

History as an apology for Totalitarianism

The uses and abuses of history are many. Most of them stem from the search for power rather than the truth. In a post-totalitarian country, the misremembered past may be used both against the previous regime and in its defense. From the perspective of “pure scholarship” both cases are deplorable, but the latter seems more obviously dangerous. Here we examine a few examples of this tendency in contemporary Russia – the tendency to use history as the tool of a totalitarian ideology.

Two definitions are the premises of this study. 1. Totalitarian ideology is the system of ideas and doctrines that justify and normalize the totalitarian form of government, usually by representing it as the reign of justice. 2. It operates through resentment and for resentment.

The identification of Russia and the Soviet Union is at the core of the resentment at the core of the totalitarian potential in contemporary Russia and its “justification” in history; specifically an identification which enables Soviet apologists to treat the USSR as a temporarily weakened and somehow beaten (or rather “cheated”) form of the Russian State. Here we follow briefly a story of this identification: from Stalin's decision to restore the Russian Imperial dimension to the Soviet state, to a new Russian-Soviet “patriotic” synthesis proclaimed by most of the Moscow's media during the May 9th celebrations in 2005. The feeling of the loss of important territories, the feeling of degradation in the state's international status, as well as dreams of revenge against the external and internal enemies held responsible for this deplorable situation – these are the most important elements of the resentment I anatomise in this paper.

Its mobilizing power has penetrated the realm of history interpretations very soon after 1991. However, it is used by the state's manipulations with history only after 1999, confirming an important role played by interpretations of the past in contemporary “political technology”¹ of the Russian Federation. The essence of these interpretations is best represented in books pretending to guide the reader toward a new, “patriotic” attitude in Russian historiography. Many of them are written by professional historians with very solid academic positions, and published in the most prestigious scholarly publishers, quite frequently serving as new historical textbooks to be used in higher learning institutions. We try here to go through ideological motives and “hot” historical issues being “reinterpreted” in these publications in the most obstinate way.

This way is opened, as so many others, by Stalin.

1.

On 19 July 1934, Josef Stalin sent his Politburo colleagues a letter entitled “On Engels’s article ‘The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom’.”² The father and co-founder of communist ideology was unmasked by Stalin as a German nationalist, blackening Russian history and politics in the name of an eternal hatred of the western powers competing with Russia. Although the letter to the Bolshevik party leaders was only published seven years later, only some few days before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, it was, from the moment it was sent, a turning-point in the attitude to Russian history in the Soviet system. A synthesis was proposed; a synthesis of the imperial, that which served the enlargement of the state and its military-political potential, with the new Soviet identity. The historical synthesis of the new ideology was built around a Russian centre, surrounded once again by a hostile world: the western powers and their “agents”. The Russian past, generally treated by the Bolsheviks in former years like the Russian present – as an arena for brutal conquest – was transformed after 1934 into a treasury of models of Soviet patriotism, such as prince Alexander Nevsky, Field-Marshal Suvorov, Admiral Nachimov, eventually Ivan the Terrible (evoked in Sergei Eisenstein’s film) – treated as a forerunner of Stalin struggling with internal and external enemies of the state. Stalin reduced the former to dust in the 1930s while intending to defeat the latter at the end of the decade. The war of 1939-1945 (and its fruits in the shape of conquests which far exceeded the

¹ See: Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics. Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*, New Haven and London 2005, esp. pp. 49-72.

² J. V. Stalin, “O stat’e F. Engelsa „O vneshnei politikie tsarizma””, *Bolshevik*, 1941, no. 9.

scope of the former Russian Empire) promoted and consolidated a specific type of Soviet-Russian patriotism. It became, in fact, Stalin's greatest monument.

It is a monument to an Empire and its victims, a monument to the victims sacrificed to the Great Empire. Russia was the first victim of the Soviet form of totalitarianism but became doubly so when it began to identify with the system which violated her. Alongside this identification there rose up a cult of the greatness of the state and its particular civilisational identity which was threatened by others: the West and its collaborators inside Russia. Russia constantly fell victim to these enemies, but also constantly fought heroically against them – as in the Great Patriotic Wars; against the French in 1812, against the Germans in 1941, and, for four hundred years, against the Poles. Defending itself and its threatened territory, Russia made war with the greatest evils threatening not only herself, but also the world; a dominant western evil empire – “Jesuit”, Napoleonic, Hitlerite (and, contemporarily, one might add, Bushite...)

The mindset which I have outlined very simply made its continuing presence felt very strongly during the Moscow ceremonies marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Great Victory. It was possible to observe that the synthesis proposed by Stalin seventy years earlier formed the basis for the propaganda of Putin's Russia. I have discussed the characteristic features of the publicity materials produced by Moscow for the commemoration of this anniversary elsewhere³, and shall therefore only refer to them marginally in further reflection on the Russian state's contemporary struggle for the past.

It is above all necessary to note the engagement of the state in this struggle. It is hard to find comparisons for the scale and multifaceted nature of this engagement – unless perhaps we look for them in non-democratic systems in which the central authorities have, if not full control, then certainly maximum influence over the political outlook of its subjects as well as the external image of the country.

The “military-patriotic” television channel “Zvezda” was symbolically founded on 22 April 2005 – Lenin's birthday – and was clearly intended for the forthcoming sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war. Present at the channel's opening ceremony were Ministers of Defence: Sergei Ivanov of contemporary Russia and Dmitri Yazov of the Brezhnev era. Together they underlined that special patriotic television was intended to be a particularly important force in the struggle with “those in the West” who tried to “diminish our victory.”⁴ The upper chamber of the Russian Parliament – the Federation Council – organises special meetings of parliamentary deputies, heads of information agencies, and also representatives of the Foreign Ministry (with the minister, Sergei Lavrov, himself), which together agree a strategy to combat the “blackening of Russia” and her history thanks to the propaganda efforts of neighbouring countries (in particular the Baltic countries and Poland)⁵. President Putin's administration has created a special board to deal with matters relating to cultural links with neighbours (of the former USSR), popularly known as the Board for Preventing Orange Revolutions. In this institution, moreover, in accordance with the words of its head, Modest Kolerov, the problems of interpreting history take an unusually important place – the history of the Russian Empire, which is to be presented as an eternal source of freedom and civilisational progress for its recent *okrainy* and present neighbours⁶. In order to communicate with an even wider circle of potential receivers of the Kremlin's vision of Russia, a decision was taken to create a global, English-language station, Russia Today. It was intended to include Europe, most of Asia and even North America in its reach.⁷

It would be possible to make a long list of these kinds of institutions – with the electronic media, the modern “engineers of the soul” at the head – created on the initiative of Russian officials to fight for the “purity” of Russia's historical and contemporary image. More disturbing and more precisely connected with the question of memory of the Soviet (and Russian) past, however, are the

³ A. Nowak, “9 maja w Rosji. Narodziny ‘biało-czerwonej’ syntezy rosyjskiej państwowości”, (9 May in Russia. Birth of the ‘White and red’ synthesis of Russian statehood), *Europa. Tygodnik idei*. Supplement to the newspaper “Fakt”, nr 20 (59), 18 May 2005.

⁴ See: Sergei Varshawchik, “Zwezdanutyi roial’ v kustakh” [article in: *Novoe Voennoe Obozrenie*]: www.nvo.ng.ru/history/2005-04-29/4_tv.html

⁵ T. Bielecki, “Narzekania Moskwy. Polacy psują wizerunek Rosji na świecie” (Moscow's Complaints. Poles screw up the image of Russia abroad.), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 July 2005.

