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WHY RUSSIA WILL NEVER MAKE IT

I can hear my opponents saying, ‘Why would you say so?! It has already made it to the ranks of great global powers!’ Such views are quite common not only in Russia but also among Ukrainians. On second thought, it seems to make sense: For half a millennium, this state has continuously existed on the political map of the world. Still, the question remains: If it has made it, then what is this ‘making’ about? Put otherwise, if there is ‘greatness’, then what – or whom – is it for?

Modern political thought comes to an overwhelming conclusion that this ‘making’ must be humanocentric, i.e. to cater for people’s requests in the best way possible. As the French philosopher Jacques Maritain put it, ‘Man does not exist for the state, the state exists for man.’ Hence, the traditional humanistic view of state-building, whose main components are political and religious freedom, unimpeded economic competition, high social standards, ensuring the rights of national and social minorities.

This was not always the norm. The dark days of the Middle Ages were replete with horrific events of religious obscurantism, social injustice, political inequality, ethnic intolerance, and other phenomena unacceptable from the point of view of modern liberal thought. It must be put down to the credit of humanity that it mostly managed to cure these ‘developmental diseases’ and leave them in the past.

However, there is no rule without an exception, and Russia is one of them. I will not address, as is usually the case, the political, social, economic, and other aspects of what confirms this conclusion. Several dozen studies and theses on this topic have already been written and many more are yet to come. I will try, at least indirectly, to approach another topic, which is for some reason almost always overlooked but, in my opinion, is perchance the most decisive for understanding the essence of Russia.

This is the complex and multifaceted problem of Muscovites’ self-esteem, i.e. a set of their own perceptions of themselves and the surrounding world, an important part of what science calls a mindset. As a matter of fact, what is implied here is how the people who later called themselves Russians (having stolen this name from the Ruthenians – proto-Ukrainians) perceive themselves and the world and what follows from this.

Separateness, uniqueness, otherness in its mystically glorified form are perhaps the most important characteristic features of the ‘Russian soul’. Our northeastern neighbours have mentioned this many times over the centuries and still love to do it. Where does it come from? That is what I suggest we ruminate on together.

As a child's consciousness is formed in the first years of its life, the psychological blueprint of a nation is established at the early stages of its development and self-awareness.

Let us start with geography. What was the territory of the future Muscovy in the 13th – 15th centuries? Right, it was Zalesye, a remote hinterland of Eastern Europe. For the rest of Europe, it remained a closed and inaccessible territory with practically no influence of European culture. The influence of Kyiv was also very limited, as it regarded those lands only as a place of honourable exile. Centuries of detachment from European processes created the psychological blueprint of a 'lonely nation' constantly looking for its shore but unable to find it. Its separateness and otherness led to the cultivation in the public consciousness of the stereotype of the Russians' higher calling, special mission, mysteriousness, etc.

This 'closed solitude', in turn, caused the emergence of another psychological phenomenon – suspiciousness and aversion to everything foreign. From the point of view of abecedarian psychology, it is quite an adequate response: I am afraid of what I do not know or do not understand. However, once rooted as a norm of a large society, this creates an entirely new social phenomenon.

In such circumstances, the Orthodox faith brought in from Rus-Ukraine quickly turned into a dogmatic, 'the only right' doctrine deprived of chances for modification and development. The latter were labelled as heresy and apostasy, which, in turn, further strengthened the sense of isolation as a norm of social development. A kind of a vicious circle emerged: The greater the belief in separateness, the higher the certainty in uniqueness; the greater the confidence in individuality, the bigger the need to feel detached from the rest of the world. This is exactly where today's Kremlin's maxim about Russia 'as a separate civilisation' comes from.

The closedness to the West was offset by the openness to the East. The system of slavish submission to the Horde was not a deliberate choice, as it had been brought by the Mongol conquest. However, the population of Zalesye, unaware of the social practice of European communities, embraced it as an acceptable formula for its social mode of life. More than three hundred years of pounding into their brains of the idea there is only one correct system – 'the almighty lord and the insignificant disempowered slave', whose life is worthless and can be taken away at any whim of the lord – had tied another psychological knot in the consciousness, which is a blind fear.

