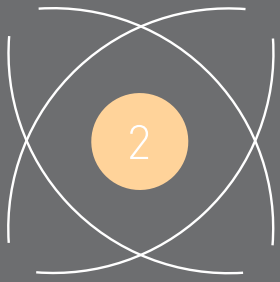

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1750-306 Lisboa
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Email: ipris@ipris.org

Editor
Paulo Gorjão

Assistant Editors
André Monteiro
Diogo Noivo

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Teresa Cardoso Bastos

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Explaining Today with Yesterday: Demystifying Nationalism in Russia

Vasco Martins
Researcher for the Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security

Introduction

Since Vladimir Putin was appointed President, the western media and some academics have intensified their accusations by classifying the Russian Federation as a country of extremism, of Russian and non-Russian nationalism, of almost certain military/paramilitary conflict, of conducting an openly hostile and abusive foreign policy towards the EU and more importantly towards the new post-Soviet states. With a demoralized and demobilized military in the wake of defeat, rising crime rates, potential dictators waiting in the wings, anti-semitism and nationalism, hyperinflation, high unemployment, and destroyed personal savings, a weak civil society supporting the republic, an historical tradition more imperial than republican, and, a general sense of national humiliation and resentment, the media was quick enough to assume that preserving this delicate balance in Russia would be impossible and soon the country would engulf the world in violent conflict.

Based on a nationalist conception and overview of the subject, this article argues that although it has significant presence and visibility on the international stage, the Russian government to a certain extent, and the Russian population in particular – like in many other countries in the world – cannot be perceived or accused of being nationalist or of having aggressive nationalist intentions. By studying several indicators that figure in the central make-up of any analysis of nationalism, this article aims to prove that the fears manifested by those who point fingers at the Russian Federation and its leaders and accuse it of having expansionist tendencies and nationalist behavior are not without pro-western biases, therefore providing an inconclusive analysis of the real threat.

The 'Near Abroad' of Georgia and Ukraine

Recently, there have been two major arguments easily identified when reading any article or newspaper concerning Russian nationalism and its position in international affairs. Russia is suspected of interfering in Ukraine's democratic elections and, violating the territorial integrity of Georgia in the name of self-determination and human rights. The overall sense one gets when reading these articles is that Russia will no longer stand idly by and is ready to embrace its nationhood and position as a superpower in the international sphere, as an equal among equals.

Ukraine's democratic elections

The air was recently filled with doubt and suspicion as Ukranian Presidential candidate Victor Yanukovych goes on to dispute the second round of elections with one of the most relevant personalities of the Orange Revolution of 2004, Yulia Timoshenko. Yanukovych's campaign had fresh, renewed ideas and assumed no ties to the Kremlin, but despite this new rhetoric, western leaders tend to read the word "KGB" in his eyes as a consequence of his pro-Russian inclination during the 2004 elections, one of the main causes of the street protests originating the Orange Revolution.

A statement that shocked the media and brought fear to the entire post-Soviet region was Putin's assurance that the Russian Federation would protect and defend all Russians living outside their homeland. A very significant portion of the population in eastern Ukraine is ethnic Russian, a heritage of Stalin's 'russification' process. Moreover, approximately 72%[1] of the residents of Sevastopol – a city in the peninsula of the Crimea, home to the Black Sea fleet, Russia's largest naval fleet – are ethnic Russians and support Yanukovych. This could present a serious demographic issue between the Ukraine and Russia, commonly used in nationalist arguments for self determination and irredentism, a scene already witnessed by the international community in the former Yugoslavia and in Kosovo.

The Black Sea fleet is expected to leave Sevastopol in 2017, by which time its contract ends. Although the lease cannot be prolonged by Presidential mandate, as it is tied to the constitutional ban on foreign bases in Ukrainian territory, the deal is still surrounded by a political mist of uncertainty and doubt, and the outcome of this issue strongly depends on who wins the current elections. With the majority of the population registered as ethnic Russians, breaking connection with one of Russia's main national identity-building concepts – its military – could prove to be an unwise decision in the face of Russian (re)emergence in international politics. On the other hand, in case Yanukovych wins the second round of elections on 7th February against Tymoshenko,

a new Russian-friendly settlement in the central government could again further aggravate the nationalist factions in Ukrainian political life and frustrate the emergence of the country's national identity, since the former has expressed his unwillingness to change the status of the Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol.