⁶ See the interview with M. Kolerov, *Dla sopredelnykh gosudarstv Rossia – eto svoboda*, www.izvestia.ru/politic/article2210910.

⁷ See http://www.pravda.ru/economics/2005/7/21/63/20023_russiatoday.html

efforts by the Russian central authorities to set down a school curriculum for their national history which meets their needs.

Vladimir Buldakov's interesting analysis was one of the first to draw attention to the manipulative content of the textbooks for Russian history which appeared after 1991. "After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many former Soviet historians, particularly 'historians' of the CPSU, transformed themselves into historians of the traditional Russian state and 'patriotic' defenders of the Fatherland. They promoted a great wave of xenophobia, ethno-phobia, and anti-Semitism. [...] They did not rediscover national history, but the possibility of identifying themselves with the new rulers. Such chameleon-like historians can have a great, although non-articulated, influence, not only on society, but on other historians".⁸ In the 1990s the state did not set out precise ideological or factual requirements for the content of history textbooks. A specific common denominator was the tendency of most of these, in adapting older content, to transfer the former, Soviet-superpower vision of history to the new reality. An overview of the textbooks of this period conducted by Ewa Thompson indicates that on several points there is a consensus between "old" and "new" textbooks. The first of these points is that there is a general agreement to preserve attitudes to history as an arena of ruthless struggle conducted in the spirit of Lenin's question "Kto kogo?" The basic instruments of this struggle are military power and technology. For Russian students, the intended audience of these textbooks, the aim of this struggle – a second general agreement – is supposed to be the maintenance of the superpower position of their state. A third assumption might be summarised in the thesis proposed by Nikolai Karamzin; the history of Russia starts in Kiev and has demonstrated natural unity for twelve centuries. This "natural unity" causes the inexplicable existence of countries such as Ukraine, and allows the joining of their territory to the Muscovite state to be termed "reunification". Successive Imperial Russian conquests are generally presented as continuation of a "natural" process of "reunification" or "voluntary" attachment of various territories to the centre in Moscow or St. Petersburg.⁹

The previously-mentioned Vladimir Buldakov identifies a similar set of features as characterising the majority of textbooks attempting to synthesise the history of Russia. He draws attention to the fact that there has not been a move toward Novgorod as an alternative centre of Russian political tradition with parliamentary-democratic symbolism, though the vision of an indivisible Russia separated from a "broken-off" Kiev has been upheld in its place. The "ideal" that emanates from the majority of textbooks can be summarised as follows: "a strong paternalistic state that guides society and defends it from enemies." This ideal has been criticised by parts of the liberal establishment, much as the deliberate steamrolling of the question of the non-Russian nationalities and their fates in the Empire into the margins of textbook accounts drew protests from the representatives of twenty republics and national areas.¹⁰ On the other hand, however, for the most chauvinistic sections of the contemporary Russian political spectrum, the choice of textbooks failed to guarantee a sufficiently "patriotic" upbringing and thus subjected the textbooks to criticism from this perspective.¹¹

The reason for the criticism was, above all, too wide a choice of textbooks. In 2002, there were more than a hundred textbooks covering Russian history (of which seventy were approved by the Ministry of Education). The authorities started to take charge of this chaos. In October 2002 the government approved a National educational program intended to support the plan for the "restoration of Russia as a great power." In March 2002, President Putin met "unofficially" with a group of the erudite, including among others Professor A.N. Sakharov, the Director of the Institute of Russian History (RAN). The President suggested that the state had at last entered a period of "post-revolutionary stabilisation" – which academics ought to reflect in their work. Professor Sakharov (himself the author, editor and reviewer of numerous history textbooks) reflected this lesson a month later in answers for a programme on Russia's TV channel number 1. Sakharov stated that the

⁸ V. Buldakov, "Attempts at the 'Nationalization' of Russian and Soviet History in the Newly Independent Slavic States", in: *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia*, ed. Hayashi Tadayuki, Sapporo 2003, p. 10-11.

⁹ E. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge. Russian Literature and Colonialism*, London 2000, Chapter 7.

¹⁰ V. Buldakov, op. cit., p. 13-15.

¹¹ A. Tarasov, "Obnovlenie gumanitarnogo obrazovaniia: molodym 'promyvaiut mozgi' i naviazvaiut novuiu ideologiu", *Svobodnaia mysl'* (formerly *Kommunist*), 1/2000.

stabilisation of a great country with a great history is always connected with the person of a wise leader...¹²

In 2003, the Ministry of Education undertook an evaluation of 107 textbooks in order to finally reduce their number to at most three on each level. When President Putin was made aware that one of the textbooks for twentieth-century history contained critical comments about his administration, the Ministry removed the textbook from the approved list while the President stated that the teaching of history ought to lay out only those facts which “develop a sense of pride in their own country”. In turn, the Ministry used this as the basis for its reconsideration of its choice of number-one textbook for twentieth-century history. The textbook which almost certainly will be the only book recommended for use, according to Maria Lipman in her analysis of this case, “makes no mention of Stalin’s ethnic deportations (perhaps to avoid a ‘distorting’ connection with the current Chechen war), largely reduces the period of the Red Terror to 1936-38 and describes the years of Putin’s rule in laudatory terms.”¹³

2.

We have considered the particular and distinctive ways in which intervention from above affects the writing of works of historical synthesis in Russia. The time has now come to examine the ideological goals they serve. We must, however, remind ourselves of two elements of the synthesis recommended by the Ministry of Education for textbooks: an apologia for contemporary Russia and the Putin regime itself connected to the purification of the Soviet Union in the Stalinist period. Stalin is here the architect of a great state and its superpower status; Putin is its restorer. Other rules must be applied in the name of a country’s power and world status. Conversely, what weakens the state, regardless of the ideas it may stand for, must be condemned.

President Putin gave a virtually official stamp to this “philosophy of history” in the convoluted formula used in his annual address given on 25 April 2005, when he termed the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. Few people still remember the words of another address given fourteen years earlier as a *Word to the People*: “A great, unheard of disaster is happening. Our MOTHERLAND, our soil, the great state that history, nature and our renowned forefathers have trusted us with, is going under, is being destroyed, is descending into darkness and nothingness. [... Shall we let the betrayers and criminals] take away our past, cut us off from the future and leave us pitifully to vegetate in the slavery and downtroddenness of our almighty neighbours?”¹⁴. This rhetorical exercise was presented at the end of July 1991, towards the end of “Sovetskaia Rossia”, serving as the ideological inspiration for the attempted coup in defence of the Soviet Union attempted a month later. Was an idea developed by Gennady Yanayev in August 1991 being perpetuated by President Putin in 2005? The current president has on many occasions stated clearly that there is no return to the Soviet Union. There is no reason to doubt the credibility of these declarations. The communist ideology and one-party system that caused the decay of the Soviet Union have been discarded by the Russian president just as they have been rejected by a clear majority of Russian society. If we compare excerpts from his official address with Yanayev’s statement of the coup’s intent, it is only to draw attention to the fact that in both cases the communist content has no meaning. Both are dominated by appeals to the heritage which has created a Great Country. The state which became most powerful during the Soviet period but which was earlier connected with the forces of “history” – that is, Russian history – and “nature.”

History and nature, intertwined in the foundations of the greatness and unity of a country best given shape by Josef Stalin; a very important message of a specific teaching, to which the last leaders of the Soviet Union appealed. These same elements appear in the ideological construction of the Putin regime. They have their logical fulfilment in one more regard. When a Great Country unites history

¹² See V. Buldakov, op. cit., p. 15-16.

