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## Russian conservatism in the Putin presidency: The dispersion of a hegemonic discourse

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**RUSSIAN CONSERVATISM IN THE PUTIN PRESIDENCY:  
THE DISPERSION OF A HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE**

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## Abstract

The article seeks to map the emergent discursive field of conservatism in Russian politics in the context of the reshaping of the political space in the Putin presidency. In the course of Putin's first presidential term 'conservatism' became a privileged mode of political self-identification in the Russian discourse, functioning as the *nodal point* of the hegemonic project of the Presidency. Yet, in accordance with the Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a *system of dispersion*, the article demonstrates the way the conservative discourse is internally fractured into two antagonistic strands, identified by their practitioners as *liberal* and *left conservatism*. While the liberal-conservative orientation supports and sustains the *depoliticising* project of the Putin presidency, which orders and stabilises the effects of the anti-communist revolution, left conservatism functions in the modality of *radical opposition* to the Putinian hegemony, thereby contributing to the pluralisation of political space in contemporary Russia. In the present Russian political constellation 'conservatism' is therefore less a name for a stable hegemonic configuration than a designator of the field of political struggle over the very identity of postcommunist Russia. The article concludes with a critical discussion of the relation the two strands of Russian conservatism establish to the period of the 1990s as the 'moment of the political' in the Russian postcommunist transformation.

# Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse

*While there are indeed results of the Revolution, whose value can be questioned, it will never be possible to forget the disposition that has been revealed through it. (Michel Foucault)*

This paper is a preliminary attempt at mapping the emergent discursive field of ‘conservatism’ in Russian politics and problematising the reconstitution of Russian identity in relation to the conventional markers of the ‘West’ and ‘Europe’ within this discursive field. We shall argue that the veritable explosion of the self-professed conservative discourses comes as a response to the reshaping of the political space in the Putin presidency. The political supremacy of the figure of the President posed the question of the formation of ‘ideological’ hegemony in Russian politics, which, during Putin’s first term, was gradually articulated around a nodal point of conservatism. As a node in the discursive network, conservatism has functioned as a modality of political identification that ventures to transcend the dualisms, characteristic of the Russian politics of the late 1980s and the 1990s, most notably, ‘democrats’ vs. ‘communists’ and ‘liberals’ vs. ‘patriots’. The claim to hegemony is thus strongly tied with the overcoming of the political polarisation of the early stages of Russian postcommunism and connects with the widely perceived stabilisation and consolidation that mark the moment of the Putin presidency. At the same time, as we shall see, the discourse of conservatism is also cast as a challenge to the presidency, inciting it to a clear political alignment as opposed to a technocratic and depoliticised stance that Putin’s discourse has arguably been marked by.<sup>1</sup> The electoral cycle of 2003-2004, in which both the President and the pro-presidential United Russia party strongly consolidated their positions, only serves to enhance the importance of the problematic of conservatism. It is precisely the ideologically polarised forces of the 1990s, the ‘left-patriotic’ Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the ‘liberal-democratic’ Union of Right Forces and Yabloko parties that suffered the heaviest defeat, which for the latter two parties also marked an exit from political life as such. At the same time, the two winners of the 2003 elections, United Russia and the new movement Homeland (*Rodina*), have both emphasised their transcendence of the old left-right dualism and toyed with the self-definition as ‘conservative’. The defeat of the conventional ‘left’ and ‘right’ forces was also welcomed by critical commentators as a clearing for the emergence of a new type of discourse in Russian

1 Cf. Kolerov 2002.

politics. 'Conservatism' has thus become a designator of a privileged modality of discourse, a marker of the emergent ideological hegemony in the Putin presidency. At the same time, the discursive space tied together by the concept of conservatism is, in full accordance with Foucault's definition of discourse a 'space of dispersion'<sup>2</sup>. As our analysis of the emergent discourse of conservatism will demonstrate, this discursive space is not merely *fragmented* into two antagonistic perspectives, identified by their practitioners as *liberal* and *left conservatisms*, but that this line of fragmentation is in fact a key *constitutive dualism* in the contemporary Russian political space. It is thus impossible to speak of the 'conservative discourse' in Russia, if one understands discourse in a facile manner as a coherent set of statements, an ideological or a normative system. At the same time, despite the dispersion within this field, the 'discourse of conservatism' arguably satisfies the criteria of the Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a set of statements governed by the same rules of formation. In short, the lines of diffraction within this space are *immanent* to Russian conservatism, drawn within this discourse and hence are part and parcel of the new hegemony, rather than indicators of its contradictions, crisis or underdevelopment. By the same token, this paper does not seek to describe the Russian discourse against the background of some stable definition of conservatism, in whose terms it may be found wanting, but analyses 'Russian conservatism' as a mode of discursive *self-definition* of its practitioners.

The analysis of the emergent Russian conservatism closely relates to the problematic of the EU-Russian identity conflicts. Insofar as conflict is understood in the sense of incompatibility of subject positions, the appearance of a hegemonic discourse that seeks to redefine the very subject position of Russia, including its positioning vis-à-vis Europe, merits close attention. The identity-related conflictual dispositions in EU-Russian relations, resulting from the problematisation of both the perceived exclusion of Russia from Europe and Russia's sovereign 'self-exclusion' from the EU normative space<sup>3</sup> are directly linked to the reshaping of the political space, in which the conventional pro-Western liberalism of the 1990s gives way to the attempts at a liberal-conservative synthesis of the kind we shall discuss below. At the same time, these discursive configurations have so far attracted little attention or, more importantly, their innovative character has been effaced by the application of ready-made conceptual frameworks, constituted by the very dualisms that the discourse in question seeks to sideline. For instance, in a rare overview of the discourse of the 'Seraphim Club', which we shall discuss in detail below, Mikhail Kochkin laments the eclecticism of this discourse as a 'cocktail'

2 See Foucault 1989, pp. 35-36.

3 See Prozorov 2004a.

of both liberal-reformist and outright ‘chauvinist’ ideas, “religious-mystical rhetoric, traditionalism, isolationism and a conviction that interests of the state should take priority over the interests of the individual”.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the question at stake is methodological rather than empirical: isn’t the perception of confusing eclecticism conditioned by the application of second-order interpretive frameworks, within which ‘traditionalism’ is wholly incompatible with liberalism, ‘geopolitical clichés’ contradict the emphasis on the rule of law, etc? More generally, as the discussion below will hopefully demonstrate, it is at least questionable to approach with such dualisms as liberal/statist, Westerniser/Slavophile, modern/postmodern a discourse that manifestly, and in some instances with self-conscious playfulness, *overrides* these very oppositions and whose political success is precisely owing to this transcendence. What is at stake in our argument against the tyranny of ready-made analytical categories is of course the very opposite of the complacent traditionalism that draws consolation from the overused phrase of Fyodor Tytchev: “Russia can’t be embraced by mind.”

Unfortunately many explanations refer to the exceptionality of Russia, its particular traditions, culture, religion, etc. What remains absolutely unclear is the mechanisms whereby these ‘traditions’ traverse history, from generation to generation, in a presumably invariable and ready-made manner. These explanations remain entirely external to their object as they do not take into account either the concrete historical conditions of the unfolding event or the perspective of its subjects which signify and transform these conditions. *The discourse of ‘Russia’s exceptionality’ thus remains abstract, theoretical and ultimately authoritarian.* The exclusive status of Russia means merely the exclusion of the political subject from the process of decision.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the point of departure of this paper is that the task of embracing Russia by mind is perfectly achievable, as Russia is in the strict sense, *‘nothing special’ precisely in being unique* and is best approached through clearing one’s mind from simplistic dualisms and analysing emergent practices in their irreducible specificity to outline their inherent (and *ipso facto* specific) *rationality* without collapsing it into a complacent quasi-universalist *rationalism* of the observer. “The main problem when people try to rationalise something is not to investigate whether or not they conform to principles of rationality, but to discover *which kind of rationality* they are using.”<sup>6</sup> Against the chimerical attributions to Russian politics of ‘cultural exceptionality’, we rather assert the exceptional nature of postcommunism as an *event*, the understanding of which

4 Kochkin 2003, p. 3.

5 Magun 2003. Emphasis added.

6 Foucault 1988, p. 59. Emphasis added.



requires a dispensation with the ready-made conceptual apparatus and the appreciation of the foundational flux of the Russian 'politics of emergence' in the 1990s, the flux that the conservative discourses discussed in this paper all seek to come to terms with.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that a 'cross-cultural' comparison of the emergent Russian conservatism with the existing Western trends can not be made, although this task is beyond the scope of the present paper.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the more basic undertaking, necessary for such comparison, must consist in a systematic archaeological description of the discourse in question that would identify its internal ordering principles or rules of formation, the object- and subject-positions specified in it and the internal lines of diffraction that prescribe the possible intra-discursive variations. The present paper ventures only an initial foray into this field, focusing on the formation of an internal distinction between 'liberal-conservative' and 'left-conservative' positions within the field of conservative discourse. The next chapter traces the emergence of conservative discourse in the early period of the Putin presidency and discusses the shift of the more established liberal forces towards a liberal-conservative position, represented by the 'right' wing of the Union of Right Forces and the Seraphim Club. We then proceed to the discussion of the articulation of a rival discursive grouping that may be called 'left-conservative' and a brief comparison of the two strands of discourse with regard to the key themes both of them highlight, with a special emphasis on the relation the two discourses establish to the 'West' and 'Europe' as two privileged markers in any postcommunist political discourse in Russia. The conclusion of the paper locates the two strands of Russian conservatism within the context of Russia's politics of emergence in the 1990s and problematises their 'coming to terms' with the event of postcommunism.

7 See Prozorov 2004b, chapter 1, Magun 2003.

8 As we shall demonstrate below, particularly the 'left' strand of Russian conservatism is strongly inspired by the current renaissance of Carl Schmitt's thought and the problematic of the political in continental political philosophy.

# 'That Other Thought':

## Liberal Conservatism in the Putin Presidency

### THE 'RIGHT TURN' AND THE PUTIN PROJECT

Although the popularity of the concept of conservatism as a modality of political self-identification increased sharply in the Putin presidency, the concept itself has figured in the Russian political discourse since its very emergence in 1991, although its presence has been arguably spectral, oscillating between the elusive status of conservatism as an object of desire and its inevitably disappointing empirical embodiment. A number of phantom political parties of various orientations have used the concept in their official titles (the Conservative Party of the Russian Federation of the recently deceased Lev Ubozhko, the self-styled Conservative Movement 'New Force' of Sergei Kirienko, etc.), while various high-profile political analysts and commentators (e.g. Andranik Migranyan, Vitaly Naishul) identified themselves as conservatives in order to be distinguished from both the dominant 'liberal-democratic' political orientations and the oppositional strands, which in the 1990s converged around the 'left-patriotic' platform of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Throughout the 1990s, conservatism has thus been either the province of obscure quasi-parties or the means of differentiating one's idiosyncratic position from the dominant polarised forces along the political spectrum. In fact, during this period the moderately successful attempts to overcome the communist/democrat and liberal/patriot dualisms were undertaken with the help of the notion of 'centrism' rather than 'conservatism' (even though the latter figured in the discourse of e.g. the Our Home Russia party, led by Victor Chernomyrdin). A succession of centrist parties, defined by their affiliation to the current cabinet of ministers rather than any substantive political doctrine, have deployed centrism as a *depoliticising* strategy, presenting their orientation in terms of a 'down-to-earth', business-like pragmatism of 'getting things done'. In this sense, centrism connects with the hegemony of the 'managerialist' discourse of the regional elites in the 1990s, which opposed themselves to the 'politicians' of all orientations. The centrist transcendence of the political polarisation of the early 1990s thus proceeded through the displacement of the political as such. Thus, the mid- and late 1990s may be said to have been a period of the *closure* of innovation in the political discourse in two ways: the domination of depoliticised managerial discourse in regional politics and the 'centre' of the political spectrum and the existence of a sharply polarised discursive axis of liberalism/patriotism, in which both camps were sharply intolerant of the positions that could not be fitted into the narrow confines of the opposed groupings. While the intolerance of the communist opposition towards

pluralism may be self-explanatory, the dogmatic character of the Russian liberal-democratic discourse is rarely addressed in Western academic discussion, although it has been the object of critique throughout the decade, starting from the publication of a (in)famous volume of 'pro-democratic' political essays in 1988, tellingly entitled *Inogo ne dano* ("There is No Other"). Indeed, the first discursive event that one may associate with the postcommunist conservatism was the publication in 1994 of a four-volume anthology of anti-liberal critique, entitled *Inoe* (The Other), sarcastically disproving the 'no-alternative' sentiment of the doctrinaire liberals and issuing a stinging criticism of the liberals of the 1990s as technocratic and economy-centred, indifferent to religion and spiritual values and marked by the contempt for their own country.<sup>9</sup> According to Gleb Pavlovsky, the informal advisor to President Putin and the most vocal critic of the liberal discourse of the 1990s, the last 15 years "were period of intellectual impotence, colourlessness, non-thought. [...] There was neither liberalism nor conservatism in the 1990s, but the name 'liberalism' was used to shut people up."<sup>10</sup> It is partly against the background of the weakening of the polarised left/right spectrum and the correlate rise of depoliticised 'anti-ideological' centrism that the conservative discourse was first articulated in the election campaign of 1999-2000, marked by the emergence of the figure of Putin as a challenger to both ideological polarisation and centrist depoliticisation.

The sharp rise of the popularity of the then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin posed the question of his political platform, which was widely perceived to be ambiguous, i.e. not easily fitted within the dominant dualistic constellation, resulting in the proverbial question of 'who is Mr. Putin?' A highly influential attempt to answer this question was made by Leonid Polyakov in an article entitled "The Liberal Conservative".<sup>11</sup> According to Polyakov, Putin's socio-economic reform programme (articulated by the Strategic Designs Centre and subsequently officialised in 2000 as the reform programme of the Russian government<sup>12</sup>) is *substantively* liberal, and thus continuous with the dominant orientation of the Yeltsin presidency, but *situationally* and *stylistically* conservative, which accounts for its perceived heterogeneity with the Yeltsinite project. In this understanding, conservatism as an 'ideological' orientation does not have its own substantive core (unlike liberalism or socialism), but is constituted by a number of stylis-

9 The full text of this collection is available at <http://www.russ.ru/antolog/inoe>. During the 1990s the key representatives in the 'auto-critique' of Russian liberalism were Vitaly Naishul, Alexei Kara-Murza, Boris Kapustin and Andrey Fadin.

10 Pavlovsky cited in *Konservator* 2.

11 See Polyakov 1999.

12 See Main Directions of Socioeconomic Policy of the Government of the Russian Federation for the Long-Term Perspective.

tic features that are opposed to similarly situational orientations such as e.g. ‘revolutionism’. In the context of the Putin project, these features include the rhetoric of consolidation and normalisation after the turbulent and antagonistic politics of the 1990s, the abandonment of doctrinaire policy orientations in favour of variably understood ‘pragmatism’, the refusal of the wholesale condemnation of Soviet history, the reaffirmation of sovereignty in foreign policy, etc.

Putin’s 1999 policy manifesto “Russia at the Millennium” explicitly proposes ‘grounding’ or ‘domesticating’ substantive principles of the liberal ideology for the purposes of arriving at a (typically conservative) ‘organic synthesis’: “We can hope for the future if we can organically synthesise the *universal principles* of market economy and democracy with the *Russian reality*.”<sup>13</sup> More concretely, these dimensions take shape in Putin’s project of ‘reconstitution of the state’ along its vertical and horizontal axes, autonomising the sovereign subjectivity of the state from respectively regional and business elites, which throughout the 1990s have dominated the space of statehood, putting into question the very existence of state subjectivity.<sup>14</sup> These ‘ordering’ tendencies may also be understood in term of the *completion* of the turbulent process referred to as the ‘transition’ to democracy, market economy, federalism, etc. The absence of transitional tropes in Putin’s discourse and the frequently explicit statements about the ‘end of the transitional period’ by such figures in the presidential administration as Vladislav Surkov and Gleb Pavlovsky support Polyakov’s argument on the stylistic conservatism of the Presidency and permit a more nuanced understanding of ‘Putinism’ than the one provided in the accounts that conceive of it solely in terms of a ‘backlash’ or ‘reaction’ against the liberal democratic aspirations of the Yeltsin presidency.<sup>15</sup> In fact, there appears to be a marked continuity between the two periods, a substantive continuity regarding the direction of reforms that is only punctured by the different stylistic orientation of the two presidencies.<sup>16</sup> While the Yeltsin presidency *initiated* the political rupture of the anticommunist revolution and subsequently attempted to introduce elements of the liberal order in a permanent political confrontation amid the displacement of statehood, the Putin presidency arguably attempts a *closure* of the unlimited political field and its *grounding* through the installation of the infrastructure of the liberal order and its stabilisation in accordance with what the President refers to as the ‘logic of nor-

13 Putin 1999.

14 See Sakwa 1999, 2000, Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4, Nicholson 2001, Bunin et al 2001a, Gaman-Golutvina 2000.

15 See Shevtsova 2002, Mendelson 2000, Shlapentokh 2000.

16 See Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the governmental rationality of the Putin presidency.

mal life'. As the following fragment from Putin's 2001 Address to the Federal Assembly illustrates, what is at stake in the Putin presidency is not a *counter-revolution* against the anarchic excesses of the Yeltsin era, but, perhaps more radically, a *break with the revolutionary logic as such*:

I would like to say clearly that we are not afraid of changes and should not be afraid of them. [...] Of course, public expectations and apprehensions do not grow out of thin air, they are based on the known logic that after a revolution there usually comes a counter-revolution, after a reform there comes a counter-reform and after that a search for those guilty of revolutionary excesses, and punishment. The more so that Russia's own historical experience abounds in such examples. But it seems to me that it is time to say firmly that this cycle is over. There will be neither a revolution nor a counter-revolution. [...] And it is long time [sic!] to learn to live according to this normal human logic. It is high time to understand that prolonged and hard work lies ahead. Our main problems are far too deep and they cannot be solved at one stroke, but only by daily qualified work. But stability is not the same thing as stagnation under a bureaucracy. We will need bold and well-thought-out decisions, we will need skilled specialists among entrepreneurs and civil servants. [...] Power in Russia should work to make a renunciation of democratic freedoms impossible and to make the economic course that has been charted irreversible.<sup>17</sup>

This fragment demonstrates that, rather than abandoning the liberal reforms of the Yeltsin presidency, Putin's reform project *consolidates* their advance by reinscribing the overall liberal-democratic order as an *irreversible* gain, a secure foundation, upon which sector-specific reforms proceed as 'daily qualified work', undertaken by 'skilled specialists'. In the argument of Yegor Gaidar, Russia's first reformist prime minister, the Putin presidency offers a possibility for an *evolutionary* course of liberal reforms that would derive their strength from the overall socio-political stabilisation and consolidation.<sup>18</sup> Igor Bunin notes as the peculiarity of the liberal reforms of the Putin presidency the technocratic style of their implementation and suggests that Putin's project may, in the case of its success, displace the age-old dualism between 'reforms' and 'order', according to which the periods of reform in Russia have always been marked by chaos and illegality, while the subsequent restoration of order entailed the abandonment of all reformist activity. In contrast, Putin's conservatism is conditioned by the conception of the decade of the 1990s as not a 'time of troubles' to be left behind but as a sufficient *ground* to build upon in the project of consolidation and ordering. Postcommunist Russia, in the Putinian vision, has already generated enough that is worth conserving. Thus, Polyakov

17 Putin 2001, p. 14. Emphasis added.

18 See Gaidar 2001.

offers the injunction for the market-oriented liberals that in the Russian political jargon are referred to as ‘young reformers’ to become ‘young conservatives’.<sup>19</sup>

Arguably, this injunction was indeed heeded by many of the representatives of the liberal forces. The electoral success of the Union of Right Forces in 1999 is frequently explained by the gradual shift of the liberal discourse towards a more situationally conservative orientation, exemplified concretely by the support of the party for Putin’s presidential candidacy.<sup>20</sup> This orientation is personified by such URF leaders as Sergei Kirienko and Anatoly Chubais and has been expounded in detail in the programmatic article of one of the leaders of URF (deputy Finance Minister in the Kasyanov cabinet and presently the Deputy Chair of the Central Bank), Alexei Ulykaev, entitled ‘The Right Turn’. Although the position of the party in 1999-2003 cannot be said to have closely followed Ulykaev’s prescriptions, the text remains a key manifesto of the conservative ‘grounding’ of Russian liberalism and merits attention less for its specific party affiliation than due to the influence of the principles, advanced in it, on the later articulations of the conservative discourse.

