

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1917 AND KREMLIN'S POLICY OF REMEMBRANCE

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The first time I visited the Lenin Mausoleum was on an autumn day in 1971. Leaves blew over Red Square, and down in the sarcophagus Lenin was lying in dim illumination, immaculately dressed in a dark suit, white shirt and a red necktie. Despite his attire he made a dismal impression with his yellow, parchment-like skin. 20 years later Soviet society dissolved, without Lenin being offered a decent burial. He is still there, in Red Square, and when I visited the Mausoleum once more in 2016, his suit was still black, but the necktie had been swapped for a blue one. Lenin, without doubt, looked better than he had done 45 years earlier. When I came out again into the daylight on Red Square, one question presented itself: why is it that the Russians continue to honour the memory of the founder of the Soviet state and architect of the October Revolution, when we know that Russia today has a political regime that is based on a repudiation of Communism? Why is Lenin still lying in state, guarded by some of Russia's finest soldiers?

This is the question that will be addressed here: what kind of perception of history, or rather remembrance policy underlies the Kremlin leadership's management of Lenin's embalmed body and the entire history of the Russian Revolution? In a recent article S.A. Smith, a leading British specialist, states that "[o]ur ability to understand – certainly to empathise with – the aspirations of 1917 has diminished"¹. Less research is being done on the Russian Revolution, according to Smith, due to the advance of Neo-Liberalism and the marginalization of the Left in western countries. Neither the so-called colour revolutions in the Ukraine, in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, nor the "Arab spring" have fulfilled the expectations that they raised in the beginning. With few exceptions they have become examples of how difficult it is to achieve political progress through violent means². We should add that the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space have created fear of a new revolution in Russia, and this undoubtedly forms part of the backdrop for the Putin administration's remembrance policy with regard to the Russian revolution.

¹ Smith, S.A. 2015. "The Historiography of the Russian Revolution 100 Years On". *Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History*, 16 (4), 733.

² Smith, "The Historiography of the Russian Revolution", 733.

Since Stalin's time (without making invidious comparisons) no Russian leader has been more occupied with the past than Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. In the 1930s there was no open debate on Russia's history and in particular not on the history of the Russian Revolution. To take a false step in this field was no joking matter, and the historians lived in fear and trembling. Stalin's intervention in the historical field was a kind of *remembrance policy*, even if this concept had not yet been coined. Remembrance history comprises not only the writing of history, but "the whole sphere of public strategies with regard to the past, the entirety of different practices and norms, connected with the regulation of the collective remembrance"³. Hereto belong measures for erecting memorials, making historical exhibitions in museums, marking by celebration of particularly significant events in the past, and directing attention to some topics in the past while being silent about others. Remembrance policy can be exerted not only by the state, but also by other agents, while the concept *history policy*, according to A.I. Miller, is reserved for a peculiar configuration of methods that presupposes "the use of state administrative and financial resources in the sphere of history and policy of remembrance in the interest of the ruling elite"⁴.

Even if the Kremlin leadership today has a guiding hand when it comes to the political use of history in Russia, it can be said without irony that compared with Stalin Putin handles the historians with kid gloves. By and large he leaves the historical debate in Russia open. It is true, however, that the Kremlin interferes in the financing and organization of historical research, the writing of text books, erection of monuments, media reach etc. In this way they make sure that the Kremlin's discourse on the national history gets a lot of attention, and there is reason to believe that this pressure from above increasingly will impact on professional historians' interpretations in the years to come⁵.

In spite of all the differences we still find some common features in Stalin's and Putin's way of arguing: in the 1930s Stalin called the historian Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovskii (1868-1932) and his so-called school to account for their way of writing history. Pokrovskii was the

³ Remembrance history as defined by D.V. Efremenko at a seminar organized by the Institute of scientific information of social sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow on 12 October 2017, under the heading "Stoletnii iubilei revoliutsii 1917 goda i rossiiskaia politika pamiati. Kommemoratsii stoletia revoliutsii v Rossii: ot pamiati k politikam pamiati". <http://gefter.ru/archive/23171>

⁴ A.I. Miller 2012, «Istoricheskaia politika v Vostochnoi Evrope nachala XXI veka», in *Istoricheskaia politika v XXI veke* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie 2012), 19.

