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## The Idea of Russia's “Special Path” (Part I)

Studies in Russian Intellectual History,  
Political Ideology, and Public Opinion

Issue Editors:

Dmitry Gorenburg, Emil Pain, and Andreas Umland

*M.E. Sharpe*

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ALEKSANDR VERKHOVSKII AND EMIL PAIN

## Civilizational Nationalism

### The Russian Version of the “Special Path”

*“Civilizational nationalism,” the view that Russia follows a special path that predisposes it to authoritarian government, affects both the country’s prospects for full-fledged democracy and the way in which academic and political circles discuss those prospects.*

In this article we examine a variety of the ideology of the “special path,” widespread in Russia, that uses the idea of a special Russian civilization to prove that full-fledged democratic development cannot occur in Russia. Why do we call this ideological model *civilizational nationalism*? Many definitions of nationalism exist, but if we confine ourselves to those accepted in political science, we can say that, broadly understood, nationalism is a political tendency in which the basic principle is the recognition of a people (nation) [*narod (natsiia)*] as the source of state power and the main agent [*sub’ekt*] of the political system. Some political forces regard a nation as an ethnic community (ethnic nationalism), while others identify the nation with the citizens of a state, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or racial characteristics (civic nationalism). Ideological systems, however,

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include more varieties of nationalism. Nationalism as an ideology postulates that humanity—in accordance with the laws of nature or for sociohistorical reasons—is divided into autonomous units that differ in terms of a set of objective characteristics, including unchanging or slowly changing mindsets. In the nineteenth century, these units were identified mainly with nations; in the late twentieth century, a certain type of supranational community—the *civilization*—was with increasing frequency identified as the main sociocultural unit associated with special mental frameworks (coherent images of the world). There have been innumerable attempts to classify civilizations on the basis of various parameters: by religious principle (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, other), by macroregion (European, Asian, African, Latin American, etc.), by location in the world system (central and peripheral), by race (civilizations of the white race, e.g.), or by country (Russian, e.g.). Many scholars have proposed typologies of civilizations based on combinations of various indicators (examples include the typologies of Nikolai Danilevsky, Philip Bagby and Fernand Braudel, Alfred Kroeber, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Ellsworth Huntington, and Samuel P. Huntington); all such typologies, however, lack rigor and use combinations of indicators chosen in an almost wholly arbitrary manner. In the opinion of the well-known Russian philosopher German Diligenskii, the very idea of a civilization “is one of those concepts of scholarly and everyday language that are not susceptible to being defined in any way that is at all rigorous and unambiguous. If we try somehow to mash together its various meanings, then obviously we get some sort of intuitive image rather than a logically tested category.”<sup>1</sup> Despite all the vagueness of the very concept of civilization, however, it is widely used in Russian politics. As a rule, it is used for the purposes usually served by ethnic nationalism: above all, to consolidate society on the basis of concepts of a common historical and cultural essence and to counterpose our own special and unique community to “foreign” communities. In this article we try to present a panorama of contemporary political forces that to one degree or another make use of the new civilizational nationalism and to analyze the causes and possible consequences for Russia of the growing interest shown by various political forces in nationalism of this type.

### The Pendulum of the Public Mood

At the beginning of the 1990s, most Russians (more than two-thirds) were gripped by expectations of positive change and a return to the “family

include more varieties of nationalism. Nationalism as an ideology postulates that humanity—in accordance with the laws of nature or for sociohistorical reasons—is divided into autonomous units that differ in terms of a set of objective characteristics, including unchanging or slowly changing mindsets. In the nineteenth century, these units were identified mainly with nations; in the late twentieth century, a certain type of supranational community—the *civilization*—was with increasing frequency identified as the main sociocultural unit associated with special mental frameworks (coherent images of the world). There have been innumerable attempts to classify civilizations on the basis of various parameters: by religious principle (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, other), by macroregion (European, Asian, African, Latin American, etc.), by location in the world system (central and peripheral), by race (civilizations of the white race, e.g.), or by country (Russian, e.g.). Many scholars have proposed typologies of civilizations based on combinations of various indicators (examples include the typologies of Nikolai Danilevsky, Philip Bagby and Fernand Braudel, Alfred Kroeber, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Ellsworth Huntington, and Samuel P. Huntington); all such typologies, however, lack rigor and use combinations of indicators chosen in an almost wholly arbitrary manner. In the opinion of the well-known Russian philosopher German Diligenskii, the very idea of a civilization “is one of those concepts of scholarly and everyday language that are not susceptible to being defined in any way that is at all rigorous and unambiguous. If we try somehow to mash together its various meanings, then obviously we get some sort of intuitive image rather than a logically tested category.”<sup>1</sup> Despite all the vagueness of the very concept of civilization, however, it is widely used in Russian politics. As a rule, it is used for the purposes usually served by ethnic nationalism: above all, to consolidate society on the basis of concepts of a common historical and cultural essence and to counterpose our own special and unique community to “foreign” communities. In this article we try to present a panorama of contemporary political forces that to one degree or another make use of the new civilizational nationalism and to analyze the causes and possible consequences for Russia of the growing interest shown by various political forces in nationalism of this type.

### The Pendulum of the Public Mood

At the beginning of the 1990s, most Russians (more than two-thirds) were gripped by expectations of positive change and a return to the “family

of civilized nations” and the beaten track of world development—modernization, democracy, and liberalism. This mood lasted for quite a long time. Only in the late 1990s did public attitudes change. By then, 67 percent of respondents already noted that “foreign” experience does not suit us because “Russia has its own special path.”<sup>2</sup> By the early 2000s, support for the idea of the “special path” had become almost total, with the proportion of respondents in agreement with it reaching 78 percent.<sup>3</sup> Few of our fellow citizens, however, have any idea of how the “special path” manifests itself in specifics. Their appraisals are primarily based on the counterposition “in Russia things are not as they are in the West.” At the same time, the idea of cultural predetermination gained ground in society: “Russia cannot be other than it is—such is our mentality.”

Of course, changes in the public mood were conditioned in many respects by the real difficulties that Russians experienced in adapting to a new economy, a new political system, and the new borders that appeared after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Identical social appraisals cannot, however, arise simultaneously in the heads of millions of people. First they are formulated by a narrow stratum of experts, customarily called the intellectual elite, the “producers of new meanings,” and only then do these ideas penetrate mass consciousness.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the members of Russia’s intellectual elite were Western-oriented thinkers (representing a broad range of liberal and social-democratic ideas). They had an enormous influence on public opinion and proudly called themselves the “superintendents of perestroika.” The reading public passed from hand to hand and passionately discussed a collection of articles dramatically titled *There Is No Other Way* [Inogo ne dano].<sup>4</sup> Its authors proclaimed the inevitable turn of the Soviet Union, and then of Russia, from Stalinism to democracy, from the planned economy to the market, and from confrontational thinking to an alliance with the Western democracies. At this very moment, the philosophical treatise *The End of History*, by the American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama, enjoyed a stunning success in post-Soviet Russia. It proclaimed the end of the age-old struggle over political ideologies and the complete and unequivocal victory of liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup> There you have one version of the idea of a predetermined historical path.

About twenty years have passed, and not a trace remains of the former confidence in the inevitable victory of liberalism and democracy in Russia. Since the early 2000s, liberal thought has surfaced only occasionally. On the whole, Mikhail Khodorkovsky captures the current condition of

liberalism in Russia: “In fact, we clearly see today the capitulation of the liberals. . . . ‘Freedom of the press,’ ‘freedom of thought,’ and ‘freedom of conscience’ are rapidly turning into parasitical expressions. Not only ordinary people but also most of those who are customarily considered the elite wearily brush them aside.”<sup>6</sup>

There are always many claimants to a place left vacant in the intellectual mainstream. They may be left-wing, traditional, or other kinds of ideas—or, indeed, various combinations of such ideas. In this article we confine ourselves to ideas that are direct or indirect heirs to the ideas of a “special path” that have been well known in Russia since the nineteenth century.

There is nothing specifically Russian in these ideas: they were borrowed from the German philosophy of that time. Later, at the start of the twentieth century, Thomas Mann formulated the main social aims and signs of the ideology of the “special path”: to defend the national culture against the threats, impending from the West, of mechanicism and the “tyranny of the masses”—a mission that only an authoritarian police state can accomplish.<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that writers do not necessarily propose this kind of ideology for their own country. Outsiders can also issue the suggestion—for Russia, among other countries. In a book published in 1974, at the height of the cold war, but issued in Russia only twenty years later, Richard Pipes writes that the sources both of the communist regime in the Soviet Union and of present-day authoritarianism must be sought in Russia’s remote past.<sup>8</sup> Special historical characteristics of the country that originated in medieval Muscovy are handed down by tradition insofar as they have become part of Russian national culture. The most important of these special characteristics was defined by Pipes as “Russians need a ruler.”<sup>9</sup>

Supporters of the current authoritarian regime naturally greet such views of Russia’s past, present, and future with approval. But these views appeal no less to advocates of some other kind of authoritarianism, especially one that is anti-West in its slogans and anti-modernization in its essence. Yet it is not difficult to find the idea of civilizational predetermination (in general or specifically for Russia) even among those who do not benefit from this idea—that is, supporters of freedom and democracy. Such is the power of the inertia generated by the talented adepts of a “special path” for Russia, starting with the Slavophiles and [the poet Fedor] Tiutchev.

