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## 7 The ethno-political pendulum

### The dynamics of the relationship between ethnic minorities and majorities in post-Soviet Russia

*Emil Pain*

The course of Russian history has often been compared to the movement of a pendulum. This metaphor is fitting as it reflects the drastic fluctuations and inversions that have always been a fundamental part of the country's development. This is a nation where revolutions are superseded by counter-revolutions, followed by periods of stalemate, only to end in further revolution. As a result, cyclic imagery is a popular tool for describing almost any period of Russian history. The beginning of the twenty-first century brought with it a dramatic turnabout in Russian politics. Counter-reforms replaced the liberal reforms of the 1990s, which have led to the increased centralisation of government, monopolisation of the economy, restriction of people's right to free speech, and other signs of an authoritarian form of government. In a work published in 2004, I began to explore one specific aspect of Russian history in terms of this pendulum model: namely the dynamics of the relationship between the country's ethnic-Russian majority and other ethnic groups (for the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to them as the ethnic minority). In its simplest form the concept of the ethno-political pendulum can be explained as follows. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic minorities were the first to overcome their identity crisis by means of ethnic mobilisation. The ethnic majority retaliated, resulting in the growth of Russian nationalism; which in turn stirred up the ethnic minority population even further.<sup>1</sup> The Russian government merely adapted to these fluctuations in mood, following the lead of whichever political group seemed more active at any given moment in time. This is my analysis of the evolution of Russia's ethno-political situation.

#### **Ethnic minorities become more active: the ethno-political pendulum is set in motion**

The beginning of Russia's post-Soviet history (the period from 1991–1994) was dominated by the activity of ethnic minority groups and movements, particularly those of the Chechens, Tatars and Yakuts and many others who had their own autonomous republics within Russian territory.

In the run up-to and immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union the leaders of all autonomous Russian republics took advantage of the growth in

national consciousness among their people and declared their sovereignty, demanding autonomy similar to that formerly granted to the Republics of the Soviet Union. The new declarations of sovereignty did have certain features that set them apart from those made by the former Union Republics. Unlike the sovereign status of the Union Republics, which, unquestionably, contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sovereignty of the Russian republics did not yield an equally dramatic result. Although these demands for autonomy did alarm many politicians and analysts, who started to refer to this process as "a parade of sovereignty" on the part of Russia's republics, for the most part they never went beyond demanding enhanced political autonomy.<sup>2</sup> The level of political demands in the 1990s of only a couple of national elites came close to demanding complete independence of their republic from the Federation. The original version of the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan identified the republic as "a sovereign state, subject to international law".<sup>3</sup> The republic passed the Law on Subsurface, which guaranteed the Republic of Tatarstan full ownership and control of its mineral resources. Meanwhile, the law "On the Military Duty and Military Service of the Citizens of the Republic of Tatarstan", of 14 March 1991, meant that citizens of the republic only had to perform their compulsory military service within the borders of Tatarstan.<sup>4</sup>

Alarmed by an upsurge in armed national conflicts and hoping to avoid the mistakes made by Mikhail Gorbachev in the formulation of his unsuccessful nationalist policy, the Russian government started off by supporting the republics' declarations of sovereignty and the creation within some of them of the institution of presidency. The creation of the Council of Republic Heads, which addressed questions of federal politics under the chairmanship of Boris Yeltsin, contributed to the enhancement of their real political independence and to the authority of the republics. This Council immediately elevated heads of the republics from the ranks of other leaders of Federation's subjects (*kraj* and *oblast*). The other main concession that President Yeltsin's administration made to the elites of the national republics were to begin treaty relations with some of the republics, which resulted in the Federative Treaty (1992), the Public Concord Treaty (1994) and, most importantly, the Treaty On Delimitation of Jurisdictional Entities and Mutual Delegation of Authority between the State Bodies of the Russian Federation and the State Bodies of the Republic of Tatarstan (1994–1995).

For some time, this policy of concession yielded positive results. Right up until mid-1992 Russia was one of the only multinational states in the post-Soviet world to succeed in avoiding the outbreak of violent ethnic conflicts on its territory. However, towards the end of 1992 several nationalist movements began to renew their activity in the republics, in spite of the Russian administration's marked readiness to make concessions.

Of all the nationalist groups, it was the Chechen nationalists that were the most uncompromising in their stand against the Kremlin. Even in the beginning of 1991 the United Congress of the Chechen People carried out a successful coup in the Chechen-Ingush Republic, which led to the establishment of the

Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. In October 1991, the Congress declared martial law, arbitrarily divided up the territory of Checheno-Ingushetia and held so-called "presidential elections". As a result of these elections, Dzhokhar Dudayev, the leader of the Congress, became the new President of Ichkeria. The "President" announced as early as March 1992 that Chechnya would only agree to negotiate with the Russian government once it officially recognised the republic's sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> According to eyewitnesses this period saw a significant rise in nationalist rhetoric, with slogans such as "Chechnya for the Chechens!" becoming increasingly popular. From 1991 citizens of non-Chechen ethnicity, who at the time represented almost 40 per cent of the republic's population (approximately 370,000 people out of a population of approximately one million) could expect to be summarily forced out of their homes. These expelled citizens obtained nothing in return for their lost homes and possessions; moreover, refusal or even delay in obeying such orders would often be punished by beatings, rape and even death.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1992 and 1993 there was a dramatic resurgence of nationalist movements in a number of other Russian autonomies. In Tatarstan this period saw the rise of such movements as the "All-Tatar Social Centre", the Sovereignty ("Suverenitet") Committee, the "Ittifaq" Party, the "Azatlyk" Youth Alliance, the "Democratic Islamic Party", the Mardjani Movement and many more. Meanwhile, there was an emergence of active nationalist movements in Dagestan, such as the Avarian "Front of Imam Shamil", the Lak "Kazikumukh", the Dargin "Tsadesh", Kumyk "Tenglik", Lezgian "Sadval".

