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Wojciech Materski

TSARS, SOVIETS, PUTIN

A STUDY OF RUSSIA'S POLITICS OF HISTORY



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FUNDACJA IM.
JANUSZA KURTYKI

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Foreword

Poland has long been a powerhouse of Russian/Soviet studies. Because of its historical connections (including the Russian occupation of large parts of Poland following the Partitions in the eighteenth century that lasted for more than a hundred years), Poland is in a uniquely advantageous position to study and analyze the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and today, the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, however, much of Poland's first-rate research on the subject is not known to Anglophone readers. This is due in part to the fact that many, if not most, Anglophone scholars do not bother to learn the Polish language, and in part to the widespread yet erroneous perception influenced by Russian propaganda that Polish scholarship in this field is generally "biased." Ukraine suffers from the same lack of appreciation by Western, particularly Anglophone experts. After Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian scholarship began to attract more attention from Anglophone scholars, while Polish scholarship has not. The publication in English of a book on the Russian/Soviet politics of history by the eminent Polish historian, Wojciech Materski, is both fortunate and overdue.

Among Poland's distinguished historians and political scientists of Russia and the Soviet Union, Professor Materski stands out as a giant in the field. He graduated from the University of Warsaw in 1974 and went on to achieve the highest academic degree ("habilitation," a "higher doctorate"), in 1981. In his long academic career since, spent mostly at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Materski has published dozens of books and hundreds of articles. Today, he is one of the best known specialists of Russia and the Soviet Union in Poland and has been honored by numerous awards for his distinguished contribution to the field. His work has focused on the history of the Soviet Union and Polish–Soviet relations, beginning with his first monograph *Polska a ZSRR 1923–1924. Stosunki wzajemne na tle sytuacji politycznej w Europie* (Poland and the Soviet Union 1923–1924: Mutual Relations against the Background of the Political Situation in Europe), which was confiscated by censors in 1976 and published only in 1981, and the latest *Władze RP na uchodźstwie. Cele wojenne i zarys odbudowy państwa 1939–1945* (The Polish Government in Exile: War Aims and the Outline for the Reconstruction of the State, 2023). At the same time, his work has not been narrowly limited, in fact it spans wide-ranging subjects and geographical areas ranging from Estonia, Lithuania, Belarus and Georgia to the Far East and Japan: *Bolszewicy i samuraje. Walka dyplomatyczna i zbrojna o rosyjski Daleki Wschód (1917–1925)* (Bolsheviks and Samurai: The Diplomatic and Armed Struggle for the Russian Far East, 1990). In the English language, *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (2007), which he co-edited, is probably his best

known. His 1996 book, *Kremlin versus Poland 1939–1945: Documents from the Soviet Archive*, is an English–Russian bilingual publication.

The original Polish edition of the present volume was published as *Od cara do “cara”* (From Tsar to “Tsar”) in 2017, in the wake of Russia’s occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014. The latter “Tsar” in quotation marks refers to today’s Russian autocratic ruler, President Vladimir Putin. The book traces and examines the politics of history (*Geschichtspolitik*) in Russia (the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation) over the centuries. History is such an essential part of human life that it is politicized in every country and every society. Democracies, where competing political forces vie publicly for power, confront the challenge of history being used as a political tool. Yet academic freedom and historical truth remain essential elements of democratic states. By contrast, dictatorial regimes almost unilaterally interpret and use history to suit the domestic and external political needs of the time. In such regimes, as is often said, those who control the past will control the future. The records over the several centuries examined in this book demonstrate the extraordinary lengths to which the Russian/Soviet state has gone and still goes to mold historical research and historical memory for political purposes. The only occasions when the state has allowed relatively free historical research and discussion are the reform era under Tsar Alexander II in the second half of the nineteenth century (“emancipation of history as an academic discipline”), during the “Thaw” under Nikita Khrushchev, the late Soviet period of *glasnost’* and *perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbachev, and the several years under Boris Yeltsin following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. After Putin took over in the late 1990s to the present day, the state of historical research has regressed to old and persistent patterns of abuse of history by the state. In many respects, the situation has now become even worse than during the Soviet era. For example, while the Soviet state never officially denied the separateness of the Ukrainian ethnicity and the Ukrainian language from its Russian counterparts, Putin denies this distinction and embarked decisively on destroying Ukraine in 2022, in an all-out war that continues today. Quite appropriately, Putin, a former Communist, has become the new Russian “Tsar.”

Professor Materski details in the present book the cyclical nature of a history subordinated to political expediency in Russia. He examines, among others, the myths surrounding Russia’s dynastic heritage, the spiritual supremacy of Orthodoxy (“Holy Rus”) over Catholicism or Protestantism, the myth of Moscow as the “Third Rome,” Russia’s “civilisational” missions (Russian/Soviet colonialism and imperialism in disguise), Russia’s identity as European, Slavic, Eurasian, or “Azioppean” (from “Aziopa,” *Azi*[ia] and *[Evr]opa*, or Asia and Europe, a caricature of the “Asiatic”–European nature of Russia, i.e. Aziopa sounds like *A-zhopa*, meaning “Ah, an ass”). He reaches the clear conclusion that Russia’s consistent policy has

been to present the state to both domestic and external audiences as strong and enduring in order to inculcate pride in the population and inspire awe in its “enemies,” as well as emphasizing the common “collectivist” values of Russia as spiritually superior to the perceived materialistic individualism of the West. Russia’s long-held resentment of the West permeates every aspect of Russian life, far beyond its political use of history. Putin alleges that the West fails to acknowledge Russia’s unique values and historical achievements.

Professor Materski devotes considerable attention to a topic of his particular interest: Moscow’s political manipulation of the history of the Katyn’ massacres of 1940, in which some 22,000 Polish POWs and others (military and police officers, border guards, civil servants and intellectuals) were summarily executed by Moscow. In the face of clear and overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Moscow has repeatedly sought to exculpate itself while blaming Nazi Germany instead. Although Professor Materski admits that his focused scrutiny of the Katyn’ case might be seen as a “design flaw” or his personal “politics of history,” it is neither. It is in fact an excellent case that sheds much light on the subject of the book: the politics of history in Russia and the Soviet Union.

The present book amply but subtly demonstrates the formidable erudition of Professor Materski. Its publication in English translation is to be welcomed by the Anglophone world as one of the best examples of Polish scholarship on the *longue durée* of Russian and Soviet history.

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Introduction

The selective approach to history, treating it like a sort of mythology which does not have very much in common with historical truth, has a history of its own that goes back to the earliest written records.¹ Presenting the key moments in a country's or nation's history in a way which is manipulative to a greater or lesser extent or helpful for its (re-)interpretation on a running basis is still one of the tools policymakers use to legitimize their power.² We could even go as far as to say that the purpose of this method is to legitimize the state by giving historical grounds to vindicate its right to an independent existence. A selective picture of a country's history fits national identity and social attitudes into the mold preselected by those in power, bolstering or imposing a specific set of opinions, political doctrines, and interpretations, or even a particular worldview on the people. The field of scholarship, branch of education, and element of journalistic commentary known as "history," if sifted and filtered, turns into a tool serving the interests of the state.

The state uses politics of memory to resolve controversial historical issues and monopolize the right to determine truth. A state which influences its people's view of the past by managing access to the facts and supplementing them with appropriate commentary exercises a form of political control. The less developed a country's civil society, the more effective the state control of history. A view of the past processed by compliant historians helps to provide its citizens with a convincing explanation of current problems and prepare them for things which may come in the future.³

1 "Rigging the past is the oldest form of knowledge control: if you have power over the interpretation of what went before (or can simply lie about it), the present and the future are at your disposal." Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 265.

2 "[I]f you're going to master a population, you have to master its past. . . . but in fact everyone is in thrall to whoever best manipulates," Judt and Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, 267–68; "Politicians use the image of the past like a menu in a restaurant to select whatever they fancy from it to build up a legend of the past as they want to see it," Andrzej Skrzypek, "Refleksje nad sąsiedzką historią," in *Pamięć i polityka historyczna w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich*, eds. Stanisław Bielen and Andrzej Skrzypek (Warszawa: Aspra, 2017), 11.

3 "As Mary Douglas said, nations need to control national memory, because nations keep their shape by shaping their citizens' understanding of the past. Yet in practice it is the historians who do research on the past, write the histories, and teach the nation's youth." Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, (New York; London: Norton, 1994), 11–12. https://www.google.pl/books/edition/Telling_the_Truth_about_History/O0aCcnVcbZcC?hl=pl&gbpv=1&dq=Appleby+Joyce,+Hunt+Lynn,+and+Jacob+Margaret,+Telling+the+truth+about+history&printsec=frontcover, n.p., accessed October 2, 2023.

The expression “politics of history,” which is derived from the German *Ge-schichtspolitik*, has not been precisely defined and some scholars call it an indefinable enigma.⁴ In the social sciences, it is treated as a tool used by political entities to shape the view of a country’s or nation’s past as they want it to be seen, in other words, as a manipulated view,⁵ the outcome of a set of preselected episodes from the past, combined into a relatively coherent narrative accentuating “the right” events and “the right” people, thereby imposing a specific dominant interpretation of the facts.

A government applies its politics of history primarily to gain an immediate advantage, such as winning the support of as many voters as possible, integrating a social group or political party by using an aptly composed, exclusive picture of history, thereby enhancing the country’s prestige on the international forum. A policy of this kind, at times loosely connected with the academic pursuit of history, is a salient component of a country’s identity politics and a tool for its promotion.⁶ For it to be a genuine politics of history, not just a series of ad hoc operations, it must be practiced systematically and professionally by institutions appointed to design and disseminate a coordinated message. This is why its best effects are achieved by the authorities in a totalitarian system, which find it much easier than the government of a democratic society to harmonize what is taught in the schools and conveyed by the media with its predetermined “national/state objective.”

In its colloquial sense, “the politics of history” is a concept with a negative connotation,⁷ though not so long ago it was still thought of as one of the operations the state conducts against a historical backdrop for processes which usually

4 Cf. Robert Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2006). See the special edition of *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, on the politics of memory, “Polityka historyczna – historia instrumentem bieżącej polityki,” ed. Stanisław Kilian, no. 2 (2008).

5 “Упражнения в описании «политики памяти» всё чаще граничат с рассуждениями о том, как в принципе превращать индивидуальную и коллективную память в объект манипулирования, отделяя её от потребительского «рыночного» поведения.” [The politics of memory, in other words the theory of indoctrination and social communication, shows how individual and collective memory may be processed into an object of manipulation.] Modest Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в Современной России: поиск институтов и языка. часть 1,” 1, www.iarex.ru/articles/40226.html, accessed October 2, 2023.

6 Cf. Aleksandr Semachko, “Политика памяти: как и зачем государства формируют свою историю,” www.special.theoryandpractice.ru/politics-of-memory. For academic discussions concerning the definition of “the politics of memory” within the Academia in Public Discourse Project, see Petr Rezvykh, “Историческая политика в россии и польше,” https://igiti.hse.ru/Meetings/Debaty2013_report, accessed October 2, 2023.

7 История в рабстве у политики. ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПОЛИТИКА практична до цинизма. Путем перелицовки неоднозначных страниц истории под необходимые тому или иному государству параметры она решает актуальные политические задачи как внутри страны,

started in the distant past. Such an approach must certainly have encouraged governments to indulge in manipulation, resort to stereotypes and simplifications, and present matters tendentiously yet in a way not so far removed from currently available facts. This made it possible to exclude marginal or nonconforming groups which did not fit into the preferred historical view.⁸

Gradually, people's respect for objective historical facts started to decline, in favor of formulations biased and tainted by current political attitudes. Today, we generally think of the politics of memory as an instrument those in power apply to leverage historical awareness for the purpose of winning social acceptance for their political plans. We tend to perceive it as a far-reaching interpretation and selective application of history in current affairs, the use of persuasive historical arguments geared to operations currently conducted by government. Historical facts manipulated in this manner cannot offer a trustworthy insight into the past, even when seen in a subjective light, but instead monopolize public debate to construct a forum for the endorsement of those in power and their interests.⁹

The politics of memory feeds selectively on history treated as a scholarly discipline and functions to a large extent as a manipulative technique governments apply to objective historical facts to achieve their aims, generally in matters well beyond the field of history. It is used primarily in the service of politics rather than to enhance the communicability of objective historical facts for purposes of social education. Every state endeavors to cultivate its historical traditions, celebrate landmark events in its identity, honor its heroes, teach its young to show respect for their country's national history, and unite its people in a shared sense of historical identity. However, as soon as this ordinary, everyday approach to history begins to turn into a drive to install "the right version" of history and promote "the right kind" of memory politics, that is when people start to suspect it of manipulation and replacing certain historical figures with surrogate "heroes," eclipsing certain historical events and obscuring them with others. As a rule,

так и на международном уровне. [. . .] что историческая политика – негативное явление, катастрофически влияющее на межгосударственные отношения, общественную ситуацию внутри страны и историческую науку.” [History is the slave of politics. The politics of memory means pragmatism taken to the verge of cynicism. By doctoring vague chapters of history to fit in with the parameters which favor a particular country, the politics of memory helps that country accomplish its current tasks, both at home as well as on the international scene.] This is the opinion of Aleksandr Dyukov, Director of the Historical Memory Foundation («Историческая память»), and researcher at the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, “Историческая политика или политическая память,” *Международная жизнь*, <https://interafairs.ru/jauthor/material/179>, accessed October 2, 2023.

8 Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, 13–14.

9 Ibid, 290.

whenever there is a call for a reshuffle in the values attributed to the various items in a country's politics of memory, the reason behind it is someone's political interest—perhaps the displacement of certain parties, organizations, or social groups in order to raise the rank of others; or maybe a calculated political need to kindle society's resentment against certain nations and diminish its sense of historical responsibility with respect to other nations.

On the whole, the expression “politics of memory” relates to activities pursued by governmental agencies, and that is how I want it to be understood in this book. The state has executive and financial potential at its disposal to effectively implement its agenda, and politics of memory is a useful tool in this respect. The state finances the educational programs conducted in its schools, vets and endorses the textbooks which carry “the right” version of its history, and monitors implementation. It provides a major source of funding for historical research, the commemoration of historic events, and the activities of institutions such as museums and memorial chambers, the state-owned media, place-name commissions, competitions for public monuments, persons of the year, arts reviews etc., which specialize in the presentation of history to society at large. The state promotes specific areas of research and disseminates information on them, depending on its priorities relating to current and strategic needs for its international public relations.

I have tried to highlight the domestic and foreign priorities pertaining to each of the periods in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, pinpointing the exact moment in time when and why their value systems changed, while at the same time tracing the indisputable continuity in Russian/Soviet politics of memory along with its specific contents and myths, permanently present albeit adjusted to suit the particular requirements of the times. In this context, I also record the equally enduring tendency of the Russian/Soviet authorities to impose their memory politics on the non-Russian nations they conquered, the territories they annexed, and the states in the Yalta sphere of influence. This enforced politics of memory may be observed in relations between Russia and Ukraine, for instance, where it has served to justify the annexation of Crimea or the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. It can be used to vindicate Russia's aggressive operations in the Middle East, of which Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia availed himself to legitimize the natural assistance lent by Orthodox Russia to “Syria, the cradle of Orthodox Christianity.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Quoted after “Магия мифа или власть’ факта: историческая политика против исторической науки в россии. Круглый стол” [The magic of myth or the power of fact: the politics of memory historical versus history in Russia. Round Table], 17. <https://openrussia.org/post/view/12464/>. This website was unavailable on October 2, 2023.

As I have already said, the contents conveyed by a country's politics of memory relate both to its international position and its domestic policy, whose weak points may be masked, for instance by conjuring up or enhancing a nationalistic atmosphere or by depreciating the traditions or experience of rivals. Its politics of memory may be utilized to sidestep the need to address a serious social problem, the resolution of which within a short spell of time would entail the risk of forfeiting the support of an electorate averse to making sacrifices.

The Russian politics of memory, which is the subject of this book, may be divided into distinct periods—Tsarist, Soviet, and Russian—yet they are all marked by a series of mutually shared characteristics, validating a joint presentation in a single volume. The common factors are their occurrence on the same territory; the civilization split into a European and Asian component;¹¹ their centralized, top-down model with neither formal nor informal (party) instruments for the control of the executive power implementing them; very few or no democratic institutions typical of a civil society; an elaborate system to control and discipline society; a low average level of education, especially as regards history; similar mechanisms to mythicize the past, counter and eliminate attempts to criticize the version of history the authorities serve up; and the manipulation both of Russia's complex of its lodgment on the periphery of global civilization as well as of its nationalistic megalomania.

Although these features occur throughout the Russian and Soviet politics of memory, nonetheless the main aims have changed over time depending on current priorities. Successive rulers of Russia have treated history instrumentally, as a tool to build up the people's acceptance of the myth of the dynasty in power, its leader or divinely appointed tsar, and later, in the mechanistic Engelsian approach to historical developments—of the ruling class. History could consolidate their sense of a united ethnos inhabiting a unified territory, subscribing to the same myths, cult of the same leader (tsar, dynasty, general secretary of the Party, president), or united by religion. History could fashion public opinion, shaping it just as the authorities wanted it, playing down their crimes and mistakes, creating the stereotypes they wanted to see.¹² All these potentials may be regarded as as-

11 The two components originated from two centers, the Principality of Moscow for the Mongol tradition, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for the European traditions, both of which aspired to unite the territories of Rus'. Cf. Yuri Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия: традиции самовластия сегодня* (Moscow: РГГУ, 2001) 140; Jarosław Bratkiewicz, *Tradycjonalizm, kolektywizm, despotyzm. Kontynuacyjne ujęcie ewolucji historyczno-politycznej (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Rosji)* (Warszawa: ISP. PAN, 1991), 103–107.

12 Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji w latach 1956–2005 jako element permanentnej destabilizacji Zachodu. Szkic do portretu współczesnej polityki rosyjskiej," *Studia Polityczne*, no. 20 (2007): 227.

pects of a more and more unabashed tendency to use history as a tool to accomplish short-term political or commercial goals, though I will not discuss the latter.¹³

The book's narrative structure combines a chronological order with an arrangement by subject-matter, to get its message across smoothly and systematically while at the same time letting readers browse for particular points of interest. I have decided on a non-linear presentation, as an overview in the first part of the book, and the greatest amount of detail in the chapter on contemporary, twenty-first-century Russia, generally up to 2017, the date of the Polish edition.

I have given special emphasis to the Katyn episode, one of the most notoriously falsified items in the Soviet politics of memory, and subsequently one of the sorest points for its Russian successor. You can treat this as a structural defect or alternatively as an aspect of my own, authorial politics of memory.

¹³ A good example of the commercial use of motifs from Russia's official politics of memory is offered by the brand names of Russian vodkas, named after well-known historical personalities, e.g. "Dmitry Donskoy," "Vladimir Monomach" or "Pyotr Stolypin" (Патент Российской Федерации. 70 градусов). More on this topic in Kolerov, "«Историческая политика» в современной России: поиск институтов и языка. часть 2," 2, www.iarex.ru/articles/40271.html, accessed October 2, 2023.

Chapter One

In the Tsar's Empire

The main dynastic myths of the Russian state

Just as with other countries, Russia's use of history to legitimize the power of its rulers and mythicize its origins go back to the very beginnings of Russian statehood. It would be hard to regard the phenomenon as "the politics of memory" exercised by the princes and dynasties ruling Russia, but rather as an appeal to the founding myth investing them as God's Anointed. Once this kind of image of the prince put down firm roots in the minds of his subjects, who had no prior sense of belonging to a distinct socio-cultural group, the people would be easier to unite for administrative purposes. In Russia, the concept of a nation understood in today's sense of the term did not come into widespread use until the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Often, the way the reigning dynasty mythicized its beginnings was by deriving its origins from the Roman Empire. This may be observed for a number of European states, Russia being one of them, as evidenced by *The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*. The Eastern Orthodox cleric Spiridon Savva of Tver, an erstwhile Metropolitan of Kiev later associated with the Duchy of Muscovy, who flourished at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, is regarded as the first to claim a Roman ancestry for the rulers of Rus', probably at the request of Ivan III or Basil III.¹⁵ Savva wrote that when the Emperor Augustus divided the world, he assigned the lands between the Vistula and the Neman to Prus, presumably a kinsman of his.¹⁶ Rurik, the founder of the dynasty reigning in Kiev, Vladimir, and Moscow, was his lineal descendant. The story was treated seriously enough for Ivan the Terrible to refer to it in his talks with the Jesuit Antonio Possevino, the Pope's legate who visited Moscow in the sixteenth century, to corroborate his claim to the lands between the Upper Vistula and the Neman along with the cities of Gdańsk (Danzig), Toruń (Thorn), and

¹⁴ For more on this subject, see Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: PWN, 2012).

¹⁵ For an exegesis of this myth, see Alexey Alexeev, "Спиридон рекомый, Саввы глаголемый (Заметки о сочинениях киевского митрополита Спиридона)," *Древней Русь. Вопросы медиевистики*, no. 3 (2010).

¹⁶ For more details on this genealogy, see Rufina Petrovna Dmitrieva, *Сказание о князьях владимирских* (Moscow: Академия Наук СССР Институт русской литературы Пушкинский дом, 1955).

Malbork (Marienburg).¹⁷ The myth carried a political sense, legitimizing not only the right of the House of Rurik to rule in the East, but also in the West. However, its shortcoming was that it did not entail a metaphysical, divine element, and hence the Church treated it with reserve. Perhaps this was the main reason why the story of a Roman lineage was later abandoned.

What turned out to be more important in the long term as a factor impacting on society, though not so much to reinforce the status of the dynasty but rather to bolster the state as such, was the installment of Russia as the successor to the legacy of Byzantium after its demise in 1453. Russia was raised to the rank of the Third Rome, as proclaimed in the religious and political idea attributed to Philotheus of Pskov, hegumen of the Yelizarov Monastery.¹⁸ Thereby, the center of the Christian civilization experienced a natural shift east after the fall of its predecessors, first Rome in 476 and secondly Byzantium in 1453. Moscow was the Third Rome; there would never be a fourth Rome and Moscow was to carry and cherish the true faith until the time of Christ's Second Coming.¹⁹

The marriage of Ivan III, grandfather of Ivan the Terrible, with Sophia Paleologue, niece and heiress of Constantine XI, the last emperor of Byzantium, was set up as a symbol of that eastward shift of Christendom. In 1453, when the Turks took Byzantium, capital of the Eastern Empire and cradle of Orthodox Christianity, the rulers of Rus'/Russia assumed the role of its future liberators. Convinced this was their mission and destiny, the tsars of Russia embraced *samoderzhaviye* (autocracy, literally "self-sufficing power"), connoting political self-rule and inde-

17 *Moscovia* Antonii Possevini Societatis Iesu. Antverpiae, ex Officina Christophori Plantini Architypographi Regii, 1587. Cf. the Vilnius edition by Thomas Plaza, printed by Jan Karcan, 1586. For an English translation, see *The Moscovia of Antonio Possevino, S.J.*: Translated with a Critical Introduction and Notes by Hugh F. Graham (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1977).

18 See Elena Vladimirovna Timoshina, "Теория 'третьего Рима' в сочинениях 'Филофеева цикла'," *Правоведение*, no. 4 (2005). The myth of Moscow as the Third Rome may have been copied from the fourteenth-century concept of the "new Tsargorod" (City of the Tsars), formulated earlier in Bulgaria and proclaiming that the new and last Tsargorod which would see Christ's Second Coming would not be Byzantium, but Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgarian Велико Търново).

19 For more on this subject, see Nina Vasilievna Sinitsyna, *Третий Рим: истоки и эволюция русской средневековой концепции (XV-XVI вв.)* (Moscow: Индрик, 1998); Donald Ostrowski, "Moscow the Third Rome' as Historical Ghost," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York; London: MetPublications, 2006); Włodzimierz Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium. Upadek Związku Sowieckiego i powstanie Federacji Rosyjskiej* (Kraków: Arcana, 2001), 18–22.

pendence of the khans of the Golden Horde.²⁰ First adopted by Ivan III along with the title “Sovereign of All Russia,” his concept of autocratic rule implied a claim to the inheritance of the political and military status of the Golden Horde, then a fast waning power.²¹ At first, the tsars kept the lid on their messianic pretensions relating to the role and significance of Russia, for fear of embroilment in a conflict with the Ottoman Empire. However, as time went on, other European countries caught on to the idea in an attempt to engage Russia in a crusade against the Turks. Russia was the inheritor of the legacy of Byzantium, they whispered into the tsar’s ear, so it had the duty to oust Islam from Europe, for the messianism of Orthodox Christendom and Russian messianism were one and the same.²²

The concept of Russia as the Third Rome rose to the rank of a state dogma in the reign of Peter the Great, when Russia started to be considered an “Empire,” and its ruler earned the appellation of an “Emperor.” The idea of the Third Rome spread far and wide in the nineteenth century, during the Russo-Turkish wars.²³ The belief in the special role of Russia became so firmly entrenched that in a way it even spilled over into the Soviet period, as may be seen in the swap of “center of the Christian civilization” over to “center of world Communism,” while religious messianism flipped into ideological messianism.²⁴ The belief still commands very many followers in today’s Russia.²⁵

20 With time, the principle of *samoderzhaviye* began to be interpreted in a different way. From the reign of Peter the Great, it meant absolute power, identifying the ruler’s interests with the interests of the state.

21 Cf. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 16–17.

22 Jan Kucharzewski, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu*, 2nd ed. (London: Veritas Foundation Press, 1958), 14. For an abridged version in English, see *The Origins of Modern Russia* (New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1948), xiv, 9–10. Available online at Origins Of Modern Russia: Kucharzewski Jan: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive, accessed January 8, 2024.

23 The Russo-Turkish wars of 1806–1812, 1828–1829, 1853–1856, and 1877–1878. See Wojciech Morawski and Sylwia Szawlowska, *Wojny rosyjsko-tureckie od XVII do XX wieku* (Warszawa: TRIO, 2006), 95–168.

24 Cf., for example, Hans Otto Seitschek, *Politischer Messianismus. Totalitarismuskritik und philosophische Geschichtsschreibung im Anschluß an Jacob Leib Talmon* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005); for Seitschek’s hypothesis that totalitarianism is a camouflaged form of religion, see the English and Polish translations of excerpts from this book, “Totalitarianisms as political religions in the 20th century: Historical and political reflections,” in *Pro Publico Bono – Public Administration* 2012/2, 44–67; online at 04-seitschek-44-67-web-ppb-2021-2.pdf (mtak.hu), accessed January 8, 2024 and “Mesjanizm polityczny i religia polityczna – niemieckie interpretacje uniwersalnego zjawiska,” trans. Magdalena Kurkowska, *Krytyka Polityczna* no. 4 (2006/2007): 95–107; Aleksandra J. Leinwand, *Sztuka w służbie utopii. O funkcjach politycznych i propagandowych sztuk plastycznych w Rosji Radzieckiej lat 1917–1922* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1998) 168–196.

25 See www.3rm.info, accessed November 20, 2024.

In its general sense, the concept of the Third Rome may be treated as a state doctrine used for centuries to vindicate Russia's claim to being the political and spiritual center of Christendom or the hub of civilizational progress, with the maintenance of the traditional Christian axiology. Russia addressed this doctrine chiefly to its domestic recipients. Sociological studies show that this is how some Russians still think of their country today.²⁶

The title “tsar” appeared at the same time as the claim that Russia was the Third Rome, the ultimate Christian power in the course of history. The title of “tsar” stressed the splendor invested in the ruler of Russia as the successor to the emperors of Rome and Byzantium. The first to style himself “Tsar of All Russia” was Ivan the Terrible.²⁷

A classic example of the way power and the man who wielded it were turned into a mythical figure in the early period of Russian statehood—a myth that went beyond the bounds of the Duchy of Muscovy and the lands of Rus' in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania²⁸—was the mythical image concocted by Ivan the Terrible of Alexander Nevsky, a prince separated from him by a distance of nine generations in time. The purpose of the maneuver was obvious. The unification of the Russian territories accomplished by Ivan's father Basil III under the House of Rurik, created a state encompassing all the Great Russian lands along with the Khanate of Kazan. It was integrated by its administrative structure and the Orthodox Christian religion, but still wanted a symbol of power entailing chivalrous and spiritual qualities to rally the people around its current prince, the symbol's inheritor, and his dynasty. Ivan chose Nevsky, a rather ambivalent character but one that could be turned into such a symbol because he had fallen into almost complete oblivion. So remote was his reign, and his times so obscure that the facts about him accessible to society at large could easily be modeled and augmented with fictitious events.

26 As many as 86 percent of the respondents to a Russian research project carried out in 2000 declared a belief that Russians differed from other nations on account of their special spirituality, which Europeans did not have, while 79 percent declared they believed Russia had a great destiny. Cf. Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 392. For a comprehensive overview of the study, see Boris Dubin and Lev Gudkov, “Конец 90-х годов: затухание образцов,” *Экономические и социальные перемены: мониторинг общественного мнения*, no. 1 (2001).

27 Mikhail Geller, *История Российской империи* (Moscow: МИК», 2001), 6. See Оглавление: История российской империи: Михаил Геллер (archive.org), accessed November 20, 2024. This book is available in a French and a Polish translation. The title “tsar” originated from the Old Slavic distortion of the Latin word *Caesar* meaning “emperor” and was also used in Bulgaria and Serbia.

28 That is, the lands of Polotsk, Kiev/Kyiv, Chernigov/Chernihiv, Bryansk and Smolensk.

In 1252, thanks to the magnanimity of his Tartar overlords, Alexander of the House of Rurik, Prince of Novgorod, was granted a *yarligh* (decree) permitting him to administer the Grand Principality of Vladimir. His patrons looked forward to collecting the tribute he was due to pay them but did not intend to help him fend off the Swedish threat, which he had to deal with on his own. Ivan's penmen were ordered to delve into the chronicle, fished out one of the Vladimirian–Swedish border incidents, which occurred in 1240 on the banks of the Neva, and blew it up into a grand Russian victory. In reality, it was just a minor border skirmish in which about twenty Novgorod warriors were killed. It was more of a disgrace than a feat to be proud of. About three centuries later, when the epithet “Nevsky” was conferred on Alexander in connection with this purportedly glorious exploit though actually due to the need to create a fitting dynastic myth, few people had heard anything more than a faint, generalizing echo about the real encounter. Soon, probably on instructions from the tsar, the Church gave its support to the new hero and in 1547 raised him to the glory of the Orthodox altars, canonizing a man who had assisted the Mongols on their forays to butcher Russian Christians. Alexander's numerous hagiographies remain silent about this and other facts concerning him, such as his investiture by, and under the watchful eye of Batu Khan, his kinship with the Mongol oppressors of Rus', and the armed assistance with which he attended them during their invasion of Western Europe.²⁹ The cult of Alexander Nevsky entered and became a permanent fixture of the Russian mythology, buttressing the dynasty's claim to divine appointment. The effectiveness of the “pre-politics of memory” installed by Ivan the Terrible may be assessed on the basis of the fact that the truth about Alexander's alleged magnificent victory over the Swedes did not come to light until the late twentieth century.³⁰

No other personage or event ever made such a spectacular entry later into the state or dynastic mythology by means of manipulation. Nonetheless, successive tsars resorted to history served up in a manipulative sauce to support their arguments, but they did so intermittently, on an occasional basis. I will present just two instances out of a long series of manipulations of this kind: Russia's mission to spread civilization, and the superiority of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Russia's claim to a mission of civilization derived from Moscow's elevation to the rank of the Third Rome and served to justify the successive stages in its territorial expansion in a ruthless policy of conquest and colonization by force

²⁹ For more on how Alexander Nevsky was set up as a national hero, see Aleksander Lipatow, “Historia a polityka historyczna,” *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, no. 2 (2012): 236–243.

³⁰ Mikhail Sokolsky, *Неверная память: Герои и антигерои России* (Moscow: Московский рабочий, 1990). This verification has its place in scholarship, but has been strongly rejected by Russian society as a whole. Cf. Chapter Six, 194, 207, 217, and 225.

of arms.³¹ It underlay the wars Muscovy, and thereafter Russia conducted as of the mid-sixteenth century to push the extent of territories under its control as far east as possible, hushing up the truth that Muscovy was building up a colonial empire, albeit in a different manner than other European powers, which were vying for overseas gains, while Russia was pressing into neighboring territories, which made it a Eurasian state already by the turn of the seventeenth century.³²

The subjugation of Perm Krai and thereafter Asian territories beyond the Urals started on the basis of overland privateering. Only later, after the first successes, was it acknowledged as a state operation. The Stroganov merchant family were the privateers, albeit with the tacit consent of Ivan the Terrible; they hired the services of a private army, Yermak's Cossacks, for the task. The complicated local situation, riven by deep-seated discord unsettling the Khanate of Siberia, let Yermak's contingent of just eight hundred men conquer vast expanses of land east of the Urals for the Tsar. The subjection of Siberia by force of arms followed a career of ups and downs in the course of which Yermak died (1585), but in retrospect it was hailed, especially in the nineteenth-century arts and literature, as a "mission of civilization."³³

The annexation of the Caucasus and Trans-Caucasus two centuries later took a different path. It was carried out successively over several decades by Russian imperial forces and was followed by a similar campaign in the mid-nineteenth century for the acquisition of Central Asia. The pitiless military operations ensuing after underhand diplomatic dealings were again presented as a "mission of civilization"—both to observers at home as well as in response to criticism abroad.³⁴ They were a defensive measure, allegedly, against the encroachment of these territories by mili-

31 "The main task of the dukes of Moscow was the expansion of their state. This expansion was given appearances of law and justice; it was called the unification of Russian lands. In reality this unification took place by means of force and terrible cruelties, against the will of the population." Kucharzewski, *The Origins*, 3.

32 The claim that it was a colonial expansion is questioned in contemporary Russian historiography. If it is admitted, albeit reluctantly, it does not go beyond the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that what came before was "a mission of civilization," "territorial expansion," not conquest. This claim has been adopted by some Western researchers. Cf. Mikhail Reyman, "Россия на переломе истории," in *Россия на рубеже XXI века: оглядываясь на век минувший*, ed. Yuri Polyakov and Andrey Sakharov (Moscow: Наука, 2000), 205–206.

33 The story of Yermak is an important motif in the literary work of Vasily Gnutov, Pyotr Krasnov, Pyotr Yershov, Lev Tolstoy, Anatoly Ivanov, and Vasily Zhukovsky; in the paintings by Vasily Surikov, Ivan Kovalenko and Dmitry Kovalenko. Yermak is the protagonist of Alexander Tchakovsky's opera *Ermak*.

34 All these operations were presented as "spreading civilization," even if they had the attributes of genocide, as in the conquest of the Circassian lands. Cf. Oliver Bullough, *Let Our Fame Be Great: Journeys Among the Defiant People of the Caucasus, Part One: The Circassians, 1864* (London: Penguin,

tant Islam embodied in the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, Russia was again fulfilling its vocation, this time to reinforce the southeastern flank of Christendom.³⁵

The myth of Russia's mission of civilization was intimately connected with the dogma of the Orthodox Church as the only Christian denomination true to the pristine faith. It was essentially the same as the myth of the Third Rome and started to be widely proclaimed after the fall of the Patriarchy of Constantinople, just five years before the institution of the Autocephaly of Russia, whose head, Jonah, styled himself Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia. In 1589, his successor Job took the title of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, which is still in use today. Jonah maintained that the mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church was to spread the true faith and convert schismatics, especially Roman Catholics.³⁶

Until the institution of the Patriarchy, Russia was not troubled by serious conflicts between the spiritual and temporal power characteristic of Western Europe (e.g. over investiture). Both parties needed each other. A key problem for the Church was securing state protection for its numerous monasteries scattered throughout Muscovy; while the state sought the sanction of its secular power by the Church, its only source of science at the time.

The Orthodox religion was the fundamental force shaping the Russian mentality, impacting on the people's attitude to their secular authorities. From the Orthodox viewpoint, the individual was part of the communion of the faithful and as such relinquished some of his personal freedom in favor of the community, which made him readily steerable.³⁷

This arrangement favorable both for Church and State was knocked out of balance when Ivan III introduced *samoderzhaviye*. Theological disputes started on the nature of temporal power and the rules which should govern its relations with the Church, especially as regards real estate. It took about a century for the situation to stabilize, with the tsar getting the upper hand.³⁸ In 1652, Patriarch Nikon reformed the liturgy in an attempt to bring the Russian Church closer to its Greek counterpart.

2011), 15–144; Adam Balcer, “Ludobójstwo Czerkiesów,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, supplement “Ale Historia,” May 10, 2013.

35 This issue was discussed in detail by Vasily Potto, *Кавказская война. В очерках, эпизодах, легендах и биографиях*, 4 vols. (Saint Petersburg: Тип. Е. Евдокимова, 1885–1889); Vasily Potto, *Утверждение русского владычества на Кавказе*, 4 vols. (Tbilisi: Тип. Я. И. Либермана, 1901–1908); *Боевые подвиги Кавказской армии*, comp. Boris Esadze (Tbilisi: Типография «Гутенберг», 1908).

36 For more on this subject, see Elżbieta Przybył, *Prawosławie*, 2nd ed. (Kraków: Znak, 2006).

37 Cf. Marian Broda, *Najtrudniejsze z rosyjskich wyzwań? Zagadka Leontjewa i Rosja* (Łódź: Kur-owice: Ibidem, 2007), 16.

38 Geller, *История Российской империи*, vol. I, 165–174.

The conflicts which rocked the Church in the wake of Nikon's reform, with the Old Believers splitting away as a separate sect, helped the Tsar achieve ascendancy.

Peter I's abolition of the Patriarchate in 1721 was symbolic of the Church's subservience to the all-powerful monarch, who now appointed the Most Holy Governing Synod as the supreme ecclesiastical authority. The Synod was a collegial body supervised by the tsar's plenipotentiary, usually a military officer.³⁹ The Orthodox religion was now a cog in the Tsar's power machine. The Church had been unable to put its house in order and Peter crushed its opposition to the window he opened up on Europe,⁴⁰ reducing it to a hierarchy fully controlled by the secular authority.

Despite a spell of intense contention between Church and State in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, no one in Russia questioned the dogma that Orthodoxy was the only Christian denomination which had kept the true faith.⁴¹ No one challenged its mission to spread the Christian religion.⁴² The name itself, Orthodoxy, is derived from the Greek words *orthos* and *doxa*, meaning "the true faith," worshiping in the right way. The tsars upheld and promoted the myth of Russian Orthodoxy as the only authentic Church, not just in their realm but in the whole world, thereby earning yet another argument to legitimize the pretension that their Empire was divinely instituted and appointed to mark out the path of universal progress. Russia was a universal Empire, the temporal reflection of the Kingdom of Heaven, whose mission was to rule supreme over all the nations in the world; and the tsar who stood at the head of this Empire was God's appointed Vicar.⁴³

Another fundamental myth which presented Russia as a State different from all other states, distinguished by its mystical origins and historic mission, personified Holy Russia as "the mother of all lands."⁴⁴ Created in the sixteenth century

39 It was not until 1917 that the next patriarch, Tikhon (Vasily Bellavin), was elected, by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, in a very different political reality.

40 Cf. Rafał Marcei Blüth, "Tragizm inteligencji rosyjskiej," in Rafał Marcei Blüth *„Likwidacja leninowskiej elity“ oraz inne pisma sowietologiczne 1933–1938* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Więż, 2016), 133–134.

41 In Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church has always been presented as the only, universal and apostolic Church, founded by Jesus Christ and his apostles.

42 In 1620, the Moscow Church Council officially proclaimed Roman Catholics non-Christian and thus due to be re-baptized.

43 Broda, *Najtrudniejsze z rosyjskich wyzwań*, 16.

44 A poem dated to the turn of the sixteenth century says,

Святая Русь-земля всем землям мати
На ней строят церкви апостольские
Они молятся Богу распятому
Самому Христу, Царю Небесному

Потому свято-Русь-земля всем землям мати. <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/63409.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

on the basis of the *byliny* Old Russian epic folk tales, it served as a founding myth for the Romanov dynasty instituting the State and integrating its people with the tsar at its center. Its roots go back to the slogans embroidered on the banners of Kuzma Minin and Prince Pozharsky which rallied the people to put up resistance against the Polish occupation of 1611–1612. The motto on them was “God save Holy Russia.”⁴⁵ The myth of Holy Russia embodied the harmonious union of Russia’s temporal and spiritual power, its autocratic ruler and its Orthodox religion.

Correlated with the myth of the Third Rome, the Holy Russia myth presented Russia as the only truly Christian state, in which the tsar and his people kept the faith unsullied and defended it against the corrupting influence of the West, to fulfill their task of implementing the Kingdom of God on earth. That was the role the myth of Holy Russia certainly played until the times of Peter I, when he brought Western culture into Russia, thereby dismantling the myth and disintegrating Russian society, which was confused by his sudden switch to a pro-Western policy.⁴⁶ For the best part of a century, the Holy Russia myth was not flaunted as much as before, and did not experience a comeback until Russia’s defense against Napoleon, continuing to enjoy an Indian summer until the early twentieth century.⁴⁷

The expression “Holy Russia” was first applied in Nikolay Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* as a lofty synonym for “homeland” or “native country,”⁴⁸ not in the narrow, national sense but in the wider, geographical meaning of the whole Empire. It was used in this way especially in the reigns of Nicholas I and Nicholas II. We may certainly see a parallel with the concept of Soviet Russia treated as the global center of a new socio-economic formation, Socialism/Communism (as the new orthodoxy), implementing a grand mission of its own to make the world a better place (with the Comintern as the new tsar).

The beginnings of history as a school subject

Until the sixteenth century, history (except for biblical history) was not considered a discipline worth teaching in Russian schools. Biblical history was studied in the monasteries. The syllabus in Russian schools, which were still at a low level and

45 Andrzej Andrusiewicz, *Carowie i cesarze Rosji. Szkice biograficzne* (Warszawa: Grupa Wydawnicza Bertelsmann Media Fakty, 2001), 114.

46 For more on this subject, see Marian Broda, “Zrozumieć Rosję”?: o rosyjskiej zagadce-tajemnicy (Kurowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Ibidem, 2011), 107 ff.

47 For more on this subject, see Alain Besançon, *Sainte Russie* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 2012).

48 See below, “Historiography in the service of the tsarist state.”

reserved for the elite, comprised the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) and stopped at the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).⁴⁹ History did not become a full-fledged school subject until the reforms in the mid-seventeenth century, which brought Russian education closer to the European model and separated theology from secular education. However, educators took a fairly casual approach to history and focused on the Early Russian *letopis* chronicles, which gave a blend of real political and religious developments with myths and legends. There were no methodological guidelines; neither was there an outline of the basic facts for the history of Russia, its origins and its people.

The extensive reforms introduced by Peter I included education. The idea of compulsory education appeared, but the children of peasants were excluded. The main changes concerned the curricula of science subjects and the institution of numerous vocational and military schools. History lost in importance and was overshadowed by the new subjects, science and modern languages. It was not in the twelve disciplines represented in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, which was founded in 1724.⁵⁰ On the other hand, history was a subject of study in Russia's first universities, St. Petersburg and Moscow (founded 1724 and 1755 respectively) and in the high schools attached to them, but only as a subsidiary of minor importance.

A serious approach to history only started in the reign of Catherine II, who introduced a new educational reform. The changes were based on the educational ideas put forward by Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius) and John Locke, and introduced schools of three types, minor, intermediate, and major schools. Sacred history was taught in the minor schools; world history and Russian history were taught in intermediate schools; while major schools offered history and geography. So it was not until the late eighteenth century that the way history was treated in Russian schools was comparable with its treatment in the education systems of the principal European countries.

This policy continued in the reign of Alexander I, which saw the establishment of Russia's first Ministry of National Education (1802, transformed in 1817 into the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and National Education). Under the Ministry's auspices, the system of education went through yet another major reform, in line with the recommendations of the lawyer Mikhail Speransky, personal adviser

⁴⁹ Cf. Alexey Leontiev, "История образования в России от древней Руси до конца XX века," *Русский язык*, no. 34 (2001).

⁵⁰ History was an incidental subject in a course on rhetoric and Church history (Красо́мво́ство и история Церкви): Petr Peckarsky, *История Императорской академии наук в Петербурге*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: издание Отд-ния рус. яз. и словесности Императорской акад. Наук, 1870), 6.

to the Tsar and a member of the Council of State. Speransky's model of education was part of an ambitious plan to train a well-educated, efficient bureaucracy to transform Russia into a constitutional monarchy, albeit still with a powerful tsar in full control of the Council of Ministers (government) and Senate.⁵¹

Speransky's reform introduced a four-level system of education: village schools, district schools, gubernyal (high) schools, and universities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Kharkov, and Warsaw). History was to be taught in high school, which had a four-year curriculum, alongside subjects like mathematics, geography, Latin, zoology, logic, and Russian poetry and literature, taught in a manner that was fairly modern for the times and offering schools and teachers a degree of autonomy they had never enjoyed before as regards syllabus options. However, his ideas in education considered and looked up to European models, and this aroused a growing wave of criticism, leading to his dismissal and the gradual return of a strictly centralized system, conservative in terms of curricular choices. The death of Alexander I and the Decembrist insurrection, an incompetent and abortive attempt to reform the country by bringing in a tripartite separation of powers (December 1825), hastened the relapse of education to its previous condition.

One of the first decisions made by the next tsar, Nicholas I, was to appoint a Committee for the Organization of the Schools to carry out a reform at all the levels of education, weed out "voluntarism of whatever kind" and restore a strictly defined system of education founded on the principle of "the unity of Russia, autocracy (*samoderzhaviye*), the Orthodox religion, and the nation" as the pillar supporting the tsar's absolute rule.⁵² In this model, history was gradually reduced to a set of facts on the history of industry and advances in the natural sciences: the reformers considered this sufficient for the educational needs of the tsar's subjects.⁵³

51 For more on this subject, see Władysław Studnicki, *Historia ustroju państwowego Rosji* (Lwów: Maniszewski i Kędziński, 1906), 2nd (reprint) ed. (Komorów: Wydawnictwo ANTYK Marcin Dybowski, 2013); Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia 1772–1839*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Springer, 1969).

52 Quoted after Vladimir Nazarevsky, *Царствование императора Николая I. 1825–1855* (Moscow: типография Т-ва И. Д. Сытина, 1910), 48.

53 For details concerning the "educational reform" introduced by Sergey Uvarov, Minister of National Education see Richard E. Pipes, Сергей Семенович Уваров: жизнеописание, авторизованный перевод с английского Андрея Захарова (Moscow: Посев, 2013); Vadim Parsamov, "Сергей Семенович Уваров," in Sergei Uvarov, *Избранные труды* (Moscow: Росспэн, 2010), Introduction.

Historiography in the service of the tsarist state

The first decade of the nineteenth century brought a significant change in the way history was treated in Russia. More and more often, it was perceived as a discipline of scholarship. At this time, a handful of aficionados started systematically collecting written records and publishing them, complete with the first scholarly commentary to them.⁵⁴ Usually, the phenomenon is associated with the most distinguished of them, Nikolay Karamzin, who is recognized as the pioneer of Russian historiography.⁵⁵ Karamzin was a mature writer when he developed a penchant for the history of Russia, no longer treating it as an opportunity for the composition of works of fiction but instead as a rigorous discipline of scholarship which relied on source documents and had its own, integrated workshop. He was the first in Russia to receive the title of historiographer, which was officially conferred on him by a special decree in 1803.⁵⁶ This was hardly surprising in view of the motto underlying the way he understood the history of the Empire: “Russia grows in strength thanks to its victories and monarchical rule; it is diminished by the devolution of power but saved by wise *samoderzhaviye*.”⁵⁷

The first volume of Karamzin's monumental oeuvre *The History of the Russian State* appeared in 1818,⁵⁸ financed by Alexander I and with his magnanimous grant of an exemption from the censor's scrutiny. Thanks to the Tsar's sponsorship, Karamzin was able to look into numerous hitherto unknown (inaccessible) sources from the Kremlin archives. He took full advantage of them, in the main body of the text as well as in extensive footnotes replete with excerpts quoted from those sources. Karamzin had a literary talent and combined it with a well-

54 The pioneers were Pavel Stroyev, Konstantin Kalaidovich and Evfimiy Bolkhovitinov. From 1834, their research and editorial work was coordinated by the Archeographic Commission, established at the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and National Education. For more on this subject, see Ludwik Bazyłow, *Historia nowożytniej kultury rosyjskiej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1986), 192–195.

55 However, some scholars give an earlier date for the beginnings of Russian historiography, even the second half of the seventeenth century; cf. Grigory Kotoshikhin, *О России в царствование Алексея Михайловича* (St. Petersburg: Издание археографической комиссии, 1884) and Fyodor Griboyedov, *История о царях и великих князьях Земли Русской* (St. Petersburg: Ово любителей древ п письменности, 1896). Cf. Ludwik Bazyłow, *Historia Rosji*, vol. I (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985), 35.

56 <http://www.portal-slovo.ru/history/35463.php>, unavailable on November 20, 2024.

57 Quoted after *Магия мифа или власть факта: историческая политика против исторической науки в россии. Круглый стол*, <https://openrussia/org/post/view/12464>, 15. This website was unavailable on January 8, 2024.

58 Eleven volumes had been published by 1824, the twelfth came out posthumously in 1829. Karamzin did not complete his work.

disciplined workshop as a historian, addressing his readers from a nationalist, conservative point of view. He left a strong impression on their imagination, made them proud to be Russian, and showed them their national history as a sequence of grand achievements motivated on moral grounds.

His work glorified the distant past of Rus' far beyond measure, yet at the same time depicted its gradual transformation into the Russian Empire as a continuous process for the advancement of civilization, and the series of brutal, bloodthirsty conquests as a grand, epoch-making mission. Despite its well-nigh ostentatious subjectivity, the enterprise kept to a formula qualifying it to be considered the first full account of the history of Russia and a work of scholarship.

Karamzin's *History* aroused a great deal of interest, far beyond what he could have expected. By 1844 it had gone through five editions, and had been translated into Polish.⁵⁹ The Tsar had made an excellent investment in what today we would call public relations. Apart from presenting the flow of events, it gave a highly consistent and persuasive argument for *samoderzhaviye* as the specifically Russian form of government strictly connected with the Russian Orthodox Church as the cornerstone endowing the monarch with his "special power." It presented *samoderzhaviye* as a "wise political system, . . . a great achievement accomplished by the Princes of Muscovy, combining the best features of the political system of Kievan Rus' with that of the Golden Horde and its Tartar and Mongol tradition, set up on the political ideals of Byzantium."⁶⁰

The success of Karamzin's *History* made the Tsar and his ministers realize how much could be done to enhance their position in society by other means than just police methods, making use of the people's interest in their history and having it interpreted in the right way. This generated the idea which with time would grow into a routine way of manipulating history for specific purposes.

Thus, in the reign of Nicholas I, Russia's domestic and foreign policy became more and more firmly buttressed by an ideology grounded on an appropriately processed version of the past – a version based on the Tsar's favorite formula, anti-European and anti-intellectual.⁶¹ This was no doubt an outcome of conclu-

59 Karamzin, *Historia państwa rosyjskiego*, Polish translation by Grzegorz Buczyński, vols. 1–12 (Warszawa: Zawadzki i Węcki, 1824–1830). This translation might have been inspired by the authorities, as the work was written from a decidedly anti-Polish stance. In a conversation with Alexander I, Karamzin tried to persuade the Tsar there was a need to permanently erase Poland from the map of Europe, cf. Ivan Galaktionov, *Император Александр I и его царствование*, Part II (St. Petersburg: Типография Л. В. Фомина, 1879), 151–152.

60 <http://www.portal-slovo.ru/history/35463.php>, accessed November 20, 2024; Nikolay Karamzin, *Записка о древней и новой России* (Moscow: Наука, 1991), 22. Karamzin was of Tatar descent and came from the Kazan Governorate; his family's surname was Kara-mirza.

61 Blüth, "Likwidacja leninowskiej elity," 135

sions drawn from Karamzin's amazing success, a reaction to new trends emerging in the West and inspired by the rise of the nation-state, accompanied by a new attitude to the legitimization of power, the long- and short-term duties of the State, and relations between ruler and ruled. The Tsar and his advisors realized that if they wanted to combat liberals and revolutionaries alike, they needed to put the right educational matter into the school curricula and control the universities training schoolteachers.

From that time on, history was taught strictly in tandem with religious instruction on the basis of Nikolay Ustryalov's textbook, which had been coming out in various editions since 1837 and was as loyal to the monarch as Karamzin's *History*.

The ideological aspects had strong links with axiology, but were also supported by a line of reasoning based on historical premises. The arguments applied were not so much a systematic presentation of the historical facts made publicly accessible, but more of a schema of selected events interpreted in a fairly haphazard manner intended to prove that the way Russia was governed was superior to Western "novelties" and persuade recipients about Russia's mission to civilize the world.⁶² Such a generalization of historical experience was to lead its recipients in a strictly defined direction and offer them indisputable proof of the exceptionality of the Russian State.

62 "Néanmoins dans les pays despotiques tous les divertissements du peuple me paraissent suspects quand ils concourent à ceux du prince; la crainte et la flatterie des petits, l'orgueil et l'hypocrite générosité des grands, sont les seuls sentiments que je crois réels entre les hommes qui vivent sous le régime de l'autocratie . . . Des préoccupations semblables possèdent encore les esprits russes; chacun masque le mal et figure le bien aux yeux du maître. C'est une permanente conjuration des sourires conspirant contre la vérité . . ." [Nevertheless, to me all the entertainments of the people in despotic countries seem suspect whenever they concur with those of the prince: the fear and the flattery of the small ones, the pride and the hypocritical generosity of the big ones—those are the only sentiments I find genuine in people who live under an autocratic regime . . . The profession of misleading foreigners is one known only in Russia . . . everyone disguises what is bad and shows what is good before the master's eyes. It is a continual conspiracy of smiles plotting against truth . . .] Astolphe, Marquis de Custine, *Lettres de Russie – La Russie en 1839* (Paris: Libraire d'Amiot, 1843), 371. Online at La Russie en 1839 par le marquis De Custine: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive, accessed January 8, 2024. An English translation of the Marquis was published soon after its first French edition and is still being reissued, e.g. as *Empire of the Czar: A Journey through Eternal Russia By the Marquis de Custine*. Foreword by Daniel J. Boorstin, Introduction by George F. Kennan (New York: Doubleday, 1989); also as *The Empire of the Czar; or, Observations on the Social, Political, and Religious State and Prospects of Russia, Made During a Journey Through That Empire*. 3 volumes (First edition London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843; latest edition Legare Street Press, 2022).

As General Aleksandr von Benckendorff, head of Department Three in the Tsar's Private Office (state security and military police), with a reputation for his primitive candor, said in a conversation with Retired General Mikhail Orlov, ex-Decembrist and advocate of liberalism, "Russia's past was splendid; its present-day is more than splendid; and as regards its future, it will surpass everything even the boldest imagination may imagine; that, my dear fellow, is the vantage-point from which one should view and describe the history of Russia."⁶³ Need I say more?

Slavophilia and Pan-Slavism

In the reign of Nicholas I, the ideological discussion conducted in Russia against a backdrop of history went further than just to find ways to prove the superiority of the Russian system of government. More and more attention was being given in it to the nation, an important concept in the European thought of the time, which some thinkers tried to turn into a doctrine to explain the purportedly natural differences dividing the human race into separate nations. The significance of the German socio-political ideas, hitherto predominant in the Russian intellectual elite, was beginning to wane, giving way to native-born concepts and political trends presented as evidence that Russia could produce minds at least as intellectually advanced as their Western counterparts. The germ of an indigenous philosophy was about to bring forth its shoots and seek an answer to the question of Russia's history, current situation, and future prospects. The authorities tolerated these discussions because at first they did not make much headway in society; nonetheless, they carried a more and more patent assertion that there was something unique about Russia. Its separate growth had been historically conditioned, making its development not at all like the picture generally observed in the development of other countries. This idea would be the linchpin of Russian intellectual life in the decades to come.

Pan-Slavism, a similar idea, was adopted from the Czech political thought.⁶⁴ The initial version proposed by the Czech Pan-Slavists postulated the liberation and unification of all the Slavic nations on the basis of linguistic, cultural, and

⁶³ "Le passé de la Russie a été admirable; son présent est plus que magnifique; quant à son avenir il est au delà de tout ce que l'imagination la plus hardie se peut figurer; voilà, mon cher, le point de vue sous lequel l'histoire russe doit être connue et écrite." After Mikhail Zhikharev, *Докладная записка потомству о Петре Яковлевиче Чаадаеве* (Moscow: МГУ, 1988), 105. Count Benckendorff was a trusted man of Tsar Nicholas I, chief of political surveillance throughout the Empire, and as of 1825 supervisor of the education system and teaching curricula.

⁶⁴ The origins of Pan-Slavism are associated with the journalism of the Czech National Revival activist Prof. Ján Kollár, a Slovak who held the Chair of Slavic Archeology at the University of Vienna.

religious affinity, later to include economic and political similarity. The idea soon caught on with Russian politicians, who claimed that it could only be put into practice under Russia's patronage and on a foundation of the Russian language and culture. From the very outset, the Russian promoters of Pan-Slavism stressed its historical aspect, which went back into the distant past of the Slavic community and its age-old cultural and religious opposition to the West. They disseminated the legend of the Three Slavic Brothers, (Lech, Czech, and Rus in the Polish version, or Kyi, Shchek, and Khoryv in its presumably earlier East Slavic variant) as the mythical origin of the Slavic peoples.⁶⁵

The early twelfth-century *Primary Chronicle* (*Nestor's Chronicle*) says that Kyi and his brothers Shchek and Khoryv founded the city of Kyiv.⁶⁶ Later, to avoid paying a tribute to the Khazar Khaganate, he moved to Byzantium, probably in the reign of Justinian I.⁶⁷ Next, he left for the Danube Valley, where he founded the city of Kyivets, but for some reason later returned to Kyiv. The legend endowed Kyi, founder and defender of the first Slavic principalities, with the right attributes to make him the primogenitor of all the modern Slavic countries and peoples.

Pan-Slavism had an indigenously Russian twin, the Slavophile movement regarded as the Russian counterpart of Romanticism which emerged in the late 1830s and had already spread quite considerably in the Empire.⁶⁸ The Slavophiles claimed that European civilization was divided by an east-west rift into a Greek-Slavic and a Western, Latinate–Germanic part. The former had preserved the pristine, Orthodox Christian faith and was pursuing the true philosophy (or science) established by the ecumenical councils; while the latter had left the Univer-

65 The legend of Kyi, Shchek, and Khoryv (Lech, Czech, and Rus) is a paraphrase of a sixth-century Armenian legend of three brothers, Kuar, Mentery, and Kherean, which probably comes from Indian mythology. In the Polish sources, the legend was first recorded in the thirteenth-century *Kronika Wielkopolska* (Chronicle of Greater Poland), cf. *Kronika Wielkopolska*, Translated by Kazimierz Abgarowicz. Introduction and commentary by Brygida Kürbis (Kraków: Universitas, 2022). Cf. <http://www.poselska.nazwa.pl/wieczorna2/historia-starozytna/kij-szczek-i-chorw-czy-lech-czech-i-rus-indyjskie-korzenie-sagi-o-lechu>, accessed November 20, 2024. One of the popular jokes in Poland under post-Yalta Soviet domination said there were *four* brothers, Lech, Czech, Rus, and Enerdus, the last one's name derived from the abbreviation NRD (pronounced "En-Er-Deh," the Polish term for the German Democratic Republic).

66 Several English translations of *Nestor's Chronicle* are available, recently in an online bilingual (Russian-English) version edited by Donald Ostrowski et al., *Povest' vremennykh let: An Interlinear Collation and Paradosis. 3 volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2003), <http://hudce7.harvard.edu/~ostrowski/pv1/>, accessed January 9, 2024.

67 Justinian I (Justinian the Great), Eastern Roman emperor (527–565), and a saint venerated in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

68 Broda, "Zrozumieć Rosję," 115.

sal Church, corrupted by the political ambitions of its clergy, especially the papacy, and followed an idolatrous path, worshiping uninspired human reason, forsaking the true, life-giving faith. Peter I had attempted to graft the Western model of the state in Russia, disturbing the country's harmony and innate traditions. Having set such a diagnosis, the Slavophiles postulated a need to return to the original, characteristic features of the Russian civilization and harmonious relations uniting *samoderzhaviye* autocracy, the Orthodox religion, and the people.

In its initial period, when the movement had just started and was crystallizing out ideologically, the term "Slavophilia" did not yet mean "Russophilia" – that would come later. It contrasted the "purely Slavic" part of Russia (not in the racial, but spiritual sense), with Russia's other component, which strove uncritically to emulate and vie with the West. The Slavophiles alluded to the concept of the Third Rome and proclaimed a belief that Russia had a historic mission to accomplish, that there would be no more wars, and all the adherents of the Orthodox religion would make up a community of free people living in truth. They idealized the life and customs of ancient Rus' and thought that a return to the past would be possible despite all the profound changes which had occurred in the world. Yet at the same time, they opted for the *samoderzhaviye* brand of autocracy, the time-honored traditional form of government in Russia. The movement's ideologists, primarily Aleksey Khomyakov and Ivan Kireyevsky, held that only Russians who were Orthodox Christians had the right qualifications to establish model communities governed on the principle of *sobornost'* (collectivity).⁶⁹

Nicholas I gave his support to the Slavophile concepts, which were deeply rooted in history, despite the patent clash between the movement's slogans of freedom and its unreserved approval of *samoderzhaviye*. By the end of his reign, Slavophile ideas were even beginning to be treated as the official ideology of the State.⁷⁰ However, soon after the accession of his son Alexander II, the Empire's short-term policy relating to Russia's conflict with Turkey as well as its strategic aims effected a switchover, and Slavophile thought moved closer to its kindred Pan-Slavism, expanding the historically based nationalist and imperial aspects latent in its semantics.

⁶⁹ See Aleksey Khomyakov, *Избранные статьи и письма* (Moscow: Городец, 2004); Ivan Kireyevsky, *О характере просвещения Европы и о его отношении к просвещению России* (Moscow: Тип. Александра Семена, 1852, available online at <https://www.prlib.ru/item/432972>, accessed December 4, 2024; and its reprint, St. Petersburg: Общество Памяти Игумены Таисии, 2006). Cf. Broda, *Najtrudniejsze z rosyjskich wyzwań*, 23–24.

⁷⁰ Włodzimierz Osadczy, *Święta Ruś. Rozwój i oddziaływanie idei prawosławia w Galicji* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej etc., 2007), 12–14.

Once planted in the Russian substrate, Pan-Slavism drew on the Legend of the Three Brothers not only for its mythical vindication but also for its agenda of a future united community of all the Slavic peoples. Its political aim was to create a pro-Russian tendency in the West Slavic nations, getting them to view Russia as their defender against Turkey, their traditional enemy, and against Austria, which was disrupting the unity of the Slavs. Just as in the Slavophile concept, Pan-Slavism presented Russia as the natural successor to Rus', with the best qualifications to put the idea of a return to Slavic unity into effect and create a specific kind of federation operating on the grounds of the Russian language and culture. Pan-Slavism understood in this way, primarily as a political doctrine, did not gain much significance until the late 1850s, in the wake of the Crimean War, especially after Russian troops occupied Bulgaria in 1878, when the prospect of ridding the Balkans of the Turks, along with the potential foundation of a joint state for all the Slavic peoples with its capital in a new Russian Constantinople became more of a reality.⁷¹

The politics of memory pursued by the Tsar and his ministers, which invoked historical arguments drawn from mythical times to promote the idea of Slavic unity under the patronage of Russia, came up against a stumbling block in the Polish Question: the proposition of a federation of free Slavic peoples focused on Russia could not be reconciled with the brutal reality and ruthless enthrallment of the Poles in the Russian zone of partitioned Poland. The Tsar's administration tried to sidestep this discrepancy by saying that Poland had been disloyal to Slavdom by receiving Christianity from Rome, not Byzantium. So it was a renegade state which had corrupted its Slavic nature by imbuing the deadly Latinism. The Slavic Judas had been justly punished by having his country dismembered: only a return to the true, Orthodox religion could restore the Polish nation to its rightful Slavic nature.⁷²

Nonetheless, the Russian authorities conducted an intensive propaganda campaign even on the Polish territories under the Tsar's rule. Their efforts reached a climax in 1912–1913, during the celebrations to mark the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty. Combined with anti-German slogans, it proved fairly effective, considering the loyalist attitude the Tsar's Polish subjects took after the outbreak of the First World War. Not surprisingly, the First Polish Cadre Company which marched north from the Austrian zone of Poland on a drive for independence was cold-shouldered by Poles in the Russian Partition, and Piłsudski's

71 Piotr Eberhardt, "Rosyjski panslawizm jako idea geopolityczna," *Przegląd Geopolityczny*, Vol. 7 (2014): 61–84; Kucharzewski, *Origins of Modern Russia*, online 140, 207.

72 Kucharzewski, *Origins of Modern Russia*, online 248

Legions even met with outright hostility when they fought on the German and Austrian side in the Battle of Łódź in November and December 1914.⁷³

Slavophile ideas came up against strong opposition in Russia as well, earning steadfast adversaries in the intellectual and political milieu. For many of Russia's intellectuals, the Slavophile belief in the mission Orthodoxy was to carry out, the profound virtues of the Russian people, the attitude of unrelenting defiance of Catholicism and the new socio-political trends coming from Western Europe was a serious cause for concern. The intelligentsia feared that this line of thinking (and action) would prevent the country from making progress, advancing in terms of civilization, and blocking its chances for democratization. This movement, known as *zapadichestvo* (Occidentalism or Westernism), was for a limit to *samoderzhaviye*, an expanded range of citizens' rights, a broad program of reform in a European spirit, universal education, and industrialization. With time, the movement split up into several branches, giving rise to the Russian party system.

By the close of the nineteenth century, a critical review of the concept of a united community of Slavic nations strictly dependent on Russia generated a new movement, Neo-Slavism, which proclaimed cooperation among the Slavic nations based on democratic principles with no predominant Big Brother. The Russian authorities took a neutral position on this development and even consented (but did not give their support) to a second Neo-Slavist Congress, which was held in St. Petersburg in 1908. With no patron to protect it, the Neo-Slavist movement soon started to dwindle. However, a Russian form of Neo-Slavism, heavily adulterated by nationalism, managed to continue operations in Russia.⁷⁴

History emancipates itself as a subject for scholarship

The broad spectrum of reforms introduced in the reign of Alexander II within the framework of *perestroika*⁷⁵ included education. History in the broad sense of the term returned to the middle schools, high schools, and universities. In his prede-

⁷³ For an extensive discussion of this issue, see Mieczysław Hertz, *Łódź w czasie wielkiej wojny* (Łódź: skł. gł. Księg. S. Seipelt, 1933); Eugenjusz Ajnenkiel, *Pierwsze oddziały Legionów Polskich w Łodzi 12–29 października 1914* (Łódź: Nakładem Księgarni S. Seipelt, 1934).

⁷⁴ Cf. Antoni Giza, "Walka o ideowo-polityczne oblicze rosyjskiego neoslawizmu w latach 1906–1910," *Slavia Orientalis*, no. 3 (1983).

⁷⁵ A century later, Mikhail Gorbachev adopted the concepts of *perestroika* and *glasnost'*, the second important component of Alexander II's reforms, for his broad program of reform. Nonetheless, these new terms did not change the foundations of the system. Cf. Geller, *История Российской империи*, vol. II, 81–83.

cessor's reign, it had been reduced merely to the teaching of facts pertaining to science and industry. In 1863, on the grounds of a new provision, institutions of higher education were granted a substantial amount of autonomy, including the right to issue scientific and scholarly publications and textbooks, institute learned societies and committees, and students were allowed to make decisions regarding academic problems, including ones in the field of history, on their own.

The different attitudes which emerged in response to the Tsar's attempt to modernize the Empire triggered discussion in all the social groups taking an active part in public life. Some criticized the reforms for stopping halfway⁷⁶ and called for revolution to abolish *samoderzhaviye*; others cautioned against a repetition of the errors Europe had committed and for the prevention of an "all-powerful Mammon" to seize control of God's people of Russia, who did not need to be reformed. A new social group, the intelligentsia or *hommes nouveaux* which was to become characteristic of Russia, emerged in the heat of these debates. It grew out of the ranks of the *raznochintsi*, persons who made an active contribution to public affairs, came from a variety of social classes such as the impoverished nobility, the townsfolk, clergy, or lower-rank administrative staff, and were university- or college-educated. Their appearance gave rise to a process of "going forth into the people," the foundation of political parties and revolutionary movements such as Land and Will or The Will of the People, and included the rise of anarchism and revolutionary terrorism. They were not stopped by the accession of a new monarch, Alexander III, and the reversal of his father's reform program. The new Tsar reinstated absolute rule and put the entire country under full control, which had lapsed due to his father's reforms.

Alexander III's withdrawal of the reform agenda meant a new policy on schools and caused another retrogression in education. Its main line was to "reinforce the faith and morality of the Orthodox people and teach them elementary, practical facts."⁷⁷ The rationality of such an approach to education was to be supported by an appropriate selection of historical arguments protected by the censorship office from confrontation with a fuller knowledge of the country's history.⁷⁸ The writer and thinker Alexander Herzen commented ironically,

76 Alexander II's *perestroika* could aptly be described as a "resistant and selective" modernization. See Jarosław Bratkiewicz, "Zasada kontynuacji i prognozowanie. Teoriodziejowy wymiar podejścia kulturalistycznego (przypadek Rosji)," in *W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu transformacji*, ed. Jadwiga Staniszkis (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1994), 70.

77 Quoted after Pavel Milyukov, *Очерки по истории русской культуры. В 3-х частях*, vol. II, 815; Geller, *История Российской империи*, vol. II, 160.

78 Valentina Tvardovskaya, "Александр III," in Aleksandr Bokhanov et al., *Российские самодержцы. 1801–1917*, (Moscow: Международные отношения, 1993), 280–282.

“The Russian authorities are performing a sort of backward prognosis to embellish the past, but they cannot embellish the present.”⁷⁹

Meanwhile, it was becoming more and more difficult to keep the intelligentsia cut off from access to a broader spectrum of objective information on Russia’s real history. The rise of scholarly work on Russian history which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the reign of Alexander II, along with the autonomy he granted the universities and colleges, made this new social class even less susceptible to the manipulation of history. A large group of historians known as the *Gosudarstvennaya Shkola* (State-Minded School) appeared, intent on creating a set of theoretical principles for the study of history. They modeled their approach to the history of Russia on Hegel’s philosophy of history. Their positivist concept of the growth of Russian statehood, highlighting the development of its institutions and laws, crystallized out in the work of scholars like Konstantin Kavelin, Vasily Sergeevich, Boris Chicherin, and Sergey Solovyov. For them, it was neither the tsar nor the dynasty but the State that was the chief agency and exponent of the process of history, while the Russian nation, which the Slavophiles had monumentalized, was merely a member of the family of European nations.

Kavelin took the concept furthest in a series of papers intended to construct a Russian theory of history. His work described Russian history as a logical sequence (or “vital unity”) of events based on coherent and mutually conditioned rules governing a country’s domestic development.⁸⁰ This perspective gave the reader a view of a logical sequence entailing the gradual decline of patriarchal and tribal relations and a corresponding rise of statehood, ensuing at a rate inversely proportional to the demise of the patriarchal system. The outstanding personalities who emerged in the course of events could either accelerate or retard the process, but neither stop nor reverse it, nor prevent the deeper and deeper penetration of the idea of statehood into the lives of the people or nation. For the state was the critical factor determining the historical processes ensuing on the Russian territories. Thus, the general rule was the emergence and gradual growth of the Russian State; yet the fact that the State became so powerful and its territory so vast testified to the extraordinary spiritual vitality of the Russians inhabiting it, superior in this respect to other Slavic nations. Kavelin and other leading

⁷⁹ Quoted after *Магия мифа или власть факта: историческая политика против исторической науки в России. Круглый стол*, <https://openrussia.org/post/view/12464>, 6, accessed December 4, 2024.

⁸⁰ In particular, see Konstantin Kavelin, *Взгляд на юридический быт Древней России* (Moscow: Издательский Дом «Экономическая газета», 2010); Konstantin Kavelin, *Наш умственный строй. Статьи по философии русской истории и культуры* (Moscow: Правда, 1989); two texts, “Критический взгляд на русскую историю” and “Мысли и заметки о русской истории.”

members of the State-Minded School such as Sergey Solovyov and Nikolay Kostomarov envisaged the future Russia as a civil society drawing on its own experience and the achievements of European civilization, full of concern for the development of its laws and institutions and offering its citizens the opportunity of unhampered, comprehensive advancement. These claims were not easy to take for the regime which cherished its autocratic principle of *samoderzhaviye*.

Challenged by the contention going on between the Slavophiles and the Occidentalists, Kavelin and other members of the State-Minded School opted for a precarious compromise and suggested that “every rational person who had the interest of his Country at heart should feel half Slavophile and half Occidentalist.”⁸¹ But his proposal did not resonate with society at large.

The State-Minded historians could certainly not expect their public declaration that they were in favor of a controlled kind of Europeanization of Russia to meet with approval from the Pan-Slavists, and in the reign of Alexander III the idea ran counter to his own and his government's politics of memory. The Hegelian approach to history as a process enlarging freedom, as well as the more and more popular Marxian theory of the automatic sequence of socio-economic formations, struck at the very foundations of autocratic *samoderzhaviye*. The authorities endeavored to combat such notions with their tried and tested method—in the schools and by holding special events and State-controlled ceremonies to assert that Russia had a unique history and was tasked with a mission to civilize the world, and that any attempt that mindlessly sought to bring in European reforms was dangerous. They tried to turn people's attention away from the postulate of reform and evoked a nationalistic atmosphere which prompted anti-Polish sentiment and resulted in anti-Semitic pogroms.

However, the controversies over the interpretation of Russian history faded into the background in comparison with the escalating wave of terrorism, the most spectacular instances of which were the assassination of Alexander II and three failed attempts to assassinate Alexander III.

The politics of memory on the eve of the Great War

The Russian political party system emerged and started to grow in the late nineteenth century but conditions for its development definitely improved after 1894, following the unexpected death of Alexander III and the accession of his son Nich-

⁸¹ Quoted after “Государственная школа,” в русской историографии, <http://studopedia.org/3-107012.html>, <http://studopedia.org/3-107012.html>, accessed December 4, 2024.

olas II. Political affairs livened up and became brisker not only in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Smaller places like Nizhny Novgorod, Ivano-Voznesensk, or Kazan, also turned into political centers, chiefly for the activities of the Social Democrats, who founded their party in 1898, or the Narodniks, viz. Socialist Revolutionaries, whose party was founded in 1901. Characteristically, even the most radical political groups put a lot of stress on the specific nature of Russia and its civilizing mission. This was no doubt due to their appreciation of the mindset of potential adherents and knowledge of the kind of arguments their listeners would find convincing.⁸²

The changes in Russia's anachronistic system of government—its Europeanization, liberalization, or democratization, not to mention reform by revolution—postulated by diverse political groups and parties in their manifestos, were dismissed *en bloc* by the new Tsar. Nicholas was fully convinced that Holy Russia could be ruled by no other system of government but absolutism, which had been proved over all the centuries of *samoderzhaviye*. Shortly after his coronation, he made the following public statement, "Let every person know that I shall commit myself fully to work for the good of the nation and observe the principles of monarchic rule as firmly and as resolutely as my late, unforgettably cherished father maintained them."⁸³

Few and far between are the passages clarifying the historical background to Nicholas' enunciations and activities in the selection of his memoirs which came out in several language versions.⁸⁴ On the whole, they may be summed up as a banal calendar of events registered on a highly ad hoc basis. So it would be an overstatement to say that Russia's last tsar had any sort of an idea of his own regarding the politics of memory; he was a man of too mediocre a mentality for that. Nonetheless, his conservatism, aversion to changes of any kind in the Russian absolutist system, and his belief that history had proved there was no alternative were all self-evident. However, under the pressure of events, the weak-willed Nicholas kept retracting for fear of being faced with an outright confrontation. The country was being liberalized almost against the will of its ruler.

82 "There exists an affinity between the Orthodox Moscow Slavophilism and the Russian revolutionary messianism. The rotten West of the Slavophiles corresponds to the bourgeoisie of the revolutionaries," Kucharzewski, *Origins of Modern Russia*, online 154.

83 Quoted after Ludwik Bazylow, *Dzieje Rosji 1801–1917* (Warszawa: PWN, 1970), 443.

84 Cf. *Дневники императора Николая II*, vol. I–II, ed. Sergey Mironenko (Moscow: Росспэн, 2011–2013); *The Diary of Nicholas II, 1917–1918: An Annotated Translation* by Kent de Mers Price (Montana: University of Montana, 1966). Polish versions are available, too: *Pamiętnik Mikołaja II od roku 1890 do 31 grudnia 1917 z przedmową Sergjusza Melgunowa*, comp. Leon Kozłowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1924); *Pamiętnik Mikołaja II*, vol. I–II, comp. Janusz Kutta (Bydgoszcz: Somix, 1990).

The growth of the Russian system of political parties entered its most advanced stage during the turbulent events of 1905, which also saw the foundation of liberal parties such as the Constitutional Democrats (aka Kadets) and the Union of October 17 (Octobrists). The mass demonstrations, retrospectively described as “the first Russian revolution,” forced the Tsar to make an important liberalizing concession: in his manifesto of October 1905, Nicholas founded a new, quasi-parliamentary institution known as the State Duma,⁸⁵ even though shortly before he had asserted that never, and under no circumstances, would he consent to rule by parliament.⁸⁶ The politics of memory conducted by the Tsar's administration, focused chiefly on the defense of *samoderzhaviye* autocracy, experienced a serious shock. The following years saw not only a continuation of this defense, but also Nicholas' attempt to reinforce absolute rule by withdrawing the concessions he had made under the pressure of the events of 1905–1906.