⁵ See B.I. Kolonitskii, «On studying the 1917 Revolution. Autobiographical Confessions and Historiographical Predictions», *Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, 4 (Fall 2015), 751-768.

leader of the first Marxist generation of Soviet historians, that had dominated the field in the 1920s. One of their main concerns was to justify the October revolution, and for that reason they painted Russia's history before 1917 in dismal colours, seeing a coherence between a dark past and a bright future. The party leadership was not satisfied with Pokrovskii's disciples, because they reduced Russian history to a series of socio-economic formations, with no place for individual destinies – and without national glory⁶. During the phase of intensive socialist construction in the 1930s a cultural readjustment to pre-revolutionary national values took place in the Soviet Union⁷. The Soviet youth should be given reasons for being proud of their own country's history; it was no longer appropriate to represent the Russian tsars as bloody oppressors and nothing more. Some of them were great commanders who had defended Russia against foreign intruders, consolidated the Russian state and made it a great power.

The core of Putin's history policy is likewise to strengthen the Russian national values, and in 2012 he told the Federal Assembly: "Precisely in civic responsibility, in patriotism I see the consolidating basis of our policy"⁸. When in the beginning of the 2000s he started to take interest in history in earnest, Putin pointed to the fact that in the 1990s, the beginning of the post-Soviet period, Russian historians «had underlined the negative, because the task was to destroy the old system», i.e the Soviet system. Now, however, one faced, not a destructive, but «a constructive task» -- to build the new Russia⁹. Putin wanted to root his new regime in history and the national community after the troubles and degradations of the 1990s, and at the same time make sure that no groups ended up outside this community. Putin was engaged on creating 'A united Russia' (*Yedinaya Rossiya*), which also became the name of his political party. Unlike Stalin, who intervened in the historical field on behalf of the victors in the Russian revolution and civil war, Putin is searching for a conciliatory narrative of the kind, which according to Aleida Assmann rightly should be offered to both victors and losers of a civil war, allowing them "to include one's conflicting views on the events into a common

⁶ See Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 1962), 102-108. George M. Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar-bureaucrat: M.N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist historians* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1978), 193-199.

⁷ See Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: D.P. Dutton 1946).

⁸ Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniuu 12.02.2012 <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/17118> and <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/15781>

⁹ N. Sokolov, *Vek surka, ili Kratkaia istoriia kolovrashcheniia rossiiskikh uchebnykh istorii*. 2008. www.polit.ru/analytics/2008/10/15/history.html. Accessed 18. oktober 2016.

context on a higher level”¹⁰.

Among professional historians in post-Soviet Russia the view on the Revolution has changed much more than in the West, and many historians of the Soviet school who used their younger days to study and endorse the October Revolution, have now distanced themselves from it. During the Soviet period research on the Russian Revolution was a highly prioritized, but at the same time strictly regulated field that affected the very legitimacy of the Soviet order. The Great October Socialist Revolution was the foundation myth of the Soviet state, and it became the start of Russia’s triumphant motion towards socialism, a heroic event that all of a sudden placed one of Europe’s most backward countries at the very avant-garde of social progress worldwide.

It is not difficult to understand that after the breakdown of the Soviet Union the new, post-Soviet leadership in Russia badly needed a reinterpretation of the Russian Revolution and a new scheme that would explain the connection between the past and the present of the country after the rejection of historical materialism. El’tsin did not come very far in creating a new general reinterpretation or “metanarrative” of Russian history. In the 1990s criticism of the Soviet order was the main instrument in legitimating the ongoing reforms, and El’tsin’s regime very quickly started to identify itself with values that earlier had been ascribed to the capitalist West during the Cold War¹¹.

It was more difficult for Russia than for the other post-Soviet states to stake a lot on national values, due to the multi-national character of the Russian Federation. Neither could El’tsin just like that choose the Imperial or great power paradigm, since he himself had worked so determinedly for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Therefore the new post-Soviet Russian identity had to be built basically on the contrast with the “totalitarian” past and on the new “democratic”, western values¹². The emphasis was clearly on breach rather than on continuity with earlier epochs in Russian history. A change was discernible, however, from the second half of the 1990s, after the 1996 elections, which became a success for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and its leader, G.A. Ziuganov. Instead of a fundamental dissociation

¹⁰ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur and Geschichtspolitik* (München: Beck 2006), 71.

