CIDOB • Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

ISSN: 2013-4428

notes internacionals CIDOB

128 SEPTEMBER 2015

"RUSSIA FOR RUSSIANS!" Ultranationalism and xenophobia in Russia: from marginality to state promoted philosophy

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The course of Russian development over the past decade has explicitly shown that both internal milieu and foreign policy domain have expressed staggering signs of radicalization and growing division between "us" (ethnic Russians) and "them" (non-Russian citizens and foreigners).

The grim irony of contemporary Russia extensively appealing to the legacy of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) as a pivotal aspect of Russian identity is that xenophobia, racial hatred and ultra/far right nationalism have by far outgrown the level of street radicals and in one form or another have penetrated various layers of Russian multiethnic and multicultural society. Currently the number of nationalist organizations actively operating in the Russian Federation may have reached 53: 22 of them being ultranationalist and 8 completely prohibited. In addition, according to numerous estimates half of the world far right radicals currently reside on the territory of the Russian Federation. From my prospective, this poses a grave challenge to both Russian society and European peace and security.

Facing a vital necessity of reforms Russian ruling and intellectual elites have usually opted for relying on a fuzzy notion called "conservatism" that served as the main vehicle of anti-reformist, reactionary and anti-democratic forces.

Many combine factors promoted the idea of incompatibility between liberal-democratic norms and values and Russian identity with distinct historical mission.

Derogatory actions against foreigners (especially from countries whose appearance differed from the Slavic one) received tacit support from numerous representatives of Russian political elite.

The so-called "Russian Spring" was meant to significantly upgrade Putin's plummeting popularity through "rectifying historical injustices" and practical steps aimed at creation of the "Russian World".

Radical forces in Europe admire V. Putin for being able to openly challenge the unipolar post-Cold War world dominated by the US.

In order "to prevent 'color revolutions' in Russia", the Kremlin has inspired a new project called "Antimaidan", which assembles a broad array of forces under the banners of "conservatism", "patriotism" and "inadmissibility of Maidan in Russia".

Ultranationalist ideology and Russian public consciousness: looking into the past, thinking about the future

Lessons drawn from Russian historical experience have explicitly pointed out one curious tendency: facing a vital necessity of reforms Russian ruling and intellectual elites have usually opted for relying on a fuzzy notion called "conservatism" that served as the main vehicle of anti-reformist, reactionary and anti-democratic forces.

The issues of "conservatism" extensively promoted during the Romanov dynasty reached its apex when the Monarchy encountered with

a broad array of challenges brought about by urgent necessity of modernization and reforms that coincided with humiliating defeat in Russian - Japanese war (1904-1905) and the First Russian Revolution (1905). This resulted in growing appeal to "conservatism" emanating from the ruling elites that translated into surging xenophobia, anti-Semitism vividly seen in the "Black Hundreds" movement and ethnic pogroms that had to a certain extent predetermined Russian historical development in the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result, explicit and derogatory discrimination of ethnic minorities pushed members of various ethnic groups onto the road of radicalization and underground revolutionary activities.

That is why today, when Russia is pursuing Eurasian integration and facing proliferation of non-Russian population, historical experience and current level of xenophobia that is acquiring much deeper influence and significantly more sophisticated forms should not be undermined. After all, approximately 53% of Russians are currently supporting the slogan "Russia for Russians!"

Russian far right movement in 1990s – early 2000: menace on the march

Disintegration of the Soviet Union was accompanied by total economic impoverishment of wide layers of Russians, political degradation and raging separatism. On the other front, ideological vacuum that emerged after the demise of the Communism resulted in growing perplexity over the future trajectory of development. The ruling elites at the time were unable/unwilling to clearly formulate national idea – in a country with historically weak civil society, absence of pluralism and clear tilt towards the guidance from above, this was a dramatic and in many respects fateful episode. This ideological void triggered a torrent of ideas and distorted historical narratives that swooped on Russian society. That is why the process of ideological and spiritual renaissance did not acquire forms commensurate with the task of ideological and cultural transformation.