Ulykaev’s call for the ‘right turn’ in Russian politics proceeds from the need to overcome the dualisms of the Russian political discourse that have led to the decline and discreditation of liberal forces during the 1990s, primarily the oppositions between ‘reforms’ and ‘stability’, ‘liberalism’ and ‘statism’, ‘pro-Westernism’ and ‘patriotism’. According to Ulykaev, the ‘right forces’ (a notable alternative term to the discredited ‘liberals’ or ‘democrats’, first launched in 1999) are able to offer a strategy that combines the positive values of both terms in the opposition, synthesising reforms and social stability, the strong state and the free economy, international integration and patriotic values. Putin’s rise to power and his victory over the ‘centrist’ challengers such as Yuri Luzhkov and Yevgeni Primakov is interpreted precisely as a triumph of a decisive reformist thrust in opposition to the promise of moderate stabilisation, i.e. “Putin brings *hope, not stability*”.<sup>21</sup> Most notably, this synthesis is furthest away from the sterile and half-hearted maxims of ‘centrist pragmatism’, as is evident from Ulykaev’s idiosyncratic construal of the function of the state in political life. Ulykaev proposes that the state be conceived as an ‘emergency state’, a *fire brigade*, a lean and minimal structure with the right of intervention

19 See Polyakov 2000.

20 By the same token, the humiliating defeat of the URF in the 2003 elections may be attributed to the weakening of this ‘liberal-conservative’ stance and the ‘oppositional’ rhetoric that alienated the more pro-Putin liberal electorate.

21 Ulykaev 1999.

limited to exceptional situations that disrupt the 'normal' current of social life, which for Ulykaev is exemplified by the functioning market economy.<sup>22</sup>

The intervention of the state into the everyday current of our lives and the dependence of our lives on the state must become not the routine but an emergency. *The Right insists on modifying the very principle of the exercise of state power: from permanent administration to targeted intervention.* The state must not resemble either the tedious and tiring bureaucrat, interfering in the most minute affair, or the powerless and somewhat comical night guard. *The state is rather the fire brigade or the rescue team:* where the normal current of social life is for some reason disturbed or threatened, there must appear highly professional and effective state services.<sup>23</sup>

The principle, according to which governmental intervention is to be an exceptional emergency rather than the norm, is actualised in the Russian government's reform programme as well, which, by analogy with the judicial presumption of innocence, refers to it as the "presumption of *non-necessity* of state regulation in any given sphere"<sup>24</sup>. In the logic of the 'fire brigade' the scope of intervention, whether minimal or universal, is never *fixed* once and for all, but is rather restricted to emergency situations, aside from which state intervention finds no justification *at all*. If state intervention is cast as *in principle* unnecessary, the criteria for 'state strength' may no longer be found in the scope and degree of state control. For Ulykaev, the strength of the state is in fact inversely related to its domain of interference. Dismissing the Hobbesian image of the Leviathan, Ulykaev claims that "there is nothing more disgraceful for the state, than the situation in which it resembles a clumsy monster. [...] In order for the state to fulfil those tasks that it alone can fulfil, it must be freed from those tasks that can well be performed by others."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, contrary to the image of the 'night guard', whose authority in the case of emergency is only vaguely stipulated, the fire brigade is endowed with *sovereign authority* that is limited only in the temporal sense. It is no coincidence that Ulykaev's metaphor of choice for the 'emergency state' is the *sword*, conceived by Foucault as the quintessential symbol and instrument of sovereignty: "The state must not resemble either the *machine* that grinds all that lives or the sticky and treacherous *swamp* that it is today. It must rather remind us of the *light, firm and precise sword* that has always been the eminent symbol of state

22 See Ulykaev 1999.

23 Ibid.

24 Programme of Socioeconomic Development of the Russian Federation for the Midterm Perspective: 2003-2005, p. 42, 44. Emphasis added.

25 Ulykaev 1999. Emphasis added.

power.’<sup>26</sup> Most notably, the notion of the fire brigade is furthest away from the enhancement of state interventionism in the economy, incessantly valorised in the ‘centrist’ political programmes of the 1990s, which is strongly resisted by Ulykaev, whose discourse rather exemplifies the naturalisation of market principles as the only feasible modality of organising economic life:

It is incorrect that the Right advocate ‘market economy’ and ‘private property’, just as it is incorrect to say that teachers are the supporters of the school of thought according to which 2 by 2 equals 4. There is no ‘market’ and ‘non-market economy’, and there is no ‘private’ and ‘non-private property’. *There is just economy and a parody thereof, there is property and there is thieving.* We have no need to solve the question of how much of a market economy we need in Russia. *We simply need to make sure that our economy is not disfigured by any socialist exercises, and it will become a market economy automatically.*

[...] The government may only have an economic policy in one sense of the word, as the *designer* and the *guarantor of the rules for equal subjects of economic activity*.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of the fire brigade permits us to displace the apparent paradox of state-led liberal reforms:<sup>28</sup> the politics of emergence of liberalism is *ipso facto* an exceptional situation of emergency, in which no ‘normal current’ of market operation obtains. While the naturalist episteme of classical liberalism would presuppose market mechanisms to emerge naturally and spontaneously, the postcommunist disposition that we have analysed elsewhere in terms of ‘infra-liberalism’<sup>29</sup> rather authorises wide-ranging governmental interventions for the purposes of laying the foundations of the liberal socioeconomic order that may then be anticipated to be internalised in the autonomous practices of social agents. This disposition also levels the distinction between ‘statism’ and ‘liberalism’, being, as it were, a consistent combination of the *extreme* variants of both positions, that brings to mind Carl Schmitt’s design for a ‘qualitatively total state’<sup>30</sup>, strong *not* because of its scope of intervention but by virtue of its effort of *self-limitation* that sustains a state-free domain of the economy. Thus, while Ulykaev advocates strong measures for the purposes of ‘renationalisation’ of the state, i.e. its autonomisation from private interests, he simultaneously proposes a radicalisation of the policy of privatisa-

26 Ibid. Emphasis added. Cf. Foucault 1990a, p. 144.

27 Ulykaev 1999. Emphasis added.

28 See Sakwa 2000a, 2000b, Nicholson 2001.

29 Prozorov 2004b, chapter 3.

30 See Schmitt 1998, Cristi 1998. For the discussion of the analytical relevance of Schmitt’s distinction between quantitative and qualitative totality see Prozorov 2004c.



tion to embrace, in a characteristically neoliberal gesture, many of the 'social' agencies that have been viewed as the province of the state.<sup>31</sup>

Other features of Ulykaev's manifesto that 'take liberties' with the dominant precepts of 'liberal-democratic' trends in the Russian discourse concern his sharp criticism of the excesses of Russia's 'regionalisation' which resulted in the fragmentation of the common socioeconomic space and the flourishing of 'regional despotisms'.<sup>32</sup> With regard to Russia's policies in the post-Soviet space, Ulykaev problematises the simulative nature of post-Soviet integration, whereby the symbolic dimension overrides economic interests to the detriment of Russian economy, and calls for a new strategy of Russian-led reintegration in the CIS, based on market-economic criteria, prefiguring the later discourse of the 'liberal empire', propounded in the 2003 election campaign by Anatoly Chubais.

Finally, with regard to Russia's foreign policy Ulykaev is sharply critical of the 'humanitarian interventionist' world order and the correlate denigration of the principle of state sovereignty. It is important to note that the article in question was written in the aftermath of the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, which, in the argument of another key figure in the Russian conservative discourse, Yegor Holmogorov, was a landmark phenomenon in Russian politics that thoroughly delegitimised naïve pro-Western attitudes, even in the liberal circles, which were in fact strongly opposed to this campaign.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, the international context of the 1999 election campaign was marked by the sharp European criticism of Russia's military operation in the Chechen Republic, which for Ulykaev marked the very essence of liberal conservatism as the assertion of Russia's sovereignty against the unconstitutional separatist regime, whose combination of military rule and religious fanaticism manifestly contradicted any conceivable version of liberalism.<sup>34</sup> The first articulation of liberal conservatism thus unfolded in the unfavourable context of Russian-European relations, which resulted in Ulykaev's strong emphasis on retaining Russia's sovereign autonomy in relation to Europe, notwithstanding the fact that the actual precepts of liberal conservatism are taken to lie squarely in the European tradition, albeit a tradition allegedly 'betrayed' by the more left-liberal and socialist forces

31 Ulykaev 1999.

32 The incapacitation of state authority has been problematised as the disappearance of the very agent of liberal reforms, and thus the main reason for their stagnation in the 1990s, by a number of prominent Russian liberals. See e.g. Gaidar 2001, Mau 1999.

33 See Holmogorov 2004.

34 Ulykaev 1999.

within Europe. This contrast actualises a distinction of ‘true’ and ‘false’ Europe, that according to Iver Neumann has been a permanent fixture of Russia’s historical discourse on its relation to Europe<sup>35</sup>, whereby the question of being inside or outside of Europe (defining the positions of respectively ‘Westernisers’ and ‘Slavophiles’) was complicated by the fragmentation of the figure of Europe itself into a ‘true’ Europe (variably conceived as liberal or socialist) and the ‘false’ Europe, the object of negative identification of various Russian discourses. Ulykaev’s discourse asserts its ‘true-European’ identity by conjuring the ‘liberal tradition’ in the situationally conservative manner and defending it against ‘left-humanitarian’ and ‘universalist’ perversions in contemporary Europe.

## **FAREWELL TO POSTCOMMUNISM: CONSERVATIVE DISCOURSES DURING PUTIN’S FIRST TERM**

During 2002-2003 the political platform of the Union of Right Forces, under the leadership of Boris Nemtsov and Irina Khakamada, shifted from this liberal-conservative stance towards what may be called a ‘left-liberal’ stance reminiscent of the Russian liberalism of the 1990s, strongly pro-Western and anti-statist. The conservative discourse thereby lost its institutional vehicle and become dispersed among a series of platforms, the most important ones being the Civic Club, the Russian Journal and the Seraphim Club. The Civic Club is a broad discussion venue, which operates a web portal ‘*Grazhdanskije Debaty*’ (Civic Debates) and unites figures of a broadly centre-right persuasion, disappointed in the ‘leftist’ leanings of the URF and Yabloko parties and yet sharply critical of the pro-Putin United Russia party as lacking any determinate ideological content.<sup>36</sup> The Russian Journal (*Russkij Zhurnal*) is an internet periodical, affiliated with the Effective Politics Foundation (FEP), run by Gleb Pavlovsky, an informal advisor to the presidential administration. Starting from 1998, the Russian Journal presented itself as a site for the articulation of novel discursive positions, irreducible to the liberal-patriotic dualism, and presently publishes the texts of both ‘liberal-conservatives’ and the more oppositional left-conservatives, whose positions we shall discuss in the following chapter. The most ideologically coherent discursive grouping is the Seraphim Club, founded in January 2003 by three television commentators, presenting the polemical programme *Odnako*

35 See Neumann 1996. For an application of this distinction to contemporary Russian politics see Morozov 2003.

36 See <http://www.globalrus.ru>. The board of the Civic Club includes such prominent figures as the novelist Tatyana Tolstaya, the Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Council of the Federation Mikhail Margelov, the famous columnist and TV commentator Maxim Sokolov, etc. The key authors, publishing at the Civic Club portal include Andrey Gromov, Alexei Chadaev and Alexander Hramchichin.

(‘However’) on Channel 1: Mikhail Leontiev, Maxim Sokolov, Alexander Privalov, as well as the editor-in-chief of the business journal *Expert* Valery Fadeev and the well-known film director Alexei Balabanov, whose works, particularly *Brat* and *Brat-2*, marked a resurgence of ‘patriotic’ sentiment in Russian mainstream cinema. As opposed to wider discussion forums, such as the Russian Journal, the Seraphim Club attempts to elaborate a coherent liberal-conservative *ideology* rather than an act as a ‘debating society’ (although the published transcripts of the Club’s seminars also demonstrate the openness of the founders to the views of both conventionally liberal and national-patriotic commentators).

The 2003 Memorandum of the Seraphim Club proceeds from the assumption that the task of stimulating sustainable economic growth (declared by President Putin as the prime national task in his 2002 Address to the Federal Assembly) is unachievable without a corresponding ‘leap’ in ‘ideational growth’ that must consist in overcoming inoperative political dualisms and the generation of the new ideological discourse. For the authors of the memorandum, the primary obstacle to such a leap is the condition of ‘politics of fear’, whereby the Russian politics of the 1990s was driven not by a coherent *project* of national development, but by a series of irrational phobias: fears of starvation in 1992, of the communist *revanche* in 1996, of the sovereign default in 1998, of the fall in oil prices in 2003, etc. “The elite, born out of a catastrophe, is only capable of reproducing catastrophic situations. *The trouble with the Russian elite is its certitude that the ship is sinking.* Our limp elite has written the country off. [...] The elite gives us a multitude of reasons that preclude our well-being: incorrect, ‘non-Protestant’ ethics, the lack of market traditions, thieving population, the ‘Dutch disease.’ All this nonsense is presented as thoughtful analysis.”<sup>37</sup> The main target of the critique is thus the ‘defeatist’ disposition of political and cultural elites, which both precludes the formation of a ‘success strategy’ for economic development, and, more importantly for our purposes, obscures the *already achieved* successes in liberal-democratic reforms. Indeed, a crucial feature of liberal conservatism according to the Seraphim Club and related commentators is the focus on the 1990s as a period of important *achievements* in political and economic transformation that presently need to be, on the one hand, *ordered* and *consolidated*, and, on the other hand, *built upon* in future re-

37 Leontiev et al 2003. See also Magun 2003 for a philosophical reading of the ‘catastrophic consciousness’ that arguably pervaded the Russian society in the 1990s. For Magun this is an inherent feature of the post-revolutionary period, whereby the (structurally necessary) failure of revolution generates a simultaneous frustration with the ‘incompleteness’ of the revolution and the sense of horror about the destructive impact it actually has caused. For a different perspective on catastrophic consciousness see Fadin 1995.

forms. The reforms of the 1990s are thus both a foundation and an object of ordering interventions.

The texts of the Club are thus not merely marked by a call for greater optimism on the part of the elite but are themselves permeated by an unusual sense of optimism, regarding e.g. the formation of the Russian middle class that can sustain a liberal-conservative project<sup>38</sup>, the adaptation of the Russian society to the results of economic liberalisation<sup>39</sup>, etc.<sup>40</sup> Within this disposition, Alexander Hramchikhin is able to claim, against the prevailing negative view of the 1990s as a period of crisis and degradation, that the 1990s have rather been one of the ‘brighter’ periods of Russian history, the era of rapid and relatively non-violent sociopolitical change, which has created the foundations of a more evolutionary liberal project. For Hramchikhin, the symptom of the defeatist worldview of the contemporary elite is the perception of the *illegitimacy* of the new Russian state, shared by both moderate liberals and the more ‘nationalist-oriented’ conservatives, which allegedly requires the discursive articulation of the ‘new’ or ‘Third’ Russia with its Imperial and Soviet predecessors. “The Third Russia has practically no patriots, at least among the elite which is still divided among the patriots of the USA (or the ‘citizens of the world’, which is the same thing) and the patriots of the USSR”.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Hramchikhin posits as the sources of the legitimacy of the Russian state two foundational moments, the defeat of the coup attempt by the Soviet leadership in August 1991 and the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in October 1993, the latter originary moment being of course disavowed by the more doctrinaire Russian liberals because of its manifestly violent and decisionist nature.

Russia will be legitimised by that political force which will come to power with a clear message that *our country was born on August 22, 1991 and it is this country that we are proud of.* [...] The formal legitimacy of the entire present political system dates back to August 1991 and October 4, 1993. This is an unconditional juridical and historical fact. It is during these days that Putin, Zyuganov, Yavlinsky, Rogozin, Glaziev, etc were born as politicians. *Without these two days, or more bluntly, without Yeltsin, they are nobody and nothing.* [...] And yet, during the 1990s, when the creator of the

38 See *Politicheskie Predpochtenia Srednego Klassa*.

39 See *Novy Levy Povорот*.

40 The articles of Alexander Privalov in *Expert* from the late 1990s onwards are particularly marked by this attempt to overcome the pathos of self-immolation and defeatism, prevalent in the Russian media. See e.g. Privalov 1997, 1999.

41 Hramchikhin 2004.

present system was in power, nothing was done for its mental legitimisation. *The interpretation of the events was granted to the people who did not accept the new Russia.*<sup>42</sup>

Hramchikhin also notes that it is paradoxically the forces that manifestly *rejected* the new sociopolitical order that repeatedly *benefited* from it in the 1990s, whether in the form of a parliamentary majority (enjoyed by the left-wing parties which did not recognise the legitimacy of the new Constitution and hence the parliament itself) or the privatisation of state property (whose beneficiaries frequently speak loudest of the ‘robber privatisation’). For Hramchikhin, it is therefore the development of a ‘new patriotism’ that is the condition of possibility of the stabilisation and consolidation of the decade of liberal reforms. The discourse of the Seraphim club extends this concept in terms of an “organic synthesis of Freedom and Russia”, a formulation, which is a trademark of the writings of e.g. Alexander Privalov and Maxim Sokolov.<sup>43</sup> Within this synthesis, the patriotic ‘Russian idea’ must be put in the service of ensuring and enhancing freedom, while the advocates of freedom must in turn cease to be ‘patriots of the USA’ and become rooted in the new (but still irreducibly Russian) postcommunist realities. “Russia is not doomed to forever oscillate between a xenophobic localism and a ‘common-European’ liberalism that could not be bothered to look around itself. We can only exit this century-old dead-end with the help of actors that realise their personal *responsibility* and are ready to act with the appropriate *humility*. They will be able to find *that other thought*, that other formula that can finally unite Russia and Freedom.”<sup>44</sup> Hence the argument of the Seraphim Club that the “necessary condition of economic growth is the growth in the production of ideas, where the present situation is not much better than in the industrial sector.”<sup>45</sup> According to Maxim Sokolov, the emergence of liberal conservatism is a natural result of the ‘post-liberal hangover’, an increasing awareness of the intellectually impoverished nature of the “universal humanist catechism” and the consequent attempt to “address Russia’s past, present and future from a more profound metaphysical standpoint.”<sup>46</sup> In this sense, conservatism is also an attempt to respond to the challenge of thinking Russian politics *seriously*, in the condition when even the academic discourse is contaminated by meaningless journalistic phantoms such as “the family’, ‘siloviki’, ‘the Petersburg group’: “political rationality is today the name for the

42 Hramchikhin 2004. Emphasis added. See also Sokolov 2003b.

43 Sokolov 2003a, Privalov 1999.

44 Privalov 1999. Emphasis added.

45 Leontiev et al 2003.

46 Sokolov 2003a.

dull ejaculation of myths by the mass media, that fill entire pages without mentioning a single actually existing object.”<sup>47</sup>

The synthesis of freedom and Russia also unfolds in the Seraphim Club’s discussion of Russia’s external relations and foreign policy, specifically with regard to the assertion of Russia’s subjectivity in world politics. According to Mikhail Leontiev, “the question of what we want for Russia is rather concrete: [...] we proceed from the fact that Russia must remain an *independent subject*, retain its subjectivity in this [globalised] future. *At any price.*”<sup>48</sup> This valorisation of political subjectivity in the face of the challenge of globalisation is perhaps the central component of the (self-)definition of a liberal conservative. According to Boris Mezhuev, a leading political scientist, increasingly influential in the conservative circles, the *conservative*, as opposed to a *traditionalist*, does not valorise the past, but rather opposes the future, and more specifically, the *dominant image of the future*:

The conservative is a person who believes that the most *likely* variant of the development of society is not the most *optimal* way. [...] Conservatism could only be born along with the idea of progress as a mode of *spiritual resistance* to the latter. [...] Contemporary conservatism can only be ‘antiglobalist’ in the most popular sense of globalism. The future order that globalism brings about can be resisted in the name of the present order with its values of national sovereignty. [...] National sovereignty is the freedom of a nation to *be itself*. What being itself means is decided situationally. It might mean opting for a monarchic form of government, to practice death penalty, etc. *I am against linking national identity concretely with some social institution. It simply consists in freedom.* And this freedom is presently disappearing.<sup>49</sup>

This fragment features a striking identification of sovereignty and freedom,<sup>50</sup> quite heterogeneous to contemporary Western (critical) discourses on sovereignty, and posits a conservative as a *partisan of pluralism* in the face of homogenising and universalising tendencies, associated with the processes of globalisation. This identification may be said to follow logically from the domestic-political linkage of ‘Russia and Freedom’, which does not merely entail a ‘domestication’ of the liberal ideal: if the ‘new Russia’ is a *free Russia*, it is simultaneously free as a sover-

47 Pavlovsky cited in *Konservator* 2.

48 *Rossija v Mirovom Kontexte*.

