IMPERIALISM, ETHNICITY AND AUTHORITARIANISM 2000–15

EDITED BY PÅL KOLSTØ AND HELGE BLAKKISRUD

The New Russian Nationalism

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Russia as an anti-liberal European civilisation

Marlene Laruelle

In this chapter I agree with Henry Hale's double argument that Putin has generally avoided making nationalism a central element of his popular appeal, and that the majority of the population has not interpreted Putin as a standard-bearer of nationalism – other, competing political groups are more distinctly associated with the nationalism niche. I share the view that in his third presidential term, marked by a sharp decrease in popular support and the anti-regime protests of 2011/12, Putin has been advancing a conservative value agenda in order to reinforce some of the regime's constituencies and to marginalise the liberals – and the nationalists. However, I challenge the view, advanced in several chapters in this volume, that Putin has suddenly brought nationalism into the picture, despite what is widely said about his 'shift' toward ethnonationalism during the Ukrainian crisis.

I interpret Putin's use of the term *russkii* in his 18 March 2014 speech justifying the annexation of Crimea as simply reflecting what had already become the mainstream use of the term. The term *russkii* is employed in a very blurry way to define both what is Russian by *culture* (and culture has always been more important than ethnicity: Russian culture is *russkaia*, not *rossiiskaia*, even if Gogol is of Ukrainian origin and Vasilii Grossman from a Jewish family) and in relation to the state in general. While *rossiiskii* is still used by those who identify with ethnic minorities to dissociate their ethnic from their civic identity, for most of the 80 per cent of those citizens who are both *russkie* and *rossiiane*,

rossiiskii has a purely official flavour: it is used in speaking about Russia in terms of citizenship, legal system and what pertains to the state as an administration, whereas *russkii* is increasingly associated with 'everything Russian', and therefore also as the Russian state understood in its historical *longue durée*.

Thus, I argue that Putin is merely reproducing the general terminological ambiguity – that of course serves the authorities' line of not taking a definite stance on the national identity of Russia. Further, I hold that if the presidential administration had really shifted toward nationalism, Russia would have been keen to annex Donbas, instead of allowing it to become a secessionist region that has made Putin look like a weak leader incapable of advancing the Russian nationalist cause. Moreover, Putin has continued his strong advocacy for a Eurasian Union with free movement of member-state citizens (and therefore of labour migrants), despite clear expressions of xenophobia in the Russian population. Finally, I maintain that the emphasis on the geopolitical competition with the West over Ukraine – on the status of Sevastopol as the final bulwark of Russian national security on its Western front, and on the need for Russia to react and to stop being humiliated by what it sees as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) advances – are the critical arguments in Putin's 18 March 2014 speech – far beyond the *russkii* nature of Crimea, which arrived only as a supplementary bonus. The massive support given by Russian public opinion – including ethnic minorities, as Mikhail Alexseev notes in his chapter – to this annexation confirms that the general consensus is founded on geopolitical/civilisational readings of Russia's relations with the West, not on the ethnic, *russkii*, nature of the annexation.

In this chapter, I develop an alternate reading of the Russian state's use of motives pertaining to the repertoire too often identified as that of 'nationalism', and offer some tools that I consider more heuristic. One of them involves examining how the Kremlin promotes Russia as the torchbearer of an anti-liberal Europe. In March 2000, Putin declared to the BBC: 'Russia is part of the European culture. And I cannot imagine my own country in isolation from Europe and what we often call the civilised world. So it is hard for me to visualise NATO as an enemy' (BBC 2000).

Read after the Ukrainian crisis that started in 2014, Putin's declarations would seem to belong to another historical era, one that is now closed. However, the gap is not solely temporal, nor can it be explained only in terms of the circumvolutions of relations between Russia and 'the West'. Other analytical tools are needed to understand how the Russian authorities 'situate' their country. In this chapter I seek to untangle the apparent contradiction between the claim that Russia is a European country and that it has an anti-Western destiny.

Any attempt to delineate the Kremlin's use of ideological tools necessitates certain precautions and theoretical explanations. As used to define the Soviet regime, the term 'ideology' is often equated with Marxist-Leninist doctrine, taught as a profession of strict faith. However, here we must distinguish clearly between ideology and doctrine. By 'doctrine' I understand a body of teachings or positions that are codified into a logical whole, and promulgated to a group of people or to a country's citizens (hence the related term of 'indoctrination'). By 'ideology' I understand a comprehensive vision of the world, a way of interpreting what is normative in a society. Paul James and Manfred Steger (2013: 23) define ideologies as 'patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations. These conceptual maps help people navigate the complexity of their political universe and carry claims to social truth.'

To avoid the catch-all nature of the concept of ideology, especially in the Russian context, I employ three additional concepts. The first is that of 'grammar', which comes from French sociology and is used to describe the overarching frameworks of legitimacy through which individuals, collectivities and states apprehend the world. The second is that of 'ideological posture', which designates an approach or an attitude embedded in broad terms and scattered perceptions, and that offers a certain degree of normativity. The third is political 'declensions', which defines the more precise state-run policies that aim to set the public agenda in terms of values, principles and behavioural standards.