Russia has become a fertile ground for the most unsophisticated xenophobic ideologies (easily manipulated from above) based on crude violence, ethnic hatred and intolerance.

The sense of moral degradation, skyrocketing criminality, growing economic inequality, the bloody Chechen War (1994-1996), the ensued outbreak of terrorism and growing number of migrant workers from the Caucasus and Central Asia facilitated further radicalization of wide masses of Russians engendering emergence of various types of far right and neo-Nazi organizations. On the other hand, the war in Yugoslavia (especially the active involvement of the NATO forces), growing disenchantment with the West that was blamed for dismal economic performance and political failures resurrected anti-Western sentiments within Russian society and promoted the idea of incompatibility between liberal-democratic norms and values and Russian identity with distinct historical mission.

It ought to be mentioned that traditions of far right nationalism in contemporary Russia go back to the times of the Soviet Union, when in the year 1980 "Pamyat" (Memory) was formed from a number of smaller groups (though it was not very numerous and disintegrated in 1985). Ultranationalist/xenophobic movement in Russia in 1990s and the early 2000th did not constitute a homogeneous body and was represented by a patchwork of various forces that varied from underground militarized organizations, open neo-Nazis (skinheads), left wing extremists, Orthodox–Christian nationalists (the "Black Hundreds"; the Russian National Union; the Union of Russian Orthodox People) and national-Imperial (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation; the Liberal Democratic Party; Russian All-People's Union) groups.

In the early 1990s the most visible and well-organized actor among Russian far rights was the Russian National Unity (the RNU). Its militarized underground structure (which may have assembled as many as 100,000 active members in both the Russian Federation and other countries of post-Soviet area) held attributes and symbols similar to the ones used in the Nazi Germany and slogans such as "Glory to Russia!". Sentiments that defined the conceptual outlook of this group did to a significant extent reflect the pervasive moods and feelings within Russian society: resurging anti-Semitism, explicit anti-Caucasian stance and anti-Americanism.

Another branch, so-called Nazi-skinheads did not have a core organization and was mostly represented by a wide range of incoherent organizations enjoying various extent of popular support. Three main factors contributed to exponential growth of this type of neo-Nazi groups:

- The First Chechen war (surrounded by aggressive anti-Caucasian information warfare orchestrated by Russian mass media)
- Economic collapse and plummeting level of education (which resulted in a staggering growth of youth criminality)
- Distorted understanding of the Second World War

Coupled together these factors created a fertile ground for the most unsophisticated xenophobic ideologies (easily manipulated from above) based on crude violence, ethnic hatred and intolerance. At certain point major Russian cities got submerged under the wave of uncontrollable violence committed by neo-Nazis. Foreigners (especially from countries whose appearance differed from the Slavic one) were afraid of visiting Russia and embassies of countries whose citizens could be targeted on the first place were instructed how to act while being in Russia. Unfortunately, these derogatory actions received tacit support from numerous representatives of Russian political elite. For instance, the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov (a notorious nationalist) tried to hush down violent crimes with clear ethnic background. Moreover,

in many respects militia and prosecutors as well as certain share of intellectual circles (several noticeable newspapers were not keen to portray skinheads and their crimes in negative light) expressed compassion with actions of violent neo-Nazis. According to numerous estimates by the year 2005 the total number of Nazi-skinheads in Russia may have reached 80,000 members. Victims of neo-Nazi criminals were counted in hundreds – although the accurate number remained unknown because local militia was not interested in classifying crimes as ethnically motivated and great number of migrant workers from Central Asia (who were main target of neo-Nazis) opted for not complaining to the state security services because many of them worked in Russia illegally.