49 Mezhuev cited in *Konservator* 2. Emphasis added.

50 See Prozorov 2004b, chapter 5, 2004c for a different philosophical linkage of sovereignty and freedom, achieved through a synthesis of political ontologies of Carl Schmitt and Michel Foucault.

eign political subject within its external environment, particularly insofar as it does not *owe its freedom to anyone*. The criticism of the defeatist and perpetually frightened Russian elite is directly linked by the Seraphim Club to Russian foreign policy: “For ten years we have been shuddering from a thought that the ‘world community’ would think that we are not progressive enough.”<sup>51</sup> Russia’s difference from other postcommunist states is taken by Privalov to consist in the absence of any positive discourse of ‘national liberation’ that could conceivably fill the eschatological vacuum left by the hegemonic ideology in the early 1990s: “we [Russia] have *dissolved*, while they have been *liberated*. [...] The population of the country was deprived of the Soviet basis of national self-identification without getting anything in return. In six years [1997] they [the elites] still have not found the words that could even slightly optimistically describe what is going on in the country. The goals of the movement launched in 1991 are exemplars of amorphousness: market economy, democratic statehood, rule of law...”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, it is precisely these amorphous slogans that are deemed by the Seraphim Club to have become the sole positive content of contemporary Western and particularly European liberalism, whose embrace of universalism and globalisation progressively hollowed out the axiological core of the liberal tradition, reducing it to a set of universal dogmas, whose intellectual poverty is compensated for by the moral fervour of their assertion.

This reactualisations of the ‘true/false Europe’ problematic permits to understand the combination, in the writings of e.g. Maxim Sokolov, of the basic principles of ‘European’ liberal doctrines and the sardonic contempt for the contemporary European ‘left-liberals’ with their valorisation of “universal human rights”<sup>53</sup>. Sokolov’s criticism targets precisely the figure of the ‘universal humans’ (*obshecheloveki*), attached to these rights, who in the depiction of the authors carry a strong resemblance to Nietzsche’s ‘last men’.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Memorandum of the Seraphim Club posits Russia as an assertive political subject against the levelling and homogenising forces of the global liberal-democratic consensus, linking spiritual renaissance and economic modernisation into a single project of the reestablishment of sovereign subjectivity, which the club refers to as a ‘blueprint for the emergent Russia’:

51 Leontiev et al 2003.

52 Privalov 1997.

53 It must be noted that the discourse of the Seraphim-Club is more generally marked by the rejection of the very notion of human rights as opposed to human freedom: “A human being does not have rights, he has freedom and the duty to limit that freedom so that it does not harm the freedom of the other.” (Privalov 2003)

54 See e.g. the weekly columns of Maxim Sokolov in Izvestia at <http://www.izvestia.ru/sokolov>.

Russia must either recognise its historic defeat and accept its place at the backdoor or restore its rightful position among world leaders. *Either a quiet and somewhat cosy descent into historical non-being or the return into history based on the unconditional faith that death must be defeated in the effort at revival. [...]* That which in the spiritual-metaphysical language is called the resurrection of Russia has a concrete political equivalent in the term 'accelerated modernisation'.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the foreign policy blueprint proposed by the Seraphim Club consists in the defence of the principle of sovereign statehood against the phenomenon of globalisation, understood less in the economic sense than in the sociopolitical one as the *levelling* of national distinctions and the *universalisation* of a liberal-democratic standard, "a process clearly hostile to any variety of conservatism"<sup>56</sup>. Thus, as opposed to the tragicomic search for the 'national idea' in the Russia of the 1990s, the Seraphim Club suggests that "no particular national idea is necessary for Russia. Russia simply needs to recall the *idea of a nation*."<sup>57</sup>

The discourse of liberal conservatism, as construed in the interpretations of the Putin project, in the programmatic discourses of 'right-wing' liberals and most recently by the Seraphim club, appears to be becoming a contender for the status of the *hegemonic* discourse. According to Gleb Pavlovsky, within the terrain of liberal conservatism Putin 'simply can't be *opposed*'.<sup>58</sup> The depoliticisation and technologisation of liberalism as a mode of governmentality rather than a foundational practice renders redundant the more revolutionary liberalism of the 1990s (a redundancy demonstrated by the results of the 2003-2004 elections) and disarms the anti-liberal criticism from the left opposition by reinscribing liberalism within a statist and patriotic context. This simultaneous victory over the ideologically polarised forces of the 1990s has resulted in the curious situation, noted by a number of observers. A wide range of radical liberal reforms in such areas as labour relations, land ownership, the legal system, natural monopolies, centre-regions relations, that have constituted the prime sites of political antagonism during the abortive attempts at their implementation in the Yeltsin presidency, are undertaken by the Putin presidency in a routine and business-like fashion without much controversy or polemic over their goals: "The sharp contrast between the scale and depth of the new round of

55 Leontiev et al 2003. Emphasis added.

56 Privalov 2003.

57 Privalov 1997. Emphasis added.

58 Pavlovsky 2000a.



reforms and the relative dullness of their public manifestation is the main feature of the social perception of the beginning stage of the Grand Reform.”<sup>59</sup>

Putin persistently works towards the reduction of uncertainty and unpredictability, *all the while remaining unpredictable himself*. [...] Putin introduces the state to Russia in the same way as the potato was introduced 300 years ago, *by a number of unnoticeable, almost embarrassingly infinitesimal steps*. This is obviously not a ‘dictatorship’ of any kind [...] but something like ‘hegemony’ that Gramsci spoke of [sic]: the *environment of new facts, catchphrases and doubtless advantages that permeates everything*.<sup>60</sup>

Within this discursive hegemony of liberal conservatism, the more conventional ideological positions (from the communist ideology to the pro-Western stance of the ‘democratic intelligentsia’) are always already inscribed as *minoritarian*, extreme positions, ‘ideological’ in the pejorative sense espoused by the critique of ideology.<sup>61</sup> It is no coincidence that after the two years of conventional liberal rhetoric the Union of Right Forces (unsuccessfully) attempted a return to the liberal-conservative position during the 2003 election campaign with Anatoly Chubais’s famous blueprint for a ‘liberal empire’.

Against the avowedly pro-European disposition of the URF leaders, one of whose campaign slogans was “Do you want to live like they do in Europe?”, Chubais’s programmatic article “Russia’s Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” proceeds from the assumption that Russia has already accepted and adapted to the ‘right-wing’ programme, which throughout the 1990s was instrumental in laying the foundations of the new statehood and the new economy. Moreover, as a veteran of political struggles of the 1990s, Chubais points out gleefully that as opposed to that period, in which liberal economic prescriptions were highly controversial, “we now do not have a single party, whose programme rejects the basic socioeconomic and political liberal values. Nobody demands the abolition of parliamentary democracy, the separation of powers and the popular elections of executive leaders; nobody demands the restoration of state own-

59 Bunin et al 2001a. See also Fedorov 2001, Zudin 2002, Bunin et al 2001b.

60 Pavlovsky 2000a. Emphasis added.

61 This is not to say that the minoritarian position may not in principle be deemed attractive and be sought by a political force as e.g. a means of retaining relative autonomy from the hegemonic centre and furnishing an alternative identity or lifestyle. In contemporary political philosophy it is precisely the minoritarian loci of politics that are anticipated to serve as site of experimentation and innovation. See e.g. Thoburn 2003 for a Deleuzian reading of ‘minor politics’. At the same time, in the Russian condition of Putinian hegemony the minoritarian status of both liberals and communists is unmistakably not of their own choosing and reflects their ‘out-of-place’ status within the liberal-conservative constellation.

ership of the means of production, the ban on private entrepreneurship and the reinstatement of price controls. That is what I call irreversibility!”<sup>62</sup> Even though the irreversibility in question clearly did not cover Chubais’s party’s electoral fortunes, the argument has a more general significance. Along with other veteran liberal reformers (Gaidar, Ulykaev, Yasin, etc.), Chubais argues that the highly contentious liberal reform platform of the early 1990s has in fact been *implemented* and liberal economic principles became *hegemonic* commonplaces, to which there now is (as Russian liberals never fail to emphasise) ‘no alternative’. “I have seen time and again how a succession of governments throughout the history of the new Russia eventually chose the *only feasible policy*, the right-wing liberal one.”<sup>63</sup> Within this new constellation, the liberal economic doctrines are perceived by Chubais to be sufficiently internalised in the Russian political discourse, the debate on e.g. taxation, pension policies and land ownership unfolding strictly within the liberal system of coordinates. The new focus of the liberal forces must now be the task of offering a new mode of Russia’s self-identification in the post-industrial era and in the condition of globalisation. It is here that Chubais abandons the technocratic tone, characteristic of the Russian liberals, and echoes the Seraphim Club’s call for spiritual renaissance: “our country has always been disposed towards the tasks of cosmic - both literally and figuratively - significance. Russia is a country with its own destiny and undoubtedly with its own historical mission.”<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the standard tropes of Russian liberalism, this mission clearly does not consist in the integration ‘with the West’ or ‘into Europe’, particularly through joining the EU, which was presented as the telos of liberal reforms in the 1999 campaign of the URF: “The long-suffering question of Russia’s entry into the leading political and military structures of Europe - the EU and NATO - is resolved unambiguously: *we must not enter either the EU or NATO*. We simply won’t ‘fit’ there, either politically or geographically.”<sup>65</sup> The alternative, proposed by Chubais, is the controversial concept of a ‘liberal empire’, which proceeds from the explicit assumption of Russia’s ‘natural leadership’ in the post-Soviet space: “It is time to clearly tell it like it is. Russia is the only and unique leader in the space of the CIS, both in the volume of its economy and the quality of life of its citizens. From this fact follows our task: *Russia can and must enhance and strengthen its leading positions in this part of the world*. [...] The ideology of Russia for the long term perspective must be *liberal imperialism*. [...] This is the task

62 Chubais 2003.

63 Ibid. Emphasis added.

64 Chubais 2003.

65 Chubais 2003.

of the scale that would permit our people to finally *overcome the spiritual crisis*, will truly *unite* and *mobilise* them.”<sup>66</sup>

This fragment is a clear departure from the economy-centric discourse of Russian liberalism that nonetheless retains the economic grounding in its justification of ‘imperialist’ policies in the CIS with reference to Russia’s increasing economic leadership in the region, reflected in the orientation of all migration flows in the CIS space towards Russia.<sup>67</sup> Chubais’s policy blueprint echoes the more theoretical discourses of liberal-conservatism (including the 1999 manifesto of Ulykaev which spoke of a ‘new imperialism’) in seeking to articulate the relative success of liberal reforms with the elusive search for a ‘national idea’ as a pathway to a spiritual revival. The ‘liberal empire’ is thus presented as a synthesis of economic modernisation and cultural renaissance. However, as the critics of Chubais’s blueprint from within the conservative circle did not fail to observe, the latter component remains unarticulated in Chubais’s proposal. Moreover, the observers, critical of the socioeconomic and foreign policies associated with the figure of Chubais, have noted that the proposal concretely boils down to the extension, via the vaguely defined imperialist means, of the neoliberal policy designs into the post-Soviet space, which obscures their ill-reputed status within Russia. Bluntly put, Russian liberal reformers try to evade their domestic failure by ‘selling’ the very same policies in the ‘near abroad’. At worst, liberal imperialism is expected to come down to Russia taking on the status of a ‘regional policeman’, imposing the liberal-democratic standards in the countries, geopolitically in its sphere of influence, all the while being deprived of its *own* subjectivity due to its inscription into a global liberal-democratic project.<sup>68</sup> It is therefore notable that Chubais’s project was criticised not for abandoning conventional Westernist liberalism, but as not conservative *enough*, particularly with regard to its embrace of the notion of globalisation which, as we have discussed, is the main target of liberal conservative criticism. Despite the

66 Ibid. Emphasis added.

67 The question of migration permits to discern a divergence of the liberal-imperialist project of Chubais from the policies of the Putin presidency. While Putin’s project has arguably consisted in developing Russia as a ‘proper’ civic-nation-state, clearly delimited from the post-Soviet space, Chubais’s blueprint unwittingly blurs the still fragile boundaries of Russian statehood in the attempt to recreate this space as an empire, by definition eluding the strict delimitation of borders, characteristic of sovereign statehood. This divergence is concretely illustrated by the liberal opposition to the government’s law on citizenship, passed in 2002, which drastically complicates the procedure for ex-Soviet citizens to acquire Russian citizenship. Ironically, on this issue the liberals joined forces with the communists, whose opposition to the law also proceeds from an ‘imperial’ reasoning, albeit not a liberal one.

68 See Holmogorov 2003a.

electoral failure of the URF in 2003,<sup>69</sup> the liberal-imperialist blueprint is highly significant as an indicator of the transformation of the liberal discourse in Russia, its embrace of ‘grand projects’ over technocratic rhetoric, its rehabilitation of the tabooed ‘imperial’ lexicon that articulates contemporary liberalism with the pre-revolutionary Russia, and, most notably, in its explicit renunciation of the ‘integrationist’ paradigm of foreign policy, exemplified by e.g. the goal of eventual EU membership. Chubais’s design follows to the letter the precept of the more ‘extremist’ conservative, Mikhail Remizov, whose work we will discuss in the following chapter: “We have nowhere to *be integrated* into – it is about time for us *to integrate*.”<sup>70</sup>

Although admittedly idiosyncratic when approached from the perspective of contemporary Western (neo)liberalism, liberal conservatism may be said to have a long and distinguished tradition in the Russian political thought. Two strands of Russian political philosophy are particularly important in this respect: the ‘legal liberalism’ of the ‘Westernisers’ of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Konstantin Kavelin, Boris Chicherin) and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century post-Marxist ‘Christian liberalism’ of e.g. Petr Struve and Semen Frank.<sup>71</sup> The former orientation sought to combine the emphasis on strong statehood, understood in terms of a legal order, with the value of individual autonomy and dignity. The latter trend, associated with the seminal publication *Vekhi*, advanced a powerful critique of revolutionism against the emergent social-democratic and socialist-revolutionary forces and emphasised the spiritual impoverishment of Russian radical thought, which conceives of Russian society and culture as a ‘clean slate’, on which doctrinal designs may be inscribed. While a detailed genealogy of the liberal-conservative disposition is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important merely to note that such a synthesis has a number of historical precedents, although has arguably never been implemented in practice.

The notion of liberal conservatism also permits a more nuanced understanding of the overall character of the Putin project, which is widely characterised in the negative terms of ‘managed

69 It must be noted that it was precisely the Chubais ‘wing’ of the party that triumphed in the intra-party conflict following the parliamentary elections of 2003, with the other leaders (Irina Khakamada, Boris Nemtsov) splitting from the party either to launch new political projects or to pursue a business career. One may therefore expect the liberal-imperialist theme to resurface in the URF discourse, as the party seeks to reassert itself prior to the 2007 parliamentary elections.

70 Remizov 2003a.

71 See Walicki 1980, pp. 397-406, 435-440. See also Sakwa 2000a, p. 35 for the discussion of the relevance of these liberal-conservative orientations to Putin’s project of reconstitution of the state.

democracy'.<sup>72</sup> As we have attempted a detailed analysis of the Putin project elsewhere<sup>73</sup>, let us merely suggest that the combination of the policy course of liberal reforms with the enhanced role of the state appears to be not an *aberration* of whatever we conceive of as the liberal-democratic ideal but rather follows the logic of *depoliticisation* of the revolutionary moment that sediments and stabilises the effects of the postcommunist revolution, while abandoning the excessive decentring of state subjectivity that ultimately threatened the fragile outcomes of liberal reforms. In this sense, liberal conservatism appears to be immanent, as a discourse of legitimation, to precisely that mode of governmentality that seeks to sediment the effects of revolutionary liberalism of the 1990s by articulating them with the logic of 'normal life' and the idea of "effective statehood", which Putin repeatedly offered as his solution to the millennial search for the Russian 'national idea'.

Within this logic it is also possible to appreciate the more assertive foreign policy stance, practiced by Putin and prescribed by the ideologues of liberal conservatism, from Chubais to the Seraphim Club. The liberal-conservative grounding of the new Russian state effects a break with the Soviet past that is more profound than 'anti-Soviet' denunciations that conjure up the negative image of the Soviet period in order to endow the new regime with post-revolutionary legitimacy, whereby the past is, as it were, still *present* in the self-definition of the new state. To performatively declare the 'post-Soviet transition' to be over (as was done by Vladislav Surkov the day after the triumphant victory of United Russia in the 2003 parliamentary elections) is, in terms of grammar, to remove the referent 'Soviet' from the 'simple past' tense to 'past perfect', the past already transcended by other past events and hence irrelevant to the present self-identification. The effect of the 'end of transition' is thus the break with the very notion of the 'post-Soviet' as a mode of identification which spares the country the status of a losing side in the Cold War and gives it appreciation of the newly gained sovereign autonomy. "How can one keep telling the country during all these years that it is going through a transitional period? It is not just that nobody bothered to explain clearly where exactly the transition is directed, but rather this very tedious term itself reeks of overdue repair works."<sup>74</sup> In his programmatic article 'Farewell to Belovezha' Gleb Pavlovsky dispenses with the 'transitionalist' self-identification and conjures a new entity, a Russia 'without adjectives', 'simply Russia' or 'Russia proper' (*prосто Rossija*):

72 See Tretiakov 2000b, Markov 2000.

73 Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4.

