



## Chauvinism or Chaos

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ALEXANDER LUKIN

## Chauvinism or Chaos

### Russia's Unpalatable Choice

*The author argues that the return of Crimea to Russia, events in and around Ukraine, and associated tendencies in Russian domestic politics have created a new reality for Russian society. Many liberals consider declining Russian influence in the world a necessary condition of internal liberalization, while many of those who favor an independent role for Russia in the world and the strengthening of its influence are proponents of an authoritarian or even Stalinist internal regime. As a result, Russians face the unpalatable choice between a democratic Russia that has been reduced to a junior partner of the West and a strong Russia with a dictatorial nationalist regime that is a threat to all its neighbors. The author proposes a third option that would meet the aspirations of the majority by combining a normal moderate patriotism with an equally moderate liberalism.*

**Keywords:** *Chaos, Crimea, democracy, liberalism, patriotism, Russia, Ukraine*

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The events of the past few months surrounding Ukraine and Crimea and also certain associated tendencies in Russian domestic politics have created a new reality for our society. It is quite likely that the entire system of international relations—and, indeed, the situation inside Russia—will no longer be the same. Change is taking place in the paradigm of our life—the paradigm that took shape after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and provided the framework within which Russia and its main partners have acted in both the Yeltsin and Putin periods. This system may be called the post-Soviet consensus. What have its chief features been? Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia has in principle been considered a partner of the West—not as close a partner as the members of its economic and political alliances, but nonetheless a country that shared its main goals in foreign and domestic policy. There have been some disagreements (over Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, etc.), but these were attributed to Russia's size and to its need for more time to adapt to Western norms and they were settled quite quickly. Special approaches to domestic politics were also attributed to the young and imperfect character of Russian democracy (the Moscow leaders themselves explained them in this way) or to certain special national characteristics. Russia was in a position comparable to that of Turkey, Ukraine, and Mexico—large states that do not fully meet Western standards but strive toward them and are achieving some measure of progress in this direction.

### **Collapse of the Post-Soviet Consensus**

The post-Soviet consensus has been based on a mutual understanding with the West to the effect that both sides would move toward closer cooperation, show understanding for one another's interests, and seek mutually acceptable compromises. In practice, however, only Russia fulfilled these conditions. Without completely renouncing the idea of national interests, it showed a willingness to partially sacrifice them for the sake of cooperation with the “civilized world” and with a view to becoming a part of that world. But the “civilized world” itself,

despite an abundance of approbatory words, was still thinking in the categories of the Cold War, which it sincerely regarded itself as having won. Forgetting all its promises (e.g., not to expand NATO to the east), the West has tried to accomplish everything that it was unable to do during the Cold War due to the resistance of the Soviet Union: it has incorporated more and more countries and territories into the sphere of its influence and relocated military objects closer and closer to the Russian border, even onto the territory of Russia's traditional allies.

This sort of approach can be explained in various ways. The current view inside Russian power structures is that the real foreign policy of the West is shaped exclusively by geopolitical goals—to gain control over an increasing number of countries and territories and become the sole dominant force in the world (to create a “unipolar world”). The values professed by the West—democracy, human rights, and so on—are dismissed as merely ideological fig leaves. This outlook is attributable to the fact that most of the current Russian leaders came out of the law enforcement structures of the late Soviet period, when hardly anyone still believed in the official communist ideology, and that ideology really did serve as a fig leaf for real policy.

Ideology plays a much greater role in Western society today than it does in Russia. The West is in fact the sole surviving ideological empire. (Communist China and Vietnam cannot be taken seriously as ideological states: the official ideology has long been no more than ritual, and even the leaders are unable to provide any clear explanation of what constitutes its communist essence.) In the West practically everyone believes in the Western ideology: it is instilled from childhood onward—in kindergarten, at school, in the university, and in the workplace. This ideology of “democratism” is essentially quite simple: although not ideal, Western society is better than all others, it is the summit of social progress, and everyone in the world should strive toward the Western model as it exists at a given moment.<sup>1</sup> In principle this is the same primitive cultural chauvinism that has characterized the many peoples and countries—from small tribes to large civilizations—that have regarded themselves as the center of the

world and all those around them as barbarians. What is different about the contemporary West is its scale.

