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Clash of Ideologies? The Nationalist Challenge to Contemporary Russian Liberalism

Abstracts. *The article is dedicated to the new significance of the national issue as a challenge posed to the contemporary Russian liberalism. The purpose of the study is to transfer the clash of liberal and nationalist ideologies from mass media and blogs into the realm of academic conceptual analysis. In the first part of the article, the key definitions of nationalism are examined and placed on a scale compatible to the described range of position developed by Russian liberals with regard to nationalist ideology. Then the two continuums are used to trace the main criteria of (in)compatibility between liberalism and nationalism. Subsequently, the focus shifts on the contemporary Russian liberalism to trace possible implications of the discovered (in)compatibilities. Finally, the conclusions contain a series of suggestions on the possible moves that have not been taken by liberals in their attempts to come to terms with the challenge of nationalism.*

Key words: Russian nationalism, Russian liberalism, political ideologies, post-Soviet.

Introduction

Over the last several decades, observers in the social sciences have witnessed the rise of nationalism both as a research subject and as a social issue (Conversi, 2004). A burning event related to nationalism would give rise to an avalanche of publications seemingly exploring all the relevant themes from conceptual puzzles to all imaginable minutiae, leaving no stone unturned and no country case unanalyzed. As soon as interest in nationalism as a research subject began to die out, a new set of nationalism-related issues came to occupy the political agenda, whipping up renewed fascination with established theories of nationalism, and occasionally opening new empirical cases for in-depth scrutiny.

The article is dedicated to one such case, namely, the debate on nationalism that has recently erupted among Russian public intellectuals that identify themselves as liberals. Unlike the familiar enunciations of the infamous “national question,” this time the point of the

discussion is not about the possible ways of resolving the problems of international and international interethnic relations (let alone, drawing a tangible and unambiguous border between the two), which was part of the liberal agenda in the 1990s (Tishlov, 1997). Nor is it about the search for tactical moves that would win popular support for which liberals and nationals fought throughout the 2000s. Instead of regarding nationalism as a social issue or a rival political ideology, Russian liberals are now attempting to reassess the significance of nationality within their own worldview and political strategy. The evolving dilemma centers on whether Russian liberals can answer the challenge of nationalism without losing their distinctive identity in the public sphere or compromising their irreducible principles. The debate is polarizing. Some argue that of any type of nationalism as incompatible with liberalism, while others support tacitly or even genuinely accept some parts of nationalist ideology, including those that are associated with the extreme right-wing forces in some parts of Europe.

The purpose of the present study is to transfer this clash of ideologies from mass media and blogs into the realm of academic conceptual analysis. The author's position is that of an adherent of liberal views (in the Continental sense (Conway, 1995; Skinner, 1998)) disengaged from the public debate, and of a social scientist specializing in nationalism studies. Instead of voicing yet another position in the debate or evaluating certain views and their proponents, this study is an attempt to evaluate the rich, novel, and controversial empirical information about nationalism that is available. It seeks to juxtapose this information with existing academic theories of nationalism. In the first part of the article I examine the key definitions of nationalism and place them on a scale compatible with the range of positions developed by Russian liberals with regard to nationalist ideology. Then I use the two continuums to evaluate the compatibility and incompatibility of liberalism and nationalism. Subsequently, I focus on the contemporary Russian liberalism and trace possible implications of the discovered compatibilities and incompatibilities. Finally, the conclusions contain a series of suggestions on the possible moves that have not yet been taken by liberals in their attempts to come to terms with the challenge of nationalism.

What Nationalism May Be

A definition of nationalism is a necessary tool to examine the space between academic analyses of nationalism, popular debate on nationalism, and nationalism proper. Lately,

however, the quest for the shared understanding of nationalism, both comprehensive and precise, has been reminiscent of the quest for the Holy Grail. It demands determination, purity, sincerity of purpose (read: scientific objectivity immune from any personal attachment to nationalism), and is immensely time consuming. The main challenge lies in the multitude of nationalisms that have emerged following the spread of the nation-state model around the globe. For a time, it seemed less and less likely that any definition would capture the diversity reported in the rapidly growing bulk of case-studies. Consequently, as early as in 1997, Craig Calhoun, the current director of the London School of Economics, suggested refraining from further attempts to define nationalism and instead on resorting to a contextual definition borrowed from a famous Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein based his contextual definition on the implicit recognition of “kinship” between various manifestations of nationalism instead of highlighting their common attributes (Calhoun, 1997). This solution works insofar as it can rely on a tacit shared understanding of the notion, and is especially efficient in empirical research of obviously nationalist phenomena, where conceptual debate would only lead the study astray. The lack of definition, however well philosophically grounded, reveals itself to be problematic when the key question is whether something ought to be considered nationalism or not; this is precisely the case of the ongoing debate on the subject amongst Russian liberals. For this reason, a definition unavoidable for the purposes of this study.

