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Preface

For more than ten years by now researchers, associated with the Political Studies Department of the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (INION) of Russian Academy of Sciences have been studying various aspects of memory politics and political use of the past in Russia and some neighboring countries. During these years we have established special research center for studies of cultural memory and symbolic politics at European University at Saint-Petersburg (Alexey Miller), yearbook for research of symbolic politics (Olga Malinova), and implemented a big research project about methodological aspects of research of memory politics in Russia and Eastern Europe, funded by Russian Science Foundation (project no. 17-18-01589-II).

Among many journals which published our research, special place belongs to “Russia in Global Affairs”. Our first texts, published in this journal, date back to 2008, and we continue our collaboration till today. We are grateful to the editors of the journal for their kind permission to republish these texts in a collective volume. These texts, being put together, constitute a sort of dotted line, which reflects the changes in our methodological approaches, changes in choice of research topics, changes in our understanding of dramatic changes which happened in memory politics during the last decade. This collection allows people, who take interest in Russian memory politics, but are not fluent in Russian, to get an insight into the topic with the help of authors, who belong to the leading and internationally recognized experts in the field of Russian memory studies.

Alexey Miller

A. Miller

The Undying Echo of the Past¹

(2008)

The break-up of the Soviet Union took place amidst ranting about the slide of the last empire into history. It would seem perfectly clear some twenty years ago that the empire, as an outdated and backward form of political organization, was giving way to the nation-state. Explanations suggested that empires collapsed because of an inability to change, adjust themselves to modern requirements and withstand pressures from national liberation movements, which ostensibly embodied progress and justice.

Today, the historical role of empires is undergoing a profound revision involving both positive and derogatory assessments, and – more importantly – appreciation of their place in the historical process.

Empires as Incubators of Modern States

Let us start by saying that there is no commonly accepted definition of ‘empire’. Researchers who try to describe this phenomenon stress the heterogeneity of empires, the inequitable relations between the center and the periphery, specific structuring of the ‘empires’ territory that resembles a wheel without a rim, which

¹ Source: Miller A. The Undying Echo of the Past // Russia in Global Affairs. – 2008. – Vol. 6, N. 3. – P. 149–165.

implies a connection of all the provinces with the center and weak – if any – connections among the provinces themselves.

Extensive attention is typically paid to the correlation between direct and indirect rule over the periphery, with scholars stressing that empires more frequently employ indirect rule with a reliance on local leaders. Also, they underline the role of empires as major actors in international – or more correctly, inter-imperial – relations, and their ability to mobilize resources for involvement in such games, as these features constitute the key objective for them and the criterion of their efficiency.

The commonly used approach of regarding the Roman Empire as the model and assessing all other empires through a comparison with it and thereby revealing their deficiencies is now fading into the past. Historians are discarding the view of empire as a pre-modern form of political organization that is giving place to the nation-state.

Putting the modern state in opposition to the traditional empire has some rationale of course. The state was not conceived as a universal structure but, rather, as something separate from society. At the same time, the state – or, more precisely, a regular police state – would most typically be based on direct rule and control, unlike the empires that would operate indirect forms of rule and control. It is a common belief that the current system of taxation, monopoly over military mobilization, stable bureaucracy, gradual replacement of the elites by virtue of birth with elites by virtue of education, and the modern understanding of the rule of law – all of these things were not typical of empires and constitute the features of the modern state¹.

Paradoxically, the modern state was born out of the heart of the empire and is – in many ways – a reaction to the problems emerging in the context of imperial contentions, above all military ones. Far from all pre-modern empires coped with the task of state-building, but some of them – Britain, France and Prussia-Germany – succeeded in it and did not stop being empires because of it. This trio and their competitors seeking to catch up with them – Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Spain – each tried in its own way to tap an acceptable

¹ Mann M. *The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results* // *States in History* / Ed. by Hall S.A. – Oxford : Blackwell, 1986. – P. 113.

combination of traditional imperial mechanisms with the forms and methods of rule of the modern state.

