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**THE RISE OF RUSSIAN NATIONALISM – FOOTSTEPS OF THE SLAVOPHILES ? :
UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF NATIONALISM AS A STATE POLICY IN
RUSSIA**

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Summary

This paper argues that nationalism is gaining strength in Russia. The recent demonstrations in Moscow and in various cities are revealing the fact that the growing nationalist tendencies in Russia are now deviating into a racist and xenophobic character. The paper defines Kremlin's policies to use nationalist ideas as tools to reconfigure general political discourse as being one of the most important factors in nationalism's recent resurgence in Russia. Thus, in an attempt to explore the main ideologies and concepts which shape Kremlin's nationalist doctrine, the paper takes a brief look into the development of the Russian idea, National identity and nationalism in Russia. Finally, the paper tries to make a clear definition of the ideology of state nationalism in Russia under Putin administration.

Key Words: Nationalism, Racism, Xenophobia, Russian Idea, Official Nationalism, Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, neo-Official Nationalism, Imperial nostalgia.

Introduction

Since the beginning of December 2010, a series of events have taken place in Russia demonstrating the increase in xenophobic feelings and nationalist tendencies among the Russian public. One of the most recent examples of those incidents have been the December protests in Moscow and in several other cities in Russia which were realized with a vast participation. The demonstrators were provoked by the death of a football fan during a fight with people coming from

the North Caucasus republics.

The December demonstrations were extremely nationalist in nature. The demonstrators often used the slogan of “Russia for the Russians” and they urged the Russian government to deport the people with Caucasian origin. Some of the demonstrations turned into riots and were accompanied by attacks on persons who were “of non-Slavic appearance”. Successive demonstrations by football supporters and nationalists have taken place in January.

The massive and landslide response that a single violent incident has created demonstrated the grave dangers that the growing aggressive sort of nationalism, hatred and xenophobia pose to the stability and security of Russian public. Between the period of December 2010 and the first week of January, more than 100 people have been victims of racist attacks, three of whom have been killed and, 11 wounded or beaten.

After the first demonstration on 11 December, the Russian government tried to appease the angry crowds by releasing without charge several dozen of aggressive participants who were arrested. It was only when the protests started to gather strength that the organisers were arrested, and President Dmitri Medvedev publicly ordered their harsh punishment. In fear of nationalist incidents on the occasion of the New Year celebrations in the Red Square, the police arrested several hundred people from the Caucasus and Asia, some of whom were removed to the city limits.

During a session of the Russian Council of State on 27 December 2010, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called for tougher regulations on residency registration, and the introduction of criminal liability for any failure to register residence. At a session of the Board of the FSS on 25 January, Medvedev called xenophobia and ethnic violence a threat to the state, and called upon the state services to prevent any manifestations of this threat.

Following the nationalist demonstrations, the suicide attack on the arrivals area of Domodedovo international airport of Moscow on 24 January which left 36 people dead and 180 injured, created a new wave of nationalist anger and hatred, making the situation even more tensed. The demonstration which was planned by the nationalists on 25 January to condemn the bomb attack on Domodedovo airport was banned by preventative measures.

Today, we are witnessing the “re-emergence” of Russian nationalism at a time Russian Federation is trying to restore its place as a super power in global politics. Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, there have been important developments fuelling the rise of nationalism in Russia. The war in Chechnya resulting in the deaths of over ten thousand Russian soldiers, the steady eastward advancement of the US-led NATO military alliance along Russia’s brittle western borders, the American military bases in Central Asia, the orange revolutions liberating ex-Soviet countries from Moscow’s orbit, Washington’s missile defence shield project that includes some central and eastern European countries, the violent terrorist attacks of Chechnian radicals in various Russian cities, the war in Georgia and most recently the incidents of December 2010 played an important role in the rise of Russian nationalism. These factors, coupled with the loss of prestige, power and a plummeting standard of living in the early post-Soviet days, has invigorated the re-emergence of Russian nationalism both within the Kremlin and in Russia’s governing assembly “State Duma”. Parties with strong nationalistic platforms based on racial or cultural views of Slavic

superiority strengthened their position in Duma. The extreme nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy became third in the presidential elections of 1991. In 1996 presidential elections, he was placed fifth with a 5.7 % share in the first round of the voting. His Liberal Democratic Party^[1] received 23% of the vote in the 1993 Duma elections. In the latest elections in 2007, the party received 8.14% of the vote, acquiring 40 of the 450 seats in the State Duma.

It goes without saying, that one of the most important factors in nationalism's recent resurgence is, that the Kremlin's political technologists have discovered nationalist ideas as tools to reconfigure general political discourse. Following the example of nationalist parties, some new youth parties and groups have also emerged stressing Russian unity and homogeneity which were openly backed by the Putin Administration and by some business circles that had close ties with Kremlin. The Ukrainian Orange revolution had a profound impact on Russian youth, primarily university and college students. The educated Russian youth began organizing a patriotic front. The "Idushchiye Vmeste" (Walking Together) movement which was created by Vasily Yakimenko in 2000 was deviated into a second group on 1 March 2005 known as "Nashi" (Ours) as a reaction to the orange revolution in Ukraine. The movement became very popular among Russian youth which grew in size to some 120,000 members.