Society's loss of confidence in the government was stopped partly thanks to the gigantic operation to “assimilate” Siberia and the Far East, reference to Yermak's expedition, and countless industrial and mining investment projects made at the time, which relied on the resources of the rural unemployed to man their undertakings. However, the improvement in the government's image thanks to all this was still negligible, and only slightly attenuated radicalism.

Radicalism bred a mood of despondency, fears of a catastrophic future, that the country was heading for disaster, and that the intelligentsia was the chief culprit to blame because it was undermining the very foundations of the state. The most spectacular display of these fears came in *Vekhi* (“Landmarks” aka “Signposts”), a collection of socio-philosophical studies published in 1909.⁸⁷ It made such a strong and successful appeal re-echoed in the press that it went

⁸⁵ The Tsar must have seen this as the last of the concessions forced upon him. He firmly rejected the possibility of instituting a constitution, which he described as “utter nonsense.” Konstantin Pobiedonostsev, one of his tutors, taught him to detest “rationalism, progress, liberalism, personal liberties, constitutions and popular sovereignty, the erroneous principle that . . . all power comes from the people.” *The Diary of Nicholas II*, 12; see online at <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent>.

⁸⁶ In a letter to his mother on his decision to grant Russia a Duma, Nicholas wrote, “From all over Russia they cried for it, and around me many—very many—held the same views . . . There was no other way out than to cross oneself and give what everybody was asking for.” *The Diary of Nicholas II*, online 23.

⁸⁷ See the original publication, *Вехи. Сборник статей о русской интеллигенции* (Moscow: В. М. Саблин, 1909). Available online at “ВЕХИ. Сборник статей о русской интеллигенции”, М., 1909 г. (vehi.net), accessed December 4, 2024. The collection comprises seven articles by Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Mikhail Gershenzon, Aleksandr Izgoyev (aka Aron Lande), Bogdan Kistyakovski, and Petr Struve.

through five more editions within a year. Its authors castigated the intelligentsia for leading society along a path of actions running counter to the wellbeing of the State. The intelligentsia had bandied about slogans of social justice and economic equality, they wrote, thereby triggering the revolution it had so desperately yearned for,⁸⁸ undermining authority and the very foundations of the State. A firm withdrawal from nihilistic moralizing and a return to the superior values, culture, humanism, and religion, was the only thing which could still save the country. It was self-evident that only autocratic *samoderzhaviye* could guarantee the restoration of these values.

The government did not embark on a dialogue on the conditions defined by the *Vekhi* group. It tried to strengthen the falling prestige of *samoderzhaviye* by turning to history for recourse and recalling its glorious chapters, when the tsar and his people were united. The time was ripe for such reminiscences, as Russia came up to a series of spectacular anniversary celebrations – three hundred years since the expulsion of the Poles from the Kremlin in 1612 and accession of the House of Romanov to the throne (1613), as well as the centenary of Russia's victory in the Great Patriotic War against Napoleon's invasion army (1812).

The Tsar and his ministers organized grand commemorative events, hoping it would extinguish the firebrand emotions kindled by the events of 1905–1907 and convince society that the absolutist model created over the centuries was the best form of government for Russia. It had led to the country's biggest successes, which could be repeated in the future provided Russia could overcome and reject these attempts to enfeeble it, and defy the project to graft Western novelties in the Russian substrate. These endeavors could be said to have been successful to a certain extent, considering the indisputable improvement in the general atmosphere at the time the war broke out and in its first weeks, at least until the spectacular series of Russian defeats in the fighting in the Masurian Lakeland and the Battle of Łódź.

Alongside stirring the Russian people's sense of patriotism, the government also noticed that it could tap the patriotic feelings of the Tsar's non-Russian subjects, especially the Poles. To do this, it applied an astonishing set of historical arguments, completely ignoring the facts which made up the reputation of Russia as

⁸⁸ Russian liberals saw revolution as a chance for national revival. They cited the examples of the English and French Revolutions, which renewed and modernized their respective countries, thoroughly transformed social awareness, and created the basis for their subsequent power, cf. Boris Kagarlitsky, *Периферийная империя: Россия и миросистема* (Moscow: Либроком, 2012). The book has been translated into English as *Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System*, trans. Renfrey Clarke (London: Pluto, 2007).

“the prison of the nations.” On August 1/14, 1914, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian forces, issued the following appeal: “People of Poland! The hour has come when the dreams your fathers and grandfathers bequeathed to you can come true. A century and a half ago, the living body of Poland was torn apart, but its soul has never died . . . The Russian army is bringing you the happy message of reunification. May the borders dividing up the Polish Nation be obliterated. May the Polish Nation be reunited in one body under the scepter of the Russian Emperor. That is the scepter under which Poland will be restored.”⁸⁹ In spite of the self-evident misgivings with which the Polish population reacted to the appeal, the government went ahead with its plans. Recruiting centers designed to call up Polish volunteers were set up already in September, and in December 1914, the First Polish Legion, a tactical unit consisting of Polish men and generally known as the Puławy Legion, was established within the framework of the Russian army. At its peak in January 1915, the Legion had about 800 men serving in it.⁹⁰

The change in the Tsar's politics of memory as regards the Polish Question did not make much of a difference to the situation on the fronts. Nonetheless, it was significant from the aspect of the beginnings of the efforts the Poles made to restore Polish statehood. One of the Partitioning Powers had actually admitted that the Polish State had been unlawfully dismembered and that its territories should be reunited—with the tsar as its monarch, nonetheless reunited. The statement had been made not by a politician but by a senior army officer. In late December 1916, Nicholas II repeated it almost word-for-word.⁹¹ Was this half-hearted turnabout in Russia's position on the criminality of the Partitions of Poland a genuine revision of its previous politics of memory regarding the Polish Question, or was it merely a tactical move? We may treat it as a debatable issue. We may also treat the Tsar's enunciation as an enforced reaction to the Act of November 5 proclaimed by the Emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary.⁹² At any rate, it was a marginal point in Russia's politics of memory.

Far from what had been expected, the first phase of the Great War brought about a surge of discussion in Russia on the country's historical role, the extent of the responsibility of the Tsar and his government for their people, and the historical grounds legitimizing the involvement of the Russian Empire in European (Bal-

⁸⁹ *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej. Wybór dokumentów 1866–1925*, ed. Halina Janowska and Tadeusz Jędruszcak (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1984), document 71, 223–224.

⁹⁰ For more on the establishment of this Legion and its combat history, see Henryk Bagiński, *Wojско Polskie na Wschodzie 1914–1920* (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1921), 9–40.

⁹¹ *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej. Wybór dokumentów*, document 130, 316–317.

⁹² *Ibid.*, document 115, page 293.

kan) affairs.⁹³ In the course of these discussions, a point appeared which gave rise to a doctrine later defined and known as Eurasianism.⁹⁴ It had no effect on the Tsar's policy, nonetheless it deserves to be mentioned here because it impacted on the political affairs of the Russian émigré community in the early years after the War and is still significant today.

The origins of Eurasianism go back to an idea formulated in the early nineteenth century by Vladimir Titov and Anton Krayevsky that Russia was neither Asia nor Europe but should pay far more attention to the Asian part of its civilizational (political) heritage.⁹⁵ An expanded version of their claim, or more of a doctrine, reappeared in 1915, when the war was going on. It was revived by the geographer Benjamin Semyonov Tyan-Shansky, who said that Russia's setbacks were due to its excessive involvement in European affairs. After the passage of two centuries since the times of Peter I, this trend turned out to be an error, because Russia should see itself not as a European but as a Eurasian country if it wanted to conduct a mission of civilization. Yet it had followed the course on which Peter I had put it, forsaking its destined path of development based on its Byzantine and Mongol heritage. Russia had abandoned its natural vocation and endeavored to Europeanize itself, contrary to its innate character. Russia's historic destiny still meant harking back to the origins of its statehood and creating a Russian Eurasian power incorporating a harmonious blend of those two elements. If the multiethnic Russian nation wanted to continue its mission of civilization, it would have to reject the evil it had imported from the West and face the challenge of building up an Empire stretching from the Elbe to the Pacific.⁹⁶

At a time when the Russian Empire was crumbling and Soviet Russia emerging, this concept gave rise to the foundation of a strange ideological kinship joining the White Russian émigrés who thought of their country in terms of a Third Rome, and the Bolshevik “new type of” State, treated as “the homeland of the world's proletariat.”

93 See Igor Vogomolov, “Русская печать в начальный период Первой мировой войны (август-декабрь 1914 г.): политика и практика,” http://inion.ru/index.php?page_id=532, accessed December 4, 2024.

94 In the bibliography of Eurasianism, the concept in its basic definition dates back to the early 1920s. Cf. *Między Europą a Azją. Idea Rosji-Eurazji*, ed. Stefan Grzybowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 1998); Ryszard Paradowski, *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji. Studium idei* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2001).

95 Paradowski, *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji*, 39.

96 Cf. Benjamin Semyonov Tyan-Shansky, *О могущественном территориальном владении применительно к России. Очерк по политической географии* (St. Petersburg: тип. М.М. Стасюлевича, 1915); Giorgi Gloveli, *Геополитическая экономия в России: от дискуссий о самобытности к глобальным моделям* (St. Petersburg: Алетея, 2009).

Chapter Two

From Lenin to Stalin

Ideology and the politics of memory

After the Bolshevik coup, Lenin and the highest-ranking members of the Party were faced with the problem of having to explain what had happened from the theoretical point of view and the discrepancies between the theory and the actual events which had occurred in Russia. According to the works of the Marxist Classics, victory for the Socialist (Communist) revolution would come as predicted by the Marxist philosophy of history, on the premises of continuous progress and the resulting sequence of socio-economic forms ensuing one after another. The problem was that the Revolution had been accomplished in a country not at a very advanced stage of capitalism, moreover not fully out of the previous, feudal phase, at most out of its initial phase.⁹⁷ Lenin tried to resolve this conundrum by bringing some “modifications” into the theory to account for the transition from the concept of revolution to the practical phase. One of his adjustments said that discrepancies in the global imperialist system accrued at an irregular rate, and hence the victory of the revolution would come at a different time in each country. He also observed that the relationship between successful revolution and the degree of a country’s economic development was not automatic, and for revolution to occur, countries which were economically advanced might lag behind those not so developed economically, because a political factor came into play as well. The point was that a country’s capitalist system as a whole rather than its segments should be mature enough for revolution. In fact, Lenin’s modification refuted Marx’s claim that a country’s economy was more important than its political situation.

In Lenin’s opinion, the capitalist system would rupture not where it was the most advanced and the working class the most numerous, but where the sum total of the discrepancies was the largest, at the weakest link in the chain, as the Russian Revolution had shown. Since it was obvious that the rate of economic and political progress was different in different countries, it followed that “the victory of socialism [was] possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone,” in other words not more or less simultaneously, as Marx

97 Lenin meant the “Asian” way of production. Cf. Yuri Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 53–58.

had assumed.⁹⁸ If the domestic, economic, and political progress in a not so well developed country where the revolution had been successful was a problem hindering the change of form, the transformation should be speeded up. In the case of Russia, following the October (in actual fact, November) Revolution, it was necessary to implement the dictatorship of the proletariat, a stage Marx had not envisaged, to abolish bourgeois rights of proprietorship and accomplish the basic aims of the revolution by violent means.⁹⁹

In his defense of the methods he had employed, Lenin argued that in most of the earlier situations, too, progress in transitions to a higher state of development had been achieved in a manner that was brutal but objectively progressive. For instance, “[i]n his own Junker fashion, Bismarck accomplished a progressive historical task.” That is, he had created a united Germany, which was a necessary stage for German capitalism to move into the imperialist stage. Bismarck had pushed the wheel of history forward, albeit by means which involved “violence and plunder, blood and corruption.”¹⁰⁰

By Stalin’s times, this and a series of other generalizations Lenin interpolated into the account of what had happened during the Russian Revolution endowed those events with a universal character in a fairly random manner and was being interpreted as a major contribution to Marxist theory and the international communist and working-class movement.¹⁰¹ Another of these “contributions” was the way the Orthodox Church and all the other Churches were dealt with.¹⁰²

The Bolsheviks paid lip service to Marx’s opinion on history with no reservations. They considered the course of history effectively automatic, a one-way pro-

98 Vladimir I. Lenin, “On the Slogan for a United States of Europe,” first published (in Russian) in *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 44, August 23, 1915, and in the official English translation in *Lenin Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974-, Vol. 21, 339–343. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Lenin: On the Slogan for a United States of Europe (marxists.org), accessed December 4, 2024. Unless otherwise stated, in this book the Marxists Internet Archive is the primary source for the English translation of all the passages quoted from the works of the Marxists Classics (Lenin, Stalin etc.).

99 More on this point in Yury Krasin, *Ленин, революция, современность: проблемы ленинской теории социалистической революции* (Moscow: Наука, 1967), 72.

100 Vladimir I. Lenin, “On the National Pride of the Great Russians,” first published (in Russian) in *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 44, August 23, 1915, and in the official English translation in *Lenin Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974-, Vol. 21, 102–106. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Lenin: On the National Pride of the Great Russians (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024.

101 Rafał Stobiecki, *Bolszewizm a historia. Próba rekonstrukcji bolszewickiej filozofii dziejów* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 44.

102 See Grzegorz Szubtarski, “Antykościelne ustawodawstwo w ZSRR za rządów Włodzimierza Lenina (1917–1923),” *Kościół i Prawo*, no. 2 (2013): 63–75.

cess of change as regards relations in, and means of production. The condition of production relations and means at any given point in history determined the “base” which generated a “superstructure,” that is, the political institutions, philosophy, arts and sciences proper for the period. Successive periods in human history followed a sequence in line with the predominant type of ownership of the means of production—from Primitive Communism, through Chattel Slavery, Serfdom/Feudalism, Capitalism/Imperialism, right up to Communism, which the Bolsheviks were endeavoring to implement. The revolution they had achieved would lead to civil war in Europe, which would bring an end to Imperialism and mark out the path for a new formation—Communism. This would be the ultimate formation, and once it was victorious worldwide, in practice history would come to an end and the historical process would reach its apogee.¹⁰³

This was the perspective from which the Soviet authorities perceived history, interpreting it for the purposes of their propaganda, in education, culture, and politics of memory. This they applied in their domestic policy as well as in matters designated for the international communist movement, which was coordinated by the Comintern or Communist International established in 1919. References to history were considered a salient feature of successful campaigning.¹⁰⁴ One of the effects of reducing the historical process down to a primitive form of historical materialism focused on the class struggle and economic issues was that its other aspects were marginalized, and hence the Bolshevik politics of memory treated the whole of Russia’s cultural traditions and statehood as matters of minor significance. They were at most fairly unimportant relics in the so-called “superstructure,” itself ranked second in importance to the “base,” which was of key importance from the point of view of doctrine.¹⁰⁵ The dogma of “the general line,” present and practiced

103 Vladimir I. Lenin, “The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis,” written in September 1915; first published (in Russian) in *Pravda* No. 260, November 7, 1928; and in the official English translation in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 21, 378–382. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Lenin: The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024

104 The writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg put it concisely: “Our [Soviet – W.M.] campaign writings are connected with the memory of the past.” Илья Эренбург, *Люди, годы, жизнь*, vol. IV: *Под колесами времени*, (Moscow: ACT, 2017). For vol. IV, see the following websites: bookshaker.net/r/ilyudi-gody-zhizn-kniga-iv-ilya-grigorevich-erenburg?page=4; www.belousenko.com/books/Erenburg/erenburg_memoirs_4.htm И. Эренбург – “Люди, годы, жизнь”, книга IV » MY-LIBRARY: Бесплатная электронная библиотека деловой и учебной литературы. Читаем книги онлайн. (my-library.info). These Russian websites were inaccessible on February 19, 2024. For an abridged English version, see *Selections from People, Years, and Life*, (comp. C. Moody, third edition, Pergamon, 1972).

105 Broda, “Zrozumieć Rosję?” 180–181.

throughout politics, culture, and education, was thrust on society as an obligatory doctrine and enforced the acceptance of a uniform worldview, a peculiar “neo-medieval cultural configuration”¹⁰⁶ imposed on society.

The application of the rules pertaining to the historical process of the class struggle to vindicate all that had happened in Russia and the territories controlled by the Bolsheviks after October 1917 lay at the very core of the new regime’s propaganda and politics of memory. What was needed was not a comprehensive spectrum of history, but rather a careful selection of facts arranged in the right sequence and supplemented with the right kind of commentary. A surfeit of facts could reveal “the observer as one who is overwhelmed by the mass of raw material and is utterly incapable of appreciating its meaning and importance.”¹⁰⁷ The Bolshevik politics of memory availed itself of prearranged arguments to make society accept a different view of the state and nation from what it had been accustomed to previously in school and in the literature it read. The Bolsheviks created new heroes, new anniversaries, new historical place-names, new patrons for schools, workplaces, and other institutions, new subjects for the arts and letters. A process started for the revision and alternative presentation of the past, which in due course the historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, deputy to the People’s Commissar for Education, would underscore with the comment that “history [was] nothing but politics projected into the past.”¹⁰⁸

Starting from Spartacus’ rebellion, the events which were presented were those which justified the objective need to use violence to achieve specific goals and the continuity of the historical process inexorably leading to the universal victory of Communism. Transition from one formation to the next one up was accomplished by means of a revolution fundamentally transforming economic, political, and ideological relations, thereby creating a basis for their re-arrangement and filling them up with new content. The Bolsheviks considered all operations which pushed this process forward necessary and therefore objectively advantageous. This was also how they justified a phenomenon which left the world shocked and stunned—the

106 The term was coined by Rafał Marcelli Blüth in “Nowa inteligencja sowiecka,” *Likwidacja leninowskiej elity oraz inne pisma sowietologiczne 1933–1938* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Więź, 2016), 154.

107 Vladimir I. Lenin, “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: X. The Place of Imperialism in History,” written January–June, 1916; first published (in Russian) in mid-1917 in pamphlet form, Petrograd; and in the official English translation in *Lenin Selected Works*, Vol.1, 667–766. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Lenin: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (marxists.org) accessed January 10, 2024.

108 Boris Kagarlitsky, *Разгадка сфинкса. Забытая история Михаила Покровского*, <http://www.alternativy.ru/ru/node/647>; Leszek Kołakowski, *Rozkład marksizmu* (Warszawa: CDN, 1987), 56; cf. the English translation, Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*. Translated by P.S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 49.

Red Terror they launched against the classes/social strata they deemed obstructions slowing down the process of change by their very existence.¹⁰⁹

The Bolsheviks' random selection of events from Russian and world history supplemented with the right kind of commentary was to justify the historic inevitability of their takeover and legitimize their drastic methods to construct "a new type of state" by means of a radical social transformation. The emergence of the Bolshevik movement took the form of a progressive war, just as the French Revolution against the *ancien régime* and the Paris Commune were "progressive." So, too, were many other "progressive wars," that is, ones which "benefited the development of mankind," their chief aim being to overthrow the existing social formation.¹¹⁰

The Bolsheviks accomplished a singular coup as regards the Marxian view of history: they made it a key component of their own, specific brand of Marxism, which later came to be called Marxism-Leninism. In their approach, history, which was to clarify the rules governing social progress and the sequence of socio-economic formations, now became a useful tool for social manipulation. With the help of "dialectics" as a turnkey, they used "history" to vindicate even the most abrupt changeovers in the totalitarian practice of their "new type of state," the Party-State hybrid—a State which had effected a precarious mix of the communal and socialistic category of "the people" with a form of power pretty close to the *samoderzhaviye* type of absolutism it had ousted.¹¹¹ To achieve this, the Bolsheviks metaphorized Marx and Engels' categories, endowing them with new semantic content.¹¹² The situation and its reflection in language inspired

109 The mass murder of class enemies and the terrorizing of society was carried out by a special institution, the political police known as the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем), generally known as the Cheka under the leadership of Felix Dzerzhinsky. In August 1918, the Cheka was transformed into the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption. In 1922, it was replaced by the State Political Directorate (Государственное политическое управление, GPU), but its powers and tasks remained the same.

110 Vladimir I. Lenin, "Socialism and War: The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democratic Party Towards the War. Chapter I. The Principles of Socialism and the War of 1914–1915," first published (in Russian) in 1917 in pamphlet form; and in the official English translation in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 21, August 1914–December 1915, 299–316. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Lenin: 1915/s+w: The Principles of Socialism and the War of 1914–1915 (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024.

111 Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 136. The Party, supposedly an emanation of the proletariat, embodying its freedom and autonomous status, was in fact a hierarchical, paramilitary entity which terrorized society, and hence a power structure like the one it had just overthrown.

112 For more, see Stobiecki, *Bolszewizm a historia*.

George Orwell to coin the laconic terms “doublethink” and “Newspeak,” labels now firmly fixed to the Bolshevik system.¹¹³

Joseph Stalin, the Fourth Classic of Marxism, gave a straightforward explanation for the discrepancies or in fact outright incongruities in the Bolshevik politics of memory with respect to classical Marxist thought. Leninism was the Marxism of the Imperialist period unknown to Marx and Engels, who wrote their works in prerevolutionary times, before the growth of Imperialism. Hence, they could not have applied the knowledge which only became available thanks to the success of the revolution. Therefore Leninism was the “continued development of Marxism” in new conditions, and any attempts to find inconsistencies in them were false a priori.¹¹⁴ Stalin’s explanation not only clarified “the alleged problems,” such as why a revolution was successfully accomplished in a country as backward as Russia and not in the developed countries of Europe; but it also turned him into the chief authority predestined to explain and put forth the only right and true meta-theory of Russian and world history.¹¹⁵ At that stage in the transmogrification of the ideological State into a totalitarian State which used ideology merely as a cover-up—this procedure served both as its politics of memory, its ideological interpretation, and a philosophy of politics understood in a specific sense.

113 Some of the main Orwellian concepts and catchphrases are “Ministry of Truth,” “War is peace,” “Freedom is slavery” and “Ignorance is power.” George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984) (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

114 Joseph Stalin, “Об основах ленинизма,” in Joseph Stalin, *Сочинения*, vol. 6, 1924. Институт Маркса-Энгельса-Ленина при ЦК ВКП(б) (Moscow: ОГИЗ – Госполитиздат, 1947), 71. For the official English translation, “Foundations of Leninism,” see *Stalin, Works*, Vol. 6, 71–196 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953). Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at The Foundations of Leninism (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024.

115 When quoting Marx, Lenin and “especially Stalin,” distorted the original “to make it fit in with their own context.” This caused huge problems for the employees of the Marx-Engels Institute, which was established in 1921 and renamed the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in 1931, mainly for the purpose of publishing all the works of the Classics of Marxism-Leninism. Editors did not dare to correct these falsifications, because “they could be sent to a labor camp for just a single omitted punctuation mark” [in a text distorted by Lenin or Stalin— W.M.]. In consequence, work on these editions dragged on indefinitely, and subsequent volumes were “published at the world’s slowest rate”: Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, comp. Czesław Miłosz, Part 2 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1990), 145–146. Cf. Aleksander Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, ed. and trans. Richard Lourie; with a foreword by Czesław Miłosz, revised ed. (New York: New York Review Books, 2003).

The arts and propaganda

Even before their coup, the Bolsheviks launched a mass propaganda campaign against the Provisional Government. Its effectiveness convinced them to continue or even expand it to influence public opinion. In fact, the very first decrees they issued, *On Peace* and *On Land*, as soon as they took power, were not legislative acts but wide-scale propaganda operations.¹¹⁶ Special institutions were set up to conduct a propaganda war, combat political and/or ideological opponents, demoralize and disintegrate the forces of the Whites, and win the support of the “basic masses of society” susceptible to manipulation. At first, these institutions were merely agitprop units embedded within legal administrative structures and *politotdely*, political cells operating in the military, which organized socialist events, demonstrations, and rallies, distributed flyers and brochures, and put up posters. In 1920, *Agitprop Otdel* (the Department for Agitation and Propaganda attached to the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Russia) took over the coordination of the work of all of these units and institutions. Stalin was the head of Agitprop, while Nadezhda Krupskaya headed an analogous government institution called *Glavpolitprosvet* (the Chief Political and Educational Committee) attached to the People’s Commissariat for Education in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, which was also put under Stalin’s control. The duties of these institutions were to implement the Party’s directives in education and culture, and draw up a catalog of recommended (i.e. permitted) historical matters along with the form and methods for their dissemination, as well as methods to combat hostile and ideologically erroneous matters.¹¹⁷

The outcome of the standard Bolshevik approach to the historical process was the removal of all vestiges of whatever kind of incorrect (unapproved) history from the public sphere—schoolbooks, place-names, monuments, patrons of institutions, theater repertoires, postage stamps, etc. Replacing them with approved substitutes was no easy matter, especially as apart from Marx and Engels there were not so many individuals and facts in the pool of qualified choices. Yet the Leader was insisting the swap should be done as soon as possible. “He was anxious to have as many revolutionary monuments erected as possible, even if they were of the simplest sort, like busts or memorial tablets to be placed in all the towns, and, if it could be managed, in the villages as well, so that what had

116 “During that first period, the decrees were really more propaganda than actual administrative measures.” Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1930), 269. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at 1930-lif.pdf (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024.

117 For more, see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilisation, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 160–162.

happened might be fixed in the people's imagination, and leave the deepest possible furrow in memory."¹¹⁸ His orders were carried out; perhaps those who implemented them did not even notice that many of the provisionally pieced together mockups of the monuments to come simply made the people or events they were supposed to honor look ridiculous.

The replacement of the mockups by permanent monuments tended to be postponed indefinitely, but there was a positive side to that. The pages of the history of the Bolshevik Party had initially been populated by a considerable number of activists deemed worthy of commemoration. But as time went on and the process later known as the personality cult intensified, they were depersonalized and reduced mainly to Lenin and Stalin, who were practically deified.¹¹⁹ So it was much easier to dismantle a makeshift mockup of someone like, for instance, a member of the Central Committee who had suddenly turned into a renegade or traitor.

Another problem was the selection of people and events out of world history qualified as progressive revolutionaries and predecessors of the new social formation. It was safer to set up anonymous heroes, especially anonymous working men and women or sometimes peasants, whose monumentalized figures started to jostle for elbow-room in Soviet popular culture.¹²⁰

In the Bolshevik politics of memory, anything that undermined the existing social formation and helped to build up the new formation was labeled "progressive." Such phenomena ranged from slave (gladiator) revolts in Antiquity (the period of chattel slavery), peasant rebellions like Wat Tyler's uprising in medieval England (the feudal period), to the Paris Commune, the most often cited movement in defiance of capitalism. These movements tended to anarchize the econ-

¹¹⁸ Trotsky, *My Life*, *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Cf. Marian Broda, *Mentalność, tradycja i bolszewicko-komunistyczne doświadczenie Rosji* (Łódź; Kurovice: Wydawnictwo Ibidem, 2007), 46–47.

¹²⁰ See, for example, the statuary by Ivan Shadr (pseudonym of Ivan Ivanov) made in 1920–1922: *The Worker*, *The Red Army Man*, and *The Farmer* (reproductions in Leonid Osintsev, *Неизвестный Шадр* (Shadrinsk: ПО «Исеть», 1995; see the illustrations insert); *The Worker*, a statue by Matvey Manizer, 1920 (reproduction in Matvey Manizer, *Скульптор о своей работе*, Vol. 1 (Moscow; Leningrad: Искусство, 1940; see the illustrations insert); or the "March 8 – Day of Women's Emancipation" poster by Adolf Strakhov (Braslavsky) (reproduction, 20 Soviet posters EXPLOITING images of women (PHOTOS) – Russia Beyond (rbth.com), accessed December 4, 2024; poster by Nikolay Kochergin "First of May 1920" (reproduction, 1st May 1920. Through the wreckage of capitalism to the worldwide fraternity of working people!, 1920 by Nikolay Mikhailovich Kochergin: History, Analysis & Facts | Arthive, accessed December 4, 2024); special issue and ordinary postage stamps, designed mainly by Ivan Shadr: see reproductions in *Michel Briefmarken Katalog 1958 Europa* (Berlin; München: Verlag des Schwaneberger Album Eugen, 1957), 1141–1145.

omy and system of power, leading to their transformation toward “the democratic socialist State.” The non-Russian ideologists and activists who deserved commemoration, according to the Bolsheviks, included the German socialist and writer Ferdinand Lassalle, the French utopian socialist Louis Blanqui, the French socialist Jean Jaurès, the German Marxists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and even . . . Judas Iscariot and Satan.¹²¹ These last two must certainly have served as patrons for the League of Atheists inspired by the Central Committee and founded by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky in 1925 (as of 1929 known as the League of Militant Atheists), and their newspapers *Bezbozhnik* and *Antireligioznik*. I should add that all museums were ordered to arrange an additional atheist exhibition, regardless of what their main field of interest was.¹²²

The individuals and events from Russian history that made it into the schools and propaganda were those whose activities weakened the tsarist system of absolutism, so therefore they must have been “progressive.” They included first and foremost the Decembrists: notwithstanding their nobiliary or even aristocratic family background, nonetheless, they made a revolutionary contribution against the system, in the spirit of the French Revolution. There was room in the Bolshevik politics of memory also for thinkers and activists classified as native precursors of Bolshevism, and these included the philosopher, journalist, and pioneer of Occidentalism Pyotr Chaadayev; the writer, journalist, and revolutionary democrat Nikolay Chernyshevsky, who propounded a utopian version of socialism; the writer and political activist Alexander Herzen who sympathized with the revolutionary democrats; and the Narodniks, who held views similar to Herzen’s (despite the fact that they failed to appreciate the importance of technological progress, their illusionary belief in the feasibility of creating a system of agrarian socialism and a generally hostile attitude to Marxism); and in particular, the Liberation of Work (*Osvobozhdeniye truda*) group, the immediate predecessors and propagators of Marxism, especially the journalist and theoretician of social thought Georgi Plekhanov and the writer and revolutionary Vera Zasulich. These last-mentioned individuals were included in the Bolshevik canon of referenced personages, despite their well-known reservations regarding the doings of the Bolsheviks: they died too soon to pose any sort of dangerous criticism. Things were quite different with Russian social democrats who continued their lives in exile and made a determined stand against the Bolshevik dictatorship in Russia, primarily Julius Martov, leader of the Mensheviks and a prominent member of

121 A monument to Judas the Iscariot was erected by the authorities in Sviyazhsk (Tatarstan) and a monument to Satan was installed in Yelets (Lipetsk Oblast). See *История России. XX век. 1894–1939*, ed. Andrey Zubov (Moscow: АСТ, Астрель, 2009), 759.

122 *Ibid.*, 816.

the International Working Union of Socialist Parties (the 2½ International), and Pavel Axelrod, an activist of the Second International.

Makeshift monuments also went up in honor of terrorists and assassins, the likes of Ivan Kalyayev, slayer of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich; or Stepan Khalturin, who attempted to assassinate Alexander II. At any rate, finding characters in history, especially in the recent past, good for portrayal and promotion, was not so indispensable a task. Eventually, the predominant heroes in the Bolshevik politics of memory were—as I have already said—the people, especially the working class, anonymous and readily reducible to lucid, pictorial symbols or slogans enigmatically rooted in history.

As soon as the Bolsheviks seized power, they treated political canvassing by means of communicative mottos, signs and symbols, visual images or easy-to-remember musical motifs very seriously. They adopted some of the earlier symbols and ceremonials but endowed them with a new context. For instance, they kept the chime formerly played every hour on the hour to the tune of the old national anthem *Bozhe tsara khrani* (God Save the Tsar) from the Kremlin's Spasskaya Tower; and just changed the name of the tune to *The Internationale*. They even saved the icon on the tower and only removed the crown on the two-headed eagle. At first, they intended to replace the crown with a hammer and sickle but eventually abandoned the idea.¹²³

In spite of Lenin's dilettantish attitude to the arts, both he and other Bolshevik leaders recognized art and literature as "a most powerful weapon for political campaigning."¹²⁴ They utilized the mass-produced arts, especially poster art, songs sung by massive choirs, and later cinematography, to communicate their message to the masses; they campaigned on an unprecedented, mass scale, also in the sphere of politics of memory.

At first, they intended to canvas and educate, also in the field of history, using slogans and other short texts. It was Lenin's idea that such compositions should accost city dwellers "from the walls or special structures installed in various clearly visible locations." They were to take the form of "brief but expressive inscriptions, concise catchphrases evaluating a historic event."¹²⁵ The practical application of the Leader's concept turned out to be negligible.

123 Trotsky, *My Life*, 278; Aleksandra J. Leinwand, "Dziedzictwo Rosji imperialnej w symbolach, obrazach i rytuałach Rosji bolszewickiej (1917–1922)," in *Rosja i Europa Wschodnia: „imperiologia” stosowana*, ed. Andrzej Nowak (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2006), 489.

124 See Anatoly Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art*; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965. Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Marxist Writers: Anatoly Lunacharsky (marxists.org) accessed January 10, 2024.

125 *Izvestia*, April 14, 1918.

The basic subjects conveyed in the new politics of memory (aka propaganda) were the recent events of the fall of 1917 and the civil war. They presented the revolutionary struggle, the working man's lot; they took the form of allegory standing for the politics of memory,¹²⁶ or embodied concepts like revolution, internationalism, the constitution, the liberation of labor, or the Comintern.¹²⁷ The Comintern was the Moscow-based, Bolshevik-controlled headquarters of the international Communist movement and in a sense a continuation of the myth of the Third Rome, the ultimate center of civilization on the course of history now running to its finish line (viz. worldwide revolution and Universal Communism).¹²⁸ The global character of the Bolshevik mission was symbolized in the coat of arms the Soviet Union adopted in July 1923 and used until its collapse, showing a golden hammer and sickle with a red star hanging over the entire globe.¹²⁹

126 Probably the best-known allegory of the first period after the coup was Sergei Kononov's colored bas-relief, a memorial plaque "To Those Who Fell Fighting for the Cause of Peace and the Brotherhood of Nations," 1918; see its reproduction in *Гражданская война и военная интервенция в СССР*, ed. Semyon Khromov (Moscow: Советская энциклопедия, 1983), between 272 and 273.

127 For example, "The Soviet Constitution Obelisk" by Nikolay Andreev and Dmitry Osipov, unveiled in Moscow in 1919 (see its reproduction in Leinwand, *Sztuka w służbie utopii*, illustration 81); the design for the Monument to the Third International by Vladimir Tatlin ("Tatlin's Tower"), drafted in 1920 but never built (see its reproduction at <http://architektonator.blogspot.com/2013/04>, accessed December 4, 2024). The 1919 "Liberation of Work" and "Revolution" competitions for monuments were won by Vera Ignatyevna Mukhina, maker of the best-known Socialist Realist statuary, "The Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman" (1937).

128 "Continuing the tradition of the Third Rome, Moscow transformed itself into the capital of the Third International as an effective tool to achieve a global state by inspiring worldwide revolution" (Nikolai Berdyaev) after Broda, "Zrozumieć Rosję?", 190. For the parallel between the Third Rome and "The Homeland of the World Proletariat," see Jarosław Bratkiewicz, "Zasada kontynuacji i prognozowanie," in *W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu transformacji*, 70–72; Mauno Koivisto, *Русская идея*, пер. с фин. Ю.С. Дерябина (Moscow: Издательство «Весь Мир», 2002), 120–121; cf. Mauno Koivisto, *Venäjän Idea* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2001; Mauno Koivisto, *The Russian Idea*, trans. Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Tammi, 2023; see online at [https://elvis.bonnierbooks.fi/file/FPYC6MGValcBMAbVtXkY4A/*/9789520458027_lukun.pdf?authcred=Z3Vlc3Q6Z3Vlc3Q=](https://elvis.bonnierbooks.fi/file/FPYC6MGValcBMAbVtXkY4A/*/), accessed December 4, 2024). The leading representative of the Smena movement, the Eurasian Nikolay Ustryalov, also saw the Comintern as a tool for the implementation of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, cf. Broda, *Mentalność, tradycja i bolszewicko-komunistyczne doświadczenie Rosji*, 98.

129 For more on the topic of Russian and Soviet "geographical symbolism," see Włodzimierz Marciniak, "Mapa i pamięć o imperium. Kartograficzne symbole nostalgii postsowieckiej," in *Inne wymiary polityki*, ed. Włodzimierz Marciniak (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2013).

On the grounds of a decree issued by the Council of People's Commissars in April 1918,¹³⁰ all the monuments and memorial plaques commemorating “the Tsars and their officials” were cleared from the streets and squares of Russian cities. They were removed because they commemorated the wrong, ideologically alien persons and events, to be replaced by new memorials which were to “celebrate the great days of the Russian socialist revolution,” that is, to the “worker revolutionaries” and other progressive persons who earned merit not on behalf of the tsars and their milieu but to improve the lives of ordinary people. The meritable included Decembrists, Revolutionary Democrats, Narodniks, etc. Signed by Lenin, Stalin, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, People's Commissar for Education, the decree later came to be known as “the Lenin monumental propaganda plan.”¹³¹

As soon as the new government moved to Moscow, Lenin started to call the pre-revolution memorials in the city's streets and squares “garbage” and often said that they had to be demolished as soon as possible for monuments to “Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Lavrov, Marat, Robespierre, and the heroes of the Paris Commune and of our own revolution” to be put up in “Moscow and other towns in Soviet Russia”.¹³² He initiated the project to dismantle those inappropriate testimonials to history by personally destroying the cross by Viktor Vasnetsov which stood in the Kremlin on the spot where Grand Duke Sergey Alexandrovich had been assassinated.¹³³ This was followed by more demolitions: of the Alexander II Monument in the Kremlin, the Alexander III Monument next to the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the monument of General Mikhail Skobelev, hero of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which stood opposite Moscow City Hall,¹³⁴ and dozens of others.

130 Council of People's Commissars, *Decree on the Removal of Monuments Erected in Honor of the Tsars and Their Officials and the Setting Up of Designs for Monuments of the Russian Socialist Revolution*, April 12, 1918. Original source: *Izvestiia vserossiiskogo tsentral'nogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta*, April 14, 1918. An English translation is available online at The Monuments Policy – Seventeen Moments in Soviet History (msu.edu), accessed January 10, 2024.

131 *История России. XX век. 1894–1939*, 758.

132 Quoted after Pavel Malkov, *Записки коменданта Московского Кремля* (Moscow: Изд-во ЦК ВЛКСМ “Молодая гвардия,” 1959). English translation: *Reminiscences of a Kremlin Commandant* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 153.

133 “In general, Lenin could not stand monuments of tsars, grand dukes and generals who had won glory under the tsars. More than once he said that the victorious people should clear away all the abominations of the autocracy . . .” *Ibid.*, 153.

134 A mockup Obelisk of Freedom was erected in its place. Today there is a monument to the founder of Moscow, Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, on the site. Another monument to General Skobelev, which was up in Warsaw in the courtyard of the 29 Listopada barracks, survived longer than Skobelev's Moscow monument and was not demolished until 1935.

In view of the time it would take to set up “the right new” monuments, the Bolsheviks decided to install makeshift surrogates, usually mockups of the winning project qualified for erection in a competition for the best design. The most renowned of these was a mockup of Marx and Engels by Sergey Mezentsev, presented as two figures down to the waist planted on the same plinth. It was unveiled in November 1918 in Moscow’s Revolution Square (until 1917 Resurrection Square). Straightaway the city’s jokesters nicknamed it “Two fuzz-faces in a tub” (*Dva borodache kupayutsa w bochke*) or “Two guys sharing a bath” (*Dvoe muzhchin v odnoy vanne*).¹³⁵

Sometimes what went up instead of a mockup was a notice or information of some other kind that the winning design for a monument would be erected on the site. Yet that was not always what happened. In January 1920, a monument of Karl Marx was endorsed and due to be put up in Moscow’s Teatralnaya Ploshchad (Theater Square). Information about this was posted up on a granite block set on a bed of concrete on the site, but the statue was not unveiled until 1961. Nonetheless, the concrete block with the notice stood there for forty years.¹³⁶

About sixty new replicas of the right kind for the period following the victorious revolution went up in Moscow and Petrograd alone. Most of them were located on streets and squares already supplied with new names. In the first year of Soviet rule, forty-five streets and squares were renamed in Petrograd. Most cities got a Revolution or an Uprising Street, an October the Twenty-Fifth or a First of May Street, a Soviet Street, a Red Army Street, etc., and the people were familiarized with the pantheon of new saints and heroes—Lenin, Trotsky, Rykov, Stalin, Lunacharsky, Kalinin, not to mention the obligatory Marx and Engels.¹³⁷ Marches, rallies, and decorations embellishing venues for the celebration of State and Party holidays sparkled with the ideologically proper historical motifs, predominated by those that referred to the Marxist Classics, the October Revolution, the lives of its leaders and spectacular facts relating to them. At a time of all manner of shortages and rationing of the most basic goods and foodstuffs, commis-

135 *Двое мужчин в одной ванне – пропаганда коммунизма*, BBC news Русская служба, April 30, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2013/04/130429_communist_monuments.shtml, accessed December 4, 2024.

136 The most notorious failure to implement an ideologically correct idea, despite its approval in an architectural competition, was the Palace of the Soviets designed by Boris Iofan, conceived as the world’s tallest structure (417 m), with a huge monument of Lenin at the top, which was to be built on the site of the demolished Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Work on the site commenced in 1933, but was interrupted by the German invasion and never resumed after the war. The trench for the construction of the Palace was converted into an outdoor swimming pool, with heated water in the cold season.

137 *История России. XX век: 1894–1939*, 759.

sions for the festooning of such events in line with the new politics of memory carried generous gratifications in the form of extra food rations, which made them a welcome perk.¹³⁸

In the wake of the Revolution, Petrograd and Moscow turned into key centers for the avant-garde arts and letters. Artists and writers treated the overthrow of the old regime as an open door to culture and the arts in the broad sense of the term, their emancipation from all manner of conventions, especially those of the formal kind. There was an upsurge of trends which had found it hard to make their way in tsarist Russia. Abstract art, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Modernism, Neo-Primitivism, Post-Impressionism, Rayonism aka Luchism, Suprematism, Analytic Cubism and other art styles all suddenly emerged and flourished.¹³⁹ Avant-garde artists thought that Communism was the political embodiment of their own war on tradition, Academic art, the gravity of the past, and authorities.¹⁴⁰ Pretty soon, however, a conflict erupted between the avant-garde arts and the new government. The Bolsheviks assumed that the arts were a highly effective means for the mass promotion of the historical and ideological message they wanted to disseminate and decided to put a stop to all the novelties. They accepted the opinion voiced by Lenin, who was an absolute ignoramus as regards the arts, that “the proletariat does not need [cultural] experiments.” The working class would find such experiments incoherent, strange, and hence arousing distrust. The Bolsheviks opted for Realism and Academism as their media to convey the ideologically approved message, in a version known as of the 1930s as Socialist Realism. They considered this type of art and architecture the most communicable, while at the same time not infecting Russia (the Soviet Union) with the degeneracy that was destroying the culture of the West. Characteristically, similar tendencies occurred in other totalitarian states, such as Italy under Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler’s Germany. The phenomenon has been described as the development of a pseudomorphic form of traditional art and culture in ostensibly modern totalitarian states, or as the legitimization of the system by means of a communicative traditionalism.¹⁴¹

At the same time, a practice which turned out to be one of the characteristic features of Soviet art, not only in its first years, was the use of imperial and reli-

138 Malkov, *Reminiscences*, 151; Leinwand, *Sztuka w służbie utopii*, 43–46.

139 For more, see Larissa Alekseevna Zhadova, *Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art 1910–1930* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982); Uwe M. Schneede, *Chagall, Kandinsky, Malewitsch und die russische Avantgarde* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1998); Pavel Klimov, *МОДЕРН в России* (Moscow: Арт-Родник, 2010).

140 Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*, 47.

141 Bratkiewicz, *Zasada kontynuacji i prognozowanie*, 66.

gious motifs and symbols with a new, ideologically correct message replacing the original content.¹⁴² Thereby Soviet art came up with a series of signs and ideograms or symbols which the people could easily decipher, creating a sort of new religion, a Socialist (Communist) ideology, a messianism “embodying Order and Truth” in the midst of “the Chaos of the Capitalist countries.”¹⁴³ The best-known symptoms of Bolshevik Russia as the Messiah of the new times were “The Twelve,” a poem by the Symbolist Alexander Blok (1918), in which the Twelve Apostles led by Jesus are twelve soldiers of the Red Army under the Red Banner;¹⁴⁴ a poster of St. George transformed into Lev Trotsky on horseback slaying the bowler-hatted Dragon of the Counter-Revolution personifying capitalism;¹⁴⁵ pictures of a working woman with a babe in arms modeled on the Madonna and Child motif;¹⁴⁶ or a commissar dying on the battlefield in the arms of a fellow comrade, modeled on the Pieta with the body of Jesus taken down from the cross and cradled in his mother’s arms.¹⁴⁷

142 See Leinwand, “Dziedzictwo Rosji imperialnej,” 487–501. “The future found its mental roots in religious thinking. The Communist vision of time resembled its Christian counterpart . . . it is not difficult to see an ideological surrogate for the Divine paradise in the universal Communist community.” Broda, “Zrozumieć Rosję”?, 179.

143 Stephan-Immanuel Teichgräber, *Die Dekonstruktion der socialistischen Mythologie in der Poetik Andrej Platonow* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 43–44, quoted after Broda, “Zrozumieć Rosję”?, 175. Cf. also Jarosław Bratkiewicz, *Tradycjonalizm, kolektywizm, despotyzm. Kontynuacyjne ujęcie ewolucji historyczno-politycznej (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Rosji)* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1991), 153.

144 The Comintern regarded this poem as “the greatest achievement of Russian poetry,” praising lines like “Let’s put a bullet into Holy Russia” (Пальнем-ка пулей в Святую Русь) or “We’ll make trouble for all the bourgeois” (Мы на горе всем буржуям: *Pravda*, January 18, 1919). For a bilingual Russian and English edition, see Alexander Blok, *Twelve. A Poema in a new translation by Maria Carlson* (Laurence: Slavic L&L, University of Kansas, 2010) available at https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/6598/BlokTwelve_RusEngTxt.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed December 4, 2024.

145 The poster by Viktor Deni (Viktor Denisov), “Saint George the Conqueror” (1920), was subsequently paraphrased several times, e.g. in a mass-produced wall calendar. See Leinwand, *Sztuka w służbie utopii*, <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.17649>, accessed December 4, 2024. In 1937, in new political conditions, Deni atoned for his sin by creating a poster entitled “Уничтожить гадину Троцкого” [“Destroy the Reptile Trotsky,”] in which a strong worker kills Trotsky the Reptile, <https://www.heritage-print.com/destroy-enemy-people-trotsky-1937-14892212.html>, accessed December 4, 2024.

146 For the paintings by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, “1918 in Petrograd” (1920) and “Mother and Child” (1927), see Petrov-Vodkin, Kuzma (1878–1939). *Все картины*, <http://gallerix.ru/album/Petrov-Vodkin>, and also Leinwand, *Sztuka w służbie utopii*, reproduction no. 44.

147 For the painting “Death of a Commissar” (1927) and its 1928 replica, see Petrov-Vodkin, Kuzma (1878–1939). *Все картины*, С Смерть комиссара. 1927 (картина) — Петров-Водкин Кузьма Сергеевич (gallerix.ru), accessed December 4, 2024.

There were fewer and fewer historical items in the propaganda and culture, its conveyor belt. Except for the history of the Party and its road to victorious revolution, there was not much left of it because, as Stalin said, “One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her—because of her backwardness, because of her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because it was profitable and could be done with impunity.”¹⁴⁸ It was high time once and for all to stop feeding on such a past. To be rid of its monuments, names, and other souvenirs, for, as historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, head of the Institute of Red Professors, argued, “There is no past, there is only the Soviet present-day.”¹⁴⁹

That was the perspective taken for a thorough upheaval in education. Pretty soon after October 1917, history disappeared from school curricula at all levels of education. Snippets of history landed up in an educational cluster known as “Society,” which was taught on the basis of a textbook with a meaningful title, “Yesterday and Tomorrow.”¹⁵⁰ In practice, the information it conveyed did not go beyond the statement that before the Revolution, life in Russia was very hard for peasants and workers, and fine for landowners and capitalists, therefore the Revolution the Bolsheviks accomplished was very important for the nation’s future. In 1921, the syllabus for “Society” was revised and supplemented with issues such as “origin and basics of rule by the people,” “bourgeois dictatorship and proletarian dictatorship,” “revolution and civil war,” “the Soviet constitution,” and “fundamental features of the Socialist system.” In a subsequent revision in 1927, “Society” was expanded to include “stages in the workers’ and peasants’ struggle against capital-

148 Joseph Stalin, “О задачах хозяйственников: Речь на Первой Всесоюзной конференции работников социалистической промышленности,” in Joseph Stalin, *Сочинения*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Государственное издательство политической литературы, 1951), 29. For the approved English translation, see “The Tasks of Business Executives: Speech Delivered at the First All-Union Conference of Leading Personnel of Socialist Industry, February 4, 1931,” published in *Works*, Vol. 13, 1930–January 1934 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954); available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at The Tasks of Business Executives (marxists.org), accessed January 10, 2024.

149 Quoted after *История России. XX век: 1894–1939*, 804.

150 Mikhail Kovalensky aka Kovalevsky, *Вчера и завтра. Как и откуда взялась, новая красная Россия* (Moscow; Leningrad: Государственное издательство, many editions incl. 1923, 1924, 1929 etc.).

ists and landowners,” “life in rural Russia before the Revolution,” “victory for the masses in 1917,” “the first decrees issued by the Soviet government,” and “rules for elections to the soviets.”¹⁵¹

The low cultural level of the masses of Russia’s inhabitants, especially after the destruction of most of the intelligentsia, made these propaganda activities, educational policy and politics of memory highly effective.¹⁵² Their results contributed to the creation of a phenomenon later known as the *Homo Sovieticus*.

The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course and catechism of Stalinism

After the death of Lenin, a period of infighting started for leadership in the Party. The main and favorite contender was Stalin, who made a series of alliances to gradually eliminate his rivals. One by one, he toppled Lev Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and Mikhail Tomsky—persons from Lenin’s close circle, members of the supreme authorities in the Party and State. Activists removed on trumped-up charges had to vanish not only from political affairs but also from the history of the Party. The propagandists in the service of the Party and State who managed the politics of memory on an everyday basis, especially as regards the origins, emergence, and growth of the Soviet “new type of” State, could not keep abreast of all these changes. They floundered through the personal particulars and the interpretations. The masses of Party members and ordinary citizens floundered, too, staggering to discover more and more enemies, spies, saboteurs, and conspirators. The chaos was all the more confusing because facts and figures ceased to count regarding the past; all that mattered was the Party’s current view on any particular subject. Two processes could be constantly observed in successive editions of textbooks on the history of the Party—no matter whether by Andrey Bubnov, Vladimir Nevsky, Nikolai Popov, or Yemelyan Yaroslavsky: the successive erasure of a string of Bolshevik activists, and a gradual change in the proportional contribution to the Revolution of Stalin,

151 Henryk Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie w podręcznikach do nauczania historii w systemie oświatowym Rosji bolszewickiej i ZSRS w latach 1917–1991* (Toruń: Dom Wydawniczy Duet, 2014), 63–64.

152 “The powerful Party and administrative mechanism of Soviet Russia mobilized all of its means to influence people’s minds and feelings: the schools, literature, press, art, science, administrative offices, universities, various organizations, enforcement authorities etc. It kept three generations hoodwinked on a daily and universal basis.” Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 101–103.

who was getting more and more of the limelight, and Lenin, who was gradually receding to the back of the stage.¹⁵³

In November 1931, an extensive article by Stalin appeared in the *Bolshevik* and *Proletarskaya Revolutsiya* magazines, summing up the matter bluntly. What had to be done was to put the discussion on the history of the Party in order and expunge all mention of “Trotskyist smugglers,” “traitors of the working class,” “downright liars,” “slanderers and falsifiers;” and followed even by “some of our historians—I am speaking of historians without quotation marks, of *Bolshevik* historians of our Party—are not free from mistakes . . .” Even “Comrade Yaroslavsky is not, unfortunately, an exception; his books on the history of the C.P.S.U. (B.), despite all their merits, contain a number of errors in matters of principle and history.”¹⁵⁴

Stalin’s lunge at a person as prominent as Secretary Yaroslavsky of the Party College of the Central Supervisory Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) and a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern paralyzed the ruling class. In the growing aura of fear enhanced by successive waves of arrests; in the atmosphere of an escalating, primitive promotion of Stalin as the Hero of the Revolution and Lenin’s sole partner—contrary to all the patent facts and documents—the message was clear. The only way to talk and write about the history of the Party and the 1917 coup was the way Stalin wanted it to be, to build up his cult.

Therefore, as the General Secretary explained in the said article, the history of the Party was not a matter to be addressed by historians continually on the trail of documents, just like some sort of “hopeless bureaucrats.” What they needed to do in their interpretation of history was not to look for important “documents” but to adopt the right “attitude” (*pravilnaya ustanovka*). The community of historians got the message alright, as kowtowing historian Anna Pankratova showed in a letter to the editor of *Proletarskaya Revolutsiya*, subsequently reprinted far and wide by other papers and magazines as an indisputable guideline. “For historians,” she wrote of Stalin’s declaration, “this article is or should be a political and historical milestone, especially as regards the achievement of the main point, bringing the attributes of

153 Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*. 50

154 Joseph Stalin, “О некоторых вопросах истории большевизма: Письмо в редакцию журнала ‘Пролетарская Революция’,” *Большевик*, no. 19/20 (1931); *Пролетарская Революция*, no. 6/113 (1931). For the official English translation, see “Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism: Letter to the Editorial Board of the Magazine *Proletarskaya Revolutsia*,” published in J.V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 13, 1930—January 1934 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954). Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism (marxists.org), accessed January 11, 2024.

the Party into the discipline of history.”¹⁵⁵ And only those things which the Gen. Sec. said were “the attributes of the Party” and “the discipline of history” were “the attributes of the Party” and “the discipline of history.”

Unquestionably, this kind of mood impacted on education, bringing far-reaching change. “Educational clusters” were abandoned and the pre-Revolution division into distinct subjects was restored. History was one of the subjects taught in the seven-grade (elementary) and secondary schools. It was to be taught on the basis of new “citizens’ history” textbooks, the first of which was Sergey Dubrovsky’s book on the history of the Soviet Union with aspects of world history, maintained in the spirit recommended by Stalin.¹⁵⁶ It expanded the syllabus for history taught hitherto with details on how workers in diverse countries around the world had supported the Russian Revolution, going on strike and organizing demonstrations in the capitalist countries, thereby making it more difficult for their governments to intervene in Russia. Students learned about the hostile attitude of the capitalist countries to the land of the Victorious Revolution, and how they were preparing for war against the Soviet Union. The examples of Italy, Poland, Germany, and Japan could show them how the “imperialist predators” were doing their damndest to bring about the downfall of Socialism.¹⁵⁷

But in 1935 Dubrovsky fell victim to repressive measures and his textbook had to be withdrawn immediately. A competition for a new history book was announced, and Stalin not only observed it, but actually took a vigorous part in the adjudication, carefully perusing the projects which were submitted, making corrections and supplementing them with extra materials.¹⁵⁸ The book finally earmarked for publication was entitled *History of the USSR. Short Course*, edited by Andrey Shestakov, not very different from Dubrovsky in terms of content, nonetheless it was acknowledged as “the first Marxist schoolbook for history.”¹⁵⁹

155 <http://lib.ru/history/felshtinsky/f2.txt>, accessed December 4, 2024. Presumably, Pankratova, a lecturer at the Academy of Communist Education, was trying to save her skin, as her husband had been convicted of Trotskyism (after she denounced him).

156 Sergei Dubrovsky, *Элементарный курс истории СССР, с кратким сообщением по всеобщей истории* (Moscow, 1933).

157 After Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie w podręcznikach*, 67–69.

158 *Ibid.*, 70–71.

159 *Краткий курс истории СССР*, ed. Andrey Shestakov (Moscow: Государственное учебно-педагогическое издательство, 1937) was published continuously until 1955. “At its core, Stalin’s *History of the Soviet Union* stems from the official 1938 English language translation of the 1937 textbook” David Brandenberger, “Stalin’s History of the Soviet Union: A Critical Edition of Shestakov’s 1937 *Short Course on the History of the USSR*,” (Richmond, VA: University of Richmond, 2018); Stalin’s History of the Soviet Union Summary (richmond.edu), accessed January 12, 2024. See *Stalin’s Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet*

The next step in the verification of the Soviet politics of memory apotheosizing Stalin in the history of the Party was taken by Lavrentiy Beria. In July 1935, Beria, at the time Secretary of the Transcaucasian National Committee of the Communist Party, delivered a lecture on the Bolshevik organizations of Transcaucasia. Pretty soon, it was published as a book in a huge print run.¹⁶⁰ Contrary to the patent facts, in this book he put forward an “innovative” claim that there were two centers, the Russian center with Lenin as its leader and the Transcaucasian center with Stalin at the head, which made an equal contribution to the Revolution. He backed up this claim with the assertion that the two leaders of the Party and Revolution made an equal contribution to the development of the Party by creating and compiling the ideological, organizational, and theoretical foundations of Bolshevism. Thereby, he imposed a new formula to describe the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): no longer was it just Lenin’s Party, now it was the Party implementing “the national policy of Lenin and Stalin.” He insisted that while appreciating the road to victory for the Revolution, what should be stressed in presentations of the history of Bolshevism should be the subsequent battle against anti-Bolshevik trends and factions, “the whiteguards, the avowed enemies of the Soviet government,” and “the miserable remnants” of the concepts and opinions of all the counterrevolutionary, anti-Party groups which had been crushed.¹⁶¹ This battle had for years been resolutely fought under the leadership of Comrade Stalin, who had also raised the theoretical ideas to the supreme height.¹⁶²

Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course. Annals of Communism Series. ed. David Brandenberger and Mikhail V. Zelenov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

160 Lavrentiy Beria, “К вопросу об истории большевистских организаций в Закавказье: Доклад на собрании Тбилисского партактива 21–22 июля 1935 г.,” 3rd ed. (Moscow: Партиздат ЦК ВКП(б), 1937). See an English-language version of the article, “The Victory of the National Policy of Lenin and Stalin” (first published in *The Communist International*, February 1937, vol. XIV, no. 2) and available from the Beria section of the Marxists Internet Archive at The Victory of the National Policy of Lenin and Stalin (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024. “The fifteen years of Soviet power in Georgia represent splendid pages in the new history of the people of Georgia.” Beria’s report, probably ghost-written for him by a group of Party historians from Georgia, was supposed to be a polemic with the diaries of Avel Yenukidze, Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the USSR, who allegedly did not put sufficient emphasis on Stalin’s role in the Social Democratic movement in Transcaucasia. The inspiration for the publication of an article correcting his errors probably came from Stalin himself. Cf. Wojciech Materski, *Gruzja*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2010), 174.

161 The Victory of the National Policy of Lenin and Stalin (marxists.org), accessed December 4, 2024.

162 For more, see Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin’s First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 7: “Beria helped [Stalin dissociate himself from his Georgian self] by serving as his accomplice in two acts that symbolized a repudiation of his heritage. The first was in 1935, when

The process to set up a sole, omnipotent Leader, which had been going on in the Soviet propaganda and politics of memory since the turn of the 1930s, had effectively been fully accomplished. The self-proclaimed champion who acceded to this seat of honor was Joseph Stalin, more and more widely acclaimed as “the Lenin of our times.”¹⁶³ The old version of history, which had not aroused much interest hitherto, was being reevaluated; so, too, was the Marxist theory of the role of the masses and the individual in history. An attack was launched against the now deceased Pokrovsky and the historians of his school, who were accused of advocating revisionist ideas and depreciating the history of the pre-revolutionary period, which was an “anti-Marxist deviation and vulgarization.” Thereby, they were depriving the people of “a feeling for their fatherland” and exerting a bad influence due to their failure to understand or notice the “Leninist-Stalinist” guidelines to history.¹⁶⁴

By the mid-thirties, the imperial approach to history had patently gained ascendancy over the class approach. There was a return to the pre-revolutionary roll of honor for heroes and victories, albeit importunately incrustated with references to, and quotes from the works of Marx, Lenin, and especially Stalin. After many years, undeniable despots were restored to a place of honor in the schoolbooks. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Catherine II—they had all, of course, resorted to cruel and ruthless methods, yet they had aspired to a far-reaching vision of Great Russia. Even for meagerly educated recipients, the allusion to the present must have been crystal-clear. By this time, the personality cult had enveloped not only the intimidated Party, but the whole of culture. Its ceremonies, at times verging on the grotesque, were turning into an essential ingredient of all public events whatsoever, particularly pompous whenever the General Secretary himself took part in them.¹⁶⁵

Beria published his notorious book, *On the History of the Bolshevik Organizations in Transcaucasia*, the purpose of which was to give Stalin a leading role in the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus by falsifying the historical facts and thereby denigrating the role of other revolutionary figures”; also Françoise Thom, *Beria: Le Janus du Kremlin* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 61–63.

163 “Сталин – это Ленин сегодня,” СТАЛИН – ЭТО ЛЕНИН СЕГОДНЯ – Страница 9 (stalinism.ru), accessed December 4, 2024 .

164 Boris Kagarlitsky, *Периферийная империя: Россия и миросистема*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Либроком, 2012); English edition: *Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 4.

165 “The floor rose in a standing ovation, applauded and cheered. It lasted a long time, some ten or fifteen minutes. Stalin was clapping, too. When the applause began to die down, someone shouted, ‘Long live the great Stalin!’ and it all started again. Finally, everyone sat down. Then a woman’s shrill cry rang out: ‘Glory to Stalin!’ [Слава Сталину!] We jumped to our feet, clapping our hands as hard as we could.” Иуа Ehrenburg, *Люди, годы, жизнь* vol. 4, 106. For an English

Rigorous adherence to Stalin's version of the history of the Party and the Soviet government started to be mandatory with no room for any departures. The basic explanations and interpretation were presented as the canons of Marxism-Leninism in the book, outlining the history of Bolshevism and known (in English) as the *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which was compiled strictly in keeping with Stalin's directives.¹⁶⁶ He ruled that all the earlier publications on the subject which attempted to expose a running list of enemies and traitors had lost their currency and no longer addressed the demand. On one occasion, he put it as follows: "Our Party's entire history is the story of our overcoming the contradictions within the Party and the inevitable strengthening of its ranks against the backdrop of that process of overcoming."¹⁶⁷ Stalin not only decided what the book's chronological order would be and checked the main points it made, but he also wrote part of the book himself.

First published in October 1938,¹⁶⁸ the *Short Course* became the Communist bible, not only for Soviet Communism but also for all of its manifestations worldwide, the quintessence of the Bolshevik politics of memory, their absolutely mandatory prerequisite. Over 300 editions of this manual for the history of global and Russian Communism were published in Stalin's lifetime, in 67 languages and a total print run of over 42 million.¹⁶⁹ The world had never seen, and would never again see anything like it. The book's main aim was to bring an end once and for all to the discussions and debates on the history of the Communist Party and

version, see *Selections from People, Years, and Life*, (comp. Christopher Moody, third edition, Pergamon, 1972).

166 *История Всесоюзной коммунистической партии (большевиков). Краткий курс.* The English version, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* is available at <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/HCPUSU39NB.html>, accessed December 4, 2024.

167 Joseph Stalin, "Еще раз о социал-демократическом уклоне в нашей партии," in *Сочинения*, vol. 9 (Moscow: ОГИЗ; Государственное издательство политической литературы, 1950), 5. For an officially approved English version of Stalin's message, see "The Social-Democratic Deviation in Our Party" and "Reply to the Discussion on the Report of 'The Social-Democratic Deviation in Our Party,'" (November 1926), available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at The Social-Democratic Deviation in our Party (marxists.org) and Reply to the Discussion on the Report on "The Social-Democratic Deviation in our Party" (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

168 Its publication in book form was preceded by a series of installments which appeared from September 9 to 19, 1938, in *Pravda*, the paper which served as the Party's official mouthpiece.

169 Andrzej Feliks Grabski, "O *Krótkim kursie* – nie całkiem krótko. Z problematyki filozofii dziejów stalinizmu," in *Archiwum Historii Myśli Politycznej*, ed. Instytut Studiów Politycznych (Polska Akademia Nauk); Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk. Zakład Historii Myśli Politycznej, vol. III (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 1993), 98.

Marxist movement. It was to stop the mouths of the educated members of the Party, whom Stalin had never trusted.

In November 1938, the Party's Central Committee adopted a resolution on the content and organization of Party propaganda in connection with the publication of the *Short Course*,¹⁷⁰ heralding an end to "license and confusion" in the presentation of the history of the Party and the Revolution. There would be no more "clashes of different points of view and arbitrary interpretations regarding the key issues in the theory and history of the Party, like the ones in the earlier textbooks." The *Short Course* was designated as the answer to the urgent need to resolve that arbitrariness, and contained the official interpretation of the basic issues in the history of the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism, approved by the Central Committee. Once it was published, any other interpretations of these issues would be "inadmissible." A Bolshevik catechism had emerged, and there would be severe reprisals for deviations of any kind from its dogmas. Only Stalin was authorized to make such departures. To make things doubly sure, the Party archives were put under the care of the NKVD, to prevent access for any who should want to rummage through the random collection of documents.¹⁷¹

All discussion whatsoever on the history of the Party stopped. That history had been fully codified and endowed with a uniform path of development, its direction marked out by the Soviet socio-political reality as its leading element. All that was left was merely competing in discussions involving quotations, the aim of which was to see who had a fuller grasp of the *Short Course*, who had come closest to the official interpretation and understanding the Leader's brilliant mind. Likewise, what resolved all historical issues not involving the Bolshevik Party was not a knowledge of the sources but using a quote from any of Stalin's statements to support a learned hypothesis. The voice of Stalin was the ultimate argument, even if the issue concerned was a point relating to ancient history.¹⁷²

170 *Коммунистическая партия Советского Союза в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и Пленумов ЦК, часть II, 1925–1953* (Moscow: Издательство политической литературы, 1953), 859–875. An English version of the *Short Course* was first published in New York by International Publishers in 1939; for a synopsis, see "History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course," available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

171 Joseph Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1945), available online at 2015.14532.J-Stalin-problems-Of-Leninism.pdf (archive.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

172 See references to Stalin in Nikolai Mashkin, *История древнего Рима* (Moscow: Госполитиздат, 1950). See also Jerzy Giedroyc, "Stalin i nowa koncepcja historii Rzymu," *Kultura* (Paris), no. 12 (1951).

The *Short Course* was the most classic of the classics in the Soviet politics of memory. For over seventy years, it served as a store of instructions which for all intents and purposes were nothing but an uninterrupted sequence of manipulations of the truth about the past. It imposed a strictly defined reading of history, the resultant of current political and ideological needs, whatever was required to build up the Leader's personality cult, and offered a repository of invectives for capitalists and especially for former Party members, branded as "traitors," "deviants," "renegades," "midgets," "miserable lackeys" etc. The *Short Course* reduced the history of the Party and Revolution merely to their political role.¹⁷³ It developed into an absolutely foolproof ideological tool for the control of political orthodoxy and indoctrination, the ruthless imposition of the one and only truth regarding the past and future of Socialism/Communism.

National and class elements in the politics of memory

The hypocrisy of the Soviet politics of memory is patently visible especially in the way the Soviet Union implemented one of its basic ideological slogans, the right of nations to self-determination. In the period immediately before they seized power and the first years of their rule, the Bolsheviks often resorted to the claim that tsarist Russia was "the prison of the nations,"¹⁷⁴ in a clear-cut condemnation of the policy of conquest and annexation. On November 15, 1917, in one of its first decrees, the Council of People's Commissars "proclaimed the right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, . . . even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state."¹⁷⁵ The decree of August 29, 1918, on the annulment of all the partitioning treaties, followed the same path.¹⁷⁶ Soon, however, it turned out that the economy could not manage without wheat from Ukraine, petroleum oil from Azerbaijani, or the mineral resources of Georgia; and hence it was necessary—if only for this reason—to return to a policy of a single, centralized economic entity, which would therefore have to be united politically, and to control disruptive tendencies.

173 Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*, 95.

174 This term was first used by the Marquis de Custine, *Lettres de Russie: la Russie en 1839*. Lenin borrowed this term from Alexander Herzen, see Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 105.

175 For the official English version, see "Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia." The first English translation was published in *The Nation* on December 28, 1919. Available online at Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

176 "Extract from the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars Annulling Agreements of Former Russian Governments with Germany and Austria Concerning Poland," available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at 29 August 1918 (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

When the conflicts concerning the Transcaucasian Federation started, along with discussions what type of relations should there be between the diverse Soviet republics, the epithet of pre-revolutionary Russia as “the prison of the nations” was dropped; if it ever appeared again, it would be modified to “the tsarist regime as the prison of the nations.”¹⁷⁷ The slogan of the right of nations to self-determination was heard less and less frequently, and it was clearly at loggerheads with what could be observed in practice. Fearing that if they continued to abide by this rule they would reduce the State to the territories inhabited by the “Great Russians,” the Bolsheviks started to employ violent means for the recovery of the peripheries of the old Empire, which were in a state of ferment for national liberation.¹⁷⁸ Already by 1918, the Bolsheviks managed to suppress the Tartar and Bashkir struggle for independence, and soon turned their attention to crush such aspirations among the Belarusians, Ukrainians, and nations living in Transcaucasia. They revived the argument familiar in tsarist times that the nations of Asia had voluntarily and peacefully submitted to Russian protection, and that Russia had saved its Slavic brethren from Muslim oppression. Now it turned out that in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, this mission to “protect the nations” would be continued by the Bolsheviks.

They started their stint to “continue protecting” by modifying and curtailing the extent of the slogan they had bandied about prior to winning the Revolution. They concurred with Lenin’s point of view that the historically warranted “right of nations to self-determination” was now the outmoded catchphrase of a bygone age of revolution and bourgeois democratic movements.¹⁷⁹ In the post-revolutionary re-

177 Cf. Mikhail Geller, *Союз нерушимый*, <http://you1917-91.narod.ru/geller.html>, accessed December 4, 2024; also in *Советское общество: возникновение, развитие, исторический финал*, ed. Yuri Afanasyev (Moscow: Рос. гос. гуманит. ун-т, 1997).

178 Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 814.

179 Cf., for instance, the official English translations of Lenin’s observations on the right of nations to self-determination, as presented on the website of the Marxists Internet Archive, “National-Liberalism and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (1913) Lenin: National-Liberalism and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (marxists.org); “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (1914) Lenin: The Right of Nations to Self-Determination (marxists.org); “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” (1916) Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (marxists.org); as contrasted with his “Speech Delivered at a Joint Session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee” May 5, 1920) Speech Delivered At A Joint Session Of The All-Russia Central Executive Committee, The Moscow Soviet Of Workers’, Peasants’ and Red Army Deputies, Trade Unions, and Factory Committees May 5, 1920 (marxists.org); or his “Report on the Internal and External Position of the Republic at a Meeting of Activists of the Moscow Organisation of the R.C.O. (B.)” (October 9, 1920) Lenin: Report on the Internal and External Position of the Republic at a Meeting of Activists of the Moscow Organisation of the R.C.P.(B.) (marxists.org), all articles accessed January 12, 2024.

alities, it had to be reinterpreted as follows: “basically we acknowledge national self-determination, but within the bounds of reason, as defined by the proletarian class struggle.”¹⁸⁰ For the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet State, the right of nations to self-determination essentially turned into “a scrap of paper,” as a historian of political ideas put it.¹⁸¹

So the critical factor which decided whether a given nation had matured enough to be independent was the extent to which its working class had developed and whether that class wanted independence. Yet of course a working class is internationalist by its very nature, so it would certainly not want to weaken the state which had achieved the victorious Revolution by creating unnecessary divisions. Theoretically, secession would be feasible only “once Socialism had achieved victory” and only “for a very short spell,” before the triumphal onset of internationalism. There should be no self-sufficient “malformed state entities of the likes of Poland,” especially as in the newly formed states the national interest “would definitely become subservient to class interest.”¹⁸² For the logic of the historical process, and the aim of Socialism was not merely to abolish the dispersion of humankind divided up into small states and separated out as individual nations, not merely to bring the nations closer to each other, but also to combine them in one big mix.

The “big mix” was to be done on a much broader scale and entail territories the Empire had lost, primarily Poland and Finland. In the case of Poland, the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin, produced a peculiar argument. They claimed that Poland’s right to self-determination should come from its “freedom to unite (with Russia, with the Russian proletariat);” from convincing the Polish working class that it would be “good for them to unite with the Russian working class” and getting them to abandon their chauvinistic mentality.¹⁸³ The task would not be easy, because “all of them there [in Poland, W.M.] are chauvinists,” as Felix Dzerzhinsky, who knew the situation well, told the Bolshevik top brass.¹⁸⁴

The Bolshevik attempt to expand the Revolution and carry it into neighboring countries by force of arms to unite with their “class brethren” was only partially

180 Quoted after Józef Smaga, *Narodziny i upadek Imperium. ZSRR 1917–1991* (Kraków: Znak, 1992), 39.

181 Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*. 48.

182 Quoted after Margarita Czernych, “Kwestia polska w interpretacji dwóch nurtów rosyjskiej myśli socjalistycznej w XX w.” trans. Aleksander Achmatowicz, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 1, 56 (1997).

183 See Vladimir I. Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question” in the official English translation available from the website of the Marxists Internet Archive, at Lenin: 1913/crnq: 4. ‘CULTURAL-NATIONAL AUTONOMY’ (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024, on “bourgeois chauvinists” from many nations, including “the Right chauvinist wing” of the Polish Socialist Party.

184 *Ibid.*

successful. The Transcaucasian republics—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—were Sovietized in a bloodbath. The Far Eastern Republic was annexed. Poland managed to fight the Bolsheviks off and hence the Baltic republics were saved as well. However, it turned out that there could be serious problems with centralizing the republics with a “new type” of Bolshevik government and putting them under strict control from Moscow. The first major conflict to erupt on this basis occurred in Transcaucasia. Once the Red Army had overpowered and suppressed the national republics newly founded there in 1918, the Bolsheviks thrust Soviet statehood upon the Azeris, Georgians, and Armenians.¹⁸⁵ Soon, however, Moscow decided to join the region with the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic, in an intermediate stage prior to full amalgamation with Russia over the heads of all of these nations and the conflicts which had divided them in the past. The project was implemented in an arbitrary manner and an atmosphere of coercion and intimidation. Efforts made by local Bolshevik leaders to stop the undertaking were brutally put down.¹⁸⁶

The Communist decision-makers continued to ignore the national issue and the traditional rifts between the nations and national groups living in the territories now under Bolshevik control, so the troubles did not come to an end with the Transcaucasian incident. At first, the policies the Bolsheviks pursued proclaimed the advent of a new era when the path of progress would be staked out by the workers, who were impervious to the nationalist phraseology characteristic of the bygone capitalist age, so not much notice was taken of these problems. The conflict died down, only to erupt even more forcefully in December 1922, when the Bolsheviks started federating these republics to create the Soviet Union, and escalated when work began to draft the Soviet constitution. “National Bolsheviks” appeared in all the non-Russian republics. These activists had swallowed the slogan of self-determination for the nations and demanded at least a say in the process to centralize their republics, as well as respect for their separate historical traditions and national culture.

The alternative solutions—a real or bogus form of federation—were made absolutely clear from the very outset of the discussion on the prospective constitution. Would it be an authentic federation or merely a federation in name to conceal effective incorporation in Russia? The project Stalin presented in April 1923 for a resolution which was to serve as the grounds for a constitutional system of dependence between Russia and the rest of the republics, on the basis of the

¹⁸⁵ See Wojciech Materski, “Kwestia tzw. pierwszej niepodległości republik Zakaukazja (1918–1921),” *Obóz*, no. 39 (2001): 9–20.

¹⁸⁶ For more on this subject, see Materski, *Gruzja*, 124–133.

“autonomization idea,”¹⁸⁷ came up against steadfast opposition at first. Notwithstanding, Stalin, who coordinated six commissions working in parallel to draft the constitution, pressed for the autonomization project regardless. What ultimately decided the issue was the authoritative voice of Lenin, whose preference was for a camouflaged form of centralization. The rest of the Party leadership concurred with him, and the final draft adopted the formula of an “All-Union State,” that is a federation uniting entities nominally enjoying equal rights.¹⁸⁸

The result of the work done by the constitutional commission, amended after Lenin’s intervention, complied with the initial premises, although they did contain points which could be presented for propaganda purposes as concessions to the National Bolsheviks, the key aspect being the maintenance of the federative formula. The gradual curtailment of these concessions, disclosing their illusory nature, was inevitable from the strategic point of view—what was being created was a classless State and Party—and would merely be spaced out over time. Rescheduling implementation was prompted by the setbacks in Transcaucasia and the different opinions they gave rise to in the close circle of Party leaders as to the rate at which the changes should be made.

At first, the National Bolsheviks appeared to have carried the day: they had defended their historically warranted right to build up their “new type” of statehood the way they wanted and relaxed their “Elder Brother’s” formula. Evidence for this came shortly after the constitution was adopted, in the form of *korenizatsiia*, the “indigenization” of the republics in the Union.¹⁸⁹ Nationality was to be a criterion applied to mark out and establish administrative entities, which improved the rating for the authorities in communities attached to their historical and national traditions, not only in the republics themselves but also in émigré circles, chiefly the Belarusians and Ukrainians, very many of whom now wanted to return home.

