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POST-SOViet transit and demodernization

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Development of post-Soviet societies was long seen—equally by scholars and political and economic actors—in terms of transit. It was a shared view that this transit meant a collective move from the totalitarian past to democratic society and market economy (Gel’man, 2003: 89ff; Pickles & Smith, 2005: 2ff) New post-Soviet and Western modernities would be established and stabilized, creating One Big Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

However, this optimistic assessment was soon blurred by unexpected deviations from the "transit" in many parts of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. We use the concept of demodernization to describe the new and under-theorized realities of the 21st century. In this issue, we test this concept in the post-Soviet context. For our purposes, we define demodernization as a reverse development in a modern society, which borrows from the previous stages of modernization and creates a new, mixed and improvised order.
In his recent “Development and Dystopia”, Mikhail Minakov explores the history of the concept (Minakov, 2018a: 117ff). Western sociology first used the concept of demodernization to describe a response to modernization by particular communities such as new religious movements or the countercultural youth (Hunter, 1981; Berger, 1973). Alain Touraine and Shmuel Eisenstadt attempted at moving this concept to the center of social theory, but they had a modest success (Touraine, 1992; Robertson, 2011). John David Bone and David Fasenfest tested the concept of demodernization in the economic analysis of late capitalism (Bone, 2010; Fasenfest, 2011).

In Eastern Europe, scholars employed this concept more eagerly, especially when post-Soviet demodernization became transparent with the return of Vladimir Putin as Russia’s president, victory of authoritarian tendencies during Viktor Ianukovych rule in Ukraine, and strengthening of the authoritarian-conservative belt stretching from Astana to Minsk, Ankara and Moscow. First, Russian ethnographer Valery Tishkov used the term to describe the cultural and socio-psychological consequences of Chechen wars for the population of Chechnya (Tishkov, 2001). Russian politician Grigorii Iavlinskii used the same term to describe a tendency in the socio-economic development of Russia in the early 21st century (Iavlinskii, 2003). Somewhat later, Ukrainian historian Andriy Portnov wrote about demodernization in the context of Ukrainian education (Portnov, 2015). Russian cultural scholar Ilya Kalinin wrote about similar processes in Russian memory politics and in the official discourse of modernization (Kalinin, 2011). Alberto Rabilotta, Yakov Rabkin and Samir Saul offered a theory of demodernization, defining it as a reverse development of a modern society (Rabilotta et al., 2013).
Alexander Etkind explained the Russian demodernization by resource dependence of Putin’s state, which quasi-monopolized the lucrative trade in oil and gas, separated the revenue of the state from the income of the population, and led to the “mass distortion of value judgments and destroyed the very capacity to produce such judgments” (Etkind, 2013: 165). Reliance on oil and gas empowers “petromacho”—the oil-and-security personnel that has populated the higher echelons of the Russian state. When the population becomes an object of the care-taking on the part of such an “elite”, it loses competitiveness, social capital, and even survival skills. Basic features of modernity such as education, health-care, and trust all become irrelevant for the purposes of the state and its stake-holders. That is why modernization in Russia must start again with “educated, industrious, creative women and men sending the ridiculous, puffy petromacho to the ash heap of history” (ibid., 166).

In recent *Demodernization. A Future in the Past* (Rabkin & Minakov, 2018), eighteen authors—philosophers, historians and sociologists—describe fourteen cases from the past and present that explore demodernization in various societies. Two core debates in this book unfold between those who see demodernization as a linear process or a cyclic and repetitive one, and between those who emphasize internal or external causes of the reverse development. Yakov Rabkin defines demodernization as a linear process:

“Demodernization means regression on the scale of modernity... It implies lasting degradation of material, health, and cultural conditions...”
in a formerly modernized society, a return to “premodern” forms of life and collective identities” (Rabkin, 2018: 17, 23).

On the contrary, Jean-Luc Guatero and Mikhail Minakov are skeptical about this linearity (Guatero, 2018: 376ff; Minakov, 2018b: 250ff). Guatero demonstrates that modernization and demodernization are relative terms that denote events in which elements of the both are inseparable (Guatero, 2018: 380). On the other hand, Minakov sees demodernization as a moment of developmental cycle, when a radical modernization provokes reaction and reverse development (Minakov, 2018b: 250ff). Also, Yakov Rabkin, Francisco Rivera, Mikhail Minakov and Guy Lanoue focus on cases in which demodernization grows out of the internal causes, though they also recognize the relevance of external factors (Rabkin, 2018; Rivera, 2018; Minakov, 2018b; Lanoue, 2018). However, Orit Bashkin, Detlev Quintern, Hitoshi Suzuki and Ilan Pappe demonstrate that Iraqi and Palestinian demodernizations have been led by external causes and supported be internal forces (Bashkin, 2018; Quintern, 2018; Suzuki, 2018; Pappe, 2018).

Our Journal continues the discussion on the concept of demodernization. In the first article of this issue, Yuriy Savelyev argues that modernization and demodernization processes are inseparable. He uses statistical analysis of European Values Study (EVS) and World Values Survey (WVS) to demonstrate the complexity of demodernization in both “successful” Western countries and controversial Eastern European societies.