I argue that the Russian state chooses from among three possible *civilisational grammars* and has built an *ideological posture* – 'conservatism' – that has materialised in several *political*

'declensions', but without resulting in the promulgation of a *doctrine*. In the conclusion, I turn to the topic that is the focus of this edited volume – nationalism – and explain the linkages between my analysis and the broader debate on Russian nationalism.

Russia's triple 'civilisational grammar': Europe, the West, and the rest

Since at least the eighteenth century, Russian intellectuals and official circles have used a civilisational grammar to define Russia's identity and place in the world, debating their country's belonging to several possible 'civilisations'. The terms of the identity debate as they have been formulated historically to date are not binary – Europe versus non-Europe, the West or the rest – but *trinary*. In the Russian view, there is a triple choice of identity: being a European country that follows the Western path of development; being a European country that follows a non-Western path of development; or being a non-European country. Defining Russia as belonging to a 'civilisation' is always made in relation to Europe as the yardstick, never to Asia.

In Russian, as in other languages, the idea of the 'Occident' or the 'West' (*Zapad*) easily overlaps in everyday speech with that of Europe (*Evropa*). In the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals wrestled with whether their country ought to follow a Western model of civilisation or develop a specific path, variously identified with Slavophile/Pan-Slavic or Byzantine-inspired terminology – the former terms see the people as the core of the nation's legitimacy; the latter emphasises the dynastic power and autocratic structure of the state (Walicki 1989; Engelstein 2009). In this debate, Westerners were defined as *zapadniki*. The call was for Russia to become part of the Occident/*Zapad*, but not *Europe*. Indeed, all nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals apprehended Russia as being part of Europe as a civilisation, understanding by that term above all their shared Christian roots and faith. Even the anti-*zapadniki*, who contested Russia's need to follow a Western path of development, agreed that Russia was part of European civilisation. According to them, Western Europe represented only one way of understanding European

identity, while Russia offered another interpretation of a shared European legacy. This division has been anchored in the history of Christianity: one root, two traditions – Catholic (and later Protestant) and Orthodox; and two empires – the Roman and the Byzantine (Thaden 1990; Billington 2004).

For all Russian intellectuals, *zapadniki* as well as anti-*zapadniki*, Russia had to be understood, since its domination by the Golden Horde, as the outpost of European/Christian civilisation against the Asian/non-Christian world. For the *zapadniki*, this destiny was a drama, a burden that had 'retarded' Russia's progress as compared with its European neighbours; for the anti-*zapadniki*, it was a chance, a blessing that had enabled Russia to maintain a Byzantine interpretation of Europe. Although Russia was defined as being at the borders of Europe, all participants in the debate considered it as being *in* Europe. The rapid extension of the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century did not structurally modify this definition, since all the major European powers were pursuing colonial policies of conquest of other territories. On the contrary, Russia's territorial continuity with its colonies was one more argument for the 'naturalness' of Russia's civilising mission of bringing European enlightenment to Asia (Hauner 1992; Layton 1994; Gorshenina 2014). It was only in the last third of the nineteenth century that certain intellectuals, mainly Orientalists by training and figures from the artistic world who sought non-conformism, began to interpret Russia's geography as shaping its identity (Tolz 2011; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2001). For them, and more clearly for their successors in the 1920s and 1930s, the Eurasianists, Russia was part of neither Europe nor Asia: it was a third continent, endowed with its own identity and destiny (Laruelle 1999). These intellectuals were the first to break with the binary tradition of Russia's civilisational grammar.

This brief historical detour helps to explain how the debate is being shaped today, and why it is misleading to represent Putin or other state officials as having an 'inconsistent' narrative about Russia's relationship to the West. Indeed, what is striking is the almost-perfect reproduction of the nineteenth-century debate in today's terms. Among the three civilisational grammars offered to

Russia for understanding its path after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first one – Russia as a European country that would follow a Western path – was supported by the Kremlin only briefly, from the final years of perestroika – with Mikhail Gorbachev calling for Russia to rejoin the 'common European home' and to become a 'normal' (that is, Western) country – to the early/mid-1990s (Malcolm 1989). With the clash between Boris Eltsin and the Supreme Soviet in October 1993, the amnesty for supporters of the latter and the resignation of Egor Gaidar, father of the 'shock therapy', in 1994, and that of Andrei Kozyrev, promoter of Russian total alignment with Western geopolitical interests, in 1996, the 'path to the West' was partly closed (Shevtsova 1999). It did not disappear from the state language, but became intermittent, visible mostly in economic and financial policies, around ministers Boris Nemtsov or Aleksei Kudrin, among others.

The third grammar is that of a non-European destiny – understood in the sense promoted by the founding fathers of Eurasianism, as seeking Russia's growing identification with Asia and complete rejection of Europe as a civilisation. Eurasianism emerged in the interwar period among Russian émigrés trying to cope with the catharsis of the 1917 Revolution and hoping to construct a structured ideology of Russian uniqueness based on its distinct Euro-Asian territory and the common destiny of its people. It was developed, with similar arguments, by Lev Gumilev in the 1960s–1980s before becoming a main doctrine of all those opposed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eltsin's 'turn' to the West (Laruelle 2008).

