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REFLECTIONS ON RUSCISM

In recent times, the term ‘ruscism’ has been increasingly gaining traction. Several dozens of articles on the subject have emerged. Political scientists and journalists are discussing it. They even go as far as bringing up ‘ruscism studies’.

This makes it especially vital to primarily outline set terminology. Indeed, this would make it easier to go about using this term, while not substituting it with other concepts. In this context, I wish to highlight the positive role of a multitude of international legal instruments, which establish clear-cut characteristics of certain phenomena and enable their effective application during the evaluation of various facts or processes.

The most striking example, in my opinion, is the UN General Assembly resolution 3314 ‘Definition of Aggression’, adopted on 14 December 1974. Article 3 of the resolution outlines a list of acts, recourse to which constitutes aggression. If we were, for example, to compare the characteristics of aggression enshrined in this resolution with the conduct of Russia against Ukraine starting from 2014, we would easily conclude that it has been nothing but aggression. This has an important practical significance for the clear definitions of the resolution enable the state victim of aggression to appeal to international judicial bodies to prosecute the aggressor-state.

Thus, what are the characteristics of ‘ruscism’? Is it an ideology or a practice? Is it merely a manifestation of Russia’s internal political processes or does it extend to its foreign policy? How shall the world respond to such a phenomenon? It is doubtful that a single article can answer all those questions, let alone many tangentially related ones. Nonetheless, we must actively look for those answers.

The first question, which needs an answer, is whether ‘ruscism’ is an ideology. After all, any political action realised by a state towards a certain set goal needs to stand on some ideological foundation. I do not believe that ‘ruscism’ is an exception. The core of this ideology is the concept of the ‘Russian world’. Its main narratives are:

- the separateness of the ‘Russian civilisation’ from the rest of the world: ‘We, the Russian people, are special, incomprehensible to foreigners’;
- the superiority of the ‘Russian civilisation’ over the rest of the world: ‘We, the Russian people, are more spiritual than anyone else; primitive mercantilism is alien to us’;
- the ‘Russian world’ is ubiquitous: wherever a single ‘Russian soul’ is present, so is the ‘Russian world’, as ‘Russia’s borders end nowhere’;

– ‘there are only the great and united russian people’ – there are no Ukrainians and Belarusians; they are made up by foreigners. That is how the denial of the right of Ukrainians and Belarusians to exist works. This is hardly different from the way Nazis denied the right of Jews to exist;

– russia is the ‘country of the victorious’: the 9 May ‘victory frenzy’ has become a crucial unifying ‘bond’. At the same time, the militarisation of the popular conscience is ongoing (even the children’s one within the new ‘Hitlerjugend’);

– russia is surrounded by enemies, which is why the county needs a ‘strong hand’ to ensure order and counter enemy ‘treachery’;

– in achieving its foreign policy objectives, russia is free to employ various methods, including military action.

This list might not be considered comprehensive, yet it already gives a certain picture of the way modern russia perceives the world and its own role therein.

The next question, which should be a matter of research, is how the ideology of ‘ruscism’ is realised in practice. There are two dimensions to this, based on the realms of domestic and foreign policy.

I believe that the following are the key defining characteristics of the ‘practical ruscism’ in russia’s domestic policy:

– suppression of all democratic rights and freedoms of citizens combined with mimicry of a democratic process. We witness typical substitution of terms since, in reality, the democratic institutions in russia are purely formal;

– formation of the ‘cult of the leader’, shaping of the perception of his exceptionality, the ‘undisputable rightness’ of his decisions, and him being the sheer embodiment of the entire country: ‘there is no Russia today if there is no Putin’;

– establishment of such a form of state governance, which is characterised by corporatism and the practice of placing the ‘right’ people in the main positions of power within the government apparatus and large businesses;

– neglecting the economic and social interests of the population’s majority for the sake of ‘russia’s grandeur’;

– reliance on the power and its use to persecute the opposition and ‘dissenters’, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and fear in society;

– implementation of the system of state propaganda and censorship to coerce the population into viewing the situation in the country and the ‘picture of the world’ as the ruling regime desires.