74 Privalov 1997.

The Belovezha agreements did not create Russia but merely *delimited it as a territory of unbound revolution*. [...] Frequently repeating the phrase ‘post-Soviet space’, the Russian political elite has learned not to notice that it entails a *non-substantiality of Russia*. [...] Belovezha is no longer equivalent to the ‘dissolution of the USSR’, because *for Russia the USSR is no longer relevant*. The USSR has been merely an unprofitable deal that for us has only entailed bad government. *Russia refuses to be a post-Soviet (or an anti-Soviet) state. Russia is simply Russia, which has to be taken into account.*<sup>75</sup>

This figure of ‘Russia Proper’ permits to understand another extravagant claim made by Pavlovsky in 2001 on the occasion of the *tenth* anniversary of the Russian declaration of state sovereignty: “This is the *first* year of our independence.”<sup>76</sup> The independence of the Russian state, received with incredulity throughout the 1990s as meaningless in the absence of a clear object, from which Russia supposedly became independent, begins in the Putin presidency to be endowed with positive value. The new appreciation of independence accords with the liberal conservative valorisation of the principle sovereignty, which, in the Schmittian sense of the decision on exception, entails precisely the declaration of independence from *anyone and anything at all*. Moreover, *pace* the excessively critical overtones of the contemporary discussions of sovereignty in IR theory, within liberal conservatism such concepts as ‘sovereignty’ and ‘national interest’ are squarely tied with the notion of *freedom*, the freedom of the state(sman) to independently devise the course of policy and of the social actors to engage in their cultural practices in the face of the homogenising and universalising thrust of ‘globalisation’.

In this manner, it is indeed possible to conceive of the Putin presidency in terms of the ‘end of transition’, a transition from the political assertion of liberalism in the anticommunist revolution to its depoliticisation as the foundation of the new order, which is in the strict sense *post-postcommunist*, as what the new order defines itself against is no longer the Soviet history but rather the revolutionary turmoil of the 1990s. The liberal conservatism of the Presidency is thus ‘conservative’ in the conventional sense, seeking to simultaneously stabilise the gains of the postcommunist revolution and do away with the ‘revolutionary disposition’ with its flux, contingency and unfounded decisionism that hamper the implementation of the positive programme of liberal reforms. Paradoxically at first glance, liberal conservatism exemplifies both

75 Pavlovsky 2000a. Emphasis added. See also Holmogorov 2002b for a same-titled article (‘Prosto Rossiya’) with a similar argument. Holmogorov argues that the opposition to President Putin from both ideologically orthodox communists and radical pro-Western ‘liberal humanists’ is owing to the President’s *purposefully abstract patriotism*, a valorisation of “Russia without adjectives”, whether ‘Soviet’ or ‘democratic’.

76 This is the title of Pavlovsky 2001a. Emphasis added.

the *success* of the revolution and its ultimate *betrayal*, disavowing the contingent origins of the emergence of the present regime.<sup>77</sup> And yet, it is precisely this depoliticisation, brought about in the Putin project that was challenged in the course of Putin's first term by a discourse that also sought to reclaim the mantle of conservatism, this time as a designator of the newly emergent *opposition* to the presidency.

<sup>77</sup> See Magun 2003 for the exemplary philosophical treatment of the problematic of the postcommunist revolution, which conceives of this betrayal as the inherent feature of any event of revolution, which must disavow itself as a force of negation to create a 'new objectivity'. See also Lefort 1988, Ranciere 2001 for a discussion of the same logic in terms of the double movement of the appearance of the political Event as a constitutive foundational decision, itself logically unfounded, and its occultation through its reinscription as a secure immanent foundation of the new order. Any revolution therefore succeeds only insofar as it betrays itself. See also Prozorov 2004d for the more detailed exploration of this theme.

# Times of Troubles, Then and Now: Left Conservatism and the Return of the Political

## THE NEW CONSERVATISM: THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE CONCEPT

It is certainly ironic that the alternative conservative discourse, articulated against the background of the largely pro-Putin ‘liberal-conservatism’, begins with the problematisation of precisely that which the liberal conservatives consider to be the greatest achievement of the Putin presidency: the consolidation, sedimentation and depoliticisation of life, the formation of a hegemonic discourse, articulating ‘Russia and Freedom’ in the reinscription of the foundational moment of the 1990s as a foundation of the new Russian state. The critique of liberal conservatism, which is at least implicitly also a critique of ‘Putinism’, unites the representatives of the ‘national-patriotic’ movement of the 1990s (from Alexander Dugin to Dmitry Rogozin) and, more interestingly, the younger commentators and analysts formerly of the liberal persuasion, (Konstantin Krylov, Mikhail Remizov, Yegor Holmogorov), who seek to articulate a conservative worldview that is more creative and pluralistic than the one embraced by the ‘left-patriotic’ opposition of the CPRF and yet is heterogeneous to the liberal-conservative synthesis. These views, articulated from 1999 in internet publications (most notably, *Russian Journal*) and marginal print media (*Spetsnaz Rossii*, *Zavtra*, etc.) entered the mainstream political discourse in 2003 in an abortive attempt at launching a major national newspaper of conservative persuasion, called *Konservator*.<sup>78</sup> During 2003 this discourse gathered political weight and, with some reservations, may be said to have eventually found a locus of political representa-

<sup>78</sup> The history of the *Konservator* weekly is symbolic in that it was founded on the ruins of *Obshaya Gazeta*, a famous ‘democratic’ weekly, headed by Yegor Yakovlev, a key figure in the liberal movement of the Perestroika period. In 2002, Yakovlev sold the paper to a young businessman Viatcheslav Leibman, who promptly closed it down and assembled a new journalist team under the title of *Konservator*, promising a clear alternative to the no longer popular liberalism of the 1990s. However, the first editorial team, led by Alexander Timofeevsky, was still of a broadly liberal persuasion, which led to its replacement with the team led by Dmitry Olshansky (a former art critic in *Segodnya*, a staunchly pro-Western paper owned by Vladimir Gusinsky). The newspaper was eventually closed down by the owner for economic reasons at the end of 2003. It is this ‘Konservator 2’ period that we shall consider below.



tion in the Homeland (*Rodina*) party, originally founded by Sergei Glaziev and Dmitry Rogozin, which emerged as a surprise winner of the 2003 parliamentary elections.<sup>79</sup>

While in the case of liberal conservatism it is relatively easy to identify the object of ‘conservation’ as the achievements of the reforms of the 1990s, which in turn generates concrete policy proposals such as an outright ban on any revision of the results of privatisation, it is at first glance difficult to conceive of the irreconcilable attitude of e.g. the Homeland movement to these reforms as in any way conservative. Thus, the primary task of the ‘new conservative’ discourse is its self-definition and self-legitimation *as* conservative, which has resulted in an intellectually fascinating reconstruction of the concept. In this chapter we shall briefly revisit this reconstruction, relying primarily on the works of Mikhail Remizov, a political philosopher whose work has been central in the articulation of the ‘new conservatism’.

Remizov begins with an epistemic reconstruction of the concept of conservatism in terms of ‘emphatic particularism’, an intellectual disposition that is diametrically opposed to the ‘left-wing’ critique of ideology.<sup>80</sup> While the latter approach condemns the universalist claims of ideology as being *in fact* conditioned by particular constellations of interests, conservatism aestheticises *this very particularity*, manifests and valorises it in its own self-presentation and criticises universalist claims solely as ‘bad taste’, a hypocritical or cowardly refusal to practice philosophical or political discourse *in first person*. In other words, the historically conditioned and politically particularistic status of an idea is for a conservative its *truth-criterion*: a statement that is not spatio-temporally or contextually grounded is ipso facto *groundless*. As opposed to the critique of ideology which practices such contextualisation as a means of ‘unravelling’ and delegitimising a certain idea, the same operation undertaken by a conservative rehabilitates it: even if purely universal and unconditioned knowledge were *possible*, it would be literally *out of place* and quite simply *would not count*. Conservatism is thus defined epistemically as the *apology of prejudice*,<sup>81</sup> which accepts the irreducible pluralism of all cultures and modes of knowledge *except* those which pretend to be universal, decontextualised or multicultural. This understand-

79 After the elections, the internal conflict between Glaziev and Rogozin led to the expulsion of the former from the leadership positions in the party and its parliamentary faction, and victory of the ‘Rogozin line’ in Homeland, which is considerably less left-wing or ‘socialist’ than that of Glaziev.

80 Remizov 2002b.

81 Remizov 2003i. The opposition to universalist ideas justifies Remizov’s definition of conservatism as *anti-utopian* thought, insofar as utopianism is understood as the abstraction from the spatiotemporal. In contrast, the attachment of the conservative to the immediate spatiotemporal coordinates of discourse renders it, in Remizov’s gleefully provocative description, literally *fundamentalist*.

ing of pluralism echoes the oft-cited notion of ‘flourishing complexity’, central to the work of the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Konstantin Leontiev, who was staunchly opposed to the ‘degenerative levelling’ of the multiplicity of cultures in the project of universalised tolerance, whose celebration of diversity is hypocritical as it brings in the humanist monism through the backdoor: ‘We must respect our differences, since underneath we are all the same’. The apology of prejudice is thus irreducible to the solipsistic assertion of the subjective truth of one’s position but is rather a disposition that accepts and valorises the multiplicity of irreconcilable positions without presuming the possibility of their reconciliation through universal communication or even peaceful coexistence in the liberal project of multicultural tolerance: for Remizov, multi-culturalism is *not itself a culture* and hence is not to be taken into account.<sup>82</sup>

The second feature of conservatism is the inherently contradictory status of its object: conservatism arises as a problematic only because that which ought to be conserved *no longer exists*, is already corrupted or betrayed. “Conservatism constitutes itself as an intellectual and aesthetic *reconstruction* of the lost integrity of life.”<sup>83</sup> In contrast to Polyakov’s situational understanding of conservatism as the consolidation of the status quo, Remizov posits conservatism as constituted by the existentially tragic realisation of the non-existence of the object of conservation and thus the necessity to construe it in both thought and practice, which in turn renders its authenticity dubious. “Historical conservatism enters the scene at the moment of fissure when it is too late ‘to conserve’; thus, its path is from the outset one of reflection on and manipulation of those forms of experience *that may no longer be retained in their authenticity*.”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, it is of course the authenticity of the ‘integrity of life’ that presumably made worthwhile its conservation. The aporia of a conservative disposition is that every valorisation of an element of the past or ‘tradition’ is always already intertwined with disenchantment, i.e. a conservative is traumatised by the lack of the self-evidence of his maxims and approaches ‘tradition’ not in terms of a facile celebration of authentic spontaneity but always within the modality of

82 Remizov 2002b. This thesis accords with the seminal critique of multiculturalism in the work of Slavoj Žižek. See Žižek 2004, pp. 110-138.

83 Remizov 2000c, 2000d. The reconstructionist drive of conservatism is also discussed in a less philosophical manner by Yegor Holmogorov, who relies on the Russian words ‘*konservirovanie*’ (conservation or preservation of foodstuffs) to emphasise that conservatism seeks to create a new, qualitatively different (and better) reality in its act of conservation, thus dispensing with the assumption of authenticity and the valorisation of the originary. “The conservative is the one who knows that everything rots and decomposes but can not *come to terms* with it.[...] *Any good conservatism is revolutionary*. A conserved product is a substantially new product, more highly priced and frequently better than the fresh one”. (Holmogorov 2003f. Emphasis added.)

84 Remizov 2002r.

problematisation. Remizov explicitly rejects the identification of conservatism with a philosophically naïve valorisation of the “primordial-universalist Tradition, with which good taste must have little in common.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Remizov considers facile and immature the claims of those who reject the possibility of a Russian conservatism on the grounds that ‘there is nothing to conserve in Russia’. The aporia of conservatism is inherent to its very definition: *conservation is required only when the valorised object is perceived as existentially problematic*.

This is a historical fact that has political and theoretical consequences. Firstly, from this follows a natural plurality of conservatisms, i.e. the diversity of strategies, whereby the conservative reconstitutes the tradition and actualises himself in political modernity. Secondly: the futility of all efforts to oppose conservative thinking to ‘project thinking’ in politics. Thirdly: the impossibility of identifying ‘tradition’ with the status quo by definition, as opposed to a political decision. Fourthly: the absence of a given referent in conservative thought, the unproblematic tradition that it can refer to, justifies the conservative recourse to philosophical and political radicalism.<sup>86</sup>

However aporetic, the predicament of the lost object of conservation *defines* the essence of conservative thought, although the more specific response to this predicament may vary. Remizov distinguishes between four ‘anthropological’ types of conservatism, of which two are presented as ineffective and apolitical ‘pseudomorphs’. The ‘realist’ type of conservatism (which ought not to be confused with the tradition of political realism) accepts the progressivist teleology and resigns himself to playing the role of the static element in the modernist movement of progress, a *brake* in the teleological advance. The realist is not an enemy of the ‘spirit of the times’ as such but is rather antagonistic to the excesses of the rationalist and progressivist disposition that generates ‘revolutionary engineering’ that takes no account of the local context. Within the Russian political field this position is represented by the already described strand of ‘centrism’, which throughout the 1990s was not opposed to the overall course of reforms, but was critical of the ‘shock therapeutic’ mode of their implementation and advocated a more ‘gradual’, ‘balanced’ and ‘pragmatic’ strategy of reforms. Remizov argues that realism is ultimately a *depoliticising* strategy that finds its ‘anthropological’ type in the

85 Ibid. Remizov’s type of conservatism is thus furthest away from the romantic naturalisation of the primordial and the authentic community or individuality. See Remizov 2003c for the explicit rejection of all naturalising gestures in the conservative discourse and the anthropological argument about the ‘insufficiency’ of a human being as a natural creature, which entails the *necessity* of supplementary ‘cultural violence’. Remizov is thus critical of all attempts to liberate a human being in his authenticity, which, in his phrase, would result in a sight as “pitiful, artificial and out of place as a nudist”. (Remizov 2003c)

86 Remizov cited in *Konservator 2*.

caricaturised figure of the bureaucrat: “Realists are the guardians of the ‘sacred social spontaneity’ which is in fact a concrete social situation that descends from a particular distribution of forces, each of which has its own, unilateral project. It is easy to see that if everyone was a ‘realist’, no *situation* could ever even *arise*.”<sup>87</sup> The price of being the defenders of the status quo, ‘in touch’ with ‘reality as it is’, is therefore political muteness and impotence. Moreover, as Remizov suggests, in the contemporary conditions of ‘globalisation’ the realist conservative is bound to feel disoriented, as the very ‘reality principle’ that he is asserting (the priority of particular interests over universal values) begins to slip away: “What if the universalist staples of humanitarian metaphysics that used to be playful euphemisms of concrete interests are now the basic and compulsory instance of the real? What if the actions of NATO [in Kosovo] *are really* guided by the scholastic metaphysics of ‘human rights’ and the grotesque mythology of the ‘humanitarian catastrophe’?”<sup>88</sup>

This disorientation generates the second type of a conservative that Remizov labels a ‘knight of the impossible’ or a ‘beautiful soul’. This figure is similar to the realist in unwittingly accepting the progressivist paradigm, but refuses any participation in the ‘evolutionary’ process and resigns himself to condemning the sins of the world from a comfortable outside location. The beautiful-soul conservative thus takes on the role of both the judge and the victim of the existing order, but, according to Remizov, only serves to maintain this order by posing as its marginal figure, both *displaced* and *untimely* in his almost comical clinging to the vestiges of the past. Remizov’s example of such a disposition is the Russian émigré movement of the Soviet period, particularly its monarchist representatives.<sup>89</sup> In the present Russia the beautiful-soul conservatism is arguably represented by both the waning orthodox Soviet communism (preached by e.g. *Sovetskaja Rossija*) and the traditionalist quasi-Slavophile discourse of e.g. Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In both cases, this conservatism assumes the enunciative modality of an *a priori outsider*, whose political significance does not exceed the arguably important project of furnishing a minoritarian lifestyle.

For Remizov, “the capacity of conservatism to acquire political meaning is a question of a massive epistemological revision of the ‘modern’ worldview. In this task the *conservative can not but be radical*, for radicalism is precisely the capacity to question the self-evident, to transform the basic codes of reality. [...] *History has no telos, no direction, no beginning and no end, and the main*

87 Remizov 2000c.

88 Remizov 2000c.

89 Ibid.

*thing is not its transformation but dwelling in it.* Having said that, the realists will become *cynics* and the knights of the impossible will not fail to become *extremists*.”<sup>90</sup> The two ‘virtuous’ types of conservatism according to Remizov are thus conditioned by the radicalisation of the epistemic break with the modern tradition (from ‘non-modernism’ to anti-modernism) that permits a conservative to play a constitutive political role *outside* the epistemico-political terrain of its opponents. For Remizov, this epistemic break is achieved in conservative philosophy by its wholehearted *active* acceptance of the diagnosis of nihilism, the Nietzschean ‘death of God’ and the human disenchantment and alienation that results from it. Within this ‘fulfilment of nihilism’ history is no longer subject to a progressivist injunction and rather unfolds as *becoming*. The conservative ontology is thus the universe of pure becoming, lacking meaning or direction but possessing the ‘rhythm of the eternal return’. On the basis of this ontology that dispenses with the linearity of the time of progress, two positions may be articulated. The ‘cynics’ are the realists which have dispensed with all ‘ideals’ and moral precepts but rather assert the brute *facticity of existence* as fundamental: “The basic reality that the cynical conservative spirit valorises – instincts, dispositions of power, the irreducibility of struggle and the inevitability of death - are, for him, nothing other than the chemical formula of *life as such*.”<sup>91</sup> While conservative realism is embodied in the depoliticised figure of the bureaucrat, cynicism finds its enunciative modality in the figure of the ‘advisor to the Prince’, loyal to any form of order once it is established and valorising the acts of sovereignty as the instance of ‘real life’. Thus, it is entirely wrong to accuse a cynic of ‘not believing in anything’, since the very ‘cynicism’ of existence is precisely a matter of *faith* and, one may suspect, an object of *desire*. Remizov might well be correct in labelling the cynics to be the ‘romantics of the political’ by contrast with ‘political romanticism’ that was the object of Carl Schmitt’s critique: as opposed to bringing Romantic essentialism into the political field, the cynical disposition romanticises the political itself as an instance of ‘real life’ rupturing the routinised and technologised existence.

The alternative disposition of virtuous conservatism, extremism, is apparently the most difficult to articulate with the conventional understanding of the conservative style.<sup>92</sup> Extremism is understood by Remizov as a radicalisation of the ‘beautiful-soul’ disposition, whereby the ‘cynical fundamentals’ of existence are cast not as exterior to human being but as brought into being by human *will* and properly political *acts*, “without grounds or justification”.<sup>93</sup> In con-

90 Ibid. Emphasis added.

91 Remizov 2000d.

92 See the critical discussion of Remizov’s theses and ‘extreme conservatism’ more generally in *Konservator-2*.

93 Remizov 2000d.

trast to cynicism extremism remains an ‘outsider’ position but deploys this very exteriority as a political force, the ‘knights of the impossible’ beginning to assert the possibility of radical transformation. Extreme conservatism explicitly attempts to create, in acts of political will that ‘emanate from nothingness’, that which it claims to be already there, moreover, there as a *foundation* of life. The new objectivity is thus created as an act of pure subjectivity that *realises itself as such*. “History will go where it is directed to go, and worlds are created out of nothing – does not this apotheosis of the subject make conservatism an *ideology of freedom in its deepest and anti-liberal sense?*”<sup>94</sup>

The Russian ‘new conservatism’, of which Remizov himself is a representative, arguably gravitates between the cynical and extremist poles of ‘radical conservatism’. Yet, the cynical ‘romanticisation of the political’ in the Russian context appears to be disabled by, firstly, the alienation of the conservatives in question from the position of power and the new Russian state as such, and, secondly, by the tendencies towards depoliticisation in the Putin presidency, which is the focus of sharpest criticism within this circle. Let us discuss these positions in greater detail.