An obvious way out would be to substitute a definition with a classification. Much contemporary literature leaves the impression that, paradoxically, notions of ethnic (identity based on the heritage of language, customs, and cultural myths) and civic (identity based on shared norms, ideals, and notions about the desirable collective future) nationalism are much easier understood, and more consistently used, than the notion of nationalism itself (Brubaker, 1999; Shulman, 2002). That is why this all too familiar civic-ethnic dichotomy, after half a century of use, is still employed despite its frequent critique. Here again, refraining from using a definition works best in case studies, especially in comparative perspective, when the important point is the distinction between crucial and superficial varieties of nationalism. For the purpose of the present study, this option appears insufficient for several reasons. Most immediately, there are no a priori grounds to suppose that the whole debate on nationalism among contemporary Russian liberals amounts to a choice between ethnic and civic nationalism. Moreover, if this had been the case, the debate would have ended with the solution of recognizing civic nationalism as compatible with, and historically related to,

liberal ideology, while rejecting ethnic nationalism as reactionary (cf. Hobsbawm, 1983). However, for contemporary Russian liberalism this solution proved inappropriate, and so the debate was not terminated so soon.

Among the many reasons, the one deserving to be immediately taken into account is the one related to the Soviet national policy, as explained by Rogers Brubaker. According to his work, Soviet official internationalism amounted to a condemnation of ethnic nationalism. This version, which postulated that the nation constituted the last chain in the alleged historical sequence of the clan – tribe – the people (“narodnost”) was formulated by Stalin. The sequence remained unquestioned not only by official Soviet ethnographers, but also by dissidents like Lev Gumilev (Shnirelman & Panarin, 2001). According to Brubaker, civic nationalism was not suppressed in the Soviet national policy simply because its existence was not recognised at all. Not surprisingly, twenty years after the fall of the USSR, and the outburst of ethnic nationalist movements in most ex-Soviet republics, ethnic nationalism is still taken for granted as the prototypical version of nationalism, if not the only one. In Russia, the nineteenth century distinction between the ethno-nationalist Slavophiles and non-nationalist, and occasionally anti-nationalist West-oriented Zapadniks (Zimmerman, 2005), remains more salient than the ethnic-civic dichotomy.

To distinguish between different varieties of Russian nationalism, or rather the publicly discussed notions of nationalism, it might be more appropriate to use neither a single definition nor a classification of nationalisms, but a classification of definitions. The typology of notions currently existing in the theory of nationalist studies is based on the extent of specificity bestowed on nationalism among other social phenomena. The typology based on this criterion would include four distinct approaches, which, even though far from giving justice to the recent theoretical proliferation of the field, adequately serve the purpose of the present study.

The most inclusive and most abstract definition of nationalism was developed by Michael Billig in the book that can be counted the last attempt at constructing a great theory in nationalism studies, before the empirical shift (Billig, 1995). According to Billig, nationalism is defined by the use of apparently neutral, “banal”, language that rests on the tacit assumption that the a nation is the only natural and self-obvious expression of social order. Thus, the prototypical manifestation of nationalism, especially in long-established nations of prosperous states, is not the glorification of the national spirit, but an automatic use of expressions without qualifiers. For example, “the capital” means the capital of the author

and his target audience's nation-state. The important conclusion from Billig's definition is that in the contemporary world not a single adult can possibly lack understanding of the nationalist word usage, meaning that everyone is a "cold", or "banal" nationalist, however unwilling to consciously espouse a "hot" nationalist ideology. As a result, this distinction becomes all the more important by highlighting the universality of nationalism and the limitation of free choice.

