

Since Putin’s first presidential term in 2000, his administration has tended to involve organizations⁵ and singular ‘experts’ –

⁴ This term is a common label for policy analysts and commentators in media discourse. I use it in commas to avoid a discussion about the criteria of expert status which are rather flexible in the Russian context.

⁵ Such kind of organizations (in Russian literature, they are referred as expert-analytical centers, think-tanks, or workshops of ideas) appeared in the early 1990s. See Alexander Sungurov, Nikolai Raspopov, and Alexander Beliaev *Instituty-mediatory i ikh razvitie v sovremennoi Rossii*, Polis, 4, 2012, pp. 99-116.

mainly economists and sociologists but also political scientists, ethnologists and demographers – into the preliminary stages of decision making. This trend stimulated the supply in the market of analytics and consulting. Some of think-tanks that are still active – such as the Moscow Center for Strategic Research (CSR), the Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) and the Institute of Public Projecting (INoPP) – were created for specific projects ordered by the presidential administrations of Putin and Medvedev. Evidently, Putin's administration considered these and other experts' organizations not only as providers of analytic reports, but also as authoritative agents of public communication.

From 2008 to 2011, when authority was personified by 'the tandem' of two leaders – a term used to describe the relationship of President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, who retained significant power after he handed down his former office to his chosen successor – additional stimulus for the public activity of experts' organizations appeared. Despite a declared 'permanent consensus' between the two tandem leaders, their public statements proved the actual differences of political targets.⁶ This divergence could not be explicitly articulated by either of the two figures or by a United Russia in so far as the principle of 'the ruling tandem' presumed a 'full consensus' between the two leaders. Thus, the articulation of the 'modernization programs' – the political course announced by Medvedev – was interpreted by several experts' organizations that proposed differing policy programs in their reports. Hence, these organizations emerged as the major articulators of the competing alternatives, a situation the media referred to as 'the war of reports and round tables.'

⁶ Elena Shestopal, *Politicheskaia povestka dnia rossijskoi vlasti i ejo vospriiatie grazhdanami*, Polis, 2, 2011, pp. 8-24; Olga Malinova, *Escho odin ryvok? Obrazy kollektivnogo proshlogo, nastojaschego i budushchego v sovremennykh diskussijakh o modernizatscii*, Politicheskaia Nauka, 2, 2012, pp. 49-72.

The reports produced by INSOR and INoPP – the former alleged to work under the Medvedev's guidelines and the latter under Putin's – as well as other think-tanks were willingly covered by the media as they gave some public articulation of such latent divergence. Indeed, journalists reduced 'substantive' aspects of the research and instead emphasized the ideological aspects of the proposed political programs and their values orientations, including dialogical contrapositions with the opinions of other speakers, their connections to the interests of specific political actors, etc. Thus, due to the mediation of journalists, these 'experts' – most likely unintentionally – became important 'ideological' actors.

This result was facilitated by the political reforms of the 2000s that enlarged the representation of the pro-Putin United Russia party in the State Duma and diminished the electoral opportunities of opposition parties, from liberal to nationalist segments of the political spectrum. Besides, since the early 2000s, the most popular means of public communication – central TV channels – had been put under the state control, thereby excluding some oppositional discourses from the "core" of the media and endorsing the hegemony of the ruling elite's eclectic discourse that combined contradicting meanings with different political narratives.⁷ Since the discourse of the pro-governmental faction of the political elite was deliberately vague and the leaders of the opposition had limited access to the main channels of mass communication, this situation 'crystallized' the policy alternatives. Hence, the reports of experts' organizations presented clearly competing visions of the announced political course aimed at 'modernization' and

⁷ Olga Malinova and Philip Casula, *Political and National Identity in Russian Political Discourse*, in André Lecours and Luis Moreno (eds.), *Nationalism and Democracy. Dichotomies, Complementarities, Oppositions*, Routledge, London-New York 2010, pp. 170-183.

received a significant response. In a sense, they compensated for the lack of ideological activity from political parties performing as articulators of alternative political programs. A sign of this unexpected appropriation of party functions by 'the experts' was a curious fact of the (unofficial) nomination of Dmitry Medvedev as a preferable candidate for the next presidential term: in fact, this was presented in a INSOR report published three weeks before the official nomination of Vladimir Putin at the congress of the United Russia.⁸

2. *The Role of 'Experts' in Setting New Public Agenda after the President Election (2011-2013)*

The 'expert' discussions between 2008 and 2010 settled a pattern of 'experts' public activity that tended to continue beyond 'the tandem' period. While public discussion of 'the modernization' in 2009-2010 was initiated by president Medvedev, in the context of the parliamentary (December 2011) and presidential (March 2012) elections and even later after Putin's re-election, some experts' organizations proposed their visions for the future political course without any such 'invitation' from the authorities.

In March 2011, the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) published a report based on sociological research entitled *Politicheskiy krizis v Rossii i vozmozhnyye mekhanizmy yego razvitiya* ("The Political Crisis in Russia and Possible Mechanisms

⁸ The 'experts' of INSOR argued that 'it is only the leader who [...] has a political will for two different but mutually complementary things: resolute institutional reforms and openness to the dialogue can 'actually launch modernization.' The document concluded: "as soon as we see such modernizing appeal in words and deeds of Dmitry Medvedev, INSOR considers the perspective and promises to nominate him for a second term" INSOR, *2011 god. Nulevoi tsikl' sledujushego presidenta*, insor-russia.ru, 4 September 2011 (<http://www.insor-russia.ru/ru/news/9610>).

of Its Development"). The authors of the report pointed to 'unexpected shifts' in the public consciousness, arguing that "the political crisis in Russia is taking place in a full course even if it is still latent."⁹ This conclusion evidently contrasted the main idea published a few weeks prior in a report by the supposedly 'pro-Putin' INoPP. The INoPP's report disproved the thesis that 'only immediate democratization will solve all problems of Russia' and instead argued that mere discussion of this thesis was potentially harmful, because it shifted "the public agenda from actual problems to a false political choice."¹⁰

In December of 2011, when mass demonstrations against fraud in the State Duma election occurred in Moscow and other large cities throughout the country, the forecast of the CSR appeared to have proved true, drawing public interest to the field of policy reports. As a result, during the next months, a series of public presentations of analytic products related to several experts' organizations were broadly covered by media. In various ways, the experts analyzed the changing political context and offered suggestions for the new political direction. Soon after Putin's election, the list of Moscow experts' centers expanded, adding a number of organizations with different political orientations. In April 2012, former minister of finance Alexey Kudrin – commonly reputed to be 'a liberal' – launched the new *Komitet grazhdanskikh initsiativ* ('Committee of Civil Initiatives'-CCI). This experts' organization was designed as an association of professionals whose cumulative authority had

⁹ Sergei Belanovsky and Mikhail Dmitriev, *Politicheskiy krizis v Rossii i vozmozhnyye mekhanizmy yego razvitiya*, CSR, 28 March 2011 (<http://polit.ru/article/2011/03/28/2011/>).

¹⁰ V. Fadeev, M. Rogozhnikov, A. Mekhanik, Yu. Polunin and A. Smirnova, *Oppozitsii nashego vremeni: Doklad Instituta obschestvennogo proyektirovaniya o sostoyanii i perspektivakh politicheskoy sistemy Rossii*, INoPP, January 2011 (http://www.inop.ru/files/inop_doklad_2011.pdf).

the ability to stimulate civic initiatives at any level of power. The CCI makes its own independent analyses of economic and political issues and even orders analytic reports on some other experts' organizations. The organization might be said to represent 'a liberal alternative' to the official 'experts' narrative.

Then, in June 2012, two new experts' organizations – the Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF, *Fond razvitiya grazhdanskogo obschestva*, led by Konstantin Kostin) and the Institute for Social, Economic and Political Research (ISEPR, *Institut sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovaniy*, led by Dmitry Badovsky) – were created at the behest of the presidential administration. These organizations were designed for analytic support of decision-making and presented 'a loyalist discourse' that supported the official position. Furthermore, in September 2012, a new 'rightist' experts' organization called the Izborsky Club – headed by the writer and journalist Aleksander Prokhanov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Zavtra* – was created with the aim of establishing an 'intellectual alternative to the liberal project.' Hence, the most important segments of the Russian political spectrum obtained their 'representation' in the form of 'expert' organizations. These new think-tanks immediately joined the public discourse regarding Putin's new political direction for the country. Their efforts were often described in terms of an opposition between 'a creative minority' (this label was used for anti-Putin protestors in 2011 and 2012) and a pro-Putin 'patriotic majority.'¹¹ The fact that these experts' organizations 'represented' the different parts of the ideological spectrum turned them into important articulators of the competing concepts of (proposed) state policy.

¹¹ See also: Olga Malinova, *Ekspertno-analiticheskie organizatsii i formirovaniye obschestvennoy povestki dnia: Analiz ideologicheskikh praktik v sovremennoy Rossii*, *Politicheskaya nauka*, 4, 2013, pp. 192-210.

3. 'Experts' and Putin's Political Course 'after Crimea'

While the main contours of Putin's new political course were molded in the first few months following his re-election, some illusions related to their further adjustment existed until early 2014. However, after the annexation of Crimea (based on the results of a referendum held on 16 March 2014) and subsequent international sanctions against Russia, both foreign and domestic policy assumed a certain direction. The struggle against the threat of international isolation became the central point of the foreign policy agenda. Even domestic politics became more strictly focused on the consolidation of resources in the context of mounting economic crises and the mobilization of mass support for Putin's regime. This second trend combined positive (an enthusiastic reaction of the majority of Russian population to the annexation of Crimea) and negative (anti-Western propaganda)¹² incentives that led to the absolute domination of the pro-Putin 'patriotic majority' in the public sphere, resulting in the marginalization of Putin's critics as 'the anti-national Fifth Column.' This structure left little space for the expression of dissenting opinions.

These circumstances significantly changed the conditions for the public activity of think-tanks. Those groups whose ideas were in agreement with the new policy course seemed to receive new opportunities to exert influence on authorities and the public. Conversely, their opponents were forced to carefully avoid accusations of a supposed 'lack of patriotism.' The 'social

¹² After the protest campaign of 2011-2012, anti-Westernism was actively used for marginalizing political opponents. Probably the most remarkable manifestation of this trend was evident with the adoption of the so called 'Foreign Agents Law' (i.e. the amendment to the law regulating the activities of the NGOs, obliging those organizations that "participate in politics" and receive sponsorship from abroad to register as foreign agents and refer to this status in their publications, including Internet), on July 2012.

conservators' and 'imperial nationalists' of the Izborsky Club received their greatest opportunity inasmuch as their ideas finally fit with the official narrative as they never had before. Since 2013, the club has published on its website¹³ dozens of reports prepared by eminent nationalist intellectuals¹⁴ covering many aspects of domestic and foreign policy, with obvious focus on the mobilization of resources for opposition to the West. A report prepared by Sergei Glazyev entitled *Predotvratit' voynu – pobedit' v voine* (To prevent the war – to win the war)¹⁵ might be the epigraph for the whole series. The members of the Izborsky Club discussed the perspectives of the new Cold War and of the Russian economic integration in Eurasia, reform of the Russian army, social and security issues as well as modern practices of waging wars ('network wars', 'digital wars', 'psycho-historical wars', 'information wars' etc.), perspectives of 'empires' (the EU as a 'failed empire' and Russia as 'floating up empire'), etc. Claiming to be "a kind of a headquarters of the patriotic forces in Russia,"¹⁶ the Izborsky Club even focuses efforts on consolidating the slightly fragmented right wing of the Russian ideological spectrum. Its comprehensive analytic activity has been well covered by the media. According to the Integrum database, in the 'post-Crimea' period, publications mentioning the Izborsky Club in print and online media have doubled (see table) and its discourse of 'patriotic forces' has become more visible in public discussions.

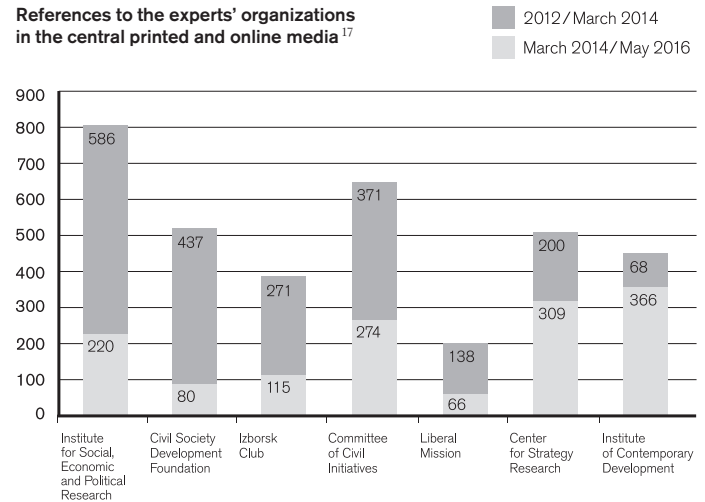
¹³ Official website of the Izborsky Club (www.izborsk-club.ru).

¹⁴ Nationalist intellectual such as such as Sergei Glazyev, Mikhail Delyagin, Vitaly Aver'yanov, Aleksandr Dugin, Sergey Chernyakhovskiy, Andrei Fursov etc.

¹⁵ Analyzing the long cycles, the report argues that regional military conflicts in which the U.S. and their satellites will challenge Russia are most probable in 2015-2018 and suggest a program to face this challenge. Sergei Glazyev, *Predotvratit' voynu – pobedit' v voine*, Izborsky Club, 30 September 2014 (www.izborsk-club.ru/content/articles/3962/).

¹⁶ Vitaly V. Aver'yanov (compiler), *Po tu storonu "krasnykh" i "belykh,"* 15 April 2013 (<http://www.izborsk-club.ru/content/articles/1164/>).

References to the experts' organizations in the central printed and online media¹⁷



Certainly, the 'experts' of the Izborsky Club attempt to affect not only public opinion but also the individual authorities whose political views were never so close to the ideals of the 'patriots.' One of its key 'experts,' Sergei Glazyev has emblematically served as a Putin adviser since 2012. This suggests that while the Kremlin does not 'buy' their ideas wholesale, it is eager to keep the Izborsky Club around as a part of its ideological 'stock supply.'

The new political circumstances gave 'patriotic' and anti-Westernist forces broader opportunities in the struggle against their political opponents, who could now finally be accused of 'anti-patriotism.' Indeed, some 'expert' organizations did not hesitate to use this weapon against their competitors. In February 2014, the Russian Institute for Strategic Research (RISR)

¹⁷ This table has been realized with data elaborated from Integrum database. See (<http://www.integrumworld.com/>).

together with the Center of the Actual Policy (CAP) published a report¹⁸ assessing the activity of eight think-tanks. These included the Moscow Carnegie Center, the Russian Political Science Association, the Russian Association of International Studies, the sociological research organization ‘Levada-Center’, the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian School of Economy, and more. According to the RISR/CAP report, the activity of the aforementioned academic and research organizations were ‘political’ inasmuch as they criticized the government and argued that the recently adopted ‘Foreign Agents Law’¹⁹ must be extended to organizations involved in political research.

Hence, this ‘war of reports’ has shifted into the sphere of academia in a slightly unexpected way. Some observers properly considered the report of the RISR/CAP as a mere ‘accusation’, causing a wave of outcries from experts who not only argued against the main intent of the report but also demonstrated the report’s inaccuracy regarding some facts. Thus, after several weeks the document disappeared from the RISR website and became available on the website of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation. However, in May 2014 the State Duma adopted new amendments that allowed the Ministry of Justice to register NGOs as ‘foreign agents’ without their consent. These measures also effectively

¹⁸ The report is entitled ‘The Methods and Technologies of Activity of the Foreign and Russian Research Centers, Consulting Structures and Universities Getting Funds from the Foreign Sources.’ See RISI-TsAP, *Metody i tekhnologii deiatel'nosti zarubezhnykh i rossijskikh issledovatel'skikh tsentrov, a takzhe issledovatel'skikh struktur i buzov, poluchaiushchikh finansirovanie iz zarubezhnykh istochnikov*, February 2014 (https://www.oprf.ru/files/2014dok/doklad_ordzhonikidze24042014.pdf).

¹⁹ The Federal Law n. 121-FZ of 20 July 2012 “On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organizations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent” (<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201207230003>).

sanctioned the stigmatization of independent research centers – whose work did not correspond with the official ‘patriotic platform’ narrative – as ‘foreign agents.’

Since 2012, the official policy had veered toward a more ‘ideological’ format. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in December 2012, Putin pointed to “the shortage of spiritual bonds”²⁰ that should be addressed as soon as possible. Thus, the president supposed the elaboration of a kind of official ideology – that from the very beginning was labelled ‘conservative’ – requesting the ‘experts’ to explore the perspectives of conservatism in contemporary Russia. This task was assigned to the Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Research (ISEPR). For the first time, an analytic task in the field of ideology was formally outsourced to an experts’ organization. Then, the ISEPR received a grant for organizing the experts’ conferences, *Berdyavskie chteniya* (“Berdyayev’s proceedings”),²¹ and the publication of the journal *Tetradi po konservatizmu* (“Notebooks on conservatism”). Nevertheless, the activity of ISEPR was not confined to the field of ‘conservatism.’ The Institute operated grants of the President of the Russian Federation for social and political research and conducted its own studies on elections and electoral systems, local governments, political parties, and more, monitoring public activity at the federal level and producing ratings of the most relevant political and public leaders. Its activity has been well covered by the media; according to the Integrum database, it is the most referenced experts’ organization in the country (see table).

²⁰ The message of the President Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly, 12 December 2012 (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>).

²¹ In 2013–2015 there were four expert conferences – in Moscow region, Yalta (with the second part in Moscow), Kaliningrad and Vladivostok.

Another experts' organization created in 2012 by the initiative of the presidential administration is the Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF): Its activity has also concentrated on analyzing of the social and political basis of Putin's regime, focusing on the regional branches. In particular, the CSDF monitors political leaders throughout regions of Russia and publishes an 'Index of the Governors' Effectiveness' which attracts a significant amount of media interest (see the table). In May 2016, it presented the results of the study of 'Putin's majority' that analyzed the social structure of the groups who support the president and predicted their further rise.

The most difficult situation regards the 'liberal' experts' organizations. They were forced to carefully select analytical topics in order to not provoke persecution. However, despite the risks of stigmatizing 'liberals' as 'Westernizers' and 'traitors of the nation,' they were able to raise their voices in the 'experts' format. In this regard, the role of Alexey Kudrin's 'Committee of Civil Initiatives' (CCI) was relevant in publishing reports that were either produced by its own experts or prepared by its order. Topics of the CCI analytical reports included reforms of the judiciary system and law-enforcement agencies, the potential for civic participation, Russia's new prospects in the global economy, perspectives for reforms after 2018, the social attitudes in the 'post-Crimea' scenario as well as regional and parliamentary elections. Basing its reports on official data published in the websites of state departments and agencies, the CCI monitored the arrangement of public spending with a project named *GosZatraty* ("State Costs"). Through these efforts, the CCI was also able to get effective media coverage (see the table).

Some 'older' 'liberal' experts' organizations also refused to surrender. In July 2014, the *Fond Liberal'naya Missiya* ("Liberal Mission Foundation") published a paper reporting the main trends of Russia's political development from 2012 to 2013 with a focus on "the crisis and transformation of

the Russian authoritarianism."²² Its activity is also regularly mentioned in the media, although its coverage is far more modest in comparison with the CCI (see table).

All of the aforementioned experts' organizations devoted their activity to analyzing the new domestic and international landscape that appeared 'post-Crimea' and to searching for answers to these newly emerged challenges. They did so in accordance with their ideological orientations: while the Izborsky Club welcomed a confrontation with the West and emphasized the alleged advantages of isolation for future development, the liberal 'expert' organization remained unable to explicitly criticize Putin's course and focused instead on monitoring the current situation and accumulating ideas for future reforms. Then, the 'loyalist' think-tanks did their best to present the current situation as 'normal' and provided analytic reports demonstrating 'democratic' development inside the contemporary authoritarian path.