This Eurasianist choice has not been particularly attractive to the elites in power, and has had success only on the margins. The few who see Russia as having an Asian destiny, such as Mikhail Titarenko, director of the Institute of the Far East in Moscow, and partisans of Russia following the Chinese model, have attracted very few disciples within the Kremlin (Rangsimaporn 2006; Laruelle 2012a). Proponents of Russia's destiny as being 'Eurasian', such as the prolific and vocal geopolitician Aleksandr Dugin, take care not to promote an Asian destiny for the country, and by no means exalt China or Japan, or the Asia-Pacific in general (Laruelle 2008). They also remain ambivalent as to cul-

tural mixing between 'Russians' and other 'Eurasian' people from Central Asia and the South Caucasus: while they celebrate Islam as a geopolitical weapon for opposing Western values, they do not favour mixed marriages, for instance. Indeed, they laud the ability of Russia/Eurasia to conserve its hermetically sealed ethnic identities, with all of them living in peace together but without mixing.[1] This third grammar, the non-European one, seems an identity deadlock, not least given the growing xenophobia towards labour migrants in Russian society (Levada Centre 2013a: 154–9). China can be apprehended as Russia's geopolitical ally against the West (Trenin 2012), but any closer integration with Asian countries or with the southern republics of Central Asia and South Caucasus would be rejected by an overwhelming majority of Russians.

Supporting the first grammar means that one is identified with the political opposition to Putin's regime. This opposition can be embodied by the old generation of liberals, who are totally discredited, or by the new 'Bolotnaia' generation. This name was given to those who protested against Putin in the winter of 2011/12, mostly from the middle and upper classes, and whose liberal claims were in large part based on values like dignity, respect and ethics (Sakwa 2014). This grammar is also promoted by the 'national democrats', who urge Russia to follow a Western path of development but with elements of anti-liberalism in terms of defence of ethnic identities and rejection of diversity (see Kolstø, this volume).

Unlike the first grammar, the third one is not viewed by the regime as a political threat, as it does not challenge Putin's legitimacy. That said, it would be mistaken to believe that the first and the third grammars have hermetically sealed borders and never interact with the regime. For instance, the links between Igor Iurgens' think tank INSOR (see below) and Dmitrii Medvedev during his presidency reveal the presence of influential people with liberal views (in the economic and political senses) among elites, especially in the private sector. The same goes for the third grammar: the Institute of the Far East has gained support from military circles that regard China as a model, and chameleon personalities like Dugin flirt with many Kremlin-sponsored lobbies. Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii is close to the

Eurasianists and does not consider Russia as being part of Europe (Lipman 2014). The links between the second and third grammars are also facilitated by a specific terminological fluidity. Both use the concept of 'Eurasia' to describe two diverging projects, an ambiguity present already in the founding Eurasianist ideology (Laruelle 2008).

The gradual elaboration of an ideological state posture

It is from within the second grammar – of a European but anti-Western Russia – that the Kremlin expresses itself. The choice has not been elaborated overnight. More than a decade passed before it took on the shape it has today. This slow process of maturation can be explained by the legacy of the Soviet decades, when everything related to 'ideology' was exclusively assimilated to the official doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. But it is also a product of the perestroika years, when ideological conflicts between liberals and communists led to the division of the country and to the spectre of civil war, symbolised by the bloody conflict over the Supreme Soviet of October 1993. The Kremlin thus slowly got involved in the rebuilding of an ideological posture. In the first phase, it denied any state need for an ideology, claiming instead to be operating in a purely pragmatic manner. In the second phase, the Kremlin recognised that there existed many possible opinions within the presidential party, guided by a vague ideological posture that was rapidly identified as conservatism. In the third phase, this posture became structured into several 'declensions', embodied by more authoritative public policies.

Phase 1: Political centrism as the new state posture, 1994–2004

The first phase unfolded during the second half of the 1990s, when the failure of the first option for Russia – following a Western path of development – opened a new space of expression for political figures representing 'patriotic centrism'. The term 'centrism' is crucial here, because it explains how the Kremlin has positioned itself, rejecting what it sees as two dangerous extremes,

the 'liberal' and the 'communist', deemed equally incapable of bringing positive solutions to Russia's crisis (Laruelle 2009a: 120–33). As early as in 1994, the Kremlin sought to avoid the allegedly 'liberal' versus 'communist' polarisation that engendered the violence between the Supreme Soviet and the president. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in May 1995 offered an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of national sentiment and to glorify Russia's prestigious past.[2] But as early as in February 1994, the State Duma granted amnesty to the August 1991 putsch-planners and the October 1993 insurgents, thereby enabling figures like Ruslan Khasbulatov and Aleksandr Rutskoi to reintegrate into the political arena.