The climatic aspect is also worth mentioning here. Finno-Ugric tribes, which would later be known as the Muscovite people, lived in harsh natural conditions. One family could not survive. Objectively, it was necessary to unite in more numerous social groups. Teamwork helped to overcome life's difficulties and existential threats. Thus, collectivism in its initially primitive form became an important psychological priority that suppressed and subordinated individ-

uality. Combined with the fear acquired from the Horde, it practically buried the local population's natural desire for initiative, expression of individuality and independent opinion, and self-assertion and replaced them with collective consciousness. Individualism received a clearly negative connotation in that society.

Those unfavourable environmental factors forced people to constantly migrate, looking for new lands that could ensure survival, at least for a while. Hence the acceptability of the idea of taking over other people's lands, the lack of clear boundaries, and the habit of constant movement 'somewhere', which later paved the way for the Horde's ideology and practice of conquest.

Thus, over several centuries, geography, natural conditions, and history had formed an ethnos with a specific self-esteem and view of the world: We are unique and special, we cannot be understood, we live up to specific spiritual standards, we do not trust anything foreign, do not love or respect it. The best form of coexistence with the extraneous is to capture and subdue it.

Much later, a formula will appear, which provides a succinct, though inexhaustive, characterisation of the essence of the Muscovite statehood: 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality'. It apparently lacks characteristics. The analysis of events that happened to Muscovy-Russia after it established itself as an entity of international politics suggests that this formula should be complemented by adjectives as follows: 'obscurantist orthodoxy, punitive autocracy, slavish nationality'.

This, of course, is unpleasant to admit. Therefore, the Muscovite intellectual thought from its very first days has sought to explain all the natural and acquired vices of the Russian national character and behaviour by the 'mystery' of Russia, its people, and, particularly, the 'Russian soul'. Many Russian thinkers have written about it. Here are some thoughts: 'The idea of a (Russian) nation is not what it thinks of itself in time, but instead what God thinks of it in eternity' (Solovyov, 1989); 'We do believe that the Russian nation is an extraordinary phenomenon in the history of the entire humanity. The character of the Russian people is so unlike those of all contemporary European peoples that Europeans still do not understand it and, conversely, understand it utterly wrong' (Dostoevsky, 1861); '[...] in this respect, our nature is infinitely higher than the European. Besides, all our conceptions are more moral, and our Russian aims are higher than those of the European world' (Dostoevsky, 1868); 'No, in political history, Russians are not conquerors and robbers, like the Huns and Mongols, but saviors [...]' (Chernyshevskiy, 1949); '[...] the Russian people are destined to express in their ethnicity the richest and the most many-sided meaning [...] such an idea, meant as an assumption articulated without self-praise and bigotry, is not without merit' (Belinsky, 1846); 'It seems to me that there is in Russian life something higher than its commune and something stronger than its power; this 'something' is difficult to put into words and still more difficult to point at with one's finger. I speak of that internal force, not entirely conscious of itself, [...] I speak of that force, finally, and

of that confidence in self which ferments in our breast. This force, independent of all external circumstances and in spite of them, has conserved the Russian people and protected their impregnable faith in themselves' (Herzen, 1849).

Such statements are various and sundry. However, they were set out most systematically by Nikolai Berdyaev, who is rightly considered one of the most outstanding connoisseurs of the aforementioned 'mysterious Russian soul' in Russian publicist and scientific circles. Dozens of studies on the topic issued from his pen.

What, then, in Berdyaev's view, are the main characteristics of this 'people's Muscovite soul' and, more broadly, Russia itself? First of all, its antinominess, i.e. its internal contradictions, combined in one phenomenon of absolute opposites. In my opinion, it is an interesting way to palm the beast's grin off as an angel's smile.

Berdyaev analyses three key elements of the Muscovite mentality: its idea of statehood, ethnicity, and religion.

The most interesting to me were the following (selected, so to speak) thoughts:

Russia is some special land, not like any other land in the world. The Russian national thought grew up with the sense of Russia as the God-chosen and God-bearing nation.

In the West they have still not felt that the spiritual powers of Russia can re-define and transform the spiritual life of the West. [...] The spiritual culture of Russia, that core of life in regard to which the statecraft itself is nothing but a superficial externality and implement, still does not occupy a great-power position in the world. [...] That which has transpired within the bosom of the Russian spirit ceases to be something provincial, isolated, and closed-in, instead becoming a global wealth common to all humankind, not just to the East but also to the West.