Since the start of the 2000s, the state-controlled mass media have disseminated the idea of the cultural or civilizational predetermination of a “special path” for Russia with particular fervor. In the spring of 2006, for example, it found reflection in a twelve-episode television series hosted by Andrei Konchalovsky, *Culture Is Destiny* [Kul'tura—eto sud'ba]. Official Russian policy picked the idea up and promoted it widely. “Culture is destiny. God commanded us to be Russians”—to quote a lecture delivered by Vladislav Surkov in June 2007 to the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>10</sup> In this lecture, the first deputy head of the Presidential Administration tells citizens that culture determines *permanent* characteristics of the political system. In the case of Russia, this means a centralized state in which the role of individuals is more important than laws.

The Kremlin's canonization of the idea of a special thousand-year-old civilization that predetermines a “special path” for Russia is gradually elevating it to the rank of an official “one true doctrine” to replace Marxism-Leninism. An army of paid and unpaid propagandists are mining this vein of gold, turning a theory into a political technology. The primary purpose of this idea is to legitimize a particular understanding of sovereignty (in which, as once happened with the concept of “autocracy” [*samoderzhavie*], independence from outside rule is conflated with domestic authoritarianism) and the excessive personalization of the system of political power.<sup>11</sup>

The same ideology has to serve the purpose of political therapy. It impresses on people that the habit of comparing the situation in Russia with that in the developed countries is senseless and harmful insofar as the West is not an example for us—it is another civilization. The inculcation into mass consciousness of ideas about a “special civilization” and its “special path” acts as a quarantine, blocking the penetration into Russia of “alien” liberal and democratic trends. True, this effort yields poor results, because comparing Russia with the West has been perhaps the most persistent theme in Russian political thought, irrespective of political orientation, for the last few centuries. Yet the dreams of political radicals like the political analyst Mikhail Iur'ev, who proposes to “establish an ideological basis for isolationism by creating unsurpassable civilizational differences,” should not be dismissed as utopian.<sup>12</sup> Although people cannot be forced to refrain from comparing Russia with the West, the political technologists are succeeding in erecting an ideological quarantine, guiding such comparisons toward negative appraisals and shaping an image of the West as an ageless civilizational enemy.

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The doctrine of the “special path of Russian civilization,” supported from above, marches in triumphant procession across the country, meeting no significant resistance. On the contrary, many representatives of the liberal camp, who consider themselves in opposition to the current regime, in fact support the same idea. At the end of 2008, an article by the historian Yuri Afanas’ev, “Are We Not Slaves? Historical Running in Place: Russia’s ‘Special Path,’” [My—ne raby? Istoricheskii beg na meste: “osobyi put’” Rossii] had great public resonance.<sup>13</sup> The article presents ideas similar to those put forward by Pipes over thirty years ago: the long history of Russia, at least since the seventeenth century, even today determines the servility of the Russian elite. The only difference is that Pipes looks for the genotype of servility in special features of the economy, while the Russian historian looks for it in the specific way in which the elite is formed. It is remarkable that Afanas’ev, who in the 1990s was a leader of the democratic movement and at that time supported the idea of *There Is No Other Way*—that is, the inevitable victory of liberalism in Russia—should now see an altogether different predetermination: there is no real alternative to authoritarianism in Russia.

Why is fatalism now in such high demand? Because it is the fellow-traveler of stagnation—a historical situation in which the ruling elite does not want to live in a new way and opposition forces have neither the capacity nor the knowledge to effect change. In an era of stagnation, the state authorities and the opposition share the same myth of the country’s predetermined destiny and in this sense its “special path.”

For the authorities, the creation of a social atmosphere of predetermination, of the impossibility of citizens improving the situation through their own efforts, is an important means of self-preservation.

A certain section of the liberally inclined intelligentsia, while rejecting the idea of a “special civilization” as the “millennial glory of Russia,” willingly accept the same myth when packaged as a civilization of “millennial slavery.”

So now we can identify at least three main types of apologists for the idea of civilizational predetermination in the form of a “special” historical path or track for Russia.

The first group can be called *conservative*. Its members are primarily representatives of the “strong-arm branch” of the power elite. They are the ones who most often refer to the cultural predetermination of Russia’s destiny in an effort to legitimize their policy of strengthening the state bureaucracy’s powers within the system of governance.

Another group consists of the *pessimists*, most of whom position themselves as liberal thinkers. For them, cultural predetermination and a “special civilization” explain and justify the liberals’ inaction or ineffectiveness. Among this group, the idea of Russia as a “country of slaves” is popular.

The third group comprises the most *radical defenders of civilizational nationalism*. Members of the first group (the political establishment)—lacking ideas of their own—appropriate this third group’s ideas with increasing frequency. As for members of the second group (the *pessimists*), it makes no sense to count them among the bearers of nationalist ideas; at most, we could call them civilizational nationalists against their will. They certainly have no interest in counterposing Russian civilization to any others. They do not in the least consider Western civilization alien and hostile to Russia. They have been impelled toward the idea of a “special civilization” by the disappointment of their hopes for rapid and dramatic changes in Russia’s democratic and humanistic development. As their doubts about the possibility of modernizing our country grow, the pessimists seek an explanation in the special characteristics of Russian civilization. Therefore we exclude this group from our analysis and focus on various models of pragmatic and ideologically engaged nationalism and especially on representatives of its most radical currents.

The theoretical constructions of the radicals are based on the following postulates:

—a special Russian civilization exists, and it determines the inevitability not just of a leading role for the state in the political system but also of a special role for the person who leads the nation, its chief (*vozhd'*) or monarch;<sup>14</sup>

—the natural territorial-political form of such a civilization is the empire;<sup>15</sup> and

—the leading role in the empire must be played by ethnic Russians, an idea that must, in one way or another, be embodied in law.<sup>16</sup>

This ideological tendency, which is the main object of our analysis, breaks down in its turn into many currents.

### **Political Currents of Civilizational Nationalism**

Of course, not all representatives of this tendency openly declare their allegiance to the “special path,” and even fewer use the actual term “special civilizational characteristics” in constructing their theories. We

identify as civilizational nationalists those authors and groups in which it is possible to discover the three indicators of civilizational nationalism listed above.

The *red patriots* constitute the procommunist wing of civilizational nationalism. They were historically the first to appear in post-Soviet Russia, at the very start of the 1990s (their opponents at that time called them “red-brown”). For ideologues in this group, the “special civilization” is an empire inside the borders of the former Soviet Union (perhaps with certain adjustments, but they see the Soviet Union as the basis of the legitimacy of the Russia they envision), invested with the mission of vanquishing the empire of the West (they also call it the “Euro-Atlantic” or “American” empire). This mission arises from the national character of the Russian people, who are inspired by the ideals of communism (alternatively, by the ideals of equality and conciliarity [*sobornost*], successfully embodied in communism) and create a great new empire. It is remarkable that this exotic but widely held doctrine regards communist ideals not as borrowings from Western Marxism but as manifestations of the national “Russian spirit.” Many organizations of red patriots declared such ideas at the outset. Examples are the early *Pamiat*, followed in the early 1990s by the multitude of so-called “fronts” for struggle against Western capitalism—the United Front of Working People, the Union of Officers, the National Salvation Front, and so on.<sup>17</sup> The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) continued this line, as did the coalitions that it formed with the nationalists. Nostalgia for the Soviet Union gradually weakened, however; and even though the CPRF succeeded in crushing all its rivals in the red-patriotic sector by the end of the 1990s, the political weight of the party began to decline.

The *Black Hundreds* [*chernosotensy*] are extreme right-wing Orthodox Christian nationalist organizations that emphasize their historical connection with ideologically similar organizations in tsarist Russia.<sup>18</sup> In 1905, an organization was formed under the name the “Black Hundred” to agitate in favor of strengthening the Romanov empire and the dominant role of the ethnic Russian Orthodox population. Their heirs in contemporary Russia endorse the same idea. In 1992, they created a new Black Hundred organization and established a newspaper under the same name; later, they made several attempts to revive the prerevolutionary Union of the Russian People.

While the red patriots call for the revival of the relatively recent Soviet empire, the Black Hundreds seek to restore the prerevolutionary

empire—that is, their project is much more utopian. Riding the wave of public reaction against everything Soviet at the beginning of the 1990s, the fantastic nature of these plans was not so obvious, but the Black Hundred organizations (above all, the National-Patriotic Front *Pamiat'* and some of its offshoots, including the Black Hundred itself) began rapidly to lose strength. The Black Hundreds still exist, but their organizations—above all, several versions of the united but already split Union of the Russian People—look very weak.