A less rigorous, but equally comprehensive theoretical notion represents nationalism as a certain type of social order, rather than a reflection of this order in language, as in Billig's banal nationalism. The key idea of this approach amounts to a suggestion that nationalism is not equal to the model of a nation-state, or even to a political sphere in general, but pervades everyday life, organizes microsocial relations, and inspires public imagery. The most prominent author representing this view, Benedict Anderson, claims nationalism belongs primarily not to political ideologies, but to less reflexive and more common social phenomena like religion or kinship. The model of a nation introduced in Anderson's "Imagined Communities" (Anderson, 2006) is that of stable readers of the same newspaper, who construct their shared present via exposure to the common news agenda. A century earlier, Ernest Renan introduced a similar idea. Renan defined the nation as the result of society's will to continue togetherness and interdependence, manifested in the imaginary "everyday plebiscite." Unlike Anderson, Renan believes the unity of the nation to rest not so much on a joint present-day agenda, but on the shared memory of the past, including the collective forgetting of events incompatible with the self-image of the nation (Renan, 1997). Compared with the language-based notion of nationalism, this idea of nationalism as a type of social structure is almost as general and inclusive, but more flexible in its particulars.

The third, and probably the most widespread definition of nationalism, like the previous one, gives the key role to the reconstruction of history not so much as a sequence of specific events, but as a search for a universal transcendent meaning of historical process. This notion, much narrower and more focused, introduces nationalism as a sort of metaphysics of history, providing a ready-made and, for some reason, emotionally appealing mode of sense-making. Nationalism, according to this definition, provides a simple, ready-made and intuitively trustworthy explanation of the meaning of history. Most importantly, the nation serves as a mediator between an individual and global historical process. Contrary to the first two notions of nationalism, this definition heavily relies on the methodological apparatus of critical social theory. This approach can be acceptable not only for critiques of

nationalism, but also by nationalists themselves, insofar as the nationalist metaphysics is accepted as true.

The most specific notion of the four narrows nationalism down to a political ideology proper. Nationalism can mean a political organization of the state emerging from the recognition of interests different from those of other similar entities. For instance, according to Charles Tilly's paradoxical theory, the nation first emerges in the course of wars and only then plunges into new wars between the already pre-existing nation-states. For Ernest Gellner, nationalism centers around the claim that political and national entities must match each other in their borders, hence the central purpose of a nationalism is the establishment of an independent nation-state and, following the example of the early nineteenth-century France, making its population culturally homogeneous by creating a shared high culture and spreading it countrywide via universal compulsory state education system (Gellner, 2008). This pure model of nation-building, however, is prone to lose its delicate balance between a relapse into naïve metaphysics and a reduction to a cynical toolkit of nationalist entrepreneurs.

Each of these four notions of nationalism has its inner particularities, as well as intermediary versions. Despite its obvious simplification, the suggested classification of definitions allows us to compare each of these understandings of nationalism to liberalism in general, and to contemporary Russian liberalism in particular, while recognizing each notion to be not universal and maintaining the necessary critical distance.

Nationalism, Liberalism, Transformation?

In this section, I turn to key contradictions between nationalism and liberalism and attempt to show how each of the four aforementioned approaches to nationalism illuminates the essence of these contradictions, especially with regard to contemporary Russian liberalism. The key purpose of this section is to distinguish between irreconcilable incompatibilities on one side, assumed, but not actual contradictions on the other, and, between these two types, most importantly, genuine problems that can be solved.

Both nationalism and liberalism are highly abstract and complicated sets of principles, so one expects the points of contradiction between them to be even more complex and sophisticated. Indeed, the three dimensions on which the two ideologies fall to opposite poles are individualism – collectivism, universalism – particularism, and inclusion – exclusion,

which belong to the most fundamental concepts of, respectively, cross-cultural studies, epistemology, and legal philosophy.

Individualism – collectivism is by far the most popular parameter of intercultural comparison in contemporary cross-cultural psychology (Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Contrary to some popular misrepresentations, individualism (or liberalism, for that matter) does not amount to egotism, nor does collectivism amount to altruism. Instead, both individualism and collectivism propose different and neutral ways of being egotistical or altruistic. The dividing line originates from the basic notion of the self. Individualists view a personality as defined by its inner qualities, relatively stable in time and self-sufficient. Alternatively, collectivists define the self primarily vis-à-vis its relation to others, and its manifestations in behavior, as highly relative to a specific situation in which they occur. An uncritical individualist considers collectivists to be cowardly conformists, while to a similarly uncritical collectivist, individualists appear as immature and unaware of the existing complexity and significance of social relations. The advent of the information age prompted the reevaluation of both individualism, by way of an increased variety of available options for identity formation, and collectivism, in view of the unprecedented importance of social networks.