Increasing involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church into politics has also played an important role in the rise of nationalism. The Russian Orthodox Church, excluding the Soviet era, has always been the defining factor as to what is "Russian" and what is not. Orthodoxy has been the indispensable part of the "Russian soul" and the consciousness of being Russian. There is an enormous resurgence within the Russian Orthodox Church in which to be a member of the Church is synonymous with national identity. The Putin Administration, which has increased its strength by getting the open support of the Orthodox Church, passed a legislation limiting the influence of other religions and various Christian denominations such as the Evangelical, Protestant, and Catholic movements. The Russian Orthodox Church, with several declarations, has warned of the dangers of the orange revolutions around Russia which might lead to bloodshed, echoing Putin's nightmare of a break up of Russia into smaller states.

The influence of the nationalist circles inside Kremlin has no doubt played a defining role in the creation of the above mentioned "state sponsored" nationalism. Putin, with a cautious personality from his KGB background, has a circle of advisers comprised of two tiny groups with strong nationalist ideology: first group which is dealing with issues of national security and international affairs is referred to as the "siloviki" (men of power) and the second group is "liberals" who provide consultancy on issues of national economy. The "siloviki" are mostly officials with military or KGB background who dominate the country's security and intelligence ministries and believe in the absolute state control on economic, political, and social life in Russia. The liberals, albeit believing in free market economy, do not have pluralistic democracy and human rights as priority topics in their agenda.

Russian nationalism, albeit in rise, cannot be perceived as the same notion that prevailed in the early years of post-Soviet Russia. In the period of Boris Yeltsin, nationalism was assorted with other ideologies such as communism. Today, Russian nationalism is mostly focused on a patriotic rhetoric and strengthening opposition against the moral and spiritual decay of Russian values. It has deviated into a multifaceted phenomenon, ranging from moderate displays of national unity to those

extremist organizations that advocate intolerance and racism against those of non-Slavic origin. The Russian Orthodox Church is actively involved in the “state sponsored” new nationalism to preserve “Russian values” against foreign and domestic threats.

Whatever we think of the Russian state, there is no doubt that it has undergone a remarkable recovery under Vladimir Putin’s leadership. Since coming to power in 1999, Putin has purposefully employed Russian imperial nostalgia and ethnocentric thinking for the restoration of the Russian national pride. By appealing to Russian nationalism and the past glories of both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Putin administration has been very successful in boosting the morale among Russians. The results of a poll^[2] published by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Studies demonstrated that the supporters of the slogan "Russia for Russians"^[3] rose from 46% in 1998 to 58% in 2005. Currently it seems that the number of supporters of this slogan is even above the number indicated by this poll. These figures show that the “state sponsored nationalism” introduced by Putin administration is prevalently supported and cherished by the Russians.

For a better understanding of the dynamics under the resurgence of nationalist tendencies in today’s Russia, it would be appropriate to briefly examine the foundations of the “Russian Idea” and the emergence of the early ideas of nationalism in Russia. This will enable us to make a comparison between the current nationalism in Russia and the one which prevailed in different forms and concepts in the past. Such a brief analysis may give us clues for a better definition of current nationalist tendencies.

The Foundations of “Russian Idea”

Throughout its history, Russia has been estranged from European dynamics. Its nationalism and national ideology are marked by a double game of attraction and revulsion towards Europe in particular and the West in general.^[4] From the 10th to the 13th centuries, the Kievan Rus’^[5] (Russia of Kiev) was well-integrated into the medieval economic system. However, the Tartar invasion which resumed in 1237 and lasted more than 250 years, tore Russia away from the West. The invasion, facilitated by the breakup of Kievan Rus’ which was followed by the division of the East Slavic people into three separate nations : modern day Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Despite having devastating consequences for the Kievan Rus’, the Tartar rule played an important role in the rise of Moscow and subsequently the Russian Empire. When the Principality of Moscow reorganized itself and rolled back the Tartar invaders, a new Russia was born which considered itself as the heir of Orthodox Byzantium, different from the Catholic and Protestant West. The victory of Moscow began the Russian drive towards the Siberian vastness.

The rise of Peter the Great has marked a turning point in Russian History. The great reforms and westernization process initiated by Peter the Great is described as “the Petrine revolution”^[6] by Sergei Mihailovic Solov’ev, who is probably the greatest Russian historian of all times. Solov’ev, in his famous work *History of Russia from the Earliest Times*, argued that the transformations (preobrazovanija) of Muscovite state and society undertaken by Peter were both necessary and unavoidable. The Westernization process of Peter liberated Russia from her medieval “clannishness” and oriented her to Europe. The instrument used to give momentum to this process was “civilization”.

The emancipation of nobles by Peter from obligatory state service in 1762 has started a period of journeys by the Russian aristocracy to the Western capitals such as Paris, London, Amsterdam and Vienna. This period is coined by Orlando Figes with the term “The Grand Tour”^[7]. The travel literature that accompanied this traffic played a vital role in shaping Russia’s self-perception *vis-à-vis* the West. Famous writer, poet and historian Nikolai Karamzin, after travelling around Europe, came to the conclusion that European people had a different way of thinking than Russians.