Historians have considerably readjusted their ideas about modernization as a process repeating the stages and forms of development of leading Western nations and have shown that the paths leading to modernity could be very different. Unsuccessful modernization could mean a collapse, like the one that absorbed Rzeczpospolita (Poland) as a result of the partitions in the 18th century. The Ottoman Empire was too late to restructure itself and was already doomed in the 19th century. It outlived Rzeczpospolita for so long only due to a lucrative geopolitical situation. Practically all empires in the 19th century differed from the classical type of empires. They saw the essence of their existence in “progress” rather than in self-maintenance or self-reproduction. And they all went through a crisis of adjustment to new methods of administration and forms of political organization. This was a genuine crisis – a story with a yet unknown finale.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we are evidencing a dynamic situation in historiography. The post-colonial discourse, in which the ‘empire’ was an abusive notion, is still wielding a strong impact, including in Eastern Europe, but its one-sidedness has become quite obvious. Let us not forget, though, that the one-sided approach was in many ways a reaction on the part of the post-colonial school to the apologetics of the empires and the hiding of the dark sides of their history.

In their efforts to legitimize themselves, empires experienced as much falsity and hypocrisy as the nation-state. They, too, claimed of being the carriers of freedom and progress. They, too, positioned themselves as the guarantors of peace. As it often happens, those claims were partly true and partly not. History provides abundant grounds for defending imperialist and nationalist ideas. And transition periods, when empires or nation-states would assert themselves, would usually hit the common man the hardest.

A statement by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler that unlike the empire, the nation-state has occupied too much place in the concepts of European history since the end of the 18th century would

sound quite justified fewer than ten years ago¹. Today, however, claims about the key role of empires in history and the view of them as a complex and ambiguous phenomenon having both a deplorable and beneficial legacy, look quite respectable.

Relations between the empire and the nation-state constitute one of the paradoxes as the project of building nation-states that seek cultural and language homogeneity was born out of the empire. France, a hallmark for the nation-state, used to be the core of an empire. More than that, it had its own record of suppressing local languages and cultures within its continental hexagon in favor of the dominating language and culture of Ile-de-France². This project was formulated by Napoleon I who considered the hexagon inherited from previous monarchs as a foundation for the future pan-European empire.

Similar projects to build nation-states in the heart of an empire can be also seen in the British Isles and in Spain, although they had specific aspects. Most continental empires, too, unveil a number of similar traits, although the formation of the core inside them around which a nation could be built was a somewhat knottier task.

In the Romanov Dynasty's Russian Empire, the project of building a nation comprising the Velikoruss (Great Russians, or ethnic Russians), the Maloruss (Ukrainians), the Beloruss (Belarusians) and the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga area took shape in the 1830s through the 1860s.

The Habsburg Empire had no Austrian-nation project for a number of reasons, but the 1867 agreement to set up a Dual Monarchy gave an impulse to the intense implementation of the plan to build a Hungarian national state in the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary.

The achievements scored by empires facilitated the formation of nations. In other words, it was not the nation-states that created empires – it was the empires that created nation-states. It is not accidental that the Spanish project witnessed a deep crisis in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries – the situation arose from the loss of Spain's imperial

¹ Stoler A.L., Cooper F. *Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda // Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World.* – Berkeley ; Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1997. – P. 22.

² Weber E. *Peasants into Frenchmen : The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914.* – Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 1992.

status. The same reasons lie behind the failure of the British and the French projects in the second half of the last century. The formation of the Russian nation also went through severe crises as the result of World War I, the 1917 revolution, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Thus, one can talk about two different paradigms for the formation of nation-states. The initial Western European project was implemented in the center of empires and was not aimed at their destruction. France and Britain set up models for building modern nation-states. Construction of nations in the core of empires largely suppressed the peripheral projects of nation-building, which re-emerged with redoubled strength in the 20th century – in Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and other regions (the Brittany and Provence projects in France never “fired” again).