The placement of both nationalism and liberalism on this cross-cultural research scale leaves little space to doubt. Freedom, which is the core value of liberalism by definition, is only the freedom of an individual. Any attempt to define a person's identity with respect to a collective entity, such as a nation, is bound to contradict the basic principles of liberalism. Paradoxically, it is the most general and therefore the least demanding of the four main notions of nationalism that leaves the fewer chances for compromise about the belief in individual freedom. Billig's concept of nationalism as a language game, just like any linguistic phenomenon, cannot be modified by individual activity or according to individual will. Moreover, critical discourse leading to an understanding of the artificiality of nationalist language does not offer the type of liberation that would satisfy a liberal. Instead of the perpetual critical reevaluation of hegemonic language, with its roots in the negative dialectics, liberalism requires the positive individual freedom of defining one's own worldview within objective limitations, and, not least, freedom from the necessity of constant critical reevaluation of society's basic premises.

The most specific notion of nationalism as a political ideology, on the other hand, offers, at a first glance, the most opportunities for developing a liberal nationalism.

Nationalism, distinct from earlier ethnic and imperial movements, first evolved in the early nineteenth century as a romantic revolutionary movement against the uniformity of preceding absolutisms. For early nationalist actors and ideologists, such as Mazzini, freedom and equality of nations, or “the peoples” matched the ideal of equal opportunities to pursue free aspirations for individuals. This alliance soon became obsolete with the first victories of nationalism. New nation-states demanded the extent of solidarity that apparently could only be guaranteed through uniformity, while old empires applied nationalism, instead of the outdated dynastic principle, to legitimize obviously illiberal regimes. An individual may or may not be allowed by nationalist ideologues to choose a nation to belong, but, once the choice was made, an individual had no chance to redefine his or her nation. This erosion of individual freedom of national self-identification progressed as nationalism grew to be regarded not only as a political ideology behind a certain type of state, but as a general type of social order. The result was the spread of a collectively imposed set of meanings from the political sphere into private life, thus challenging another important liberal value. Finally, nationalist metaphysics, with its claim of deriving all the ultimately important truths about identity from an unchanging collective essence, paved the way for Neo-Conservatism (Kristol, 1995), leaving liberalism as the major constituent of the current political agenda, especially for post-Soviet states.

In Russia the relationship between nationalism and liberalism was framed as the opposite of individualism – collectivism with particular intensity. The most obvious reason is the shared image of the Russian nation as collectivist, and its identity, as inseparable from vague, but intuitively understandable and attractive notions of organic unity of *sobornost*, as opposed to rationally and voluntarily chosen solidarity, and collectively prescribed *dukhovnost*, as opposed to individual search for meaning. These traits of Russianness were not only implicitly recognizable, but also associated with the international symbols of Russian culture, such as works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In contrast, liberalism was frequently portrayed by its domestic opponents as anti-Russian, allegedly undermining not only the power of the Russian state, but also the Russian way of life, whatever it may be, and the core values constituting the Russian identity. The popular quest for nationalist metaphysics to replace the defeated Communist ideology did not make the situation easier for Russian liberals in the early 1990s. Anti-Russian liberalism was too influential to be avoided and too difficult to resist. The quest for traces of liberalism in Russian history in the long run proved to be hardly efficient. Apparently, heroes of Russian liberalism, such as Alexander the Second

or Stolypin, could not compete in popular appeal with the most anti-liberal historical characters, such as Ivan the Terrible and Stalin. At a deeper level, the very attempts to justify the right of existence for Russian liberalism with precedents from the past ultimately meant implicit acceptance of the collectivist essentialist principles and consent to play a losing battle on the enemy's ground. Initially, in the beginning of the 1990s, grand metaphysics along the lines of reorganizing Russia as a whole soon gave way to burning economic and safety problems. No sooner did this situation change, however, than the tension between nationalism and liberalism again appeared at the forefront. This time the key complications arose not from nationalist collectivism versus individual freedom, but from negotiating an individual's social identities in a global context. The contemporary debate on nationalism revolves around the search for universally acceptable rules for the inclusion of individuals into social entities.