Once re-elected to a second term in 1996, Boris Eltsin immediately set about promoting Russian national identity and quickly lifted the ideological ban imposed on patriotic themes. He raised the possibility of forming a new national ideal: 'There were different periods in Russia's 20th-century history – monarchy, totalitarianism, perestroika, and the democratic path of development. Each era had its ideology. We do not have one' (quoted in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* 1996). Further: 'The most important thing for Russia is the search for a national idea, a national ideology' (ibid.). From 1994 to 1996, several foreign observers, among them Fiona Hill (1998), noted a massive return to debates about the idea of great power (*derzhavnost'*), particularly in the press. In the second half of the 1990s three key figures embodied this move toward 'patriotic centrism': Moscow Mayor Iurii Luzhkov; former presidential candidate, Governor of Krasnoyarsk Aleksandr Lebed; and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov. All three called for Russia to preserve its strategic interests in its 'near abroad' without returning to a Soviet or to an imperial logic; to develop a distinct stance in the international arena without reverting to Cold War patterns of confrontation with the West; and to restructure itself domestically by reaffirming the role of central power without re-creating an ideology-based regime (Laruelle 2009a).

Putin's first mandate was a direct product of this evolution, which occurred in the final years of Eltsin's reign. The new president was able to consolidate vertical power structures, and to

rebuild Russia's image abroad. The birth of the pro-presidential party United Russia 'kidnapped' the electoral niche and ideological orientation of the Primakov–Luzhkov bloc, Fatherland–All Russia, which presented itself as the 'party of governors', made up of regional elites, industrial groups and major financial groups, as well as members of the security services, all of whom would later constitute the backbone of Putin's power (Sakwa 2008; Soldatov and Borogan 2011; Dawisha 2014). This first 'patriotic centrism' was largely empty of ideological content, except for calling for Russia's stabilisation and revival. Putin cast himself as a-ideological, claiming to be working solely in line with technocratic objectives (Hanson 2003). In 2003 the authorities discussed the creation of a Council for National Ideology (*Sovet po natsional'noi ideologii*) to be convened by major intellectual and cultural figures, but the project never led to anything concrete, and it aroused little enthusiasm within the state bodies (Prochat v glavy . . . 2003).

Phase 2: Structuring an ideological state posture, 2004–12

The second period covers the years of Putin's second term and Medvedev's term (2004–12). This chronological division may seem paradoxical, as Medvedev's term is conventionally described as separate from Putin's terms. However, both are part of the same era during which the Russian state structured an ideological posture, and increased cooperation with some non-state actors that influenced the 'content' of this posture, such as the Moscow Patriarchate.

The a-ideological narrative of the Russian authorities found itself challenged by the 'colour revolutions', especially the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. While references to liberalism and the Western model have become intermittent in the public arena after the Eltsin-era failures, the return of political contestation in the name of democracy in the 'near abroad' induced the Kremlin to react (Laruelle 2012b). Moreover, on the domestic scene, the authorities also had to face up to the large popular demonstrations of 2005, which took the regime by surprise and showed that social contestation was still possible.[3] Just as unexpected was the

dissidence of the Rodina party, led by Dmitrii Rogozin – especially as it had been created with the support of the presidential administration, and the Kremlin therefore had expected it to show total loyalty (Laruelle 2009a: 102–17). United Russia thus understood that a space of political contestation existed, not only in the so-called liberal camp, but also to its left, a space where the focus was on topics of a more nationalist and socialist nature. If the presidential party wanted to leave its stamp on Russian political life for the coming decade, it would no longer be able to limit itself to glorifying the president's person: it would have to formulate a more coherent ideological posture.

However, this strategy was far from unanimously accepted within Putin's inner circle, or within United Russia and the government elites more broadly. In 2006, the publication of a book by Aleksei Chadaev titled *Putin: His Ideology* provoked a stir within the presidential administration (see Chadaev 2006). While some supported the move toward recognising the need for an ideology, other figures did not hide their lack of enthusiasm for the idea itself.

The contentious figure of Vladislav Surkov, Putin's long-time *eminence grise* – a former deputy head of the presidential administration, later deputy prime minister and then assistant to the president on foreign affairs – embodies this paradoxical attitude of the state elites toward ideology. Surkov was the main architect of both the ideologisation and the 'packaging' of the Putin regime: he supplied it with its most refined tools, inspired by marketing and public relations techniques from the private sector. He initiated new concepts such as 'sovereign democracy' (*suverennaia demokratiia*) to define Russia's position on the world stage and the nature of its regime (Okara 2007). He followed the example of Gleb Pavlovskii in launching numerous media platforms, especially online portals and a news agency. Among other things, he organised the pro-presidential youth movement Nashi, and was involved in the creation of A Just Russia (*Spravedlivaia Rossiia*) as a loyalist centre-left social alternative to United Russia. Surkov's vision of Russia's role in the world is one of Russia embracing globalisation by creating a specific Russian 'brand' or 'voice' that would make the country an attractive great power, with

an economy on its way to modernisation, strengthened by soft-power tools. Surkov has been highly critical of those who look back to the Soviet experience and those who feel attracted by a Eurasian or Asian destiny for Russia. Instead, he stresses the need for Russian national identity to look forward and to identify as a 'second Europe' (Surkov 2010; see also Sakwa 2011b).