4. Experts and "Ideology"

In many countries, think-tanks are formally – or more often informally – affiliated with specific political groups (such as parties) and are identified by their 'rightist' or 'leftist' orientation. Generally speaking, they always have some ideological dimension and might be understood in relation to the viewpoints of other speakers – in terms of support or opposition to certain public ideas – and could be measured by a right-left scale. The most explicit ideological effects of the experts' discourses resulted from their representation of

²² Kirill Rogov (ed.), *Osnovnye tendentsii politicheskogo razvitiya Rossii v 2011-2013 gg.: Krizis i transformatsia rossijskogo avtoritarizmea*, liberal.ru, 2 July 2014 (<http://www.liberal.ru/articles/6537>).

competing approaches to public issues under particular value orientations (hence, they can be arranged against one another on this grounds); from a lower argumentation in retelling the results of research to mass audiences of non-specialists; from their explicit or implicit connections to particular political agents (such as parties or leaders). Thus, we could argue that the more policy issues are a matter of public debate, the more salient are the ideological functions of experts' discourse.

Nevertheless, some aspects are still specific to the Russian case. First, the public activity of experts' organizations in Russia is awarded special influence because the political parties are not strong participants in the market of political ideas. This conclusion might be partly explained by actual inability of parties' to influence the political course – that is determined by the president who acts above the party politics – and partly by informal control of the presidential administration over the party structure. Second, in such circumstances the experts' activity becomes a kind of 'substitution' of purely political forms in 'a struggle over meanings,' compensating for a lack of party 'representation' in some segments of ideological spectrum. Of course, 'the experts' could not perform as political parties, in so far as realization of their proposals depended entirely on those who were vested with power or struggled for power. So, they were simply articulators of ideas they had no chance to fulfil.

Finally, despite an ideological component related to any public discourse concerning political issues, its explicit demonstration undermines the symbolic capital of the expert experts' community as its authority is based on objectivity of scientific knowledge. So, an overgrowth of ideological components is not advisable for expert experts' community whose legitimacy is based on objective knowledge.

Chapter IV

Russia as 'Katechon':
Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy
Maria Engström, Uppsala University

Moscow's attitudes towards foreign policy can be understood through the neo-conservative concept of Russia as *Katechon* – the 'restrainer,' a protective agent against the forces of chaos in the world. Many of the neo-conservative doctrines and ideas popular today, including the messianic *Katechon* concept, originated in the early 1990s from relatively marginal, radical right-wing groups. Today, these views have begun to influence the official policies of the Kremlin. In contemporary scholarship, this process is commonly referred to as Russia's (or Putin's) "conservative turn." The phenomenon of neo-conservatism and the rise of political theology in contemporary Russia have drawn the attention of scholars from various disciplines,¹ but the concept of *Katechon* has not yet been fully studied. This essay will discuss the concept of *Katechon* within the emerging discursive field of new Russian conservatism, while demonstrating a historical analysis of the traditions of 'state-messianism' in Russian culture and the Western roots of the contemporary Russian conservative doctrine. In so doing,

¹ Sergei Prozorov, *Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse*, DIIS Working Paper, 20, 2004; Marlene Laruelle, *Conservatism as the Kremlin's New Toolkit: An Ideology at the Lowest Cost*, Russian Analytical Digest, 138, 8 November 2013; Andrei Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, *A New Russian Conservatism: Domestic Roots and Repercussions for Europe*, Notes Internacionals CIDOB, 93, June 2014.

I hope to demonstrate that the actualization of the messianic *Katechon* ideologeme and the extensive use of collective cultural memory in contemporary Russian political discourse is one of the dominant factors accounting for the popularity of Putin's politics of 'ideological sovereignty' in foreign policy and national security, both among the elites and ordinary Russian citizens.

1. Foreign Policy and the Neo-Conservative Ideology

The third revision of the foreign policy doctrine of the Russian Federation, signed by Putin in February 2013, marked a critical shift in Russia's history of foreign relations. The concept criticized the attempts of "some countries" to ignore the decisions of the UN Security Council, military interventions in sovereign states, and even the "re-ideologization of foreign relations." The doctrine declared that in today's unstable and dangerous world, Russia had a "unique role, formed centuries ago, of a balancing factor in international affairs and the development of the world civilization."² This document closely paralleled the key points of Putin's pre-election essay dedicated to foreign policy, "Russia and the Changing World," published on 27 February 2012. One of the main theses in Putin's piece is that rising global instability is due to Western – primarily the efforts of NATO and the U.S. – attempts to interfere with the internal affairs of other countries. Specifically, Putin ascribed the cause of these military interventions to economic interests, in contradiction of UN statutes. According to Putin, these

² The Foreign Policy concept of the Russian Federation – *Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii* – adopted on 12 February 2013 (http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/122186).

appeals to human rights and the advancement of democratic liberties under the guise of 'humanitarian interventions' are nothing more than pure demagoguery. In his words:

They often say that human rights are more important than the state sovereignty. Undoubtedly, crimes against humanity should be punished in the international courts. However, when this clause is used to violate the sovereignty of the state, when human rights are protected from the outside and selectively and for "protecting" these rights, [other] rights of many people are violated, including the most basic and sacral one, the right of life, then we are not facing a noble cause but a pure demagoguery.³

Certain internal political processes of the last several years must be understood in the light of this new foreign policy direction. "The Russian approach to human rights" and a demonstrative propaganda campaign of "traditional values" – including the new legal initiatives of 2013 and 2014, the hunt for "agents of influence," actions against NGOs, the passage of the "anti-gay law," the new state cultural policy, and more – all testify to a re-ideologization of Russian foreign policy. This re-ideologization is also in full alignment with the neo-conservative doctrine, which maintains that a state without ideology cannot be considered truly sovereign.⁴ According to the text of this new foreign policy doctrine, Russia views itself as an important military and economic power and a unique 'restraining' force in an increasingly chaotic world. It also considers itself one of the global 'ideological poles,' a unique civilization whose values should be disseminated throughout the world through 'soft power.' This view of Russia as an alternative

³ Vladimir Putin, *Rossiia i menyayushchipsya mir*, Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 27 February 2012.

⁴ The conservative ideologists have since long ago maintained that the ban on ideology in Russia and Putin's orientation toward the concept of realism is extremely harmful for Russia's interests, which after the collapse of the USSR and the rejection of Marxism can oppose nothing to the liberal model of internal and foreign policy.

model and a restraining factor in the chaos of international relations is in fact a 'bureaucratic,' secular version of the messianic concept of *Katechon*. Thus, as the influence of this conservative ideology on foreign policy is particularly noticeable, we must examine this concept in further detail.

Proponents view contemporary Russian messianism as an alternative to the doctrine of 'American exceptionalism' and a potent ideological tool for openly challenging Western hegemony and creating a new polycentric world order. They also argue that the true cause of the current 'ideological Cold War' between Russia and the United States is a clash between two messianic projects with shared roots in Christian eschatology and European political thought.

2. *Russia, the Restrainer as a National Idea*

The eschatological doctrine of Rome as the last Kingdom of God, protecting the world from the Antichrist, is central to all Christian cultures. Christian interpretations of *katechon* (ὁ Κατέχων), 'the withholding,' are based on the eschatological moment of the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.⁵

⁵ Scriptural quotations are from the NRSV, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, 1989, 2 Thess. 2:3-7 (<http://bible.oremus.org/?q1=351660442>).

St. John Chrysostom interprets Paul's words as a reference to the Emperor and his power that 'withholds' and protects the world from the advent of the Antichrist. In this teaching, the Roman Empire is an antithesis of Anomia and will exist until the Second Advent, restraining the chaos. This empire has no constant temporal or spatial characteristics and can present itself in many different states (*translatio imperii romani*).

In the Russian tradition, this historiosophic concept is presented in the well-known concept of Moscow as the 'third Rome,' dating back to the 16th century. It was authored by the elder monk Philotheus of the Belozersk monastery between 1523-1524 and was officially recorded in the 1589 Founding Deed of the Council of Moscow, which established the Moscow Patriarchate.⁶ The postulates that the Russian people are the chosen nation and that their colossal burden is to fight against the Antichrist led to the formation of a specific governing style in the Tsardom of Muscovy, which can be defined as both sinister and successful. It had already been specified during the reign of Ivan the Terrible that the two enemies of the *Katechon* (Moscow) were the external Antichrist – i.e., all the lands beyond Muscovy – and the internal Antichrist, no less dangerous than the external. Internal resistance to the state, particularly during unstable periods, is now interpreted as an indulgence to the powers of Anomia and Chaos. This eschatological view has become a constant in Russian history and in the Russian understanding of power.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Christian idea of *katechon* was reformulated in the secular context of Russian foreign policy, while still maintaining some providential elements of

⁶ See the monograph by Sinitsyna who follows the history of transformations of the *Katechon* ideologeme (theories of the world monarchies, theories of *translatio imperii*, and the concept of Moscow as the Third Rome). Nina Vasilevna Sinitsyna, *Tretii Rim. Istoki i evolutsiia russkoi srednevekovoi kontseptsii* (XV-XVI vv), Indrik, Moskva 1998.

Russia as the protector of the world and the military “shield” of Europe.⁷ For example, the interpretation of Russia as a “shield” can be found in Pushkin’s letter to Chaadayev (19 October 1836):

What concerns your ideas, you know that I do not agree with you on many points. Without doubt, the Schism separated us from the rest of Europe, and we did not participate in all the great events that shattered it, but we did have a special destiny. It was Russia and its limitless territory that absorbed the Mongolian invasion. The Tatars did not risk going to the Western borders, leaving us in their rear. They went back to their deserts and the Christian civilization was saved [...] our martyrdom saved the energetic development of Europe all the trouble.⁸

Fyodor Tyutchev also uses this ideologeme, demonstrated in his 1848 poem “Russian Geography”:

Moscow and Peter’s town, the city of Constantine,
These are the cherished capitals of the Russian monarchy. [...] This is the Russian empire and it will never pass away,
Just as the Spirit foretold and Daniel prophesied.⁹

During the ‘Silver Age’, the view of *katechon* as a ‘shield’ against the forces of evil was once again reformulated, this time in the apocalyptic and decadent Eurasian context. Russia is under the Dionysian intoxication and no longer prevents the Antichrist from entering the world, but in contrast, permits

⁷ The Eschatological medieval concept of Philotheus considerably changes in the 18th and 19th centuries, acquiring the features of a ‘political doctrine’ closely related to the “Eastern question.” See Andrei Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla: Literatura i gosudarstvennaia ideologija v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII – pervoi treti XIX stoletia*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moskva 2004.

⁸ Alexander Sergejevich Pushkin, *P. Ia. Chaadaevu. 19 oktiabria 1836. Iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, in Alexander Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, t.10, GIKhL, Moskva 1962, p. 307. This passage gained much popularity in the Soviet times due to Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *The Mirror* (1975) in which the protagonist reads this letter off screen.

⁹ Fedor Tyutchev, *Russian Geography*, in Andrew Baruch Wachtel and Ilya Vinitsky (eds), *Russian Literature*, Polity, London 2009, p. 97.

him the fallen world because there no longer exists any hope of salvation. In this version, Russia lays down the shield and refuses to prevent the “pan-Mongolic” movement, most vividly depicted in Alexander Blok’s *Scythians* (1918):

You’ve had whole centuries. We – a single hour.
Like serfs obedient to their feudal lord,
We’ve held the shield between two hostile powers-
Old Europe and the barbarous Mongol horde.
[...]
But we ourselves, henceforth, we shall not serve
As henchmen holding up the trusty shield.
We’ll keep our distance and, slit-eyed, observe
The deadly conflict raging on the field.

We shall not stir, even though the frenzied Huns
Plunder the corpses of the slain in battle, drive
Their cattle into shrines, burn cities down,
And roast their white-skinned fellow men alive.¹⁰

Full study of the Soviet version of katechonic messianism is an important topic which is beyond the scope of this essay. I will only mention that during the early post-Soviet period, Russian right-wing intellectuals began to interpret the Soviet – primarily Stalinist – period of Russian history as exclusively katechonic. The Soviet idea of protecting the working class from capital – and later during the World War II, the belief in protection of humankind from the evil of Nazism – is today interpreted by neoconservatives as a version of secular State messianism and Orthodox universalism.

Thus, the Greek-and-Roman idea of ‘internal structure’ – an inner order of the inhabited world – transformed the Russian soil into the idea of ‘defense from the external enemy.’ Russia is understood not so much as an empire – which holds the power of chaos beyond the borders of the world through

¹⁰ Aleksandr Blok, *The Scythians*, 1918 (<https://allpoetry.com/The-Scythians>).

its inner order – but rather as a military force that resists a metaphysical enemy, sent by the Antichrist (historically the Tatars, the Turks, freemasons, Napoleon, Hitler, and today liberals, American foreign agents, and the LGBT movement). One of the most prominent contemporary conservative thinkers, Yegor Kholmogorov, expressed the katechonic essence of Russia's mission in the following way: “Russians always “defend,” even when it seems that they attack.”¹¹

It should be emphasized that the post-Soviet neoconservative discourse of *katechon* originates not only in the East Christian and Russian historiosophic tradition but also in the political theology of Carl Schmitt, who writes about *Katechon* in his book *Nomos of the Earth* (1950) in a chapter entitled “The Christian Empire as a Restrainer (*Katechon*) of the Antichrist.”¹² For Schmitt, *Katechon* is identical with the State, understanding it as a force that restrains the chaos.¹³ On 19 December 1947, Schmitt wrote in his *Diary*: “I believe in the [*k*]hatechon; he is the only possibility for me to understand history and find its meaning as a Christian.”¹⁴

¹¹ Yegor Kholmogorov, *Russkii proekt. Restavratsiia budushchego*, Algoritm, Moskva 2005, p. 280.

¹² The post-Soviet concept of katechonic messianism was developed with reference to American neo-conservatism and the political philosophy of Schmitt's disciple Leo Strauss who criticized Schmitt's critique of liberalism in his “Comments on Carl Schmitt's The Concept of the Political.” See Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Telos Press Publishing, New York 2003; Leo Strauss, *Anmerkungen zu Carl Schmitt, Der Begriff des Politischen*, Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, 67/6, August-September 1932, pp. 732-749.

¹³ See Julia Hell, *Katechon: Carl Schmitt's Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future*, *The Germanic Review*, 84/4, 2009, pp. 283-326.

¹⁴ Carl Schmitt and Eberhard Freiherr von Medem (ed.), *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951*, Dunkler und Humblot, Berlin 1991, p. 63, quoted in: Wolfgang Palaver, *Carl Schmitt's “Apocalyptic” Resistance against Global Civil War*, in Robert Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Politics and Apocalypse*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing 2007, pp. 69-94.

The first Russian translations of Schmitt appeared in the 1990s.¹⁵ In radical neoconservative circles, Alexander Dugin popularized his thought. In the 1997 article “Revolution and *Katechon*” Dugin introduced Schmitt's conceptualization, which had not previously been used in texts belonging to the Russian tradition of State messianism.¹⁶ The term quickly became very popular in neoconservative circles, and more recently has been increasingly used in the media, reaching wider and wider audiences. For example, in 2013 Sergei Kurginyan used the term in his New Year's Eve address to the followers of his movement *Sut' Vremeni* (“The Essence of Time”). In his own words:

Many things are clouding around Russia; the evil is approaching from all directions; from the Middle East, from the Far East; it is clouding around Europe and the whole world. We know that the circle of evil is tightening around us. We remember that Russia is *Katechon*, that is, the withholder of peace.¹⁷

On 16 November 2015, following the terror attack in Paris, the very popular pro-Kremlin writer and journalist Sergei Minayev published on his Facebook page a post that characterized Russia as *Katechon*, almost entirely alone in fighting against the global evil of ISIS. Interestingly, Minayev employed the main neoconservative metaphors of *Katechon*, which are ‘North’ and ‘cold’:

And something tells me that, as it usually happens, the rescue will come from the unsmiling people of the North; that is, us. At an unhuman cost, by sacrificing a ravaged generation Russia once

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt was first translated into Russian in 1992, when Alexander Filippov, the translator and popularizer of Schmitt's legacy, published a translation of “The Concept of the Political.” See Carl Schmitt, *Poniatie politicheskogo*, *Voprosy sociologii*, 1, 1992, pp. 35-67.

¹⁶ Alexander Dugin, *Katekhon i Revolyutsiya*, Arctogeia, Moskva 1997.

¹⁷ Sergei Kurginyan, *New Year Eve address to the followers of the movement Sut' Vremeni*, *Sovetskii Khabarovsk*, 31 December 2013.

again will have to save the world. The rescued world will applaud us vigorously for a couple of years after the victory. The applause will be sincere, boisterous and grateful. But by the fourth year they will again pronounce us an empire and start shunning us.

This might be the intended purpose of our territory. To save, without any profit, dividend, or gratitude. Winter is not simply coming. We are the winter.¹⁸

Yegor Kholmogorov also described the apocalyptic mood of the present moment and discussed the readiness of Russians to “remove the lid.” In his words:

To be the third is a calling and an undisputable place of Russians in history. The meaning of this place is not to allow for “the fourth one” to come; we have to stand on a post, keeping off all the contenders for the Roman scepter by kicks, clubs, and nuclear missiles [...] any non-Russian, “fourth” idea will be the incarnation of evil and will result in a painful end of the whole world. This is how the Byzantine idea of Katechon is refracted in our imperial consciousness, the idea of withholding the world. That which stands on the bridge between the Antichrist and the world and which does not let the Antichrist into the world. Nowadays it is not a bridge but rather a manhole, the lid of which is removed from time to time, and some vampires, or werewolves or murderers come out of this hole. The Russian tarpaulin boot stamps on that lid, and restores the silence for some time. The crawling beast knows that if it shows itself too much, the Russian will not hesitate to blast it together with the whole world. Because “there shall not be the fourth one,” and if before us there was the Flood, after us there is only the Apocalypse.¹⁹

¹⁸ Sergei Minayev’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/minaevsergei?fref=ts>).

¹⁹ Yegor Kholmogorov, *Russkii proekt. Restavratsiia budushchego*, Algoritm, Moskva 2005, pp. 18-19.

3. The ‘Atomic Orthodoxy’: Russia’s Double Shield

According to contemporary Russian neoconservatives, in order to fulfill the mission of *katechon*, Russia must first unite ‘the Reds’ and ‘the Whites.’ It is important to take both the nuclear shield from the modernist technocratic red tradition and orthodox messianism from the white one. Orthodoxy thus becomes a political force, akin to the military-industrial complex, functioning both as a shield and a guarantor of sovereignty. That is why, according to the neoconservative doctrine, all attempts to diminish the role of the Orthodox Church must be persecuted because they represent not only an attack against Russian religious and cultural identity but also a sign of the coming doomsday. This concept of the ‘two shields of Russia’ is known in neoconservative circles as the ideology of ‘atomic orthodoxy.’ During the 2007 press-conference, Putin was asked by a journalist from Sarov – the city where the first Soviet atomic bomb was created – about the future of orthodoxy and the nuclear strategy of Russia. Putin replied:

Both topics are related because both the traditional faith of the Russian Federation and the nuclear shield of Russia are the components that strengthen the Russian State and create necessary conditions for internal and external security of the country. This clearly means how the state has to treat both of them today and in the future.²⁰

Thus, Yegor Kholmogorov further developed Putin’s unification of orthodoxy with the nuclear shield as a doctrine of the atomic orthodoxy. Here are several points of this ideology:

[...First:] the religious and historical mission of Russia is to secure for the Russian and orthodox people the best possible conditions, in the words of St Seraphim of Sarov, to acquire the Holy Spirit, to approach God.

²⁰ Vladimir Putin, Press conference on 1 February 2007 (<http://lenta.ru/articles/2007/02/01/putin/>).