Another force - National Bolshevik Party (NBP) known for its neo-Imperialist, openly xenophobic and anti-liberal activities and ideology represented a peculiar combination of far-right and far-left dogmas. Frequently members of the party have been charged with ethnic crimes, terrorism, seizure of administrative buildings and inducement for separatism in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and the Baltic States. The party had cells and representatives not only in the countries of the post-Soviet area (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia and the Baltic States) but also in Israel, Sweden, Canada, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the UK and Poland. Perhaps, this party should not have been mentioned in scopes of this paper if it was not for Alexandr Dugin (notoriously known neo-Fascist and xenophobe) – one of the most noticeable representatives of contemporary Russian ultranationalism and neo-imperialism who happened to be a founding father of this organization.

In the final analysis, it ought to be mentioned that by the year 2005 xenophobia, racial hatred and ethnic crimes committed by ultranationalists in Russia had become a serious obstacle and a matter of international criticism that the Kremlin (already seeing Russia as an independent pole in international relation) was to somehow mitigate.

In January of 2006, while visiting Auschwitz Vladimir Putin openly acknowledged that anti-Semitism and the skyrocketing of neo-Nazi ideology had constituted a major problem for Russia. Similarly, the Amnesty report, entitled "Russian Federation: Violent racism out of control" explicitly voiced dissatisfaction with race-motivated crimes in Russia.

Taming the dragon or creating Frankenstein? Kremlin and Russian far right nationalism (2005 - 2011)

Visible dangers emanating from uncontrollable violent far right nationalists induced the Kremlin to accept a new tactics that would have marginalized most atrocious groups and promote creation of a layer of "conservative patriots". On the other hand, increasing antagonism with the US and their European allies (over the invasion of Iraq, expansion of the EU and a parade of "color revolutions") were exploited by the Kremlin in the process of creation of an imitation of direct participation of masses in political process. In this juncture, nationalist forces were perceived as the most convenient vehicle of communication that could be used both in terms of suppression of opposition and (most importantly) aggressive propaganda campaigns.

This period in development of Russian nationalist movement primarily coincided with emergence in 2003 of "Rodina" ("Motherland") political project[1] (as a coalition of 30 nationalist and far-right groups that was established by Dmitri Rogozin, Sergey Glazyev, Sergey Baburin and other representatives of nationalist forces), "Nashi" (Ours) youth movement (2005 date of initiation) and breathtaking success of such controversial figures as the already mentioned A. Dugin and Sergey Kurginyan, Mikhail Leontiev, Maxim Shevchenko, Nikolai Starikov, Alexandr Prokhanov, Nataliya Narotchnitskaya. The range of ideas represented by this new stronghold of Russian "conservatism" varied from neo-Stalinism to most notorious forms of ethno-nationalism, xenophobia and neo-Fascism.

Nonetheless, ideas promoted by the Kremlin did not yield results tantamount to the expectations. First, "Rodina" party managed to gain much more popularity than it was supposed to. Moreover, youth "patriotic" organizations did not relieve Russian society of raging xenophobic sentiments: on the contrary, starting from the year 2005 Russia experienced an avalanche of ethnic crimes and the rift stipulated by racial discord became even more apparent. More importantly, newly emerged organizations acquired traits of nationalist groupings and started to actively promote ethno-nationalist agendas.

> The Kremlin perceived the nationalist forces as the most convenient vehicle of communication for both suppressing opposition and boosting aggressive propaganda campaigns.

Another clumsy and ill-calculated attempt to "harness" far right movement was the so-called "Russian March" (first celebrated in 2005) – it turned out to be an openly neo-Nazi action initially extensively supported by officials. Incidentally, one of the main organizers of the event was the Eurasian Youth Union (guided by A. Dugin). Later on, this gathering embraced various reactionary elements within Russian society, ranging from neo-Nazis, monarchists, to neo-pagans and Cossacks.

An uneasy alliance: what went wrong?

Very soon however, numerous mistakes in the aforementioned approach became evident. First, imperial nationalism (that was to have acquired predominant positions and pave the way towards re-emergence of the new Russia) was supplemented by growing in popularity ethnic nationalism.

