

## Raising 'The Russian Question': Ethnicity and Statehood – *Russkie* and *Rossiya*

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The breakdown of the USSR has made the Russian state's mismatch with nationalists' conceptions of Russia more urgent. This article systematizes key contemporary Russian images of 'Russia' by drawing a number of concentric circles around the Russian Federation. It is pointed out that some of these circles are associated with ethnicity, while others are primarily statist. An important conclusion is that most of these images portray Russia spanning wider than does the present Russian state. The article intimates that a variance of foreign policies may be justified on the basis of ideas of Russianness.

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*'I feel myself deeply as a Russian man [russkiy chelovek] both by origin and by my roots. At the same time I consider myself a Russian [rossiyanin], who rose in a multinational environment. Therefore in the history of Russia there is nothing alien to me. All that there was belongs to me.'*

Ivan Rybkin, Speaker of the State Duma 1994–95

The above quotation contains the essence of what in Russia is frequently termed *russkiy vopros* – the question of the position of ethnic Russians in relation to other groups in a multinational state, be it the Russian federation, the USSR or indeed the Russian empire.

The English term 'Russian' may in the Russian language correspond to two different terms – *russkiy* and *rossiyskiy*. The first is defined by ethnic/cultural variables;<sup>2</sup> the latter by statist/territorial ones. Accordingly, the official name of the old Russian empire was *Rossiyskaya Imperiya*. A little more curiously, perhaps, the first 'R' in RSFSR stood for *rossiyskiy*. (The explanation of this, of course, is that the RSFSR itself was a federate structure, and was not seen as the homeland of one ethnic group.)

The national identities which have been the object of most scholarly research have been related to independence-seeking, irredentist or similar

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political movements – where a state in one way or the other outsizes the (perceived) community of nation. The *russkiy* people, on the other hand, has always been the *Staatsvolk*, the dominating people, of its state. This latter circumstance has in a profound way influenced the character of the national identity of ethnic Russians. For that reason it is also the starting point of this article.

The article aims to systematize expressions of Russian nationalism, and Russian nationalists' images of *Rossiya*, by making use of 'standard' theories of nationalism and the nation. The article begins with a short discussion of definitions of the terms 'nationalism' and 'nation', and the development of a model of strands of Russian nationalism. Thereafter, in the main part of the article, the focus shifts to the nation, with a discussion of the concentric circles of *russkiy* national identity.

The intention with the article is to systematize lines of thought, not to rank them according to their predominance in the public. Thus, the reasoning is frequently illustrated with quotations of elite sources which are not necessarily representative of large segments of the public.

### Introduction

Throughout the period in which Russian national identity was shaped, the Russians made up the ethnic core of an ever-expanding empire. Moscow's expansion after the end of Mongol rule was in principle aimed at gathering all the land of old *Rus*, neutralizing the threat of the Tartars, and uniting under Russian rule Orthodox Christians and other Christians (such as the Armenians), but the absence of territorial boundaries, and the ease of the expansion, kept it going. As a result, the building of the national state and the forging of an empire, processes which in the West were clearly separated both in time and space, proceeded in Russia concurrently and contiguously and became virtually indistinguishable. The annexed territories were swiftly included in the people's image of 'Russia, one and indivisible'. Political subjugation was usually followed by colonization, blurring the notion of 'historical Fatherland'.

The character of Russian nationalism today is closely associated with the imperial experience of the ethnic Russians. Basically, the longevity of the Russian empire has sustained two different Russian national identities. By the beginning of the 1800s, two trends of nationalist thinking emerged in Western Europe. In France, an idea of citizenship was born with the revolution, an idea which basically claimed that the legitimacy of the regime had to be founded on popular support, not on dynastic tradition. In Germany, which still existed only as an idea of cultural community (primarily based on language), another idea emerged. This was an idea

which, accordingly, was rooted in culture; it was the Romantic nationalism which was to stimulate movements for separatism and unification throughout Europe in the years to come. In Russia, both these inspirations spread at a remarkable speed in the early 1800s. Here, as in the West, two concepts of nation and fatherland developed; one rational, political (in the West a universal concept of political liberty and the rights of man, in the East one of personal loyalty to the Dynasty and to the Church, and later to the state as such), the other based on history, 'on monuments and graveyards.'<sup>3</sup>

In the West, Romantic nationalism added substance to the idea of citizenship and resulted in the thesis of the nation-state. In Russia, on the other hand, the imperial character of the Russian state kept these ideas separate and incompatible, and made these ideas continue to exist side by side in a rather uneasy relationship.

#### Defining 'Nation' and 'Nationalism' for the Russian Case

Ideally, our definition of 'nation' should be denuded of elements of nationalist ideology. Getting at such a definition has proved extraordinarily difficult. Hugh Seton-Watson, an authority in this field, has concluded that 'no 'scientific definition' of a nation can be devised ... All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one.'<sup>4</sup> Several attempts have been made at making an essentialist definition of the term, pointing out one or more key cultural variables as definitory. Among those tried are language, religion, common history/descent, ethnicity/race, and statehood. For a group of people to be termed a nation, its members typically have to share several of these characteristics, although historically, one criterion may have been predominant (for example, statehood in the US and Canada, language in Germany, or culture and history in France). Stalin made his attempt in 1913. His definition, interesting because it is still being used habitually in Russia, includes four criteria: the members of a nation live under the same economic conditions, on the same territory, speak the same language, and have a similar culture and national character.<sup>5</sup> That definition was a piece of politicizing in itself; a group such as the Jews, with its members scattered over the country, was excluded.