Following the defeat of President Yushchenko in this year's elections, Russia was quick enough to send an ambassador to Ukraine, for the first time in five months, underpinning its support to any of the less democratic forces – as they are categorized by the media – disputing the second round of elections in the country. But the Russian hand in Ukraine's political life has diminished considerably, ever since Yushchenko assumed the presidency following the days of the Orange Revolution. Russia's rhetoric towards Ukraine shifted to an 'only foreign policy' stance, strongly condemning NATO membership plans and threatening to sell gas at market prices instead of at the current privileged prices Ukraine is paying. While United Russia is endorsing presidential candidate Yanukovych, nothing more has been done to seriously support his candidacy, contrasting heavily with the times when Leonid Kuchma was the strong man for Moscow. Moreover, both Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine – even in Galicia, the stronghold of Ukrainian identity, appear to have made peace with each other and are fully committed to avoiding any ethnic or even full blown military conflict.

Campaigning on an openly anti-Russian platform, Yushchenko was the only politician playing the war drums this time. While in 2004 his election was mainly focused on patriotic grounds of a free and united Ukraine, today due to popular disenchantment with his rule, Yushchenko is playing the nationalist card calling all patriotic Ukrainians to boycott the second round of elections. Russian imposition in Ukrainian domestic political affairs is highly exaggerated by Yushchenko, a tendency that is followed by the western media. Today, Russian involvement in Ukraine's affairs is not as strong and therefore not as exploitable as before.

The territorial integrity of Georgia

Following the August war of 2008, Russia was accused by most western news agencies of having invaded Georgia's sovereign territory in the name of military annexation and nationalism. Standing by its intentions, Russia accused the Georgian government of triggering the summer war by attacking Russian peacekeeping forces stationed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia since the 1991 and 1992-1993 wars respectively.

The outcome of this war was the *de facto* independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the freezing of relations between two countries that were already very suspicious of each other. Mikheil Sakashvili was deemed the main responsible for triggering the summer invasion and his democratically colored movement lost most of its credibility

as thousands of Georgians protested against his rule in the capital, demanding his resignation. Besides this outcome, this war brought two more arguments to the stage. The first is that the West will not help or even collaborate with military ventures that might lead to a much more serious and wider conflict than the August war, which made NATO and the EU withdraw their support for Georgia's integration in the Atlantic organization. But by doing so, both organizations have sent a very clear message to Moscow: business remains as usual. Georgia gave Russia's 'vertical power' the excuse it needed to counter the colored revolutions it fears so much without entering into direct confrontation with the Ukraine, NATO and subsequently with the EU, especially with the Baltic countries, the Czech Republic and Poland. Secondly, by not playing a leading role in Georgia, the West left Russia an open door policy in terms of hostility towards Ukraine and the rest of its 'near abroad' space. Russia is thus depicted as a 19th century state whose *realpolitik* and jingoist conception of international politics must be taken very seriously and confronted with care.

The media tends to merge nationalism with statist patriotic values. Putin never instilled Russian nationalism in the country or in the ethnic diasporas. What he and his close circle of advisors did was to use old Soviet ideals to exacerbate the glory of the country and to underpin its weight in international affairs, which consequently reflected on national identity and foreign policy. References to Stalin, to the privileged and friendly relationship with Belarus and other former Soviet republics, the resurrection of the old Cold War ways and further military spending and rearmament are not fruit of a well established nationalist regime, but instead reflect the international circumstances shaping the political nostalgia of a country that once ruled half the world but now finds itself lost in its crucial search for identity. Foreign policy is one of the major factors influencing national identity, as the other defines the 'us', and Russia is looking for the respect it once commanded in international affairs.