¹³ Maria Lipman, “Rewriting History for Putin”, *The Moscow Times*, March 22, 2004, <http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/70115.htm>

¹⁴ *Sovetskaia Rossia*, July 23, 1991, quoted after: Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe. A Study in Identity and International Relations*, London & New York 1996, p. 179.

and nature, only the hostility of external forces can part them. The above-mentioned *Word to the People* (that is, the Soviet people) spoke plainly of this in 1991.

When we see the “special relationship” of President Putin with President Bush, and then the even more “special” relationships connecting (until recently) the Russian leader with the German Chancellor and the President of France, it is hard to imagine official acceptance of the clearly xenophobic, anti-western element of the Soviet-Russian synthesis described above. And yet, it is sufficient to recall the first programmatic statement of the Russian president to the Russian Federation – from the year 2000. With minimal pathos the Russian president in essence repeated the warning given by the leaders of the 1991 attempted coup: “Russia has met with a systematic challenge to its state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and found itself face to face with forces that strive towards a geopolitical reorganisation of the world.”¹⁵ Evil forces are still out there and still strive to weaken the national-geopolitical heir to the USSR; to its territorial development, to depriving it of sovereignty and world significance. Vladimir Putin, beginning his first term as Russian president, gave clearly to understand that he perceives these forces and intends to take their measure – but through a more subtle game than open confrontation. This game continues. Its character and meanderings are subjects for analysis by political scientists. For us will suffice the statement that as much as President Putin emphasises partnership in his attitude towards his western partners and rivals, in his comments to Russians themselves he talks rather of rivalry, and even of a permanent external threat.

These motifs did not come from nowhere. They have been present in Russian public discourse constantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union. They did not dominate from the start, but rather developed gradually. It is worthwhile quickly recalling some characteristics of these phenomena in order to better understand the historical consciousness which the Putin regime simultaneously appeals to and builds.

3.

Immediately after 1991, when Boris Yeltsin built his political position on the clear opposition of a new, self-determined Russia with the old communist system, a positive attachment to the Soviet Union was limited to circles with the national-communist opposition. This current of opinion, represented by newspapers such as *Den*, *Zavtra*, *Pravda* or *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, was skilfully relegated to the margins of political life. Followers of this current constantly developed the strengths of their argument, however, as well as strong influence in intellectual circles. The representatives of the academic elite from the recent Soviet period did not lose their academic positions as members of the Academy of Science, Directors of Institutes, *cadre* leaders, university professors. Some headed in the new direction indicated by the new authorities. Others worked towards purely academic aims. Some, however, started at the work of adapting the old Soviet ideology to the situation in which the Russian Federation, treated as the heir to the Soviet Union, found itself. An heir, moreover, obligated to fight for the whole of its great inheritance. “Academic expertise” directed in this way quickly brought inspiring results. Researchers from the Institute for General Genetics of the Russian Academy of Sciences discovered a common genetic code for the inhabitants of the USSR – which *Pravda* cited at the end of 1992 as proof of the natural character of the Russian unity which had been brutally injured by the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ From other spheres of research, some Russian geologists pointed to the geological similarities factors as further evidence of their Great Country’s natural unity and size; the fact that the Russian (Eurasian) geological formation reaches along the former borders of the USSR.¹⁷

In 1994, the elite of Russian sociologists from the Academy of Sciences presented a comprehensive study of the reforms and transformations up to that point. They were heralded as “theses for the future” which for the most part were connected with a characteristic evaluation of the state’s history. The authors stated in the first thesis that “The Empire-(Soviet)Union was not a product

¹⁵ *Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii Federalnomu Sobraniuu. Put’ k effektivnomu gosudarstvu*, Moskva 2000. English text retrieved on 15 March 2006 from http://president.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029_70658.shtml

¹⁶ See *Pravda*, October 9, 1992; quoted after Vera Tolz, *Inventing the Nation: Russia*, London 2001, p. 239.

¹⁷ This geological argument is employed by A. Gubin and V. Strokin in their *Ocherki istorii Kionigsberga*, Kaliningrad 1991, p.7.

of the natural aggressiveness of the Muscovite authorities but the result of a natural-historical, political and economic integration of the interests of various nations, which voluntarily and consciously joined forces and sought defence in one of the most materially and culturally developed civilisations on the planet – the Russian (*russkaia/rossiiskaia*) civilisation.” The seventh and final thesis outlined the almost messianic conviction that Russia would not only once more unite the nations of the “Imperial Union” but would in addition become a new “epicentre [sic] of world economic and spiritual life.” The New Eurasian Union would become a global model of the transition from industrial society to a stable post-industrial society, in harmony with natural development. “Time to work for Russia and the union of fraternal nations.” These words end not some manifesto published for publicity by some new party, but an almost 400-page volume of analysis by the Institute for Socio-Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.¹⁸

I have quoted this work not because of the originality of its thesis but because of its typical character. It makes a connection typical in Russian intellectual praxis after 1991, “stamping” academic analysis with an ideological project; a project of rebuilding the “Imperial Union” in the name of the most elevated slogans. Such books, analyses and studies, signed with professorial titles from many disciplines, mostly in the social sciences, can be counted in the hundreds. From them comes a clear structure for the ideological interpretation of the Russian political community and the nature of its past, as well as how its present state is evaluated along with its prospects for the future – clearly connected with the disappointment with the results of political and economic reforms and the demise of Russia’s superpower status. In this spirit of crisis ideas which have appeared in Russian thought in similar situations – after the defeat in the Crimean War in the nineteenth century and the shock of the western-style reforms attempted then – have returned. Russia (in the interpretation of her intellectual elite) once again feels deceived by the West, has once more hardened in her conviction in her civilisational peculiarity. The “Imperial Union” was the political foundation which has been buried by repeated Occidentalism.

Anatol Utkin, the Director of the Centre for the Research of the United States at the Russian Academy of Sciences, has synthesised this feeling with the recollection of the Soviet Union’s rivalry with the “imperialist bloc” during the Cold War. The first chapter of this synthesis was presented in a publication which might serve as the symbol of Utkin’s argument – namely, in *Kommunist*, the theoretical organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which from its first 1992 edition changed its name to *Svobodnaya mysl* (Free thought). The no less symbolic title of the article – “Russia and the West”¹⁹ – signalled a return to a tradition of sharp conflict between the two eponymous heroes. Russia cannot become the West. This is axiomatic, which Utkin once again demonstrates through the results of the reforms of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras. He does, however, raise a question; how can this peculiarity and the interests connected with it (including geopolitical interests) be defended against Western invasion? He answers his question in a manner which justifies the demands of modernisation using the reforms of Peter I as a model. Russia must imitate the technical and institutional achievements of the West in order to effectively defend its own interests and preserve its individuality. The reforms of Peter I rescued Russia from the fate of the colonised peoples of Africa and Asia. Modernisation is a game with the West – against the West – for the survival of Russia as a culturally specific, sovereign civilisational and political entity. The Soviet period was, in Utkin’s understanding, effective in maintaining the independence of the Russian community for seventy years against a “Faustian” western model aiming at world domination. In 1991, Russia capitulated to the West, as India, China, Turkey and Japan had all had to. A return to the game of independence is nonetheless possible, suggests Utkin, if Russia only reverses the “blindness” of contemporary modernisers who have forgotten her basic interests and particular values.