Karamzin’s doubts were shared by many educated Russians as they struggled to define their “Europeanness”. Europe was described as “corrupt”, “decadent”, “false” and “superficial”, “materialist” and “egoistical” by famous writers such as Fanvizin, Herzen and Dostoevsky. The constant repetition of these epithets signalled the emergence of an ideology – a distinctive view of Russia in the mirror of the West. The idea that the West was morally corrupt was echoed by virtually every writer from Pushkin to the Slavophiles. Herzen and Dostoevsky placed it at the heart of their messianic visions of Russia’s destiny to save the fallen West.^[8]

Russia, under Peter the Great, sought Europe’s approval and wanted to be recognized as equals by it. However, she was also uncertain about her place in Europe. Did Russia belong to West or East? Russia’s educated élites were aware that Russia was not “Europe”. If Russia could not become a part of “Europe”, it should take more pride in being “different”. In this nationalist mythology the “Russian soul” was awarded a higher moral value than the material achievements of the West. It had a Christian mission to save the world.^[9]

The French Revolution of 1789 and the following Jacobin reign of terror badly shook the belief among Russia’s educated élites that Europe was the source of progress and enlightenment. The Russian aristocracy which was immersed in French culture, became opponents of France and Europe when Russia went to war with France under Napoleon.

At the height of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812, many officers discovered that it was the peasants and the serfs who were the real patriots. These officers later would stand up for the “nation” and the “people’s cause”, in what would become known as the Decembrist^[10] uprising on 14 December 1825.

The young Decembrist leader, Colonel Pavel Ivanovich Pestel, envisaged a nation state ruling in the interests of the Great Russians. The other national groups - the Finns, the Georgians, the Ukrainians, and so on - would be forced to dissolve their differences and “become Russian”. Only the Jews were beyond assimilation and, Pestel thought, should be expelled from Russia. Such attitudes were commonplace among the Decembrists as they struggled in their minds to reform the Russian Empire on the model of the European national states.^[11] Despite being an unsuccessful attempt to re-shape the political structure of Russia, the Decembrist uprising had indispensable contributions to the development of the idea of “Russian superiority” over the non-Russian communities and constituted an important milestone in the awakening of the “Russian consciousness and identity”.

The victory of 1812 promoted a new interest and pride in Russia’s past. The masterpiece of Nikolai Karamzin, *History of the Russian State*, which was published in 1818 was considered as the

re-discovery of the Russian history and the Russian pride. The common conviction among the educated élites that Russia's history started with the process of Westernization under the reign of Peter the Great rapidly faded away. The distant past of Russia became a valuable source, where the answers to the questions about the country's nature and destiny were searched.

Official Nationalism

In the 1830s and 1840s, during the reign of Nicholas I, the Russian government, for the first and only time until the Bolsheviks seized power, formulated an official ideology. This ideology, later labelled Official Nationalism, was promulgated by an array of conservative scholars and publicist with the support of the crown. It had some points in common with the Slavophile doctrine, except that, while extolling Russia's unique virtues, it was not anti-Western: Peter the Great, anathema of the Slavophiles, was the doctrine's idol.^[12]

The Official Nationality ideology had its origins in a statement which was made in March 1832 by Count Sergei Uvarov (1786 – 1855) to Nicholas I. His ideology was based on three concepts: orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. Orthodoxy meant devotion to Russian Orthodox Church and the return to the spiritual roots of pre-Petrine Russia. The affirmation of the principle of autocracy meant a return to the old Muscovite notion of autocracy as the basic and permanent feature of Russian statehood. Finally, nationality was interpreted by Uvarov as devotion to the Russian national heritage and spiritual make-up of the people, a refusal to trust Western Europe as a model for Russia, or Western European theories as at all relevant for Russia.^[13]

The ideology of Official Nationalism prevailed as the official political doctrine until February 1917. The successor of Nicolas I, Alexander II was the only Tsar who did not strictly followed the ideology. However, it was faithfully adhered to by the two last Emperors, Alexander III and Nicholas II.

Slavophilism

The etymological meaning of “Slavophilism” is “love of Slavs”. However, this term was used to define a group of ideologists who formed a romantic and nationalist group of opposition to the trend known as “Westernism” (zapadnichestvo).

Slavophilism first emerged in Poland in the very beginning of the 17th century. The earliest repercussions of this ideology in Russia occurred in 1820s among intellectual circles organized by young idealists such as Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoevsky. However, the ideology strongly appeared as a response to Peter Chadeev's famous work *First Philosophical Letter* which was published in 1836. In his brief essays, Chadeev raised the question of Russia's place in the world history. The discussion launched by Chadeev created a controversy between the Slavophiles and Westerners which dominated the Russian political thought until the modern times.

The classical Slavophiles were a remarkably homogeneous group who were members of a small number of noble families. The most outstanding thinkers of Slavophilism were Ivan Kireevsky (1806 – 56), Aleksei Khomiakov (1804 – 60), Konstantin Aksakov (1817 – 60) and Yury Samarin

(1819 – 76). Their intellectual home was Moscow, where they had their education. They considered St. Petersburg as a symbol of corruption of the Russian life by the hostile West.

The central issue of the Slavophile ideology was Russia's relationship with Western Europe. According to the Slavophiles, Russia's exclusion from the Roman Heritage was the essential feature distinguishing her from Europe. Russia had been spared this fatal heritage and was therefore, established on purely Christian principles that were in complete harmony with the spirit of the Slavic peasant commune. The West was poisoned by shallow rationalism and racked by class antagonism from which Russia was saved by her Byzantine heritage and Slavic spirit.