Neither Ernest Gellner nor Eric Hobsbawm, two other authorities, gave definite definitions of the nation in their major works. Gellner discusses two typical approaches to this problem – one pointing to cultural traits shared, and one centring on self-definition. Finding weaknesses with both, he concludes that it is probably best 'to approach this problem by using this

term without attempting too much in the way of formal definition, and looking at what culture *does*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, their very antipathy towards what they define as nationalism ('...for every single nationalism which has so far raised its ugly head...', is a Gellnerian formulation) may be explanatory here – listing characteristics may seem to imply an acceptance of the nationalist self-perception, seeing the world as naturally divided into nations, each with its own individuality.

Some attempts at unemotional definitions have departed from *nationalism*; 'a nation is an ethnic group whose leaders have either achieved, or aspire to achieve, a state where its cultural group is hegemonic', says social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen.<sup>7</sup> Anthony H. Birch considers that a nation is best defined as 'a society which either governs itself today, or has done so in the past, or has a credible claim to do so in the not-too-distant future.'<sup>8</sup> Both these definitions, however, have a circularity inherent making them less than perfect.

The definition of 'nation' which I will make use of in the following is one suggested by Anthony D. Smith; a definition grasping well the 'sounding board' dimension. Smith here defines a nation as 'a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members'.<sup>9</sup> As with the definition of nationalism, however, I consider that a slight change of focus is necessary for my particular case: I choose not to emphasize the last passage concerning economy and legal matters – doing that we would exclude the Russians in the newly independent CIS states, as indeed different *irredenta* cases.

Scholarly attitudes towards *nationalism* – its sources and functions – are regularly placed along a continuum describing the 'constructedness' of nations. On one end of the continuum are the theorists diverging most strongly from the self-perception of the nationalist – the category termed modernists, instrumentalists, or deconstructionists, seeing nationalism basically as an independent variable influenced by one or several novel mechanisms of social penetration, such as urbanization, military conscription, schooling, and media. An early formulation of this perspective was made by Hans Kohn, who states that nationalism 'presupposes the existence, in fact or as an ideal, of a centralized form of government over a large distinct territory'.<sup>10</sup> Ernest Gellner states that '... nationalism is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself'.<sup>11</sup> Eric Hobsbawm is just as clear: 'In short, for the purposes of analysis, nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around'.<sup>12</sup>

Modernists vary in which factors they see as decisive over the independent variable of nationalism. Gellner stresses the spread of universal

education and communication systems resulting from industrialization. Nationalism is the consequence of 'a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state'.<sup>14</sup> Hobsbawm takes as his starting point the state system which appeared following the French revolution: The state needed people's consent on more things – such as tax-paying or military service – and had to develop a civic loyalty to get it. Simultaneously, an increasing professional specialization required improved and standardized education, making way for a cultural standardization within the state's territory. The state-attached 'patriotic' nationalism which appeared got the substance we attribute to it today only by the end of the nineteenth century, when it merged with the Romantic cultural nationalist thought.<sup>15</sup> In my opinion, this description fits best the 'Western' kind of nationalism, in Hans Kohn's terminology. In the East, including Russia, I suggest that a merger like that described by Hobsbawm did not take place; instead, Romantic nationalism remained uncomfortably detached from the state, whereas the state responded with an all-embracing 'Official Nationality'.

A modernist perspective like that of Hobsbawm does seem to fit well with the Soviet case: Instead of seeing (minority) nationalisms here as results of years of cultural and political oppression, it stresses the indisputable fact that Russians, just as much as for example, the Muslim tribal peoples of Central Asia, have been subject to the same extraordinary process of forced industrialization since 1917 (we may stretch that perspective to include the last two decades of the 1800s). Modernization, with the uprooting of people, the greatly increased social and geographical mobility etc. so closely associated with a growth of nationalism, has taken place at an unprecedented speed. On this level 'all the Soviet people, non-Russians and Russians alike, shared a traumatic and often tragic evolution'.<sup>16</sup>

The purely modernist perspective has, however, one major weakness: It does not indicate what *character* a nation will assume, or how strong the cement of a corresponding nationalism will be. Here, in my opinion, the other end of the continuum – the primordialist or 'epiphenomenon' perspective – supplies valuable insights. Anthony D. Smith, the major theorist today coming closest to the primordialist position,<sup>17</sup> acknowledges several modernist points, such as the modernity of nationalism and the importance of societal processes and intellectual elites in nation-formation. To him, however, they fail in their not relating the 'construction' of modern nations to the existence of premodern ethnic communities.<sup>18</sup> Social processes such as industrialization, and local peculiarities such as Westernization in the Russian case, determines the timing of the growth in national sentiments, but their character, location and strength must be

explained by historical factors. Basically, nationalism cannot play on nothing; a sounding board of some kind is needed.

Ernest Gellner has defined nationalism as 'primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.'<sup>19</sup> The same definition is used by Hobsbawm,<sup>20</sup> and nearly identical definitions are being used by a great number of theorists. A theoretical implication of this perspective is that 'once nation-states have been established and the rhetoric of national interest generally accepted it is difficult to identify anything specific as nationalism.'<sup>21</sup>

My understanding of nationalism is different from that of Gellner and Hobsbawm. I choose to employ a recent definition by Smith which keeps the basic idea, but specifies several elements of this perspective; he holds that nationalism is 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation''.<sup>22</sup> This definition in my interpretation fathoms activities spanning from the striving to attain identity to the maintaining of autonomy. Another advantage with this definition is that it does not imply that nations can be free only if they possess their own sovereign state. The significance of the latter point is made strikingly clear by the Bolshevik nationality policy, with its encouragement of national expressions aimed at *preventing* secessionism. '[W]e cannot conclude that one can only speak of nationalism and nation-building if a political movement strives to establish a sovereign national state', as Gerhard Simon has pointed out.<sup>23</sup> On only one point do I disagree with Smith's definition; I consider that nationalism may be the property of independent individuals, and not only of 'movements'. I do not see this as a major point of disagreement, and will therefore in the following presentations follow Smith's definition, but I reserve for myself the freedom to term an individual case's ideology as 'his' nationalist ideology.