Several years later, Utkin dotted the “I” in his evaluation of the Soviet period. He did so in a volume advertised as new *Vekhi* – a new manifesto for Russia’s critical intelligentsia after ninety years. It presented Stalin as the greatest master of the game of Russia’s sovereignty and greatness. The master from whose diplomatic achievements – with the Yalta agreement foremost – contemporary Russian politicians should learn. Utkin embellished this with an open apologia for communism as a system which secured for Russia superpower status with exceptional scientific and technical efficiency

¹⁸ *Reformirovanie Rossii: mify i realnost’*, ed. G. W. Osipow and others, Moskva 1994, p. 370-371.

¹⁹ A. I. Utkin, “Rossia i Zapad”, *Svobodnaja mysl’*, no. 70: 1993, p. 3-14.

and the ability to ensure agreeable living conditions and spiritual development for its multi-ethnic population.²⁰

Many other authors – sociologists, political scientists and historians – have trodden the same path – from the disappointment of Gorbachev’s “perestroika” and the “democratisation” of Yeltsin’s early years – to rehabilitate the Soviet period. Many representatives of the Russian cultural elite have not shifted so far, unambiguously rejecting and condemning the Soviet period. At the same time there is growing criticism of new attempts to “Occidentalise” Russia, seen in a steadily growing nostalgia for “real” Russia – older, pre-revolutionary, imperial, Tsarist. The figurehead of this movement, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, gave hard-hitting examples of this kind of apologia for Imperial Russia in his mid-90s publication “The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century”. Dressed up as academic historical argument, the rhetoric of this great writer aimed to demonstrate several theses which were duplicated in countless variations in other publications. We shall discuss only two theses.

Firstly: institutions and political models borrowed from the West or imposed on Russia by the West are harmful to her. (In emphatic style, Solzhenitsyn discusses the thesis that the mercantile republic of Novgorod might be a structural alternative to the authoritarian system of Moscow. In the spirit of nineteenth-century Tsarist propaganda he presents the Novgorod republican system as being, in reality, a “rotten oligarchy”, not offering its subjects any more freedom from the Muscovite system, leading the country to desolate anarchy. Rescue is perceived by Solzhenitsyn, as by Karamzin before him, as lying in strong Tsarist authority loyally supported by masses of faithful subjects. The danger to this system comes from the West – the symbol recalled by Solzhenitsyn is that of the Time of Trouble (*Smuta*), introduced almost entirely by “Polish intervention.” The West, represented at this time by “Latin” Poland, attempted to take Russia’s “Orthodox soul”, her civilisational specificity. The Russian nation rose up to preserve their identity against western intervention, Solzhenitsyn reminds his readers. At the same moment, please note, that Boris Yeltsin introduced a new national holiday into the calendar to replace anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution; the anniversary of the exile of the Poles from the Kremlin.)

Secondly: the shape of the Russian state has been enlarged through just wars to unify the heritage of Kievan Russia. In this sense Solzhenitsyn completely justifies the partitions of the Polish Rzeczpospolita undertaken by Russia with the help of Prussia and Austria. In Solzhenitsyn’s vision there is no place for the separation of these lands – and therefore for either Belarus or Ukraine – from the Russian state.

Thirdly: the great empire established by Russia in the nineteenth century differed fundamentally from all others, and in particular from the western empires. It was built in such a way that it benefited the nations annexed to it and acted to the detriment of the Russian centre. Some nations, such as the rebellious Poles, did not value this pleasant state of affairs, states Solzhenitsyn, repeating, not without regret, yet another cliché of the most primitive Tsarist propaganda.²¹

Russia, the special civilisation, threatened with political and cultural aggression from the West, which is always ready to exploit any period of sadness for the Russian state. Russia – great, justly built for the good of its “attached” peoples. These motifs, which have found in Solzhenitsyn an authoritative defender, were commonly understood to mean that Russia in the final decade of the twentieth century found itself once again in a state of Great Sadness and new threat, and the West (or at least some of its politicians) cynically exploiting the situation in order to finally reduce the significance of the Russian political and cultural community. This has been a view taken up by more and more representatives of the Russian elite – even those who had hoped at the beginning if that same

²⁰ A. I. Utkin, “Pochemu ischez Sovetskii Soiuz”, and idem, “Vstrechi na vysshem urovne”, in: *Na pereputie (Novye Vekhi)*, Moskva 1999, pp. 185-213 i 228-239.

²¹ See A. Solzhenitsyn, „*The Russian Question*” at the End of the Twentieth Century, New York 1995, pp. 5-9, 25-31, 38-46, 64-65. Compare with another fundamental apologia for the Russian Empire, connected to accusations against another “disloyal” element, in Solzhenitsyn’s slightly later history of Russians and Jews in the same state – *Dvesti let vmieste (1795-1995)*, Parts 1 and 2 – as well as the comprehensive criticism by Siemion Reznik: *Vmieste ili vrozn’. Zamietki na poliakh knigi A. I. Solzhenitsyna*, Moskva 2003.

decade for a swift “normalisation” – understood as emulation in many aspects of life of the most highly economically developed countries in the West.²²

When after the 1997 financial crisis Russia developed unusually fast and under her own steam – thanks to rising prices for the exported raw energy supplies – the sense that such a result might be a real possibility began to grow rapidly. When at the same time the 1999 enlargement of NATO embraced the former satellite states of the USSR (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, and eventually the Baltic States) and the strength of that alliance was employed in military action against Orthodox Serbia, regarded by Russia as her natural client, the feeling intensified that conflict between Russia and the West was real and required real solutions. Russia, the “natural defender of truth and justice” had, once more, to perform this role on the world stage, requiring preparedness to effectively defend its interests in its (of course, “natural”) sphere of influence. At this moment, Boris Yeltsin transferred power to Vladimir Putin.

It was also the moment in which historical apologia for the Russian Empire – as a palladium, a “special path” for Russia in history – was able to coincide with the rehabilitation of the Soviet system, or at least those aspects which could be interpreted as characteristic of Russia’s strength as a great power. Almost a decade had passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The memory of the humiliations and discomforts of the previous ten years of “reform and democratisation” could begin to outweigh the memory of the “difficulties” of the previous system. With growing distance, nostalgia for the diminished symbols of the greatness of the state began to outweigh the memory of the victims that state had devoured. After a period spent demolishing the Soviet criminals came the moment of their rehabilitation, or at least more open discussion of the need to rebuild (the renewed attempts to rebuild the statue to Felix Dzerzhinsky in front of the former NKVD-KGB headquarters at the Lubyanka in Moscow have a symbolic significance here).

4.

It is now time to make sense of this new historical memory. Among the incomprehensible number of examples that appeared somewhere between academic and popular history it is possible to select extreme ideological perspectives – like, for example, the work of the distinguished medievalist Igor Froyanov, the Dean of History at Saint Petersburg University (who joined the Communist Party only after it was officially dissolved). He presents the history of Russia as an eternal struggle with foreign, Jewish (the [*zhidovstvuiushchie*] cult active at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), or Vatican espionage (beginning with the “Papal tutor” of Zoe Paleologue, the wife of Ivan III). This struggle, the stakes of which are not just the size of the state but the very survival of the Russian nation, intensified during the Soviet period, according to the author. First Lenin, and then Stalin, appeared in the role of saviour of Russia against foreign influence by progressively eliminating the significance of anti-Russian, Jewish elements in the Soviet system (the representatives being first Marx himself, then the “businessman of the Revolution” Parvus-Helfand in 1917, and finally the Jewish members of the Politburo of the Bolshevik Central Committee). The height of the Russian state’s good fortune in this vision is the period of conquest of all of Eastern and Central Europe after 1945 when – according to Froyanov – Stalin succeeded in realising the vision of Nikolai Danilevsky: a potent Slavic bloc under Russian leadership. This bloc was able to resist the hostility of the Western powers and create an ideal Russian civilisation. Unfortunately, infiltration by foreign elements, as happened after the death of Stalin, led to open treachery and catastrophe, of which Yeltsin is the symbol for the author.²³

An example of “creative continuation” of this kind of historical conception might be the new book by Aleksei Mitrofanov, the politician (he is the Deputy Leader of Zhirinovskiy’s “Liberal Democratic Party”) most obviously inspired by the thoughts of professional historians like Froyanov.