*Orthodox fundamentalists*: one of the obvious causes of the strategic failure of Black Hundred propaganda was that many Russians found it incomprehensible. Its archaic Orthodox and monarchist rhetoric attracted a few but repelled the majority. With the growth and (relative) intellectual maturation of a church-oriented public, the Black Hundreds found a new audience and merged with a new kind of activist—Orthodox fundamentalists. Ethnic Russian nationalism is by no means foreign to the fundamentalists, but their main focus lies elsewhere: with the fight against the Antichrist, as manifested in, among other things, symbols imposed by the post-Soviet state authorities in imitation of the West (bar codes on goods for sale, taxpayer identification numbers, etc.). This group understands Russia's special role in religious terms: Russia is the throne of Our Lady, the last bastion of faith in a world sunk in apostasy, and so on. Thus, at the turn of the 2000s, a quite visible movement of Russian Orthodox fundamentalists emerged.<sup>19</sup> The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church (the primary target of the fundamentalists' propaganda) succeeded in weakening this movement, and it failed to become (or possibly has not yet become) an important player on the Russian political scene, although it has made its contribution to the nationalist agenda.

The *neo-Eurasianists* are another openly anti-Western political-ideological group that took shape in the mid-1990s. It is inextricably connected with the name of Alexander Dugin, whose political views have changed repeatedly. Strictly speaking, however, the issue is not his views but the astonishing role that this man has played in the establishment of Russian nationalism.<sup>20</sup> Up to 1998, he was the leading ideologue of the National-Bolshevik Party. Later Dugin profited from the political establishment's adherence to certain vague ideas about Eurasianism—in the sense of the country's dual Russo-Turkic and Orthodox-Muslim heritage.<sup>21</sup> Dugin himself always endorsed views closer to those of the Western "new right" than to classical Eurasianism, which makes it possible to describe his views as neofascist. Renouncing his former

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radicalism (not completely, of course, but more as a matter of changing his image), Dugin began successfully to exploit these banal anti-Western ideas, promoting himself as an intellectual guru no longer for the national-Bolsheviks but for officials of various ranks. The organizations that he created at the beginning of the 2000s—the International Eurasian Movement (IEM) and the Eurasian Youth League—were ephemeral and never had many members, but the list of the IEM leadership included an impressive number of high-status figures.<sup>22</sup> Most important, all the sections of Russian nationalism discussed above make use of his ideas to some degree, however they feel about Dugin himself. Through all the changes in his political views, two basic ideas recur in his works like incantations: the need to build a Eurasian empire, at least inside the bounds of the former Soviet Union, and the need to confront so-called “Anglo-Saxon liberalism.”<sup>23</sup>

*Neo-Nazi groups*—the Russian neo-Nazis are currently the most aggressive movement and are oriented toward youth. The history of Russian neo-Nazism goes back to Soviet times, but both then and in the 1990s, it was not a real but rather an imitative neo-Nazism. Most of the organizations that have most often been called “Russian fascists,” even if they called themselves fascist or Nazi, were not fascist or Nazi: they relied on eclectic ideologies and resembled neither classical Nazi organizations nor postwar West European neo-Nazis. This was true, above all, of Russian National Unity (RNU), which in the mid-1990s dominated or marginalized almost all groups of radical Russian nationalists. The RNU approved of Hitler but cultivated traditional Russian patriotism; the organization called itself Orthodox, but the views of its leader and of many activists were too exotic for them to accept such a self-identification. Although a militarized organization, the RNU took part in a comparatively small number (for its enormous size—up to fifteen thousand members in its heyday) of violent actions. In 2000, the RNU splintered into many tiny organizations—partly in response to pressure from the authorities, partly due to its own lack of activity.<sup>24</sup>

The collapse of the RNU signaled some sort of general political tendency—a dead end for the radical ethnic Russian nationalism that had emerged in the 1990s. Their propaganda no longer affected the masses. It did not cause their organizations to grow. Voters failed to support them in elections, and from the start of the 2000s, the elections themselves ceased to reflect real public sentiments. Militarized structures lost their purpose—there was nowhere to use them, given the political

demobilization of society. Finally, the authorities coopted some of the nationalists' slogans. Under these conditions, radical nationalism undertook a search for new forms.

One manifestation of this search was a rapid growth in the Nazi skinhead movement, which emerged in the mid-1990s in Russia and initially copied similar groups in Western Europe. Such copying required, first, that the Russian groups study and reproduce the neo-Nazi ideology of White Power (even then, the view of skinheads as blockheaded hooligans was a gross exaggeration); second, that they master the outer manifestations of the subculture of Western ultrarightists (attire, musical styles, and forms and mode of public behavior); and third, that they demonstrate activity—systematic (ideally) street violence against “aliens” of any kind (their first priority was to attack blacks, as such groups did in Europe; then the main target shifted to people from the Caucasus, and even later to people who looked like members of indigenous Central Asian ethnic groups).

The Nazi skinheads constantly expanded their activities, and in the early 2000s, their crimes occurred on a scale that could no longer be overlooked. Within another couple of years, by the middle of the decade, the neo-Nazis had become not just noticeable but the most active and numerous section of the Russian nationalist movement. Their preponderance was so obvious that since then not a single nationalist project with a claim to more than a marginal role has been able to get by without them.<sup>25</sup>

In recent years, there have been signs that the skinhead subculture is becoming less fashionable, at least in Russia's largest cities. The authorities are putting more pressure on skinhead organizations, and the law-enforcement agencies are stepping up efforts to prosecute them. Nevertheless, this movement remains a noticeably bellicose and anarchic force, as manifested in its organizational structure. It consists of a multitude of small autonomous groups (often with fewer than ten fighters) that maintain predominantly horizontal and often indirect ties with one another. Hierarchical networks sometimes arise, such as the United Brigades 88 at the beginning of the decade; a current movement of this type is Nazi Straight Edge. Attempts have also been made to create large political organizations: the largest was the National Socialist Society (NSS), which was active from 2004 both on the political scene (in local elections, the “Russian march”) and in street attacks and killings. The law-enforcement agencies, however, crushed the NSS in 2007–8. Proceedings are now underway to ban the last large legal neo-Nazi organization—the Slavic Union (SU). For these reasons, the

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neo-Nazi movement is reassuming the form of autonomous, horizontal and conspiratorial structures.

### **Attempts by Russian Nationalists to Leave the “Special Path”**

In view of the amorphous nature of today’s neo-Nazi movement, it is not easy to characterize its ideology. We do not claim to have conducted a full content analysis of the diverse texts produced by this movement—this work remains to be done—but we can say for sure that the transition from the patriotic syncretism of the RNU to the ideology of White Power entailed a loss of the fundamental features of the Russian version of “civilizational nationalism.”

White Power as an ideological current is new to Russia, and it does not support the traditional slogan of post-Soviet Russian nationalism—“Bring Back the Empire!” Not only do Nazi skinheads not put forward imperial demands to expand Russian territory; they do not even support the idea of “holding on to territory.” On the contrary, they have an interest in the separation from Russia of ethnically (as they understand it, “racially”) alien territories—specifically, the North Caucasus. In general, they pose as the defending side—defending themselves against the “invasion” of immigrants and all non-Slavs (Muslim expansion is also mentioned though rarely; neo-Nazis are usually indifferent to religion, be they unbelievers, Orthodox, or neo-pagans).

The neo-Nazis have less and less faith in the “Führer principle,” because they are disappointed with the activity of the Führers who have already put themselves forward—Alexander Barkashov (RNU), Dmitri Rumiantsev (NSS), Dmitry Demushkin (SU), and so on. Of course, they do not support the ideas of liberal democracy either. As already noted, they are spontaneous anarchists, and many of them describe themselves as such.

Finally, the very concept of a “special path” for Russia is deeply foreign to the skinheads. They are oriented toward White Power and recognize the need for an alliance (if one based on necessity rather than friendship) of the “white nations” against the rest. Their ideal is a state that is ethnically pure in its self-definition (they allow for the existence of subordinate ethnic groups) alongside other states of the same kind. Moreover, they believe that West Europeans should understand the national state in such terms as well—as they would, in the skinheads’ view, we

it not for the interference of “accursed political correctness.” Although not a literal quotation, this statement expresses the gist of their argument, which we cannot quote verbatim because the original vocabulary is not fit to print.

At the same time, Russian neo-Nazis can entertain ideas of civilizational nationalism—just not as traditionally understood in Russia. Rather, they accept the version that prevailed in the Third Reich: civilizations of the white Aryan race whose mission is to rule the world. The only difference is that the German Nazis excluded the Slavs, including the Russians, from the community of Aryan nations, whereas the Russian neo-Nazis do not doubt the necessity of ethnic Russian domination in Russia (they usually define ethnic affiliation in terms of blood, although some of them are prepared to relax the criteria, especially because neo-Nazis may themselves have non-Slavic surnames).