### **Mixing and Unmixing Nation and State**

In official Soviet terminology, nationalism was described as 'a bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology and policy'. With their insistence on nation being a more important distinction of people than class, all nationalist ideologies contain reactionary elements. Contrary to this, 'patriotism' was defined as 'love and devotion to the motherland and readiness to serve its interests'.<sup>24</sup> In Russia, liberal theorists as well as nationalists of different shades still typically follow this distinction. Academician Dmitriy Likhachev, a liberal nationalist, has distinguished between nationalism and patriotism, considering the latter 'one of the noblest of feelings', and the former 'among the basest misfortunes of mankind'.<sup>25</sup> Several writers,

including political scientist Alexander Yanov, have since adopted this distinction. Yanov also adds a third concept – chauvinism: 'A patriot loves his country, but this does not prevent him from loving humanity. A chauvinist loves his country but dislikes humanity, especially if it is of Jewish origin. A nationalist loves his country but sees humanity as an invading force ready to conquer it – with the Jews in the vanguard.'<sup>26</sup>

All these definitions are imprecise to the point of uselessness in a scholarly context – one man's patriotism too frequently manifests itself as another man's nationalism. Nevertheless, 'patriotism' remains a highly rated term in Russian politics, whereas only a few extremists admit to being nationalists.

There is such a thing as patriotism which is distinguished from nationalism. As a matter of fact, we may stick to the above Soviet definition of the term. What nevertheless deprives such a term some of its significance, is the fact that patriotism very frequently is a term attributed to what Lenin would have called 'great Russian chauvinism'. Because, whereas the ethnic Russians were certainly to some extent Sovietized during Soviet times, Soviet culture, imposed all over the Union, was to a significant extent *russkiy* in content. The ethnic Russian nationalism which appeared from the 1970s onwards with spokesmen like Igor Shafarevich, which was on surface defensive – pointing, for example, to the absence of separate union republic institutions in the RSFSR – intentionally or unintentionally missed the point; the whole of the Union was in fact the playground of ethnic Russian culture. (The anti-Semitism which is very frequently an element of Russian nationalist rhetoric, including that of Shafarevich, will not be discussed here.)

Thus, rather than distinguishing between nationalism and patriotism, I will suggest a somewhat different set of terms to describe different directions which may all be termed nationalist, but which vary with regard to the extent to which they advocate the predominance of one people above others, and with regard to what territory they wish to see as part of their state.

The constant flow of impulses from the West has served to press for a convergence of nation and state in Russia. What has happened, however, is that here, a double-faced Russian national identity – one focusing on the nation, the other on the state – has appeared:

Where German Romantic thought substituted for the French revolutionary 'citizenship' the idea of *Volk* or *narod*, the multi-cultural character of the empire bred a nation-centred nationalism. Exponents of this direction are frequently termed *vozrozhdentsy* (*vozrozhdenie* – rebirth, renaissance), *pochvenniki* (*pochva* – earth, soil), 'culturalists' or 'nativists'. This nationalism, I consider, exists in two ideal-typical versions: First, as

what I will term a Russian 'ethnic core' nationalism, a nationalism which holds that the nation should seek its own good within the boundaries of its core area, and thus rejects wider territorial claims although some of its people may live outside that area. This idea was first expressed tentatively in a modern form by the Slavophiles. 'Tentatively', because it lasted until the 1970s before the first significant suggestion of a dismemberment of the empire was presented, as a means to further the interests of the Russian nation.<sup>27</sup> As Roman Szporluk has pointed out, Russian thinkers and politicians, liberal and conservative alike, 'often found it impossible to free themselves from their allegiance to the empire, especially its territorial integrity, even when they had no attachment to the czarist state'.<sup>28</sup> Second, the nation-centred nationalism has been expressed as what I call a *supremacist* nationalism. This also departs from the idea of a Russian nation, but is simultaneously territorial in the sense that it claims that the Russian nation needs definite dominance over the whole multi-national state, and accepts a degree of oppression of the other peoples in order to achieve that.

TABLE I  
THE CHARACTER OF NATIONALISM

<i>Territorial orientation</i>	<i>Primarily ethnic</i>	<i>Primarily statist (gosudarstvenniki)</i>
'Core' oriented	Ethnic core nationalists	e.g. Russian Federation nationalists
'Empire' oriented	Supremacist nationalists	Empire savers, <i>soyuzniki</i>

Opposed to the nationalism departing from the nation, we have a nationalism which is state-centred (although not necessarily regime-centred). Exponents of this direction are frequently termed *gosudarstvenniki* (*gosudarstvo* – state), *soyuzniki* (*soyuz* – union), *derzhavniki* (*derzhava* – state, great power) or simply 'empire savers'.

The *gosudarstvenniki* consider that the Russians by virtue of being numerically in the majority, historically the gatherers of the lands, and bearers of the Russian language, should be in a somehow dominant position, without oppressing other peoples. The primarily statist nationalisms, like the primarily ethnic ones, should be considered *russkiye*. To the extent that the term *rossiyskiy* denotes a brand of nationalism, it is strictly speaking a matter of an all-Russian/Soviet 'melting pot' one. Nevertheless, the term *rossiyskiy* is frequently used by state-oriented nationalists, precisely because the state is their point of departure.

The *gosudarstsvennik* becomes more of a nationalist and less of a *gosudarstvennik* when his reasoning takes on an element of promotion of the interests of one particular ethnic group. I.e, the interests of this ethnic group acquires value in its own right. In that case, in a multinational state, one is by necessity an exponent of an ideology favouring a more or less privileged position of one ethnic group. The development may of course also take place the other way; a nationalist may develop to put more emphasis on the interests of the state.

