

# The Izborsky Club, or the New Conservative Avant-Garde in Russia

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In August 2014 the Ukrainian crisis was in full swing, and it had become obvious that Russia was behind the secessionist powerbrokers of Donetsk and Lugansk, who were able to hold off the advances of the Ukrainian army only with military support from the Russian regular army. That month seventy-six-year-old Alexander Prokhanov, known in the 1980s by his nickname of “song bird” of the Soviet General Staff, and one of the main supporters of the Novorossiia concept, was filmed aboard a T-95 bomber bearing the emblem of the Izborsky Club.<sup>1</sup> Russia has continued the Soviet tradition of giving airplanes names of famous national figures. This leads to the question of what this Izborsky Club is and how it managed to earn the honor of having one of Russia’s leading military aircraft named after it.

The Izborsky Club argues that the two major catastrophes of twentieth-century Russia—the fall of tsarism in 1917 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991—resulted from the Russian state refusing to recognize a state ideology. According to the Club, the current regime does not have a specific ideology, and it has been unable to turn ideological fragments into a logical whole. The mission of the Club is thus to reopen the “cultural front” and to be “a laboratory where we will elaborate an ideology, an institute to engage in creating a forward-looking theory, a construction site to make an ideological weapon that we will send into combat without delay.”<sup>2</sup> The founding of the Club at the end of 2012 spurred lively debate in the Russian press, with observers, both Russian and foreign, analyzing it as a symbol of the ideological hardening taking place during Vladimir Putin’s third presidential term.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the many debates, there has been no research based on a systematic analysis of sources, nor any attempt to map the Club’s connections to the authorities. In general, works on “Russian nationalism” concentrate on the typologization of doctrines or the

<sup>1</sup>See “Nebesnyi Izborsk,” *Izborsk LiveJournal*, August 16, 2014, <http://izborsk-club.livejournal.com/71006.html>. Unless otherwise indicated, all URLs cited in this article were last accessed on June 23, 2016.

<sup>2</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 10:32, and no. 2:4.

<sup>3</sup>Sergei Gogin, “Izborskii klub: Back in the USSR?,” *Ezhednevnyi zhurnal*, January 9, 2013, <http://www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=12560#>.

individual trajectories of their main theorists, but ignore the issue of institutional location. This article argues that the Club helps to fill a gap because, for the first time, a large group of self-identified nationalists or anti-liberals has united under a single structure with the objective of influencing the authorities. My analysis is founded on reading the Club's journal, *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, which has been published nearly monthly since 2013 (27 issues, ranging from 120 to 160 pages, from January 2013 to August 2015). The journal belongs to the Russian tradition of "thick journals," and carries political articles, literary excerpts, sometimes even poetry, and a rich and sophisticated visual element, reproducing the works of many contemporary artists. I do not cover the books published in the Club's series: many of them either reproduce, slightly transformed, the journal's articles, or are compilation of papers, op-eds, and speeches of the Club's main members, and cover topics such as conspiracy theories, the information war against Russia, Western Russophobia, Russian elite's betrayal, and calls for Russia's revival and reassertion.

In this article I first explore the context of the Club's emergence, and then map its main figures and their connections to higher decision-making circles. Second, I investigate how the Club encapsulates its main ideological precepts—the Red and White reconciliation, the imperial debate, and the economic aspect of Russian "greatpowerness."

## ENCAPSULATING RUSSIA'S IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTIONS

Compared to the many other attempts over two decades of post-Soviet history to create "united fronts" for Russian nationalism, the Club offers a distinct experience. It emerges as a product of a triple context. First, since the mid-2000s the Russian authorities have been actively trying to slow the arrival of Western funding to Russian educational institutions and civil society organizations. With that aim in mind, they progressively refined a policy of public funding to make Russian higher education autonomous from Western financial support and to promote a "patriotically-oriented" civil society.<sup>4</sup> Part of this dynamic also affected the world of think tanks, which has been progressively structured with a range of small discussion groups, both inside and outside the presidential party United Russia and the main government bodies. These think tanks tried to capture public funds at a time when oil revenues were flooding through Russia, but also to occupy the diversified ideological niches that the Medvedev-Putin diarchy opened.<sup>5</sup>

The second context arose out of Putin's third term and its attendant "conservative turn." To counter the liberal Bolotnaya protests of winter 2011–12, the Kremlin positioned itself as a defender of so-called traditional values, which it understood to be the heterosexual family (non-recognition of homosexuality and LGTB rights), with its emphasis on having children not only as a basis of individual life but also for the country's demographic health; maintaining a healthy way of life (fighting against alcoholism); respecting the elderly and

<sup>4</sup>Sarah L. Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia: State-Society Relations in the post-Yeltsin Era," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58:3 (2011): 11–27.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London, 2014). On the birth of the think tank field see Marlene Laruelle, "Inside and Around the Kremlin's Black Box: the New Nationalist Think Tanks in Russia," *Stockholm Papers*, October 2009.

hierarchy, to name just a few.<sup>6</sup> This was concretized in a series of new laws, or draft laws, that have been passed or discussed since 2012: the law against so-called gay propaganda, the anti-blasphemy law in response to the Pussy Riots trial, the Internet restriction bill in the name of child protection, the ban on obscene language on cinema, books, and music, and so on. This also has been accompanied by new financial benefits for families with two or more children, new draft laws that attempt to restrict abortion, and a host of public relations activities to promote healthier ways of life—all of them with a very limited impact. In this context, all references to “conservatism” were welcome and given a new space to express themselves, particularly in the media.

The third setting is the trajectory of Putin’s “eminence grise,” Vladislav Surkov, who resigned from his role as deputy prime minister in May 2013—officially a voluntary move, but he was probably dismissed for having failed to counter the Bolotnaya movement.<sup>7</sup> Surkov played a key role in structuring the public landscape during Putin’s second term and Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency, and in orchestrating many patriotic projects—the Nashi movement to mobilize youth, new concepts such as “sovereign democracy,” and sophisticated media tools.<sup>8</sup> Surkov envisions Russia embracing globalization by creating a specific Russian “brand” or “voice” that would make the country an attractive great power, with an economy on its way to modernization, strengthened by soft power tools. Surkov has been very critical of those who look back to the Soviet experience, or those attracted by a Eurasian or Asian destiny for Russia, claiming instead the need for Russian national identity to look forward and to identify as a “second Europe.”<sup>9</sup>

Surkov’s worldview largely opposes that of the Izborsky Club, which constantly denounces his hidden “Westernism.” Reinforcing these ideological differences are conflicts of personality and strategy. Surkov developed a “divide-and-rule” policy to ensure that all self-proclaimed nationalists would remain instrumental to the Kremlin without threatening Putin’s legitimacy. For instance, Surkov allied himself with Sergey Kurginyan, a former leading nationalist publicist figure from the 1980s and 1990s who now supports the regime. In an interview, Izborsky Club co-founder Vitali Averyanov said that the Club was able to emerge as unified platform for nationalists only after Surkov fell from grace.<sup>10</sup> In 2014 the Ukrainian crisis accentuated tensions between Surkov and the Club. The latter has supported Igor Strelkov and the most radical insurgents, and hoped that Russia would annex Donetsk, Lugansk, and even other regions of eastern Ukraine. Surkov, meanwhile, seems to have been behind the deal, at the end of the spring, to remove the most radical figures of the

<sup>6</sup>Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “The Pussy Riot affair and Putin’s démarche from sovereign democracy to sovereign morality,” *Nationalities Papers* 42:4 (2014): 615–21.