## TIME OF TROUBLES I: TOWARDS A GENERAL DELEGITIMATION OF THE 1990S

The first crucial feature of the ‘new conservatism’ is its irreconcilable opposition to the political regime that descends from the 1991 anticommunist revolution. More specifically, as opposed to the liberal conservatives such as Hramchikhin, for whom this event indeed designates the revolutionary moment of foundation, new conservatives perceive it as a repetition of the ‘time of troubles’, a purely destructive event that failed to install any new positivity. “As Russia is a country with an interrupted and betrayed tradition [...], any conservatism that orients us towards the reproduction of the status quo is nothing less than the absolutisation of merely one of the moments of our frantic historical trajectory, in this case one of the *degenerative* moments.”<sup>95</sup> For Konstantin Krylov, the regime that took hold in 1991 does not even deserve the liberal label that it claims for itself but is rather presented as an instance of monstrous negativity: “The conservative position is reducible to the formulation: there are things that can not be abolished, or else we all perish. The liberal position is contained in the response: no, we can cancel all these prohibitions and go on living. The third position, however, argues that these things can be abolished. As a result, we are going to perish, *and that is fine*.”

94 Ibid.

95 Remizov 2002r.

[...] It seems that the leadership of the state since 1991 has been composed of real ‘conservatives’, who are perfectly aware of the dangers of their actions, and that is *precisely* why they keep acting that way.”<sup>96</sup> Krylov’s criticism is more extreme than the stances of other new conservatives due to his perception of the overarching Russophobia of the governing elites, for which he coins the idiosyncratic term *Nerus*’ (literally ‘non-Russia’, yet connoting a sense of despicable, non-human otherness). Pace a facile reading, *Nerus*’ does not refer to the non-Russian ethnic who allegedly possess disproportionate political or economic influence (i.e. Krylov’s argument is not simply racist), but to the disposition of the *deracinated* elite, which may be ethnically Russian but is marked by the contempt for the Russian nation, perceived as a clean slate for ideological construction and resource extraction. Discussing the tabooed nationalist slogan ‘Russia for the Russians’ (whose advocates were famously dismissed as ‘idiots’ by President Putin on a number of occasions), Krylov claims that the counter-slogan of the present elite, however patriotic in its self-presentation, is ‘Russia *without* Russians’, the *inanimate object of exploitation*. More concretely, the primary object of Krylov’s criticism is of course the oligarchic economic elite, best exemplified by the Yukos group, whose owner Mikhail Khodorkovsky had (prior to his 2004 infamous ‘prison letter’<sup>97</sup>) practiced a notoriously ‘rootless cosmopolitan’ discourse, marked by a condescending attitude towards the Russians as lacking the capitalist ‘work ethic’, respect for property and ‘civic culture’, which was perceived as offensive even in the liberal circles. Thus, the positive programme of the new conservatism according to Krylov must consist in the dismantlement of the post-1991 regime constructed by the Russophobic *Nerus*’ elite: “No ‘programme of the revival of Russia is necessary. More precisely, no realistic programme of revival is *possible* without the victory over *Nerus*’, and that very victory will make such a programme *redundant*. *The important thing is to give back to the Russian people the power over their country, give them property, let them live the way they want with national dignity.*”<sup>98</sup> From this pathos follows a key feature of new conservatism that distinguishes them sharply from the liberal conservative camp: the *resistance to the gradual legitimisation of the ‘oligarchic capitalist’ order*, the popular acceptance of the ‘injustice’ of the reforms of the 1990s as a ‘historical fact’ and the appearance of the post-1991 order as a ‘new objectivity’. The ‘new conservative’ discourse resists the looming liberal conservative depoliticisation by undertaking a genealogy

96 Krylov 2003e.

97 See Khodorkovsky 2004. The text in question is written in the typically ‘liberal-conservative’ vein, emphasising the need to embed liberalism in the Russian tradition and culture, and renouncing the cosmopolitan orientation of the liberalism of the 1990s. For a rejoinder to Khodorkovsky from a representative of the ‘pro-Western’ liberal position see Ryzhkov 2004.

98 Krylov 2003f. Emphasis added. As we shall see below, this minimalism with regard to the articulation of a positive programme characterises the ‘new conservatism’ more generally.

of the Putin regime, demonstrating its lowly origins in the ‘criminal’ privatisation policy and the violent suppression of ‘patriotic resistance’ in the events of October 1993.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, the failure of the depoliticising efforts during the 1990s<sup>100</sup> is viewed as indicative of the *a-political* nature of Russian liberalism, incapable of open political confrontation and choosing to present its maxims in terms of ‘common-sense’ and ‘no-alternative’ discourses that we have addressed above. For Remizov, the liberals, apparently triumphant in the ‘civil war’ of 1991-1993 failed to become *victors* in this war, precisely due to their incapacity to constitute this victory as a hegemonic discourse, depoliticise the foundational moment as a constitutional foundation and thus universalise their manifestly particularist, sectarian stance:

In the case of the civil war the criterion [of victory] is the capacity to constitute a state, the capacity to become Power, to create on the basis of one’s political subculture a new carcass of national political culture. For instance, Bolshevism, which during the Revolution and the Civil War was still a sectarian phenomenon, managed to grow into a representation of the societal whole. In the case of the democrats, a sect triumphant in the early 1990s, nothing of the kind happened. The best evidence here is the very fact that they failed to become the interpreters of their own victory, couldn’t use the ‘victor’s privilege’ to write their own history. [...] They failed to create the field itself, and thus look so ridiculous now that try to throw someone out of it.<sup>101</sup>

Remizov is thus critical not so much of the ideology of Russian liberalism as of the liberals’ failure to *install* an ideology, the latter understood in the post-Marxist sense as *constitutive* of the social field rather than its misrecognition, not a ‘false consciousness of social being’ but that very being itself.<sup>102</sup> In a cynical-conservative moment, Remizov appears to be willing to grant legitimacy to the new Russia on the condition that such an ideological order be established: “As there are no truth-criteria applicable to ideology, its only ‘verification’ is the capacity of the constituted worlds to revolve around their creators.”<sup>103</sup> The object of critique is therefore the manifest lack of such *phenomeno-technical capacity* of liberalism<sup>104</sup>, which was also noted by such liberal-conservatives as Privalov and Hramchikhin. Unlike these authors, Remizov views

99 See Krylov 2003f, 2003b, 2003c.

100 See Prozorov 2004b, pp. 332-338 for the discussion of this failure in terms of the ‘lingering of the political’ in the Russian postcommunist transformation.

101 Remizov 2003f. Emphasis added.

102 See e.g. Zizek 2004, pp. 70-74.

103 Remizov 2001l.

104 See Osborne and Rose 1997, 1999 for the discussion of this notion.



this failure as not merely an error to be corrected but as an indicator of the inadequacy of the very notion of revolution as a designator of the events of the early 1990s, which should rather be thought of as a ‘time of troubles’ (*smuta*): “Revolution *begins* in the moment when the newly mobilised subject with claims to authority enters the scene. The time of troubles *ends* in this very moment.”<sup>105</sup>

This distinction is crucial for establishing one’s relation to the Putin presidency: if we perceive the events of 1991 as a revolution, then the present moment may be thought in terms of stabilisation, the crystallisation of the ‘social energy’ freed in the revolutionary moment, the routinisation of the gains of revolution as governmental mechanisms. On the contrary, if one perceives 1991 as the ‘time of troubles’, what is at stake is not stabilisation (since there is no revolutionary positivity that to stabilise), but the *constitution* of a new revolutionary positivity in the present moment, a task for which a Putinian ‘pragmatism’ is entirely ill-fitted, particularly insofar as it avoids any serious engagement with the heritage of the 1990s.<sup>106</sup> “If there is something that gives the present state a shade of acceptability, it is rather its agreement to shy away from its origins.”<sup>107</sup> Remizov is particularly scathing about the national holidays of the ‘New Russia’, which, rather than serve the symbolic function of enacting the new legitimacy, plunges the society into tedious meaninglessness:

Indifference is the authentic way to celebrate all these new holidays, each of which is classically simulative, referring to a pseudo- or non-event: the ‘Day of Sovereignty’ is the day when sovereignty was renounced; the National Flag Day is the day of the affective renunciation of the Soviet flag, the Day of the Constitution refers to the false and non-historical pretension to found the state on law, etc. In short, we are speaking of the landmarks of the recent history of Russian non-being that is the titular history of the Russian ‘liberal conservatism’.<sup>108</sup>

The ultimate divergence between liberal and new conservatism is now clear: the latter denies the very *legitimacy* of the new Russia that the former wishes to consolidate as a *sovereign political subject*, viewing the ‘August revolution’ not as the foundational moment of the new Russian history but as its ‘black hole’.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the new conservatism is inherently oriented towards the

105 Remizov 2002o.

106 Ibid.

107 Remizov 2002l.

108 Remizov 2002l.

109 Ibid.

radically futurist project: “The past is already destroyed, the present is intolerable and the future is the only remaining bastion that is worth fighting for.”<sup>110</sup>

Remizov’s criticism of the discourse of the Seraphim Club is scornful about its practitioners’ understanding of conservatism as “the right to invoke, ‘from Russia with love’, the stars of Anglo-Saxon neo-conservatism, in the absence in Russia of any of the few things that made the latter conservative in the Anglo-Saxon context: the civilisational specificity, geopolitical conflictuality and institutional givenness.”<sup>111</sup> Discussing the flirtation of erstwhile liberal cosmopolitans with the concepts of patriotism and nationalism, he notes the instrumental use to which these concepts are put, whereby the accidental and illegitimate borders of the new Russian state are, by default and in the absence of any ethnocultural mediation, held to constitute a ‘civic nation’. “The state can no longer thematise the meaning of its *particularity* and the meaningfulness of its *border*. Why, for instance, must a state be localised as Russia, if the attributes of liberal legal and economic order, on which it grounds itself, are in fact universal?”<sup>112</sup> If borders and nationhood are contingent, then liberal patriotism results in the absurd demand for the ‘patriot’ to be ready to die for the status quo, *for no reason*.

At the same time, the electoral success of the Putin project makes the argument about the *absurdity* of liberal conservatism insufficient. Thus, the 2003-2004 writings of Remizov, Krylov and others are marked by a bitter anxiety regarding precisely the *likelihood* of this ‘impossible’ liberal-conservative hegemony:

The decade of reforms was sufficient to come to terms with ‘being-thrown-into-the-market’ as something inevitable. Two years of Putin’s ‘rule’ were sufficient to spontaneously legitimate the post-Soviet structural degradation of society [...] as a constituted and adequate reality. This is the necessary precondition of the conservative politico-psychological complex: the ability to perceive one’s social environment not in terms of collapse, catastrophe or a chaotic ‘transitional moment’ but as a crystallised reality, with regard to which it is possible to talk about ‘conservation’, ‘reproduction’ and ‘transformation’.<sup>113</sup>

110 Holmogorov in *Konservator* 2.

111 Remizov 2003h.

112 Remizov 2001g. Emphasis added.

113 Remizov 2003h. Emphasis added.

For Remizov, it is only with the advent of Putin that the monstrous phantom of ‘post-Soviet Russia’ could claim its right to be recognised as a reality, which makes possible the articulation of ‘liberal conservatism’. By the same token, Krylov emphasises the importance of the discourse of normality and ‘common-sense’ in the Putin presidency for the creation of the perception of the present order as already constituted, a ‘fact of life’. Putin’s articulation of liberal reformism with the patriotic rhetoric and its presentation as a ‘logic of normal life’ is taken to have established a hegemonic discursive structure, within which the opposition is always bound to lose: “The appropriation of the right to speak in the ‘common-sense’ modality is the key moment in any struggle. If the slogans of one side are perceived as self-evident, while the other has ‘something to prove’, victory is at hand. [...] ‘Nothing can be done about it’, ‘that’s the way it goes’, ‘there is no alternative’ – these are the typical formulae of common sense.”<sup>114</sup> Ironically, the time of troubles of the early 1990s is presently succeeded by a no less troublesome moment of the Putinian hegemony.

## TIME OF TROUBLES II: THE LEFT-CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION TO PUTINISM

The discursive transformation that redefines the ‘monstrous’ postcommunist moment in terms of ‘common sense’ makes it necessary for ‘proper’ conservatism to undertake a similar redefinition of itself and its target of criticism, which traditionally has been liberal cosmopolitanism: “The Perestroika liberalism with its belief in ‘universal communication’ is now completely anachronistic and not interesting even as an object of polemics.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, it is precisely the ‘new’ liberalism, presenting itself as conservative and “grounding itself in terms of civilisational identity, defensive mobilisation and structural stability”<sup>116</sup> that must become the adversary of the present-day heirs of the ‘national-patriotism’ of the 1990s. In the course of 2003, this position defined itself as the *‘left-conservative opposition’* to the Putin presidency, which it interprets in terms of ‘right-wing liberalism’ (synonymous to our notion of liberal conservatism). Let us discuss in greater detail each term in this definition.

The ‘leftism’ of the new conservatism is concretely exemplified by the demand for the revision of the results of privatisation, the unwillingness to ‘come to terms’ with the oligarchic regime that emerged in the 1990s. While the defining feature of liberal conservatism may well be the claim for the ‘untouchability’ of the 1993 Constitution and the results of the privatisation as

114 Krylov 2003b.

115 Remizov 2003h.

116 Ibid.

the 'sacred' grounds of the new order, it is precisely the resistance to such sacralisation and the insistence on the 'lowly origins' of these 'grounds' that forms the drive of left conservatism. At the same time, both Remizov and Krylov seek to distinguish this stance from the 'leftist' worldview that conceives of private property *as such* as an evil and preaches a facile understanding of economic and social equality.<sup>117</sup> Both authors appear to have no disagreement with the market economic order in principle but emphasise the illegitimate nature of the Russian privatisation, particularly with regard to natural resources. Indeed, the task of differentiating the new conservatism from the 'left-patriotic' position, exemplified by the Communist Party and its allies, is deemed paramount for the new discourse, as is evident from the intervention of Boris Mezhuev in the discussion in the *Russian Journal* on the left-conservative ideology, entitled 'Easy on Leftism!'" Mezhuev argues that the criticism of the privatisation settlement of the 1990s must not entail a facile demand for 'expropriation and redistribution' (a Leninist staple phrase), which would be no more 'just' or 'legitimate' than the original process, but must rather call for the new open pact between the state and the economic elite, whereby the state (in a Schmittian gesture) strictly delimits the domain of the application of economic rationality and thus makes market economy a *function* of state policy.<sup>118</sup> Mezhuev also notes that the leftism of the left conservatism ought not to be confused with the contemporary Western left-wing 'anti-globalism', which accepts, ontologically and hence politically, the *reality* of 'globalisation' and the withering away of sovereign statehood. Referring specifically to the increasingly fashionable (quasi-)Deleuzian approach of Hardt and Negri<sup>119</sup>, Mezhuev clearly distinguishes this 'globalist critique of globalisation' from the 'pragmatic isolationism' that left-conservatives advocate on the basis of the continued assertion of the irreducibility of the principle of sovereignty. Similarly, Konstantin Krylov claims that the task for left-conservative thought consists in the *critique of the objectification of globalisation* as an inherent condition, a 'postmodern' *state of affairs* rather than as a particular *paradigm*.<sup>120</sup> Left conservatism therefore casts globalisation as not an 'objective phenomenon' around which particular struggles may take place, but as in itself a form of political struggle, a friend/enemy distinction, constituted by 'the globalisers' and 'the globalised'. The object of opposition is thus not merely the 'reality' of globalisation as such, but rather the 'no-alternative' modality of discourse within which 'globalisation' as an object is constituted and which many strands of leftist 'anti-globalism' unwittingly replicate, if only by demanding 'alternative globalisation' rather than dispensing

117 Ibid. See also Krylov 2003c, Remizov 2003g.

118 See Mezhuev 2003. See also Remizov 2003g.

119 See Hardt and Negri 2000.

120 Krylov 2003e.

with the concept as such. The task of conservative criticism may thus be formulated in terms of disruptive *repoliticisation* of the naturalised and essentialised process of globalisation.

Secondly, the left-conservative circle faces the task of defining what is specifically *conservative* about it in the context of the Putinian political consolidation. This task is partially accomplished in Remizov's above-discussed philosophical reconstruction of conservatism as inherently aporetic, venturing to install that which it says already exists. Taking into consideration the rejectionism of left-conservatives with regard to the 'August settlement' it is easy to understand that their conservatism is furthest away from centrist or realist positions: "It is a pitiful fate to be a centrist where we are facing a pathological misbalance, to be a realist where we may speak of the disruption of the very 'instance of the real'."<sup>121</sup> Yegor Holmogorov shares this point of departure in a slogan-like formulation for the new conservative movement: "Towards the restoration of the future!" "The whole nostalgic movement is united by the perception that at some point Russia chose the wrong path and that this mistake can in fact be corrected, pace the liberal optimism *a la* 'There is no alternative!' The oppositional drive was simply muted by the loud hysterical screams that 'there is no way back'"<sup>122</sup> The defeat of the opposition within this system of coordinates is self-evident; hence the task of conservative criticism must consist in breaking the taboos and resisting the self-evidences, instituted in the 1990s and sedimented in the Putinian hegemony. While the 'patriotic' opposition of the 1990s was resigned to the embarrassed stance: 'Oh, but *of course* we do not support border revisions, deprivatisation, etc.', Holmogorov urges the conservative movement to enunciate a Nietzschean 'yes, yes' position on these tabooed issues: "Yes, we *would* like to return to the past!" And yet, this return must not be thought in the facile and impossible sense of returning to the juncture at which Russia allegedly went astray, but rather as a *restoration of that present which would have been the future*, had the correct path not been abandoned. In other words, Holmogorov's manifesto demands a restoration of "that better future which the past was pregnant with"<sup>123</sup>. At this point, Remizov's argument about conservatism being a radical constructivist project is concretised in political practice: "Due to the divergence of lines of the 'present future' and the 'project future' we end up in a *wide space of creativity*. This platform will be truly

121 Remizov 2003i.

122 Holmogorov 2003c.

123 Ibid.

left-conservative, as it combines the conservative reliance on the past and the left-wing orientation towards the future<sup>124</sup>.

Finally, we ought to address the third term in the identification of 'left-conservative opposition'. In the consensual atmosphere of the Putin presidency, the very emergence of the new opposition, beyond the weakened CPRF and the dwindling Westernist-liberal minority, is in itself a significant event. Moreover, as we shall demonstrate, the left-conservative strand of discourse exemplifies the most fundamental challenge to the depoliticising logic of the Putin presidency. The first aspect of opposition, discussed repeatedly by Remizov, is the critique of *economic rationality* that permeates the entire discourse of the Putin presidency. We have discussed elsewhere the universalisation of economic rationality in the Putinian discourse, whereby even the governmental mechanisms and the operations of the state are subjected to the logic of economic efficiency and many of the state functions in social policy and economic regulation are transferred to the private sector.<sup>125</sup> It is this rationality of neoliberal governance that attracts liberal conservatives to the Putin presidency, as it exemplifies the functioning of liberal governmental practices in the post-revolutionary modality. On the contrary, it is precisely this economy-centric pragmatism that Remizov decries as the instance of ultimate depoliticisation.