The Nazi skinhead movement, even though it is gradually abandoning the specific skinhead style, is still unacceptable to the many citizens who in principle might support Russian nationalism. They are repelled by the open sympathy for Hitler, the clearly visible foreign roots of the movement, and its even clearer indifference toward (or—more often—open neglect of) established traditions of nationalist discourse. All these features demand too radical a reorientation from potential supporters. It is no accident that the neo-Nazi movement remains primarily a youth movement, but even there its growth has slowed.

By the start of the 2000s, the nationalist milieu sensed the need for a different variant of nationalism that would be acceptable both to Nazi skinheads and to citizens more conservative in their behavioral and mental habits. The Movement Against Illegal Immigration (MAII), which appeared on the Russian political scene in 2002, tried to exploit this need. It offered Russian youth—and then not only youth—a popular product, already tested by the RNU, in the form of the slogan: “Russia for the Russians!” The MAII formulated, more clearly than the neo-Nazis, an image of the main enemy of the Russians—formally immigrants belonging to other ethnic groups but in fact all “aliens” [*inorodtsy*]. “Migrantophobia” became not only a universally comprehensible but also a legal version of nationalist propaganda: it was possible to formulate it in nonethnic terms and speak out more or less in unison with the many officials talking about the necessity of restricting immigration (with equally transparent ethnic connotations). Initially, the MAII did not issue political declarations of any kind apart from the single idea of ensuring the dominance of ethnic

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Russians in the country, and this restraint won sympathy for the MAII from many supporters of other Russian nationalist groups and currents, including Nazi skinheads, because having such a simple agenda made it possible to avoid ideological splits, long recognized as one of the chief problems of the Russian nationalist movement. From the start, the MAII demonstrated loyalty to the authorities, which markedly reduced the pressure from law enforcement. The MAII did not look like an imitative political phenomenon imported from the West, although MAII leader Aleksandr Belov rightly noted that the MAII's main demand is identical to that of European ultrarightists, including the corresponding parliamentary parties, which gave the movement solidity. At the same time, the MAII is inextricably connected with earlier trends in Russian nationalism. Belov himself is a former member of *Pamiat'* and maintains ties with it.

In the second half of Putin's first term, the growing popularity of nationalist ideas in Russia turned them into a valuable political resource that could not be ignored by most antiliberal Russian political parties. The CPRF, which had already appropriated the ideas of civilizational nationalism in the 1990s (without formally renouncing traditional left-wing ideas of internationalism), in 2002–3 ratcheted up its ethnonationalistic rhetoric. The Liberal-Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, which by the end of the 1990s had almost lost its ideological coloration, in the first half of the 2000s again began to peddle the idea of Russian nationalism, combined with socialist populism (for the elections to the fifth Duma session, it came up with the slogan "We Are for the Poor, We Are for the Russians").

In preparation for the parliamentary elections of 2003, the authorities created first an electoral bloc named the Popular-Patriotic Union Rodina [Motherland], then the Rodina party. The designers of this project could at first regard it as quite successful, but no doubt they soon wondered whether it might not be too successful. Rodina's triumph in the 2003 elections (9 percent of votes for a bloc that had only just been created, largely taken away from the main opposition force—the CPRF) demonstrated not only the popularity of its national-populist rhetoric: after all, the CPRF used essentially similar rhetoric. The difference between the parties was rather a matter of form: Rodina was more candid and appeared fresh. That is, the elections also demonstrated the popularity of the idea of a new party as such. The growth of Rodina was simply stunning: a check conducted by the Federal Registration Service in April 2006 revealed that the party had 135,000 members and was the second

largest in Russia (the largest being the main party of power—United Russia). Rodina, loyal to the authorities from the start, was allowed to indulge in openly national-populist rhetoric that left both the CPRF and Zhirinovskiy's party, which took too lackadaisical an approach to the role of chief official nationalist, in the dust. Rodina's ethno-xenophobic and oppositional rhetoric were initially restrained by the party's ties with the Kremlin. We will explain the dual position of the Russian authorities in relation to nationalism below, but here we note that it was not the increasingly aggressive nature of Rodina's nationalistic and xenophobic ideas that eventually led to its collapse. The party began to defy the Kremlin. Then the designers of Rodina destroyed their own creation.<sup>26</sup>

Rodina's ideology defies easy interpretation, because the people who gathered under its roof were too varied. They included clearly left-wing figures (Oleg Shein), conservative Orthodox nationalists (Aleksandr Krutov and others), socially oriented conservatives (Sergei Glazev), typical adepts of the "special path of Russian civilization" (Natalya Narochnitskaya), and advocates of a racially pure ethnonationalism (Andrei Savel'ev). All this diversity did not (and, indeed, probably could not) fit into a single ideology or even into a shared party rhetoric. Yet Rodina's message rang out loud and clear. It was identical to that of the MAII—for ethnicization of the Russian state and against "migrants" (which is always understood in public discourse as referring not to all migrants but specifically to ethnic non-Russians who have "flooded" into "traditionally Russian" regions).

Throughout the party's existence, it pulled in oppositionists of the most varied kinds, including activists from the emerging nationalist networks. Even the uncontrollable and anarchic Nazi skinheads appeared acceptable to Rodina. Here Rodina naturally came into competition with the MAII, which had already staked a claim to these groups.

The MAII itself was growing rapidly at that time, creating small but active cells in many regions and cooperating with the semiunderground neo-Nazis. Connected with radicals and unrecognized by the authorities despite its inveterate loyalty, the movement was doomed to drift toward politicization. The triumphant first "Russian march" on 4 November 2005 made the MAII widely known and fueled its ambitions; they reached their apogee after the riots in Kondopoga almost a year later, which the MAII presented as its own successful project. Transformation into an oppositional political organization was almost inevitable. Right then, in mid-2006, Rodina fell apart; and a substantial number of its leaders and

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activists became natural allies of the MAII. These were people from its most nationalist wing, who refused to join the second most important party of power—A Just Russia. This refusal led to the plan for the Great Russia Party—to be based primarily on the cells of the MAII and led by the radical ethnonationalist Andrei Savel'ev, then still a State Duma deputy. But the authorities did not support this plan, which under contemporary Russian conditions doomed it to failure. Great Russia quickly left the scene, and since then the MAII has come under growing pressure from the authorities. It was driven into irreconcilable opposition, is now in serious crisis, and is unlikely to regain the banner of Russian ethnonationalism that it raised in 2005–6. But others have adopted its ideas and methods.

Thus, 2009 saw the rapid rise of Russian Image, a group that has in fact retraveled the path of the early MAII, emphasizing its nonoppositional character and linking itself even more closely with the neo-Nazis. This group, like the MAII and Rodina, combines nationalism with populist rhetoric. Only the arrest of two members on suspicion of murdering the lawyer and antifascist Stanislav Markelov slowed the rise of Russian Image, but if the group is marginalized like the MAII before it, we can anticipate new attempts to repeat the MAII's success.

It is, of course, politically problematic to create a movement that can grow but not become oppositional—or, at least, not be perceived as such by the Kremlin. But the experience of political construction embodied in the history of the MAII may prove promising at the level of ideology.

In 2010, adepts of pure ethnonationalism even put out the first issue of *Voprosy natsionalizma*, a journal under the editorship of Konstantin Krylov, who does not count ideologues of empire as Russian nationalists.<sup>27</sup> We will have more to say about this conflict; for the moment, we note that supporters of pure ethnic nationalism have advantages over the other—great-power or imperial—branch of civilizational nationalism. The ethnic nationalists have a practically indestructible horizontal structure that includes all sorts of people from business people and young professionals to street fighters. They also have an idea that many find appealing—making Russia a “normal” ethnonational state “like all other countries,” in which ethnic Russians will play the dominant role.

### **The “Russian Doctrine” as a Striking Experiment in Forming an Official Ideology of Civilizational Nationalism**

The intellectual output produced in Russia by all political groups that call themselves defenders of a Russian “special civilization” can be reduced

to *two basic types*. The first comprises pure propaganda and ideological texts that express the idea of civilizational predetermination with no justification beyond the statement “as is well known.” The second type of output includes scientific theories. Both kinds of construction offer ideological prohibitions on the borrowing or cultivation of democratic institutions in Russia. We will try to substantiate this conclusion, first analyzing overt propaganda.