At first these organisations proved immensely influential, wielding enough power to challenge the official administrations in their respective autonomies. However, by the mid-1990s their authority had already begun to wane.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this decline in authority can be attributed to the fact that in most of the territories, the nationalist parties in question had succeeded in achieving many of their political goals. As time went on, many of the movements and their leaders burned out. Moreover, many of the more radical leaders proved themselves to be inept political managers, which led to widespread disillusionment in the movements. As political attention focused more and more on privatisation, new political institutions and bodies absorbed some of the ethnic radicals. However, in my opinion, the main reason for this decline was that the Communist nomenclature, which had been the *de facto* leaders of many of the "nationalist movements" in the majority of the republics, had got what it most wanted out of the arrangement, i.e. self-preservation, and no longer needed the support of nationalism. Mintimer Shaimiev, the head of the Tatar regional committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Bashkiria's Murtaza Rakimov, the head of the State Council of Dagestan, M. Magomedov, and the communist and Soviet leaders of several other republics were all named presidents of their respective republics and after this were increasingly more inclined to make compromises with Moscow. Having cemented their authority, the republics' "new-old" leaders now regarded the leaders of the radical nationalist movements that had helped bring them to power as their main competitors.

It was precisely these leaders that were the first to try out the technique of “softly crushing the opposition”; they also started the trend for faking election campaigns that has since become very popular with the federal authorities when it comes to parliamentary and presidential elections. The crushing of opposition movements began in earnest in the mid-1990s. Romay Yuldush, the leader of the Tatar “Azatlyk” Youth Movement, describes how this happened:

It got really tough in 1995, when all the opposition forces – be they liberal, social-democrat or communist – found themselves eased out of the State Council as a result of President Shaimiev’s electoral manipulations. The authority of the ruling elite became limitless. Authoritarianism, suppression of freedom of speech, political manipulations. The ruling party would always win 70–80% of the votes at elections.<sup>8</sup>

However, although many of the nationalist movements were effectively suppressed in the majority of republics and in spite of the fact that local political elites had grown stronger, there still was no evidence that nationalist activity was declining. It was just that the main activists had changed. At the end of the 1990s they became Russian nationalist organisations, which from 2000 onwards grew into a mass movement of fast-growing Russian nationalist groups.

### **The ethnic majority becomes more active: bringing together the ideas of imperialism and Russian nationalism**

In 1991 in the whole country there were only a couple of dozen people who could be defined as members of Russian nationalist organisations, whereas in 2000 the youth skinhead movement alone had over 10,000 supporters; just three years later that number had tripled to 33,000.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, these are merely the official statistics given by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; independent experts suggest that support for ultra-radical movements among the youth is even greater.<sup>10</sup> One wonders: what are the reasons for this sudden rise in organised nationalism in Russia?

From the middle of the 1990s an increase in ethnic consciousness became evident not only among ethnic minorities, but among all ethnic communities in Russia at large. For the first time in many years of observation, it became the ethnic majority that began to display a greater awareness of its ethnic identity. Between 1994 and 1999, in a study of a group of ethnic minorities (including the Tatars, the Bashkirians, the Ossetians and the Yakuts) the increase in the percentage of people who were acutely concerned with ethnicity was 10–15 per cent, whereas among Russian subjects it had doubled. At the same time there was a rise in more emotionally charged expressions of ethnic consciousness. Whereas in 1994 no more than 8 per cent of Russians, including those resident in the national republics, responded that “any means were acceptable for ensuring the well-being of their people”, in 1999 such a stance was shared by over a quarter of Russian respondents, both in the republics and in the Russian *oblasts*.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the

1990s nearly 50 per cent of the Russian ethnic community supported (whether wholly or partly) the idea of "Russia for the Russians". By 2002 the number rose above this level and since then has never dropped to below 53 per cent.<sup>12</sup>

Analysis of sociological monitoring data collected over the past 17 years (1990–2007) by the service, nowadays called Levada-Center (analysis of answers given by ethnic Russians to the question: "What is your attitude towards people belonging to other nationalities...?"), led to the following conclusions:

First, it became possible to select *constructed phobias*, completely influenced by mass media. Such phobias are revealed towards peoples with whom *population of the Russian Federation had no direct contacts, and knew about them only from the existing descriptions. Phobias of that kind are very unstable and exposed to rapid increases and declines* depending on the mass media information. Thus, for instance, during the Soviet rule the attitude towards Arabs in Russia was positive, whereas after the terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 it changed and became strongly negative. Later on when the number of references to "Arab terrorists" in the press has substantially decreased the attitudes to Arabs became neutral, even indifferent. The same is true about the rise and fall in anti-American attitudes.

Second, *there exist relatively stable ethnic distances in relations with peoples, whose images depend on historically set stereotypes. Fluctuations in mass evaluations remain within the frameworks of stable intervals.* It is reflected on a scale of ethnic prejudices existing among Russian population. For better understanding I divided it into three levels:

*The first level – the highest degree of negativism – "minorities as enemies"* To this category belong representatives of ethnic communities, that over 12 years arouse negative feelings in no less than 20 per cent of respondents.

