10 Conservative political romanticism in post-Soviet Russia

Andrey Medushevsky

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The main prerequisites of romantic thought are the contradiction between social reality and social ideal, psychological disappointment and deep frustration in the face of this reality, and the search for ways to overcome it through emotional and voluntary activity. As a matter of fact, revolutionary romanticism prevailed in periods of the destruction of the *Ancien Régime* and conservative romanticism – in periods of restoration, counter-revolution or post-revolutionary stabilization. Both forms of romantic approach are similar in their heuristic grounds – the rejection of rationalism, scientific knowledge and empirical studies in favour of emotional exaggeration and an idealized picture of reality – but they differ dramatically in concepts of the future and the methods of its creation. The phenomenon of conservative political romanticism gained strength in post-Soviet Russia as a reaction to rapid and convulsive changes following the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union.

The idea of this chapter is to reconsider theoretical backgrounds, political and constitutional implications of this movement in current Russian political thought as well as its possible influence upon Russian and post-Soviet reality in the future along the following lines: the place of this intellectual movement in the creation of a post-Soviet global vision of reality, social and cognitive adaptation of Russian society; systematization of proposals for the solution of modern conflicts and challenges; the reconstruction of the national historical

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memory; a programme of proposed political and constitutional reforms; the impact of conservative romanticism in the social construction of reality; contradictions and potential consequences of this doctrine in practical implementation; the challenge of romanticism to knowledge and the ethical choice of the professional community. To reconstruct an ideal type of this mental aberration means to propose alternative explanations of phenomena.

At the core of our analysis, therefore, there is no description of the individual impact of different representatives of this theoretical movement (who are often in strong disagreement with each other on many important items and practical issues) but the reconsideration of the ideological phenomenon of post-Soviet political romanticism as such in its theoretical background, conceptual instruments, social initiatives and potential political outcomes.

Political romanticism and the creation of a post-Soviet vision of reality

The new phenomenon of global communications separated the individual from original sources of information. That resulted in two principal consequences: the progressive, and unprecedented, quantitative growth of the information resources of society, on the one hand, and a decline in the quality of reliable information which is necessary for self-orientation and decision-making processes on an individual level – on the other.[1] The manipulative technologies, based on the selection of facts and the creation of artificial images of reality could be effective if they provided some combination of reliable knowledge elements and emotional substitutes. The result of this separation of mass consciousness from reliable knowledge is the growth of alienation and frustration in society, channelled in new forms of social and cognitive adaptation, which becomes a basis for new forms of individual or mass mobilization. In this way, historical memory and the cognitive map of reality could be transformed spontaneously without any visible changes. Romanticism as a simplified explanatory instrument and at the same time as an emotional reaction to the frustration of the transitional period is a principal cognitive answer to this social demand. The problem of the quality of information and manipulation is the essence of this phenomenon. From this point of view, the irritation of romantics at conventional scientific terminology, the idea of creating a principally new cognitive orientation and even a new system of notions and definitions (in the form of 'Orthodox sociology', 'Russian political sciences', a new language of the humanities as opposed to international ones) are quite explicable. The romantic approach is required by mass society not for constructive work, but for reconciliation with the unpleasant circumstances of life. As Karl Schmitt pointed out, historically the political theology of romanticism tended toward discussion without decision instead of decision without discussion.[2]

The specific features of conservative thought have not changed radically from de Maistre, Chateaubriand and Burke to the German romantics of the

Sturm und Drang period and Russian philosophers and writers like Dostoevsky, Berdyaev or Solzhenitsyn. In a similar way, contemporary Russian neo-conservative political ideology, as opposed to revolutionary romanticism, has the following guiding principles: historicism (retrospective orientation) versus rationalism (prospective orientation); a concrete approach versus an abstract, logical approach; the emotional and partisan approach versus the neutral, disinterested and value-free interpretation of reality; the religious and moral vs. the secular and rational type of values; the hierarchic vs. the homogeneous structure of society; historical pessimism vs. optimism, scepticism regarding social changes provoked by globalization, modernization and Westernization.

At the same time, neo-conservative romanticism is not equal to traditional conservatism in terms of ideology (a combination of different elements of other doctrines) and social priorities (not only theoretical concepts but a programme of radical social transformation based on emotional exaggeration and mobilization, formation of new cognitive orientation in social space and time, art and science, culture and politics). The plurality of forms of conservative romanticism makes it difficult to represent an ideal or 'pure' form of conservative political romanticism in the Russian historical context.[3] At the current stage of Russian historiography and political sciences, we have a detailed interpretation of all trends of historical conservatism[4] in its relation to liberalism[5] and Russian post-revolutionary émigré thought.[6] All political projects of Russian conservatives are reconstructed as well as their practical implementation in the period of limited constitutional monarchy (1905–17) and the Russian Revolution.[7] Programmatic documents of conservative parties are also under intensive investigation.[8] At the same time, current conservative political romanticism is not a direct continuation of classic conservative concepts, but rather a new 'remake' of them in the changed social situation of the post-Soviet era.[9]