The new approach to history, the origins of the federative Soviet Union, and respect for the national factor beside class did not last long. The assumption that education in the socialist spirit would weaken the destructive national factor and

187 Joseph Stalin, “Национальные моменты в партийном и государственном строительстве. Тезисы,” in *Сочинения*, vol. 5 (Moscow: ОГИЗ; Государственное издательство политической литературы, 1947), 181–194. For the official English translation, see “National Factors in Party and State Affairs” (March 24, 1923), available from the website of the Marxists Internet Archive, at National Factors in Party and State Affairs (marxists.org), accessed January 12, 2024.

188 *Образование Союза Советских Социалистических Республик. Сборник документов*, comp. Sofya Iosifovna Yakubovskaya (Moscow: Наука, 1972), docs. 215, 456–472.

189 For more on this, see Wojciech Materski, *Polska a ZSRR 1923–1924. Stosunki wzajemne na tle sytuacji politycznej w Europie* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1981), 261–271.

strengthen the constructive class element, leading to closer union turned out to be wrong. It was disproved in the Polraions Dzierżeńszczyzna and Marchlewszczyzna, Polish national districts whose inhabitants clung to their cultural tradition and religion, despite all the attempts to indoctrinate them. They were hostile to the idea of collectivizing their farms.

All that was left was to centralize the Soviet empire by resorting to the methods tried and tested under the tsars—violence, compulsory Russification, and decacination.¹⁹⁰ Just as in tsarist Russia, Russian was made an obligatory subject in all the schools, the Russian alphabet was introduced in those regions where it had never been used before, and Russian history and literature were made priority subjects on all the school curricula.¹⁹¹ In outcome, a singular turnabout had to be carried out in the concepts derived from the idea of internationalism and class fraternity, which flipped over to a never directly declared but overly apparent Great Russian nationalism.¹⁹² Distinctions started to be made in assessments of Russia’s reactionary domestic policy under the tsars, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as compared to its “effectively progressive” foreign policy of friendship with neighboring nations, which had been welcomed into a mutually shared state designed to give them a better life and a brighter future.¹⁹³

Also, Russia’s past was more and more often perceived as something more than just the oppression of the masses. The evils Russia had committed were downplayed: for instance, the culprits to blame for partitioning Poland were Austria and Prussia, while all that Russia did was to stop them from gobbling up all the territories of Poland–Lithuania. On the other hand, Russian successes were magnified and bloated out of all proportion: the Smolensk regiments were the real victors in the Battle of Grunwald (1410), with a minor contribution from the Lithuanian and Polish forces.¹⁹⁴ The pages of Russian history filled up with scientists who pioneered just about all the key inventions in world civilization, long before the inventors or discoverers generally credited with them. A Russian called Kova Mitny was the first to discover America, well before Columbus.¹⁹⁵ The atmosphere was such that even the top Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, who had always lambasted the tsarist policy of conquest and never concurred with the opinion that Russia was unique among all the nations in the world, was ac-

190 Afanasyev, *Opasная Россия*, 108.

191 Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie w podręcznikach*, 88–89. Russian was not compulsory only in the elementary (four-year) schools in the national republics.

192 Cf. Broda, “Zrozumieć Rosję”? 173ff.

193 For more on this, see Smaga, *Narodziny i upadek Imperium*, 142–143.

194 That is what *Краткий курс истории СССР*, (*The Short Course*) says on p. 43.

195 <https://otvet.mail.ru/question/77540880>, accessed November 20, 2024.

cused of being unpatriotic and relegated to the ranks of the “anti-Marxists, entranced by a vulgar type of sociology, succumbing to bourgeois concepts of history.”¹⁹⁶ Luckily, he did not live to see it all in print.

In line with the habit developed by the Bolsheviks to see themselves as continuing the imperial legacy, some historians arrived at a conclusion that despite the linguistic smokescreen, there came a time in the Soviet politics of memory when it started to glorify the Russian imperial conquests and well-nigh unashamedly sing the praises of the unique and superior Russian nation.¹⁹⁷ Any who ventured to challenge that uniqueness which the Bolsheviks claimed to be continuing were branded as chauvinists, nationalists, ideological enemies, in sum—dangerous upstarts.

The operations Stalin and the Stalinist regime undertook in the ‘30s and ‘40s against entire nations considered the system’s real or potential enemies generally amounted to their annihilation or isolation from “wholesome society.” Thus, the enemies of the State were determined not on the criterion of class, as the ideology said, but on national grounds. The victims of these repressions were (in chronological order): the Koreans, Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians, Jews, Germans, and later the Karachays, Chechens, the Ingush people, Balkars, Kalmyks, Crimean Tartars, Meskhetian Turks, the Hemshin people, and the Kurds.¹⁹⁸ These operations were an almost exact repetition of the tsarist policy—the genocide of the Circassians, and the slaughter and repressive measures against the peoples of the Northern Caucasus.

A fully premeditated campaign was undertaken to wipe out the intelligentsia of the repressed nations, and their “basic masses,” mainly peoples of the Northern Caucasus or Koreans or Jews from the Far East, were sent to forced labor camps or deported to uninhabited parts of Central Asia. It dealt in one fell swoop with the labor shortage in economically important but uninhabited places.¹⁹⁹

196 Quoted after Grabski, *O Krótkim kursie*, 119. For an extensive discussion of this topic, see *Против антимарксистской концепции М. Н. Покровского: сборник статей*, ed. Boris Grekov, Emelyan Yaroslavsky, and Semyon Kuzmich Bushuev (Moscow; Leningrad: Акад. наук СССР, 1939); *Против антимарксистской концепции М. Н. Покровского: сборник статей*, vol. 2 (Moscow; Leningrad, 1940); Andrey Artizov, “М.Н. Покровский: финал карьеры – успех или поражение?,” *Отечественная история*, no. 1–2 (1998).

197 Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume III: The Breakdown*, 95.

198 Nicolas Werth, “Un État contre son peuple. Violences, répressions, terreurs en URSS de 1917 à 1953,” in Stéphane Courtois et al., *Livre noir du communisme: Crimes, terreur, répression* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1997), 240–257. English translation: *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1999).

199 Cf. Boris Kurashvili, *Политическая доктрина сталина*, *История СССР*, No. 5 (1989): 51–68.

The NKVD's Polish operation launched in August 1937 was particularly ruthless. It was targeted against all the Polish people in the Soviet Union, regardless of social stratification, so it met all the criteria qualifying it as genocide.²⁰⁰ The number of victims has been estimated at 120–140 thousand. The full operation was preceded by the destruction of Dzierżyńszczyzna and Marchlewszczyzna, the two Polish national districts, and the murder or deportation of their entire population. Another group shortlisted for annihilation were the Polish Communists. The leaders of the Communist Party of Poland were murdered, and subsequently, in August 1938, this party was dissolved on the trumped-up charge that it had been “infiltrated by Piłsudski's and POW [Polish Military Organization] agents.”

Behind a façade of internationalism, in the 1930s Soviet policy on the nationalities was dominated by a nationalism which far outstripped its tsarist predecessor as regards criminal ruthlessness. Descriptions of Bolshevik doctrine and Soviet Marxism-Leninism as “a specific articulation of a camouflaged Great Russian nationalism” come as no surprise. It was a continuation of the tsarist imperial policy, a dictatorship divested of ideology, or perhaps just hiding under an ideological mask and wooing the masses with empty slogans.²⁰¹ A good description of its nature is given by the original title of the book by the Polish historian and politician Jan Kucharczyński, *Od białego do czerwonego caratu* (literally “From the White to the Red Tsardom”), and by an expression which came into widespread use after the collapse of the USSR, “the Soviet proletarian-internationalist Empire,”²⁰² showing that the ideology the system paid lip-service to was in reality dominated by typically imperial operations. This evaluation may be said to hold for the 1930s as well as for all the subsequent decades of the Soviet State.²⁰³

200 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Tomasz Sommer, *Operacja Antypolska NKWD 1937–1938. Geneza i przebieg ludobójstwa popełnionego na Polakach w Związku Sowieckim* (Warszawa: 3S Media, 2014).

201 Cf. Mikhail Agursky, *The Third Rome: National Bolshevism in the USSR* (London: Westview Press, 1987); Stobiecki, *Bolszewizm a historia*, 46.

202 Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 86.

203 “The Soviet Union began to be perceived as the first empire of a new type, deliberately hiding its imperial nature behind a screen purporting to implement self-determination for the nations.” Andrzej Nowak, “Od redaktora,” in Nowak, *Rosja i Europa Wschodnia: „imperiologia“ stosowana*, 9–10. “[Gradually] the state was transforming from the headquarters of revolution into a rational and bureaucratic apparatus for the resolution of pragmatic tasks.” Andrey Sokolov, “Конец советской истории,” in *Россия на пороге XXI века: оглядываясь на век минувший*, ed. Yuri Polyakov and Andrey N. Sakharov (Moscow: Наука, 2000), 244.

The war of 1941–1945 and an adjustment to the Soviet policy of memory

The about-turn of 1939, the switch from the status the Soviet Union had proudly insisted on in its propaganda as “the defender of peace” to an aggressive alliance with Nazi Germany in the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, was certainly a surprise to the inhabitants of the USSR. It was all the more of a shock to the international communist movement, which for years had been indoctrinated to see fascism as its chief ideological enemy.²⁰⁴ Adolf Hitler flipped over into an ally overnight, Russia’s partner for the business of gobbling up East-Central Europe. Yet, for more insightful observers it was not so astonishing, in view of the profound systemic similarities (both countries had a one-party system under a dictatorial leader, rule by terror and invigilation, and a vast extent of power for the political police),²⁰⁵ mutual hostility to the Versailles order, and a program of territorial expansion. The Soviet Union’s imperial aims had become noticeable as soon as the Bolsheviks seized power, so by the late 1930s, despite its membership of the League of Nations, the USSR had manifested its imperial ambitions plainly enough for all to see.²⁰⁶

The next wave of mass repression against the enemies of the system (i.e. Stalin)—real or primarily potential or imaginary enemies—terrorized the people of the Soviet Union so much that defiance of any kind against the complete reversal of the propaganda image of Hitler’s Germany was unthinkable and ruled out completely. Nonetheless, the new match and its impending consummation had to be given some sort of justification in the propaganda. Not all the people found the argument convincing that Soviet policy should be guided by the rule that any means might be lawful if it served a specific purpose.²⁰⁷ To justify the volte-face, the propagandists resorted to historical arguments and the stereotype of the “Polish lord” exploiting and oppressing the national minorities in Poland, and Germany as “the cradle of Marxism,” the country with the world’s most mature working class (as regards ideology). Suddenly there was a spate of exhibitions in Moscow and Leningrad displaying German art, the German economy, and Ger-

²⁰⁴ Roger Moorhouse, *The Devil’s Alliance: Hitler’s Pact with Stalin, 1939–1941* (London: Bodley Head, 2014) 17, 282.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 119; Horst Duhnke, *Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945* (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1972), 343.

²⁰⁶ Proof came with the Soviet–Japanese armed conflict (the Battle of Lake Khasan in July and August 1938 and the Battles of Khalkhin Gol in May to August 1939).

²⁰⁷ A Red Army officer’s statement, quoted after Sławomir Dębski, *Między Berlinem a Moskwą. Stosunki niemiecko-sowieckie 1939–1941* (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2003), 120.

man achievements in science and technology. A ban was imposed overnight on the performance of Sergey's cantata from Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*,²⁰⁸ and Eisenstein's extremely popular, undeniably anti-German film *Alexander Nevsky*; films showing the persecution of the Jews in the Third Reich were removed from the cinemas.²⁰⁹ They were replaced by the announcement of forthcoming premieres of Wagner's *Valkyrie* in Moscow's Bolshoi, and *Lohengrin* in Leningrad's Kirov (formerly Mariinsky) Theater.²¹⁰ A sentence of five years in prison was brought in for the dissemination of "anti-German attitudes," and on the principle of inertia, courts still continued to hand it down for a couple of months after Hitler's invasion in June 1941.²¹¹

Another problem that was promptly dealt with was the vast amount of confusion in the Communist parties subject to the Comintern in connection with the German invasion of Poland. On September 8, following Stalin's instructions, the head of the Comintern, Georgy Dimitrov, announced a directive in which he called the Polish–German war "bilaterally imperialist," and asserted that "the international proletariat should certainly not defend fascist Poland."²¹²

Stalin procrastinated for as long as he could with the Red Army's attack on Poland, leaving Berlin disgruntled. He bided his time to make the best use of his assets defined in the secret protocol to the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact²¹³ without

208 "Театр в годы войны: 70 документов из архивов," <https://www.mariinsky.ru/ru/about/ww2/1941/>, accessed November 20, 2024. Alexander Nevsky, op. 78 (1938–1939), cantata for mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra, lyrics by Vladimir Lugovskoy.

209 The following historical movies were produced in the USSR: *Professor Mamlock*, directed by Adolf Minkin and Herbert Rappaport, based on Friedrich Wolf's play (première September 1938) and "The Oppenheim Family," directed by Grigori Roshal, based on Lion Feuchtwanger's novel (première January 1939).

210 The Moscow première (directed by Sergei Eisenstein) was played in November 1940, and the Leningrad première (directed by Vladimir Losski) was staged in June 1941 (on the 21st, the eve of Hitler's invasion). See Tahirih Motazedian, "The Communist *Walküre*: Eisenstein's Vision for Marrying German Wagnerism with Soviet Communism," *Journal of Musicological Research*, July 13, 2021, 183–213; online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411896.2021.1941005>, accessed November 20, 2024; "Die Walküre" by Wagner, Moscow, 1940 (introduction by Sergei Eisenstein); Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137.

211 Ehrenburg, *Люди, годы, жизнь*, vol. 4.

212 Quoted from the collection of documents published as *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 1: *Jeńcy nie wypowiedzianej wojny. Sierpień 1939 – marzec 1940* (Warszawa: Trio, 1995), 8–9; cf. the English edition, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment. Prisoners of an Undeclared War*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 17–25, esp. 18 and 21. For more, see Dębski, *Między Berlinem a Moskwą*, 131–135.

213 *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 1, doc. 2, p. 66–67; English edition *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, doc. 2, p. 66–67.

being accused of embarking on an aggression plan jointly with Hitler. He did not decide to enter the war until he could reasonably use the argument that he would be protecting his fraternal Slavic minorities in the event of Poland's total collapse, to save them from the Wehrmacht. Thereby he would be fulfilling his historic duty with respect to the minorities forcibly sundered from Russia in the wake of the Polish–Bolshevik war of 1920. Thanks to Stalin, after years of “slavery under bourgeois–landowners’ Poland,” they could now be reunited with the motherland—the Byelorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics.²¹⁴

Stalin let Berlin know in advance of his intention to “protect the Slavic minorities,” and quite naturally, Hitler took it with a great deal of reservation.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, the erasure of all the anti-German items from the Soviet propaganda only convinced the Germans that it was merely a question of keeping up appearances, and that they should have no misgivings about the Soviets’ loyalty.

Soviet propaganda gave a lot of publicity to the restoration of the Slavic minorities to their Soviet motherland. There were special newsreels; a special series of postage stamps was issued to mark the occasion; and numerous articles were published in the papers. The main idea was that historic justice had been done and a splendid future awaited the annexed territories in the Socialist fold. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories were subjected to a heavy dose of indoctrination which included memory politics. A lot of money was lavished on the scheme, with a network of propaganda, cultural and educational centers set out.²¹⁶

The population of the incorporated territories was targeted with a massive stream of historical propaganda, manifested at its fullest intensity in the schools. A new history syllabus was brought in at all levels of the education system, which boiled down to a primitive dogma that Socialism marked the culmination of the historical process; it was not intended to educate, but rather to bring up young people “in the spirit of internationalism, to reject religion, espouse Soviet patriotism, and adopt discipline and a Socialist attitude to work.”²¹⁷ All they needed to know about the history of the Second Polish Republic was what they could learn from the speech delivered by People’s Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov during the session of the Supreme Soviet held on October 31, 1939, summed up in his remark

214 *Международное положение и внешняя политика СССР. Сборник документов и материалов* (Moscow: Воениздат, 1939), 22–25, 27–29, 191–192.

215 Dębski, *Między Berlinem a Moskwą*, 108.

216 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Albin Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków na ziemiach wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1939–1941* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1997), 482ff, (592–603).

217 *Інструкцыя аб парадку рэарганізацыі заходніх абласцей БССР* (Minsk, 1939), after Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków*, 430.

that it was “the bastard of the Versailles Treaty,” and had only existed “at the expense of the oppressed non-Polish minorities.”²¹⁸

The adult population of the annexed territories, especially in the rural areas, was also subjected to a political propaganda campaign. An extensive network of “agitation points,” “red corners,” reading rooms, culture centers, libraries, local societies etc. was established to cater for this need. The main aim of all these entities was to make the people aware how much they had suffered under the rule of “Polish lords,” how the simple folk had been oppressed for centuries, and how much they had gained by being united with the great family of Soviet peoples. It was obvious that the campaign would have a very low success rate, primarily because of its overtly fraudulent content. Nonetheless, the reign of terror launched by the NKVD (the Soviet political police) effectively prevented protest or resistance of any kind, both as regards school attendance, which was compulsory, as well as participation in the political lectures, which were in fact a form of obligatory adult education.

The Soviet propaganda campaign, conducted in the fall of 1939 chiefly in the newspapers and focused on the “liberation” of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian brethren thanks to the historic act of justice accomplished by the Red Army, soon lost momentum. However, things were quite different with the fundamental change effected after September 1939 in the Soviet politics of memory concerning relations with Germany. This campaign was carried out under the motto Stalin availed himself of in the telegram he sent to Ribbentrop in October 1939, assuring him that “the friendship between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Germany, cemented in blood [had] every reason to be solid and lasting.”²¹⁹ In spite of this guideline, Soviet propagandists were “completely flabbergasted” and did not know “what and how to write” about the volte-face that had occurred.²²⁰ They were even more confused when, not much later, they got another guideline from the head of the Red Army’s Political Board Lev Mekhlis, instructing them that they were not even allowed to mention fascism.²²¹ A series of books criticizing

218 *Международное положение и внешняя политика СССР*, 156–157.

219 Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941–1945* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964) 89; Moorhouse, *The Devil’s Alliance*, 73. “What made a stunning impression on me was Stalin’s telegram to Ribbentrop, speaking of friendship cemented by blood.” Ehrenburg, *Люди, годы, жизнь*, vol. 4.

220 Vladimir Nevezhin, *Синдром наступательной войны. Советская пропаганда в преддверии “священных боев”, 1939–1941 гг.* (Moscow: АИРО-XX, 1997), 57.

221 “— Не дразните немцев . . . — А затем пояснил: — “Красная звезда” часто пишет о фашистах, фашизме. Прекратите. Обстановка меняется. Не надо громко об этом кричать.” [“Do not annoy the Germans . . .” And then [Stalin] explained: “*The Red Star* often writes about fascists, fascism. Stop that. The situation is changing. There is no need to shout about it.”] That was Stalin’s instruction to Mekhlis, after Dmitry Volkogonov, *Триумф и трагедия. Полити-*

fascism were removed from bookstores and libraries overnight.²²² Things reached a point where some texts on the war between Russia and Prussia, which had already been approved for publication, were suppressed, and Hitler was not to be compared to Napoleon.²²³

Once the problems connected with the annexation of Poland's eastern territories had been "regulated," Soviet propagandists got down to compiling the "historical arguments" to support the next stage in the implementation of the secret clauses in Stalin's deal with Hitler, the seizure of the Baltic states. The credit for inaugurating this aspect of the Soviet politics of memory, once it had been confirmed, should go to Molotov and the speech in which he propounded that small states like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia could protect their independence only in a strict arrangement with the Soviet Union on the basis of shared military resources.²²⁴ Articles started to appear arguing that after the First World War, the bourgeoisie of the Baltic republics had played a counterrevolutionary part, obstructing the socialist changes initiated by the people and, "acting in cahoots with foreign imperialists and Russian White forces, had stopped the Red Army's advance." Under pressure from the bourgeoisie, the Baltic republics had proclaimed their so-called "independence, turning into strategic bases for intervention . . . against the Soviet State."²²⁵

The Red Army's assault on Finland, which followed shortly, was partially successful: only part of Finland's territory, Karelia, was annexed. The other Baltic republics succumbed to Moscow's military and political pressure and "of their own free will" became Soviet republics. In June 1940, when the Soviets served an ultimatum on Romania, that country yielded up Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina to the USSR. Stalin was triumphant. In November 1940, Commissar Molotov traveled to Berlin to make arrangements for the next phase of territorial plunder. However, no agreement was reached. In an atmosphere of

чeский портрет И.В.Сталина. В 2-х книгах, vol. II, part 1 (Moscow: Издательство Агентства печати Новости, 1989), 131; available at http://imwerden.de/pdf/volkogonov_triumf_i_tragediya_kn2_ch1_1989_ocr.pdf, accessed December 13, 2023.

222 Nikolay Kornev, *Третья империя в лицах* (Moscow: Гослитиздат, 1937); Ernst Thälmann, *Боевые речи и статьи* (Moscow: Моск. Рабочий, 1935); Sergey Vishnev, *Как вооружаются фашистские поджигатели войны* (Сер: Библиотека Красноармейца. Moscow: Воениздат, 1939). For more, see Mikhail Zelenov, "Главлит и историческая наука в 20–30-е годы," *Вопросы истории*, no. (1997): 21ff.

223 Nevezhin, *Синдром наступательной войны*, 61, 64.

224 *Международное положение и внешняя политика СССР*, 163–164.

225 *Борьба за Советскую власть в Прибалтике*, ed. Isaac Mints et al. (Moscow: Наука, 1967), 225 (see also 420, 523–524).

growing distrust, both parties started to prepare for the forthcoming clash.²²⁶ Hitler was first and struck on June 22, 1941.

The string of setbacks the Red Army sustained in the first weeks after the German invasion brought it home to Stalin that he would never get people to identify with their country merely by applying a reign of terror and get them to make sacrifices. What was needed was a radical change in the propaganda, especially in the politics of memory, which had to invoke arguments with a better chance of reaching the people than the timeworn ideological phraseology. It had to “appeal to the patriotic potential in the traditional Russian spiritual culture.”²²⁷ The first signal of the change came with Stalin’s address delivered during the celebrations for the anniversary of the Bolshevik coup. Speaking on November 7, 1941, in the vaults of the Moscow underground, he recalled public figures from the history of Russia under the tsars (not heroes of the Revolution and civil war, as he had done hitherto): “The war you are waging is a war of liberation, a just war. Let the manly images of our great ancestors—Alexander Nevsky, Dimitry Donskoy, Kuzma Minin, Dimitry Pozharsky, Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov—inspire you in this war!”²²⁸ One of the outcomes following on from this speech was the foundation of a new series of Soviet military distinctions for bravery, named after the chief personages and most glorious chapters in the Empire’s military history: the Orders of the Great Patriotic War (instituted May 1942), Generalissimo Suvorov (July 1942), General Kutuzov (July 1942), Prince Alexander Nevsky (July 1942), Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky (October 1943), Admiral Fyodor Ushakov (March 1944), and Admiral Pavel Nakhimov (March 1944). The Order of St. George was skipped,²²⁹ nevertheless the list definitely gave the impression of the Red Army being appended to the roll call of glory, unbroken over many centuries of Russian/Soviet military exploits. The abolition of the institution of army commis-

226 Nevezhin, *Синдром наступательной войны*, 146 ff; Volkogonov, *Триумф и трагедия*, 136 (letter from Georgy Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff, to Stalin), see http://imwerden.de/pdf/volkogonov_triumf_i_tragediya_kn2_ch1_1989_ocr.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024.

227 “Святейший Патриарх Московский и всея Руси Алексий II, Столетие трагедий, Столетие надежд,” in *Россия на рубеже XXI века*, ed. Polyakov and Sakharov, 31.

228 Joseph Stalin, “Speech at the Red Army Parade on the Red Square, Moscow, November 7, 1942.” Official English translation available from the Marxists Internet Archive at [Speech at the Red Army Parade on the Red Square, Moscow \(marxists.org\)](http://www.marxists.org), accessed November 20, 2024. The newsreel made to mark the event presented the ceremony taking place in Red Square.

229 Full name: The Military Order of St. George the Martyr and Victor, awarded 1769–1917; revised 1992.

sars in October 1942 served as a symbol of this continuity, ending the obstructive doubling of command at every level of the Soviet forces.²³⁰

The Soviets began to refer to their war against Nazi Germany and its satellites as “the Great Patriotic War,” thereby directly associating it with the heroic tradition of the war against Napoleon’s invasion and the Russian victory of 1812. What was accentuated in the epithet, not only during the war but also in the subsequent decades of its mythification, were its references to the Nation and State, rather than to “Class,” “the Party,” “Socialism,” or “Communism.” In the beginnings of Soviet statehood, that would have been regarded as a heresy.

Propaganda instantly highlighted the heroic deeds of soldiers who were not Russian by nationality but they or their forefathers had “made a voluntary decision to unite with Russia” and were now defending Russia as their historic home country.²³¹ This prepared the ground for the decision to create national units with their own language for separate military commands within the framework of the Red Army.²³²

Another feature which had been absent since the 1917 coup, the theme of Slavic unity, was now restored to the Soviet wartime politics of memory and proclaimed the need of all the Slavic peoples to put up resistance to the Teutonic onslaught. In October 1941, an All-Slavic Committee of the Soviet Union was founded during a “meeting of representatives of all the Slavic nations.” The new institution’s statute defined it as “an anti-fascist social organization, founded to fight fascism in the Slavic countries.”²³³ In early 1942, the Committee launched the publication of its monthly magazine *Slavyane*. One of its tasks was “to present the heroic chapters in the history of the Slavic nations,”²³⁴ that is, to accomplish the

230 *Великая Отечественная война. 1943 год: Исследования, документы, комментарии*, ed. Vasily Khristoforov (Moscow: Издательство Главного архивного управления города Москвы, 2013), 261–262. Shortly (January 1943), the epaulettes which had been abolished after 1917 were restored.

231 Teofil Benke, “Informacyjno-propagandowe aspekty zwycięstw Armii Czerwonej w latach Wielkiej Wojny Narodowej ZSRR (czerwiec 1941 – maj 1945),” in *Związek Radziecki w latach Wielkiej Wojny Narodowej 1941–1945*, ed. Piotr Łossowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1979), 141.

232 66 national units were created from November 1941 to September 1942, including 26 infantry and mountain infantry divisions, 18 infantry brigades and 22 cavalry divisions, recruiting Azeris, Balkars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Georgians, Ingush, Kabardians, Kalmyks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Armenians, Turkmens, and Uzbeks. Cf. Nikolai A. Kirсанov, “Национальные формирования Красной Армии в Великой Отечественной войне 1941 – 1945 гг.,” *Отечественная история*, no. 4 (1995).

233 <http://libinfo.org/index/index.php?id=1024>, accessed December 4, 2024.

234 Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Славяне* (*Slavyane*, no. 1, 64: 1943). Poland was represented on the editorial team by Wanda Wasilewska. Some sources say that the first issue was

Neo-Slavic aspect of the Russian wartime politics of memory and mobilize the Slavic nations along anti-German lines.

The history of the Party, the triumph of the Revolution, and the victories won by heroes of the civil war were being accorded less and less room in the propaganda and newspapers. The peak of this trend came with the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943, running a shockwave through society, which had been indoctrinated for years in the spirit of communist internationalism. The withdrawal was interpreted to mean “the calling off of worldwide revolution.”²³⁵ Actually, the gesture, calculated to appeal to the Allies, did not change much, as the duties of the Comintern were taken over by a department of the Central Committee.

The decision to scrap the Comintern was paralleled by another similar move in December 1943. The Soviet Union got a new national anthem to replace the old *Internationale*.²³⁶ In the new lyrics, personally edited by Stalin, “Great Russia” stood side by side with “Lenin and Stalin,” while “class,” the main motif of the *Internationale*, was superseded by a new theme, presumably regarded as a better way to get the message across: “Stalin has brought us up to be loyal to *our country*.” The history of Russia and the Soviet Union was turning into an ideological oxymoron, a hybrid of Marxism and nationalism.

Understandably, the wartime change in the Soviet politics of memory was particularly evident in culture, literature, the theater, and cinematography. A generous source of financial sponsorship from the State helped to bring out works showing war in a broad historical context, with a sequence of many other victorious campaigns beginning with the times of Rus’.²³⁷ All of these productions contributed to building up national unity and solidarity in the war against the foreign enemy, a war in which Russia always had to be victorious. A whole series of stories, novels, and plays was created alluding to Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*, which had only recently been banned from the movie screens. They depicted the resistance Rus’ had put up against the Germanic onslaught.²³⁸ Several novels

published in June 1942 (https://vk.com/journal_slavyane, accessed November 20, 2024). For more, see Sergei Lototsky and Andrey Dmytruk, “Консолидирующая роль славянского движения в борьбе против фашизма (1941–1944 гг.),” in *Боевое братство славян на защите мира: материалы конференции*, ed. Alexey Rodionov (Hrodna: ГрГУ им. Я. Купалы, 2009), 275–280.

²³⁵ Quoted after *Великая Отечественная война. 1943 год*, 255.

²³⁶ The new national anthem was composed by Alexander Alexandrov, with new lyrics by Sergey Mikhalkov and Gabriel El-Registan. Cf. Chapter Five, Note 536.

²³⁷ Petr Vykhodtsev, *История русской советской литературы* (Moscow: Высшая школа, 1974).

²³⁸ The beneficiaries included Valentin Kostylev, Vadim Safonov, Ilya Selvinsky, Vladimir Solovyov, and Aleksey Tolstoy.

came out in vast print runs—Sergey Borodin’s *Dmitry Donskoy* on the unification of the principalities of Rus’ and their emancipation from the suzerainty of the far more powerful Golden Horde, Valentin Kostylev’s *Kuzma Minin* on the expulsion of the Poles from Moscow in 1612, Sergey Golubov’s *Bagration* on Russia’s victory over Napoleon, and Aleksandr Stepanov’s extremely popular novel *Port Arthur* on the Russo-Japanese war. Plays based on historical themes involving war, such as Ilya Selvinsky’s *Livonian Trilogy* on the sixteenth-century Livonian wars, and Aleksey Tolstoy’s *Ivan the Terrible*, were put on in the repertoire theaters. The first part of Selvinsky’s *Trilogy*, portraying the age of Ivan the Terrible, carried a particularly trenchant message, that in times of mortal danger for a nation, a truly great leader must sometimes resort to severe, or even cruel measures, because only by doing so will he be able to save his country and its people.

In 1944, Eisenstein completed *Ivan the Terrible*, another first-rate movie maintained in the same spirit, with Nikolay Cherkasov’s outstanding contribution in the title role (the same actor had also played a memorable part in *Alexander Nevsky*). The main character’s resemblance to Stalin, and the allusion, was so explicit that when the sequel was ready in 1946 and portrayed Ivan in an overly demonic light, while the *oprichnina* (Ivan’s secret police) was all-too similar to the NKVD, Eisenstein was assailed with a massive wave of criticism which cost him his life.²³⁹

Similar pictures showing contemporary wartime events against a historical backdrop presenting Russia’s war effort against Germany in the age-old tradition of striving for national liberation were also made in film studios scattered throughout the “more provincial” Soviet republics. The most memorable of these were Mikheil Chiaureli’s *Giorgi Saakadze, Eagle of the Caucasus*, about the seventeenth-century hero of the Georgian war against the Turks, and Amo Bek-Nazaryan’s *David Bek* about the eighteenth-century hero of Armenia’s war of independence against Persia.

However, the most spectacular instance of the radical transformation in the Soviet wartime politics of memory was the far-reaching change of attitude to the Russian Orthodox Church and the acknowledgement of its contribution to the

239 *Historia kina*, vol. 2: *Kino klasyczne*, ed. Tadeusz Lubelski, Iwona Sowińska and Rafał Syska (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 305–306. In his criticism of Part Two, Stalin said that Eisenstein did not appreciate the fact that the Oprichnina was a progressive unit on which Ivan the Terrible relied to get all of Russia into one centralized state (quoted after Jerzy W. Borejsza, “Kto popierał Marka Twaina? Wokół zbioru dokumentów ‘Stalin i kosmopolityzm 1945–1953,’” in *Niepiękny wiek XX*, ed. Jerzy Eisler (Warszawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010), 426).

growth of the Russian state.²⁴⁰ A broad spectrum of religious arguments were put into the propaganda campaign to mobilize Soviet society for the war effort, which was to save and protect Holy Russia and the Russian Orthodox faith. This was an absolute reversal of what had been practiced hitherto, especially if we call to mind that about 42 thousand clergymen and religious had been murdered under the Soviet regime, and another 45 thousand were sent to prison or gulags.²⁴¹

Stalin evidently considered continuing to plug atheism in his propaganda not only pointless but downright dangerous and something that demobilized society in wartime conditions. After less than two decades of non-existence, the Patriarchate was restored, which was no doubt intended as a clear sign that the years of State persecution of the Church had come to an end, and the policy of enforcing atheism upon society had been abandoned, at least for a time. In September 1943, after the bishops had conferred with the State authorities, they elected Sergius (Ivan Stragorodskiy), Metropolitan of Moscow, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.²⁴² The see had been vacant since 1925. The appointment was made in a canonical formula adopted on consultation with Stalin and with his consent, in which the title “Holy Rus”²⁴³ was extended to cover the entire Soviet territory.²⁴⁴ This development accentuated the significance of the Russian Orthodox Church in the history of the Nation and State. Even clergymen who had been experienced a quarter-century of persecution were left in no doubt that “Comrade Stalin attached a great deal of importance to religion. Now the Russian Orthodox Church should triumph.”²⁴⁵

240 This issue has been extensively discussed in *Русская православная церковь в годы Великой отечественной войны 1941–1945 гг. Сборник документов*, comp. Olga Vasilyeva, Ivan Kudryavtsev, and Lyudmila A. Lyukova (Moscow: Крутицкое подворье, 2009).

241 For more, see Nikolay Emelyanov and Olga Khailova, “Гонения на Русскую православную церковь (1917–1950-е годы),” *Россия и современный мир*, no. 4 (2008); Igor Kurlyandsky, Сталин, власть, религия (религиозный и церковный факторы во внутренней политике советского государства в 1922–1953 гг.) (Moscow: Кучково поле, 2011).

242 The previous Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow (born Vasily Bellavin) died in April 1925, hounded by the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU: Объединённое государственное политическое управление). See “Дело 25 ‘О судебном процессе патриарха Тихона,’” in *Политбюро и церковь. 1922–1925 гг. В 2-х кн.*, comp. Nikolai Pokrovsky and Stanislav Petrov (Moscow: «Российская политическая энциклопедия» (РОССПЭН); Novosibirsk: «Сибирский хронограф», 1997), 249–304.

243 Vladislav Tsurin, “К истории Русской Церкви в годы Великой Отечественной войны. Комментарий в интересах нации,” <http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/413990.html>, accessed November 20, 2024. The bibliography calls this secret agreement the “Stalinist Concordat” (see, for example, Sergey Lvovich Firsov, “Istoria Vosstanoveniya Moskovskoy Patriarkhii Stalinym v 1943 godu,” <http://www.rusbaptist.stunda.org/mp.htm>, accessed November 20, 2024).

244 Except for the Autocephaly of Georgia.

245 Quoted after *Великая Отечественная война. 1943 год*, 275.

The newsreels filmed during the war were a visible sign of the new attitude the State authorities took to the Church. Suddenly, images of the ruins of churches and other places of worship devastated by the enemy, women making the sign of the cross on the foreheads of soldiers departing for the front, Orthodox priests etc. were flashed on the screen. All this was taken as a genuine change of policy not only in the general response to these developments, which society actually welcomed very enthusiastically.²⁴⁶

Naturally enough, the Church's new structure was kept under close surveillance, but its restoration was a fact. The Soviet authorities gave their consent to have 20 thousand churches opened and priests released from the gulags were appointed to them. The classical seven-day week with Sunday as a day of rest (the Lord's Day) was restored, while the five-day week introduced in 1929 was dropped.²⁴⁷ The seminaries re-opened to educate candidates for the priesthood, while the Union of Militant Atheists suspended its activities, its magazine *Bezbozhnik* ("The Godless") was closed down, and no more anti-religious publications appeared.²⁴⁸

The change in attitude to religion was made for purely propaganda purposes. It was merely a change of image, and its aim was to "help to mobilize people to fight Germany."²⁴⁹ The Patriarchy was given a guardian in the person of Georgy Karpov, a senior officer from the People's Commissariat for State Security, to "look after" the Church and act as chairman for the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church,²⁵⁰ an institution strikingly similar to the Most Holy Governing Synod instituted by Peter I in 1721, which for nearly two centuries had acted as a surrogate for the patriarchy. Only this time, in the very same year (1943), over a thousand priests experienced persecution and five hundred of them were executed.²⁵¹ It was done to make the Church's hierarchs realize that the change was superfi-

²⁴⁶ For more, see Mikhail Shkarovsky, *Русская Православная Церковь при Сталине и Хрущеве* (Moscow: Издательство Крутицкого подворья, Общество любителей церковной истории, 2005), 282–285.

²⁴⁷ Under the five-day week, workers were divided into five groups, each of which had a different day off. This had a good effect on the organization of work and productivity, which increased by approximately 27%, see Paweł Rzewuski, "Kalendarz w stylu radzieckim," <http://wolne.media.net/kalendarz-w-stylu-radzieckim/>, accessed November 20, 2024.

²⁴⁸ For religious policy under Stalin, see www.baptysci.pl/slowo-prawdy/996, accessed November 20, 2024.

²⁴⁹ Information from the Deputy People's Commissar of Defense Viktor Abakumov for the State Defense Committee, quoted after *Великая Отечественная война. 1943 год*, 276.

²⁵⁰ Sergey Firsov, "История восстановления московской Патриархии Сталиным в 1943 году," <http://www.rusbaptist.stunda.org/mp.htm>, accessed December 4, 2024.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, the subchapter entitled "Между прошлым и будущим."

cial, and the duty of the leaders of the Church were first and foremost to lend an air of legitimacy to the Communist authorities and be strictly subservient to them. Right until the end of Soviet rule, the Church knew what its duties were and carried them out.

Still before the war was over, the authorities started to have second thoughts about their politics of memory. Had they not gone too far and given too much leeway to the Church, when they were so close to having it completely delegatized?²⁵² Were they right to let people think that there were a few outstanding military commanders in tsarist times? Hadn't they idealized the tsars?²⁵³ As VE Day drew closer, time was running out for observing a continuity in the history of Russia under the tsars, Russia in the Orthodox Christian fold, Soviet Russia, and the atheist USSR; time was running out for considering the pre-revolutionary period for inclusion in the ideologically acceptable historical tradition.

There was also a more serious question, cautiously formulated at first but in a more and more forthright manner as time went on (i.e. by the Brezhnev era). That question was, "Was it right for the USSR to continue cooperating with the Allies right to the end of the war?" Hadn't the Soviet Union missed the right moment to spark a European revolution and bring about a total reshuffle in the political setup throughout the continent?²⁵⁴

The postwar return to ideology

The Soviet Union's wartime collaboration with the Allies started to make some of the foreign commentators speculate that the Soviet leaders had abandoned their aggressive ideology once and for all. Some even started to see this as one of the pillars for the United Nations, a new organization founded at this time for the purpose of global security.²⁵⁵ They had watched three decades of dreadful dealings, but wishful thinking got the better of their experience.

The paramount contribution the USSR made to winning the victory and the vast expansion of the European territory under its control in the wake of the Yalta Conference, as well as permanent membership of the United Nations Secu-

252 This issue has been discussed extensively in Kurlyandsky, *Сталин, власть, религия*.

253 Vykhodtsev, *История русской советской литературы*, 577.

254 Cf. Svyatoslav Rybas, *Громыко. Война, мир и дипломатия* (Moscow: Молодая гвардия, 2011), 96 (statements of the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Boris Ponomarev).

255 Eugene P. Chase, *The United Nations in Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1950), 52–54; Przemysław Grudziński, *Przyszłość Europy w koncepcjach Franklina D. Roosevelta (1933–1945)* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1980), 147–162.

rity Council turned the Soviet Union into a world power. For Soviet society, it was spectacular proof of the claim that the Soviet Union was an emanation of the most progressive form of government representing the victorious forces of history: Russia's legacy as the world's savior.²⁵⁶

However, these successes also brought phenomena which Party leaders perceived as threats to the full control of society they had enjoyed hitherto, using ideology to keep it in check. The barrier which had kept the Soviet people completely cut off from the rest of the world and let them be indoctrinated and persuaded that the Socialist system was superior to all the other systems had sustained a serious degree of erosion. Hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers had been POWs, and innumerable Soviet civilians had been sent out of the country for slave labor. All these Soviet citizens now found themselves in foreign parts and could confront the lies the propaganda at home had fed them with the reality. Now they were within the sphere of "disintegrative influences." They could not all be shot or isolated off in labor camps. Those who couldn't had to be handled using the system's traditional methods—mass propaganda and/or intimidation.

The course of events at the Twelfth Session of the Supreme Council of the USSR, held in June 1945, shows how seriously the problem was taken. Quite naturally, the predominant issue as regards international affairs was victory in the war, but a lot of attention was also paid to problems connected with the new type of threats coming from the outside, capitalist world.²⁵⁷ In the opinion of those participating in the discussion, the fact that Germany, the vanguard of imperialism, had been beaten did not at all mean that things had changed in the attitude of the West to the Soviet Union from what it was like before the dissolution of the Comintern. They reached a conclusion that the West was clearly returning to a fixed ideological position and adopting a policy of confrontation. In the records of the Session, the victory tended to be described not so much as the result of cooperation between the Allied countries with a preponderant contribution from the Soviet Union, but as an outright victory for the progressive Socialist system.²⁵⁸

This system had been enhanced very significantly with the territories gained in the first phase of the war, the fruit of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and with the Soviet sphere of influence in East-Central Europe and assets in the Far East

256 Cf. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 10–11.

257 Двенадцатая сессия Верховного Совета СССР [1-го созыва], (22–23 июня 1945 г.): стенографический отчет (Moscow: Изд. Верховного Совета СССР, 1945).

258 "Our victory means above all that our social system has won . . ." Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York; London: Vintage Books, 1993), 1000.

acquired at Yalta. However, the historical interpretation this first expansion was given not in the Marxist way (viz. as an outcome of the theory of successive formations) but in a nationalistic sense. The absorption of the Baltic republics, the eastern territories of prewar Poland, and part of Romania was presented as a buttress of the Soviet borders thanks to the recovery of the Empire's former lands, in other words it was an act of historical justice.²⁵⁹

Characteristically, too, Stalin presented victory in the war in the Far East, which the USSR did not join until August 1945, as the conclusion of the bilateral conflict “which Japan started in 1904,” and for the just settlement of which Russia/the Soviet Union had to wait forty years.²⁶⁰ With such a long perspective of wrongs, it was easier to explain Russia's right to territorial compensation in the form of the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands and recognize it as historically and morally justified. It was harder to produce a convincing argument regarding the continuity (tradition) of the war effort in the Far East by the tsarist forces and the Red Army, but that was a subject no one in the Soviet Union wanted to embark on, just as no one was interested in another issue—why the USSR broke the neutrality pact it had made with Japan in April 1941.

The need to correct the wartime politics of memory, which had been distinctly oriented on national and religious aspects, was not so self-evident in the domestic field. Terrorized by the system yet mesmerized by the Great Stalin, the overwhelming majority of its domestic recipients failed to notice the speciousness and incongruity of the essence of the traditional Russian patriotism as compared with the traditional class struggle; war for the national cause compared with revolutionary war; Alexander Nevsky or Peter the Great compared with Stalin, Kutuzov with Chapayev; the defense of Port Arthur compared with the defense of Stalingrad. They had lost the sensitivity to be capable of distinguishing between what was class-oriented, internationalist, or progressive, and what was national and threatened to push them down into nationalism, make them sink in backwardness.

Things were quite different with Soviet relations with the inhabitants of the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, with the countries in the Yaltan sphere of influence, and generally with the international Communist movement. Here it was a question of returning to the traditional, original message regarding class; to Marx and Lenin and their slogan, “Workers of the world, unite!” There was a

²⁵⁹ *Краткий курс истории СССР; Борьба за Советскую власть в Прибалтике*, 540; Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie w podręcznikach*, 126–127.

²⁶⁰ Joseph Stalin, *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (London: Hutchinson, no date). Available online from the Marxists Internet Archive at on-the-great-patriotic-war-stalin.pdf (marxists.org), accessed January 13, 2024.

need for circumspection, care in the use of the historical argument of Russia as “the Elder Brother,” the great, infallible, and progressive Russian nation—a claim served up without restraint for the non-Russian peoples in the Soviet Union.²⁶¹

Two different axiological orders were current simultaneously. There was the ideological order which invoked the traditions of Communism, and the order which presented Russia as a power and was attuned to its imperial tradition. The fact that these two orders were functioning side by side of each other reflected the confusion in the Kremlin itself. As prospects for the further expansion of Communism shrank,²⁶² there was a marked ascendancy in the imperial trend focused on reinforcing the Russian presence in the territories gained as a result of the war and the potential to Sovietize them.²⁶³ The American analyst and politician William Averell Harriman could not have been far from the truth when he observed that there were three aims in Stalin’s postwar policy: to put down firm roots in the Soviet Union’s Yalta sphere of influence, significantly enhancing the USSR’s security; to improve the status of Communist parties in Western Europe and their power to wreak havoc in the political systems of those countries; and at the same time to maintain good working relations with Britain and America, tricking them into believing that the cooperation which had worked during the war would be continued in the postwar period. That would be the policy of the USSR while it waited for the right conditions to trigger revolution and bring about a large-scale change.²⁶⁴

The casting vote in the decisions as to what was progressive and complied with the spirit of revolution and the Marxist tradition belonged to Stalin. Victory in the biggest war in history and the obsequious tribute he got in the conferral of the title of Generalissimo on him in June 1945 took him to the heights of popularity in the Soviet Union. The way the victory was presented in public speeches and the media in the Soviet Union followed a singular formula. The Nation had triumphed under the leadership of its one and only Supreme Leader. Other senior commanders were

261 “The Russian nation is the most outstanding nation of all the nations that constituted the Soviet Union . . . the leading force of the Soviet Union among all the nations of our country.” Ibid.

262 These included the failure of the Communists in Greece, the fading hope of expanding Communist influence in France and Italy, the weak position of the Communists in the western occupation zones of Germany, and vain hopes of good election results for the Communists in a number of other European countries.

263 Cf. Jerzy Holzer, *Komunizm w Europie. Dzieje ruchu i systemu władzy* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2000), 68–69.

264 After Jerzy Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny* (Kraków: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN; Znak, 2012), 31. See also Edward Reilly Stettinius Jr., *Roosevelt and the Russians* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1949), 314–315.

either given a general mention or not mentioned at all: there could not be even the slightest hint of anything like competition for the victor's crown. This was no doubt connected with Stalin's well-nigh obsessive fear of Bonapartism, which had reaped thousands of victims among the senior officers of the Red Army, including Mikhail Frunze and Mikhail Tukhachevsky. Such fears revived after the war, which, as Stalin knew very well, had been won thanks to his generals and marshals, not to himself or the Party leaders. Soon, the real victor of the Great Patriotic War, Marshal Georgy Zhukov, was to feel the consequences of those fears. Stalin started to be jealous of Zhukov's popularity.²⁶⁵ But before it happened, the Generalissimo decided to do away with the annual celebration of Victory Day (May 9) because he considered the 1946 and 1947 events too laudatory for Marshal Zhukov, the real winner of the victory, and not for himself. On the grounds of a resolution passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on December 23, 1947, for many years May 9 ceased to be a day off work.²⁶⁶

Stalin's personality cult was at its apogee and had reached the fringes of the absurd. An editorial in *Pravda*, the Party's main journalistic mouthpiece, proclaimed, "Never before has history known a man like Stalin, whose shoulders bear such a gigantic burden."²⁶⁷ Similar races for apologists vying with each other for the most sophisticated hagiographic expressions for "The Driver of the Steam Engine of History"²⁶⁸ soon spread to the forcibly Sovietized countries of the Yalta sphere.²⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the climate for relations between the great powers was in systematic decline. There were more and more misunderstandings on how to handle the agreements made earlier concerning the organization of peacetime order: arrangements for the occupation of Germany, implementation of the Yalta Treaty (the Declaration on Liberated Europe), and the restoration of peace in the Far East. A conference was held in Paris for the settlement of peace treaties with the

265 Cf. Georgy Zhukov, *Стенограмма октябрьского (1957 г.) пленума ЦК КПСС и другие документы*, comp. Vladimir Naumov et al. (Moscow: Международный фонд «Демократия», 2001); Cf. Rudolf Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991* (Novosibirsk: Сибирский хронограф, 2nd edn., 2000), 32–43.

266 <http://base.garant.ru/6341191/#ixzz4RaSXOFo8>, accessed November 20, 2024.

267 "Народ и вождь," [The Nation and Its Leader], *Pravda*, June 29, 1945, БД East View Газета «Правда»: полный электронный архив (shpl.ru), accessed November 20, 2024.

268 The Driver epithet appears in the adulatory poem, "Słowo o Stalinie," (A Word on Stalin), by the Polish poet Władysław Broniewski, and is available at *Słowo o Stalinie – Władysław Broniewski* (poezja.org), accessed November 20, 2024.

269 For more examples of behavior of this kind from other Polish writers, see Maria Bogucka, *Kultura, naród, trwanie. Dzieje kultury polskiej od zarania do 1989 roku* (Warszawa: Trio, 2008), 485, 515.

Axis satellites, but the eruption of the Cold War was just a question of time. From the point of view of the Soviet system, grounded on fear of domestic and foreign threats and hence the continual rallying of the people for a never-ending revolutionary struggle—the Cold War was an absolute necessity.²⁷⁰ The Soviet politics of memory was now faced with the vital task of persuading its people that the capitalist world was only waiting for an opportunity to crush the Soviet State and stop its progressive system from spreading throughout the world. It had already taken the first steps to achieve this by trying to infiltrate the Soviet Union with a message which was hostile on class grounds and a threat to the values of the USSR's native civilization rooted in the traditions of many generations.

A large-scale campaign was launched in defense of Russian/Soviet culture against these sinister influences from the degenerate, nihilistic bourgeois culture. The scheme also encompassed the countries in the Soviet sphere of influence. The full project was conducted under the auspices of Andrei Zhdanov, head of the Central Committee's Department for Culture and Ideology, with effective support from the services operating the system of repression and using terror and intimidation to enforce compliance.²⁷¹ A new word which now came into widespread use was *zhdanovshchina*, a synonym for the enforcement of the ideologized Soviet culture, Stalin's personality cult, and the depreciation or eradication of all manner of Western cultural influences which were "hostile on grounds of class." Pretty soon, this process assumed the characteristic features of the traditional Great Russian nationalism and anti-Semitism,²⁷² which some historians have called "State-sponsored anti-Semitism."²⁷³

A crusade started for the construction of an apotheosis of the Great Victor who had saved the world from fascism and brought freedom to the nations, with no regard for the vast losses he had sustained himself. That victory was achieved only thanks to Stalin's brilliant strategy and his personal command of the Red Army's war effort. With time, the apotheosizing was envisaged to grow into a lasting mythicization. However, the moment came after a decade—at the Twentieth Party Congress—when the nation replaced Stalin in the role of chief hero.

270 Cf. Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, 160–162.

271 Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти. 1945–1991*, 46–50.

272 Arno Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden. Die tragische Geschichte des Jüdischen Antifaschistischen Komitees und der sowjetischen Juden* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 2000); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005) 181–183, 805–806; Jarosław Tomasiewicz, "Osmoza komunizmu i nacjonalizmu w Rosji: geneza hybrydy," *Historia i Polityka*, no. 4 (2010): 135–155.

273 Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти*, 58–61.

In line with Party directives and counter to society's fresh memories, the politics of memory now cleared the picture of the war of all that reminded people of the fact that when it broke out Stalin had stood side by side with Hitler. No one could have gathered from the message served up by the propaganda that there was ever such a thing as the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact or a Soviet–German Treaty on friendship and a common border; that the neutrality of the Baltic republics had been trampled and they had been forcibly incorporated in the Soviet Union; that Polish officers had been massacred in Katyn; or that in the final phase of the war there had been a vast scale of looting by Red Army stragglers. It was forbidden to even mention the series of setbacks the Soviet Union suffered in the first months after the German invasion, or that hundreds of thousands of Red Army men surrendered with little or no resistance. Any mentions of the military and economic aid supplied by the Allies were inadmissible, as was the fact that the Soviet Union benefited from the Lend–Lease Act.²⁷⁴ There was only Stalin's brilliant strategic plan, the unswerving heroism of the Red Army, and the heroic effort made by those who worked behind the lines.

A fairly straightforward explanation was found to administer to those who were not convinced that the wartime coalition with the capitalist countries was admissible ideologically. It was served up to Stalin in a discussion with doubting Balkan Communists, by Georgy Dimitrov, ex-head of the Comintern and absolutely devoted to the Leader. After the First World War, Dimitrov explained, capitalism was in a crisis which eventually led to a collapse. The intensity of the crisis passed through different phases, bringing about a split within the capitalist formation into “two factions, the fascist group and the democratic [bourgeois–democratic] wing.” To prevent victory for the fascists, “whose brutal rule would have brought the working class to dire straits, the Soviet Union had to support the democratic faction.” However, “once we have stopped the fascist danger, we will come out against them.”²⁷⁵

A significant reversal in the propaganda started still during the war, once it was known that the Soviets would control one of the occupation zones in Germany. The massive anti-German campaign with slogans like “Kill the German!” or “Germans are not humans but beasts” started to be damped down. The man who stood as the symbol for this campaign was the writer and journalist Ilya

274 George Mellinger, *Soviet Lend–Lease Fighter Aces of World War II* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006).

275 Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, 24.

Ehrenburg.²⁷⁶ An incidental remark Stalin had uttered at the beginning of 1942²⁷⁷ started to be used to “organize” the Germans “on the Soviet side,” project all the hatred and demand for revenge from the nation (i.e. “the Germans”) to just one group, “the Nazis,” and recall Hitler’s German victims—something that had not been mentioned up to that time.²⁷⁸ The years under fascist rule in Germany started to be singled out as an exception from the rest of German history and treated as an anomaly in the history of a nation with an otherwise accomplished record for its contribution to the world’s heritage of culture and social philosophy. Germany was a nation with a progressive working class and distinguished philosophers, the nation which had generated Marxism.²⁷⁹ The attitude the Soviet politics of memory now took to Germany was again class-oriented, in line with the internationalist doctrine.

We could hardly say the same about the Soviet propaganda created during the war regarding the idea of a historical Slavonic community united in the face of a “Teutonic threat” not on the basis of class but on ethnic grounds; a Slavonic community for which the Second World War was simply the next phase of “the age-old struggle of the Slavic peoples for their existence and independence,” as Stalin put it.²⁸⁰ During the war, the Slavic idea crossed from propaganda into the sphere of real politics and became a useful tool to Sovietize the countries in the Yalta sphere of influence, maybe even with the still not very clearly articulated

276 Немцы не люди . . . Если ты не убил за день хотя бы одного немца, твой день пропал . . . Если ты не убьешь немца, немец убьет тебя . . . Убей немца! – это просит старуха-мать. Убей немца! – это молит тебя дитя. Убей немца! – это кричит родная земля. Не промахнись. Не пропусти. Убей!” – Иуа Ehrenburg, “Убей!” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, July 24, 1942.

277 “The experience of history teaches us that Hitlers come and go, but the German nation and the German state remain,” *Pravda*, February 23, 1942.

278 This issue has been discussed extensively in Alexander Fischer, “Vergebliches Ringen um das deutsche Ostheer. Nationalkomitee ‘Freies Deutschland’ und Bund Deutscher Offiziere,” in *Haus der Geschichte der BRD, Kriegsgefangene. Wojennoplennyje: sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in Deutschland, deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1995); Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1955); Gulzhauhar Kakenovna Kokebayeva, *Германия – Россия – СССР: политика, война и плен* (Almaty: Қазақ университеті, 2009), 245–261.

279 “It would be equally incorrect to identify Hitler’s Germany with the German people,” Vyacheslav Molotov said at the Paris meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers on July 10, 1946, setting out Moscow’s stance on Germany’s political, economic and military future, see *Внешняя политика Советского Союза. 1946 год* (Moscow: Главполитиздат, 1952), 238. The English version of Molotov’s speech is available at https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2003/1/10/1a764b04-2068-4a44-97c5-38bd4e168fd1/publishable_en.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024. Cf. Ehrenburg, *Люди, годы, жизнь*, vol. 5.

280 Stalin, *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*.

intention of having them imbibed into a future Soviet federation.²⁸¹ Coordinated by the All-Slavic Committee, its Moscow-based HQ, the Slavic movement entailed a network consisting of five committees, one for each of the Slavic countries in the Soviet Union's Yalta sphere of influence, as well as the Slavic Congress in the United States.²⁸² It even made a mark for itself in the United Nations, in which this group of countries closely cooperating with the Soviet Union came to be known as "the group of Slavic States."²⁸³

Another distinctly noticeable feature in the Soviet postwar politics of memory was a change of attitude to the Holocaust and the Jewish question in general. During the war, the Soviet press had published a wide range of articles on the atrocities committed against the Jews. Vasily Grossman's reports, which appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, made a particularly strong impact on Soviet readers.²⁸⁴ However, articles like his, highlighting the unique suffering of the Jews, disappeared soon after the war. A change occurred in propaganda and education, both in the Soviet Union itself as well as in its satellites. It was a change for a new interpretation which was to hold for decades and spoke of a universalized, general type of suffering inflicted by the "Hitlerites" on all victims regardless of nationality. From that point on, the Soviet politics of memory presented the atrocities the Germans committed as crimes against the whole of society. The murder of the Jews was not singled out as a crime in a category of its own; usually there was no special mention of Jewish victims.²⁸⁵ If any sort of distinctions were made between the victims, it tended to be on the lines of geographical location rather than nationality. This is how the first summary report issued

281 As speculated by the Yugoslav Communist politician Milovan Djilas. Cf. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, 71.

282 A Slavic Committee was established in Poland in August 1945. Its headquarters were in Warsaw and there were six regional branches. It published a monthly called *Życie Słowiańskie* dedicated to the history of the Slavic region and community; for the Statute of the Committee, see *Polsko-radzieckie stosunki kulturalne 1944–1949. Dokumenty i materiały*, ed. Wiesław Balcerak (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), doc. 45, p. 95–100.

283 The group's members were Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and three Soviet delegations (the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). The Slavic group operated until 1956, when a group of former German satellite countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary) joined the UN. Cf. Wojciech Materski, *Dyplomacja Polski „lubelskiej”. Lipiec 1944 – marzec 1947* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2007), 320 ff.

284 Cf. Vasily Grossman, *Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945*, edited and translated by Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova from Grossman's wartime notebooks (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005).

285 Cf. Tony Judt with Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York; London: Vintage, 2013).

by the Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German–Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory put it.²⁸⁶

An anti-Semitic course set in and gradually grew bigger. Its most spectacular symptoms included the withdrawal of consent for the publication of *The Black Volume* of records of the extermination of Soviet Jews in 1941–1945;²⁸⁷ the murder of the director of the Moscow State Jewish Theater, Solomon Mikhoels; the attack on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which was dissolved in the fall of 1948; and the so-called Kremlin Doctors' Plot. *Of course*, this war was not against the Jews as such but against “cosmopolitanism bereft of a homeland.” What with the vast amount of damage done to the Soviet economic resources, shortages of commodities of practically every kind, and pretty soon also a famine, the Soviet authorities needed a domestic enemy to serve as the butt of popular discontent. Traditionally, as had happened over the centuries, the scapegoats blamed for crises were persons with names which indicated their origin. People stopped talking and writing about the suffering that befell the Jews during the war. Stalin's last years passed in an atmosphere of persecution of the Jews, who were accused of fomenting a plot against the Soviet authorities and the dictator himself.²⁸⁸ In subsequent years, there were more waves of anti-Semitism, labeled “the war on Zionism.”²⁸⁹

The systems operating for propaganda and education in the satellite countries were also put under the influence of the Soviet politics of memory. Their individual memory politics were cross-checked from start to finish, and the Soviet Union was presented in them as practically the sole force responsible for victory in the Second World War. This gave their respective Communist parties a compelling reason to hold power, give those previously in power a negative historical assessment and drive them out. Thereby, they devised a sort of founding myth for their new type of statehood modeled on the Soviet system, which

286 *Документы обвиняют: Сборник документов о чудовищных зверствах германских властей на временно захваченных ими советских территориях* (Moscow: ОГИЗ; Госполитиздат, 1945).

287 *The Black Volume* was compiled by Vasily Grossman and Ilya Ehrenburg. Cf. Ehrenburg, *Люди, годы, жизнь*; see the English edition, *Selections*, 237–239.

288 *Сталин и космополитизм: документы Агитпропа ЦК КПСС, 1945–1953*, ed. Aleksandr N. Yakovlev (Moscow: МФД: Материк, 2005); Lustiger, *Czerwona księga: Stalin i Żydzi*; Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin*, 1064–1067; Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, 145–146; Yakov Rapoport, *На рубеже двух эпох: дело врачей 1953 года* (Moscow: Книга, 1988) For more, see Alexey Fateev, *Образ врага в советской пропаганде. 1945–1954 гг.* (Moscow: Институт российской истории РАН, 1999).

289 Smaga, *Narodziny i upadek Imperium*, 190–191.

had proved its mettle by winning the war.²⁹⁰ Propaganda of this kind soon erased the media image of a victorious coalition of Allies, in favor of the heroic Red Army.

As Stalinism intensified, starting from 1947, when Cominform was set up, more institutions were founded to coordinate the diverse fields of the process in the countries controlled by Moscow. The societies of Marxist historians founded in the various satellite countries were one type of institution responsible for laying down and monitoring the subjects of study and methods to be applied in historical research, a kind of informal police force keeping an eye on the research methodology to make it conform with the Soviet model.²⁹¹ In general education, the process was implemented by dismissing teachers who had been educated and trained in the “bourgeois” manner and replacing them with the system’s appointees with qualifications including courses of Marxism–Leninism. The counterparts in higher education were colleges of Marxism and teacher training institutes affiliated with the Central Committee of the respective “fraternal” Communist Party.²⁹² Chairs for the History of the Soviet Union were founded in the universities and colleges.²⁹³ A country’s national history as well as world history were taught in a primitive way based on a class interpretation coupled with an uncritical approach to everything that Russian (Soviet) scholarship said.²⁹⁴ Sundry monuments and memorials set up in places which happened to have been on the Red Army’s route of liberation served as symbols of Sovietization.

The death of Stalin in March 1953 marked a fundamental caesura in the history of the Soviet State. It was probably more of a watershed than the death of Lenin²⁹⁵ and brought an end to the era of the centralized imperial power hidden behind an ideological smokescreen, effectively ruled by one man and using terror and atrocity on a mass scale as a political instrument. It was not at all clear who was to succeed the Driver of the Steam Engine of History, who had systematically been eliminating potential claimants. However, it seemed unquestionable that Stalin would stay in the Soviet Union’s politics of memory as its key point of reference, as powerful as he had been in his life. Soon the Party itself was to check and declare that axiomatic truth erroneous.

290 Cf. Paweł Machcewicz, “‘30-lecie zwycięstwa nad faszyzmem’. O polityce historycznej PRL i bloku radzieckiego,” in *Niepiękny wiek XX*, 523.

291 Bogucka, *Kultura, naród, trwanie*, 506.

292 *Ibid.*, 500.

293 Otilda Wyszomirska-Kuźmińska, *Więzi humanistów polskich i radzieckich (1944–1980)* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), 37, 39.

294 Holzer, *Komunizm w Europie*, 75.

295 Nicolas Werth, “Un État contre son peuple,” 277.

Chapter Three

From Khrushchev to Chernenko

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party: adjustments to the Soviet politics of memory

After the death of Stalin, the existing system of power was shaken. A series of dramatic events occurred before it could assume a new personal shape with Nikita Khrushchev as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.²⁹⁶ The crucial change was the arrest of Lavrentiy Beria, the chief of the NKVD, who had been Number 2 in the Soviet Union up to that time, and a group of his closest collaborators.²⁹⁷ A process subsequently called the “thaw” was under way: it meant the de-Stalinization of the system, first of all a withdrawal of its oppressive character. It was accompanied by a change in the propaganda: Stalin appeared less often in the press and was less often mentioned on radio. Observers were quick to notice that neither the theses published for the golden jubilee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in July 1953 nor other related Party documents mentioned Stalin more than a few times and did not include the usual, obligatory deferential adjectives or other cultic epithets.²⁹⁸

At the same time, in the Soviet politics of memory there was a clear return to Lenin and the initial period of the “new type” of statehood. All of this augured large-scale reevaluation, first formulated at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party held in February 1956.

Especially Nikita Khrushchev’s report delivered on behalf of the Central Committee attracted close attention. Members of the Party and invited guests were baffled by the fact that only Lenin’s name, not Stalin’s, was mentioned at the opening and close of Khrushchev’s report. Stalin’s death received a cursory mention when Khrushchev ridiculed the hopes of the USSR’s enemies for “confusion among members of the Party and discord among its leaders” to occur, which turned out to be totally unsubstantiated. An even bigger shock came when he stressed the need to “revert to the standards of Party business established by Lenin, which had often been infringed in the past.” He also emphasized how important it was to restore and comprehensively strengthen Lenin’s “principles of

²⁹⁶ Khrushchev took up this appointment, equivalent to General Secretary, on September 7, 1953.

²⁹⁷ For details, see Knight, *Beria*, 197–204, 7; Thom, *Béria*, 61–63 “La chute de Béria.”

²⁹⁸ Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown*, 450.

collegiality,”²⁹⁹ which—as the context suggested—had taken place recently, i.e. after Stalin’s death.

Khrushchev said that over the past seventeen years, the propaganda related to the history of the Party had been based on the *Short Course*. Although he did not criticize it openly, he expressed the need to “compile a serious textbook of the history of our Party which will be edited in accordance with scientific Marxist objectivism, a textbook of the history of Soviet society, a book pertaining to the events of the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War.”³⁰⁰ The message was clear: the *Short Course* was neither based on facts, nor Marxist, nor did it present the experience of wielding power and ruling the international Communist movement in the general way it should do.

The part of the report which covered international issues was equally surprising. Beside the traditional formulas like the need to maintain peace in the world and the role of the invariably peace-loving Soviet Union, there were enunciations far removed from those made earlier on similar occasions by senior officials of the Soviet State and Party. The most important claim at loggerheads with the politics of memory pursued so far implied it was possible to make a transition to a new formation (Socialism or Communism) peacefully,³⁰¹ without resorting to a coup or a revolutionary war, which was a contradiction of the doctrine of Marxism–Leninism. Clearly manipulating the facts, Khrushchev tried to convince the floor that Lenin had himself envisaged a peaceful transition to a new formation.³⁰²

Although the idea of peaceful transition to a new system, implying the coexistence of two systems and a parliamentary way of changing the formation, was

299 For the original Russian text, see “Материалы XX съезда Коммунистической партии Советского Союза 14–25 февраля 1956 г.” Available online at https://istmat.org/files/uploads/52190/20_sezd_chast_1_1956.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024. For the official English translation, available online on the Marxists Internet website, see Nikita Khrushchev, Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U., delivered February 24–25, 1956, at Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. (marxists.org), accessed January 15, 2024.

300 Ibid.

301 “. . . the claim that we allegedly consider violence and civil war to be the only way to transform society does not correspond to reality . . . there is also the option of a parliamentary path to make the transition to Socialism.” This part of Khrushchev’s speech is not covered by the Marxists Internet Archive; we have translated the passage from the approved Polish version of the speech in *Materiały XX Zjazdu Komunistycznej Partii Związku Radzieckiego 14–25 lutego 1956 r. Referaty, wybór przemówień, uchwały i rezolucje* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1956), 40–41.

302 For Lenin’s use of the slogan of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world for immediate purposes, see Foy D. Kohler, Mose L. Harvey, Leon Goure, and Richard Soll, *Soviet Strategy for the Seventies from Cold War to Peaceful Coexistence* (Miami: Center for Advanced International Studies/ University of Miami, 1973), 19–23.

not entirely original,³⁰³ the fact that it was reiterated by the First Secretary of the Communist Party, that is the highest authority not only in the Soviet Union but also in the whole of the Communist world, had a big global impact.³⁰⁴ The idea was amplified and acknowledged by Anastas Mikoyan, a member of the Politburo, during the debate on Khrushchev's report.³⁰⁵

Another spectacular departure from the doctrine was Khrushchev's claim that there were many different ways to achieve a change of formation, which meant the admissibility of the way adopted by the Communists of Yugoslavia, the specific Chinese approach, and the so-called rightist–nationalist deviation condemned in Poland in 1948. According to Khrushchev, all of these options fitted in the doctrine. He also claimed that the future could bring new solutions that had not been tried so far, as in a new context “transitional forms on the way to Socialism will become more and more variegated,” depending on “specific historical, social and economic conditions and the specific character of each of the countries.”³⁰⁶

Khrushchev insisted on the possibility of permanent “peaceful coexistence of two systems.” Referring to the Pancasila Declaration adopted at the Bandung Conference which marked the rise of a nonaligned movement, he asked delegates if these principles could be taken as the basis for peaceful relations between all the countries on earth. The vital interests and postulates of the nations would be met if all the countries acknowledged the five principles.³⁰⁷ It looked like a very seri-

303 The first in the Cominform (Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers Parties) to put forward this claim was the Communist Party of Great Britain, in its 1951 manifesto, *The British Road to Socialism* (officially approved at its Congress the following year). Curiously enough, this document, iconoclastic for its times, was inspired by Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, one of Stalin's most ardent apologists.

304 “The claims that the two systems could live in peaceful coexistence, that in the modern era it was possible to prevent wars and that there were various forms of transition to Socialism were of no less importance than the disclosure of Stalin's atrocities,” Sergei Khrushchev, *Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты: взгляд изнутри*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Новости, 1994), 95. Sergei Khrushchev emigrated to the United States and published several books in English about his father. See also Kohler, Harvey, Goure, and Soll, *Soviet Strategy for the Seventies*, 31–38.

305 After *Materiały XX Zjazdu KPZR*, 271–278 (the discussion following Khrushchev's speech is not on the website of the Marxists Internet Archive).

306 *Ibid.*, 40.

307 *Materiały XX Zjazdu KPZR*, 36–38. For the five principles of the Bandung Conference, see *Prawo międzynarodowe i historia dyplomatyczna. Wybór dokumentów*, comp. Ludwik Gelberg, Vol. III (Warszawa: PWN, 1960), doc. 146, 498–506.

ous peace offer, a declaration for progress along the path set by both the 1955 Geneva Conferences.³⁰⁸

Although Khrushchev had undeniably challenged the cult of Stalin, he did not present the consequences it had for the operations of the Party and State. What he criticized were the ruthless methods rather than the groundless accusations at their basis, that is the claim that in the course of building a new system divergent tendencies would become more and more pronounced. He went as far as to repeat the statements Stalin made on many occasions on sundry “conspirators and traitors” disclosed and castigated within the Party’s ranks—“Trotskyists, Bukharinists, bourgeois nationalists and other avowed enemies of the masses, proponents of a return to capitalism.” Khrushchev did not miss the opportunity to mention his personal success, the “unmasking” of the agent Beria, who sold out to the imperialists, and his accomplices, a vile “gang” of “traitors.”³⁰⁹

The Congress was coming to an end and it was unlikely that anything of importance could still happen —“nothing presaged the imminent storm.”³¹⁰ However, during the closing, extraordinary late-night meeting to which guests were not invited, Khrushchev delivered a secret report which went on for several hours, entitled “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences.”³¹¹ This speech had not been vetted by the Presidium and was far more critical than Khrushchev’s first report; many of the points it made contested the Central Committee’s report.³¹²

Already the introductory part was disconcerting. Khrushchev avowed that “extolling one man” and “making him into a godhead,” “transforming him into an infallible sage,” “the greatest leader,” “sublime strategist of all times and nations” was inadmissible and “alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.” Allegedly, that

308 The 1955 Geneva formula referred to the period of wartime cooperation, the July conference of the heads of government of the Four Powers (France, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union), and the conference of their foreign ministers (October–November).

309 For an abridged English translation of Nikita Khrushchev’s Speech to the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U., see the Marxists Internet Archive, at Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. (marxists.org), accessed January 15, 2024.

310 Sergei Khrushchev, *Hukuma Xpyyuev*, 117.

311 An English version of Khrushchev’s secret speech is available online from the Wilson Center Digital Archive at Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, ‘On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,’ Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union | Wilson Center Digital Archive, accessed January 15, 2024.

312 This extraordinary session and Khrushchev’s presentation of a report that had not been vetted by the Presidium could take place only because it occurred at the most expedient time, when the Congress was practically over, after the dissolution of the old Presidium and before the election of a new one, when for a brief moment Khrushchev enjoyed special powers.

man was omniscient, all-seeing, thought on behalf of all the people, could do everything on his own and never erred. That was the appraisal of one man, specifically of Stalin, which had been served up for many years.

Khrushchev did not deny the fact that Stalin had made a praiseworthy contribution to the October Revolution and even recalled his distinguished service, but said that instead he would focus on how the personality cult emerged and grew, leading to a number of exceptionally serious and severe distortions of “Leninist principles of Soviet Socialist democracy” and “revolutionary Socialist legality.” To make his listeners realize the extent of these distortions, he used several examples to provide a detailed account of the main pathologies “that have affected the Party and its affairs over the past twenty years.” During this time Stalin ruled the Party autocratically, “imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion.” There was no longer a “leading collective,” and no Central Committee plenums were held. Not even a single plenum was called during the 1941–1945 war; there was an attempt to hold one in October 1941, but Stalin boycotted it and the discussion could not start.

Anyone who tried to stand up against this arbitrary behavior or simply initiate a discussion was removed from the leading collective and “annihilated” morally and physically. Repressions, initially used against opponents of Leninism, after 1935 were targeted also at many honest Communists, at those Party cadres which carried the brunt of the civil war and the first, most difficult years of industrialization and collectivization. For this purpose, Stalin coined the phrase “enemy of the people,” which let him skip holding an investigation or inquiry of any kind and apply “the most cruel repression, violating all norms of revolutionary legality, against anyone who in any way disagreed with Stalin, against those who were only suspected of hostile intent, against those who had bad reputations.” In practice, the only proof of guilt was “the confession of the accused himself, . . . acquired through physical pressures against the accused . . .” When such methods were applied, as many as seventy percent of the participants of the Seventeenth Party Congress (1934), known as the Congress of Victors, turned out to be “enemies of the people” and were subjected to repressive measures. Khrushchev believed the charges against them were “fabricated,” “absurd, savage and contrary to commonsense.” He told his listeners that since 1954, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union had approved the rehabilitation of about eight thousand persons out of thousands of victims: “many were rehabilitated posthumously.”

“The cult of the individual acquired such a monstrous size chiefly because Stalin himself, using all conceivable methods, supported the glorification of his own person.” To give an example of this self-glorification and lack of even elementary modesty, Khrushchev quoted Stalin’s *Short Biography*, which was pub-

lished in 1948 and was full of expressions like “the greatest leader” or “sublime strategist of all times and nations.”³¹³ He read out the notes Stalin put on the typescript wherever he considered it had not done justice to his achievements and presented it to Khrushchev.³¹⁴

Passing on to the 1941–1945 war, Khrushchev challenged the hitherto obligatory argument that the Nazi German invasion was a surprise to the Soviets and that was why in the first months of the fighting there was a series of embarrassing setbacks. He quoted several facts that contradicted this and laid the blame on Stalin for the initial inaction and the subsequent erroneous methods of leading the country and the Party. In his opinion, Stalin did not have very much of an idea of the real situation on the fronts. During the war, which went on for several years, he never even visited any of the front-line troops, but he was constantly meddling in operations, issuing commands and constantly calling for the tanks to advance, without ever considering the realities or colossal human losses due to his decisions. After the victory, he brutally brushed aside all the senior commanders responsible for it and put himself in the limelight, making it impossible for anyone else but himself to be credited with success on the front line. He insisted on brainwashing people that the victory won by the whole nation was the result of his own and no other person’s bravery or genius.

Khrushchev rejected the hitherto mandatory interpretation of the history of the Bolshevik Party based on the *Short Course* and especially on Stalin’s part in it. Not only did he question his role as “the leader of progressive humanity, the inspiration of the world, the father of the Soviet people, the master of science and learning, the supreme military genius and altogether the greatest genius in history,” but using many carefully selected examples, characterized him as “in reality a paranoiac torturer, a mass murderer of millions, tormentor, and a military ignoramus who had brought the Soviet state to the verge of disaster.”³¹⁵ While denouncing Stalin and exposing the crimes he had perpetrated on Party comrades, Khrushchev did not criticize the system and organization of the State or the Party itself that held the State in an iron grip. He never uttered a word about

313 Иосиф Виссарионович Сталин. *Краткая биография* (Moscow: Госполитиздат, 1948), 243. For the official English version, see *Joseph Stalin: A Short Biography*. Compiled by G.F. Alexandrov, M.R. Galaktionov, V.S. Krzhkov, M.B. Mitin, V.D. Mochalov, and P.N. Pospelov. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1949). Available online at Joseph-Stalin-A-short-biography-FLPH-Moscow-1949.pdf (michaelharrison.org.uk), accessed November 20, 2024.

314 One of these notes reads: “In his masterful fulfillment of the tasks of leader of the Party and Nation, and enjoying the support of the whole of Soviet society, Stalin did not let himself indulge in even a hint of conceit, pride or self-admiration over his activities.”