### Concentric Circles: Who are the Russians?

From 1934 onwards, all Soviet citizens were equipped with an internal passport, in which nationality was stated in the fifth graph, as indeed it was in all standardized official forms. At the age of 16, all citizens of the state were obliged to state their nationality, upon receiving their passport. The youngster was free to choose only between the nationalities of his or her father and mother. Thus, the state attributed an element of 'blood relations' to nationality.

The Soviet passport laws, introduced by a motivation to promote national 'flourishing' in the Union, made the whole matter of nationality more rigid than it had been before. Today, the authorities of the Russian Federation seem to be intent on maintaining the Soviet passport system. In March 1995, the presidential committee on citizenship affairs announced that the draft of a new Russian passport was approved and that it would have a space for declaring of nationality. The only difference from the previous passport system was that the owner of the passport would be free to leave the nationality line blank. Some republican leaders had argued strongly for the maintenance of this post in the passport. Generally, this will probably serve as a precaution against ethnic assimilation of non-Russian groups. The leaders' position has, however, also been explained by a more dubious wish on their side to mobilize voters on an ethnic basis.<sup>29</sup>

Those with *russkiy* stamped in 'point five' in the passports of course make up the basic reference group for Russian nationalists. The clear-cut definition of who belongs to the nation and who does not has not, however, prevented a number of different identities from emerging among ethnic Russians. In order to understand the ambitions nourished by different groups of nationalists, it is helpful to view the cultural and territorial expanses these people are hoping to control as a series of concentric circles. In the following I will discuss different 'circles' implied in policy statements of exponents of Russian nationalism, starting with the smallest.

The reason why Russian nationalism gives proper cause for concern outside Russia is inherent in the characteristics of the different directions

described above; the ambitions of Russian nationalism tends to transcend the borders of the present Russian state. As well-known Russian nationalist Sergey Baburin, an advocate of an East Slav union, replied, when this writer in an interview commented that the Ukrainians did not seem to want to re-join Russia: 'They will want to.'<sup>30</sup> As long as he thinks so, one might reason, Baburin the nationalist is not dangerous. The reason to worry becomes even more clear when one observes Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who promotes a clear-cut supremacist nationalist ideology. It is tempting to reject Zhirinovskiy's rhetoric as a clown's (albeit successful) populism. Intellectually, people like Baburin and writer and editor Aleksandr Prokhanov have considerably more to offer. However, clowns have come to power before elsewhere, and also tried to realize their populist programs.

The most obvious 'circle' to begin the discussion with is that delineated by the borders of the present Russian Federation. Those speaking in favour of keeping the Russian state within these borders may be divided into two groups; (primarily state-oriented) Russian Federation nationalists and ethnic core nationalists.

The former group is not least represented by the Yeltsin regime, which has striven to establish the present borders of Russia as legitimate in the minds of the population, and play on different nation-building instruments to build a *rossiyskiy* identity. Notably, the regime has tried to play on such sentiments when justifying the military actions in Chechnya.

In the USSR, app. 50 per cent of the citizens were, by their passports, ethnic Russians. In the Russian Federation today ethnic Russians make up 82 per cent. All other peoples are very small in comparison; Tatars make up 3.7 per cent, Ukrainians 3, Chuvash 1.2, Bashkirs 0.9, peoples of Dagestan 1.2, Belorussians 0.7.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the ethnic Russians now make up a large majority of the population of the Russian Federation has stimulated some thoughts in the direction of ethnic purity of the state. 'Russia is the mono-national state for ethnic Russians', a writer stated in the radical nationalist newspaper *Ataka*.<sup>32</sup> In some cases, such thoughts touch upon genetics: *Chistota very i chistota krovi* ('Purity in faith and purity in blood') is the slogan of the nationalist newspaper *Shturmovik* ('The Attacker'), organ of the obscure Russian National Union.

Among more mainstream politicians, the ideas are less repulsive. The reflections may lack some intellectual completeness, but are still fascinating by virtue of their implications. Gennadiy Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) with a recent past as one of the leaders of the red-brown National Salvation Front (FNS) – while often emphasizing the multi-cultural character of the Russian Federation – has actually pointed to a possibility to turn this state into some sort of nation-state: The vital interests of Russia, he stated in the autumn of 1994,

'are above all in the gathering on our land, under its wings, under the protection of powerful statehood, all Russian [*russkiye*] people, all who consider Russia their Homeland, all those peoples who agree to connect with her their historical fate. ... Today, for the first time in three centuries, we have a real chance to establish a symphonic unity of our spiritual and state traditions.' To further muddle the picture, Zyuganov in the same article advocated a recreation, on a voluntary basis, of the USSR.<sup>33</sup>

In a book published in 1990, Russia expert Geoffrey Hosking pointed to what he saw as a paradox of the Russian national identity [*Bewusstsein*]: 'It cannot completely unfold itself *in* the Russian-Soviet state; it however also fears that it will not be able to live on *without* the state. In my opinion, this fear is groundless. The Russian people will not be able to flourish until it finally ceases to oppress other peoples.'<sup>34</sup> Three years later, after the breakup of the USSR, John B. Dunlop, an expert on Russia nationalism, commented: 'Paradoxical as it may seem, the loss of the historic Tsarist and Soviet Empires could lead directly to the rebirth of Russia as a major Eurasian power with a vibrant economy and cultural achievements which would be the envy of the rest of the world.'<sup>35</sup>

Both these quotations seem to indicate the opinion that Russia would be better off as a sort of nation-state, rather than as a multinational state. While implying that national identity is dynamic, they reflect a view of national identity which is also that of the nationalist himself; that the well-being of the nation as such decides upon the well-being of the individual and the state. The message of anti-imperialism is a positive one; the inherent message of the blessings of the nation-state is not necessarily so.