The remarkable tendency in the current situation is a combination of conservative romanticism with other ideological trends (like liberalism, socialism and nationalism) and an amalgamation of different ideological principles in order to bridge the gap between reality and an ideal. Right- and left-wing trends of romanticism are combined in a special and very explosive form of social protest ('red-brown' coalition and a new interpretation of communism as the essence of Russian traditionalism). The idea of 'conservative revolution' as a reflection of this controversial post-Soviet phenomenon is a *contradictio in adjecto* according to the logic of classic conservative thought. Aggressive forms of conservative romanticism could be interpreted as being a result of the absence of any real exchange of information, alienation of the individual and the search for simple decisions in a complex situation, the form of sublimation of actual social neuroses. The following series of questions arises: what is the real substance of new romantic concepts, why are such concepts so influential, which political strategies, legal and institutional innovations could be associated with this type of mentality, and what possible

outcomes does conservative political romanticism provide in the short term? This is indeed a Gordian knot of the current Russian politics of national identification.

The concept of civilization: modern conflicts and challenges

Modern challenges such as rationalism, nationalism, democracy, information and modernization are all under consideration and critique by Russian conservative romantics in the framework of the 'Russian civilization' concept. Schematically formulated, this concept is perhaps the starting point of the romantic rescheduling of post-Soviet intellectual debate. This concept of civilization is very unclear in modern historiography. There are many typologies of civilization based on different criteria – religion (Orthodox, Islamic, Buddhist and other faiths); regionalization in a global framework (European, Asian, African or Eurasian civilizations); place in a global system of communications and distribution of technologies (central and peripheral civilizations); racial divergences ('white race' or 'black race' civilizations, for example); national divergences (also varied in the context of ethnic or cultural interpretation of the term); states or empires ('Russian civilization', 'European' or 'American civilization'); stages of development (civilization in the process of formation or decline); main functional principles (religion, ideology, war, trade); or psychological orientations (hedonistic, paranoid etc.).

The vagueness of the term provides the possibility of different approaches to and conclusions about 'Russian civilization': is it religious par excellence or are there some other (ideological, national, political) criteria for it, and how could permanent features of this civilization be found and described? The possibility of combining different criteria is a basis for opposed notions of 'Russian civilization' – as part of a European, a global ('Eurasian civilization'), or a unique civilization ('Russian civilization' as such).

The civilization-conflict approach to globalization is used by romantics as the interpretation of Russian cultural and geostrategic uniqueness. Russia is represented not as a part of European civilization but as a self-sustained civilization which is not comparable with others. Having recognized that geopolitics and geostrategic interests are the crucial factors for the interpretation of historical political development, it should also be acknowledged that they acquire even greater importance for the exploration of political and military conflicts – from the First and Second World Wars and the 'Cold War' to wars in the Persian Gulf and Iraq and conflicts in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union, such as Kosovo, or the recent conflict with Georgia. The logic of this approach includes three main premises, namely, that there are permanent and, in principle, unchangeable interests of civilizations (or empires); the main conflict is between the 'global West' (Western Europe, USA and their allies) and the 'global East' (all other countries); this conflict reached its peak after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the bipolar construction of international security. The

historical mission of Russian civilization, therefore, is to protect itself against permanent geopolitical enemies such as Western Europe and the USA, while ignoring previous periods of stability and strategic partnership.

The popular concept of empire as another explanatory tool is used for the interpretation of this struggle in terms of competition between the Russian or Soviet Empire and the empires of the West from the Varangian invasion (a subject of a long, unproductive and unfinished debate in Russian historiography) through military conflicts in the past (a subject of patriotic feelings in mass consciousness) to current political upheavals ('coloured revolutions' as inspired by the West). Russia, according to this logic, has no permanent allies, only permanent rivals which should be neutralized by preventive actions of the state. According to this approach, destructive ideologies like imperialism, fascism, communism or Westernization and globalization are not to be viewed as products of global development but rather as sophisticated tools for the destruction of Russian identity in the past and present.

The background to this approach is a very simplified version of the West and East without any differentiation between nations, states and their respective interests.[10] Anti-Americanism is a paramount part of this system of ideas. The defence of conflicts and wars in history is the main conclusion: if the history of the world was the history of wars – the same would be true for the future. Today, this permanent war has not stopped, but has only changed in character – digital warfare has the same destructive political impact as conventional warfare. The most important example for the proponents of this outlook is the destruction of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc not by force, but by the use of intelligent soft-power technologies. The forms of competition between nations are changed, not the substance – from the direct dictates of the superpower to the idea of a hidden world government, global financial oligarchy or macabre international conspiracy against Russian civilization. The real answer to this challenge would be to create a new empire – the third one, or the fifth one in a broader historical retrospective.