The foreign policy of the West is based on this faith. The key tendency in foreign policy thinking is defined—paradoxical though it may seem—by pragmatic ideologues. They believe that the best way of incorporating all “barbarian” peoples and countries into the world of “freedom and democracy” is by exposing them to political influence through economic and political alliances. For this, it is necessary that those who come into power in these countries should be people who understand that an orientation toward the West will be to their own advantage, and everything possible should be done to facilitate this outcome. If even these people do not fully meet “democratic” standards—well, that is not so terrible. Let them first be placed in a position of economic and political subordination. Then under the influence of the West they will be pulled up to the required standard. It is precisely for this reason that the Europeans only listlessly take the Estonian and Latvian regimes to task for depriving many Russian speakers of civil rights. Although officially they try not to advertise the reasons for this shortsighted attitude, the reasons sometimes emerge into view. An example is the remarkable conclusion to a report of the independent German Bertelsmann Foundation on the situation in Estonia: “Estonia has never had any direct or indirect challenges to its democratization or transition to a market economy . . . . Although Estonia’s ethnic cleavages remain serious, the restrictive citizenship policy has meant that Russians have much less political power, which otherwise might have enabled them to slow the pace of reform.”<sup>2</sup> This is plain and clear: the Russians in Estonia are the sole obstacle to Westernization, so their rights had to be restricted.

For the same reason, the radical nationalists in Ukraine fall outside the Europeans’ field of vision: after all, these are people acting “on the side of progress”; it is possible to justify them historically or even turn a blind eye to certain crimes (just as a blind eye was turned to the crimes of the Kosovan nationalists or of the Croatian army in Serbian Krajina, for instance). The behavior of the EU’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and

Security Policy Catherine Ashton has been characteristic: she condemned an attempt by fighters of the “Right Sector” to seize the building of the Ukrainian Supreme Rada after the anti-Russian opposition had come to power, but had in fact supported them earlier when they did the same thing at a time when the majority in the Rada were “bad guys” who were not fully oriented toward the EU. Conversely, crimes committed by the forces of “regression” must be highlighted and condemned without reservation.

Some idealistic ideologues in the West say that it is bad to make friends even with “progressive” dictators; they try to condemn “our own bastards” and criticize the authorities for retreating from the ideals of “democratism.” Such people, however, do not determine real policy: they are regarded as impractical armchair dreamers who impede the real task. Thus the striving for global geopolitical domination is intertwined with ideological goals and it is quite difficult to say which comes first.

It is of interest that a similar dispute occurred in another ideological empire—Soviet Russia—at the time when communist values were still an article of faith there. The discussions about the Brest Peace are well-known: idealistic communists preferred to perish rather than enter into negotiations with the “class enemy” and even came close to having their way, but the more pragmatic Lenin persuaded his colleagues that it was not worth dying and that the main thing was not the purity of the idea but the power of the ideologues. As long as they remained in power the gradual triumph of their ideology throughout the world was assured, but if they perished that possibility would die with them. Also of interest is the dispute among the Russian Bolsheviks concerning the need to honor the promises made in the so-called Karakhan declarations, in which Moscow renounced all the rights and privileges that tsarist Russia had possessed in China. Adolf Yoffe, the Russian representative in China, viewed the unwillingness of Moscow to honor these promises in full as a ruinous tendency toward the revival of imperialism. In his reply Leon Trotsky pointed out to his colleague that Russia was poor and that the strengthening of its material position as the base of world communism was not imperialism (Lukin 2007, pp. 175–77).

Even Stalin, who is often accused of reviving traditional Russian imperialism, actually preserved a significant ideological element in his foreign policy. In a speech delivered in 1927 he said: “An internationalist is one who is willing to defend the Soviet Union without reservations, without vacillations, and without conditions because the Soviet Union is the base of the world revolutionary movement and it is impossible to defend or advance this revolutionary movement without defending the Soviet Union.” Expansion of the territory of the Soviet Union was not traditional imperialism but the strengthening and broadening of the field of world progress (Stalin 1953, p. 51).