The issue of selective inclusion of individuals into a particular nation has only recently come to the forefront of the conceptual political debate and is closely related to the overall agenda of globalization and mass migrations. The latter are understood differently both by migrants and nationals of host countries, and were so from the start. They have by now reached, at least in the popular imagination, a scale that had not been predicted by either side. If the previous expectations of migration process at present seem to be severe understatements, then much of the contemporary evaluations might, on the contrary, later prove to be even further from reality. Nevertheless, the one immediate and all too real consequence of the general unpreparedness for mass migrations presents itself in the form of an upsurge in popularity of extreme right movements all over Europe. Paradoxically, many key traits of this new reality resemble the alarmist portrayals of Europe as polarized, increasingly unsafe, fraught with unpredictable cases of violence, and approaching barbarity in its public sphere. Thus, the prophesies propagated by the extreme right political forces seem to a certain extent self-fulfilling, if the cause is ascribed not to mass migrants, but to radical nationalists themselves. The analysis of situations in many Western European states leads to the conclusion that the threat is only temporary, caused by the falsely understood political correctness, and solved by readiness to articulate, if not immediately try to solve the problem, from the side of moderate mainstream political forces. Alternatively, after the initial self-establishment in the political sphere, extreme right wing parties have to adjust their self-presentation strategy to spread their electoral base beyond the narrow circle of extremists. Once the threat of polarization and the extinction of the center is avoided, the inclusion of the migration issue into public debate is likely to result in the development of a more or less

acceptable program for the inclusion of migrants into their host societies. Peculiarly, the spread of nationalism all over the globe as a dominant ideology of the twentieth century may make the quest for solution easier, since migrants share with the populations of their host countries if not national identities, then at least notions about the model nation-state, perceptions of nationality as the source of meaning and tool of sense-making, skills for organizing social relations according to nationalist imagination, and, especially the pervasive “banality” of nationalist language. Thus, nationalism in a pan-European context may in the long run not only be the cause, but the solution of the problem of inclusion of migrants. As the common ground for dialogue, nationalism might in this case unexpectedly provide the grounds for liberalism, particularly in the constitutionalist version advocated by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 2001).

In Russia, there is so far hardly any sign of this scenario of nationalism preparing proto-reflexive field of operation for rational debate according to liberal principles. Instead of migrants in the proper sense of the word, the increasingly pertinent discussions of the issue similar to that of European influx of migration reflects the inter country movements from ethnically non-Russian peripheries of both the contemporary Russian Federation (in particular, the Caucasus) and the former Soviet Union (in particular, Central Asia) into the Russian economical centers. Instead of coming as an outside threat to the established European order with the national question largely closed and almost outdated for European nation-states, the migration issue in contemporary Russia pierces the very center of the question of Russian national identity with regard to its imperial past and perceived post-imperial fall from heaven, for which Russian liberals are habitually blamed. Thus, in the matter of inclusion/exclusion, unlike the controversies between individualism and collectivism, the Russian liberalism currently faces specific challenges that do not necessarily follow from liberalism as such. It is to particular circumstances of the new wave of Russian liberalism and its relation to nationalism that we now turn.

Russia: New Challenge for Liberals?

The place of nationalism in the political discourse and actions of the contemporary Russian liberals can be logically approached from the inverted perspective – via evaluating the role of liberals in the recent history of Russia. In this regard, at least two views easily present themselves – that which was reflexively developed by liberals themselves and the other,

which was proposed by independent academic observers and analysts. Needless to say, the two views blatantly contradict each other.

The retrospective notion of contemporary Russian liberals on their role in the history of Russian nationalism was most clearly expressed by Anatoly Chubais – one of the most influential, recognizable and, unpopular figures in the movement. In one of his interviews, he remembered an idea voiced at an informal seminar organized by an economist Boris Levin in the 1980s. Even then, it was predicted that after the fall of the Soviet system Russia would have to undergo three transitions – from the central planning to the free market economy, from autocracy to democracy, and from an empire to a nation-state. The first transition, despite its perceived extreme hardship, has, according to Chubais, been the easiest and is by now already accomplished, while the two remaining transitions are still in process (Chubais, 2008). The interesting feature of this triple narrative configuration is the implication that nation-building, like economic reforms, are to be undertaken by liberals. Another important idea underlying this responsibility implies that the whole issue of nationalism reflects objective challenges on a par with the economic crises and problems of growth.