1. Another important purpose vested upon "Rodina" was to bereave the Communist Party certain number of potential votes, whereby establishing a hegemony of the United Russia political party in the Russian Parliament.

Moreover, Nazi-skinhead movement and other military radicals did not cease to exist. International attention was brought to the hideous assassination of Stanislav Markelov (human right activist) and Anastasia Baburova (well-known activist of Russian anti-Nazi movement) that was said to have been committed by the neo-Nazi BORN (literary "Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists") – this was one of numerous crimes perpetrated by members of this far right group. In addition, in order to boast with significant aggrandizement in the rank-and-file (to attract more financial support) such organizations as "Nashi" tacitly recruited neo-Nazis, skinheads and football hooligans. Most certainly, this jeopardized the Kremlin-inspired project.

What made matters even more complicated was that the role of nationalists in Russia changed dramatically: previously they occupied marginal positions but growing participation in politics made them a convenient ally (in certain respect a tool) of various political forces that tried to manipulate public mass conscious. Such ideas as "Russia for Russians", "Let us clean Moscow from the garbage", "Glory to Russia!", "Say no to migrants from Central Asia", "Moscow for Muscovites" acquired exponential support. Most perplexing for the Kremlin was that politicians and intellectuals closely associated with ruling elites also abused such slogans and mottoes. Interestingly enough, yet in the year 2013 V. Putin himself explicitly acclaimed the idea of implementation of

For European far rights Russia and Vladimir Putin appear to be the only remaining custodian of conservatism, Christian values and self-sufficient foreign policy.

further restrictions for work migration to Russia – an obvious attempt to use national-populist agendas and gain support from growing nationalist movement. Moreover, in October 2014 during the Valdai Club meeting in Sochi V. Putin openly stated his adherence to nationalism, which he juxtaposed to chauvinist ideology (though conveniently obfuscating the red line between two concepts)[2].

This picture would be incomplete without pointing out the grave inconsistency and ambiguity in steps taken by the Kremlin. On the one hand, V. Putin and other officials have criticized xenophobia and ethnic intolerance as inadmissible activities for the Russian Federation. Nonetheless, on the other, state sponsored/orchestrated anti-American, anti-Georgian, anti-Ukrainian and anti-Baltic campaigns and a number of popular TV shows (such as "Nasha Russia" –"Our Russia") that ridiculed population of Central Asia -in particular Tajikistan- clearly suggested that xenophobia and racism emanated from the very top of Russian political architecture. This incoherence and clumsiness raise a logical question: if one sort of xenophobia and racism is to be tolerated and approved, why should its different branches be prohibited?

2. http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2598456

Putin's return to office, the war in Ukraine and Russian neo-nationalist dilemma

In the final analysis, it was the decision of V. Putin to return to power that triggered a new lap of frictions within Russian nationalist circles. Certain groups openly opposed this idea. For instance, the so-called "ethnic-nationalists" assumed hostile attitude towards the Kremlin primarily because of alleged discrimination of ethnic Russians as a result of illegal migration and financial support to the North Caucasus. Such organizations as the "Russians Movement", the "Movement against Illegal Migration", the "Russian National-Democratic Party", the "Slavic Alliance" and the "Northern Brotherhood" extensively supported by Slavic neo-pagans, neo-Nazi groupings, explicitly voiced their concern over the trajectory of development of the Russian society.

The most noticeable figure of the neo-nationalism became Alexei Navalny who based his program on criticism of corruption intertwined with "ethnic factors". Such slogans as "Stop feeding the Caucasus" have enjoyed outstanding rates of popularity especially among young and educated citizens of Moscow – a clear contrast with ill-educated violent have-nots. Moreover, explicit anti-Kremlin stance of A. Navalny and his associates posed a serious problem for aging Russian regime. Worsening economic situation coupled with the dramatic raise of Ramzan Kadyrov underscore not only the fact that the North Caucasus is drifting away from Moscow in each and every sense, yet generates number of serious questions regarding financial means injected in ailing corrupt economies of the region. Indeed, such issues do have powerful effect on many Russians, especially considering that the society has been suffering a malaise called "ethnic division" for a long time and symptoms thereof are likely to progress even further. The issue of populism and crude manipulation with masses based on primitive distortion of facts and ideas currently offered by liberal-nationalists are not new. After all, was it not Vladimir Putin whose breathtaking ascension to power was handsomely saturated with the same ingredients?