This is exactly how the West acts today. And so long as it was extending its influence over the small countries of Eastern Europe, all went well. But with Russia it ran into a hitch. Russia refused to incorporate itself fully into the Western system and insisted on its own approaches, at least on certain issues of special importance to it. This was not because its leaders were congenital anti-Westernizers. Quite the contrary: both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin began with concessions, trying to induce a like response from their partners. But instead they received only empty promises, and under the pressure of circumstances they were compelled to adopt a firmer position.

What were these circumstances? The point is that according to numerous opinion polls the majority of Russians do not regard Western society as ideal. This is the difference between Russia and Eastern Europe. Even in Eastern Europe the West has certain problems: in Poland and Hungary, conservative Catholics, who do not accept many of the moral norms of contemporary Europe, are in a strong position; in Bulgaria and Romania, corruption is deeply entrenched and democratic institutions are weak. However, all these countries are comparatively small and can be swallowed gradually; moreover, their alliance with the West gives them hopes of prosperity and security guarantees. Russia, by contrast, is too big, and it is unrealistic to count on its Westernization without the support of the majority of its citizens. And these citizens do not want to be Westernized. The concerns of Western society—human rights, equality for women, the

campaign for homosexual marriages, and so on—are of little concern to them. On the contrary, much of this agenda irritates them. Actively reviving religious organizations (both Orthodox Christian and Muslim) consider the West not an ideal society but a focus of sin and speak of the need for Russia to pursue its own path. Russians view persistent attempts to impose alien values, induce culturally close neighbors to break away from Russia, and deploy troops closer and closer to its borders as a policy of encirclement and suffocation.

Of course, a Westernized minority has emerged in Russia, especially in the big cities, but it is small. The very operation of Western-style democracy, in which the majority determines (or at least actively influences) state policy, in conjunction with the hostile foreign policy of the West, therefore increases the popularity of leaders who appeal to this traditional majority. For ideological reasons Westerners are unable to grasp this situation. As research shows, any ideology possesses the property of rejecting facts that are inconsistent with it. Characteristic in this respect is the position of Michael McFaul, most of whose forecasts concerning Russia and the world have proved wrong but who for ideological reasons is still considered the leading American expert on Russia because he is a pious believer in the truth of “democratism.”

In 1999 McFaul argued in the *Journal of Democracy* that the democratic system in Russia, although imperfect (he called it “electoral democracy”), was already sufficiently entrenched institutionally to make it impossible for Yeltsin’s successors to abolish it. He wrote:

The existing electoral democracy possesses the same sort of stable power as the illiberal characteristics of the regime. If the state of the economy continues to deteriorate over a long period, Russian democracy will not survive. The country needs a rapid economic upswing that would create a more favorable situation for the future consolidation of liberal democracy . . . It is curious, however, that the most surprising result of the recent Russian financial collapse is a demonstration of the robustness of democracy and not its weakness. Announcements of the death of Russian democracy are premature. (McFaul 1999, p. 18; retranslated from the Russian)

In reality everything happened the other way around: a rapid economic upswing led to the strengthening of precisely the illiberal characteristics of the regime. I pointed to this possibility in a commentary published in the same issue of the journal, where I observed that the high level of pluralism [in the 1990s] had been guaranteed not by institutions but by the personal qualities of Yeltsin and that his successor would in fact be able to do whatever he liked, including the imposition of serious restrictions on pluralism:

The “electoral clan system” is hardly capable of evolving into a liberal democracy. It may move toward a situation like that in Chechnya today or in China after 1911, in which the central government has only a nominal existence and local military-administrative clans continually war against one another. Or a strong undemocratic leader may consolidate the country. In either case, democratic freedoms will be even more strongly curtailed. Given the role that supreme leaders have traditionally played in Russia, . . . a future Russian president . . . may well be able to change the current temporary balance of forces, either by amending the constitution or by abolishing it altogether. (Lukin 1999, p. 40)