- This extreme form of negativism was revealed over these years towards the Chechens and the Gypsies. These were the only groups arousing a negative attitude of more than 50 per cent of Russian respondents. Towards the Chechens such an attitude was fixed since 1995 and towards the Gypsies it was fixed since 2000.
- The next category within the first level – negative attitude towards the Azerbaijanis (the level of negative attitude has never been less than 30 per cent of respondents, and since 1998 it increased to 40 per cent).
- A still lower level of negative attitude but still within the first level was revealed towards the Armenians and the Georgians (the level of received negative assessments has never been lower than 27 per cent, but during the conflict with Georgia 45 per cent of respondents expressed their negative attitude towards this nation).
- The last category within the first level consists of peoples of Central Asia, who arouse negative feelings in 20–22 per cent of respondents. At the same time the volume of negative attitudes to representatives of this group increases in proportion to the growth of the group itself, which since 2000 is regarded as the main source of migrants to Russia.

*The second level – “moderate negativism” – “minorities as “strangers”.* Here we find:

- The Jews and the peoples from the Baltic republics who arouse negative feelings in 13 to 17 per cent of respondents (depending on the year);
- the Tatars and the Bashkirs – negative assessments varying from 12 to 15 per cent.

*The third level – low degree of negativism – minorities viewed as “almost like ourselves”.* Ethnic phobia did not exceed 10 per cent in relation to the ethnically related peoples, such as the Ukrainians and the Belorussians, though at the time of worsening of interstate relations with Ukraine, the number of negative assessments temporarily increases. To the same group belong the Moldovans, the Poles, the Germans, and most of ethnic groups with territorial autonomies in the Urals, Siberia, and Far East of Russia. Negative attitudes towards representatives of such minorities are very feeble.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the attitude of the Russians towards minorities changed. The USSR opposed any revelations of ethnicity and at the same time practised an imperial, protective attitude towards minorities: “They will profit from being with us” or “They cannot survive without us”, whereas today minorities are regarded as a threat to the ethnic majority.

- The highest degree of threats – *separatism and terrorism* – carriers: the Chechens and some other Muslim peoples in the North Caucasus.
- The next degree of threats – *crime, deception, and unfair trade* – carriers: the Gypsies, the Azerbaijanis, and to a certain extent some other Caucasian peoples.
- Still another degree of threats – *spreading of an alien way of living* – carriers: diaspora groups of Muslim minorities, originating from the Central Asia.
- All types of threats to a certain degree weaken the traditional (for both the Russian Empire and the USSR after the 1950s) type of negative attitude towards minorities as *anti-Semitism*.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the role of populist political powers, attempting to profit politically from igniting ethnic phobias among the ethnic majority has strengthened. It is possible to highlight several political currents that exploited xenophobia and presented a combination of imperialism and nationalism ideas. I now plan to talk about just a few of these groups.<sup>13</sup>

*The Red Patriots* – the pro-communist wing of civic nationalism, which exploited the nostalgia felt by a large part of the Russian population for the “majesty” of the USSR. This was historically the first movement to emerge in post-Soviet Russia at the beginning of the 1990s (at the time opponents called members of the movement the “Brown-Reds”). The ideologists behind this movement believed in a “special civilisation” – an empire within the borders of the former Soviet Union, with a mission to conquer the Empire of the West (also



known as the Euro-Atlantic or American empire). This mission was dependent on the national character of the Russian people, guided by the ideals of Communism. Many Red Patriot organisations began their activity with the declaration of similar ideas. These included the early "Memory" ("Pamyat") organisation and, subsequently, numerous so-called "Fronts" for combating Western capitalism of the early 1990s (the United Workers' Front, the Union of Officers, the National Salvation Front and many more).<sup>14</sup> The same ideas were later adopted by the Russian Communist Party, whose leader, Gennady Zyuganov, incorporated them into his presidential campaign in 2008.<sup>15</sup>

■ *The Black Hundreds*: extreme-right organisations, Orthodox-nationalist organisations, which emphasised their historical connection to ideologically analogous organisations of Tsarist Russia.<sup>16</sup> In 1905 an organisation called the "Black Hundred" was formed, which supported the political strengthening of the dominant role of the Russian Orthodox population within the Romanov Empire. The same ideas are upheld by the movement's successors in modern Russia.

■ *Orthodox fundamentalists*: a movement that is not unlike the Black Hundred, but deals with the special role of Russia and the Russian people in strictly religious terms: Russia is the throne of the Holy Mother, the last stronghold of faith in a world headed towards apostasy, etc.

■ *Neo-Eurasianism*: yet another openly anti-West politico-ideological current, that came into existence in the mid-1990s. The movement is inseparably linked with the name of Alexander Dugin, who played a significant role in bringing together nationalist and imperialist ideas.<sup>17</sup>

In theory the principles of nationalism and imperialism are complete contradictions, because nationalism assumes the sovereignty of the people-nation; whereas an imperialist regime assumes the sovereignty of power (of the imperium). The growth of ethnic distrust, inherent in ethnic nationalism, fits ill with the imperialist pursuit of holding many nations under one rule. The nationalist slogan "Russia for Russians!" is the complete opposite of the traditional imperialist slogan "All people – subjects of one sovereign" (allowing for certain variations, in cases where the empire is not a monarchy). In modern Russian political life there is no end of vehement discussion between the imperialists (commonly known as the *Derzhavniki*) and Russian ethnic nationalists. The imperialists insist that Russian nationalism represents a threat to a revival of the Empire and, in fact, is leading to the disintegration of Russia. Ethnic nationalists respond that the Imperial regime was in the past responsible for sucking all the blood out of the Russian people and that false, supranational doctrines only get in the way of the creation of an ethno-nationalist state, in which the Russian nation would finally be recognised as the sole, major, law-making nation.