<sup>7</sup>On Bolotnaya see Graeme Robertson, “Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011–2012 in Broader Perspective,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60:2 (2013): 11–23. On Surkov see Lilia Biriukova, Maksim Glinkin, and Maksim Tovkailo, “Surkova mogli uvolit’ za simpatiiu k Bolotnoi,” *Vedomosti*, May 13, 2013, [http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/11931721/surkov\\_poteryal\\_soveschatelnyj\\_golos](http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/11931721/surkov_poteryal_soveschatelnyj_golos), which lists the main possible reasons for his resignation.

<sup>8</sup>See Karen Dawisha, “Vladislav Surkov, 1964–,” in *Russia’s People of Empire: Lives Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Stephen Norris and Willard Sunderland (Bloomington, 2012), 339–49.

<sup>9</sup>See Vladislav Surkov, *Texts* (Moscow, 2010). See also Richard Sakwa, “Surkov: Dark Prince of the Kremlin,” *Open Democracy*, April 7, 2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/richard-sakwa/surkov-dark-prince-of-kremlin>.

<sup>10</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2014, no. 6:86.

insurgency and replace them with local power-brokers in order to transform the insurrection into a more classic frozen secessionist conflict under Moscow's stranglehold.<sup>11</sup>

Born from this triple context, the Izborsky Club hopes to position itself as the new conservative avant-garde. The notion of cultural front that it advances comes obviously from the Soviet past and the Bolshevik tradition of using culture to advance its new values agenda.<sup>12</sup> Yet it also draws inspiration from the German *Kulturkampf* between religious and secular factions in Bismarck's Prussia. It also nurtures the fascination of many Russian nationalist-oriented intellectuals for Gramscian-style theories that hold that to influence the political order and invigorate it with new ideas, the field of culture first must be won. The Club does not hide its pride in having unified different conservative movements around a single platform, a feat that supposedly ended more than two decades of ideological rifts and an institutional inability to mount an organized front. However, as I will explain later, any such success must be understood as relative.

"Nationalist" may not be the most appropriate adjective to employ when describing the Izborsky Club. If nationalism is understood in its bounded version as ethnonationalism, then the Club is not nationalist but imperialist. "Anti-liberal" would probably be a more pertinent designation, because the doctrinal core that unites the Club's many internal trends is a rejection of liberalism in all its forms—political, moral, and economic. This anti-liberal tone comes with a narrative on Russia's uniqueness, hence the overlap with nationalism. The Club claims conservatism as its central ideology, but a conservatism that should not, its members insist, be interpreted as a reactionary or backward-looking doctrine, but rather as a dynamic one seeking to build a new political order, both domestically and internationally, based on "traditional" values. Yet the term is vaguely defined: Which period is to be "conserved"—Stolypin's reforms, Stalin's mobilizing project, or Brezhnev's era and its cultural legacy? Another concept that regularly finds its way into the Club's narrative is "sovereignty," the backbone of the mainstream statist conception. The cover of one of the Club's books, *Putin in the Mirror of the Izborsky Club*, declared, for instance, that "for Russians, the state is a second religion."<sup>13</sup> As Maria Engström has shown, this obsession for stateness and sovereignty is equivalent with the notion of a fortress resistant to external influences, or the *katekhon* as described in Byzantine theology.<sup>14</sup>

Politically the Club is positioned within what one might call the "systemic opposition." I define this term to encompass the movements that support Putin—Alesandr Ageev defines Putin's political mission as a "metaphysical event"—but do not follow the official lines of the government or the presidential party United Russia. The Club criticizes both the president and his party for being too "centrist" in terms of their values, and it would like them to enunciate an official national ideology. It also denounces the Russian government's economic policies as too liberal, calling instead for a more dirigist policy that would reestablish the

<sup>11</sup>Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, "Kremlin 'Grey Cardinal' Surkov's Deal for a 'Donetsk Transdnistria'?" *The Interpreter*, July 9, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/kremlin-grey-cardinal-surkovs-deal-for-a-donetsk-transdnistria/>.

<sup>12</sup>On this see, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>A. Prokhanov et al., *Putin v zerkale Izborskogo kluba* (Moscow, 2014).

<sup>14</sup>Maria Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35:3 (2014): 356–79.

Soviet welfare state and resurrect the state planning apparatus.<sup>15</sup> With certain nuances, the Club thus occupies the ideological space that Gennady Zyuganov's Communist party did at its peak, with the same combination of reference to Holy Russia and such socialist/Soviet economic features as the nationalization of major economic enterprises, the abolition of private property, and the reinstitution of autarkic terms of trade.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most striking features of the Club's ideology is its emphasis on a new great mobilization project for Russia, and the name given to it—the great leap forward (*bol'shoi ryvok*), an unabashed reference to the policies of forced collectivization and rapid industrialization that Communist China pursued between 1958 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> The Club also refers to the major public works policies of the Soviet era, and the atmosphere of permanent ideological mobilization that suffused the Stalin era, desperately trying to make the project Orthodox by putting it in parallel with the Christ's resurrection on Easter.<sup>18</sup> Several of the Club's authors, such as Maksim Kalashnikov, refer to the creation of a new *oprichnina*—Ivan the Terrible's repressive and blood-stained secret police apparatus—to manage this mobilization project. A “lightning development army” (*armiia molnienosnogo razvitiia*) of fifty thousand young men and women, unrestrained by either administrative agencies or the law, would be in charge of a “moral revolution,” a terminology that leaves little doubt about the repressive nature of the project.<sup>19</sup>

## THE CLUB'S IDEOLOGICAL GENESIS AND POLITICAL MAPPING

### THE “RUSSIAN DOCTRINE” AS A GENESIS OF THE CLUB

The Club is the direct heir of a previous initiative, the Center for Dynamic Conservatism, created in 2005 and renamed the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism in 2009.<sup>20</sup> The center became famous for its publication of a collective text, *Serge's Project*—referring to one of Russia's most popular saints, Sergius of Radonezh—also known as the Russian Doctrine.<sup>21</sup> This programmatic text presented itself as the successor to the famous *Vekhi* (*Signposts*) of 1909, a manifesto against the ideology of the radical intelligentsia of early twentieth century, but equally merits comparison with the New American Century project, a doctrine advanced by American neo-conservatives at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> The reference to Sergius of Radonezh confirms the distinctly Orthodox tone of the document, which was presented as a first attempt to theorize Russia's new conservatism.

<sup>15</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2014, no. 3:74, 95.

<sup>16</sup>Luke March, *The Communist Party in Post-Soviet Russia* (Manchester, 2002).

<sup>17</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 1:41.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 2:7.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 1:84, and no. 5:28.

<sup>20</sup>If one enters <http://www.dynacon.ru/> into a browser search window one is automatically taken to “[www.izborsk-club.ru.](http://www.izborsk-club.ru/)”

<sup>21</sup>Sergius of Radonezh, canonized in 1452, is famous for having blessed Dmitri Donskoy before his battle against the Mongols in 1380, which marks the beginning of the liberation of Muscovy from the “Tatar yolk” ([http://www.rusdoctrina.ru.](http://www.rusdoctrina.ru/)).