The so-called "Russian Spring" was meant to significantly upgrade V. Putin's plummeting popularity and achieve consolidation of wide layers of Russian society through "rectifying historical injustices" and practical steps aimed at creation of the "Russian World". Indeed, initially the popular support of V. Putin skyrocketed and visible consolidation of Russian society including nationalist forces seemed to have been achieved. Nevertheless, the "post-Crimea" hangover was starting to fade away with the advent of economic crisis and the outbreak of war in the Southeast of Ukraine. One of the most surprising outcomes for the Kremlin was the actual rift within Russian ultranationalist forces that (primarily due to the lack of knowledge and mostly distorted information provided by Russian mass media) started to perceive the ongoing conflict from two diverging prospective. Naturally, the larger part of Russian nationalist forces fully supported pro-Russian rebels in Donbass, whereas certain layers were in favor of Euromaidan because of its alleged tilt towards ethnic

nationalism (in this juncture, the "Azov" battalion was hailed as a force representing genuine ideas of Slavic ethno-nationalism). The most evident corroboration of this tendency was the fact that in 2014 Russian nationalists took part in three different sections of "Russian March" (ideologically adverse to each other) and with visible ideological countercharges expressed by all sides.

Perhaps, another matter of deep concern lies within the following: it is not a secret that Russian far right nationalists are fighting on both sides of the front line. In case the conflict subsides, many militants are likely to return home. The impact of their "re-integration" into the peaceful life could yield unpredictable results. After all, experience of the two Chechen wars clearly showed that many solders could not easily return back to normal. On the other hand, it would be safe to suggest that the "heroes" of the war in Ukrainian Southeast, such as Igor Strelkov (Girkin), have accumulated visible support within radical circles – especially those who accuse the Kremlin of inability/unwillingness to conduct coherent policy in respect to the "Novorossiya" and Russian speaking minority in Ukraine. Strelkov might appear as a new phenomenon within Russian nationalist milieu – his outlook consists of a combination of Imperial–Orthodox line and inevitability of re-emergence of the new Russia under the dictatorship of a Stalinist/Tsarist model. For this type of nationalists Vladimir Putin is seen as weak and indecisive leader and the political opposition is perceived as national traitors to be done away most decisively. These nationalists are not populists interested in accretion of wealth – they are idealist with fanatic creed in their historic mission. This could be extremely dangerous combination given Russian (and European) historical experience of the first half of the 20th century.

Youth, sportsmen, intellectuals, Cossacks, military veterans and nationalists have been merged together into an organism that will be able to act in broad scopes and without any remorse. .