¹¹ See R.W.Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press 1997)

¹² See Olga Iu. Malinova, *Aktualnoe proshloe: Simvolicheskaja politika vlastvuiushchei elity i dilemmy rossiiskoi identichnosti* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2015), 175-178.

from the Soviet heritage came a new emphasis on *reconciliation* in El'tsin's history policy, and November 7, Revolution Day, was renamed as "The Day for Reconciliation and Accord"¹³.

Another visible effect of this was the conspicuous official reburial of the mortal remains of the Tsar's family. However, El'tsin and his entourage were presumably still under the spell of the Soviet narrative of pre-revolutionary Russia, perceiving the authoritarian *ancien regime* as a contrast to "democratic" Russia. It was essential to uphold this divergence in order to emphasize the grandness of the ongoing reforms¹⁴. Anyhow, El'tsin lacked a plausible narrative that in a positive way could connect the present with the Imperial period of Russian history.

Putin has, since he took over as President of the Russian Federation in the year 2000, been even more dedicated to reconciliation with the Soviet past. In the beginning he was influenced by what Olga Malinova calls the "popular-patriotic opposition", in particular the Communist party of the Russian Federation and their interpretation of Russia's history, which not surprisingly was more open to the positive values in the Soviet epoch. In the beginning of his first presidential term Putin characteristically persuaded the State Duma to vote for the retention of several Soviet state symbols, among them the Red flag and the Soviet star for the Russian armed forces, as well as the old Soviet anthem, albeit with a new text¹⁵. And since then Putin has stuck to this conciliatory strategy. His message to the Federation Council in 2016 was that

«the lessons of history we need first and foremost in order to strengthen the societal, civic agreement that we have succeeded in obtaining [...] It is inadmissible to drag schisms, malice, offences and bitterness of the past into our present [social] life, in one's own political and other interests to speculate in tragedies, which touched upon practically every family in Russia, regardless of on which side of the barricades our ancestors ended up. Let us always remember: we are a united people, we are one people, and Russia is one and the same for us (*Rossia u nas odna*)"¹⁶.

¹³ Malinova, *Aktualnoe proshloe*, 179-180.

¹⁴ Olga Iu. Malinova, "Neudobnyi iubilej: itogi pereosmysleniia 'Mifa osnovaniia' SSSR v ofitsial'nom istoricheskom narrative RF". *Political science (RU)*, 2017, No 3, 22-24.

¹⁵ See Kristian Lundby Gjerde, "The Use of History in Russia 2000-2011: the Kremlin and the search for consensus". *East European Politics* 2015, Vol.31, No 2, 152.

¹⁶ <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379> Accessed 25.03.2018.

Thus the Kremlin leadership is still careful not to alienate those Russians who are nostalgic about the Soviet period and its lost stability, especially elderly people. And they are still numerous. This was possibly the main reason why Putin and his collaborators were deliberately ambiguous in their statements in connection with the centenary of the Russian Revolution last year. For the commemoration of 1917 was not only about the Revolution, something that happened 100 years ago, it was about a whole epoch in Russian history, which was introduced by the Revolution. So, according to Russian minister of culture, Vladimir Medinskii, one should avoid dividing people into just and unjust, into reds and whites, but realize that both groups who fought in the Revolution and Civil War, were guided by patriotic feelings and a wish to defend Russia. They only understood the task differently¹⁷. This ambiguity on the part of the Kremlin leadership is the reason why Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, is still on display on Red Square. Putin does not want to have him removed before an overwhelming majority of the Russian population is in favour of expelling him from the Mausoleum¹⁸. That would hurt the older generation since it would imply that millions of Soviet citizens had nourished false ideals during the 74 years of Soviet power. To reach this end, the removal of Lenin, we probably have to wait until the generations that learned to look up to him has gone. But as long as Lenin is on Red Square, says the Russian historian Eduard Radzinskii, “the Revolution continues”¹⁹.