■ Around 2006–2007 these two powers reached a compromise, which was founded on the idea of a "special ethnic Russian civilisation," as a supra-ethnic community, which would form, as it were, certain general mental characteristics for all nations falling into the Russian Empire and making up a single civilisation. Thus emerged the idea of a Russian (or Eurasian) civilisation, which in turn produced a political doctrine that I propose to call "civilisational nationalism".

This doctrine is based on the following postulates:

- The fundamental, common feature of the Russian (Eurasian) civilisation is the acceptance not only of the need for the government to have a key role within the political system, but also of the special role of the figure of the leader of the nation, its chief or monarch.<sup>18</sup>
- The natural territorial-political form of such a civilisation is to be an empire<sup>19</sup> (this is the concession to the imperialist idea).
- The Russian people, whose dominant status must be confirmed by law, will play the leading role in the empire<sup>20</sup> (this is the concession made to Russian nationalism).

Such a doctrine, in the minds of its originators, for example the authors of "Russian Doctrine", should ensure the preservation of a multinational state (in this way taking the place of federalism, which was allegedly not mentally conducive to a Russian civilisation), while simultaneously securing the leading role of the Russian people in the state.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the text of the doctrine leaves no room for doubt in its treatment of "special Russian civilisation" – not as a multinational, but Russian, ethnically Russian, civilisation. The doctrine's authors imagine society as a "living social organism, the backbone of which is the state-building Russian people – Russians." This leads us to wonder what role is given to other people. The doctrine calls them "aliens", they are given the honourable status, in the authors' minds, of "relatives", younger relatives, naturally, who recognise the authority of the "patriarch and founder of the family". In such a way, the authors of the doctrine borrowed the Soviet idea of nations as younger and older relatives, expanding on it by turning the Russian "elder brothers", as they appeared under Stalin, into ancestors or patriarchs. On the other hand, the "Russian Doctrine" completely rejects the Soviet conception of internationalism, as "ignoring the hierarchy of Russia's ethno-cultural riches". The noted Russian researcher Galina Zvereva points out that the "Russian Doctrine" is full of oppositions such as "us – them", "ours – theirs", "Russia – the West", "liberalism – conservatism", "Russians – non-Russians", and many more.<sup>22</sup>

### **Russian power and the programmes of civilisational nationalism**

The Russian political elite is at a crossroads. On the one hand, Russian ethnic nationalism is an admittedly unacceptable strategy for the Russian state, as it provokes the growth of ethno-nationalism among ethnic minorities and is fraught with conflict. On the other hand, nationalism is appealing as an effective way of mobilising the masses, especially in the context of the current desire for autonomy of Russian society. In these conditions, civilisational nationalism has shown itself to be an acceptable, if not only means of consolidating society for the current government. In the absence of its own consistent concept of a "national

idea", the government in practice gradually asserts the conception of civilisational nationalism, born outside the Kremlin, as being dominant.

From 2000 onwards, the idea of the cultural and civic requirement of Russia's "special path" has been circulated more actively by the state's mass media. For example, in spring 2006 this was reflected in the 12-part television series made by Andrei Konchalovsky under the title *Culture is Fate*. The idea was subsequently given wide currency in official Russian politics. "Culture is Fate. God wills us to be Russian, ethnically Russian" – this is a quote from a lecture given by V. Surkov at the presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences in June 2007.<sup>23</sup> In his lecture, the First Deputy Chief of the Russian government points out that culture is what determines the lasting features of the political system. In Russia's case this means centralised authority, in which the role of the individual is more important than laws.

The Kremlin's canonisation of the idea a special centuries-old civilisation, which predetermines Russia's "special path" of gradually elevates the idea to the rank of an official "sole true teaching", intended to replace Marxism-Leninism. An army of official state and freelance propagandists is working on this golden vein, turning this theoretical concept into political technology. First and foremost, this idea is intended to legitimise a somewhat peculiar understanding of "sovereignty" (in which, much like in the old understanding of "autocracy", external independence is confused with internal authoritarianism) and the overly personalised nature of the system of political authority.<sup>24</sup>

This ideology is also expected to solve the problems of political therapy. People are indoctrinated with the idea that it is pointless and even harmful to compare Russia to developed countries, because the West is not an example, it is a different civilisation. The embedding of the ideas of a "special civilisation" and a "special way" in the consciousness of the masses play the role of a *cordon sanitaire*, to prevent the penetration of "alien" currents of liberalism and democracy into Russia. This, it seems, is a decidedly negative trend since comparing ourselves to the West is perhaps one of the most consistent characteristics of Russian political thinking of the last few centuries, regardless of political orientation. Nevertheless, the dreams of political radicals, such as the political analyst Mikhail Yuryev, who talks about "ensuring isolationism by creating insurmountable civic distinctions",<sup>25</sup> should not be regarded as a utopia. If it is not possible to stop people from making comparisons to the West, then politicians are perfectly capable of putting up an ideological cordon, while these comparisons lead towards a negative evaluation and creating an image of the West as an eternal enemy of civilisation.

Here, things do get a little bit complicated: the Russian government shies away from ideological absolutism and does not make its own choice, allowing people to orientate themselves based on practices and symbols implemented by the state. It is also important to note that the Russian political establishment in its current form is not a single monolithic group, but rather a conglomerate of rather different government clans, each proposing de facto different versions of civilisational nationalism. For this reason alone, such a doctrine cannot be either comprehensive or concrete.