A totally different view belongs to Marlene Laruelle, an intellectual on the Russian extreme right (Laruelle, 2008). In her attempt to move from this subject to the more general depiction of the contemporary Russian nationalism she chose as her starting point the condemnation of the role played by Russian liberals, whom she regards merely as an Eastern extension of American neoliberalism. Nationalism, according to Laruelle, is necessary for contemporary Russia not in the objective sense of answering historical challenges, but as a psychological intermission for remedying the wounds inflicted by liberal economic reforms during the 1990s. Moreover, following this logic, she concludes that any type of nationalism would suffice, as long as it is taken away from marginal extremist groups and is appropriated by official political discourse. Laruelle's bold prediction that the official propaganda devised by the by now well-known ideologist Surkov would integrate the nation and pacify the population came out of print in 2009 (Laruelle, 2009). Ironically in the next several years, the nationally directed propaganda attained more and more traditionalist overtones leading to emotionally inflamed polarization, while the liberals preserved economical stability by leading Russia through the global financial crisis with relative success. Indeed, the current Russian debate on nationalism hardly resembles Laruelle's vision of piece and unity.

The trait that makes Laruelle's inaccurate prediction important is the identification of the crucial point determining the ongoing relevance of nationalism for Russian liberals, -

namely, the contrast between the much reiterated and allegedly universal popular appeal of nationalism – and the manifest unpopularity of the liberal reformers. This contrast naturally creates a temptation to decline or at least postpone the task of actually solving the issue of nation-building, especially in view of no definite plan, in favor of instrumentalization of nationalism in the short-term struggle for power. In 2011-2012, this scenario was played to its full extent by an anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny (Krechetnikov, 2011). Not related to the liberal economical reforms, though remotely connected to some of the previously established figures of Russian liberalism, Navalny managed to create an image appealing to the newly emerged middle class of Russian big cities (those whom their opponents pejoratively call hipsters) and combined it with attendance of the “Russian marches” – manifestations held by extreme nationalists – and playing on xenophobic anti-immigrant and anti-Caucasian popular sentiments. The case of Navalny remained on top of the Russian political agenda primarily due to his criminal prosecution for alleged malpractice combined with his participation in the electoral campaign for the position of the mayor of Moscow. By the end of 2012, after Navalny achieved impressive, but not miraculous results in the election and was found guilty, but not given a prison sentence, his popularity drastically decreased, - so much so that one of the intellectual leaders of the liberal Russia recently suggested that Navalny should yield to new political figures (Yasin, 2013).

The case of Navalny, whatever its future perspectives may be, has been instrumental in illuminating the controversial relations between nationalism and liberalism in contemporary Russia. The most frequently voiced conclusion made from this experience amounts to a sad observation that nationalism in its xenophobic form, which used to be unimaginable for anyone besides marginal extremists, has grown to be regarded as appropriate by the general educated public, especially by the newly self-positioned liberals. What might in the long run prove to be a more significant consequence than the new mode of expressing what had probably been present from the start, is the problematization of the national issue for liberals themselves. Besides its attempt to redefine the limits of propriety for a true liberal’s public behavior, the important side effect of the whole Navalny episode might be the public demand that liberals take a firm stand on the national issue, following Chubais’s suggestion.