The eternal return to archetypes: Russia's place between West and East

The question of Russia's place between West and East has a long history of debate. It was the central issue in all discussions about Russian modernization between Slavophiles and Westernizers, Populists and Marxists, liberals and conservatives in post-Soviet Russia. This debate significantly influenced international historiography[11] and became a part of current political controversies in post-Soviet countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their search for identity and stable relationships with a new Russia.[12]

The problem involves a typology of modernization-types – endogenous and exogenous forms, organic or catch-up modernization, modernization in legal contractual forms, or oriented to rupture legal continuity. Questions arise concerning the diffusion of European innovations and their positive and

negative consequences in the general context of Russian culture.[13] The crucial aspect of this debate seems to be the relationship between cognitive and technological aspects of modernization on the level of central and local culture.[14] The conservative romantic vision of the problem is the adoption of the technological aspect of modernization by excluding the cognitive and value aspect of it. That means that modernization does not include Westernization and should be realized in a conservative form in order to protect traditional values of society.

A vicious circle in conservative romantic thought could be illustrated by proposed reform addenda – to provide changes without real shift of values and consciousness like the fundamentalist Iran of the Ayatollahs, Communist China, Cuba, North Korea or in Venezuela – countries which conserved their proper national 'identity' and equal allocation, 'in proportion', of authentic ideas in a globalized world.

Three main prerequisites of this conclusion should be taken into consideration: first, the metaphysical idea of permanent values and specificities of every civilization which could not be changed voluntarily without danger of destruction to the whole system of communications; second, the rigid divorce between moral and legal modes of social existence – the childish idea that the Russian people are the bearers of the eternal virtues of fairness (collectivism, mutual aid and general joyousness) as opposed to Western formal legal culture, based on civil law and justice (individualist and egoist capitalist culture, the cult of personal individual success and private property); third, the holistic or integrative approach to state–society relations in Russia (as opposed to the West) which is based not on legal contract (or formal Constitution) but on a special informal (and religious in nature) mechanism of self-regulation and self-stabilization – 'symphony' between the main social actors and the state power. The basic premise of this construction is of religious origin and is interpreted in terms of the Russian Orthodox tradition, moral values, humility and collective salvation instead of Catholic or Protestant personal salvation via contract with God. Thus the undisputed merit of Orthodox solutions is fairness in the representation of traditional values.

The romantic idealization of Russian specificity in such aspects as the religious beliefs of the traditional population (which does not exist today), statehood (legitimacy and the special system of power), universal beliefs and ethics is not only a form of nostalgia. New political theology under construction absorbed archaic ideas as a form of quasi-scientific explanation. The idea of shielding Russian society and the state from the destructive components of globalization has practical implications: the rejection of constructive dialogue, legal forms of conflict solution, the exploitation of ancient stereotypes, and the defence of the autarkic (closed) state and the use of filtration of information or different concepts of censorship. The same kind of ideas symbolized a cultural conflict of modernity everywhere. This body of ideas is of course not typical for Russia; it was taken by romantics from the Western conservative heritage and can be found in all modernized states of Europe,

Latin America or Asia that have experimented with guided democracy or authoritarian modernization.

Reconsideration of the national historical memory

Romantic reconstruction of historical memory today includes three guiding ideas: relativist social epistemology – interpretation of history and society as 'historical narrative' in a framework of postmodernist concepts; nationalism as the main value orientation; and the concept of historicism as a key instrument of analysis and deep anthropological scepticism.

The first idea is that historical memory would not necessarily be based on reliable knowledge or experience, but could be an artificially created construction, easily changed if necessary. Historical memory is thus an area of permanent competition between different 'narratives' or 'projects'. Some of them are appropriate to the national consciousness; others are inappropriate and unacceptable to it. Such 'projects' as Enlightenment, capitalism, globalization, and human rights theory are products of Western civilization and could not be transported to other parts of the world. As a result, this romantic type of cognitive adaptation is based predominantly on negative premises (zero-sum game between civilizations), not on positive ones (bilateral cooperation and mutual enrichment). It is possible in the form of aggressive obscurantism towards other cultures and militant subjectivism as a principal method of self-identification. The search for a 'national idea' is an example of such conservative reaction to globalization.

The national idea as an important romantic cliché is interpreted broadly as the self-identification of the nation,[15] but on what grounds and priorities? The national idea in this interpretation is not a phenomenon of historical experience, or a result of academic investigations, but rather a phenomenon of mass culture, 'collective unconsciousness', an artificially created project – a combination of images of past and future. It is rather the alchemy of power – not power of knowledge. Nobody knows how this idea could be formulated and by whom. The construction of the nation and the proper interpretation of nationalistic feelings are another main preoccupation of this intellectual movement and a key element of current debate between its different branches. The concept of the nation and 'national interest' is very controversial and involves different definitions of the term – civic nation, ethnic nation, a combination of both, or some supranational identity; nation as embodiment of a state (or an empire) or a rival of uneven state; nation as a real historical phenomenon or sociological fiction. The items of 'uneven nation', 'state-building nation', 'national priorities' are in the debate concerning Russian identity. But how should be the Russian factor considered without harming the national integrity of the country? How do nationalism and democracy correlate with one another, and how should the proper national policy be conducted and centrifugal tendency be fought?[16] There are no relevant answers: proposed solutions are based on oversimplification of national

reality in the past and present, the schematically postulated opposition between integration and disintegration without any special attention to federalism, regionalism, devolution or cultural and administrative autonomy as different forms of compromise in centre–periphery relations in complex multi-cultural, multi-national and multi–linguistic communities.