In this way the state's attitude to the imperialist ideology that is an inherent part of civilisational nationalism seems particularly inconsistent. On the one hand, the imperialist principle of the "retention of territories" is canonised in Russian politics. Vladimir Putin said that "the large-scale retention of the state" is "one of Russia's greatest achievements over the last century".<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the current administration has never asserted the idea of imperial expansion, not counting the creation of satellite enclaves in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia.

Another example of the inconsistency of this "elusive" official ideology is connected with the problem of the use of generalised definitions of Russian people in official political discourse. The terms "ethnic Russians" and "the Russian people", which historically have ethnic connotations, are never used in such situations. At the same time, state officials also avoid using the strictly geographical term "people from Russia" ("rossiyane"), introduced into contemporary political discourse under Boris Yeltsin, whose speechwriters took up a word, found in Russian nineteenth century literature. What is more, the ethnic Russian connotations in the general definition of the people of Russia become inevitably apparent in the government's attempts to appeal to patriotic history.

Not only are such connotations commonly found in history textbooks and the speeches of cultural activists, they are an equally common feature of political discourse. The only possible way round this obvious display of contradictions would seem to be to resort to a supra-ethnic conception of society, which is more commonly and simply known as "civilisation".

In practice, in recent years, the government has performed some complicated manoeuvres in its treatment of nationalist tendencies in society. On the one hand, the government is actively cultivating traditional methods of mobilising society – mobilisation through the use of the heroic military past (the glorification of imperial victories) and through the use of fear (the image of the enemy). On the other hand, the government is also attempting to extinguish the possible upsurge of militarism that can be ignited as a result of such mobilisation methods, in order to avoid real foreign policy conflicts (as was the case at the time of the disagreement with the Ukraine over the Kerch Strait in October 2003). The 2008 Georgian War, which seriously ignited the militant mood of the masses, is an exception to this mechanism. However, even in this case the Russian government tried to avoid a serious domestic militant mobilisation.

The Russian government is more than a little worried by the growing influence of Russian nationalism. It finds itself increasingly unable to control the growth and the very behaviour of this movement, not even daring to say the words "Russian nationalism" aloud. Attempts made by the government to create a kind of controllable or tameable hybrid nationalism have failed. The government was forced to abandon its own project – the "Motherland" ("Rodina") party, which was created by the Kremlin's advisors in 2003 in order to take part in the elections of that year, only to be artificially split up by the very same advisors just two years later. In the hope of securing the support of the nationalist electorate, the party was forced to criticise the government from an extreme-nationalist stance. Much the same happened in 2008–2009 with the "Our Own"

("Nashi") and "The Young Guard" ("Molodaya Gvardiya") youth movements. Their activities reflected all the more distinctly a nationalist component that the state considered excessive.<sup>27</sup> In keeping with the Russian nationalist mood, the Kremlin instituted a holiday, the "Day of National Unity" on 4 November and is now terrified of its own creation. Every year the Special Purpose Police Unit (OMON) has to be called in to keep the peace during the thousand-strong "Russian March" demonstration. This was the demonstration that provided the training ground for the people who took to Moscow's Manezhnaya Square on 11 December 2010. On this day between 5,000 (according to official statistics) and 12,000 (according to independent studies) people filled the square, almost up to the walls of the Kremlin, chanting slogans such as "Russia for Russians – Moscow for Muscovites!" and "Moscow isn't the Caucasus!" There were no coaches to bring them to the Square, there were no bribes, no one was lured in with promises of a rock-concert – this was an unprompted demonstration that spanned a total of 15 Russian cities. According to statistics, the level of approval or sympathy of the citizens of Russia for this demonstration of political activism reached 25–27 per cent and was matched by an approximately equal level of uncertainty.

There is nothing tame about modern nationalism today. It cannot be an ally of the government, as it derives its very strength from unrest. Looking through the prism of this mood, the current government is perceived as corrupt and anti-nationalist, which means that nationalist powers cannot rely on government support.

The government cannot control nationalism, but it can inadvertently strengthen it, depending on the nationalist mood of the masses. After the pogroms in Kondopoga (2006) the government began talking about the need to "guarantee priority to the native population"; after the war in Georgia (2008) it announced the introduction of quotas for foreign citizens. After the events at Manezhnaya Square on 27 December 2010 there was talk of limiting not only the entry of foreign citizens into Russia, but also increasing controls on internal migrants – that is to say, Russian citizens who wish to move from one region of their homeland to another. The more concessions are made, the more the volume of demand escalates. Today nationalists are not only demanding restrictions on "alien" national groups entering Moscow, but also the deportation of those already living there. This increase in xenophobia leads to a strengthening of this very discrimination against ethnic minorities, especially against those coming from the Northern Caucasus.

In 2001–2010 the Center for Ethno-political Studies, which I head, carried out experimental examination of the situation regarding discrimination of representatives of national minorities in the employment sphere. It was part of the general monitoring of the legal situation of national minorities in Russia.<sup>28</sup>

The examination was carried out by volunteers, mainly by students. Every pair of volunteers (a Russian and a representative of a national minority) tried to get employment. While eliminating all possible factors but the ethnic one, feasible candidates "provoked" employers to choose between a Russian and a

representative of a national minority. Thus, for instance, one of our volunteers was refused employment on the pretext that he was a student and would be absent from work for the examination session, which was against the company's policy. Then some time later a Russian volunteer applied to the same employer for work and specially stressed that he was a student and would be absent from work for the examination session. If despite this circumstance he was hired, the refusal previously received by a representative of a national minority was regarded as a case of discrimination. A group of volunteers made two or three attempts to get a job in almost 50 enterprises advertising vacancies and in 40.5 per cent of cases the employer's refusal could be interpreted as a sign of discrimination against national minorities.