Post-Soviet Russia needs not only reconciliation. Another main concern is to give the country a firmer historical identity, and this goal seems to be incompatible with reconciling the “reds” and the “whites” to each other. Putin and his closest staff members in the field of history, such as Sergei Naryshkin, the present head of the Russian Foreign intelligence service and chairman of the *Russian Historical Society* - and minister of culture Medinskii, are agreed that the only thing that can give Russian history a firm coherence after Marxism-Leninism, is Russia’s great power tradition, which ascribes to the Russian state organization a unique subjective and beneficial role in forging Russian society through the ages, all – as it seems, in accordance with well-known postulates of the pre-revolutionary Russian *state historical school*²⁰.

¹⁷ <http://www.odnako.org/blogs/nastrechu-100-letiyu-revolyucii-zveno-v>

¹⁸ See the newspaper *Argumenty i fakty* 07.05.2009.

¹⁹ *Rossiiskaia gazeta. Federal'nyi vypusk* [No. 6831 \(260\)](https://rg.ru/2015/11/18/radzinskiy.html) <https://rg.ru/2015/11/18/radzinskiy.html>. Accessed 06.01.2017.

²⁰ These postulates are neatly summarized in Pavel N. Miliukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul'tury* (‘Sketches of the History of Russian Culture’), vol. 1 (St.Petersburg: Tip-ia M.A.Aleksandrova 1904). Miliukov, one of Russia’s foremost historians, believed that the state paradigm was the key to understanding Russia’s past. As a

Through their textbook projects and erection of monuments and memorials the Kremlin leadership has been occupied with constructing an “infrastructure of remembrance” of key events and heroes, a symbolic axis, that link post-Soviet Russia firmly with both the Soviet and the pre-revolutionary Tsarist past. This axis is Russia’s great power status, independent of regime, and a key concept in this connection is *preiemptvennost’* (continuity)²¹, which is projected on the whole “millennial history” of Russia.

A major problem for this new metanarrative of Russian history is how to make the Russian revolution fit into the scheme? One crucial issue in this connection is the correlation between the Revolution of 1917 and the First World War. Among western historians it has always been a conviction that the Russian Revolution grew from the war. And that still seems to be the case. In a recent book Joshua A. Sanborn, for instance, maintains that “the Russian Revolution as a whole was a product of the war and was decisively influenced by soldiers at every key stage.”²² And Christopher Read likewise writes that without August 1914 “the revolution as we know it could not have taken place.”²³ Comparative research on revolutions also indicates that great revolutionary upheavals generally only succeed if the old regime is weakened in advance because of external strains.²⁴ S.A. Smith in his new book on the Russian Revolution reminds us of the fact that in practically all socialist revolutions in the 20th century, it was not crisis in the capitalist system, but imperialist wars that led the old regimes into crisis.²⁵

Military defeat, war weariness and lack of food and coal for heating in the cities were important reasons for the fall of Tsardom and also for the problems of the so-called Provisional Government, which only existed for eight months. Contrariwise the war explains a lot of the success of the Bolsheviks in the autumn of 1917, even if the general deterioration in living conditions for the working class in Petrograd may have been more important than the

liberal politician and leader of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, however, he went in for changing Russia’s course in the direction of liberal democracy and the parliamentary system. To obtain this it was crucial to get away from the “millennial” hypertrophic state.

²¹ See Malinova, *Aktual’noe proshloe*, 180.

²² Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 235.

²³ Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-1922* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 22.

²⁴ See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: a comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979).

²⁵ S.A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution. An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 4.

desire for peace²⁶. Today the majority of historians both in the west and in the east find it difficult to imagine the Russian Revolution of 1917 without three years' of preceding war. "The War that gave Birth to a Revolution", is the title of V.P. Buldakov and T.G. Leont'eva's book on First World War from 2015²⁷.

In the Soviet era, however, it was not acceptable to use the Great War as an explanation for why a revolution broke out in Russia and became successful, because that would call into question the legitimacy of the October Revolution as revolution in a Marxist sense.

Especially from the 1930s it was important to show that the October Revolution was caused by classical Marxist prerequisites for a socialist workers' revolution and that it was deeply rooted in Russian society itself. It was wrong to attach too much importance to external impulses, even if Lenin himself saw a clear connection between the Great War and the Revolution.

Remarkably enough as long as the Soviet Union existed, not a single memorial was erected to honour the Russian soldiers that fell on the battlefield in the years 1914–1917. Altogether 1.7 million soldiers perished. No anniversaries were marked in connection with the First World War. Why? The explanation is that the October Revolution was programmatically an anti-national revolution and a revolt against the war. Lenin wanted to transform the Great War from being a war between nations to becoming a war between classes. And he succeeded - but only in Russia.