Isolationism as a policy for ethnic Russians has been promoted by two groups opposed to each other; isolationist nationalists and liberal democrats. Belonging to the latter is the late Academician Andrey Sakharov, who spoke in favour of all nations' right to self determination. The isolationist Russias promoted by these different camps are not, however, the same. First, the degree of securing of minorities' rights would probably differ (although some democrats, too, are against guarantees of groups' rights and wish to see only individual rights guaranteed.) Second, the territorial boundaries of the states may vary: basically, some nationalists see themselves as isolationists but are in fact expansionist, by their wish to enlarge Russia to include areas densely populated by ethnic Russians. It seems reasonable to conclude that liberal democrats are less prone to such expansionism than are the isolationist nationalists.

Very few Russian nationalists claim a Fatherland smaller than the Russian Federation. Recently, however, there have been put forward some suggestions advocating a policy which would lead to a smaller and more ethnically homogenous, not to say politically calmer, Russian state:

Especially since the outbreak of the war in Chechnya, Chechnya/North Caucasus have in the minds of many Russians become most of all sources of trouble which the country can do without – at least if shedding them off does not lead to a further breakup of the state. One prominent moderate nationalist who has advocated a granting of full independence to Chechnya is Stanislav Govorukhin, leader of the Democratic Party of Russia: 'I think that Chechnya has a full right to independence. ... I believe that Russia too has a right to independence from the Chechen criminal groups. It is necessary to help them return to their historical homeland', he stated last summer.<sup>36</sup>

Numerous analysts have over the last few years suggested that the very existence of this 'point five' has contributed greatly to maintain ethnic diversions in the multicultural state. In other words, the ethnic conflicts emerging in the territory of the USSR in the 1980s and 1990s would not have been as serious had it not been for the presence of the passport. Distinctions which might otherwise have become at least partly forgotten, have been kept alive and relevant.

This thesis is supported by the fact that Russian nationalists routinely speak of their 25 million brethren in the 'near abroad' – the number of ethnic Russians established by the 1989 Soviet census – drawing another ethnically motivated circle. The sense of oneness with these people is strong even within government circles (at least rhetorically), as was demonstrated by Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev's April 1995 statement that Russia should if necessary use military force to protect their interests.<sup>37</sup>

That statement reflects a contradiction: whereas the Russian constitution speaks of 'we, the multinational people of Russia', the reasoning behind Kozyrev's statement is that the *russkie* are somehow more *rossiyan* than other citizens of the state. Certainly, it is hard to imagine the foreign minister making the same suggestion of, for example, the Tatars outside the Russian Federation.

In fact, Kozyrev's statement is only one out of several indications of a change in the policy of the Russian regime over the last two years. More specifically, official policies and statements by Russian officials have been aimed at *etnicheskie rossiyane* (a very confusing term, since there is no such ethnic group) or *sootechestvenniki* (compatriots). These groups include all 'historical peoples of Russia'. Since December 1993, however, there have appeared frequent references to '*russkie* and other Russian-speaking populations abroad'.

Valeriy Solovey, a leading expert on Russian nationalism, wrote early 1994 on the 'nationalization' of the Russian regime's policies. Solovey pointed to *derzhavnik* and also nationalist tendencies in the policies of the regime. This development, he considered, culminated with the Chechen

expedition. 'One may speak of a qualitatively new tendency in Russian politics, partly spontaneous, partly targeted', Solovey said. He explained this development with the need of Yeltsin and his entourage to stay in power to secure their political and even physical safety, and drew a parallel to Stalin's playing on Russian nationalism at the time of WW II.<sup>38</sup>

Andrey Kozyrev's statement on the use of military force for the Russian diaspora was strongly supported by General-turned-politician Aleksandr Lebed, co-leader of the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) and a very popular candidate for the June presidential elections. Interestingly, the word for 'Russian' in the party name is *russkiy*. Lebed and his co-leaders Yuriy Skokov and Dmitriy Rogozin made the new Russian diaspora a main issue before last December's Duma elections. Lebed however denies that his party is a nationalist organization. In his opinion, it is merely an organization for cultivated Russians, and goes across ethnic cleavages.

KRO leader Yuriy Skokov has pointed to the following resolution of the organization, as summarizing its nationality policy: 'Without the unity of the Russian [*russkiy*] people there may not be a union of the peoples of Russia. Without a union of the peoples of Russia there may not be a strong, effective state – the guarantor of all-peoples' interests.'<sup>39</sup> KRO's 'union of peoples' message is emphasized by its having been joined by several ethnic associations, organized in a group called precisely 'Union of Peoples of Russia' led by Skokov.

Gennadiy Zyuganov, too, has made the ethnic Russians outside the Russian Federation a political issue. In late 1994, he described the Russian Federation as 'a stump which betrayed 25 million of its *compatriots* [emphasis added]; left them abroad and even in this situation is not securing them the maintenance of the basic human rights in accordance with international law.'<sup>40</sup> In other words, he prefers not to refer to ethnicity in his argument. At the same time, however, this argument is just the same as that of ethnic nationalists: Russia has, in his party's view, 'the right and obligation' to take care of the interests of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers residing outside Russia's borders. These and similar statements seem not to take into consideration what has been pointed out by several scholars; that local Russian diasporas in the former Soviet republics in many instances have developed identities differing from those of ethnic Russians in the Russian Federation.