[...Second:] in order to fulfill this mission successfully, Russia cannot be an orthodox state only; it should be a powerful state so that nobody and no weapon could silence our testimony of Christ. [...Third:] to develop most perfect military, organizational, and other means to protect our sovereignty is not only a military-political but also a spiritual goal, in which the secular and the sacral are going hand in hand.²¹

The term “atomic orthodoxy” originates from the title of Russian contemporary artist Alexey Beliaev-Gintovt’s painting from the cycle “*Novonovosibirsk*” (1999-2001), which depicts a deeply frozen Russia and a missile submarine with a rudder resembling a cross.²² Hence, Kholmogorov is not alone in his Orthodox-technocratic utopia. His main thesis is close to Alexander Prokhanov’s concept, which emerged in “The Fifth Empire,” that the Soviet civilization is a logical extension of Russian Orthodox civilization and that the modern State must use both resources to its advantage.²³ This katechonic ideology has also been developed by the Center for Dynamic Conservatism. Thus, the ‘Russian doctrine’ project, introduced in 2005 by Vitaliy Aver’yanov, Maksim Kalashnikov and Andrey Kobayakov, also presupposes a marriage of advanced technological society with conservative Orthodox ideology. Aver’yanov defines the ‘Russian doctrine’ as follows:

The goal of the proposed ideology of reformation is to create the centaur of Orthodoxy and innovation-based economics, of high spirituality and high technology. This centaur will present the 21st-century face of Russia. It will be carried out by a new attacking class, imperial and authoritarian, not liberal and democratic.²⁴

²¹ Yegor Kholmogorov, *Atomnoe pravoslavie. Sarovskaia leksiia*, Specnaz, 7, July 2007 (<http://www.specnaz.ru/article/?1118>).

²² See: Andrei Molodkin and Alexey Beliaev-Gintovt, *Atomnoe Pravoslaviye, Novonovosibirsk*, 2001 (<http://www.doctrine.ru/delo/novonovosibirsk/?i=4>).

²³ Aleksandr Prokhanov, *Pyataya imperia*, Eksmo, Moskva 2007.

²⁴ Vitaliy Aver’yanov, *Nuzhny drugie ljudi*, Zavtra, 14 July 2010.

For Yegor Kholmogorov, Alexander Dugin, Alexander Prokhanov and many other neoconservative ideologists, the development and strengthening of the military shield of Russia is a question of ‘agyopolitics,’ i.e. a question of spiritual nature. That is why the fact that the a-bomb was created on the territory of the Sarov monastery (following Stalin’s orders) has been interpreted as God’s providence, and the clarification of St Seraphim’s image has been compared with the flash from a nuclear explosion.²⁵ The doctrine of atomic orthodoxy is fully devoid of subjects such as suffering or death, which were dominant in the perestroika period after the Chernobyl catastrophe.

4. Conclusion

Contemporary Russian neo-conservatism treats orthodoxy as a political religion, emphasizing the connection of the Russian Church with war and the discourse of “resistance to evil by force.” There is an increased interest for warrior princes – such as Alexander Nevsky and Dmitry Donskoy – and for figures like Iosif Volotsky, known for his fight against ‘Jewish heresy.’ Political orthodoxy manifests itself most explicitly in the attempt to canonize the royal builders of the Russian empire, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Stalin, and also military warriors such as marshal Zhukov, the seamen from the perished Kursk submarine, and the martyr fighter Yevgeny Rodionov.

Both the West and the liberal opposition within Russia heavily criticize the Russian state and the Orthodox Church for repressive measures against modern art, against NGOs, for the

²⁵ See the image at the webpage: S Bogom, *Beseda prepodobnogo Serafima Sarovskogo s N.A. Motovilovym* (<http://sbogom.kiev.ua/beseda-prepodobnogo-serafima-sarovskogo-s-n-a-motovilovym/>).

Pussy Riot trial, for the Dima Yakovlev law, and for the passage of anti-gay laws, where Russia has been compared with Nazi Germany. Modern katechonic conservatism views this critique solely as an attack against the actions of a Kremlin that attempts to strengthen its 'orthodox shield.' Conservative analysts are certain that in the nearest future we will witness the clash of two ideologies because Russian foreign policy focuses precisely on the expansion and propaganda of their understanding of human rights based on the orthodox tradition. Yegor Kholmogorov argues that in the situation of nuclear parity, it is especially important to strengthen the 'conceptual shield':

As long as the atomic clinch remains [...] the war is being conducted primarily by conceptual [] means. That is why, together with a traditional military defense, the Russian State has to protect the nation by conceptual means, to protect it from mental threats.²⁶

Although many of the most radical neoconservative ideas and projects are not yet supported by the Kremlin, the fact that many of them are discussed in popular culture and the mass media – as opposed to marginal right-wing circles as was the case in the 1990s and 2000s – signifies that the political climate in the country has changed and that we are at the beginning of a new epoch in Russian history. Sanctions, an 'information war,' and diplomatic isolation as punishment for Russia's actions in the Ukraine have been interpreted by both a large part of Russian ruling elite and many ordinary Russians as confirmation of progressing Anomia in the West, and justification for the katechonic argument. The ideologization of domestic, foreign and security policy can be understood as Putin's attempt to legitimize his own power, and his popular support

can be analyzed as the result of propaganda. However, such explanations ignore the important factor of collective memory and identity, the deep roots of the katechonic discourse in Russian culture, pre-revolutionary, Soviet and contemporary.

²⁶ Yegor Kholmogorov, *Atomnoe pravoslavie*, Russkii obozrevatel, 31 August 2008 (<http://www.rus-obr.ru/idea/594>).

Chapter V

Neo-Conservatism as National Idea for Russia?

Andrei Melville, NRU-HSE

The dominant political discourse in contemporary Russia is a reflection of both crucially important policy choices of the ruling regime as well as deep changes in attitudes, perceptions and self-perceptions among the ruling elites and other segments of the population. It appears that Russia's unsuccessful, quarter-century long search for a post-Soviet national ethos and identity has reached an important milestone – a near consensus based on a particular worldview version of self-styled identity and a set of approved values.¹

1. *The 'Fortress Russia'*

This newly established version of the national idea heralds Russia ascension to its legitimate status as a great power in a chaotic world of adversaries. In order to withstand external enemies, Russia must mobilize internally through a set of revived conservative values. This new discourse evokes one experience from my personal research. About a decade ago, I was involved in a research project aimed at forecasting a series of alternative

scenarios for Russia in 2020. We developed four variants and tested them in focus groups that involved various audiences from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok. These scenarios were:

1. *Kremlin's Gambit*: When oil prices persistently remain high, domestic political and economic competition is sacrificed for strategic goals of rapid modernization and the expansion of Russia's international influence

2. *Russian Mosaic*: As globalization successfully progresses, Russia becomes more decentralized, embodying a 'mosaic.' The international community at large and the most prosperous and active regions and social actors in particular reap the rewards of this new pluralism

3. *New Russian Dream*: After a new generation of elites comes to power, Russia pursues a coherent strategy of political and economic liberalization resulting in integration with the global world order

4. *The Fortress Russia*, a 'Horror Story' and a highly undesirable scenario that can be briefly described as follows:

The world of 2020 is unstable and prone to severe crisis. International law and international institutions are dramatically undermined, to the point of being replaced by force and military power. A rapid arms race is accompanied by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear ones. Russia finds itself in a hostile international environment. Numerous local armed conflicts menace the borders of the country, especially in Central Asia. The U.S. and the EU come to the conclusion that they have 'lost Russia.' They fail to influence Russian politics and return to deterrence, which in fact means the Cold War. [...] Elements of the U.S. National Missile Defense system are deployed near Russian borders. All the major powers try to increase their influence in Eurasia, including the regional ones – China, Iran, Turkey, etc. Hence, Russia is forced into all-around defense while the rivalry between 'old powers' – including the US and its European allies – with the new competitors – such as China, India, Iran and others – tends to become more and more intensive. Besides that, new areas of conflict and instability emerge or get wider in Latin America, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Balkans, etc. Russia does not interfere in these conflicts. It does not join any coalitions, while trying

¹ This paper develops some ideas explored in: Andrei Melville, *Russian Political Ideology – New Conservatism Ascendant*, in Irvin Studin (ed), *Russia: Strategy, Policy and Administration*, Palgrave, London (forthcoming 2017).

to utilize the contradictions between world leaders. The new Cold War has provoked the outflow of foreign capital and investments from Russia. Russian defense expenditure has radically increased. Russians have to bear the slump of incomes and growth of taxes. Volatile oil prices and a hostile international environment significantly undermine prospects of modernization. The country has to mobilize resources by all possible means to counteract the external threats and challenges for the sake of sovereignty and integrity of the country. The representatives of the security forces predominate in the government and manage the 'rules of the game.' Political opposition does not exist. [...] Russia needs to be united and mobilized to respond successfully to external threats, even if this limits economic competition, political rights and freedoms. Russia is a 'fortress,' towering over a dangerous ocean of chaos.²

During discussions with our focus groups, nearly all of the participants we surveyed considered this scenario as extremely undesirable and highly improbable. However, today this scenario appears to represent the core of a new, near universal conservative ideology, almost a 'symphony' between the 'power state,' the elites and the population. How did this occur? Is this unity solid and durable? What is its social base? What policy recommendations does it entail? Do political and ideological alternatives exist for the Russian future?

As postulated in the 'Fortress Russia' scenario, the world today is, indeed, unstable and prone to severe crises. The contemporary world also appears dramatically different in comparison with the period immediately following the Cold War. Now, most of the original optimism and goals of global cooperation and integration no longer exist, while reality appears much harsher: new axes and spheres of global and regional confrontation,

² Andrei Melville and Ivan Timofeev, *Rossiya 2020: Al'ternativnyye Stsenarii i Obschbestvennyye Predpochteniya*, Polis, 4, 2008, pp. 66-85. See also: Andrei Melville and Ivan Timofeev, *Russia in 2020: Alternative Scenarios of the Near Future*, in K. Almqvist and A. Linalater, *On Russia*, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, Stockholm 2010, pp. 127-148.

shifting balances of power, the spread of new forms of terrorism, violent conflicts, instability, territorial disputes, changing borders, religious wars and even a new bipolar world that divides the globe into twin opposing forces of 'West' and 'Anti-West.' Following decades of the dominance of the narrative of a global world order that resulted in the erosion of 'classical' state sovereignty and national borders, it appears that we are now witnessing a revival of national sovereignties – a 'neo-Westphalian world' based on 'traditional' geopolitics where irreconcilable conflicts, permanent rivalry between states and groups of states, focus on spheres of influence, buffer zones, appear more and more likely.³ Major international institutions seem to be in jeopardy and the power of international law is in decline. Apparently, it appears that the three decades of the post-Cold War order have been spent in vain, and the "Cold War 2.0" has already begun or is in the process of beginning.

The historical opportunities that appeared during Gorbachev's Perestroika and following the demise of the Soviet Union and Communism are lacking today, with little apparent path of return. The essential divide between Russia and the West has reemerged, although it has presented itself in new forms. Both sides are preoccupied with mutual disillusionments and disappointments, sharing responsibility for missed opportunities. Attitudes towards Russia as a 'collapsed empire' and not as a 'new democracy,' the self-styled Western position of 'teacher' and not as a 'therapist,' the crises in Yugoslavia and Kosovo, NATO's enlargement, and more are intrinsic to the U.S. and West European side. Conversely, the implicit and unspoken assumptions regarding 'privileged interests' in the 'Near Abroad', post-imperial frustrations, 'phantom pains,' and resentments can be attributed to the Russian side.

³ See Walter Russel Mead, *The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers*, Foreign Affairs, 93/3, 2014.

Nevertheless, today's Russia appears vastly different from its post-Soviet stage and the majority of Russians perceive their country as finally 'rising from its knees' and restoring its legitimate status as a great power. However, a minority in Russia and a majority in the West refer to Russia as a 'revisionist' entity, returning to its historical authoritarian patterns. Regardless, the prevailing mood among Russian population (and a very large part of the elites) is resentment, while a remarkable ideological consensus – with the exception of marginal fringes of 'liberals' – has emerged in Russia and is evident in the rise of neo-conservatism to the position of Russia's long-awaited new national idea.

It is fair to say that this newly emerged consensus is far from monolithic and that there exist various flanks and coalitions among its proponents, including some respectable pro-Kremlin think tanks (groups that are close to the President's administration, like ISEPR⁴ and the famous Valdai Club⁵) and some radical – but relatively marginal – extremes (such as the emblematic Izborsky Club⁶). However, there are some shared, core ideological components of neo-conservatism. These include the concept that Russia is a unique civilization-state with a special mission in an adversarial world; the necessity to defend traditional conservative values under assault by the depraved forces of Western moral decay; and the supremacy of political status quo threatened by subversive external intrusions and by the internal 'fifth column.'

⁴ The Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research (ISEPR) produces a quite notable regular publications: the "Folders on Conservatism" almanac (<http://www.isepr.ru/en/>).

⁵ See <http://valdaiclub.com/>.

⁶ See <http://izborsk-club.ru/>.

2. *New Geopolitics and New Ideological Warfare*

Primarily, this neo-conservative version of the Russian national idea purports to resurrect a centuries-old concept of Russia as a unique civilization-state distinct from 'regular' nation-states and with a special 'mission' in the world.⁷ This view claims Russia as a 'floating Empire'⁸ or a "continental empire, and not a nation-state."⁹ Some advocates of neo-conservatism trace its roots back to the concept of the 'Third Rome' expressed in the 15th and 16th centuries, while others seek its legitimization in the so called 'Eurasian tradition' of the 1920-30s. Nonetheless, the dominant strains of neoconservative justification all relate to revived geopolitical arguments. Indeed, one of the favorite arguments of this ideology is that the era of globalization is over and that geopolitics is back. Globalization and interdependence are said to be "factors of vulnerability"¹⁰ for Russia in the unfair world of singular super-power dominance. To overcome this unjust and unfavorable position, Russia must restore its legitimate great power status in the 'real' world of permanent conflicts and confrontation, relying not on previous illusions of 'common goals' and interdependence but exclusively on its national interests and effectively resisting the American and Western monopoly. Nevertheless, these

⁷ Tsygankov points that the current discourse of a "distinct civilization" is the product of the international pressures and domestic vulnerabilities. See, Andrei Tsygankov, *Crafting the State-Civilization. Vladimir Putin's Turn to Distinct Values*, Problems of Post-Communism, 63/3, 2016.

⁸ Vitaly Aver'yanov, *Vsplyvayushchaya Imperiya*, Izborsky Club, 8 April 2015 (<http://izborsk-club.ru/content/articles/5201>).

⁹ A "Manifesto of Enlightened Conservatism" has been presented in: Nikita Mikhalkov, *Pravo i Pravda. Manifest Prosveshchennogo konservatizma*, Polit.ru, 26 October 2010 (<http://polit.ru/article/2010/10/26/manifest>).

¹⁰ Sergei N. Karaganov, *Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya vneshnyaya politika: konets 2010-kh – nachalo 2020-kh godov*, Sovet po Vneshney i Oboronnoy Politike, 2016 (http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/тезисы_23мая_sm.pdf).

proclaimed national interests are vaguely defined and based on a concept of ‘national sovereignty’ that is primarily understood as noninterference from the external forces in Russia’s domestic affairs and recognition of Russia’s privileged ‘spheres of influence’ in the ‘Near Abroad.’

According to traditional geopolitical logic, neo-conservatism understands the world arena as a *bellum omnium contra omnes* whereby major international players cannot agree on basic rules of interactions and are trapped in a “Hobbesian moment.”¹¹ In this simplified ‘black and white’ picture of world politics,¹² especially in its extreme versions, a ‘fight to the death’ is the only logic¹³ between two major geopolitical rivals – the “West” and “rising non-Western states” – two diametrically opposed and irreconcilable systems of values that pit ‘freedom’ (the core value claimed by the current Western global system) and ‘justice’ (the contending principle identified by the ‘anti-West’).

Indeed, the thesis of ‘geopolitical revival’ in neoconservative mentality closely parallels the thesis of ‘ideological revival’ and the promotion of traditional conservative values. Common principles are hardly possible to be found as these values are in direct opposition to one another, recalling an almost forgotten ‘ideological struggle’¹⁴ and substantially repudiating perestroika

¹¹ Fyodor Lukyanov and Ivan Krastev (eds.), *New Rules or No Rules? XI Annual Valdai Discussion Club Meeting Participant’s Report*, Valdai Club, 13 March 2015 (http://valdaiclub.com/publications/reports/new_rules_or_no_rules_xi_annual_valdai_discussion_club_meeting_participants_report/).

¹² Some important critical arguments against the neoconservative “geopolitical revival” are presented in: Andrei Kortunov, *The Splendours and Miseries of Geopolitics*, Russian International Affairs Council, 14 January 2015 (http://russian-council.ru/en/inner/?id_4=5074#top-content).

¹³ Aleksandr Nagornyy, *Rossiia i zapadniki*, Izborsky Club, 1 December 2015 (<http://izborsk-club.ru/content/articles/7867>).

¹⁴ Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club, *War and Peace in the 21st Century. International Stability and Balance of the New Type*, Russia in Global Affairs, 10 February 2016 (<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/valday/War-and-Peace-in-the-21st-Century-International-Stability-and-Balance-of-the-New-Type-17972>).

and Gorbachev’s ‘new thinking’ as though it never occurred. This ‘struggle’ is supposed to have both international and domestic dimensions, with an argument concerning the “re-ideologization of international relations” recalling Soviet overtones where “we are on the ‘right side’ and our ideological opponents on the defensive.” However, this time “our” ideology is not Marxism-Leninism but Russian neo-conservatism. Remarkably, the West is to be blamed for this re-ideologization since it remains the center of the “new international ideocracy.”¹⁵ Hence, on a global level this struggle opposes the “emerging ideology of neo-conservatism” and “defensive democratic messianism.”¹⁶

Neo-conservatism is supposed to have both domestic and international appeal. It represents the aspirations of ‘rising’ nations that challenge the existing unjust world order and seek to restore the viable fundamentals of traditional (‘pre-modern’) values in order to protect from current ‘European decay.’ These values mainly consist of religious fundamentalism (resisting decadent permissiveness), collectivism (as opposed to a disruptive individualism), a unique version of patriotism based on the mythology of ‘spiritual bonds,’¹⁷ the primacy of the State (‘statism’), and neopatrimonialism.¹⁸ Some of these ideological components evoke past Soviet rhetoric.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Alexander Lukin, *Novaya Mezhdunarodnaya Ideokratiya i Rossiya*, *Sravnitel’naya Politika*, 1/22, 2016.

¹⁶ Sergei N. Karaganov, *Strategiya dlya Rossii*.

¹⁷ See Olga Malinova, “*Spiritual Bonds*” as *State Ideology*, *Russia in Global Affairs* 4/6, 2014.

¹⁸ See Stephen Hanson, *On the Novelty of Patrimonialism in Putin’s Russia*, in Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State Is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991*, Reset, Rome 2016. During the Reset DOC conference held in Venice on 17-18 June 2016, Hanson also coined a noteworthy expression of “neopatrimonialism by default” as recurrent ideological, political and social pattern of contemporary Russia.

¹⁹ On this regard, Timofeev has a perceptive vision and states: “In effect, Russia is resurrecting a Soviet version of its identity. This new identity is missing the socialist/collectivist component, but, nevertheless, retains the equally important patriotic element. The next stage in this search is finding a universal idea.” Ivan Timofeev, *From a Greater Europe to a Greater Eurasia*, *Russia Direct*, 4/6, 2016.

However, the truly universal appeal of Marxism-Leninism is still missing in this neoconservative version of a new Russian national concept and identity, most likely not accidentally. By some standards, this ideology is ‘weak’, specifically designed for domestic purposes and domestic consumption, consonant only with the marginal ideas of the European ‘New Right’ and with some ambitions of the ‘rising’ adversaries of the post-Cold War world order. Hence, despite its pretensions for universal appeal, Russian neo-conservatism is fundamentally parochial and only partly resonates with some ideas of the new populist and nationalist movements in Europe and most recently in the U.S.