The negative view of Russia's participation in the First World War was so entrenched in the minds of the Russians that it took some 20 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union before they were ready to do anything about it. Only in 2010 the Kremlin leadership decided to rehabilitate the First World War as a symbol for Russian heroism and suffering. In his speech to the Russian Federal Assembly on June 27 2012, Putin declared that Russia's defeat in the First World War resulted from the treachery of the Bolshevik leaders: he blamed them for having withdrawn Russia from the War and concluded a disgraceful peace with the central powers, the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty on March 3 1918, when Russia finally withdrew from the war:

²⁶ Smith, *Russia in Revolution*, 119-120. On the other hand one can of course surmise that the worsened living conditions to a large extent resulted from the war.

²⁷ V.P. Buldakov & T.G. Leont'eva, *Voina, porodivshaia revoliutsiiu. Rossiia, 1914-1917 gg.* (Moskva: Novyi khronograf 2015).

“Our country lost this war to the loser. A unique situation in the history of mankind! We lost to loosing Germany. In reality we capitulated for her, and she after some time capitulated for the Entente. And this was the result of a national betrayal of the leadership of the country at that time”.

The Bolsheviks had to accept the independence of Poland, Finland, the Baltic states and Ukraine (in practice the Ukraine became a German protectorate), and also cede parts of the Caucasus. Later they would not acknowledge that Brest-Litovsk was a mistake, said Putin, and therefore they continued to name this war “imperialist” and failed to honour the Russian army and its heroism²⁸.

On 1 August 2014 Putin unveiled the first official Russian monument in the war memorial park *Poklonnaia Gora* in Moscow, devoted to the Russian soldiers that died during the Great War. 1 August 1914 was the day when Russia joined the war and it has become the official day of remembrance for this war in Russia. On account of the Bolsheviks, Russia became a victim in the war, instead of taking part in sharing the fruits of victory²⁹. This re-evaluation of the Great War is also a suitable issue for bringing together two different Russias, Russia proper and Russia abroad, i.e. the Russians who fled the country because of the Revolution of 1917 – or to-day rather their descendants³⁰. At the initiative of Russian emigrant groups and the Russian Ministry of culture, a memorial will reportedly be raised in the Crimea, where the Civil War in the European part of Russia came to an end in November 1920.

The idea of “the stolen victory” was an important element in the Kremlin leadership’s history policy in the 2014 centenary year. The need to rehabilitate Russia’s participation in the First World War is connected with the fact that The Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) has become even more important in post-Soviet Russia than it was before. It has been called the Putin regime’s foundation myth³¹ and has done a lot to displace the memory of the Revolution³². Remembrance of the War, as it were, makes all dissonance die away. Ideological conflicts, contradictions between generations, as well as between ethnical groups disappear like magic.

²⁸ Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniuu 12.02.2012 <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/17118> and <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/15781>

²⁹ This view is shared by quite a few professional Russian historians to-day, among them the well-known Boris N. Mironov (B.N. Mironov, personal communication, St.Petersburg 24.09.2016).

³⁰ Vera Tolz, “Modern Russian Memory of the Great War, 1914-1920”, E. Lohr, V. Tolz, A. Semyonov & M. von Hagen (eds.), *The Empire and Nationalism at War* (Bloomington: Slavica Pub 2014), 279.

³¹ See Nikolai Kuposov, *Pamiat’ strogogo rezhima. Istorii i politika v Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie 2011), 163.

³² Jens Petter Nielsen 2017, ‘Å skape mening i konsolideringens navn’. Den russiske revolusjonens hundreårsjubileum, *Arbeiderhistorie* (Oslo:Universitetsforlaget 2017), 23-41.

Victory Day, May 9, is today apprehended by most people in Russia as the real national day of the country, and it is definitely about to displace the memory of the Russian Revolution, and November 7³³.