We have also analysed 8,200 advertisements in newspapers specialising in publishing free-of-charge information about household rentals. It was discovered that every tenth advert said: "only for Russians" or "only for a Russian family". It should be mentioned that announcements in periodicals do not fully reveal their discriminatory character due to control by the authorities who realize that such advertisements would be regarded as discriminatory. In private advertisements placed on the Internet or illegally pasted on the walls of the houses intended for rent, restrictions on nationality occur three to four times more frequently than in legal periodicals.

The level of xenophobia in Russia is not declining and this indicates that the support of populist forces has shifted away from the hybrid imperialist-nationalist project towards real Russian nationalism. However, this shift is very likely to provoke a growth in the mobilization of ethnic minorities. It is possible that the response of the minorities will not be symmetrical and it may come about in completely different ways to those of the 1990s.

### **The nationalism of the ethnic minority becomes more active: religious mobilization**

Whereas in the first decade of the twenty-first century Russian ethnic domain saw a distillation of social activity into ethnic activity, in the historically Muslim Russian republics the ethnic mobilization of the 1990s was succeeded by various forms of religious mobilization.

Since Ramzan Kadyrov became President of the Chechen Republic in 2007, the republic has been subject to a theocratic regime, which is only matched by the Taliban regimes of Sudan and Afghanistan. All female citizens of the republic, both those working in government organisations and studying in state universities and schools, are required to wear the veil, long skirts and other items of religious attire. Dozens of women have already been punished for violating these laws. In one instance, which took place on 13 September 2010 in Grozny, a group of women who were not wearing veils were shot at with paintball guns. The shooting was accompanied by chants of "Put on your veils! Dress properly, you sluts!" A video of this attack was posted on Youtube. Commenting on the incident on the channel "Grozny", President Kadyrov declared: "When I find

them (gunfighters), I will offer them my gratitude". In November 2008 the bodies of seven murdered women were found in Grozny. The Chechen President was caught coming out of the mosque after an afternoon prayer and explained why these young women *deserved to die*. According to President Kadyrov, they were all immoral women and their male relatives were right to kill them for the sake of their family honour.<sup>29</sup> Following yet another incident in September 2010, in which a young Chechen woman complained to the police about her father's cruel treatment, the Chechen President declared, "A man should have the opportunity to kill his own daughter".<sup>30</sup> The Kadyrov Fund also provides the funding for a large-scale programme of "cleansing", the exorcism of evil spirits, which resembles a beating of those afflicted by this "illness". In his report to the President, Daoud Selmurzaev, the head of the recently opened Islamic Medical Centre where these procedures take place claimed to have been successful in ridding *over 130,000 people* of these evil spirits (this number accounts for about of a third of the republic's population).

I have given here merely a rough sketch of Chechnya's current political regime. However, even this sketch makes it abundantly clear that this regime does not correspond to the Russian Constitution's definition of a secular republic. This regime is completely unacceptable for the non-Muslim, Russian population of the republic, which has decreased by a factor of ten since the 1990s. According to a survey carried out in 2002, there were only 40,600 Russian citizens (3.7 per cent of the republic's population) in Chechnya. There are also signs that the Chechen people are no happier about Kadyrov's policy, which has resulted in many people leaving the republic for other regions of Russia and so in this way it influences the whole of Russia. It is hard to get an accurate idea of the actual numbers of emigrants from Chechnya and other republics, as this is a case of internal migration of people who keep their republic registrations, while living primarily in the central regions of Russia, where they attract widespread xenophobia. It is worth underlining that Russian citizens who originate from the Northern Caucasus attract far more hateful ethnic stereotypes and abuse than those from any other part of the CIS. They are, after all, the most conflicted group of new-arrivals, as they strive to defiantly affirm their rights to keep living by their old customs and behaviour in their new environment.

In several other republics, societies are split by the battle between the traditional and untraditional Salafi currents of Islam. These proceedings, which first started in Russia at the end of the 1990s in the Northern Caucasus, are now appearing more widely and even in the Volga region of central Russia. Vallil Yakupov, the first deputy mufti of Tatarstan, points out that "the majority of the young people now associate themselves with a religious movement, that came from abroad and most closely resembles Wahhabism, but prefer to refer to themselves as Salafis." He offers the following prognosis, "Having seen the evolution of this movement in other post-Soviet republics, where the level of Islamisation was higher than that of Tatarstan, we can see what can be expected from it".<sup>31</sup>

What, then, is to come for the country as a whole? For now, only one thing – the growing radicalisation of conflicting groups of a divided society. Existing

ethnic policy does not yet have the resources necessary to negotiate this social divide.

### **Cyclic change and the fundamental problems at the heart of Russian ethnic policy**

In the first decade of the twenty-first century it became fashionable in the official press and amongst political scientists to refer to the presidencies of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev as “an era of stability”, in contrast to the “restlessness of the 1990s” under the government of Boris Yeltsin – “an era of chaos and disintegration”. The beginning of the twenty-first century may at first glance also appear to have been a period of stabilisation in terms of inter-ethnic relations, after the turbulent and conflict-ridden 1990s. There really was a radical change in the ethno-political situation in comparison to the previous decade. However, inter-ethnic relations were not stabilised, there was simply a change in the type of instability, in the type of inter-ethnic contradictions. During the Yeltsin era, inter-ethnic relations can be said to have been “vertical” in nature, as manifested by confrontations between the republics and the federal government, whereas during the “era of stability” inter-ethnic relations took on a more “horizontal” character. That is to say, the conflict was now primarily between the ethnic Russian majority and ethnic minorities and was not only being fought out in the outer republics, as was the case in the 1990s, but practically across the whole of Russia.