<sup>22</sup>Published in 1909 with articles by Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Peter Struve, and Semion Frank, *Vekhi* called on the revolutionary intelligentsia to promote the primacy of the spiritual over the material, to

Conceiving of Russia as a specific civilization, whose values are in direct opposition to those of the West, the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism called on the country to fight for its spiritual sovereignty and to recover its strictly Russian (*russkii*)—and not Rossian (*rossiiskii*)—historical traditions such as autocracy, empire, and unity. The Center does not regard its insistence on Orthodox traditions as incompatible with the Soviet heritage since, as it claims, “we consider the borders of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union as holy.”<sup>23</sup> The Institute for Dynamic Conservatism is financed by a foundation called The Russian Entrepreneur, which aims at promoting what it calls “popular diplomacy”; in other words, sparking discussions aimed at the general public about the Russian nation and Russia’s place in the world.<sup>24</sup> To this end the Foundation finances a newspaper of the same name, *Russkii predprinimatel'*, an information agency called RPMonitor, which has a special “Russian World” page dedicated to the media’s treatment of issues linked with Russia’s identity, as well as an internet portal for geopolitics designed to popularize the main arguments of Russian foreign policy in such a way as to “counter the ideological diversions of forces opposed to Russia from developing among youth.”<sup>25</sup>

The Russian Doctrine received significant support from the Moscow Patriarchate, in particular from the Danilov Monastery, known for its conservative positions. Then-Metropolitan Kirill (Patriarch since 2008) presented the programmatic text at the World Russian National Council, and it was also backed by institutions known for their nationalist views, such as the Russian Union of Writers. In 2009 the Foundation set up a project called Decalogue-21 to promote the Ten Commandments among youth as moral ideals impeccably suited to contemporary life and for all Russian citizens, no matter their religious beliefs or affiliations.<sup>26</sup> This initiative is a direct continuation of the logic of the Russian Doctrine: imbue state organs with religious precepts so as to foster order, morality, and patriotism. Though the biblical references may seem extreme, the foundation has nevertheless organized a conference devoted to the Decalogue in partnership with the Patriotic-State Club, one of United Russia’s discussion clubs, in which several high-ranking civil servants have participated, including members of the Duma’s Committee for Youth Affairs.<sup>27</sup>

The Izborsky Club emerged from an encounter between the two founders of the Center for Dynamic Conservatism, Vitali Averyanov and Andrey Kobayakov, and Alexander Prokhanov, chief editor of the Soviet-oriented weekly newspaper *Zavtra*. Since the final years of perestroika, Prokhanov repeatedly has tried to engineer broad coalitions against Western-oriented reforms, for example the National Salvation Front and the People’s

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strive toward a merging of knowledge and faith, and to restore the role of religious philosophy in the intellectual and spiritual development of Russia.

<sup>23</sup>*Rusaskaia doktrina*, <http://www.rusdoctrina.ru/index.php?subject=5> (document no longer available).

<sup>24</sup>The Foundation has no other website than its journal, *Russkii predprinimatel'*, [www.ruspred.ru](http://www.ruspred.ru).

<sup>25</sup>Vitalii Aver'ianov, “Stolknovenie missii,” *Russkii predprinimatel'*, no. 1–2 (2005), <http://www.ruspred.ru/arh/24/spro.php>; and [www.win.ru/about/index.pht](http://www.win.ru/about/index.pht). Some of this information was located at [www.rpmonitor.ru](http://www.rpmonitor.ru), and <http://www.rpmonitor.ru/ru/rum/>, but this website no longer functions.

<sup>26</sup>*Initiativa Dekalog-XXI i problem npravstvennogo vozrozhdeniia rossiiskogo obshchestva* (Moscow, 2008), 27–29.

<sup>27</sup>“Sovmestnoe zadesanie Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskogo kluba partii Edinaia Rossiia i RP-kluba,” *Initiativa Dekalog-XXI*.

Patriotic Union, which backed Zyuganov's 1996 presidential candidacy.<sup>28</sup> After several years devoted mostly to literature—his political novel *Gospodin Geksogen* earned him the prestigious National Best-seller Prize in 2001—Prokhanov returned to political activism, always seeking consensus between the different anti-liberal factions. Averyanov, a member of the Writers' Union and of several secular councils of the Russian Orthodox Church, became one of the best known Orthodox publicists as chief editor of *Pravoslavie.ru*, the most-read Orthodox website. Kobyakov is an economist, chief editor of *Russkii predprinimatel'* and *RPMonitor.ru*, and deputy editor of the journal *Odnako*, which is associated with the television program of the same name hosted by Mikhail Leontev on Channel One. The Center for Dynamic Conservatism merged totally with the Izborsky Club and gave it its web address, *dynacon.ru*.

The Club was thus born by the blending of two ideological traditions. The first, which Prokhanov embodies, can be called "Soviet imperialist"—a broad term that also includes, but is not limited to, the Eurasianists. He gives the Club's journal, *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, its main tone and pathos, and many of its articles are devoted to him as well, revealing at times features akin to a cult of personality. The second tradition, which Averyanov personifies, can be defined as political Orthodoxy. Both overlap on many of their analyses, but offer diverging nuances and tones.

#### THE CLUB'S CORE AND PERIPHERAL CONTRIBUTORS

The Club offers an interesting combination of personalities, individual and collective trajectories, and ideological stances. It can be divided into several concentric circles.

Founding fathers Alexander Prokhanov, Vitali Averyanov, and Andrey Kobyakov lead the Club and shape its overarching doctrinal direction. A second group gathers together major names on the Russian ideological scene: Natalia Narochnitskaya, director of the Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation, and famous promoter of political Orthodoxy; Father Tikhon (Shevkunov), a prominent cleric and best-selling writer, the editor of *Pravoslavie.ru*, and rumored to be Putin's personal confessor; and Leonid Ivashov, a retired general, influential mediator between nationalist circles and the military, and long-time supporter of Alexander Dugin. Three other Club members are leading opinion journalists and media entrepreneurs: Mikhail Leontev has his famous weekly magazine on Channel One, *Odnako*; Maksim Shevchenko, in charge of several broadcasts on Channel One, is known for specializing on ethnocultural and religious issues, especially in the North Caucasus; and Nikolai Starikov, commercial director of Channel One in St. Petersburg, co-chairman of the Great Fatherland party, and publicist.<sup>29</sup> Two famous economists, Sergey Glazyev and Mikhail Deliagin, bring their economic expertise to the Club, and with them a series of lesser known economic experts, all sharing relatively similar statist stances that favor economic dirigisme.

Surrounding the Club's main figures is a third, larger group of core members with different backgrounds. Some are old friends of Prokhanov and regular contributors to

<sup>28</sup>Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist Russia* (Lanham, 1998).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

*Zavtra*, like journalists Vladislav Shurygin and Alexander Nagorny, for instance. For them, the Club offers a new platform for publishing, and they view it as a doctrinal extension of *Zavtra*; often their papers appear first in *Zavtra*, and then are republished in the Club's journal. Others are famous publicists such as the pro-Stalinist writer and novelist Maksim Kalashnikov (his real name is Vladimir Kucherenko); the expert Andrey Fursov, who is a member of the Writers' Union; and the Eurasianist and Fascist geopolitician Alexander Dugin. The latter joined the Club with his own Eurasianist group: Valeri Korovin, who when elected to the Public Chamber in spring 2014 became the first representative of the Eurasianist movement in a state institution; Leonid Savin, editor in chief of the *Geopolitika* website and journal; and Shamil Sultanov, president of a small think tank called the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Center.<sup>30</sup>

A fourth circle is comprised of less prominent figures who are regular contributors to the Club's journal, often directing their own small institutions (see below). A fifth circle of occasional contributors includes specialists from a range of backgrounds who have been invited to one of the Club's seminars or have written a commissioned paper on a specific topic: writers and publicists linked to major literary institutions such as the Writers' Union; academics, often in the hard sciences, from the Academy of Sciences; professors from provincial universities; figures from the art world, mostly film editors; and Orthodox clerics. Last but not least, a sixth circle is comprised of senior official representatives (regional governors, federal district representatives, and presidents of autonomous republics, for instance Yakutia-Sakha and Dagestan), high-ranking military personnel from the Headquarters of the Armed Forces or other military bodies, and CEOs from the military-industrial complex.

#### POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL MAPPING OF THE CLUB

The Club appears to function on a fairly generous budget. The print publications are of very good quality, and the Club launched a book series that since September 2015 has published twenty-four *publitsistika*-type books. Workshops and seminars are numerous: several per month, all listed in each issue of *Izbornskii klub*. The Club's members travel regularly across Russia's regions and sometimes abroad to places judged symbolic for the Club's ideology: in 2013–14 they went to Gaza, Syria, and Transnistria, and in 2015 Prokhanov met for several hours with former Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad.<sup>31</sup>

Prokhanov's long-held connections with the military-industrial complex, and the space given in *Izbornskii klub* to such figures as Yuri Lastochkin, CEO of Rybinskie Motors and Saturn, Russia's largest aeronautical-engine manufacturer, provide some insight as to the possible origins of the funding. Many Club members also seem to have their own small institutions, often very obscure, but which probably generate their own funding. For example,

<sup>30</sup>A biography of each Club's member is available in the special issue of the journal devoted to its first anniversary, *Izbornskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 9.

<sup>31</sup>See the interview with Khalid Mishaal, the Hamas leader, and Prokhanov's article "Slava Khamas!" in *Izbornskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2014, no. 1:85–105; *ibid.*, 2013, no. 3 (for when Prokhanov, Mikhail Leontev, and Maksim Shevchenko met with Bashar El-Assad in Syria); and "Iran nebesnyi i Rossiia nebesnaia," 2015, no. 6:20–41.

Alexandr Ageev leads the Russian Academy of Forecasting; Sergey Bachikov – the International Academy of Corporate Management; Vasili Simchera is president of the bank Senator; Alexander Notin has his own investment fund, Monolit; Mikhail Kazin – his own consulting firm, Neokon; and, finally, Oleg Rozanov is CEO of a network of pharmacies called Metr. This gives us a small window into the largely understudied world of consultancies in Russia.

In terms of political lobbying, the Club is able to draw on some established networks. Prokhanov has maintained connections within the military and security forces dating from the Soviet era. These are still functional, as he demonstrated in August 2014 when he was able to get a Tu-95 bomber based at Engels Air Base, close to Saratov, named after the Izborsky Club and painted with its logo.<sup>32</sup> He cultivates links to the industrial-military complex, too, thanks to which the Club has had several of its meetings at the Aviastar factory in Ulyanovsk, where Tupolevs and Iluyshins are made; at the Energomash factory in Khimki, which builds rockets; and in Uralvagonzavod at the aircraft engine manufacturer Saturn, a famous machine-building company and the largest battle tank manufacturer in the world. Prokhanov also has access to another network, the Rodina party led by Dmitri Rogozin, deputy prime minister in charge of the military-industrial complex. Prokhanov announced a decade ago that he would align with Rodina rather than Zyuganov's Communist party, and this alliance continues to the present.<sup>33</sup> Prokhanov presents himself as one of the main ideologues for Rogozin's political stance and feeds the Rodina's website with many of his analyses.<sup>34</sup>

The Club also draws some of its legitimacy from its contacts with various high-ranking senior officials. Its highest-placed figure, Sergey Glazev, is the presidential adviser for regional integration issues, in charge of supervising the Eurasian Union project. Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky attended the opening ceremony of the Club in September 2012, but while he shares most of its ideological stances, he does not actively participate in its events.<sup>35</sup> In every meeting organized by the Club in Russia's regions, Prokhanov is able to gather all governors and vice-governors, a sign of his deep-rooted connections with regional elites, but also of his ability to promote himself as having the ear of Moscow.

### **THE NEED FOR A UNIFYING METANARRATIVE ... AND ITS PARTIAL FAILURE**

Launched in fall 2012 in the small town of Izborsk, near Pskov, the Club's political identity is reflected in the name it chose. The city was commemorating its 1150-year anniversary—

<sup>32</sup>Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Strategicheskii bombardirovshchik 'Izborskii Klub,'" *Zavtra*, August 21, 2014, <http://zavtra.ru/content/view/strategicheskij-bombardirovshchik-izborskij-klub/>.

<sup>33</sup>On Rodina see Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York, 2009), 102–18.

<sup>34</sup>See, for instance, "Aleksei Zhuravlev i partiia Rodina podderzhivaiut Aleksandra Prokhanova," *Rodina*, November 21, 2014, <http://rodina.ru/novosti/Aleksej-Zhuravlyov-i-partiya-RODINA-podderzhivayut-Aleksandra-Prokhanova>.

<sup>35</sup>"Medinskii vse-taki priekhal v 'Izborskii klub' patriotov i vystupil s zaiavleniem," *Newsru.com*, September 8, 2012, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/08sep2012/medinsky.html>.

a date based on the legendary arrival of Rurik and his brothers in the region—a reason for the Club to celebrate the longevity of Russian statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*). The city is also situated on the western border of the Russian world, meaning it resisted an array of invasions—from Lithuania-Poland in the sixteenth century, Sweden in the seventeenth century, and Germany during the Second World War. This brandishes the two flagship banners of the Club: the historical continuity of Russia, and its fundamental mission as a fortress against Western influences. The Club's powerful argument is to show that these are two sides of the same coin. It is when Russia loses its sense of temporal unity through political change that it becomes vulnerable to external attacks. As stated by Vitali Averyanov, "Russia is one and indivisible not only in space but also in time."<sup>36</sup> The Club's ideological production confirms, if needed, the extent to which the early post-Soviet years were traumatic and remain the emotional frame of reference. In a brilliant leap, the Club proclaims that Russia's major challenge is to "reject the liberal discourses that have dominated since 1991 and according to which Russian history is at a complete impasse, the Russian people and the peoples of our empire are allies of defeat in defeat, our history is only a succession of executioner's blocks and gallows, and our tsars, princes, and leaders are either sadists or degenerates."<sup>37</sup>

#### THE LONG-AWAITED RED-AND-WHITE RECONCILIATION?

Although the Club seems to offer a consensus on anti-liberal principles, its members disagree on many doctrinal issues. Prokhanov's judicious strategy is not to try to solve these differences, but to integrate them into a consensual metanarrative that allows for plurality of opinion within it. Sergey Chernyakhovsky, one of the Club's authors, also insists that the goal "is not a synthesis, but an alliance" between different anti-liberal tendencies.<sup>38</sup> What are these tendencies? Two dominate traditionally: the *red* one, nostalgic for the Soviet past, and especially the Stalinist years; and the *white* one, nostalgic for the prerevolutionary period. This division is anything but new, as it has torn apart dissident circles since the early 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

Prokhanov calls for reconciliation (*primirenie*) between Reds and Whites. "It is necessary to create a state in which, as Putin has said, one can live as a Red commissar or as a White officer."<sup>40</sup> In *Izborskii klub*'s first issue Prokhanov solemnly appealed to all supporters of a strong state (*gosudarstvenniki*): "This [Red-White] fusion means integrating into the state structure and its actions a powerful element of social justice, which is inherited from the Soviet Union, and a return to Orthodox Christian spirituality and the universality of traditional Russia." Symbolizing this rapprochement, the third edition of the journal offered a photomontage with Stalin and Nicholas II posing alongside one another. During

<sup>36</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 3:72.