315 Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown*, 450.

the Party's responsibility for the atrocities it had committed on individuals who had not joined it, for hundreds of thousands of victims who had suffered persecution, for the destruction of rural life as a result of dekulakization and forced collectivization, for the artificially produced famine on a huge scale, for the deportation of whole nations and for the ubiquitous reign of terror.

Despite its one-sidedness, the speech came as a shock to those present. Soon it would shake the whole Party, the entire Soviet Union, and the whole system.³¹⁶

The Congress marked the beginning of a reevaluation process in international relations. The sign of the times came with the dismantling of Cominform in April 1956, which had controlled the international Communist movement, just like the dissolution of Comintern, which had done the same job until 1943. Yet in fact, not much really changed. The role of Cominform as a disciplinary organization controlling the countries taken over under the Yalta agreement was assumed by the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, and the international Communist movement was supervised by the institution of cyclically convened international debates of Communist and workers' parties.

There is an interesting Polish aspect to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes and charging him with responsibility for practically all the system's pathologies. After the abortive attempt to make Germany responsible for the Katyn massacre before the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal, the matter was strictly censored in the Soviet Union, and even if it was ever sporadically mentioned, the context would be the "clarification" made in the Budrenko Report. The same held in Poland, too.³¹⁷ But in 1956, thanks to the Soviet thaw and the political change in Poland in October of that year, it seemed there was a chance to discuss the matter and disclose the truth. Perhaps there were even some top-level consultations on the issue.

In April 1973, a brochure entitled *Moich czternaście lat 1956-1970: zwierzenia Władysława Gomułka* [My Fourteen Years, 1956–1970: The Confessions of Władysław Gomułka] was published by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party and circulated among hand-picked comrades.³¹⁸ Apparently, it was the fruit of long conversations held a month before by a certain M.S. with Gomułka on the years when he was First Secretary of the Party and ruled the country.

316 Cf. Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти. 1945–1991*, 122–129.

317 Cf. Witold Wasilewski, "Kłamstwo Katyńskie – narodziny i trwanie," in *Zbrodnia katyńska. W kręgu prawdy i kłamstwa*, ed. Sławomir Kalbarczyk (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2010), 68–88.

318 Władysław Gomułka, *Moich czternaście lat* (Łódź: Wyd. im. Legionów Polskich, 1981). Cf. Maria Turlejska, "Uwagi o 'Wspomnieniach' W. Gomułka," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 103 (1993): 92–100.

Gomułka contested the brochure's credibility and denied that he had ever held such conversations with anyone. However, it was quoted by journalists and historians and acquired a life of its own. The passage quoted most often was on the Katyn massacre and the proposal Khrushchev made Gomułka in the wake of the Polish October:

During one of the meetings, Khrushchev suggested the Katyn issue should be brought to public notice and it should be admitted officially who perpetuated the crime, naturally putting all the blame on Stalin. "It's all the same to him now," Khrushchev joked, "so many crimes have been attributed to him, he can take another one and it will not make the slightest difference to him. Anyway, everyone knows who did it and because we do not want to admit it officially, we get all the blame." As a matter of fact, he was right and now I regret I did not follow his suggestion. I did not want to, because once, straight after the war, I put all the blame on the Germans . . . Today, I am sorry I did not take him up on the offer.³¹⁹

An occasion for such a confidential exchange between the two politicians might have come, for example, during Gomułka's five-day visit to Moscow in November. Khrushchev's memoirs do not mention such a conversation,³²⁰ but this does not prove that they never (that is, not later than 1957–1959) talked about the Katyn issue. Apart from that, in the late '50s the Katyn massacre must definitely have been discussed in Gomułka's immediate Party and government circle. This is confirmed by a memorandum on the matter for Khrushchev, written on March 9, 1959 by Aleksandr Shelepin, then chairman of the KGB. The memo was a top-secret document and handwritten, perhaps so as not to disclose its content to anyone else, including the typist. That was unprecedented for documents drafted in the highest Party and government echelons of the times.

In the memo, Shelepin informed Khrushchev that since 1940 the KGB had "kept in its records files and other materials relating to the execution in the same year of prisoners-of-war, interned officers, gendarmes, policemen and others from the former bourgeois Poland." He provided details of the killings, the total number of victims and the numbers from particular special camps. He wrote that no information on the matter had ever been disclosed to anyone, and

³¹⁹ *Gomułka i inni. Dokumenty z archiwum KC 1948–1982*; wstęp, wprowadzenia i przypisy Jakub Andrzejewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krag, 1986), 230. Khrushchev's conversation with Gomułka regarding the disclosure of the real perpetrators of the crime was recognized as authentic in 1992 by Vyacheslav Kostikov, press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation, but his information does not have much value as evidence, cf. Jarema Maciszewski, *Wydrzeć prawdę* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1993), 18–19.

³²⁰ Cf. *The Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2: *Reformer (1945–1964)*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev, trans. George Shriver and Stephen Shenfield (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

the said documents were being kept in a sealed room. According to Shelepin, it did not make much sense because “all these materials are not important operationally or historically.” At the same time, it was doubtful whether they could be of much importance to “our Polish friends.” However, they were dangerous, because any indiscretion “may lead to the exposure of the operation, which could have all manner of undesirable consequences for our country,” as the official version of the deaths said that “the eliminated Poles were murdered by the German occupying forces.” Therefore, the head of the KGB suggested all the records relating to the Katyn massacre be destroyed, except (at most) for the protocols issued by the NKVD’s Special Council, which passed the death sentences, and the reports confirming the executions. This would reduce the volume of documents very considerably, making it possible to put them all in a “special file.” He attached a handwritten draft of a top-secret decision, to be made by the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union permitting the KGB to destroy personal records which he considered “superfluous.”³²¹

There are no references to this document in the post-Soviet archives, at least not in those that have been declassified so far, to imply it was delivered to Khrushchev and the matter was continued, or that the records were destroyed. Neither the full records nor the records of the NKVD Special Council (the Central Troika, *Osoboe soveshchanie*) Shelepin mentioned, nor the reports confirming the executions have been found. Most likely, such reports would have been drafted by the NKVD regional executive boards in Smolensk, Kalinin (Tver) and Kharkov and the prison administrative authorities in the republics concerned on the completion of the “discharge operations,” or reports made by groups of professional murderers, specialists handling “special operations” dispatched by HQ to Smolensk, Kalinin (Tver) and Kharkiv.

Bearing in mind that Shelepin’s memo, just like the fundamental records of the 1940 massacre, was discovered in Closed Packet No.1, we may surmise the packet was created after the memo had been written (March 1959), which would agree with the recommendation to seal up all the extant materials on the massacre after they had been reduced down to a minimum, and contain them in a “special file.” This would make it highly unlikely for the 21,857 personal files of the prisoners-of-war and other victims of the Katyn Massacre—priceless relics for their families and invaluable materials for historians—ever to be found in Russian archives.

³²¹ *Katyn. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, comp. Wojciech Materski (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1992), docs. 10 and 11; p. 42–47. See the English edition, *Katyn: Documents of Genocide*, ed. Wojciech Materski (Warsaw: Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, 1993), doc. 5 and 6, p. 26–31.

There is only one extant yet vague testimony, from one Smirnov, who was a KGB employee at the time, for the story that the documents were destroyed. He “dimly recalled” that in 1959 he seconded two of his subordinates for a fortnight’s leave to “burn some files.”³²² Even if it was true, there should be some evidence in the archives to support his claim. It is hardly imaginable that an operation on such a large scale, involving over twenty thousand files, could have been carried out on the strength of only an oral command: under the Soviet system, any action at any level of authority had to be confirmed by an official *bumaga* (document). Even then, some traces, administrative or financial, would have survived. That was the opinion of the late Stepan Rodzevich, one of the most thorough-going Russian prosecutors, one of the team which conducted the Katyn investigation in the 1990s. He said that he believed the files were being kept in an archive. He did not know whether it was in Moscow or in Omsk, but they were being kept somewhere.³²³

Rodzevich also observed that Shelepin notified Khrushchev of the matter with a detailed description, as if it was the first time Khrushchev was hearing of it. However, in the spring of 1940, Khrushchev was a member of the Politburo, one of Stalin’s most trusted men, his right-hand man in Ukraine. His colleagues from the Politburo who had signed the decision of March 5 did not have any secrets they would need to hold back from him, the more so as the “dismantling” of some of the camps (Starobielsk) and prisons must have taken place in territory he was responsible for, so he must have known of it. For Shelepin, head of the secret police, this must have been obvious, so maybe there was another addressee of his memo besides Khrushchev? Indirect evidence for the hypothesis that in 1957 Khrushchev suggested to Gomułka he could disclose the crime and put the whole blame on Stalin was provided by an overt attempt to tamper with and doctor one of the transcripts of the Politburo’s confidential decision of March 5, 1940, to suggest it was Stalin and Stalin alone who should be blamed for it.³²⁴

The new post-congressional politics of memory

The Twentieth Party Congress brought significant change to the Soviet politics of memory, not only in the presentation of the Party’s history but also of the 1941–1945 war. It concerned mostly the role of Stalin, which was belittled, some-

³²² *Zeszyty Katyńskie* (Warszawa) no. 20 (2005): 162.

³²³ *Biuletyn Katyński* (Kraków) No. 37 (1993): 4.

³²⁴ Cf. Wojciech Materski, *Mord katyński. Siedemdziesiąt lat drogi do prawdy* (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych. Departament Edukacji i Współpracy z Zagranicą, 2010), 58–60.

times too much, and he was made responsible for all the evils in the public life of the Soviet State and Party, the failures in the first phase of the war and the staggering number of victims it had claimed. The rehabilitation of many of the persecuted Party members was gathering momentum; their names were restored to public notice, and appeared in flyers, studies, and school textbooks. The Party authorities decided to set up teams of scholars who were entrusted with the compilation of “reliable surveys” of the history of the Party and the 1941–1945 war. A decision was made to publish all the stenographic records taken during Party congresses, beginning with the First Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, which was held in 1898.³²⁵ Two teams led by Pyotr Pospelov, secretary to the Central Committee, started work on a multivolume history of the Party³²⁶ and an equally exhaustive *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945*.³²⁷ The project was conducted in the Institute of Marxism–Leninism, which was affiliated with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Apparently, the Party was to act as a sharp-eyed patron, which was to guarantee that the general decisions conformed with the current politics of memory.³²⁸

The revision of Stalin’s part in the Great Patriotic War (by means of deletion and downplaying) was accompanied by making the public aware of the role of the Red Army’s senior commanders in the final triumph, as signaled in Khrushchev’s Congress speech. This could be observed in publications intended for the general reader, interviews, documentaries and in an initiative planned centrally and carried out in an organized project to make a record of the commanders’ war memories. Each of the commanders shortlisted for the project was to be assigned a secretary, usually an experienced writer or journalist to help him with the task. The result was a series of war memoirs which made the general public believe that the victory had been achieved thanks to a joint effort, that it was the mutual success of the army and auxiliary services, and that it had not been marred by

325 The transcripts of subsequent congresses were translated into Polish and published successively by the Książka i Wiedza publishing house. Some (but not all) of the original Russian records are available in English translation on the website of the Marxists Internet Archive.

326 *История Коммунистической партии Советского Союза. В 6 томах* (Moscow: Политическая литература, 1964–1980).

327 *История Великой Отечественной Войны Советского Союза, 1941–1945. В 6 томах* (Moscow: Воениздат, 1960–1965).

328 When the scholars reached a conclusion on the basis of extensive research that Soviet war losses amounted to 26.6 million dead, Khrushchev is believed to have said, “Twenty million will do for now,” and this estimate of the fatalities was put in the study; Igor Garin, “Переписанная история РФ. Наследники палачей заматают следы,” 4, *Переписанная история РФ. Наследники палачей заматают следы* / NV, accessed November 20, 2024.

Stalin's arbitrary and amateur operations. The series comprised dozens of memoirs written by senior commanders of the Red Army,³²⁹ including the most distinguished figures: Ivan Bagramyan, Pavel Batov, Vasily Chuikov, Ivan Konev, Kirill Meretskov, Konstantin Rokossovsky, Sergei Shtemenko, Aleksandr Vasilevsky and Georgy Zhukov.³³⁰ Indeed, these publications helped to revise public memory of the war years though not as much as they were expected to diminish Stalin's role in the victory. The fact that these memoirs were published at certain time intervals meant they appeared in a different political context, when there was a new head of the Soviet State and Party.

The Twentieth Congress wreaked havoc in education. Teachers who taught history and social and political subjects (Political Economics of Socialism, Marxist Philosophy, History of the Bolshevik Party, and Scientific Communism) were confused about what was still on the syllabus they should be teaching and what textbooks they should be using. The *Short Course*, hitherto the fundamental textbook, as well as other teaching materials based on it, were suddenly completely out of line with Khrushchev's secret speech, which soon became public knowledge. That is why a decision was made to cancel some of the final examinations on the History of the Party and compile a new syllabus as soon as possible. At the same time, changes were made in the education system: as of 1958, eight grades of elementary school were made compulsory, with a limited syllabus for history and ideological instruction. This was a response to what Khrushchev had said about the educational system, which, he claimed, produced too many new but unwanted members of the intelligentsia. This, in turn, resulted in a deficit of skilled workers and technicians. It was assumed that the majority of elementary school graduates would either take up a job or continue education in a vocational sec-

329 For a list of the authors, see *Великая Отечественная война 1941–1945: энциклопедия* (Moscow: Советская энциклопедия, 1985), 443–444.

330 The memoirs of all of the commanding officers mentioned in this paragraph were translated into Polish and published. English translations have been made of the memoirs of Vasily Chuikov (*The End of the Third Reich*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967); Ivan Konev (*The Year of Victory*, Honolulu: University of the Pacific, 2005; *The Great March of Liberation*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972); Kirill Meretskov (*Serving the People*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971; *City Invincible*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970); Konstantin Rokossovsky (*A Soldier's Duty*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985); Sergei Shtemenko (*The Last Six Months: Russia's Final Battles with Hitler's Armies in World War II*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977; *The Soviet General Staff at War*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986); Aleksandr Vasilevsky (*200 Days of Fire: Accounts by Participants and Witnesses of the Battle of Stalingrad*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970; *A Lifelong Cause*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981; *Rout of the Kwantung Army*, Moscow: Krasnaya Zvezda, 1980); and Georgy Zhukov (*Marshal of Victory: The World War II Memoirs of General Georgy Zhukov*, Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2015).

ondary school. Professional training was to be expanded at the cost of a radical reduction of the number of high schools in operation up to that time.³³¹

Soon, new core curricula were introduced for Contemporary History, the History of the Party and ideological subjects. However, right from the start history was repeating itself, though on a smaller scale. The extant textbooks were rendered obsolete and ousted by new ones, which were edited to bloat Khrushchev's part in the Bolshevik Revolution, the civil war, the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, and his contribution to postwar successes, especially in the economy and scientific and technological progress. The role of Stalin was either diminished or left unsaid.³³² Characteristically, Khrushchev, who not so long before had fiercely fought against the personality cult and for the significance of collective leadership, did not protest—he simply treated these tributes and the new cult as absolutely natural.³³³

The thaw and the ensuing rehabilitation of numerous individuals associated with the arts and culture who had been persecuted resulted in their work coming out in the public sphere and general ferment in cultural affairs. Soviet cinematography enjoyed a lot of publicity, attracting global attention and acclaim for its films showing the tragic nature of the civil war and the 1941–1945 war as it really was, seen by ordinary people who were caught up in it and behaved the way they did not just for ideological reasons, as they had been portrayed before, but also on purely humanitarian grounds.³³⁴

331 More details in Henryk Składanowski, “Sowiecki system oświatowo-propagandowy w okresie rządów Nikity Chruszczowa,” *Toruńskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, no. 1 (2009): “Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne w XX wieku,” ed. Zbigniew Karpus, 73–93.

332 Cf. Boris Datsyuk, *История СССР: учебное пособие* (Moscow: ВПШ и АОН при ЦК КПСС, 1963); *История СССР. Эпоха социализма (1917–1957 гг.)*, ed. Maxim Kim (Moscow: Изд-во Полит. Лит-ры, 1964).

333 Leonid Brezhnev, a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee, wrote in his diary, “We have a cult. Comrade Khrushchev has become conceited (*заялся*), he does not unite us, he divides us. He has gotten out of hand.” [*У нас культ. Т. Хрущев заялся, он нас не объединяет, а разъединяет. Распоясался.*]; “A second cult, Khrushchev’s cult has appeared, taking the place of the previous cult. It’s creating an unbearable atmosphere in the Presidium, the conditions are not right for work. People are insulting each other, shouting at one another and even mocking others. You cannot have an opinion of your own,” “Дневники брэжневца,” <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2015/12/16/rassekrechenty-taynye-dnevniki-brezhneva.html>, accessed November 20, 2024; <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2831499>, accessed November 20, 2024. In 1952–1966, the Politburo of the Party’s Central Committee was called “the Presidium.”

334 In particular, *The Forty-First (Сорок первый)* directed by Grigori Chukhrai (1956), *And Quiet Flows the Don (Тихий Дон)* directed by Sergei Gerasimov (1957), *The Cranes Are Flying (Летят журавли)* directed by Mikhail Kalatozov (1957), and *Ballad of a Soldier (Баллада о солдате)* directed by Grigori Chukhrai (1959).

Hopes for the development of culture free of the ideological straitjacket turned out to be illusory. Things backslid to the beaten track of Socialist Realism, which was indirectly symbolized by the closing down of the abstract art exhibition at the Moscow Manege in a project personally plugged by Khrushchev, and the hate campaign against Boris Pasternak following the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to him for his novel *Doctor Zhivago*, arbitrarily slated as anti-Soviet. Nonetheless, for a long time the literary community continued to cherish illusions that the thaw would go on and that the tragic history of the recent decades could be treated as a backdrop to their work.

Attempts to reproduce a picture of history as it really happened came in work published in the monthly *Novy Mir* edited by Alexander Tvardovsky and a number of novels, such as Galina Nikolaeva's *Battle En Route*, Pavel Nilin's *Cruelty*, and especially Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*.³³⁵ Writers and poets whose work had not been published for years, such as Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Bulgakov, Osip Mandelstam, Boris Pilnyak, and many others, reappeared on the publishing scene. At the same time, the late 1950s marked the beginnings of *samizdat*, the informal circulation of literature, which made it possible to vindicate the truth about the past on a much larger scale than the scope tolerated by the official politics of memory.³³⁶ *Samizdat* publications exposed the truth about the purges, political persecution and the regime's other crimes in a bolder and deeper way than Khrushchev's secret speech.³³⁷ For Khrushchev himself, who quickly learned that maybe he had gone too far in slamming the personality cult, the situation became uncomfortable and politically risky.

His reluctance to make the thaw too radical is understandable, as his criticism of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress met with misgivings on the part of society, which had been raised in the Stalin cult. A large number of Party activists responded with resentment short of outright opposition, and that is why Khrushchev had to correlate the rate of his top-down de-Stalinization with the changes

335 English editions: Pavel F. Nilin, *Cruelty*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956 [?]; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, London: Harvill, 1991, and many other editions; and Vladimir Dudintsev, *Not by Bread Alone*, London: Hutchinson, 1958.

336 The beginnings of *samizdat* are associated with the poet Nikolay Glazkov, who started making typescript copies of his poetry and put *Samsebyaizdat* (Самсебяиздат, "Myself by Myself Publishers") on the front page.

337 *Колымские рассказы* (*Kolya Tales*) by Varlam Shalamov (online: <https://shalamov.ru/library/2/>, accessed November 20, 2024), or *Крутой маршрут* (*Journey into the Whirlwind*) by Eugenia Ginzburg.

in the Party's and administrative *nomenklatura* (moguls). To achieve this, he wanted to put limits on the terms in office of senior Party administrators and bring in younger persons, which did not earn him any popularity. Likewise, he did not endear himself to more followers by promising to expand the cultivation of corn on an enormous scale,³³⁸ or to catch up and overtake the West in economic development and implement Communism within twenty years.³³⁹ Khrushchev tried to stifle the criticism by a proven method, bumping up the slating of Stalin and fighting his enduring cult. He orchestrated an elaborate intrigue to remove Stalin's body from the Mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square, where he was entombed next to Vladimir Lenin, the icon of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Twenty-Second Congress, held in October 1961, turned into the arena for Khrushchev's new offensive against Stalin, this time including an attack on his *posobniks* ("accomplices"), Lazar Kaganovich, Georgy Malenkov, and Vyacheslav Molotov. Pelted with an avalanche of drastic particulars of Stalin's crimes juxtaposed with the glowing memory of Lenin, the Congress adopted a resolution to remove Stalin's casket from the Mausoleum, "because the serious violations of Lenin's teachings, abuse of power, mass repressions against honest Soviet citizens, and other actions committed by Stalin during the personality cult rule out the possibility for the casket with his body to stay in the Lenin Mausoleum."³⁴⁰ Henceforth, the edifice was to be called the "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Mausoleum," and the inscription on the façade was to be "Lenin."

When news of Stalin's removal from the Mausoleum spread, projects started throughout the country to dismantle his monuments, sometimes with the use of spectacular means—helicopters, heavy cranes, and occasionally dynamite. Many towns, streets, squares, and industrial plants named after Stalin were rapidly renamed—a phenomenon that had not occurred after the Twentieth Congress. Stalingrad became Volgograd, Stalinabad became Dushanbe, Staliniri became Tskhinvali, Stalino became Donetsk, and the peak of Mount Stalin in the Pamirs became the Peak of Communism. Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich were removed from the Party. Nevertheless, even in Khrushchev's immedi-

338 Hence his popular nickname "Никита-Кукурузник" (Nikita Kukuruznik/ Nikita the Corn Man), derived from *kukuruz* – corn.

339 According to the new Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union compiled under Khrushchev's supervision and adopted by the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Communism was to come to the Soviet Union by 1980, see http://aleksandr-kommari.narod.ru/kpss_programma_1961.htm, accessed November 20, 2024. More details in Alexander Pyzhikov, *Оттепель: идеологические новации и проекты (1953–1964)* (Moscow: Акад. гуманитар. наук, 1998); *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, ed. Andrey Zubov (Moscow: Астрель: АСТ, 2009), 339–343.

340 Quoted after Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти. 1945–1991*, 217–218. The casket was removed immediately, even before the Congress closed.

ate circle there were still people like Alexander Shelepin, the head of the State Security Committee, or the leaders of the Komsomol, Vladimir Semichastny (soon to be the new head of the KGB) and Sergei Pavlov, who demonstrated their attachment to Stalin quite openly.³⁴¹

Despite Khrushchev's symbolic success with the removal of Stalin from the Mausoleum, the Twenty-Second Congress did not help his falling reputation. His decline was hastened on by a very serious international crisis he caused in connection with his attempt to deploy medium-range ballistic missile launchers in Cuba (October 1962). In addition, Khrushchev's status was undermined to an even greater extent by food shortages and the socially unpopular method of countering them by introducing a rationing system in successive cities. In Novocherkassk, it led to a massive, brutally suppressed rebellion. Opposition within the Party leadership was becoming more and more evident, and a palace revolution was brewing. Khrushchev was clearly unaware of this, and when he was warned almost at the last moment, he did not believe it.³⁴² Hence, he was immensely surprised when upon his return from a week's holiday in Pitsunda, and met at the airport only by Vladimir Semichastny, head of the State Security Committee, who notified him that an extraordinary extended plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party had just voted him out of office and sent him into "well-deserved retirement."³⁴³ His eleven years in power came to an end, in an exceptionally peaceful way, for that matter.³⁴⁴

The historical counteroffensive during the Brezhnev era

Leonid Brezhnev was another who came to power with slogans of reverting to the true path of progress, the need for collegial leadership, and a curb to Khrushchev's arbitrariness and voluntarism. Indeed, the period of his term in office as

341 *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 262–264.

342 Sergei Khrushchev, *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты*, vol. 2, 495–503.

343 Roy Medvedev, *Личность и эпоха: Политический портрет Л. И. Брежнева*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Новости, 1991), 100–102. The first attempt to remove Khrushchev from power, made in June 1957 by his Central Committee comrades, was foiled by the army, in particular Marshal Georgy Zhukov. *Молотов, Маленков, Каганович, 1957: стенограмма шоньского пленума ЦК КПСС и другие документы*, comp. Natalya Kovaleva et al. (Moscow: Международный Фонд "Демократия," 1998). See also Sergei Khrushchev, *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты*, vol. 1, 304–321.

344 Leonid Mlechin, *Как Брежнев сменил Хрущева. Тайная история дворцового переворота* (Moscow: Центрполиграф, 2014). See also Myron Rush, *Political Succession in the USSR* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 208–214.

General Secretary of the Party³⁴⁵ can be said to have come close to the formula of collegial power, especially toward the end when his advancing dementia turned him into a façade masking power.³⁴⁶

Analysts observing Soviet affairs carefully examined Brezhnev's first public appearances after his rise to power as leader of the Party and the entire Soviet Union. They looked for signs of continuity and change compared to the previous period. Significantly, in his first appearance, on the anniversary of the 1917 Revolution, he didn't even mention the 1941–1945 war or Stalin.³⁴⁷ This could be interpreted as disapproval of Khrushchev's extensive criticism of Stalin, but also as the lack of a developed strategy to withdraw from criticism, at least in part. Instead, his speech contained a declaration supported by an appropriately chosen quote from Lenin that the Soviet Union respected national paths of development, and an assurance that Moscow considered it unacceptable to "impose the experience of any party or state on other parties and states." This was accompanied by another declaration concerning the experience of the early years after 1917, that the process of building and developing the Socialist community and integrating "sovereign states" must be carried out "patiently and cautiously." It was quite a telling confession, especially in view of the Red Army's brutal intervention in Hungary in the fall of 1956.

Within a year and a half, Brezhnev had adopted a more confrontational approach. He warned that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would steadfastly fight to strengthen the internationalist unity of all the fraternal parties on the basis of the great teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, that is on the grounds of Marxism–Leninism.³⁴⁸ This meant their own experience and search for national paths should be put aside, which soon turned out to hold true.

345 The office of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU was restored in 1966 (replacing the office of First Secretary, which had been introduced in 1953).

346 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Mikhail Voslensky, *Номенклатура. Господствующий класс Советского Союза* (Moscow: Советская Россия, 1991), 380–386, 391–394 (Political Bureau of the Central Committee, Secretariat of the Central Committee, apparatus of the Central Committee). The claim that Brezhnev's dementia had reached an advanced stage by the end of his life are not confirmed by his notes, which he kept almost until his last days, Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Леонид Брежнев Рабочие и дневниковые записи. В 3 т. Т. 1: Леонид Брежнев. Рабочие и дневниковые записи. 1964–1982 гг.* (Moscow: Историческая литература, 2016).

347 Leonid I. Brezhnev, *О внешней политике КПСС и Советского государства. Речи и статьи* (Moscow: Политиздат, 1975), 6–15. See the official English version of this speech on the website of the Marxists Internet archive at 47th-Anniversary-October-Revolution.pdf (marxists.org), accessed November 20, 2024.

348 From Brezhnev's speech at the Twenty-Third Congress in March 1966; Brezhnev, *О внешней политике КПСС и Советского государства*, 51.

After his invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Brezhnev recalled Lenin's words about the need to maintain a strong army, and he never mentioned "national paths" again. He thanked the army for fulfilling its "historic role" of reinforcing "cooperation between the Socialist countries," verbalizing the doctrine of their limited sovereignty in favor of the common interest—"progress of the global Socialist system," later referred to in the United States and elsewhere as the Brezhnev Doctrine.

One could also view it as a degenerate mutation of Russian messianism, a contemporary, Socialist Third Rome assuming the mission of defending and protecting the Socialist community.³⁴⁹

The Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko presented an outline of the Brezhnev Doctrine in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in October 1968.³⁵⁰ Brezhnev himself explained its meaning and ideological groundwork in a speech at the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party in Warsaw in November 1968:

Of course, an operation such as military assistance offered to a fraternal country to avert a threat to its Socialist system is an extraordinary measure, enforced by special circumstances, and may only be taken if triggered by the activities of enemies of Socialism at home or abroad and if those activities pose a threat to the mutual interests of the group of Socialist countries.³⁵¹

Whether such operations were indeed being conducted and posed a threat was something only Moscow could decide. The Brezhnev Doctrine stayed in force until the end of the 1980s, invariably justified by the across-the-board principle of Socialist internationalism, which took precedence over the interests of individual countries.

Just as the Brezhnev Doctrine was meant to discipline the Socialist community, a similar idea was needed in the face of the more and more pronounced disruptive influences within the Soviet Union. The idea assumed the form of an assertion that all the nations in the USSR had apparently achieved full unity and a "historically new social community, the Soviet nation" had emerged. The imposition of this idea would signify that all the national issues within the Union were considered to have been resolved, in compliance with the guidelines formulated by Lenin. Anyone who did not accept this was branded a hooligan, an extremist,

³⁴⁹ Cf. Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Antropologia władzy. Między Traktatem Lizbońskim a kryzysem* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2009), 123–124.

³⁵⁰ *Трубуна Луду*, October 4, 1968. For details, see Svyatoslav Rybas, *Громыко. Война, мир и дипломатия* (Moscow: Молодая гвардия, 2011), 149–154; <https://www.litmir.info/br/?b=213046&p=94>, accessed November 20, 2024.

³⁵¹ Brezhnev, *О внешней политике КПСС*, 136 (135–137).

or at best a nationalist. All the differences between the diverse republics were simply disregarded and Russian standards and values were imposed in education, culture, propaganda, and essentially in the politics of memory. The dogma of the superiority of Soviet Russian culture and science deeply offended other communities, especially those like Armenia, Georgia, or Uzbekistan, whose cultural history went back over a thousand years more than Russia's.³⁵²

Under Brezhnev, the 1941–1945 war was the fundamental component of the Soviet politics of memory. As of May 9, 1965, the celebration of Victory Day, which had not been observed for well over a decade, was reinstated and featured a mandatory parade on Red Square. It was restored to the rank of one of the most important official holidays—second only to the anniversary of the October Revolution.³⁵³ The authorities encouraged projects like the erection of tombs of the Unknown Soldier, which appeared throughout the country, with memorial flames in front of them. School outings were organized to “places of military glory.” and honors were conferred on “heroic cities.” Henceforth, memorials of this kind were to be the standard, helping to bring young people up in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and reverence for the frontline soldiers.³⁵⁴

An effort to create new war heroes started, slowly and cautiously at first, despite the fact that such a long time had passed since the end of the war. Its main goal was to turn Leonid Brezhnev—a political commissar in the Red Army and head of the Political Directorate of the Fourth Ukrainian Front at the peak of his military career—into a hero on a par with marshals and combatants with records of distinguished service in 1941–1945. By a strange twist of fate, it turned out that the combat he had engaged in was crucial to the winning of the ultimate victory, and the battles in defense of Malaya Zemlya (the Small Land, a bridgehead near the Tsemes Bay and the town of Stanichki, south of Novorossiysk), in reality far from the main fronts where fate had placed Brezhnev, vir-

352 Cf. Pavel Varnavskii, “Советский народ: создание единой идентичности в СССР как конструирование общей памяти (на материалах Бурятской АССР), Исследования по новой имперской истории и национализму в постсоветском пространстве,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2004), https://www.abimperio.net/cgi-bin/aishow.pl?idlang=2;state=plain_pdf;fn=201009/toc%20abimperio2004-4.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024; Mikhail Grebenyuk, “Советский народ: государственно-политический конструкт,” *Аналитика культурологии*, no. 3 (2011); see also <http://www.analiculturolog.ru/>, accessed November 20, 2024.

353 On the grounds of the Resolution of April 26, 1965 of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, <http://base.garant.ru/6341191/#ixzz4RaSXOFo8>, not available on November 20, 2024. As of 1995, it was a military parade; earlier, there had been military parades in front of the Kremlin walls only in 1945, 1965, and later in 1985 and 1990.

354 Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Ленинским курсом: речи и статьи*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Политиздат, 1972), 8–10, 15 ff.

tually rivaled the defense of Stalingrad or Leningrad.³⁵⁵ Obliging historians started to publish newspaper stories and reports as well as poems³⁵⁶ on the defense of Malaya Zemlya— even a song was composed praising the defense and was to be sung on any and every occasion.³⁵⁷ In 1980, a commemorative volume titled *Malaya Zemlya* and ghost-written for Brezhnev, along with *Vozrozhdeni* and *Tselina*, two other volumes on his postwar years, were awarded the highly prestigious Lenin Prize.³⁵⁸

In 1966, Brezhnev was promoted to the rank of Marshal for his “distinguished service” during the war and thereafter the title of Hero of the Soviet Union along with the Gold Star medal was conferred on him four times,³⁵⁹ which made him a military figure on a par with Marshal Zhukov.³⁶⁰ He was also awarded the Order of Lenin eight times, the title of Hero of Socialist Labor three times, the Order of the October Revolution twice, the Order of the Red Banner twice, the Czechoslovak Klement Gottwald Order twice, the East German Karl Marx Medal for outstanding (if publicly obscure), scientific achievement, and numerous other distinctions and medals. In short, Brezhnev became an impassioned collector of

355 Soon there were many anecdotes going round about Malaya Zemlya, for example, about a 1973 interview of a person applying for admission to the Party. “Did you fight in Malaya Zemlya?” “No, I’m afraid I didn’t. I was holed up at the Arch of Kursk.” (Анекдот: 1973 год, приём в партию. «На Малой земле воевали?» — «Нет, на Курской дуге отсиживался») after Рассекречены дневники Брежнева: Утром брился, мыл голову. В гарем не заезжал, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26473.7/3342595/>, accessed November 20, 2024.

356 The best known, widely reprinted and translated poem was “Мала земля” by Pyotr Rebro.

357 It was composed by Aleksandra Pakhmutova with lyrics by Nikolai Dobronravov. Many performers had it in their repertoire, including the Soviet Sinatra Muslim Magomayev and Iosif Kobzon, another crooner.

358 Leonid I. Brezhnev, “Малая земля,” *Новый мир*, no. 2 (1978). The defense of the “Lesser Land” lasted a long time (225 days), though at low intensity and not involving large forces. An English translation entitled *Trilogy* attributed to Brezhnev, with *Little Land* as its Part One, was published by International Publishers in 1980.

359 *Герои Советского Союза: Краткий биографический словарь в двух томах*, ed. Ivan Shkadov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Воениздат, 1987).

360 This title was conferred three times on Marshal Semyon Budyonny, Air Marshal Ivan Kozhedub and Air Marshal Alexander Pokryshkin.

decorations and awards.³⁶¹ By the mid-70s, his growing cult had in a way systematically defined the number one politician in the Soviet Party and State: he had to be a loyal follower of Lenin, a sharp analyst, an outstanding political strategist, the most distinguished leader of his times, a diligent principal, etc. There was even an attempt to bump him up to the role of an eminent theorist as the creator of Brezhnevism, a superior form of Marxism-Leninism.³⁶²

Although the scope of Brezhnev's power was relatively narrower compared to what his predecessors had enjoyed, clearly the system could not work properly without building up his cult. However, by this time, society, which had experienced so many ups and downs in historical assessments since 1953, was growing more and more skeptical. People began to mock the rapidly aging Brezhnev more and more and innumerable jokes about him circulated well-night openly.³⁶³ That was the worst thing that could happen to a politician.

The tendency imposed by the Party to apotheosize the war and its hitherto underappreciated figures like Brezhnev was accompanied by another trend that contrasted the politics of memory focused on 1941–1945 as plugged by the Party and State with a grass-roots view showing the war through the experience of private individuals, unsung heroes who laid their lives down for the defense of their country.³⁶⁴ A similar thing happened with the civil war and the early days of Bolshevik power, which started to be referred to as a confrontation between two different senses of patriotism, marking a departure from the previous black-and-white convention, where the Whites were always portrayed in a negative light, while the Bolsheviks were invariably the goodies.³⁶⁵ In both cases, that is the October Revolution and the war with Poland in 1919–1920, as well as the

361 Cf. *Рассекречены дневники Брежнева*, entries for May 10, 1976, February 15 and 20, 1978, December 19, 1981, and February 25, 1982.

362 Cf. Smaga, *Narodziny i upadek imperium*, 277–278.

363 For a Polish perspective on jokes about Brezhnev, see Mariusz Leśniewski, “Żarty ze Stalina i Breżniewa, czyli jak dowcipem walczone z komuną,” <http://www.dziennikbaltycki.pl/artukul/682879.html>; “Breżniew wiecznie żywy w dowcipach,” http://www.news.sadurski.com/Satyra_Ab_surdy_Ciekawostki/0/1/594/0/; “Dowcipy o Leonidzie Breżniewie,” <http://www.dowcipy.net/>. There are plenty of Brezhnev jokes on the Internet, e.g. at Brezhnev Jokes – 26 Hilarious Brezhnev Jokes (upjoke.com), all these websites were accessed on November 20, 2024.

364 In particular, the film *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (*А зори здесь тихие*) directed by Stanislav Rostotsky (1972) and the film *Долгие вёрсты войны* directed by Alexander Karpov (1975) as well as ballads and war songs by Alexander Galich, Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotsky.

365 This tendency was most evident in the cinematography, e.g., *Two Comrades Were Serving* (*Служили два товарища*) directed by Yevgeny Karelov (1968), the TV mini-series *The Adjutant of His Excellency* (*Адъютант его превосходительства*) directed by Yevgeny Tashkov (1969); made into a movie in 1970, and *The Flight* (*Без*) directed by by Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov (1972).

Great Patriotic War, Stalin's name made a wary return in neutral or favorable contexts, and the term "personality cult" appeared less and less often. It looked as if the ground was being prepared for a retreat from the politics of memory line set by the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses, but evidently in a snail's crawl expected to take a long time.

Historians date the beginning of the ideological campaign for a return to the politics of memory based on the *Short History* to the golden jubilee of the October Revolution. That was when the revision of Khrushchev's assessment of Stalin started to gather momentum. The history textbooks and academic coursebooks published after 1967 were revised and sections criticizing the personality cult were expurgated. Publications in the press, especially in *Pravda*, the Party's daily, queried the concept of a "Stalin cult," arguing that if anything, there were "isolated errors made by that most outstanding statesman." *Pravda* published a pompous commemorative text for Stalin's ninetieth birthday, and a bust sculpted by the well-known artist Nikolai Tomsky was put up on his grave in the Kremlin wall. Under the impact of this kind of memory politics, society started to polarize and split up into those who supported the decisions of the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Congresses condemning the personality cult, and those who wanted Stalin rehabilitated and were labeled Neo-Stalinists by their adversaries.³⁶⁶

The extent to which the Soviet politics of memory of the time ceased to condemn the abuses attending the personality cult, restored Stalin to the pantheon of the Founding Fathers of the Soviet State and Party, and made him the principal creator of its power alongside Lenin, can be gauged on the basis of the entry for him in the prestigious *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya* (Soviet Military Encyclopedia). It is as long as Lenin's, and says that he was an "outstanding theoretician and propagator of Marxism–Leninism . . . an active participant in the preparations and implementation of the Great Socialist October Revolution," who made a "personal contribution to socialist industrialization, helped the State achieve the independence of all the branches of the national economy and their technological reconstruction, as well as the success of the *kolhoz* collective farming system in the countryside and the cultural revolution; the man who laid the foundations for the reinforcement of the defense of our Socialist Fatherland and the reconstruction of its Armed Forces." He was the man who, when challenged by war, "concentrated all the power in his hands and directed the conversion of the national economy for the needs of war, putting in an enormous amount of work to mobilize all the State's forces to resist the enemy and secure victory." After the war, Stalin "made a tremendous contribution to the development of the postwar

366 Пикхова, *Советский Союз: история власти. 1945–1991*, 255, 258.

peaceful order . . . and the battle to reconstruct and develop the national economy; . . . took measures to enhance the defensive potential of the State and the technological rearmament of the Soviet armed forces.” Toward the end of Stalin’s biographic entry there was a short paragraph with a rather vague remark that “mistakes occurred” in his activities and some features of his character were “not constructive.” Later in his career, he “started to deviate from the Leninist principles of collective leadership, which gave rise to a personality cult . . . infringing Socialist law and order and causing serious damage to the Party’s activities.”³⁶⁷ That was it—not a word about his personal responsibility for millions of victims, for the elimination of Party and military activists, for many other atrocities and perversions.

During Brezhnev’s term in office, the authorities experienced more and more problems with the *samizdat* phenomenon and the grassroots movement to learn the truth about the history of the Soviet regime. One of the causes of this was undoubtedly the attempt to stifle this trend, as had happened under Khrushchev.³⁶⁸ In September 1965, writers Yuliy Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky were arrested and prosecuted for publishing anti-Soviet novels and short stories abroad.³⁶⁹ The scale of the social protest fomented by this decision, later referred to as the beginning of the organized “movement of defenders of rights and independent views” exceeded

367 *Советская военная энциклопедия. В 8 томах. Том 7. Радиоконтроль – Тачанка*, ed. Nikolay Ogarkov (Moscow: Воениздат, 1979), 514–517.

368 A series of arrests was conducted of the Mayakovsky Square group of poets, vocalists and orators who had been giving open-air performances and poetry readings next to the Vladimir Mayakovsky Monument in Moscow since the summer of 1958. The arrestees included Vladimir Osipov (arrested April 1961), Ilya Bokshtein (arrested August 1961), and Eduard Kuznetsov (arrested October 1961). In February 1962, they were sentenced to 5–7 years in corrective labor camps for “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.” In March 1964, Vladimir Bukovsky was convicted for “parasitism” and sentenced to five years in a labor camp; in 1960, Anatoly Marchenko, a *samizdat* activist, was sentenced to 6 years in a labor camp; in February 1964, General Petro Hryhorenko (Grigorenko), a lecturer at the Frunze Military Academy, was sentenced for making a public appeal for people to stand up in opposition to the “distortions of Leninism” and forcibly committed to a special psychiatric hospital. For more details, see *Крамola: Инакомыслие в СССР при Хрущеве и Брежневе 1953–1982 гг. Рассекреченные документы Верховного суда и Прокуратуры СССР*, ed. Vladimir Kozlov and Sergey Mironenko (Moscow: Материк, 2005); Lyudmila M. Alekseeva, *История инакомыслия в СССР: новейший период* (Moscow: Моск. Хельсинк. Группа, 2012); “Ruch w obronie. Lata dysydentów,” comp. Małgorzata Strasz, *Karta*, no. 16 (1995): 4–16; Anatoly Marchenko, *Мои показания* (Moscow: ОГИ, 2005).

369 Sinyavsky used the pen-name Abram Tertz, and Daniel’s pen-name was Nikolai Arzhak. For more on the Sinyavsky and Daniel trial, see Abram Tertz, *Цена метафоры, или Преступление и наказание Сняевского и Даниэля* (Moscow: Книга, 1989); and “Śąd idzie! Stenogram z procesu A. Siniawskiego i J. Daniela (A. Terca i M. Arżaka), Moskwa, luty 1966” the Polish translation of the minutes of their trial, published in Paris by Instytut Literacki in 1966.

all expectation. The authorities realized that times had definitively changed, and other methods of curtailing democratic aspirations, which they called “dissidence,” had to be sought.³⁷⁰

Russian dissidents held a demonstration in Red Square to protest against the military intervention in Czechoslovakia. News of the incident went round the world, even though there were only seven persons in the protest. A few months later, the Human Rights Defense Initiative Group was founded and straightaway went public. Opposition to the regime was growing and concentrated in two groups known by the names of their chief representatives as the Sakharov group and the Solzhenitsyn group.³⁷¹

In the late 1960s, the distinguished physicist Andrey Sakharov, one of the joint creators of the Soviet hydrogen bomb and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences awarded the Hero of the Socialist Labor title three times, published a *samizdat* which soon appeared abroad as *Thoughts on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom*.³⁷² It was reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies and became the cornerstone of the emerging civil society and a sign of democratization, although not all dissidents concurred with Sakharov’s claim that the two systems were inevitably converging. One of those who disagreed with Sakharov on this point was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, leader of the other group of dissidents, a hero of the 1941–1945 war, a Gulag survivor and writer. Solzhenitsyn respected Sakharov but did not consider democracy the best system for Russia’s future. He preferred the traditional values of Russian Orthodoxy and the Slavophile movement, and admired the ideas and policy of Pyotr Stolypin. These were the values underpinning his activities in opposition to the Soviet authorities and efforts to expose the criminal nature of the Soviet system, illustrating it with numerous examples from his meticulously compiled Gulag record.

The data Solzhenitsyn collected for a book and later published in subsequent volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*³⁷³ were a cause for serious alarm to the special services. In September 1973, the KGB confiscated Solzhenitsyn’s data collection,

370 Cf. Konrad Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy w Związku Radzieckim i Rosji w kontekście przemian ideowych, politycznych, społecznych i ekonomicznych* (Warszawa: Instytut Nauk Politycznych PAN, 2013), 110–117.

371 Cf. *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 417–425.

372 Formerly available at http://www.yabloko.ru/Themes/History/sakharov_progress.html, inaccessible on November 20, 2024. The Polish translation appeared in *Kultura* (Paris, 1968).

373 A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *Архипелаг ГУЛаг. 1918–1956: Опыт художественного исследования*. [В 3 т.] Т. 1–3 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1973–1975). Cf. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, I-II*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

which only prompted him to let the YMCA Press publish a copy smuggled out of Russia earlier. At this time he also published his *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*.³⁷⁴ Solzhenitsyn was arrested, which instantly triggered an international outcry. Western politicians warned Moscow that a solution to the problem in the characteristic Soviet way could lead to a new wave of the Cold War.³⁷⁵ Yuri Andropov, head of the KGB, suggested making a compromise with the writer, knowing well that after the Twentieth Congress, neither resorting to harsh forms of repression nor tolerating Solzhenitsyn's activities such as *samizdat* publications, interviews for the foreign press, or smuggling manuscripts out to the West were acceptable. There was only one solution on the table, in line with the Bolshevik practice after the 1917 Revolution regarding those whom the regime chose not to murder: to send the writer into exile. An agreement was reached with West Germany, and Solzhenitsyn left the country in the fall of 1973.³⁷⁶ That was a temporary solution to the problem, which signaled that a return to the reign of terror was no longer acceptable as the foundation of the system and main tool to discipline the intelligentsia and control society.³⁷⁷

During Brezhnev's term as leader of the Party, a specific confrontation with the West occurred in the Soviet politics of memory regarding the Katyn massacre. In the late 1960s, a series of publications appeared in the West on this mass murder. The subject was raised in the press, especially in the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries. The Katyn Lobby operating in the United Kingdom announced that the period for which documents relating to Katyn were kept secret was about to expire and British archives would declassify particularly important

374 For an English edition, see *Conservative Dissent, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Letter to the Soviet Leaders, 1974*, online at <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1973-2/the-dissident>, accessed January 20, 2024.

375 "I cannot imagine any progress in our relations should there be a tragedy concerning the writer Solzhenitsyn," German Chancellor Willy Brandt warned Brezhnev; quoted after Svyatoslav Rybas, "Фактор Солженицына," *Журнал Святослава Рыбаса*, <http://srybas.livejournal.com/369081.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

376 Not much later, deportation orders were issued against other insubordinate artists, including the teacher and human rights activist Ilya Gabay, the writer Anatoly Marchenko, and the writer and human rights defender Vladimir Bukovsky. A popular joke said that "They swapped a hooligan for Luis Corvalan" (*Обменяли хулигана на Луиса Корвалана*, *Обменяли хулигана на Луиса Корвалана* — Циклопедия (cyclowiki.org, accessed November 20, 2024). In 1976, Bukovsky was exchanged for the Chilean Communist Luis Corvalán).

377 For terror as the fundamental tool of Soviet rule, see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sergiy Bilokin, *Масовий терор як засіб державного управління в СРСР. 1917–1941 рр.: джерелознавче дослідження* (Київ: Інститут історії України НАН. України, 1999).

records³⁷⁸ and committees for the erection of monuments commemorating the victims of the Katyn massacre were set up in several cities.³⁷⁹

Typically enough, the Soviet authorities launched a counteroffensive concerning a Belarusian village called Khatyn. Like many other places, it was burned down by the Nazi Germans, and its population practically wiped out. The English transliteration of its name, “Khatyn,” was deceptively similar to “Katyn” and became a pretext for an unprecedented disinformation campaign, baffling readers and blurring the truth about the atrocity committed on Polish prisoners-of-war. At the turn of the 1970s, a memorial was opened in Khatyn as a branch of the Minsk Museum of the Great Patriotic War. A massive sculpture of a man carrying a child, one of the few survivors of the carnage, towered over the site. An abundantly illustrated commemorative album was issued in a big print run, and Khatyn went into the schoolbooks, memorial publications, and especially into encyclopedias and lexicons. The village became a mandatory stop on the tourist route for foreign visitors to Belarus. Khatyn started to host prominent political figures, including U.S. President Richard Nixon during his famous visit to the Soviet Union in May 1972, which some commentators considered the end of the Cold War,³⁸⁰ as well as many other political leaders visiting the Soviet Union.³⁸¹

Initially, Khatyn created a considerable amount of confusion, especially among Soviet citizens. However, in the course of time, the cynicism of the operations, which offended the memory of Polish and Belarusian victims alike, became all too obvious.

The Khatyn memorial was an attempt to counteract any tendency that showed up the dark side of Soviet involvement in the war of 1941–1945. It was the paramount task of the Soviet politics of memory, carried out with the help of an appropriately oriented historical research program, continuously unveiling new monuments and applying propaganda and ideological dogma to promote an idealized, unequivocally laudatory image of the Red Army and the wartime conduct of Soviet society. The offensive initiated under Khrushchev to mythicize the war gathered even more momentum, especially in cinematography and memoir literature. A spectacular instance was the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. Not only the content but also the scale of the

378 Cf. Materski, *Mord katyński*, 61.

379 See Alina Siomkajło, *Katyń w pomnikach świata* (Warszawa: Agencja Wydawnicza CB, 2002).

380 One of the foremost personalities holding this opinion was the American political scientist and geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski, cf. Zbigniew Brzeziński, “Współzawodnictwo,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 26 (1973): 3–38.

381 Visitors to Khatyn included Yasser Arafat, Fidel Castro, and Rajiv Gandhi. Cf. <https://histmag.org/70-lat-temu-zrownano-z-ziemia-wies-Chatyn-7745>, accessed November 20, 2024.

event was thrust upon the countries in the Soviet sphere of influence, during a specially convened meeting of the secretaries of the central committees of fraternal parties responsible for ideology and foreign affairs.³⁸² It was the first such coordinated information and propaganda initiative covering the entire bloc, and included joint scientific and propaganda events, painting and poster exhibitions, film screenings, meetings for journalists, and commemorative sessions of international institutions. The operation was never repeated on subsequent round victory anniversaries, probably because of the already evident serious cracks in the “communal” façade of unity.³⁸³

Andropov and Chernenko: paroxysms of the system

The twilight of Brezhnev’s rule was marked by ideological and economic crisis. Despite the illusion created by the propaganda, which presented stagnation as stability, there was a shortage of basic goods in the stores, and on the black market prices were twice as high as the official ones. Ration cards for meat and butter were introduced in successive cities. The only people who did not complain were senior Party and State officials, who shopped in a separate network of stores. The dismal social mood was worsened by reports of masses of “internationalist soldiers” coming home from Afghanistan in caskets.³⁸⁴ Additionally, there were other traumatic events for the system like the election of a pope from Poland, a conflict with Romania³⁸⁵ and the outbreak of the Polish Solidarity movement, corruption on an enormous scale, the anachronism of the system, and decline in the prestige of all authorities whatsoever. It made even the most diehard Party hardliners stop and think. Although the situation in the so-called Socialist community seemed to be under control after the imposition of martial law in Poland, the geriatric Party leaders finally realized that profound reform was needed. Yuri Andropov, who had earned merit for himself by improving and modernizing the opera-

382 Cf. Paweł Machcewicz, “30-lecie zwycięstwa nad faszyzmem”. O polityce historycznej PRL i bloku radzieckiego,” in *Niepiękny wiek XX*, 523 ff.

383 *Ibid.*, 529–530, 532.

384 Пikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 372. In December 1979, there was a Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, formally to support one of the parties in the civil war, but the real aim was to gain full control of that country. It marked the beginning of nine years of brutal war.

385 Romania openly condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. For details, see Adam Burakowski, *Geniusz Karpat. Dyktatura Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965–1989* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2008), 256–257.

tions of the KGB, the cornerstone of the Party,³⁸⁶ was elected its new General Secretary, indicating that in the face of the ongoing economic and social crisis and the ineffectiveness of the proxy war in Afghanistan, the Party leaders of the Soviet empire had reached a conclusion: only those working for the most effective institution in the State, that is its political police, could control the situation and find a remedy against imminent disaster.³⁸⁷ They created a precedent which would be used again a decade later, again on the same grounds.

Andropov's idea was strikingly simple: the principles of the system, its ideological foundation and strategic goals were right, but the organization was faulty due to inadequately motivated and badly supervised human resources, including individuals in the highest echelons of the Party.³⁸⁸ Improving the administrative system, selecting the right personnel, ensuring the proper control of the services and strictly enforcing regulations would bring the State back onto the path for growth and fulfill its historic role as the vanguard of social progress leading to global change. Not all the leaders of the Soviet Party and State condoned such an approach, and Andropov, who was well aware of the lethargy of the apparatus, knew it.³⁸⁹ In his battle against the system's pathologies, widespread corruption and incompetence, Andropov opted for a hitherto unprecedented extent of transparency in criminal proceedings. The pages of the central press were full of news reports about criminal proceedings against high-ranking Party and State officials. It marked a complete shift in information policy, a sort of preview of *glasnost*' before the term was disseminated by one of Andropov's successors.³⁹⁰

In the process of restructuring the system and announcing a new edition of the Communist Party Program,³⁹¹ Andropov, a pragmatist and level-headed *apparatchik*, attached less significance to the politics of memory than his predecessors

386 Andropov was head of the State Security Committee (the KGB) from 1967 to 1982.

387 Józef Smaga, *Rosja w 20 stuleciu* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 234.

388 "What was shocking was the indifference and inaction of the highest Party and State structures, silently watching the decline in the country's development," as Vitaly Vorotnikov, First Secretary of the Krasnodar Regional Committee of the Communist Party recollected in *А было это так. . . Из дневника члена Политбюро ЦК КПСС* (Moscow: Литрес, 1995), 12.

389 *Ibid.*, 15–16.

390 Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 378–382.

391 See "USSR: On the Threshold of 1984. Statement by Yuri Andropov, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU [delivered at the] Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, December 26, 1983," available in the official English translation from the Marxists Internet Archive at andropov-1.pdf (marxists.org) accessed January 20, 2024; cf. Yuri Andropov, *Избранные речи и статьи* (Moscow: Политиздат, 1983). In fact, Andropov's speech is misdated in the Marxists Internet Archive; the date given in the official Russian publication (and its official Polish translation) is June 15, 1983.

had done and did not manipulate the past to create a heroic image of himself—perhaps due to lack of time (he was seriously ill). Instead, he focused on the immediate issues of system overhaul and, in foreign affairs, particularly on the strained Soviet–American relations which had been pushed to dangerous limits (the war in Afghanistan, the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, and the Polish Solidarity crisis).

If one were to pinpoint a specific personal trait in Andropov’s approach to history during his short term in office, it would undoubtedly be his attempt to restore Felix Dzerzhinsky to the pantheon of the system’s founding fathers. Andropov began working on the project when he was still head of the KGB, and continued after being elected General Secretary of the Party. Perhaps a certain similarity in their biographies made him fascinated with the creator and head of the early Soviet security services (the Cheka, GPU, and OGPU): both served as the head of repressive institutions, members of the top-level Party bodies, and were recognized as economic experts. Compliant historians and journalists picked up on this, constructing parallel lives for these “exceptionally modest and undemanding” individuals serving an idea.³⁹² The peak of this campaign came in 1987, with Dzerzhinsky’s one hundred and tenth birthday as a pretext.³⁹³

The sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Soviet Union seemed a good opportunity to identify the priorities of the new General Secretary in the politics of memory. However, in his speech at the main anniversary ceremony, historical issues, which he treated somewhat conventionally, were overshadowed by current endeavors to improve the operations of the State and its international relations, especially with the United States.³⁹⁴ The historical points in his address were arranged in an unusual way, as Kremlinologists sensitive to such aspects in speeches delivered by Soviet leaders were quick to spot. The first to be mentioned was Mikhail Kalinin, a deceased chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, not a particularly colorful personality, only then followed by Marx and Engels, with Lenin and Brezhnev coming later. For Andropov, the anniversary was mainly a pretext to present his statement on the historic Soviet “fraternal union” of free nations, which provided them with the opportunity for “unhampered development,” the elimination “not only of legal but also actual inequality,” and the growth

392 Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova, *Yuri Andropov: A Secret Passage into the Kremlin* (New York; London: Macmillan 1983), 131–132.

393 Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia’s Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 91–100.

394 The official English version of this speech, “Y. V. Andropov, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*,” is available from the Marxists Internet Archive at [andropovanniversaryussr.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/andropovanniversaryussr.pdf) (marxists.org) accessed January 20, 2024.

of “internationalist consciousness.” He reiterated Brezhnev’s idea of a united Soviet nation, though not so categorically: “Socialist nations have formed [in the USSR], and these now comprise a new historical community—the Soviet people.” This success was possible thanks to the observance of the sacrosanct “Leninist principles of the nationalities policy,” thanks to the Communist Party, the “leading force” in this process. This “new historical community—the Soviet people” owed a lot, especially to the Russian nation, its “disinterested fraternal assistance,” as well as to the Russian language, which drew together “all the Soviet nations and nationalities,” provided them with the opportunity to make “the riches of world civilization accessible to them,” and even, as Lenin said, “to fuse them.” However, “on no account must there be either any forestalling of events or any holding back of processes that have already matured,” he concluded. So there was a very cautious revision of Brezhnev’s views on the supposedly already accomplished process of shaping a united Soviet nation.

On the other hand, the historical references he made to the “external” Socialist community were scarce and enigmatic. He invoked the Brezhnev Doctrine in a roundabout way (“the principle of socialist internationalism”) and limited himself to saying that they did “not always succeed in drawing timely conclusions from the changes within the socialist world itself . . . There were illusions we had had to abandon, and mistakes for which we had had to pay a price.” He summed up this part of his speech by assuring that “the Soviet Union will do its utmost to make the world socialist system stronger and more prosperous.” This could be interpreted as a warning to Poland that the developments under martial law were still being closely monitored, and if necessary, Moscow would not hesitate to implement the Hungarian scenario, which was closely associated with Andropov,³⁹⁵ or its Czechoslovak sequel.³⁹⁶

The policy of “discipline and organization,” pursued in the second half of his short tenure, practically from his hospital bed, had a negligible effect. Also Andropov’s attempts to make a personal contribution to the theory and decide whether the USSR was in a state of “developed” or “developing” socialism were perceived as farcical already at the time, a degradation of the prestige of the authorities.³⁹⁷

395 Andropov was Soviet ambassador to Hungary from July 1954 to March 1955, and the Kremlin’s chief adviser on the question of military intervention.

396 “We are in favor of friendship with all the socialist countries . . . and opt for the enhancement of political cooperation, the most important instrument of which is the organization of the Warsaw Pact.” Andropov’s speech at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, June 15, 1983. This speech is not available from the website of the Marxists Internet Archive; we have translated it from the official Polish version in Andropov, *Wybrane przemówienia i artykuły* 343.

397 Cf. Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 398–399.

Comments went round when he failed to appear on the Mausoleum tribune for the anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution;³⁹⁸ people expected a turning point, a new leader. They did not have to wait long, the change came in early February 1984.

Seriously ill, Andropov designated Mikhail Gorbachev, his protégé and right-hand man for the improvement of the system, as his successor.³⁹⁹ However, the highest Party echelon did not disclose this information in a public announcement. Instead, they chose Konstantin Chernenko, a Party conservative who belonged to their trusted circle and was the most prominent critic of the reforms undertaken after 1982. Like his predecessor, Chernenko was so seriously ill throughout his short term in office that he hardly ever attended Party meetings, and appointed Gorbachev his plenipotentiary to present his opinion.

So we can hardly speak of a politics of memory or any amendments or changes proposed by Chernenko in this area during his term in office. Complicated issues relating to the Party's past, the personality cult and the repressions associated with it, as well as Stalin's name, simply vanished from newspaper columns. The difficult past of the Soviet Party and State appeared only sporadically, whenever circumstances made it impossible to avoid the subject, for example, during round anniversaries. Even then, the enigmatic way the atrocities or perversions in the system were treated made the information practically undecipherable. For example, in the memorial articles published to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the death of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, one of tens of thousands of senior commanders executed on no grounds at all during the mass purges of the Red Army in June 1937, the papers only dropped a hint that "his life ended in tragedy."⁴⁰⁰ A similarly vague statement concluded the biographies of most Party and State officials, or high-ranking military personnel in encyclopedias, lexicons, and textbooks. Nevertheless, they were lucky to be mentioned at all, because figures like Nikolai Bukharin, Lev Kamenev, Yuri Piatakov, Karl Radek, Alexei Rykov, Mikhail Tomsky, Lev Trotsky, and Grigory Zinoviev did not get in at all.⁴⁰¹

In a 1982 book ghost-written for Chernenko containing what was purported to be his creed as a Party *apparatchik*, the predominant subjects were organizational

398 The General Secretary's attendance at the Mausoleum during these celebrations was practically his main duty. Leonid Brezhnev did it, properly supported and on the right drugs, just two days before his death.

399 Gorbachev had the reputation of "the most talented *apparatchik* in the history of the USSR after Stalin," Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy w Związku Radzieckim i Rosji*, 84.

400 Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 382.

401 Cf., for example, *Гражданская война и военная интервенция в СССР: Энциклопедия*, ed. Semyon S. Khromov (Moscow: Советская Энциклопедия, 1983).

issues, and ideas and prescriptions how to resolve the problems in the Party apparatus and administration.⁴⁰² The only historical aspects or ideas attributable to him occur in the introduction to the official Polish edition, which has his signature on it. All he offers are clichés about “loyalty to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism,” “the preservation of a lasting peace,” and the “inviolability of the borders of European states.” These are supplemented with a couple of references to the “sacrosanct combat alliance and friendship of the nations of the Soviet Union and Poland,” which “has withstood the test of time” because it is “based on Lenin’s principles of proletarian internationalism,” confirmed during the “difficult days Poland has been through lately.”⁴⁰³ It could hardly have gotten more banal.

While Andropov tried to salvage the anachronistic economy by disciplining operations and mobilizing reserves, Chernenko seemed oblivious to the threats. During his brief term in office, he focused on the “superstructure”: dealing with dissident movements, suppressing religion, and promoting the Russian language, which he believed united the Soviet Union.

He also continued a project which had started under Brezhnev and Andropov to restore Party membership to those who “had been unfairly removed from the Party” after the Twenty-Second Party Congress. One of those he rehabilitated was Molotov.⁴⁰⁴ This decision, made by the Politburo already in July 1983, was implemented well-nigh secretly and not published even in the in-house news bulletin of the Communist Party Central Committee. At the same session, the Politburo considered reinstating Georgy Malenkov and Lazar Kaganovich, who had been expelled from the Party in December 1961. According to the full official minutes, it was decided that their Party membership cards should be restored, but without too much haste, so as not to create a sensation. This remark in the official record reflects the characteristic atmosphere prevailing in the Politburo whenever there were discussions of matters relating to the personality cult, which had been so spectacularly condemned at the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses. Members of the Politburo were virtually unanimous in condemning Khrushchev for his de-Stalinization policy. They slated him for his “utterly despicable antics against Stalin, for what he did to Stalin and our history” (Dmitry Ustinov), for “tainting and besmirching our policy” (Nikolai Tikhonov), for the “unlawful reha-

⁴⁰² Konstantin U. Chernenko, *Вопросы работы партийного и государственного аппарата* (Moscow: Политиздат, 1982). Polish edition: *Problemy pracy aparatu partyjnego i państwowego*, trans. and ed. Krystyna Jaśkiewicz and Urszula Drożdż, (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1984).

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5–8.

⁴⁰⁴ Chernenko personally handed Molotov’s card back to its owner on his reinstatement in the Party, showing his disapproval of the de-Stalinization implemented after the Twentieth Congress, http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_m/molotov_vm.php, accessed November 20, 2024.

bilitation of numerous individuals who had been rightly punished” (Viktor Chebrikov), and for “what he did to the Party” (Mikhail Gorbachev). They concluded that “no enemy had caused as much damage as Khrushchev with his policy on the past of our Party and State” (Andrei Gromyko and Gorbachev).⁴⁰⁵ That was the real situation in the top echelons of the Communist Party a quarter of a century after the Twentieth, purportedly groundbreaking, Party Congress. The bad boy was Khrushchev, not Stalin, whose horrific crimes had been exposed.

Andropov’s successor could not do much in the way of “restoring Stalin to the Party.” He did not have enough time. He died just over a year after Andropov, leaving the Party’s leaders with a crisis on their hands and the State in an even worse economic and social situation than he had found it.

Both Andropov and Chernenko were General Secretary of the Party, that is head of the entire system, for too short a time to leave their individual mark on the Soviet politics of memory of their time. In principle, it continued as it had been pursued by Brezhnev, although there were a few surprises, such as the showing of the shocking anti-Stalinist film by Tengiz Abuladze, *Pokayaniye* (Repentance, 1984), which signaled a relaxation of the late Brezhnev censorship straitjacket. Changes in the approach to the problematical history of the Soviet Union, in some respects quite far-reaching, came with the election of their successor, Mikhail Gorbachev, a politician who was much younger than the other members of the Politburo.

⁴⁰⁵ “Рабочей записи заседания Политбюро ЦК КПСС 12 июля 1983 года,” in Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 387–389.

Chapter Four

Gorbachev and the traps of *glasnost*'

The reformer

When Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, he was aware of the disastrous state of the country and the need for far-reaching reform. However, he did not present his reform in terms of abandoning an anachronistic, inefficient socio-economic system, riddled with corruption and nepotism, but instead spoke of it as an improvement and modernization of the system which had worked for years, and as “a return to Leninism,” in the superstructure, the economic and social basis for the structure of the state, the sole source of “explanations and answers to the questions that have arisen.”⁴⁰⁶ Considering the deep and far-reaching changes he intended to introduce, one may assume it was a tactic, although not devoid of naïveté, rather than a profession of faith, cynicism rather than ideological idealism.⁴⁰⁷ The slogan of “a return to Leninism,” which was to justify the reforms, in a way pacified critics in advance, pushing the unconvinced and doubters out onto the position of ones who challenged the ideas of Lenin, the founding father, the brilliant theoretician, practitioner and strategist.

The new General Secretary presented the basic principles of his vision of reform in April 1985 at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He intended to reform and improve the system by tapping the “potential opportunities offered by Socialism,” which had “not been properly utilized before.” It should be done first by stabilizing the economy and then speeding it up to achieve dynamic growth. This growth was to translate into an improvement in the people’s standard of living, to be achieved by transferring part of the capital expenditure from the arms industry, which consumed a huge amount of resources, to the machine industry, electrical engineering and electronics, which were to be

406 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Перестройка и новое мышление для нашей страны и для всего мира* (Moscow: Политиздат, 1987) English translation: *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row: 1987). Online at Perestroika: new thinking for our country and the world: Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeevich, 1931-: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive; also at Perestroika: new thinking for our country and the world (archive.org), both websites accessed February 3, 2024.

407 Though years later (2005), Gorbachev himself assured, “When I was in power, I was under the illusion of the possibility of reforming the system,” quoted after Alicja Stępień-Kuczyńska, *Michaił Gorbaczow a idea i praktyka pieriestrojki* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016), 81.

modernized. This shift was to be possible if the international situation got better, if there was progress in disarmament, and if Soviet–American relations improved.

Gorbachev repeated the reformist ideas he had presented at the April Plenum at the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Communist Party, the highest decision-making body in the Soviet Party and State.⁴⁰⁸ At the Party Congress, held at the turn of February and March, a difficult discussion of the ideas took place between the “reformers” and the conservatives; eventually, at Gorbachev’s request, the Plenum adopted his program for the reform of the Soviet Union’s economic and social affairs, in spite of the fact that a number of its points clearly curtailed the Party’s still unlimited powers. However, the top echelons of the authorities were already convinced that the inefficient system, which was weakened by the arms race, was heading for an economic disaster which could not be stopped unless sweeping changes were made.

As could be expected, Gorbachev began by making radical changes in the top Party and State appointments. He brought younger people into the highest Party authorities, appointing Nikolai Ryzhkov, hitherto head of the Economic Department of the Central Committee, as Prime Minister, and—to the great surprise of all observers—made Eduard Shevardnadze, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia, Minister of Foreign Affairs, which was the key office for improving the Soviet Union’s relations throughout the world. The promotion of these fifty-year-olds was a signal to Party members that the geriatric *nomenklatura* period was coming to an end and prospects were opening for young, dynamic people. In the first three years of Gorbachev’s term of office, as many as 80 percent of the *nomenklatura* were replaced at the Party’s local (*krai*, *oblast*, and *raion*) levels. Regardless of the overly moderate success of his reforms, Gorbachev gained real support for them, or rather for himself, which made him largely independent of the balance of power in the Politburo and mentors like Andrei Gromyko.

The acceleration Gorbachev was after required not only industrial investment transfer, but also significant capital. Yet from the very outset, capital was in short supply, mainly due to the fall in prices of energy resources on world markets in 1986, which radically reduced the possibility of obtaining the necessary funds. Economic growth was to be stimulated by the State-Owned Enterprises Act, the key legislation for the reform package, which introduced free market mechanisms on an unprecedented scale in Socialist economies: planning at the company

⁴⁰⁸ Политический доклад Центрального Комитета КПСС XXVII съезду Коммунистической партии Советского Союза. Из доклада Генерального секретаря ЦК КПСС товарища М. С. Горбачева, 25 февраля 1986 г. (Moscow: Политиздат, 1986).

level, applications for central funds on a competitive basis, a free market of suppliers and subcontractors, and self-sufficiency. However, management could not take full advantage of the instruments it provided; they were accustomed to a command-and-distribution model of the economy and avoided the risks of making independent decisions. Using the new potential irrationally, in line with the realities of an anachronistic system, they only aggravated the crisis. The chances for acceleration were blighted by three factors: an ill-conceived anti-alcohol campaign, which brought a radical drop in state revenue; failure to control the absorption of the rapidly growing investments, which resulted in a huge amount of wastefulness; and panic on the home market, caused by a significant reduction in the import of industrial goods for general use, which fueled inflation.⁴⁰⁹ This was exacerbated by the biggest power plant disaster in the history of nuclear energy, which occurred in Chernobyl (April 1986) and had serious economic and social consequences.

The halt to economic growth cast serious doubt on the feasibility of implementing the basic reform plan, prompting Gorbachev to redirect public attention to the next points on his agenda, restructuring (*perestroika*) and transparency (*glasnost*'). These were not verbalized until the Plenum of the Central Committee in January 1987, although public opinion has identified them with Gorbachev from the very beginning of his career as General Secretary.

The concept of *perestroika*, "restructuring,"⁴¹⁰ was borrowed from the reform program of Alexander II. It was the buzzword that signified the process which, over time, was to encompass all aspects of the country's public affairs, from the structural transformation of the economy to international relations, with the objective of limiting the destructive competition for global hegemony. As Gorbachev warned, accepting such an approach would call for "new thinking" about the Soviet Union and the world, based on the primacy of intensive growth over extensive development, and international cooperation over confrontation.⁴¹¹ He tried to persuade the "top echelon of power," which had been accustomed to reasoning in terms of confrontation and the arms race, that without radical *détente*, without making the world free from war, arms races and nuclear weapons, it would be

409 Adam Bartnicki, "Michał Gorbaczow – prezydent upadającego państwa," *Miscellanea Historico-Juridica*, vol. VII (2009): 196–197.

410 This concept was also used by Stalin in his bid for full power. See Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 107; Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji," 248.

411 *Отвечая на вызов времени. Внешняя политика перестройки Подробнее*, ed. Mikhail Belugaev (Moscow: Весь мир, 2010), 74–75; Stepien-Kuczyńska, *Michał Gorbaczow a idea i praktyka pierestrojki*, 159ff.

impossible to obtain conditions for long-term, stable development at home.⁴¹² It was a clear message: we have lost the arms race, let's save the country by putting aside our global ambitions.

Soon, *perestroika* was applicable in almost all areas of the country's public affairs, far in excess of its initial focus on the transformation of the economic system. It became a symbol and synthesis of the new stage of the Soviet Union's development that had begun in the spring of 1985, very different from the previous ones. Gorbachev did not put his ultimate aim into words, nor its all-encompassing nature intended to bring the Soviet economy *en bloc* closer to the standards of the developed economies, but without increasing the social costs, which rendered the entire scheme an unachievable utopia right from the start. The same was true of the postulate to extend *perestroika* throughout the entire Socialist Bloc, in an attempt to move away from "clinging to old forms of cooperation, limiting ourselves to them," which had resulted in "obvious harm to the prestige and possibilities of Socialism," and through "new relations" within the community: "socialism must show in full measure the dynamism of its political and economic system, a humane way of life."⁴¹³

Gorbachev's accumulation of ideas poorly connected with each other and not based on Soviet economic realities, their ideological ambivalence and at the same time his inability to break away from the old, discredited patterns of propaganda, and a kind of political eclecticism—all this aroused the world's interest, but gave no chance of success. The program behind the catchy slogan of *perestroika* based on historical traditions, was not a well-thought-out package of reforms, but "a desperate leap into the unknown."⁴¹⁴ A leap taken by a man who fooled himself into believing he had the qualifications, expertise and intellectual backing for it, and was flattered by the recognition with which the world's media wrote about him as a reformer, admiring his "European wife" as well.

Significantly, from the very beginning, Gorbachev presented *perestroika* as "a continuation of the feat accomplished in October [1917],"⁴¹⁵ which, together with the slogan of "a return to Leninism," suggested that the entire post-Leninist stage in the history of the Soviet Union had run counter to the original vision.⁴¹⁶ From

⁴¹² *Trybuna Ludu*, January 28, 1987.

⁴¹³ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 151.

⁴¹⁴ Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 110.

⁴¹⁵ This slogan appeared even on stamps issued in 1988 (5 kopeck stamps designed by Andrey Zdobnikov).

⁴¹⁶ In contemporary Russia, retrospective critique of the "return to Leninism" slogan says that the sharp polarization it gave rise to created a false image of the period after 1924, suggesting that "all the victims of Stalinism" were innocent, but, as this criticism implies, not all of them deserved to be rehabilitated.

his perspective, the Soviet period was divided into five historical stages: Leninism, the personality cult, voluntarism, stagnation, and *perestroika*. Obviously, only the first and the last in the line, which drew directly on Stage One, were good; the rest sandwiched between them were marred by errors, distortions, violations and departures from the Leninist line. The truth about the three middle stages, full of “inconvenient historical individuals and events” deleted from the history of the State, had been hidden from the public or lied about, and only thanks to *glasnost* could the people gradually learn about them. It was pretty obvious that there were two paramount dates for the entire Soviet period: the coup on November 7, 1917, and the election of Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Party on March 11, 1985.⁴¹⁷

Gorbachev's second year of pushing his and his team's *perestroika* reforms turned out to be a milestone in the quagmire of Soviet irreformability. In January 1987, at the Plenum of the Central Committee, which was inaugurated by the General Secretary's paper on the reconstruction and human resources policy of the Party, the discussion focused on the *perestroika* of the political system, including genuine elections giving electors a choice of several candidates running for office in the Party. The meeting polarized its participants, not only into reformers versus conservatives, but also made Gorbachev come up against hard opposition from the radical reformer Boris Yeltsin, First Secretary of the City Committee of the CPSU in Moscow, who until then had been Gorbachev's close ally in the bid for reform.⁴¹⁸

Launching a counterattack, Gorbachev appealed to the ordinary members of the Party for their support, arguing for the need of democratic processes in the Party and the entire system. At the same time, he accused the community of social scientists, whose expert opinions were being cited by his opponents in the Central Committee, of not understanding the challenges of the times, sticking to the stereotypes of past decades, and sharing the responsibility for abandoning the Socialist model of the State. He managed to defend the basic demand which he had presented at the Plenum: elections to offices in the Party by secret ballot with several candidates running. He pushed through a new stage of the process, particularly traumatic for the Soviet Party and State—radical *perestroika* in the Party itself. His slogan was “De-nationalize [emancipate] the Party,” defining the autonomiza-

⁴¹⁷ Henryk Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie*, 220.

⁴¹⁸ Boris Yeltsin, *Исповедь на заданную тему* (Moscow: Издательство ПИК, 1990), 3–4; online at https://urfu.ru/fileadmin/user_upload/common_files/docs_units/mvk/yeltsin/Yeltsin_Boris_Isповед_na_zadannuyu_temu.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024; Vorotnikov, *А было это так... Из дневника члена Политбюро ЦК КПСС*, 46; Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 443–444.

tion of executive power in the system of soviets with respect to the system of Party committees. Under pressure from Gorbachev, these radically restrictive measures—*perestroika* of the “superstructure”—were eventually admitted at the Plenum and later confirmed by the Nineteenth Conference of the CPSU (June/July 1988). The new rules were a bitter pill to swallow for local secretaries at various levels in the Party hierarchy, individuals who had held several offices simultaneously, serving as Party secretaries and chairmen of diverse soviets in the Party-cum-State hybrid; but Gorbachev presented these moves as “the next phase of the reform package.”⁴¹⁹ The introduction of democratic procedures within the Party itself, limited as they were, was to prove crucial for the further fate of the system, directly leading to its collapse.