²²See *The Search for a New Russian National Identity: Russian Perspectives*, ed. by J. H. Billington and K. Parthe, Washington, D.C. [Library of Congress] 2003, as well as J. H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

²³I. Friojanov, *Oktiabr’ siemnadsatogo. Gliadia iz nastoiashchego*, St-Petersburg 1997; idem, *Pogruzhenie v bezdnu. Rossiia na iskhode XX veka*, St-Petersburg 1999 (2nd ed., Kiev 2003).

He presents a comprehensive analysis of the genius of Stalin as the greatest Russian geopolitician, but also fundamentally justifying the purges carried out by him: such as the ethnic purges of the late 1930s (liquidation of “potentially undermining forces” – after all, he argues, Roosevelt did the same with the Japanese in the USA after 1941); the liquidation of the old Bolshevik cadres in 1937-1938 (“according to contemporary historians,” writes Mitrofanov, “it was conceived as the removal of potential fifth-columnists at the beginning of the war”); also the debate with the “Cosmopolitans” in the so-called Leningrad affair at the end of the 1940s (St. Petersburg/Leningrad is an eternal source of Western interference and foreign espionage in Russia). After the death of Stalin there began a crisis which only Yuri Andropov attempted to bring to an end. Instead, treachery triumphed. Mitrofanov brings his lesson up to date by suggesting that it might be stopped by employing Stalin’s methods with the “oligarchs”.²⁴

The new encyclopaedia of the Stalin era, published under the patronage of an editorial board made up of well-known professors (such as Alexander Panarin or the previously discussed Anatol Utkin) and literary critics (like Lev Aninsky), continues in the same vein. This work sets itself the task of justifying “the activities of J. V. Stalin – great politician, wise national and international statesman, victorious leader and profound thinker”. To see what this means in detail, one can look up entries such as GULAG (the most humane form of punishment for real enemies of socialism) or “Katyn” (where the Germans [sic!] murdered 22,000 Polish officers; the documents released by Gorbachev and Yeltsin with Stalin’s signature ordering their execution is, quite simply, a forgery). “Anti-soviet defamers will not get much further. The truth of socialism, the truth of the Stalin era, is stronger” concludes the encyclopaedia.²⁵

It would be possible to indicate various examples of more subtle apologias for the Empire, linked with the rejection of all arguments for its victims or critics. Examples which dress themselves in the trappings of the most academic monograph – such as, for example, the imposing size and collection of sources in the work of the long-time director of the Foreign Ministry Archive, P. V. Stegnyy, devoted to the role of Russia in the partitions of the Polish Commonwealth (which comes to the same conclusions as the work of Solzhenitsyn and earlier works of nineteenth-century Russian historical propagandists: Catherine the Great only took what was Russian; the division of weak lands on the periphery is normal political practice; between Russia and Germany there is no place for independent political bodies).²⁶

A more brutal example of the same tendency is expressed in the book by the professional historian from Moscow, Mikhail Meltyukhov, dedicated to the Polish-Soviet conflicts of the twentieth century. These conflicts are, for him, fragments of eternal Western aggression against Russia. When Russia (in this case, Soviet Russia) comes into conflict it is only to take what is rightfully hers. Stalin appears as a genial successor to Catherine II. The Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the involvement of the USSR in the attack on Poland in September 1939 are presented as purely defensive postures, underlining the primacy of Russian *raison d’etat*. This posture represented not only Stalin’s profound realism but also historical justice and even – argues Meltyukhov – humanitarianism. In this context the mass deportations of more than half a million people from the territory occupied by the Red Army in September 1939 to camps in the depths of the Soviet Union is presented as a “peacekeeping mission” which prevented the murder of those Poles deported to Siberia by protecting them from the Ukrainians panting with thirst for revenge...²⁷

²⁴ Alexei Mitrofanov, *Rossiiia pered raspadom ili vstupleniiem w Evrosoiuz*, Moskva: Ad Marginem, 2005, pp. 134, 154, 158-159, and many others.

²⁵ Vladimir Sukhodeev, *Epokha Stalina: sobytiia i liudi. Enciklopedia*, Moskva: Algoritm, 2004, pp. 3, 98-99 (on GULAG), 128-129 (on Katyn).

²⁶ P. V. Stegnyy, *Razdiely Polshi i diplomatia Ekatiieriny II. 1772, 1793, 1795*, Moskva 2002 – compare the criticism of the neo-imperial tendencies of this book presented in the review by a researcher from the University of Saint Petersburg, Larissa Arzhakova: “Rozbiory Rzeczypospolitej”, *Arcana*, no. 64-65 (4-5/2005), pp. 132-135.

²⁷ M. Meltyukhov, *Sovetsko-polskie voiny. Voienno-politicheskoe protivostoianie 1918-1939 gg.*, Moskva 2001 – compare my comprehensive review concentrating on the shocking falsehoods in this book – in: A. Nowak, *Od imperium do imperium. Spojrzenia na historie*

Books explaining the interpretation of Russian and Soviet history here summarised in the works of Froyanov, Stegnyy and Meltyukhov can be found in vast numbers on the shelves of Russian bookshops. It is not possible, obviously, to discuss every title of this kind; we are going to focus on one which aims to provide a synthesis of this whole broad stream of thought. Its author is Natalia Narochnitskaya, a doctor of History, an established employee of the academically prestigious Institute of International Relations and Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences and, at the same time, a parliamentary deputy in the Duma – the deputy chairperson of its Foreign Affairs Committee, in fact. For some years (1982-1989) while a Soviet representative in the Secretariat of the UN in New York, she had the opportunity to become familiar with not only Western publications on the subject of Russia and the Soviet Union, but also propaganda methods to counter their propositions and theses. In the Soviet diplomatic corps, Natalia Narochnitskaya put her knowledge to use in the service of ideals outlined by her father, Alexei, a member of the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences – who had secured his position in the Soviet historical profession with a comprehensive analysis of Stalin's letters condemning the anti-Russian tendency of classical Marxism.²⁸ The confrontation of the Cold War was thus placed in a context of eternal Western enmity towards Russia.

The twentieth-century portion of this synthesis is presented in an particularly effective manner in a book published last year: *Za chto i s kiem my voevali* (Why and with whom we fought). This was the historical publication most trumpeted by the Russian media to accompany the sixtieth anniversary of victory. Published in an edition of 30,000 (the average historical monograph in Russia has a print run of 1,000 copies), it is entirely devoted to apologia for Stalin's policy during World War II – from the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact to Yalta and Potsdam – as a model, prudent and positive for the whole population, of the politics of a Russian Head of State.²⁹

However it is not this book which contains the most comprehensive and pointed vision of the whole of Russian history as that of a country threatened with extinction through Western aggression, a country which was most effectively defended against such aggression in the Stalinist period. In fact, it is the 500-page volume published a year earlier by the same author – *Rossia i russkie v mirovoi istorii* (Russia and the Russians in the World History).