Some Russian nationalists favour some degree of extension of the Russian state, where the motivation is ethnic, but where the inculcation of large minorities is seen as acceptable. This position was expressed by a Russian general in an interview in 1992: 'Ukraine or rather Eastern Ukraine will come back [to Russia] in five, ten or fifteen years. Western Ukraine can go to hell!', he said. The interviewer interpreted this as an indication that we

may presently be seeing the creation of a new 'medieval dividing line' between Russia and the West, between the Orthodox Church and Western secular modernity.<sup>41</sup>

The ambitions of nationally minded Russians is however not limited to securing a good life for ethnic Russians within and outside the Russian Federation. While frequently talking of the interests of ethnic Russians as such, Russian nationalists very rarely actively *exclude* other East Slavs from the category of *russkiye*. In many minds remain the age-old distinction between *velikorossy*, *malorossy* and *belorossy* (Great Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians) and White Russians). Again, this is basically an ethnic distinction: perceptions of cultural similarity are justifying the cause of reunification. More specifically, among Russian nationalists, the view of Belorussian and Ukrainian languages as merely dialects of the Russian language, and their cultures as sub-cultures to a larger Russian one, is widespread.

One famous exponent of the view that the East Slavs of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan (where millions of ethnic Russians have immigrated after WW II) should unite, is Nobel prize winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In his address to the State Duma in October 1994, this was precisely his main idea. He advocated the establishment of such a union on a strictly ethnic basis, implying that ethnocracy was the only legitimate system of government: 'Ten of our regions declared autonomous republics, national regions, moreover most of all so-called titular nation ... it makes up much-much-much less than 50 per cent. And nevertheless there is created anti-democracy: the minority should rule the majority. Yes, the nation should control, administratively control, only the territory where it makes up a clear majority, and better, a qualified majority.' As he had in his recent article 'The Russian question at the end of the 20th century', he spoke of Russia's penetration into the Caucasus and Central Asia as a 'historical mistake'.<sup>42</sup>

The yet wider circle fathoms the whole of the Soviet Union. Here, the purely ethnic element disappears. In its place, in the thinking of prominent nationalists, some sort of mysticism often appears. This tendency is well demonstrated in the case of Aleksandr Prokhanov. In a 1992 interview, he stated: 'We tragically received the destruction of the Soviet Union, because it was the destruction of the empire, the destruction of the cupola under which coexisted and mutually influenced a number of ethnoses, peoples, that had been brought together into one unitary, great geopolitical reality. Our brotherhood was a geopolitical brotherhood. Under this empire's scepter it was not accidental which cultures were united, but all those whose fate it was to find themselves in this geopolitical goblet between three oceans.'<sup>43</sup>

Whereas the Russian ethnic core nationalism or the East Slav nationalism are precisely that – nationalisms – the above described tendency is somewhat less easily described as such. The two former tendencies are exclusive, the latter is clearly inclusive, judging from the above quotation alone. What, after all, makes it a nationalism, is the fact that it tends to be associated with a wish for ethnic Russian predominance in the multi-ethnic state. (That also goes for Prokhanov.)

A popular strand of thought of Russian nationalism of both moderate and radical brands over the last few years is that of Eurasianism, which basically claims that Russia culturally is neither Europe nor Asia, but something in-between. Eurasianist reflections are very frequent today in intellectual justifications of the need to reassemble the USSR. Neil MacFarlane has identified five prepositions in the current manifestation of Eurasianist thought: First, Russia's capacity to become part of Europe is limited or impossible as a result of profoundly different geographical realities. Second, the essence of the Russian character is profoundly different from that of the West. Third, Russia is also inextricably Western, the character of the nation being defined by the tension between 'East' and 'West' and the effort to achieve synthesis between the two. Fourth, and consequently, Russian interests must be balanced between Europe and Asia. Fifth, Russia's placement at the centre of Eurasia suggests that primary attention must be focused on its relations with other CIS states.<sup>44</sup> Among prominent centrist-liberal Eurasianists, MacFarlane mentions Sergey Stankevich and Vladimir Lukin.

Not least, moderate Eurasianism reflects an obsession with geopolitical speculations which is widespread in Russia today; speculations reminding of 19th century Western debate. This tendency is also present in writings by Stankevich and Lukin.

The ease with which one may switch from one nationality to another depends on the closeness of the two nations. Whereas there is widespread acceptance today in academic circles to view ethnicity in cultural rather than racial terms, a trait such as complexion is one which is surpassed only with great difficulty. Between nations of people with basically the same physical appearance, things are easier. Simultaneously, people tend to marry across ethnic cleavages more frequently when these are not very wide. (In the USSR, the authorities used to boast of the number of inter-ethnic marriages, being careful not to mention that marriages between for example, Russians and Caucasians were still quite rare.)

In particular between the East Slavs, the distance has been short. These peoples look alike, their languages are quite similar, and they share a lot in terms of history. As a consequence, today, some of the most fervent Russian nationalists are actually at least half Ukrainian (for example, Aleksandr

Rutskoy), and there are also examples of Ukrainian nationalists with Russian roots (for example, the first Minister of Defense of independent Ukraine, Konstantin Morozov.)

What exactly are the characteristics of the East Slavs which, according to the Russian nationalists, make them fit to live together? Ultimately, the answer seems to be a vague reference to commonness as pointed to above. Frequently, these peoples are spoken of as 'Orthodox Slavs'. Certainly, they remain within the geographical expanse of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, however, religion is today far from a characteristic of all East Slavs, or even the inhabitants of Russia proper; recent figures show that only a minority of Russians nourish religious sentiments. Furthermore, not all East Slavs are Orthodox – Uniates, Protestants, Catholics and adherents of a number of sects make up a significant group among them.