3. *Primacy of the Status Quo and Sources of the Domestic Support*

Undoubtedly, the main domestic aims of this form of neo-conservatism are stability, propagation of the regime, and preservation of the status quo. Hence, the proponents of this new version of Russian national idea actively endorse the aforementioned view of a ‘besieged fortress,’ surrounded by an extremely adversarial environment and effectively propagating an ‘image of the enemy.’ Rejection of globalization as a major destabilizing factors corresponds with the rejection of external interference in the sovereign affairs of Russian domestic politics.²⁰ Following this logic, stability and order are more important than the law

²⁰ Russia’s neo-conservative ideology based on “restoration of the moral and political unity of the authorities and the people – boils down to the following ideas: ‘stability’ – unchangeability of the authorities – overcoming ‘chaos’ caused by Yeltsin’s reforms; ‘traditionalism’; a special role of Orthodoxy and its importance in the matter of society’s ‘moral upbringing’; fighting Western influence – civil society organizations as well as constitutional state and human rights movements are appointed ‘agents’ thereof by the Kremlin political engineers.” Lev Gudkov, *The ‘Great Power’ Ideology as a Condition of Putin’s Regime Legitimacy*, in Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State Is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991*, Reset, Rome 2016.

and the rights of the individual. In the words of one of the advocates of this neo-conservative vision: “for a conservative, tradition and morality are above the law.”²¹

Indeed, stability and maintenance of the status quo are distinguishing features of conservatism in general – in all cases throughout history. Nevertheless, attempts to legitimize the current conditions derive not just from appeals to conserve the present, but even from a reactionary desire to restore the past – including its symbols, identities and myths. Therefore, Russia’s neo-conservative ideology lacks some very critical elements like a vision of the future, long-term goals, and a positive agenda of how to attain them. Despite widespread claims of “conservatism for development”²² – relying on Russia’s indigenous resources and capabilities and its pivot towards the ‘East’ – Russia’s “sovereign modernization” would not be viable without relying on Western technologies and investments.

However, despite all of these discussed conceptual weaknesses and practical vulnerabilities, the neoconservative version of Russia’s national idea persists as a nearly-universally supported ideology. What are the sources of neo-conservatism’s domestic support and how secure is it in Russia? First, the greatest impetus for the movement comes from the central authorities and powerful elite groupings whose main priority is preservation of the status quo. The static dominance of leaders and elites, with positions to guarantee personal gain, is the key factor and the principal cause of this current demand for conservative ideology.

Another important segment of the social base supporting neo-conservatism is the constantly expanding bureaucratic

²¹ Boris Makarenko (ed.), *Konservativizm i razvitiye: Osnovy obschestvennogo soglasiya*, Alpina, Moskva 2015, p. 275.

²² Rather sophisticated versions of these claims are documented in the above-mentioned volume: Boris Makarenko (ed.), *Konservativizm i razvitiye*.

estate in today's Russia. Bureaucracy – at any rank and geographic level – is a natural bearer of a conservative attitude and stance. The bureaucracy's natural conservative inclination is reinforced by various benefits from the status of individual officials and their ever growing salaries. This ideological inclination is also widespread among other social groups whose existence and wellbeing depends on the government – employees of government-financed organizations, military, pensioners, etc.

Conservative attitudes and values are also characteristic among a large group of the middle class that emerged as a result of the redistribution of rents during the oil boom in the early 2000s. In contrast to the famous 'Lipset hypothesis' – which stated that economic growth and the expansion of the middle class would produce democratic and liberal expectations and demands – large segments of Russia's contemporary middle class seem to support conservative values and the status quo. A possible explanation of this 'paradox' is related to the massive, widespread level of dependence on the state. Economically and administratively, the middle class is largely 'servile' – their very existence depends on bureaucratic decisions rather than independent economic (and other) activities.²³ This situation is also evident in some other non-Western countries.²⁴

Finally, regarding sources of domestic support, one should note that the neo-conservative version of Russia's national idea falls largely in line with widespread, pre-existing public attitudes. On the one hand, this process is the result of an effective TV propaganda campaign that became the crucial instrument of ideological legitimization. On the other hand, it also embodies various effects of popular syndromes and

²³ See Evgeny Gontmakher and Cameron Ross, *The Middle Class and Democratization in Russia*, *Europe-Asia Studies* 67/2, 2015.

²⁴ China may be another specific example refuting the causality nexus between economic growth and the wellbeing of the emerging middle class, on the one hand, and support of democratic values – on the other.

complexes, nostalgia, resentment and frustrations. As with the phenomena of "moral majority" during Reaganism, these popular attitudes function as both a specific stimulus and a source of massive support for neoconservative ideology.

The dominant motivations for these neo-conservative sentiments in today's Russia consist of a *mélange* of emotional issues, such as the desire for a return to 'great power' status, the belief in a 'special Russian way,' the 'image of the enemy,' and the priority of 'order and stability.' All of these attitudes strongly resonate with the major premises of neo-conservatism. In June 2016, 67% of respondents said they believed that Russia was a great power: 48% believed so due to its military power (the same figure was 30% in 1999) and 39% for its economic potential (64% in 1999). Interestingly, while 82% of those polled stated they were proud to live in Russia (this figure remained the same over the last ten years), only 68% of them said they were proud of contemporary Russia, while 44% were proud of Russian history, and 21% of respondents said they were proud of Russian territory. This patriotic élan is reinforced by an "image of the enemy" spread by massive propaganda campaigns: from the fall of 2015 to the spring of 2016, the large majority of the population (80%) felt the presence of the external enemies – such as 'the West' (75%), the U.S. (70%) and Ukraine (48%) – and only slightly perceived the presence of a few allies such as Belarus (50%), Kazakhstan (39%), China (34%), India and Armenia (13%).²⁵

Public opinion polls reveal that neoconservative assumptions regarding Russia's 'special way' are deeply rooted in popular attitudes. In spring of 2015, 55% of respondents felt that 'Russia's own way' was unique and fundamentally different from all other nations in the world. However, the majority

²⁵ Data extrapolated from the Levada Center's surveys published on 13 October 2015, 2 November 2015, 2 and 30 June 2016 on the website www.levada.ru.

(69%) were not able to clearly articulate the nature and the peculiarities of this Russia's 'special way.' Many respondents believed that that democracy did exist in Russia. It is important to note that the percentage of these respondents has dramatically increased following the events of Crimea, from 37% in 2006 to 62% at the end of 2015. Incidentally, this trend may be a remarkable manifestation of both the impact of propagandistic mobilization 'around the flag' and a profound confusion in the people's mentality. Lastly, when asked what type of democracy Russia necessitated, 46% of respondents affirmed "a completely special kind that is appropriate to Russia's national traditions and unique characteristics," 19% chose a type "that existed in the Soviet Union," and only 16% chose a version "that exists in the developed countries such as the Europe ones and the United States." In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, the powerful urge towards stability and status quo are well evident, with 61% of respondents preferring 'order,' even at expense of individual rights and freedoms.²⁶

The picture seems to take shape: public moods in today's Russia appear chaotic and certainly in line with major postulates of neo-conservative ideology, which leads to a traditional 'chicken and egg' issue: do neo-conservative ideologists develop their version of Russian national identity reflecting popular attitudes drawn from widespread frustrations and syndromes? Or do they simply enforce their view on the people through powerful propaganda in order to inculcate these preferences? Most likely, both of these arguments are true and reflect important components of a complex Russian society. A more important question deals with the resilience of these beliefs in public opinion and, accordingly, in determining the popular support for neo-conservatism in Russia.

²⁶ Data extrapolated from the Levada Center's surveys published on 28 October 2014, 21 April 2015 and 20 January 2016 on the website www.levada.ru.

4. Prospects

We must acknowledge the actual – and sometimes embryonic – complexity of the current state of the popular mood in Russia. On the one hand, there exists clear, widespread support for the neo-conservative status quo, although it has many distinct causes. On the other hand, there are signs of doubts about the permanence of this new social contract that could lead to a replacement of 'TV in the place of the refrigerator' with a 'refrigerator in the place of political involvement.'²⁷ We must closely monitor signs of shifting trends in public opinion that may eventually threaten the neo-conservative consensus. In particular, there currently exist signs of potential fatigue with the massive propagandistic brainwashing apparatus and the emergence of concerns related to the daily lives of 'rank-and-life' Russians. For example, in February 2016, during the current economic crisis, survey respondents began to characterize their anxieties in a different way. Instead of rating "enemies outside" as their primary fear, a greater number of the respondents expressed their concern for other issues, like the "growth of prices" and the "impoverishment of population" (54%); the economic crisis (49%); the potential for Russia to be drawn into conflicts outside its borders (33%); unemployment (26%); increase in tensions with Western countries (22%), etc.²⁸ In other words, the popular foundations of this new ideological consensus in Russia may very well become vulnerable in the future. Clearly, it is difficult to accurately predict the paths and outcomes of these fluctuations: nevertheless, in the future they

²⁷ See Andrei Kolesnikov, *Russian Ideology After Crimea*, The Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow 2015 (http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kolesnikov_Ideology2015_web_Eng.pdf). In this context, TV means 'patriotic propaganda', while the refrigerator still represents the wellbeing of the population.

²⁸ Data extrapolated from a Levada Center's survey published on 26 February 2016 on the website www.levada.ru.

may significantly challenge the solidity and the durability of the seemingly strong neo-conservative ideological consensus in today's Russia.

Apart from the obvious volatility in public attitudes, there may exist other factors which could eventually undermine the seemingly immutable status quo and the near-universal acceptance of neo-conservative ideology in today's Russia. In continuing with the previous argument, it is difficult to predict exactly how long the social base and the ideological appeal of neo-conservatism will endure. It has proven resilient in the case of contemporary Russia. However, as demonstrated above, there may be various exogenous and endogenous events that hold the potential to disrupt and undermine the current popular support for the status quo. An additional long-term possibility is the emergence of a new generation of elites with no connection to the previous regime and a new search for Russia's post-industrial modernization.

Generational elite change may become – as in other developing countries – a powerful instrument for political and social transformation. Currently, regime stability and ideological consensus are sheer facts of the Russian state, as demonstrated by the power of the ruler, the interests of the elites, specific middle class motivations, and popular support. However, the beauty of political history is in its unpredictability. There may exist many other latent factors at work, whose impact we will only become aware of in the future.

Part II

The Demise of Liberalism in Russia: Testing the Waters on the Subject

Chapter VI

Cultural Contradictions of Post-Communist Russian (Il)Liberalism *Nina Khrushcheva, The New School*

Things that I admire elsewhere, I hate [in Russia]... I find them too dearly paid for; order, patience, calmness, elegance, respectfulness, the natural and moral relations that ought to exist between those who think and those who do, in short all that gives worth and charm to well-organized societies, all that gives meaning and purpose to political institutions, is lost... here.¹

We wanted for the better, but it turned out as usual.²

A few simple definitions of Liberalism should provide useful in the following discussion of the cultural contradictions of the (il)liberal developments in the post-communist Russia. Defined in economic terms, liberalism is the concept that a government should not intervene in an attempt to control prices, rents, and/or wages but rather let open competition and the forces of supply and demand create an equilibrium that benefits the vast majority of citizens. It differs from the doctrine of *laissez faire* in its acceptance of government intervention in certain circumstances, such as to control the creation and spread of monopolies and in the distribution of public good. In general, economic liberalism favors the redistribution of income through taxes and

¹ Astolphe de Custine, *Empire of the Czar: A Journey Through Eternal Russia*, Doubleday, New York 1989, p. 233.

² Aleksandr P. Gamov, *Khoteli kak lushche... Devyatnadsat vecherov s Viktorom Chernomyrdinym ili Kak rozhdalis krylatye slova epokhi*, Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya-CheRo, Moskva 2008, p. 239.

welfare payments. A political definition of liberalism outlines a concept wherein the preservation of individual liberty and the maximization of freedom of choice should be the primary aims of a representative government. It stresses that all individuals stand equal before law (without class privileges) and have only a voluntary contractual relationship with their government. It defends freedom of speech and press, freedom of artistic and intellectual expression, freedom of religion, the right to private property, and the use of state resources for the welfare of the individual. The political systems of North America and Western Europe can be described by applying the following two notions: they are liberal because they seek to guarantee rights of individuals, and they are democratic because their institutions seek to translate popular views into public policy.

However, in recent decades, as ordinary citizens' living standards have stagnated and threats to security and stability have multiplied around the world, these two principles of Western politics have come into conflict. As a result, 'liberal democracy' has been diverging, giving rise to two (not inherently) contradictory regime forms: 'illiberal democracy' (democracy without rights, or in other words, 'democratic authoritarianism') and 'undemocratic liberalism' (rights without democracy). An example of the 'illiberal democracy' is when vast sections of policy are guarded from democratic participation. Macroeconomic decisions are made by independent central banks. Social conflicts are settled by constitutional courts. This has been an increasing reality in the nearly two decades of Putin's Russia, where this type of leadership is defined as 'managed' or 'sovereign' democracy as opposed to other Western liberal models. While the Kremlin argues that this special system is necessary in order to protect Russia from its many enemies, both domestic and foreign, this mode of governance has become a trend in more and more countries within the European Union – like Hungary and Poland – and others elsewhere such as India, Turkey, or China.

At the same time, the development of 'undemocratic liberalism' can be seen in the rise of Donald Trump, the real estate mogul and reality TV star who defied all predictions to emerge as the victorious candidate in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. In the 1990s, this trend was already being represented by Boris Yeltsin's post-communist de-institutionalized era of hyper-liberal capitalism.

1. The Impact of 'Cultural Legacy' on the Russian Undemocratic Liberalism

One specific goal of the Yeltsin era economic reforms was to establish a new class of businessmen and private property owners: a body of people who could form the foundation of a new model post-Soviet citizen. However, the experience of this post-communist liberal economic 'revolution' turned out to be very different from the original expectations. For just as people became disillusioned with Communism due to its broken promises, after 1991 the words 'democracy' and 'reform' quickly became equally as unbearable to large sectors of the Russian public.

Only a few years after the reform process had begun, disappointed analysts were posing stark questions: "Why has Western style liberalism, embraced almost everywhere in theory, proved difficult even to approximate in practice? Why has freedom not yet been established, even though the totalitarian state has been torn down?"³ Indeed, many analysts judged the results of the first post-communist decade as a near complete failure and blamed either internal corruption or Western institutions like the IMF and the World Bank.

³ Stephen Holmes, *Cultural Legacies or State Collapse?*, in Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*, A Council on Foreign Relations Book, New York 1996, p. 25.

The blame attached to these international bodies was, of course, far too simplistic, as the Bretton Woods Institutions had existed for over sixty years and many of their projects have proven successful. Additionally, corruption is part of every political economy and exists to varying degrees in every country. What is significant is the consensus that Russia's political economy has been corrupt on every level. According to numerous sources, Russia was ranked among the ten most corrupt nations in the world during each year of Yeltsin's decade in power – while Putin's Russia has performed only marginally better.⁴ Under Yeltsin, international investors regularly complained about corruption. The financial crisis of 1998 only further worsened this, inciting discussion as to whether Russia's developing economy was, in fact, a form of developing capitalism, or simply 'oligarchism,' a system where a narrow elite have "stolen the state, and everything else."⁵

This question drew global attention. Public and political speculations of 'Who lost Russia?' triggered debates within the IMF and the World Bank, resulting in a restructuring process of both institutions in the late 1990s. Boris Yeltsin was forced to resign and in 2000, the new President Vladimir Putin declared a "dictatorship of law and order" in order to combat what was perceived as Russia's lawlessness.⁶ However,

⁴ *The Corruption Perceptions Index 1999* – published by Transparency International – ranked Russia 76 out of 85 countries. Denmark was ranked the least corrupt country, and the United States shared 17th place with Austria. On a 10-point scale, with Denmark being a 10, Russia scored 2.4. The U.S. and Austria both had 7.5, while Cameroon earned only 1.4, the lowest score. For comparison, in 2015 Russia scored 29, and holds 119th place out of 168 countries. Respectively, America scored 76 and ranks 16th (https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_1999/0/).

⁵ Kenneth Murphy and Marek Hassel, *Stealing the State and Everything Else: A Survey on Corruption in the Post-Communist World*, Project Syndicate, Prague, Winter 1999.

⁶ Jonas Bernstein, *Party Lines: Dictated by Law, or Nods*, The Moscow Times, 4 March 2000.

Putin has been unable to root out corruption throughout his seventeen years in power – first serving two terms as president, then prime minister, and now president yet again – although there have been almost annual promises to curtail favoritism.⁷ The issue of corruption certainly highlights Russia's complicated transition, but the country's general problem with liberalism and capitalism extend far beyond politics and into history and culture. According to Stephen Holmes, corruption is not a cause but rather a consequence of what he calls 'cultural legacies,' "habits acquired in the past which are difficult to shake and which purportedly obstruct the successful creation and function of democratic and market institutions. Habits die hard and mentalities change slow."⁸

Several aspects within the Russian 'national character' and 'cultural legacy' help to explain the failings of liberal policies in Russia since 1991. Among these are the influence of Asian culture and values that remain from the previous system of government, both of which reinforce the special role of family and friend relationships – a form of that prizes the commune as opposed to the value of an individual. The influence of these factors leaves little hope for the existence of a 'faceless bureaucracy,' able to apply the law equally to all, without regard to personal preferences and sympathies. The mixed results of the reform process, varying assessments by Russian actors and outside participants and analysts,⁹ and the now largely anti-liberal regime of Vladimir Putin, all suggest that the root of these problems extend far deeper than only issues of bad policies, inefficient implementation, or the supposedly corrupt nature of the Russian state. In Holmes' words:

⁷ Ivan Krastev and Vladislav Inozemtsev, *Putin's Self-Destruction: Russia's New Anti-Corruption Campaign Will Sink the Regime*, Transit Online, 2013 (<http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/putins-self-destruction/>).

⁸ Stephen Holmes, *Cultural Legacies*, p. 26.

What deserves careful thought is the reform-hampering role of inherited attitudes and patterns of behavior. People do more easily what they are used to doing than what they have never done... Habits and expectations, which perversely constrict freedom of choice, can be handed down from generation to generation and survive for centuries by sheer inertia.¹⁰

The two epigrams by de Custine and Chernomyrdin at the beginning of this essay suggest a simple but powerful conclusion: Russia's culture has a deep impact on any reform effort, meaning that regardless of those efforts, the country has had difficulty embracing change. Why is it that the late Tsarist system, late Communism, and post-Communism all failed to generate viable alternatives and only produced changes that appeared flawed and destructive? Why is it that replacing the old regime always resulted in a crippled successor regime? One possible answer to these questions is a great paradox of 'tyranny,' in which a 'weak state' provides too much government, depriving people of the basic liberties needed to make their own decisions.¹¹ Such a state is left impotent, unable to solve the fundamental problems that face it, remaining effective only through weakening and discrediting alternatives. This pattern certainly defines Vladimir Putin's governing style – seen most clearly in his top-down command structure known as the “vertical of power”¹² – but it also held true following 1991,

⁹ Today only a handful of reformists insist that the road to capitalism, which they chose by way of “shock therapy,” had proven successful. In his book “Russian style privatization”, Chubais argues that the way reforms were implemented was defined by the necessity to neutralize the Soviet-style bureaucracy, because the command system never wanted to admit that a “Soviet man like every other man was nothing more than ‘homo economicus,’ fully engrossed in the economic interests: interest in money, interest in property and profit.” Anatoly Borisovich Chubais (ed.), *Privatizatsiya po-rossiiskii*, Vagrius, Moskva 1999, p. 29.

¹⁰ Stephen Holmes, *Cultural Legacies*, p. 26.

¹¹ See, for example, Edward Kennan, *Muscovite Political Folkways*, The Russian Review, 45/2, April 1986, pp. 115-182.

when reform efforts led by Western-style liberals such as Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais refused to tolerate any alternative to themselves.¹³

This point brings to the fore another paradox: having endured some of the worst despots in the history of the world, the Russian people have developed an almost apocalyptic fear of change, especially regime change. The end of a regime engenders not hope but a fear of catastrophe. Thus, power in Russia, far more than in other cultures, is subject to inertia, which creates a favorable environment for autocratic rule. The person wielding power embodies power and is followed by the population regardless of, and often even in spite of, the types of policies he implements. This attitude marked people's devotion to Iosif Stalin and helps to explain the re-election of Boris Yeltsin in 1996 when, despite poll numbers that showed his popularity was at its lowest point in his entire presidency, the Russian people voted to re-elect him, most likely reasoning ‘better the devil we know.’ The phenomenon of Putin's popularity, steadily hovering over 80% in recent years, is of a similar nature – if not Putin, who else?¹⁴ In fact, this attitude is often held subconsciously rather than consciously and is

¹² Ivan Sukhov, *The Power Vertical and the Nation's Self-Consciousness*, Russia in Global Affairs, 15 June 2008 (http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_10931).