<sup>37</sup>"Izborskii klub i novaia ideologiya: Replika Aleksandra Prokhanova," *Vesti.ru*, June 21, 2014, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1706416#>.

<sup>38</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 3:86.

<sup>39</sup>See Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

<sup>40</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 1:6.

a trip to Yekaterinburg, during which the Club followed a procession honoring Nicholas II and his family (who were executed there) and visited the nearby Snezhinsk secret nuclear site, Prokhanov advanced the idea of a monument to Red-White reconciliation. It would feature a woman symbolizing the motherland and two soldiers at her feet, one Soviet, one tsarist.<sup>41</sup>

The White-Red reconciliation should be done, in other words, on behalf of the country's sovereignty. Russia should follow "the tradition of the Russian tsars, of the builders of empire, or the tradition of Stalin, of the construction of Soviet civilization, [because] in both cases what is most sacred is the sovereignty of state power."<sup>42</sup> And in order to heal the rift that sundered Red from White in the aftermath of 1917, Prokhanov proposed a smart and ambitious historical "pirouette": "What destroyed tsarism was not Bolshevism, but the liberalism of the February Revolution," a cunning attempt to blame the West for the end of the tsarist system while framing the Soviet Union as the historical extension of imperial Russia.<sup>43</sup> The pages of *Izborskii klub* attempt to illustrate this Red-White reconciliation: Russian churches and monasteries, landscapes traditional for expressing the alleged "Russian soul"—valleys, rivers, and birch forests—alongside Soviet military and industrial symbols. The journal also has republished myriad paintings by Aleksei Belyaev-Gintovt (1965), probably one of the best representatives of the "second modern" style of art in Russia.<sup>44</sup> Belyaev-Gintovt, who won the Kandinsky prize in 2008, is close to several patriotic circles, and his painting, combining Soviet, Cosmist, Aryan, and Eurasianist motifs, illustrates to perfection the Club's call for ideological consensus.

This reconciliation strategy is not new. Almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Prokhanov began to use his weekly *Den'—Zavtra's* predecessor—as a platform for dialogue for all those opposed to change. Prokhanov was at that time also in charge of *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, a bastion of Soviet ideology, but he invited Metropolitan Ioann Snychev (1927–95), known for his ultraconservative, monarchist, and anti-Semitic views, to bless the editorial board, looking already for a Red-White reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> This peace process is today presented as an absolute necessity for Russia for two reasons. First, because whereas in the 1990s the country was too ideologically divided to allow for it, Putin's decades have erased the memory of an irreducible opposition between Red and White memories. Second, because the country is now on the cusp of a new historical catastrophe and new divisions, the anti-Putin protests of 2011–12 being merely the tip of the iceberg. Thus the time has come for Red and White to move beyond their divisions and unify. It is the second element that the Club displays most in its writings. The parallels

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., no. 3:46–47, 16, 20.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 51. However, this subtle interpretation is not universally accepted. Some Club members, such as Gen. Leonid Ivashov, advance more classical arguments to explain the events of 1917: the tsarist elites were too European and forgot their own country, which was "fooled" by the Bolsheviks, who were mostly Jewish; but thanks to Stalin, by the end of the Second World War senior leadership consisted of new Russians and patriots (ibid., 33).

<sup>44</sup>Maria Engström, "Neokosmizm, imperiia i aktual'noe iskusstvo: Aleksei Belyaev-Gintovt," International Conference *Russian Aviation and Space: Technology and Cultural Imagination*, University of Leeds, October 28–30, 2010.

<sup>45</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 3:23.

between today's Russia with the Times of Troubles are constantly drawn.<sup>46</sup> The Club even refers to the American Civil War and Reconstruction, noting that the North-South reconciliation in the United States did not have to be complete in order to be successful; two competing narratives have continued to coexist, but the country is unified by a metanarrative on American values.<sup>47</sup>

Still, the Club has not fully succeeded in carrying out its reconciliatory goal. It gives a platform to religious figures, including Father Tikhon; and some Club members, such as Alexander Dugin and to a lesser extent Prokhanov himself, have been closely connected to such influential Orthodox businessmen as Konstantin Malofeev, supposedly one of the main funders of the Donbas insurgency.<sup>48</sup> Orthodox values and the sanctity of Russia are major themes in *Izorskii klub*'s overarching narrative. According to Prokhanov, "the Russian state's ideology is funded on service, sacrificial exploit, and faith in divine trade ... because Russia is a holy-bearer corridor (*sviatunosnyi koridor*)."<sup>49</sup> Orthodoxy is also a tool in the Club's declarations of anti-Western and anti-liberal faith: "The West is the contemporary space of the anti-Christ," it argues, and it is marked by its decadent mores and consumerism, facing a Russia which positions itself as a standard-bearer of conservative Christian values.<sup>50</sup> Thus Orthodoxy is integrated as the Club's predominant discourse as it validates Russia's statehood and universal mission. Yet the imperial past is acknowledged only in order to promote the continuity of the Russian state—the Romanovs *per se* have not been rehabilitated. A purely pro-tsarist narrative remains largely absent from the Club, and its main monarchist arms do not feature in the pages of the journal.

At the doctrinal level, then, the Club has thus far failed to generate the deep, much longed-for reconciliation between Reds and Whites: the monarchist movements remain outside its reach. Although the Club is the product of a marriage between Soviet imperialism, as celebrated by Prokhanov, and the more classic political Orthodoxy of the Russian Doctrine, the alliance remains uneven. Prokhanov's style largely dominates, a trend that accelerated in 2014 with the Ukrainian crisis. Gradually, the White message has been erased and replaced with a more modest cult of Orthodoxy as the symbol of a timeless Russian identity, whose sanctify embodies mostly ... the Soviet regime. This sanctifying of the Soviet Union was vividly illustrated in May 2015, when the Club commissioning a new icon, "The Great-Power Virgin Mary" (*Bogomater' derzhavnaiia*), showing Stalin as a holy figure, an icon that has been blessed in a small parish, and exhibited on a tank for the May 9 military parade.<sup>51</sup> With this provocative gesture—which the Patriarchate intensely criticized—Prokhanov was hoping to promote a literal reading of the notion he coined of "religion of the victory" (*religiia pobedy*) for defining the meaning of the 1945 victory for Russia.

<sup>46</sup>The Time of Troubles is the term conventionally used to describe the years of interregnum between the death of the last Rurik Dynasty tsar in 1598 and the establishment of the Romanov Dynasty in 1613.

<sup>47</sup>*Izorskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 3:53.

<sup>48</sup>Courtney Weaver, "Malofeev: The Russian Billionaire Linking Moscow to the Rebels," *Financial Times*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/84481538-1103-11e4-94f3-00144feabdc0.html> (subscription necessary for access).