The decisions of the Nineteenth Conference set the main directions for constitutional reform, triggering a revolution in the Soviet Union’s political system. One of the crucial changes was that the Party lost its monopoly in selecting candidates for elections to the soviets. The institution which was henceforth to act as the supreme body exercising executive power was the Congress of People’s Deputies, consisting of 2,250 deputies, 1,500 of whom were to be elected in general elections and 750 were to be appointed by the Party and its subsidiary organizations. With a significant percentage of its deputies not card-carrying members of the Communist Party—supporters of Gorbachev in his battle against Party hardliners—the Congress was now invested with real power. It could consider any problem and make an independent decision without the need for a recommendation or endorsement from the Party authorities. It elected the chairman and members of the Supreme Soviet, which acted as the legislative body during intervals between sessions of the Congress. One of the powers still held by the Supreme Soviet was to elect the government, the body wielding supreme executive and administrative power, as well as the judges of the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor General. Compared to the system in operation hitherto, it was not a reform but a revolution, a foretaste heralding fundamental change in the political system.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. *Материалы XIX Всесоюзной конференции Коммунистической партии Советского Союза. 28 июня – 1 июля 1988 года* (Moscow: Политиздат, 1988). For an English translation of Gorbachev’s speech, see *19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU: Documents and Materials. Report by Mikhail GORBACHEV, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. Resolutions*, available from the website of the Marxists Internet Archive at [19th-all-union-conference-cpsu.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/cpsu/19th-conference-cpsu.pdf) (marxists.org), accessed February 2, 2024.

***Glasnost*' and the Soviet Republics**

In the conditions of *glasnost*', the creation of a united Soviet nation (*jediniy sovet-skiy narod*), supposedly accomplished during Brezhnev's term, turned out to be pie in the sky. On the wave of a social revival, the system which had been destabilized by the chaotic reforms began to reveal the deep-rooted flaws in the question of nationalities in the Soviet Union. The movements which emerged spontaneously in the Soviet republics in support of *perestroika* began to transform into national fronts. The tide of revival, initially focused on educational and cultural demands, respect for native traditions, and instruction in the schools in the local languages, now began to embrace political demands. The authorities were completely unprepared for the rise of such aspirations.⁴²⁰

The incidents which occurred in Yakutsk in March and April 1986, with demonstrators shouting "Down with the Russians" and "Yakutia for the Yakuts," loomed large, bringing a serious warning and showing that tension between the generally Russian center and the republics had risen to an ominous level. Similar incidents, though on a much broader scale, broke out shortly afterwards in December of the same year, in the capital of the Kazakh SSR after an unfortunate personnel decision when a Russian, not a Kazakh, was appointed First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. The disturbances were only brought under control after several days of street riots in which between 150 and 200 people were killed, according to various sources.⁴²¹ There would be more bloodshed in many other places in several regions of the Soviet Union.

Inveterate ethnic conflicts flared up again locally both in the Soviet and autonomous republics, including the particularly dramatic and brutal Armenian–Azerbaijani clash over Nagorno–Karabakh.⁴²² Moscow was invaded by a crowd of protesting Crimean Tatars, whose forebears Stalin had deported from their homeland and who now wanted to return. A movement demanding the disclosure of the truth about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the resulting annexation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was growing in strength in the Baltic republics. Calls for self-determination and the revision of existing arrangements in the Soviet Union emerged in Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine, and pretty soon also in the remaining republics, including Russia. The crisis in the politics of memory hitherto practiced, which had for a long time supported the claim

⁴²⁰ Cf. Vorotnikov, *А было это так... Из дневника члена Политбюро ЦК КПСС*, 140–141.

⁴²¹ Piotr Grochmalski, *Kazachstan. Studium politologiczne* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2006), 95–97.

⁴²² Out of about 150 clashes which broke out in connection with this conflict, at least 20 resulted in fatalities. cf. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 175.

of a single Soviet nation and which Gorbachev believed in himself,⁴²³ unleashed a turbulent series of events, both in Russia and other republics as well, with people clamoring for their own history and tradition of an independent statehood of their own. Republican narratives diverged more and more from the politics of memory pursued by the central authorities and came into conflict with the official position. Gorbachev's slogan of a return to Leninism was rapidly losing its initial attractiveness.

In different republics, the struggle to restore the native history, and the rejection, or at least cautious challenge to the politics of memory propagated by the central authorities, took different courses, both in terms of the rate at which it proceeded and the form it assumed. Here are a few examples.

In Georgia, which had enjoyed a separate statehood of its own going back to the beginnings of the first millennium AD, *glasnost'* was seen pretty much on a par with the restoration of Georgian history. Fairly soon, the call for respect for Georgia's native culture began to be accompanied by demands for democratization and respect for human rights. Censorship meant that these demands were voiced primarily in the streets. As time went on, the stairway leading up to the building of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in the capital Tbilisi became the main stage for these activities. Rallies, sit-in demonstrations, and hunger strikes were held there habitually. They were organized by students and oppositionists from spontaneously emerging national groups. Symbols and signs appeared on the streets of the cities, recalling the history of the independent Republic of Georgia which had been overthrown by the Bolsheviks in 1921. The authorities lost control of the situation and reacted chaotically, often in a manner contrary to the policy of headquarters in Moscow. For example, in August 1988 they legalized the overtly anti-Soviet National Democratic Party. The resolutions passed by successive plenums of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, calling for the "internationalist education of working people," and the improvement of "outdated methods of Party leadership," fighting "religious superstitions and relics of tradition," etc., fell on deaf ears.⁴²⁴

The campaign for national emancipation was no less turbulent in Azerbaijan. Triggered by the policy of *glasnost'* and fortified by the new phase of the conflict

423 Cf. the latest Russian edition of Andrey Grachev, *Горбачёв. Человек, который хотел как лучше* (Moscow: Эксмо, 2023). See the French edition, Andreï Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbatchev: La Terre et le Destin* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 2001), 225; and Grachev's English-language book, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2019; First published 2008).

424 *Заря Востока*, October 3, 1987. For details, see Wojciech Materski, *Gruzja*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2010), 254–258.

with Armenia, the grassroots Azerbaijani movement started to articulate political claims side by side with its social demands. With the tacit consent of the authorities, Azerbaijan's traditions of independence in 1918–1920, previously presented only in a negative light, were restored. Political associations and organizations, such as the Azerbaijan People's Front, were established, declared their support for *perestroika* and called for the liberalization and modernization of their republic. By the end of 1988, the number of informal, spontaneously founded organizations had exceeded four hundred; *samizdat* publications, hitherto quite scarce in Azerbaijan, flourished on a massive scale and were the main source (alongside the official press) from which Azerbaijani society began to obtain information at odds with the official politics of memory. Azerbaijanis learned of their national heroes, the achievements of their first republic, the Stalinist crimes against the people of Azerbaijan, and the disastrous effects brought about by the enforcement of a foreign alphabet, alien to the national heritage of their republic etc.⁴²⁵

In Ukraine, the Chernobyl tragedy encouraged rising national sentiments and a sense of national self-sufficiency. The fact that the central authorities hushed up the causes and scale of the disaster and downplayed the persisting high risk level only provoked the spontaneously arising initiatives to organize Ukrainian society along ecological lines. Soon, these movements expanded into the sphere of culture and national independence, inspired by a sense of their own historical tradition, which had been suppressed for decades. Taking advantage of Gorbachevian *glasnost*', national groups embarked on bolder and bolder operations, including attempts to check the activities of the authorities and hold street demonstrations. The traditions of Ukraine's struggle for national independence, and the memory of distinguished persons such as Taras Shevchenko, the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic (1918–1921), and the traumatic famine of 1932–1933 provided a historical foundation for the self-organization of Ukrainian society, especially in the western regions of the Republic. An ever-growing movement was launched for the legalization of the Greek Catholic Church (Uniates in communion with Rome), which had been persecuted by the Bolsheviks.⁴²⁶ All the efforts the Party and government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic made to stop the downslide of Moscow's politics of memory were futile. The Chernobyl disaster had a devastating effect on the inhabitants of the Belarusian SSR as well, undermining the confidence of this Republic, which had never caused any trouble before to the Soviet Party and State. These sentiments were intensified when the

425 Tadeusz Świętochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); see the chapter entitled "Decolonization and Its Crises," 193–220.

426 Andrzej Chojnowski, *Ukraina* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 1997), 198–201.

people learned the truth about the mass graves at Kuropaty, a hitherto unknown Belarusian chapter in the Stalinist reign of terror. The social unrest it caused took on an institutional form, with movements springing up for the revival of the Belarusian culture and language, and the restoration of the nation's historical identity and memory. Remarkably, operations and attitudes prompted by *glasnost'* were ruthlessly hounded by local authorities in the Republic but supported and defended by central authorities in Moscow. This emboldened Belarusian nationalists, who began to press for the prosecution of those responsible for the Stalinist crimes and called for a stop to the prioritization of Russian in Belarusian schools. Social and cultural organizations and discussion groups, mainly run by young people, began to emerge spontaneously throughout the Republic. The culmination of this process was marked by the establishment of Revival, the Organizing Committee of the Belarusian National Front in October 1988.⁴²⁷

The Baltic republics were the fastest to produce movements in support of the *glasnost'* political formula. They were the constituent parts of the Soviet Union which had been under the regime for a much shorter time than other members of the USSR. Like the various regions of Transcaucasia, the Baltic republics put up the strongest opposition to the central politics of memory, which ignored the local traditions of statehood and cultural distinctiveness. In the fall of 1986, Estonia experienced its Singing Revolution,⁴²⁸ followed by the Phosphorite War, an ecological campaign against central investments which were degrading the local natural environment. The first political demonstrations in the Baltic republics were held in the summer of 1987, on the anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Pro-*glasnost'* organizations and movements such as Sąjūdis, the Lithuanian Reform Movement, the Latvian and Estonian Popular Front, the Latvian National Independence Movement, and the Lithuanian Freedom League started to emerge, demanding freedom. On the following anniversary of the Pact, over 200,000 people demonstrated in Vilnius and called for the whole truth about the Pact and its secret protocol to be made public.⁴²⁹ Similar, but much less numerous demonstrations in Riga and Tallinn were dispersed by the local “people’s” police force. In November 1988, the Supreme Soviets of the Lithuanian SSR and the Estonian SSR recognized their respective native tongue as their country’s official language and restored their national symbols; the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR followed suit in the spring of 1989.

427 Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białoruś* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007), 278–283.

428 The Singing Revolution was a series of tens of thousands of events when protesters sang Estonian patriotic songs in public.

429 Piotr Łossowski, *Litwa* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001), 211–212; Jan Lewandowski, *Estonia* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001).

On August 23, 1989, the next anniversary of the Pact, about two million people held hands in a live chain over 600 km long along the borders connecting the three Baltic republics enslaved by the Soviets in 1940. This demonstration sent a loud echo around the world, and the publication the secret protocol to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact on August 15 did not stop it. Gorbachev had finally given his consent to the disclosure of this document, the existence of which Moscow had always denied up to that time.⁴³⁰ Its publication marked another grassroots step in the expansion of Gorbachev's *glasnost*', this time sparked by the people of the Baltic republics. In March 1990, the Second Congress of People's Deputies saw the creation of the Alexander Yakovlev Commission, which was mandated to study "all the issues related to the Agreement of August 23, 1939," collect and publish the records. The Commission is believed to have assembled a huge volume of source documents but did not manage to draft a final report of its work before the USSR collapsed. We do not know what happened to these records.⁴³¹

Autonomization processes occurred not only in the Baltic republics and Georgia, but even in the Moldovan SSR, which had never given Moscow any trouble before. As news arrived from other republics, sporadic efforts to defend the national language and ecological movements appeared in Moldova, too, and started to turn into political initiatives in support of *glasnost*', understood as a Moldovan national revival. In 1988, the Popular Front of Moldova was created as a result of this ongoing process, and later played an important political role.⁴³²

The Central Asian republics engaged in somewhat less advanced national endeavors to define their own historical identity, yet even in Kazakhstan, where the people were considered "the most Russified,"⁴³³ anti-Russian sentiments flared up and did not subside even after the incidents in Alma–Ata were brutally suppressed. In May 1989, in an attempt to channel them into the rut of a limited autonomy, the central authorities withdrew their nominee and the Kazakh Nursultan Nazarbayev took over as First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party. The authorities in Moscow managed to put a check on the pro-autonomy campaign conducted mainly by the Kazakh intelligentsia, but had to acquiesce to costly eco-

⁴³⁰ In the TASS commentary on the publication, it was argued that despite this protocol, the accession of the three Baltic republics to the USSR was... voluntary, *Izvestia*, August 16, 1989.

⁴³¹ СССР, *Восточная Европа и Вторая мировая война 1939–1941: Дискуссии, комментарии, размышления*, ed. Sergey Sluch (Moscow: Наука, 2007), 312.

⁴³² Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 171.

⁴³³ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (London: Penguin Books, 2002) 71; Grochmalski, *Kazakhstan*, 101.

conomic concessions which damaged its own standing, while an Islamic revival began, bringing serious future problems.

Disturbances prompted by national aspirations spread not only in the Soviet republics, but also in autonomous territories like Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Other oppressed nations, such as the Chechens, Ingushes and Volga Germans, in addition to the Crimean Tatars, demanded their rights, which had been trampled during the Stalinist period. The entire Soviet Union was engulfed in turmoil, a vast tide of protest rose up against Russian domination and exploitation. The assumption that “*perestroika* would solve everything”⁴³⁴ when it came to ethnic problems, turned out to be completely false.

The efforts made by headquarters in Moscow to control the disruptive forces at all costs and pacify national emotions gave no results. It would have been difficult to silence them using arguments such as the ones Gorbachev advanced, telling the nations and ethnic groups which had been oppressed and exploited by tsarist Russia that they owed all their subsequent growth to the Bolsheviks.⁴³⁵ It was all too obvious that the real Soviet Union, as it had operated for decades, was just like the colonial metropolis-versus-periphery system.⁴³⁶ Faced with a snowballing effect in social and economic problems, the architect of *perestroika* tried to save his skin by taking a quantum leap and bringing radical changes in the political sphere, too, subjecting it to “democratization” in accordance with his “new thinking.” It was high time for this. In the latter half of 1988, the Soviet Empire’s economy was veering toward collapse, and the country was rocked by intense discord splitting up the Party and government headquarters and branches in the miscellaneous republics, which no longer felt stable and secure under the rule of the new General Secretary. The opposition to Gorbachev within the highest authorities united against him ideologically, as shown in an article published in the press by the Communist Nina Andreeva, a lecturer at one of Leningrad’s universities. She stood up in defense of the hitherto model of the Soviet Party and

434 Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbatchev*, 224.

435 See Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 104–107.

436 “After the fall of the authoritarian forms of support for the Soviet system, declarative and administrative socialism was replaced not by a harmonious friendship of nations, but by an uncontrollable surge of national complexes and emotions,” Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbatchev*, 224. For details, see *Źródła nienawiści. Konflikty etniczne w krajach postkomunistycznych*, ed. Kamil Janicki (Kraków; Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Erica, 2009); Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 169–188; Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 463–474; Zbigniew T. Szmurło, “Pieriestrojka i tragiczne wydarzenia w Sumgaicie,” *Studia Gdańskie. Wizje i rzeczywistość*, vol. 10 (2013): 267–281

State.⁴³⁷ So Gorbachev had to act quickly to change the system of government and make it independent of the balance of power in the top echelons of the Party.

In the parliamentary elections held in March 1989 under the new regulations, the CPSU, now riven by internal discord, for the first time lost its monopoly on nominating candidates; voters were given a real choice. Ultimately, the Communists won, but many central apparatus nominees lost to candidates recommended by public institutions and social organizations. One of the winners was Andrey Sakharov, who was supported by the USSR Academy of Sciences. The biggest winner was Boris Yeltsin, a candidate in a Moscow constituency who had fallen out with Gorbachev and scored a record, with almost 90 percent of the votes in his constituency cast for him,⁴³⁸ which gave him a strong claim to pursue his vast political ambitions.

Democratization and history

Having reasons to fear the threat to *perestroika* from the conservatives, who made up the dominant part of the Party apparatus, Gorbachev decided to secure as much public support for his ideas as he could. He started to define the reforms as “a new phase in the growth of Socialism,” calling for “the support of the masses, the development of democracy and a decisive turn toward science.”⁴³⁹ This turnabout did not go with the educational reform he had inherited from Andropov and Chernenko, which had come into force in the spring of 1984 on the grounds of previous arrangements.⁴⁴⁰ Its main guideline was that children and young people should be educated by and for work. Hence, the reform was focused on vocational schools, training youngsters to develop an interest in and respect for blue-collar professions. Despite the fact that history was given a substantial place in the curricula, the chief aim of the general subjects was to educate citizens committed to the communist idea, convinced of the unique role of the USSR in the world, respecting the Party and State, and identifying with their goals.⁴⁴¹ In

437 Nina Alexandrovna Andreeva, “Не могу поступаться принципами,” *Советская Россия*, March 13, 1988; Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 447–449.

438 Yeltsin, *Исповедь на заданную тему*, 76.

439 Gorbachev’s speech at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, January 27, 1987, *Pravda*, January 28, 1987; Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 444.

440 For an extensive discussion, see *О реформе общеобразовательной профессиональной школы: сборник документов и материалов*, comp. Gennady Strizhov (Moscow: Изд-во Политической литературы, 1984).

441 Składanowski, *Relacje sowiecko-polskie w podręcznikach*, 203–216.

the Andropov and Chernenko program, there was no room for censure of the personality cult or mass repression—students would learn of them from other sources, such as the family, the press, radio and television. With each year of Gorbachev's term in office, there was more and more information in this area, as “freeing history from its shackles” by revealing the whole truth about the departure from the path set by Lenin and the tragic consequences thereof was considered an effective way to gain public support for the reforms.

A development which sent a strong signal to society that the authorities had really started to implement the principle of democratization came with the decision taken in October 1986 to release all political prisoners from the labor camps, along with the personal offer made to Andrey Sakharov, the main opposition figure, to return to Moscow from exile in Gorky (the Soviet name for Nizhny Novgorod in 1932–1990). This move was an international sensation.⁴⁴² Shortly afterwards, in 1987, another sensation made the headlines—the dismantling of all the political isolation camps, i.e. the gulags or slave labor camps which had been a characteristic part of the Soviet system practically from the outset, and long gone at least in theory.⁴⁴³

Although the principles of democratization and transparency in the treatment of historical matters were to be applied, the way they were actually being put into practice left much to be desired. Gorbachev's real politics of memory boiled down mainly to promoting “a return to Leninism” and “back to the sources.” At the same time, Leninism was treated as a catchphrase, often in an illogical manner, as, for example, in Gorbachev's oft-repeated avowal that “Lenin said that socialism and democracy were inseparable.” Moreover, attempts to analyze his knowledge of Lenin's ideas invariably led to the discovery that it was very superficial, and that he was much closer to social democrats like Eduard Bernstein or Karl Kautsky, whose focus was on the process and the changes, not the end goal of Communism.⁴⁴⁴

On the basis of Gorbachev's programmatic manifesto, *Perestroika and New Political Thinking*, we may assume that the aim of the reforms he imposed on the Party and State was not to achieve the classless society of the future which was the ideal of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Instead, he wanted to accomplish a “broad

442 “Ruch w obronie pokoju. Lata dysydentów,” comp. Małgorzata Strasz, *Karta*, no. 16 (1995): 15.

443 For more on this point, see Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Galina Mikhailovna Ivanova, *История ГУЛАГа, 1918–1958: социально-экономический и политико-правовой аспекты* (Moscow: Наука, 2006); Stanisław Ciesielski, *Gulag. Radzieckie obozy koncentracyjne 1918–1953* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2010).

444 Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbachev*, 132, 266–267.

democratization in public affairs," which he identified with Leninism, although he never attempted to prove the validity of his assumption. He considered this the condition which had to be met to hold back the more and more aggravating economic degradation of the State, the only way to avoid the numerous difficulties hindering "normal development," but he never defined what kind of development he was talking about.⁴⁴⁵

Gorbachev's statements why there should be a "return to Leninism" were not at all precise, either. He made references to the construction and consolidation of the State that allegedly went off course after 1924 (when Lenin died) due to errors made by the Party's leaders.⁴⁴⁶ Having reiterated this general claim over and over again, at the same time, in complete contradiction to it, he was steadfast in his defense of "the wrong way," evidently the bad choice—collectivization, which had ruined agriculture and spoiled the countryside; enforced industrialization, which had been carried out at a huge social cost and ruined the natural environment; he even defended the stagnation under Brezhnev.⁴⁴⁷ The Bolshevik coup of November 1917 was in his view nothing but a "free choice" made by the nation.⁴⁴⁸ Unlike Khrushchev, he tried not to mention the crimes of the Stalinist period, limiting himself to general phrases like "the intelligentsia, including intellectuals in the Bolshevik Party, suffered enormous, at times irretrievable, losses because of violations of socialist legality and the repressions of the 1930s." Sometimes he would add that "[a]ny attempts to justify that lawlessness by political needs, international tension or alleged exacerbation of class struggle in the country are wrong."⁴⁴⁹

Gorbachev's speech at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU in November 1987 put the half-heartedness and incoherence of his politics of memory in a nutshell. It was dedicated to "the Great October Socialist Revolution" and meant to be a celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik coup. In retrospect, Gorbachev himself assessed this speech as "in some way subject to restrictions" and "deliberately silent on certain matters." He tried to please both the conservatives who defended the Party against "groundless accusations," and critics of "*glasnost*" served up in small doses," but effectively failed to contribute anything to the official position regarding "errors and distortions" enunciated in the late '60s. He mentioned the obligatory phrase about Stalin's responsibility

445 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 32–34.

446 "the actual situation that was arising was one that Lenin warned against: the automobile was going not where the one at the steering wheel thought it was going," *ibid.*, 23.

447 *Ibid.*, 40–44.

448 *Ibid.*, 39.

449 *Ibid.*, 81, 106–107.

for “repressive measures and lawlessness against the Party and the Nation,” but continuing on this topic, did not fail to add that “the leading core of the Party, headed by Stalin, defended Leninism in the ideological struggle and drafted the strategy and tactics applied in the initial phase of building Socialism.”⁴⁵⁰ This way of implementing *glasnost* and filling in the blanks was bound to raise, and did raise criticism and opposition to his evident circumventing, sidestepping a clear-cut position on issues that were still controversial.

Equally questionable, not to say deceitful, were Gorbachev’s statements on the crises in the countries in the Soviet zone. His utterances on such matters were supposedly compatible with the spirit of *glasnost*. In his view, the dramatic events in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia did not occur because the Socialist system had been thrust upon them, but were due to “the mistakes of the ruling parties” and “the West and its incessant attempts to undermine the growth of the Socialist countries and trip them up.” He considered the Socialist system superior because of “the objective fact that in none of the Socialist countries has there been a return to the old arrangements.” He seemed to be completely unaware that the framework for this “objective fact” was the Soviet Army (the troops of the Warsaw Pact) and the shackles of Yalta.⁴⁵¹

Soviet society did not show such restraint. *Glasnost*, the eruption of publicity on previously forbidden (or silenced) historical topics, and the accompanying confusion triggered public discussion. There were more and more patent signs that the system which had previously been disciplined by extensive control mechanisms was being democratized. Discussion clubs, associations, regional societies, political parties, and various social movements mushroomed. Initially, most of them were *neformaly*, “informals.” Many focused on the historical aspect of *glasnost*, the recovery of the national or local history, and the truth about the perversions of the system, which Khrushchev had revealed only in part. Newspaper editors tried to make their own contribution to filling the blanks in history, settling accounts with the past, and debunking people and events known to the public only from hagiographic stories, and this included Lenin, the creator of the system.⁴⁵²

450 *Известия ЦК КПСС*, no. 2 (1989): 212, quoted after Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 447.

451 *Ibid.*, 220.

452 “In many publications, especially ones for the general reader, Lenin is presented in a very over-sentimentalized way and therefore not very truthfully. Here, too, there is a need for deeper analysis and calm historical assessment,” Prof. Yuri Polyakov stated in a public speech on the blanks in Russia’s history; quoted after the PAP (Polish Press Agency) *Bulletin Kraje Socjalistyczne*, October 23, 1987, 8.

In September 1987, presumably prompted by the authorities, the Novosti Press Agency launched a series of open press conferences involving scholars on “the most difficult moments of our domestic history.” They started with issues such as identifying the blanks or the historical progression and scale of the demographic slump in the aftermath of the Bolshevik coup, civil war and Stalinist repression.⁴⁵³ The censors were so confused that they did not stop the wide-scale circulation of copies of speeches delivered at these meetings, thereby contributing to the abolition of more taboos on the history of the Soviet period.

The initial focus on the perversions of the personality cult period gradually expanded to cover the earlier phase as well, starting with the causes of the 1917 coup. There were even voices demanding the truth about the Brezhnev era and the “gradual rehabilitation or even restoration of Stalinism” carried out at that time.⁴⁵⁴

The truth about the past was being restored in culture as well, in line with Gorbachev’s announcement that “there cannot be any forgotten names or blanks, either in history or in literature.”⁴⁵⁵ There was a massive campaign to recall and restore the names of individuals associated with the arts who had sustained repressive measures—writers, poets, musicians, painters, architects—whose names had fallen into oblivion, forgotten for decades. The weekly magazines, *Moskovskiye novosti*, *Ogoniok*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, as well as the monthlies *Oktyabr*, *Novy mir*, *Znamia*, and *Druzhba narodov*, were in the vanguard of this movement. Huge print runs notwithstanding, they quickly disappeared from newsstands, just like the history books written for the general public in the spirit of *glasnost*’. It was no longer possible to put the genie back into the bottle.

The only way to curb the growing independence of the press would have cost the authorities a huge loss of face. The spontaneity and escalating growth of the informal movements began to seriously worry the leaders of the Party, which was losing the initiative, as well as Gorbachev himself, who had a vested interest in the pressure these circles could command to be able to continue his *pere-stroika*. An attempt to control them was made at a congress held in Moscow in the summer of 1987 attended by diverse informal circles, clubs and other unregistered organizations established outside of the Party. The scale of this spontaneous movement is demonstrated by the fact that the number of informals was estimated at 150 to 200 in Moscow alone; with time, some of them turned into the

453 Ibid., 1–2.

454 Yuri Burtin, “Вам, из другого поколения,” *Октябрь*, no. 8 (1987), <http://www.burtin.ru/vam.htm>. This website was inaccessible on December 4, 2024.

455 *Московские новости* (*Moskovskiye novosti*), November 9, 1987; PAP (Polish Press Agency) Bulletin *Kraje Socjalistyczne*, November 10, 1987.

founding groups of political parties. The congress spokesman, former dissident Gleb Pavlovsky, “a man of many faces,” became a celebrated political scientist and media expert, director of the Postfactum agency, and a TV star.⁴⁵⁶ The plan to take control of the spontaneous informal movement turned out to be abortive, and the congress actually helped to give the informals even more publicity.

The integration of the informal movements operating in the provinces and republics continued completely beyond Moscow’s control. These provincial developments were a key factor in national revival and lay at the origin of popular fronts. For instance, in October 1987, a congress of Chechen intellectuals was held in Grozny on the initiative of the local Komsomol branch and historical topics dominated the subjects discussed. The Caucasus Association was founded at this event, setting in motion a campaign for the autonomy of Chechnya, which eventually led to outright armed conflict and the secession of the territory.⁴⁵⁷

The renaissance of historical topics and the search for the truth about the pathologies of the Soviet system stimulated by developments like the informal movement exerted enormous pressure on the official politics of memory. However, it did not bring a significant change, largely due to Gorbachev’s habit of dithering when it came to the actual implementation of his *glasnost’* policy. According to his closest associates, Gorbachev’s use of historical arguments was purely manipulative. So eager to “return to Leninism” and referring to history at every opportunity, he was inherently incapable of practicing what he preached and actually filling in the blanks, “telling the truth about our past, giving all matters their true names.”⁴⁵⁸ His politics of memory cannot be treated as a coherent, well-planned concept, but rather as a flexible response to an ambient situation, which was plain as day in his relations with Poland and the Polish United Workers’ Party.

Problems with Poland. Katyn

Gorbachev said that *Perestroika* was conceived not only as a program to transform the Soviet Union, but also as a proposal of reform addressed to “fraternal

456 Sławomir Popowski, “Koniec imperium,” 18, studioopinii.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SP-Koniec-imperium.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024.

457 Stanisław Ciesielski, *Rosja—Czeczenia. Dwa stulecia konfliktu*, Studia z dziejów Europy Wschodniej 2. Historia CLXVI (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2003; with an English summary, “Russia and Chechnya: Two Centuries of Conflict”).

458 Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbatchev*, 18 (Valentin Falin’s opinion).

Socialist countries.”⁴⁵⁹ This was also how he saw its *glasnost*' component. In Poland at least, *glasnost*' began to be associated with serious hopes that a number of issues from the difficult past the two countries shared, which had previously been suppressed by the censors, would now be taken up. These hopes came from developments like Gorbachev's first visit to Poland as the new General Secretary of the CPSU in late April 1985. During the visit, in a discussion with General Wojciech Jaruzelski, Gorbachev “declared his good will” to address and clarify the most important blanks in the history of Polish–Soviet relations, such as “the Katyn massacre, the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact and the deportations.” However, he also stated that he needed time to “study these issues more thoroughly” and “entrust their analysis to various persons.”⁴⁶⁰ All the Poles could do was to wait and hope that these were not empty promises.

The matter was put aside for another two years. During the visit of the Polish Party delegation to Moscow in April 1987, a declaration of cooperation on ideology, science and culture was signed between the CPSU and the Polish United Workers' Party. One of the basic areas the declaration mentioned was cooperation between the Party historians of both countries to elucidate the blanks in the difficult past, so as “not to leave our children and grandchildren with unresolved problems.”⁴⁶¹ Regardless of the attenuating phrase that this cooperation would be based on ideological principles in the research on and dissemination of history, which toned down this declaration, it was a first-of-a-kind announcement with no precedent in the Soviet politics of memory. As a result, in May 1987 “under pressure from the Polish group,”⁴⁶² a joint commission of Party historians from the USSR and the Polish People's Republic was established to clarify the blanks. Its chairman for the Soviets was Professor Georgy Smirnov, and Professor Jarema Maciszewski for Poland.

At the commission's inaugural meeting on May 19, the aim of its activities was defined as “to disclose the distressing areas in the history of Soviet–Polish relations, and gradually to arrive at a joint, open and honest scholarly position on difficult, suppressed or falsified aspects of these relations.”⁴⁶³ It was obvious from

459 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 147–155.

460 Wojciech Jaruzelski, “Słowo wstępne,” in Jarema Maciszewski, *Wydrzeć prawdę* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1993).

461 *Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945–1989. Wybór dokumentów*, comp. Justyna Zajęc (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2005), 118. See also Stępień-Kuczyńska, *Michaił Gorbaczow a idea i praktyka pieriestrojki*, 337–339.

462 Aleksandr N. Jakovlev, “К читателю,” in *Катынь. Пленники необъявленной войны: Док. и материалы*, (Moscow, МФД, 1997), 5.

463 Quoted after Inessa Sergejewna Jąźborowska, “Stan badań na temat stosunków polsko-radzieckich,” in *Białe plamy – czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w polsko-rosyjskich stosunkach*

the beginning that making progress in this area, i.e. establishing new findings or verifying existing false claims, would not be possible unless access was granted to Soviet archive resources, which had previously been made available either in part to trusted persons or were completely unavailable, and unless the censorship restrictions on topics such as the Katyn massacre or the mass deportations were lifted. Probably against the intention of the Soviets, the establishment of the joint commission and the definition of its scope turned into a test of the credibility of *glasnost*, as well as of Gorbachev's politics of memory in general. The task was difficult for the commission itself, whose members were academics who thought along ideological lines and the schematic, class-oriented way of treating history.

In the initial stage of work, the commission defined the chronological and substantive framework of its activities. More than twenty issues and research projects were selected in areas considered priorities from the point of view of blanks or black (deliberately falsified) spots. These included: Russia and the reconstruction of the Polish State in 1918, the Polish–Bolshevik war of 1919–1920, the extermination of the KPP (Polish Communist Party) in the 1930s, the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact (August 1939), the Red Army's invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939, the mass deportations of the population of eastern Poland to Russia, the Katyn massacre (1940), and Stalin's conduct relating to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Working teams were established and tasks were allocated.⁴⁶⁴

The first tentatively undertaken issues, Bolshevik Russia in the face of the establishment of an independent Polish State in November 1918, the dissolution of the KPP and ruthless murder of its leaders, showed the limits to which the commission could go. It turned out that as regards access to previously classified archival materials, it could only count on "a small back door" being left ajar, as one of the members of the commission put it with the benefit of hindsight. All the commission received were incomplete materials, evidently vetted by trusted specialists from the Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism–Leninism at the Central Committee of the CPSU.⁴⁶⁵ Indeed, the Soviet party was clearly reluctant to undertake a more probing verification of the Polish aspects in their cur-

1918–2008, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatolij W. Torkunow (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2010), 844. Prof. Inessa Yazhborovskaya was a Russian member of the commission.

⁴⁶⁴ Jaźborowska, *Ibid.*, 844.

⁴⁶⁵ Ryszard Nazarewicz, "Sprawy polskie w schyłkowym okresie działalności Kominternu," *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 4 (2003): 39.

rent politics of memory, limiting it to sometimes salient, but generally incidental amendments.⁴⁶⁶

Soon, the barrier to *glasnost*' started to loom large in the commission's work, strictly limiting its work: this happened when the topic of the Katyn massacre was raised. From the outset, Katyn was considered a priority by the Polish party to the commission, and from the beginning Co-Chairman Smirnov had it postponed on the grounds that chronologically it came later.⁴⁶⁷ He was following instructions from the CPSU Central Committee's International Department for the Socialist Countries, which was unofficially monitoring the work of the joint commission, checking and restricting the issues the commission could deal with and determining their scope.⁴⁶⁸

Perhaps the efforts of the Polish members of the commission asking for a start to work on the Katyn massacre contributed to the context of the shocking series of articles by Valentin Falin, chief of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, in the Party magazine *Novoye Vremya*. In his extensive articles, the former Soviet ambassador to West Germany, head of the Novosti Agency, a trusted advisor to Gorbachev, claimed that Poland was an accomplice to Hitler's aggressive operations and co-responsible for the outbreak of World War II.⁴⁶⁹ Neither the content of these articles, nor the author and place of publication could have been a sheer coincidence. It should have been taken as a warning that changes in the Soviet politics of memory would proceed at the pace and scope determined in Moscow, not outside of the Soviet Union, and that they could go either way, also unfavorably from the point of view of any foreign country involved.⁴⁷⁰

In May 1988, the Polish historians who were members of the commission presented their expert opinion on the report of the Burdenko Commission, proving its unreliability and the groundlessness of its conclusion that Germany was to

466 Cf. the first book published under the auspices of the commission, *Tragedia Komunistycznej Partii Polski*, ed. Jarema Maciszewski (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1989).

467 "It was obvious to me that Smirnov was strictly following the Central Committee's orders. So I could clearly see that there was no political decision for us on this key issue, or rather there was one – a rejection," Maciszewski, *Wydrzeć prawdę*, 43.

468 *Katyni. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4: *Echa Katynia: kwiecień 1943 – marzec 2005*, comp. Wojciech Materski, Natalia S. Lebedeva et al. (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych – Wydawnictwo, 2006), 29.

469 Valentin Falin, "Почему в 1939-м? Размышления о начале Второй мировой войны, *Новое время*, no. 38–41 (1987).

470 Maciszewski, *Wydrzeć prawdę*, 74–76. For an interesting opinion on Falin, see Adam Daniel Rotfeld, "Sukces niepowodzenia, czyli fenomen Michała Gorbaczowa," in Gracow, *Gorbaczow*, 20–21, the Polish edition of Grachev's *Горбачёв*.

blame for the Katyn massacre.⁴⁷¹ The very fact of the official submission of their expert opinion with a final conclusion of this kind was a signal development. However, the Soviet members of the commission did not discuss these findings from the aspect of arguments. Presumably, they did not obtain consent to do so from the Central Committee of the CPSU, which stuck to the canonical version of the Katyn massacre enshrined in the Burdenko report. They probably did not have access to the true, unadulterated records, nor were they sure that there were any extant records. The most conservative of them went as far as to abandon the previously adopted objectivity in the commission's procedures and ruthlessly attacked the authors of the expert opinion, accusing them of producing "a biased document, written to fit a preconceived hypothesis, not taking into account the valid arguments and conclusions of the Burdenko commission, focusing only on its weaknesses, contradictions or obvious mistakes."⁴⁷² The commission's work ceased to make sense, but for some time it kept going propelled by the momentum it had gathered.

At the same time, however, the Soviets made moderate progress in understanding the situation of the Poles, and provided minor arguments to indicate that the issue was still on the agenda. The Katyn burial ground was cleaned up, and work was planned to "build a memorial complex to the Polish officers" which Poland would not find offensive. The plaque which said that the atrocity had been committed by "fascist invaders" was to go for good. There was no objection to the Polish request to have a cross consecrated by Archbishop Glemp put up on the premises, which was done on September 2, 1988. A decision was made at the highest Party level to hold a competition for the design of a monument to the fallen Polish officers buried in Katyn. The USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs decided it would be right to simplify visa formalities to allow members of the families of the murdered men to visit the cemetery.⁴⁷³

The commission's last plenary meeting was held in Moscow in August 1989. Its activities had petered out and practically came to a standstill that year, and in December the Polish part of the commission was disbanded. The commission's work did not result in a breakthrough in the difficult areas in the history of Soviet-Polish relations, including Katyn. The Soviet party, especially Gorbachev himself, was clearly not prepared for a breakthrough amounting to a paramount correction to the image of the Second World War in the Soviet politics of memory. During an official visit to Poland in the summer of 1988, Gorbachev solemnly as-

471 *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4, docs. 102, p. 459–471.

472 Maciszewski, *Wyrzec prawdę*, 99.

473 *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, doc. 25–29, 82–99. See *Katyn: Documents of Genocide*, doc. 25–29, p. 82–99.

sured Polish intellectuals at a meeting in the Royal Castle in Warsaw that there were no secret records in the Soviet archives that could shed new light on the Katyn massacre.⁴⁷⁴

Characteristically, this passage was omitted from his statement in the minutes of the meeting published after the visit.⁴⁷⁵ He made similar assurances in a personal conversation with General Jaruzelski.⁴⁷⁶ He was evidently lying, as confirmed by his close associates, his personal advisor Alexander Yakovlev; Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the KGB; and his subsequent advisors Prof. Andrey Grachev and Valentin Falin.⁴⁷⁷ All he had the courage to do was to add an enigmatic statement in the postscript to the brochure published after his visit to Poland that left the door ajar for a change in the Soviet assessment of the Katyn massacre: "The story of this tragedy is currently being carefully investigated. On the basis of the results of the investigation, it will be possible to conclude to what extent these or other judgments and assessments are right."⁴⁷⁸

Meanwhile, on the tide of *perestroika* and *glasnost*', the Soviets were beginning to lose control of a number of issues, including the truth about the inherent criminality of the system, which had been held in check so far. There were numerous signals indicating that the current Soviet policy on the Katyn issue had reached a dead end and that a bold decision was needed. That was what Gorbachev's advisor Valentin Falin told him, warning that the situation in Poland on this issue had almost reached a boiling point. In April, a group of Central Committee members drafted a memorandum suggesting that the Prosecutor's Office and the State Security Committee should "scrupulously check" all the circumstances of the Katyn massacre and conduct an appropriate archive search on the matter.

474 I was at the meeting and heard Gorbachev say this. Similarly, Gorbachev sounded very credible when he lied about other issues and other circumstances. Cf. Władimir Bukovsky (Vladimir Bukovsky), *Moskiewski proces. Dysydent w archiwach Kremla*, trans. from French by Jolanta Darczewska et al. (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1998), 681–682; cf. Vladimir Boukovsky, *Jugement à Moscou. Un dissident dans les archives du Kremlin* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995); and the Russian version, Vladimir Bukovsky, *Московский процесс* (Часть 1, Часть 2) (London: Русская мысль, 1996).

475 *Pieriestrojka i socjalistyczna odnowa – wspólna przepustka w XXI wiek. Wizyta Michaiła Gorbaczowa w Polsce w dniach 11–14 lipca 1988 r.*, ed. Izabela Kwasiborska-Jarosz (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 87.

476 Jaruzelski, "Słowo wstępne," 9–11.

477 Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (München: Droemer Knaur Verlag, 1993), 414–415; Yakovlev, "К читателю," 5–6; "he scammed, lied, equivocated," Rotfeld, "Sukces niepowodzenia," 21 quoted after Valentin Falin, *Конфликты в Кремле. Сумерки богов по-русски* (Moscow: Наш XX век, 1999).

478 *Inteligencja wobec nowych problemów socjalizmu. Spotkanie Michaiła Gorbaczowa z przedstawicielami polskiej inteligencji* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 88–89.

Judging by the signatures on the document, those who were pressuring the Committee on this matter may indeed have had no knowledge of whether such materials could still be found. What they were interested in was another aspect of the matter: convincing their “Polish comrades” that a “scrupulous search” was being carried out by “qualified Soviet authorities.” In the draft they attached for a Committee decision, they proposed that news of “the examination being conducted by the relevant Soviet authorities of the circumstances in which the Polish officers were exterminated” be published in all the national media.⁴⁷⁹

However, Gorbachev preferred to play for time. In February 1990, Falin, who was keeping an eye on the matter, informed him that the truth about the extermination of the POWs from the three special camps was no longer a secret, as a group of historians, Yuri Zorya, Natalia Lebedeva, and Valentina Parsadanova, had learned of it indirectly, by examining the files of the NKVD Convoy Troops. He mentioned that these historians had prepared publications on this basis, which it would be difficult to stop, and which were scheduled for publication by midyear. “A situation has arisen,” Falin continued, “which does not allow us to continue to stick to the previous versions and avoid crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s,” pretending that “no materials revealing the real background to the Katyn tragedy have been found in the USSR’s state archives.” Therefore, he postulated that President Jaruzelski be informed without delay that records had been discovered during an archival search with a sequence of dates (or indications) “that call into question the credibility of Burdenko’s report,” and allow us to draw the conclusion that the Katyn massacre “was the work of the NKVD, and personally of Beria and Merkulov.” It would be up to Jaruzelski to decide on the best way to inform the people of Poland of this in order to “remove the political aspect of the problem” and at the same time “forestall an emotional outcry.”⁴⁸⁰

It was probably only after reading this memorandum that Gorbachev realized that he could no longer beat about the bush on this issue. However, before he decided to contact his “Polish comrades,” the matter finally ceased to be a secret.

In March 1990, *Moskovskie Novosti* published a report by Natalia Lebedeva that presented the results of her archive search which “revealed the secret assassination of fifteen thousand Polish officers in 1940.”⁴⁸¹ Aleksandr Tshipko, the author of the introduction to her report, and Gennady Zhavoronkov, the editor of

479 *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, docs. 33–34, p. 114–117. See *Katyn: Documents of Genocide*, doc. 21 and 22, p. 75–77.

480 *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, doc. 35, p. 118–125. See *Katyn: Documents of Genocide*, doc. 23, p. 79–85.

481 Natalia Sergeevna Lebedeva, “Катынская трагедия,” *Московские новости*, no. 12, March 1990.

the publication, stated unequivocally that the question of the responsibility for the Katyn massacre had been answered once and for all. After the errors made due to haste had been corrected, Lebedeva's full report with all the findings was published in May,⁴⁸² also by the journal *Mezhdunarodnaya zhyzn*.⁴⁸³

Now it was no longer possible not to make a statement. The only question was how to present this information, which was disastrous for the prestige of the Soviet politics of memory, in order to minimize the shock to public opinion. An appropriate formula had to be found to limit as much as possible the disclosure of the details about the institutions and individuals responsible for this mass murder and circumvent the question of falsifying the truth.

Jaruzelski's upcoming visit to Moscow was considered a good time for it. According to the memoirs of Gorbachev's associates, about a fortnight before the visit, he had read or probably reread the records in Closed Packet No. 1, containing the basic documents concerning the Katyn genocide, including several transcripts of the key decision taken by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on March 5, 1940.⁴⁸⁴ Even if he considered disclosing it to the Poles, he never made such a decision. It is hard to say what he still wanted to salvage, considering that no one who knew what the Soviet system was like would have believed that the NKVD committed a crime on such a colossal scale as Katyn on their own initiative, without an order from the top echelons to do it.

The Polish delegation's Moscow visit started on April 11, 1990. Its aim was to conduct the final talks and sign a declaration on "the nature of allied relations between the two countries."⁴⁸⁵ During the visit, on April 13, the World Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Katyn Massacre, on the premises of the Polish Embassy in Moscow, Gorbachev handed General Jaruzelski two large folders containing photocopies of the documents issued by the Party and NKVD concerning

482 "И ещё раз о Катыни," *Московские новости*, no. 18, May 1990.

483 "О трагедии в Катыни," *Международная жизнь*, no. 5, May 1990.

484 "When he was looking through it earlier, he advised the archivist responsible for the special files department, 'You'd better hide it and don't let anyone know about it without my consent. You can get your fingers burnt,'" quoted after Valery I. Boldin, *Крушение пьедестала* (Moscow: Республика, 1995), 257. See also Władimir Abarinow, *Оправсу з Катуніа*, trans. Walentyna Dworak and Klaudia Rumińska (Kraków: Znak, 2007), 253; cf. Vladimir Abarinow, *Катынский лабиринт* (Moscow: Новости, 1991), 124.

485 Three years later, Wojciech Jaruzelski claimed that he gave official notice that he would only come to Moscow on condition that the Soviets "disclosed the truth about the Katyn massacre;" he went there only after Gorbachev had assured him that "they had found records . . . that confirmed the responsibility of the NKVD [for the Katyn massacre – W.M.]," Jaruzelski, "Słowo wstępne," 12.

the clearance of three special camps for Polish prisoners of war in the spring 1940. These records included death transportation lists from the camps in Kozelsk and Ostashkov, most of them consisting of about a hundred names each; a list of prisoners of war from the Starobelsk camp; and miscellaneous other documents. These materials had no archival reference numbers and had clearly been preselected, presumably to limit the responsibility to senior NKVD officers. Nevertheless, it was a colossal turnabout—for the first time the system revealed its internal source records of the mass murder, and was forced to disclose the secret it had been hiding for decades.

There were no official speeches. The handover was accompanied only by the exchange of a few words—probably so as not to put Gorbachev, who had been dodging the issue for such a long time, in an even more awkward situation. During the subsequent conversation between the two politicians, when pressed by Jaruzelski, Gorbachev “started to prevaricate and lie,” as the then Head of the General Department of the Central Committee, Valery Boldin, put it, trying to give the impression that the discovery of the real perpetrators was news to him as well.⁴⁸⁶

The very same day, the Soviet press published a statement by TASS which said, “Recently, Soviet archivists and historians have found certain documents concerning Polish servicemen held in the Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov camps . . . all the disclosed archival materials allow us to conclude that Beria, Merkulov and their collaborators were directly responsible for the crime committed in Katyn Forest.”⁴⁸⁷

The claim made by the Soviet politics of memory regarding the Katyn massacre, which had been fiercely defended for decades, collapsed, drastically deflating the credibility of the *glasnost*’ policy regarding other difficult historical issues.

One of the consequences of the Soviet admission of responsibility for the Katyn massacre was Investigation No. 159, launched in the fall of 1990 of by the Chief Military Prosecutor’s Office of the USSR.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Boldin, *Крушение пьедестала*, 258.

⁴⁸⁷ *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4, docs. 121, 504–505. Annex, doc. 24; see the English edition, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. A.M. Cienciala, N.S. Lebedeva, W. Materski (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2007), doc. 117, p. 344–345.

⁴⁸⁸ For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Wojciech Materski, “Śledztwo nr 159 Naczelnej Prokuratury Wojskowej ZSRR /Federacji Rosyjskiej,” in *Inne wymiary polityki*, ed. Włodzimierz Marciniak (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2013), 95–112.

Anti-Katyn

Gorbachev's hesitant, inconsistent position regarding the official confirmation of Soviet responsibility for the Katyn massacre was probably influenced by his uncertainty what the reaction would be at home and around the world, and particularly by the fear that it would make the Soviet Union look like a criminal state. Perhaps he was not fully aware of the fact that for Poland and the world at large it was not a revelation, but only confirmation of what was generally known outside of the USSR already. That was why the world did not regard the TASS communiqué as a revelation but simply as a manifestation of *glasnost*'. However, this could change over time if it were not followed by the release of further documents and developments that went beyond the enigmatic formula of "NKVD responsibility." So the Soviets had to adopt a specific tactical line on the matter to keep up appearances.

On November 3, 1990, before taking a decision whether or not to disclose more records on the Katyn massacre, Gorbachev issued an unpublished directive ordering "the USSR's Academy of Sciences, Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Defense, and Committee for State Security, along with other institutions and organizations, to conduct a research project by April 1, 1991, to retrieve and publish archival materials regarding developments in bilateral Soviet-Polish relations showing that the Soviet Union sustained a loss due to the said developments."⁴⁸⁹ So the President of the Soviet Union must have recognized an urgent need to find an equally grim counterweight to neutralize the imminent shock that would come to the Soviet people from the disclosure of the fact that the perpetrators of the Katyn genocide were top figures in the Soviet Party and State.

The idea of finding an incident to counterbalance the Katyn massacre is well illustrated by a passage from a conversation Jarema Maciszewski, the chairman of the Polish group in the joint commission, conducted with Valentin Falin, and quoted in his memoirs:

"Looking me straight in the eye, he said, 'We have all the documents.'

After a moment of silence, I said that I had never had any doubts about it and asked him, 'So, at a time of *perestroika* and *glasnost*', what's stopping us from jointly telling the truth to our nations and the whole world?'

'It's a complicated matter,' he replied briefly.

I took a gamble, 'You're looking for an equivalent on our part? You won't find one.'

'Maybe,' he replied."⁴⁹⁰

489 *Katyn. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, doc. 36, 130–131.

490 Maciszewski, *Wyrzec prawdę*, 124.

One can hardly fail to notice the correlation between that conversation and Gorbachev's confidential directive.

The consequence of Gorbachev's directive was the strikingly amoral anti-Katyn affair—a coldly calculated attempt to “counterbalance” the truth about the murder of the Polish POWs, which it was no longer possible to conceal, with a comparable “Polish atrocity.” Helpful “historians” turned up immediately to cook up such an equivalent—the “Polish atrocity,” also involving prisoners-of-war, but apprehended in the war of 1919–1920. The fact is that about 18,000 Red Army soldiers died in Polish POW camps as a result of disease, malnutrition, cold and mistreatment.⁴⁹¹ They died as a result of the weakness of the Polish state at that time, chaotic organization, the appointment of inept commanding officers to run the camps, and simply because it was objectively impossible to provide better conditions for them. The Soviets turned a blind eye to the similar fate of Polish prisoners-of-war in Soviet captivity, especially in the Siberian labor columns.⁴⁹²

Characteristically, until Gorbachev issued his confidential directive, the problem of Soviet prisoners-of-war in 1920 and grievances against Poland in this regard had never been raised in the mutual relations—not even under the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939), when relations with the Soviets were strained and full of mutual grievances, not to mention the years under the Polish People's Republic. If there were any publications on the subject, they went unnoticed. It was not the subject that was sensational, but the way it was manipulated for political purposes.

As Gorbachev had expected, soon the first publications and media statements appeared, in which things that occurred eighty years earlier started to be manipulated. Remarkably, it was an institutional response, just as the command “find it” was institutional.⁴⁹³ Prestigious centers of learning—Moscow State University, the Military History Institute of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR/RF, and the

491 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see *Красноармейцы в польском плену в 1919–1922 гг.: сборник документов и материалов*, comp. Evgenia Nikolaevna Eliseeva et al (Moscow; Saint Petersburg: Летний сад, 2004); Zbigniew Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy i ukraińscy na terenie Polski w latach 1918–1924* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 1997).

492 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see *Zwycięzcy za drutami. Jeńcy polscy w niewoli (1919–1922). Dokumenty i materiały*, comp. Stanisław Alexandrowicz, Zbigniew Karpus, and Waldemar Rezmer (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995); reviewed in “Polscy jeńcy wojenni w niewoli sowieckiej 1919–1922. Materiały archiwalne, comp. Zbigniew Karpus, Iwan Kostiuszko, Waldemar Rezmer, and Ewa Rosowska,” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2009: 192–199.

493 During Gorbachev's term as General Secretary, alongside “looking for it” there was also a secret “cleaning operation” of the archives – mainly of current records, adapting them to the “myth of the enlightened reformer, liberal and democrat,” and perhaps also in other respects. Bukowski, *Moskiewski proces*, 610 (Polish edition); see also the 1996 Russian edition, Bukovsky,

Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies of the USSR/RF Academy of Sciences—quickly took the lead in the smear campaign against Poland.⁴⁹⁴

This campaign, especially aggressive in the Soviet press, was intended to create an image of Poland as a country which had committed genocide on prisoners-of-war from the earlier war, and was partially repaid for it years later in Katyn Forest. Not only propagandists but also professional historians, politicians and military officers promoted the claim in the same spirit, in order to impose an interpretation of the Katyn massacre as a crime of passion, committed because the Soviets could not come to terms with the behavior of the Polish State in 1919–1920. So, they tried to exonerate the crime of Katyn and scale it down, which was supposed to put Poland in a worse situation morally and legally. Consequently, as the commentary in the government paper *Izvestia* suggested, the problem in Soviet–Polish relations was not the Katyn massacre, to which the Soviets had admitted, but the hushed up Polish crime, for which Poland was clearly shirking its responsibility.⁴⁹⁵

This approach provided new scope for false, rapidly escalating claims. Successive “experts,” proclaiming the newly discovered “truth” about Polish crimes against Soviet POWs in 1920, began to vie with each other on the number of Red Army men “premeditatedly murdered,” disregarding even the most elementary logic. The numbers taken into Polish captivity were compared with the number of those who came home, but tens of thousands who escaped from the internment camps or joined Russian, Belarusian, or Ukrainian military units recruiting on Polish territory, as well as those who were released from internment but refused to return to the USSR (and there were a lot of them) were ignored. The Soviet “investigators” treating them all as “murdered by the Poles.” Subsequent bidders announced that there were sixty thousand, eighty thousand, a hundred thousand, or even over a hundred thousand victims, making absurdly random estimates with no reference at all to source documents.⁴⁹⁶

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation kept practically all of this “interpretation” concocted on Gorbachev’s express order, while it re-

Московский прощес Cf. Bukovsky, *Judgment in Moscow: Soviet Crimes and Western Complicity*, trans. Alyona Kojevnikov (Ninth of November Press, 2019).

⁴⁹⁴ Krzysztof Komorowski and Witold Rawski, *Anty-Katyni. Jercy sowieccy w niewoli polskiej. Fakty i mity* (Warszawa: Wojskowe Biuro Badań Historycznych, 2006), 9.

⁴⁹⁵ “Or perhaps the Polish government may not want to follow our example and will not be able to talk about it for fear that the number of victims [Russian prisoners-of-war] was much higher than in Katyn?” *Izvestia*, September 8, 1990 [quoted after Komorowski and Rawski, 10–11].

⁴⁹⁶ For more, see Komorowski and Rawski, *Anty-Katyni*, 15–17; Wojciech Materski, *Katyni. Od kłamstwa ku prawdzie* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2012), 197–202.

jected much of the politics of memory current during his presidency. On many occasions Anti-Katyn has been exposed as a hoax, yet in Russia it is still present in the public mind, impervious to rational argument. It is not disappearing, but growing stronger and stronger, undoubtedly corroborated by the fact that it has made its way into Russian schoolbooks.⁴⁹⁷ It marks the peak “achievement” of Gorbachev’s politics of memory; clearly, the Russian authorities still find it attractive, even though it is a shocking example of the amorality of history utilized for political purposes.

Disintegration of the Empire

Destabilized by the growing tendencies of national emancipation in the republics and rent by the deepening divisions in the Party, the Soviet politics of memory was losing ground. Disputes about Lenin, Stalin, and responsibility for the repressions and mass crimes continued to absorb society, but they were overshadowed by the basic issue—restoration of the ability to run the state. The future of the reconstruction program and its chief proponent would be decided by political processes taking place in a not fully controlled manner, the aim of which was to replace the anachronistic Party and State system with a new, not fully defined setup. Carried along on the crest of a wave of public support for reform at least until 1988, Gorbachev had curbed the omnipotence of the Party. In his battle against the Party apparatus for control of the reform process, he had opted for a fundamentally new systemic arrangement: not a mock but a genuine, real general election to the Congress of People’s Deputies, which in turn would have the right to elect the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

In accordance with the decisions of the Nineteenth Conference of the CPSU in July 1988, in December a new electoral law (On the Election of National Deputies of the USSR) was adopted and the necessary amendments were introduced to the 1977 Constitution. In March 1990, the first parliamentary election was held pursuant to the new electoral law. It returned a Congress which elected Mikhail Gorbachev to the newly created office of President of the Soviet Union. On his election to the presidency, Gorbachev resigned as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The President’s power relied on the support of his Council of Ministers, Presidential Council and Security Council. The State adopted the model of a presidential republic.

497 Cf. Chapter Five, p. 175–176, footnotes 586 and 587.

Ostensibly, Communist Party candidates had won an absolute majority, but many of their long-term incumbents including top brass lost their seats. A sharp division emerged between supporters of reform, most of whom had not run on the Communist Party ticket and set up the Interregional Deputies' Group (IRDG) at the end of the Congress, and their critics, mainly Party apparatchiks in the Soyuz faction. Aware of the rift, Gorbachev gave his support to the moderate faction which was the predominant force in the Congress, against the radical reformers, which allowed him to successfully run for the key post of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. The fact that he served as the Party's General Secretary confirmed his role as leader of the system under modernization.

Regardless of the ambivalent part Gorbachev played in the Congress, the emergence of this institution turned out to be crucial for the further course of political developments in the USSR. Its weight entailed the power to control and block decisions made by the central executive power, bring the IRDG opposition into the system, and emancipate the Soviet republics, which gained real opportunities to create their own legislation and exercise regional control.⁴⁹⁸

Stabilizing the new system and radically limiting the Party's omnipotence called for the removal of Article 6 from the 1977 Constitution, which said,

The leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organisations and public organisations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The CPSU . . . determines the general perspectives of the development of society and the course of the home and foreign policy of the USSR, directs the great constructive work of the Soviet people, and imparts a planned, systematic and theoretically substantiated character to their struggle for the victory of communism. All party organisations shall function within the framework of the Constitution of the USSR.⁴⁹⁹

The IRDG put the deletion of Article 6 on the Congress' agenda, arguing that it was the only way to complete the reforms, get rid of the Soviet system once and for all, and create the conditions needed to establish a democratic system.

Although the matter was not settled at the First Congress, it entered public discussion and was disseminated in a way which could no longer be suppressed. After the Congress, the IRDG leaders, including Andrey Sakharov, Boris Yeltsin, Gavriil Popov, and Yuri Afanasyev, started a massive propaganda campaign to prepare the ground for its implementation. The discussion continued at the Second Congress in December 1989, and a surprising compromise was worked out:

⁴⁹⁸ For details, see Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 501–506; Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 311–312.

⁴⁹⁹ After the official English translation quoted from the website of the Marxists Internet Archive at constitution-ussr-1977.pdf (marxists.org), accessed February 7, 2024.

the deputies agreed to erase Article 6 on condition that the office of President of the USSR be founded, which had no precedent in the Soviet system. It was a logical move, since if Article 6 were deleted, the Party's General Secretary would lose the legal grounds to exercise power.

Demonstrations and rallies in support of the deletion of Article 6 were held across the country. The biggest, numbering about 200,000, marched through the streets of Moscow on February 4, 1990. Under such pressure, the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU that met the next day agreed to drop the constitutional provision on the dominant role of the Party, as Gorbachev proposed, and meet his postulate concerning "the need to found the office of President."⁵⁰⁰ Formally, the institution of the office of President of the USSR would let the de facto Number One, the Party's General Secretary, obtain a status enabling him to continue on the international arena in accordance with diplomatic protocol.

Taking into account this exchange of views, the Third Extraordinary Congress of People's Deputies, which sat in mid-March 1990, adopted the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the USSR in Matters of the Political System, and the Law on the Establishment of the Office of the President of the USSR.⁵⁰¹ A change in the system, albeit incomplete, had occurred.⁵⁰² Theoretically, Gorbachev's powers had been enhanced, but in practice he had no mechanisms to implement them: he had alienated and split up the old *nomenklatura* but failed to construct an efficient and trustworthy power structure of his own. He was unable to stop the growing influence of Boris Yeltsin, who was systematically building up his status as leader of the Russian SFSR.⁵⁰³

Even before the amendment to the Constitution had been passed, Gorbachev, speaking at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU on September 30, 1989, was forced to admit that it was necessary to structure the Soviet Union anew, and that seventy years of efforts to achieve this had ended in failure. The Plenum tacitly took note of his opinion that the current status of the Soviet republics was unclear and their rights, obligations and responsibilities undefined.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ <http://varjag-2007.livejournal.com/1535863.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² For an extensive discussion of the constitutional changes, see Jerzy Kowalski, *Konstytucja Federacji Rosyjskiej a rosyjska i europejska tradycja konstytucyjna* (Warszawa; Poznań: Polskie Wydawnictwo Prawnicze IURIS, 2003), 96–101.

⁵⁰³ Andrzej Furier, *Dekada Jelcyna. Uwarunkowania rosyjskich przemian społecznych i politycznych 1991–2000* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2003), 20ff.

⁵⁰⁴ *Известия ЦК КПСС*, no. 1 (1989): 85. See an attempt to defend Gorbachov's policy on nationalities, *Союз можно было сохранить: Белая книга: документы и факты о политике М.С. Горбачева по реформированию и сохранению многонационального государства*, ed. Alexander Veber, et al., 2nd ed. (Moscow: Апрель-85, 1995).

Gorbachev's appointment as President did not change much for him in terms of practical means to stop the Soviet republics from seeking to expand the scope of their autonomy and their Party centers from bidding for independence of the CPSU. He no longer had a compliant Party structure at his disposal to let him control these processes or pacify the old conflicts, in particular the Armenian–Azerbaijani territorial dispute, now resurging with new strength.

There were several important steps in the breakup of the Soviet Union: the Supreme Council of Georgia terminated its agreement to found the USSR (March 1990); the Baltic republics decided to adopt declarations of independence (March–May 1990), and especially the adoption of the Russian Declaration of Sovereignty at the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian SFSR on June 12, 1990.⁵⁰⁵ Similar decisions were made by more Soviet and autonomous republics, such as Tatarstan, North Ossetia, South Ossetia, and even the territory of Transdnistria, which did not have a separate status.

Gorbachev's attempt in October 1990 to recover control over political developments in the Russian SFSR through the Act of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the supremacy of Soviet law over republican regulations failed. The Supreme Council of the RSFSR reacted by adopting an analogous act which said the law of the Republic was superior to the All-Union law.

Defending his rapidly weakening position, Gorbachev decided to turn toward the conservatives in the Party and fend off its liberals, who supported the reforms. He took over the leadership of the Council of Ministers personally and with the help of the Federation Council, which had expanded its powers, tried to bring the situation under control. In the tense atmosphere following the ruthlessly suppressed revolt in Lithuania (January 1991) and the violent pacification of Latvia and Estonia, he decided to call a referendum on the feasibility of the continuing existence of the Soviet Union. In the ballot held in mid-March, a majority voted in favor of staying in the USSR, presumably apprehensive of the unpredictable consequences of its collapse, but only nine out of the fifteen Soviet republics staged a referendum.

In addition, in the Russian SFSR the referendum was supplemented with a question on the establishment of a president for the Russian Republic. Following a yes vote, in June Boris Yeltsin, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR since May 1990, won the election in the first round, gaining a very strong mandate

⁵⁰⁵ As many as 907 deputies voted for the Declaration, 13 were against, and 19 abstained. Section 5 stated that the legislation of the Russian Republic took precedence over All-Union law, which effectively put Russia outside of the USSR, PAP [the Polish Press Agency], June 13, 1990. Some researchers consider this as the moment marking the actual collapse of the USSR. Justyna Ołędzka, "Współczesna Rosja 1991–2011," *Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2014): 133.

to pursue his political ambitions. He did not even hide he was pleased to be taking revenge on Gorbachev, who had fired him from the post of secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Party in 1987 and tried to boot him out for criticizing the half-heartedness of the reforms.

The result of the referendum encouraged Gorbachev to seek a compromise with the rebel republics. The Novo-Ogaryovo process launched in April 1991 in an attempt to negotiate a new agreement with the republics, created a chance to stop the collapse of the Union. Soon, however, Gorbachev clearly gave up on this scenario, although the draft for a new agreement on a “Union of Sovereign States” had been negotiated and in principle accepted by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.⁵⁰⁶

On August 19, before the Novo-Ogaryovo process could reach a happy conclusion,⁵⁰⁷ a group that called itself the State Committee on the State of Emergency (*Gosudarstvenny komitet po chrezvychaynomu polozheniu*) headed by Vice-President Gennady Yanayev attempted to stage a coup. They had Gorbachev’s tacit consent. Their chief aim was to stop the adoption of a new federal arrangement and prevent what the rebels saw as the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union. Thanks to the determination of the people of Moscow and Yeltsin immediately issuing a decree which was straightaway announced in the media, taking control of all the power structures in the Republic (the army and forces subject to the Ministry of Defense, the State Security Committee, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs), the coup failed.

However, now the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable, which was largely due to Yeltsin blocking the Novo-Ogaryovo process.⁵⁰⁸ When the Soviet republics declared independence, Gorbachev’s power as President of the Soviet Union was drastically curtailed.⁵⁰⁹ He also lost control over the Party, which was in a deep rut and on the defensive.

Straight after the coup was foiled, Gorbachev decided to step down as General Secretary of the CPSU, calling for its self-dissolution. However, his successor, Vladimir (Volodymyr) Ivashko, ignored his appeal.

Yeltsin issued a number of decrees during the coup (August 19–21), including one for the authorities of the Russian Republic to take over all the state property of the USSR located on the territory of Russia, and another extending the powers of the President of the Russian SFSR over the armed forces, internal affairs and

506 *Союз можно было сохранить: Белая книга*, 168–172.

507 Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 575 (570–576).

508 Cf. Gratchev, *Le Mystère Gorbachev*, 341.

509 “[After the August Coup] Gorbachev was the leader of an essentially symbolic structure whose authority was questioned by the more and more independent leaders of the republics,” translated from p. 400 of the Polish version of Grachev.

state security institutions, and subordinating the law enforcement agencies to himself. On August 21, the Supreme Council of the RSFSR endorsed these decrees, recognizing Yeltsin's extraordinary powers during the coup. Yeltsin issued more decrees on August 23, instructing the Ministry of Internal Affairs to secure the assets of the Communist Party of the RSFSR, which henceforth were to belong to the State, and ordering the Central Bank of the Russian Federation to block the accounts of the Communist Party of the Russian SFSR. Under another decree issued on the same day, he banned the activities of the Communist Party of the Russian SFSR on the territory of Russia and announced the forthcoming dissolution of all of its organizational structures and the prohibition of the dissemination of the communist ideology.⁵¹⁰ All payments from the budget of the Russian SFSR designated for All-Union institutions were suspended. On August 29, the parliament of the Russian SFSR passed a law banning the activities of the CPSU and sequestering its assets. The parliaments of the other Republics followed suit.

Gorbachev had lost the initiative completely.⁵¹¹ The system of the Soviet Party and State had effectively disintegrated.

On December 8, Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk, the Presidents of the Russian SFSR and the Ukrainian SSR, and Stanislav Shushkevich, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Belarusian SSR, met in the Belovezha Forest at a place called Viskuly near Brest on the Bug River and signed the Belovezha Accords on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an entity resembling a confederation.⁵¹² This act was an overt violation of the 1977 Constitution of the USSR and had the features of a coup d'état. However, it had an obvious, easy-to-win propaganda value: it was an almost perfect match of the agreement or founding treaty establishing the Soviet Union in December 1922⁵¹³ and brought the Soviet era to a close, relegating the Soviet Union to the pages of history.

510 *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 579; Bukovsky, *Московский процесс*. On November 6, Yeltsin issued a decree extending the ban to cover the activities of the CPSU.

511 Aleksandr Korzhakov, *Борис Ельцин: от рассвета до заката* [Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk] (Moscow: Интербук, 1997), 113 ff.

512 For the text of the Belovezha Accords, see *Дипломатический вестник*, no. 1 (1992): 3–6. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 184–186; Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 304; Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy w Związku Radzieckim*, 127. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of the Kazakh SSR was also expected to sign the Agreement, but in the end did not; cf. Korzhakov, *Борис Ельцин: от рассвета до заката*, 126–129.

513 The only signature missing from the Belovezha agreement compared to the Founding Treaty of the USSR was that of a representative of the Transcaucasian SFSR, which had long since been defunct.

Within a fortnight, all the other Soviet republics acceded to the agreement. Characteristically, Europe's reaction to these events was surprisingly quick. On December 16, at the extraordinary meeting of ministers of the European Communities on the accession agreement with Poland, a declaration was adopted recognizing the new international entities established in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁵¹⁴

A few days later, on December 26, the Council of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union declared its dissolution. On the eve of the signing of this act, Gorbachev, who had been ruthlessly harassed by Yeltsin and overwhelmed by events, resigned as President.⁵¹⁵

The disintegration of the USSR became a reality almost to the day of the sixty-ninth anniversary of its establishment, December 30, 1922.

514 Alicja Stępień-Kuczyńska, "Unia Europejska–Rosja," in *Studia nauk społecznych i humanistycznych*, ed. Jerzy Juchnowski and Marian Stanisław Wolański (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2008), 615.

515 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 305. For an extensive discussion of the process of the collapse of the USSR, see Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 169ff.

Chapter Five

The 1990s, Yeltsin's decade

The Russian Federation: consolidation of power

The disintegration of the Soviet Union proved that the stage in Russia's history which started in November 1917 was not a historical regularity, but a full-scale tragedy caused by a constellation of different factors.⁵¹⁶ For the communities inhabiting the territory of the former Russian Empire and thereafter controlled by the Bolsheviks, this tragedy lasted for over seventy years, and somewhat shorter in the Baltic states and those countries that found themselves in the Soviet zone of influence after the Yalta Conference. With the collapse of the USSR, nationalist sentiments, stifled for decades, revived, especially in Russia, and the old ethnic conflicts resurged.⁵¹⁷

Out of the bankrupt Soviet state, a standalone, internationally recognized legal entity emerged and was named the Russian Federation. It inherited a massive economic crisis as well as political chaos in the wake of uncoordinated political reform. Before the Russian Federation managed to shape into a more or less stable state, it went through a difficult period of getting rid of the relics of the old Soviet system, its institutions and modes of operation. Initially, this process emulated the course followed in the developed countries of Western Europe, which seemed to have found the only good way of securing social progress.⁵¹⁸ The most dramatic episode, besides the two Chechen wars, occurred in the fall of 1993.

For President Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first democratically elected head of state and ruler,⁵¹⁹ the fundamental problem was to wind up and get rid of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, which had served as the USSR's supreme legislator. The deputies declared that the Belovezha Accords, pursuant to which the Commonwealth of Independent States had been proclaimed, were legally invalid and thus Article 11 prescribing the dissolution of all of the All-Union governing bodies was also invalid. Neither did they acknowledge the decision of the Supreme Coun-

516 Nicolas Werth, "Un État contre son peuple," 53 ff.

517 Cf. Andrei D. Sakharov, *Россия в XX веке: проблемы национальных отношений*, ed. Andrei Sakharov, and Valery Mikhailov (Moscow: Наука, 1999) 26–28.

518 Cf. Andrey Sokolov, "Конец советской истории," in *Россия на рубеже XXI века: оглядываясь на век минувший*, 242.

519 Theoretically, Yeltsin had a very strong mandate, obtained in a general election. Aleksandr Barsenkov, Valery Koretsky, and Aleksandr Ostapenko, *Политическая Россия сегодня* (Moscow: Московский Рабочий, 1993), 8.

cil of the Russian Federation of January 1992, which ruled that Soviet deputies no longer held a mandate to continue acting in their former capacity on the territory of the Russian Federation. In March 1992, they made an attempt to convene a Sixth Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, which the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation declared a violation of Russia's sovereignty and a threat to the country's independence.⁵²⁰ However, from the legal point of view, the situation was ambiguous, since the 1978 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was still in force⁵²¹ and contained several references to the 1977 Constitution of the USSR and other Soviet legal regulations, but did not define the governing institutions introduced by Yeltsin on the grounds of his decree of November 6, 1991.⁵²²

Straight after the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Yeltsin seemed to be working hand in hand with Ruslan Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR, but when their respective powers had to be delimited, their cooperation turned into conflict, which soon evolved into a struggle for dominance (because the political system had to be defined as presidential or parliamentary) or, as some researchers say, into a struggle for power between various governing bodies aiming to establish an "extraordinary, presidential–plebiscitary democracy."⁵²³

In December 1992, the Seventh Congress of People's Deputies declared that the extraordinary powers granted to the President to carry out economic reform had expired. It adopted a number of amendments to the Constitution, giving the Supreme Soviet broad prerogatives to oversee central and local government, in accordance with Khasbulatov's slogan, "All power to the Soviets!" which he had taken from Lenin. Speaking during the Congress, Yeltsin accused the deputies of blocking the reforms and disturbing the balance of power between the constitutional governing bodies. He announced that a referendum would be held to weigh up the citizens' confidence in the President and in the Congress of People's Deputies.⁵²⁴ Ultimately, the Congress decided to follow the recommendation of a

520 *Постановление Президиума Верховного Совета Российской Федерации по. 2493–1* of March 11, 1992, http://russia.bestpravo.com/fed1992/data03/tex_14624.htm, unavailable on November 20, 2024.

521 Officially, the 1978 Soviet Constitution stayed in force until December 25, 1993.

522 The President, the Vice-President with a narrow scope of powers, the Council of Ministers (headed by the President) as well as the Presidential Administration and the Presidential Council (established in February 1993); a reduced number of ministries, merged ministries, new central institutions (including the State Committee on Antimonopoly Policy and Support for New Economic Structures, and the State Committee for State Property Management).

523 Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium*, 552.

524 See Barsenkov, Koretsky, and Ostapenko, *Политическая Россия сегодня*, 9.

special *ad hoc* committee⁵²⁵ and postpone the implementation of its amendments until after the constitutional referendum.

On March 20, 1993, the Eighth Congress tried to withdraw from those decisions; and the subsequent, Ninth Extraordinary Congress, held March 26–29, wanted to impeach Yeltsin. Although a majority (617 deputies) voted for impeachment, while only 268 were against, the qualified majority of 689 required for effective impeachment was not reached.

The constitutional referendum was held on April 25, 1993 and comprised four questions. The results were as follows: 59% of those who voted expressed their confidence in Yeltsin, 53% approved of his policies in 1992, 31% voted for an early presidential election, and 43% voted for an early parliamentary election.⁵²⁶ Both sides regarded the results as their success. The opposition said that the President had been defeated as he did not manage to have the Congress dissolved.

Yeltsin, on the other hand, considered he had been authorized to continue exercising his powers as before. In May, he launched his offensive by establishing the Constitutional Assembly, which was to draft a new constitution, define the powers of the main political institutions including the president, and once and for all get rid of the Congress of People's Deputies. The countermeasures adopted by Chairman Khasbulatov of the Supreme Soviet proved ineffective and the Assembly started its work.

In August, Yeltsin made his next move to abolish the persisting dyarchy. At a session of the Council of the leaders of the republics and other federal entities of the Russian Federation, he suggested that, side by side with the Supreme Soviet, a new constitutional legislative body called the Federation Council should be established. It was to operate as a secondary, mini-parliament with two deputies returned for each federal entity. In response, Khasbulatov presented the Supreme Soviet with a package of bills intended to drastically curb the President's prerogatives. At the same time, he gave his active support to the Communists, who wanted to restore the Soviet Union. To that end, he appealed to the parliaments of the republics within the Commonwealth of Independent States to form a supra-national legislative body. In response, Yeltsin made an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the deputies from entering the building where the session was to be held, treating this step as preparatory to the dissolution of the Congress of People's

⁵²⁵ The members of this *ad hoc* committee represented the President of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation, and the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.

⁵²⁶ The percentage results for the first two questions were calculated in relation to the number of votes cast, while the percentages for the last two questions, which concerned constitutional matters, were calculated in relation to the total number of persons entitled to vote.

Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, which stirred up controversy even among his closest collaborators.

Amid the escalating crisis, which intensified due to the conflict between the President and his Deputy Alexander Rutskoi, on September 21, 1993, Yeltsin issued a decree *On the stepwise constitutional reform in the Russian Federation and the dissolution of the Congress of People's Deputies*.⁵²⁷ The result of that step, as he wrote in his notes, was that “Russia was entering a new epoch. We were shrugging off and cleansing the remains of the filth, lies, and falsity accumulated for seventy-odd years.”⁵²⁸ If treated literally, the decree ended the period of dyarchy, dissolved the Supreme Soviet, and announced the establishment of the State Duma, which looked back to the (quasi)parliamentary traditions of the early twentieth century. The plan was to stage the election to the new legislative body in December 1993.

However, secured by its legal backing, the old system did not intend to go without a fight. The deputies barricaded themselves in Moscow's White House and tried to replace Yeltsin with a new president, but were unable to summon a quorum. In front of the building, a crowd of thousands of supporters of the Congress clashed with police cordoning off the area. Confident of popular support, the Soviet resolved to take yet another step. It lowered the quorum, dismissed Yeltsin and appointed Rutskoi, who had served as his deputy up to that point. A tussle ensued, reminiscent of the confrontation between the Bolsheviks and the Constitutional Assembly in 1917–18.