Russia is full of contradictions and antinomies. The soul of Russia is not veiled over by any sort of doctrines. [...] To get at the riddle of the mystery hidden within the soul of Russia is possible by admitting outright the anti-nomic nature of Russia, its macabre contradictions.

The creativity of the Russian spirit is twofold, as is Russian historical life. [...] The unfathomable depth and unbounded loftiness are combined with some degradation, ignobility, absence of dignity, and slavery. The infinite love for people and genuine love of Christ are combined with misanthropy and cruelty. The thirst for absolute freedom in Christ [...] is countered with the submissiveness of the slave. Is not that the essence of Russia herself?

[In Russia] no one has coveted power, and all were afraid of it as something impure. Our Orthodox ideology concerning autocracy is the same manifestation of the non-state spirit, the refusal of the people and society to construct a state life.

The Russian soul seems to desire a sacred societal aspect, a God-chosen power. The nature of the Russian people conceives of itself as something ascetical, shunning earthly deeds and earthly blessings.

The Russian people seems to desire not so much a free state and freedom within the state as freedom from the state, freedom from concerns about the world order. The Russian people does not want to be a masculine builder, its nature defines itself as feminine, passive, and submissive in matters of state, it always awaits a bridegroom, a man, a ruler [...].

The state authority has always been an external, not an inward, principle for the non-statist Russian people; it was not created by it but rather came as if from the outside, like a bridegroom to his bride.

It is very characteristic that in Russian history there has been no period of knightly chivalry, that masculine principle. Bound up with this is the insufficient development of the personal principle in Russian life. The Russian people has always loved to live in the warmth of the collective, as if dissolved back into the element of earth, into the bosom of the mother. Knightly chivalry forges a sense of personal worth and honour, it brings to life the tempering of the person. This personal tempering has not been invented over the span of Russian history. In Russian man there is softness, in the Russian face there is no sharply distinct profile [...].

The Russian non-statism is not a conquering of freedom for itself but rather a surrendering of itself, a freedom from activity (Berdyayev, 1918).

However, Berdyayev notes that there is also an antithesis:

Russia is the most statist and bureaucratically cumbersome country in the world, where everything is transformed into a political tool. The Russian people has forged the mightiest state in the world, the sublime empire [...].

The powers of the people, which is quite pertinently believed to be striving for an inner spiritual life, is surrendered to the colossus of the state transforming everything into its tool. The interests of building, supporting, and guarding the state occupy a completely exceptional and towering place in Russian history. The Russian people has almost no strength left for a free creative life, with all its blood gone for bolstering and defending the state [...].

The person has been smothered by the vast dimensions of the state laying down its extravagant demands. The bureaucracy has grown to daunting proportions. Russian statehood [...] has become a self-sufficing abstract principle; it lives its own particular life as a law unto itself reluctant to assume its subordinate function to the life of the people. This peculiarity of Russian history has imposed upon Russian life an imprint of joylessness and smothering. The free play of human creative powers has been impossible [...].

Great sacrifices have been made by the Russian people for the building up of the Russian state, much of its blood has been shed, but it has remained powerless within its immense state. Imperialism is alien to the Russian people in the Western and bourgeois sense of the word, but it submissively surrendered its powers to the building up of imperialism, in which its heart was disinterested. Herein is hidden the mystery of Russian history and the Russian soul. No sort of philosophy of history, whether Slavophil or Westerniser, has yet solved the enigma why the most stateless people has created such an immense and mighty state, why so anarchist a people is so submissive to bureaucracy, and why such a free-spirited people does not seem to desire a life of freedom. This mystery is bound up with the relationship of the feminine and masculine principles in the character of the Russian people. This antinomic aspect occurs throughout the entire Russian life (Berdyayev, 1918).