The greatest difficulty faced by the Slavophiles in their interpretation of Russian history was to find an adequate explanation for the Petrine reforms. The Petrine reforms, according to the Slavophiles, cut the links between upper strata and the common people and created an insurmountable gap between the people (*narod*) and the enlightened elite (*obshchestvo*) that had adopted Western ways. The return of the enlightened sections of the society to the fold of Orthodoxy and the "native principles" preserved in the village commune seemed to offer the only hope of a cure for Russia.^[14]

The Slavophile ideology has no doubt occupies an important place in the process of the development of national identity and nationalism in Russia. Its contribution to the awakening of self-awareness among the Russian nation with its distinctions and individualities is indisputable. The repercussions of the Slavophile doctrine, in fact, can still be seen in current Russia where the long lasting debate whether Russia is European or Eastern is increasingly lively.

Pan-Slavism

The ideology of Pan-Slavism played almost no role during the Middle Ages and Muscovite period. An echo of Pan-Slavic idea was seen in the manifesto of Peter the Great to the Balkan Slavs which was issued during his war against the Ottoman Empire. Modern Pan-Slavism also was not born in Russia. It originated among the southern and western Slavs in the first half of nineteenth century. However it gradually found reflections in Russia. The first significant group of adherents were one of the Decembrists organizations, the Society of United Slavs. They envisaged the liberation of western and southern Slavs and the creation of a Slavic federation in which Russia would be an equal member. After the failure of the Decembrists, the Pan-Slavic idea was picked up by the conservative Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin. He became the chairman of the main Pan-Slavic organization the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Society.^[15]

Unlike the Slavophiles, the Pan-Slavic group was rather loose and heterogeneous. The group assumed a pivotal role in championing the cause of Balkan Slavs during the Balkan wars of 1875-78. During those years, the influence of the Pan-Slavic group reached its climax and gained a considerable public support. Finally, the liberation of the southern Slavs from Turkish rule was accepted by the government as an official policy by Alexander II.

Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky was the advocate of a more extreme sort of Pan-Slavism. According to him Slavs had the potential to produce great civilization similar to the Western. He argued that under the direction of Russia, the Slavs must seize Constantinople, re-assume the role of

Byzantium, and build an imperishable empire. However, in order to realize this aim, the Slavs had to liberate themselves from their German and Turkish rulers and to join to Russia.

Against Danilevsky's program, the philosopher Konstantin Leontiev wanted an alliance between Islam and Orthodoxy against the liberal ferment of dissolution from the West. He opposed all conflict between Russians and Ottomans in the Balkans. The enemy was above all Anglo-Saxon. Leontiev's vision still appeals to many Russians today.

The Pan-Slavic ideology based on the superiority of the Slavs and the utopia to bring them together has been an important milestone in the overall process of the development of Russian nationalism.

The Impact of Russian Literature on the Development of Russian National Awareness

In addition to the theories developed by political thinkers and philosophers, Russian literature and the works of great writers played a very important role in the awakening of national awareness and the fledgling of nationalist sentiments in Russia. Their works reached to millions – especially to common people – and thus, were in many ways more effective than the official ideologies or the nationalist doctrines of the educated élites.

Pushkin, most probably the greatest poet and writer of Russia, has always been a source of national pride for Russians. He is among the leading writers who have reflected the “Russian soul” and “Russian folk” in their works. Pushkin had a strong European type of education and this European heritage was seen in his early works. Yet, for all Western inclinations, Pushkin was a poet with a Russian voice. He was practically brought up by his peasant nurse, whose tales and songs became a lifelong inspiration for his verse.^[16]

He strongly felt the obligation to develop a language that could be understood by every Russian citizen. Pushkin is often considered as the first writer who established a link between the educated higher strata and the common Russian people. He used a simple and comprehensible Russian tongue which reached from the simplest peasant to the highest prince. Love to the motherland, the search for the Russian soul, solidarity and brotherhood among Russians were themes which Pushkin used in his works to awaken and distinguish the Russian identity and the patriotic feelings.

Young Dostoevsky was a member of Petrashevsky Circle and he was condemned to death by the Tsar for his activities against the government. His death penalty was changed to hard labour in Siberia with a last minute reprieve. His hard labour work in Omsk was a turning point in the writer's life. After being released, he returned writing with completely different ideas. He called for “a return to the soil” and opposed the ideas of the radical intelligentsia. He argued that the true way was to return to the “purely national” and truly Christian values of the Russian people. The ordinary Russian people with simple origins who have been his companion throughout his hard labour penalty have played an important role in Dostoevsky's metamorphosis. During those years he realized the difference dividing the common Russian people from the Westernized intelligentsia.

Against the rational egoism of European capitalism Dostoevsky set the ideal of the authentic fraternal community preserved in Orthodoxy and Russian folk traditions.^[17] With his strong opposition to socialism, his devotion to Russian Orthodox Church and his attachment to the Russian values and traditions, Dostoevsky has no doubt been a follower of the Slavophiles. However, the “universally human mission of the Russian people” was much stronger in Dostoevsky than in classical Slavophilism. He played an important role in the resurgence of interest in religion (the so-called “religious renaissance”) among many educated Russians in the 20th century. Dostoevsky also believed that the liberation of Slavic people from Turkish rule and the conquest of “Constantinople” were Russia’s mission. These views demonstrate Dostoevsky’s belief in the ideology of Pan-Slavism as well.