One example is the “Russian doctrine”—the manifesto of “Russian conservatism,” which intellectually unites various political circles of antiliberal and anti-Western orientation.<sup>28</sup> The doctrine was consistently presented to various audiences in 2005–7. In particular, the stillborn Great Russia Party accepted the doctrine as the basis of its platform. At one moment, it even seemed that the doctrine might obtain official approval. Certain figures associated with the Center for Social-Conservative Policy (CSCP)—one of the three ideological clubs of United Russia—gave it serious consideration. At the same time, an ideologue (and future patriarch) of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Metropolitan Kirill, expressed approval of the doctrine.<sup>29</sup> But both the CSCP and the ROC leadership lost interest in the “Russian doctrine” as soon as it became clear that no sanction would be forthcoming from above for the promotion of such an ambitious product, developed outside direct Kremlin control.

The “Russian doctrine,” like most texts of its kind created in the 2000s, is extraordinarily eclectic, combining left-wing and right-wing, Russian and Eurasian ideas. The most fundamental and consistent position in this doctrine is negative consolidation, its constant appeal to an image of the enemy. As the well-known Russian scholar Galina Zvereva observes, the “Russian doctrine” is literally saturated with such oppositions as “we—they,” “native—alien,” “Russia—the West,” and “liberalism—conservatism.” The basic terms of this doctrine are “Russian civilization,” “Russian spirit,” “Orthodoxy,” and “national Russian state.” All these, as the authors conceive of them, are political and cultural phenomena fundamentally unlike their Western counterparts.

The text of the doctrine leaves not the slightest doubt that the “special civilization” is understood as Russian—ethnically Russian. For the authors of the doctrine, society is a “living social organism whose base is the state-forming Russian people—the ethnic Russians.”<sup>30</sup>

What kind of place are other peoples offered? The doctrine calls them “members of other tribes” [*inoplemenniki*] and gives them the

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orable (in the authors' view) status of "relatives"—younger relatives, of course, who acknowledge the "founder of the lineage and of the house" [*rodonachal'nik i osnovatel' doma*]. In this way, the authors follow the Soviet idea of peoples as older and younger relatives, but they develop it, elevating the Russians from older brothers to fathers. At the same time, the doctrine rejects the Soviet concept of internationalism altogether as "ignoring the hierarchy of Russia's ethnocultural realities." For all its pious respect for the Soviet past, for the "achievements of the Soviet system," the doctrine also rejects another Soviet institution—the federal structure of the country. Russia is envisioned as a unitary state (a "networked empire") with vertical governance ("national autocracy") and the administrative division of the country—that is, without ethnic republics.

This is a standard ethnonationalist program that justifies the dominance of a single people and a single religion in the political state system. What purpose does the "special civilization" serve here? The authors intend that the civilizational packaging should not only give their claims a scientific appearance but also provide them with an additional argument to prove that this path, and no other, is predetermined: "We cannot do otherwise: our civilization will not permit it." The approach contains an important "psychological" aspect: due to the established meaning of the word, many people in Russia find it difficult to admit to being ethnonationalists, but they have no trouble calling themselves "supporters of the special civilization." Finally, the identifier "we" seems much more convincing if it refers not to a "nation" (there are lots of nations) but to a "civilization."

The "Russian doctrine" positions itself as a political technology or project, a platform to bring the so-called national-conservative forces to power. But it is precisely as an ethnopolitical project that this doctrine is unrealizable. It calls for basing the integration of the peoples of Russia on the idea of a special Russian civilization, but when civilization is defined in ethnic terms the number of "civilizations" explodes. Indeed, we already have a whole cluster of other concepts of special regional and ethnic civilizations. Authors who identify themselves with the Caucasus speak about "Caucasian civilization."<sup>31</sup> Tatar authors discuss "Turkic," "Tatar-Turkic," or "Islamic civilization."<sup>32</sup> Circassians speak of "Circassian civilization." Chuvash posit a "Bulgar–Chuvash civilization," and Yakuts refer to the "civilization of the Sakha people."<sup>33</sup> So much for your single Russian (or at least Eurasian) civilization.

### Lost in the “Matrix”

The ideology of civilizational nationalism is nourished to one degree or another by the theoretical constructs of well-known scholars. One of them is A.S. Panarin, whose academic achievements are not in doubt and whose nonconformism and intellectual daring, repeatedly displayed during the Soviet period, inspire respect.<sup>34</sup> At the turn of the 1990s, when the dominant public feeling was that Russia had deviated from the path of “normal civilized life,” Panarin called for the “expansion of the horizon of our own existence” and “humanistic universalism.” He spoke out against an approach “that breaks up the unity of the human race” and for a “universalistic perspective of general human salvation and a shared future.”<sup>35</sup> After the events of October 1993, Panarin sharply changed course and declared that expectations of a return to the “European home” had collapsed. Disillusioned with the prospect of liberal reforms in Russia, the philosopher moved closer to the supporters of neo-Eurasian ideology and antiglobalism. At that time, Panarin’s basic idea was an “Orthodox civilization” that predetermined Russia’s age-old path as a supraethnic empire and authoritarian state fundamentally different from Western democracies. To substantiate this fundamental difference, Panarin proposed two types of mentality—Western and Eastern (Eurasian).<sup>36</sup>

Unlike political technologists who merely postulate some sort of civilizationally predetermined Russian path, Panarin as a philosopher tries to substantiate his idea. In his opinion, European (Western) and Eastern minds differ fundamentally in their specific features and develop without intersecting, like parallel worlds. The Western mentality is evolutionary and temporal (that is, dependent on historical time). It is oriented toward the future, toward achievement and mobility; it therefore tends to think in terms of progress (“getting ahead” versus “lagging behind”). The Eastern (Eurasian) mentality, by contrast, is more spatial and horizontal; it underlies the unhurried character of the Eurasian peoples, their inclination toward paternalism and life in large empires. In essence, this theory reproduces the content of the already forgotten debate between the evolutionist and diffusionist schools in anthropology, which ended with the recognition of local civilizations as a spatial expression of stadial types. Thus interpreted, Eurasian and Western civilizations represent different stages of a single process. So it was in history, for Europeans in the past were “spatial traditionalists” of the same kind as many Asian peoples today. The well-known student of antiquity A.F. Losev writes

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the static quality of the Hellenic mind. It is turned toward the past; the world is ruled by fate, to which not only people but also gods are subject; consequently, no room is left for historical development. According to the ancient Greeks, the “golden age” is behind us; the world does not move, or at least it does not undergo qualitative change. The ancient Greeks seem to be people who “walk backward into the future,” and “go out to meet it ‘backs first.’”<sup>37</sup> Until the Renaissance, Europe had no concept of the future. The concepts “then” and “later” existed, but not the concept of the future as a wished and planned-for time. All values referred to the traditional canon: people won approval if they complied with the customs established by their fathers and grandfathers. In essence, the idea of the future arose in Europe only in the modern period, as a result of modernization.

The arguments of another apologist of the “special path”—Svetlana Kirdina—are less persuasive. Developing the ideas of institutional economics, she strays into (from our point of view) the dead end of cultural determinism and “discovers” two types of society or—to use her own terms—two dominant societal matrices. In one of them, “I” predominates over “We”; in the other, “We” predominates over “I.” Once again, the properties of a matrix, in her opinion, are forever fixed. “It is precisely the dominant matrix,” she writes, “that reflects the main mode of social organization spontaneously found by a society under conditions of habituation in given spaces, in a specific environment.”<sup>38</sup>

Nothing, it seems, could be simpler than finding the primordial homeland of some civilization and describing the specific conditions of social life. And hey presto—the hypothesis concerning spontaneously found and for some reason permanently fixed modes of adaptation is proven! On checking, however, this hypothesis turns out to have cracks in all its links. Changing conditions lead either to altered modes of social organization or to the emergence of quasi-traditions that only resemble their predecessors. Even what seems at first glance the simple problem of determining the time and place at which the dominant matrix took shape usually proves insoluble.

Many peoples that Panarin and Kirdina assign to different types in terms of their “age-old mental essence” emerged under the same conditions. According to Panarin, for instance, the Finns are “temporal progressivists” and belong to the Western type, while the Turkic peoples are “spatial traditionalists” and belong to the Eurasian type. But in fact both the Finns and Turks belong to one and the same Altaic family, emerged

as peoples in the Altai, and started to resettle from Asia to Europe only over centuries. The Finns, together with the Ugrians, are by origin the same kind of Eurasian people as the Russians, who in historical times resettled in the opposite direction—from Europe to Asia.

So when and in what region did the “primordial essence” of Eurasian civilization form? And if there were a number of these beginnings, then how could they be permanent? If peoples changed their historical track once, then what prevents such changes in other eras?