What is really the post-Soviet foundation myth, however, is not the war itself, but the Putinist idea of the historical continuity of the Russian great power tradition, where the victory over Nazi-Germany is only the absolute apex. As a rule foundation myths has a “before” and an “after”, but in this case emphasis is on continuity, or rather on a cyclical conception of history, where the principle on which the history of modern Russia allegedly is based, with certain intervals appear with particular clarity. In this connection the Great War is considered as a necessary stepping stone between Imperial Russia, the Great Patriotic War and post-Soviet Russia, which is about to regain its great power status under the leadership of Vladimir Putin³⁴. Because one hundred years ago the October Revolution came about as an upheaval against the First World War, it ended up casting shadows over Russia’s participation in this war throughout the entire Soviet period. Now, when Russia’s new leadership has decided once and for all that the First World War was also a war for Russia’s honour and national interest, the war has started to cast shadows further back over the 1917 Revolution, not only the October Revolution, but also the February revolution.

When Boris El’tsin in 1998 renamed November 7 as “The day for reconciliation and accord”, the intention was that this day, instead of being a day for commemoration of the Russian Revolution should be used for overcoming the split that the Revolution created, which still persists between those who are against and those who have positive feelings about the Soviet past. In 2005 Putin renamed it again “The day for national unity” and moved it to November 4, a day that historically is related to the investiture of the Romanov dynasty in the early 17th century and the restoration of the Russian state after the Time of Troubles. This was a deliberate move to divert attention away from the discord about the Soviet past towards the

³³ Markku Kangaspuro, “History Politics and the Changing Meaning of Victory Day in Contemporary Russia”, in Manuel Bragan & Peter Tame (eds.), *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936-2016* (Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015), 333-343.

³⁴ For Boris El’tsin in the 1990s the Great Patriotic War was first of all the merit of «the courage, patriotism and self-sacrifice» of the Soviet people, not of the Stalinist, totalitarian leadership (see Malinova, *Aktual’noe proshloe*, 91-100).

heritage of Russian state building. Presumably it was no accident that this decision was taken on December 29 2004, three days after the fulfilment of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution³⁵.

In this way the revolution was symbolically downgraded, and for many years Putin and Medvedev did not speak about the Russian revolution, if they did not have to. Since the beginning of the new millennium November 7, the old Revolution Day, has been swallowed up by a historical military parade: on Revolution Day in 1941, when German military detachments were approaching Moscow and could already glimpse the bulbous domes in the Kremlin, Stalin carried out a military parade on Red Square to demonstrate the Russians' indomitable readiness to fight. In recent years on November 7 a parade has been held on Red Square as an imitation of the 1941 parade, with uniforms of the time and equipment from the Second World War. In this way Revolution Day has changed its character completely from being a day of remembrance for the October Revolution to becoming still another day of remembrance for the victory over Nazi Germany.

The foundation myth of the Soviet state, however, cannot simply be pushed away, because of the dimension of this event – and its international repercussions; and the problem remains that the Russian Revolution unavoidably weakens the continuity of the Russian great power tradition. Seen from the point of view of the Kremlin the main problem with the Bolsheviks is perhaps not communism, but the fact that they tore down the old tsarist state and afterwards entered into a separate peace with Russia's enemies. Of course, it would have been possible for Putin to distance himself from October, but embrace the February Revolution, which aimed at introducing democracy in Russia. But that was not the case either. In the year 2000 Putin became firm friends with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great writer and outspoken and intrepid Soviet dissident, who had returned to Russia in 1994 after 20 years' exile in the west. This was an unlikely alliance, of course, since Putin came from KGB, an organization that Solzhenitsyn had used his entire life to combat; Elena Bonner has called their friendship “a psychological problem worthy of Dostoyevskiy's pen”³⁶.

The struggle against revolution had been a governing idea throughout Solzhenitsyn's public life, and Putin came to share his views on the February Revolution and its topicality. When in

³⁵ See Vladislav Inozemtsev, “Razdvoenie soznaniia”, *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (Moscow) 07.11.2012, 2. Malinova suggests that Putin's personal views also played a part here; according to her Putin has never been particularly fond of the October revolution (Malinova, *Aktual'noe proshloe*, 78-79).

³⁶ R. Horvath, “Apologist or Putinist? Solzhenitsyn, the Oligarchs, and the Specter of Orange revolution”, *The Russian review* 2011 (70/2), 300-318.