Nikolai Gogol, who was in fact a Ukrainian, fell in love with local peasantry and with their simple life style and traditions. Gogol’s divine vision was inspired by his champions, the Slavophiles, whose fantasy of Russia as a holy union of Christian souls. In his famous novel “*Dead Souls*”, Gogol tried to picture the “Russian soul” which would save the Christian world. The concept of a national soul or essence was commonplace in the Romantic age, though Gogol was the first to give the “Russian soul” this messianic turn. The “Russian principle” of Christian love, to be revealed by Gogol would save the humanity from the selfish individualism of the West.^[18]

There are numerous works of various writers on the themes of the search for the Russian soul, Russian identity and patriotism. However, in this paper, I wanted to give examples from the most famous Russian writers who set their seal not only to Russian literature but Russian political thought as well.

Eurasianism

Historical Eurasianism is multi-faceted phenomenon and has changed over time. The term “Eurasia” was first used by Western geographers in the 19th century. When the term entered into the Russian intellectual discourse, however, it acquired a new cultural and geopolitical meaning. The Russian interpretation of Eurasianism was actually a manifestation of late Tsarist Russia's imperial ambitions.

The “Eurasian” ideologists such as Nikolai Trubetskoï and Pyotr Savitski argued that Russia has a unique identity and should thus embark on a development course apart from the West. They saw Russia and Eurasia as sharply separated both from the rest of Europe and from Asia. In a way, these Eurasianists returned to visions of Russia that were prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was an isolationist philosophy which saw Orthodoxy as a religious ideology that would serve as a guiding influence for the world.^[19]

According to the Eurasiansits, Russia is not an Eastern part of Europe but a continent in itself, which occupies the centre of the Eurasian “Heartland” extending from Moscow to the Urals and the Urals to the Trans-Baikal, This vast and inaccessible “Heartland” should be under control of Russia including Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Eurasianist thinking played a definitive role in the Soviet policies of the Cold War era which aimed to make the Russo-Siberian centre of the USSR inaccessible and unreachable. Eurasianism albeit implicitly present in Soviet ideology, has never become the official ideology. However, the “sanctuarization” of the Soviet “Heartland” has been the semi-official ideology of the Red Army from Stalin to Brezhnev.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin have been target the of strong criticism of the imperial neo-nationalists, the national-Communists, patriots and above all, Eurasianists who opposed the Russian withdrawal from the Eastern-European, Ukrainian, Baltic, and central-Asian glaxis of this “Heartland.”

Nationalism in the Soviet Union

Following the October Revolution and collapse of the Russian empire there was an increase in national movements among different nationalities that lived in the country. The Bolshevik government based its nationalities policy on the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology. According to these principles, the new Soviet State would be based on the “friendship of nations”, all nations should disappear with time, and nationalism was considered a bourgeois ideology. These principles were reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia, proclaimed one month after the October Revolution on 21 November 1917.

However, the Soviet government showed reluctance in following these ideals. Only Poland, Finland and Baltic countries were able to receive independence after the October Revolution. When Ukraine declared independence in 1918, the response of the Soviet Union was severe. The resulting civil war in Ukraine continued for more than three years and ended with the annexation of Ukraine by Russia. The resistance of the Central Asian nations against the Soviet regime continued until the middle of the 1920s and ended with a defeat. Baltic countries remained independent only until 1940, when the Soviet Army occupied their territory.

The Soviet Union was formally established on December 30, 1922. With the understanding of “internationalism”, the Soviet leadership supported the development of national language and cultures from 1920s until half of 1930s. In that way, the Soviet rulers expected to receive the support of non-Russian nationalities to the Soviet regime. The plan had some limited success. National minorities who were poorly treated during the Russian Empire, favoured the ideology of internationalism and national equality in the Soviet Union. However this situation changed from the second half of the 1930s. The Soviet leadership took steps to enhance the role of the Russian nation among other nationalities. During this period many nationalities became the victims of Sovietization. The collectivization of lands and the deportation of rich peasants to Siberia had devastating results in the Ukraine where six to seven million people have died of starvation in 1932 – 1933. Religious institutions were devastated, and national literatures, music, and art were forbidden. The Jewish community was also target of the Soviet government. By the end of the 1930s almost all Jews were dismissed from leading positions in the Communist Party and mostly deported to hard labour camps in Siberia.

By the beginning of the 1940s, the term "unreliable" nationalities appeared in the official Soviet ideology. The Volga Germans, Chechens, Crimean Tartars and dozens of smaller nationalities

were subject of mass deportation and collective punishment, based on allegations of collaboration with the Nazis. The number of deported people under Stalin is estimated to reach 3.5 million. During the hard conditions of World War II, the Soviet leadership felt the necessity to encourage Russian nationalism. In his victory speech, Josef Stalin talked about the special qualities of the Russian people. The new Soviet national anthem praised the role of the Great Russia^[20] in the creation of the Soviet Union.

The term of Nikita Khrushchev was a period of rehabilitation for the repressed nationalities. Most of them were allowed to return to their original homes. However, Crimean Tartars and Volga Germans remained the exception of this rehabilitation, since their lands had been taken over by Russians and Ukrainians. Another stunning step of Khrushchev was the presentation of the Crimea as a “gift” to Ukraine in 1954 despite the fact that the majority its population was Russian.

During Leonid Brezhnev's leadership the old slogan, “Friendship of Nations” was accepted as the main policy towards nationalities question. Nationalism continued to be considered as a bourgeois ideology and was not tolerated. However, there existed a double standard toward Russian nationalism. Slogans on the superiority of Russians over other nations were permitted where as any sort of nationalist slogan was strictly forbidden for the other nations of the Soviet Union.