Furthermore, nationalist movements may take decades, even centuries to take control of the state and mobilize the population towards the nationalist cause. If Russia is considered to have a nationalist behavior, evaluating this nationalism proves essential to recognizing its strengths and weaknesses as well as its role in politics and society.

Setting the Scene

In any political regime in the world, two major indicators must be studied to assess nationalist inclination in political life. Firstly, and in order to mobilize the population, there must exist active nationalist political parties in Parliament, supported by the people and with enough political and economic power to agitate and rally popular support around the national cause. Secondly, if nationalism is not a manifestation of the estab-

lished power, it is therefore based on a regional type of ethnic secessionist nationalism. Thus, in order to be successful, the population in the concerned region should be completely mobilized, and their ethnic characteristics such as language, religion, history, racial traits etc, must be well defined. Finally, there should have been a few incidents against the dominant ethnic group that mirrors the overall ethnicity of the state in the separatist region (i.e. ethnic Russians in Chechnya).

But when analyzing these two very specific driving forces behind nationalism in Russia – the inclination for party politics and regional ethnic nationalism – all the above accusations of nationalist expansion and ethnic territorial control become somewhat questionable. Careful assessment demonstrates that instead of nationalist agitation in the Russian Duma, profound elite power politics are at work, searching for a vertical approach to control state authority. Moreover, every other danger of disintegration and secession by ethnic regions seem to have vanished into dormant oblivion, as they consider controlling their economy preferable to full independence.

Nationalism in the Duma

Today in Russian party politics, barely any other political party survives legislative elections except for the almighty United Russia, a party associated with Prime Minister Putin. United Russia is constituted of two former political parties – Unity and Fatherland-All Russia (among other smaller parties) – that merged together to create the winning coalition currently ruling the Russian Duma. Even before United Russia was created, Unity had already declared itself at the service of Putin, who had no problem in loosely associating with the emerging party as well.

When assessing any nationalist association, one finds that Unity leaned towards a civic Russian nationalism (rossiiskii) rather than an ethnic Russian nationalism (russkii). This seems to be an appropriate position for a bloc where ethnic non-Russians were prominent: Sergey Shoigun, one of the party founders in 2001 is a Tuvian, and the power behind Unity at the time, Boris Berezovsky, is Jewish. Moreover, there are no articles or official reports suggesting that United Russia's members have an agenda based on nationalist conceptions of politics, channel nationalist rhetoric towards their public or censor ethnic or any other groups, contrary to the actions of other opposition party members. Lack of democracy, or of constitutional liberalism as Fareed Zakaria[2] deems it, or even the development of a system with autocratic characteristics, does not necessarily entail the emergence of a nationalist party in the long term.

There are however two other political parties with representation in the Duma that lean towards much more autocratic and even fascist concepts of political rule in the

country. These are the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) led by Gennady Zyuganov and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) led by the famous Vladimir Zhirinovsky.

In their research on Russian politics Joan Barth Urban and Valerii Solovei[3] identified three ideological movements within the KPRF: the Marxist-Leninist revivalists; the Marxist reformers; and the left-wing nationalists. Gennady Zyuganov, the current leader of the KPRF, is the central figure of what Urban calls the left-wing nationalists, although they might more appropriately be categorized as representatives of the statist-patriotic communist tendency.[4] They are statists because their allegiance to the Russian state is stronger than their allegiance to the loose definition of an ethnic Russian people, disrupting any ideas of a strong well-rooted nationalism. They are patriotic rather than nationalistic because of a commitment to supra-ethnic internationalist principles and a belief in Russia as a multinational state with equal rights guaranteed to all, although the dominant role of the Russian nation is paramount. In this respect, the KPRF's position does not substantially differ from that of the Kremlin itself, in that the state is viewed as more important than the nation, something that is redolent of the Russian Empire. Moving away from party ideology to more pragmatic assessments, it appears that since 1991 the KPRF has been trying to mobilize both the left and the nationalist movements in Russia (known as 'red-browns') and has successfully annexed some of them to their party. Nevertheless, on 1st November 1998, the KPRF central committee decided to break these alliances and run alone in the 1999 elections, making a renewed attempt to gather all socialist and nationalistic groups under its roof. One of the imperatives was to erect a barrier against ultra-nationalists like General Al'bert Makashov, a communist member of the Duma emboldened by the financial crisis to vent xenophobic and extreme anti-Semitic views. Makashov caused a firestorm in October when he demanded quotas on Jews in political office and the deportation of the "yids", "shylocks", and "bloodsuckers", who had wrecked Russia's economy.[5] Although KPRF leaders speak freely about delicate issues, there appears to be little ideological support for it to be deemed nationalistic. Moreover, there is an effective control of extremist nationalism whenever it is directed at the minorities living in the Federation, of which ultimate evidence lies in the expulsion of Makashov from the KPRF.