In Eastern Europe, the projects relying on empires saw fewer achievements at the beginning of the 20th century since the regional countries had lost World War I. Instead, peripheral national construction projects that tore apart the empire structure were implemented there. Unlike projects conceived in the imperial center, these suggested a stronger accent on ethnic motives. In many ways, they not only rejected the empires but were the fruits of imperial policies. For instance, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia got independence before the Great War through a compromise achieved among the Christian empires concerning control over the outskirts of the shrinking Ottoman Empire. As for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, they surfaced (for shorter or longer periods of time) as a result of contentions between the empires during World War I and support for peripheral nationalism in the opposite camp. These contentions washed away former restrictions on playing the trump card of nationalism in fighting with each other that the empires, which had partitioned Poland, had adhered to. Thus the empires were not only the backgrounds for or obstacles to building nations and nation-states; they actually took part in it.

The evolution of empires and assimilation of new methods of rule and control over the population had many other aspects as well. The empires transformed and stopped resembling their traditional

models. The direction of their evolution changed dramatically after World War II.

During the previous two centuries, empires sought to replace the indirect forms of rule, which the U.S. political scientist Charles Tilly has classified as their generic feature, with direct rule and control methods being the characteristic of a modern state¹. In the 20th century, indirect control over the periphery moved to the foreground again. The “people’s democracies” of Eastern Europe were not parts of the Soviet Union – they were definitely parts of the “Kremlin’s empire.”

This form of government was far from new. Michael Doyle, the author of an important theoretic work on empires, believes that Athens played the role of an imperial center in the union of Greek poleis². While the latter were formally independent, Athens could control their external and, to a certain degree, internal policies quite efficiently. The cases where ancient Athens, Communist-era Moscow, or today’s Washington have had to resort to direct military interventions for keeping their control signaled the failure of regular policies of indirect control rather than the manifestation of their might. In this sense, the Soviet Union was really an anachronism and its disintegration as an empire employing the direct rule over its periphery was quite logical.

In recent years, historians have given increasingly more attention to the notion of ‘imperial power’³. It is broader and more flexible than the notion of ‘empire,’ and embraces various instances of inequitable relations between the center and periphery regions – either formally included in the empire or retaining formal independence. Incidentally, the word ‘imperium’ initially had the meaning of sovereign power over a territory. It is quite fruitful in this light to compare the problems of Russia’s post-imperial development with countries that have a tradition of an imperial metropolitan nation and the relevant interpretations of sovereignty.

¹ Tilly Ch. How Empires End // After Empire. Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building : The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires / Ed. by Barkey K., Hagen M. von. – Boulder, CO, 1997. – P.3.

² Doyle M. Empires. – Ithaca ; N.Y., 1986.

³ Lieven D. Empire : The Russian Empire and Its Rivals. – Yale University Press, 2000.

The very fact that Russia was an empire in the past does not explain the complexities it has been going through in the course of modernization and democratization. Simultaneously, parting with the imperial past, which creates new opportunities for the solution to these tasks, does not provide a guarantee of success. Nor does Russia's imperial role fix its image of either a guilty party or a benefactor in relations with its neighbors.

The Soviet Union as an Empire

The Soviet Union ceased to exist more than a decade and a half ago, but serious attempts to revisit the experience of Soviet ethnicity have been few in number so far. Quite possibly, the distance we have covered since then is still too small, and too great a portion of the Soviet legacy still remains part of everyday life.

One of the major achievements of historiography in the analysis of the first decades of the 20th century was overcoming the hypnogenic image of the year 1917 as a pivot that ushered in a "different history". The fruitfulness of this approach was demonstrated by Peter Holquist in an article discussing the mechanisms of control over public moods by the Bolshevik regime¹. Holquist showed the irrelevance of comparing 1920 to 1913; as this comparison presupposes that the cardinal breakup of 1917 is the only landmark event lying between the two years. A rise of attention toward public moods and the swelling of the agencies set up to monitor them were not at all the specific products of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, they took place in all the participant countries of World War I immediately after its outbreak.

Holquist's approach can be applied to many other aspects of Russian history at the beginning of the 20th century, and it also enables one to see the degree to which modern tendencies of the latest imperial period were embodied in Soviet policy, albeit in different forms.