Nevertheless, it may be noted that being a believer is one thing; belonging to a culture profoundly influenced by the views and values of one particular religion is something else. This Aleksandr Lebed appears to have recognized: in early 1995 he suggested that Orthodoxy should serve as an integrative national idea for Russia. For such an idea, there were only two candidates: Orthodoxy and nationalism. 'We must bring the army and the church back to the point where they cooperate. Because in the face of the choice between Christian belief and nationalism I rather defend the patriarch than Zhirinovskij. I am no religious person, but I respect the feelings of the believers. And nationalism is its opposite pole. From there the distance is not long to fascism.'<sup>45</sup>

Another quote may introduce a slightly different perspective – albeit one far-fetched. Former Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoy has for some years now described himself as an Orthodox believer. At the same time, he has regretted strongly the breakup of the USSR, and lately, he has been explicitly calling for a recreation of that state, or simply *Rossiya*, as he prefers to call it. What cultural characteristic could he point to which was shared by all citizens of that state? In a 1992 interview, Rutskoy made explicit the association of true Russianness with being a believer. 'I never was an atheist, and I never will be. Faith is a part of Russian [*rossiyskij*] culture.' I need to go to church, and sometimes I manage to be there when the liturgy is taking place', he said. In this statement, significantly, Rutskoy first made a point out of his own being an Orthodox – belonging to the *russkiy* culture – and then turned this into an expression of an all-Russian culture. The peoples of *Rossiya* may not have the same faith, but they all do have faith.<sup>46</sup>

For the sake of the completeness of the concentric circles model, a circle of exclusive nationalism could be extended from either Russia proper or from the East Slav areas, to include Southern Orthodox Slavs. Over the

years, Russians have felt a closeness with the Bulgarians. In the 1990s, however, the focus has been on the Serbs of former Yugoslavia.

Certainly, solidarity with the Serbs is an important element in the foreign policy statements of the Russian anti-reform opposition, and more recently also on the side of the Russian leadership itself; cf. Boris Yeltsin's feverish attacks on NATO's bombing of Bosnian Serbs in the early autumn of 1995. Indicative of the sentiments in large segments of Russian political life, the State Duma mid-August 1995 voted by 234 to 0 to impose economic sanctions on Croatia because of its 'open genocide against Serbs'.<sup>47</sup> In Aleksandr Prokhanov's newspaper *Zavtra*, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic is spoken of as *velikiy serb* – 'the great Serb'.<sup>48</sup>

In the Russian Church, the Serb cause is a salient one. Not only among reactionary church leaders such as the infamous late Metropolitan Ioann, but also with Patriarch Aleksiy II himself. Last summer, Aleksiy II – interestingly in the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, which is primarily inclined towards communism – told of a recent visit to rump Yugoslavia. He described how he and his people had been received 'as representatives of a great country which had always supported its Serbian brothers, Slavs of the same faith and blood'.<sup>49</sup>

To the representatives of the Church, Orthodoxy is an important point of reference. However, one thing easily makes the point that this alone is not all: the mostly atheistic Communists are among the most eager supporters of the Bosnian Serbs in Russian politics. To them, anti-Westernism and historical ties matter more.

And ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who is a very good friend indeed with the Bosnian Serbs, although promoting the interests of one people, rarely comments on cultural traits characteristic to that people. In a recent interview, he spoke of people with a 'wild hatred against Slav, Orthodox people'.<sup>50</sup> However, Zhirinovskiy until recently did not indicate that he was much involved in religious matters. A comment he made in a profile interview with *Literaturnaya Rossiya* in 1991 is illustrative; when asked about his literary preferences, he replied that he had just been given a children's bible, which he intended to read. He added that he had also read the bible as a child; his grandmother made sure he had one.<sup>51</sup> (A year's time ago, however, he counted himself among a minority of 210 Orthodox believers in the Duma.<sup>52</sup>)

### Conclusion

The breakdown of the USSR made the territorial borders of the RSFSR/Russia more important, and thereby the issue of this territorial entity's mismatch with nationalists' conceptions of Russia more urgent.

The above discussion has systematized key contemporary Russian images of 'Russia' by drawing a number of concentric circles around the Russian Federation. It has been pointed out that some of these circles are associated with ethnicity, while others are primarily statist. An important conclusion is that the only significant circle which is smaller than that of the Russian Federation is one excluding some or all of North Caucasus. And it should also be noted that one's image of who the Russians are might at the same time suggest expansion of the state in other directions. Another important conclusion of this discussion regards the lack of intellectual coherence in the reasoning of Russian nationalists. Certainly, most of them run into trouble when having to define who they consider to be ethnic Russians.

Nationalism becomes a problem when it leads to oppression of minorities in a state or attempts to expand the borders of that state. In the case of Russia, the demographic situation and ethnic identities of Russian nationalists give a potential for both. Neither the demographic situation nor ethnic identities are easily altered. The dangers of the coming to power of a regime prone to radical policies will thus be particularly great in Russia for years to come.

Most of all, this article should have served to intimate what a variance of foreign policies may be justified on the basis of ideas of Russianness. Furthermore, it should have demonstrated that hopes and also ambitions of expansionism are indeed important elements of the ideology of a wide range of important political actors in Russia today.

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#### NOTES

1. 'Pyataya popytka stanovleniya rossiyskogo parlamentarizma', *Rossiyskie vesti*, 12 May 1994.
2. In the following, I will define an ethnic community, following Anthony D. Smith, as being 'a social group whose members share a sense of common origins, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity.' Anthony D. Smith: *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.66.
3. Hans Kohn: *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1946), p.574.
4. Hugh Seton-Watson: *Nations and State: An enquiry into the origins of nations and the politics of nationalism* (Methuen, London, 1982), p.5.