¹³ Anatoly Chubais insists: “Of course our privatization was not without ‘minuses,’ however if we followed the slow A-B-C process suggested by the ‘soft’ reformers, we would have had much more negative outcome... Criminalization would have been absolute.” Anatoly Borisovich Chubais (ed.), *Privatizatsiya po-rossiiskii*, p. 32. However, already in the 1990s there was enough evidence that reforms could have taken a less radical turn if the reformers and their Western advisors would have been less rigid in understanding the reforms. Traditional structures would not have been destroyed, appropriate new structures would have been built, and Russian cultural values – such as a preference of a commune versus the individual – would have been considered. See, for example: Giulietto Chiesa, *Prosbchai, Rossiya*, Geya, Moskva 1997, pp. 35-60; Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kontorovich (eds.), *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk 1998.

¹⁴ RT, *Putin continues to ride high in popularity polls, latest research shows*, RT, 5 May 2016 (<https://www.rt.com/politics/341922-putin-continues-to-ride-high/>).

part of a centuries old tradition, which only time and different (positive) experiences have the ability to change.

In his seminal work *Culture and Explosion*,¹⁵ Russian cultural historian Yuri Lotman offers the perspective that unlike Western culture, Russian culture embodies an underlying binary logic of opposition. Without necessarily being aware of these patterns, individuals and groups conceptualize social lives in terms of absolute alternatives that admit no compromise. There is no neutral ground. When a path is chosen, it must be seen as absolutely victorious. Therefore, Russian leaders always believe in the righteousness of their policies. Regarding the binary logic in terms of human values, Lotman offers the following sets of stark oppositions: charity in Russia vs. justice in the West; love vs. the law; personal morality (ethics) vs. state law; holiness vs. politics, and so on. In contrast to the Western institutions that operate on standard protocols, Russia often operates according to ‘personalized rituals.’ According to Lotman, a fateful result of this binary thinking is that after defeating an opponent, the victor must always seek to rewrite the past. The past is seen not as the foundation for organic growth, but rather as a source of flaws to be destroyed before it is able to infect the new regime. Creation is preceded by total destruction, thus occurring in a void. Means and ends are divorced, as the longed-for new world can only be constructed on the ruins of the old.

In the 1990s, Yeltsin, Gaidar, Chubais and their colleagues appeared to be acting in line with this classical script of Russian history, repeating that binary logic of opposition. Reformers fashioned a monolithic, mythological West, understood primarily in terms of its opposition to the Soviet Union. And despite their liberalism, these reformers reverted to the usual absolutist, and rather destructive, formula of ‘we know best’ in their attempts to transform the old Soviet society. Communism

¹⁵ Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, *Kultura i Vzryv*, Gnozis, Moskva 1992.

failed because it was a bankrupt ideology. They reasoned that the Russian society and economy would begin to work only by quickly adopting a viable ideology: the free market model. Never mind that such change could only be imposed by the autocratic techniques of ‘the ends justifying the means,’ and lacking the necessary institutions to see the ensure its viability. What Isaiah Berlin called “the mixture of utopian faith and brutal disregard for civilized morality,”¹⁶ in reference to the Bolshevik policies, could also be applied to the Russian liberal reform process, which ruled more often by presidential decree rather than through transparency and democratic consent.¹⁷

However, the essence of democracy is to secure public support for government policies, something Yeltsin consistently failed to do. We cannot auction, privatize, or even redistribute the assets of a huge country among the people without wide citizen involvement, particularly when the people are well-aware of the high (and often bloody) price paid to develop those assets. In order to be supported by the public, economic liberties would only be viable when the public and authorities have agreed on a defined set of goals, procedures, regulations, and codes. Although the Russian and Soviet systems never had such a written code, they had a strict tradition of rituals and ‘informal formalities’ that were followed by the elite and the people alike. When the traditionally accepted systems were formally destroyed in 1991, rituals were no longer functional neither within the power elite nor between the people and the government.

The formerly unwritten set of rules were replaced by the ‘undemocratic liberalism’ – ‘*bespredel*’ (limitless lawlessness) – as Yeltsin’s government overlooked the need to replace old

¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century in Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1969, p. 17.

¹⁷ See Janine Wedel, *Rigging the U.S.-Russian Relationship: Harvard, Chubais, and the Transidentity Game*, Democratizatsiya, 7/4, Fall 1999.

autocratic rituals with the new modern regulations of societal protocol and new, functioning institutions of democracy. Thus, the separation between the state and society suppressed anything that Russia has ever known before. Deprived of the familiar patterns and structures, and lacking any formal replacement, the people have become greatly confused about the formal functions and responsibilities of citizens, government officials and businessmen in the Russia's new capitalist environment.

Reforming without democratic consent, rather than making reforms comprehensible to the wider public, doomed the entire liberal program from the start and empowered illiberal forces within the country. From 1991 onwards, policies imposed from the top clashed with expectations from the bottom, mainly because the average Russian clung to the long-established idea that the interests of the commune, of the state, far surpassed the interests of any individual. They are deemed more valuable than any concept of democracy or capitalism. Incidentally this helps explain the resilience of the Communist Party in Russia, which even Vladimir Putin supports, despite his affiliation with the competing United Russia party.

2. The Illiberal Democracy of the Putin State

This Russian belief system as described above was better suited to the 'illiberal democracy' Putin's Kremlin rather than the 'undemocratic liberalism' of the Yeltsin regime. Most analyses of Putin's government, with its ruling philosophy of 'sovereign' or 'managed democracy', emphasize his KGB past and portray him as a destroyer of liberty and democratic freedoms, yet this strong-man act fits into a centuries-old Russian tradition of so-called 'liberal conservatism,' a hybrid model of reform and oppression exercised by many leaders before Putin. It is a longstanding belief that Russia, with its enormous territory and

a population prone to communal attitudes, necessitates a strong not in the place of liberal reforms, but rather in order for reforms to become coherent and successful. For instance, in 2000 Putin's first order of business as the new President was to combine Russia's 89 federal subjects into just several federal districts ruled by 'super-governors' handpicked by the Kremlin. Just recently in 2016, through a similar effort of centralization the Kremlin implemented an 'anti-terror' law – or the 'Big Brother' law, as it was immediately dubbed – which ordered Russia's phone companies to keep logs of users' calls and internet histories for six months. The results of these 'strong-hand' reforms are often unsatisfactory and appear undemocratic and illiberal if assessed from the point of view of Western democracy, as their stated goals of protecting the country against disorder or terrorism often manifest in cracking down on any possibility of disobedience or dissent. Yet, as Putin sees it, he has simply brought unified compliance to the federal governance.

In fact, in the first decade of Putin's rule this fusion of 'reform and conservatism' did provide some stability to the Russian governing system, in stark contrast to the chaos of the Yeltsin era. For example, in his early Kremlin years Putin made serious efforts to consolidate property rights and to liberalize and normalize the economy. He employed a series of liberal-minded finance ministers, like Alexey Kudrin, who achieved reasonable results in regulating businesses. Big oil and other natural resource conglomerates – such as Gazprom, Rosneft and others – were seen as national treasures and were thus brought under state control. Other businesses that resented Kremlin oversight were destroyed, like the now-defunct oil company Yukos, whose owner Khodorkovsky spent fourteen years in prison for supporting the opposition politics despite Putin's objections. Although undemocratic from the point of view of liberal democracy, from the perspective of 'liberal-conservatives' these acts were essential in order to eradicate

the influence of the Yeltsin-era ‘oligarchism’ and place the Kremlin at the center of economic progress. And real progress did occur in some areas, as in 2011 when Russia’s trade and finances became stable enough for the country to be admitted into the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Putin has often argued that instilling a network of restrictive laws is necessary to strengthen order.¹⁸ In this, his Russia squarely fits the ‘liberal-conservative’ model, especially preceding his 2012 reelection for president when further consolidation of power drove the Kremlin’s ‘law and order’ agenda away from the murky idea of fostering stability to forcing control. A century ago, this very model was employed by Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, a man Putin holds in high regard. Stolypin attempted to reform Russia in the midst of the 1905 revolution and used extreme violence to suppress the uprising, yet he pursued some liberal social and economic reforms, most famously giving the peasants land ownership.

As a philosophical model for the ‘liberal-conservatism,’ both Stolypin and Putin have followed the teachings of the 19th century jurist Boris Chicherin. Chicherin was the first author to express concern about the tendency of liberalism to veer towards the inclusion of too many rights, particularly in the case of Russia. Long before Lotman outlined Russia’s binary logic of opposition, in which differing perspectives allow for no middle ground or compromise, Chicherin espoused a similar view in discussing liberalism. Chicherin writes that the Russian liberal

¹⁸ Thomas Grove, *Russia’s Putin Signs New Law Against ‘Undesirable’ NGOs*, WSJ, 25 May 2015 (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-putin-signs-new-law-against-undesirable-ngos-1432567550>). See also, Tania Lemondzhava, *In Russia, the Doors are Closing*, Foreign Policy, 29 April 2016 (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/29/in-russia-the-doors-are-closing-tourism-putin-human-rights/>); and Fred Lucas, *Back to the Soviet Era: Putin’s New Law Could Lead to Religious Crackdown*, Daily Signal, 20 July 2016 (<http://dailysignal.com/2016/07/20/back-to-the-soviet-era-putins-new-law-could-lead-to-religious-crackdown/>).

travels on a few high-sounding words: freedom, openness, public opinion [...] which he interprets as having no limits. [...] Hence he regards as products of outrageous despotism the most elementary concepts such as obedience to law or the need for a police and bureaucracy. [...] The extreme development of liberty, inherent in democracy, inevitably leads to the breakdown of the state organism. To counter this, it is necessary to have strong authority.¹⁹

Other philosophers who followed, from Vladimir Solovyov to post-Bolshevik revolution exiles Nikolai Berdyaev and Ivan Ilyin, shared the same view of ‘liberal-conservatism.’ Similarly, Putin’s ‘dictatorship of law’ stands in opposition to what the Russian president saw as Yeltsin’s bespredel: liberalism run amok. Putin has shown himself faithfully devoted to these philosophical views as he regularly returns to Ilyin’s notion of ‘legal consciousness,’ which he prefers over Western liberal democracy. In the philosopher’s words, “at the head of the state there must be a single will,” and a “united and strong state power, dictatorial in scope,”²⁰ though with legal limits. Hence, the ruler must have popular support, organs of the state must be responsible and accountable, and the principle of legality must be preserved and all persons must be equal under the law.

Putin certainly relies on popular support, often taking the public’s pulse by looking at poll numbers, collecting questions for his frequent and lengthy TV-broadcast town-halls with the country’s citizens, and visiting remote locations in Russia, although that has become more of a rarity compared to his earlier Kremlin years. The last principle, too, has become increasingly challenging for the Kremlin. In fact, since Putin began his third term in 2012 a series of laws have been passed criminalizing

¹⁹ Cited in Gary M. Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 1828-1866*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992.

²⁰ Cited in Marc Bennetts, *I’m Going to Ruin Their Lives: Inside Putin’s War on Russia’s Opposition*, Oneworld Publications, London 2016.

repeated street protests. The aim of such laws is to boost the Russian government's ability to control public discourse and the free exchange of information. This flies in the face of Ilyin's notion that the top down autocratic state would respect civil rights and promote civil society irrespective of the challenges it posed to the state.

As the experience of Putinism has confirmed, the state invariably feels threatened by those challenges. Even though the Putin administration has been formally more consistent regarding civil society institutions – in 2004 it created a series of 'public councils' on a variety of issues, from art and education to finances and administration – than the Yeltsin regime, these councils have remained 'Russian-specific.' That is, their job has been mostly to conform to the agenda of the state. After all, by liberal conservative standards, civil society should serve to cooperate with the state in order to better the country, not to create a disarray of opposition. The view of a limited, law-based, and accountable dictatorship espoused by Chicherin, Ilyin, and other philosophers is a noteworthy concept for those who are attempting to understand the Russian state. Yet, there has been no real evidence that it able to work in a society long term. Stolypin, after all, was only Russia's minister for five years. Who knows what further restrictive measures he may have instituted for the sake of a strong state. The perils of 'illiberal democracy' as demonstrated by Putin's increasingly controlling presidential third term, from curtailing the freedom to protest to the 'Big Brother' law and many other restrictions in between, the 'illiberal' takes over and 'democracy' fades.

Leaders and countries who take cues from Putin – like the Hungarian and Indian Prime Ministers Viktor Orbán and Narendra Modi, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or Poland's former Prime Minister and Chairman of the right-wing 'Law and Justice' (PiS) party, Jarosław Kaczyński – who hope that flexing muscle and curtailing opposition will protect their

countries from internal turmoil and external threats, should be wary of Russia's example.²¹ While these 'illiberal' democrats' promise to shelter their countries from a variety of problems may be appealing to voters, there is little evidence that they do. After all, in Russia under Putin terrorist acts continue to permeate public spaces and opinions, the issue of corruption has not changed, and extrajudicial killings show no sign of slowing down and are increasing instead.²²

²¹ See Nina Khrushcheva, *The Lilli-Putin's of the EU*, Project Syndicate, 28 March 2016 (<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/leaders-building-illiberal-regimes-in-hungary-and-poland-by-nina-l-khrushcheva-2016-03?barrier=true>) and Nina Khrushcheva, *The Strongman's Power Trap*, Project Syndicate, 19 July 2016 (<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putin-xi-erdogan-pow-er-trap-by-nina-l-khrushcheva-2016-07>).

²² Institute for Economics and Peace, *2015 Global Terrorism Index*, IEP, November 2015, p. 90 (<http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-Global-Terrorism-Index-Report.pdf>); Levada Center, *Russian Public Opinion 2012-2013*, Annual Report, Levada Analytical Center, Moscow 2013, p. 164-165 (http://www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/2012_eng.pdf) and RT, *Russia to launch own corruption index, to replace 'biased' Transparency Intl*, RT, 20 April 2015 (<http://on.rt.com/xh3vei>). See also, SN, *The Putin critics who have been assassinated*, Sky News, 4 July 2016 (<http://news.sky.com/story/the-putin-critics-who-have-been-assassinated-10369350>).

Chapter VII

When Dreams Come True. Liberal Trends
and Liberal Mythology in Russian Media
Nadezhda Azhgikhina
European Federation of Journalists

On August 22nd 2016, Russia celebrated its National Flag Day and the 25th anniversary of the Russian state's victory over putschists. During the dramatic days of August 1991, an enthusiastic crowd resisted the coup arranged by the GKChP, a faction of officials in power who detained Soviet president Gorbachev in Crimea in an attempt to create a new government and end the democratization process in the USSR. Those three days gave a fresh start to Russian – and global – history and opened a new chapter in the development of Russian media and journalism.¹ It is not an exaggeration to say that new Russian journalism was born and established its contemporary framework and principles during those three days. Nevertheless, many problems and dramas of today's Russian media development can also trace their roots and origins to those days.

Perestroika, August 1991, the Soviet collapse and the new order in Russia clearly transformed the nation at all levels, political, economic and ideological, introduced 'revolutions' of concepts and practices, and at the same time

¹ Alfred B. Evans, *The failure of democratization in Russia: A comparative perspective*, Journal of Eurasian Studies, 2/1, January 2011, pp. 40-51; Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina Vanden Heuvel, *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers*, Norton, New York 1989; Victoria E. Bonnell, Ann Cooper and Gregory Freidin (eds.), *Russia at the barricades: eyewitness accounts of the August 1991 coup*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk 1994.

created an impressive 'life experiment.' Participation in this ambitious transformation of the Russian society and the establishment of new rules were lifelong goals for many people of all different ages, a realization of the old dreams and desires of the previous generations of Russian intellectuals.

The liberal dream was a long term 'love affair' of Russian intellectuals and the foundation of many ideological concepts and clandestine movements in the country. The liberal concept was more than simply an idea, it was a very deep and emotional part of Russian identity: great Russian literature, which had battled against censorship for almost three centuries, elaborated a great mythology of freedom, and naturally liberal ideas were a part of it.²

² The great dream of freedom was core stone of 'golden age' of Russian literature and way of thinking, and transformed and developed its character during all recent history. Alexander Griboyedov, Petr Chaadayev, Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov created brilliant lines and images presenting this dream. Freedom was part of romanticism, accompanied in Russia by the dream of civil liberation, inspired by French revolution and the Decembrists revolt in 1825. The idea of liberation of peasant people from slavery gave power to the next generations of writers and journalists. The magazine *Sovremennik*, *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* and other publications developed intellectual debate using 'aesopian language' under struck censorship. Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Lev Tolstoy payed serious attention to the consequences of fighting for freedom and its moral and existential aspects. In late 19th century, the dream of freedom and first liberal reforms gave fresh start to led journalist and writer's movement for democratization. In the 20th century, freedom was also romanticized by Alexander Blok, Maxim Gorky, and many others. During Stalin's terror, the dream of freedom was best presented in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*, in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*; in Khrushchev and Brezhnev time it was presented by Sinyavsky and Daniel samizdat and dissident literature. See Victor Terras (ed.), *Handbook of Russian literature*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1985; Nina Barkovskaya and Mark Lipovetsky (eds.), *Russkaya literatura XX-XXI vekov: Napravleniya i techeniya*, Ural State Pedagogical University Press, Ekaterinburg 2011.

1. *A Heavy Legacy*

It is not an exaggeration to say that in practice, the liberal experience in Russia was too short-lived and rigid. Liberals were primarily preoccupied with the theoretical aspects of their ideas and had little awareness about their implementation. The cost of this idealistic approach was effectively high. I would never forget the experience of my friends and colleagues in August 1991: we were ready to sacrifice for press, information and all the other civil freedoms when we stayed around the Russian White House in August 1991. However, we could not predict that in the new Russia – free from communism and censorship – journalists would be regularly murdered while their killers and masterminds would live with impunity and attacks and threats would become an everyday occurrence.³

It is remarkable that for the 25th anniversary of the failed coup, the event was not been presented as it had been in years past, as the heroic and romantic effort of a people united in demanding innovation and democratization of their country. Rather, in the summer of 2016 many national TV programs described the events of August 1991 as a big mistake, a betrayal, a sort of ‘color revolution’ masterminded from abroad. Additionally, some analysts wrote that people had been deceived by small groups of liberals.⁴ We are clearly witnessing a transformation and new divisions within the Russian society today, and it is time to carefully study the country’s recent past

³ Yelena Vartanova, *Postsovetskiiye transformatsii rossiyskikh SMI i zhurnalistiki*, MediaMir, Moskva 2014. See also *The Russian Media Guide to the troubled world of independent journalism*, The Calvert Journal, 2017 (<http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2228/russian-media-guide-to-the-troubled-world-of-independent-journalism>).

⁴ For example, the popular political talk show *Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovym* where his guests used to blame liberals and ‘democrats’ of 1991 and point at them for tragedy of Donbass people and all tragedies of Russia in general.

in order to understand the main trends and problems of the period. What happened to our country? Why did it happen? These traditional questions appear in everyday discussions in Russia, and remind me of the period of late Soviet stagnation, when people spent their evenings debating the nation’s past history and future potential.