In practice the government of most Russian regions and *oblasts* is to some degree shaped by the rise of xenophobia amongst its ethnic majority population. In this connection our observations lead us to four models of national (ethnic) policy which have taken shape in the different regions of Russia.<sup>32</sup>

1 *Silencing the problem.* Authorities try to ignore the rise of xenophobia among its ethnic-Russian citizens and believe that inter-ethnic tension is provoked by asking too many questions about the problems of national minorities. *This is the predominant political model in Russia's biggest cities, especially Moscow, St Petersburg, and also in the Tula, Ryazan Smolensk and other central oblasts.*

In conditions where the regional government does not want to take account of the problems of the minorities, law-enforcement representatives, the police first and foremost, are inclined to displays of ideologically motivated force against minorities, even those that are clearly visible to the naked eye, as nothing more than unrelated acts of hooliganism or youthful “squabbles”. This practice of silencing ethnically motivated problems results in an escalation of Russian nationalism, with the silence of the regional governments being perceived as tacit support for or at least benevolent neutrality in the face of their extremist activities.

Whereas in the 1990s there were only small groups of skinheads (numbering some three to ten people), since 2000 they have been forming far



larger organisations (up to 500 people). The first groups to emerge in Moscow were the "Skin Legion" and "Blood&Honor" (a Russian off-shoot of an international Nazi-Skinhead organisation), as well as the "Nationalist-Socialist Group 88". Each of these groups had between 200 and 250 members. By 2004 Moscow counted no fewer than 6,000 young Nazis; St Petersburg had over 3,000, of whom 500 belonged to one single organisation – the "Russian Fist" ("Russkiy Kulak"); Nizhny Novgorod counted 2,500 skinheads, of whom 300 belonged to the biggest group, "North" ("Sever").<sup>33</sup> The numbers of neo-Nazi organisations have grown even more since that time, more importantly, new branches of neo-Nazism have emerged, such as the "Movement Against Illegal Immigration" (DPNI), all of which are staking their claim to being most influential nationalist force.<sup>34</sup>

2 *Confrontation with individual national minorities.* This is the approach taken by a number of western regions in Russia, which have a high Cossack population and equally high anti-Cossack feeling (such as the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions and to a lesser degree, the Rostov oblast). According to many analysts, the Russian regions of the North Caucasus are "one of the most nationalist and conservative regions of Russia". One only has to think of the anti-Semitic speeches of the beloved former governor of the Kuban Nikolai Kondratenko and the Cossack pogroms.<sup>35</sup> The situation is further exacerbated by the region's geographical proximity to Chechnya. Statements published in the strictly controlled local press often follow the simple, and for that very reason all the more frightening, formula: "Chechens aren't people; they're enemies of Russia and should be destroyed".<sup>36</sup> The procuracy and legal institutions make their contribution to the increase of Russian nationalist extremism, bringing criminal proceedings against anyone who criticises the nationalist gospel and turns a blind eye to the activities of the actual preachers. The Stavropol region has the greatest number of this kind of radical nationalist organisations of all the Russian regions, such as the "Russian National Unity" (RNE). This was where, in 2002, criminal action was brought against not the activists of the RNE, but rather against a scholar, Viktor Avksentiev, a renowned expert in the field of ethnic conflict.

3 *Balancing between anti-minority public opinion and the need to secure political stability, which results in a kind of protection of the rights of national minorities (Voronezh, Volgograd and Kursk oblasts).* This is the Southern Nechernozemiye district, adjoining the North Caucasus. Proximity to Chechnya and the steady stream of migrants from the Caucasus gives rise to strong xenophobic feeling in public opinion. Alongside that, large industrial centres such as Voronezh and Volgograd are dependent on an influx of ethnic minorities to make up their workforce. In rural areas, too, there are extensive areas that have historically been populated by ethnic minorities. Consequently, overt support of Russian nationalism could dramatically destabilise the political situation of this sub-region – this motivates the government towards a policy of balance.

- 4 *Counteracting extremism and constructive cooperation with ethnic minorities. (Perm region, Astrakhan, Samara, Saratov and Orenburg oblasts).*  
The situation in the Astrakhan *oblast* is as follows:

The administration of the *oblast* is based on the idea that the authorities should not make any distinction between different ethnicities and believes that citizens of all nationalities should have equal rights and be subject to the same responsibilities. Only if these conditions are adhered to can the population have confidence in its governing bodies of authority. Without this confidence, a multi-national region cannot possibly have a normal, balanced government.<sup>37</sup>

The Perm region introduced a more or less effective programme of ethno-cultural development. However, even in these progressive regions, the potential for ethnic policy is greatly limited by a number of factors, for example by the absence of a unified, conceptual basis for such a policy applicable across the whole country.

A whole decade (the 1990s) went under the shadow of the mobilisation of the so-called "titular nationalities" in the Russian republics, stirred up by the local elite to fight for the sovereignty of the republic. In a number of cases, this kind of mobilisation resulted in armed conflicts between groups of citizens and the federal government, as was the case in the Chechen republic. This changed in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as a different set of problems became the central focus, namely the rejection of migrants of other ethnicities by their host societies, primarily citizens of Russia's largest cities.