5. Ibid, p.14.
6. Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983) p.7.
7. Ibid., p.45.
8. Thomas Hylland Eriksen: 'Ethnicity and Nationalism: Definitions and Critical Reflections', in *Journal of Peace Research*, No.2 (1992), p.220.
9. Anthony H. Birch: *Nationalism and National Integration* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1989), p.6.
10. Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity* (Penguin, London, 1991), p.14.
11. Hans Kohn: *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and background*, p.4.
12. Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, p.48.
13. Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge University Press 1990), p.10.
14. Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, p.48.
15. Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, pp.94-5.
16. Ronald G. Suny: 'Nationalities and Nationalism', in Abraham Brumberg (ed.): *Chronicle of a Revolution: A Western-Soviet Inquiry into Perestroika* (Pantheon, New York, 1990), pp.110-11.
17. It should be noted that Smith himself explicitly places himself somewhere in-between the two positions; see Anthony D. Smith: *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), pp.12-13.
18. Anthony D. Smith: 'Ethnic Identity and Territorial Nationalism in Comparative Perspective', in Alexander J. Motyl (ed.): *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities* (Columbia University press, New York, 1992), p.48.
19. Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, p.1; Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, p.9.
20. Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, p.9.
21. John Breuilly: *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1982), p.251.
22. Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.73.
23. Gerhard Simon: *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1991), p.13.
24. Another related concept is 'cosmopolitanism', defined as 'a reactionary, bourgeois ideology which propagates repudiation of national traditions, culture and patriotism, and denies the sovereignty of states and nations.' The aim of cosmopolitanism is said to be the merging of peoples, if necessary by violent means. The variations of 'internationalism' were interestingly defined to have the same aim, but are distinguished by the quality of their means; merging happens out of 'necessity', by 'objective' development. The definitions are from Bolshaya Sovetskaya entsiklopedia, 3rd ed. Moscow 1970-81, quoted in Pål Kolstø: 'The Concept of "Patriotic Internationalism": A Contribution to the Understanding of Soviet Ideology', *Nordic Journal for Soviet and East European Studies*, Vol.4 (1984), pp.2-6.
25. Dmitrii Likhachev: *Zametki o russkom, Pisatel i vremya* (Sovetskaya Rossiya: Moscow, 1981), p.69.
26. Alexander Yanov: 'Russian Nationalism as the Ideology of Counterreform', *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, special ed.: 'Russian Nationalism Today' (19 December 1988), p.49.
27. That only happened with Solzhenitsyn's 1973 'Letter to the Soviet Leaders'.
28. Roman Szporluk: 'The War Between Two Russias: Yeltsin and the New Awakening', *The Washington Post*, 25 August 1991.
29. See Valeriy Tishkov, 'Post-Soviet Nationalism', A chapter in the book *A Mind Aflame: Nationalist and Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR* (due to be published by PRIO/Sage 1996).
30. Interview with the author medio December 1994.
31. 'Potentsialno opasnye tochki', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 1 March 1994.
32. Andrey Arhipov: Rossiya - eto mononatsionalnoe gosudarstvo russkikh, *Ataka*, No.33 (August 1994).
33. 'Gennadii Ziuganov: 'Bez chego ne mozhet byt nashei Rossii', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, No.35, 2 September 1994.

34. Geoffrey Hosking: Russischer Nationalismus vor 1914 und heute: Die Spannung zwischen imperialen und ethnischen Bewusstsein'. In Andreas Kappeler (ed.): *Die Russen: Ihr Nationalbewusstsein in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Markus Verlag, Köln, 1990), p.182.
35. John Dunlop: 'Russia: confronting a loss of empire', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.): *Nation and politics in the Soviet successor states* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.70.
36. 'Stanislav Govorukhin Comes Out for Chechen Independence', *Moscow News*, No.29 (28 July-3 August 1995).
37. Itar-Tass 19 April 1995, quoted in *OMRI Daily Digest*, 20 April 1995.
38. Among the examples of flirtation with *russkiy* national sentiments, Solovey pointed to Yeltsin's visit to an exhibition of Ilya Glazunov, his statement on the occasion of the reopening of the Church of Christ the Savior, and his meetings with Patriarch Aleksiy II and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In foreign policy, he pointed to several *derzhavnik* traits: the pro-Serb position on Yugoslavia, Russia's preparedness to participate in the nuclear programs of of Iran and India, the efforts to help Iraq on the embargo issue, Foreign Minister Kozyrev's refusal to sign the Partnership for Peace treaty etc. 'Judging by a number of indications, the campaign in Chechnya was to be the beginning and strongest stimulant for a deep and complex program of "nationalisation", Solovey said. Valeriy Solovey: "Natsionalisatsiya" rezhima budet prodolzhatsya', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 March 1995.
39. Yuriy Skokov: 'Vlast radi budushchego', *Trud*, 16 September 1995.
40. 'Liubaya diktatura besperspektivna: Bojarskaya, proletarskaya, presidentskaya' *Oppositsiya*, No.11 (1994).
41. Ola Tunander: 'New European Dividing Lines?', in *Norway Facing a Changing Europe*. Conference Proceedings, Norwegian Foreign Policy Studies No.79 (1992), p.55.
42. Statement reprinted in *Grazhdanin Rossii*, No.21 (November 1994).
43. 'I budet Den', *Moskovskii literator*, No.29 (August 1992).
44. Neil MacFarlane: 'Russian Conceptions of Europe', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.10, No.3 (1994), p.248.
45. 'Wenn Verteidigungsminister lüge...' *Die Zeit*, No.3 (13 January 1995).
46. 'Ya ne sobiraius podpilivat nozhku prezidentskogo stula', *Sobesednik*, Vol.41 (1992).
47. *Jamestown Broadcast Daily Monitor*, Vol.1, No.73 ( 14 August 1995)
48. See 'Velikiy serb Radovan Karadzic vyigral voinu u Ameriki', *Zavtra*, No.47 (52) (December 1994).
49. 'Slovo v zashchitu bratev', *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 June 1995.
50. 'Furazhki nosili ne tolko evrei', *Pravda-5*, 8 September 1995
51. 'Za menya progołosovala tselya Shveitsariya', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 12 July 1991.
52. 'Nashe oruzhie – vybory, i my pobedim', *Kubanskiy kurer*, 17 November 1994.