The defining characteristics of ‘ruscism’ in the realm of the foreign policy include:

– total violation, abuse, and manipulation of international law;

– recourse to acts of armed aggression, terrorism, genocide, and other crimes against humanity;

– direct interference in domestic affairs of other countries through the organisation of disinformation campaigns, active propaganda through state-controlled

mass media outlets, bribery of politicians, public figures, and journalists and creating pro-russian opposition from them;

- usage of novel generations of warfare, including cyberattacks;
- protection of authoritarian regimes across the globe;
- nuclear terrorism and so forth.

The next question is how we define regimes with identical or similar characteristics. Looking back at the well-known 14 characteristics of fascism outlined by the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco, as well as the practices of Nazism, we must acknowledge that we speak of fascism. Even such russian experts as Andrey Piontkovsky, Igor Yakovenko, Gleb Pavlovsky, Igor Eidman, and Stanislav Belkovsky further reinforce this understanding.

The chauvinistic, racist, xenophobic, and anti-liberal characteristics of russian fascism and its genocidal practices have been highlighted by such Ukrainian experts as, for example, Oleh Hryniv, Serhii Datsiuk, Anton Drobovych, Oleksandr Kostenko, Ostap Kryvdyk, Petro Oleshchuk, Oleh Romanchuk, and Larysa Yakubova.

Among the few Western analysts [relevant to the subject], I primarily wish to refer to Timothy Snider and his characterisation of russian fascism as ‘schizofascism’. He emphasises that the word ‘ruscism’, produced by Ukrainians, is a more elegant designation for the phenomenon.

It must be stressed, that the ideology of ‘ruscism’ has become acceptable for the overwhelming majority of russia’s population: 80 percent of it has expressed support for the military aggression against Ukraine and the crimes their troops have committed in the temporarily occupied territories. Thus, the narrative advanced by certain western ‘liberals’ that we are solely dealing with ‘putin’s war’ against Ukraine is entirely disingenuous. No, this is the war russians wage for the sake of exterminating Ukraine and its people. This is a textbook example of a genocidal war.

Therefore, even based on this somewhat sketchy analysis, we can already define ‘ruscism’ as the manifestation of a racist, xenophobic, chauvinistic, and populist ideology, which is supported, despite its blatant anti-democratic nature, by the majority of russian population and realised within the aggressive and criminal foreign policy of russia.

‘Ruscism’ is a term equivalent to such concepts as fascism, Nazism, and communism and must be condemned as the ideology and practice of hatred. The term ‘ruscism’ must be enshrined in international legal instruments as a modern equivalent to fascism inherent to russia. The global community must mobilise the anti-ruscism front through building a broad anti-putin coalition. The masterminds behind the ideology of ‘ruscism’ and its perpetrators must stand before a special international tribunal and bear the punishment for their crimes.

The unprovoked cruel aggression of russia against Ukraine has demonstrated to the democratic world that it faces an existential enemy embodied in 'ruscism'. Russia has yet again confirmed that it is not merely an Evil Empire but instead the embodiment of Global Evil. Regime changes within russia do nothing to reform the barbaric, militant, and deeply anti-democratic nature of the russian society. It is pervaded by the ideas of chauvinism and imperialism. Democratic russia is similar to hot snow or dry water. The West has no right to yet again recourse to holding onto the idea of the existence of 'good russians'. According to the results of a poll conducted by the All-russian centre for public opinion research, nearly 60 percent of russians see no benefits in the Western civilisation and democracy. Among those, 26 percent call Western values 'destructive'. Whereas those who support those values constitute – imagine! – as much as 2 percent. With that in mind, can we really 'democratise' that population and only hold putin responsible for russian crimes?

Since russia is a colonial empire, which for centuries has ruthlessly exploited its colonies, while destroying the subjugated peoples, the civilised world must aid those peoples in reclaiming freedom and returning to independent existence. Imperial russia has no right to a future in its current form and borders.

The regulated disintegration of that country, creation, in its territory, of several peace-loving non-nuclear states are our sole chances of averting the nuclear apocalypse. The civilised world must finally acknowledge this and start shaping its secure future.