The idea that culture is permanent and unchangeable presupposes that life is unchangeable and closed to outside influences. But such isolation has never existed, perhaps with the exception of a few tribes in the jungles of the Amazon, the Kalahari Desert, and other impenetrable areas. Peoples migrate, and during migration the conditions of their existence change. And if conditions change, then peoples change along with them. The Altaic peoples originally had a common cultural code and a common language and were adapted to the same natural conditions. But the conditions of life in Finland or Hungary are quite different from the conditions of life in the Altai Mountains, and the Altaic migrants adapted to them in different ways. Even after adapting their way of life to new places, however, peoples constantly faced waves of invasion and resettlement by other ethnic groups. Many peoples have sharply altered their ethnic base as a result. For example, the present-day English and French were originally Celtic peoples; then they were Romanized, and then they came under the influence of Germanic peoples. Borrowings, however, have varied in nature. The English have retained the name of their state (Britain) from the Celtic period and their language from the Germanic period. The French have lost their original Celtic autonym (Gauls) and adopted the name of Germanic tribes (Franks), but their literary language, unlike that of the English, belongs to the Romance group. The Bulgarians have chosen a Turkic autonym in historical times but retained a Slavic language and self-consciousness. And in this cauldron of unending cultural ethnogenesis, where various cultural roots combine in ways difficult to explain to form the languages, autonoms, and self-consciousness of peoples, Kirdina seeks the basis of an unshakable matrix and a primordial cultural code?

Attempts to localize “Russian (Eurasian) civilization” in time also show striking discrepancies. For example, Academician A.N. Sakharov, director of the Institute of Russian History, draws a distinction between “Russian civilization,” which in his opinion took shape between the tenth

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and the thirteenth centuries, and the “great Eurasian power” or multiethnic state that arose toward the end of the fifteenth century under Ivan III. Eurasian civilization also supposedly took shape at this time. In another of his works, however, he speaks of Eurasian civilization arising only in the eighteenth century. The Africanist Iu.M. Kobishchanov declares that “Russian civilization” took shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whereas in the eighteenth century it was replaced by the “St. Petersburg variety of Western civilization,” which was later replaced in turn by “Soviet civilization.” The leaders of the Union of Realists and the Realists’ Club still call on us only “to set about forming a Eurasian Slav–Turkic civilization.”<sup>39</sup> As the criteria for identifying Russian (Eurasian) civilization are wholly arbitrary and each author proposes his own set of such criteria, there is not the slightest hope that the players of this enthralling game will ever agree on the time when the special civilization arose.

### The Unity and Struggle of Opposites in Russian Nationalism

As already noted, Russian civilizational nationalism paradoxically combines three different ideas that do not seem to be consistent with one another: the imperial or great-power idea [*derzhavnichestvo*], ethnic nationalism, and the idea of the development of and conflict among supraethnic civilizations.

In the theory of nationalism and the nation, the imperial and nationalist principles are antipodes simply by virtue of the fact that nationalism as a political trend presupposes the sovereignty of the people or nation, while an imperial regime represents the sovereignty of the state (*imperium*). In real historical practice, however, there has not been such a strict opposition between these principles. Only nationalist movements of ethnic minorities have been able—and then only at certain stages of their activity—to adhere to the classic norms of nationalism. Nationalist movements speaking on behalf of the ethnic majority of empires have usually supported the idea of preserving the imperial state as the body of the nation and its imperial regime as the pivot of the nation. At least, the last phase of the Romanov empire saw the emergence, as noted above, of this type of nationalist movement (radical variants including the Union of the Archangel Mikhail and the Union of the Russian People). A considerable proportion of present-day Russian nationalist organizations also

recognize both the dominant role of ethnic Russians in Russia's political system and Russian imperial ideals. Here, for instance, is the MAII's leader Belov, who usually avoids this pastime, trying to theorize: "Yes, Russia has an imperial destiny. . . . The Russian mind inevitably and fatally gravitates toward and beyond the limit, which means that Russians are doomed to expand, to broaden the boundaries of the Russian world. . . . That is why any state built by Russians will turn out, somehow or other, to be an empire."<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, differences between the principles remain. Thus, the growth of ethnic suspicion is difficult to reconcile with attempts to keep peoples inside a single state. The slogan "Russia for the Russians!" is diametrically opposed to the traditional imperial slogan: "All peoples are subjects of a single sovereign" (with necessary adjustments if the empire is not a monarchy). In contemporary political life, heated discussions break out now and then between imperialists and Russian ethnonationalists. The imperialists assert that ethnic Russian nationalism is damaging to imperial revival, and even that it leads to the disintegration of Russia. The ethnonationalists reply that in the past the imperial regime sucked all the blood out of the Russian people, and that false supraethnic doctrines only impede the creation of an ethnonational state in which the Russians will finally be recognized as the only state-forming people. In addition, the ethnonationalists reproach the imperialists for lacking a firm ethnonational identity and even for insufficient racial purity—of being "halfbloods."<sup>41</sup>

Civilizational nationalism to some degree suits both sides, bringing to the fore values shared by both imperialists and Russian ethnonationalists. These values flow from the most important idea of civilizational nationalism—the permanence of the basic cultural characteristics of autonomous human groups. Both of the groups under discussion proceed from a primordialistic understanding of ethnic qualities as supposedly permanently and genetically attached to the body of the ethnic group, and one of the most salient of these qualities is the allegedly ancient predisposition of Russians toward an imperial regime and imperial grandeur. "Our yearning for a firm hand," writes Iur'ev, "arises not so much from the chaos in our social life as from a deep-rooted inner need in Russian people."<sup>42</sup> This statement comes from one of the most radical advocates of the creation of a new empire. Moreover, both the imperialists and the ethnonationalists know that the imperial idea has no appeal to most of Russia's peoples—and not only the Chechen,

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ur, Yakut, and other nationalists who seek greater autonomy or full independence for their republics or for the ruling elites of these republics. Both the imperialists and the ethnonationalists therefore regard the ethnic majority as the only potential subject of imperial revival. Hence, the support that both give to the idea of the political dominance of ethnic Russians in Russia. This idea is actively upheld by representatives of both groups, but it gives rise to the inevitable argument about how to define “Russians.”

The simplest criterion is “blood.” This one could potentially be very popular, because it is exactly how an enormous number of our fellow citizens understand the term “ethnic affiliation” [*natsional'nost'*], while apparently an even larger number place this criterion on an equal footing with others (“language,” “culture,” etc.). Aleksandr Sevast'ianov, a former chair of the National-Imperial Party of Russia (NIPR), for example, only advocates “blood” as a criterion, and all Russian neo-Nazis wholly accept it. The design for any empire built on this foundation will draw only on the model of the Third Reich, which tested the tools for its practical implementation.<sup>43</sup>

Much more popular at present is a more respectable criterion of “Russianness” [*russkost'*]—“culture.” Nationalist activists go on at length about it. For example, one of the national-imperial projects that is more in tune with current moods is that presented by Dmitry Volodikhin, according to whom “Russia’s ruling elite must consist of Russians by culture, not necessarily Russians by blood.” The author emphasizes, however, that their religious–cultural affiliation must be firm and obvious.<sup>44</sup> Thereby he excludes from the elite of the imperial state Russia’s Muslim citizens, whose number has doubled over the last half-century and continues to grow rapidly—not to mention Russia’s no less numerous atheists and agnostics.

A big problem with “culture” as a criterion is its weak functionality: it is not clear which elements of culture to assess and where to draw the line. In practice, these groups use an arbitrary mixture of various elements, completely ignoring their linkages and differences and methods of assessing them. This reflects the political marginality of the Russian ethnonationalists: they are still so far from imagining their real accession to power that they have little interest in real plans of reconstruction (what they pass off as such plans are, with rare exceptions, mere propaganda). Although a graphic example of the nonfunctionality of the “cultural” criterion is there for all to see: for the last decade and a half, the authorities

have looked without success for a sensible definition of who counts as a “compatriot.”\*

For a whole series of theoreticians of the “special path,” however, the problem of defining “Russianness” does not arise, because they pay no attention to the situation of individuals, thinking exclusively on the scale of peoples and civilizations. Panarin has proposed an imperial plan based on the “unshakable essence of Eurasian civilization.” In his view, the empire is a supraethnic formation with room for both Orthodoxy and Islam as the religions that underlie “Eurasian civilization” and therefore the Eurasian empire, and people must somehow adjust themselves to this unity.<sup>45</sup>

Gennadii Ziuganov usually talks along the same lines, explicitly or implicitly quoting the more respectable adepts of civilizational nationalism and mixing up the most diverse approaches to Russian nationalism. Here is how Ziuganov was presented as a presidential candidate in the 2008 elections:

The World Government and Putin’s team find Ziuganov disagreeable not only because he is a communist, but because he—alone among the candidates for president—is Russian both by blood and by spirit. Unlike the other candidates, who are Westernizers, Ziuganov believes that Russia is more than a country; that it is not a toady of the West but a unique Russian civilization; and that not the pro-Western elite but the people of Russia, 83 percent of whom are ethnic Russians, represent Russia’s national interests. The Russian language and Russian culture are therefore the spiritual basis of Russia’s unity. It is necessary to unite all healthy forces to save Russian spiritual culture—as the trinity of science, art, and faith—from annihilation. It is necessary to fight emasculation of the moral principle and aesthetic content in artistic creation, against the substitution of evil for good. Ziuganov has written about this in his books *On the Russians and Russia* [O russkikh i Rossii] and *Holy Rus and Koshchei’s Kingdom* [Sviataia Rus’ i Kashcheevo tsarstvo].<sup>46</sup>

Strange as it may seem, the ROC has elaborated a fairly consistent view of cultural ethnonationalism—moreover, of an imperial kind. Patriarch Aleksii II and the future patriarch Kirill jointly put forward this view as early as 1999–2000 and have since then disseminated it widely if not developed it in depth. The view—let us call it “church-oriented Russian

\*Compatriot—*sootchestvennik*, the term used for residents of other states, especially post-Soviet states, who are assigned the right to regard Russia as their homeland.—Trans.

nationalism”—is based on a definition of “Russianness” by culture and categorically *not* by blood (although, of course, one still comes across expressions like “blood kinship,” which probably indicate the eruption into consciousness of the rejected but not forgotten biologizing approach to ethnicity, which influenced the overwhelming majority of Soviet people) “Culture” itself is defined simply and quite unambiguously—in terms of religion. This definition provides the most instrumental interpretation of “Russianness”—broad and at the same time inclusive.