Later, when McFaul was ambassador in Moscow, after he spoke at the Moscow Carnegie Center on May 25, 2012, and, in particular, defended American support for revolutions in the Arab world, I asked him a question: did he not think that democratization and the destruction of secular authoritarian regimes in these countries would lead to the same consequences as earlier in Algeria—that is, to chaos and the victory of Islamists? After all, Arab Muslim political culture clearly does not accept Western values and the people would vote for leaders whom they found easier to understand. McFaul replied that in the opinion of American experts the situation might follow not the Algerian but the Indonesian scenario, and in Indonesia the collapse of authoritarianism *had* led to democratization. This analysis, of course, may have reflected simple ignorance of the significant differences between the mild Islam of Southeast Asia, which had been exposed to the influence of other, more tolerant religions: Buddhism and Hinduism. But the main thing here, of course, is not

this, but the ideologically motivated striving to see what you want to see and not what is really there. The result of Western policy is clearly visible today: complete chaos in Libya, where Islamists have killed the American ambassador; a cruel civil war in Syria; and in Egypt the return to power of the generals, who alone proved able to halt the chaos caused by the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. Today, again failing to grasp the essence of events, McFaul is calling for the isolation of “incorrect” Russia within the framework of the ideological schema of the struggle between “democracy” and “autocracy” and for continued pressure on Russia on all fronts: in Ukraine, in Georgia, and in Moldova.<sup>3</sup> This approach will naturally lead to even greater confrontation and to the final disintegration of these—and perhaps also certain other—post-Soviet states. It will also significantly strengthen the position of authoritarian forces in Russia itself and create the preconditions for the formation of an anti-Western alliance of Russia, China, and possibly some other Asian states (such as Iran and Pakistan).

The ideology-driven expansion of the West is in the process of breaking apart Russia’s neighbors. It has already led to the territorial division of Moldova and Georgia, and now Ukraine is also falling apart before our eyes. A distinguishing feature of these countries is that the cultural boundary passed right across their territory, so that they could have remained united only if their leaders had taken into account the interests of regions that gravitate toward Europe as well as regions that seek to maintain traditional ties with Russia. The one-sided wager on pro-Western nationalists in the post-Soviet states brought about sharp internal conflicts and persecution of the Russian-speaking population, to which Russia could not remain indifferent. When “fraternal” Ukraine was drawn into this process and the threat of a NATO presence arose in Crimea—a territory that evokes special feelings in Russia and where most residents consider themselves Russians—a strengthened Russia decided that it could retreat no further.

Moscow’s sharp reaction clearly took the West by surprise. At the end of March 2014, an astonished General Philip M. Breedlove, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, declared: “Russia is acting much more like an adversary than a

partner.”<sup>4</sup> But given that NATO has been acting like an adversary since its very inception and failed to change its approach to Russia after the end of the Cold War, there was really no cause for surprise. A change in Russian policy was only a matter of time.

What might this change bring? Of course, I hope that reason will prevail in the West and that serious consideration will be given to Russia’s proposals to guarantee the rights of the Russian-oriented population in the former Soviet republics. The proposals that Russia is now putting forward seem reasonable and their adoption could lead to a settlement of the conflict in Ukraine—the creation of a coalition government taking into account the interests of the eastern and southern regions, federalization, neutrality, the granting of official status to the Russian language, and so on. For Western ideologues, however, adoption of these proposals would mean not a settlement acceptable to all parties but the success of the “bad guys” in putting a brake on Ukraine’s progress—and that is an ideological taboo. For the West, accepting Russian proposals means admitting that someone else besides the West has a right to define what constitutes social progress, what is good and what is bad for other countries and societies. The ideology of “democratism” will hardly permit that. And the West will probably choose a different approach—to support pro-Western radicals everywhere in the post-Soviet space, with all the new conflicts that this will entail. Russia will then be forced to seriously reorient its policy toward the South and the East. On the one hand, this may help Russia accomplish a strategic task—the development of its own Asian regions. On the other hand, it may place Russia in a position of dependence on strong Asian partners—above all, China. But the lack of understanding and the hostility of the West will leave Russia with no other choice.