2005 the Orange Revolution took place in the Ukraine, Solzhenitsyn involuntarily compared it with the February Revolution in Russia in 1917. In those days Germany was behind the scenes, helping Lenin and other Bolsheviks to get back to Russia, supplying them with money and so on. A hundred years later western philanthropic organizations played the same role according to Solzhenitsyn, encouraging revolutionary unrest in the Ukraine. February 1917 brought mediocrities to power in Russia, maybe with the best of intentions, but they were spineless and were soon swept away by Lenin and the Bolsheviks³⁷.

Solzhenitsyn's views on the February revolution touched deep-felt chords within the Kremlin leadership³⁸ and on 13 March 2007 Kreml organized a round table conference on Solzhenitsyn's article «Reflections on the February revolution»³⁹ at the Russian State Humanistic University in Moscow. Here Vladislav Surkov, Putin's vice-chief of staff and the theoretician behind the concept "the sovereign democracy" held a programmatic speech which he called "A resignation speech of a growing liberal". It says a lot about Solzhenitsyn's influence on Putin's entourage. Surkov repeated the thesis that the liberal leaders, who came to power in February, in practice prepared the soil for Bolshevism:

«In my opinion October had already taken place in February. At least it was predetermined and power did not belong, in my opinion, to the democratic public for a minute at that time. It is a fact that the real power, the revolutionary energy, the real political power was on the side of the most radical, the extremist groups [...] Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn calls on to protect the people, and we are happy to support this idea, and the president [V.V.Putin] has used this expression in one of his speeches. We have to remember that revolution, it is first and foremost a waste of human beings, it is first and foremost destruction»⁴⁰.

It can be said that Putin's concern for not offending anybody works against the wish to create an inner coherence and continuity in history, because his strategy is not oriented towards mastering the past, but rather to ignore it. But even an outright condemnation of the idea of revolution (as above), does not fit into the great power scheme. Even if the Great War has

³⁷ Horvath, «Apologist or Putinist?», 311.

³⁸ Nielsen, «'Å skape mening i konsolideringens navn'», 32-33.

³⁹ Published for the first time in A.I.Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika* vol. 1-3 (Iaroslavl': Verkhniaia Volga 1995-1997), (vol. 1, 457-503), but written already in the 1980s.

⁴⁰ *Vremia novostei* No 50, 23.03.2007.

been rehabilitated and cleared as a necessary stepping stone between the imperial period of Russian history and World War II, the foundation of the Soviet order, viz. the revolution, still has somehow to be worked into the new metanarrative of Russian history. It is significant that in 2017 the Kremlin did not find it suitable to erect any kind of memorials devoted to the revolution, and there was no official commemoration of the centenary of 1917. The whole question of the meaning and historical significance of the Russian revolution was handed over to Academia, which by and large was not ready to take part in the Kremlin's remembrance policy.

Putin was not completely silent about the revolution, though. In greetings to conferences in Moscow, St.Petersburg and other places he again urged the Russians to use the centenary of revolution to put an end to the division that the revolution had created, and he warned against the schisms that revolutions necessarily create. But what is more important, if not directly, then indirectly he condemned the Russian Revolution one week before the November 7 by opening the Pandora's box of Stalin's crimes. On October 30 Putin was present at the opening of an impressive memorial on the Sakharov prospect, devoted to the victims of political repressions in the USSR, the Wall of Sorrow (*Stena skorbi*). He did not attempt to hide that in his opinion the opening of this memorial was particularly topical in the year of the centenary of the Russian revolution⁴¹. At the unveiling ceremony he stated that «this terrible past is impossible to erase from the national remembrance and even more impossible to justify with any higher so-called common weal of the people»⁴².

Still there is a problem with Putin's anti-revolutionary, anti-Bolshevik position, viz. the nexus between the Great War and the Great Patriotic War in the infrastructure of remembrance. The paradox is that while it is easy to stigmatize the Bolsheviks as traitors in the First World War, when they tore down the old tsarist state, they are inextricably linked with the victories in the second. Even if the Russian Revolution ruined the Tsarist state, apparently it did not weaken the Russian statehood in the long run. Quite to the contrary, the Bolsheviks, by industrializing the country and centralizing its political power structures, opened a new era of Russian state-building, which exceeded everything that Russia had obtained in the past. Without October it is indeed doubtful that Russia could have done so well during the Second World War. This

⁴¹ <https://news.mail.ru/politics/31486303/?frommail=1> Accessed 01.11.2017

⁴² <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/10/30/136550-v-moskve-otkryli-memorial-zhertvam-repressiy-na-tseremoniyu-otkrytiya-steny-skorbi-prihal-putin> Accessed 09.05.2018

dilemma is difficult to resolve, and it manifests itself in Stalin's person and his dual role as Lenin's successor and generalissimo during the Great Patriotic War.