The problem is not economic rationality itself but the attempt to universalise it as a model of social relations and to conceive of the 'market' as a matrix of society. This is precisely what happens when the President suggests that efficiency and competitiveness is the exhaustive definition of 'our national idea'. Pretending to represent the Whole, rationality degenerates into rationalism.<sup>126</sup>

The fractured society clumsily asks [the President] how to become whole, and he answers that it must become wealthy. Strictly speaking, the president's response is tautological: he refers to efficiency, while the question is about charting that very social unity, which subsequently may be found efficient or inefficient. [...] To declare pragmatism as the ideology of power in today's Russia is merely to put the cart before the horse.<sup>127</sup>

124 Remizov 2003i.

125 Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4.

126 Remizov 2003g.

127 Remizov 2002r.

Remizov refers to Putin's tautological definition of the 'national idea' in terms of *efficient statehood*, whereby the efficient achievement of the desired goals is presented as the very definition of these goals. However, the unwillingness to decide on overriding goals does not annul the *necessity* of such decisions but merely transfers their locus elsewhere. As Remizov notes, if the authority resigns itself to 'going with the flow' and 'adapting to the circumstances', it simultaneously renounces any claim to the political, since power consists precisely in *defining* circumstances for others to adapt to.<sup>128</sup> As we shall discuss in more detail below, the same impotence of 'pragmatism' is revealed by the mainstream foreign policy discourse in Russia: both Remizov and Mezhuev decry with disgust the 'low-bred cynicism' of the current foreign policy elite, whose understanding of *Realpolitik* is equivalent to the desire (frequently voiced by Russian analysts and politicians prior to the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003) to "be in time to take a place at the victor's table".<sup>129</sup>

The critique of 'pragmatism' also concerns the wider aspects of the Putin project, most notably the atmosphere of consolidation and consensus that it brings about. "The Russian political class lacks an ideational-political matrix of antagonism. It is *amorphous* and hence *substantively united*. Its consensus is defined by the unanimity of ideological dumbness, the refusal of any value-based antagonism. It is a *consensus by default*, a mirror image of the absent-minded and indifferent consensus in the society."<sup>130</sup> There is thus a mutually reinforcing process of the public retreat from politics out of contempt for the meaningless slogans of the political elite and the political elite's turn towards the economy-centric logic of pragmatism and efficiency in the light of public indifference. Referring to the celebrations of the anniversary of the October Revolution under the new label 'the Day of Consent and Reconciliation', Remizov interprets the basic drive of the Putin presidency in terms of the extreme indifference to the political, whereby political meaning as such evaporates in the unstructured and amorphous space of 'positive indifference' towards the President on behalf of the so-called 'Putin's majority', the 70% of the electorate united by little more than a certain mild fondness for the President, who according to the polls is trusted a lot less than one's relatives and a little more than one's work colleagues.<sup>131</sup> According to Holmogorov, the original 'Putin's majority' of 1999, which was a manifestly particularistic and in a sense extreme position, explicitly puncturing the centrist consensus exemplified by the 'Fatherland-All Russia' movement, was eventually betrayed by

128 Remizov 2002m.

129 Remizov 2002r.

130 Remizov 2000b.

131 Remizov 2003b.

the President himself in the hegemonic rearticulation of political particularism into depoliticised universalism, whereby the figure of the President loses political significance and rather functions as a master signifier of the social space as such: “Today ‘Putin’ is not at all a political position, but a limiting frame of any possible politics, beyond which there is mere idiocy and indecency. [...] In contrast to Yeltsin’s privatisation of power, Putin fully nationalised himself as a politician, whereby nothing more remains *of himself*.”<sup>132</sup> The society appears to accept this settlement, compensating for its utter withdrawal from politics with the astonishingly high approval rating of the President, which in turn is conditioned precisely by his acceptance of the societal withdrawal.<sup>133</sup>

This is not to say that left-conservatives would prefer the antagonistic political scene of the 1990s to the present situation. In a dismissive gesture, Remizov describes the 1990s as an era of the ‘democracy of spectacle’<sup>134</sup>, a typically postmodern disseminative play of non-referential signifiers, only rarely punctured by authentic political moments (e.g. the violent clashes of October 1993). Both the simulacrum of authentic political antagonism and the present ‘conservative’ depoliticisation are thus perceived by Remizov as a travesty of the notion of the political: “As this system of simulation, that due to some distasteful misunderstanding was labelled ‘politics’, discredits itself and recedes into the past, it is precisely the bureaucratic concept that is the natural candidate for filling in the gap. After the indulgent travesty of the spectacle there is a temptation to ‘do business’ pure and simple.”<sup>135</sup> Remizov’s critique of this temptation invokes a Schmittian argument of the primacy of the exceptional decision to the constituted norm: the bureaucratic logic of pragmatically ‘doing business’ may only unfold within a pre-constituted domain of ‘politics’, the *delineation* of which is the prerogative of the sovereign political act, which is what the Putin presidency persistently seeks to *avoid*.<sup>136</sup> “Prior to serving the

132 Holmogorov and Krylov 2003.

133 Naishul 2004. See Magun 2003 for a different interpretation of the present societal withdrawal from politics. Within the philosophical frame of understanding postcommunism as a revolutionary event, Magun reads the societal self-depoliticisation as a radicalisation of the revolutionary negation of power, whereby the locus of power as such rather than its concrete occupants is, as it were, decapitated and desacralised. In the radical sense, in the aftermath of the revolution, power and politics simply stopped being interesting for the Russian society with the consequence of power being ‘left to its own devices’. Rather than the society being excluded from participation in politics, it is rather political authority that is according to Magun bracketed off from human existence, as if the sovereign was left out in the cold by its disinterested subjects.

134 For the detailed critique of the ‘democracy of spectacle’ see Remizov 2000a.

135 Remizov 2000b.

136 Ibid.



society, the authority must invent it. Prior to the appearance of the interests of society, there has to be made a decision on what this society is. The demand for the project means simply that this decision must now be made”<sup>137</sup>

Remizov therefore asserts a ‘political existentialist’ challenge to the present logic of depoliticisation of what is (to add insult to injury) an ‘alien’, non-historical regime: “The limit nature of our situation entails the need [...] *choose ourselves, invent ourselves, project ourselves as Russia anew.*”<sup>138</sup> This statement recalls Remizov’s understanding of conservatism as inherently aporetic: “It is meaningless to ask what Russia is in its essence. Not even because it does not have an essence, but simply because in the situation when questions of that kind even arise, no answer can pretend to be final. The Being that questions itself, that has become a problem for itself is already cursed: *it must produce itself instead of just being.* It has to become a *project.*”<sup>139</sup> In this understanding, conservatism has everything to gain from renouncing the illusions of primordial authenticity and articulating its project of (re)constituting Russia in the austere language of a Schmittian sovereign decision.

The tragic irony of this disposition is that it is logically driven to embrace the position of authority (any order being a priori ‘good’, as long as it is *established*) and welcome any sovereign decision as an authentic political act. And yet, in the present Russian reality, it is precisely the sovereign, i.e. President Putin himself, that for the most part *contributes* to the depoliticising trend, being almost single-handedly responsible for installing the new hegemonic political style that is opposed to the very principle of the political as a value-based antagonism. Occupying the locus of the “sovereign emission of meaning”, the President fails to utilise his sovereign power of authoritative nomination, sacrificing his *legitimacy* as a sovereign to revel in his *popularity* as, ultimately, a ‘private individual’.<sup>140</sup> Putin’s consensual discourse is deemed by Remizov to shun any sort of exclusionary practices that would constitute an ‘ideology’. “Putin is not an *ideology* but a *dictionary*”,<sup>141</sup> a collection of words and cross-references that do not constitute a

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.

139 Remizov 2001c.

140 Remizov 2003b. See also Remizov 2002a, in which Remizov critically discusses the President’s habit of making even mildly controversial statements solely “as a matter of personal opinion”, thus *neutralising* whatever political force these statements may have had. Rather than a sovereign, Putin is conceived by Remizov as an *anaesthesiologist*: “People find it easier to come to terms with the repulsiveness of their society, when at the heart of it they see a President, who is ‘trying to do something’ and ‘saying correct things.’”

141 Remizov 2000e.

whole, a *particularistic whole* that is constituted by its *division* from something else. “The very subjectivity of power is repressed by the demand for consensus.”<sup>142</sup> Therefore, to reassert political subjectivity is to rupture hegemonic stability at the price of the open manifestation of *conflict*.<sup>143</sup>

It is at this point that failure of the left-conservatives to establish a discursive position close to the sovereign locus (and hence occupy the enunciative modality of ‘cynics’) leads them to the extremist modality, whereby conflict is *welcomed* as an ‘instance of the Real’ in the conditions of the false lull of depoliticisation, often referred to as the ‘new stagnation’, a phrase that recalls the Brezhnev period in the history of the Soviet Union.<sup>144</sup> It is no coincidence that the only acts of President Putin that have attracted the positive assessment of these critics are those minor yet noticeable *exceptions* that the President took with regard to his own image of an apolitical manager. We have discussed elsewhere the way in which the figure of Putin is marked by the irreducible dualism whereby the ‘positivity’ of the President as a liberal-conservative ‘stabiliser’ is punctured by the President’s own forays into the domain of the obscene, particularly manifest on the level of rhetoric yet also evident in the uncharacteristically harsh stances on a number of issues, be it the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, allegedly spurned by the personal animosity between the two figures, or the uncompromising position with regard to Chechen separatism.<sup>145</sup> Two interpretations of this dualism are enunciated in the left-conservative circle. On the one hand, there is a facile view of Putin, entertained during the early years of the presidency by such figures as Alexander Prokhanov, as secretly ‘one of us’, a ‘secret agent’ in the enemy camp, having a *hidden project* behind the façade of liberal reformism. In this manner, the conservative discourse has joined the conspiratorial exercises of the opponents of Putin in certain circles of ‘democratic intelligentsia’, construing a phantasmatic figure of Putin as a ‘latent autocrat’, the one who always ‘says less’ both quantitatively and qualitatively, than he ‘thinks’.<sup>146</sup>

The more nuanced view is offered by Remizov, for whom a hidden or latent political project is a contradiction in terms, the project being necessarily phenomenal rather than noumenal and hence contained *without remainder* in the actually occurring discursive practices. “Putin’s

142 Ibid.

143 Remizov 2000e.

144 Pavlovsky cited in *Konservator* 2.

145 See Prozorov 2004b, pp. 325-330.

146 Remizov 2003e.

soul' is a metaphysical prejudice. [...] We simply need to recognise that there is nothing beneath the apparent, *even if the apparent hints towards the existence of a secret*. Secretiveness is the last resort of power, which no longer has anything about it that could deserve being hidden. Thus, Putin 'wants' precisely that which he talks about, i.e. *nothing*.<sup>147</sup> The fact that there is a perception of the existence of 'another Putin' behind the surface of the positivity of the 'things said' is merely a blunt proof of the fact that the actual (and the only 'real') Putin's project 'comes down to nothing'.<sup>148</sup> In line with the liberal-conservative reading, Putin is thus interpreted as merely the sign of the routinisation of the nihilism of the 1990s, its most logical conclusion: if Putin is a patriot, his 'patria' is the 'New Russia' of decadent hedonism that the left-conservatives consider an abominable historical accident. Putin's 2004 Address to the Federal Assembly appears to be the pinnacle of this displacement of the political in the President's discourse: left-conservative commentators have noted with repugnance the President's formulation of the 'national idea' in terms of the triad of 'Security, Freedom and Comfort!'<sup>149</sup> According to Stanislav Belkovsky, "the speech positioned Putin as a *fierce anti-conservative*, and consequently as a *radical liberal* to the core", so that the author is able to entitle his article "*Putin Becomes Chubais?*".<sup>150</sup>

On Wednesday, Putin told his electorate to abandon all hope. That he is not the man they thought he was. He is not the champion of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and the National Principle," but the opposite: "the good Chubais." A politician who thinks like Chubais, talks like Chubais, dresses like Chubais, and acts like Chubais. And for all that he is not Chubais, the widely despised CEO of Unified Energy Systems, but the legitimate ruler of Russia.

The centerpiece of the address was Putin's ideal of the new Russians of the 21st century -- "free people in a free country," as he called them. At the same time Putin emphasized that by "free" he meant economically self-sufficient. The time has come to put aside Russia's eternal anti-bourgeois bias, the President said in essence. The spiritual and mystical aspects of freedom, traditionally prized in the Russian consciousness, were left to rot by the side of the road of history.<sup>151</sup>

147 Remizov 2002m.

148 Remizov 2000e.

149 See Putin 2004.

150 See Belkovsky 2004.

151 Ibid. Emphasis added.

Similarly, Konstantin Krylov claims that the Address was a final blow to the illusion of Putin as a conservative, demonstrating that “the President proceeds from a purely Western system of values and, in fact, has a better feel for it than our self-proclaimed pro-Western ‘liberals’”.<sup>152</sup>

Left conservatives are thus either resigned to the loyalty to what is ultimately a phantasm of their own creation or must rupture the existing political consensus by abandoning the reverence for the sovereign. It is to be noted that within a Schmittian philosophical orientation which informs particularly Remizov’s work, conflict or antagonism is presented as the *condition of possibility* of both the authentic political relation and the formation of sovereign subjectivity, envisioned as a ‘*decisive*’ *subject*. Thus, left conservatism asserts the *ineradicability* of precisely that, the disappearance of which liberal conservatism hails as Putin’s greatest achievement. Remizov ventures that despite the simulative nature of Putin’s sovereign gestures that rupture his own depoliticising trend, the ‘premonition of the Sovereign’ may start a life of its own, independent of the figure of the President. However limited in scope, the arrest of Khodorkovsky and the attack on Yukos in 2003 are held to have politicised for the first time the question of the results of the privatisation, taking this issue out of the domain of intra-elite intrigues and into the space of public discourse.<sup>153</sup> The rise of the Homeland movement in the election campaign of 2003, which openly enunciated the discourse that many conservatives attributed to Putin in a ‘latent’ manner, points to the dissolution of the dualistic myth of the President as both a sovereign and a ‘liberal manager’ through the bi-polarisation of the actual political spectrum. In this sense, left conservatism may ultimately be read as the *materialisation of the sovereign spectre of Putin*. “There is no borderline between social game and social practice, between collective hallucination and collective reality. [...] Millions of people are looking for a black cat in a pitch-black room. They almost see it. Eventually, it will jump out.”<sup>154</sup>

152 Krylov 2004.

153 Remizov 2003e. In contrast, the liberal-conservative grouping, which is in general highly critical of the ‘oligarchs’, responded in a highly critical manner to Khodorkovsky’s arrest. Sokolov’s editorial at the Civic Club portal on the day of the arrest explicitly states that “every barbarity must have a limit” and that all the critical questions that liberal-conservatives would address to Khodorkovsky are to be ‘taken off’ the agenda until the excessive punitive measures are renounced by the authorities. See Sokolov 2003c.

154 Remizov 2003f.

## THE IMPERATIVE OF SOVEREIGNTY: LEFT CONSERVATISM AND GETTING OVER 'THE WEST'

The contribution of the conservative discourse to enhancing the conflictual potential of Russian politics proceeds from purposefully intensifying the cleavages between Putin's 'right-wing liberalism' and the left-conservative perspective,<sup>155</sup> particularly with regard to the socio-economic reform course of the Presidency and its foreign policy orientation in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. In the domestic political arena, left conservatism is marked by great disappointment with the low ambition of Putin's modernisation programme, (in)famously formulated by the President and his economic advisors as 'catching up with Portugal'. Remizov notes disdainfully the incomprehensibility of the very choice of the referent object in the absence of any reflections on what Russia will *become* if it does indeed catch up with Portugal. The President's famous phrase in the 2002 Address to The Federal Assembly that the ultimate task of state authorities is to create conditions "under which Russians may earn money and invest it with benefit to themselves"<sup>156</sup> is perceived by Remizov as a hopelessly vulgar economism, which, moreover, is utterly meaningless in the Russian fractured social structure and the notoriously unequal distribution of wealth.<sup>157</sup> According to Remizov, the adoption of the economy-centric discourse of Western neoliberalism in the absence of any reflections on its (illiberal and non-economic) conditions of possibility results in the currently perceived triumph of hedonistic consumption without a corresponding ethos of ascetic production. The criticism of Putin by the representatives of the 1990s' economic elites is thus a case of misrecognition of affinity: Putinism *is* the logical conclusion of the economy-centred denial of politics by the liberals of the 1990s. Even more absurd in Remizov's argument is the President's insistence on 'accelerated modernisation', as exemplified by e.g. his slogan of doubling the Russian GDP in the next five years, which recalls the slogan of 'acceleration' (*uskorenie*) in President Gorbachev's discourse in the late-Soviet period, in which that which was to be 'accelerated' was in fact withering away. "The language of the present authority permanently reproduces the gap between the benevolence, rhetorical emptiness and historical optimism regarding the goals and the alarmist, critical and mobilising tone, regarding the means."<sup>158</sup>

The same contradiction is observed in the President's statement of the key goal of Russia's reform being the enhancement of the competitiveness of the country in all dimensions.

155 Holmogorov and Krylov 2003.

156 Putin 2002.

157 Remizov 2002m.

158 Remizov 2002n.

Tight competition is a norm in the international community and in the modern world, competition for markets, investments, economic and political influence. Russia must be strong and competitive in this fight. Today countries compete with each other on all economic and political parameters: tax pressure, the level of security of the country and its citizens, property protection guarantees. They compete in making the business environment more attractive, in developing economic freedoms, in improving the quality of state institutions and the efficiency of the legal and judicial system. Competition has indeed become global. [...] The conclusion is obvious: no one is going to war with us in the modern world. No one wants this, and no one needs this. But no one is really waiting for us either. No one will help us specially. We have to fight for our place under the 'economic sun'.<sup>159</sup>

To put it concretely, we must work for Russia's competitiveness in all the meanings of this word.<sup>160</sup>

This extreme extension of the economic logic to the extra-economic domain, whereby the state itself is cast as a business corporation, co-exists in Putin's discourse with the emphasis on interstate economic rivalry as the key feature of the condition of globalisation. While liberal conservatism wholly embraces the fetishisation of generalised competitiveness as the slogan for the second round of liberal economic reforms, Remizov remains unconvinced if not scornful.

Some saw this as a sign of the revival of alarmist, conflictogenic, healthy political consciousness. On the contrary, I believe that this is a linguistic symptom of the political inadequacy of the President who grew too fond of economic metaphors. [...] Competition is only possible within certain constituted and guaranteed rules of the game. Yet, the game states (i.e. sovereign states) play is not guided by the rules but rather concerns the definition of these rules.<sup>161</sup>

Recalling the well-known praise of the liberal economist Vladimir Mau to the effect that the Putin administration did or said nothing that would not be understood by the reader of *Financial Times*, Remizov sardonically notes that the ultimate trouble with the presidency is pre-

159 Putin 2002. Emphasis added.

160 Putin 2001. Emphasis added. See also Programme of Socioeconomic Development of the Russian Federation for the Midterm Perspective: 2003-2005 for the detailed specification of the task of enhancing the competitiveness of Russian business, government and the human capital.