Another important recent demand for liberals to make the national issue one of their priorities came slightly earlier – that time, not from sympathizers, but from bitter antagonists. The widely debated series of events was triggered by a federal television channel broadcasting

a movie that celebrated the anniversary of the victory in the Second World war by glorification of the secret service SMERSH. The occurrence provoked condemnation from Leonid Gozman, who frequently takes a public stand on behalf of the Russian liberal movement. In his blog, Gozman made a comment on the channel's policy by claiming the SMERSH corps to be different from the Nazi SS only in their uniforms. This statement was discussed at the parliamentary level and reinterpreted from anti-Stalinist, which is what liberals themselves would like to be seen, into anti-patriotic, which is how liberals have been routinely portrayed by their opponents at least for the last two decades. The key significance of the situation presented itself in an article published by "Komsomolskaya Pravda", one of the most widely circulated Russian tabloids, and subsequently removed from its website. The author of the article stated the following: "Sometimes one feels a pity that Nazis did not make the ancestors of contemporary liberals into lampshades. There would have been fewer problems." The utterance, with its obvious anti-Semitic hint, provoked indignation from a wider circle than that of liberal sympathizers and caused Gozman to publicly defend the right for critical patriotism as opposed to unconditional glorification of everything in the historical past and present (Gozman, 2013). Here again, the quest for a liberal position on the national issue was proved as something that cannot be postponed for much longer

In the absence of any such position, probably the most striking peculiarity of the contemporary Russian liberalism with regard to the national issue lies in anti-nationalist stance that repeatedly leads the center-right politicians to take on the agenda that in Europe is associated with the political left. Thus, the liberal minister of economic development Alexei Uliukaev made a statement on the necessity of guaranteeing rights of migrants and protecting them from conditions approaching slave labor (Uliukaev, 2013) – instead of expressing solidarity with employers, as it might be expected from a his side of the political spectrum. Accordingly, the already mentioned Leonid Gozman repeatedly defended the vision of Russia as a multiethnic, rather than ethnically defined state, and Alexei Kudrin, ex-minister of finance and one of Russia's most celebrated economists, asserted the unacceptability of participation in whatever kind of public events together with nationalists. One of the obvious reasons of this mixed agenda is obviously the absence of a moderate left-wing party in present-day Russia. A more subtle reason stems from the traditions of Russian intelligentsia, which is expected to aim at a universal moral position, instead of representing interests of a particular part of the electorate. Most importantly, however, the position of contemporary Russian liberals on the national issue is constructed in the defensive mode, as the answer to an

outer challenge, rather than, as in the case of the successful economic reforms, an alternative vision challenging the collapsed habitual order.

Preliminary Conclusions

The overview of the four main definitions of nationalism, their relation to key principles of nationalism, and their specific implications for the contemporary Russian nationalism may lead to two types of conclusions – predictions about future developments or practical recommendations. The choice between these two alternatives echoes the classical structure-agency dichotomy. Based on the essence of the research subject, with its strong belief in the capacities of individual agents, and also cautioned by the failed prediction of the more detailed and profound study, the preferable options seems to be not the estimation of what is probable, but a suggestion of what is possible.

This analysis offers three basic principles that Russian liberals might chose to follow in the near future for coping with the national issue. First, the challenge of forging the new Russian national identity, as distinct from the eternal discussions on the Russian idea, must be separated from the threat posed by the growing popularity of xenophobia and migrantophobia (which, as Laruelle justly remarks, are nor uniquely Russian phenomena). This is a necessary precondition for starting to develop a non-nationalist response to the challenge of post-imperial nation-building, which would marginalize nationalist populism without special effort, as a mere side effect.

The second suggestion amounts to recognition of nationalism as neither an objective phenomenon with inevitable characteristics nor an artificial collection of slogans and superstitions, but as an powerful ideology with an inner logic. As I maintained elsewhere, once a particular version of nationalism is adopted, its logic comes into action and, by exercising its potential, limits the range of possibilities and imposes its own inner chain of causes and effects. Besides the moral consideration, the tactical use of nationalism for gaining popularity may therefore prove dangerous not only for the society in general, but for the initiators themselves.

Third, the national challenge will most likely be solved, once its is accepted by liberals as an intrinsic part of their own views, and not an imposed puzzle. This move beyond the purely defensive position will not happen immediately after such an intention is recognized. The central issue of contemporary Russian national identity that might appear relevant to the

classical liberalism is the structure and legislation of Russia as a federation. The void existing in contemporary Russian public debate about Russian federalism presents a sharp contrast with the actual existence of Russia as a federation. A reliable working model of Russian federalism, as opposed to the habitual primordialist vs constructionalist discussion of interethnic relations, would enable Russian liberalism to appropriate the whole national issue within the liberal notions of legal guarantees of individual rights within functioning political structures and social institutions – which is precisely what liberals and others want for their country.

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