Narochnitskaya begins her historical analysis at almost exactly the same moment, some 135 years before Nikolai Danilevsky, though she cites the Russian historical philosopher as the greatest authority. The initial thesis of Danilevsky and Narochnitskaya comprises two assumptions and leads to two logical conclusions: 1. The West rejects Russia and her particular spiritual and historical experience. 2. The West finds itself simultaneously in a fatal civilisational crisis. *Ergo*: for Russia to proceed on a Western path is suicidal. Not only for Russia. The fate of the world depends on the fate of Russia's political and spiritual sovereignty, in opposition to the inevitably doomed West.³⁰

Narochnitskaya then sets herself an exceptionally ambitious goal: to cleanse Russian history of the falsehoods that have weighed upon her for the past several centuries due to Western propaganda. Cleanse so that Russians regain their faith in the greatness of their country – because if they save Russia they will, by extension, save the world. Above all, states Narochnitskaya, it is necessary to cast aside the Western lenses through which Russian historians, from Sergei Solovyov onwards have viewed Russian history. (In point of fact, Narochnitskaya accuses the father of Russian “national” historiography of *Orientalism*; defined as the interpretation of his country's history and achievements only through foreign, Western categories treated as “higher” categories.) Russia has her own particular paradigm of historical development, which Nikolai Karamzin understood before Solovyov and which the present author under discussion wishes to remind her readers of. Only when this Karamzinite perspective is taken can the peculiar characteristics of Russia be appreciated as precisely those which critique the West. Following in the footsteps of the Slavophiles, the parliamentary deputy indicates the

Europy Wschodniej, Kraków 2004, p. 258-271.

²⁸ A. L. Narochnitskii, *Znachenie pis'ma I. V. Stalina 'O stat'e Engelsa «Vneshnaia politika russkogo carizma» dla sovietskoi istorichzeskoi nauki*, Moskva 1951.

²⁹ N. A. Narochnitskaya, *Za chto i s kiem my voevali*, Moskva 2005; see also: “Strategia antipobedy” [an interview with N. A. Narochnitskaya], *Literaturnaia gazeta*, No. 19/2005; N. A. Narochnitskaya, *Vse oskorblenia v adries SSSR dolzhny byt' priesecheny*, strana.Ru, May 6 2005.

³⁰ N. A. Narochnitskaya, *Rossia i russkie v mirovoi istorii*, Moskva 2004, pp. 7, 21-23.

Russian lack of enthusiasm for legal norms and restrictions, contrasted by her with the Russian people preference for spiritual truth from the very beginning (from the time of Alexander Nevsky).

For Narochnitskaya the importance of this truth is the belief that, historically, Russia has always been the object of aggression and never the aggressor. As she writes, whatever others do write on the Russian imperialism from the eleventh to twenty-first centuries – the real aggressors are the Central European Catholics (the Poles and the Hungarians) constantly taking the side of the West. Only the Yalta-Potsdam system imposed by Stalin, immediately observes Narochnitskaya, succeeded in changing this attitude, though unfortunately for only forty-five years.³¹ In this manner she conducts not only an apologia for Stalin's politics and the achievements of the USSR as a superpower, but also a denial of such historical "details" as the conquests of the Russian Empire under Peter I, Catherine II (who eliminated the great rival state, the Polish Republic), and Alexander I (who moved the border of the Russian Empire to Warta, 200 kilometres from Berlin). The author acquits herself well in this endeavour, terming the eighteenth-century partitions of the Polish Republic "the famous cliché of supposed Russian expansionism" (p.87). Russia, in Narochnitskaya's historical interpretation, contended from the eleventh century onwards with the "Drang nach Osten" of the Latin West, the Vatican and the Polish Commonwealth, as she writes elsewhere (p.402). In a polemic against Richard Pipes, one of the "deceivers of Russia" most often accused by her, Narochnitskaya moves to state that, in contrast to the Western rulers, Moscow has never taken so much as a square metre of privately owned land in expanding her rule (because, of course, it is not expansion) [sic! – p.139: obviously Narochnitskaya does not want to take into account that which almost all Russian and Muscovite historians describe: the mass dispossession and deportation of local elites before the annexation of successive territories to the Muscovite centre...]

While only defending herself against the West, Russia has more than once saved it while taking fatal blows against herself: beginning with the wars against the Mongols, through the wars with Turkey, and finishing with the Great Patriotic War itself. The West, however, was always ungrateful. Why? Because the aim of the West was always the exploitation and destruction of Russia. As proof of this, Narochnitskaya cites the broadly anti-Russian writings of Engels only condemned by Stalin in 1934 (p.163-164). She also cites two maps as further proof of her thesis: one published in the British press in 1890 (in a satirical publication, which Narochnitskaya does not emphasise); and a second, taken from an obscure anti-masonic pamphlet of 1920. Both maps, in the opinion of the author, reveal the serious and meaningful Western plan to create a geopolitical desert in Russia (p.188-191). Like the journalists of *Pravda* and *Den* when they discovered hundreds of such maps of a partitioned Russia, Narochnitskaya sees their realisation in the condition of Russian statehood after *perestroika* and the collapse of the USSR.

Like her direct forebears, Narochnitskaya also sees the period around the end of World War I and the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution as the scene of the most serious Western attempt to smash Russia before 1991. The central problem in this period is, for her, interpreting the policy of President Woodrow Wilson – based on the slogan of national self-determination – as a fundamentally anti-Russian geopolitical diversion. Lenin and Trotsky are, for her, the authors and executors of the same anti-Russian policy, following the tendency of the founding-fathers of Marxism. The beginnings of Soviet statehood are signs not just of territorial expansion of the Empire, but also the diminution of Russian agency, persecuted in the context of a "korenizatsia" of non-Russian national elements by the early Bolshevik leaders. Russia was at this time near death.

And Stalin rescued Russia from death. Only he understood what had been set out for him by Danilevsky; the vital element in any world policy is not a class struggle, but the struggle between Russia and the West. The Russian nation only started to build their country up when their political leadership chose to embrace a vision of unavoidable conflict with the West and at the same time chose the ideal mission of the Third Rome for their nation – taken from Ivan III's Muscovite doctrine. Stalin returned to this concept and – from the late 1930s – Russia began to revive. The foresighted leader started to forcibly prepare the country for the war he perceived as unavoidable; industrialisation and militarization brought costs, but without them Russia would not have survived the next decade. The spiritual element of these preparations was Stalin's rediscovery of Russian pride in national greatness, through confrontation not only with the historical school of Mikhail Pokrovsky's diminution of this

³¹ Idem, p. 506.

pride, but with all anti-Russian factions; above all, through confrontation with the “Old Guard” of Bolshevik leaders, saturated in anti-Russian prejudices. In the view of Narochitskaya, the terror of 1937 was a lesser evil than that which threatened Russia in the event of victory by Trotsky, Zinoviev or Bukharin in their struggle for power. Narochitskaya accuses this group of dependence on the “Jewish-Masonic” politicians of the USA. (p.247-250) She also, incidentally, discovers the essence of the term Stalinism: “a historical-philosophical axiom for the interpretation of contemporary history, in the context of which Russian superpower status ceases to be an insult.” (p.240)

Stalin prepared Russia for the struggle to attain and maintain superpower status. The late 1930s showed, in Narochitskaya’s interpretation, the strategic genius and effectiveness of Stalin in striving toward that goal. The West was at that time divided. Russia (the USSR) was threatened by a greater danger from the Anglo-Saxon camp, which wanted to embroil her in the war against the Germans. Stalin, through the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, extricated himself masterfully from the trap laid for Russia. On the strength of the pact, he took only what “rightfully” belonged to Russia. Stalin’s strike against Poland in September 1939 was only, according to Narochitskaya, a pre-emption of the strike planned by Poland against Soviet Ukraine in its role as hyena of German policy. Stalin, however, outsmarted and punished the “Polish hyena”. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact is, continues Narochitskaya, demonised today because it was, in essence, the greatest defeat for the Anglo-Saxon strategy of the twentieth century, a setback in the strategy to weaken Russia (p.259-264). When Russia and Germany come to a *modus vivendi*, as they did in August 1939, it is a “nightmare” for Anglo-Saxon interests. Condemnation of Stalin’s pact with Hitler results from the fact that Anglo-Saxon propaganda has imposed its perspective on the world, a perspective created by no objective morality or justice but only the interests of Washington and London (p.267).