There have been anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments in Baltic republics, where active nationalists were imprisoned and sent to exile. The Soviet leadership, in an attempt to appease these nationalist tendencies and dissatisfaction, made larger investments in Baltic countries compared with those of the other national republics. However, Russians were considered as occupiers in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia and thus the Baltic countries were the first to declare their independence during the time of “perestroika” (1985 - 1991). The Soviet Union finally collapsed in December 1991 and many nations of the former union began a new chapter in their history as independent countries.

The Current Situation

According to Prof. B.I. Cherny, the situation of economic and social chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the swift decay in social values and traditions played an important role in the strengthening of nationalist tendencies. However, Cherny argues that the most important factor which fuelled nationalism in Russia was the anti-Russian nationalism which appeared in the ex-Soviet republics like Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Georgia and in some newly emerged independent states in Central Asia. With the new geopolitical situation following the fragmentation of Soviet Union, about 25 million of ethnic Russians has discovered themselves in a situation of minorities. Those ethnic Russians who remained in various newly emerged independent states have been the target of racial discrimination and humiliation and this brought the issue of “Russian diaspora” in a centre of political discourse. Anti-Russian acts in ex-Soviet republics had a fuelling effect on the growth of Russian nationalism and neo-imperial tendencies in Russia.^[21]

Today we observe different opinions among political analysts and writers on the categorization of the existing nationalist currents in Russia. These currents seem to be fragmented from a populist-Slavophile pole to an extremist xenophobic pole. However, it seems possible to make a general categorization by dividing the national nationalist currents into four main groups: the

neo-Slavophiles, Eurasianists, national-Communists, and ethnic nationalists.

The neo-Slavophiles are considered as the supporters of the theses of Russian novelist and historian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918 – 2008). Solzhenitsyn directed strong criticism to the newly emerged oligarchic classes of post-Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, he was an opponent of any sort of nostalgia for Soviet Communism. Opposing to all sorts of extremist nationalism, he defended a new and moderate patriotism. Expressing his concerns about the fate of the 25 million ethnic Russians in the “near abroad” of the former Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn advocated the protection and development of the national character of the Russian Orthodox Church. In his great work *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals*, Solzhenitsyn argued that Russia has to leave the burden of all non-Slav republics, which he claimed were slowing the development and weakening the Russian nation. The Nobel Peace Prize owner recommended the creation of a federation of three Slavic nations namely, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Solzhenitsyn was criticized for advocating a neo-imperial nostalgia and utopia.

The Eurasianists seem to be widespread and more influential in the current Russian political arena. They are inspired by the ideas of famous Russian philosopher, historian and anthropologist, Lev Gumilev (1912 – 1992). Studying the works of Konstantin Leontyev and Nikolay Danilevsky, Gumilev developed his theory in which he regarded Russians as a "super-ethnos", kindred to Turkic peoples of the Eurasian steppe. This common heritage binds Russians with the nations of Central Asia and necessitates them to develop solidarity against the destructive influences of the West. According to Gumilev, new Russia must respect the principle of ethnic pluralism and it should consider the nations of its periphery as potential allies against the Western influences. In order to achieve that goal, Russians and the Turkish-speaking peoples of Central Asia have to unite for a common cause and set aside their religious differences.

Today, the heritage of Gumilev is cherished not only by leading national-patriotic writers and journalists but also by politicians, bureaucrats, military officials and Russian intelligentsia. Aleksandr Dugin is perhaps the best known follower of Gumilev. Known as the most popular ideologist of Russian expansionism and nationalism, Dugin has played a leading role in the foundation of the Eurasia Party which was officially recognized by the Ministry of Justice on 31 May 2001, and is alleged to enjoy the support of the presidential office. His political activities are focused on the restoration of the Russian Empire in Eurasian sphere. This, according to Dugin, should be done through separation of the former Soviet republics, such as Georgia and Ukraine, and the Russian-speaking territories in these countries, especially Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, should be unified with Russia. His ideas on the establishment of a “Turkic-Slavic” alliance in the Eurasian sphere have recently become very popular among certain nationalistic circles.

Despite its declining popularity especially among the youth, the national-Communist movement is still a force in Russian politics. The national-Communists dream for the continuation of the Soviet State. However, they are also aware of the reality that the communist ideology does no longer exist in Russia. The leading figure representing the national-Communist ideology is Gennady Zyuganov who is the First Secretary of the Communist Party since 1993. The political propagandas of Zyuganov’s Communist Party mainly focus on the decline in living standards following the collapse of Soviet socialism. Communist Party is also a strong opponent of newly emerged Russian oligarchy who controls most of the economic assets of the country. According to Zyuganov, increase

in violent crime and ethnic demands to win autonomy are all consequences of the disappearance of socialism. Thus, the Communist Party advocates a new sort of “socialism” based on a strong central government guaranteeing personal and economic security of Russians. Zyuganov has been successful in combining his socialist ideology with Russian nationalism and his Communist Party became allies with numerous other left-wing and right-wing nationalist forces, forming a common “national-patriotic alliance.”^[22]

The ethnic nationalists are the representatives of extreme right in Russia whose goal is to achieve “ethnic purity” of Russia based on Slavic origin. They are extremely racist, xenophobic and populist. They advocate the deployment of all people of non-Slavic origin, especially people from the Caucasus whom they consider as the reason of the increase in crime and public disorder. They are anti-Semitic and loyal defenders of the slogan “Russia for Russians”. Today Russian nationalist intellectuals are mostly gathered around the literary journal *Nash Sovremennik*, a periodical with a nationalist and patriotic content. The articles issued in the said journal vary from a neo-Orthodox, conservative, neo-nationalist approach to xenophobic and racist ideologies.