The concept of a 'separate way' proposed by contemporary conservative romantics as the main explanatory tool has much in common with German metaphysics of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries with such metaphysical ideas as 'Sonderweg', the 'Blut und Boden' ideology of the Nazi era, 'uneven nation', 'will of the state', state as 'juridical person', etc.[17] In a similar way, Russia as an 'Orthodox civilization' cannot be interpreted with rational arguments created by Western thought for another social reality and measured by comparable criteria. That means the necessity of returning to authentic Russian tradition, which had been lost in the twentieth century or even earlier – during the period of Peter the Great's and Catherine the Great's reforms during the eighteenth century, or after the liberal reforms of Alexander II in the second half of the nineteenth century.[18] The analytic potential of this approach is based on geopolitics (the idea of permanent political interest, based on geography, climate or a system of maritime communications), social Darwinism and social biology (the idea of the 'ethnic code' of the Russian civilization), psychoanalysis (the idea of the archetype as an unchangeable unit) and nationalism (the intention to protect autochthonous Russian national culture from 'soulless Western culture' by a closed authoritarian state).[19]

In obvious contradiction to the general conservative postmodernist philosophy, historicism is proclaimed as another key method of argumentation regarding not only general retrospective orientation of sociological theory but romantic idealization of the future as a return to the past. That means the search for an explanation of current social events in the framework of the so-called 'national spirit' just as in the sense of the German historical school of law of the nineteenth century or in the archaic theoretical constructions of N. Danilevsky, N. Berdyaev, G. Fedotov, I. Ilyin, 'Signposts', etc.[20] The 'Providence', 'Holy Russia', 'Russian soul', 'Messianic impetus', 'the empire' and other metaphysical constructions of an old conventional wisdom are recollected, updated and reproduced by neo-romantics. For many scholars, even of academic status, it became obvious that the 'main ideologems' of Russian history – 'Moscow – the Third Rome'; 'Orthodoxy', 'Autocracy', 'Populism' and 'Marxism–Leninism' – are similar in structure, spirit and social functions. The conclusion is that the 'Russian idea' is profoundly anti-modern and anti-Western.[21] This interpretation involves some sort of fatalism – the idea of national predestination or a world mission which is based on history and cannot be changed. From this angle, alternative paths as well as other historical forms are impossible.[22] European alternatives in the form of feudalism, enlightened absolutism, and representative government have not been realized in Russia. Russian statehood could not be compared with

European statehood or that of Asian countries. The idea of historical mission correlates with the idea of the 'separate way' of historical development, predetermined by some invariants of Russian political culture.[23]

Among them are the following: geography of the country (the poor soil and climate as an explanation for extensive forms of agriculture), unstable borders (external invasions and colonization), the unique type of social organization (peasant community and serfdom), permanent state–society struggle, combination of property rights and administrative control in the hands of the bureaucracy, special social functions of a despotic state. These historical trends probably really determined the formation of Russian statehood in the past, but as it was shown by classic Russian historiography, they lost their absolute character in the modern period and should definitely not be exaggerated in contemporary history.[24]

The 'Russian system' and its rivals in the past and present

This exaggeration of a very schematic or even caricatured nature is represented in the concept of a special 'Russian system', formed as a result of the unique synthesis of Byzantine and Eastern (Mongol yoke) forms but not identical to them. The most characteristic features of this system as opposed to Western forms are: central concentration of property and power – the ruling elite, enslavement of all estates, absolute despotic control of a state power over society which cannot be limited by representative institutes and positive law. In contrast to Western experience, this type of power is based not on the balance of conflicting social interests but on interests of power itself which ipso facto could not be transformed into a normal law-based state. The state was not created by law – on the contrary, the law is an epiphenomenon of the state, which can control society via religious and moral obligations and the 'dictatorship of law'.