This agreement was broken by Hitler in 1941, but Russia did not stray from the path dictated by her interests. The soldiers Red Army fought heroically for her but above all Stalin cared for her. This period, emphasises Narochitskaya, constantly appealing to Orthodox values, led to the unification of the Soviet state with the Orthodox Church (including development of the activities of the Patriarchate) in service to the same goal as Stalin: the greatness of Russia. From the fire of the Great Patriotic War there emerged a patriotic synthesis. Stalin defended this spiritual victory at Yalta and Potsdam, where he did not deceive his Western partners, but rather ensured Russia’s retention of her pre-revolutionary territory. In this way, Russia became an obstacle to the Masonic plan for global unification made real by the Anglo-Saxon powers. Through his hard negotiating position at the Bretton Woods negotiations on the future shape of the United Nations, Molotov saved the world from a universal world government (p.269-293).

Stalin did not only reconstruct the geopolitical heritage of the Russian Empire, but also safeguarded it with a broad barrier of satellite states, with Poland occupying a central position. The powerful strengthening of Russian potential engineered by Stalin, however, gave the Anglo-Saxon powers cause to start the Cold War. The essence of this conflict was not the struggle against communism but the traditional conflict between Russia and the West – Narochitskaya states authoritatively, once again proving the currency of Danilevsky’s historical-philosophical prognosis (p.314-324).

In this conflict, Russia was forced to defend the natural sphere of influence she had gained with the same methods employed by her opponent; in this view, the “invasion of Cuba by the USA” (as Narochitskaya describes the Bay of Pigs in 1961) justified the USSR’s intervention in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (p.334-342). Stalin had no plans for aggression against the West, simply wishing to retain what he had gained for Russia in 1945. Only the logic of the Cold War drew Khrushchev and Brezhnev into action on a global scale. The West perpetrated its great diversion in this war under the banner of a supposed struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. Here Narochitskaya firmly resists the application of the term totalitarian to the Soviet Union (from the Stalin period), as it makes a comparison between the country she sees as simply the apotheosis of Great Russia and the criminal system led by Hitler. Totalitarianism is a propagandistic concept serving the essence to maintain the struggle between Russia and the West states Narochitskaya, returning to the vision of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* of half a century earlier (p.343-344).

The second tool employed by the West in its criminal diversion against Russian power was solidarity with the “enslaved nations” of the Soviet Republics and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this manner, western liberalism began once more to tighten its geopolitical grip around

Russia. This time, the aim was not only separation of what Stalin had fought for at Yalta and Potsdam but the whole area of traditional expansion by the West and its primary implements in the region (Poland and the Vatican). The concern was Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Baltic States. The slogan of independence for these countries was and is nothing more than cover for the anti-Russian policy of the West. Narochnitskaya presents the situations in these countries one by one. Ukraine is, for her, the key territory. The strategists of the West have, understanding this fact, created an artificial Ukrainian nationalism, in this way continuing the united anti-Russian policy of the Vatican and the ideals of the Polish insurgents of the nineteenth century (p.429-443). As successful as the policy of creating an artificial nationalism has been in Ukraine, however, it has been a complete fiasco in Belarus. Narochnitskaya argues for the annexation of Belarus to Russia as fast as possible, concerned with the reinforcement of the “healthy [Russian] organism” with twelve million un-westernised Slavs, free of the complexes in regard to the West that so rob Russians of their reason (p.443-446).

Narochnitskaya employs a purely geopolitical argument in the case of the Baltic States: “the organiser of Eastern Europe has always been either Russia or Germany” (p.476). Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians attained statehood on the basis of the treaty signed at Brest-Litovsk in 1918 between the Second Reich and Soviet Russia, and therefore those same powers had the right to take it back twenty-one years later in a treaty between the Third Reich and the USSR (we must draw attention to the fact that this idea by Narochnitskaya was repeated exactly by Vladimir Putin in a television interview for the German channel ARD/ZDF during the May 2005 commemorations³²). Now that they have attained formal independence as part of a Western “*cordon sanitaire*”, they have done so completely illegally. As an argument to further discredit the Baltic States, Narochnitskaya argues that “fascist cliques” governed these countries between the wars and then collaborated with the Third Reich during the war (President Putin again repeated this during the May 2005 commemorations in Moscow as part of the propaganda campaign to explain the absence of Estonia and the protests of Lithuania; evidently only superpowers such as the USSR had the right to collaborate with Hitler). In essence, adds Narochnitskaya, Lithuania (for example) was created thanks to Soviet Russia, survived against Poland and the West in 1920 – and then regained Vilnius on the basis of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (p.490-493). In relation to Estonia, Narochnitskaya digs even deeper to assign responsibility for this country’s independence to Russia: she reminds her readers that, according to the terms of the Treaty of Nystad, which ended Peter the Great’s victorious war against Sweden, Russia obtained the territory of present-day Estonia for the round sum of two million *efimeks*. Bearing in mind that the Treaty of Nystad was never cancelled, the separation of Estonia from Russia was not only abuse of Russia’s political rights but also her sacred right to retain her privately bought property... (p.495).

The author then devotes her attention once more to the fatal role played in the region by Poland. In the twentieth century, from Pilsudski to Solidarity, the country has been driven to its successive fits not by anti-communism but by a political tradition of anti-Russian aggression which has lasted without a break, according to Narochnitskaya, since the eleventh century. The words used by her on this matter have a threatening ring: “The constant, centuries-long repetition of the anti-Russian policy of Western European Catholics, an independent Poland, means that we must deal with her seriously” (p.507).

The remaining implements of the Western strategy to weaken and destroy Russia – Poland and the former Soviet Republics – did not, according to Narochnitskaya, gain any independence in an exchange of supposed totalitarianism to supposed democracy. Today they are subjected by the NATO system as surely as by the former Warsaw Pact (p.505). Russia also gained no more from these changes, contrary to the illusions of some pro-Western sections of the Russian intelligentsia. The year 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union was not only the collapse of Yalta and Potsdam, but of all the gains in Russian history since the sixteenth century (p.520).

Russia, in order to once more be reborn, must recognise the truth which, as Narochnitskaya frequently reminds us, was best expressed by Danilevsky: Russians will never be regarded by those in the West as being a community with equal rights. Russia must once again stand and confront those

³² *My ne pozvolim proshlomu khvatat’ nas za rukava* – an interview by President Putin given to the German television stations ARD and ZDF, 6 May 2005, in: www.strana.ru/stories/05/05/05/3605/247372.html

who oppose her size (arguing with those who favour a “Eurasian” solution, Narochnitskaya on this occasion resists the temptation to side with the Asian nations in the struggle against the West, if the price would be any kind of territorial surrender, such as the Kurile Islands given to Japan – p.524-525). Quoting the speech by President Putin in 2000, speaking particularly of the urgency of facing up to the “systematic challenge” to Russia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, Narochnitskaya ends her work with an appeal to the religious foundation of the Russian soul; Russia must defend her Great Power status in order to rescue her God-given identity and through this – as the only country able to resist a wave of global nihilism – save the world.