¹ Holquist P. "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work" : Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context // The Journal of Modern History. – 1997. – Vol. 69, N 3. – P. 415–450.

Paradoxically enough, foreign – and especially émigré – historiographies tend to draw no basic differences between the Romanov empire and the Soviet Union in what concerns the interpretations of imperial problems and national issue. Historians have mostly come to a consensus suggesting that World War I gave a powerful push to the ethnic factor in Central and Eastern Europe and the Bolsheviks naturally had to deal with that legacy, as well as with the results of national liberation movement activity on the outskirts of the empire during the final phase of the war and in the first years of peace.

Nor should there be any doubt that many experts, whom the Soviets invited to design their ethnic policy, had matured as professionals before the revolution of 1917. The role of these experts on ethnography was recently highlighted by Francine Hirsch in the book called “Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union”¹. Although this book contains some really valuable information, it has a conceptual weakness that vividly illustrates the current tendency to overstate the role of the Romanov legacy in Soviet policy.

In discussing the “evolutional” understanding of a nation by the “imperial ethnographers” and their political patrons, the Soviet Union’s likeness with other modernizing empires, and the absence of elements of “positive discrimination” of formally subordinate nationalities in Soviet policy of the 1920s, Hirsch argues with Terry Martin, who describes the Soviet Union as a new type of empire and underlines a radical breakup of Soviet-era ethnic policy with that of the Romanov empire.

Martin’s position looks much more convincing since he shows more than anyone else the marked difference in the Bolsheviks’ ethnic policy with the Romanov policy. In his book “The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939”², Martin traces the evolution of the Soviet government’s policy from the

¹ Hirsh F. *Empire of Nations : Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Culture and Society after Socialism)*. – Ithaca ; London : Cornell University Press, 2005.

² Martin T. *The Affirmative Action Empire : Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*. – Ithaca ; London : Cornell University Press, 2001.

early 1920s through the early 1930s, relying on a variety of sources. This decade included the rise of the Soviet Union and the period of the so-called korenizatsiya (nativization) policy [a gradual removal of the Russian language from state and public life through its replacement with native languages and through a resettlement of ethnic Russians from the newly formed national republics – Ed.].

Martin offers a scrupulous analysis of “how it was done” combined with the theoretic discussion of “what it was like.” He singles out four major ideological prerequisites that underlay the Soviet ethnic policy. By the time the Bolsheviks seized power, they had reached a consensus on the dangers of nationalism as an ideology having a huge mobilizing power, one that could form a supra-class society in a struggle for national ideas. The experience of the Civil War further convinced them that nationalism was a major competitor to their own ideology addressed to social classes.

Hence there came a simple conclusion – formulated by Georgy Pyatakov – that nationalism must be declared an enemy and resolutely fought against. Yet Lenin and Stalin proposed a completely different tactic. They surmised that if the Soviet government provides for some ethnic forms of state and public life; i.e. partly meets the requirements of nationalism, it would be able to split the supra-class unity of national movements, neutralize the attractiveness of nationalistic slogans, and thereby create better conditions for manifestations of class contentions and acceptance of the Bolshevik ideology. Importantly, this policy format highlighted the basically new, non-imperialist nature of the political entity that arose out of the ruins of the Tsarist Empire. The Bolsheviks believed – quite foresightedly – that the very label of ‘empire’ might have highly deplorable consequences for Soviet power at the beginning of the 20th century.

Furthermore, Martin analyzes the Bolsheviks’ modernization concept. They believed that nations emerge in the course of capitalist development and are transitory historical phenomena. Also, they looked at national consciousness as an inescapable phase of human society’s development, which all people must overcome as they move along the path to internationalism. A future merger of nations is possible only through the total liberation of suppressed peoples.

The Austrian-Hungarian experience and the intensity of nationalistic movements after the collapse of the Russian empire convinced the Bolsheviks that national consolidation is inevitable under socialism, too. In his attempts to prove the unavoidable Ukrainization and Belarusization of cities with a predominantly Russian population in those two Soviet republics, Stalin pointed to Hungary, where the German-speaking population dominated the cities in the 19th century, but eventually gave way to the Hungarians. On the eastern outskirts of Russia, where nationalism was much weaker, “national construction” was declared to be a part of socialist modernization and was widely seen as a positive part of the program rather than a concession.