### **A False Choice**

In saying that Russia, like any country, has a right to defend its own interests—indeed, inevitably will defend these interests the way they are understood by its elite and by the majority of the

population—I cannot fail to note the following tendency. For some reason, most supporters of the liberalization of society in Russia today have absolutely no understanding of the country’s national tasks and scorn the feelings and values of the majority of its people, whom they regard as reactionary and oblivious to the advantages of Europeanization and progress. Many liberals view Russian influence in the world as a negative phenomenon and consider the decline of Russian influence conducive to internal liberalization and its unavoidable accompaniment. At the same time, many of those who favor an independent role for Russia in the world and a strengthening of its influence also advocate a strict and authoritarian internal regime, authoritarianism; some even seek a revival of Stalinism.

To many people today this strong connection between foreign policy and domestic politics appears self-evident. However, this has far from always been the case in Russia. Conservatives in tsarist times were usually not supporters of an active foreign policy. It suffices to recall the Slavophiles, who advocated a special path of internal development, or, for instance, the cautious policy of Alexander III, who declared that “the whole Balkans are not worth the life of a single Russian soldier” and during whose reign Russia did not participate in a single war. Conversely, an active foreign policy has usually been conducted by liberals. It was the liberal reformer Alexander II who liberated the Balkans, and Pavel Miliukov, leader of the Constitutional Democrats at the time of World War I, even acquired the nickname “Dardanellesky” for his calls to continue fighting on the side of the Allies until final victory was won and Turkey partitioned.

This is because at that time Russian conservatives understood patriotism in terms of preserving the country’s resources and the lives of its inhabitants and protesting against the squandering of its wealth in pursuit of alien and incomprehensible external goals. At the same time, the majority of liberals considered that a modernized and even Westernized Russia should become not a subordinate part of the Western world but a legitimate and powerful part of that world with its own interests. Many of them

also thought that it should be Russia's mission to Europeanize and Westernize the lands of the East, of which Russia had a better understanding by virtue of its geographical position and its substantial Muslim and Buddhist population.

It is hard to imagine Alexander Pushkin, with his poetic rebuke *To the Slanderers of Russia*, or even the much more radical Decembrists supporting the conversion of a reformed Russia into a junior partner of Britain or France, not to mention the possibility of dividing it up. And yet the idea that it would be possible and even desirable to divide Russia up into "a number of small prosperous Switzerlands" is quite widespread among Russian liberals. I first heard a proposal of this kind from the well-known dissident Kronid Lyubarsky at the time when he was living in Munich. Soon thereafter, however, similar views found reflection in the draft constitution of Andrei Sakharov, who proposed that all the peoples of the Soviet Union form republics with the right to secede and that Russia itself be divided into a number of regions (*okrugi*) with full economic independence.<sup>5</sup>

Two points were striking in these proposals. First, their authors completely failed to understand that a country cannot be divided up without provoking numerous bloody conflicts. The result would not be a number of Switzerlands but a number of Bosnias or Lebanons. Subsequently the course of the disintegration of the Soviet Union demonstrated this clearly. This is a pragmatic point, suggesting ignorance of political realities or a refusal to acknowledge them.

But there is also a more important, spiritual point. A plan to divide up your own country implies that you do not recognize its historical and cultural value—in effect, that you feel an ideological hatred for it. For if you think that any country, even a small one, is of enormous interest to all mankind by virtue of its unique historical path, national ideas, and culture, then a large country such as Russia, which has played a significant role in world history, must be of even greater value in all these respects, and its division into a multitude of tiny pieces must be cause at least for regret.

It is only fair to admit that ideological hatred for Russia—or, as people now say, Russophobia—was characteristic of some liberals

in tsarist Russia too. For example, this was the idea expressed by Pyotr Chaadaev in his first philosophical letter, where he argued that Russia has no history because true history supposedly exists only in the Catholic West. At about the same time, another partisan of Catholicism, the writer Vladimir Pecherin, penned the celebrated lines:

*How sweet it is to hate the fatherland*

*And greedily await its destruction!*

*And to see in its destruction*

*The universal hand of rebirth.*

Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century, such views were just curiosities: they were not characteristic of the majority of liberals.