This gave rise to confrontations between different population groups, like that which took place in Kondopoga (2006). What is more, the Russian ethno-political situation from 2000 onwards resembled more and more that of the global "North". One would think that this similarity should have allowed Russia to make greater use of foreign conceptions and implementations of ethnic policy.

Towards the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, the leaders of three European nations, Angela Merkel (Germany), David Cameron (Great Britain) and Nicolas Sarkozy (France) spoke out against multicultural policy, as it is commonly understood by the masses, which as good as supports the division of societies, split into separate religious and ethnic communities; at the same time they supported the need for a higher level of integration of migrants into the host community, into the society.

Dmitry Medvedev made a somewhat oblique response to this declaration. At the February (2011) meeting of the State Council on the subject of international interaction, the president tried to rehabilitate the term "multiculturalism", remarking that the new-fangled slogans of the European leaders on the subject of its failure were not applicable to Russia.<sup>38</sup> It seems to me that the judgement of the Russian leader is the result of a misunderstanding, an "*effet Jourdain*", unaware that he was also speaking in prose. The fact of the matter is that the Russian President had himself on more than one occasion criticised the very same elements of

multiculturalism as were now being attacked by his European colleagues. This was particularly common when he spoke about the situation in the North Caucasus, which is strongly reflected in clan culture, ethnic separatism and religious radicalism. All these factors lead to the creation of almost insurmountable obstacles to governing of the region and forming an unprecedented wave of terrorism, not to mention the problems arising from the modernisation of this place. The Russian President, like the European leaders, reiterated the fact that the problem of combating social division is connected with the integration of citizens – he just gave it a different name. At the December (2010) meeting of the State Council, focusing on the resurgence of Russian nationalism, Medvedev said that this reflected the development of “all-Russian patriotism”. At the February meeting of the State Council in Ufa, he said that it represented a duty, that of the building of the “Russian nation”. However, in reality, the possibility of transplanting the European concept of social integration in Russia is very limited.

*The object of the policy?* In the West the xenophobia of the host society is aimed primarily at immigrants, i.e. foreign nationals who have come to the country in question from abroad. In Russia, however, the primary object of xenophobia is not so much immigrants, but rather internal migrants – citizens of the Russian Federation, primarily citizens of the Northern Caucasus republics. This alone goes to show that the Western policy of combating problems of migration by restricting the entry of citizens and changing citizenship or regulations with regard to residence rights, cannot be used to solve the problem of Russian inter-ethnic and religious tension.

*The problem of the breakdown of political management in the area of migration and ethnic policy.* In EU countries the direction of the development of legislation and political practices with regard to migration, defending human rights and supporting the rights of national minorities is an interconnected process, both institutionally (they are all part of the same administration unit) and ideologically (they all rely on the shared belief in the importance of human rights). Russia does not have either the single ideological basis necessary for the implementation of an integrationist policy; nor is there any proper interconnection between the administration and legislative practices. While there was a change in immigration policy from 2000 onward, ethnic (“national”) policy had not changed since it was formulated in the 1990s. The concept of ethnic policy has not been revised since 1996. The legislative activity of the State Duma in the sphere of ethnic (“national”) politics has been frozen between 2000–2010, while the ministry that was responsible, under a variety of different names, for carrying out such policy in the 1990s, was disbanded in 2004.

*The fundamentals of a functioning state authority.* In the West key innovations in the field of ethnic and migration policy are shaped by political parties and the institutions of civil society; they go through a stage of public discussion and are then passed and codified by the legislative authority, becoming a norm to be executed by the state. In Russia, however, there is a completely different approach to policy-making in all areas of life. In Russia principles and norms are shaped by the governing authority and then approved by parties, represented at

the Federal Assembly. In the context of such a method of policy-making the involvement of an expert community or the wider public in its shaping and implementation is severely limited, while the possibility of passing counter-productive political decisions is, conversely, very great. What is more, the parties, alienated from actual participation in the shaping of the policy and unencumbered by responsibility for its realisation, are inclined towards populism. It is no accident that almost all the political parties represented in the Russian parliament exploit ethno-phobia and migrant-phobia. Russia is among the top five European countries in terms of the national level of mass migrant-phobia.<sup>39</sup>

In the European Union the main mechanism for the implementation of ethno-cultural and migrant policy is the cooperation of governing bodies and civil institution. This cooperation means that citizens' participation in politics is constant, and not just limited to election periods. In Russia, civil institutions are significantly weaker. Moreover, according to recent research, Russia can be distinguished from the 28 other European countries by the low value of given to civil solidarity and mutual ("horizontal") confidence.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the intensification of social integration in Russia seems highly unlikely in the near future.

Nevertheless, I believe that a shift in Russia from multicultural division to multicultural integration is strategically inevitable. Our country has made its first steps towards innovative modernisation; moreover this is not simply a slogan of some leader, but a real necessity for a country with a great history and a great culture. And just as breathing in presupposes breathing out, so economic innovation calls for political, legal, social and cultural modernisation.

## Notes

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- 15 V. S. Nikitin *The Presidential Qualities of Gennady Zyuganov*, from the official website of the Russian Communist Party (7 January 2008) (<http://kprf.ru/vibory2008/chronicle/54161.html>).
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- 30 Cf. [www.newsru.com/crime/08sep2010/honourmurder20year.html](http://www.newsru.com/crime/08sep2010/honourmurder20year.html).
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