The other political party is one of the most successful in maintaining itself above the threshold and on track to Duma seats is the LDPR. The party appealed to a more stridently nationalistic movement, but its appeal normally owed a great deal to Zhirinovsky himself. Zhirinovsky's support base consists of relatively well educated young males from large cities, who not only feel but understand Russia's potential and its past humiliation; of older less educated males from smaller cities, who have spent most of their lives in the Soviet times; of disgruntled rural residents and numerous members of the Russian armed forces. His views, although different from those of the typical

nationalist, are still characterized by imaginary concepts of power and expansion, akin to the nationalist rhetoric used by ordinary politicians. For Zhirinovsky, statism is the key concept, but unlike historical liberals (who pressed for the emancipation of the individual and society from the oppression of an autocratic state in pre-revolutionary Russia) the LDPR is ready to take the step forward and take power into its own hands, indicative of classical features of fascism. The idea of a strong 'russified' state is not antithetical to empire, according to the LDPR leader, as it is the perfect tool for the recreation of the old Russian empire. He underlines the importance of territory and the return to pre-revolution borders. Correcting what he sees as the problems of federalism is at the top of the agenda, and smaller nations (i.e. Chechnya or Tatarstan) are expected to accept their fate inside this new empire. While declaring not to be chauvinistic, Zhirinovsky speaks of a state controlled by Russians. An ethnically pure Russian state is his answer to the threat of anarchy, and those who don't like it can always leave the country. Therefore, in place of the existing federal system, which safeguards the rights of national minorities, Zhirinovsky has proposed a return to a provincial system of local government where the provinces, as in Tsarist times, are controlled by the central government. He speaks of restoring Russia to the imperial borders of 1900, when Russia included parts of contemporary Poland and Finland (NATO member and ally respectively). Denying Russia its historical borders will inevitably lead to war. Zhirinovsky has also called upon expansion to the south. This geopolitical coup is to be done as shock therapy: suddenly, rapidly and effectively, a *blitzkrieg* that would end with Russia and India sharing a common border. This would bring order from Kabul to Istanbul, eliminating the "red, Muslim, Turkic and Islamic threats" and removing any possibility of a third world war. In his characteristic way, Zhirinovsky wrote that "the final 'thrust' is to the south: As I dream of it, Russian soldiers will wash their boots in the warm waters of the Indian ocean and forever change to summer uniforms (...) we must pacify the region forever".[6] This can be considered a much more serious threat if Zhirinovsky manages to garner strong support for his cause.

Expansionist nationalism resembles the kind of nationalist feeling that was present in Serbia and Croatia in the early 1990s, except that for all his eccentricities, Zhirinovsky has never organized a paramilitary group to defend Russian minorities in the non-Russian republics of the former USSR. Even when Putin himself claims that the Russian state will defend the rights of ethnic Russians abroad, there is no evidence that this will be done in an expansionist nationalist way, much to the contrary.