Could the concepts of liberalism and freedom of the press have any future in Russia? Many experts and many writers and businessmen have given a negative response, writing long and short texts regarding the subject.⁵ Nevertheless, we can be optimistic and we must learn lessons from Russian history in order to build an effective new concept and practice based on that experience. First, we must understand what liberalism meant for the younger generations of Russians living under perestroika – as I was – and for our older colleagues and teachers. This concept was essentially associated with rule of law, civil freedoms, human rights, free media, and a market economy. The latter element, the market economy, was considered in our dreams as the ideal ‘paradise’ while, in contrast, the socialist system was seen as the ‘hell.’ We can remember how the Soviet era TV reports narrating the South Bronx were, with the ‘spring/autumn attacks’ of workers in New York and other ‘shocking’ stories were replaced by reports from the 5th Avenue showing its glossy glass windows and lights. This change in narration regarding the United States and its basic values symbolized a total conceptual transformation of the official position towards the “beloved enemy.” For

⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is true and everything is possible: the surreal heart of the new Russia*, Public Affairs, New York 2014; Mikhail Zygar, *All The Kremlin’s Men: Inside The Court of Vladimir Putin*, Public Affairs, New York 2016, Nadezhda Azhgikhina, *It’s Not Too Late for an Honest Russian-American Dialogue*, The Nation, 17 January 2017 (<https://www.thenation.com/article/its-not-too-late-for-an-honest-russian-american-dialogue/>).

Russians, this model became the only possible alternative that apparently welcomed the ideal of building a new capital order in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, no one – including the brave ‘architects of perestroika’ and the new Russian leaders – had had a lived experience of capitalism. What could and should have been implemented in the new Russia was no more than a very general and vague notion, rather than tangible policies.

This phenomenon had deep roots in the surrealistic perception of the external world that the totally closed societies had, the Soviet society among them. I remember that time very well: I was a young journalist for *Ogonek*, a national weekly magazine that became a frontline of the ‘liberalization’ of information. Its publications offered the audience new pages of Russian and international history, publishing diaries and testimonies from the Gulags, the truth about Stalin’s repressions, and the prohibited texts of exiles and dissident writers and artists. Together with two other weeklies – *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Moskovskiye Novosti* – the magazine created the basis for a new ideology and a new cultural canon in Russia during years of perestroika. In 1988 *Ogonek* published Bukharin’s last will, his manifesto of ‘communism with a human face.’ Following its publication, thousands of letters came to the magazine and many people wrote that they have been waiting for this moment all of their life.⁶ 1989 was a very important year: the Berlin wall collapsed, the iron curtain disappeared, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR – and its Congress of People’s deputies of USSR – had been (more or less) independently elected, and Article 6 in the Soviet Constitution had been removed, eradicating the monopoly of the ruling role of Communist Party. In effect, 1989 was the

end of the dominance of Soviet ideology. Beginning in 1988, the young legal experts Mikhail Fedotov, Yuri Baturin and Vladimir Entin drafted the first ‘law on press and other mass media,’ effectively establishing freedom of information, while other enthusiastic intellectuals began studying legal drafts to fully implement glasnost. We all understood freedom as a gift, a golden rain, and lived those emotional moments of hope. Nevertheless, we did not struggle for that freedom as other journalists in many old democracies had for decades; we did not understand that achieving freedom required an everyday effort. We perceived it as a bright wedding celebration and this was the most dramatic mistake that we made.

The aforementioned ‘law on press and other mass media’ was based on the best European legal practices and was approved in the perfect framework for a detective story (published twenty years later by its authors). The draft reached the parliament through a publication in the Estonian language sports newspaper *Sportileht* and later in *Molodezh Estonii*, as it needed to be officially published before the first hearing in the parliament and in Estonia the press had slightly more freedom. This mechanism fostered a clandestine transportation of copies with translation through to parliament building. Finally, the law was approved by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 12 June 1990. The law gave the basis for future media laws in Russia and all other former Soviet states. For the first time in Russian history, after more than 300 years of total state control and censorship in the media (with a short exception in the spring of 1917), censorship was declared illegal and every citizen had the right to establish private media. In addition, journalists received the right to refuse to write anything against their principles.

⁶ Some of these letters are collected in the volume: Christopher Cerf, Marina Albee, Lev N. Gushchin, and Lynn Visson (eds.), *Small Fires: Letters from the Soviet People to Ogonyok Magazine, 1987-1990*, Summit Books, New York 1990.

2. *Hopes and Disillusions in Post-Soviet Russia*

Today, the law on press and other mass media is still active in Russia and is generally considered as one of the best media laws in Europe. Nevertheless, its implementation was problematic from the very beginning as it was to an extent the development of a market economy. I would never forget our discussions at *Ogonek*, when we started the first judicial case for our independence from the dominant Pravda Publishing House. Being a part of *Ogonek*, the most popular weekly in the country, was a great responsibility. We truly believed that gaining independence from the official party-oriented publisher was an opportunity to automatically become incredibly wealthy, and began planning higher salaries for journalists and even bought a sort of historical palace in the center of Moscow for our office space. Many colleagues far more experienced and older than I were certain that such transformation had to occur. We won the court case in 1991, the market economy followed, and we remained without money and facilities while the property of the magazine passed on to the new owners – former Soviet directors – and we could not manage to work without extra sponsorship. In 1992, the first registration service formalized more than 400 names of newly established media in one year. Essentially, more than one media channel had been registered every day. Everyone wanted to establish their own media station, nobody wanted to cooperate, nobody wanted to establish an association of owners or workers, and the idea of trade unionism was tossed into garbage bin of history as an abandoned Soviet relic.

Newcomers – with no understanding of professional and ethical standards – arrived at the media field in a new framework free from any regulations. In parallel, almost all existing publications eliminated their proofreading and checking sections because of budgetary concerns and as a result the quality of

information became a significant issue. In this moment, a new form of censorship came to complete this dramatic picture. Surprisingly, many enthusiasts were eager to support this new censorship.

In fact, in the aftermath of the failed August 1991 coup, new Russian authorities banned the communist media, giving their first demonstration that evidently the old practices were coming back. Only the new NGO Glasnost Defense Foundation called for equal justice for all political movements and media outlets, but its voice was a weak minority and remained basically unheard. A real challenge for press freedom and a nascent democracy as a whole occurred during the Russian constitutional crisis and the storming of the White House in October 1993. At that time, most of liberal publications (and Moscow intellectuals) supported that shelling. The famous dissidents Andrei Sinyavsky and Vladimir Maksimov overcame their previous disagreements with each other and together wrote an open letter stating that democracy could not be built with non-democratic tools. None of the liberal publications wanted to publish this letter. Finally, this sensitive appeal was printed in the communist newspaper *Pravda*, while a kind of neo-bolshevism – a way of thinking that was influencing the political, civic and media practices – came to complete the picture of post-Soviet Russia.

3. *Oligarchs, Media and Politicization of Journalists*

Another trend evidenced in the failure of Russian liberalism is related to the use of media by their new owners, the ‘oligarchs,’ who used mass communication as one of the most effective tools for consolidating political and financial interests. In fact, most of the newly established media organizations failed in the mid-90s and the sector was quickly polarized into oligopolies. Indeed, the media market was divided between just a few giants and journalists began to ‘serve’ them. Some professionals truly

believed that private owners would encourage press freedom because of their personal interest in the issue, counting on 'good oligarchs' as possible saviors of the liberal dream.

In this framework of competition and privately owned communication, the 'media wars' between the Gusinsky and Berezovsky media empires on national television and the participation of journalists in the guise of public relations officers for the elections while working at the same time for the media – some even promoting two opponents at the same time – played a dramatic role in negative public attitudes toward journalism and media. In effect, journalists lost any trusted credibility. At the same time, income inequality grew dramatically, with the salaries of ordinary media workers in peripheral regions at times more than 100 times lower than those of correspondents and editors in Moscow. Furthermore, those (fortunate) operating television stations began to have their rights limited and could potentially be destroyed at any moment. Professional solidarity disappeared, seen clearly when the 'good oligarchs' sold the NTV channel and changed its policy and the Russian Union of Journalists called to protect it. Nevertheless, people from the regions did not support this call.

In close parallel, violence against journalists – including beating and even murdering – became a regular practice, and most of these cases ended in the impunity of the culprits. According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation and the Russian Union of Journalists, since 1993 more than 350 journalists and media managers have been assassinated, have disappeared or have died in unclear circumstances.⁷ The database "Conflicts in the Media"

⁷ See Glasnost Defense Foundation, *Digest n° 785*, 16 January 2017 (<http://www.gdf.ru/digest/item/1/1445#z1>); Luke Harding, *To be a journalist in Russia is suicide*, *The Guardian*, 24 November 2008 (<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/nov/24/anna-politkovskaya-russia-press-freedom>) and the list of journalists killed in Russia prepared by John Crawford and Boris Timoshenko (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_journalists_killed_in_Russia).

has registered dozens of cases of violence of journalists rights all over Russia, including threats, attacks, firing and various forms of censorship.⁸ Especially in the 2000s, control of the media came from financial groups – very closely associated with established power structures – and (although officially illegal) censorship flourished and became more and more sophisticated.

In addition, self-censorship became an everyday practice, while independent voices were marginalized from the mainstream media to the internet or other small publications. Since 1991 – and especially after 9/11 when governments across the world, including Russia's, implemented measures to prevent terrorism including restrictions for media freedom – many amendments to the media law have been omitted while a great number of diverse restrictions of media freedom have been introduced. It is not an exaggeration to say that Russian independent media and civil society were those who suffered the most from international sanctions in so far as each new sanction was accompanied by further restrictions for independent media and NGOs operating in the country. Apparently, we could demand ourselves if these sanctions were by origin conceived against the independent voices in Russia. Indeed, the politicians and oligarchs targeted by sanctions have been reimbursed by the state budget and have remained free from any criticism and internal investigations, instead becoming sort of self-styled patriotic martyrs.

Nevertheless, the media framework that exists in Russia is still rather diverse and presents a number of extraordinary

⁸ See Ann Cooper, *The death of glasnost: How Russia's attempt at openness failed, Committee to Protect Journalists*, 27 April 2015 (<https://cpj.org/2015/04/attacks-on-the-press-death-of-glasnost-russia-attempt-at-openness-failed.php>); Alyssa Rosenberg, *How censorship works in Vladimir Putin's Russia*, *The Washington Post*, 9 February 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../how-censorship-works-in-vladimir-putins-russia/>); Nadezhda Azhgikhina, *10 years Without Anna Politkovskaya*, *Rights in Russia*, 21 October 2016 (<http://www.rightsinrussia.info/advisory-council/advisory-committee/azhgikhina-3>).

examples of strong professionalism and innovative management: some national political newspapers such as *Novaya Gazeta*, the radio station *Ekho Moskvyy*, the television channel *Dozhd*, and many others are good examples of professional journalism, appreciated even internationally. Similarly, some Russian regions also present examples of strong independent media such as the TV channel (also now online) *Tomsk 2*, the local networks *Yakutsk Vecherny*, *Gorodskiy Vesty* in Sverdlovsk region, *Prima Media* and *Arsenyevskiy Vesty* in Vladivostok, *Deloboy Peterburg* and *Fontanka* in Saint Petersburg, the publishing house *Altapress* in Altay, and dozens of private newspapers in the Urals, Northern and Southern Russia. Many of them started their businesses in the 1990s, some of them with Western support. Additionally, the association of independent regional publishers has more than 50 active members with discrete commercial success.

Almost all of these smaller media networks faced multiple problems and challenges. However, they created a basis for future development: they are trusted by their audience, they elaborated new strategies to combat pressure from above, and they developed their agenda autonomously. These new online media platforms also demonstrate new communication trends and, most importantly, show the many young journalists who came to the field and did not give up, believing in their victory in this battle for the ‘free word’ and in the mission of journalism.

4. *A Postponed Liberal Agenda*

Hence, we could say that since perestroika and the first victory of the liberal model in 1991, the liberal concept in the media (and about the media) has been transformed several times. However, these long years of liberal economy and liberal declarations in politics did not bring the Russian media to a

sustainable market model nor did it introduce instruments to protect democracy, media freedoms, and the role of journalists’ in society. In the 2000s, the liberal concept slowly began to lose its dominant position. Not many voices today recall the famous First Russian Civic Forum in 2000, when then-newly elected president Putin was co-chairing the event together with Lyudmila Alexeyeva, an icon of the dissident movement Moscow Helsinki Group.⁹ In his speech, the president talked about a liberal path for the country, promising to lead Russia to a full and deep democracy with the triumph of freedoms and active cooperation at international level.

At that time, a fifth of Russian citizens – almost 30 million people – were receiving free aid from Russian NGOs every year in the form of training, consultations, courses, etc. Hence, NGOs became an important part of Russia’s society and economy, creating some 2,000 working positions and helping people survive during the difficult ‘shock therapy’ era that transformed the Russian socio-economic system. Nevertheless, in a short period of time liberal trends were replaced by other ones associated with a ‘strong state’ and ‘vertical power.’ These included anti-Western or so-called ‘patriotic’ voices that referred to a ‘unique Russian way,’ the emergence of religious activists participating in the fields of media and politics, and the Orthodox Church playing the role of exclusive ‘moral jury,’ claiming to replace the former Soviet ideological department in the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Fundamentalism was not blamed but was rather promoted in TV shows and the mainstream media. The new legislative framework created strong challenges for NGOs.

Hundreds of small civil organizations ended their activities, partly as a result of these restrictions and more

⁹ See Alexander Nikitin and Jane Buchanan, *The Kremlin’s Civic Forum: Cooperation or Co-optation for Civil Society in Russia?*, *Demokratizatsiya*, 10/2, March 2002.

generally as a result of increasing state control of the media. Today – especially in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis and anti-Russian sanctions – mainstream political discussion and media debates are a far cry from those of the early 2000s and the hopes expressed in the Civic Forum. Indeed, anti-Western trends and anti-Americanism have become mainstream while propaganda has completely replaced journalism on the national television. Unfortunately, the Western response to that attitude has worked as a mirror, demonizing Russia as a new ‘empire of evil’ and the Russian media landscape as a desert. As we have demonstrated, this is not entirely true. Nevertheless, a consistent practice of journalists based on liberal and independent media principles is difficult to realize.

The recent legal restrictions and misuse of legislation are effectively challenging many independent voices. “Since its adoption, the “Law on Counteracting Extremist Activities” has been used to suppress freedom of expression, dissenting any critical voices in the Russian press and blogosphere in cases where the subject of criticism is not a particular person but rather a broader group of people or a system itself” said Galina Arapova, director of the Mass Media Defense Center and board member of Article 19. Evidently, the definition itself of “extremism” is very broad and unclear. The number of court cases brought under this law has grown fast. Recently, Article 282 of the criminal code (hate speech) has been also used against media for critical publications. In some cases, the incitement to hate towards the so-called ‘social groups’ had been evidenced by experts of linguistics. Among those ‘social groups’ were the employees of the regional administration, policemen, cossacks, judges, etc. It means that any critical publication, for example, digging corruption in local police could become a target.

Media legal experts also referred to many cases of misuse of the law, for example, a newspaper that could be taken to court for incitement of hatred by publishing old photos from

the Second World War with a Nazi flag as illustration of historical material. The criminal liability for defamation was introduced again some months after it was decriminalized in 2012. The new provision provides harsh financial penalties even in comparison with the previous legislation and includes a special section “on libels against judges, jurors, prosecutors and law enforcement officials.”¹⁰ Engaging in an investigation on corruption, among others, is now even more problematic considering that the new version of law protects personal data. Recent examples of court cases where top managers and state officials sued independent media organizations after they reported on their luxury expenses clearly supports this.

Regardless, complaints against the media and journalists for defamation and damage to dignity and business reputation – which made up the majority of all cases against journalists some years ago – are no longer so prevalent in Russia. In the 1990s and 2000s, rich and powerful individuals used to bring journalists and media to the court. Today, more often the controlling institutions initiate cases against the media for violations of different laws and regulations (including things related to the internet), while the anti-extremist and anti-hatred legislations are functional to this task. Recently, the media legal experts counted more than 20 new initiatives and regulations related to the media, and most of them were to many extents restrictive and were not discussed with the professional community or the public at all. Article 144 of the criminal code – a supposed protection for journalists from harassment – and the establishment of criminal liability for the “obstruction of the lawful professional activities of journalists” is used very rarely.

¹⁰ RiR, Galina Arapova on a New Database on Media Law, Rights in Russia (<http://www.rightsinrussia.info/archive/interviews-1/arapova>); Galina Arapova (ed.), *Tsena Slova: Novyye Grani Diffamatsii*, Tsentr Zashchity Prav Smi, Voronezh 2013.

Further, media owners also face new restrictions, including limitations on foreign investment and new regulations for advertisement. Several printed media organizations – mostly funded through joint and private investment – have been closed or have stopped producing printed versions and been relegated to working online. Indeed, new internet regulations created various restrictions as well: the so called ‘bloggers law’ required any web site with more than 3,000 visitors per day to be considered as a media outlet and be legally responsible for all published information. Bloggers could no longer be anonymous on online platforms and this type of media could also be banned without warning. The recent initiative for the implementation of the ‘Yarovaya law’ – a law that demands total control of all internet activities in Russia – is incredibly expensive, far from practically realized, and has prepared the Russian public for a great discussion. Unfortunately, the majority of Russians are not aware that freedom of the media, journalists’ rights, or end of impunity are their own business and have no interest in those issues. This fact – as well as the absence of professional solidarity and cooperation between media actors – contributes significantly to the current situation in the Russian media field. Recalling the traditional Russian questions “What is to be done?” we may think about the simple and well known points of the general liberal agenda. Nothing new. This contains open discussion, education and awareness including media literacy for everybody, development of self-regulation in the media, transparency in the market etc. Nevertheless, above all, enforcing an active citizenship – through daily, hard and qualified work of journalists that strengthen free institutions – is crucial for implementing free press and realizing a sustainable democratic regime.

Chapter VIII

Unsuccess’ of Russian Liberalism: Contemporary Reflections Vladislav Zubok, LSE

From the time Peter the Great ‘brought Russia to Europe,’ Russian elites have imported and emulated the values of freedom and liberty engendered by the religious, intellectual, and political developments of western Europe.¹ Driven by the needs of modernization and the desire to be members of the ‘civilized club’ of developed nations, these elites attempted to periodically apply these principles to Russian state-building efforts and socio-economic reforms. These attempts began with Catherine the Great and her grandson Alexander I, concurrent with the first massive influx of liberal ideas and values from Europe. These attempts resumed during the period of Great Reforms, then again during the first Russian revolution and the ‘Duma Monarchy,’ and most remarkably during the brief interregnum of February-October 1917. These efforts resulted in complete social anarchy and economic destruction that eventually paved the way for the dictatorship of Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks.

¹ On the history of Russian liberalism see Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York 1966; Gary M. Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 1828-1866*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992; Julia Berest, *The Emergence of Russian Liberalism. Alexander Kunitsyn in Context, 1783-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011; Anton A. Fedyashin, *Liberals under Autocracy: Modernization and Civil Society in Russia, 1866-1904*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2012.

1. *The Roots of Liberal 'Unsuccess' in Russia*

From an intellectual-cultural perspective, the Soviet communist period can be viewed as a 'substitute' for liberalism. Instead of appropriating European liberalism for state-building, the radical segment of the Russian intelligentsia embraced a different European concept: Marxist socialism. Similarly, instead of serving as a European apprentice and staying in the civilised club, Lenin and his disciples envisioned themselves as makers of a new world. While a descendent of the ideals of the European Enlightenment, the communist utopia was in fact a radical negation of the European liberal tradition. Instead of liberty, it offered social justice. The movement had remarkable success in Russia. Of course, the Bolshevik government used unbridled terror in order to impose its millenarian vision on Russians and other peoples of the former Tsarist empire. At the same time, it is difficult to deny the fact that at socialism, in stark contrast to liberalism, found great receptivity in Russian society.

After World War II, European liberalism was seen as dead and discredited, yet the global intervention of the United States gave liberal ideas newfound vitality. These ideas became the ideological foundation of a highly successful Western project that, in the 1970s, appeared to be the winning global project. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had failed to 'liberalize' the Stalinist version of socialism deeply embedded in the bureaucratic and fiscal/economic structures of the state. In the new global model, the Soviet Union appeared to be falling to the role of global pariah. The Soviet-Russian elites, who were once seen as the vanguard of the global left in the 1960s, were now frustrated and disenchanting. Younger intellectuals had lost faith in the kingdom of social justice and become 'westernizers.' They returned to the ideas of a once-reviled liberalism and began to admire its achievements and culture in Western countries.²

Gorbachev's perestroika was not a liberal project, but its evolution reflected the triumph of a 'new' global liberalism and the dissolution of the socialist project. Mikhail Gorbachev launched his reforms in an attempt to rejuvenate Soviet socialism by dismantling Stalinist 'aberration,' yet only five years later, he redirected his reforms entirely towards the principles of global liberalism. During his final year in office – while still the General Secretary of the Communist Party – Gorbachev claimed the country had evolved to a social democracy, but did so at the time when European social democracy had already lost its distinct identity and become diluted in the US-led global liberal consensus.³ Above all, it was Gorbachev's reluctant and haphazard liberalization of the Soviet Union that undermined the state and its economy, ending in the complete disintegration of the Soviet project along nationalist and geographic lines.