The third prerequisite of the Bolshevik approach was the conviction that the nationalism of non-Russian peoples was a reaction to their suppression by the tsarist regime and a result of the mistrust toward ethnic Russians. Lenin insisted on the importance of differentiating between nationalism of the oppressors and nationalism of the oppressed. This presumption led to a conclusion – quite natural for the anti-colonial discourse – that the “chauvinism of the Great Russians” was far more dangerous than the nationalism of the oppressed peoples. Stalin made an adjustment to this principle, saying that the nationalism of the Georgians and some other nations also suppressed and exploited smaller peoples. He always combined his attacks against the chauvinism of the Great Russians with a mention of the dangers, albeit smaller ones, that came from smaller local nationalisms.

The fourth factor of Soviet ethnic policy was that it is closely related to foreign policy. Following Nikolai Skrypnik, a Ukrainian Bolshevik, Martin speaks of the ‘Piedmont principle’ of the Soviet ethnic policy, which manifests itself in a patronizing attitude toward people who had become separated by the western state border of the Soviet Union at that time – Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, Jews and Finns. Such a policy was meant to win over the hearts of their compatriots on the other side of the border and secure opportunities for Moscow to influence its western neighbors. Similarly, calls for rebellions among the suppressed peoples of the East were accompanied by references to the positive Soviet policy toward the nationalities of the Soviet East.

As the Soviet government set up territorial entities according to the ethnic principle, it denied the Austrian-Marxist principle of an individual cultural autonomy – and simultaneously put up obstacles against the assimilation of dispersed ethnic groups. Instead, a vertical ethnic-territorial system was built to the level of ethnic districts, rural municipalities and even collective farms. As a result, a huge pyramid of ethnic Soviets (councils) on thousands of ethnic territories emerged already in the mid-1920s.

Martin indicates that this policy did not envision a genuine federalization. Although the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the USSR were federations in form, real power was always concentrated in the center. Soviet federalism did not imply devolution, i.e. the delegating of political and economic power to federation constituents.

Another important factor of this policy was the closure of the eastern peripheral territories for agricultural colonization by ethnic Russians, which had been actively developed before 1917. In the Caucasus, Kazakhstan and Central Asia as well, ethnic Russians were in many cases forced to leave under the slogans of “decolonization.”

On the whole, Martin proposes branding Soviet ethnic policy as the “internationalist nationalism” or “affirmative action;” i.e. positive discrimination that was applied to the formerly oppressed sections of the population. In essence, the Bolsheviks took the lead in solving ethnic issues that are typical of all stages of the development of national movements. They fostered the ethnic elites where they had never existed before or where they had been too weak. They disseminated and supported in masses of people the various forms of ethnic culture and identity where the problem was high on the agenda. They helped territorialize ethnicities and created ethnic territorial entities of various levels. Finally, they solved the tasks inside those entities that would be typical of the arising or already existing nation-states; they promoted new ethnic elites and imposed new official languages. Neutrality toward ethnic issues, the hallmark of Bolshevik policies before the revolution, was rejected, as emphasis was placed on “affirmative action” up to an overt hostility even to a voluntary assimilation.

The policy of affirmative action or positive discrimination of non-Russians would inevitably mean infringements on the rights of

ethnic Russians and their readiness to make sacrifices for the interests of other ethnic groups. This showed up during the delimitation of territories; that is, the drawing of borders between the Soviet republics (of which the eastern border of Belarus is glaring evidence). It is also reflected in the denial of the right of Russians to have autonomies in the parts of other Union republics where they lived in compact communities (ethnic Russians received it in a few republics only in 1926). Nor could they have proportional representation in the agencies of power of autonomous republics. Moreover, Russian culture was castigated as that of capitalists and landlords; the imperial culture of the oppressors.