The question of ideology again took centre-stage during the presidential elections of March 2008 and the transfer of power from Putin and Medvedev. During the December 2007 legislative elections, Putin made a point of criticising United Russia for its lack of ideology: 'Has United Russia proven to be an ideal political structure? Quite obviously not. It has no formed ideology, no principles for which the majority of its members would be ready to do battle and to stake its authority' (Putin 2007b). The establishment of a Putin/Medvedev diarchy (*dvoevlastie*) in 2008 expanded the space for greater ideological content inside the presidential party itself.

Party wings had begun to take shape from 2005 on, but they first became institutionalised under Medvedev. The liberal wing, led by Vladimir Pligin and Valerii Fadeev, includes several figures who began their political careers in the Union of Right Forces before rallying behind United Russia. This wing has been close to the magazine *Ekspert*. Its club, the Club of 4 November, wanted the Kremlin to prioritise the monetisation of social benefits, promote private property and private entrepreneurship and reduce the role of the security services in Russia's political and economic life. By contrast, the conservative wing and its think tank, the Centre for Social Conservative Policy, calls for Russia to develop a policy giving priority to the state in the economy, and underscores Russia's Soviet great-power legacy and the need for national pride in 'Russianness' (Laruelle 2009b).

Outside of the presidential party, Medvedev authorised more provocative ideological trends, like that represented by the Institute for Modern Development (INSOR), which advocates Russia's return to a Western path. Led by Igor Iurgens, a prominent lobbyist in the investment and insurance sector, INSOR quickly became Medvedev's spearhead for the narrative of 'modernisation' (Smith 2010). The institute has published several

scandal-creating reports, asserting the need for Russia to make far-reaching reforms not only of its economy but also of its political regime, questioning the usefulness of regional bodies like the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) for promoting Russia's role in its 'near abroad', and openly debating possible Russian membership in NATO (Iurgens 2011a, 2011b; see also Aragonés 2010). The real value of INSOR was probably not so much connected to developing concrete policy recommendations, as to opening new spaces for discussion, analyse reactions from public opinion and various interests groups, and foster the formation of a 'modernisation' lobby.

Phase 3: Conservatism as the official state posture, 2011–

The third phase began with the announcement, in September 2011, that Medvedev and Putin would be swapping roles as president and prime minister. The fact that Medvedev's presidency ended with the first massive anti-Putin protests, which took place in the winter of 2011/12, and the birth of the Bolotnaia movement, which re-introduced liberal voices in the public space (albeit only the opposition one), contributed to closing the space for ideological pluralism that was then flourishing inside the establishment (Robertson 2013; Greene 2013).

In these three discernible phases in the Kremlin's structuring of an ideological posture, the terminology was chosen relatively early: that of conservatism. In the mid-1990s, the authorities did not use this term widely, as they were still framing their position in terms of centrism against the two 'extremes'. From 1999 on, the site of the Unity Party, the direct precursor to United Russia, contained a rubric called 'Our Ideology', which made reference to conservatism. The director of the Centre for Development of Programmatic Documents of the Unity Party, German Moro, a recognised researcher on conservative theories, saw in conservatism the 'only system of ideas capable of saving Russia'. He defined it as a way of thinking that 'is based on eternal social and moral values: respect for one's own tradition, trust in the tradition of one's forefathers, and priority given to the interests of society'

(quoted in Popov 2006). In 2000, Putin himself drew an explicit parallel between Russia's need to share common moral values and the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism (*Moral'nyi kodeks stroitelia kommunizma*) – the 'twelve commandments' that had been introduced by the Communist Party in 1961 in hopes of strengthening the morality of citizens – thereby permitting himself a positive reference to the doctrinal strictness of the Soviet regime (Putin 2000).

In 2007, as debates were taking place on the necessity to institutionalise wings inside the presidential party, Boris Gryzlov, then Chairman of the State Duma, intervened in order to clarify United Russia's viewpoint. The party, he declared, has only one ideology: 'social conservatism' (Gryzlov 2007). By this term, Gryzlov meant to define the party's centrism as part of the ideological field (opposing both 'extremisms', that of liberalism and that of communism), its pragmatism in economic matters and its desire to dominate the entirety of the political checkerboard. He lambasted the principle of revolution, charged with having caused Russia heavy damage and with slowing down the modernisation of the country, whether during the 1910s and 1920s or during the 1990s. In his view, Russian modernisation can be realised only by a process of gradual reforms, ones that proceed without inducing devastating social effects, without endangering state stability and without borrowing from foreign ideologies, whether Marxism or liberalism. Furthermore, the ideology of the party was, according to Gryzlov, 'the support provided to the middle class and the actions undertaken in the interest of that class, which has no need of a revolution of any kind whether financial, economic, cultural, political, orange [that is, colour revolutions, *ML*], red [communist], brown [fascist] or blue [homosexual]' (Gryzlov 2004).