In 1991, in a new, smaller Russia, Boris Yeltsin became the first elected president. As a result, he was bestowed with enormous political legitimacy. He was also the first national leader who attempted to implement an impressive array of liberal doctrines onto Russia's state-building efforts, particularly regarding economic and social reforms. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin was hardly personally identified as a liberal, yet he staunchly believed that liberalism – as a set of economic and political principles – was the only way for Russia to become an advanced and prosperous society. Over the next twenty-five

² Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's children: the last Russian intelligentsia*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2009; Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2006.

³ On Gorbachev's evolution to 'new thinking' and Social Democracy see Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West. Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the Idea of the Cold War*, Columbia University Press, New York 2000; Archie Brown, *Did Gorbachev as the General Secretary Become a Social Democrat?*, Europe-Asia Studies, 65/2, 2013.

years, Russia transformed itself beyond belief. However, from the viewpoint of its architects and ardent advocates, the liberal project in Russia went disastrously wrong. The Russian state did not collapse as it had in 1917, and the Russian economy even recovered under these reforms. Yet the state and the society under Vladimir Putin resembled more a corrupt Third World authoritarianism than a developed liberal democracy.

The repeated failures of reforms in Russia, especially in the 1990s, created a sense of ‘unsuccess,’ a fatal path dependency. Today in Russia, anything referred to as ‘liberal’ seems a doomed enterprise. The word itself appears to be cursed. In a final irony, Western liberalism has entered another stage of its crisis, and the debates about the causes of this crisis have only begun. At this juncture, both the Russian leadership and the Russian public lack any radical substitute for liberalism. Instead, they have turned to conservative values. In 2013, Putin even went so far as to declare that Russia stood as the defender of European conservatism, the representative of ‘true European values’ in the face of the cosmopolitan, postmodern, ‘decadent’ liberal practices of the West.

There are several obvious explanations for the ‘unsuccess’ of liberalism in Russia. Above all, that the Russian elites imposed too many changes too quickly on a society that was not yet ready to adapt to liberal norms and rules of behaviour. What appeared ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ for American liberals was not at all inherent to or natural for Russian society. History had not provided Russia with opportunities for the gradual development of a liberal ‘cultural code.’ Instead, liberalism was injected into the nation much like last-minute medicine into a dying patient. In 1917, this injection led to a lethal outcome. In 1991 a similar injection, while nonfatal, left Russia a deeply traumatized, divided, and chaotic country.

At the same time, there are less clear explanations related to the specificities of Russian liberalism as it historically

developed on Russia’s political ‘soil.’ Russian liberalism, of course, underwent remarkable changes over the last century. Late Soviet and post-Soviet liberalism hold almost nothing in common with Russian pre-revolutionary liberalism: the latter lacked any populism (“love for people”) and focused instead on pursuit of individual civic freedoms, on individual cases of political prisoners, and on “being free in the unfree society.”⁴ Yet there are recurring features that are often unnoticed by observers. It seems that with each new ‘incarnation,’ Russian liberalism has had to learn some basic lessons anew. It resists learning from its past failures and mistakes. Above all, Russian liberals refuse to acquiesce to basic structural limitations for their experiments, such as the country’s standing in the world, Russia’s political and economic history, and Russian culture. While this essay is not the place for a full treatment of such complex concepts, I will map out several issues that may be useful to consider in order to better understand the ‘unsuccess’ of Russian liberalism in the past and the challenges that face Russian liberals in the future.

2. Liberalism, Representative Politics, and Governability

Following the end of state-sponsored terror in the late Soviet period, it became possible to discuss political ideas in one’s private environment among trusted friends. In their discussions at home and later in the Samizdat publications, some Moscow intellectuals acknowledged the lack of liberal culture in Russia.

⁴ Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratization and Radical Nationalism in Russia*, Routledge, London-New York 2005; Lyudmila Alekseyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, Little, Brown, Boston 1990.

They also began to argue that the Soviet state and bureaucracy was archaic, corrupt, and inefficient. It stood in the way of basic civic freedoms, and impeded the progress of the country's economic and social modernization. The best way to improve the state, produce effective governability, and promote modernization was to observe the constitutional principles of 'checks and balances' and to import Western liberal principles of mass political representation, free press, and government transparency. Liberal legalism in dissident circles of the mid-1960s gave an impetus to the movement of human rights defenders.⁵

These claims – so familiar to critics of the current Russian regime – are difficult to question in and of themselves. At the same time, as Russian history has repeatedly shown, they pose two contradictory problems in terms of state governability and management of mass politics. Constitutional reforms and freedom of the press by themselves do not create propitious conditions for state governability. In fact, under certain unfavourable conditions, particularly during severe economic and financial crises, these reforms may contribute to destabilization and anarchy.

During the late 18th and 19th centuries, Russian liberals were both members of the governing estates and staffed the Russian bureaucracy. This changed significantly when Russian liberalism became a broader social phenomenon, expanding to involve the middle classes. Liberals of the early 20th century, who formed the Constitutional Democratic Party, waged political wars against Russian bureaucrats. Carried away by their political agenda, many Russian liberals of that generation failed to realize that they had much in common with the state bureaucrats. The gap between 'systemic' (bureaucratic) liberalism and 'unsystemic' liberalism in Russia resurfaced in the late 1990s, after the

⁵ Benjamin Nathans, *The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'Pin and the Idea of Rights under "Developed Socialism,"* *Slavic Review*, 66/4, Winter 2007, pp. 630-663.

initial idealistic expectations of Russia's reforms disappeared. Revulsion of the state is a recurring phenomenon of Russian liberalism. Oftentimes, one hears complaint that 'there are not enough good liberals' in the Russian bureaucracy. These complaints echo the old idealistic chant that 'there are not enough good communists' in the Communist Party.

Another recurring problem was the difficulty that Russian liberals had with mass politics. During 1917, the tiny elite of Russian liberals were drowned in the political sea created by the regime of universal political rights. Just like the Tsarist administration earlier, Russian liberals were unable to handle mass participatory politics, particularly during its most turbulent, populist and demagogic phase. As a result, the liberals quickly lost initiative to radical socialists and eventually became the first victims of the Bolshevik dictatorship. Most of the Russian liberals at the time rejected the option of 'strong hand,' an authoritarian dictatorship that would have been a lesser evil to Bolshevism.

A similar pattern occurred during the second round of liberalism from 1990 to 1998. Liberal ideas had phenomenal success in mobilizing the public because they were seen as an alternative to the failed communist model. This time, in contrast to 1917, liberalism in Russia seemed to be 'on the right side of history.' Yet Russian liberal politicians mishandled mass politics in a spectacular way: they refused to form a political party until 1993, instead positing themselves as an apolitical, almost moral movement. Perhaps a long-term, albeit false, association between liberals and the Russian intelligentsia played a role in this. Russian liberals, having come to power under Yeltsin, showed an intense aversion to organized mass politics. Instead of institutionalizing it, they preferred to use the liberal press and means of 'political technology' – including open bribes – to deny victory to their enemies, the communists and nationalists.⁶

The new reforms, ardently supported by the professional classes in Russian capitals and some other cities, turned out to be directed against those classes. In sum, Russian economic reforms killed the mass base for liberal democracy – most of teachers, technical and humanist intelligentsia, artists, dissidents and others who originally championed ‘freedom against communism,’ fell victim to harsh market conditions. Some continued to vote, desperately, against ‘liberal parties’ who criticized economic reforms – such as *Yabloko* – while others shifted to communist and nationalist opposition. Faced with rapidly diminishing political ratings, Russian liberals of the 1990s reacted to the chaotic privatization of state property, that had already been occurring under Gorbachev, by choosing the option of a liberal oligarchy, a small group of ‘enlightened’ liberal bureaucrats and ‘businessmen’ whose new liberal regime was permitted to take over huge chunks of state property. It was not a return to the Russian pre-revolutionary traditions of entrepreneurship and property. Rather, it was the legalization of kleptocracy, a culture of top-down corruption and endemic illegitimacy of the elites, the ideas of public good, and property rights.⁷

⁶ Historiography of the post-Soviet liberalism has not yet been written. On the first attempts of Russian liberals of various strands to contemplate on the recent past see Pavel Aven and Alfred Kokh, *Revolutsiia Gaidara. Istoriia reform 90-kh iz pervykh ruk*, Alpina, Moskva 2013; Viktor Sheinis, *Vzlet i padeniie parlamenta. Perelomnyie gody v rossiiskoi politike*, 1985-1993, Voll. 1-2, Carnegie Center, Moscow 2005.

⁷ This was part of the political strategy of Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais, and other young liberal economic reformers in the Yeltsin government. The most frank and critical account of this is: Peter Reddaway and Dmitrii Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms. Market Bolshevism against Democracy*, US Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C. 2001. On the chaotic and uncontrolled privatization of state property in late Gorbachev's years see Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State. Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1998. On the property relations in the Tsarist Russia see Ekaterina Pravilova, *A Public Empire. Property and the Quest for the Common Good in Imperial Russia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014.

These two tiny but powerful groups became the only – and very precarious – social base for liberalism in Russia, as they stood in opposition to communism and reactionary nationalism. Some Russian liberals, like Anatoly Chubais, placed their last bet in a strong authoritarian leader who would be constitutionally empowered to resist radical and reactionary waves of popular resentment.⁸ In supporting this, these liberals ironically contributed to the constitutional platform of Vladimir Putin. In fact, the new President did begin to restore Russia's governability, but in the process he not only subordinated both liberal bureaucrats and new billionaires to his regime but also renounced some of the ‘shibboleths’ of Russian liberalism, such as freedom of the press and the ‘checks and balances’ of state institutions. Today, when architects of the 1990s ‘liberal economy’ speak about the need to revive Russian liberalism (Anatoly Chubais included among them), their breath-taking cynicism should remind everyone that liberalism cannot be revived in Russia without a honest and transparent analysis of what occurred in the 1990s. Russian liberalism may have been doomed by many serious problems. At the same time, as a broad political movement, liberalism in Russia was destroyed by liberals-in-government.

3. Liberalism and Russian Nationalism

One problem for Russian liberalism was its inability to coexist with Russian nationalism, a natural phenomenon in the age of mass ideologies and politics. In the ‘first period’ of 1905 to 1917, Russian liberals equated Russian nationalism with the xenophobic and anti-Semitic Black Hundred movement,

⁸ On the politics of Russian liberalism under Boris Yeltsin see Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia. Myths and Reality*, Carnegie, Moscow 1999.

assuming it was inspired by the reactionary circles of the Tsarist government. Among Russian liberals, only Peter Struve attempted to develop a ‘concept’ of liberal Russian nationalism, understood as inclusionary cultural nationalism, based on Russian language and culture.⁹

From 1990 to 1991, the second coming of Russian democratic mass politics, Late Soviet liberals took a similarly negative view of manifestations of Russian nationalism. To them, Russian nationalism was seen only as reactionary and ‘fascist.’ They viewed Russian nationalists as defenders of the Stalinist empire and a totalitarian past. At the same time, they viewed almost every non-Russian nationalist leader and nationalist movement as their ‘natural’ ally against the ‘imperial’ state. However, the liberals of the 1990s failed to offer or develop any of their own concepts of nationhood. Some attempts, by Valery Tishkov and others, to form a concept of non-ethnic Russian – *Rossiiskiy* – civic nation did not find support of liberal mainstream. Like their Western liberal counterparts, Russian liberals found it easier to deal with the identities of the ethnic and cosmopolitan minorities than with the national identity of majority of the country.¹⁰

⁹ Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905-1944*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1980; Olga Malinova, *Liberalnyi natsionalizm (seredina XIX – nachalo XX veka)*, RIK Rusanova, Moskva 2000; Olga Zhukova, *Edinstvo kul'tury i politiki: liberalno-konservativnyi proekt P.B. Struve v sozdanii Rossii*, in Olga A. Zhukova and Vladimir K. Kantor (eds.), *Petr Berngardovich Struve*, Rosspen, Moskva 2012, pp. 105-115.

¹⁰ The literature on this point is insufficient and highly contested. The confrontation between Soviet liberals and *Pamyat* society in 1986 shaped the standoff between the two camps during the perestroika years. When Yeltsin clashed with the Russian Supreme Soviet in 1993 and destroyed it by force in October, many Russian intellectuals applauded this decision as the only way to suppress the “brown-red forces.” On the contested ground of Russian liberalism and nationalism under the Soviet regime see Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia. The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev*, I.B.Tauris, London 2017.

Following an initial romance with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, most Russian liberals rejected him as a ‘reactionary prophet,’ mainly due to his harsh criticism of economic liberalization and privatization schemes in addition to his unabashed defence of the ‘Russian people’ in the face of liberal reformers. From 1992 to 1993, Russian liberalism found itself on the side of the authoritarian presidency against the threat of a ‘brown-red’ coalition of nationalists and communists. Many liberal-minded intellectuals applauded Yeltsin’s destruction of the Supreme Soviet in October 1993 and three years later closed their eyes to the fictitious and manipulated presidential elections of 1996. The revulsion between liberalism and nationalism in Russia eventually became mutual. Various strands of imperialist and nationalist identity-building emerged, often helmed by charismatic speakers who presented liberals in Russia as an ‘anti-populist elite’ beholden to foreign powers, the United States above all. The self-identification of Russian liberals with the ‘intelligentsia’ served to aggravate this view. One century ago, liberals may have been averse to nationalism, but they at the very least referred to themselves ‘Russians’ while making efforts to reach out to non-Russian ethnic minorities. In the 1990s, the widespread view among ex-Soviet intellectuals with liberal ideas was a sort of national nihilism. Many of them even questioned that a ‘true intelligent’ individual in Russia could be non-Russian (*Russkiy*). This national nihilism centred solely on Russian national identity – not Tatar, Jewish, Georgian, etc. – and contributed to the complete domination of illiberal ideas in the sphere of national identity-construction.

4. *Culture, Identity, and Global Liberalism*

Most of ideas of liberals in Russia today are borrowed from American liberalism. This poses an additional problem in adapting it to Russian historical and cultural realities. After all, the American official and popular ideology offers freedom of the individual from state oppression and the ability to ‘pursue happiness’ – above all in the spheres of religion and business. American political culture demands complete separation of business and religious life from the state. Many political conflicts and divisions in American liberalism are caused by the tension around this fundamental aspiration. Guided by this aspiration, the American state in the 20th century built a global business-trade ‘empire’ that surpassed anything that humanity had ever before created.

Russia’s role in this global U.S.-constructed world can at best be marginal and complicated. In Russia, historically, the Russian Orthodox Church – like the Catholic Church in Poland or Islam elsewhere – was a foundational institution of Russian statehood and identity. Subjugation of the church in the Petrine system added to the tight connection between the religion and the state in Russia. Equally significant is that the concept of freedom of business based on sanctity of private property and civic rights, underlining the economic autonomy of an individual, has never been a fundamental aspiration in Russian culture, at least since Ivan the Terrible destroyed the merchants’ city of Novgorod as a rival of Moscow.

‘Trade,’ ‘business,’ and individual economic entrepreneurship were tainted notions in Russian culture far before the revolution and contributed to the victory of Bolshevism and the lasting power of the communist utopia. Instead of aspiring to economic and religious freedoms, most of Russians viewed them with doubt, suspicion and fear. As the vast majority of Russian intellectuals, who were not liberal, have indicated,

the main Russian aspiration was to have a strong, stable state able to protect citizens from both external threats and internal conflicting forces. While most of Americans would prefer to fight authoritarianism rather than lose their civic freedoms, the majority of Russians would prefer to sacrifice their civic freedom for the sake of security and stability. This strong cultural-historical pattern certainly creates ‘path dependency’ limitations for liberalism in Russia. These limitations affected Gorbachev’s reforms, as he hesitated to introduce shock therapy style economic reforms in 1990 and 1991. These limitations also hastened the demise of Yeltsin-era liberalism, following the implementation of shock therapy.

Liberals in Russia have been not blind to these limitations. Yet their answer to them historically has been: ‘Europe and the West will help us!’ Both in 1917 and in 1991, liberal publicists and politicians hoped that their alliances with western liberal democracies would help them drag their country towards a liberal ‘progressive’ future. And in both cases, they expected that somehow Western powers would understand their plight and offer Russia a special arrangement, in order to ensure its long-term strategic partnership in the ‘family of civilized nations.’ Instead, the country was forced to face geopolitical, economic, and financial realities that only further aggravated their prospects of liberal transformation. This was particularly felt in 1991, when Western countries, guided by a rigid, one-size-fits all ‘Washington consensus’ refused even to consider a special dispensation for Russian economic reforms. They also refused to provide a Marshall Plan to the struggling post-Soviet economy, all the while not forgetting to collect old Kerensky debts that the liberal predecessors of Gaidar and Chubais had made in 1917 in order to continue the war against Germany on the side of the Entente.

The “unsuccess” of domestic liberalism in the 1990s was mirrored in the frustrations of those who attempted to

implement liberal principles in Russia's foreign policy. Andrei Kozyrev – the most liberal foreign minister the country has ever had – expected that Russia would become a 'second Canada,' a country with special relationship with the United States and a place for American investments. Instead, the Russian government learned that world politics were guided by two sets of principles: liberal rules for members of the club and rules of realism for those who are excluded. The story of the Eastern expansion 'by invitation' of NATO and EU, without ever offering the same opportunity to Russia, is well known. It confirmed the growing suspicions of Russian political elites that international liberalism was not the best option for Russia. Instead of a 'second Canada,' Russia's place in the U.S.-led global liberal order appeared closer to Argentina, Columbia, or Nigeria. Most of the so-called economic liberals, and many of the businessmen their policies had generated, 'voted with their feet': abandoning their own country, they camped their moneys and families in comfortable locations in the West. In so doing, they acted in the same fashion as the corrupt elites in Latin America, Middle East, and other countries of the Third World, who tired of their resource-exporting economies to the Western market, and with a few exceptions, perpetuated the status quo instead of advancing social and economic development.

The place of liberal practitioners in the foreign policy discourse inside Russia gradually became filled by those who believed that Russia's 'destiny' was to build up a strong state and dominate the expanses of 'Eurasia.'¹¹ The ideas that Russia was an 'island Eurasia' were expressed by a wide array of individuals, from respectable philosophers like Vadim Tsymbursky to self-elected preachers like Aleksander Dugin, Alexandr Prokhanov, and Sergei Kurginyan. These ideas deeply resonated with the

¹¹ Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism. An Ideology of Empire*, Woodrow Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University Press, Washington D.C., 2008.

cultural-historical memories and 'codes' of the past, with a long pedigree of predecessors ranging from Danilevsky and Dostoyevsky to Rozanov, Trubetskoy, Savitsky, Vernadsky, etc. Their fantastic ideas and plots may appear frightening to Western analysts and intoxicating to many Russians, yet they do not provide sensible, realistic, and strategic means for Russia to advance with their neighbours and other great global powers. Instead of pursuing a modus of mutually profitable economic relations, these ideas leave Russia only a path towards permanent conflicts, tensions, Macchiavellian deals, garrison mentality and wars.

5. *The Future of Liberalism in Russia*

The immediate prospects of liberalism in Russia are bleak. To begin with, the external 'matrix' that fostered liberalism in the Soviet Union and Russia twenty-five years ago is currently under severe strains across the globe: in the United States, Great Britain, and in many members of European Union, the liberal consensus is cracking, under attack by new nationalisms and right-wing populism. The norms and values of liberal society appeared to have emerged triumphant after the fall of communism, yet as it is often the case, the 'developed liberal society' – just like its 'mature socialist' antagonist in the 70s' and 80s – proved to be ridden with internal contradictions, some of them new and some of them swept under the carpet since the 1980s. What are the prospects for a healthy Russian liberalism, when no one knows what liberalism in Greece, Italy, and France will look like tomorrow? It would be naïve to expect liberals in Russia to engender meaningful insights on the crisis of global liberalism.