According to Orthodox canons, all those christened in the Orthodox Church are Orthodox Christians. The set of Orthodox Christians thus defined in Russia almost matches the set of those who define themselves as Russians (surveys show that in practical terms the percentage of respondents christened coincides with the percentage of Russians). But this set also encompasses a considerable number of other citizens who define themselves as ethnic Jews [*evrei*], Tatars, Ukrainians, and so on. Moreover, this set extends beyond the borders of Russia to encompass a clear majority of the population in Belarus and Ukraine (subsequent schisms do not automatically excommunicate people christened in the ROC) and a substantial proportion of the population in Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia, and other states in diminishing order. Even in Europe and the United States there are significant numbers of Russians thus defined although there the ROC has to address itself to other cultural criteria in the course of communicating with other Orthodox churches.

No, no one in the ROC (except for marginal individuals) says that the concepts “ethnic Russian” and “Orthodox” are identical, but there is no need to say this, because the “civilization” in whose name this intellectual exercise is conducted is called not ethnic Russian [*ruskii*] but civic Russian [*rossiiskii*] or Orthodox—depending on the scale required. Adherents of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism (excluding oppositional religious minorities) are offered the role of junior partners.

Given the desecularization of Russia’s intellectual community over the last two decades, this model appeals to many people, including a considerable proportion of highly placed officials.<sup>47</sup>

### The Russian State Authorities and Programs of Civilizational Nationalism

Russia’s political elite is at a crossroad. On the one hand, the Russian state authorities find Russian ethnonationalism flagrantly unacceptable

because it provokes a surge in minority ethnonationalisms and is fraught with conflict. On the other hand, nationalism is extraordinarily appealing as an effective means of mobilizing the masses, especially amid the current atomization of Russian society. Civic nationalism, whose ideal model is French republicanism, might assume the role of a “useful nationalism,” but the authoritarian essence of state power, which always and everywhere tends toward the exploitation of traditional mental stereotypes, impedes this development.

Thus, civilizational nationalism is almost the only means of consolidating society that the current Russian political regime can accept. It need only choose which variety of this concept to use.

Here, admittedly, a certain difficulty arises: the established power structure cannot borrow an ideology from an outside group for fear of giving the “cultural donor” political weight and creating a viable rival. This very factor doomed to failure the ambitious plans of the authors of the “Russian doctrine.” For the same reason, the ROC leadership cannot be proclaimed the main source of official ideology.

At present, the Russian authorities—in accordance with the tradition of Vladimir Putin, who has always tried to avoid ideological definition—are keeping their choice hidden, letting citizens be guided by the practices and symbols introduced by the state. It is also important to note that the Russian political establishment in its current form is not a monolithic group but a conglomerate of rather diverse bureaucratic clans, which de facto offer different versions of civilizational nationalism. For this reason alone, this doctrine cannot be coherent and clear.

Thus, the authorities express a highly inconsistent attitude toward imperial ideology as an inseparable part of Russian civilizational nationalism. On the one hand, Russian policy canonizes the imperial principle of “holding on to territory”: Putin has called the “persistence of the state over a wide expanse” a “millennial feat of Russia.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the current authorities have never proclaimed imperial expansion as an ideal—if we do not count the creation of satellite enclaves in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the anti-Ukrainian escapades of Yuri Luzhkov, and statements by certain other low-ranking politicians.

Another manifestation of the contradictory nature of the “elusive” official ideology has to do with the use in official discourse of a general term for citizens of Russia. The state never uses *russkie* and *ruskii narod*, terms that have historically had a strong ethnic connotation, for this purpose. At the same time, official representatives also avoid using the purely

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geographical *rossiiane*, introduced into official discourse under Boris Yeltsin, whose speechwriters borrowed a term from nineteenth-century Russian literature. Meanwhile, ethnic Russian connotations applied to general references to citizens of the Russian state inevitably arise during the authorities' increasingly frequent appeals to Russian history.

Such connotations now predominate not only in history textbooks and in the speeches of many cultural figures but also in politicians' statements. The only way to overcome this obvious contradiction is to refer to a supraethnic level of community, usually called a "civilization." It goes without saying that the rhetoric of civilizational nationalism increasingly permeates official academic discourse—for example, university courses in history. A public outcry resulted when Dugin, one of the most odious ideologues of civilizational nationalism, obtained an official position at Moscow State University—albeit in the sociology faculty, whose dean had long been a scandalous character.<sup>49</sup>

In the second half of the 2000s, civilizational nationalism, with its play on ethnic and supraethnic principles, gradually became a commonplace in the speeches not only of publicists but also of important state figures, including Vladislav Surkov, father of the idea of "sovereign democracy."<sup>50</sup>

It is remarkable that Dmitry Medvedev, before assuming the presidency, took issue with Surkov (without naming him) and criticized his term, saying that the "concepts *sovereignty* and *democracy* come from different conceptual categories and cannot be compared. . . . If any qualifiers are attached to the word 'democracy,' it leaves a strange aftertaste. It suggests that some sort of different, untraditional democracy is under discussion."<sup>51</sup> But after becoming head of state, Medvedev did not rule out the concept of "sovereign democracy."

Nevertheless, the concept has not lost its "strange aftertaste": although the value of democracy is recognized, its essential indicators, which limit personal power, are denied. The justification for this peculiarity rests on theories of a "special civilization" that is intrinsically more predisposed toward authoritarian rule than Western civilization.

It merits attention that, on the whole, Surkov constructs his approach in the same manner as does the Russian Orthodox Church. The ROC ostensibly does not reject the achievements of modernization or many other universal values, but it selects and after its own fashion modifies those compatible with its assumed set of "primordial qualities" of the recipient—"Russian civilization."

This effort is supposed to give rise not to a marked-down plan for us to catch up with the West (“Russia à la West”) but to our own Russian “civilizational project,” equal in value to Western civilization and even capable of competing with it on a global scale.

In practice, the authorities in recent years have been conducting complex maneuvers in their relations with the nationalist tendencies in society.

On the one hand, the regime actively cultivates traditional methods of social mobilization by commemorating a heroic military past (glorifying the empire’s victories) and instilling fear (creating an image of the enemy). On the other hand, it extinguishes the outbursts of militarism that such methods of mobilization may provoke to head off real foreign policy conflicts (as at the start of the Second Iraq War or during the dispute with Ukraine over the Strait of Kerch in October 2003) and prevent one of the ruling clans from gaining power. An exception to the functioning of this mechanism was the war against Georgia in 2008, which aroused strong militaristic feelings among the masses. But even in this case the Russian authorities tried to block excessive domestic militaristic mobilization.

If the authorities see an extremely high level of ethnic prejudices in society, the regime may accommodate them. After the ethnic pogrom in Kondopoga (30 August–3 September 2006), those at the top talked about the need to “ensure preference for the indigenous population” (support for the idea of domination); and after conflict with Georgia (in the autumn of 2006), the state introduced quotas for certain foreign workers—especially those working in street markets (for a while, this measure had a big impact on the large cities, to the point where even Luzhkov spoke out against the government decision initiated by Putin himself, but soon the traders found ways to evade the bureaucratic restrictions). But the anti-Georgian excesses of the autumn of 2006 proved too scandalous; and two years later, during and right after the August war, the entire might of the propaganda machine was mobilized to assert the nonethnic nature of the conflict—and, indeed, despite an acute situation of direct military conflict Russians took hardly any ethnic actions against Georgians.