With Putin's return to power in 2012, the presidential administration moved forward and made this ideological posture official. It set about commissioning works on conservative ideology from several think tanks, tasked with elaborating a certain set of references. The main think tank, the Institute for Social-Economic and Political Research (*Institut sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovanii*) (ISEPI), is headed by Dmitrii Badovskii, a former deputy director of the Department of Domestic Policy of

the Presidential Administration. ISEPI is the main umbrella structure engaged in elaborating ideas of conservatism, and provides grants to smaller institutions and movements. In 2014, ISEPI published an almanac titled *Notebooks on Conservatism* (*Tetradi po konservatizmu*), the aim being to systematise the Kremlin's set of references. The texts are mainly proceedings of the Berdiaevian Lectures, which are organised by ISEPI. Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948), a champion of the 'Russian idea' and an embodiment of Russian religious philosophy of the early twentieth century, is central in references that the Kremlin and its circle of think tanks choose to cite. However, he is overtaken by the very conservative theoretician Ivan Ilin (1883–1954), a monarchist who died in emigration and whose remains have been repatriated back to Russia, the latter with Putin's personal involvement. A third key figure is Konstantin Leontev (1831–91), one of the main proponents of the Byzantine legacy as Russia's political and historical matrix.

Other less important think tanks are also active in this market of ideological production, among them the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (*Fond razvitiia grazhdanskogo obshchestva*) headed by Konstantin Kostin, himself also a former deputy director of the Department of Domestic Policy of the Presidential Administration; the Institute for Priority Regional Projects (*Institut prioritetnykh regional'nykh proektov*) run by Nikolai Mironov; the Agency of Political and Economic Communications (*Agenstvo politicheskikh i ekonomicheskikh kommunikatsii*) headed by Dmitrii Orlov; and the Centre for Political Analysis (*Tsentr politicheskogo analiza*) at ITAR-TASS led by Pavel Danilin (see *Insider* 2014).

This ideological outsourcing has nothing Russia-specific about it, and is rather similar to that in place between the US federal administration and think tanks in the Washington area. The outsourcing appears to be supervised by Viacheslav Volodin, first deputy head of the presidential administration, who is in charge of domestic policy and relations with civil society. It is complemented by the actions and declarations of several political/public figures, whose roles include articulating the official stance: Viacheslav Nikonov, former director of the foundation 'Russian

World', now chair of the Duma Committee on Education; Nataliia Narochnitskaia, director of the Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation, and famed as a promoter of political Orthodoxy; and Elena Mizulina, chair of the Duma Committee on Family, Women, and Children Affairs, and a champion of the Kremlin's morality crusade.

The three political 'declensions' of the state posture

During the third phase, the conservative posture became more elaborated and began to target not only the presidential structure and party, but the broader audience as well. The presidential administration has invested in three categories of political language to give it content: the languages of patriotism, morality and national culture. These 'declensions' are agenda-setters: they result in the implementation of public policies to promote them, accompanied by budget allocations, massive investments in the media and the introduction of new coercive laws to target and sometimes penalise anyone who challenges them.

The first, primordial state language is that of patriotism, defined as 'love of the motherland (*rodina*), devotion to the fatherland (*otechestvo*), and willingness to serve its interests and defend it, up to and including self-sacrifice (*samopozhertvovanie*)' (Gosudarstvennaia programma. . . 2001). By sponsoring patriotism, the Russian authorities hope to 'give a renewed impetus to the spiritual rebirth of the people of Russia. . ., to maintain social stability, to restore the national economy, and to strengthen the defensive capability of the country. . . and to weaken ideological opposition to the state' (ibid.). Criticising the state would put Russia at risk: the citizens are invited to work at dealing with the problems of their country without participating in anti-state activities or criticising the functioning of the state structure. This patriotism was the first object of the state policy of 'revival', with its early stages under Eltsin's second term (1996–2000), and the programmes for 'patriotic education of the Russian citizens', launched by Putin in 2001. This Kremlin-backed patriotism is embodied by the state's investment in theatrical historical

commemorations; the re-introduction of patriotic activities at schools and in extra-curricular activities for children and teenagers; the propaganda to revalorise the military services and the army, granting greater rights to Cossacks, who can form vigilante militia groups to patrol the streets of certain Russian towns; and so on (Nemtsova 2014). However, despite high visibility, this does not necessarily impact on the everyday social practices of the population.[4]

On the foundation of patriotism another ideological content has been erected: that of moral values (*tsennosti*). By morality, the Kremlin understands the respect for 'traditional' values: the heterosexual family (non-recognition of LGBT rights); an emphasis on having children as a basis for individual life but also for the country's demographic health; maintaining a healthy lifestyle (the fight against alcoholism); respect for the elderly and the hierarchy and so forth. This has been concretised in a series of new laws, or draft laws, since 2012: the law against so-called gay propaganda, the anti-blasphemy law in response to the Pussy Riot trial, the Internet restriction bill in the name of child protection, the ban on obscene language in the cinema, books and music, and others. In addition have come new state policies on financial benefits for families with two or more children, new draft laws to limit abortion and many public relations actions to promote healthier lifestyles – all with very limited impact.