The deputies stayed in the White House, but their parliamentary IDs were canceled, and the power, gas, and water supply was cut off and the drain network blocked. When Patriarch Alexy II tried to intervene but was unsuccessful, Yeltsin decided to use force to resolve the impasse.⁵²⁹ He wanted to get the military to storm the building but at first failed to persuade them. Yet the tables turned when supporters of the deputies were the first to resort to violence and attacked several selected targets in Moscow, which led to fighting in the streets and barricades being put up. The attacks on the headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the office of Moscow's mayor, and the

527 Decree no. 1400, “*О поэтапной конституционной реформе в Российской Федерации*,” <http://1993.sovnarkom.ru/TEXT/DOKUMENT/1400.htm>, accessed November 20, 2024; http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_14733, accessed November 20, 2024. Cf. Korzhakov, *Борис Ельцин: от рассвета до заката* [Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk], 155.

528 Cf. Boris Yeltsin, *Записки президента* (Moscow: Огонек, 1994), 363–364. English translation: Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Random House, 1994) 359.

529 Korzhakov, *Борис Ельцин: от рассвета до заката*, 170.

headquarters of the President's supporters were repulsed by law enforcement units. When that happened, Yeltsin finally managed to convince the military, which had remained neutral up to that point, to take his side.⁵³⁰ The Two-Day Civil War began.

In the early hours of October 3, after Yeltsin had declared a state of emergency, the White House was attacked by storm troops, including the elitist Alpha and Vympel special units.⁵³¹ Ten tanks started pelting the upper stories of the parliament building with gunfire. The supporters of the deputies, who had been standing around, dispersed. In the late afternoon, when the fighting subsided, the defenders of the White House, including Ruslan Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and Deputy President Alexander Rutskoi, surrendered and were arrested. The official records say 160 persons were killed, but the real number of fatalities was probably much higher.⁵³²

The constitutional crisis was over.⁵³³ All the institutions exercising power deriving from the Soviet Union and mandated under the 1977 Constitution were dissolved. The Russian Federation started to stabilize its political system as a presidential republic and the role of its parliament remained secondary, albeit not fully defined. It also strove, rather unconvincingly, to identify a tradition of its own for such a system of government in the quasi-parliamentary period after 1905; the republican period of Kerensky's few months of premiership; and in Pyotr Stolypyn's program of social and economic reform.⁵³⁴ This was not so much part of Yeltsin's own politics of memory, as he was not very interested in history, but rather a tendency observable in the mass media to find a moment in Russia's past which could become the core of a future model of Russian statehood and be presented to the general public as a starting point for this statehood to be re-

530 Ibid., 177.

531 Initially, both special units refused to obey the order. They only decided to fight after one of their soldiers was accidentally killed. Cf. Yeltsin, *Записки президента*, 11–13; *The Struggle for Russia*, 13–14.

532 Some estimates give as many as 800 fatalities. Cf. the Polish Press Agency PAP, October 4, 1993; <http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/20-rocznica-puczu-przeciwko-prezydentowi-borysowi-jelcynowi>, accessed November 20, 2024.

533 “This was a fight against me, first a subterranean opposition, then a more and more open conflict. This was a fight to change the foundations of the state.” Yeltsin, *Записки президента*, 283; cf. *The Struggle for Russia*, 184.

534 Presented by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as the ideal leader for Russia, Pyotr Stolypin was the first politician who wanted to construct a Russian nation based on a politically mature peasantry as the foundation of a modernized monarchy; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Red Wheel*, vol. I: *August 14*, trans. Harry Willetts (New York: FGS Classics, 2014).

stored after seven decades of Bolshevik chaos and experiments on Russian society which claimed millions of victims.

In the nationwide referendum which was held on December 12, 1993, with a turnout of 55%, over 54% voted for the new constitution of the Russian Federation, which became law on December 25, 1993, laying the legal foundations for the Russian political system dubbed a “presidential monarchy” by its critics. It was modeled on West European presidential systems, but included the archetypal elements of Russian civilization, giving the president a wide range of prerogatives he could use to limit democracy.⁵³⁵ So, from the legal point of view, the dramatic controversy surrounding the presidency and the separation of powers was over.

The attempt to delegatize Bolshevik rule

In his bid to remove the relics of the Soviet regime, Yeltsin paid attention most of all to the symbolic aspect, because of its instrumentality in the citizens’ ability to identify with their country and for the dissipation of nostalgia for the old times, felt not only by the older generations. Of course, it was of vital importance for him to remove the Communists from the political arena, or at least to reduce their role, given the current situation and the prospect of a forthcoming election. To achieve his objectives, he initiated several moves even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union: on November 23, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR adopted a resolution on a new national anthem,⁵³⁶ on August 22, 1991, Yeltsin issued a decree replacing the red flag and the hammer and sickle with the tricolor national flag of tsarist Russia, introduced by Peter I (in which the white color symbolizes peace, purity, and perfection; blue stands for faith, constancy, and loyalty; and red for strength, energy, and blood shed for the homeland),⁵³⁷ and on November 30, 1993, he published a decree on the restoration of the imperial coat of arms, codified at the turn of the sixteenth century: Gules (red), displaying a Two-Headed Eagle, the heads topped with crowns and a third crown

⁵³⁵ For the official English version of the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation online, see The Constitution of the Russian Federation, accessed November 20, 2024. See also Olędzka, “Współczesna Rosja,” 134–136; Sokolov, “Конец советской истории,” 252, 264.

⁵³⁶ “Patrioticheskaya Pesnya,” composed by Mikhail Glinka, has been the national anthem of the Russian Federation since December 25, 1991. However, to the end of Yeltsin’s second term, no generally acceptable words were chosen to the tune.

⁵³⁷ According to one version, the colors of the flag were the colors of the coat of arms of Moscow (white for St. George’s horse; blue for his coat; and red for his shield). This tricolor flag was probably hoisted for the first time on one of the Russian ships in 1667, i.e. during the reign of Peter I’s father, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov.

between them, all Or (gold); the Eagle charged on the breast with an escutcheon showing St. George slaying the dragon (that is the Russian Pogonia).⁵³⁸

Legal action was at least as vital in Yeltsin's battle against the Communists and their influence on the general public. His decree on the delegalization of the Communist Party and the nationalization of its estate, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, remained a dead letter. It did not lead to any practical measures against central or local Party units, whose activities were inextricably tangled up with the operations of the omnipotent KGB. As a result, he failed to make use of the months immediately following the putsch at the peak of his support, when the rebels and the Communist Party were generally condemned. He failed to get the premises owned by the Party sealed up and its assets impounded; he did not even mount a media campaign against the Communists. Yeltsin stopped halfway and failed to seize his best hour, when he could have done away with the old power structures and established new ones. He missed the moment when he could have brought the Communist Party to trial in open court proceedings, publicly discredit and expose the Socialist regime, push it off its pedestal, demonstrate and prove its crimes.⁵³⁹

Consequently, the Communists, who flocked together in the Congress of People's Deputies, the legislative body which Gorbachev had established and which was hampering the reforms, managed to survive the toughest time. Not only did they reorganize in the new circumstances, but also successfully joined in the process of dog-eat-dog privatization, and then even mounted an offensive, taking the delegalization decree to the Constitutional Court.

President Yeltsin accepted the challenge in the hope that the proceedings before the Constitutional Court could be turned into an anti-Communist Nuremberg, and allow him to redefine his status from defendant to prosecutor.⁵⁴⁰ The renowned Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky granted Yeltsin's request to gather evidence for the trial. To that end, he gained access to the top-secret documents

538 For post-Soviet "restorative and ironic" nostalgia, see Włodzimierz Marciniak, "Mapa i pamięć o imperium. Kartograficzne symbole nostalgii postsowieckiej," in *Inne wymiary polityki*, 149–150.

539 Cf. Vladimir Bukovsky, *Московский процесс* (Moscow; Paris: МИК: Русская мысль, 1996), accessed November 20, 2024. English translation: *Judgment in Moscow: Soviet Crimes and Western Complicity*, trans. Alyona Kojevnikov (Ninth of November Press, 2019). We have translated this passage from the Polish edition, Władimir Bukowski, *Moskiewski proces. Dysydent w archiwach Kremla*, trans. J. Darczewska et al., (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1998), 703–704. The passage is also quoted in *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish–Russian Relations*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

540 *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 579.

produced by the Communist regime, kept in the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the former KGB. Not only did he survey their holdings, but he also used a state-of-the-art mini-scanner to make copies of thousands of key papers without being discovered. The evidence he collected over six months was to be used during the forthcoming proceedings, and a clandestine electronic copy helped to make the source-based book *Moskovskiy protsess (Judgment in Moscow)*. This publication, translated into several languages, argues incontrovertibly that the Soviet system was criminal right from the start and that the world would be in jeopardy from Russian Communists for as long as they remained a political force. Yeltsin wanted Bukovsky, alongside Sergei Kovalev, another celebrated human rights activist, to take the stand as witnesses.⁵⁴¹

The proceedings began in the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation in May 1992, the charge being the unlawfulness of the delegatization of the Communist Party.⁵⁴² The prosecutors were former Party activists, who did not focus on the facts concerning the delegatization or challenge the records presented to prove that the Soviet system was a criminal setup. Instead, they concentrated on formal aspects. Their first point was that Yeltsin's decrees were in breach of the principle of separation of powers and made no distinction between the powers of the various state authorities in the Russian Federation.

The trial, which ended in November 1992, took a turn that Yeltsin had not expected, even though a number of deputies filed suits in support of his decrees and postulating that the Communists' charges be dismissed.⁵⁴³

During the proceedings, Sergey Shakhrai, Yeltsin's legal advisor, submitted documents with clear evidence that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (in some periods also operating as "the Russian Communist Party" or "the All-Union Communist Party") was responsible for numerous crimes, including the Katyn Atrocity and the annihilation of its own members. The documents he presented, the contents of which were corroborated by the testimonies of Yeltsin's witnesses, did not leave a shadow of doubt. However, only one of the presiding judges showed some appreciation of the President's position, while the others evidently

⁵⁴¹ The President's experts included Memorial activists Nikita Okhotin, Nikita Petrov and Arseny Roginsky. *Rosja a Katyń*, ed. Anna Dzienkiewicz, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Ośrodek KARTA, 2010), 115.

⁵⁴² The case was heard in five sessions, all in 1992: May 26, July 6–15, July 20–August 4, August 14–October 23, and October 28–November 30.

⁵⁴³ There were ten suits, signed by a total of over eighty deputies. They were filed by the historian Prof. Vyacheslav Bragin, who was a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR; Sergei Yushenkov, chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Subcommittee on mass media; the well-known human rights defender and member of the Presidential Council Sergei Kovalev (aka Kovalyov); Oleg Rummyantsev, leader of the social democratic movement; and the economist and political scientist Viktor Sheinis, who was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR.

sympathized with the Communists and thus the Court refrained from delivering a judgment, either in the legal or moral sense.⁵⁴⁴ It dismissed all the evidence proving the crimes committed by the Communist Party throughout the seventy years of its existence on the grounds that it had been collected outside of the procedure for the trial, and asserted that “historical processes” could not be admitted as proof in a court case. Sticking to the letter of the Russian Constitution, the Court ruled that seventeen points in Yeltsin’s decrees on the delegalization of the Communist Party and the confiscation of its assets were unconstitutional, because they were either inadequately substantiated or legally faulty. Therefore, it declared the ban on Communist ideology unconstitutional; the ban on Communists forming a political party of their own was ruled unconstitutional, too.

The Court sidestepped the decision to condemn the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and did not declare that the Russian Federation was a continuation of Russia’s statehood from before that Revolution, disregarding the seven decades of the Soviet experiment, so the ruling could not have been any different. In other words, the Court ruled that the Communist Party had operated pursuant to the law created by the Communist Party, and completely ignored the fact that the Soviet State and Party established by the Bolsheviks were unconstitutional as such. The final part of the verdict merely said that in the Russian Federation, the Communist Party should not set up cells in workplaces, but structure them territorially.

The Constitutional Court did not find the Communist Party, as an entire organization, responsible for the August 1991 coup, which was one of Yeltsin’s demands and one of the main premises behind the delegalization decree. The Court asserted that the putsch had been fomented by the Party’s headquarters, not its regional units, which gave grounds for the Communists to reclaim practically all the impounded property, except for the assets of the Central Committee, because the Court found the Party’s headquarters guilty of plotting the coup. That ruling was the only part of the judges’ decision pertaining to the real operations of the Communist Party and not the legal aspects.

The Moscow trial ended in a weird compromise. The Constitutional Court evaded passing judgment on the Communist Party’s criminal ideology and its real consequences, namely the atrocities carried out by the system, even though it decided to consider the 1991 putsch. As a result, the central institution resident in the Party’s headquarters was indicted and dissolved, but its assets were

⁵⁴⁴ For the judgment issued by the Constitutional Court on November 30, 1992 (Постановление N 9-П от 30 ноября 1992 года), see <http://www.panorama.ru/ks/d9209.shtml>, accessed November 20, 2024.

left in the hands of its regional apparatus. So, there appeared to be legal grounds to reactivate the Communist Party, which is what happened quite soon.⁵⁴⁵ Voicing his opinion on the verdict, Sergei Kovalev stated bitterly, “I’m sure that if the court, whether national or international, had consisted of impartial . . . judges, we would have seen a trial very much like the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi Party, . . . the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would have been proclaimed a criminal organization and its operations banned, regardless of the name, old or new.”⁵⁴⁶

Soon afterwards, in February 1993, the Constitutional Court invalidated Yeltsin’s decision of October 1992, when he had delegatized the National Salvation Front, which had a membership of left-wingers and nationalists and had been operating *de facto* since April 1988. The Front embraced about forty organizations and associations of the left- and right-wing opposition, such as the Russian Communist Workers’ Party and the extremist Russian National Unity.⁵⁴⁷ However, the Front did not survive for long due to in-fighting between the leaders of particular groups and their inability to define a joint program and future objectives. It was delegatized for the second time by President Yeltsin following the coup of October 1993 and that decision was never challenged.⁵⁴⁸

For Yeltsin, the verdicts of the Constitutional Court were a bitter blow. In their aftermath, he gave up his attempts to have the Communist Party condemned as a criminal organization, although many people, for instance Vladimir Bukovsky, tried to persuade him to launch a new offensive before the Communists managed to regroup and become a serious political force again. With hindsight, especially in the context of the second presidential election campaign (June–July 1996), Yeltsin’s inaction proved fateful. Presumably, he withdrew because he was not fully aware how important decommunization was for his country and therefore was not persistent enough in his struggle against the Communists, and ditched the plan to carry

545 The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Коммунистическая Партия Российской Федерации; КПРФ) was established at the congress of ex-Communist activists which was held on February 13, 1993, and Gennady Zyuganov was elected its General Secretary.

546 Quoted after <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,2492091.html#ixzz4VFpmnueA>, accessed November 20, 2024.

547 *Лево-правый блок, Мегалоплис-экспресс*, no. 11 (1992: 21; Jarosław Bratkiewicz, *Rosyjscy nacjonalisci w latach 1992–1996. Od detradycjonalizacji do retradycjonalizacji* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1998), 32.

548 Artyom Fomenkov, “К вопросу о политической истории постсоветской России: II Конгресс Фронта национального спасения и крах объединенной оппозиции в 1993 году,” *Научный диалог*, no. 9 (2012). In 1994, two ephemeral nationalist organizations were created, one led by Ilya Konstantinov and another by Valeri Smirnov (former members of the National Salvation Front, Фронт национального спасения).

out a vetting process, however limited, even though Sergei Kovalev had been consistently but ineffectively urging him to conduct it.⁵⁴⁹ Yeltsin and his followers (that is his administration and the “Family”) deemed it far more important to gain control of the State assets and its natural resources and privatize them, so as to get as much profit out of them as possible, for themselves as well (which was termed *no-menklatura* capitalism).⁵⁵⁰

Yet the process of decommunization did not stop after the verdict of the Constitutional Court. It entered a new phase of grassroots community initiatives, which were not directly related to the politics of memory pursued in the 1990s. A special place was held by Memorial, a human rights group which started in January 1989, at the close of the Soviet era. The statutory aims of this NGO were to research Soviet repressive measures and disseminate information about them, to protect human rights, and to support the identification and rehabilitation of victims of the Soviet system, not only in Russia, but also in the other member states of the former Union and the satellite countries of the USSR.⁵⁵¹ The selfless work Memorial carried out to reveal the truth about the Soviet crimes invariably met with a hostile reaction on the part of the authorities and bafflement from a large part of Russian society, which had been scarred by totalitarianism.⁵⁵²

Sadly, the results of the research on Soviet crimes which was initiated by Memorial made only a negligible amount of impact on the awareness of Russian society, because the activists did not realize that this new knowledge had to be spread using educational tools. The progress that had been made in the study of history was hardly reflected in the curricula, it neither inspired mass culture nor, for that matter, television broadcasting. As regards the history of Russia before the 1917 Revolution, the content of the majority of the textbooks remained practically intact, except for the references to and quotations from the chief representatives of Marxism, Lenin, and particular general secretaries of the Communist

549 Wojciech Konończuk, “Dekomunizacja, której nie było,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, June 8, 2015.

550 Афанасьев, *Опасная Россия*, 119.

551 Memorial's Polish Commission, coordinated by Aleksander Gurjanow (aka Aleksandr Gurianov), made an invaluable contribution, working closely with Karta. Their main project was compiling an index of persons who had suffered repressive measures. Cf. Aleksander Gurjanow, “Memoriał a Katyń,” in *Rosja a Katyń*, 113–141.

552 However, the work Memorial has done is recognized and esteemed in Poland and around the world; Radio Liberty has called it “a ray of light in the kingdom of darkness” (quoted after Anna Łabuszewska, “Promień światła w królestwie mroku,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, September 24, 2015; www.svoboda.org/media/video/27255668.html, accessed November 20, 2024).

Party which used to litter Soviet-era publications. These were removed.⁵⁵³ A few “alternative” history books started to appear (i.e. ones the teacher could opt to work with). These were much more critical of the Soviet past—and denounced, while their authors were accused of “swapping Soviet ideological dogma for a primitive anti-Communist line.”⁵⁵⁴

With time, the intensely anti-Communist narrative which marked Yeltsin’s first term was clearly losing its cutting edge. Its adherents were not steadfast enough to implement it in the politics of memory and decommunize Russian public space. The country was left with thousands of Communist monuments (for instance, Moscow still had over one hundred statues of Lenin), hundreds of thousands of Soviet names of streets, squares, subway stations, towns, and villages. The half-hearted effort and inconsistency is best exemplified by the names of St. Petersburg and its environs, still known as *Leningradskaya Oblast*.

Revindication of the real history of Russia and its people

The politics of memory practiced by the Russian authorities in the first decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union can hardly be viewed as comprehensive and well-planned. One may even venture a hypothesis that Yeltsin and his followers were distrustful of the politics of memory, considering it a propaganda weapon typical of the Communist regime and believing that now public support had to be won with economic arguments, not by manipulating with the past.⁵⁵⁵ It can be conceded that Yeltsin was not at all preoccupied with the politics of memory and considered it a “marginal” issue.⁵⁵⁶

Certain problems relating to history and the philosophy of history, labeled as “patriotic and national reflection,” were raised by Russian nationalists. History formed the core of their program, the part which made the most powerful impact

553 Kagarlitsky, Введение: “История как политика,” in *Периферийная империя*; www.cyfroteka.pl/catalog/eboki/0203410/020/ff/101/OEBPS/Text.xhtml. This website was unavailable in January 2024.

554 Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в Современной России . . . , Часть 2, 4. www.iarex.ru/articles/40271.htm, accessed November 20, 2024.

555 See the opinion of Prof. Nikolay Korosov of Emory University, “Историческая политика в современной России. Путь в «сужающемся тоннеле»? Исторические ассоциации и историческая политика трех кремлевских сроков: от травм к гордости – и обратно,” *Дебаты*, June 22, 2016, <https://gefter.ru/archive/19060>, accessed November 20, 2024.

556 Oksana Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” in *Pamięć i polityka historyczna w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich*, ed. Stanisław Bieleń and Andrzej Skrzypek (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2017), 24.

on the general public and was ubiquitous in their political propaganda.⁵⁵⁷ Perhaps Yeltsin's administration did not want to dabble in the politics of memory to avoid conflict with organizations with the words *Derzhava* or *Otechestvo* (meaning, respectively, "Great Power" and "Fatherland") in their names; organizations which the President called "fascist" when aroused by political fervor.⁵⁵⁸ Yeltsin's administration did not pursue a particularly vibrant politics of memory.⁵⁵⁹ Only Vice-President Rutskoi, who flaunted his patriotism and attachment to Russian tradition ostentatiously—in contrast to Yeltsin—would occasionally take the subject up.⁵⁶⁰

Nonetheless, some favorable changes could be observed in the growing amount of information about the crimes and abnormalities of the previous political system. Democratization was in progress and archives became more accessible, so Russian historiography, closely followed by the media, was quick, if chaotic, in making up for the time lost during the Soviet era. Research results met with immense public interest and the demand for the true history of the Russian state was enormous, as its dark pages had been only partly revealed in the period of apparent *glasnost'* under Gorbachev. At first, that growing interest in events which for decades had been presented in a warped image proved practically impossible to control or manage efficiently by administrative methods.

It may have been largely due to the social pressure which accompanied the retrieval of the real history of the Soviet Union that the issue of rehabilitating the victims of mass reprisals resurged. Already by December 1991, a commission was formed to declassify the records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It was chaired by General Professor Dmitri Volkogonov, a military historian and one of Yeltsin's experts. His scrutiny of the Party's archives let him issue an impressive number of his own publications,⁵⁶¹ but the commission did not do much to improve the procedures for access to the archives. So perhaps it was not

557 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Bratkiewicz, *Rosyjscy nacjonalisci*.

558 Yeltsin issued a decree on measures to counteract indigenous fascism. Cf. Aleksandr Galkin, "Российский фашизм?" *Социологический журнал*, no. 2 (1994): 17–27; Vladimir Boyarintsev, "О фашизме в России," *Молодая гвардия*, no. 11 (1995): 52–59.

559 "The policies of Yeltsin's radical anti-communist regime generally focused on social and political values. Patriotic and national matters held only a very moderate place in his policy . . . at this stage the rise of national and patriotic sentiment in Russia was a grassroots development," Sakharov, "Национальный вопрос и русская цивилизация," 27.

560 For example, "For us, the most important directive is Russia's thousand-year history," *Pravda*, January 30, 1992; quoted after Bratkiewicz, *Rosyjscy nacjonalisci*, 59.

561 Cf. the following books by Dmitri A. Volkogonov: *Сталин*, vol. 1–2 (Moscow: Литрес, 1991–1992); *Троцкий*, vol. 1–2 (Moscow: Новости, 1994); *Ленин: Политический портрет*, vol. 1–2 (Moscow: Новости, 1994); and *Семь возжей. Галерея лидеров СССР в двух книгах* (Moscow: Новости, 1995).

only the Moscow trial, which was going on at the time, but also the inconsequence of Volkogonov's institution that motivated Yeltsin to issue a decree stipulating the unconditional declassification of all documents pertaining to the Soviet mass repressions and violation of human rights (June 1992). However, like Yeltsin's other decrees, this one too was hard to enforce and so access to the majority of the archival holdings of the special services (that is the Federal Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Military Prosecutor's Office) ultimately did not come under it.⁵⁶²

In late 1992, a presidential commission was established for the rehabilitation of victims of political repression. Its chairperson was Aleksandr Yakovlev, who had formerly headed a similar commission working for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and investigating political trials that had taken place between the 1930s and the 1950s to rehabilitate the victims. All in all, as a result of the operations of both commissions, which were carefully observed by the general public, over four million persons were rehabilitated.

What the citizens knew about the scale of the mass repressions and the victims, who, having been rehabilitated, could be commemorated, stood in stark contrast to their attitude to Stalin, the man responsible for those repressions. What the people were aware of seemed not to affect the myth of the great leader who had triumphed over fascism. Marginalizing Stalin, as proposed in Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, and his assertion that the victory belonged to the nation, albeit led by an incompetent blunderer,⁵⁶³ never appealed to the average Russian, as corroborated by the revival of Stalin's cult under Brezhnev. Yeltsin addressed the problem in his own way, which in this case was unlike his usual straightforward manner of confronting difficulties. Now he strove not to touch it at all. Even during the exceptionally ceremonial celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the victory in the Second World War, Yeltsin did all he could not to mention Stalin; his endeavors materialized in the thoroughly de-Stalinized Museum of the Great Patriotic War on Poklonnaya Gora, a hill in Moscow which had been virtually leveled to erect the facility.⁵⁶⁴ Yet the President's tactics were definitely at variance with Stalin's undiminishing popularity with the general public, a phenomenon which is completely irrational to an outside observer.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility*, 91–100.

⁵⁶³ Cf. Chapter Three, See also Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти, 1945–1991*, 48.

⁵⁶⁴ I have observed the phenomenon myself.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Maria Ferretti, *Сталин умер вчера . . . А действительно ли умер Сталин?* (Moscow: Аспект-Пресс, 2008), 429–432.

As I have already said, Yeltsin did not pay much attention to historical issues. Presumably, the reasons lay in his biography: he could have been unwilling to recall his own political career from before he began to stand up in opposition to the Soviet legacy.⁵⁶⁶ In 1978, when he was first secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg), the military engineer Nikolai Ipatiev's house, in the cellars of which the Bolsheviks had killed Tsar Nicolas II, his family and most trusted servants, was razed to the ground.⁵⁶⁷ However, Yeltsin did not manage altogether to evade a head-on collision with history, he just seemed to respond passively to developments that had an indirect bearing on the politics of memory practiced during the first term of his presidency.

In July 1993, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation initiated an investigation to identify the place where the remains of the Romanovs, murdered by the Bolsheviks on July 17, 1918, had been buried. The grounds for this action was a motion submitted by Aleksandr Avdonin, a geologist who believed he had found the site on the basis of a note left by Yakov Yurovsky, the chief executioner in the assassination, and preserved by his son Yevgeniy.⁵⁶⁸ Having assessed the merits of Avdonin's revelation, an official investigation was launched with Yeltsin's support. The purported burial place, namely an adit in an old mine near Yekaterinburg in the Ural Federal District, was examined by two teams of anthropologists, a Russian and an American one. Samples were collected and sent to the best scientific institutes, for instance a London spectroscopy lab. The skulls which were discovered on the site made it possible to reconstruct the facial features of the victims using Mikhail Gerasimov's method. Five members of the Romanov family were identified beyond all doubt. From then on, the case was taken over by a state commission established in the summer of 1997 by Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov.

On January 30, 1998, the commission issued its final announcement that scientists had identified beyond all doubt the remains of Tsar Nicolas II, his wife

566 Yeltsin was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1990; as of 1977, First Secretary of the Party's committee for Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) Oblast; and as of 1985 First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee.

567 Years later, giving excuses for demolishing such an important historic building, Yeltsin claimed that it was not his initiative, he had only "received orders from the Politburo to bulldoze Ipatiev House," which he accepted and implemented. Cf. Boris Yeltsin, *Президентский марафон: Размышления, воспоминания, впечатления . . .*, (Moscow: Издательство АСТ, 2000), 235; online at <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/book/9201>, accessed November 20, 2024. English edition: *Midnight Diaries*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 301.

568 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Jan Sobczak, *Mikołaj II – ostatni car Rosji. Studium postaci i ewolucji władzy* (Pułtusk; Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR, 2009), 548–554.

and children. Shortly afterwards, President Yeltsin signed a directive ordering the burial of the mortal remains of the Romanovs in St. Petersburg's Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul, in the Peter and Paul Fortress. However, that was not the end of it. The President's hopes were dashed when unexpectedly "very strange things started to happen."⁵⁶⁹

Yeltsin's decision was challenged by Eduard Rossel, Governor of Sverdlovsk Oblast, and Yuri Luzhkov, Mayor of Moscow. Both of them demanded that the Tsar and his family be buried in the territory they were administering. Rossel wanted them to be laid to rest in Yekaterinburg, as they had been killed in its vicinity, and Luzhkov wanted it to be in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, which is a symbol of Russia's revival following the Soviet era. The Orthodox Church entered the controversy too, because it rejected the results of the investigation on the grounds that they were based on DNA profiling, a method it deemed unacceptable. "An interim burial" was suggested without giving the victims' names until the Church officials reached their final decision on the matter.⁵⁷⁰

Ultimately, on July 17, 1998, the eightieth anniversary of the execution, the funeral service was held in the Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul, attended by almost all the descendants of the Romanov dynasty (now living abroad), even though Patriarch Alexy II decided not to participate or give his blessing. Although it was a private ceremony, not a state funeral, President Yeltsin was in the congregation, which reportedly "took all the political elite in Moscow by surprise."⁵⁷¹ Yet it would be hard to treat his attendance as an expression of his personal views on that tragic episode in the history of Russia; rather, it should be seen as a deliberate PR maneuver.

Unlike his successor, Yeltsin was clearly not at all interested in the concept of *Russkiy mir*, the "Russian world."⁵⁷² The idea probably dates back to the eleventh century and was popularized in the latter half of the nineteenth century by Count Sergey Uvarov, and later revived in discussions on the philosophy of history in the 1990s. *Russkiy mir* is defined as a phenomenon specific to Russia, a historic community which embraces people cultivating Russian culture and speaking Russian, people who "think Russian" and identify with Russia regardless of their ac-

569 Boris Yeltsin, *Президентский марафон*, 234; *Midnight Diaries*, 301.

570 "Благоверный царь Николай Александрович и его семья," *Московские епархиальные ведомости*, no. 10–11 (2000): 20–33.

571 *Ibid.*, 263. Speaking at the ceremony, Yeltsin observed that "What happened in Yekaterinburg was one of the most shameful chapters in our history The culprits are those who committed this crime, but also those who justified it over the decades," quoted after *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 617.

572 Cf. Chapter Six, 192.

tual place of domicile. If Yeltsin had wanted to support the *Russkiy mir* idea, he would have had to pursue an active politics of memory and make references in his official speeches to the Russian presence (“mission of civilization” or more properly Russia’s military mission) beyond its current borders, that is revitalize Russia’s colonial legacy.⁵⁷³ A predictable result would have been conflict with foreign countries, especially those with large Russian minorities, because he would have had to secure special prerogatives for those Russian communities. At the same time, he would have had to back the ambitions of the Russian Orthodox Church to put all the Orthodox Christians raised in the Russian spiritual tradition under its pastoral care. That would have meant the citizens of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine as well. Yeltsin clearly preferred not to make such declarations.

Closed Packet No. 1

In December 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to the end of his term as president, he handed over the most important state documents to Boris Yeltsin. One of the items was Closed Packet No. 1, which contained the basic records concerning the Katyn genocide. Like his predecessor, Yeltsin was not in a hurry to disclose the truth about one of the most heinous secret murders committed by the Soviet State and Party. He did not decide to make these records public until he had to present evidence for the trial he expected to delegalize the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. So the release of the information was actually a byproduct of his abortive campaign against the Communists and did not stem from his intention to clear up Russian–Polish relations by revealing the skeleton in his closet.

However, his attitude to the tragic events in Russia’s and Poland’s shared history was relatively open, which stood in contrast to his general reticence in historical matters. That openness was corroborated, for instance, by the fact that in April 1992 the Head Office of the Polish National Archives and the government Archival Commission of the Russian Federation signed a cooperation agreement. One of its parts, the memorandum of understanding,⁵⁷⁴ included a point which discussed plans for a collaborative project to publish several volumes of archival

573 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Olga Nikolaevna Batanova, “Русский мир как реальность и глобальный проект,” *Право и политика*, no. 12 (2008); Andrzej Wierzbicki, “Русский мир jako projekt restauracyjny imperium,” in *Rosja. Rozważania imperiologiczne*, ed. Stanisław Bieleń and Andrzej Skrzypek (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR, 2015), 101–136.

574 Registratura Naczelnej Dyrekcji Archiwów Państwowych [Registry of the Supreme Directorate of the State Archives of the Republic of Poland], WZ-060-Rosja-7/92.

materials relating to the Katyn Atrocity and entitled *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni* (English edition: *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment*).⁵⁷⁵ An editorial board was formed, jointly presided over by the eminent Polish historian Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor and Prof. Rudolf Pikhoya, head of the Russian Rossarkhiv archives.⁵⁷⁶ Irrefutable proof of that openness came with the permission the Russians granted to the Polish Military Archival Commission to carry out research in the post-Soviet archival holdings which had previously been classified and inaccessible. Only in the first year of its operations, the Polish Commission made copies of over 600 thousand pages of documentation concerning Soviet reprisals against Poles and Polish citizens of various ethnicities.⁵⁷⁷

In October 1992, Prof. Pikhoya, acting as President Yeltsin's special envoy, brought Lech Wałęsa, President of the Republic of Poland, certified photocopies of the records in Closed Packet No. 1: Beria's memo to Stalin of March 3, 1940; a transcript of the minutes of the session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks with the decision of March 5, 1940 regarding the extermination of the Polish prisoners and POWs; as well as other drastic materials from the special files (*osoby papki*) concerning the Katyn Massacre. One of the biggest lies in modern history was finally exposed. Only now did Poland and the rest of the world learn of one more aspect of the crime, unknown up to that time: that the Politburo's decision concerned not only the Polish POWs, but also 7,300 other Polish citizens who were being held as prisoners, including a considerable number of Polish Army officers, soldiers of the Border Protection Corps, and policemen.

575 On the grounds of, or in connection with this agreement, in 1995–2007, four volumes of thoroughly prepared records of the Katyn Massacre were published in Polish, totaling approximately 250 editorial sheets [5,600 A4 pages of 1,800 characters of Polish, or 300 words of English]. The Polish volumes served as the basis for two further volumes in Russian and one in English. The volumes published were *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 1: *Jeńcy nie wypowiedzianej wojny. Sierpień 1939 – marzec 1940* (Warszawa: Trio, 1995); vol. 2: *Zagłada. Marzec–czerwiec 1940* (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych: Trio, 1998); vol. 3: *Losy ocalałych. Lipiec 1940 – marzec 1943* (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych: Trio, 2001); vol. 4: *Echa Katynia. Kwiecień 1943 – marzec 2005* (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych – Wydział Wydawnictw, 2006); *КАТЫНЬ. Пленники необъявленной войны: Док. и материалы*, Серия «Россия. XX век. Документы» (Moscow: МФД, 1997); *КАТЫНЬ. Март 1940 г. – сентябрь 2000 г.: Расстрел. Судьбы живых. Эхо Катynи. Документы* (Moscow: Издательство “Весь Мир,” 2001); and *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, trans. Marian Schwartz, Anna M. Cienciala and Maia A. Kipp (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007).

576 *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4, docs. 131, 522.

577 “Informacja o wynikach pracy Wojskowej Komisji Archiwalnej w archiwach Federacji Rosyjskiej w okresie wrzesień 1992 – czerwiec 1993,” comp. Jan Pięta, in *Biuletyn Wojskowej Służby Archiwalnej*, no. 16 (1993): 41–46.

At the same time, the Katyn investigation conducted since the fall of 1990 by the Main Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation, seemed to be gathering momentum. Even before Prof. Pikhoya arrived in Warsaw, the Russians had intimated that the proceedings would soon be closed, though in a mode which the Poles would find unsatisfactory.⁵⁷⁸ On the other hand, the Russians consented to release the files of Case No. 159, and since the fall of 1992, open access was being granted to the gradually disclosed, extremely important evidence given by Dmitri Tokarev, former head of the NKVD Directorate in Kalinin (now Tver), who was an eyewitness and bystander observing the murders of the Polish POWs from Ostashkov.⁵⁷⁹ Other evidence (or rather a series of answers to about a dozen questions) made public was the testimony of Pyotr Soprunenko, erstwhile head of the NKVD Directorate for POWs.⁵⁸⁰ Access was also given to the extensive, though extremely fraudulent testimony of Mitrofan Syromiatnikov, an officer of the Kharkov NKVD Directorate,⁵⁸¹ as well as several other important documents. The developments of 1992–94 were marked by an openness that had never been observed before on the part of the Russians, neither would it be seen again later.

However, there was no imminent closure to the Katyn investigation. For President Yeltsin, the matter lost its significance once the court proceedings for the delegatization of the Communist Party were over. Moreover, inside the Main Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation, or more precisely between its top officials and the prosecutors investigating the case, a controversy broke out about how to classify the Katyn Atrocity.⁵⁸² Poland's reminder letters requesting the completion of the work on the case were ineffective. The investigation practically ground to a halt and its results were never published. To make matters worse, Anatoly Yablokov, the chief prosecutor who had been showing due diligence in leading the investigation, was suddenly dismissed and the expert opinion which he had commissioned, with its conclusion declaring the Katyn Atrocity "a large-scale war crime which should be treated as an act of genocide,"⁵⁸³ was removed from the records of the investigation and thus

578 General Vyacheslav Frolov, who supervised the investigation, announced that if no living perpetrators of the crime were identified, then under Russian law there would be no trial and the proceedings would be discontinued. Wojciech Materski, "Śledztwo nr 159," 98–99.

579 *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, no. 3 (1994): "Zeżnanie Tokariewa"; *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2, Annex: doc. 2, p. 432–472

580 *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, no. 5 (1995): "II półwiecze zbrodni. Katyń–Twer–Charków," 137–146; *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2, Annex: doc. 1, p. 423–431.

581 *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2, Annex: doc. 3, p. 472–500.

582 Materski, "Śledztwo nr 159," 100.

583 Quoted after *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4, doc. 135, p. 561. For the full document, see *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 4, p. 525–563; *Rosja a Katyń*, p. 48–108.

ceased to be an official document. The investigation was never formally discontinued, but it was shrouded by a veil of silence until the very end of Boris Yeltsin's second presidential term.

One of the hypotheses as to why the Katyn investigation was brought to a standstill says that perhaps the Russian prosecutors assumed that the Polish prisoners and POWs had been murdered in compliance with the principle of "revolutionary purposefulness," which means that in light of the Soviet legislation in force at the time, proceedings concerning the Katyn Massacre could not be filed with a criminal court, neither could the rehabilitation procedure be applied. Even though this explanation seems absurd, it has its supporters, including the well-known historian and journalist Roy Medvedev.⁵⁸⁴

When the investigation ground to a halt, another dismissal occurred: Prof. Pikhoya ceased to be head of the Russian archives and joint chair of the Polish–Russian editorial board for the Katyn documentary project. Prof. Pikhoya had earned the esteem of the Polish members of the board for all the hard work, expertise and integrity he had put into their mutual undertaking.⁵⁸⁵

Regardless of the fact that the Soviet State had officially admitted that it was behind the Katyn Atrocity, and despite the fact that it had conducted an investigation on the matter, Russian publishers and media continued to propagate the lie that the crime had been committed by Germany. Moreover, new publications by persons with academic credentials started to appear, claiming that the contents of Closed Packet No. 1 were forgeries.⁵⁸⁶ On many occasions, Poland urged the Russian institutions to respond to the disinformation, but no official démenti was ever issued.

Clearly, the Russian authorities were not keen to have the truth published about the mass murder of the Polish prisoners and POWs or to repudiate the fabrications by putting the plain facts in history textbooks and academic publications, releasing an official statement or making those who spread disinformation about the Katyn Massacre liable to prosecution. Otherwise they would have prevented the dissemination of scandalously mendacious texts about Katyn such as

584 Cf. Inessa Jąźborowska and Anatolij Jabłokow, "Sprawa kатыńska w Rosji – w ujęciu historycznym i obecnie," in *Jak patrzeć na Polskę, Niemcy i świat? Księga jubileuszowa profesora Eugeniusza Cezarego Króla*, ed. Joanna Szymoniczek (Warszawa: Bellona: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2017), 1004.

585 I had the opportunity to observe this personally.

586 Cf. Andrzej Przewoźnik and Jolanta Adamska, *Katyni. Zbrodnia. Prawda. Pamięć* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2010), 573–574.

Yuri Mukhin's cynical and offensive *Katynskiy detektiv* [The Katyn Detective], which was available even from the newsstand on the premises of the State Duma.⁵⁸⁷

Polish protests against the disinformation, denial of Soviet responsibility for the Katyn Atrocity, and against the anti-Katyn lies bandied about in the Russian media fell on deaf ears. Especially the anti-Katyn campaign went far beyond what could have been expected from journalists or pseudoscientists, and was joined by official State institutions. In a public speech delivered in November 1994 on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Boris Shardakov, Russian consul in Kraków, said, "In 1920, Józef Piłsudski established concentration camps for [Soviet] POWs, both officers and men of the Red Army. 60,000 of them were killed there without a trial, the Poles used some of them as shooting targets . . . Józef Piłsudski is a criminal just like Joseph Stalin."⁵⁸⁸

The calumny, hurled by Shardakov but instigated by Gorbachev, took on a life of its own. It found its way into Russian mass culture, for instance, a popular TV series *Berlinskiy ekspres* [Berlin express train] starring the famous actor Vyacheslav Tikhonov, memorable for his part as SS Standartenführer Max Otto von Stierlitz in *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. The idea that Poland committed genocide against the Soviet POWs was presented in a very evocative way, because over half of the movie resembles a documentary based on original Polish, Soviet, and German newsreels.⁵⁸⁹ *Berlinskiy ekspres*, which has been aired many times, has undoubtedly had a strong impact on the Polish–Russian relations. By reiterat-

587 Yuri Mukhin, *Катынский детектив* (Moscow: Фирма Светотон ЛТД, 1995). See the parliamentary declaration submitted at the 73rd session of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on February 15, 1996, by Parliamentary Deputy Maria Dmochowska (PAP, February 16, 1996) and the Statement of the Independent Historical Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre, February 2, 1996; "Zbrodnia nie ukarana. Katyń–Twer–Charków," *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, no. 6 (1996): 473–475.

588 Quoted after Komorowski and Rawski, *Anty-Katyń. Jeńcy sowieccy w niewoli polskiej*, 13–14.

589 *Берлинский экспрес*, part 1–2, directed by Ravshan Otkirov. Played by Vyacheslav Tikhonov, diplomat Georgiy Astakhov returns by train from Berlin to Moscow on August 22, 1939. On the way, a Polish female intelligence agent is supposed to shoot him, but, captivated by his profoundly humanitarian behavior and discovering the truth about Polish–Soviet relations (the aggressive, anti-Soviet policy pursued by Poland), she does not carry out her orders. One of the reasons is the truth she learns from Astakhov about the fate of 70,000 Red Army prisoners. In 1920, the Polish authorities put them in concentration camps with no food, forcing them to become cannibals. The Poles used those who were still alive in military exercises to simulate an enemy attack, for young Polish soldiers to practice killing enemies in combat-like conditions and become proficient in using weapons—conveniently, practically, and safely. The agent also learns that the Soviet policy is like messianism, because its goal is—to save humanity.

ing and indeed reinforcing the anti-Katyn lies, it contributed to the sustained growth of anti-Polish sentiment and Polonophobia in today's Russia.

However, notwithstanding the slowdown of the Katyn investigation, the repeated lies about Germany committing the crime, and the dissemination of fabricated "facts" on the Polish genocide of the Soviets, Yeltsin's presidency, especially its first term, was marked by an attempt to mitigate historical grievances. That tendency was abruptly cut short on September 14, 1999, when Igor Ivanov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, uttered a statement subsequently widely publicized in the Russian press, that the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland in September 1939 was not an aggressive act at all. His words drew a strong response from Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵⁹⁰

Nonetheless, the progress that was definitely made in allowing access to the post-Soviet archival records of the repressions against ethnic Poles and Polish citizens in general cannot be attributed to a pre-planned project for politics of memory. More likely, it was the result of a relaxation of the previously more stringent practices and a more casual attitude to Soviet crimes, formerly hushed up. However, in the late 1990s, the archives holding information about the criminality of the Communist system were no longer so readily accessible, and after 2000 there was a patent reversal.⁵⁹¹ It is hard not to see this as an outcome of new official guidelines and a change in Russia's policy on (non)admission to records evidencing the darkest chapters in the Soviet past.

Eurasianism

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was paralleled by the disintegration of the ideological, primarily Marxist, foundations of its statehood. The ideological vacuum, as well as the moral and political degradation, made for an urgent need to create a new Russian identity and reinstate a Russian awareness based on historical experience. Admittedly, one could immediately observe attempts to forge a traditionalist ideology rooted in the beliefs from before the Bolshevik Revolution, but they tended to be rather isolated and unofficial. The void was soon filled by geopolitics, which allowed for the definition of the national interest and political goals, placed them in the context of the international balance of powers and po-

⁵⁹⁰ Marek Menkiszak and Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, "Polska polityka wschodnia," in *Polityka zagraniczna RP 1989–2002*, ed. Roman Kuźniar and Krzysztof Szczepanik (Warszawa: Askon: Fundacja Studiów Międzynarodowych, 2002), 239.

⁵⁹¹ I observed this process myself.

tentials, and identified the strategy for Russia's foreign policy.⁵⁹² Later on, as Yeltsin's second term was coming to an end, it was becoming more and more evident that these premises were leading to the idea that Russia should compete for a larger zone of influence and control the post-Soviet territories and neighboring countries. There was a revival of the geographical determinism typical of the past centuries: thinking about the greatness of Russia mainly in the categories of territorial extent and uniting and expanding "the Russian lands."

The keystone of this approach was the concept of the "Eurasian nation," which went back to the idea of a "Eurasian superpower," proposed in the 1920s by Nikolai Alekseev. The concept was receiving more and more support,⁵⁹³ also from the philosopher and historian Alexandr Dugin, its stalwart ideologist and modernizer.⁵⁹⁴ Dugin's writings produced in the 1990s say that Russia should dominate over as large a part of Europe as possible as well as over northern Asia; and they reconcile Communism absolved of all its aberrations with Nationalism. Dugin refers to a mysticism specific for Russia (with its notions of the spirit of the nation, its territory and cultural space), but his thinking goes well beyond the concept of the State, replacing it with "geopolitical potency." He asserts that in the future, Russia is going to emanate far beyond the borders of its "retrieved" Empire and liberate the world from the rule of the Maritime Civilization. It will build an alternative civilization and have the last word in mankind's progress.⁵⁹⁵

Eurasianism not only described the situation of Russia on the threshold of the twenty-first century, but also explained the 1917 Revolution and Bolshevik rule in a way that resonated with the masses as a "result of this country's enforced Europeanization,"⁵⁹⁶ offering Russians the role of an internationally im-

592 Włodzimierz Marciniak, "Mapa i pamięć o imperium." 139–141, 145–146 (this article gives a bibliography of the subject).

593 *Rosja Putina. Leksykon*, ed. Albin Głowacki and Alicja Stepień-Kuczyńska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2004), 109–111. For an extensive discussion, see Paradowski, *Eurazjackie imperium Rosji*; Stanisław Bieleń, *Tożsamość międzynarodowa Federacji Rosyjskiej* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-Jr, 2006).

594 Cf. the following publications by Aleksandr Dugin: *Мистерии Евразии* (Moscow: Арктогея, 1996); *Основы геополитики: геополитическое будущее России* (Moscow: Арктогея, 1997) and its English translation *Foundations of Geopolitics* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 2000), translated from the Russian by Lawless v0, available online at Foundations-of-Geopolitics.pdf (maeutiek.nl), accessed January 25, 2024; "Теория евразийского государства," the Foreword in Nikolay Alekseev, *Русский народ и государство* (Moscow: Аграф, 1998). See also Katarzyna Kaczyńska, "Koncepcja neo-eurazjatyizmu Aleksandra Dugina," *Nowy Prometeusz*, no. 5 (2013): 59–69.

595 For more, see Paradowski, *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji*, e.g. 16–18, 263–265.

596 Eduard Bagramov, "Национальные идеи в евразийском контексте," in *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 71.

portant agency, the guarantor of practically worldwide stability.⁵⁹⁷ To the growing number of its supporters, the modernized version called neo-Eurasianism seemed to be a valid “new approach to the world and Russia’s place in it, . . . an alternative to its complete breakdown.”⁵⁹⁸

One cannot say that Eurasianist thinking resonated with the Russian ruling class. Yet this ideology proved attractive to those who had been privileged under the Communist system and absorbed its imperialist arguments as well as to nationalists, especially the better educated ones. Nikita Mikhalkov, a celebrated actor and director “seduced by the ideas of Eurasianism,” asserted,

Russia is the Eurasian continent It creates a balance between East and West. Russia has always been Eurasia. Russia cannot be lifted up and united just by economic ties. There should be an idea. What idea is it and who are we? Are we an empire? No. Are we a Socialist country? No. Who are we? We are Eurasia. We have had, we have, and I suppose we shall always have our own, Eurasian way Today, in our native land, the beatific (*blagotvornye*) ideas of Eurasianism can actually be put into practice.⁵⁹⁹

As the proponents of Eurasianism reconcile their geopolitical program with the myth of Holy Russia and the idea of *Russkiy mir*, they are backed by the Orthodox Church, which favors their vision of Russia because it harmoniously combines Russian statehood with the stable social values of multi-ethnic Russia/Eurasia, which have been shaped by the country’s history, including the Soviet period, prioritizing spirituality, moral purification, social equality, and personal freedom.⁶⁰⁰ The Orthodox Church believes that the concept of Eurasianism demonstrates the spiritual superiority of Russia, which stands in opposition to the new universalist world order, propelled by the inherently valueless Western consumerism and American imperialist interests.

The advocates of Eurasianism, especially Dugin, said that the successful implementation of their ideas hinged on Russia’s close cooperation—be it political, economic, or military—with the most important European country, that is Germany, on the operations of the Moscow–Berlin geopolitical axis. Conditions for

597 In the narrower sense of geopolitical discourse, “Eurasia” is “the area of Russian political, economic and cultural domination,” Konrad Świder, “Od imperium do geopolityki: rosyjskie geopolityczne racjonalizacje Rosji,” in Jadwiga Staniszkis, Włodzimierz Marciniak, and Konrad Świder, *Selekularyzacja myślenia politycznego w Rosji. Przejście od religijnej idei „właściwego istnienia” do koncepcji imperium i geopolityki* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2016), 123.

598 *Ibid.*, 71–72.

599 “«Мы – Евразия» Беседа с Никитой Михалковым. Ведет поэт Эдмунд Едковский,” *Континент* (Paris; Moscow), no. 70 (1992): 320, https://vtoraya-literatura.com/pdf/kontinent_070_1992_text.pdf, accessed November 20, 2024.

600 Bagramov, “Национальные идеи в евразийском контексте,” 87.

such a project were not propitious in Yeltsin's first term. In particular, the senior military fascinated with Dugin played a lesser role in the state.

At least until 1994, the Russian authorities seemed to acquiesce to the status of a junior partner granted to their country by the United States. But when the US administration firmly rejected the Russian suggestion that all the post-Soviet territories should be turned into Moscow's zone of influence and home ground—when Washington refused to condone a Russian version of the Monroe Doctrine—Russia changed its global strategy. It started to endorse a multiaxial model of the world and counter the hegemony of the United States. This attitude came much closer to Dugin's thinking.

In this context, the Russian politics of memory witnessed a return of the postulate that the country should recover its status based on the myth of Holy Russia. The idea was promoted explicitly by the nationalists,⁶⁰¹ but it was also upheld in a less clear-cut form, without outright references to Russia's historical mission and messianism, by the authorities. The myth of Holy Russia was expected both to strengthen the conviction that Russia would restore its abruptly forfeited position as a superpower, and bring about the cultural reintegration of the post-Soviet space.

It was also spread abroad as part of the effort to defend (or more precisely propagate) the idea of the Russian world. In the early 1990s, both these concepts, *Svyataya Rus'* and *Russkiy mir*, recurred frequently in the language of the Orthodox Church and the Russian state institutions, and referred to the inhabitants of the Russian Federation and the Russian diaspora in other countries as well as to Orthodox Christians in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. The foundations on which this construct rests, together with the entire politics of memory promoted by the Russian Church, are Orthodox Christianity and the Russian language and culture, all of them viewed in diachronic continuity, from the origins of Rus' to the present, including the Soviet period partly absolved of its crimes.⁶⁰²

Without doubt, a more serious problem facing Yeltsin and his ministry was how to respond to the concepts offered by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a Nobel Prize winner and former dissident who in May 1994 decided to come home from the United States in the guise of a prophet. On his return, he was welcomed with full pomp and circumstance by President Yeltsin and began to bear himself as an unassailable authority. His miscellaneous lectures, publications, and a TV show of his own contributed to ideological discussion in Russia as well as to the Russian politi-

601 Michał Soska, *Za Świętą Rus'. Współczesny nacjonalizm rosyjski – zarys ideologii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von Borowiecky, 2009), 10ff.

602 Cf. Ała Matreńczyk, "Jednoczy nas matka ruskich miast," *Przegląd Prawosławny*, no. 8 (2008): 32–33; Andrzej Grajewski, "Russkij mir," *Gość Niedzielny*, no. 3, January 19, 2014.

cal thinking embracing nationalist concepts rooted in Pan-Slavism (“non-chauvinistic nationalism”). Solzhenitsyn severely deprecated the Soviet system: it was guilty of many crimes and had devastated the nation physically, morally, and intellectually. He described it as cosmopolitan and anti-Russian, which was actually what Lenin had wanted for Russia. Solzhenitsyn said that the goals that Lenin had identified for the country soon brought the demise and dissipation of the best of Russia had to offer.

In his manifesto-like text *Rebuilding Russia*, which was published still before his return home, Solzhenitsyn claimed that the Russians, left politically perplexed after decades of Communism, needed a strong, centralized system of government to move forward to the task of reconstructing their State and making it as powerful as it was destined to be thanks to its tradition and mission. He argued that under the Soviet Empire, first Russia and next the Slavic republics were the ones that had been the most ruthlessly exploited, whereas the other republics grew at their cost, undermining the Russian and other Slavic nations, and sapping their strength.⁶⁰³ Russia should stand up in opposition to the bad influence of Western culture, Solzhenitsyn said, return to the traditional religious piety of the Russian folk, and, on the foundation of Orthodox Christianity, integrate the Slavic ethnic family—Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and northern Kazakhstan.⁶⁰⁴ The Asian and Transcaucasian republics had been leeching off the nations of Rus’ for too long: they should be weaned and learn to fend for themselves. The nation of Rus’, which had been forcibly divided, first by the Mongols and subsequently by the Polish colonizers, into Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, should restore its unity and build up “a Great Russia of Eastern Slavdom.”

It is rather unlikely that Solzhenitsyn’s historiosophical views could have been a problem for Yeltsin. Russia’s President never expressed his opinion on the matter, but in all probability he did not mind the writer’s naïve monarchism, attachment to the symbolism of his native land (*pochva*), fascination with folk piety, and ideas on the historical unity of the Slavs. Yeltsin was himself in favor of the integration of the Slavic countries, evidence of which was provided, for instance, by the establishment of the International Slavic Academy of Sciences, Edu-

603 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Как нам обустроить Россию?,” *Литературная газета*, no. 38 (1990) (специальный выпуск); see Solzhenitsyn’s views on the future of Russia and the Slavic region in his article, “Русский вопрос к концу XX века,” *Новый Мир*, no. 7 (1994): 135–176. For the English translation of this article, see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals* (Vintage/Ebury, 1991).

604 See Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*, 93; Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 369.

cation, Art, and Culture in May 1992.⁶⁰⁵ However, he could have felt personally offended when Solzhenitsyn started criticizing the processes going on in Russia more and more bitterly, complaining that the opportunities to cure the country which had emerged after the disintegration of the Soviet Union were being wasted, and deploring the reforms, which apparently ran counter to the Russian national character. Yeltsin's prestige was scorned when Solzhenitsyn refused to receive Russia's highest honor from the hands of a president who, apparently, had "pushed his country to the brink of disaster."⁶⁰⁶

The writer summed up his views of the matter in his essay *Russia in Collapse*, which could hardly be interpreted as anything but a devastating critique of the direction in which the country was being taken during Yeltsin's presidency.⁶⁰⁷ Solzhenitsyn castigated not only the chaotic, ill-considered reforms, in particular the economically improvident privatization, but also the non-action leading to demographic disaster, political passivity during the war in the Balkans following the split-up of Yugoslavia and the troubles in Chechnya.⁶⁰⁸ President Yeltsin must have been appalled when Solzhenitsyn said that during his presidency Russia was a "pirate country under a democratic flag" and a platform for "government-level plunder."⁶⁰⁹ No wonder that Solzhenitsyn soon lost his regular TV show and no longer featured on any of the official channels.⁶¹⁰

Initially, the writer's very firmly expressed opinions were gaining more and more popularity among his compatriots. But gradually they lost their appeal, because they were shockingly moralizing and magisterial, and evidently divorced from reality.

605 The Academy's founding members were Russia, Serbia and Transnistria. Its first president was the economist and statistician Prof. Boris Isakov, who was succeeded in 2015 by the lawyer Prof. Sergei Baburin.

606 Quoted after Adam Krzemiński, "Solżenicyn czyli dwie dusze Rosji," *Polityka*, August 14, 2008.

607 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Россия в обвале* (Moscow: Русский путь, 1998). For the English translation, see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Russia in Collapse*, trans. Olga M. Cooke (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, 2004).

608 In *Russia in Collapse*, Solzhenitsyn argues that to heal itself, Russia should "amputate the degenerated member of its body," i.e. withdraw from Chechnya.

609 Quoted after *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 595, 713.

610 Cf. Piotr Głuszkowski, "Solżenicyn – śmierć proroka," *Pressje*, file 15 (2009): "Wschód – strategia czy obsesja?" 18.

Yeltsin straitjacketed

In the 1996 election (held on June 16, with the second round on July 3), Yeltsin won his second term, defeating Gennady Zyuganov, the candidate of the Russian Communist Party. Yeltsin notched up a success even though the opinion polls had initially suggested he could not win and a feeling of dissatisfaction prevailed among the general public, tired of inefficient reforms and hence nostalgic for the Soviet past. His success was earned thanks to a colossal effort by his propaganda machine, especially television hyping him up as a nationalist politician focused on the restoration of Russia's status as a superpower. His profile had been redesigned on the basis of voters' preferences. Another secret behind Yeltsin's victory was that he had hired foreign specialists as members of his campaign team and secured an immense amount of financial support from the oligarchs who feared the Communists might seize power again.

And so, the ailing President, who was starting to resemble Brezhnev more and more, both physically and intellectually, diseased and struggling with his alcohol problem, stayed in office. Yet the real power was taken over by his Family, that is the people around him in the Kremlin, who reaped fat profits from the ongoing privatization of state-owned business.⁶¹¹

Constantly perturbed by unofficial factions competing against each other, devised and collapsed Ponzi schemes, mafias settling accounts with one another, and corporate groups operating in the gray zone between politics and business, Russia was set on course for economic, social, and moral disaster. A radical attempt was made in August 1998 to jump off that course with extraordinary measures: a floating exchange rate for the ruble; the currency was redenominated, losing about 80% of its value in relation to the US dollar; and the state announced it was temporarily unable to redeem its GKO (*Gosudarstvennye kaznacheskyye obyazatelstva*) short-term treasury bonds. These steps brought only a marginal improvement to the situation, but the social costs were enormous.

Russian society became apathetic and turned its back on the corrupt world of politics. Support for the President went into steady decline and by mid-1999 had plummeted to below 2%. The opinion polls had never been so shattering, not even for Gorbachev at the end of his political career.

⁶¹¹ "More and more often when making decisions, he was guided by the interests of the family clan, not the state," Korzhakov, *Борис Ельцин: от рассвета до заката*, 359.

On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin announced his resignation.⁶¹² He appointed Vladimir Putin, who had been serving as prime minister since August 1999, to deputize for him until the next presidential election. Characteristically, the new president's first move was to grant Yeltsin and his family immunity, which was unprecedented in the history of democratic systems.⁶¹³ Thus, Yeltsin's presidency, which had been riddled with corruption and embezzlement, and had spawned a caste of oligarchs, was acquitted for the price of succession to the throne.

Boris Yeltsin had come to power with slogans of democratizing the political system and returning to the source of Russian democracy, that is its government after the Revolution of February 1917. Due to his inconsistent reforms, incoordinate policies, inept co-workers, intellectual shortcomings, and debilitating alcoholism, he had to resign, having forsaken his original goals. He did not manage to delegalize the Communist Party; the top echelons of the former KGB, officially disbanded in November 1991, survived practically unscathed, and an ex-KGB officer was appointed by Yeltsin to be his successor.⁶¹⁴ A new, powerful group of oligarchs appeared and looted the national economy without scruple, while Yeltsin's family and colleagues were up to their necks in the scandal. The nationalist movements gathered strength and the Russian mafia grew extremely influential, not only at home but also abroad.

612 86 % of the respondents in a public opinion poll supported Yeltsin's decision to resign from the presidency before his term ended, while over 8% had no opinion on the matter. *История России. XX век: 1939–2007*, 620.

613 Указ от 31 декабря 1999 г. N 1763 *О гарантиях президенту Российской Федерации, прекратившему исполнение своих полномочий, и членам его семьи*, <http://www.aif.ru/dont-knows/file/1475256>, webpage unavailable on November 20, 2024. This document is also referred to as Decree No. 1 issued by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation. Cf. Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 329. Significantly, in December 1991, Yeltsin provided “personal guarantees,” although with a different, more political scope, to Gorbachev when he was resigning, *ibid.*, 362.

614 “Power was taken over in Russia by a special services corporation personalized by Vladimir Putin,” Świder, *Od imperium do geopolityki*, 124.

Chapter Six

The twenty-first century and Vladimir Putin

A vision of a Eurasian Superpower

When Vladimir Putin assumed power, he outlined his vision of how he would exercise it and his strategy for the development of his state, basing his ideas on a selection of historical experiences to legitimize Russia's right to the status of a superpower. He presented his ideas in a political manifesto entitled "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium."⁶¹⁵ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who had a conversation with President Putin shortly after he came to power, was highly impressed by the main points in this document. He saw Putin as his "ideal of a politician—a new Stolypin."⁶¹⁶ According to some political scientists and commentators, this meeting made a crucial impact on Putin's political strategy and prompted him to adopt and assimilate Solzhenitsyn's vision of the prospective empire, which would consist of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the northern part of Kazakhstan.⁶¹⁷

Nonetheless, it would be hard to speak of a well-knit and fairly comprehensive politics of memory conducted by Putin in the initial period after he took power. The beginning of his memory politics is generally dated to the campaign preceding the sixtieth anniversary of the victory in World War II (2005), while his politics of memory exercised on a mass scale engaging not only propaganda instruments but also "the rest of the State's administrators" is usually dated to no earlier than "around 2011."⁶¹⁸

615 www.artbedev.ru/tools/decoder/. For more, see Marian Broda, "Putinowskie antidotum," in *Rosja w okresie prezydentury Władimira Putina*, ed. Alicja Stępień-Kuczyńska and Stanisław Bieleń (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008). For an English translation, see Putin on RUS-SIA & MILLENNIUM (uoregon.edu, accessed November 20, 2024).

616 Gluszkowski, "Solzhenitsyn – śmierć proroka," 19. Despite his subsequent disappointment, Solzhenitsyn was fascinated by Putin, and until the end of his life (2008) he was proud that "under Putin, the nation began to remember what it means to be a Russian," quoted after Piotr Skwieciński, "Zmienia się mądrość etapu – Solzhenitsyn przestaje się podobać putinowcom," <http://wpolityce.pl/swiat/215696>, accessed November 20, 2024.

617 Cf. Peter Eltsov and Klaus Larres, "Will Eastern Ukraine and Northern Kazakhstan Be Next?" *The New Republic*, March 11, 2014; Peter Eltsov and Klaus Larres, "Putin realizuje wizję wielkiej Rosji Solzhenitsyna?" *Polonia Christiana*, March 13, 2014; <https://pch24.pl/putin-realizuje-wizje-wielkiej-rosji-solzhenitsyna/>, accessed November 20, 2024.

618 Историческая политика в современной России. Путь в «сужающемся тоннеле»? Исторические ассоциации и историческая политика трех кремлевских сроков: от травм к гордости — и обратно, June 22, 2016, <https://gefter.ru/archive/19060>, accessed November 20, 2024 (opinion expressed by the philosopher and journalist Prof. Mikhail Nemtsov).

To implement the strategic aim enshrined in his manifesto, that is to restore a centralized, efficiently administered Russia to the status of a superpower, which it had a right to by virtue of its “historic potential” and “spiritual dimension” thanks to a tradition going back many centuries, Putin first had to consolidate Russian power, which had been seriously undermined during Yeltsin’s presidency. That is why in his first months in office Putin concentrated on the technology of politics, building up a system of “controlled” or “sovereign” democracy, implicitly entailing a show-down with the oligarchs, regional big-shots, members of the Yeltsin clan, generals with political aspirations, the mafia, and the preponderance of bureaucracy.⁶¹⁹ Only once he had dealt with these matters could he proceed to the next stage, economic and financial affairs, putting a stop to the impending disaster.

Nevertheless, even in this period we may observe certain motifs in his public speeches indicative of a revision of the politics of memory practiced hitherto. The first domestic aspect to be noticed was a rejection of his predecessor’s approach to the Communist Party and the entire Soviet period. From the viewpoint of foreign relations, there was a return to the historical narrative which had been present in the Russian politics of memory for centuries: the claim that Russia/the USSR was beleaguered by foreign antagonists who wanted to weaken its international status, depreciate its achievements, and attack its prestige. This narrative has always been welcomed and well received by the people of Russia because, as sociologists have argued, it concurs with the polarized, dichotomizing view of matters and problems derived from the Russian Orthodox religious substrate. This tendency on the part of Russian society as a whole to see things in opposition to each other has been invoked in attempts to explain the social acceptance accorded Putin, who is largely perceived by the average Russian as a man who came from nowhere. Discernible ever since the beginning of his presidency, Putin’s social acceptance may be accounted for by the fact that he embodies the hopes ordinary Russians nurture for an end to the chaos and uncertainty of the previous decade.⁶²⁰

A specific feature of the Russian politics of memory since 2000 has been the effort it has made to maintain as much control as possible over the post-Soviet territories. Russia has been using historical arguments to put pressure on the European countries and the USA to respect the agreements reached in the 1990s concerning their policy on Russia and its special rights regarding its “Near Abroad” (*ближнее зарубежье*), that is the countries created in outcome of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

619 Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 430–432.

620 Marian Broda, “*Zrozumieć Rosję?*”, 202–203.

Russia has intensified its policy of trying to make Europe and the USA acknowledge that it still has a *droit de regard*, certain privileges, rights which it enjoyed in the early 1990s, over the territory of the former Soviet Union. This tendency came to the fore in a particularly explicit manner in the summer of 2008 during the Georgian crisis and in 2014 after the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

These special rights have been an important point on the agenda Russia has been pursuing for more than a decade in its politics of memory and vision of its future as a state in the international context. Putin has employed his picture of the post-Soviet countries to mount his *idée fixe* of a Eurasian Union. The first step he made in this direction was to set up a customs union. The group of East European and Asian countries correlated under the auspices of Moscow is to act as a counterbalance of sorts, an eastern equivalent of the European Union.⁶²¹

Until the fall of 2013, Putin's key task was to try to win the approval of Kyiv, which was continually dithering between Moscow and Brussels. In his original draft, the scheme would be pointless if Kyiv did not join. Hence his brutal reaction to the events in Kyiv after November 2013: the Maidan Revolution, domestic unrest, and the fall of President Yanukovich, Russia's annexation of Crimea and violation of international order, followed by its instigation of war in southeast Ukraine (or "New Russia," as the region is called by Russian chauvinists)—all this left the world stunned.

Russia's politics of memory was one of the key points in its arsenal of arguments for isolating Ukraine off from Europe/the EU and connecting it to Russia. This argument highlighted the myth of Holy Rus' and the community of Slavic peoples in its age-old confrontation with the West. It would be hard to assess whether Yanukovich let himself be drawn into Putin's game with history, or whether it was couched within the tactics of sitting on the fence characteristic of his presidency. It was not until his overthrow that Putin decided to establish his Eurasian Economic Union. This he did with Ukraine in a state of permanent crisis and no prospects to keep the new Ukrainian government under his control. On May 29, 2014, in Astana, he signed the agreement for the new organization with Belarus and Kazakhstan, so it was a rather stunted version of the original scheme.⁶²²

621 For more on this topic, see Aleksandr Morozov, *Путин, Сталин, Чингисхан – герои Евразии*, <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/tsennosti/234013-putin-stalin-chingishan-geroi-evrazii>, accessed November 20, 2024.

622 Signed by Putin, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Alexander Lukashenko, the document states that the Union will start operations after its ratification by the three countries. This was expected to take place in 2015 (information from PAP, the Polish Press Agency, May 30, 2014). Indeed, enlarged by Armenia, which acceded in October 2014, and Kyrgyzstan (acceded in December 2014), the Union started operations on January 1, 2015.

This vision of his for a novel form of integration, or rather control, was why Putin so adamantly tried to stifle Ukraine's attempts to establish closer contacts with Europe. To do this, before resorting to military force, he used every opportunity he could,⁶²³ chiefly by manipulating the price of Russia's natural gas. As we know, pressure from Moscow eventually blocked the ratification of Kyiv's *de facto* successful negotiations and already signed association agreement with the EU and the free trade agreement which had been concluded on November 29, 2013 in Vilnius, causing a vast amount of turmoil in Ukraine.

After the fall of Yanukovich, Russia started to treat Ukraine as a country ruled by a hostile fascist regime which was oppressing the people, and the problems associated with this constituted a serious stumbling block for the politics of memory he was trying to construct on the claim of Slavic unity. The Eurasian concept gained currency and harmonized with Russia's new ideology, which was to collect up the Russian territories, reintegrate and subordinate not only the post-Soviet area but also the countries of the former Yalta sphere. Initially, the subordination was to concern chiefly dependence on Russia for raw materials. The patent, socially differentiated reception of this idea, mainly concerning opinion-shaping groups and the intelligentsia, is probably due to misgivings whether it would be practicable in the formula in which it has been presented: concern whether the target "Eurasia" would not in fact be travestied as an "Asiope."⁶²⁴

Moreover, the Eurasia concept is perceived as more than just the integration of the nations and national groups making up the Russian Federation, but as the restoration and reinforcement of Russian control over the post-Soviet territory, not only by soft means such as propaganda, mass culture, and widely accessible TV channels, but also forcibly. This has been amply proved by Russia's war against Georgia and seizure of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two of the provinces of Georgia; as well as by the annexation of Crimea, the troubles in eastern Ukraine, and the maintenance of Russian troops in Transnistria, which has been going on for well over a decade.

These brutal operations against post-Soviet countries are enjoying popular support, as evidenced by Putin's continually high rating, which has risen after

⁶²³ He had been doing this from the beginning of his first term. Cf. Michał Słowikowski, "Miejsce i rola Wspólnoty Niepodległych Państw w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej," in *Rosja między współczesnością a historią*, 18–27.

⁶²⁴ Broda, *Zrozumieć Rosję*, 218. For more on the concept of "Asiope," see Marian Broda, *Mentalność, tradycja i bolszewicko-komunistyczne doświadczenie Rosji*, 98ff.

each of these operations. By the end of 2016 it had reached 90%, an unprecedented level never recorded for any other leader.⁶²⁵

The myth of Slavic Orthodox religious unity

The myth of a united anti-Western Slavic community rooted in a mutually shared Eastern Orthodox Christian substrate is far more manifest in today's Russia than the nineteenth-century Pan-Slavist slogans, though they still enjoy a place of their own in Russia's current politics of memory. The United Slavdom myth is a tried and tested tool, proven effective for the winning over and rallying of Russia's home population, especially in the *glubinka* (provinces), as well as for its impact in Ukraine and to a somewhat lesser extent in Belarus, damping down the intention of the inhabitants of those two countries to join the rest of Europe, with which they have no mutual ties of religion. The practical implementation of this line of impact has been seriously hampered in Ukraine, its chief target, owing to the annexation of Crimea, which started with the Little Green Men stage and gradually progressed to a full-scale invasion with the use of heavy weapons.

Not so long ago, the United Slavdom myth, which has been knocking around in Putin's politics of memory since the start of his presidency, gained a new propaganda instrument in the form of the magazine *Slavyane*, which has been reactivated and started coming out again in November 2013 as the official periodical of the International Slavic Academy of Sciences, Education, Art, and Culture founded in May 1992.⁶²⁶ The new Academy is an institutional emanation created by "patriotic circles" and effectively enjoying the support of the Russian government, presumably on account of the nostalgia for the Soviet era it shares with President Putin.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁵ Putin's ratings have fluctuated recently: 83 % (Levada Center, March 2015); 89 % (Levada Center, June 2015); 73 % (Levada Center, March 2016); 90 % (VCIOM, Russian Public Opinion Research Center, October 2016). The independent sociological and marketing research organization founded by Yuri Levada (1930–2006), and run by Lev Gudkov, was put on the list of "foreign agents" (because it had a grant from the United States) in June 2016. Its research was practically suspended.

⁶²⁶ The magazine was published in 1942–1958. See Chapter Two, Footnote 234.

⁶²⁷ This Academy was founded "как ответная реакция на Беловежский заговор государственных преступников Ельцина, Кравчука и Шушкевича, на осуществлённый ими и подготовленный перевёртышами-предателями развал Советского Союза с целью противостоять процессам распада нашей Великой Державы, которую наши мужественные предки в течение тысячелетия бережно собирали, складывали по кирпичику, укрепляли и передали нам, своим потомкам [in response to the Belovezha conspiracy plotted by state criminals Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Shushkevich, for the collapse of the Soviet Union that they carried out and two-faced traitors had prepared. The Academy's task is to resist processes leading to the collapse of our Great Power, which our courageous

Slavic unity and the brotherhood of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus was the motto for the celebrations to mark the sixty-fifth anniversary of Victory Day, which President Dmitry Medvedev held in a new way. He organized a private meeting for a closed circle of veterans and Presidents Yanukovych and Lukashenko, heads of state of “fraternal Slavic countries.” On the day before the military parade, all three Presidents rode along the streets of Moscow in a convertible limo, to the Alexander Gardens for the unveiling ceremony of the Memorial to the Hero Cities. Each of the 14 blocks of granite making up the memorial was decorated with the St. George Ribbon,⁶²⁸ a symbolic mark of respect for the heroes of the 1941–1945 war, and of the continuity in Russia’s military tradition.⁶²⁹

The most spectacular instance of this policy were the celebrations for the one thousand and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’. On his way for the celebration in Kyiv, Putin said outright that during his discussion with Presidents Yanukovych and Lukashenko,⁶³⁰ he would “hold talks . . . to discuss bilateral cooperation, especially trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties, and exchange views on current integration collaboration underway in Eurasia.”⁶³¹

The celebrations culminated on July 25, 2013, with a meeting Putin held in the Kremlin with the patriarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and other local Orthodox Churches. At this meeting, he said,

The moral foundations of the Orthodox faith played a major role in the formation of our national character and the mentality of Russia’s peoples, revealing the best creative qualities of

ancestors assiduously built up for over a millennium, laying it brick by brick, strengthening and passing it down to us, their descendants]” said B.L. Isakov, President of the International Slavic Academy of Sciences, Moscow, see his article in *Знание – власть!*, http://znanie-vlast.ru/publ/kruglye_stoly/rossija_belarus/isakov_b_i_doktor_ehkonomicheskikh_nauk_prezident_mezhdunarodnoj_slavjanskoj_akademii_nauk_g_moskva/4-1-0-11, website not available on November 20, 2024.

628 The Saint George Ribbon (*георгиевская ленточка*), a miniature of the ribbon with three black and two orange stripes which is an integral part of the Cross of Saint George. Copies of the Ribbon were distributed free of charge in the streets of Russian cities, mainly in Moscow, on May 9, 2005 (Victory Day) to commemorate the heroes of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945. The Cross of Saint George (since 1913 the Decoration of the Military Order of Saint George) was founded in 1807 as a decoration for bravery and valor, awarded to lower ranks and junior officers; abolished in 1917.

629 *РНА Новосту* [*RIA Novosti*], May 8, 2010; www.dni.ru/society/2010/5/8/191261.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

630 Lukashenko absented himself and did not turn up in Kyiv. Consequently, Putin refused to attend the next round of celebrations, held in Minsk, July 29–30; Patriarch Kirill went on his own, <http://charter97.org.ru/news/2013/7/30/73044>, page not available on November 20, 2024; see PAP, July 30, 2013.

631 Official English translation on the website of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin will make a working visit to Ukraine • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed February 8, 2024.

our nation, helping Russia hold a dignified place among the European and global civilisations. Orthodoxy has become a spiritual buttress for the Russian state and for our national consciousness, uniting Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus through strong bonds of brotherhood.⁶³²

A former senior officer of the KGB, an organization known for its antireligious operations, Putin felt that henceforth he was predestined to make statements of this kind. In the documentary on “the second baptism of Russia,” which was broadcast on state television in connection with the anniversary, he unexpectedly revealed that when he was a child he was secretly baptized, so he is a member of “the great family of Russian Orthodox Christians.”⁶³³

After the events held in Moscow with a great deal of pomp and circumstance, President Putin and Patriarch Kirill traveled to Kyiv to attend another round of celebrations. In his Kievan speech, Putin said,

This is a shared celebration for our brotherly peoples and an important event for Orthodox Christians around the world . . . Strong humanitarian and spiritual ties are a firm foundation for Russian–Ukrainian friendship. It has been built over the course of many centuries, and together, we have lived through the most difficult trials, tribulations and tragedies. But we were also together as we built and protected our common Fatherland, Great Rus.⁶³⁴

This and similar statements made by Putin showed his Eurasian Union as one of his strategic aims in the post-Soviet dimension. A political elaboration of the idea of a United Slavdom based on a common Eastern Orthodox Christian genealogy, its distinct and separate civilization and its moral superiority—in light of such utterances, the concept appears to be no less than a new embodiment of the *Rus-skiy mir* idea I discussed in the previous chapter.