Ignoring the possibility of comparing this historical 'Russian system' with other theocracies and despotic traditional states of the world, on the one hand, and its similarities with European absolutist monarchies, on the other, this concept rejects even the fact of its evolution in modern history and variability of the current transformation process. The whole of Russian history appeared to be a cyclical dynamic of mechanical stability in the form of authoritarianism (when power is stable) and spontaneous disintegration in the form of turbulences – 'times of troubles' (with the state losing its control over society and the ruling elite).[25]

This vague term, the 'Time of Troubles', is taken from historical lexicon of the seventeenth century and is used especially to mark the principal differences of this kind of disintegration from 'normal' bourgeois revolutions of the Western type, which created the civil society and law-based state. The Russian Revolution of 1917, in contrast to the French revolution, was in this sense not a 'real' one but social turmoil caused by the collision of traditional (pre-modern) social relations and mental stereotypes with external destructive influences.

This primitive stability–destruction dynamic is represented as an 'iron law' of Russian history, based on a very special type of property–power relationships. The nature of stability is, thus, the effective and overwhelming control of the state over property; the nature of instability – the erosion of this control by capitalist reforms or Western-type modernization tended towards social differentiation and the creation of a financial oligarchy. This quasi-Marxist approach combined with psychoanalytic terminology is used by conservative romantics for the interpretation of state destabilization at the beginning of the seventeenth century, its collapse in the period of the Russian Revolution and Civil War at the beginning of the twentieth century and the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century. When property and power were separated, the degeneration of the Russian system was inevitable.[26]

This approach is crucial for the romantic rejection of historical reforms aimed at modernization according to Western standards (from Peter the Great to Sergei Witte and Piotr Stolypin). The emancipation of the serfs by Alexander II is a subject of intensive current debates between conservative and liberal historians.[27] The conservative outlook is represented in very partisan and emotional criticism of the liberal strategy of social and political transformation proposed by the Russian reformers – the 'enlightened bureaucrats' of the nineteenth century and the constitutional democrats at the beginning of the twentieth century which is described as inorganic, unproductive and destructive for the destiny of Russia – the main cause of the collapse of the Russian Empire and the establishment of Bolshevik rule. In a similar way, Perestroika, as proclaimed by Mikhail Gorbachev and the radical reforms of Boris Yeltsin are interpreted not as a natural sequence of Soviet system dysfunction and the search for freedom and democracy in order to overcome one-party dictatorship, but as a true 'national catastrophe', organized mainly by Western enemies and Russian traitors. By contrast, positive symbols of national identity are represented for conservative romantics by such personalities as Ivan the Terrible (as a real founder of the autocratic system), Alexander III (who reversed the liberal reforms of his father) and Stalin (who restored the system of absolute power after the revolution, destroyed opposition to the system and combined Bolshevism with Russian national patriotism). The progressive apology of Stalinism is a crucial element and important part of this radical rethinking of history and rescheduling of the national historical memory.[28] This reinterpretation of the past involves a new construction of the social landscape, temporal aspects of historical consciousness and the very essence of being for the post-Soviet population.

The idea of post-Soviet restoration: content and political impact

The proposed conservative programme of restoration includes three main parts, namely, cultural and national renaissance; social and economic transformation of society; political and constitutional changes. The main target of the first part of the romantic programme is the moral revival of the nation.

This would be possible by curbing the psychological disorientation and influence of destructive anti-Russian propaganda and Hollywood-style cultural influences: the glorification of evildoing and the cult of money and violence, value relativism, national separatism, individualism, the deviation of young people, egoism and sexual misconduct, as well as such 'hypocritical ideas' as tolerance, human and minority rights doctrines and anti-patriotic feelings.[29] Positive social values should according to this outlook be based on traditional religions, support for the establishment of Russian national cultural identity, patriotism – 'heroic traditions of our fathers and grandfathers', purification of language and restoration of traditional collectivist virtues, rewriting of national history (first of all of national history books), a new system of education (based not on Bologna-process constructions but on the traditional system), the reorganization of science (the rejection of the American-style grant system of financial support) and the reorientation from this angle of the whole system of registration and validation of specialists. The profound changes of psychological condition involve not only ideological, but also semiotic aspects – reform of the Russian language in order to cleanse it of foreign words and symbols by discovering adequate equivalents in Russian or even from the ancient Greek-Slavic tradition. Some amazing exercises in hermeneutics were realized with the intention of creating a special Russian theoretical language in the humanities in order to avoid the use of international terminology (which is 'Western' by definition) and to reflect special features of Russian culture and 'senses' (in plural form). The whole programme has a deeply nationalistic and ecclesiastical flavour.

The romantic social reform addenda are in many respects similar to European conservative movements: revitalization of traditional religious and social values as a true basis for moral economy, the support of the Russian nation – demographic changes, family building and the restoration of its reproductive functions, the limitation of migration and deep concern and scepticism over the possibility of assimilating people into a multi-cultural framework. The economic doctrine is based on the conservative ideology of solidarism (solidarity as mutual aid), protectionism and industrialism versus market economy, monetarism and financial speculations. The criticism of virtual economics, actualized by the world crisis, covers such items as the structure of the banking system, the governmental ('monetarist') politics of financial stabilization and stimulation and the growing integration of the national economy into the international market which is interpreted as growing dependence on such institutes as the World Bank, or WTO. Private property as such is not rejected (as was the case in the transitional period) but presumed to come under strict social control in a framework of partnership between society and big business and a progressive schedule of taxes. The land-property debate which reached its climax after the adoption of the Land Code of 2001 is still important in the context of controversial relations between positive law and the traditional spirit of justice.[30] The appeal to the traditional values of the Orthodox Church, the ancient traditions of peasant communities and the

Soviet kolkhoz-system, the collectivist mentality and distributive justice are the principal arguments of the private land-property opponents.