According to the analyses of Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (2014), the frequency of the term 'morality' (*nravstvennost'*) and of the adjective 'spiritual' (*dukhovnyi*) in Putin's speeches has increased in recent years, especially since 2012. She claims that the Kremlin's attempt to appear as a provider of morality able to fill the ethical void of Russian society is above all a response tactic to the Bolotnaia movement, often qualified as 'ethical protests', as the theme of ethics in politics was central to it. However, the concept of a deficit in spiritual values has been a common narrative in Russia ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and had entered the state language before Bolotnaia. Above all, it is to be found in the Russian Orthodox Church, which has elaborated the pantheon of these moral values and progressively introduced them into the language of the state, in particular through the state

programmes for patriotic education (see Knox 2003; Mitrokhin 2005; Mozgovoi 2005; Fagan 2014).

The third state language is that of celebrating Russia's 'culture', a way to create a cultural consensus in the country and smooth over political tensions. Three major directions of public policy and discourse can be discerned here. The first is that of re-writing history, attempting to promote a single reading of the pivotal events of Russian history. As part of this, Russia's Historical Society, led by Sergei Naryshkin, Chairman of the State Duma, listed twenty 'difficult questions', going from the birth of the first Russian state to the reign of Putin (Rodin 2013). The history re-writing initiative has had some successes with the preparation of a single history textbook for the twentieth century, which ventures to celebrate Stalin and Soviet exploits and reduces the dark chapters concerning the regime,[5] as well as with the attacks on Memorial, which was threatened with closure at the end of 2014 (*Moscow Times* 2014).

The second direction is the progressive officialisation of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is increasingly present at state ceremonies at all levels, and in ever-closer interaction with the structures of the state. Patriarch Kirill has gone so far as to speak of Putin as being a 'miracle of God' (Bryanski 2012), and the World Russian People's Council, which is close to the Church, gave its first award to the Russian president for the preservation of Russia's 'great power statehood' (*Russia beyond the Headlines* 2013). The Church has succeeded in entering the prisons and the army, and has tried, although with greater difficulty, to gain access to the school system.

The third direction is Putin's re-establishment of high-profiled meetings with representatives of the arts and culture (*Ekho Moskvy* 2011), and with descendants of all the great names of Russian literature: Tolstoy, Dostoevskii, Sholokhov, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn (Loginov, M. 2013). Putin is echoed in this by his Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinskii, whose public policies follow this self-glorification of an a-temporal and Russian culture superior to that of Western Europe (Lipman 2014).

Structuring the 'anti-Western European civilisation' narrative

Conservatism as the official state posture is intrinsically linked to Russia's location among the three 'civilisational grammars' discussed above. Indeed, with 'the West' becoming increasingly assimilated to liberalism (political, economic and moral), conservatism is seen as another way of formulating Russia's status as the *other* Europe, the one that does *not* follow the Western path of development. Once again, today's official narratives echo intellectual debates of the nineteenth century – a time when Western Europe was decried for its liberalism, materialism and consumerism, whereas Russia was celebrated for representing authentic European values. Among the traditional umbrella-terms used to define this civilisational path in recent years, the Kremlin did not select the Slavophile narrative, which would be challenging to elaborate on the international arena (no foreign policy could be based on 'Slavic solidarity'), or for domestic consumption (it would promote a too overly ethnocentric definition of the Russian nation). Instead, another set of references was selected and celebrated: that of the Byzantine legacy. In official discourse, multiple parallels were made to Byzantium as an empire; as an autocracy where temporal and secular powers interacted closely; and as a bulwark against the 'West', around the theological notion of '*katechon*' (fortress).[6]

In the statements of Russian officials we can see a clear-cut separation between criticisms of the West and claims about Russia's Europeanness. On several occasions Russian officials have unequivocally supported the thesis of Russia's Europeanness. Speaking in Washington, DC in 2011, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov defined Europe, the United States and the Russian Federation as 'the three pillars and three branches of European civilization' (Lavrov 2011). Several official texts have stressed the common values that Russia shares with Europe: 'Russia's opting for Europe is not a fashion or a result of political circumstance. It is the natural result of several centuries of state and societal development' (*Agitator* . . . 2006: 35).