<sup>49</sup>*Izorskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 1:3.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 6:12.

<sup>51</sup>The icon is on the cover of the *Izorskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2015, no. 4, and its story is told in pictures over the first several pages of this issue.

Similarly, an article by him on “Mystical Stalinism” offers a solemn hymn to the Soviet leader who transformed a defeat into a victory and who, like a Phoenix, would be reborn in popular memories akin to a *bogatyr'*, a traditional figure of Russian tales.<sup>52</sup> Another issue of *Izborskii klub*, devoted to the topic of social justice, displays a lithograph showing Jesus with a Soviet flag, leading the crowd.<sup>53</sup>

The active presence of the founders of the Russian Doctrine is thus insufficient to rally all political movements that refer to political Orthodoxy. Clerical institutions are active only at the margins of the Club. The high priestess of political Orthodoxy, Natalia Narochnitskaya, although a member of the Club, has barely published in its journal, instead cultivating other outlets for expressing her views.<sup>54</sup> Father Tikhon does not make up for the visible absence of the principle ideologues of the Patriarchate, such as Vsevolod Chaplin, even if in 2015 an issue of *Izborskii klub* carried a long discussion with Metropoli Ilarion and announced that Episcop Avgustin (Anisimov) had joined the Club. The latter did not co-opt, for instance, Nikita Mikhalkov, nor other figures advancing a monarchist agenda. Vitali Averyanov recognizes that monarchist movements, particularly the Russian Aristocratic Council, oppose Putin and demand that Lenin’s mausoleum be removed and the anti-religious character of the Soviet regime be denounced, none of which the Kremlin is prepared to do.<sup>55</sup> The Club’s legitimacy has been dented by its inability to find a place for the White narrative, especially since the White past has been massively rehabilitated in Russia’s public space.<sup>56</sup> The reburial of General Anton Denikin and the conservative thinker Ivan Il’in in 2005 paved the way for a broader reintegration of the tsarist past, and the White Army in particular, into the state’s symbolic apparatus (thanks in large part to the influence of film director Nikita Mikhalkov).

#### THE DILEMMA OF IMPERIALISM AND ETHNONATIONALISM

The second doctrinal tension dividing the Club is the attitude toward empire. The concept of empire is ambiguous because it covers not only the historical reality of the tsarist empire but also a broader imperial project that can be embodied in different forms. On several occasions the Club’s authors have mentioned the intrinsically imperial nature of Russia. One of the Club’s mottos is that Russian history can be divided into five periods, each representing an empire: Kiev and Novgorod were the first Russian empire, expanding to the north, south, and east; Moscow was the second, once it threw off the Mongol yoke; the Romanov empire was the third; the Soviet Union was the fourth; and the ongoing Eurasian Union project – the fifth.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the Club does not confer supremacy of any sort onto the tsarist regime as the bearer of Russia’s imperial identity, preferring instead to emphasize an imperial model

<sup>52</sup>Aleksandr Prokhanov, “Misticheskii stalinizm,” *ibid.*, 78–81.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 7:4.

<sup>54</sup>However, she published a book in the Club’s series on one of her fetish topics, the notion of Russian world. See Natalia Narochnitskaia, *Sosredotochenie Rossii: Bitva za russkii mir* (Moscow, 2015).

<sup>55</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 6:23.

<sup>56</sup>See Peter Rutland, “By Glorifying WWI, Putin Ignores Its Tragedy,” *The Moscow Times*, August 4, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/by-glorifying-wwi-putin-ignores-its-tragedy/504549.html>.

<sup>57</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 1:5.

detached from the very nature of the regime. This ambiguity is reflected in the fluid character of the terminology used. The Russian state can be described as Russian (*russkii*), Rossian (*rossiiskii*), or Eurasian (*evraziiskii*), without particular distinction. Prokhanov has also taken up the theme of “Big Russia” (*Bol'shaia Rossiia*), which was launched by Yuri Krupnov, a scholar at the Institute for Demography, Migration, and Regional Development who participated in writing Russia's demographic doctrine, and then adopted by Dugin in early 2014, and put in parallel with the Eurasian Union.<sup>58</sup> Rus', Russia, and Eurasia act therefore as synonyms.

A pro-Soviet minded figure, Prokhanov celebrates national diversity on the Soviet model of friendship among peoples: Soviet or Eurasian supra-identity articulates itself harmoniously to localized ethnic identities. As he states, “under empire I mean not the domination of one aggressive nation against the others, but a symphony of spaces, cultures, languages, peoples, potentialities.”<sup>59</sup> This presupposition is developed by *Izborskii klub* when it reports on the many meetings with representatives of national republics, for instance the president of Yakutia-Sakha Yegor Borisov, or the head of the Dagestan republic, Ramazan Abdulatipov, who both embody this Soviet frame of friendship between peoples.<sup>60</sup> The pages of the Club's journal openly prioritize supporters of the Eurasian project, which takes two main forms: the metaphysical Eurasianism developed by Alexander Dugin, or the official Kremlin version in the form of the Customs Union/Eurasian Economic Union, which is personified in Sergey Glazyev.<sup>61</sup> The first version is aggressive and expansionist; the second is more moderate and respectful of international norms. The first has developed an esoteric argument on the mission of empire; the second is confined to building a regional economic project. Both denounce the United States and liberalism as Russia's primary enemies. The first celebrates the common outlooks of Orthodoxy and Islam; the second, Russia's capacity to develop strategic partnerships with countries in Asia and the Middle East. Both are equally represented in *Izborskii klub*, a subtle balance to maintain given the mutual personal dislike of Dugin and Glazyev.

However, the members of the Club are far from unanimous when it comes to defining Russia as an empire, because of the issue of multiethnicity. If Russia is an empire, it has to celebrate its ethnic diversity, and possibly its ethnic mixing. But ethnic miscegenation remains a classic fear of nationalists, in Russia as everywhere else, and it has been an increasingly important theme in Russia, cited by roughly two-thirds of a Russian public

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., no. 4:3. On Dugin manipulating this notion see “Pozner. Aleksandr Dugin,” *First channel*, April 21, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc0xuUgLV6I>. Full transcript available at <http://pozneronline.ru/2014/04/7669/>.

<sup>59</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 10:15.

<sup>60</sup>“Simfoniia narodov (vyezdnoe zasedanie Izborskogo kluba v Iakutii)” and “Moi Dagestan,” in *ibid.*, no. 10:12–26. See also, on nationalism, “Rossiia: Skhvatka narodov ili garmoniia,” *ibid.*, 2014, no. 1:4–19.