During the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, by contrast, hostility to the Russian state as such\* came to predominate within the liberal movement. There were probably several reasons for this. First, the movement took shape inside the Soviet system, which subordinated all spheres of life to the state. Under these circumstances the struggle for freedom inevitably became a struggle not only against the specifically Soviet form of the state but also against the Russian state as such. A passage in the memoirs of Valeria Novodvorskaia\*\* is of interest in this connection:

In August 1968, I became a real enemy of the state, the army, navy, and air force, the party, and the Warsaw Pact. I walked the streets like an underground resistance fighter in occupied territory. That was when I decided that for all these crimes . . . there was only one form of punishment—destruction of the state. Even today, when the state lies half-destroyed in blood and dirt, when it seems very probable that it will perish together with the entire nation, I feel neither pity nor repentance. Accursed be the day on which the Soviet Union

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\*Literally, “state-fighting ideas” (*gosudarstvoborcheskie idei*).—Trans.

\*\*Valeria Novodvorskaia (1950–2014)—one of the earliest and most radical Soviet dissidents, founder and leader of the Democratic Union.—Trans.

was born! Let it turn into a common grave for us all. (Novodvorskaia 1993)

Perhaps these thoughts are excessively radical and “poetic,” but they do reflect some sort of tendency.

Second, Russian liberals were brought up on Soviet ideology and understood its negation as the creation of a new ideology with the signs reversed. Thus, if the authorities considered the Soviet Union a great progressive state and the alternative to the socially backward West then their enemies felt compelled to view it as a wholly pernicious state that had to be subordinated to the “civilized” West. This attitude has been extended to the post-Soviet Russian Federation, which oppositionists now find increasingly reminiscent of the Soviet Union.

Third, the attitudes of Russian liberals reflected their inadequate education—in particular, their poor knowledge of the history and culture of their own country and especially of Russian religious culture (again a consequence of Soviet antireligious education), which possesses a unique wealth that differs in significant respects from the European tradition.

In the West, by the way, supporters of universal democratization, liberals, and human rights activists do not oppose the foreign policy initiatives or even the military expeditions of their governments. They merely demand that these initiatives and expeditions be conducted in the interests of “democracy.” Thus, in the ideology of democratism, traditional Western expansionism has merely changed its form: whereas the Crusades were conducted in the name of true religion, and colonial conquests were justified by reference to the civilizing mission of progressive societies, today bombing raids are flown ostensibly “in defense of human rights violated by dictators.” The hypocrisy and senselessness of this approach is well illustrated in a famous Internet meme that puts the following words in the mouth of Barack Obama: “Syrians have killed Syrians. So now we must kill Syrians in order to stop Syrians killing Syrians.” In the West and especially in the United States, hostility to the state is a characteristic attitude not of liberals but of extreme conservatives.

Thus the hostility to the Russian state that prevails in today's liberal and human rights movement is essentially as much a vestige of the Soviet system as are attempts to directly restore Soviet attributes and symbols, only with signs reversed. Whereas the struggle for liberalization in contemporary Russia has been monopolized by primitive Westernizers who are hostile to the Russian state, do not care about Russia's national goals, and do not understand that for a whole series of reasons (geographical position, size, cultural traditions, and the values of the majority of the population) their country cannot be simply an appendage of the Western system, the struggle for Russian national goals has in fact been monopolized by advocates of dictatorship. This latter tendency manifested itself with special clarity during the recent events in Ukraine, when the—in principle good—cause of reunification with Crimea provided a pretext for the most odious personages from the recent but forgotten Soviet past to return to prominence. The chief advocates and propagandists for this cause were semi-fascist and Stalinist figures—the ideologues of the attempted putsch of August 1991—who previously would not even have been allowed anywhere near the state television studios. Critics of government policy are being chased out of the journalistic community and the media outlets of the opposition are being closed down. Radio and television speak in a single voice—one that breaks now and then into a chauvinistic shriek and calls for nuclear war. An increasing number of television programs remind me of old KGB products designed to “rebuff the class enemy.” It would appear that the defunct worldview of the Soviet special services, according to which we are surrounded by external and internal enemies against whom we must wage a merciless struggle, is again coming to dominate our information space.