John O'Loughlin and Paul Talbot[7] conducted interviews that are reflective of the degree of nationalist mobilization in the Russian population: if it is mobilized or is favorable to the idea of national mobilization, evidence would show the people's desire to have the territorial space coincide with the contemporary (or historical) borders of the nation, as nationalism and territory are intrinsically related concepts.

Table 1 "If Russia should seek to reunite with the countries of the former Soviet Union, by what means should this be pursued?"

Response	Frequency	%
Do not want it pursued	642	53.5
Only by political means	257	21.4
Only by economic means	90	7.5
Only by military means	5	0.4
All means are possible	103	8.6
Hard to say	103	8.6

Source: O'Loughlin and Talbot.

As Table 1 demonstrates, while more than half of the respondents do not wish reunification with the former Soviet republics, only 0.4% of the respondents would support a military intervention to restore the sovereign territory of the Soviet Union. These results indicate passivity concerning the matter of changing contemporary territorial borders. Therefore the desire to reunify the nation and bring ethnic Russians back within Russia's borders does not seem to be a prime concern for Russia's masses. In opposition to Serbia and especially Kosovo, where the population was completely mobilized and ready to fight what they considered the Albanian threat, in Russia there is no sufficient political support for a popular mass nationalist uprising in order to create a 'greater-Russia'.

The Threat of Disintegration

When the rise of secessionist movements in the former Soviet Republics, majorly underpinned by Yeltsin's support, gave way to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the latent threat of disintegration loomed over the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, today the Russian Federation.

After the Soviet Union fell apart, Russian leaders were faced with the task of shaping a Russian state in a territory where other peoples aspired to do the same. The Chechens, as well as the Tatars, the Komi, and the Yakuts among others, wished to establish their own independent states out of the ruins of the Soviet Union. The result stopped short of disintegration and created a federation of eighty-nine constituent units called the 'subjects of the federation'. Of these 'subjects' twenty-one are ethnically based republics, six are *krais* (territories), ten are autonomous *okrugs* (districts), one is an autonomous *oblast*, two are cities, and forty-nine are *oblasts* (provinces).

The first challenge to the second leader of Russia, former President and current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was the task of holding together such a diverse multi-national state. Under his leadership as Russia's Prime Minister in 1999, Moscow re-started the protracted war against the breakaway Republic of Chechnya. Putin and the Russian elites justified the intervention with a straightforward argument: if nothing is done to prevent Chechnya from seceding, a precedent will be set and the whole of the Russian Federation will eventually collapse. When giving an interview to a Russian television channel and just before Yeltsin ceded the presidency, Putin said "I am convinced that we will not solve any problems, any economic or social problems, while the state is disintegrating". This weakness of state would (re)awaken old fears concerning Russia's stability and integrity, as nationalist movements tend to flourish when economic downturns are at hand. Also, for any nationalist the prospect of deciding one's national economic policies is a powerful motive to push for more autonomy or even full blown independence. Thus, and because Russia had failed to develop a durable and sustainable *modus operandi* as a state, it faced federal collapse in the aftermath of the August 1998 financial crisis.[8]

However, the situation described above no longer seems to hold any truth. When ethnic revival presented a way for ethnic minority elites to gather even more political power, most of them chose to avoid ethnicized conflict and focus on matters of sovereignty as a path to increased self-rule and economic well being. Whenever ethnic revival is mentioned, it is largely in the context of the republic's multi-ethnic population and the promotion of inter-ethnic friendship. Dmitry Gorenburg argued that "the leaders of the ethnic republics of the Russian Federation have tended to de-emphasize the ethnic revival aspects in their programs, instead focusing their rhetoric on the economic advantages of sovereignty and on the benefits of federalism and decentralization".[9]

Russian federalism is considered by many academics and authors on the subject to be asymmetrical. Post-Soviet Russia inherited a redesigned federal model that was used in the Soviet Union itself and culminated in a series of bilateral treaties between Yeltsin and each of the ethnic region leaders. As only a small number of these treaties actually provided any devolution of powers, the federalization of Russia was based on territorial aspects, with the most significant power-sharing agreements being concluded with the key 'ethnic' republics of the federation: Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha. Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry[10] in their study on methods of eliminating and managing conflicts, while analyzing the case of federalism as a viable option, concluded that although possibly sustainable in theory, federalism by decentralizing decision-making empowers regions, therefore 'nurturing' the prospect of 'one step closer' to independence. If the centre loosens the grip on the amount of sovereignty it cedes, the regions will eventually press for more.