<sup>61</sup>On Dugin see, for instance, Andreas Umland, “Pathological Tendencies in Russian ‘Neo-Eurasianism’: The Significance of the Rise of Aleksandr Dugin for the Interpretation of Public Life in Contemporary Russia,” *Russian Politics and Law* 47:1 (2009): 76–89; Anton Shekhovtsov, “Is Dugin a Traditionalist? ‘Neo-Eurasianism’ and Perennial Philosophy,” *Russian Review* 68 (October 2009): 662–78; and *idem*, “Aleksandr Dugin's Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream Political Publicist, 1980–1998: A Case Study in the Rise of Late and Post-Soviet Russian Fascism,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1:2 (2010): 144–52.

increasingly influenced by xenophobic attitudes toward migrant laborers.<sup>62</sup> Although non-imperialists constitute a minority of the Club's membership, they and their opinions are given space, and are debated, in the Club's journal. Konstantin Zatulin, the director of the Institute of CIS Countries, an old friend of former Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and an avid partisan of Russian support for "compatriots" abroad, openly criticizes the Eurasianist perspective and its imperial whiffs. He denounces the Club's call for developing privileged relations with the Islamic world, and he did not support Prokhanov's trip to Gaza, for instance. Zatulin put into words the issue at the heart of the imperial debate in Russia: "Yes, I am in favor of empire. ... And maybe it will be called 'Eurasian' at this new stage of history. But I want that to be clear: it is a geographical notion above all."<sup>63</sup> By insisting on Eurasia as a purely geographical notion, Zatulin states indirectly that this Eurasian destiny for Russia cannot be one that involves cultural or ethnic mixing with "Asia." Many contributors to *Izorskii klub* have been more explicit than Zatulin in their view that Russian ethnic identity must be preserved. Kalashnikov devoted an article to "White Europeans and Their Demographic 'Suicide'" as a dangerous path down which Russia is treading. Yuri Polyakov, editor in chief of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, spoke of Russia's depopulation as genocide.<sup>64</sup>

The Club does not limit itself to historical and cultural debates, of course, but tries to advance concrete policy strategies, which in the case of its concerns about ethnic identity often pertain to migration policy. It demands, for instance, that official status be given to the Russianness of the Russian Federation in order to protect ethnic Russians from what it describes as ethnic discrimination, and to consolidate Russian culture and language. In exchange for this Russification of Russia, the country could afford a liberal migration policy that would give Russian passports to all those who have lived legally there for the past five years and who can meet certain salary and Russian-language proficiency requirements. However, the club would prefer to see a state policy of fighting male mortality, reducing the number of civil servants, and bringing more retirees back to work. Such policies, it argues, would add about 5 million people to Russia's workforce, and they would "render unnecessary the massive arrival of *gastarbeiter*, help stop the destruction of Russia's ethnocultural equilibrium, and break free from migrants who cannot or will not integrate."<sup>65</sup>

The Club's debate over imperialism versus ethnonationalism betrays the organization's ambiguous attitudes toward the doctrines from which it borrows. Two contributors to *Izorskii klub*, Dugin and Kalashnikov, have long been known for their efforts to introduce a neo-Fascist language, and even Nazi references and symbols, into the Russian nationalist publishing landscape. In many other publications, Dugin has been one of the main proponents of rehabilitating Fascist and Nazi theories in Russia.<sup>66</sup> And Dugin has revealed

<sup>62</sup>See the Levada Center's annual report, *Russian Public Opinion 2012–2013* (Moscow, 2013), 154–59. However, it should be noticed that xenophobia has declined drastically since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, a sign that confirms it is a largely media-manipulated perception.

<sup>63</sup>*Izorskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 6:15.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 9:20, 96.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 5:50.

<sup>66</sup>On Dugin's borrowings from Fascism and Nazism see Andreas Umland, "Aleksandr Dugin's Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream Political Publicist, 1980–1998: A Case Study in the Rise of Late and Post-Soviet Russian Fascism," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1 (2010): 144–52; Anton Shekhovtsov,

himself in Izborskii klub as a paradoxical denigrator of Russia's traditional multiethnicity, denouncing the old saying, "Scratch a Russian and you will find a Tatar," as a "pseudo-historical Russophobic myth" that could be easily refuted because genetic analyses have found little presence of Tatar or Mongol genes among Russians and the dominance of the Slavic-Aryan type.<sup>67</sup> In another article, Kalashnikov did not hesitate to draw an explicit parallel to Nazism when explaining the need for a Russian Ahnenerbe—an institution that would produce a new ideology based on the cult of ancestors, and integrate ancient esoteric know-how into modern science.<sup>68</sup> All this could be accomplished, moreover, while "avoiding Germany's errors, which led to its defeat," he added without further explanation.<sup>69</sup> The Club's doctrinal borrowings seem therefore coming mostly from Communist regimes at their harshest time—Stalin and Mao—with some typically Russian tones—the *oprichnina* reference—but the discreet mention of Nazism is neither innocent nor accidental.

Prokhanov's response to Zatulin and those who support him is short on analysis, especially as he refuses to grapple with the dilemma of Russia as a xenophobic empire. He reminded his readers that arguments over the "unprofitability" of empire for Russia have been going on since Yuri Andropov's time. Russia stopped believing in the empire and collapsed; proof, according to Prokhanov, that empire is the only option if destruction is to be avoided.<sup>70</sup> This inability to address the ethnonationalism issue is perceptible also in the refusal of the Club to engage in any critical dialogue with the National-Democrats (*Natsdemy*). The latter are mentioned only once or twice, in passing, as enemies of Russia because they display pro-Western orientations, call for the secession of the North Caucasus, and support a closed Russia that refuses any imperial mission, all in order to preserve the country's ethnic homogeneity.<sup>71</sup> The Club missed out on the opportunity to engage in a frank discussion of the nature of Russia as an empire or a nation-state.

#### PROKHANOV'S TOUCH: REINTEGRATING THE ECONOMY INTO THE DEBATE ON THE NATION

In an attempt to resolve these two fundamental oppositions—the Red and White reading of Russia's history, and the empire-versus-xenophobia dilemma—Prokhanov updated what had been his ideological calling card since the 1970s: he reinserted the economy into the debate over national identity in hopes of moving away from contentious friction over the past and the nature of national identity. In 1979 he became known for a potent and noteworthy article, "Metaphor of the Present," in which he denounced the hidden elitism of "village prose." He interpreted village prose as cultivating a vision of a long gone world; only by turning toward modernity could the greatness of Soviet power be maintained. He thus

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"The Palingenic Thrust of Russian Neo-Eurasianism: Ideas of Rebirth in Aleksandr Dugin's Worldview," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9:4 (2008): 491–506; and Leonid Luks, "A 'Third Way' – or Back to the Third Reich?" *Russian Politics and Law* 47:1 (2009): 7–23.

<sup>67</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 4:45.

<sup>68</sup>Ahnenerbe was the Nazi institution in charge of finding new evidence of the racial heritage of the Germanic people, to research the history of the Aryan race, and to promote an occult knowledge on world history.

<sup>69</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 10:94–103.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 6:16–17.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 2014, no. 2:17.

encouraged nationalists to search for an ideology other than *passéism*, promoting instead the “urbanization” of national feeling, in which self-expression would find an outlet in technological progress.<sup>72</sup> Prokhanov’s understanding of the Club’s present mission follows the same vein: rehabilitate the economy, industry in particular, in a discourse mired in intellectual and spiritual limbo.