The current situation presents Russians with a choice: *either* to support democratization but oppose the strengthening of Russia's international position in favor of turning it into a junior, subordinate partner of the West *or* to strengthen Russia in conjunction with the establishment of a nationalist dictatorship that would pose a threat to all its neighbors. *Either* Nemtsov and Kasparov *or* Dugin and Prokhanov—and nothing in between.

The first position may be suspected of catering to the interests of the corrupt comprador stratum headed by the oligarchs and big bureaucrats, who fear for their savings and real estate in London. For them the chaos and disarray of the 1990s were a golden age, when they were able to use their connections in the government to plunder their own people with impunity and take the loot abroad. A certain measure of pluralism is even useful in this regard, because a dictatorship may turn against theft: it should not be forgotten that Benito Mussolini was the most effective in uprooting the Italian Mafia.

The basis of the second tendency is the increasingly pervasive ideology of the special services, with its celebrated theory of the authoritarian “detour” that alone supposedly might save Russia from collapse, with its psychology of the besieged fortress, and with its search for an enemy in every neighbor and a traitor in everyone who thinks differently. In contrast to Soviet times and the Yeltsin period, the bearers of this ideology are no longer restrained by the political authorities because they themselves are the political authorities.

Which of these alternatives are we to choose? On the one hand, “sooner Varangians than bloodsuckers”<sup>\*</sup> who might return the country to the GULAG; on the other hand, I sympathize with an “ingathering of Russian lands” and would like our country to have more rational borders, because the authoritarian regime will eventually fall but Russia will remain. And whether the Westernizing politicians of the opposition—many of whom, incidentally, have already been in power and only fostered the system of theft and chaos—will be able to preserve Russia is very doubtful. The situation is extremely complex. For me the bard Alexander Gorodnitsky has come to symbolize this complexity: in 2007 he wrote a song titled *Sevastopol Will Stay Russian*

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<sup>\*</sup>A quotation from the poem “Letters to a Roman Friend” (Pis'ma rimskomu drugu) by the Soviet dissident poet Joseph Brodsky. According to legend, the Varangians were the Vikings whom the tribes of ancient Rus' invited to “come and rule over us.”—Trans.

[Sevastopol' ostanetsia russkim], which became the informal hymn of the city; and yet now he has signed a letter of the intelligentsia against “the annexation of Crimea.” But why is it necessary to make such a choice at all? Why is it not possible to be a supporter of a free but strong and independent Russia? This, after all, was always the kind of country for which Russian liberals fought. The West for them was an ideal only in regard to certain elements of internal structure, but they never idealized its pragmatic and often anti-Russian foreign policy. And only out-and-out terrorists and enemies of the Russian state such as the Bolsheviks called for “turning the imperialist war into a civil war.”

Today too the close interconnection between democracy and the foreign policy goals of the West is no more than a myth of the Russian liberal opposition. While strictly observing the rule of law at home, Western leaders have a much more pragmatic attitude toward international law. It was not Russia but the West that thwarted the creation of a new system of world politics based on international law when the possibility of such a system arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was not Russia but the West that—having come to believe in the “end of history”—took advantage of its temporary monopoly of effective military power to create a world in which it is considered permissible to grab whatever is there for the taking, erase any boundaries, and break any agreements for the sake of a “good purpose.” It was not Russia but the West that deliberately destroyed the postwar legal system based on respect for state sovereignty by promoting theories such as “humanitarian intervention” and “responsibility to protect.” It was not Russia but the West that exerted pressure on the International Court of Justice to rule that Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence did not violate international law. Russia repeatedly warned that the precedents of the bombing of Serbia, the separation of Kosovo from Serbia, and the military operations in Iraq and Libya would undermine the system of international law, including the principle of the inviolability of borders in Europe as enshrined in the Helsinki documents. If not

for the UN Security Council, then any strong power will decide for itself which morsel to swallow and for what “good purpose.”