From time to time, the authorities encourage specific groups of nationalists, attempting to use them in the political struggle and/or create a loyal and less aggressive version of the nationalist movement, but such attempts have not yet succeeded. The Rodina story is the best known example of this. Something similar happened in 2008–9 with the pro-Kremlin youth movements. An openly nationalist component suddenly appeared in their

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activity, so that at times it was possible to draw a parallel with the early MAII. After a number of experiments, however, this component was almost completely eliminated in response to the failure of all attempts to avoid its radicalization (including its infiltration by neo-Nazis).<sup>52</sup>

Lacking their own consistent and coherent “national idea,” the authorities are in practice gradually affirming civilizational nationalism as the dominant view. The greatest resistance probably comes from the uncoordinated and poorly considered actions of the authorities themselves. Outside opposition is weak, although nationalists who are independent of the Kremlin seem to have the greatest opportunity for resistance. Despite being weak and disorganized, these groups are less so than other ideological sectors of the opposition (if we include among the nationalists not only the MAII, neo-Nazis, or politicians like Baburin and Rogozin but also the left-wing nationalists—the CPRF and the National-Bolshevik Party).

Since the current authorities do not use large-scale repression as a method of suppressing resistance, three other methods remain—ideological competition, police restrictions, and enticement.

Bureaucrats find it difficult to compete ideologically with people who have a sincere commitment to a given idea. To cite one good example, the Russian authorities established a new holiday—National Unity Day on 4 November, in commemoration of [the freeing of Moscow from the Poles in] 1612. But Russian nationalist organizations, united for the purpose in the “Russian march” movement, immediately monopolized this holiday, which Russian historical mythology portrayed as celebrating a victory over the West. As a result, the authorities are now afraid of this holiday, which forces them to beef up urban police forces in a timely manner, study—like reports from the front—information about meetings of nationalists that have taken place or been dispersed, organize counter-marches by [the pro-Kremlin youth movement] Nashi, and more.

Of course, the regime can always resort to police restrictions. Such restrictions have greatly helped on several occasions against demonstrations of the nationalist opposition but on the whole have been unable to crush them: even the very weak MAII gathered only somewhat fewer participants than usual for the “Russian march” of 4 November 2009, while restrictions rarely stop the national-Bolsheviks. Police forces have suppressed the most dangerous neo-Nazi gangs in Moscow and some other cities, so that in 2009 the number of hate crimes for the first time did not rise and even fell.<sup>53</sup> But the neo-Nazi underground remains active:

it is taking greater care to observe the rules of conspiracy and mounts increasingly frequent attacks on the police themselves. Apparently, the new groups that are constantly emerging will be more difficult to catch. Indeed, police methods in general can be regarded only as an auxiliary means.

The practice of enticing opponents, including buying them out or taking them under the regime's wing, is used as widely as possible. But both sides always take part in such games. While the authorities think they are co-opting opponents and bringing them under control, the targets of enticement think that they are switching to the tactic of entryism. They may even dream of rapid success—of the gradual renewal of the power structure and the growing weight within it of national-imperialist forces, ready in the event of a crisis to distract people from their real problems with bold plans for the building of a new empire from Vladivostok to Lisbon. Iur'ev sets out just such an idea in his *The Third Empire* [Tret'ia imperiia], which was a bestseller in 2007.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, Iur'ev's dreams are overly optimistic. Under the conditions prevailing in Russia, no independent nationalist can obtain power through democratic procedures. Nor is there much likelihood of them seizing power as a result of a military coup, although they discuss such a possibility. What is quite likely (although not inevitable, of course) is a gradual escalation of expansionist, militarist, and ethno-xenophobic sentiments, both in society and within the power elite, as civilizational nationalism gains strength and becomes institutionalized. If this escalation goes far enough, it will create a fundamentally different political situation that may dramatically increase the probability of radical nationalist forces attaining power by one means or another.

Nevertheless, viewed from a strategic perspective, the special path of civilizational nationalism is undoubtedly a dead end that goes against the global tendencies of world development, impedes the modernization of social institutions, and thereby undermines any hope of Russia occupying a worthy place in the future world order.

## Notes

1. G.G. Diligenskii, "'Konets istorii' ili smena tsivilizatsii?" in *Tsivilizatsii* (Moscow, 1993), no. 2, p. 44.

2. E.A. Pain, *Mezhdú imperii i natsiei* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2004), p. 97.

3. A.L. Andreev, "'My' i 'oni': k kharakteristike vneshnepoliticheskikh

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6. M. Khodorkovskii, “Krizis liberalizma v Rossii,” *Vedomosti*, no. 52 (1092), 29 March 2004.

7. T. Mann, “Russuzhdeniia apolitichnogo,” trans. from German by E. Eliseeva, *Vestnik Evropy*, 2008, no. 24.

8. R. Pipes, *Rossia pri starom rezhime* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004) [translation of Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974)—Ed.].

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10. Vladislav Surkov, “Russkaia politicheskaia kul'tura. Vzgliad iz utopii,” speech given to the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 8 June 2007.

11. Vladislav Surkov, “Suverenitet—eto politicheskii sinonim konkurentosposobnosti,” transcript, pts. 1–2, Moscow, February 2006.

12. M. Iur'ev, “Krepost' Rossia,” in *Krepost' Rossia: proshchanie s liberalizmom. Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Iauza and Eksmo, 2005), p. 59.

13. Iu. Afanas'ev, “My—ne raby? Istoricheskii beg na meste: ‘osobyi put'’ Rossii,” *Novaia gazeta*, 5 December 2008.

14. See, e.g., Dmitrii Volodikhin, “Nam nuzhna samodержavnaiia monarkhiia, neskol'ko smiagchennaia riadom predstavitel'nykh uchrezhdenii,” in *Rossiiskoe gosudarstvo: vchera, segodnia, zavtra*, ed. I.M. Kliamkin (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2007).

15. See, e.g., M. Iur'ev, “Estestvennym dlia russkikh variantom gosudarstvennogo ustroistvo iavliaetsia smes' ideokratii i imperskogo paternalizma,” in *Rossiiskoe gosudarstvo*.

16. See, e.g., A.B. Kobiakov and V.V. Aver'ianov, eds., “*Russkaia doktrina*” (*Sergievskii projekt*) (Moscow: Iauza, 2007).

17. A. Verkhovskii, “Ideinaia evoliutsiia russkogo natsionalizma: 1990-e i 2000-e gody,” in *Verkhi i nizy russkogo natsionalizma*, ed. Verkhovskii (Moscow: Tsentr “Sova,” 2007), p. 10.

18. In nineteenth-century Russian legal literature, a “black hundred” [*chernaia sotnia*] was the name given to a population that paid taxes collectively and was divided into military-administrative units called “hundreds.” This term was used for self-identification by extremely reactionary, antirevolutionary, and anti-Semitic organizations that arose in Russia during the first antimonarchist revolution of 1905–7. The Black Hundreds included such organizations as the Union of the Russian People, the Union of the Archangel Michael, the United Nobility, the Russian Monarchist Party, and the Society for Active Struggle Against the Revolution. The

47. For a more detailed account of various aspects of the theory of “Orthodox nationalism,” see A. Verkhovskii, “Tserkovnyi proekt rossiiskoi identichnosti,” in *Sovremennye interpretatsii russkogo natsionalizma*, ed. M. Lariuel’ (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2007), pp. 171–88.

48. “Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii Vladimira Vladimirovicha Putina Federal’nomu sobraniuu RF” (16 May 2003), *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 17 May 2003.

49. V. Shnirel’man, “‘Nesovmestimost’ kul’tur’: ot nauchnykh kontseptsii i shkol’nogo obrazovaniia do real’noi politiki,” in *Russkii natsionalizm: ideologiia i nastroyenie*, pp. 183–222.

50. O. Karpenko, “‘Suverennaia demokratiia’ dlia vnutrennego i naruzhnogo primeneniia,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2007, no. 1.

51. “Dlia protsvetaniia vsekhnado uchityvat’ interesy kazhdogo. Interv’iu pervogo vitse-prem’era pravitel’stva Rossii Dmitriia Medvedeva glavnomu redaktoru zhurnala ‘Ekspert’ Valeriiu Fadeevu,” *Ekspert*, 24 July 2006 ([www.expert.ru/printissues/expert/2006/28/interview\\_medvedev](http://www.expert.ru/printissues/expert/2006/28/interview_medvedev)).

52. G. Kozhevnikova, “Ul’trapravnye tendentsii v prokremlevskikh molodezhnykh dvizheniiakh,” in *Russkii natsionalizm mezhdvlast’iu i oppozitsiei*, ed. V. Pribylovskii (Moscow: Tsentr “Panorama,” 2010), pp. 4–17.

53. See the detailed statistics in the appendixes to the last annual report of the Sova Center: *Ksenofobiia, svoboda sovesti i anti-ekstremizm v Rossii v 2009 godu* (Moscow: Tsentr “Sova,” 2010), pp. 127–41.

54. M. Iur’ev, *Tret’ia imperiia. Rossiia, kotoraiadolzha byt’* (St. Petersburg and Moscow: Limbus-Press, Izdatel’stvo K. Tublina, 2007).