Svetlana Shcherbak aims at deconstructing the very concept of demodernization. The concept of demodernization concept relies on constructing an “ideal modernity” as something coherent and consistent, and
Shcherbak disagrees with this vision. She argues that the normative core of modernity evolves because its components do not comprise an internally consistent system but are interconnected freely and flexibly. Modernity consists of “light” and “dark” sides including universal education and the Holocaust, rational science and ethnic cleansing. Shcherbak concludes that some modern phenomena, which we construe as demodernization, are in fact the consequences of contradiction within the neoliberal idea of freedom.

Leonid Luks elaborates on the cases of ideological reaction to political emancipation in Europe after WWI in the forms of the German “conservative revolution” and “Eurasianism” of the Russian émigrés in Europe. Using rich historical evidence, Luks shows how political imagination used irrational arguments to counter political modernization in Central and Eastern Europe. He has also showed that intellectual discourses that promote anti-Westernism also led to the demodernizing effect.

Viktor Koziuk and Oleksndr Dluhopolskyi study the “resource curse”, a demodernizing effect in the resource-dependent societies. Authors show that the over-reliance on natural resources leads to institutional deficit, domination of informal rules and procedures in making managerial decisions, and usurpation of power by the ruling groups. Based on solid analysis of data on the economic and managerial practices in the contemporary societies, the authors prove statistical dependency between the mineral export and development of crony sectors of the economy, as well as the inverse correlation between mineral exports and political stability.

Chris Monday studies a number of post-Soviet and post-communist societies where the legacy of one-party rule led to the increase of the role
of family as cultural institution. Author argues that societies of Russia, Belarus, North Korea, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, or Azerbaijan follow a similar institutional path: they have developed a unique situation in which one-family rule has replaced the communist party as the governing mechanism. Even more, the author argues that the one-family rule gives a measure of political stability to these nations.

In a connected argument, Anton Avksentiev and Valentyna Kyselova demonstrate how neopatrimonialism impacts the processes of political coalition-building at the national and regional levels in Ukraine. The authors study the logic of power groups that act in parliament and regional councils. Based on vast collections of data, authors prove that at the national level these coalitions are typically formed based on "minimal winning", whereas the regional councils are prone to form broader models of coalition. Role of ideologies is weaker in these coalitions, while patronal ties are more important. Also, the scholars show how the so-called “party of power”—one of the most visible examples of post-Soviet political demodernization—involves into its pyramid parochial power groups, national and local.

Oleksandr Zabirko analyses political imagination of the post-Soviet Russophone sci-fi writers and its audiences. The author argues that the most popular genres of speculative fiction promote aesthetic—and ideological—“re-enchantment” of the post-Soviet cultural world. In this process, many conservatively oriented authors exploit the generic conventions of fantasy or science fiction in order to suggest a continuity between fiction and reality. Focusing on geopolitical and social models that
construe the negative Other, these authors legitimize archaic communal structures and disseminate aesthetics of resentment. Zabirko also demonstrates how mass literature shapes the ideological and aesthetic views that later realize in political or military actions in the post-Soviet region.

Maria Engström offers the analysis of Russian neomodernist utopia in visual arts. She focuses on the work of Anton Chumak, a Russian contemporary artist. Engström discerns in Chumak’s images of the Donbass a vision of imperial modernism, which presents an alternative to the postindustrial era. This aesthetics reflect the new role of the Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia. Author elaborates on this similarity and shows how the aesthetic utopia of “new antiquity” and “new order” visualizes the “conservative turn” in Russian politics and culture, seeking for an alternative to neoliberal postindustrialism.

We hope that the new issue of the Ideology and Politics Journal will provoke interest of scholars and wider audiences interested in the political and cultural processes in post-Soviet societies.

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ANTINOMIES OF LATE MODERNITY:

EASTERN EUROPE IN PERIL OF DEMODERNIZATION

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Abstract. The article suggests a synthesis of the current theoretical interpretations of modernization and demonstrates that modernization is a permanent, relative, non-linear and antinomic process which has to be considered in the context of demodernization risks. Statistical analysis of European Values Study (EVS) and World Values Survey (WVS) data during 1990’s–2000’s reveals the confounding value foundations of modernization and demodernization in more successful countries, which are involved in the process of European integration, as well as in post-Soviet Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

If a gradual growth of well-being and a sense of existential security contribute to the spread of emancipation values via socialization of younger generations, which is a prerequisite for the modernization of political institutions, acute socio-economic problems and a loss of confidence by social agents lead to peril of demodernization through the strengthening of materialist value orientations among the population. Thus, the study proves that the process of modernization may be inextricably linked to demodernization over the same period of time. Such a view allows better understanding of the contradictions of
development trends of post-socialist Eastern Europe and the fundamental threats of demodernization of present-day societies.