No less contradictory, mutually exclusive, and controversial is Berdyayev's reasoning about the attitude of Russians to the question of ethnicity:

Russia is the most unchauvenistic land in the world. For us, nationalism always produces an impression of something non-Russian, imposed, something outlandish. By and large, the Germans, the English, and the French are all chauvinists and nationalists filled with national arrogance and complacency. Russians almost seem ashamed of being Russians; they are alien to national pride and oftentimes – alas! – to national dignity. An aggressive nationalism is altogether uncharacteristic for the Russian people, as is any tendency towards a forceful Russification. The Russian does not come to the fore, does not put on airs, does not despise others. In the Russian element there is some sort of national unselfishness and sacrifice unknown to Western peoples. The Russian intelligentsia has always reacted with disgust towards nationalism and loathed it as something impure. It has professed exclusively supranational ideals. However superficial and banal the cosmopolitan doctrines of the intelligentsia may be, in them, though distortedly, was reflected the supranational and all-humankind spirit of the Russian people. [...] Dostoevsky outright proclaimed that the Russian man is an omniman, that the spirit of Russia is a universal spirit, and that he had a different understanding of Russia's mission from that of nationalists [...].

It is Russia's supra-nationalism and its freedom from nationalism that are national in Russia; in this lies the unique essence of Russia, differing from every other land in the world. Russia is destined to be a liberator of peoples. This mission is anchored in its unique spirit [...].

Russia is the most nationalistic land in the world, a land of unseen excesses of nationalism, oppression of subservient nationalities by Russification,

a land of national boasting, a land in which everything is nationalised right up to the universal Church of Christ, a land considering itself to be the only God-chosen one and spurning all of Europe as rot and the devil's brood consigned to perdition [...].

The most humble is also the greatest, the mightiest, and the only God-chosen one. 'Russian' is the embodiment of that what is right, good, true, and godly. Russia is the 'holy Rus'. Russia is sinful, but in its sinfulness it remains a holy land – a land of saints living by the ideals of sanctity. V. Solovyov ridiculed the assuredness of the Russian national self-conceit in imagining that all the saints spoke Russian. That same Dostoevsky, who preached the omniman and appealed to the universal spirit, also preached the most rabid nationalism, badgered the Polish and the Jews, and denied that the West had any right to be considered a Christian world. The Russian self-conceit always finds expression in Russia's considering itself not only the most Christian but also the sole Christian land in the world. [...] Russia, destined in its spirit to be a liberator of peoples, has been an oppressor all too often, therefore evoking hostility and suspicion towards itself, which we now have to surmount (Berdyayev, 1918).

And a few words about the church:

Russian history presents quite exceptional a spectacle with the total nationalisation of the Church of Christ, which defines itself as universal. Clerical nationalism is an innately Russian phenomenon. Our Old Ritualism is heavily steeped in it. However, the same nationalism reigns also within the ruling church. The same nationalism also pervades the Slavophil ideology, which has always substituted the Russian for the universal. The universal spirit of Christ, the masculine universal Logos has been made captive by the feminine national element, by the Russian soil in its pagan lineage. There was thus formed a religion of dissolving away into the mother's loving embrace, into the collective national element, into the living warmth. Russian religiosity is a feminine religiosity – a religiosity of collective biological warmth experienced as a mystical warmth. Weakly developed within it is the personal religious principle; it is afraid to emerge from out of the collective warmth into the cold and fire of personal religiosity [...] Russia is a God-bearing land [...] The Russian people are mostly lazy in their religious ascent, with its religiosity being of the plains, not of the heights; collective humility comes to it easier than the religious tempering of a person, than sacrificing the warmth and comfort of the national elemental lifestyle. For their humility, the Russian people receive in reward this comfort and warmth of collective life. Such is the popular groundwork for the nationalisation of the church in Russia (Berdyayev, 1918).