The proposal to define the Soviet Union as an “affirmative action empire” is an attempt to find a new term for denoting a specific and hitherto unknown type of political organization. This highly centralized state that sought to interfere with all spheres of life and that made use of extreme forms of violence was formally structured as a federation of sovereign nations. It came into being as a successor to the Russian Empire and seized back the bulk of the peripheral provinces of the former empire, but then it embarked on strengthening non-Russian ethnic groups and creating them in places where they had barely ever existed.

According to Martin, the notion of the “affirmative action empire” is meant to stress the novelty of Soviet ethnic policy as compared to colonialism and imperialism of the past, on the one hand, and the difference that the Soviet Union had with the empires of the New Time, including the Romanov empire.

The pan-Russian nation project, which was the pillar of Russian nationalism in the Romanov empire, was simply cast away; many of its achievements were conscientiously dismantled, and the Ukrainian and Belarusian ethnic groups got the institutional status of separate nations with their own territories.

In Russia itself, the research of Soviet ethnic policy is just making its first steps, and it appears that only one of its pages – the tragic deportations – has been studied in detail. The role of the ethnic factor in the repressions requires special scrutiny. That the factor played an important role is not in any doubt, and in some cases the Stalinist terror took the form of genocide. For instance, more than 110,000 Poles

out of a total number of 130,000 who were arrested in Leningrad in 1937 (and they were arrested just because they were Poles) were shot within several months after their incarceration. Incidentally, Polish champions of “historical policy” who insist on listing the execution of Polish officers in Katyn, Mednoye and other places in 1940 as an act of genocide – which is an extremely questionable qualification of that crime – pay far less attention to the unquestionable genocide of the Poles in 1937.

The ethnic factor played a substantial role in the history of collectivization and the famines of 1932 and 1933, which is intensively discussed these days. Historians are having a serious debate on its significance in high-rank decision-making in Moscow in those years. Unfortunately, the works of some Russian authors trying to join in the discussion are typical “paid services” and fall short of standing up to professional criticism.

Meanwhile, a scrupulous analysis and profound public recognition of the repressiveness of the Russian Empire and, in an incomparably greater measure, of the Soviet Empire, including as concerns their ethnic policies, is extremely important for Russia and for relations with its neighbors.

The Policy of the Past

Today’s mindset and the historical memory of ethnic Russians has (or had until recently) a peculiarity that makes it drastically different from the mentality and historical memory of neighboring nations, both those living in independent states and inside Russia. Hungarian philosopher Istvan Bibo wrote that Eastern Europeans have a collective existential fear of the real or imaginary death of an entire ethnos through the loss of state sovereignty, assimilation, deportation, or genocide¹.

Initially, that fear was caused by the Turks, then by the Germans, and in some cases by the Poles, and later by Russia. The perception of

¹ Bibo I. *The Distress of East European Small States // Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination* / ed. by K. Nagy. – Boulder : Social Science Monographs, 1991.

Germany as an immediate threat vanished after World War II, while apprehensions about Turkey had dispelled much earlier. This existential fear, which had been born out of hundreds of years of unpredictable and often catastrophic development, concentrated around the Soviet Union for the past half a century and shifted over to Russia after 1991.

As for the Russians, the motive of ethnic victimization was not typical of them until fairly recently. They have always had the feeling that they were victims of repressions on the part of the state machinery, which they did not consider as something ethnically alien to them. The phenomenon described by Bibo is not psychologically close to the Russians and therefore they do not understand it. Collective existential fears can hardly be named among the properties of a healthy psyche. It is not worthwhile for us to breed the mentality of a besieged fortress or the atmosphere of fear for the very existence of the Russian nation – and this is what some of our publicists have been doing so actively in recent years.

There are forces in many neighboring states that quite purposefully seek to turn history into a weapon for political struggle (in Poland these forces invented the term ‘historical policy’ to denote the tendency). They try to glue the “guilty” labels to certain countries – Russia in the first place – in international relations and to position themselves as innocent “victims” in a bid to gain certain moral advantages. They call for Russia’s repentance and reparations for real and fictitious sins and they describe Russia as an incurably vicious imperial nation and paint it in the grim colors of an institutionalized and hostile alien. The proponents of “historical policy” still eye our country as a handy instrument to shape their national identity. They also find this instrument efficient in fighting their political opponents and marginalizing some other groups of the population, especially ethnic Russian minorities wherever they exist.