The Ideology of State Nationalism Under Putin

By examining the roots of national identity and nationalism in Russia, this paper tried to demonstrate the evolutionary process that the Russian nationalism has passed through since from the very beginning until the current day. It is that historical perspective which might give clues about the official state ideology of Russia under Putin administration in terms of nationalism and national identity.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian academics, policy-makers, philosophers and bureaucracy have struggled to develop a new concept that could play a guiding role in building a new and powerful Russia reminiscent of the imperial past. In the current debate on how to accomplish the revival of Russia as a great power, it is obvious that the Westernizers and Eurasianists are playing the most prominent roles.

Looking at the nationalist currents in Russia’s history and making a comparison with Putin’s current policies might help us to define which doctrine is adopted by the Russian state. “Official Nationalism” which was introduced by Nicholas I in the 1830s as an official ideology has surprisingly common features with Putin’s state nationalism. As to recall, the ideology of Official Nationalism was based on three concepts: orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. The repercussions of these three concepts are visible in Putin’s interpretation of state nationalism. Putin administration has open support of the Orthodox Church and there has been an apparent revival of orthodoxy in politics since the beginning of Putin’s presidency. Autocracy is another undeniable aspect of Putin’s government. Russia has witnessed a sharp autocratic turn with Putin’s immense centralization of power. His policies to neuter the Russian Duma, intimidate the press and manipulate the levers of Russian economy have gained the support of the Russian nation since his popularity among Russians has never declined. Nationality, albeit not in a discriminative character, is also another concept the state nationalism under Putin. An emphasis to national pride and national identity are often seen in speeches of Putin. Despite the fact that Putin has always been careful in underlining the importance of the peaceful co-existence and solidarity of different nationalities under a single motherland and flag, the superiority of Russians on the other nationalities has also been implicitly imposed during

Putin's presidency.

Putin's state nationalism cannot be put under the category of classic Slavophile ideology which cherished the Slavic peasant commune and was very antagonistic to the West. Russia under Putin's government, despite being cautious in relations with the West, has never adopted an openly hostile stance towards Western powers as the Slavophiles did. A limited influence of neo-Slavophile ideology however, can be seen in the policies of Putin. Protection and development of the national character of the Russian Orthodox Church, attempts to avert the departure of two Slavic countries, namely the Ukraine and Belarus, from the orbit of Moscow can be interpreted as factors reflecting the neo-Slavophile character of Putin's state nationalism. In 2007, Putin granted Solzhenitsyn, the hero of neo-Slavophiles, a State Award for humanitarian achievement which explicitly demonstrated his sympathy to this ideology.

The Eurasianists had high hopes when Putin came to power in 1999. Putin's decisive and to some extent brutal policies in Chechnya strengthened Eurasianist hopes. However, the expectations that Putin administration would lead Russia in a Eurasian discourse faded away swiftly in the early years of Putin. Especially following the September 11 attacks, Putin pursued a moderate and pragmatic policy based on cooperation with the United States and with the European Union. In those years, there has been a rapid US "expansion" in Central Asian countries with the opening of US military bases. This situation started to change as of 2005 when the US experienced a sudden geopolitical reversal in Central Asia, with regional leaders becoming suspicious of the US presence. The decline of US's presence commenced with Uzbekistan's decision in July 2005 to evict US military forces from an air base at Karshi-Khanabad.

Putin administration swiftly moved to fill the political gap which occurred with the US withdrawal. Russia strengthened the loosened ties not only with Uzbekistan but also with other Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan and Azerbaijan. This new pro-active stance and diplomatic success received a warm welcome from the Eurasianist camp. Putin, by publicly praising Lev Gumilev, founder of modern Eurasianist movement, demonstrated his belief in the Eurasianist ideology. The consolidation of Russia's influence in the near neighbourhood through regional organizations such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (CACO), Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) also confirmed Putin's Eurasianist discourse. It seems clear that Eurasianist influence remains strong, if not predominant to this day within the Russian policy-making establishment. Nevertheless, it would also be wrong to claim that Putin administration is guided entirely by Eurasianist thinking.

Regarding ethnic nationalism, the views of Kremlin seems to be very clear. On 16 December 2010, Putin answered the questions of Russian people during a call-in show. In the said TV show, while answering a question Putin said that;

“Any display of extremism must be cut short immediately. People from all parts of Russia, whether they are from the North Caucasus, Far East, Siberia or central Russia, should feel comfortable regardless of where they live. The state, local authorities, NGOs and most importantly all Russian citizens themselves, regardless of their ethnic origin and religious beliefs, should realize that we are children of one country and feel comfortable in any part

of this country”.

In his speech, defining ethnic nationalism and radicalism as a virus, Putin underlined;

“Radicalism has always been present in society. Just like viruses: They are present in almost every person, but if you have a good immune system, then you’re not affected by those viruses. Similarly with society – if it is mature then these viruses of radicalism and extremism are just present there somewhere in your cells, they can’t do anything. But as soon as society becomes weak, your immune system goes down, then diseases start to develop”.