The political reform agenda concentrates on such aspects as constitutional changes, structure of power, and legitimacy of the political regime. Proposed constitutional transformation includes such principal changes as the elimination of the value-free character of positive law, the secular character of the state and education, the reinterpretation and limitation of human rights and liberal freedoms. A long debate took place on the constitutional incorporation of norms for state ideology or national doctrine principles. Legal changes were proposed according to these guiding principles in constitutional, international, civil, criminal, family and administrative law as well as the mass-media and Internet-law regulations and procedures.[31] Among important proposed innovations were: repressive anti-corruption measures, the restoration of capital punishment, limitation of the role of international humanitarian law and the European Court of Human Rights in national affairs, enforcement of state security services in terms of their prerogatives and even new tourism legislation to minimize the popularity of tourism abroad. All such initiatives by different conservative think tanks were presented in the proposed projects of state sovereignty, state security and information security doctrines.[32]

The legitimacy of the regime under construction according to this approach should be based not on democratic choice but on the idea of the loyalty of the subjects to the sovereign – the state power. The distaste for parties and the disrepute of politicians in the mass consciousness inevitably reflect on the institutions in which they are housed. And if representative institutions themselves are generally perceived as inadequate instruments of democracy, then saving the situation becomes quite a task. Invectives against politicians abound in the so-called anti-parliamentary literature of the late nineteenth century, and have recurred ever since.[33]

In Russia, the idea of paternalism, loyal behaviour and humility (or even servility) to supreme power is the mainstream of right-wing ideological doctrines such as the 'Manifesto of enlightened conservatism;' 'The Project of Russia', 'Russian doctrine' – an eclectic mixture of ancient conservatism, socialism, nationalism, Slavophile and Eurasian concepts of a new Empire. Occasionalism as 'the magic hand of chance', and belief in providential political leaders is another side of anti-parliamentary and anti-party romantic feelings. The language of such documents is similar to the lexicon of conservative romantics from the era of Otto von Bismarck or Napoleon III. It reproduces many ideological clichés from Weimar Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal or France under Mussolini, Franco, Salazar and Pétain, but not from the books of contemporary historians or political scientists.

The programme of conservative constitutional transformation

The central part of the conservative programme is constitutional amendments aimed at reconsideration of the political structure of the state regarding such

principles as constitutionalism, federalism, parliamentary democracy and separation of power as represented in the Russian Constitution of 1993. Three main strategies of political modernization were proposed in the transitional period: the liberal idea to transform this system into the 'normal' law-based state of Western-type democracy (in the form of a parliamentary, or mixed parliamentary-presidential regime); the pragmatic opinion to keep the system of limited pluralism for the transitional period with subsequent liberalization, and the conservative idea of restoring a full-scale authoritarian system congenial to the historical form of unlimited power in monarchical or dictatorial form.[34] This debate is important in the context of the separation of ways between different countries of the post-Soviet era: for one group, the search for political alternatives to the Russian model was found in 'coloured revolutions'; for the second – in the legal modernization of existing systems, for the third – in total rejection of constitutional and political reforms in order to conserve stability and the 'vertical of power', even by conservation of the most archaic elements of political regimes in power.

In the post-Soviet context, the conservative trend is embodied in the transformation of the political system from an uneven democracy to a guided democracy, constitutional parallelism and important changes in symbolic attributes of power and the style of government.[35] The Russian constitutional evolution since 2000 included a reshaping of the political process along the following lines: limitation of political participation (new electoral law, regulation of political parties and non-governmental organizations, restrictions on participation in national parties and elimination of regional parties, special interest parties in national elections); transition from the contractual theory of federalism to the constitutional and subsequent reinterpretation of federalism as a more centralized one (the creation of a parallel system of administrative regions under the intermediate control of the president's representatives in federal districts and the presidential appointment of governors in lieu of popular election and a new process for the selection of governors – presidential nomination, confirmation by regional legislature); increasing correction of the mechanism of the separation of powers (by the creation of a powerful governmental party majority in central and local parliaments and the upholding of pro-governmental conservative movements); systematic changes in the formation of the upper chamber of parliament – the Council of the Federation according to a centralized model of federalism; the creation of new extra-constitutional bodies like the State Council and the Public Chamber as a para-legislative collective ombudsman which could be used for the selection of social initiatives; the transformation of the judicial system and the process of nomination of the Chair of the Constitutional Court.[36]

According to constitutional amendments adopted in 2008, the president's mandate was extended from four to six years. Conservative reforms conducted in the period after 2000 resulted in the creation of the system of limited pluralism with 'monarchical' presidential prerogatives similar to the historical phenomenon of sham constitutionalism that existed in Russia during the

period of limited constitutional monarchy – 1905–17. The official concept of 'sovereign democracy' which appeared as an answer to this ideological demand, was criticized by right-wing conservatives as insufficient and contradictory. Romantics obviously aimed to create a sovereign state without adjectives.