161 Remizov 2002k.

cisely its reduction of the political and the historical to the narrow economic lifeworld of that very reader<sup>162</sup>: “What kind of a history is it where states compete in their *attractiveness*? To put it bluntly, it must be that history in which the ultimate force is the freely floating world capital. The agitated states gather around it, baring their teeth, but no longer as armed predators, but as *slaves at the slave market*.”<sup>163</sup>

This eloquent analogy returns us to the key theme of left conservatism, i.e. its resistance to the theory and practice of globalisation. However, the left-conservative critique is not restricted to the lamentation over the surrender of Russia’s sovereignty to global capitalism but also concerns the more overtly ‘political’ aspects of contemporary international relations, particularly the so-called ‘war on terror’. The liberal-conservative community has enthusiastically welcomed Putin’s foreign policy shift after September 11 as a means for Russia to assume its ‘rightful place’ among ‘Western’ countries and to legitimise the military operation in the Chechen Republic in the ‘global anti-terrorist’ discourse. In Boris Mezhuev’s formula, liberal conservatives or ‘liberal patriots’ proceed from the simple logic of ‘if they can do it, so can we’, whereby the war in Chechnya, which served as an *obstacle* to Russia’s ‘European’ or, more abstractly, ‘liberal-democratic’ identity, suddenly becomes the *proof* of the latter in the new anti-terrorist constellation.<sup>164</sup>

However, left-conservatives remain wary both of the global anti-terrorist climate and Russia’s role in this alliance. Remizov’s writings in particular appear curiously appreciative of the *political rupture* that ‘terrorism’ brought about in the globalised neoliberal consensus and strongly critical of the liberal attempts to evade the political challenge of terrorism through its ‘criminalisation’ or, in Schmittian terms, the recasting of the legitimate *enemy* (ontologically *equal* to oneself) as a despicable, almost ‘inhuman’ *foe*, an ‘enemy that should not be’, that should not

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid. Emphasis added.

164 Mezhuev 2002.

be defeated but rather *annihilated*.<sup>165</sup> Both Russian and American anti-terrorist discourses are taken to deny the very ‘metaphysics of decisiveness’ that acts of terrorism exemplify and embody as an exceptional instance of the ‘heroic’ in the sterile landscape of contemporary managerial politics. In an immediate commentary after the September 11 events, entitled ‘*Homo Oeconomicus* is dead!’, Remizov claims that the attacks symbolise the end of the universalisation of economic rationality, the demonstration of its utter impotence in the face of an authentic political act that should lead to the belated abandonment of the ‘ontological carelessness’ of the Western subjectivity.<sup>166</sup>

Remizov’s fascination with terrorism appears to be conditioned by what Slavoj Žižek called the ‘passion of the real’<sup>167</sup>, the disposition that aestheticises extreme and violent experiences as pathways to authentic or integral life in the conditions of increasing routinisation and sterilisation of human existence. Yet, Remizov’s position is more nuanced. The *event* of global terrorism is considered to be *political*, since it reinstalls, with a vengeance, the Schmittian principles of the necessity of the friend-enemy distinction and the sovereign decision. An *active* response to the challenge of terrorism is thus identical to the reassertion of oneself as a *sovereign political subject* and is therefore a ‘healthy’ phenomenon. This understanding echoes the European ‘conservative revolutionary’ thought of the interwar period, which cast war as an existential limit experience that provides access to authentic existence.<sup>168</sup> Remizov recalls Andre Glucksmann’s formula of war as ‘cogito for two’, the foundational moment of *subjectivity* that is realised

165 Schmitt makes a distinction between enemy (*hostis*) and (*inimicus*) to stress the specificity of the relationship of political enmity. The concept of *inimicus* belongs to the realm of the private and concerns various forms of moral, aesthetic or economic resentment, revulsion or hate that are connoted by the archaic English word ‘foe’, whose return into everyday circulation was interpreted by Schmitt as an example of the collapse of the political into the moral. The concept of *hostis* is limited to the public realm and concerns the existential threat posed to *the form of life* either from the inside or from the outside. See Schmitt 1976, pp. 27-29. Schmitt interprets the liberal usurpation of the notion of humanity in the drive to criminalise or even medicalise the enemy as an inhuman monster and a total non-value in terms of the perversion of the proper relation of enmity into a moralistic *friend-foe* distinction, which *pace* the inattentive readings, is entirely contrary to Schmitt’s own construction of the friend-enemy distinction.

166 Remizov 2001d.

167 See Žižek 2004, particularly chapters 2, 4.

168 See Huysmans 1998, Wolin 1992a, 1992b.



through *inter-subjective* enmity.<sup>169</sup> The *war* on terror is as such a positive development for the constitution of Russia (or any other state) as a sovereign subject.

The problem with contemporary anti-terrorism is that the only subject that *enacts* its sovereignty in this manner is the USA, all other members of the anti-terrorist coalition being on the contrary deprived of their sovereignty through their involvement in an *external* project. The European or Russian criticism of American ‘unilateralism’ is absolutely meaningless for Remizov, as there *can not be* any other sovereign policy line than unilateralism, entirely irrespectively of the number of one’s ‘allies’. The problem with the American anti-terrorist discourse is not its unilateralism but rather its *universalism*, in that it effects a closure of the political in the “monstrous identity of the act of violence and the act of trial under the guise of universal morality”.<sup>170</sup> In other words, while war is a violent relation that implies a *statutory equality* of the parties and the judicial relation is asymmetric but non-violent, the collapse of this distinction into a quasi-universal morality brings about “an unprecedented and humiliating form of domination” in which the victim of ‘moral intervention’ is entirely deprived of an enunciative modality, in line with Lyotard’s notion of the *differend*.<sup>171</sup> The post-September 11 anti-terrorist discourse is viewed by Remizov as a paradoxical combination of the utmost intensification of enmity and its total depoliticisation, whereby the production of monster images and phantom threats takes the place of the due ‘existential recognition’ of the enemy. Moreover, it is precisely this disposition that, according to Remizov, is *generative* of terrorism: *pace* the humanist or socialist arguments that find ‘root causes’ of terror in poverty, inequality or the lack of ‘civic education’, Remizov views terrorism as a consequence of *taking offence* by the humiliating nature of the global order, with its combination of “economico-technical might” and “anthropological worthlessness”.<sup>172</sup> Terrorism therefore targets less the political and economic structures of the ‘world order’ than its incongruously impotent anthropological carrier, the normalised Western individual, which in Remizov’s description bears all the attributes of Nietzsche’s ‘last man’, the *passive nihilist*. For Remizov, the challenge of terrorism as a properly *political* enemy

169 Remizov 2001e.

170 Remizov 2001n.

171 Remizov 2001n. See Lyotard 1989. The notion of the *differend* refers to the irreducible remainder, involved in the attempt to render the terms of one discourse within another, which entails that every ‘inclusion’ within a discursive field is always conditioned by a foundational exclusion of that or those which in the terms of the system in question cannot be enunciated. The exclusion of the *differend* divests the subject of the very enunciative modality, within which a grievance may be expressed. In judicial terms, it is as if a plaintiff is divested of the means to argue his case and becomes for that reason an *a priori* victim.

172 Remizov 2001a.

would consist in the corresponding *repoliticisation* of the ‘object’ of terrorism, be it Russia or the West, as a *sovereign subject*, the defence of its irreducibly *particular existential lifeworld*, as opposed to the universalist drive to eradicate ‘terrorism as such’. Instead, Putin’s hurried entry into the Western ‘anti-terrorist’ coalition is entirely suffused with the desire for the ‘normalisation’ of the world order and the strengthening of the domestic depoliticisation by international recognition of the Putin regime as a part of the ‘liberal-democratic community’.

Remizov is particularly critical of the naïve attempts of Russian liberal-conservatives to utilise for Russia’s benefit the apparent cleavage between the USA and Europe over the character of anti-terrorist struggles. Both the ‘classical’ geopolitical view, according to which Russia and Europe should ‘balance’ American power and the liberal conservative thesis, according to which Russia and the USA share the readiness for self-defence against terrorism as opposed to the impotent and decadent Europe, are viewed by Remizov as ignoring the ‘*internal bipolarity*’ of the West, whereby American ‘power politics’ is *complemented* by the European ‘liberal-humanitarian’ outlook, directed towards the same ends, be it ‘promotion of democracy’ or ‘human rights’. The realist/idealist dualism with regard to US-European relations is thus both trite and empirically false, interests always being intertwined with ideals and messianic self-understandings, and ideals tending to be activated only in matters of self-interest. Moreover, the Kosovo bombing campaign of 1999, which, as we have remarked, was a ‘wake-up call’ for many Russian conservatives, illustrates the perfect congruence of the two orientations, both of them being based on the self-asserted right to condition a country’s sovereignty by her commitment to externally posited norms.<sup>173</sup> As Remizov notes, humanitarian interventions that have become the predominant form of military action *require* a combination of American power politics and the moralising rhetoric of European liberal humanitarianism, whereby the latter acts as the ‘symbolic creditor’ of American ‘realism’.<sup>174</sup>

In the Russian discourse this false dualism is exemplified by the cosmopolitan maximalism of the ‘democratic intelligentsia’, operating with a naively optimistic vision of Europe as a moral ‘world leader’, and the more pro-American position of liberal conservatives, which suggests that Russia’s pathway to the West lies less in the mimesis of ‘European values’ than in the power-political move of active participation in the anti-terrorist coalition. It is now not the ‘progressive Russia’, critical of the war in Chechnya, but the very “‘Russia at war’ that finds in

173 In Remizov’s reading, even the more radical trends of contemporary Western anti-globalism ultimately function as the ‘heretical’ version of the global mainstream. See Remizov 2002f.

174 Remizov 2002d.

the ‘pro-Western choice’ the source of its political legitimacy”.<sup>175</sup> This position is referred to by Remizov as ‘military-style liberalism’<sup>176</sup>, in which the attribute ‘military-style’ is borrowed from the sphere of fashion and connotes superficiality and eagerness to impress. The immaturity of this position is also hinted at by the title of Holmogorov’s article, “Born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September”.<sup>177</sup> “Russia, as liberal conservatives want to see it, moves to the West with the walk of a *newly-converted barbarian*, who is more resolute in his faith than the jaded citizens of world capitals. The Good, personified by the ‘civilisation of freedom’, presently need not merely ‘European standards’, but big fists.”<sup>178</sup> While for liberal conservatives, the anti-terrorist context is the window of opportunity for Russia to undertake a speedier and more autonomous path of integration with the West as e.g. a ‘liberal empire’, for Remizov it serves as the symptom of the fundamental crisis of that very West that should lead to the abandonment of the ‘integrationist’ paradigm of Russian foreign policy as such:

Unfortunately, up to now the contradictions of this paradigm were revealed to us ‘dialectically’, postfactum, though painful personal experience. One wonders whether at this point they may explode in advance, prior to being realised here. [...] I can only hope that the waves of burning oil and blood will flow sufficiently widely all over the world so that we finally realise that we have nowhere to be integrated into. It is about time for us to integrate.<sup>179</sup>

The (anti)terrorist neurosis is an internal illness of Western societies, the effect of the combination of their technological might and psychological worthlessness. Entering the contours of the anti-terrorist front we are guaranteed to reproduce the latter but do not come any closer to emulating the former.<sup>180</sup>

175 Remizov 2002g.

176 The polemic between liberal and left-conservatives has indeed been characterised by mutual intolerance and ad hominem attacks. See e.g. Sokolov 2003a. The liberal conservative community has been particularly eager to reclaim the label of ‘conservatives’ for itself, branding its opponents ‘left extremists’, anti-democratic, anti-Western and anti-liberal, but lacking any positive content aside from the adolescent romanticisation of violence. For an extensive discussion between the representatives of two trends see *Konservator-2*.

177 Holmogorov 2003d.

178 Remizov 2002g.

179 Remizov 2003a.

180 Remizov 2002g- See also Remizov 2002p.

Thus, the only possibility of Russian *victory* in the war on terror consists in simply *exiting* this ‘war’, by “killing the West within itself.”<sup>181</sup> It is here that the left-conservative opposition to the ‘integrationist’ tendencies in the Putin regime is manifested most starkly: in contrast to the liberal conservative attempt to achieve the tasks of integration in a quasi-sovereign, ‘military style’ gesture, left-conservatism urges the abandonment of the very notion of integration, the exit from Western alliances and, in Remizov’s fortunate formulation, ‘*getting over*’ the West (as opposed to e.g. ‘prevailing’ over it).<sup>182</sup> This orientation generates a conception of the Chechen war that is strikingly different from the ‘international terrorist’ narrative, espoused by the Putin presidency. “We must recognise that the Chechen problem is a local or regional problem, a problem of *ethnocriminal separatist mutiny*: only then may it be *resolved*, and, moreover, *resolved by us*. [...] Only this position on Chechnya will be a strong one. Secondly, we must clearly state that the plot of the struggle of the ‘global community’ with ‘global terrorism’ is of no major concern to us. *Only then can we avoid a collapse of Russia in the internal conflict of Western civilisation.*”<sup>183</sup> The war against the particular locus of ‘ethnocriminal separatism’ exemplifies a properly *political* conflict against an identifiable enemy, while the concept of the ‘war on terror’ is read by Remizov literally as, ultimately, a bizarre attempt to do away with existential fear that, furthermore, reconstitutes the Western subject as first and foremost a (potential) *victim*. Recalling Zizek’s discussion of contemporary Western societies as ‘societies of victims’, marked by the cult of ‘absolutised irresponsibility’ and the transference of blame<sup>184</sup>, Remizov reiterates the claim about ‘anti-terrorism’ being the *malaise* of Western societies, which should be of no concern or consequence in Russia: “(Anti)terrorist wars are to be understood as the convulsions of the societies of alienation”.<sup>185</sup> With regard to Chechnya, Remizov suggests that the very politicisation of the conflict as targeting a particular enemy must make meaningful to the Russian society the status of that conflict as a *war*, in which every member of the political community is implicated and hence no ‘terrorist act’ in the strict sense is possible: “If you like, this

181 Remizov 2002p.

182 Ibid.

183 Remizov 2002p.

184 Zizek 2004, pp. 140-144.

185 Remizov 2002c. Remizov’s deconstruction of anti-terrorism as a Western existential malaise proceeds from focusing on the key attribute of the definition of terrorism, whereby its victims are repeatedly presented as ‘entirely innocent people’, which serves to further demonise the figure of the terrorist. “It’s not just a question of philosophical consideration, which would lead us to doubting the possibility of ever finding even one such ‘entirely innocent’ person. It is rather that this parasitical figure of speech is a mandate for absolute irresponsibility of asocial masses, a symbol of all those to consider it their sacred right ‘not to be concerned’ by the wars their country is leading.” (Remizov 2002c)

is a question of *self-respect*: you cannot ‘terrorise’ us, *at worst you can just blow us up.*”<sup>186</sup> This mobilising disposition is of course the very opposite of the liberal conservative self-styled ‘hawkism’, which demands precisely the exceptionalist anti-terrorist actions of the strong state for the *protection* of ‘entirely innocent people’, apolitical private individuals.

The foreign policy orientation proposed by left conservatism comes down to an *active-isolationist* stance, whereby the assertion of (the possibility of) sovereignty in the face of the discourses of economic globalisation and global (anti)terrorism becomes a paramount *existential value*, filling the locus left vacant by the previous master signifier of ‘integration’. “The specificity of the current situation is that this apparently local role and identity would acquire a directly ‘universal-human’ character in the world, in which it is impossible even to conceive of a more radical challenge to globalism than our ‘active isolationism’, a *reticent realpolitical experience of a continental state that proves that sovereignty is in fact possible.*”<sup>187</sup> The same argument is advanced by Boris Mezhuev and Yegor Holmogorov, who, in the context of the discussion of Russia’s attitude to the Iraq War warn against two stances characteristic of Russian pro-Western liberals: the critique of the West for its policy of ‘double standards’ that does not target the ‘liberal humanist’ standards themselves (the left-liberal position) and the enthusiastic embrace of American unilateral exceptionalism as the indicator of the political vitality of liberalism (the liberal-conservative position). Instead, Holmogorov suggests that the awareness of the ubiquity of double standards and hypocritical deployments of normative arguments for ulterior purposes in international relations must entail the limitation of foreign policy to the active defence of national interest, reducible to the assertion of sovereignty.<sup>188</sup> A pessimistic vision of international relations as inherently cursed by the confluence of realism and idealism in the pursuit of power leads to a foreign-political *minimalism* of ‘active isolationism’ that is at the same time ethically and rhetorically *maximalist* in that the purely *formal* assertion of the possibility of sovereignty is endowed with *existential* significance.

Russia’s relations with Europe are discussed with particular attention by the left-conservative commentators, insofar the Russian discourse on Europe, particularly in the Putin presidency, inevitably brings in the problematics of Russian *identity* and *self-definition*. In a programmatic article, Remizov observes the tendency of Russian liberals to speak of Europe in exclamatory and axiomatic terms and suggests instead that any enunciation of ‘Europe’ must be accompa-

186 Remizov 2002c.

187 Remizov 2002f.

188 Holmogorov 2003e. See also Mezhuev 2002.

nied by the reflection on the meaning of the concept.<sup>189</sup> The proverbial ‘European identity’ is obviously a problematic term, if one expects identity to be constituted on the basis of geographical, cultural or geopolitical criteria. However, this is precisely the path avoided by the discourse of European integration, which instead deploys universalist claims that can not be *localised* and are therefore, in the conservative worldview, out of place. Similarly, Dmitry Zamyatin points to the increasing irrelevance of cultural-historical and geopolitical factors to the European identity and suggests that rather than designate a spatially particular locus, ‘Europe’ refers to a particular global *strategy*, entirely independent of spatial coordinates and hence exemplary of the *utopian* political disposition.<sup>190</sup> The only positive figure of Europe, accepted by the conservative political ontology, would be a neo-imperial Europe, asserting its geopolitical and cultural particularism along the lines of the contemporary European ‘far right’. Recognising that such a Europe would be geopolitically antagonistic to Russia<sup>191</sup>, Holmogorov nonetheless proclaims it to be (in the Schmittian sense) a “worthy and stronger adversary than the blurry geopolitical interjection of today’s liberal EU”.<sup>192</sup> Since at present such a neo-imperial project is not anticipated, Remizov ventures that “the term ‘European identity’ may well be a contradiction in terms. Thus, the rhetorical utilisation of the word ‘Europe’ is simulative in the classical sense, i.e. it refers only to itself [...] and possibly to the very act of renunciation of meaning. *Euro-optimism celebrates its own non-identity.*”<sup>193</sup> Therefore, the task of ‘integration into Europe’, perpetually reaffirmed by President Putin, is impossible even if it were desirable, since ‘Europe’ merely designates a locus where it ought to be, a locus presently *vacant*.<sup>194</sup> More specifically, Remizov conceives of Europe as a historical archetype, a *memorial* that deserves an epitaph rather than the reverence of a candidate for ‘integration’.

189 Remizov 2001h. See also Remizov 2002d. Cf. Elbe 2002 for a ‘European’ attempt at a similar rupture of the self-evidence of ‘Europe’.

190 Zamyatin 2002.

191 For the more conventionally geopolitical argument on the inherent antagonism between Russia and Europe see Tsimbursky 2002. Geopolitical readings of Europe differ from the left-conservative ones, in that the latter discourse perceives European *normative* expansion as a threat to Russia, while for geopoliticians the thrust of European policies is simply to push Russia *aside* from European affairs, to deny it any presence in continental politics. The ‘colonising’ drive of Europe is, according to Tsimbursky, directed towards the Mediterranean rather than Eurasia.