Now there are some conclusions and, as always, they are playing 'both sides of the fence' in the truly Muscovite manner:

The same enigmatic antinomy can be traced throughout everything in Russia. There can be established an innumerable quantity of theses and antitheses concerning the Russian national character, and many a contradiction within the Russian soul can be reveal. Russia is a land of boundless freedom of spirit, a land of wandering and search for the truth of God. Russia is the most non-bourgeois land in the world; it does not have the deep-rooted philistinism, which so repulses and repels Russians in the West. Dostoevsky, from whom one can learn much of the soul of Russia, in his disconcerting Legend about the Grand Inquisitor, was a proponent of so bold and boundless freedom in Christ, such as no one ever yet in the world was impelled to affirm. The affirmation of the freedom of spirit as something characteristically Russian has always been an essential trait of Slavophilism. The Slavophiles and Dostoevsky always match the inward freedom of the Russian people, its organic religious freedom, which it will not give up for any worldly blessing, with the inward non-freedom of the Western peoples, their enslavement to the external. The Russian people truly possess the freedom of spirit, give only to him who is not too consumed by the thirst for earthly gain or worldly felicity. Russia is a land of essential freedom, unknown to the advanced peoples of the West, with their reinforced philistine norms. Only within Russia is there not that grip of bourgeois conventions, the despotism of the philistine family. The Russian man with great ease surmounts all kinds of bourgeoisness, he can escape from everyday life and standardised existence. The role of a wanderer is so intrinsic to Russia and so beautiful. The wanderer is the freest man in the world. He walks the earth, but his element is the air, he has no roots into the earth, in him there is no earthliness. The wanderer is freed of the 'world' and all of its burdens; for him, earthly life is reduced to a small knapsack upon the shoulders. The grandeur of the Russian people and its vocation towards a higher life is concentrated within the wanderer character. The latter has found its expression not only in the life of the people but also within cultural life, within the life of the finest part of the intelligentsia. Here, too, we know of wanderers, free in spirit, and attached to nothing, eternal pilgrims, seeking after the unseen city [...].

And here is also an antithesis. Russia is a land of unprecedented servility and horrid abasement, a land, lacking in the awareness of the rights of the person and not defending the dignity of the person, a land of inert conservatism, of the enslavement of religious life by the state, a land of robust family life and hard flesh. [...] It is next to impossible to get Russia budge

from its spot since it is so ponderous, so inert, so lackadaisical, so immersed in the material, so submissively reconciled with its life [...] everyone prefers to remain in the lowlands, the flatlands, to be 'like everybody else'. The person everywhere is subjected to the organic collective. Our landed strata are bereft of the sense of rights and even of dignity, they want no self-initiative or activity, and they always trust that others after them will do the same. [...] Russia still remains a land of the depersonalised collective [...]

The turning towards its own soil, towards its own national element in Russia so readily assumes a character of enslavement, leads to immobility, turns into reaction. Russia is like an eligible girl, awaiting a bridegroom, who ought to scale whatever the heights, but there arrives not the intended, but only a German official to dominate her. [...] And though in other lands there might be found all the contradictoriness, but it is only in Russia that a thesis is countermanded by an antithesis, a bureaucratic state is begotten of anarchism, servility comes of freedom, and extreme nationalism is borne out of supranationalism (Berdyayev, 1918).

The only reason why I have made you, dear readers, read Berdyayev's reflections for so long is to help you acquire a better understanding of the psychological portrait of the people with whom we have to coexist at the behest of history. Having acquainted, at least briefly, with Berdyayev's conclusions (and he, as I mentioned above, is only one of many who described the 'mysteries of the Russian soul'), we can see that the psychological traumas and knots tied up during the formative stage of the Muscovite nation have eventually transformed into paranoid ideas of its exceptionalism and permissiveness.

Is it possible to feel safe near the people whose representatives describe themselves as contradictory, dogmatic, joyless, suspicious, barbaric, anarchic, great-power, imperialist, mean, slavish, ignoble, cruel, bifurcated in the worldview, having no dignity, unable and reluctant to arrange their lives, living in a world of dreams and fantasies, not knowing the limits of their existence, both physical and spiritual, and so on and so forth?

To somehow balance such a psychological portrait, there is only one way left – pseudo-philosophical mysticism based on boundless and unfounded fiction. That is when we see the emergence of such ideas as being 'God-chosen' and 'God-bearing', having a 'special spiritual responsibility', 'mysterious Russian soul', 'in Russia you can only believe', 'nation-wanderer', 'nation-liberator', 'feminine and masculine principles' in Russian history, 'the Russian people desires to be of the earth, like a bride awaiting a man', and many other statements devoid of common sense, though no less exotic. One can only imagine what goes on in the heads of ordinary Muscovites if for centuries they have been exposed to such psychological gobbledygook.