More than thirty years after publishing his first major work, Prokhanov has returned to the task of celebrating industrialization as Russia’s source of autonomy from the rest of the world and driver of its great power, both in strategic terms and in symbolic recognition. “The post-industrialization narrative,” he solemnly declared, “is a form of neo-colonialism,” reiterating a widespread narrative about the danger Russia would face if it became simply a raw-material exporter that was unable to produce sophisticated manufactured goods.<sup>73</sup> The de-industrialization of Russia must be fought against because it is intrinsically linked to the risk of losing state sovereignty. Prokhanov often evokes his fetish theme of the “Russian weapon” (*russkoe oruzhie*), a term that sounds paradoxical in Russian because it does not refer to a weapon made in Russia, but to one that embodies Russian cultural characteristics. Prokhanov explicitly proclaims this Russian weapon would “defend not only people and territory, but also Russia’s religious and cultural contributions.”<sup>74</sup> In a grandiloquent tone, he recalls that the missiles and warships produced in Russia have the spirit of Alexander Nevsky, who was victorious over German and Swedish armies, and Dmitri Donskoy, who was victorious over the Golden Horde.<sup>75</sup>

This industrialist discourse does not lack more pragmatic motives, of course. As we saw previously, the Club cultivates relations with the military industrial complex, in particular with its more advanced and prestigious sectors: nuclear, space, and aviation. It also gives the floor to those who embody the success of Russian/Soviet science: Zhores Alferov, for example, who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2000, is a co-creator of modern hetero-structure physics and electronics, and became a Club member.

The Club presents itself as ready to do battle with Western liberalism and displays updated knowledge of the West as compared to similar discourses in the 1990s and 2000s, with a more sophisticated analysis of West’s economic difficulties, the transformative role of communication, and soft- and hard-power uses of information technology (IT). Economic issues occupy a significant place in the pages of its journal. Various dossiers supervised by economists, often by Glazyev, focus on the Eurasian integration processes, customs regulation, the state of Russian exports, agricultural sector reforms, food security, and the development of the services sector. The Club calls for renationalizing the main industrial sectors and having strong financial incentives to sponsor it through state orders. It celebrates the collective ownership of land as well as Stolypin-style reforms, and seeks a protectionist system that hampers imports and investments overseas. It also emphasizes the need for Russia to become competitive in terms of information and network warfare, and thus massive

<sup>72</sup>Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 156.

<sup>73</sup>*Izbornik klub: Russkie strategii*, 2013, no. 5:5.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 1:6.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 2014, no. 2:14.

investment in advanced technologies, but without explaining how Russia could become self-sufficient or how a state economy could develop the IT sector.<sup>76</sup>

The Club often makes reference to the traditional leftism of Russian society. It relies on several Levada Center sociological surveys, which confirm that the majority of the population wants more state involvement in economy and sees the state as the main provider of social justice and redistribution.<sup>77</sup> However, surveys also show that Russian public opinion favors preserving spaces of freedom and the market economy, and would therefore oppose a new Soviet-style dirigisme. For the Club, nonetheless, the next stage in the Putin-backed reassertion of Russia is to turn back economic liberalism, and to get rid of the liberals who still dominate decision-making in the economic sphere.<sup>78</sup> The Ukrainian crisis reinvigorated this discourse, which took the form of a violent anti-oligarch narrative.

The Club provides a rich tapestry for scholarly debates on the place of ideology in Putin's Russia. Its ideological kernel has paired several significant canons of "Russian nationalism" with debates currently animating Russian public opinion—conspirological readings of geopolitics, information war, Russia's economic choices in a globalized system, and so on. However, the Club does not offer any substantive strategic revisioning of Russia's role in global affairs and identity, and is unable to present a convincing, forward-looking picture. It nurtures discursive reservoirs of symbols that are still very much Soviet-oriented, and identity repertoires that are less original or innovative than those elaborated around Surkov or the *Natsdemy*. However, as I have sought to illustrate, the Club represents one of the rare cases of attempting to institutionalize a doctrine, in the sense that there is an identifiable platform that can be located in its political networks, and to some extent its financial ones, and this location is closely articulated to ideological contents.

Is the Club thus a result of Putin's regime? To pose the question in these terms is reductive, because it supposes a fully functional centralized operating model, dominated by a single personality or an inner circle capable of ruling the whole political system and the public space. Russia's decision-making processes are more complex. The country is entirely pyramidal on crucial strategic questions, and largely decentralized on what is judged to be minor. The red lines that cannot be crossed are not explicit, but implicit, hence the risk of "uncontrolled slides." Debates between intellectuals over the country's need for a new ideology are considered minor, not strategic, because they do not directly affect the structure of the regime—that is, the relationship between political elites, main rent-producing industries, and asset redistribution. Pluralism is thus acceptable so long as it remains pro-regime. In order to weaken the Bolotnaya movement, the presidential administration welcomed new, better structured counter-ideologies, which are expressed in a gray area that is neither totally official nor totally dissident, something that the Club encapsulates.

The Club draws on significant support—informal from Dmitri Rogozin, more official via Sergey Glazyev, allies within the military and military-industrial complex, as well as in

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., no. 6:61–75.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 2013, no. 5:86.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 2014, no. 3:100.

the media realm via Mikhail Leontev's broad network. However, pretending that the Club is a product of the Kremlin is too simplistic. It appears to be in open conflict with Vladislav Surkov and his rival network, and went too far in supporting the most radical insurgents in Donetsk and Lugansk during spring 2014. The Izborsky Club played a crucial role in the first month of the crisis, between March and June 2014, celebrating Crimea's reintegration into its Russian motherland, calling on the Kremlin to annex the secessionist territories, and hoping for a pro-Russian uprising in the whole of eastern Ukraine. Prokhanov's and Dugin's networks fed the power-brokers in Donetsk and Lugansk with ready-made narratives, administrative resources, and possibly even military support, and they played a key role in structuring the concept of Novorossiia. In a special issue devoted to the notion of Novorossiia, *Izborskii klub* tried to enshrine it within a very deprecating narrative about Ukrainians as a "*limitrof* people" who lacked any clear civilizational self-identification.<sup>79</sup> It is a narrative that has nothing radical about it, given contemporary Russian mainstream thinking; however, by presenting Novorossiia as the beginning of the national liberation of Russians and calling for the revolution to reach Russia, the Club went too far, and it was progressively invited to moderate the revolutionary tone of its discourse and reintegrate into the Kremlin-backed mainstream.<sup>80</sup>

The Club confirms the progressive structuring of a field of "think tanks" in Russia whose function is to occupy different ideological niches and offer a range of "products" that the authorities can sample, make official, or reject. It also highlights the failure of any unidirectional approach in analyzing the interaction between the Russian state and "ideology." The Club is neither purely artificial, made of top-down, puppet ideologies, nor is it an example of successful nationalist lobbying in the heart of the Kremlin. It reveals the existence of autonomous spaces authorized by the regime, sometimes supported, some marginalized, and the blurring of red lines, which can be crossed unintentionally or retroactively modified. The Putin regime is actively testing a growing number of these "products" on the public; nonetheless, none of them has been developed into a full-fledged ideology, in the sense of the continuation of an articulated doctrine, on the model of Marxism-Leninism. Indoctrination would require tools that have not yet been developed, as well as an enormous mechanism to repress those, including some among the elite, who would refuse to subscribe to the new ideology.

Vitali Averiyarov's statement that "we have already almost created a sort of ideological reserve of the Kremlin, and now the real question is that of activating this ideology," is above all aspirational.<sup>81</sup> It reflects the pious wishes of the Club's members, but does not seem to fit into the presidential administration's strategies. The Gramsci-inspired strategies of this conservative avant-garde to capture the state by first occupying the intellectual space remains an ongoing process, the results of which are so far unknown.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., no. 5:10.

<sup>80</sup>Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32:1 (2015): 55–74, also available at <http://dx.doi.org.10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004>.

<sup>81</sup>*Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, 2014, no. 6:86.