Could it not have been different? Is it possible that October could be included in Putin's metanarrative of Russia's history? Putin did take a step further with his history policy when in 2007 he put forward a plan for a new series of textbooks in history for Russian schools. The first result of this was a new instruction book for history teachers, which turned out as first and foremost an account of Russia as a great power⁴³. As was to be expected it underlines the continuity of Russia's state tradition, and the author, A.V. Filippov, went to considerable lengths to integrate the Revolution into this narrative. In his scheme not only the Great War but also the Russian Revolution becomes a necessary "stepping stone" onwards to today's post-Soviet Russia. To achieve this Filippov even invoked the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948), who considered Bolshevism a kind of Modern "anti-national" manifestation of Russian nationalism. To replace «Moscow as the Third Rome», the idea that after the fall of the East Roman Empire (1453) the Russian Orthodox Church became the true defender of Christianity, the Bolsheviks organized "The Third International" (Comintern). And many traits with the idea of The Third Rome were transferred to it. "The Third International", wrote Berdiaev, "is not an International, but the Russian national idea"⁴⁴.

Olga Malinova points to a less far-fetched theory which could serve the same purpose, the construction of Russian history developed by G.A. Ziuganov and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation in the early 1990s. This is a theory about the Soviet epoch as an organic period in Russia's history rather than a deviation from its general course. Ziuganov's scheme is not an outright acceptance of the Soviet foundation myth, but its partial transformation, from the revolution being a war between classes to becoming more like "a clash between civilizations"⁴⁵. This is Lenin's thesis back to front. In this scheme October 1917 becomes a significant episode in the centuries long antagonism between the West and Russia, when Russia once more stood forward as a counterweight against western hegemony. In this connection October changed its character as foundation myth from being an event «before and

⁴³ A.V. Filippov (ed.), *Istoriia Rossii 1945–2008 gg. Kniga dlia uchitelia*. 2-oe izdanie, dorabotannoe i dopolnennoe (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Prosveshchenie 2008).

⁴⁴ N. Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University 2013).

⁴⁵ Malinova, Aktual'noe proshloe, 49-53, Idem, "Neudobnyi iubilei", 25-26.

«after», to becoming, as it were, a peculiar manifestation of the Russian idea. It seemed, wrote Ziuganov,

“that the Russian Revolution of 1917 could justify the hopes of the West to get rid of its main geopolitical rival, but they were unavailing. The Revolution did not destroy, on the contrary, it renewed and strengthened the Russian statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*), cleaning it of its obsolete feudal-bourgeois forms. However, having thrown off the form, the Soviet regime at the same time rather quickly inherited from the historical Russia her moral ideals as well as her experience as a great power in building a powerful state”⁴⁶.

No doubt, if Putin had accepted this way of approaching history, the connection between the first world war and the second would have become clearer, and post-Soviet Russia could have continued to lean on the infrastructure of remembrance, inherited from the USSR, including the revolution. So why was this unacceptable for Putin, when we know that in the beginning of his reign he was more open to Zyuganov's theory (confer his inclusion of Soviet symbols in the Russian symbolic field)? The problem is that what is won in historical continuity by this scheme, is lost in *continuity of regimes*. Obviously Putin's remonstrance is related to the so-called color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, which has created fear that a color revolution can take place in Russia too. Ziuganov's scheme is, as Malinova underlines, obviously less advantageous to a party in power than to a party hoping to obtain the power. And the message that the revolutionary deconstruction of one state apparatus or regime can result in a state or regime that is even stronger, is not a message that the Kremlin leadership today is ready to convey to the Russian people.

⁴⁶ G.A.Ziuganov, “Vzgliad za gorizont”, *Obozrevatel' – Observer*. Moscow 1994 no. 18, 144.
http://www.observer.materik.ru/observer/N18_94/18_20.htm Accessed 19.05.2018.