We will never make agreements with those who employ “historical policies” for self-serving ends, but contrary to what many of our publicists and politicians claim, this does not mean that the recognition of our own historical sins and their public denunciation “will play into the hands of Russia’s enemies.” The thing is that a multitude of people in those countries do not have any intention to turn history into an instrument of political strife. They remember the

traumas of the past but they are ready for reconciliation. Nothing is more offensive for them in contacts with the Russians than a lack of knowledge and understanding of the dark pages of the past on the part of Russians.

The inability to discern the fears of neighbors and to understand how serious their reasons are cannot be called a virtue, especially if a nation dramatically needs a critical reassessment of its own history and relations with other nations. This explains to a large degree the crisis of understanding and trust, characteristic of the relations between today's Russia and its neighbors. Each side will have to go along its part of the road toward untangling the knot. The Russians will have to look more profoundly at the repressiveness of empires, to which they are successors in both the positive and negative sense. Our neighbors will have to realize that the Russians, too, were victimized by empires that had been built with reliance on their strength, tolerance and talent and, second, that besides traumas and tragedies the empires had other sides as well.

In Russia itself, an acute struggle is going on around the interpretation of history, and the topics heard in public discussions include the existence of ostensibly perpetual Russian properties. For instance, the long imperial tradition is described as a property of the Russian government that recurs along with despotism. Russia's history is then featured as an absolutely unique and practically irremovable chain of reincarnations of this despotic power. The country revolves along a vicious circle and the possibility of breaking it either looks impossible or inseparable from radical fighting with the state and a revolution that erases the old system from the face of the Earth. This tradition can be traced to the Bolshevik outlook on history and its version is still alive in the milieu identifying themselves as liberals. The only difference is that the Bolshevik version of history portrayed the October 1917 revolution as a rupturing of the vicious circle, while the liberal one portrays it as its continuation and expansion. On the contrary, the proponents of the empire treat the same features as a prerequisite for reverting to the "correct path." "Russia can only exist as an empire, or it cannot exist at all," or: "the Russian nation is tormented by the senselessness of its existence in the absence of an imperial mission," they claim.

Other typical motives of this debate – the binary opposition between the bad state and the good intelligentsia (or vice versa), the bad nationalists and the good central government (or vice versa) and so on – are also closely linked to it.

Another frequent issue is the willingness to “straighten out” Russian history. Maria Todorova, who mentions the traditional and continuing tendency to “normalize” history and the desire to consider it as a unique one which rejects the application of Western-European categories, makes a keen observation that the polemic has a political content, apart from the scientific one¹.

The current tendency to “normalize” Russian history deserves attention in as much as it implies dismantling of the tendentious and degenerating “uniqueness” theory. At the same time, methodologically well-conceived research that accentuates the specificity of Russian history in one way or another makes up an absolutely legitimate part of historiography regardless of whether it is authored by Russian or foreign historians.

Todorova draws a comparison between the current debates on Russian history and the recent debates on a special German path (Sonderweg). The approach that treated the country’s history as a deviation from the European model of development remained quite topical until Germany embedded itself in pan-European organizations. Now the same special features are viewed as a version of European history. The accent is made on the common traits and Germany’s historical development is thus “normalized.” The same mechanism applies to Russia – the problem of its historical uniqueness will remain topical (or rather, politically topical) until it gets a place in European and international organizations.

This is a correct and exceptionally timely observation, as we are seeing a change in the political context and the influence of the factor on the scientific discourse of Russia’s history. There is a great risk of getting mired in counterproductive discussions about the frontiers of the European model of historical development. References to the history of

¹ Todorova M. Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. – 2000. – Vol. 1, N 4. – P. 717–727.

one region or another or one nation or another as “European” or “non-European” are unscrupulously used today inside the EU itself and along its periphery when it comes to discussing whether the region or nation deserves to be a member of a united Europe. A discussion that aims to broaden our perspective on the European model of history (or actually multiple and very different models) is quite useful, yet it brings forth a new conflict between history and politics. The rise of a historical myth about the unity of Europe, which serves the European Community today, seems quite apparent.