632 Official English translation on the website of the President of Russia, Meeting with representatives of different Orthodox Patriarchates and Churches • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed February 8, 2024.

633 Official English translation on the website of the President of Russia, Interview for the documentary film *The Second Baptism of Rus* • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed February 8, 2024. Entitled *Фильм митрополита Илариона “ВТОРОЕ КРЕЩЕНИЕ РУСИ,”* the documentary was presented by Hilarion, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, and broadcast on July 22, on the Russia 1 TV channel. This “Second Baptism” referred to the past 25 years of the “renaissance of Orthodoxy in Russia.”

634 Official English translation on the website of the President of Russia, Meeting with members of Holy Synod of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed February 8, 2024. In Ukraine, Putin’s speech was considered controversial and challenged, for instance, by Andriy Ilyenko, a deputy who protested in the Ukrainian parliament against the “imposition of Russian holy days on Ukraine.” After a report published by the PAP Polish Press Agency on July 27, 2013.

The State's effort to get the Russian Orthodox Church to join in its politics of memory met with full approval from the Church hierarchy. Both the former Patriarch Alexy II as well the present incumbent Kirill have made an enthusiastic contribution, especially as regards Ukraine, for which the Russian Patriarchy is competing against the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. The Patriarch of Moscow is present at important anniversary events alongside the President or Prime Minister and makes an address in line with State policy. Conversely, the President and Premier have been regularly attending religious ceremonies celebrated for special occasions in the Cathedral of the Dormition or the Church of Christ the Savior. Every time they appear at one of these services, a full transmission of the event is broadcast on the main channels of Russian State Television.⁶³⁵

In response, the Church has taken care to distance itself off from issuing a clear-cut condemnation of the Soviet period, which was so very traumatic for it. Sometimes it has even gone well beyond what the State's politics of memory might expect of it in vindicating those times. For example, in an account of the last forty years of the Soviet regime, Alexy II failed to mention any defects in the operations of its socioeconomic system, and instead of blaming the State's absurd economic policy and totalitarian character for the people's low standard of living, said it was due to the State maintaining "left-wing governments and movements all around the world, which gave rise to a significant drop in our people's standard of living."⁶³⁶ In other words, the Russian Orthodox Church has managed to accept the State's (bygone) political system and has only wondered whether it was worthwhile (or expedient in terms of costs) to promote it worldwide.

Credit for pioneering the strict collaboration between Church and State is not due to Putin himself; their current joint work is merely a continuation of an effort that started when Andropov was First Secretary and later attenuated during Yeltsin's presidency. The Patriarchy, which was riddled by the KGB—every bishop had to be a KGB man—served as an outright supporting tool for the government, and had a fairly administrative nature, serving mainly to combat religious groups which did not belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ I had the occasion to watch such events. Joint State and Church ceremonies were held, for example, on the quartercentenary of the end of the *Smuta* (Time of Troubles) and the quartercentenary of the accession of the Romanov dynasty; every year there is a joint celebration of National Unity Day. Russian TV regularly broadcasts annual services attended by the President and Premier at Easter and for the Russian New Year (Old New Year).

⁶³⁶ Святейший Патриарх Московский и всея Руси Алексий II. Столетие трагедии, Столетие надежд," in *Россия на рубеже XXI века: оглядываясь на век минувший*, ed. Yuri Polyakov (Moscow: Наука, 2000), 32.

⁶³⁷ "The Orthodox Church is simply one of the State's ideological institutions, completely subordinated to its policies." *Putin wants a history embracing the Tsar, Stalin and Yeltsin*. See Jakub

In gratitude for the monopoly it has been granted in religious affairs, the Russian Orthodox Church always and everywhere voices its support for the President, and Patriarch Kirill I has even declared that the fact that Putin has been in office for well over a decade is a benefit for the nation, a veritable “miracle” granted by God.⁶³⁸

One of the manifestations of this close cooperation was the canonization of Nicholas II, the last tsar, “savior and new martyr” (*iskupitel i novomuchennik*), along with the other members of his family murdered as “holy tsarist sufferers” (*tsarstvenniye strastoteprtsy*).⁶³⁹ The ceremony was held in August 2000 and received with approval by the secular authorities, albeit not from some of the Orthodox theologians, one of the objections being the question whether the killing of Nicholas II was a martyrdom in the religious sense, or a political “martyrdom.” For obvious reasons, Yekaterinburg’s Church of All the Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land, known as “the Church on Blood,” was appointed as the official pilgrimage center for the veneration of the new saints.⁶⁴⁰

Later, however, the last tsar receded into the background of Russia’s contemporary politics of memory, or in practice withdrawn. It was not until 2015 that the people of Russia were again reminded of Nicholas II, when he became the patron of Moscow Technical University of Communications and Informatics. Interestingly, his predecessors honored as the University’s patrons were Stalin (1946–1961), followed by Dzerzhinsky (1988–1992).⁶⁴¹

Occasionally, during Putin’s presidency the Russian politics of memory has availed itself of subjects involving the Russian Orthodox Church and persons associated with it in rather unexpected contexts. On February 1, 2013, during a discussion of tasks on the government’s agenda presented at a meeting with Patriarch Kirill and members of the Arkhiyereyskiy Sobor of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin stressed the need for the Church’s active participation in the achievement of these tasks. In his opinion, the Church has a lot to say, not only in social affairs but also in matters concerning the building up of the patriotic spirit, which is the source of the power of the authentic, “true Russia of history, the Rus-

Majmurek’s interview with Ilya Budraitskis, a researcher and activist from Moscow, www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/rosja/20150116, 3, accessed November 20, 2024.

638 <http://www.pch24.pl/odrodzenie-cerkwi-w-rosji,6873,i.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

639 The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) canonized Nicholas II and his family in 1981, but the Russian Orthodox Church did not recognize its authority to do this. In 2003, ROCOR reunited with the Russian Orthodox Church.

640 The Monastery of the Holy Imperial Passion Bearers (Монастырь в честь Святых Царственных Страстотерпцев) was erected on the site of Ganina Yama, a deep pit in the Four Brothers mine, the place where the bodies of the Romanov family were buried.

641 Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 32.

sia of Minin and Pozharsky, Dmitry Donskoy and Alexander Nevsky, St Serguis of Radonezh and St Serphim of Sarov, that defeated Nazism and saved the world.”⁶⁴²

This medley explicates the victory of 1945, attributing it to the patronage and intercession of saints of the Russian Orthodox Church. What is particularly striking is the inclusion of St. Seraphim of Sarov in the pantheon of patrons of the Red Army. Seraphim was canonized in the early twentieth century,⁶⁴³ and a number of his prophecies have come true to an amazing degree of accuracy.⁶⁴⁴ Putin considered it expedient to remind Russian society of him, since one of his prophecies predicted that a period of splendor and a great revival would start for Russia in the early twenty-first century (2003), precisely at the time of Putin’s presidency.

Manipulating episodes from Russia’s early history

Since the start of Putin’s first period in office as president, victory in World War II, the chief component of Russia’s propaganda and politics of memory, has been augmented with items drawn from the country’s early history. They have been recalled mainly in the context of their anniversaries, with emphasis on their mythicized content to incorporate them in the people’s awareness of the superiority of the Russian State and Nation. Putin’s neo-imperial course for Russia’s restoration to the rank of a superpower has called for an appreciation by society at large of the magnificent historic legacy it has inherited.

Social attunement to this tradition, which was accorded a very meager presence in the knowledge most Russians living in the twentieth century had of their history, has been systematically enhanced since 2000 and focused on a meticulous selection of tableaux from Russia’s history, including episodes for its earliest years. There have been numerous projects, both on the regional and national scale, undertaken within this mode of reviving historical identity. One of them is the series

642 Official English translation on the website of the President of Russia, Meeting with delegates to the Bishops’ Council • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed February 8, 2024.

643 St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833), was a monk, ascetic and “holy elder,” from the Sarov Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God. He is one of the most important figures in the history of Russian Orthodox spirituality. For more, see Marek Jakimiuk and Jan Misiejuk, *Święty Serafim Sarowski. Żywot i pouczenia* (Hajnówka: Bratczyk, 1999).

644 Saint Seraphim predicted the execution of the Tsar’s family; the fall of the Habsburg empire; millions of war victims when Russia had a population of 180 million; and that the Antichrist (Bolshevism) would appear in Russia. Seraphim also prophesied his own canonization. Cf. Św. Serafim z Sarowa, *Ogień Ducha Świętego: rozmowa św. Serafina z Sarowa z Mikołajem Aleksandrowiczem Motowilowem*, trans. Henryk Paprocki; introduction by Father Joann Kołogriwow (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2008); www.tamby.info/predskazaniya/sarovski.htm, accessed November 20, 2024.

of extremely popular exhibitions entitled “Russia: My History,” held in the History Park on the site of the National Economic Achievements Exhibition, Moscow. These events, such as “The Romanovs,” marking the dynasty’s quartercentenary; “The House of Rurik;” “Orthodox Rus’: From Great Upheavals to Great Victory,” have subsequently been presented in several other cities throughout the country to reinforce the people’s sense of the continuity and distinction of Russian history.⁶⁴⁵

This policy of shaping the required historical tradition based on a selective approach to Russia’s past has been fashioned by a series of spectacularly celebrated anniversaries, starting with the one thousand and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’, and followed by the quartercentenary of Minin and Pozharsky’s national rising to drive out the Poles, the quartercentenary of the accession of the Romanov dynasty, the bicentenary of the defeat of Napoleon, and the sixtieth and seventieth anniversaries of victory in the war of 1941–1945, the “Second Great Patriotic War” (the first was 1812). In a move intended to bolster society’s affirmative response to memory politics of this kind, 2012 was declared the Year of Russian History, elegantly making use of the coincidental cyclic feature in the dates, 1612—1812—2012, respectively for the anti-Polish and anti-Napoleonic campaigns aligned with the present day.

The politics of memory under President Putin has revived tributes to Yermak, with no regard at all to the colonial aspect of his operations. In utter disregard for the real facts of history, he is being promoted, also in the schools, as an agent of civilization, a defender of oppressed peoples, and a symbol of Russia “the Elder Brother” of the peoples he conquered. He is being projected as “playing an objectively progressive role” with respect to them.⁶⁴⁶ Not only is this image of Yermak present in the propaganda and mass culture,⁶⁴⁷ but it has also come to be accepted by Russian society at large as the figure of “a national hero whose achievements must not be forgotten,” a source of pride, a great patriotic inspiration.⁶⁴⁸

645 These exhibitions have been shown in places like Saint Petersburg, Krasnodar, Tyumen and in the Livadia Palace, Crimea, <http://vdnh.ru/events/vystavki/obrazovatelno-vystavochnyy-kompleksrossiya-moya-istoriya->, accessed November 20, 2024; <https://www.afisha.ru/exhibition/90085/> site not available on November 20, 2024; <http://www.romanovi-expo.ru/>, accessed December 4, 2024.

646 *Putin pragne istorii, w której zmieści się i car, i Stalin, i Jelcyn*, 3.

647 In 1996, *Yermak*, a 5-episode hagiographic TV serial directed by Vladimir Krasnopolsky and Valery Uskov, was filmed for Russian television and broadcast many times in the following years. Yermak is the name of a four-section locomotive, the world’s most powerful electric engine. Its production started in 2015 in the Novocherkassk Electric Locomotive Plant.

648 See, for instance, Olga V. Mokrousova, *Образ Ермака в фольклоре, литературе и изобразительном искусстве*, <http://nsportal.ru/ap/library/literaturnoe-tvorchestvo/2014/01/12/obraz-ermaka-v-folklore-literature-i-izobrazitelnom>, accessed November 20, 2024.

Curiously enough, the old Soviet habit of manipulating the facts about the Battle of Grunwald is still being practiced in Russia's present-day politics of memory. The lead in this game has been taken by the Russian Historical and Military Association, founded on the grounds of a presidential decree issued by Putin in 2012 and chaired since May 2012 by Vladimir Medinsky, former Minister of Culture. According to the story plugged by this nationalist, state-supported institution, July 15, 1410, is a memorable date for the military history of *Russia*; it is the day when “*Russian* forces and their allies, the Lithuanians, Poles, and Czechs, vanquished the German knights on the field of battle at Grunwald.”⁶⁴⁹ This manipulation is typical of the way Russian propaganda handles history: some regiments from Smolensk did indeed participate in combat at the Battle of Grunwald, but in point of fact, they accounted for just 5% of all the forces fighting against the Teutonic Order.⁶⁵⁰

Putin's attitude to the Soviet legacy

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the absence of an ideological factor to integrate the population of the Russian Federation, disparate in every way one could think of, has been a real problem for Putin's administration. During his first period in office as President, a discernible effort was made to find a surrogate for this ingredient applied in the Soviet Communist ideology to integrate, or more precisely to discipline society. There is a good deal of evidence to show that the component eventually selected for the purpose was Russian nationalism coupled with a sense of nostalgia for the lost empire.⁶⁵¹ A spectacular manifestation of this came with Putin's decision to withdraw the new national anthem introduced by Yeltsin in 1991. During the New Year celebrations held in the Kremlin on the night of December 31, 1999/January 1, 2000 marking the turn of the millenia, Putin personally presented the Russian Federation's new national anthem to his countrymen and the world at large. In practice, it was a return to the old national anthem from the Soviet era,⁶⁵² with the same, instantly recognizable tune

649 Quoted after *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, July 16, 2015.

650 Of the fifty regiments commanded by King Vladislaus Jagiełło (Jogaila) and Grand Duke Vitold (Vitautas), only three incomplete units were associated with the Smolensk region (Smolensk, Smolensk-Mstislav and Smolensk-Orsha).

651 “There are many people in Russia, many of them well educated, who believe that Russia can either be an empire or not be at all.” This was the opinion expressed by Alexander Prokhanov, a Russian writer, www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/sennost/234013-putin-stalin, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

652 In December 1943, *The Internationale*, which had served as the national anthem, was replaced by a new anthem composed by Alexander Alexandrov, with new lyrics by Sergey Mikhail-

to stir up nostalgia for the bygone times of hegemonism, and just the words updated in line with the new trend.⁶⁵³ Putin's decision could be read as an appeal to his fellow citizens not to repudiate the Communist spell in Russia's history and to see its good aspects, not just the bad ones, as Yeltsin tried to do.⁶⁵⁴

The business with the national anthem, which is a Soviet–Russian hybrid, is a good illustration of the fundamental difference between Yeltsin and Putin. Yeltsin did his best to erase all the good reminiscences of the Soviet era and remind people only of things that discredited it; whereas Putin has been endeavoring to make a partial defense, effectively rejecting the ideology but holding on to the superpower values such as hegemonism, effectiveness, and public order supervised and administered by the State. Following on from a spell with a strange vacuum, the empty space left by the Communist ideology started to be filled up by Great Russian nationalism, respect and admiration for a strong State, and a personality cult.⁶⁵⁵ The existence and continuity of a strong State turned into a value, irrespectively of its sociopolitical setup or the nature of the regime currently implementing that historical continuity.⁶⁵⁶ That is the only logical explanation for phenomena like the juxtaposition, side by side of one another on the same poster titled “Interior Ministers of Russia”—of a motley crowd of characters as different as *Oprichnina* chief Malyuta Skuratov (d.1573), the liberal Mikhail Loris-Melikov (1880–1881), and the suicide Nikolai Shchelokov (1966–1982), dismissed from office for embezzlement and removed from the Party.⁶⁵⁷

The Soviet tune of the national anthem together with the national flag used in the period following the February Revolution and the tsarist Eagle made up

kov and Gabriel El-Registan. Since the words of the anthem praised Stalin, after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, on Khrushchev's order, only the tune was played, and the words were never sung. Cf. Chapter Two, Footnote 236.

653 The author of the new version of the anthem, as well as its 1977 update, was the professional, indefatigable anthem writer Sergey Mikhalkov, who removed references to “The Soviet Land,” “The Intransigent Union,” and Lenin, replacing them with lofty words about a country full of natural resources with a bright future ahead of it.

654 Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 136–138.

655 The political science expert and journalist Gleb Pavlovsky, former adviser to President Putin, said that “modern Russia is a country with no ideology and no aim,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 16, 2014.

656 “A structure is being built in which a strong, vertically integrated, authoritarian, cannibalistic state is turning not so much into an instrument to safeguard the community, but a value in itself, because only such a state can secure the existence of the nation,” says the Russian historian Nikita Sokolov, *Магия мифа или власть факта: историческая политика против исторической науки в России. Круглый стол*, <https://openrussia.org/post/view/12464>, 8. This webpage was unavailable in early 2024.

657 *Ibid.*, 17.

the resultant sum of symbols clearly identifying Putin's "new Russia" with the full historical tradition, comprising the period under the tsars, the republican spell, and the Soviet episode. Putin undoubtedly made the right diagnosis of the expectations of public opinion, which was growing tired of Yeltsin's "policy of mass rejection."⁶⁵⁸ He shared a feeling prevalent in a large segment of society—nostalgia for Russia's lost power, as his very first public speeches as President showed.⁶⁵⁹ It was an image of power idealized in defiance of the facts of history. That is why Russia's contemporary politics of memory entails a motif characteristic of the Soviet period: the USSR as a state consistently fighting for peace in the world (with "fighting" as one of its favorite words), and Stalin as the staunch implementer of that peace policy.⁶⁶⁰ The episodes Putin's politics of memory recalls focus on the prominent Soviet propaganda campaigns in defense of Abyssinia (1935) and Czechoslovakia (1938), as well as the Soviet "peace strategy" of those years as put on record completely regardless of its invasion of Poland and Finland, and seizure of the Baltic republics.⁶⁶¹

Putinesque manipulation is a ubiquitous factor in presentations of Russia's efforts to preserve and/or enlarge its sphere of influence as "fighting for peace" in the region concerned, ever-present not only in its politics of memory but also in the policies it is currently pursuing, suffice it to recall Syria or Iran, and especially eastern and southeastern Ukraine.

A particularly striking instance of Russian endeavors to conjure up a false image of the Soviet Union,⁶⁶² transforming it from an aggressor into a fighter striving for peace and security, comes with matters relating to the period immediately preceding the Second World War and the Soviet Union's share in the responsibility for its outbreak. The predominant claim made in the Russian politics of memory after 2000 concerning the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact has been the conten-

658 Cf. "Born in USSR' (part 1). Z Walerijem Sołowiejem rozmawia Magdalena Wasyleczko," www.new.org.pl/2012-09-201,born_in_ussr_cz.1.html. This website is now unavailable (2024).

659 See, for instance, PAP Polish Press Agency, January 18, 2000, and July 8, 2000.

660 This was highlighted particularly during the most intensive period in the work of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. See, for instance, Vilnys Yanovych Sypols, *Советский Союз в борьбе за мир и безопасность. 1933–1939* (Moscow: Мысль, 1974); Konstantin Voschenkov, *СССР и борьба за мир. Международные конференции. 1944–1974* (Moscow: Издательство "Международные Отношения," 1975); Ivan Kovalenko, *Советский Союз в борьбе за мир и коллективную безопасность в Азии* (Moscow: Наука, 1976); Alexey Narochnitsky, *60 лет борьбы СССР за мир и безопасность* (Moscow: Наука, 1979).

661 See Wojciech Materski, "Amorficzność paradygmatu polityki zagranicznej Związku Sowieckiego. Między globalizmem ideologicznym teorii a imperialistyczną praktyką," in *W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu transformacji*, 143–152.

662 Jasiewicz, "Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji 1956–2005," 232.

tion that it was an inevitable step the Soviet Union was compelled to take following the Munich agreement of September 1938, an unavoidable measure to successfully ward off the danger of being isolated off, no different from run-of-the-mill, routine diplomatic operations.⁶⁶³

There has been a remarkable degree of backsliding in the assessment of diverse events and developments compared to opinions held during Yeltsin's term as president. Yet it could have been expected.

The fact that the Russian State Duma issued a resolution condemning the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact⁶⁶⁴ was relativized and downplayed in a mass campaign conducted in the summer of 2009 preceding the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. The campaign was targeted at prewar Poland, which it presented as purportedly Hitler's first ally, and therefore jointly responsible for the outbreak of the war.⁶⁶⁵ Putin was clearly alluding to these allegations in his speech during the memorial event held on September 1, 2009, at Westerplatte (the Polish military outpost on the Baltic, one of the first places Germany attacked), when he said, "Of course, mistakes have to be admitted. Our country has done so. The State Duma of the Russian Federation, our country's Parliament has condemned the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. We are entitled to expect the same from other countries that had made a deal with the Nazis, and not at the level of statements by political leaders, but at the level of political decisions."⁶⁶⁶ He said that in his opinion the cause of the Second World War was "the dire legacy of the Versailles Treaty" in which the Entente Powers "humiliated" Germany.⁶⁶⁷ His listeners were perplexed—no one had ventured to say that in Poland.

663 Cf. Alexander Dyukov, *«Пакт Молотова — Риббентропа» в вопросах и ответах* (Moscow: Фонд «Историческая память», 2009); Mariusz Wołos, "Historiografia rosyjska pierwszej dekady XXI stulecia wobec historii Związku Radzieckiego oraz węzłowych problemów z dziejów polsko-radzieckich (zarys problematyki)," *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 3 (2011): 146–148.

664 *Dziennik. Gazeta Prawna*, September 2, 2009.

665 Cf. *Секреты польской политики. 1935–1945 гг. Рассекреченные документы Службы внешней разведки Российской Федерации*, comp. Lev Sotskov (Moscow: РИПОЛ Классик, 2010).

666 We have quoted the official English-language version of Prime Minister Putin's Westerplatte speech as published by the Russian Government on its website at Official Website of the Government of the Russian Federation, accessed November 20, 2024. For the official Polish record, see the PAP (Polish Press Agency) communiqué of September 2, 2009, at www.dziennik.com/wiadomosci/artukul/, accessed November 20, 2024; and www.wprost.pl/ar/170620/, accessed November 20, 2024.

667 Ibid. See also Wojciech Materski, "Polsko-niemiecka Deklaracja o niestosowaniu przemyocy ze stycznia 1934 roku w stosunkach polsko-sowieckich i polsko-rosyjskich. Aspekt historyczny i współczesny," in *Jak patrzeć na Polskę, Niemcy i świat*, 930–931.

The creeping return of the Stalin cult

One of Putin's basic tasks in the construction of a new politics of memory was to take a position on the assessment of Stalin, a controversy which for decades had divided Russian society. From the very outset of his first presidency, he set out on a slow but systematic course of whitewashing the picture of Stalin in public opinion and its historical awareness. He was not the first to make the attempt, and looked back to the undeniable efforts Leonid Brezhnev had made to do this when he was First Secretary.⁶⁶⁸ But he went much further.

One of the results of Putin's endeavors was a recurrent surge of nostalgia for the man who butchered his own nation but also became a figure of global stature and ensured the Soviet Union of the crucial say in how the world was to be run after the Second World War. There are plenty of examples of this in the Russian media and publishing. On numerous occasions the claim has been put forward—characteristically for this cultural and civilizational milieu—that what counts are not the criminal methods used in the period when Stalin enjoyed omnipotence but the effects he achieved: a colossal rise in the power of the empire which took up a much higher place on the international forum than what Russia had under the tsars before the First World War. Many of these statements tell their recipients about the “dirty lies” disseminated even by Russian historians who try to deny the obvious fact that Russia rose to the status of a world power precisely thanks to the policy Stalin conducted in 1939 and later.⁶⁶⁹

Up to the sixtieth anniversary of the death of Stalin in March 2013, the main official statements outlining Russia's current politics of memory seldom mentioned him outright in a favorable context, yet they were full of appreciation and respect in references to events the public had no trouble with associating with him. Nowadays, quite a few “independent” historians are saying Stalin was a political genius who built up the power of the Soviet Union. They may be doing this either because that is what they believe, or for commercial reasons; there is still a massive demand for honoring the memory of Stalin, as I have said above. Their work may be treated as crowd-pleasing, but we can hardly brush aside the books and articles which are recommended reading on the school and college syllabuses which say that Stalin was a

⁶⁶⁸ Pikhoya, *Советский Союз: история власти 1945–1991*, 255–256, 321–324. Cf. Chapter Three, Footnote 366.

⁶⁶⁹ Arsen Martirosyan, *Сталин и Великая Отечественная война* (Moscow: Издательство «Вече», 2008).

great leader forced by circumstances to make decisions that might have been morally controversial but saved the country from its domestic and foreign enemies.⁶⁷⁰

There has been a massive wave of Russian users of the Internet visiting websites promoting the Stalin cult.⁶⁷¹ This is evidently not against the current politics of memory because despite the fact that some of these websites have published absolutely scandalous material, there have never been any interventions to censor them. As regards the defense of Stalin's domestic and foreign policy, there is little or no difference between these websites and the large-circulation books by Yuri Ivanov, Arsen Martirosyan, Mikhail Meltyukhov, Sergei Pereslegin, Aleksandr Shikorad, Dmitri Zhukov, and Igor Pykhalov, to name but a few. Their work is flooding the book market and evidently meeting a public demand. They are now openly contesting the practice of "tarnishing Stalin's repute;" they are against his "continual character assassination."⁶⁷² Such attitudes were still fairly sporadic just a few years ago. Honest and trustworthy historians stand no chance of challenging such claims and impacting on public opinion because they publish their work in low-circulation professional journals and present papers at academic conferences, which are addressed to an elitist audience, not broadcast in the opinion-making media.

Since 2000, the evidently advancing process of "restoring Stalin's historic role" has faced Putin with numerous questions concerning Stalin and the period of his omnipotent rule in the history of the Soviet Union/Russia. At first, he tried to reconcile the highly polarized views on Stalin. He described the totalitarian system and its victims, Soviet citizens, but refrained from giving an opinion on Stalin himself. When asked directly during a live TV broadcast, he beat about the bush and responded enigmatically that it was "an important, fundamental issue" but avoided giving a hard and fast answer.⁶⁷³ On another occasion, he admitted that there were repressions, but they contributed to the background of—the Soviet space race.⁶⁷⁴

However, even in these first, "tactical" replies, there was a noticeable nostalgia for the Soviet era and admiration for the great leader. Putin has tried, and is still trying not to come out into the open with his fascination with Stalin and hides it behind the excuse that it would be hard "to arrive at a comprehensive judgment" or that it is "a complex problem, involving the coexistence of evil traits

670 Cf. Aleksandr Filippov, *Новейшая история России 1945–2006гг. Книга для учителя* (Moscow: Просвещение, 2008). See also Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces Both Russia and the West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 107–109, 233.

671 See, for example, www.zastalina.ru, website unavailable on November 20, 2024; <http://stalinism.narod.ru>, accessed November 20, 2024.

672 Martirosyan, *Сталин и Великая Отечественная война*, 4.

673 Cf. http://pravoirk.ru/otvet_putina_venediktovu, website blocked on November 20, 2024.

674 Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 144.

and genius in one and the same person.”⁶⁷⁵ There is clearly no ideological back-drop to his fascination with Stalin;⁶⁷⁶ he admires him for being an effective politician and an exceptionally skillful manipulator.

Putin must certainly know how important the change in the opinions ambient in the Yeltsin period has been in helping him win the sympathy of a very substantial majority of the political forces and build up his electorate. He realizes that the radical check he has conducted on Russia’s politics of memory as regards the Soviet period and above all Stalin has done him good.

The fullest statement Putin has made on the matter was during his annual teleconference with journalists in December 2009. When asked about Stalin, he made a departure from his usual self-control and this time concentrated on “the positive aspects of Stalin’s rule over the country . . . and openly commended his achievements.” He said that it was only due to firm rule that Stalin succeeded in fundamentally turning the country from an agricultural land into an industrial state. Granted, the peasantry did not survive, but industrialization was indeed implemented. “We won the Great Patriotic War . . . today nobody may criticize the man who organized it all and stood at the head of this victory.” Yes, all these successes were achieved “at the unacceptable price of repressions, yet they were undeniable achievements.”⁶⁷⁷ One of the journalists attending the meeting had the impression that “the dictator was a step nearer rehabilitation.”⁶⁷⁸

At another meeting of the same type four years later, when asked whether the monuments that had stood in Moscow in honor of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky should be restored, he gave an answer which suggested that their rehabilitation was a question which called for serious consideration. Of course, it was the business of the municipal authorities and he had no intention of interfering in their decision, but he also added that we should behave in a rational way in matters concerning the past. For instance, in Britain there are monuments in honor of Oli-

675 “Поскольку тема Сталина и сталинизма до сих пор дискутируется активно, то я специально этот вопрос оставил. Нельзя, на мой взгляд, давать оценки в целом.” Putin’s words during a radio interview with Vladimir Kara-Murza, December 3, 2009. “Грани времени”, www.svoboda.org/content/article/1894412.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

676 In 2011, Boris Berezovsky, the man who “discovered” Putin and then became his avowed enemy, said, “The Russian regime has no ideology, no party, no politics—it is nothing but the power of a single man,” see Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 261.

677 *Ibid.*

678 “Путин восхваляет Сталина за сверхдержаву и победу,” *Сибирь без Цензуры*, December 5, 2013; www.inoforum.ru/137414349545, website unavailable on November 20, 2024.

ver Cromwell, who caused just as much bloodshed [as Stalin] but he also made an important contribution to the history of his country.⁶⁷⁹

Similar statements Putin has made have prompted some commentators to ask what it is that fascinates him so much about Stalin and the way he governed the country, and why is it that the system of government Stalin created gets so much attention from Russia's current president. Could it be that he considers some of Stalin's solutions and/or mechanisms worth applying in Russia today?⁶⁸⁰ When this question was put to him directly, Putin said that the model of the state he was trying to construct had nothing in common with Stalinism—except for its aim to achieve order and discipline.⁶⁸¹

Perhaps we should look for a grain of rationality about Putin's fascination with Stalin in the opinion that what he is impressed by is the way Stalin got rid of those who accompanied him on his road to power—once he had all the power firmly in his hands and no longer needed them. The *Vedemosti* web portal published an editorial which said, "Putin is faced with the same task Stalin faced in the early 1930s. Only for Putin, what's standing in the way are not bourgeois 'Old Bolsheviks' but 'St. Petersburg Cheka boys' turned mafiosos who've sweetened him up with power like sugar in a glass of water."⁶⁸²

For a short spell, when Dmitry Medvedev took over as President of the Russian Federation for one term in office, observers thought that Russia's politics of memory would be at least partially de-Stalinized.⁶⁸³ The auspicious factors favoring this were the general improvement in the atmosphere of public debate, media accessibility for human rights campaigners and NGOs, and a departure from Putin's policy of pushing the opposition into the margin of public affairs. We in Poland noticed this change, too, and pinned our hopes on it, that an intensifying course of de-Stalinization could make for progress in matters concerning history, and especially facilitate access to archives and the records still not handed over to Poland of the investigation the Military Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation was conducting on the Katyn Atrocity.⁶⁸⁴

679 Putin's annual meeting with journalists, December 19, 2013, broadcast on Rossiya 24; I listened to this teleconference.

680 "Зачем Путин вспомнил Сталина," June 13, 2013, www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2013/06/13/razmyshleniya_o_tiranii, accessed November 20, 2024.

681 Putin's statement of April 25, 2013, <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1167195/>, website unavailable on November 20, 2024.

682 "Чтобы выжить, Путин должен стать Сталиным," *Новая Газета*, no.139, December 7, 2012; www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/55687.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

683 Cf. Jadwiga Rogoża, *W cieniu Putina. Prezydentura Dmitrija Miedwiediewa* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2011), 13–14.

684 Wojciech Materski, "Śledztwo nr 159," 108–109.

However, in 2004–2005 an aggressive propaganda campaign was launched against attempts to revise the claim that just before World War II broke out the USSR was conducting a policy for peace, and against those who contested the claim that in the last phase of the war the Red Army was on a “mission of liberation.” Medvedev never uttered a word to show he had reservations, which dispelled the illusions, especially as the campaign was targeted against Poland, which in the latter half of 2004 was the subject of about 130 articles in the Russian hard copy and electronic media alone.⁶⁸⁵

Concern for Russia’s international image prompted the creation of the Russia Today TV channel, which in 2005 began a round-the-clock service in English and devotes a lot of airtime to programs designed to knock “historical stereotypes” of Russia, in other words to plug the view which is in line with Russia’s politics of memory.⁶⁸⁶

There was another surge of illusions about President Medvedev after the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. The subject of Soviet co-responsibility for its outbreak started to fade in the foreign media. Commentators noted a distinct amendment to the Russian politics of memory.⁶⁸⁷ Presumably, the authorities managing it came to the conclusion that they had gone over the top with the aggressiveness of their arguments for the defense, which was shaky as regards facts and could have a bad effect on Russia’s political and economic objectives. The tone became less confrontational with respect to the Baltic republics and Poland; there were no more statements in Stalin’s defense, not to mention apologetic declarations for him.

President Medvedev was associated with this reversal, especially in the speech he delivered for the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions (October 30, 2009), and his interview of May 7, 2010 for *Izvestia*, a paper regarded as the mouthpiece of the Russian government. In this interview he described “the events at the start of the war, the events that took place at Katyn” as “a black page in our history,” accused Stalin of committing “a vast array of crimes against his own people,” and called the Soviet Union “totalitarian in nature . . . a

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. “Propaganda historyczna Rosji,” 10–15; Leszek Pietrzak, “Rosyjska wersja II wojny światowej,” www.wpolityce.pl/polityka/113275, accessed November 20, 2024; Zofia Chyra-Rolicz, “Refleksje o polityce historycznej – naszej i sąsiadów,” in *Jak patrzeć na Polskę, Niemcy i świat?* 890–891.

⁶⁸⁶ Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 26–27.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Marcin Kaczmarek and Jadwiga Rogoża, “Ewolucja rosyjskiej polityki historycznej,” www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2010-05-12, accessed November 20, 2024; Nikolai Bukharin, *Россия – Польша: опыт двадцатилетних отношений: 90-е годы XX века – первое десятилетие XXI века*, 2nd ed. (Moscow; Saint Petersburg: Нестор-История, 2014), 179.

regime that suppressed basic rights and freedoms.”⁶⁸⁸ These remarks carried a distinctly new language, a sort of de-Stalinization of the historical rhetoric.⁶⁸⁹

The signals sent by the Russian authorities in the first weeks after the Smolensk Air Crash seemed to suggest that the liberalization of their politics of memory on Poland could be a permanent change of direction. The hopes drawn from the handful of “liberal” remarks made by President Medvedev evidently obviated the fact that the Russian vertical system of power is based on individual persons, not on the offices they hold. The last of the illusions were shattered when Medvedev’s term in office came to an end in May 2012 followed by the return of Putin, who was elected President for the third time.

In Russia’s politics of memory everything returned to what it was before. We could even venture to say that now Putin started to be more and more outspoken about Stalin’s place in history, and speeded up the rate of change in his ever bolder utterances. The very concept of “de-Stalinization” came under fire. Vasily Khristoforov, director of the Federal Security Service Archives, said that from the legal point of view, the term was inappropriate because “Stalin had never been *de jure* declared a criminal.” Therefore, the use of the term “crime” for the operations of the Stalinist regime was beyond legal classification: “we have no legal grounds for such a usage.”⁶⁹⁰

All this brought commentators to realize that Stalin had already been rehabilitated, at least in part. One of the political commentators referring to the statements Putin made during his third term as President, put it laconically: “Contrary to what people think, Stalin has not died yet.”⁶⁹¹

In March 2013, in the context of the sixtieth anniversary of his death, disputes over his place in history soared to a record intensity. There was a spate of TV programs, round tables, newspaper articles, and special issues. Most of them reiterated Putin’s remarks on what a complex character Stalin was, undoubtedly responsible for a lot of evil but also the man thanks to whom the Soviet Union

688 Quoted after Dmitry Medvedev, “Нам не надо стесняться рассказывать правду о войне – ту правду, которую мы выстрадали,” *Известия*, May 7, 2010; <http://izvestia.ru/news/361448#zz4LMmAKEMW>, website unavailable on November 20, 2024. For the official English translation of this interview, which we have used for the quotes, see the official website of the President of Russia at News · President · Events · President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024. See also Jązborowska and Jabłokow, *Sprawa katyńska w Rosji*, 1008–1013.

689 Dagmara Moskwa, “‘Putinowska’ wizja przeszłości. Nowa koncepcja nauczania historii w świetle polityki historycznej Federacji Rosyjskiej,” *Historia i Polityka*, no. 11 (2014): 95.

690 Quoted after Modest Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России: поиск институтов и языка,” Часть 2, 8, www.iarex.ru/articles/40271.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

691 Evgenia Kuznetsova, “Путин vs Сталин,” <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/stalin-roubld-table/1614648.html> [March 4, 2013], accessed November 20, 2024.

became a global power and for decades played a dominant role in the world.⁶⁹² The implication was that the arrangements Stalin made—his pact with Hitler, his invasion of Poland and Finland, his annexation of the Baltic republics, the seizure of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, the Katyn genocide, and the deportation of entire nations⁶⁹³—maybe came at a high price, but they were well-founded.

One of the memorable events was the round table organized by the Moscow Independent Press Center.⁶⁹⁴ Here are a few quotes from the shocking statements made during the discussion. In the opinion of the writer Svyatoslav Rybas, joint author of a well-known book on Stalin,⁶⁹⁵ thanks to Stalin's hard-line rule, the Soviet Union

managed to do more than just build up an efficient economy and secure a series of new technologies, still unsurpassed in terms of efficiency, . . . some people in our elite are trying to prove that there was a better way we could have chosen to follow . . . but there was no such thing . . . the business of a great politician is to consider the results, not the sacrifices (victims).⁶⁹⁶

According to journalist Yuri Boldyrev,

Stalin's severity was not really so excessive, but quite natural for those times. Weren't things much the same in England and France, not to mention what went on in their colonies! [Viewed against that backdrop], the Stalinist atrocities don't look so out of the ordinary We should take a closer look at Stalin's character and not let manipulators use the information on him against us.⁶⁹⁷

692 See, for instance, <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/stalin-round-table/1614648.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

693 Cf. Nikolai Bugai and Askarbi Gonov, *Кавказ, народы в эшелонах: (20–60-е годы)* (Moscow: ИНСАН, 1998); Nikolai Bugai, *Депортация народов Крыма. Документы, факты, комментарии* (Moscow: ИНСАН, 2002).

694 “Значение Сталина для современного общества. Круглый стол 27 февраля 2013 года,” <https://topwar.ru/24955-znachenie-stalina-dlya-sovremennogo-obschestva-kruglyy-stol.html>, accessed November 20, 2024. The participants were Anatoly Baranov, Yuri Boldyrev, Mikhail Delyagin, Andrey Fursov, Svyatoslav Rybas and Mikhail Weller. See also “Путин vs Сталин. Влияние личности Сталина на современную политику,” <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/stalin-round-table/1614648.html>, accessed November 20, 2024; “Плюсы и минусы сталинской эпохи,” <https://fi.nam.fm/archive-view/7671/1/unavailable> on November 20, 2024; “Сталин для современности,” <http://maxpark.com/user/1368296567/content/1841957>, unavailable on November 20, 2024; “Сталинские чтения.” Yuri Boldyrev and Mikhail Delyagin, <http://krasnoje.tv/node/17773>, unavailable on November 20, 2024.

695 Svyatoslav Rybas and Yekaterina Rybas, *Сталин. Судьба и стратегия. В двух томах* (Moscow: Молодая гвардия, 2007).

696 “Значение Сталина,” 1–2.

697 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

Mikhail Delyagin, head of the Institute of Globalization Studies and editor-in-chief of the journal *Svobodnaya mysl*, said that

the character of Stalin has never been so relevant for Russian society as it is now . . . I don't like Putin, but compared to those who could take over from him, he may well seem democratic and humanitarian . . . I can't rule out the rise of a "new Soviet Union."⁶⁹⁸

Nearly all the speakers addressed the subject of Putin compared to Stalin: was the way they governed similar or each other's opposite? Different opinions were voiced, nonetheless, a number of speakers observed that "the distinctiveness and persistence of the position held by Russia's current leader is comparable with the General Secretary's [Stalin's] qualities (*kachestva*)."⁶⁹⁹

Just as Ivan the Terrible needed a cult of Alexander Nevsky, so there are numerous monuments from the Soviet era (including hundreds, if not thousands of Lenin) still up in Russia nowadays, and a number of the facts I have referred to above show that there is a tendency to clear Stalin's name in public opinion and society's historical awareness. One of the particularly characteristic symptoms of this re-evaluation process occurred around the time of the seventieth anniversary of the Victory of Stalingrad (February 2, 2013), when thousands of portraits of Stalin appeared on the streets of Russian cities, and for a day Volgograd even reverted to its old name [Stalingrad].⁷⁰⁰ The media hyped up Putin's speech, that Stalin would "for all time be a symbol of our nation's unity and invincible spirit, a symbol of true patriotism, a symbol of the greatest victory won by Soviet soldiers and liberators . . . Russia will never be conquered for as long as we remain true to Russia, our language, culture, and the roots of our national memory."⁷⁰¹

One of the comments made after this speech which I think is worth quoting comes from the statement made by the political scientist Igor Bunin for the Rosbalt Agency:

Stalin is admired by a large segment of society because he chopped off his boyars' heads, did not have a country house, and used to wear a shinel [Russian military coat]. The approval of the masses for Stalin is based on these myths . . . Of course, Putin's participation in the celebrations in Volgograd, where his supporters, people with similar opinions, sang a

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁰⁰ Significantly, during the discussion on this proposal, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin expressed the opinion that the name change to Stalingrad should be made permanent, www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/sennost/234013-putin-stalin, unavailable on November 20, 2024.

⁷⁰¹ PAP Polish Press Agency, February 3, 2013; "Stalingrad na wieki pozostanie symbolem niezwykłego ducha naszego narodu" – TVN24, accessed November 20, 2024

hosanna for Stalin, does not mean a return to Stalinism, but still, it's a sort of virtual Stalinism, something like an ersatz.⁷⁰²

President Putin is sensitive to these sentiments and has been indulgent to the tendency to give such references to Stalin more elbow room in the Russian public sphere. In February 2015, a monument reproducing the famous photograph of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin was unveiled near Livadia Palace in Crimea to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference.⁷⁰³ Ever since, there have always been fresh flowers in front of one of the figures—Stalin's. Three months later, a new bust of Stalin was unveiled in the city of Lipetsk (south of Moscow, with a population of half a million) despite opposition from some of the inhabitants.⁷⁰⁴ In 2015–2016, monuments and busts of Stalin went up in Penza, Lipetsk, Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai, the Mari El Autonomous Republic (on the Middle Volga), the Pskov Oblast, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan.⁷⁰⁵ A Stalin Museum was opened in the Tver Oblast thanks to support from the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky.

A new wave of discussion has swept over the country on whether there is a need to “restore Stalin's reputation,” in the course of which a few more statues of him were unveiled, and in the spring of 2017 a suggestion was put forward to rename Volgograd Airport “Stalingradsky Aeroport.”⁷⁰⁶

Another suggestion was to remove Solzhenitsyn's *GULag Archipelago* from the approved reading list for schools because, as Yuri Polakov, chief editor of *Literaturnaya gazeta* put it, “the way the book evaluates the extremely complex situation in the Lenin and Stalin era runs counter to the historical facts and common sense . . . and makes [young people] hate their country . . . and the Soviet form of our statehood.”⁷⁰⁷

702 Igor Bunin, “Возвращение к полноценному сталинизму сегодня невозможно,” августа 26, 2013, www.rosbalt.ru/main/2013/08/26/1168411.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

703 <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/na-krymie-odslonieto-pomnikstalina-roosevelta-i-churchilla,512943.html>, accessed November 20, 2024. The sculptor is Zurab Tsereteli, who made Moscow's bizarre monument of Peter the Great.

704 Wojciech Konończuk, “Dekomunizacja, której nie było,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, June 8, 2015 (special insert).

705 “Трепещите, ядом плюйте Как Иосиф Сталин возвращается в жизнь современной России,” Источник: *Meduza*, 25 февраля 2016. Signatures are being collected for/against the erection of monuments to Stalin in Moscow and Krasnoyarsk. Cf. Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 29.

706 Prof. Andrey Zubov and Dr Nikita Sokolov voiced their opinions on this idea in a discussion on Radio Liberty, broadcast on TV Current Time 1 (“Настоящее Время”), September 10, 2016, at 8–9 a.m. Central European time.

707 Quoted after Piotr Skwieciński, “Zmienia się mądrość etapu – Sołżenicyn przestaje się podobać putninowcom,” <http://wppolityce.pl/swiat/215696>, accessed November 20, 2024.

All this had been happening in the context of a growing, generally held opinion that although Stalin had committed errors and offenses, or even crimes, nevertheless and beyond all doubt he was a far-sighted political genius. A frequently invoked example of his strategic “genius” is the outcome of the Yalta Conference, the resolutions adopted by the Big Three in February 1945, “the fairest possible compromise arrived at by the Victors,” which laid the cornerstone for decades of peace in Europe.⁷⁰⁸ Thanks to his diplomacy worthy of a maestro during the difficult negotiations in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, Stalin turned the Soviet Union, and hence also its successor state, modern Russia, into a world power.⁷⁰⁹ As Patriarch Kirill, who joined in the drive to restore Stalin to his rightful place in history, told his faithful, “the successes scored by this leader of the state, who laid the foundations for the country’s restoration and modernization, should not be questioned, even if this particular leader had a reputation for iniquity.”⁷¹⁰

Clearly, Russian society finds arguments of this kind convincing, as I have already said. Contrary to all logic, they are at the foundations of a large-scale cult of the “god-tsar.”⁷¹¹

We could also take a look at the matter from a different viewpoint, like some Russian analysts, in whose opinion the tendency which may be observed on a mass scale in contemporary Russia to vindicate the methods applied for the exercise of power in the Stalinist period reflects a longing for a leader who would enforce order by violent means, put an end to “democratorship,” restore the Empire, and cordon Russia off from the bad influence reaching it from the West.⁷¹²

708 Cf., for example, Ялта-45. Начертания нового мира, ed. Natalia Alekseevna Narochnyt-skaya (Moscow: Вече, 2010).

709 Viktor Alksnis’s contribution to the Radio Liberty discussion. See also an opinion poll conducted in March 2015 by the Levada Center, in which as many as 45 % respondents described the Stalinist repressions as justified, www.levada.ru/31-03-2015/stalin-i-jego-rolv-istorii-strany, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

710 Patriarch Kirill’s speech of November 7, 2015, delivered during the opening of the exhibition dedicated to the twentieth-century history of Russia, www.levada.ru/31-03-2015/stalin-i-jego-rolv-istorii-strany, page unavailable on November 20, 2024. Cf. “Patriarcha Wszechrusi: nie należy wątpić w sukcesy przywódcy, nawet nikczemnego,” a report on the Patriarch’s speech, on the website of TVN, a commercial TV station operating in Poland, November 4, 2015. Patriarcha Cyryl apeluje o uznanie reformatorów Rosji – TVN24.

711 According to public opinion polls conducted in Russia in 2011, 26 % of the respondents thought that Stalin did more good than evil for his country, and only 24 % thought the opposite, www.inosmi.ru/russia/2013039/206605762.html, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

712 *Bring back Stalin, he’d get things put in order* – www.5-tv.ru/video/508494/?pages=false, accessed November 20, 2024, quoted after Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 29.

So the opinion voiced by writer Igor Garin comes as no surprise. He wrote that “in modern Russia Stalin, who allowed all manner of conceivable and inconceivable disasters to happen, is turning more and more into the Number Two National Hero.”⁷¹³ The only point open to debate is whether Number One is still Lenin, or Putin.

The myth of the Second Great Patriotic War (1941–1945)

The Second World War, understood as the period from June 1941 to September 1945, undoubtedly commands the dominant position in Russia’s politics of memory. This period is referred to as the Great Patriotic War. In the opinion of Georgy Kumanev, Head of the Russian Military History Center at the Russian Academy of Sciences, “years pass, generations come and go, but the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 will always be an inexhaustible subject of study.”⁷¹⁴ The myth of the heroic Soviet Union—the great victor, the power which won peace for the world and was the main force in the anti-fascist coalition, the architect of the postwar peace arrangement—is continually being built up on the basis of a selective approach to facts.⁷¹⁵ Victory in the war of 1941–1945 is effectively the only, no-alternative basis for the historical identification of Putin’s Russia with the events of the first half of the twentieth century.⁷¹⁶ That is the fundamental factor based on historical reference uniting Russian society, which is highly diversified on every other count.⁷¹⁷ There is the general, almost absolute consensus on

⁷¹³ Garin, *Переписанная история РФ. Наследники палачей замечают следы*, 4. “Igor Garin” is the nom-de-plume of mathematician Prof. Igor Papirov.

⁷¹⁴ Georgy Kumanev, *Рядом со Сталиным: Откровенные свидетельства (встречи, беседы, интервью, документы)*, 2nd ed. (Smolensk: Русич, 2001), 521. Cf. Spasimir Domaradzki, “Polityka historyczna w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich po roku 1989,” *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, no. 2 (2008): 30.

⁷¹⁵ See, for example, Putin’s speech for the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II; the official English version is available from the website of the President of the Russian Federation at *Speech at the Military Parade in Honour of the 60th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War • President of Russia* (kremlin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024.

⁷¹⁶ “For the masses, their awareness of history focuses on the basic themes of Soviet history: the Great Patriotic War, the first successful manned spaceflight, and the October Revolution. Sometimes the First World War is commemorated, while everything else fades from memory into mythology.” Bukharin, *Россия – Польша*, 177.

⁷¹⁷ See Włodzimierz Marciniak, “Kryzys długi jak stulecie,” in Jurij Fielsztynski and Władimir Pribyłowski, *Korporacja zabójców. Rosja, KGB i prezydent Putin*, (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2008), 376. Cf. the book’s English edition, Yuri Felshtinsky and Vladimir Pribylovsky, *The Age of Assassins: The Rise and Rise of Vladimir Putin: How Scary Are Russia’s New Rulers?* (London: Gibson Square Books Ltd, 2008).

the victory myth. 85% of the respondents in a series of recurrent sociological opinion polls agree that May the Ninth, Victory Day, is the most important national holiday of the Russian State, recognized by the vast majority of Russian society, and 95% are convinced that members of their family took part in the war and made a personal contribution to the final victory.⁷¹⁸

The myth of the Great Patriotic War is unchallengeable, hence in official statements and propaganda the Soviet Union's connivance with Nazi Germany, its joint responsibility with Germany for the events of September 1939, the enthrallment of Poland and the Baltic countries, the NKVD's deals with the SS and Gestapo, the Soviet invasion of Finland, the Crime of Katyn, the mass deportations, the Augustów Atrocity, and the gigantic scale of the marauding and plunder conducted by the Red Army at the end of the war, etc.—all these things are passed over in silence or minimized.⁷¹⁹ In addition, the truth about the first phase of the fighting and the months of ignominious defeat are hushed up. The real causes are hidden behind a smokescreen of claims which have been put forward but historians have long since disproved, that Stalin was absolutely unprepared for a German attack and that there was a dramatic disproportion in the amount of modern equipment, especially armored vehicles and aircraft, available to the forces of the two belligerents, decidedly to the detriment of the Red Army.⁷²⁰

Not much harm was done to the myth of the Great Patriotic War as it was passed on from the Soviet era via the politics of memory practiced by Yeltsin, who can hardly be regarded as its staunch promoter. It revived and experienced a renaissance after 2004, when “the cult of the Second World War became the basis for the State ideology.”⁷²¹ It peaked in 2005, and again in 2009 and 2011, although it has always held, and continues to hold the key position in the politics of memory practiced by the Russian Federation.

718 Modest Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России: поиск институтов и языка,” Часть 1, 6, www.iarex.ru/articles/40226.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

719 On this point, see Pavel M. Polan, “Преступление и покаяние: Россия в поисках примирения со своей историей,” in *Изучение диктатур: опыт России и Германии: материалы конф. «Диктатуры: дискуссии в России и Германии»*, ed. Marianna Borisovna Korchagina (Moscow: Памятники ист. мысли, 2007), 29–30.

720 More details on this issue in, for example, Viktor Suvorov, *Ледокол: Кто начал Вторую мировую войну?* (Moscow: АСТ, 1989), English translation, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?*, trans. Thomas V. Beattie (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990); Vladimir Nevezhin, *Синдром наступательной войны. Советская пропаганда в преддверии «священных боев». 1939–1941 гг.* (Moscow: АИРО-XX, 1997); Mark Semenovich Solonin, *Мозгоимение. Фальшивая история Великой войны* (Moscow: Яуза, 2008); Mikhail Meltyukhov, *Упущенный шанс Сталина: схватка за Европу, 1939–1941 гг.: документы, факты, суждения*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Вече, 2008).

721 Prof. Nikolai Korosov's opinion in “«Историческая политика» в современной России.”

Nurturing the victory myth has evoked a favorable climate for the reconstruction of Russia's international status as a world power. Thus, it has been addressed first and foremost to Russian society, underpinning its belief in President Putin's claim that "anyone who did not miss the Soviet Union was heartless." It bolstered the general opinion that after all, Communism was not so bad, everyone had a job and a secure livelihood, maybe at a modest yet stable standard of living, and people could lead a safe, quiet life. It was all ruined with the Soviet Union collapsed.⁷²² Hence, there was practically universal agreement with Putin's statement that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama."⁷²³

As we know from Putin's subsequent utterances, these words of his should not be taken to mean that he intended to restore the Soviet Union, but instead as an announcement of his plan to turn the post-Soviet countries (excluding the Baltic republics, which have joined NATO) into a ring of friendly neighbors.⁷²⁴ In the 1990s, the institution of the Commonwealth of Independent States was a measure designed to put this agenda into practice, later to be superseded by Putin's concept of a Eurasian union.

The events organized to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the gigantic media campaign that attended them played a special role in this respect. In his speech in Red Square, the President addressed many grand words of acknowledgement to the Soviet State, making it practically the sole victor, with just a modicum of support for the demolition of the Third Reich from the United States, Britain, France and—Italian and German antifascists. Putin did not even mention the other Allies. He did not utter a word in response to the appeals to apologize during his Ninth of May speech for Yalta and the Soviet devastation of Central and Eastern Europe.⁷²⁵ The pomp and ceremony matched that for the golden jubilee of the victory, but outdid the earlier commemoration by far in appropriating for itself all the glory of triumph due to the other Allies.

A similar display of panache attended the seventieth anniversary of victory in 2015. However, given the circumstances of the brutal aggression against Uk-

722 Domaradzki, *Polityka historyczna w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich*, 32.

723 Послание Федеральному Собранию, April 25, 2005, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_тыре63372.shtml. For the official English version, see Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024. Years later, at the annual meeting with journalists on December 19, 2013, he repeated this opinion, aired in the live transmission on the Rossiya 24 channel, which I watched.

724 Путин считает, что распад СССР стал трагедией для миллионов, ia.ru/politics/20050505/39937603, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

725 For the official English version of Putin's 2005 Victory Day speech, see Note 728. Cf. the PAP Polish Press Agency report, May 10, 2005 and the commentary in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 10, 2005.

rairie, only twenty-seven of about sixty-eight world leaders invited to attend the festivities turned up in Moscow.⁷²⁶ Nonetheless, Putin could hardly say the pageant was not a success, especially as its international aspect had been of secondary importance from the very outset. The flourish accompanying successive victory anniversaries is far more important in his politics of memory as regards the Russian recipients of the ceremonies, and his domestic audience has always been happy with a show of power with which they can identify. “The Victory Day Parade is intended above all for use at home . . . and is needed for propaganda purposes, to make people forget that their standard of living has gone down from what they had not so long ago.”⁷²⁷

The propaganda used the boycott of the seventieth anniversary by Western leaders coupled with attendance by the main leaders of the Asian countries to rationalize the eastward turn in Russia’s policy. The eastern trend was legitimized as a natural process, reinforced by a mutually shared system of values.⁷²⁸

Spurred along by so much ceremony, the myth of the Great Patriotic War has been serving as the idiosyncratic cornerstone and paramount content of Russia’s politics of memory in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. It commands the first place unquestionably also because it allows of a supra-national interpretation. It could be used to influence neighboring countries, especially Belarus and (until the Maidan Uprising) Ukraine, bolstering the sense of community in the post-Soviet area. It can still be used to draw up and unite scores of national and ethnic groups inhabiting the Russian Federation and integrated under the Soviet state (prior to its collapse) within a purported “multinational Soviet nation.”

In his apotheosis of the victories won by the Red Army in the 1941–1945 phase of the war and thereby enhancing the myth of the victorious Soviet Union, Putin never tires of insisting that today’s Russia cannot be blamed for all the sinister aspects in the doings of the Soviet State, the Bolshevik Party, and the atrocities committed by the system.⁷²⁹ This is patent in his pronouncements concerning

726 Attendees included the leaders of Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, India, Kazakhstan and Cuba, countries which represent democratic standards comparable with those in Russia.

727 The PAP Polish Press Agency quoted this statement by the Russian writer, journalist and war correspondent Dmitry Glukhovsky, May 9, 2015.

728 Cf. Maria Domańska, “Rosyjskie obchody 70. rocznicy zwycięstwa nad nazizmem: znaczenie w epoce globalnej konfrontacji,” *Komentarze, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich*, no. 171 (May 20, 2015): 5; <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/424>, accessed November 20, 2024. For the official English version of Putin’s speech for Victory Day, 2025, see We pay tribute to all those who fought to the bitter for every street, every house and every frontier of our Motherland • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024.

729 For more on this issue, see, for example, Nikolai Bugai, *Проблемы репрессий и реабилитации граждан: история и историография (XX в. – начало XXI в.)* (Moscow: Гриф и К, 2012), 458, 464.

the Katyn Atrocity. He speaks of it as a crime committed by the System, not by the State: by an anonymous System which he never identifies with Stalin nor with the Party; the System which oppressed Russians first and foremost and “mercilessly trampled them underfoot.”⁷³⁰

The mythization of the 1945 Victory, coupled with the Slavic concepts plus a few other aspects of the politics of memory and economic pressure are important tools which Putin is using to recover control of the ruins of the Soviet Union, or in other words, to reintegrate the post-Soviet space.⁷³¹ For this, the myth of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 is an extremely expedient factor; it is a special sort of “Religion of Victory,”⁷³² applied in an endeavor to collect up not only the national and ethnic communities inhabiting the Russian Federation but also some of the post-Soviet countries as well.

The religious nature of victory in the war of 1941–1945 has been confirmed by the Russian Orthodox Church, which has recognized that “victory over Germany was a miracle wrought by God,” as Patriarch Kirill said during the celebrations for the seventieth anniversary. The idea was taken up by Protopriest Vsevolod Chaplin, representing the Patriarchate of Moscow, who said that “The Russian Orthodox religion was the decisive factor clinching the victory over fascism; prior to battle, political officers made the sign of the cross more often than they invoked the name of Stalin.”⁷³³

Putin and his retinue did not deny these claims, because they fitted in quite well with their general politics of memory, which makes the victory the axis for the construction of a new national ideology presenting Russia as the Chosen Polity, a new Third Rome, while at the same time and despite all the diverse historic perturbations such as Bolshevism, still enjoying God’s special care and concern on account of its moral superiority.⁷³⁴

This Russian/Soviet brand of messianism, supposedly proven beyond all reasonable doubt by victory in the war of 1941–1945, turns that triumph into a phenomenon which is sacrosanct and thereby satisfies a social need. It is being used

730 For the official English version of Vladimir Putin’s Katyn Forest speech delivered on May 7, 2010, see the website of the Prime Minister of Russia at ARCHIVE OF THE OFFICIAL SITE OF THE 2008–2012 PRIME MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VLADIMIR PUTIN – Events (premier.gov.ru), accessed November 20, 2024. I attended the event and heard him deliver it.

731 Cf. Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy*, 297.

732 The term “Religion of Victory” was used by the historian Nikita Sokolov, during the discussion in the studio of Radio Liberty, broadcast on TV Current Time 1 (“Настоящее Время”), September 10, at 8–9 a.m. Central European time.

733 Both quotations in this paragraph from the Polish Catholic weekly *Niedziela*, May 9, 2015.

734 Cf. “Cerkiew „sakralizuje” zwycięstwo ZSRR nad Hitlerem,” <https://m.niedziela.pl/artykul/15682/Rosja-Cerkiew-,sakralizuje-zwyciestwo>, accessed November 20, 2024.

as the core of Russia's politics of memory in the Putin era, with the remaining ingredients of that policy built up around it. As I have already said, Putin's policy in this respect has been discernible from the very start of his presidency, but since 2004 its general, well correlated outline has been implemented in a particularly clear manner in response to the events held to commemorate the Warsaw Uprising of 1944,⁷³⁵ the assertive politics of memory adopted by the Baltic republics,⁷³⁶ and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, viewed in Russia as an outcrop of extreme nationalism comparable to the ideology of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.⁷³⁷ The components of Russian messianism, alongside victory in the Great Patriotic War and glorification of the Red Army's mission of liberation in East-Central Europe, include the denial, or at least diminishment, of the crimes of Communism, the apotheosis of the Strong State and its historically endorsed mission as the bringer of civilization.⁷³⁸

The creation of the myth of the Soviet Union as a world power consistently implementing its policy of peace is accompanied by silence, soft-pedaling, or even outright falsification of the facts relating to the worst moments in the history of that period. This is striking in view of the conduct of most of the other countries with a dramatic experience of totalitarianism in their history, which have endeavored (albeit in various ways) to come to terms with their past, settle accounts and get over it, or at least write up a critical record. With Russia, whenever dodging the "difficult issue" proves impossible, they are presented in an enigmatic or manipulated manner.

That is how the Soviet invasion of Finland in November 1939 has been handled, for instance. Speaking at a meeting with historians in Novo-Ogarevo, Putin said that Stalin's so-called Winter War was certainly not an act of aggression but—an attempt to redress the wrongs done during the delimitation of the Soviet-Finnish border in the negotiations in 1920.⁷³⁹ The only thing he thought that needed to be done by way of an evaluation was to demand a memorial set up for the 150 thousand Red Army

735 The 2004 commemorative events for the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 put special emphasis on the Soviet responsibility for the tragic fate of Warsaw. Cf. "Antypolska kampania historyczna jako element nowej ideologii państwowej i technologia polityczna," in the *Propaganda historyczna Rosji* report by Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich [Centre for Eastern Studies, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en>, accessed November 20, 2024] (Warszawa, 2005), 7–8.

736 Pietrovskaya, "Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей," 26.

737 Kolerov, "«Историческая политика» в современной России," part 2, 4.

738 Domańska, "Rosyjskie obchody 70. rocznicy zwycięstwa," 3.

739 The Soviet–Finnish peace negotiations began in Tartu on June 12, 1920, and ended on October 14 of the same year, after the Bolshevik defeat in the war with Poland. In their final phase, the Finns had a much better negotiating position than initially and did not let the Soviets dictate to them in matters of delimitation. For the Peace Treaty of October 14, 1920 on the delimi-

soldiers engaged “for internationalistic reasons” who lost their lives in that war trying to “graft the idea of social justice in the neighboring country.”⁷⁴⁰

A series of specialized publishing enterprises have been established to propagate the right version of the story of the Great Patriotic War and generally promote Russia’s politics of memory. Europa, a publishing house catering for works on political subjects, has been operating since 2005, specializing in serving up books on the contemporary history of Ukraine, the Caucasus, the *Pribaltika* (Baltic republics), the Imperial tradition and the Russian doctrine on the national and ethnic minorities, in correlation with the officially approved textbooks for history. Since 2006 an information agency called Regnum has been active in the field of publishing and information policy, concentrating on developments in the post-Soviet countries examined as the setting for the growth of hostile attitudes to Russia in their politics of memory. These efforts have been supported since 2006 by an internet service operating the imperia.ru website, founded (as it proudly proclaims) “to fight for *Russkii mir*.”⁷⁴¹ Analogous activities have been conducted since 2008 by a foundation called Historical Memory, directed by Aleksandr Dyukov, which specializes in supporting research on collaboration with Nazi Germany by nationalists in former Soviet republics, and publishing the results in its periodical *Zhurnal rossiyskikh i vostочноevropeyskikh istoricheskikh issledovaniy*.⁷⁴²

These and similar publishers, foundations, and websites are fighting on the frontline in the “battle for history,” defending the official line on the history of the Russian Empire and disavowing the memory politics of ex-Soviet republics, chiefly Ukraine and the Baltic countries. Putin’s statements made for successive anniversaries serve as the guidelines for their work, indicating their chief targets.⁷⁴³

In spite of all these wide-ranging activities, in 2013 a fairly widely known discussion club for humanitarian issues associated with the *Novoe literaturnoye obozreniye* publishers came out with a declaration on “Politics of Memory in the Twenty-First Century: The Russian and European Experience.” Endorsed by the club’s president, philosopher and cultural historian Ilya Kalinin,⁷⁴⁴ the declara-

tation of Soviet-Finnish border, see *Документы внешней политики СССР*, vol. III (Moscow: Госполитиздат, 1959), doc. 137, 265–280 [map].

740 *RIA Novosti*, March 14, 2013; <http://ria.ru/society/20130314/927341148.html>, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

741 https://vk.com/imperiya_ru_info, accessed November 20, 2024.

742 This periodical has been published since 2010. Aleksandr Dyukov, the Foundation’s head, is editor-in-chief. Cf. Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 27.

743 *Putin pragnie istorii, w której zmieści się i car, i Stalin, i Jelcyn*, 3–4.

744 Kalinin’s remarks are available in *ГЕФТЕР*, May 25, 2013; <http://gefter.ru/archive/8592>, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

tion claimed that there was no politics of memory at all in Russia, in the sense of “an infrastructure of ideological narrative, or of a natural self-organizing social setup.” It gave the following arguments to support the allegations: there was no overall strategy for the task, and hence no policy consistently pursued by the authorities, even at a rudimentary level; there was no idea of what tasks should be addressed within the framework of memory politics; there was neither an infrastructure nor the right mechanism for an effective politics of memory; there was a want of an appropriate forum for dialogue; the Russian authorities had an extremely narrow pool of resources at their disposal for the country’s politics of memory as regards national symbols, events, historical figures etc. to mobilize society to act in solidarity; a lot of time and opportunities for action had been lost; the agencies responsible for politics of memory had needlessly succumbed to provocative actions by ex-Soviet countries and those in the former Soviet sphere of influence, dragging them into historical controversies regarding totalitarianism; and there were no staff training programs or instruments for successful discussion on the European forum relating to politics of memory.

Russian political journalism offers an interesting explanation why there are so many shortcomings, for instance why de-Stalinization is not on the agenda for Russia’s politics of memory now, during Putin’s third term as President. It’s because “currently there is no approval for de-Stalinization from the First Citizen.” Until September 2011, that meant President Medvedev, who had quite often observed the need for it; but currently there were no remarks of this kind coming from the topmost echelon.⁷⁴⁵

On the other hand, a defensive mechanism has been put in operation to protect the main lines in the current politics of memory. Henceforth questioning of whatever kind of the unequivocally favorable, idealized image of the Red Army, the victor of World War II, will be prosecuted under the bill brought to the State Duma in June 2013 and supported by all the main political parties.⁷⁴⁶ The new regulation could be interpreted on a much broader basis and applied against any attempts whatsoever to offend the reputation of any of Russia’s armed forces. It could even be used as grounds to prosecute deniers of Alexander Nevsky’s victory over the Livonian Order in the Battle of Lake Peipus in 1242.

Neighboring countries which try to demolish monuments to their Red Army liberators still up in their towns and cities are also at risk of reprisals, as Estonia

⁷⁴⁵ Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России,” part 2, 9.

⁷⁴⁶ <http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/oskarzenie-armii-czerwonej-o-zbrodnie>, accessed November 20, 2024. The penalties provided for under the Act are to be fines starting from 300,000 rubles or imprisonment for 3 or more years.

learned much to its chagrin,⁷⁴⁷ while Poland has also been battling against prospects of Russian disgruntlement.⁷⁴⁸

Other manipulations of history

There is another point worthy of note regarding Russia's politics of memory under Putin concerning recent events. Following his promotion by Boris Yeltsin to the rank of a politician of nationwide importance,⁷⁴⁹ Putin did not refrain from short-listing his predecessor's presidency, the period immediately after the collapse of the USSR, for verification regarding politics of memory. As his authority grew and his power strengthened, Putin's statements on both of Yeltsin's terms in office as President became more and more overtly critical; he called them a time of rampant anarchy and chaos, selling national (state) interests down the river, cringing to the West, apologizing for wrongs for which Russia was not to blame. On October 1, 2007, in his speech inaugurating the Eighth Congress of the United Russia Party, he said that in the Yeltsin period "our economy and society in general were in a depressed state. The same can be said of the morale of the country at the time. Our territorial integrity was under threat."⁷⁵⁰ In the context of similar opinions, the man in the street got the message that the departure of Yeltsin marked a major turning point in his country's history, while the anti-Western attitude was upgraded to the rank of a paramount national virtue.

747 Following the removal of a Red Army "liberator monument" from the center of Tallin in 2007, Moscow cut off Estonia's oil supply.

748 In Poland, there have been years of hesitation over the removal of the Warsaw Monument to Brotherhood in Arms, colloquially known as "The Four Sleeping Men," from plac Wileński, a prominent square in the city, as well as over the proposal to reduce the area of the vast Red Army cemetery and mausoleum on aleja Żwirki i Wigury in Warsaw.

749 On returning from East Germany in 1990, where he had worked as a KGB foreign intelligence officer, Putin, a retired KGB lieutenant colonel, was employed in the secretariat of the mayor of Saint Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak. He became an important member of the Petersburg Circle (aka "the Petersburg Chekists"). In 1994, he was appointed first deputy to the chairman of the City Council of Saint Petersburg. In 1996, on Sobchak's recommendation, he joined the administration of the President of Russia, and in 1998 he was appointed head of the FSB (Federal Security Service), the successor institution to the KGB. At Yeltsin's request, in 1999 Putin assumed the duties of prime minister (as first deputy), and not much later as acting president and head of the government.

750 President of Russia, Opening Remarks at the VIIIth United Russia Congress. Opening Remarks at the VIIIth United Russia Party Congress • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed December 16, 2023.

Symptomatically, Putin has always spoken with a great deal of respect of Andropov, long-standing head of the KGB and Putin's precursor in the control of the Soviet Union's government authorities by its special services. He has mentioned him on many occasions as an example of a leader who was able to find effective solutions to the country's problems and used the special services to exercise efficient control of political, social, and economic processes, but his premature death prevented him from completing his cleaning up job. Contrary to historical facts, Putin has presented Andropov as an ascetic intellectual and romantic, dedicated to the service of his country and the embodiment of the ethos of the special services.⁷⁵¹ In December 1999, during his stint as Prime Minister, he held a second unveiling ceremony for the bust of Andropov which had stood in front of the main edifice of the Lubyanka Prison⁷⁵² but had been removed during the attempted coup to save it from destruction by the crowd venting its anger and trying to demolish the monument of Felix Dzerzhinsky.⁷⁵³ Putin made it quite plain who was his role-model and whose work he wanted to continue.

Putin abandoned the trend characteristic of the Yeltsin presidency to play down the official Soviet state holidays and attenuate the pomp and circumstance with which they used to be celebrated in Soviet times and which had turned into a popular custom. Some, like Victory Day (the Ninth of May), he preserved outright and tried to restore the status they had enjoyed earlier; for others, he suggested alternative festivities to commemorate events chronologically close to the suppressed celebrations. The most spectacular examples of his swaps were National Unity Day,⁷⁵⁴ instituted in 2004 as a replacement for the canonical celebration in Soviet times of the Bolshevik Revolution ("the Great October Socialist Rev-

751 For more details, see Soldatov and Borogan, *The New Nobility*, 91–100.

752 *Вечерняя Москва*, December 21, 1999.

753 During Putin's first term as President, the monument of Felix Dzerzhinsky was reconstructed and put up in the courtyard of the Main Directorate of Internal Affairs (the Moscow branch of the People's Police Force) at Petrovka 38. See also Domaradzki, *Polityka historyczna w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich*, 37, n. 14.

754 National Unity Day commemorates the event heralding the end of the *Smuta* (Time of Troubles), the expulsion of the international garrison stationed in the Kremlin by the Poles (November 4, 1612). The date of this state holiday coincides with the Orthodox Feast Day of the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan, whom the Church credits with a miraculous intervention leading to the expulsion of the Poles from the Kremlin. The icon was brought to Moscow from Nizhny Novgorod by the troops of the merchant Kuzma Minin and Prince Dmitry Pozharsky. Cf. Bukharin, *Россия – Польша*, 176.

olution”),⁷⁵⁵ and Defender of the Fatherland Day, aka Men’s Day, a surrogate for the anniversary of the foundation of the Red Army.

To date, another important name change has not been put into effect, for the official name of the commemoration of June 22 introduced by President Yeltsin in June 1996 and known as “the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow.” In the spring of 2012, on the tide of a new chapter in the battle for monuments, a petition landed on Putin’s desk, asking for the name of this holiday to be changed to “Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Nazism and Collaboration.” According to press reports, this purportedly grassroots initiative had been signed by ten thousand people, who believed that the change would promote “the battle against the memory politics of post-Soviet and post-Communist countries succumbing to revisionism regarding the role of Hitler’s collaborators.”⁷⁵⁶ The petition made it to the State Duma, but no further developments have been brought to public notice to date (the spring of 2017).

No other ideas of this kind have been observed in recent years, perhaps because the pretexts for them have been few and far between. “Russians have a rather modest historical memory. We don’t have very many events that we really want to celebrate. And that’s a problem for us, we don’t have the groundwork to build up our sense of national identity.”⁷⁵⁷

On the other hand, a day that has stayed in the calendar of official state holidays is June 12, introduced by President Yeltsin to mark Russian Independence Day. It is still being celebrated even though society at large does not identify with it,⁷⁵⁸ nor do Russians really understand what this holiday is about. After coming to power, Putin decided to change its name to “Russia Day.”⁷⁵⁹ Presumably, he must have agreed with critics who said that Russia did not have a tradition of independence. It was certainly a rational move, because one could hardly concur with Yeltsin’s logic that Russia had liberated itself from the Soviet Union in a manner comparable to what happened, say, in Estonia or Georgia, so it should

755 “Traditionally, the Seventh of November, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, held an important place in the people’s collective awareness – decades of Soviet propaganda had taken their toll. We had to offer the people of Russia a surrogate holiday and move out of the circle of Communist symbolism. We had to find a date as close as possible to November 7, and the closest was the anniversary of the Fourth of November,” “Born in USSR” (part 2), www.new.org.pl/2012-09-21,born_in_ussr_cz.2.html, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

756 Quoted after Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России,” part 1, 12.

757 Ibid.

758 The low level of people’s identification with this date was probably due to its arbitrary provenance. Yeltsin intended it to commemorate the adoption of the Russian declaration of sovereignty on June 12, 1990, a document Russians are not familiar with, and at the same time to recall the first general election of the President of the Russian Federation exactly a year later.

759 Waclaw Radziwinowicz, “Z ludzi radzieckich Rosjanie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 12, 2015.

honor and celebrate the fact in the same way. The day is still observed but, like International Women's Day or Navy Day, it's not associated with any specific event in history.⁷⁶⁰

Putin's effort to save as much as could be salvaged from the Soviet era has left an imprint above all on education. Valery Solovey, a lecturer from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and an expert on PR, recalls that "In 2000 school textbooks started to change. The State reached a conclusion that we have to take a favorable view of our history. The bad impression created in public awareness [under Yeltsin – W.M.] was giving rise to serious problems."⁷⁶¹

A development most definitely attuned to the atmosphere of neo-imperial nostalgia was the marketing of Aleksandr Filippov's handbook for teachers on the history of Russia, 1945–2006, which was published during an ongoing election.⁷⁶² Its author misses the times when the Soviet Union was a dominant player on the international scene, highlights the role of Stalin and the Bolshevik Party in building up the status of the USSR as a world power, and relativizes the responsibility of Lenin, Stalin, and the entire system for the countless crimes that were committed. Students are to learn that, for instance, the Katyn massacre was "a repayment for the death of young Red Army soldiers held as POWs by the Poles in 1920," that the Great Hunger in Ukraine is a fake, that the mass crimes of the 1930s (i.e. the purges) were a "rational" response to "opposition against modernization," that the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact was a "response to Munich," and the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939 was done "to liberate Western Ukraine and Byelorussia."⁷⁶³ Significantly, Filippov's formula generated a negative reaction not only abroad.⁷⁶⁴ It met up against sharp criticism in Russia itself, for its unceasing surge of neo-Stalinization.⁷⁶⁵

760 I have had the occasion to observe this behavior.

761 "Born in USSR" (part 2), www.new.org.pl/2012-09-21,born_in_ussr_cz.2.html, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

762 Aleksandr V. Filippov, *Новейшая история России 1945–2006гг.* This book was to replace the textbook by Igor Dolutsky, *Отечественная история. XX век: Учебник для 10–11 классов общеобразовательных учреждений. В двух частях. Ч.2*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Мнемозина, 2000), which was considered not patriotic enough, and its recommendation issued by the Ministry of Education was withdrawn; see Pietrovskaya, "Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей," 27.

763 Quoted after www.rp.pl/artykul/181545.html?print=tak, accessed November 20, 2024. Cf. Jasiwicz, *Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji*, 232.

764 PAP Polish Press Agency report, August 26, 2008; www.racjonalista.pl/index.php/s,11/t,15341, accessed November 20, 2024.