192 Holmogorov 2002a.

193 Remizov 2001j.

194 Remizov 2001j.

A somewhat different interpretation is advanced by Konstantin Krylov, who shares the assumption of the ontological non-identity of Europe, but recasts it *positively* in terms of the European capacity to absorb and incorporate other identities: “Europe’ designates a *method of consuming any possible culture*. [...] Europe can digest absolutely anything without ever becoming that which it devours. *Europe is a civilisation that appropriates, assimilates and enriches itself thereby*. It is notable that the history of Europe *began* with such an act of assimilation, i.e. from the Renaissance, the unique procedure of appropriating the past heritage. [...] In the course of the colonisation of the world Europeans stole the world from itself, making it an *epiphenomenon of Europe*.”<sup>195</sup> From this assumption follows an interpretation of European ‘multiculturalism’ that goes beyond the standard conservative tropes of ‘moral degeneration’ and the ‘loss of vitality’. As opposed to the argument that the increasing immigration and the feared ‘Islamisation’ of Europe would eventually destroy whatever is meant by ‘European identity’ and supplant it with an ‘Islamic’ one, Krylov ventures that there is nothing inconceivable about Europe, in contrast, devouring Islam, making it a ‘European religion’ and mobilising it for particular purposes, “just as Buddhism, which has been used by Europeans as a material for producing snug psychoanalytic toys”.<sup>196</sup> In this reading, ‘European identity’ also appears a false problem, which necessitates a rethinking of Russia’s positioning itself in terms of its ‘European choice’.<sup>197</sup>

Therefore, left conservatism attacks the very discourse of “Russia and Europe”, which has arguably been constitutive of Russia’s (non-) identity, as markedly *irrelevant* in all its modalities: the Gorbachevian optimism of the ‘Common European Home’, the desire of liberal-conservatives to ‘abduct Europe’ by disassociating it from the USA and thus claiming the mythical role of Zeus for Russia, or the quasi-culturological trick of pronouncing Russia to be the ‘true’ Europe as opposed to the degenerate Europe of ‘pederasts and punks’ repeatedly decried by Dmitry Rogozin in the course of the 2003 election campaign.<sup>198</sup> This wild oscillation of positions that nonetheless all *refer* to Europe as a relevant Other is for Remizov a symptom of *hysteria* that must be ceased by a simple *dissociation* of Russia from Europe *as such*: “Up to this moment European politics was an *existential zone* for us, an area of fateful deeds, in

195 Krylov 2002.

196 Ibid.

197 One ought to note that the scepticism with regard to the European identity is by no means restricted to the parochial voice of a Russian conservative. See the magisterial work of Stephan Elbe (2003), which shares the deep pessimism about the present state of the European project and advances a Nietzschean perspective on Europe that resonates with the criticisms voiced by Remizov.

198 See e.g. Rogozin 2004, an article tellingly titled “We are the True Europe”.

which we fought not so much for our interests, but for the formation of our identity. Europe has never been our friend but has always been our Other, the glance of which we were trying to steal, deserve or provoke so that it could mediate our subjectivity. The 'abduction of Europe' resembles an erotic game with a succession of sadistic and masochistic phases. First we impose ourselves on it in order to define ourselves through its frightened stare and then reject our selves to be defined by it through a condescending glance. [Thus,] the very abduction of Europe is twisted inside out and is presented as a *return* to it."<sup>199</sup> Since the present EU is viewed as lacking proper political subjectivity and an unlikely 'conservative' Europe would still be Russia's geopolitical antagonist, the 'question of Europe' is of no consequence for Russia's self-identification and should be discarded without regret.

The discourse on Europe, practiced by such 'left-conservatives' as Remizov and Holmogorov, is thus distinct from the geopolitical constructions of e.g. Alexander Dugin or Alexei Panarin, prevalent in the 'patriotic' discourse of the 1990s. Indeed, one may doubt whether the 'new conservatism' is *at all* affected by the 'geopolitical imagination' with its constitutive cleavage of Atlanticism/Eurasianism, which fractures the image of Europe into the pro-American Atlanticist group and the Eurasian Heartland. Instead, left conservatism is considerably more attuned to the realities of contemporary European thought and practice with the consequence of abandoning all attempts at finding a 'true' Europe with which Russia ought to identify and cooperate. At the same time, the left-conservative orientation towards the present depoliticised liberal-humanist EU is not antagonistic in any other than an ethico-political sense (due to the European betrayal of the political, which offends the conservative sensibility). It is rather that the 'question of Europe' is simply *removed* from the Russian political agenda in the strictly sovereignty-based vision of foreign policy. Similarly to the 'liberal-conservative' discourse, domestic-political priorities and Russia's influence in its immediate borderlands appear to trump ambitious Euro-integrationist visions. However, for liberal-conservatives, particularly those practicing what Remizov refers to as 'military-style liberalism', Russia's entry into the 'Western community' remains a valuable objective, though its achievement ought not to be tied with the subjection to external normative pressure. For 'left-conservatives', on the other hand, the very paradigm of integration remains outdated and discredited, and the maximal content of cooperation is exhausted by what may be termed 'mutual delimitation' of Russia and Europe, whereby both parties recognise each others' *legitimate difference*. The conflictual disposition towards Europe in left conservatism is thus less a question of Russian-European relations than a strictly domestic question of Russia 'getting over' Europe in its identity formation. Within the

199 Remizov 2001h.



discourse of Russian conservatism, the centrality of sovereignty limits the scope of discursive diffraction to the oscillation between the problematisation of the lack of due recognition of Russia as a member of the 'Western' or 'European' community and, as it were, the *de-problematisation* of the question of recognition as such, whereby Russia's identity no longer requires the confirmatory nod of the Other.

## Russian Conservatism and the 1990s: The Effacement of the Event

In conclusion, let us address the question of the political relevance of the above-discussed strands of the conservative discourse, particularly insofar as they are explicitly dissociated from any political party and are thus not directly operative in the circumscribed field of parliamentary politics. The 'liberal-conservative' discourse of course possesses a more immediate policy relevance, insofar as its proponents are either affiliated with the presidential administration and participating in the design of the political course of the Putin presidency (Pavlovsky) or explicitly positing themselves as the new site, at which Putin's political platform may be re-articulated in a more consistent manner than the fragmented and ideologically incoherent United Russia party (Seraphim Club). Indeed, even without any attribution of a direct connection between the Putin administration and the liberal conservative community of scholars and commentators, one may argue that liberal conservatism, as described above, is a precise designator of the *positive programme* of the presidency and an appropriate marker of its hegemonic status. Yet rather than being a 'master-signifier' (i.e. a fetishised central concept around which various discursive strands converge), liberal-conservatism is rather the 'unnameable' term in the discourse of the Putin presidency, whose success is owing precisely to its successful elusion of all identification. The answer to the proverbial question 'Who is Mr. Putin?' is thus entirely contained in the perpetual resurgence of the question itself.

In contrast, the 'left-conservative' strand of discourse may well be perceived as the marginal, obscene excess of the Presidency, an impossible attempt to render in terms of ideological positivity the phantasmatic dimension of Putin's sovereignty.<sup>200</sup> At the same time, one ought

200 As we have argued elsewhere (Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4, 2004c), the transcendental dimension of over-  
eignty is entirely contained in its function of the obscene excess that cannot be subsumed under the positivity of  
the system.

to recall Remizov's premonition of the 'shadow of Putin' (a phantom that need not be related to the figure of the President as such) taking on a life of its own in the 'new opposition' movement. The success of the Homeland bloc, which deployed many of the theses of 'left conservatism', in the 2003 parliamentary elections demonstrates the plausibility of this claim. Indeed, after the 2003 elections one frequently encounters the definition of the current Russian political spectrum as circumscribed by the limit figures of Dmitry Rogozin (Homeland) and Anatoly Chubais (URF), with Putin occupying the hegemonic middle ground.<sup>201</sup> For our purposes, this reading leads to the striking conclusion that the discourse of conservatism, dispersed into 'liberal' and 'left' strands, presently defines the *entire* political space in Russia. As the nostalgic Communist discourse practiced by CPRF appears radically weakened due to the incorporation of Soviet symbolism into the liberal-conservative hegemony and the 'pro-Western' cosmopolitan liberalism entirely lacks parliamentary representation, the political space appears to be dominated by a conservative disposition, which, as we have seen, is nonetheless directed towards entirely different 'objects of conservation': the post-1991 'new Russia' in the case of 'liberal conservatives' and the construct of the 'sovereign Russia', espoused in the left-conservative call for the 'restoration of the future'. What unites these two disparate trends into a hegemonic constellation is the centrality of the principle of sovereignty, the perception of Russia as an autonomous political subject, no longer owing its 'identity' to external validation, and the desire to overcome the flux and instability characteristic of the Russian politics of the 1990s. The marginality of the conservative discourse is therefore a clear misconception.<sup>202</sup>

At the same time, conceiving of the conservative discourse in the Foucauldian sense as a system of dispersion entails an attunement to the *tactical polyvalence* of discursive practices<sup>203</sup>, whereby the latter may function in the modality of both support and resistance within the hegemonic field. In the current constellation, it is in fact the 'extremist' left conservatism that contributes to the increasing pluralisation of the political space and thereby exemplifies resis-

201 Verhovskiy cited in *Novy Konservatizm I/ Ili Anti-Liberalizm*.

202 Moreover, as one commentator (Gabovich cited in *Novy Konservatizm I/ Ili Anti-Liberalizm*) notes, branding certain ideas as 'marginal' may provide a sense of false consolation and obscure the gradual entry of these ideas into the mainstream, as has arguably been the case with the geopolitical and Eurasianist doctrines of Alexander Dugin, who gradually moved from the 'extremist' position in the political spectrum of the early 1990s into the mainstream of Russian politics. The presently relatively low influence of Dugin *personally* should not be confused with his achievement in widening the space of legitimate political discourse to embrace formerly 'extremist' stands.

203 Foucault 1990, pp. 99-100.

tance to the Putinian hegemony. While liberal conservatives, particularly those of a clear pro-Putin persuasion, advocate and support the present depoliticising tendencies as both inherent to the conservative disposition and instrumental for the undertaking of the second round of liberal reforms in an evolutionary and technocratic manner, left-conservatives are one of the few political forces in contemporary Russia that explicitly seek the rupture of the present pro-Putin consensus, the enhancement of the conflictual potential of Russian politics and the prevention of the sedimentation of liberal-reformist foundational practices into the conservative foundation of the Russian state.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, this ‘repoliticisation’ should not be equated with the resurgence of the ‘reactionary’ discourses of the pro-Soviet nostalgia. Even the liberal critics of left conservatism admit that its practitioners are “furthest away from being ‘Soviet’. They behave otherwise, they have a different habitus and they are able to communicate in different environments, use various languages.”<sup>205</sup> From the perspective of a political theorist, one of the most fascinating features about this discourse is its indebtedness to the contemporary Western poststructuralist or ‘postmodern’ philosophy, with which conservatism shares the philosophical heritage of Nietzsche and Heidegger.<sup>206</sup> Ironically, the Habermasian label ‘young conservatives’ with regard to French poststructuralists is entirely true in the Russian context, as the most fruitful applications of these approaches are to be found, politically, on the ‘conservative’ part of the spectrum and tend to be practiced by younger scholars. This situation is not entirely surprising, insofar as one may read poststructuralism itself in a politically reductionist manner as a *non-Marxist critique of liberalism*. Besides, in the context of Russia’s persistent efforts at ‘catching up’ or ‘integrating’ with the West, the powerful autocritique of the West advanced in poststructuralist philosophy might indeed raise a question about the attractiveness of the West as an object of emulation. The existence of the post-structuralist/conservative nexus in the Russian context also has important consequences for the attempts at a critique of ‘left conservatism’. It is entirely illusory and self-complacent to

204 The other, less articulated stance with a similar re-politicising drive is the ‘young Communist’ grouping, which has its origins in the youth organisations of the CPRF, dissatisfied by the orthodox position of the Party and its flirtation with nationalism that in the opinion of such CPRF representatives as Ilya Ponomarev led to its eventual defeat in 2003-2004. Young Communists seek to articulate a programme that resonates with the present ‘anti-globalisation’ movement in the West that has so far had no impact in Russian politics. In terms of intellectual influences, this grouping is inspired by post-Marxist critical theory and particularly the work of Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek.

205 Gabovich cited in *Novy Konservatism I/ Ili Anti-Liberalizm*.

206 For the philosophical exploration of this lineage see e.g. Megill 1985, Critchley 1992, Wolin 1994. Aside from Nietzsche and Schmitt, the work of Michel Foucault appears as one of the strongest influences on Remizov’s writings. See e.g. Remizov 2000c, 2000d, 2003i.

suggest that a ‘deconstructive’ approach may unravel this discourse, simply because, as our discussion has demonstrated, it posits itself as explicitly anti-essentialist and dispenses with any valorisation of originary authenticity. Both the recognition of the inherent aporia of the object of conservation and the assertion of radical epistemic particularism render left conservatism immune to the denaturalising and historicising pathos of deconstruction, similarly to the Schmittian ontology of political exceptionalism, which may well be considered the ultimate *limit* of deconstructive thought rather than its easy *target*.<sup>207</sup> In many ways, left conservatism is in itself an impressive attempt at a *deconstruction of ‘Putinism’*.

This critical disposition of left conservatism also points to the fact that *pace* the frequently facile international criticism of the Putin presidency and the bemusing attempts to locate a ‘liberal opposition’ to the Putin regime, the only properly oppositional force in contemporary Russia is in fact the *opposition to Putin’s liberalism*, which presently contributes to greater pluralism in Russian politics and whose advent to power is indeed checked by the Putinian hegemonic order of ‘managed democracy’. This is not to say that the agonistic appreciation of political pluralism is inherent to left conservatism: the above-discussed statements of its practitioners are marked by a high degree of intolerance of the Russia of the 1990s and its symbolic figures, which makes it conceivable that the possible ‘left-conservative hegemony’ would be marked by a series of violent closures. Indeed, in its relation to the anticommunist revolution of the 1990s left conservatism reveals itself as thoroughly paradoxical. On the level of *political ontology*, it enacts the spectre of the political against the liberal-conservative drive for depoliticisation, affirming the obscene excess of the new order in its desperate attempt at re-politicising it. In this sense, this discourse is more ‘left’ than ‘conservative’, insofar as we take the ‘left’ disposition to be faithful to the Event of the revolution and resist its systemic sedimentation.<sup>208</sup> This stubborn genealogical recuperation of the lowly origin of Putin’s regime aligns ‘left conservatism’ with the deconstructionist mode of political criticism. At the same time, on the level of its noticeably scant substantive programme, this discourse itself disavows the spectrality of the revolutionary moment of the 1990s in its utterly rejectionist approach to this period as a somehow ‘non-authentic’ event, a mere ‘time of troubles’ unworthy of the name of the Revo-

207 See Prozorov 2004c for the more detailed exploration of this theme.

208 See Magun 2003.

lution.<sup>209</sup> From this dismissal follows the appropriation by left-conservatives of the mantle of the only ‘properly’ political force, the ‘true revolutionary’ subject. Such a ‘privatisation of the political’ is ultimately a merely more extreme version of the Putinian disavowal of the 1990s.

We may venture that despite their differences *both* strands of the conservative discourse seek to ‘come to terms’ with the event of postcommunism through the attempt at its *effacement*, either via *depoliticisation* or *demonisation*. What this ‘infidelity’ to the revolution points to is indeed the ‘trauma’ of the encounter with the ‘Real’ in Žižek’s sense: the experience of the 1990s as a properly revolutionary Event that points to the conditions of possibility of the new order being simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of its closure into self-immanence. As Schmittian, post-structuralist and psychoanalytic critical approaches suggest, ‘society’ (or any form of constituted order) is *impossible* insofar as it is always plagued by the obscene excess that cannot be subsumed under it. In the Russian discourse, the ‘1990’s’ stand precisely for that obscene political supplement that renders impossible any attempt to conceive of order as self-immanent or founded in an immaculate conception.<sup>210</sup> And yet, it is facile to infer from this argument for impossibility the *non-existence* of the foundational event – a gesture that would be both a philosophical and a political platitude. Along with Žižek, we shall rather suggest that the ‘Real *happens*’, the revolutionary event *takes place*, the undecidable is in fact *decided* – and *that* is what it is *impossible* to come to terms with. “The point is not that the Real is impossible but rather that the *impossible is Real*. A trauma, or an act, is simply the point when the Real happens, and this is difficult to accept.”<sup>211</sup>

The Russian conservative discourse in both its varieties is thus marked by the traumatic awareness of the impossibility of *what actually took place*. “The truly traumatic thing is that *mira-*

209 This tension between the critical philosophical drive and the more immediate political orientation of left conservatism echoes a similar cleavage in the work of Carl Schmitt, which is the primary inspiration behind Remizov’s writings. In Schmitt’s political realism the ontological and axiological affirmation of the political Event, irrespectively of its substance, is accompanied by the empirical devaluation of the actually occurring revolution, which in the Schmitt’s case is exemplified by his resentment with regard to the Weimar Republic.

210 We ought to emphasise that in speaking of the ‘1990s’ we refer to the moment of the political, that is irreducible to any single political decision or stance, let alone identifiable with a particular political force such as the Yeltsin presidency. As we have noted above, the ideological discourses of this period, whether on the left or the right have been marked by a strong degree of dogmatism and intolerance. What is at stake in the reference to the 1990s is thus the affirmation of the very Event of the revolution rather than the adherence to any particular position enunciated in the revolutionary discourse.

211 Žižek 2004, p. 70. Emphasis added.

*cles* – not in the religious sense but in the sense of free acts – *do happen*, but it's very difficult to come to terms with them. [The] Real is not this kind of thing-in-itself that we cannot approach; the Real is, rather, freedom as a *radical cut in the texture of reality*.<sup>212</sup> As Artemiy Magun argues with regard to the simultaneous minimalism and profundity of the Russian revolution of 1991: “Revolutionary negation has no substance, it is in no way determined. [...] The revolution consists in the fact that *something* started moving, that *something took place*.”<sup>213</sup> As an Event that is *irreducible to the order of being*, as an act of radical freedom involved in the decisionist foundation ‘out of nothingness’,<sup>214</sup> the moment of the political in the 1990s is unsettling for both liberal conservatives (as the testimony to the radically non-conservative origin of the object of conservation) and left-conservatives (as the testimony to the absolute indifference of the principle of the political to the substance of the foundational act, revolution and the ‘time of troubles’ being, pace Remizov, *structurally identical*). Both of these strands of conservatism may therefore be targeted by a critical disposition that practices the ‘non-positive affirmation’<sup>215</sup> of the political as the irreducible constitutive excess of every form of order: “To tarry with the negative is to stick to the impossible, paradoxical, monstrous perspective, to identify with the undefined and undefinable element of social order, with the symptom of its internal impossibility. To take such a position is frightening and difficult, even impossible. There is no pure ‘leftism’, just as there is no pure negation. *Nonetheless, only this contradictory stance allows, in our view, the access to the fundamentals of the political*.”<sup>216</sup> And yet, one ought to be reserved in the condemnation of Russian conservatism for this failure to come to terms with the 1990s, if only because a *properly political politics* (i.e. a politics attuned to its ‘impossible’, aporetic character) still remains to be invented or even *thought*.<sup>217</sup> In the meantime, one may credit particularly

212 Ibid, p. 166.

213 Magun 2003.

214 See Žižek 2004, pp. 135-138. See also Rancière 2001.

215 See Foucault 1977.

216 Magun 2003. See Prozorov 2004b, pp. 468-471 for the elaboration of such a critical stance that we refer to as ‘tarrying with the 1990s’.

217 Such a politics would be a logical impossibility insofar as it will cancel itself out by deconstructing the undecidable status of its constitutive decisions and the unfounded character of its foundations. Simply put, within such a conception, to which the Derridean account of decisionism (1992, 1996) veers dangerously close, nothing would ever be able to take place or happen *at all*. See Moran 2002. Thus, while the critical purchase of the affirmation of the political is evident, it does not appear possible to articulate a positive political programme that would be faithful to such an affirmation. See Prozorov 2004d for the more detailed exposition of the relation between the political and depoliticisation.

the 'extremist' left conservatism with the ongoing expansion of the epistemic-political field in contemporary Russia, making it possible to think differently once more, if only for a while.

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