It is true that the aforementioned articles were written a century ago, which gives you grounds to object that they are all about a different Russia. Unfortunately, this is not the case. They are about the same Russia, aggressive, imperial, rapacious, cruel, deceitful, and mean. Regrettably, this is not an exhaustive list. The Moscow-led Comintern with its schizophrenic concept of ‘world revolution’, subjugation of ‘national peripheries’ by the Bolsheviks, seizure of the Baltic states before the Soviet-German War, delineation of spheres of influence with the Nazis and partition of Poland, domination over half of Europe after World War II, Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Afghanistan (1980), shooting down of a Korean airliner (1982), Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh – these are just some examples of its aggressive foreign policy in the 20th century.

However, Russia’s policy of internal aggression was the same – famines, gulags, arrogance, and cruelty to the conquered peoples, ‘enlightenment’ and ‘messianism’ that they ascribed to themselves, extermination of national elites, total Russification, and the like.

Has anything changed today? Not at all. Georgia, Crimea, Donbas, Syria, Libya, MH-17, political assassinations abroad and in Russia itself (suffice it to recall the case of Nemtsov), Chechen wars, attempts to shift the responsibility for unleashing World War II to Western countries, interference in the internal affairs of other states through social networks, territorial claims against former Soviet republics as territorial gifts ‘from the Russian people’, etc. This is modern-day Russia.

As far as I am concerned, the quintessence of Russia’s vision of the world, at least under the current political regime, is Putin’s response to a schoolboy about Russia’s borders, which, according to the president, ‘do not end anywhere!’

Centuries go by, but Muscovy and the mentality of its people remain intact. Freedom, human rights, dignity, and well-established life are much lower priorities for Russians and their leaders than the delusive idea of global supremacy and the imposition of their own distorted philosophy of being on others. ‘Deep people’, ‘supreme ruler’, ‘headmost alpha nation’, ‘100 (200? 300?) years of geopolitical solitude’, ‘Russia that will undoubtedly fight wars (war is a means of communication in a sense, too) ... arousing awe and hatred’, ‘headed west for four centuries, Russia took another four-centuries-long pivot to the east but never found its place. Now that both paths are travelled, ideologies of the third way, third type of civilisation, third world, and third Rome will be in high demand’ – all of these lines were penned by V. Surkov, Putin’s assistant and mouthpiece (Surkov, 2019).

As A. Dugin put it in a similar vein, ‘There is something in the very mysticism of Russian history. [...] Putin, like Moses, freed the Russian people from the liberal Egyptian captivity. [...] There is a magic line between the desert and the prom-

ised land, by which I understand the great Russian future...’ (Dugin, 2019); ‘Putin has declared Russia a continent. This is exactly what we had expected for over 30 years – Continent Russia. There is water around it, and beyond it there are other continents – more or less imaginary...’ (Dugin, 2020)

Is it any different from the previous fantasies?

What can be said about the psychological type of such people? Only one answer comes to my mind: They are dangerous for everyone around, particularly for Russia itself.

Why so? Because this is the reason why Russia has not succeeded. It cannot get rid of the chains of its own making. Berdyaev was right in saying that the Muscovite people have lost the opportunity for self-development under the pressure of the state that they had forged through endless conquests. The Muscovites do not succeed because they are afraid of self-identification. They cannot speak out loud about their nationality, of which they are afraid, though living in a multinational state. They have to wear a military *gymnastyorka* instead of a traditional *kosovorotka*, otherwise all other nations in Russia will wear ‘kosovorotkas’ of their own. At that point, however, the great power ideology will instantly fall apart, with Moscow forced to recognise the right of other nations to their identity, history, culture, and, finally, self-determination. The Muscovites have become hostages of their own conquests. They are not Russians, not even ‘Ruthenians’; sooth to say, they are ‘internationalists’ professing a hardcore Russian nationalism and chauvinism. History has nevertheless played a low-down trick on the Muscovites: The more they seized, the less evident their own identity became. Dissolved in Russian conquests, it is now almost completely blurred by ‘all-Russianness’.