In the early 2010s, with the polarisation of European public opinion over the issue of LGBT rights, and the Kremlin's use of

the morality language, a broad path opened up for Russia to officialise its status as an 'alternative Europe' by adopting a posture as the saviour of Christian values. This was exemplified by Putin's speech at the Valdai Discussion Club on 20 September 2013, in which he stated:

> Today we need new strategies to preserve our identity in a rapidly changing world, a world that has become more open, transparent, and interdependent . . . For us, questions about who we are and who we want to be are increasingly prominent in our society . . . It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural, and national self-determination . . . We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious, and even sexual. (Putin 2013a)

In nineteenth-century thought, Russia's self-proclaimed mission was to tell Europe, which it deemed to be losing its identity, who it really was. Today, the same vision has been updated – with the Kremlin no longer willing to be a recipient of lessons, but instead intending to be a teacher of the West. The Kremlin has elaborated an ideological language that makes it possible to give meaning to Russia's foreign policy (support to established regimes against street revolutions; attempts to modify UN and European legislation in the name of traditional values and respect for national contexts), to its domestic policy (narrowing of public freedoms in the name of the three 'declensions' of power: patriotism, morality and national culture) and presenting Russia as the anti-liberal force of Europe. In fostering this conservative posture, the Kremlin hopes to cement its power at home while also establishing Russia abroad, by procuring for itself new fellow travellers around Europe and in the United States – in the former, among the circles of populist right-wing parties; and in the latter, among the religious right (Orenstein 2014).

Conclusions

Among the three 'civilisational grammars' available for positioning Russia in relation to Europe, the Kremlin chose the second one – of being a European country that follows a non-Western path of development – already in the second half of the 1990s. Since then, it has been gradually constructing an ideological posture, cemented around the concept of conservatism. This posture has been progressively refined into the three 'declensions', manifest in concrete public policies and new coercive legislation. The conservative posture, and in particular the language of morality, are seen as the way to rehabilitate Russia as the *other* Europe, making it possible to reject Western liberalism while claiming to be the authentic Europe. Within this ideological posture, plurality is maintained, and even the institutionalisation of the three 'declensions' still offers some sort of room for manoeuvre, including many internal disagreements. This limited plurality has prevented the constitution of a doctrine, properly speaking, on such key matters as the relation between Church and state, the definition of a core Russian identity, the relation to the imperial past and current migration policy.

How does the analysis presented in this chapter relate to the broader debate about Russian nationalism? Scholarly debates have tended to overestimate the ideological contents advanced by Russian intellectuals and politicians and underestimate the personal trajectory or the institutional location of these *entrepreneurs* of nationalism. As a result, nationalism becomes a confusing notion employed to define several groups of people or agencies, with different tools for disseminating their ideas, speaking to different constituencies, and with highly diverging agendas (for more on this, see Laruelle 2014a). State representatives, politicians rallying around the regime or in opposition, the clergy, academic or quasi-academic figures, skinhead groups – all these may be encompassed as bearers of 'Russian nationalism', something that does not help in building a relevant interpretative framework.

Taking the state narrative as my focal point, I have sought to encapsulate what is often interpreted as nationalism and show

that it can be construed through different hermeneutical prisms, as with 'ideological grammars'. These grammars address the issue of Russia's identity and place in the world scene. Their political 'declensions' instrumentalise classic topics of 'nationalism', such as glorifying national culture and traditions. However, even if the terminologies used may be the same, these must not be conflated with the 'nationalism' of skinhead groups, or the sophisticated ideological constructions of some intellectuals. Analysing these elements as 'state grammars' enables us to capture better the underlying political dynamics, their actors and their aims, than by using the normative notion of 'nationalism'.

The Kremlin sees this ideological posture as a *function*, so it must be operationalised. It needs to offer a consensus-based vision of Russia's role and destiny, a set of precepts fluid enough to allow flux and reinterpretations, depending on the circumstances, domestically and internationally. Deciding on a specific doctrinal content would reduce the plasticity of this posture, in turn generating new challenges from within the state structure and the elite itself, and requiring a more elaborate coercive apparatus. The Putin regime's ability to maintain social consensus as the country's economic prospects become bleaker will be a crucial test for the Kremlin's ideological posture. It will force a decision on whether to 'freeze' the posture as a flexible and operational tool, or to transform it into a rigid doctrine – with everything that would imply in terms of coercive policies.

Notes

1. Dugin has criticised the old expression 'Scratch a Russian and you will find a Tatar' as a 'pseudo-historical Russophobic myth', which he claims is easy to disprove, as genetic analyses have shown 'little trace of Mongol or Tatar genes among Russians and a dominance of the Slavo-Aryan genetic type' (Dugin 2013: 45).
2. On the cult of the Second World War in Russia, see Tumarkin (1994); Wood (2011: 172–200).
3. The largest social mobilisation the country has known was that of January 2005: the state had decided to replace the benefits in kind (mainly free public transport and medications) traditionally granted to the poorest classes with financial compensation. This monetisation

of social benefits triggered large spontaneous demonstrations from several tens of thousands of persons around the country and forced the Kremlin to reverse its decision.

4. See the special cluster 'Patriotism from Below in Russia' in *Europe–Asia Studies*, 67, 1.
5. There also seems to be an obvious financial interest in offering a unified history textbook to Russian schools (see Becker and Myers 2014).
6. See, for instance, the Byzantine portal Katekhon, <http://www.katehon> (last accessed 12 March 2015), and the anti-liberal think-tank Izborskii Klub, <http://www.dynacon.ru> (last accessed 12 March 2015).