The position of Western leaders on Crimea, who refer to the principles of respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, is therefore seen in Russia as nothing but the rankest hypocrisy. In the new situation—one in which everything is decided by force and ideology serves merely as its fig leaf—it is necessary to determine how force should be applied and to what end. It seems to me that if the principle of the inviolability of borders is no longer operative then the wishes of the population should be taken into account. If the inhabitants of South Sudan were allowed to break away from Sudan and the people of East Timor from Indonesia, if the Catalonians have the right to secede from Spain and the Scots from Britain, then why can the residents of Crimea not break away from Ukraine and join Russia? I am struck by the pro-Western dogmatism of Russians who oppose the incorporation of Crimea: they care more about the abstract principles of the West, which Western countries seek to impose on others but do not observe themselves, than about the aspirations of millions of people.

At the same time, living in a besieged fortress where the authorities see enemies everywhere and view those who think differently as traitors and a fifth column is by no means an appealing prospect. Undoubtedly, most Russians would prefer not to make this choice. Numerous polls show that most Russians love their country and want it to be strong and prosperous, but that they also value their freedom to travel at home and abroad, are concerned about the corruption and irresponsibility of the authorities, and certainly do not dream of the restoration of Stalinism or the establishment of a nationalist dictatorship.

The unpalatable choice facing Russia impels many talented people to leave the country. I know this from the many students who see no attractive prospects of employment in Russia except for work in the bodies of state power and administration, where it is now possible to earn high incomes. In all other spheres, such as science, education, health care, industry, and private business, pay is higher

abroad—and, indeed, life there is much more secure and comfortable.

Moreover, people are emigrating not only to the West but also to Asian countries—China, Thailand, India, and so on.

There is only one way out of this situation. People have to be offered a third path—one that will satisfy the aspirations of the majority. This path would combine the normal, moderate patriotism that is natural for the citizens of a great country proud of its history with an equally moderate liberalism, expressed in a striving to live more freely, in accordance with the law, without theft and corruption, and with developed self-government. The European path or vector for the development of Russia should not mean subordinating our country to the interests of the EU; it should mean borrowing positive and acceptable elements of the European state structure, above all, the rule of law, constructively interacting with Europe and the United States, and clarifying the Russian position while firmly upholding Russian interests. Supporters of this path should not disseminate values of “democratism” that are of no interest to anyone in Russia and irritate the majority of citizens (like feminism and homosexual marriage), but focus on the country’s real problems, problems of real public concern: the struggles for an independent judicial system, against corruption and illegal migration, and against the privileges of the ruling caste, nationalism, and xenophobia. It is necessary to explain that precisely these problems prevent Russia from becoming a great and powerful country. Only such a truly liberal movement will be capable of opening up prospects for the country, making life comfortable for the majority of Russians, and giving Russia itself international appeal and popularity.

## Notes

1. [The ideology of “democratism”] is described by Ilya Smirnov, who introduced the word *liberasty* into circulation in a book by the same title (I. Smirnov, *Liberastiia* [<http://supol.narod.ra/archive/books/liberast.htm>]).

2. *BTI 2008 Estonia Country Report* ([www.bti-project.de/reports/laenderberichte/ecse/est/2008/index.nc](http://www.bti-project.de/reports/laenderberichte/ecse/est/2008/index.nc)).

3. Michael A. McFaul, "Confronting Putin's Russia," *New York Times*, March 23, 2014 ([www.nytimes.com/2014/03/24/opinion/confronting-putins-russia.html?hp&rref=opinion&r=1/](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/24/opinion/confronting-putins-russia.html?hp&rref=opinion&r=1/)).

4. Quoted from: Adrian Croft, "NATO Says Russia Has Big Force at Ukraine's Border, Worries over Transdnistria" ([www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/23/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSBREA2M0EG20140323/](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/23/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSBREA2M0EG20140323/)).

5. A.D. Sakharov, *Proekt: Konstitutsiia Soiuza Sovetskikh Respublik Evropy i Azii* ([www.yabloko.ru/Themes/History/sakharovconst.html](http://www.yabloko.ru/Themes/History/sakharovconst.html)).

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