As Mikhail Epstein rightly notes, ‘The great tragedy of Russia is that she did not unite herself but was forced to unite by an external force and coercion of the Horde. To overthrow the Horde, Russia absorbed it, girded up the loins and subtly became the Horde herself, taking the form of an alien, Oriental despotic world order and embracing the spirit of nomadism. Instead of developing her own lands, she turned her eyes to foreign ones. And now there is only Russia wandering throughout Eurasia, and everyone can see her from afar, except herself. What is the use of gaining everything but losing yourself?’ (Epstein, 1990)

Therefore, Russia, in the sense of the authentic Muscovite people, has not yet established itself and will not be able to do so until it liberates itself, i.e. allows other enslaved peoples to freely develop. There will be no free Russia and no Russia at all without freedom of the peoples it has enslaved. Here, in fact, lies the ‘mystery’ of Russia and ‘mysterious’ soul of its people. The only chance and prospect for Russia consists in returning to the beginning – to historical Muscovy and self-identification as only one of many peoples inhabiting this land with no additional rights compared to others.

Is it possible? No, it is not. Even after the change of the current Kremlin regime, for the genome of chauvinism, eternal conquest, and supremacy over other peoples is all too firmly entrenched in the psychology of Russians. However, the irony is that the longer Moscow does not return to its roots, the less chance it has for survival. And here is the countdown clock. Widespread poverty, total alcoholism, not even a demographic crisis but real extinction, rising unemployment, and social apathy will result in the degradation of the Muscovite ethnos per se, something the Kremlin officials refuse to understand thus far. They still think that the glue of 'victory frenzy' can hold the last world empire together. How very naive. The USSR proved by its collapse that there could be no 'Soviet people – a new historical community'. This is nonsense, fiction, and nothing similar will ever happen in today's Russia, even with the accelerated militarisation of public thinking and Russification of one and a half hundred peoples once occupied by Moscow. Propaganda also has its limits, and the national consciousness of these peoples is not so easy to destroy.

The only thing that unites Yakuts and Dagestanis, Udmurts and Karelians, Adyghes and Tatars in the modern-day Russian Empire is fear. The fear of the totalitarian system, for which people are only expendables. The smallest slave is afraid of the bigger one, the latter fears the one who is even bigger, and so on up to the topmost, who is also a slave, the slave of the system and surroundings of his own making. In such a terrible psychological reference frame, the Muscovite people have lived throughout their entire history. However, the latest events in some regions of Russia indicate that the fear on which the Russian autocracy has stood for centuries is slowly disappearing, directly challenging the Moscow centre.

The real threat to the Kremlin is also a real, not fictional, federalisation and decentralisation, which will result in an even earlier collapse. The economic independence of Russian regions is a death sentence for the unity of the Russian state, which is well understood in Moscow at the time when some analysts are already talking about a 'grass-roots anticolonial movement' (Degtyanov, 2020)

What do we have in the end? The Russian society, which is not aware of its borders, does not respect the norms of cohabitation with other peoples, despises and fears them at the same time, claims a special role and responsibility in the world and considers itself a 'separate civilisation' that requires special treatment but at the same time seeks to destroy the entire world. Authoritarianism and the prison of the nations, where the Muscovites themselves act both as a guard and a prisoner, is Russia's inside, while world's bogeyman is what lies on the surface. 'The land of slaves, the state of lords!'

Therefore, Russia has not yet established itself as a democratic, liberal, free, and social state, as it cannot and will not do it. All that remains is to intensify repression inside the country and aggression outside. This, however, is an evolutionary dead end and a catalyst for the collapse.

‘The problem is not that Putin embodies “vague geopolitical complexes of the elite.” Those are the vague geopolitical complexes of the people. Putin is not Russia. Everything is much sadder. Putin is the people. Yes, like Hitler. Or did Hitler express ideas alien to the Germans?’ Such a conclusion about modern Russia was made by a former citizen of the USSR P. Mezhuritskyi, who had emigrated to Israel in his time (Piontkovsky, 2020). And it is hard to disagree with him.

Russia’s sad irony lies in the fact that its distorted worldview and invasive centuries-long aggressive policy will ultimately contribute to its future collapse. Russia is devouring itself. When will it happen and what consequences will it bring for humanity?

This will be the subject of the next article.

P.S. As an attentive reader has hopefully noticed, I have cited Russian sources only.