Table 2 Indicators of separatist activities in Russia's ethnic regions

	Declared Sovereignty	Raised Administrative Status	Adopted Own Constitution	Held Referendum on Sovereignty	Declared	Refused to send conscripts
Bashkortostan	X	X	X	X		
Chechnya	X	X	X		X	X
Dagestan	X		X			
Mordovia	X	X				
Kalmykia	X	X	X			
Sakha	X	X	X			
Tatarstan	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Treisman.[11]

As Table 2 Shows, Tatarstan and by association Bashkortostan were at the forefront of the sovereignty movement, and although this status was pursued by several other regions, only those that could provide the economic leverage to support these claims of independence (financial resources are of the utmost importance if any autonomous or secessionist movement is to be successful) could engage in serious negotiations with the federal government.

In the early 1990's, Tatarstan accounted for around one quarter of Russia's oil output and was a major industrial manufacturing region, while Bashkortostan was a key oil refining and transit region. Furthermore, both regions are not only geographically connected, but also share a similar language and the same religion. In addition, one fifth of the population of Bashkortostan speaks Tatar. These similar characteristics present in both republics increased the dangers of unity, political 'comradeship' and fueled eventual demands for autonomy and a further loss of sovereignty by the federal government.

Tatarstan already had plans to reach independence as a state when Gorbachev launched *perestroika* in the last days of the Soviet Union. Their leaders, while asking for independence in internal policy-making, argued that Tatarstan would be better off managing its economic potential on its own through a return to full statehood. With regards to ethnicity, in 1988 the nationalist Tatar Public Centre (TOTs) was formed, explicitly modeling itself after the Baltic popular front organizations. It began by calling for the protection of Tatar culture and ended up championing full independence for Tatarstan. In 1991, a radical wing broke from the TOTs and formed Ittifak, or 'Alliance'. Ittifak promoted an exclusionary nationalist agenda, openly hostile to Russians in Tatarstan, where they account for one third of the entire population. As Ittifak attempted to mobilize moderate Tatars into the 'cause', pro-Russian and pro-federalist groups began organizing themselves in order to respond to these threats. After the bilateral treaties between the Tatarstan leadership

and the federal government were signed in 1994, support for the nationalist cause began to fade away. Despite early agitation, there was no mass mobilization in Tatarstan, and by 1996 the only ethnic claims made in the region were for a revival of the Tatar language that had been oppressed under communist rule.

Tatar leaders redirected their objectives of full independence at an associated membership within the Russian Federation. All the issues of economic sovereignty began narrowing into calls for increased quotas for petroleum exports and for an independent budget, with fixed yearly payments to the central government. But they also called for the development of a Tatar foreign policy – which comes at a high financial costs – participation in international treaties and even the establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign states.[12] During this period only a few references were made to ethnic issues, and although the concept of a Tatar nation was being developed, it was to include all the inhabitants of the republic and to be underpinned by the concept of citizenship, reflecting the adoption of an inclusive civic nationalism policy.

The pathway to increasing the sovereignty of Bashkortostan was similar to that of Tatarstan. Economic questions were central to their demands, as was the approval of specific laws that would enable the region's financial system to assist with the development of foreign trade, regulate the transition to a market economy and even to create a republican constitution. However, contrary to what happened in Tatarstan, most leaders barely made any reference to ethnic components in their speeches. The process culminated with Bashkortostan following Tatarstan in signing a bilateral treaty with the federal government in 1994, six months after the latter. Their most important achievements included not only the adoption of a new constitution, but the signing of the bilateral treaty, developing relations with foreign states and preserving the ethnic balance in the republic. Again, and just like Tatarstan, multi ethnic diversity and ethnic separatism were not articulated into demands of autonomy or sovereignty and all was centered in achieving more economic and political freedoms. To be sure, it appears that the extreme nationalist character of post-Soviet Russia has been subdued by a constant struggle to keep the federation healthy and alive.