Finding an appropriate answer to the question under which category, Putin’s ideology of nationalism can be placed necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the process of nationalism in Russia and the concepts that shaped the current nationalist tendencies of different character. The previous parts of this paper tried to take a brief look to the process of evolution of nationalism, which mainly shaped today’s nationalist ideologies in Russia. This short voyage to the past gave us a reliable and valuable source to understand and make a definition of Putin’s ideology of state nationalism.

Thus, this paper comes to the conclusion that the nationalist ideology of Putin Administration can be defined as a “neo-Official Nationalism” reminding the days of Nicholas I who tried to develop a new ideology of nationalism to dominate the domestic and foreign affairs of Imperial Russia. This neo-Official Nationalism is based on Orthodoxy, autocracy and national pride and is strengthened with a Eurasianist, and to a certain extent, Slavophile influence. It is dressed with an imperial nostalgia and a strong rhetoric of “peaceful co-existence of different nationalities under one flag and motherland”. Putin cannot be defined as an anti-Western as were the Slavophiles. His policy towards the west and particularly to the US is shaped by pragmatism and cautiousness. Putin’s neo-Official Nationalism seems to be deprived of irredentist and expansionist policies or territorial claims. However, it can adopt an aggressive tone and hostility when the question comes to the ethnic Russians living in the periphery of Russia. The issue of the “protection” of this Russian diaspora is used as a strong policy tool to manipulate the domestic politics as well as foreign relations with those countries who are hosting the ethnic Russians. The latest example of this was seen during the crisis with Georgia. Putin’s neo-Official Nationalism strongly rejects ethnic discrimination, racism and xenophobia, albeit it implicitly imposes the superiority of Russians over the other nationalities. It aims to plant the seeds of national pride among all nationalities of being citizens of a “great power”. Feeling the protection of the state, these citizens, in return, are expected to cast aside all sorts of “dreams” of self-determination or independence.

^[1]The Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) was founded by Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Vladimir Bogachev in 1990. It has been the second registered party in the Soviet Union.

^[2]Russian Public Opinion Research Center, Левада: 58% россиян – националисты, 16.08.2005,

<http://wciom.com/archives/thematic-archive/info-material/single/1618.html>

^[3]“Russia is for Russians” is a political slogan and nationalist doctrine, which originated in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century. The original “Russia for Russians” idea has variably been ascribed to a Black Hundreds ideologue Vladimir Gringmut, General Mikhail Skobelev, or Tsar Alexander III of Russia.

^[4] Robert Steuckers, Foundations of Russian Nationalism, 20 June 2010, http://www.eurorus.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6604%3Afoundations-of-russian-nationalism&catid=3%3Aanalysis&Itemid=92&lang=en

^[5]**Kievan Rus'** (Russian: Кйевская Русь), is the name used by Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin for the Medieval state of Rus. The state existed from approximately 880 to sometime in the middle of the 13th century when it disintegrated. It was founded by East Slavic Tribes and Scandinavian traders (Varangians) called "Rus'" and centered in Novgorod. The state later included territories stretching south to the Black Sea, east to Volga, and west to the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

^[6]See Сергей Михайлович Соловьев, История России с древнейших времен, Publisher: Oleg E. Kolesnikov (Русская история в Библиотеке Магистра, <http://www.lib.ru/HISTORY/SOLOVIEV/solv01.txt>

^[7]Orlando Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, New York, 2002, p.62

^[8]Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, p.65

^[9] Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, p.66

^[10]They are often referred to as Decembrists.

^[11]Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, p.86

^[12]Richard Pipes, Russian Conservatism and Its Critics A Study in Political Culture, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005, p.98

^[13]Sergei Vasilievich Utechin, Russian Political Thought, London, 1963, p.72

^[14]Andrzej Walicki, A history of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1979, pp. 98-99

^[15]Utechin, Russian Political Thought, London, 1963, p.85

^[16]Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, p.83

^[17]Walicki, A history of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism, p. 312

^[18]Figes, Natasha’s Dance A Cultural History of Russia, pp.313-315

^[19]Dmitry Shlapentok, Russia's Foreign Policy and Eurasianism, 1 September 2005, EURASIA NET.ORG,
<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080205a.shtml>

^[20]Союз нерушимый республик свободных (Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics)
Сплотила навеки Великая Русь. (Great Russia has welded forever to stand.)
Да здравствует созданный волей народов (Created in struggle by will of the people)
Единый, могучий Советский Союз! (United and mighty, our Soviet land!)

^[21]В.И.Черный, Национализм в России в конце XX – начале XXI веков, дипломная работа, Министерство образования и науки Российской Федерации, Государственное образовательное учреждение высшего профессионального образования, http://5ka.su/ref/history/0_object8218.html, 2004, p.4

^[22]"Русский национальный собор"(РНС) (Russkii Nazional'ni Sobor - Russian National Assembly) was founded on February 1992 by a group of Russian nationalist leaders (A.Sterligov, B.Rasputin, G.Zyuganov, A.Makashov). It constituted a new organisation as an "umbrella coalition" of numerous groups and fractions. RNS declared itself as a "block of patriotic parties and Russian national movements with a goal of unifying Russian and other indigenous peoples of Russia for the sake of revival of united Motherland, for defence of national-state interests, for preserving traditional moral and religious values of Russia's citizens".

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