Generation 3.0: far right ideology in the changing Russia

In order to understand the role of nationalist ideology in post-2012 Russia, one need to take closer look at both internal and external factors that have played crucial role in transformation of the Kremlin's goals and strategies related to this phenomena. Aggressive perception of the "outer world" reflected in the "spheres-of-influence" approach and explicit anti-West sentiments have contributed to the changing role of xenophobic and ultranationalist groups and organization in the Russian Federation. In this regard, two key dates should be discerned: the year 2007 (notorious Munich conference) and 2008 (the war between Russia and Georgia). Starting from these two events that shook the essence of European and post-Soviet countries European ultranationalists have been providing support for Russian foreign policy actions aimed at re-integration of former Soviet republics into the Kremlin's sphere of influence. For many radicals in Europe Russia and Vladimir Putin appear to be the only remaining custodian of conservatism, Christian values and self-sufficient foreign policy. Moreover, given the great role of anti-Americanism (and anti-NATO moods) in Europe, radical forces admire V. Putin for being able to openly challenge the unipolar post-Cold War world dominated by the US. In addition, allegedly tough subordination of Chechnya (though the image promoted by mass media does not reflect the real state of affairs) by the means of decisive military measures provides an erroneous image of Russia in Europe. Acting in scopes of "divide and rule" tactics the Kremlin has been willing to engage in close relations with European far rights using Russian nationalist organizations and individuals for establishing and maintaining close contacts. These ties have been secured by personal active contribution of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin (one of the founding fathers of "Rodina"), Anatoly Zhuravlev (representative of the United Russia), A. Dugin and other notorious Russian nationalists who have been able to establish cordial relations with and attain broad understanding and support from the European far rights. Clearly such relations have been coordinated and guided from the very top of the existing power architecture in the Russian Federation. International mass media have also unraveled extensive evidences[3] of significant financial support the Kremlin is ready to provide for major European far right organizations. Moreover, the dialogue with European far rights is particularly vital for the Kremlin in countries strategically important from energy security point of view – this is easily deducible from the map of Russian oil/gas pipelines stretching to the EU and the state of relations between the local and Russian far rights.

It appears however, that the strong desire to derive support from the side of European nationalists may have resulted in a number of miscalculations. For instance, the first International Russian Conservative Forum that took place in Saint Petersburg on March 22 2015 attracted open neo-Nazis and criminals – to the extent that even Marine Le Pen (a well-known admirer of V. Putin) turned down the invitation in order not to be involved in such a derogatory assembly. The event was also severely criticized by the majority of Russian liberals and anti-fascists, whereas the Kremlin opted to dissociate itself from the event.

From the other prospective, the Kremlin does not shy away from using the scary image of Russian violent Nazi-skinheads and radicals responsible for crimes and ethnic pogroms (such as in Kondopoga and Birylevo) hinting that the current elites

3. See http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putins-farright-ambition-thinktank-reveals-how-russian-president-is-wooing--and-funding--populist-parties-across-europe-to-gain-influence-in-the-eu-9883052.html; http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/strange-bedfellows-putin-and-europe%E2%80%99s-far-right; http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/08/russia-europe-right-putin-front-national-eu

are by far more civil and predictable than other far right nationalist forces and that the potential raise to power of far more ultranationalist forces could bring about irreparable damage not only to the Russian Federation itself yet for the entire continental security architecture. In the final analysis, Russian historical experience of the first quarter of the 20th century might be seen as an argument compelling enough for the European elites to continue cooperation with current political regime.

On the domestic front, the Kremlin has inspired a new project called "Antimaidan" whose purpose is "to prevent 'color revolutions' in Russia". It assembles a broad array of forces under the banners of "conservatism", "patriotism" and "inadmissibility of Maidan in Russia". Incidentally, leader of this group include not only well-known intellectuals and civil activists with far going connections with the Kremlin (such as Nikolai Starikov and Dmitry Sablin), but also the leader of the Russian motorcycle club-gang "the Night Wolves", Alexander "the Surgeon" Zaldostanov, who enjoys personal friendship with the Russian President V. Putin.

In certain respect, it might appear as a reiteration of moves previously conducted by the Kremlin, although there are crucial differences that need to be taken into account. The composition of this project drastically differs from the previous ones: youth, sportsmen, intellectuals, Cossacks, military veterans and nationalists have been merged together into an organism that will be able to act in broad scopes and without any remorse. The main justification of any actions (as though and derogatory as they might be) will be the fuzzy concept of "public good". Many experts have already come up with a historical similarity between the "Antimaidan" and German SA paramilitary forces or the infamous "death squads" in Latin America and even the Red Guards in China.

The question however appears to be much more sophisticated and perilous than it seems on the surface. By now it remains unclear if this new project signifies yet another attempt to use nationalist forces for specific goals or whether this move is an inception of a new chapter of Russian history with a long lasting tradition of authoritarianism and repressions against opposition.