There are other and more dangerous traps on the way to “normalizing” Russian history.

Like it was in the case of Germany, normalization can be achieved by the biased highlighting of some aspects and scripts of history and blurring out others, which means that “normalization” becomes as much a victim in the name of politics as the “uniqueness” theory. The normalization of Germany history – in the normal German discourse at least – does not imply a rejection of the recognition of the exceptionality of Nazi crimes. It regards the Nazi period as a breakdown and not as a logical result of the centuries-long German history – in contrast to what German liberals would say in the 1950s and the 1960s. In Russia, there is a tendency today to interpret the terror of the 1920s–1950s as a norm; an unavoidable byproduct of a speedy modernization in a backward agrarian country, not as a deviation. This logic eliminates the necessity for any moral assessments of the horrible events of the past.

Professional history arose in the early 19th century as part of nation-building ventures and it remains the same in many aspects today. That is why the Russian authorities, which are apparently concerned with the problems of national consolidation, give so much attention to history textbooks and, generally, to society’s historical memory. Yet a question arises: How is it actually done? There is an obvious tendency toward construing “a glorious past” – an inalienable part of any national historical narrative, no doubt. Yet the problem is whom are we trying to bring up – a soldier or a citizen? As a civil community, a nation is formed not only by the memory of glorious deeds, but also by the recognition of the mistakes and crimes of the past.

Building an awareness of Russia's tragedies of the 20th century may be fruitful and help recognize the value of individual rights and freedoms, as well as the value of the national community and of an individual's life. It remains unclear in this context whether the visit that Vladimir Putin made last year to the Bitsa testing range on the outskirts of Moscow, where thousands of innocent people were executed in the 1930s, marked the start of a tradition where the president would participate in the commemoration of the victims of Bolshevist terror or whether it was a single episode in the election campaign. State policy in the field of society's historical consciousness is still unclear.

Generally speaking, history does not provide clear answers to the problems of modern life; nor does it predestine the future development. Yet it sets before us many important questions worth thinking about. How can one learn to respect the state without falling into servility or piousness? Or how can one master social and civic activity and overcome carnivorous individualism bred by Soviet Communism and the post-Communist era of wild capitalism? Or how does one combine tolerance and activity in a country where the tolerant are often inactive and the active are intolerant? There are no simple answers to these questions, but even considering them through the prism of history could be very useful.

A. Miller

A Nation-State or a State-Nation?¹

(2008)

U.S. political scientist Alfred Stepan published an article² soon after Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution in which he analyzed the opportunities for a policy of national construction in Ukraine. Although Stepan had never studied Ukraine before the article, he is an acclaimed expert in authoritarian regimes and models of their democratization.

Stepan's analysis of the political situation in Ukraine rests on the opposition between two models. One of them is the very familiar 'nation-state.' An alternative model – the 'state-nation' – has been developed by Stepan in cooperation with his long-time co-author Juan Linz and Indian political scientist Yogendra Yadav, using materials on Belgium, India and Spain³.

The policy goal of the nation-state is to impose a powerful united identity of society as a community of members in a nation and citizens in a state. To this end, the government conducts a homogenizing assimilation policy in education, culture and language. In electoral policies, autonomy-minded parties are not considered to be coalition partners, while separatist parties are outlawed or marginalized.

¹ Source: Miller A. A Nation-State or a State-Nation? // *Russia in Global Affairs*. – 2008 – Vol. 6, N 4. – P. 127–138.

² Stepan A. Ukraine: Improbable Democratic 'Nation-State' But Possible Democratic 'State-Nation'? // *Post Soviet Affairs*. – 2005. – Vol. 21, N 4. – P. 279–308.

³ Stepan A., Linz J.J., Yadav Y. *Crafting State-Nations*. – Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 2011.