765 "To call a spade a spade—this is a blatant, cynical whitewash of Stalin and Stalinism. Everything that could be done to restore Stalin has been done in it." <http://urokiistorii/ru/current/view/>

Despite the controversy surrounding Filippov's textbook, the post-Soviet nostalgia it recommended—"restoring the truth about Stalin to society at large" and "bringing education" into the politics of memory pursued by the state authorities—has been continued in school and university books as well as in guidelines and handbooks for teachers. A particularly abhorrent and reprehensible specimen of this practice was a course book for the history of Russia compiled in 2010 for students of the Moscow State University (MGU), the chief school of higher education nationwide. It tells young Russians that Stalin's home policy in the 1930s was justified by the need to modernize the country and defend it against the threat from the West; also that he was absolutely right to isolate millions of his own citizens in labor camps to prevent them from plotting against the State.⁷⁶⁶ History textbooks used in teachers' training colleges make the same kind of claims, presenting Stalin as a great modernizer, sometimes responding a bit too drastically, nonetheless rationally, to the domestic and foreign dangers threatening the Soviet State and systematically building up its status on the international arena.⁷⁶⁷

Another textbook currently required for tenth-grade students resolves the problem with evaluating Stalin in another, "more modern" way. On reading the passage on Stalin's huge achievements and next the paragraph on his "faults," students are expected to decide for themselves what the overall balance comes to and what the final assessment of Stalin should be.⁷⁶⁸

The products of Russia's politics of memory transplanted to the field of education are presumably associated with a series of utterances Putin made in 2006–2007 in connection with standards in the teaching of Russian history at the high school and college level. He described the books published in the 1990s as meeting foreign expectations ("dancing to the tune of foreign grants") with the participation of foreigners interested in painting a black picture of Soviet and Russian history. He called for the removal of such books and replacement with new ones written for all levels of education in accordance with a unified pro-

2009/10/uchebnik-filipova, page unavailable on November 20, 2024. See also Либералы устроили истерику вокруг учебника истории, www.liberty.ru/Themes/, accessed November 20, 2024.

766 Alexander Barsenkov and Alexander Vdovin, *История России, 1917–2007: учебное пособие для студентов высших учебных заведений исторических и политологических специальностей* (Moscow: Аспект Пресс, 2010). Mariusz Wołos, an expert on Russian historiography, calls this political trend "historiographical neo-Stalinism," see Wołos, *Historiografia rosyjska*, 141–142.

767 Alexander Danilov, Mikhail Gorinov, and Alexander Barsenkov, *История России 1900–1945 гг. Книга для учителя* (Moscow: Просвещение, 2009) [after Wołos, *Historiografia rosyjska*, 143].

768 Oleg Volobuev, Petr N. Romanov, and Sergey Karpachev, *История России: начало XX – начало XXI века* (Moscow: Дрофа, 2016).

gram.⁷⁶⁹ The task for history textbooks was not so much to teach real history but rather to make young Russians proud of their country's history and protect them against the sense of guilt the West was trying to instill in them with its manipulations.⁷⁷⁰

And that is indeed what happened. The new books, evidently written at Putin's behest, present Stalin and the massive reign of terror in an absolutely different way. They claim that he was a great leader forced by outside circumstances to make difficult and controversial decisions which were necessary from the point of view of the country's interests. As we read in Filippov's book, not only were there victims, but in addition the repressive measures affected the "ruling elite" first and foremost, because "the goal was to mobilise the leadership in order to make it more effective in the process of industrialization." Thanks to that, the purges created "a new class of managers capable of solving the task of modernization in conditions of shortages of resources, loyal to the supreme power and immaculate from the point of view of executive discipline."⁷⁷¹

The politics of memory conducted over the past decade or so has been oscillating between nostalgia for Russian hegemony and the great victory myth of 1945, and has built up a sturdy backdrop to support it in Russia's state-controlled mass culture. It has a strong presence on TV, in the film industry, and high-circulation publications on specially profiled subjects selected from Russian history and presented in an attractive way for "the man in the street." There is also a "patriotic cinematography" addressing not only subjects connected with the war of 1941–1945 but also a broad spectrum of issues from the history of Russia, and it most certainly enjoys state patronage.

In 2007–2009, at the peak of this tendency to highlight historical references, the anti-heroes of a couple of these productions were Poland and the Polish people. In *Smersh*,⁷⁷² a four-episode TV serial directed by Zinoviy Rojzman, the plot is set in 1945 in the region of Grodno (now Hrodna, Belarus, but occupied by Poland at the time). The local people are being terrorized by "a gang of Polish Home

769 Especially for the high schools. For more details, see Moskwa, „*Putinowska*“ *wizja przeszłości*, 96–98 (94–98).

770 Putin has strongly distanced himself off from "Yeltsin's negation," repeating that "being a Russian citizen is a source of prestige," PAP Polish Press Agency report, December 2, 2001. On June 21, 2007, during a ceremony for the creation of a Russian World foundation, Putin was still complaining about "the poor quality of textbooks." Vladimir Putin signed a decree on creating a Russian World foundation • President of Russia (kremlin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024.

771 Filippov, *Новейшая история России*; quotation from Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West*, 107–109.

772 SMERSH (СМЕРШ) is the acronym for the Soviet military counterintelligence service which operated in 1943–1946.

Army soldiers” who give them no peace. The gang’s commanding officer is Józef, a fanatic who has no qualms about killing women and children.

In *Shchaste razvedchika* (2009, by Aleksandr Sidorov and Stas Dovzhik),⁷⁷³ a TV production filmed as a pseudo-documentary, the favorite Russian (Soviet) cinema convention, Aleksei Botian, a Soviet secret agent active in Lesser Poland in January 1945, saves the city of Kraków from destruction and the lives of thousands of inhabitants of the Sub-Carpathian region of Poland, due to be killed by the Nazi Germans. The message is clear: our boys risked their lives for Poland, and now the Poles are pulling down the monuments set up in gratitude to the Red Army. In fact, there was a real Aleksander Bocian, but he was not a heroic and altruistic secret agent, instead he was an ex-NCO of the Polish Army working for the NKVD and figuring out the underground structures of the Polish Home Army in Lesser Poland.⁷⁷⁴

The film which may be considered the most spectacular instance of state patronage for projects which promote and circulate the right historical content on a mass scale is *1612* (directed by Vladimir Khotinenko, screenplay Arifem Aliyev). This production received a vast amount of support from the authorities⁷⁷⁵ in view of the low level of public awareness of National Unity Day (November 4) and its significance. This official holiday is a commemoration of the historical events the film presents in a very dramatic way: the national rising against the oppressors. The garrison installed by the Poles in the Kremlin was driven out of the citadel, marking the end of the *Smuta* (Time of Troubles). Perhaps the intentions behind the decision to make this film went further; maybe its reviewer for *La Repubblica*, who saw the première was right to observe that it was “Russia’s reply to *Katyn*” (directed by Andrzej Wajda).⁷⁷⁶

A key event on the agenda to remodel public historical awareness was the Name of Russia opinion poll conducted in the latter half of 2008 by the Rossiya state TV network. Respondents were asked to name the historical figure who had

773 The film was released on DVD a year earlier as *Поединки: Счастье разведчика*

774 Dawid Golik, “‘Nieszczęście’ Aloszy,” *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 8–9 (2009): 152–158; Justyna Prus, “Czy agent NKWD ocalał Kraków,” *Rzeczpospolita*, February 9, 2009; “Alosza – partyzant, który ocalał Kraków,” <http://fakty.interia.pl/prasa/odkrywca/news-,nId,834083,nPack,3>, accessed November 20, 2024.

775 “. . . the historical films *1612*, and especially *Taras Bulba*, were made on political commission,” Bukharin, *Россия – Польша*, 176. The plot of *Taras Bulba*, (2009), based on Nikolai Gogol’s novel and directed by Vladimir Bortko, is set in the 16th and 17th centuries in the southeastern borderlands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The director honed the anti-Polish episodes of the novel by adding a number of scenes showing Poles as exceptionally cruel invaders.

776 Quoted after http://kino.dlastudenta.pl/arttykul/wielka-smuta_w_polskim_kinie,25716.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

done the most to deserve commemoration, the top personality to be remembered and honored as the patron for Russia, whose achievements could be considered representative of all that was best in the national history.⁷⁷⁷ A huge number of votes⁷⁷⁸ were cast over a six-month spell and a large TV jury commented on them on a weekly basis. Unexpectedly, the winner was Prince Alexander Nevsky,⁷⁷⁹ a character whose public image had been created by Sergei Eisenstein's dramatic movie, which made him easier to recognize and promote in the early twenty-first century. The hyped up figure of Nevsky, introduced to filmgoers in a couple of "uplifting" though highly manipulated episodes on screen which showed him as the defender of Russia against the perpetually hostile West, turned out to work well in today's conditions, after over six decades.

Voters gave Nevsky a clear yes, recognizing him as a symbol of opposition to patterns of behavior imposed by the perennially inimical West (aka the EU, NATO, the USA etc.); a figure defiantly standing up against the West, which is trying to teach today's successors to the legacy of Holy Rus' what respect for human rights and the law in general mean, how they should be keeping to the standards in international relations etc.

The official results said that Alexander Nevsky got slightly more votes than runners-up Pyotr Stolypin and Joseph Stalin.⁷⁸⁰ However, the general opinion was that the results were rigged to stop it from coming out that the real winner was Stalin, the way things seemed to be going from the very start of the voting.⁷⁸¹ This was hardly surprising, in view of the fact that Stalin's version of the Great Patri-

777 Opinion polls of this kind are carried out in Russia every year, although not in such a spectacular televised form as in 2008. Since 2003, Putin's name has appeared on the list of outstanding historical figures, and since 2008 he has always been in the top five. Bukharin, *Россия – Польша*, 177.

778 Voting went on for six months, and about 50 million votes were cast (35% of the population of the Russian Federation, which has approximately 143 million citizens). Even if some people voted more than once, the "turnout" shows the exceptional interest this opinion poll aroused.

779 Cf. Chapter One.

780 Nevski won with 524,575 votes, Stolypin got 523,766, and Stalin got 519,071. Next came Alexander Pushkin, Peter the Great, Vladimir Lenin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Suvorov, Dmitri Mendeleev, Ivan the Terrible, Catherine II and Alexander II. The jury contest ended in a draw, with winners Nevsky and Pushkin getting 131 votes each, followed by Suvorov (120) and Stolypin (116); Stalin came tenth (39). PAP Polish Press Agency report, December 28, 2008.

781 Film director Nikita Mikhalkov, the chairman of the jury, had warned this might happen: "We may find ourselves in a situation where absolute authorities and their arbitrary decisions ignoring people's opinions may prevail, and this is what a significant part of the nation wants," www.tvn24/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/aleksander-newski, accessed November 20, 2024. See also www.polacynewschodzie.pl/aktualnosci/zobacz/1033, page not available on November 20, 2024; Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West*, 4–5.

otic War of 1941–1945 has always been and still is the number-one myth plugged in the memory politics of the Soviet Union and, since 1991, the Russian Federation. Anyone who criticizes the way Stalin ruled the country and has misgivings as to the valor and fighting spirit of the Red Army will be dubbed a blasphemer by public opinion.

Moreover, some commentators said that the votes for Ivan the Terrible, who came tenth, were cast for a prince of exactly the same kind, cruel and tyrannical, so they should be pooled with those for Stalin. Those who voted for either of them make up a large segment of society, whose preferences at the ballot box look clear enough.⁷⁸² A few years later, in October 2016, a monumental statue of Ivan the Terrible was unveiled in one of the cities in Russia.⁷⁸³ Some commentators saw this as an overt sign of incoherence in the Russian politics of memory, the confusion of symbols of power and authority with those of ruthlessness and the brutal enthrallment of the people.⁷⁸⁴

The last six months of 2008, the time when the Name of Russia opinion poll was carried out, saw the start of a process to crystallize out the content of Russia's politics of memory. Its neo-Stalinist imperial tendencies came to light pretty soon, in connection with the round anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War coming up in the fall of 2009, which I have already discussed.

The politics of memory Russia has been conducting in recent years is distinctly moving away from the Soviet cliché of the collective hero and instead is focusing on individuals, distinguished political leaders, military commanders, social activists. Lenin is a figure who seems to have dropped out of its range of view. The debates concerning him in the wake of “Back to Leninism,” the catchphrase coined by Gorbachev, have long since petered out following the Yeltsin presidency and a phase when Lenin's position in the history of Russia was challenged and cut down to size. Nonetheless, his monuments and the streets and squares named after him are still doing well, while any attempts to write a critical assessment of him are invariably blackballed. Would-be authors of such publica-

782 Pavel Lungin, “Встает вопрос, что, Россия обезумела?,” *Новая газета* (the *Культура* supplement), October 16, 2016, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/10/16/70195-vstaet-vopros-chtorossiya-obezumela>, accessed November 20, 2024.

783 “В Орле установили памятник ивану грозному,” Interfax, October 3, 2016; <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/10/03/ivan>, accessed November 20, 2024.

784 “это символ не государственной мощи, но всеобщего российского страха и бессилия. Бедная русская история.” [This monument is not a symbol of the power and authority of the State but of the general Russian fear and powerlessness.] Kirill Martynov, “Мемориализация ужаса. Почему проблема памятника Грозному в Орле связана не столько с прошлым, сколько с нами сегодняшними,” *Новая газета*, October 17, 2016, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/10/17/70192-memorializatsiya-uzhasa>, accessed December 29, 2023.

tions can hardly expect to make it into the bestseller category, and some have actually fallen victim to physical violence by elseways notorious “unidentified perpetrators.”⁷⁸⁵

A symptomatic feature appeared in Russia’s politics of memory with the work of the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests, directed by Sergey Naryshkin, head of the presidential administration.⁷⁸⁶ The powers and status of this institution, founded by President Dmitry Medvedev in May 2009,⁷⁸⁷ were reminiscent of the role played by the censorship office in Soviet times. It was to see to the right interpretation of the tricky passages in Russian history, only as regards “Russian interests,”⁷⁸⁸ and recommend ways to “neutralize the unwelcome outcomes“ of publications on historical subjects published abroad.⁷⁸⁹

Naryshkin’s Commission was silent whenever blatant falsifications of history occurred, for instance, it did not denounce any of the publications which claimed that the Katyn Atrocity was a German crime,⁷⁹⁰ presumably because it did not consider this kind of bogus history detrimental to Russian interests. Yet the time when the Commission was called into existence was certainly connected with the upcoming round anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War and the imminent wave of publications on its origins—along with Stalin’s deal with Hitler in the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact—expected in Russia as well.⁷⁹¹

785 It happened on two occasions to Akim Arutyunov, author of a book that debunked the Leader; see Akim Arutyunov, *Досье Ленина без ретуши. Документы. Факты. Свидетельства* (Moscow: Вече, 1999). I learned of this in my conversations with Arutyunov.

786 The Commission had a membership of 28, including representatives of the State Duma, the Federal Security Service, the Ministry of Defense, and the Russian Academy of Sciences.

787 *Указ Президента Российской Федерации*, no. 549, May 15, 2009, Президент России (krem-lin.ru), accessed November 20, 2024.

788 According to Vladimir Ryzhkov, Deputy Speaker of the State Duma and Co-Chairman of Parnas, the Republican Party of Russia, it was “to shut the mouths of those who wanted to write about the crimes of the Stalinist regime.” Quoted after *Propaganda historyczna Rosji*, 18.

789 The Commission discussed the possibility of requesting the severance of diplomatic relations with a country whose historians “falsified Russian history.” *Ibid.*

790 For example, *Немцы в Катыни: Документы о расстреле польских военнопленных осенью 1941 года*, comp. Richard Kosolapov et al. (Moscow: Изд-во ИТРК, 2010); *Тайны Катынской трагедии: Материалы круглого стола по теме: «Катынская трагедия: правовые и политические аспекты», проведенного 19 апреля 2010 года в Государственной Думе Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации*, ed. Viktor Plyukhin (Moscow: [б. и.], 2010).

791 The idea of establishing a commission of this type was put forward in the spring of 2008 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and instantly earned the support of the General Staff of the Russian Army. Cf. Solonin, *Мозгоимение*, 367.

How far the penalties may go for departures from the current line on the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact is shown by the case of Vladimir Luzgin, a history teacher from Perm. A local court sentenced him to a heavy fine for saying that the Pact helped Hitler start the Second World War and that its signatories destroyed the Polish State.⁷⁹² The verdict was upheld by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, which dismissed the argument of the defense that this was what the history textbooks published in 1994 and 1995 said, which Luzgin used for history when he was a student at school.⁷⁹³ He must have been a poor student, because he did not understand that if it were not for the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact and the Red Army's occupation of Eastern Poland, Hitler would have been a few hundred miles closer to Moscow in June 1941 and the Wehrmacht would have managed to take the city before winter, which would have spelled the end for Russia, which was saved by Stalin's brilliant move.⁷⁹⁴

While interpretations of this kind of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact are subject to prosecution, there has been no reaction to similar, albeit not quite as direct ones, or ones which arrive at a different evaluation, for instance, Aleksandr Dugin's comment: "If both parties had kept this important [Ribbentrop–Molotov] Pact—but . . . neither of them did—we would have done with the British and Americans long ago. What we would have today would be how to divide the world up between Russia and Germany, not the question of Anglo-American dominance."⁷⁹⁵

The institution of the Naryshkin Commission came as a surprise. Comments made by foreign observers, but also by a few Russians pointed out that it was an instrument to counteract (*viz.* prosecute the authors of) remarks which did not run counter to history but instead to the State's politics of memory and the right version of the events as imposed by the State. The Commission did not publish

792 "Российский суд запретил рассказывать о сотрудничестве СССР и нацистской Германии," *Московский Комсомолец*, July 1, 2016; "Ссылка в Нюрнберг," <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3026212>, accessed November 20, 2024.

793 "ВС РФ оставил в силе приговор Владимиру Лузгину по делу о 'реабилитации нацизма'," *Открытая Россия*, August 1, 2016; <https://openrussia.org/post/view/17294/>, page unavailable on November 20, 2024. Professor Andrei Zubov and lawyer Irina Fadeyeva spoke extensively on this issue as a symbol of the politics of memory in today's Russia during a discussion in the Radio Liberty studio, broadcast on the TV Current Time 1 ("Настоящее Время") channel, September 10, 2016, at 8–9 a.m. Central European time.

794 A statement by Viktor Alksnis, former leader of the Communist Party, *ibid.*

795 "Спасти западную европу от восточной. Философ Александр Дугин рассуждает о континентальной миссии России," quoted after www.geopolityka.net/jan-majkaaleksander-dugin-i-kontynentalna-misja-rosji/, accessed November 20, 2024.

any reports, so it would be hard to tell how far its interference in scholarship went. Presumably, its very existence was enough to “discipline” many authors.

Significantly, alongside its repressive role, the Commission to counter falsification also acted as a patron sponsoring the publication of printed matter it considered worthwhile from the point of view of memory politics.⁷⁹⁶ This aspect came to the fore after just a few months of its operations, against the backdrop of the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, with official support for presentations of events which preceded the start of the war in accordance with what the Russian authorities wanted, regardless of the precarious nature of such enunciations.⁷⁹⁷ In this respect, the Commission was presumably continuing the line adopted by the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, which had sent out a “recommended reading list” to governors and other senior administrators to help them with the implementation of the official politics of memory.⁷⁹⁸

The Commission *de facto* ceased operations in the spring of 2012, although formally it was not closed down. Presumably, the fact that its activities were suspended should be associated with critical opinions that it had failed to tackle the tasks of defining a set of principles for the State’s politics of memory and had never issued a statement on the matter.⁷⁹⁹ As subsequent years showed, those tasks were assiduously taken up by institutions considered successors to the Naryshkin Commission and backed by supportive State patronage. The chief representatives of these offshoots are the Russian Historical and Military Association, which I have mentioned above,⁸⁰⁰ as well as the Russian Historical Society, which was founded in 2012 within the framework of a new offensive in memory politics. The latter institution, whose chairman is Sergey Naryshkin, looks back to the traditions of the Imperial Russian Historical Society (1866–1917).⁸⁰¹

Any attempt to address the subject of Russia’s current (post-2000) politics of memory invariably leads to questions whether the degree of manipulation in it

⁷⁹⁶ The official patronage was clearly marked in each of these publications, recommending them to readers. Cf. Gennady Matveev and Viktoria Matveeva, *Польский плен. Военнослужащие Красной армии в плену у Поляков в 1919–1921 гг.* (Moscow: Родина медиа, 2011).

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. Wołos, *Historiografia rosyjska*, 136–137.

⁷⁹⁸ Solonin, *Мозгоимение*, 170–171. This information has not been confirmed.

⁷⁹⁹ Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России,” part 1, 11.

⁸⁰⁰ “The Russian Historical and Military Association, headed by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, has become one of the main players in the perpetuation of historical myths that correspond to the interests of the state at a given specific time,” the sociologist Anatolii Golubovskii commented, *Магия мифа или власть факта*, 1–2.

⁸⁰¹ Cf. Sergey Shakhrai, “Напишем историю вместе,” February 27, 2013, <https://svop.ru/news/2478>, accessed November 20, 2024.

will not thwart the point of carrying out research and what kind of expertise lies behind its recommendations: do professional historians have a say in all this, or is it just a stomp ground for “historical PR specialists” implementing their superior’s directives? The gap between matters propagated and facts based on source materials casts doubt on the professionalism of the experts promoting these matters, or alternatively on their integrity.⁸⁰²

The self-evident tendentiousness and selectivity of Russia’s politics of memory evokes the next question, which I have already mentioned above: has it been conceptualized on the basis of the servile approach taken in Soviet times and its epigones, or was it a reverse order of cause and effect? Most probably a mix of both. The Russian authorities have no trouble with searching through their highly pluralistic indigenous historiography to fish out those formulations which they can use to reconstruct the interpretations they want to impose. One could also ask whether Putin’s politics of memory regarding the replacement of Marxism-Leninism with the national and superpower idea has any kind of conceptualization behind it at all, whether it is coherent. My review suggests that it can hardly be said to be conceptualized or coherent. Alongside its permanent components, it also contains items which do not fit in with the main idea or do not correspond with it at all, are make-shift and eclectic, picked on a running basis to suit *ad hoc* political needs.⁸⁰³

The demand for such content, manifest in official statements, acts as an incentive and resonates with a segment of the milieu of Russian historians ready to respond whenever opportunity knocks. The result is that we get publications which are deliberately tendentious and unreliable.

Poland in Russia’s politics of memory

At the beginning of Putin’s first term as President, it seemed that there would finally be some progress in the so-called anti-Katyn question, which had been pending for decades. In December 2000, an agreement was finally reached between

802 “When we consider the use the authorities [of contemporary Russia] are making of history, what is appalling is not the fact itself, but *the way they are doing it*, misusing history for bad purposes,” says the historian Askold Ivanchik in *Магия мифа или власть факта*, 9.

803 “. . . as much as possible was collected from all the various periods of Russian history, put together and labeled ‘the national symbols.’ This included the well-known, though nowadays completely useless ideas, ‘Holy Rus,’ ‘Moscow the Third Rome,’ the ‘Orthodoxy–*samoderzhaviye*–nationality’ formula, and ‘proletarian internationalism,’” see Afanasyev, *Опасная Россия*, 127–128. “The concept of [Russian politics of memory after 2000] encompassed separate snippets, items at loggerheads with each other,” Pietrovskaya, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей” 26.

the supreme authorities of the archives of the two countries, Poland and the Russian Federation, and subsequently a joint team of historians and archivists was appointed to prepare the source materials on the Red Army men held in Poland as prisoners-of-war in the aftermath of the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919–1920. The members of the committee included historians and archivists, specialists who had spent years working on Polish–Soviet relations, especially their political and military aspects. The outcome of their joint effort was a large volume of source documents which gave a proficient account of the issue and rejected the anti-Katyn allegations.⁸⁰⁴ In theory, the book was published in Moscow in 2004, but it was neither dispatched for regular distribution nor mentioned in the papers. Most of the small print run has still not been put on the market and is not available for the purposes of scholarship. The volume is cited only sporadically, while publications in the anti-Katyn spirit appear and are referred to on a daily basis. Not even the team of Putin's ghostwriters seem to know, or refuse to acknowledge the volume's conclusion. This came out quite clearly in Putin's address during the memorial event in Katyn Forest on April 7, 2010, in which he cited the number of Red Army victims who died in Polish POW camps, reiterating the figures given by anti-Katyn publications.⁸⁰⁵

The first institutional attempt to release the tension which had accrued from so-called past events and controversies due to the selective approach or conflicting interpretations ambient in the politics of memory practiced by both countries was made in 2002. A special commission of historians was set up in the foreign ministries of both parties, with the task of arriving at a mutual position on the disputed issues. In practice, the commission never started its work, that is, it did not get beyond the organizing stage.⁸⁰⁶

Yet there was an obvious need for an institution of this kind, at the very least in view of the question of the Russian position on the Katyn Atrocity, which the government and authorities of Russia had put on hold. For years Investigation No. 159 had been going on in the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation, as I have said above. Poland had been trying to persuade the Russian

804 *Красноармейцы в польском плену в 1919–1922 гг: сборник документов и материалов*, comp. Evgenia Nikolaevna Eliseeva et al. (Moscow: Летний сад, 2004).

805 Allegedly thirty-three thousand – I was there and heard him say this. In the official English version of Putin's Katyn speech of April 7, 2010, there is no mention at all of Soviet POWs held in Poland after the Bolshevik–Polish war of 1919–1920. ARCHIVE OF THE OFFICIAL SITE OF THE 2008–2012 PRIME MINISTER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VLADIMIR PUTIN – Events (premier.gov.ru), accessed February 14, 2024.

806 I was a member of the commission, so I had first-hand knowledge.

investigators to finalize their work, but had gotten nowhere.⁸⁰⁷ A change in the Russian position only came after yet another intervention, during a visit to Moscow by Professor Leon Kieres, President of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, in August 2004, when he announced that Poland would not engage in any further appeals on the issue and—in view of its inability to get the Russians to surmount their inertia—intended to start an investigation of its own.⁸⁰⁸ He was notified that in fact the proceedings had finished and its results would be presented by the end of the year.⁸⁰⁹

In March 2005, after more delay, the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation notified the Poles officially that its investigation of the Katyn Atrocity had closed “in connection with the death of the guilty parties.”⁸¹⁰ What discomfited the Polish authorities was not so much the fact that the proceedings had been discontinued, but the information that the genocidal decision taken by the Central Committee of the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on March 5, 1940, had been qualified in the investigation of 2002–2005 pursuant to Art. 171 of the 1926 Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, in force in 1940, as a “misfeasance” which led to “intentional manslaughter” (Art. 102), the prosecution of which had been dismissed “due to the death of those guilty of the offense.” The Russian prosecution did not find any features of genocide in the Katyn Atrocity “either in the aspect concerning the State or in the legal sense,” only “misfeasance leading to serious consequences.”

No grounds were given for such a conclusion to the investigation, which effectively reduced the mass murders to an ordinary felony. The grounds for the decision were not published because the document was “classified.” Neither was a list published giving the names of the “official persons” responsible for the “Katyn incidents”: this, too was deemed “a classified document.”⁸¹¹ The scandalous end to fourteen years of proceedings caused outrage, especially in Poland.⁸¹²

807 Cf. Chapter Five, 173–175.

808 IAR Polish Radio News Agency, August 4, 2004.

809 President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was told the same thing during his visit to Moscow in September 2004. For more details on this topic, see Materski, *Śledztwo nr 159*, 102–103.

810 See PAP Polish Press Agency report, March 12, 2005; “Zbrodnia katyńska. Polskie śledztwo,” *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, no. 20 (2005): 182–185.

811 PAP Polish Press Agency report, March 12, 2005. The grounds for such a ruling are still classified today, which is hardly surprising considering its absurdity from the logical and legal point of view. However, its “rationality” from the point of view of the interests of the Russian authorities may be warranted by the fear that any other outcome could have “given rise to legal liabilities – claims for compensation, war reparations and so on.” “Born in USSR” (part 2), www.new.org.pl/2012-09-21,born_in_ussr_cz.2.html, page not available on November 20, 2024.

812 See the press articles published on March 12–15, 2005.

It was no doubt in connection with this kind of closure to the Katyn investigation that deniers of Soviet culpability revived their allegations. The man who acted as their informal political leader was Viktor Ilyukhin, a Communist Party deputy to the State Duma.⁸¹³

The way in which the Russians terminated the Katyn investigation brought about a freeze in relations with Poland, ruining the prospects for dialogue of any kind on historical matters. A chance for a change in the rigorous attitude adopted by the Russians did not come until a new situation appeared on the home front in Poland, when a Civic Platform and Polish People's Party coalition came to power. During Prime Minister Donald Tusk's visit to Moscow in February 2008, the Polish delegation and its Russian hosts concurred that an instrumental approach to the treatment of historical subjects was having a destructive effect, and therefore a decision was taken to set up a new group of experts harking back to the legacy of the Joint Commission of 2002. The organization of the new group would likewise be a task for the respective foreign ministries of the two countries. That was how the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was created; and Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld, the Minister's Plenipotentiary for Relations with Russia, and Anatoly Torkunov, Rector of the Moscow State Institute for Foreign Relations, were appointed its joint directors on behalf of Poland and Russia respectively.

The Group met on a fairly regular basis, in both countries alternately, and operated until 2013. For a fairly long spell, its activities effectively stopped in the tense atmosphere which ensued as a result of Russia's aggressive operations against Ukraine. Professor Rotfeld handed in his resignation. Unexpectedly, in March 2017, Witold Waszczykowski, Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, decided to resume the Group's activities, arguing that there was "a need for dialogue, the furtherance of personal and cultural contacts, and the restoration of bilateral economic relations."⁸¹⁴ A new team of experts was appointed for Poland under the leadership of Professor Mirosław Filipowicz. Viewed against the background of Russia's ongoing occupation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine, not to mention the policy Russia was pursuing on other regions of its political interests, Minister Waszczykowski's decision must be regarded as controversial.

The Group should be credited for the overall balance in the work it accomplished in the few years when it was active to arrive at a jointly held, or fairly

813 Cf. Victor Ilyukhin, "Катынское дело по Геббельсу," <https://kprf.ru/dep/70990.html>, accessed November 20, 2024; Victor Ilyukhin, *Тайны Катынской трагедии. Материалы «круглого стола», проведённого 19 апреля 2010 года в Государственной Думе Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации* (Moscow: Политическое просвещение, 2010).

814 PAP Polish Press Agency report, March 9, 2017.

close position on particular historical issues which had been problematic.⁸¹⁵ However, its achievements had little or no effect at all on the Russian politics of memory I have been examining in this book. This aspect of Russia's policy has always been modeled to meet political requirements, not on the basis of results provided by scholarly research, as manifested in the stubborn insistence on the claim that the Katyn Atrocity was merely a run-of-the-mill case of manslaughter, the recurrent anti-Katyn fabrications, or the relentless highlighting of controversial issues in relations between Poland and Lithuania, or Poland and Ukraine, rounded off with the inevitable conclusion that it all goes to show that Poland has always been "an invader and oppressor of other nations, always spreading Catholicism by violence or stealth on territories that are canonically Eastern Orthodox."⁸¹⁶

Poland's sensitivity to historical issues has always and invariably been exploited by Russia for its current political needs and to trigger the changes and/or decisions it wanted in such matters.⁸¹⁷

In the jubilee year of 2009, tension concerning history, ostensibly relaxing when the Tusk government came to power in Poland, again resurfaced. This time the pretext was provided by statements made not only in Poland but also from many parts of the world that the Soviets were jointly to blame for the outbreak of World War Two. Moscow treated such assertions not merely as a slur against the policies pursued by the Soviet Union, but also as an attack against Russia's current security and prestige.⁸¹⁸ A few weeks before September 1, Russia launched a massive propaganda campaign to present the foreign policy the Soviets pursued on the eve of the outbreak of the war as peaceful and defensive, in an attempt

815 This is evidenced primarily by the study jointly compiled and published in three language versions, Polish, Russian and English: *Białe plamy – czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w polsko-rosyjskich stosunkach 1918–2008*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatolij W. Torkunow (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2010), *Белые пятна – черные пятна: Сложные вопросы в российско-польских отношениях*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (Moscow: Аспект Пресс, 2010), *White Spots – Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918–2008*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). A vitriolic attack was launched on the Polish publishing house, which was accused of making 90% of the publication represent the Polish version of history: see Kolerov, «Историческая политика» в современной России, part 1, 12.

816 Quoted after *Propaganda historyczna Rosji*, 9.

817 "Polish sensitivity to historical issues allows Russia to use them as a tool to regulate of Polish–Russian political relations, and this can be traced over the last 25 years," Pietrovskaya, "Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей," 35–36.

818 Domańska, "Rosyjskie obchody 70. rocznicy zwycięstwa"; Stanisław Gregorowicz, "Antypolska propaganda historyczna w Federacji Rosyjskiej," *Nasz Głos*, no. 2 (2009).

not only to refute the allegations, but also to pin the blame for starting the war on Poland. The Polish–German non-aggression pact concluded in January 1934—a typical defensive agreement—was, according to Russia, “an aggressive pact between Piłsudski and Hitler,” which purportedly contributed to the origin of the Second World War “far more than the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact helped Hitler decide to start the War.”⁸¹⁹ This claim was supposed to be backed up by a volume of documents collected by Soviet intelligence and published in August 2009, with Major General Lev Sotskov, a senior officer in the Russian “services” as its editor.⁸²⁰ Of course, no such conclusion could be drawn from the material published in the volume, but a reader who was not a specialist in the field would not have been able to make an independent assessment for himself. A readymade evaluation was handed to him on a plate in the introduction, which was full of manipulation, and the claim it presented was reproduced in numerous newspaper articles and news services.⁸²¹

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation went as far as to post an item on its official website alleging that it was the aggressive policy practiced by the Second Polish Republic which forced the Soviet Union to enter a pact with Nazi Germany.⁸²² Indeed, Poland was so arrogant and presumptuous, convinced it was a world power, that it refused to hear of Hitler’s “modest territorial claims,” thereby destabilizing the situation in the region and leaving Moscow with no option but to embark on defensive measures to protect itself against the danger instigated by Poland’s behavior. The author of this amazing revelation was a professional military historian, Col. Sergei Kovalyev, head of the Military History Research Department for the Northwestern Region of the Russian Federation in the Institute of Military History at the Defense Ministry of the Russian Fed-

819 For details, see Materski, *Polsko-niemiecka Deklaracja o niestosowaniu przemocy ze stycznia 1934 roku*, 920–933.

820 Since August 17 [2009], the volume has been available on the website of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, <http://svr.gov.ru/smi/2009/itar-tass20090825.htm>, accessed November 20, 2024; <http://svr.gov.ru/smi/2009.htm>, accessed November 20, 2024.

821 *Секреты польской политики 1935–1945 гг.*, 3–9. See a review of this book by Piotr Gontarczyk, “Polska w oczach wywiadu sowieckiego,” *Rzeczpospolita*, September 3, 2009; Władysław Bułhak, “Krótki kurs dezinformacji,” *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 12 (2009): 14–32.

822 For the full text, see Sergei Kovalyev, “Вымыслы и фальсификации в оценках роли СССР накануне и с началом Второй мировой войны,” *Взгляд*, June 4, 2009. See also “МО признало дискуссионной статью о причинах начала Второй мировой,” *Известия*, June 4, 2009; “Шок. Министерство обороны РФ считает, что зачинщиком Второй мировой войны была Польша, а не Германия.” This page was blocked by the service provider on November 20, 2024.

eration. One of Col. Kovalyev's duties was running the Military Encyclopedia for the Ministry, so by definition he was considered a purveyor of objective facts.⁸²³

Russian television joined the campaign, too, and broadcast a news item on an anti-USSR plot hatched by Poland with Japan and Germany in the 1930s. This conspiracy was apparently based on a secret clause in the military declaration made by Poland and Germany in January 1934.⁸²⁴

Like the anti-Katyn lies, which Russia is still bandying about,⁸²⁵ the allegation of Poland's culpability for sparking the Second World War seems to have entered the repertoire of Russia's politics of memory for a longer stint. Evidence of this is provided by statements such as the one made by Sergey Andreyev, Russian Ambassador to Poland, on September 25, 2015, on the TVN24 channel. He contended that Poland "blocked the creation of a coalition against Germany" and its policy "led to the disaster of September 1939," hence one could speak of "Poland's co-responsibility for the outbreak of the War."⁸²⁶

So it was not just Maj. Gen. Sotskov's volume but also a number of other publications that declared the plot the Soviets hatched with Nazi Germany in 1939—which it would be hard to deny that it happened and that it was a conspiracy whose first vic-

823 *Актуальная история. Научно-публицистический Интернет-журнал*, <http://actualhistory.ru/history/foundation-400>, page not available on November 20, 2024.

824 *Вести недели*, TV Россия, June 21, 2009. Quoted after *Propaganda historyczna Rosji*, 26.

825 In December 2014, the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky called for the erection of a monument in Kraków to the 1919–1920 Red Army POWs and again used the defamatory expression "Polish concentration camps," in which "between 60 and 100 thousand Soviet prisoners of war" were killed, PAP Polish Press Agency report, December 9, 2014. A year later, Medinsky again made the same remark, but cut the figures down to "between 28 and 40 thousand POWs," PAP Polish Press Agency, January 29, 2016. For details on the recent anti-Katyn discourse, see Jązborska and Jabłokow, "Sprawa katyńska w Rosji," 1018–1021.

826 PAP Polish Press Agency report, September 25, 2015. Audio recording of Brygida Grysiak's interview with Ambassador Sergey Andreyev, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/ambasador-rosji-wpolsce-w-rozmowie-z-reporterka-czarno-na-bialym,580483.html>, accessed November 20, 2024. In connection with this statement, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a communiqué which said that, "The claim presented by the highest official representative of the Russian state in Poland denies the historical truth and reproduces the most deceitful interpretations of the events used in the Stalinist and Communist period," PAP Polish Press Agency communiqué, September 26, 2015. Commenting on Andreyev's statement, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Grzegorz Schetyna said, "These are unpleasant words resulting from a misunderstanding of history and a lack of awareness of how harmful and untrue they are . . . you cannot say things that take us back to the times when Vyacheslav Molotov was responsible for Soviet diplomacy," *ibid.* See also Sergey Andreyev and Sławomir Dębski, "O trudnych relacjach polsko-rosyjskich," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 16, 2015.

tim was Poland—was foisted upon Moscow by the circumstances and was “within the bounds of standard international diplomatic practice at the time.”⁸²⁷

Some went even further and said that the “operation” the Red Army conducted on Polish territory after September 17, 1939, in outcome of that conspiracy, was not war but something akin to a “peace operation” as understood in international relations at the time.⁸²⁸ On the tide of this massive propaganda attack, in a publication endorsed with a foreword by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Poland was even charged not only with plotting with Hitler, but actually planning to exterminate its Jewish inhabitants.⁸²⁹

In light of the Smolensk tragedy, the fleeting glimmer of hope for a change in the approach taken by the Russian authorities to difficult historical issues in their relations with Poland turned out to be illusory. They would soon be back to square one with tension and conflicts over the contradictory trends in the politics of memory pursued by the two countries. A new phase of the war over the monuments erupted and peaked in September 2015, when the Polish authorities pulled down the bust of General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, which had been up in Pieniężno near Warsaw. In July 1944, Chernyakhovsky had used subterfuge to arrest the commanding officers of the Vilnian Division of the Polish Home Army and deport them to the Soviet Union.⁸³⁰ When Dr. Łukasz Kamiński, President of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, made a declaration that the Institute would “encourage local authorities to demolish Soviet monuments,” the Russians said these intents “bordered on barbarity.”⁸³¹

There are more Polish flashpoints of this kind in the Russian politics of memory. They are all impervious to argumentation based on research results and have

827 Cf., for example, Mikhail Myagkov, “От Мюнхенского соглашения до подписания советско-германского договора от 23 августа 1939 г.: предыстория вопроса,” in *Международный кризис 1939–1941 гг.: от советско-германских договоров 1939 г. до нападения Германии на СССР: материалы международной конференции, организованной Институтом всеобщей истории Российской академии наук, Университетом Латвии, Институтом современной истории (Мюнхен), Московским отделением Фонда им. Конрада Аденауэра, Москва 3–4 февраля 2005 г.*, ed. Natalia Ivanovna Egorova et al. (Moscow: Права человека, 2006), 52–58.

828 Mikhail Meltyukhov, *Советско-польские войны. Военно-политическое противостояние 1918–1939 гг.* (Moscow: Вече, 2001), 416–418.

829 See Spiridon Drozhzhin, “Договор о ненападении между Советским Союзом и Германией и общественное мнение современной Германии,” in *Партитура Второй мировой. Кто и когда начал войну?* ed. Natalia Alekseevna Narochnitskaya (Moscow: Вече, 2009), 63.

830 PAP Polish Press Agency report, September 17, 2015; <https://pl.sputniknews.com/opinie/201509181040427/>, page not available on November 20, 2024.

831 PAP Polish Press Agency report, March 29, 2016. See Robert Jurszo, “Spór o pomniki Armii Czerwonej. O rosyjskiej schizofrenii historycznej,” *Spór o pomniki Armii Czerwonej. O rosyjskiej schizofrenii historycznej* – WP Opinie, accessed November 20, 2024.

been on Russia's menu for donkey's years. They start with the Polish presence in the Kremlin in the early seventeenth century and continue right up to the incitement of Ukraine against Russia Poland is allegedly conducting now. They appear to be needed to keep up the story about the devious, two-faced neighbor, innately anti-Russian and a traitor to Slavdom, forever scheming against the territorial integrity, prestige and reputation of "invariably peace-loving" Russia.⁸³² It's an image good for keeping up the myth of Russia being surrounded by enemies, as well as from the point of view of Moscow's foreign policy. It legitimizes Russia's tactics in East-Central Europe, which involves a variety of different approaches to the diverse countries in the region. It makes for an easier gambit to disintegrate them, and in the long run to trigger disintegrative forces in the European Union.

⁸³² This claim crops up not only in propaganda statements and publications, but also in those aspiring to scholarship. Cf., for instance, Elena Yakovleva, *Польша против СССР 1939–1950* (Moscow: Вече, 2007); and my review of this book, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 1 (2008): 239–250.

Conclusion

Today the practice of Russia's politics of memory has not strayed very far from the manipulations it used in the Imperial or Soviet era. All that has changed are the methods, while the aims have stayed more or less the same in many respects, while the unintended side effect of these activities, depriving history of its character as a field of scholarship, is similar. Scholarship has never been the purpose of these manipulative operations tampering with historical facts; instead, they have always been intended to conjure up a picture of the past just as the authorities wanted it to be to stabilize and reinforce their power, draw public attention away from their blunders and negligence, to create and build up a cult of the ruler (tsar, general secretary, or president), discredit the politicians in opposition to him and groups aspiring to power in the country, as well as adversaries or rivals on the international scene, and ultimately to vindicate outright aggression—against Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and against Ukraine in a full-scale war in 2022.

Under the absolute monarchy, and next in the Soviet totalitarian state, those in power did not even need to impose policy of this kind because it was implemented more or less as a matter of course by compliant individuals pursuing a livelihood in the arts and culture, chiefly writers and journalists, always prompt to read their masters' minds. It was only after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party that we may speak of the emergence in the public sphere of an attempt to arrive at an interpretation of history independent of the version decreed by the Soviet State and its ruling Party. This trend was suppressed under Brezhnev, but revived in the age of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* and in the first years of the Yeltsin presidency started to conduct a substantial verification of what the people of Russia knew in the way of historical facts.

After 2000, the tendency to endow the country's politics of memory with a chaotic and incoherent ideology returned,⁸³³ arousing opposition from liberal

833 “The authorities seem to have no logical ideology. Depending on the needs of a given moment, they may turn to Eurasianism, e.g. in the context of rapprochement with China, to strengthen them ideologically. Russia may present itself as a separate civilization, or it may treat itself as part of Europe. The term ‘hybridity’ has become popular, which is, in my opinion, quite a successful term,” says the historian Askold Ivanchik, *Магия мифа или власть факта: историческая политика против исторической науки в России. Круглый стол*, <https://openrussia.org/post/view/12464>, 16, accessed December 4, 2024. The term “aggregateness” (*agregatowość*) proposed by Bratkiewicz, seems a successful definition as well: Jarosław Bratkiewicz, “Zasada

circles.⁸³⁴ One of the essential features of this revival has been its eclecticism, due to the authorities wanting to find a common denominator to put all the periods in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union under one umbrella, reconciling the traditions and identity of the medieval principality with that of the tsarist monarchy, the Soviet State and its Party, and finally with that of the liberalizing statehood in the post-Communist period of transformation. They have also been endeavoring to realign the approach to history taken in all of the country's major political projects to head in the same direction.⁸³⁵

The common denominator which is being applied in the politics of memory practiced under Putin's presidency is the vision of "a strong state in which shared values are preferred to a misconceived individualism, a state evoking admiration among its enemies and making its subjects proud of it."⁸³⁶ Russia's memory politics contains a mix of the reminders of the Soviet era ubiquitous in the country's urban infrastructure, the cult of Lenin side by side with tributes to Admiral Kolchak,⁸³⁷ the canonization of Nicholas II next to nostalgia for the USSR etc.⁸³⁸ A tricky test

kontynuacji i prognozowanie. Teoriohistoryczny wymiar podejścia kulturalistycznego (przypadek Rosji)," in *W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu transformacji*, 69.

834 See the opinion of Irina Shcherbakova, a Memorial activist, in Petr Rezvikh, "Историческая политика в России и Польше," <https://igiti.hse.ru/Meetings/Debaty/2013-report>, 3–4, page not available on November 20, 2024.

835 Oksana Petrovskaya (aka Pietrovskaya), an associate of the Russian Institute for Strategic Research in Moscow, who has researched these problems, distinguishes four basic approaches to the past in the Russian political spectrum: "white" – monarchist; "red" – communist; "red-brown" – national-patriotic; and "pink-blue" – liberal. They differ in the nature of identification with the past and choice of facts and figures; the only feature they share is the myth of the Great Patriotic War, cf. Pietrowskaja, "Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей," 19–22.

836 Mikołaj Banaszkiwicz, "Zapełnienia polityki historycznej – przypadek rosyjski," *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, no. 2 (2008), *Polityka historyczna – historia instrumentem bieżącej polityki*, ed. Stanisław Kilian, 9–17.

837 These have ranged from the repatriation of Kolchak's remains from the United States on the initiative of President Putin and their ceremonial burial with honors in Russia (2005), the ten-episode hagiographic series *Адмирал* ("The Admiral," 2009, directed by Andrei Kravchuk), shown several times on television, and a vast number of publications on Kolchak flooding the historical book market.

838 According to the political scientist Gleb Pavlovsky, Russians are indoctrinated by the contemporary politics of memory and "feel that they are scions of both the Reds and the Whites, children of the revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries," quoted after Banaszkiwicz, "Zapełnienia polityki historycznej," 17. "The Russian collective consciousness has become an amalgam of historical successes and leaders who have played key roles in the history of this country: Lenin and Stalin stand next to the now canonized Tsar Nicholas II, all symbolizing Russia's past glory and idealized in textbooks presenting the Russian version of history . . . the Lenin Museum has

this kind of memory politics, described as the construction of a “non-contradictory history of Russia,”⁸³⁹ will have to negotiate, will be the centenary of the October Revolution inexorably coming up in 2017.

The new chapter in Russia’s politics of memory entails fewer invocations to the Deity than the plentiful references of the kind that characterized the tsarist period, or primitive asides typical of Soviet times when it suddenly turned out that humanity had to thank the Russians for practically every invention or discovery, and every measure the country’s authorities took was rooted in the profound learning they had gleaned from the theory of Marxism–Leninism. Currently, the pool of arguments available is much smaller, since now it is much harder to fish out items from the tsarist period which for decades Russians were taught to look down on, or from the criminal depravities of the Soviet era, and roll them into an appropriately manipulated whole to serve up as an edifying subject for the politics of memory. One by one, the myths buttressing Russia’s post-Soviet identity have crumbled up: the Great Revolution has turned into a coup; rule by the people has become the Party’s diktat over society; collectivization is now seen as a series of crimes committed against rural areas; and industrialization as the building of a giant with feet of clay. Despite its superficiality and selective nature, the so-called *glasnost*’ of the mid-1980s followed by the policy conducted by Boris Yeltsin on the basis of the claim that the Bolshevik Party was a criminal organization⁸⁴⁰ have not left much of a legacy to choose from Russian/Soviet history out of a stretch of over seven decades of the twentieth century which could be used to integrate society, bolster its sense of identity, and build up its national pride. What is left is history in the sense of geography (i.e. the vast extent of the Empire),⁸⁴¹ and the anachronistic attributes of a superpower—territorial magnitude and military strength based on an all-embracing culture (viz. the Russian language) and worship in a superficial, ritual Russian Orthodoxy.

As in all the preceding periods, what we’re seeing now is a dichotomous picture: Russia reflected in its authorities and ruling class, contrasted with the people of Russia. Regardless of the incoherence of the message communicated by Russia’s politics of memory and the changes made in its details to fit the occasion,

been reopened, Nicholas II canonized and the eightieth anniversary of the KGB celebrated with great pomp.” Justyna Ołędzka, “Współczesna Rosja 1991–2011,” *Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2014): 141–142.

839 “Putin wants a history that can accommodate both the Tsar, Stalin and Yeltsin.” See Jakub Majmurek’s interview with Moscow activist Ilya Budraitis, www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/rosja/20150116, accessed December 4, 2024; Jurszo, *Spór o pomniki Armii Czerwonej*.

840 Cf. Chapter Five, 161–167.

841 Cf. Świder, “Od imperium do geopolityki,” 177–184.

the stereotype image it presents of its nation is that of “a peace-loving people, a patient and docile martyr, whose existence is subject to a variety of dangers at home and threats from abroad.” It is the predicament of the Russian people to be “endlessly put to the test, have to do battle, make sacrifices, stand up in opposition to enemies.” The champion who invariably comes to the rescue of the hard-pressed Russian nation, hauling it out of its oppression while at the same time serving as the guarantor of its might as a superpower, is its leader and governor, the strong man systematically putting his purposes into practice, the strong man who unites and directs the amorphous, passive human masses. Whenever there is a want of such a leader and governor, chaos ensues; nowadays we do have a strong man, so we are successfully reconstructing our status as a world power.⁸⁴²

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet political experiment, Russia is still a country in which history continues to play a significant role in political and social affairs; culturally, it is traditionalist and conservative. Two ideologizing approaches to memory politics vie with each other for ascendancy: one draws on Stalin’s *Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)* for inspiration; its rival is grounded in the confidential address Khrushchev delivered at the Communist Party’s Twentieth Congress.⁸⁴³ Moreover, the disputes which ran rampant in two of the nineteenth-century schools of history, the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, have come back to life and entered the minds of today’s opinion-making elites. One thing they do agree on is that the history of Russia is a self-sufficient, self-contained phenomenon, unique and living in a world of its own; and that the Soviet era should be discarded and not taken into consideration, because it was an experience that made no contribution to the Russian identity. Russia’s identity is Orthodox, Eurasian, and that sets Russia apart, distinguishes it and its mission of civilization from Europe and the rest of the world.⁸⁴⁴

In today’s Russia, history is invariably attracting readers and recipients. It has a broad presence in mass culture, books and magazines, movies, and on television. It is a key ingredient in the means the government uses to influence public opinion, develop “the right” attitudes and gain support for the way it is tackling (or intends to tackle) social problems.

⁸⁴² Cf. Bukharin, *Россия – Польша*, 177.

⁸⁴³ Cf. Kolerov, “«Историческая политика» в современной России,” part 2, 2, www.iarex.ru/articles/40271, accessed December 4, 2024.

⁸⁴⁴ See a very interesting attempt to question this separateness, showing that “the history of Moscow/Russia has not evolved in isolation from the history of Europe, but to a large extent it was parallel to it, on the basis of Russia’s specific faculty to reproduce the transformations that the Old Continent underwent in the modern period,” Staniszkis, Marciniak, and Świder, *Sekularyzacja myślenia politycznego w Rosji*, 17.

In the course of just a few years of Yeltsin's presidency, an enormous volume of documentary publications came out in Russia, including ones based on newly declassified source materials. The type of publications ranged from minor points of interest, through articles to monographic works presenting historical subjects in an entirely new way and endeavoring to drop ideological context. Subjects addressed included "blanks in history," i.e. subjects suppressed by the censorship authorities; as well as "black patches," fabricated information deliberately put into circulation earlier. This practice stopped as soon as Vladimir Putin came to power. A gradually growing amount of restrictions was put on access to archives and many of the collections of documents relating to the Soviet period which had just been declassified and made available for historical research were reclassified and withheld.⁸⁴⁵ A new chapter in Russia's politics of memory and practice of history—the Putin way of conducting memory politics—started and is still continuing today. To a large extent, it is a policy that seeks to rehabilitate the Soviet period, and despite the efforts under Yeltsin to make the public aware of the truth about the criminal nature of that system, the authorities are not coming up against any major problems with their new project, especially in view of the mental inertia of Russian society as a whole and the fact that it is still living "in a genetically Soviet landscape of memory."⁸⁴⁶

This politics of memory is similar to what was practiced previously, especially as regards the aggressive defense of the USSR against the charge of its responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War and its territorial conquests at the expense of Poland, Finland, Germany, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, enduring thanks to indulgence on the part of its Allies. Russia is conducting a massive campaign to erase all of these negative facts from the memory of its own people, by persistently serving up a cliché of itself as the altruistic state which saved the world from fascism at a cost of millions of lives of its own soldiers.

Other themes with a lasting or intermittent presence in the Russian politics of memory, such as the historic role of the Bolshevik Party, Stalin, the Yalta dissection of Europe, or the malfunctioning of the system as such etc., tend to be interpreted on a one-off or fairly stable basis in light of the victory myth of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945. The myth also entails the motif of the suffering sustained by the Russian nation and caused by the system; other victims are mentioned only sporadically. This aspect of what Russians know about their past is being smoothed out to suit the current objective, i.e. keeping the people under control (or increasing the

845 I know this from personal experience. My remark applies especially to the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации). See also Jasiewicz, "Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji," 246–247; Wołos, "Historiografia rosyjska," 133.

846 Kolerov, "«Историческая политика» в современной России," part 1, 6.

level of control). Attempts to encourage identification with earlier times through selected motifs from the tsarist period, such as symbolic representations of the Orthodox Church, portrayals of the Romanovs, military victories and distinguished commanders, are present all the time, but their social attractiveness is limited and may give rise to mixed feelings. This is best seen in the efforts made to idealize the last tsar, which were particularly pronounced during Yeltsin's second term as president. The campaign to put Nicholas II on a pedestal was promptly abandoned after a series of publications on the mistakes he made and his intellectual shortcomings.⁸⁴⁷

The vacancy Nicholas II failed to fill in Russia's politics of memory is beginning to be taken up by Vladimir I, Grand Prince of Rus' and its first Christian ruler, a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as of the Roman Catholic Church, and in recent years a symbol of the glorious history of Rus'/Russia. This is no doubt connected with the fact that Vladimir was baptized in Kherson (Chersonesos), Crimea, so he is the perfect choice for the patron of the operation to incorporate the Crimean Peninsula in Russia. On National Unity Day, November 4, 2016, President Putin officiated at the unveiling ceremony of a new statue of Vladimir in Moscow.⁸⁴⁸ Earlier, monuments dedicated to Vladimir the Baptist were unveiled in Astrakhan (2013), Bataysk in the Oblast of Rostov (2015), and Smolensk (2015); another is due to be unveiled in Kaliningrad.

The politics of memory conducted by today's Russia is only ostensibly the outcome of the recent discussions concerning the black image of the country's tsarist and Soviet past. Answers have been sought to questions how to build up Russia's historical identity given these detrimental facts, which events and developments should be focused on in education and by the propaganda, who are the personalities worthy of memorial statues or having streets and squares named after them. Yet in point of fact, they have been supplanted by other questions, such as why Russia's neighbors do not appreciate the civilizing role in its history, why are they continually offending Russia and trying to expel it from Europe, accusing Russia for things it never committed or did when pressurized by historic circumstances, why are they biting the Russian hand stretched out in amity, paying back with such ingratitude for so many selfless sacrifices. This message took time to crystallize out, though its early manifestations may be traced back to Yeltsin's second presidency.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁷ The tendency to idealize has been applied to a lesser extent to his devastatingly ineffective political opponents (mainly Alexander Kerensky, the figurehead of Russia's fledgling democracy).

⁸⁴⁸ *Izvestia*, November 4–5, 2013. The statue, sculpted by Salavat Shcherbakov, after a design by Igor Voskresensky, was erected on Borovitskaya Ploshchad'.

⁸⁴⁹ See, for example, the interview with President Yeltsin in *Der Spiegel*, July 4, 1999.

All these questions may be summed up in a feeling recurrent at least since the times of Peter the Great and still as strong as ever in today's Russia: that compared with other developed countries, Russia seems to be out on the peripheries. The world must fear Russia, so as not to laugh at it.⁸⁵⁰ This inferiority complex, this sense of being second-rate in terms of civilization, is the reverse side of the panoply set up by processes like the reforms of Peter the Great and Alexander II, or Stalin's or Putin's narrative of the beleaguered state surrounded by devious enemies. Another aspect of this complex is reflected in the tendency to attribute the authorship of all the inventions in world history to Russians, or to prove that Russia is world champion in every sports discipline, no matter what the costs (in terms of unfair competition and institutionalized doping practices on a mass scale). This kind of memory politics is boosting the aggressive kind of Great Russian nationalism, confirming the belief that the rest of the world is hostile to all that is Russian, and encouraging extremist political movements.⁸⁵¹

It would be hard to pinpoint a precise date when the historical motifs used in official Russian statements communicated in culture, education and the media using State services, started to adopt the form of an essentially integrated, purposeful, approved message, propagated in a long-term enterprise of State-controlled indoctrination. For years, the attitude to the Soviet past and the extent to which its achievements are highlighted and its deficiencies noted has been one of the permanent ingredients conditioning access to the Russian ruling elite and its enunciations, nonetheless a certain amount of difference between the two top personages in the country came to light quite clearly during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev⁸⁵²—clearly enough to elicit overt mentions in the media under

850 “Many Russians think that their country's military and political power is still treated as the only or key premise for (extorted) respect from others,” Broda, *Mentalność, tradycja i bolszewicko-komunistyczne doświadczenie Rosji*, 144.

851 For the Russian neo-fascist movements, see Vladimir I. Piyushenko, *Ксенофобия, национализм, фашизм: лики русского неонацизма* (Moscow: Академия, 2005); Semyon Charny, *Расизм, ксенофобия, антисемитизм, этническая дискриминация в Российской Федерации в 2005 г: обзорный доклад Московского бюро по правам человека* (Moscow: Академия, 2006), <http://civilcontrol.ru/antirasizm.htm>, not accessed November 20, 2024 1; Włodzimierz Iszczuk, “Antypolonizm. Zwyczajny rosyjski faszyzm,” <http://jagiellonia.org/antypolonizm-zwyczajny-rosyjski-faszyzm/>, accessed November 20, 2024.

852 On becoming president, Dmitry Medvedev was outspoken on many occasions on Stalin's crimes, www.se.pl/wydarzenia/swiat/prezydent-rosji-dmitrij-miedwiediew-przyznaje_136483.html, accessed November 20, 2024; <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/miedwiediew-krytykuje-stalina-wojna-ze-swoim-narodem-to-najciezsza-zbrodnia/lyet5>, accessed November 20, 2024. In turn, Putin has been trying to avoid the subject, and whenever he was obliged to give an opinion, he did so enigmatically or in a way that left people perplexed, e.g. “Yes, Stalin was certainly a tyrant and many call him a criminal, but he was not a Nazi;” or “problematic pages in our history

a relaxed degree of State control.⁸⁵³ Some analysts have even gone as far as to call Medvedev's presidency a separate spell in memory politics, distinct from the heavy Putin brand.⁸⁵⁴ I cannot go along with this, because the differences in their respective approach were either formal or superficial, and applied not so much to differences in evaluation but rather in the characteristic forms of expression they preferred. A distinct example of this is provided by the document on National Security Strategy signed by Medvedev on May 12, 2009.⁸⁵⁵ This decree makes it quite plain that any attempt to question the official version of Russian history will be treated as a threat to national security.⁸⁵⁶ Under the guidelines laid down by Putin in 2013, the official version is to be embodied in an across-the-board obligatory set of history textbooks strictly unified in terms of content.⁸⁵⁷

On the whole, the vista of what has been published over the past years in Russia on the key events and developments of the twentieth century, such as Bolshevism and Stalinism, the personality cult, the Khrushchev thaw, the Brezhnev doctrine, the invasion of Afghanistan, the Chechen wars etc., gives a highly variegated picture. Many invaluable, high-quality, professional publications have been issued in the period, alongside others reproducing anachronisms and blatant fabrications.⁸⁵⁸ It will surely be no exaggeration to say that the latter category would not have had the chance to flood the market if the politics of memory pursued by the Russian authorities were different. One cannot expect a genuine improve-

exist," but "We have less than some countries. And ours are not as terrible as those of some others." Both references after Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 109.

853 "Mr. Putin's tendency to praise Stalin is contrary to the attitude Medvedev expressed on October 30 [2005 – W. M.], the day when Russians commemorate the victims of political repressions in the Soviet Union: an attitude of resolute opposition to a dictatorial regime," www.inoforum.ru/137414349545, page unavailable on November 20, 2024.

854 For instance, Pietrovskaya, "Инструментализация истории," 24–29, distinguishes four periods in Russian memory politics since the collapse of the USSR: 1991–1999 (Yeltsin), 2000–2009 (Putin), 2009–2012 (Medvedev) and since 2012 (Putin).

855 Указ Президента РФ от 12 мая 2009 г. № 537 "О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года," *Российская газета*, Федеральный выпуск, no. 88, May 19, 2009.

856 "81. Негативное воздействие на состояние национальной безопасности в сфере культуры усиливают попытки пересмотра взглядов на историю России, ее роль и место в мировой истории" [Attempts to revise views on the history of Russia, its role and place in world history exert a negative impact on national security in the sphere of culture], *ibid.* Cf. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/29277/page/4>, accessed December 31, 2023.

857 The legislative process concerning this issue and consultations between the Duma and the government (Social Council of the Ministry of Education and Science) had not finished by the end of 2016. Cf. Pietrowskaja, "Инструментализация истории," 31.

858 For example, Wołos, *Historiografi a rosyjska pierwszej dekady XXI stulecia*, 133–154.

ment in the situation until there is a change in this respect, but the outlook for that is not optimistic. Above all, Russian society itself is not prepared for such a change because, as Gavriil Popov, a former mayor of Moscow put it, none of the governments in power since 1991 has prescribed “an antidote against lies about the past” to society at large.⁸⁵⁹

Some of Russia’s historians are laboring to find that antidote, but the revival of research characteristic for the Yeltsin presidency has long since gone, and the palpable efforts made in the 1990s on behalf of objectivity are clearly in decline.⁸⁶⁰ Putin’s warning addressed to the community of historians that Russia’s domestic history must be “positive” is weighing down on them.⁸⁶¹ The “positive” image of history is being built up not so much by historians, but rather by sometime eminent representatives of the arts poisoned by Great Russian nationalism,⁸⁶² and even state officials and administrators are joining in their endeavors.⁸⁶³

Perhaps those who say that Putin needed such a radical change in the politics of memory to “wake society up from its ideological lethargy” are right. Perhaps he needed it to work out “a new formula for patriotism,” a new sense of national pride and pride of the Russian State, with the application of references neither to ideology nor to nostalgia for the system, but mentions of Russia’s status as a superpower and nostalgia for the Strong State which the world feared, in spite of all the enemies surrounding it.⁸⁶⁴ This view fits in with the general belief that Putin the servant of imperial power does not feel any ideological ties with the Soviet era yet is fascinated by the effectiveness of a series of mechanisms employed in

859 Cf. Gavriil Popov, *1941–1945: заметки о войне* (Moscow: Олимп, 2005), 125.

860 Cf. Wojciech Materski, “Rok 1939 w historiografii rosyjskiej,” *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 3 (2009): 73–88.

861 See Jonathan Dimbleby, *Russia: A Journey to the Heart of a Land and Its People* (London: BBC Books, 2009) “President Putin has ordained that ‘history should be positive . . .’” 315; and “With President Putin’s ominous demand that ‘history should be positive’ in mind, I asked him about teaching the history of ‘the Soviet era’ to his pupils. Did he teach ‘positive’ history? . . .” 411.

862 For example, the writer Valentin Rasputin, an erstwhile distinguished humanist turned aggressive nationalist, proclaims the cult of strong power and condemns politicians like Gorbachev or Yeltsin who, when at the helm of the state, demonstrated that they “hated historical and national Russia.” Quoted after Adam Michnik, “Polityka historyczna, wariant rosyjski,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 27–28, 2006, 22–23; www.wyborcza.pl/1,93057,3373624.html, accessed November 20, 2024.

863 “Senior Russian officials and functionaries are involved in denying Joseph Stalin’s co-responsibility for the outbreak of World War II, the occupation of the Baltic states by the USSR or the passivity of the Red Army during the Warsaw Uprising,” *Propaganda historyczna Rosji w latach 2004–2009*, 3.

864 Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy*, 296–297; *Propaganda historyczna Rosji*, 4–5.

those days to rule the country.⁸⁶⁵ Nevertheless, for the general reception of his new policy to work, there is a need—and this is where his compliant historians come in—to lower the social costs for its expediency, rig them in the right way, “write hundreds or tens of thousands instead of millions killed, which is still a reasonable price to pay for the erection of a ‘brilliant future.’”⁸⁶⁶

The main aim of the promotion of the Soviet Union as a world power in the politics of memory practiced by the present-day Russian Federation is to focus the attention of Russians on the effort their country is now making to retrieve that status, and the accent is being put on a “new type of patriotism,” a vision of a “Russian national state.”⁸⁶⁷ At the same time, it is to draw their attention away from the deficiencies they encounter in their daily lives,⁸⁶⁸ obliterate the shortcomings of the system by a revival of nostalgia for past glory, enhance the popularity of Putin and his political entourage, and present the prospective target worth the penny-pinching—Russia’s return to the role of global hegemony. The way the people of Russia reacted to the annexation of Crimea offers tangible proof that it’s a worthwhile goal: they were enthusiastic over the peninsula’s “return to the motherland.” The best proof of how effectively the politics of memory is being applied to manipulate Russian society comes in the high level of support Russians have given and still continue to give the large-scale war they launched in 2022 against Ukraine—despite the vast number of casualties and huge death toll they have sustained.

For all the importance the rulers of contemporary Russia attach to their politics of memory and the effort they are making to salvage what they can as regards the favorable reception of the Soviet period, they are unable to exercise effective control of all the media, for instance the American Current Time 1 TV channel (*Nastoyashcheye Vremya*), which broadcasts in Russian. There have even been attempts to detract from the pride and glory generated by achievements as unassailable as the Soviet space race.⁸⁶⁹ Such matters are, of course, on the sidelines of the mainstream in the shaping of public awareness of history as staked out by mass culture and the readily accessible media, which are strictly focused on the government.

⁸⁶⁵ Alexey Mukhin, *Путин: ближний круг президента* (Moscow: Алгоритм, 2005), 178, quoted after Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy*, 298.

⁸⁶⁶ Garin, “Переписанная история РФ. Наследники палачей замечают следы,” [www.glavpost.com/post/17jan2016/opinion/7079](http://www glavpost.com/post/17jan2016/opinion/7079), 5. Page not found, November 20, 2024.

⁸⁶⁷ Pietrowskaja, “Инструментализация истории в отношениях России с Польшей,” 23.

⁸⁶⁸ “We did not hark back to our historical mission until we started to decline economically,” “«Историческая политика» в современной России” (Prof. Nikolay Korosov).

⁸⁶⁹ For example, in Aleksey German’s famous film *Бумажный солдат* (“Paper Soldier,” 2008), showing the criminal underside of the Soviet successes in the space race.

Russia's politics of memory is determined to a large extent—probably just like its counterparts in other countries—not by professional historians but by the mass media acquiescent to the requirements of the politicians manipulating history.⁸⁷⁰ The media men are closely attuned to the powers that be and immediately catch even the faintest signal from them, treating it almost as a specific instruction, which they put into practice in their articles and radio and TV broadcasts.⁸⁷¹ Of course, to do this they avail themselves of the services of professionals ready for the sake of their career or for other reasons to meet the expectations of the authorities. Otherwise it would be hard to understand why publications like, for instance, a book on “Germans in Katyn”⁸⁷² come out under the auspices of a university, or why Aleksey Plotnikov, a professor of the Moscow State Linguistic University and a specialist in international economic relations, should embark on issuing the statement he made on the subject for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, a large-circulation paper with a liberal reputation.⁸⁷³ He had never engaged in scholarly research on the subject before, yet he made an authoritative statement that Katyn was a German crime and that those who denied it were “supporting Goebbels’ version of the story, ignoring or keeping quiet about the facts which were unfavorable for them,” in “self-evident manipulation and contrary to all the principles.” There was no point in discussing the matter with the Poles, because they were like “a scorpion cowering under a stone”—they pounce, bite you, and run back to hide. Likewise, in his opinion, it was just as pointless to accuse the Soviet Union of the Augustów Atrocity, the so-called Minor Katyn. That was a blatant lie, because “the Soviet Union never conducted executions of that kind without a trial, especially on prisoners-of-war who were citizens of foreign countries.” Nonetheless, the Poles rejected this self-evident truth, and “they’re going to keep saying that something that is as white as driven snow is as black as soot. They’ve run themselves into a dead end over Katyn and neither can nor want to get out of it.”

870 Or acquiescent to just one politician, as the expert on Russian affairs Prof. Włodzimierz Marciniak says, using the synonym “Putinism” for Russia’s memory politics, cf. Marciniak, “Ślady Putinizmu w Słupcy,” *Nasz Dziennik*, May 21–22, 2011. See also Marciniak, “Jeśli polityka historyczna Putina oparta jest na kręctwie, to nasza polityka powinna być oparta na prawdzie,” www.wpolityce.pl/polityka/113803. Page not found, November 20, 2024.

871 “Statements made by representatives of the Russian authorities, in particular Vladimir Putin, are immediately picked up by the elites, the press, television, artists and even scientists,” *Propaganda historyczna Rosji*, 4.

872 *Немцы в Катыни: Документы о расстреле польских военнопленных осенью 1941 года*. For a similar publication, *Тайны Катынской трагедии*, see Chapter Six, note 199.

873 “Катынский тупик. С проф. Алексеем Плотниковым беседовал Олег Назаров,” *Литературная газета*, no. 34, September 2, 2015. See also Witold Wasilewski, “Kłamstwa ‘jak bliny,’” <http://www.naszdziennik.pl/mysl/144539,klamstwa-jak-bliny.html>, accessed November 20, 2024.

Such opinions are still being voiced by “intellectuals,” a quarter of a century after the USSR officially admitted that it committed the Katyn Atrocity, and after the publication and recurrent re-issue of the official records in Closed Packet No.1.

Nonetheless, the fact that some of Russia’s professional historians are opportunists ready to engage in making the memory politics the authorities want should not be applied to the whole milieu of historians.⁸⁷⁴ It’s true that serious research on the history of the Soviet era earning official disapproval for the scholars committed to them has not petered out in today’s Russia. Such work is still being continued, but neither television nor “the free press” shows any interest in them of the type shown in the 1990s. Such work does not, and will enjoy political patronage for a long time to come.

Not only is the manipulative presentation of historical facts supporting the current projects undertaken by those in power, but it is also reinforcing the tendency to whitewash Bolshevism and Stalinism, which has been continuously applied since 2000⁸⁷⁵ and often appears in school textbooks, where it is served up as objective truth. As a result, Russian society is developing a false historical awareness: stereotypes are being cultivated, along with chauvinistic nationalism inculcated from the earliest years of childhood, contempt for diplomacy based on respect for international treaties, pathological ambitions of Russia as a superpower, nostalgia for bygone times when the world feared the Soviet Union, and the misguided belief that the USSR was the world’s first welfare state.⁸⁷⁶

It would be hard to say how much of what the people of Russia know about history and the information presented in the media gives the true facts and how much of it has been manipulated for the purposes of memory politics. Moreover, whether the manipulation is effective from the point of view of those who rule the country, and whether it compensates elderly Russians with a sense of pride in the alleged recovery of Russia’s status as a superpower, to make up for the dire poverty in which many of them live.⁸⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the policy intended to per-

874 For the conflict between the professional integrity of Russian historians and the authorities’ expectations, requiring them to push the official memory politics, see Rezvikh, “Историческая политика в России и Польше” (in particular, the opinion of Prof. Pavel Uvarov, 19–20).

875 Garin, “Переписанная история РФ. Наследники палачей заматают следы.”

876 “Most Russians believe that the USSR was the first country to provide a fair deal for ordinary people and make their lives bearable,” Andrey Sokolov, “Конец советской истории,” in *Россия на рубеже XXI века: оглядываясь на век минувший*, 256 (Prof. Sokolov is a distinguished social historian and political scientist).

877 “Putin wanted the world to know that Russia intended once again to become a superpower and the world had better not forget it.” Dimpleby, *Russia: A Journey*, 358. “Actually, who is the State’s politics of memory addressed to? Who is it meant for? Just the masses, or generally speaking, the poor and simple folk who need a very simplified idea of Russia’s mission.” “«Истори-

suade people that there is a need for a solid executive authority and show that Russia was able to assume the position of a world power and hold this status effectively when it was strong and power was concentrated in the hands of one man—that policy seems to be falling on fertile ground. Hence, the frequent practice in mass culture, especially on television, of referring to Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great and presenting them in a well-nigh hagiographical convention, despite the ambiguities concerning the way these or other analogous historical figures may be assessed.⁸⁷⁸

Assuming that the results of the series of presidential and parliamentary elections which have taken place in recent years give a good picture of the range of views held by voters, we may say that Putin's line of argument has been successful. A large segment of Russian society believes that what Russia needs is the restoration of a system in which power lies in the hands of one man and a one-party system. In the current conditions, that means power concentrated in the hands of Vladimir Putin and his party United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*), which has come pretty close to monopolizing the whole of the country's political scene.⁸⁷⁹

This system of government has been scoring spectacular "successes" in the form of the *de facto* annexed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the incorporation of Crimea, the control of Transnistria, and so-called Novorossiia "New Russia." Most Russians are proud of these achievements, as we may infer from opinion polls, which say that over 80% support the operations Putin has carried out using his "Little Green Men."⁸⁸⁰ They have also given their support to his so-called "Special Operation" against Ukraine, albeit no reliable data have been issued to estimate how big that support has been. However bad the economic situation is getting at home, impacting on the standard of living for ordinary people and involving the country in new conflicts, the position commanded by Putin and

ческая политика» в современной России" (Prof. Mikhail Nemtsov). "In Russia's radically atomized and poor society, imperial discourse compensates for everyday problems," "Polityka historyczna Rosji – rozmowa z prof. Andrzejem Nowakiem," *Frona*, no. 44–45 (2008) (interview by Piotr Palka).

878 For example, according to the Slavophiles, Peter I was responsible for practically all of Russia's misfortunes; he looked up to the West and forced Western arrangements upon his country, thereby depriving Russia of its most important feature, its self-existence, "Historia jako polityka," www.cyfroteka.pl/catalog/eboki/0203410/020/ff/101/OEBPS/Text/section004.xhtml. Page not found, November 20, 2024.

879 See "Чтобы выжить, Путин должен стать Сталиным," *Новая Газета*, no 139, December 7, 2012; www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/55687.html. Page not found, November 20, 2024.

880 At the beginning of August, 2014, 87 % supported him, according to a survey conducted by the Levada Center; quoted after *Polska. The Times*, August 28, 2014.

his party is as strong as ever.⁸⁸¹ So it is probably right to say that a large part of Russian society regards Putin as a new embodiment of Russia's traditional autocratic rulers, almost a Tsar Vladimir.⁸⁸²

Russia's aggressive politics of memory, its policy of conjuring up enemies and whipping up an air of nationalist sentiment to unite Russian society around its ruler—these are key instruments now being applied to accomplish modern Russia's ambition of becoming a superpower. And we must reckon with these ambitions, with this politics of memory being continued by Moscow at least over the next few years. This is indicated by incidents such as the desecration of Katyn Cemetery perpetrated in April 2017, with the installation of plaques reproducing anti-Katyn lore.⁸⁸³ No doubt there will be a rising tide of similar operations, especially as a suggestion has been put forward to establish a Russian counterpart of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance to combat the politics of memory pursued by countries from the former Yalta sphere of Soviet dominance.⁸⁸⁴

881 This was demonstrated by the election to the State Duma in September 2016, in which Yedynaya Rossiya won 343 seats, i.e. a supermajority under the law of the Russian Federation.

882 Broda, "Zrozumieć Rosję," 200.

883 In early April 2017, anti-Katyn plaques were put up on the site of the Katyn Memorial, regarding "the fate of Red Army prisoners-of-war in Polish captivity in 1919–1920." Vladislav Kononov, executive director of the infamous Russian Historical and Military Association said that these plaques announced a forthcoming exhibition on Polish–Russian relations in the 20th century in the future museum which is to be established in Katyn Forest (in the so-called Russian part of the Memorial Complex). PAP Polish Press Agency, April 9, 2017.

884 "East European historical and political structures should be met and answered with Russian historical and political structures that are analogous in terms of operational capabilities and funding. Not by separate partisan units, but regular forces . . . Today, we are facing an urgent task: developing an effective Russian historical and political structure, or to put it in everyday language, a Russian Institute of National Remembrance," Alexander Dyukov, "Историческая политика или политическая память," *Международная жизнь*, <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/179>, accessed November 20, 2024.

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