In order to restore 'symphony' to society-state relations, the restoration of historical institutions is recommended as more appropriate to mass consciousness in the form of the 'Land Assembly' (*Zemskii Sobor*) or a system of Soviets as surrogate forms of social representation. Some authors go so far as to present arguments in favour of the restoration of the estate system, the aristocracy or even the monarchy. The idea of convoking a Constitutional Assembly in order to adopt a new constitution recently became popular in these circles. The Russian Orthodox Church played an important role in this debate, arguing for the prevalence of the collective spirit of fairness over individual human rights and the need to incorporate the individual into a traditional religion-based system of values. Authoritarianism is represented as a unique means of preventing the destruction of the 'national identity'. Constitutionalism as such is blamed by many conservative romantics for being an artificial product of uncritical Westernization. They applauded recent governmental decisions to regulate and restrict non-governmental organizations, supported measures against 'aggressive introduction of Western liberal political culture' in other parts of the world and proclaimed that authentic Russian civilization is based on the predominance of the national state and charismatic leadership of any kind (religious or secular ideology).

The rise of nationalism in the post-Soviet period originated mainly in the conflict between Russian and Soviet identity in the former Soviet Union.[37] The natural form of future conservative statehood should thus be the new empire – the supra-national form of the ruling class and government (also in artificially recreated archaic forms). The predominant role of the Russian nation as a 'state-building nation' must be ensured in this empire by fixed legal norms incorporated into the constitution, or constitutional laws. The highest principles of Russian statehood should be formulated and officially declared as a national doctrine. The possible result of this programme of constitutional transformation seems to be the rebirth of social utopianism – the idea of restructuring global political addenda in terms of conservative values, national interests and authoritarianism, the export of conservative messianic culture to other countries of the world in order to stop the 'humanitarian imperialism of the West' and the subversive activity of a hidden 'global government'.

Les infortunes de la vertu: doctrinal contradictions and practical disadvantages of political romanticism

New political romanticism, like its earlier modifications,[38] is not homogeneous philosophy or social practice and is represented in the current Russian political context by three main trends:

First, the 'pure form' of old-fashioned romanticism as an embodiment of authentic Russian pre-revolutionary conservatism or conservative liberalism which was definitely opposed to the revolution and looked for the cultural and political alternative in national spirit, historical identity and general nostalgia for historical forms of social and political organization.

Second, the 'new romanticism', oriented towards an active solution of contemporary problems such as globalization, nationalism and the search for identity. The social theory of this movement is an eclectic combination of postmodernist philosophical relativism, Christian democracy, conventional anti-Americanism, solidarism and authoritarian ideas of European origin combined with home-grown ideas. Solidarism as a European intellectual and social movement originated in the ideas of Léon Duguit and other theorists of social cooperation. Historically it was used by the corporativist regimes of the inter-war period (Italy and Portugal) as the main alternative to liberalism and communism and the ideological instrument for the 'organic' integration of society on traditional religious and moral values, resolution of national and social conflicts, criticism of parliamentary democracy, limitation of political pluralism and individual human rights, reinstallation of paternalism in political culture. Elements of this theoretical tradition were represented in Russian post-revolutionary émigré thought, and also became a source of inspiration to contemporary conservative romantics. The main ideas are taken from the ideological heritage of European nationalism: solidarism, corporative organization, 'work and order', religion and personal devotion, the sacred character of the supreme power of the state and the search for the national identity in a multi-national state.

Third, radical political romanticism which in many respects is similar to early fascist doctrines combined with ideas of social justice and socialism. The basic ideas are extreme nationalism (even in racist form), interpretation of politics in terms of the friend-enemy paradigm, authoritarianism as the historically determined destiny of Russia. The main political target is a 'conservative revolution' – a radical transformation of the political regime in order to realize a 'national mission' in the world and create a national (ethnic 'Russian') empire with a state ideology by the crude oppression of opponents (liberals, migrants, different minorities).