Tolstoy begins his *Anna Karenina* by affirming "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." In a similar manner, liberals in Russia have their own 'unhappy family,' vastly different from their western colleagues.

They are now split into ‘systemic’ (in the government) and ‘anti-systemic’ (anti-regime) categories, and dangerously resemble the patterns of 1905 and 1991. There exists a lack of meaningful dialogue both among liberals themselves and between liberals and their critics – conservatives, nationalists, etc. Instead, the situation that currently exists is a sort of ‘intellectual war’ pitting everyone against everyone. They cannot even agree the most basic principles: was there liberal tradition in Russia? Did private property exist before the revolution?¹²

Unfortunately, liberal thinkers in Russia have not even begun to grapple with the fundamental problems of their country’s past experience. In order to do so, they must answer certain fundamental questions. First, what does a liberal democratic alternative to Putin’s hybrid authoritarianism look like? How is it possible to make a liberalized Russia governable, without the danger of drifting into chaos and conflict? Second, how to address the challenge of Russian (*Russkyi*) national identity in a multi-ethnic country where ethnic Russians constitute the overwhelming majority? How to form a liberal civic concept of Russian nationalism that would simultaneously protect the rights of minorities without threatening the political-territorial integrity of the country? Third, what can be an alternative foreign policy for a post-Putin Russia that would both serve to alleviate the current tensions with the United States and European Union and help provide Russia a decent place in the global liberal order of economy, finances, and trade? The future of liberalism in Russia will greatly depend on the intellectual and political ability of liberals themselves to tackle these important questions.

¹¹ See the debate between the historian Aleksandr Yanov and the philosopher Igor Klyamkin, the head of the Moscow-based “Liberal Initiative,” Aleksandr Yanov, *Artilleriya b’yet po svoim?*, Snob, 13 November 2016 (<https://snob.ru/profile/11778/blog/114935>).

Speakers and Contributors

Giuliano Amato is a Judge of the Constitutional Court of Italy since September 2013. He served as Secretary of the Treasury in Italy and was the Italian Prime Minister in 1992-1993 and in 2000-2001. From 2006 to 2008, he served as the Minister of the Interior. He was the vice-chairman of the Convention for the European Constitution. He has chaired the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani and the Center for American Studies in Rome. Professor of Law in several Italian universities and abroad, he has written books and articles on the economy and public institutions, European antitrust, personal liberties, comparative government, European integration and humanities. He has served as the Chair of Reser DOC's scientific committee from 2003 to 2013.

Nadezhda Azhgikbina, PhD at the Moscow State University, is Executive Secretary of the Russian Union of Journalists, Vice president of the European Federation of Journalists, member of the Russian PEN and member of the Union of Russian Writers. Author and editor of 20 books and collections on journalism, culture, gender and human rights issues. Russian coordinator of number of Russian-American and International

projects on freedom of media, safety of journalists, human rights and gender under the aegis of UN, UNESCO, OSCE, IFJ, Columbia University and other institutions.

Alexey Barabashev is a full Professor at the department of government and municipal administration, school of social science at the National Research University – Higher School of Economics in Moscow – where he teaches courses on civil service, including civil service reforms in Russia – and research associate at the Centre for Public Management and Governance, Faculty of Management, University of Johannesburg. His research interests are focused on theory of bureaucracy, and applications of the theory toward Russian practical needs, methodology of reflexive systems, philosophy of science. Since 2004, he also serves as the president (from 2011) and dean (2004-2011) of the School of Public Administration and Management and as the chair of the Department of Civil and Municipal Service at Higher School of Economics. Between 1991 and 2004 he was a professor and deputy dean of the School of Public Administration at the Moscow State University. Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center (Kennan

Institute for Advanced Russian Studies) in 1992 and in 2013, President of the Kennan Russian Alumni Association (1992-1996), President elected of the Alumni Association for Russia-U.S. Academic Exchange Programs (1996-2000). His production lists more than 200 publications including his latest books: *Reforming of the Public Service of Russian Federation* (2003-2006), 2006; *Public Service: Complex Approach*, 2009; *Administrative Reform and Reform of Public Service in Russia: the Problems of Coordination*, 2010.

Anton Barbashin is political analyst, managing editor and member of the editorial board at Intersection Project. He is also an analyst at the Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding and a member of the Polish-Russian discussion club with Stefan Batory Foundation in Warsaw. Formerly researcher with Center for Postindustrial Studies (Moscow) where he has researched Eurasian Union integration and ideology of the neo-Eurasianism. He graduated from the Novosibirsk State University of Economic and Management, where he studied International Relations. His publications appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *The American Interest*, *The National Interest*, *The Diplomat*, *The Moscow Times* among others.

Giancarlo Bosetti is the Director and one of the founders of Reset-Dialogues on Civilizations. He is the editor-in-chief of the online journal (www.resetdoc.org) and of *Reset*, a cultural magazine he founded in 1993. He was vice-editor-in-chief of the Italian daily *L'Unità*. He is currently a columnist for the Italian daily *La Repubblica* and he has been teaching at University La Sapienza, and

University Roma Tre. Among his books *La lezione di questo secolo*, a book-interview with Karl Popper (1997), *Cattiva maestra televisione*, (ed.) with essays by Karl Popper, John Condry and Pope John Paul II (2012), *Il Fallimento dei laici furiosi* (2009), *Fedi in dialogo, il mondo ne ha bisogno* (2015). He edited the book *Omnia mutantur. La scoperta filosofica del pluralismo culturale* (2013), with contributions of R. Bernstein, S. Veca, M. Ricciardi.

Giancarlo Corò is Associate Professor of Applied Economics at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where he is director of the School of Economics, Languages, and Entrepreneurship for International Trade. His research topics are Industrial cluster economics, Global value chains analysis, Regional economic policies. He is also director of the Master in Economics of Russia and Eastern Europe and he has the scientific responsibility of The Urban Innovation Bootcamp, an action-learning programme involving students, firms and institutions in projects of social and green innovation. He participated in several international research programs with other Universities and Institutions, among which: SMEs Systems Policies for Regional Development, Universidade de Santa Cruz Do Sul, Brazil (2012); Global Value Chains analysis at Centre on Globalization, Governance and Competitiveness, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA (2014); Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Finance research program (INEF) at University of Hohenheim, Germany (2015); Forum Pymes with the Istituto Italo-latinoamericano at León, Mexico (2016).

Riccardo Mario Cucciolla is PhD in political history at IMT Institute for Advanced Studies (Lucca) in collaboration with the Higher School of Economics (Moscow). His doctoral research – entitled *The crisis of Soviet power in Central Asia: The 'Uzbek cotton affair', 1975-1991* – is based on primary, secondary and tertiary sources that he sought in the Russian, Uzbek and American archives. For his research, he spent long visiting periods at Higher School of Economics (Moscow), Institute of History of Academy of Sciences of Republic of Uzbekistan (Tashkent) and Aarhus University (Aarhus). Since 2012, he also collaborates in teaching Contemporary History; History of International Relations; and Theory and History of Political Parties and Movements at LUISS Guido Carli in Rome. In 2016, he has edited for Reset DOC the volume *The Power State Is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991*.

Maria Engström is Associate Professor of Russian, School of Humanities and Media Studies at Dalarna University, Sweden. Her research focus is on the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian politics, contemporary Russian Utopian imagination, the Post-Soviet right-wing intellectual milieu, and Imperial aesthetics in Russian literature and art. Her recent publications include *Apollo against Black Square: Conservative Futurism in Contemporary Russia* (2016), *'Orthodoxy or death!': Political Orthodoxy in Russia* (2015) and *Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy* (2014). She is currently working on a monograph, *New Russian Conservatism: Ideology and Aesthetics of Empire*.

Pasquale Gagliardi is Secretary-General of the Fondazione Cini since 1 January 2002. After graduating in law from the Catholic University, Milan, in 1958, he focused on the study of social sciences applied to business management. From 1970 to 1977 he worked in companies with direct managerial responsibilities: he was managing director of the UPIM chain, part of the Rinascente Group, from 1970 to 1974, and then joint general manager of an industrial conglomerate. From 1977 to 2005, he was the head of ISTUD (an institute of management studies, now the ISTUD Foundation), where he achieved his mission of making the institute economically and financially independent and enabling it to take an active part in scientific thinking about management and organizations in the Italian and international scientific community. As a scholar, Pasquale Gagliardi has contributed to the international spread of the use of cultural and social anthropology in studying the issues faced by companies and contemporary institutions. On this subject he has published articles, essays and books both in Italy and abroad; the best-known is *Le imprese come culture* (1986). He is a member of the editorial board of *Organization and Organization Studies*, and a member of the scientific committee of AICIS- Åland International Institute of Comparative Island Studies.

Andrea Graziosi is professor of history (on leave) at the Università di Napoli Federico II, currently President of Italy's National Authority for the Evaluation of Universities and Research (www.anvur.it), *associé* of the *Centre d'études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre-eu-*

ropéen (Paris) and fellow of Harvard's Ukrainian Research Institute and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Former President of the Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History, in 2005 he was awarded the Order of Yaroslav the Wise for his studies on the Soviet famines. The author of books on Soviet, Eastern European and Italian history, and the co-chair of the series *Dokumenty sovetskoi istorii* (Rosspen), Professor Graziosi sits in the editorial boards of numerous international scientific journals, and has taught and lectured in several European and American Universities. Recently his scientific interests expanded to the political history of languages.

Stephen E. Hanson (Ph.D. at University of California in 1991 and BA at Harvard University in 1985) is Vice Provost for International Affairs, Director of the Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, and Lettie Pate Evans Professor in the Department of Government at the College of William & Mary. He is the author of *Post-Imperial Democracies: Ideology and Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia* (2010) and *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (1997), which won the 1998 Wayne S. Vucinich book award from the Association for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies. He is also a co-editor of *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule*, (2003), a co-author of *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (2001), and the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters examining post-communist politics in comparative perspective.

Nina Khrushcheva is Professor in the Graduate Program of International Affairs and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs of Milano School of International Affairs at The New School. She is a senior fellow of the World Policy Institute and an editor of and a contributor to *Project Syndicate: Association of Newspapers Around the World*. After receiving her Ph.D. from Princeton University, she had a two-year appointment as a research fellow at the School of Historical Studies of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and then served as Deputy Editor of *East European Constitutional Review* at the NYU School of Law. She is a member of Council on Foreign Relations and a recipient of Great Immigrants: The Pride of America Award from Carnegie Corporation of New York. Her articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times* and other publications. She is the author of *Imagining Nabokov: Russia Between Art and Politics* (2008) and *The Lost Khrushchev: A Journey Into the Gulag of the Russian Mind* (2014).

Andrey Kortunov is Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and received post-graduate degrees at the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences. He got a PhD degree in History and he was Deputy Director of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies and founder and first president of the Moscow Public Science Foundation. He taught Russian foreign policy at the University of Miami and at the Lewis & Clark College (University of California) in Portland. In 2011, he was elected

Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council, a non-profit partnership established by order of the President of the Russian Federation. His academic interests are: international relations, foreign and domestic policy of Russia and Russian-American relations. Author of over 120 publications dedicated to the analysis of Soviet/Russian-American relations, global security, and the foreign and domestic policy of the USSR and Russia.

Mark Kramer is Director of Cold War Studies and a Senior Fellow of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. Originally trained in mathematics, he went on to study international relations as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and was also an Academy Fellow in Harvard's Academy of International and Area Studies. His latest books are *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1990* (2013), *Reassessing History on Two Continents* (2013), and *Der Kreml und die Wende 1989* (2014), and he is the editor of a forthcoming three-volume collection entitled *The Fate of Communist Regimes, 1989-1991*.

Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs and Associate Director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. She explores contemporary political, social and cultural changes in Russia and Central Asia through the prism of ideologies and nationalism. She has authored *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (2008), *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Con-*

temporary Russia (2009), and *Russia's Strategies in the Arctic and the Future of the Far North* (2014).

Olga Malinova is PhD and chief research fellow of the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences; Professor of Political Science, Department of the Moscow Institute of International Relations; Professor of the School of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Higher School of Economics National Research University. She is author and editor of several books and articles about political discourse and political ideologies, symbolic politics, institutes and practices of the public sphere in Russia, liberalism, nationalism and national identity, including: *Liberal Nationalism – the Middle of the Nineteenth – the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (2000); *"The West" in the Twentieth Century: Transformation of Discourse About Collective Identity* (2009); *Ideas and Symbolic Space of Post-Soviet Russia: Dynamics, Institutional Environment, Actors*, (2011); *Constructing Meanings: Study of Symbolic Politics in Modern Russia*, (2013); *The "Actual" Past: A Symbolic Policy of the Governing Elite and Dilemmas of Russian Identity*, (2015).

Andrei Melville is Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Head of Department of Political Science at National Research University – Higher School of Economics. He is Distinguished scholar of Russia. His academic interests are in comparative politics, regime change, democratization and authoritarianism, world politics. His previous positions were in MGIMO university and in the Institute of the

USA and Canada. He was visiting professor at UC Berkeley (1992 and 1994) and at the University of Bergen (1997, 1999 and 2009). He is member of editorial boards of *American Political Science Review*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *Polis*, etc. His principal publications include: *Political Atlas of the Modern World as editor and co-author* (2010); *Russian Foreign Policy: Concepts and Realities as co-editor and co-author* (2005); *Political Science: Textbook as editor and co-author* (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; 2013); *Democratic Transitions* (1999); *The Glasnost Papers* as co-editor with Gail Lapidus and co-author (1990).

Adam Michnik is editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Historian, co-founder of KOR (Committee for the Defense of Workers), prominent "Solidarity" activist during the '80s, he was detained many times during 1965-1980, spending a total of six years in Polish prisons for activities opposing the communist regime. In 1989, he has been a key Solidarity adviser in the Round Table Talks, member of the first non-communist parliament, 1989-1991 and editor-in-chief of the first independent Polish newspaper – *Gazeta Wyborcza*. He was awarded with several prizes and titles: Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, The Erasmus Prize, The Francisco Cerecedo Journalist Prize as a first non-Spanish author, Grand Prince Giedymin Order; Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur; doctorate *honoris causa* from The New School for Social Research in New York, from the University of Minnesota, University of Michigan, from Connecticut College; honorary senator of the University of Ljubljana, honorary professor of the

Kyiv Mohyla Academy, in September 2011 awarded with the Goethe Medal by the Goethe-Institut. In 2012 he received the degree of doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Klaipeda and the University of Ljubljana. For supporting the fight for freedom of Lithuania and Lithuanians against Soviet aggression, the Lithuanian Parliament awarded him unanimously the prestigious Freedom Award (13 January 2015). In September 2015, he received the Adam Mickiewicz award for contribution to the development of French-German-Polish cooperation within the framework of the Weimar Triangle. Among his books: *Church, the Left, Dialogue* (1977); *From the History of Honour in Poland. Prison Notes* (1985).

Nikolay Mitrokhin is associated academic fellow, *RCEES* and columnist of *Grani.ru*. From 2008 to 2014 he was academic fellow of The Research Center for East-European Studies at Bremen university (Germany) and in 2002 he got a PhD in History at the Russian State University for Humanities (Moscow). From 1991 to 1999, he worked at the Information and Research Centre "Panorama" (Moscow) and from 1999 to 2004 at the Memorial Human Rights Centre (Moscow). He was fellow at *Alexander von Humboldt Foundation* (2005-2006) and at *Gerda Henkel Foundation* (2006-2008). He is author and co-author of numerous books in Russian: *Bishops and Eparchies (Dioceses) of the Russian Orthodox Church* (1997), *Turkmenistan: State Policy and Human Rights* (1999), *Economic Activity of The Russian Orthodox Church* (2000), *Russian Party: The Russian Nationalist Movement in the USSR. 1953-1985* (2003), *The Russian Orthodox Church:*

Contemporary Condition and Actual Problems (2004, 2006); and also written more than 100 academic publications in Russian, English, German, French, Italian and Ukrainian about ethnic and religious issues in USSR and CIS from 1953 to the present days.

Daniela Rizzi (PhD in Slavistic studies at the University of Rome – La Sapienza) she was assistant professor at the University of Trento, then took up a post as associate professor at Ca' Foscari in 1998 and full professor since 2002. She teaches Russian language, literature and cultural history. Her research work, ranging from the second half of the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century, covers two fields of study: one in literary history and the second philological. In the first field, she initially devoted herself to Modernist Russian drama, especially from a theoretical point of view, and later focused her attention on various aspects of 19th century and early 20th century literary history, both in fiction and poetry. In the second field, she edited unpublished 20th century works and the critical edition of a 18th century manuscript. She is presently the head of a research unit in a Project of National Relevance concerning the Russian emigration to Italy between 1900 and 1940; and member of the faculty board in the PhD program in Modern Languages Cultures and Societies (Eastern Europe section). She directs, together with Giorgio Ziffer, the journal *Russica Romana*.

Kirill Rogov is leading research fellow at the Russian Academy for National Economy and Public Administration, member of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy (CFDP) and member of Supervisory Board of Liberal Mission

Foundation (Moscow). Since 2007, he is leading research fellow in the Institute for Economic Policy (Gaidar Institute) and in the Academy for National Economy and Public Policy. In 2012-2013, he has coordinated the reports on key issues of Russian economic development for the government of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Economic Development accomplished by the Gaidar Institute. In 2015, he was the editor of "Monitoring of the current economic situation" published by Gaidar Institute and Academy for National Economy. He is also columnist for the *Financial Times*, *Vedomosti*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Forbes Russia* and others. His research is focused on the problems of current political development and political economy. Among his publications: *The "third cycle": Is Russia headed back to the future?* (2011); *Forty Years in the Desert: The Political Cycles of Post-Soviet transition* (2013); *Triumphs and Crises of Plebiscitary Presidentialism. Putin's Russia. How It Rose, How It Is Maintained, and How It Might End* (2015); *Can "Putnomics" survive?* (2015).

Sergio Romano has retired from the Italian Foreign Service in 1989 after serving as Director General for cultural relations (1977-1983), Permanent representative to NATO (1983-1985) and Italian Ambassador to the USSR (1985-1989). He has been visiting professor at Harvard University, and taught at the Bocconi University in Milan. He has chaired the Awards Committee of the Balzan Foundation. He is a columnist for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and received honorary degrees from the Institute of Political Studies in Paris (1989), the University of Macerata (1993) and the Institute for World His-

tory of the Russian Academy of Science (1994). His most recent books are *Elogio della Guerra Fredda* (2015) and *Berlino capitale* with Beda Romano (2016).

Roberto Toscano has been Italy's Ambassador to India (2008-2010), after being for five years (2003-2008) the Italian Ambassador to Iran. Until 2003, he was Head of Policy Planning at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and chaired the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee network on conflict, peace, and development co-operation. As a career diplomat, he has served in a number of other posts (Chile, USSR, Spain, United States, as well as at Italy's Permanent Mission to the United Nations at Geneva). He holds a degree in law from the University of Parma and an MA from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, which he attended as a Fulbright fellow. In 1987-1988 he was a Fellow at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. From 2000 to 2003, he was a visiting professor of in-

ternational relations in the Department of Political Science at LUISS University in Rome. He is the author of books and articles on human rights, peacekeeping, conflict prevention, ethics and international relations published in Italy, the U.S., France and Spain.

Vladislav M. Zubok is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Specialist in Cold War and Soviet-Russian history, director of Russia global affairs programme at the LSE IDEAS, and head of Europe-Russia-Ukraine group in the LSE-Hertie School Dahrendorf Project. The list of publications includes *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* with C. Pleshakov (1996), *A Failed Empire: the Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (2007), and *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (2009). Currently finished the book manuscript "Patriotism of Pity" about life of the 20th century Russian intellectual Dmitry Likhachev and works on the project: "1991: Russia destroys the Soviet Union."

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