One might shrug one’s shoulders and ask why it is necessary to describe one book in such detail. Would it not be better to simply disregard it and its theses? Well, I repeat, the reason it is worth paying so much attention to is not that it was published by one of the most prestigious publishers (*Mezhdunarodnoe Otnoshenia*), or that it had a relatively large print run (of 5,000 copies in its first edition). It is primarily important because the views expressed in this book are not at all original; in fact, they are typical. Typical of hundreds of similar works, also published by prestigious firms and signed with the names and titles of employees of the most distinguished Russian academic institutions. The book by Natalia Narochnitskaya is the crest of this wave of “reinterpretation” of Russian history. In this wave, unfortunately, the truly great achievements of the Russian historical profession are lost, often taking argument with the views I have described. In bookshops, in the media, and in terms of sales, there are more books of this kind available than those of Narochnitskaya’s critics.

It might also be said that such a wave of megalomaniac publications seeking to compensate for manifold national complexes has been seen in other countries in the former Soviet bloc, even starting to be evident in Germany. Similar, it is true, but not the same. What does this dangerous difference consist in, let’s say at the end, in which in the Russian publications we have discussed here one can notice that totalitarian potential that the works in other Eastern and Central European countries, praying on history in the last 15 years, would not obtain?

This difference is made up of several different factors. The first is, quite simply, the size and potential, of the country which is described by these views; not simply totalitarian potential but simply political and military potential. The threat posed increases along with the size of the country – and not just the threat, but also the responsibilities: of the country itself, its neighbours and the whole region. Secondly, the degree of involvement by the political authorities in shaping the picture of national history is important. Of course, one might counter that in many countries the authorities help to popularise history – by approving school textbooks, for example, or organising official commemoration of various anniversaries and the memorialisation of particular heroes from the national past. It is necessary, however, to note that in Russia in the last five years a “qualitative” change has been seen.

It is more important, however, to consider the choice of values which are promoted and the heroes who are placed on pedestals. In this regard the situation in Russia is more unsettling: in this wave of historical “revisionism” it consists of a choice in favour of values appropriate to a superpower – at the cost of individual freedoms, which have been identified as “oligarchic” lawlessness, weakening a great and just state. It consists of putting not just anyone on a pedestal, but Stalin himself. It concerns the justification of the greatest crimes of the Soviet systems by Russian historians, including those perpetrated on the Russians themselves (for example the Terror of 1937) as well as those – perhaps especially those – perpetrated by the Russians on their non-Russian subjects (for example, the famine in Ukraine or, more generally, the ethnic purges of the late 1930s) and, of course, on their neighbours: the crimes symbolised by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Katyn, the Yalta System, and the interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It consists of justification or even apologia for totalitarianism in a country to which fell the sad fate of being the major test-bed of this terrible system.

It is also possible to imagine the scale of this problem by once more counting the ideological consequences of this Russo-Soviet revision of history. First, there is the obvious assumption that the essence of relations between great nations is deadly conflict – whether it be the class struggle proposed by Marx, or the racial struggle announced by the younger colleagues of the philosopher from Trier. The Russian historical ideologues turn the sense of this conflict into an encounter between Russian civilisation and the West (that is, the USA), which has usurped Russia’s place as the global model for development. If in this conflict it has lost all track of reality (or at least its most important elements) its result is that it seems to be worth sacrificing individual freedom, because it is not lonely individuals

but a powerful centralised state that will gain the victory in this conflict. In this great conflict there is no place for independence for the countries which find themselves between Russia and the West (assuming that the border of “the West” is Germany). Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and, even more so, Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia or Georgia; these are not political communities which can exist independently. They are eternal pawns in a great game between opponents in a global conflict. If they are not with Russia, they become the implements (the whores, as some Russian politicians would prefer to say) of the West. Because, argues Narochnitskaya – and following her, Putin – the organiser of Eastern Europe must be either Russia or Germany. In this way, we come to the final conclusion: as long as Russia’s cause is just, every new instance of expansionism is in essence, just a reconquest.

Is it sufficient simply to define the vision of history described here as having “totalitarian potential”? It does, of course, depend on the definition of totalitarianism. My personal preference is for the definition proposed by Richard Pipes in his comparison of three totalitarian regimes. The most important similarity between these systems is identified by the American academic as lying in the field of... psychology: “Communism, Fascism and National Socialism exacerbated and exploited popular resentments – class, racial, and ethnic – to win mass support and to reinforce the claim that they, not the democratically elected governments, expressed the true will of the people. All three appealed to the emotion of hate.”³³ This, hardly novel, way of interpreting the phenomenon of totalitarianism, was expanded by the English philosopher, Roger Scruton. He defined totalitarianism in the following way: “a pseudo-science that justifies and recruits resentment, that undermines and dismisses all rival claims to legitimacy, and which endows the not quite successful with the proof of their superior intellectual power and their right to govern [...] Nothing is more comforting to the resentful than the thought that those who possess what they envy possess it unjustly. In the worldview of the resentful success is not a proof of virtue but, on the contrary, a call to retribution”³⁴.

Nothing more than resentment and its ideological exploitation is needed to explain the success of the Nazis in overthrowing the Weimar Republic – the source of which was a feeling of defeat after World War I; a defeat interpreted as a great deception. When after successive governments of the Yeltsin era had felt torn between the sense of liberation from the chains of the Soviet system and progressively stronger feeling of disappointment in the results (geopolitically, in terms of prestige, and even materially) of the collapse of the USSR, this second wave for historical resentment began to open more and more in official statements by Russian politicians – as in the Weimar Republic. Russia came to be identified as the victim of a great conspiracy of hostile Western forces, the deception of *perestroika* and the treachery of its own imperial *okrainy*. As the objects of organised jealousy and hostility, open hatreds became the symbols of successes not attained: “oligarchs” both within and without Russia demanding independence and opting for a quicker path toward the Western model of development for the Soviet blocs and former Soviet republics from Poland, through the Baltic States, to Ukraine and Georgia. To stop them, to demonstrate Russia’s right to govern these territories, even with the old methods: this was indeed a “call to retribution”, sounded loudly in revisions of history which once more acclaimed Stalin, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the Yalta system.

This wave of resentment expressed through historical revisionism is perhaps the only similarity between the republic of Hindenburg and the country of Putin. It is certainly not sufficient to simply draw conclusions about a possible sudden return of totalitarianism in Russia. It is, however, sufficient as a warning for historians, or at least those who comport themselves formally in that role. When they begin to treat the past instrumentally, they ignore certain facts completely and remain silent about others, subjecting their obligation to search for the truth to the higher imperatives of service to a political idea, and they do not, in this way, become chaplains to some just cause. They are, in fact, fools. It is important in whose court they serve. When they appear as priests of Russian renewal, and demonstrate themselves jesters in Stalin’s court, the matter is not simply amusing. It is also, unfortunately, dangerous.

Translated from Polish by Jaime Ashworth

³³ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, New York 1993, p. 262.

³⁴ R. Scruton, “Źródło totalitaryzmu” (The Source of Totalitarianism), in: *Totalitaryzm a zachodnia tradycja* (Totalitarianism and western tradition), ed. by M. Kuniński, Kraków 2006, pp. 62-63.