The main disagreements between these three trends cover the most vital themes of a new romantic political theology under construction:

- the concept of Russian civilization (whether it should be based on religious, national or ethnic priorities); of the Russian nation (its cultural, civil or ethnic interpretation and different visions of historical stages of development and future prospects in the light of these criteria); the concept of the state (whether it should be multi-national, national or ethnic) and of sovereignty (opposing visions of democracy and empire or their reconciliation in hybrid forms);
- the impact of historical tradition (the possibility of using it in passive and active forms); the nature of justice and fairness in the Russian context

(legal, distributive and traditional forms of arguing); the concept of development (the quest of exogenous and endogenous forms);

- the notion of a future restoration (as a gradual return to historical forms or as a radical conservative revolution); the nature of the 'Russian system' and ways to transform it in the future (archaic and modernized versions of state–society interpretation); the concept of a closed state (different opinions about integration of the country in a globalized world); moderate or radical programmes of cultural, social and legal reforms.

The problem of democratic consolidation is at the same time a problem of cognitive dissonance in society – the emotional situation in which the individual simultaneously has different frames of behaviour or knowledge which cannot be combined or be reconciled with reality. The outcome from this situation means the active search of new cognitive frames and adequate standards of behaviour.[39] The cognitive dissonance situation is typical for transitional societies. This concept is useful for the interpretation of a clear divorce between social ideal and rational choice; between the idea of social justice and effective governance and between traditional legal consciousness and positive law and institutes, created, implanted or oppressively installed by political power in the process of catch-up modernization. Every fully-exploded constitutional cycle involves three phases: the rejection of an old constitution of society; the establishment of a new one, and the complex process of reconciliation between the new normative system and the old social and mental reality.[40] The third phase is very ambivalent in terms of interpretation and outcomes: it could be achieved by some combination of tradition and novelty or in a full-scale restoration under the slogan of 'return to reality' and the extermination of all new institutes (in a direct or indirect manner). That means the collapse of democratic transition, restoration of an old system, perhaps in a modified form of sham constitutionalism and the creation of the basis for the new constitutional cycle in future. In such a situation of unstable balance, the political choice of the elite and intellectuals is of acute importance because it could dramatically change the whole strategy of the transformation of society.

The 'legal dualism' or conflict between established positive law and legal consciousness is a reflection of this cognitive dissonance. Different trends of conservative political romanticism could be interpreted as varied strategies for overcoming of this conflict. The social function of the romantic intellectual movement (in both moderate and radical forms) is primarily psychological therapy of social neuroses, emotional adaptation of the traditional mind to the changed society. Romanticism as an artificial, simplified and illusory construction of reality is, thus, the legitimization of the conservative phase of the post-Soviet constitutional cycle. As a political doctrine, conservative romanticism could be used for different purposes: to create a new system of values and for the establishment of a schedule of negative and positive legal criteria (constitutional modernization or constitutional retreat); to consolidate

society, the ruling elite and a number of intellectuals around the idea of stability, solidarity and counter-revolutionary mentality; to legitimize authoritarian political power as the embodiment of Russian historical specifics and minimize criticism of undemocratic political initiatives at home and in foreign policy; to oppose 'subversive' national separatism, liberalism and Westernization projects; and to create for the government the means for flexible manoeuvring between different ideologies and programmes.

Romanticism, knowledge and the ethical choice of the professional community

The new romantic 'political theology' obviously appeared to be in a sharp contradiction to modern science. The postmodernist logic of romantic visionaries is, in principle, opposed to the logic of modern scientists, which is based on empirical research and verification, scientific forecast instead of prophecy, intuitive prevision or metaphysical speculations. The eclectic romantic amalgamation of abstract moral imperatives, art theories and occasional social practices cannot be proved or falsified in terms of scientific knowledge. The apocalyptic vision of modern civilization, the idea of national salvation or preservation in the form of self-isolation, excludes the effective integration of Russian society to the global reality and tends towards alienation, stagnation and the destruction of social integrity in terms of national or political priorities.

The crucial contradiction of post-Soviet conservative political romanticism, as well as for historical forms of this phenomenon, is of a cognitive character: a clear divorce between the romantic ideal of the stable homogeneous society and the closed state with indoctrinated subjects, on the one hand, and new trends of globalization, modernization and free information exchange, on the other. The concept of post-Soviet restoration in the form of an eternal return to traditional forms of commonwealth and authoritarianism or in the form of conservative revolution is an artificial ideological construction and is opposed to new forms of social and cognitive adaptation. Namely, the rigorous moral doctrine of conservative romanticism appeared to be in sharp conflict with the new reality invoked by post-industrial social conditions.

The problem of the ethical choice of the professional community in such circumstances is of paramount importance. Do we need to accept and tolerate all surrogate products of quasi-sociological methods of interpretation and naïve, romantic stories about the past and future as a special form of 'art-therapy', or should we rather break the silence and subject them to intensive social criticism, in terms of the professional criteria of reliable knowledge and political disadvantages, regarding the notably aggressive and illiberal implications of romantic political theology? The possible outcome of this cognitive impasse of conservative romanticism seems to be a radical reform of higher education – the formation of a new creative type of personality, capable of

critical analysis of social data, self-orientation and the decision-making process in a dynamically changed world and ready to reject old-fashioned social stereotypes, mental prejudices and intractable cognitive frames.

Notes

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