Conclusion

From the evidence gathered, at this point it is possible to conclude that the world will not witness the rise of a powerful ill-minded Russian nation flexing its muscles, neither in its 'near-abroad' regions nor within its borders. Moreover, it appears that the Russian state itself is having problems of its own, especially regarding the military department. Every day, new reports surface concerning armament malfunctions or even the halt of military projects due to lack of funding. How will the 'great, glorious and feared' Russian army

conquer all the lands between its borders and the Indian ocean, or threaten Ukraine's Crimea region with the same fate as that of Georgia's if it cannot even afford new uniforms for its soldiers?[13] How will it defy NATO's undisputed dominance in the region in these conditions? The days of the glorious, feared Red Army are now long gone.

Lack of popular mobilization serves as the ultimate evidence of the failure of extremist nationalism and denies all accusations of the emergence of a nationalist rogue-like state in Russia. Sufficient proof lies in the frailties of federalism and decentralization. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a fragile balance has been kept between the central government and regional powers, a balance that implies successive decentralization of power to the regions and that constitutes a permanent threat of secession. Thus, it has been the top policy of the Russian leadership to do everything possible to keep the country together and its borders intact, even if that translates into terrorizing the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus.

To conclude, there appears to be a clear lack of understanding between two old foes, something that dates back to the days of the old Tsarist empire. If the West does not seem to understand Russia, than it is also true that Russia does not seem to make any effort of rapprochement towards the western world, even though it rhetorically announces so in its policies, both internally and externally. There is a strong need for reformation of the dynamics in this relationship, especially in a century where borderless threats grow and cooperation becomes key. But in order to cooperate, the perception and idea that each side has of the other must be given a new image. This new image can only be implemented by mass media channels: they must avoid making groundless accusations and assess the situation as it is in reality and not as their perception dictates. The Barack Obama administration's 'reset button' policy should therefore apply, above all to the media channels of all western countries. Opinions are grown in the minds of the voters through media channels and through the behavior of their leaders. How can there be understanding when all John McCain saw in Vladimir Putin's eyes were the letters KGB? Indeed the times of "The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming" are long gone, but it appears that the *operandi* remains the same. Those who consider themselves to be friends of the Russian people should review their criticisms and work their way to promoting real liberal pro-democratic values and human rights, instead of directing their efforts towards making unsubstantiated accusations of extreme nationalism and expansionism, further alienating Russia from the west, where it belongs.

(Endnotes)

1 See the Ukranian Census for Sevastopol City, All-Ukrainian population census, State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001.
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3 Valerii D. Solovei and Joan Barth Urban, *Russia's Communists at the crossroads* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 102.
4 Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 136.
5 Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular choice and managed democracy: the Russian elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 111.
6 Jacob Kipp, "The Zhirinovsky Threat" (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3, May/June 1994), pp. 72-86.
7 John O'Loughlin and Paul Talbot, "Where in the world is Russia? Geopolitical perceptions and preferences of ordinary Russians" (*Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 46, No. 1, January/February 2005), pp. 23-50.
8 Graeme P. Herd, "Russia: Systemic Transformation or Federal Collapse?" (*Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No. 3, May 1999), pp. 259-269.
9 Dmitry Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic mobilisation or power grab?" (*Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2, March 1999), p. 246.
10 Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The politics of ethnic conflict regulation: case studies of protracted ethnic conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 20.
11 Daniel S. Treisman, "Ethnic Revival: The Separatist Activism of Regional Leaders in a Postcommunist Order" (*World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 2, January 1997), pp. 212-249.
12 Gorenburg, op. cit., pp. 245-274.
13 Steven Eke, "Russian army scraps new uniforms" (*BBC News*, 1 May 2009).