**Key words**: modernization, values, social change, demodernization, East European countries.

The full text of this article is accessible in Ukrainian.
DEMODERNIZATION OR INTERNAL TENSIONS OF MODERNITY?

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Abstract. This article is devoted to criticism of the demodernization concept as a diagnosis of modern negative social and political phenomena. Author sees the main weakness of the demodernization concept in seeing the driving ideal of modernity as coherent and consistent.

Hence the program of modernity implies an inner inconsistency that manifests, in particular, in tensions between freedom and equality, individual autonomy and common will, as well as the normative core of modernity and its institutional practices. In addition, the normative core of modernity evolves because its components do not comprise an internally consistent system but are interconnected freely and flexible. Interpretation of the program of modernity components and its constellation historically changes. One important feature of modernity is a focus on the rational reconstruction of society on the grounds of a utopian vision of an ideal society. Accordingly, ethnic cleansing and the Holocaust are the ‘dark side’ of modernity that connects with idea of the self-determination of a people that are understood as a homogeneous ethnic entity.

Neoliberalism became the basic ideological program of the last decades of the twentieth century and it also reproduces important features of modernity.
Neoliberalism combines the pathos of moral universalism and the aspiration of rational mastership. Implementation of the neoliberal principles of the minimal state and free market lead to a strengthening of globalized elites, increased inequality, and erosion of the middle class, which together result in a crisis of liberal democracy and the rise of populism.

Therefore, the modern phenomena that can be defined as demodernization are the consequences of realizing the modern ideal of freedom defined in a neoliberal manner. They bring out the internal tensions of the program of modernity.

**Key words**: demodernization, modernity, neoliberalism, populism, the crisis of liberal democracy.

The full text of this article is accessible in Russian.
REFLECTIONS ON “CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION” IN GERMANY AND RUSSIAN-GERMAN PARALLELS

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Abstract. The WWI have ended with the destruction of empires and victory of Western democracies. However, one of the results of this victory was a radical revolt against the West and its values. The anti-Western discourse was stubbornly supported by German and Russian intellectuals that contained the deeply rooted in their cultures tradition of countering the Western development path. Among the most radical Weimar Germany’s deniers of the West were the representatives of the so-called “conservative revolution”, while in the Russian emigration the main anti-West champions were the “Eurasianists.” These two movements are analyzed in this article.

Key words: conservative revolution, Eurasianism, World War One, Bolshevism, National Socialism, totalitarianism, liberalism, Westernism.

The full text of the article is accessible in Russian.
RESOURCE CURSE: THE ROLE OF WEAK INSTITUTIONS AND CRONY-SECTORS

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Annotation. The article analyzes the effect of «resource curse» in view of the inherent characteristics of resource-dependent countries: insufficient development of institutions, domination of informal rules and procedures in making managerial decisions, falling quality of life for the overwhelming majority of population, state usurpation in the interests of the ruling elites. The hypothesis of a direct relationship between the mineral export and the development of crony-sectors and the power distance is tested. Also another hypothesis of an indirect relationship between the mineral export and the political stability is tested. Based on the analysis of combination of the political regime, mineral exports and democracy index, the rentier countries were grouped into four groups. Conclusions about Ukraine’s compliance with the level of the analyzed indicators for the group of democracies with weak institutions have been made.
**Key words:** resource curse, oligarchic economy, quality of institutions, governance, power distance, policy, resource wealth, commodity export, political regime.

The full text of this article is accessible in Ukrainian.
FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY TO FAMILY ORGANIZATION

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Abstract. Author of this paper argues that Russia, Belorussia, North Korea, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Cuba, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan continue down a similar institutional path. These countries have developed a unique system where family rule has replaced the communist party as the governing mechanism. The author proves that this is no mere nepotism, rather the family has become a pivotal institution which grants these nations stability and even prosperity. This paper places familism in the context of the communist legacy. Family rule is central to, the politics, economy, culture and social structure of these counties.

Key words: communism, family, institution, Russia, Belarus

The full text of this article is accessible in Russian.
CALCULATED VERSUS IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVES:

THE LOGIC OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COALITION FORMATION IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. This article proceeds from the assertion that the neopatrimonial essence of the Ukrainian state not only transforms the institutional status and actual function of coalitions, but also the process of coalition formation both at the national and regional levels. Therefore, the subject of this study is the formation and function of parliamentary and regional council alliances in Ukraine and the logic behind them. To define what factors (pragmatic strategies, ideological proximity, or informal “patronal politics”) determine the process of forming coalitions in Ukraine, this article puts forward the first empirical test of classical theories of coalition formation within Ukrainian research discourse. The empirical study is based on materials from the 3rd-8th convocations of the Verkhovna Rada (1998-2018) and all acting regional councils of the southeastern regions.
Based on the results of their empirical tests, the authors of the article argue that, at the national level, "minimal-winning" or "minimal-winning-with one securing faction" coalitions are typically formed, whereas regional councils are prone to forming broader models of coalitions. In terms of ideological proximity, this article suggests that the formation of coalitions based on party antagonisms across the ideological scale is common at both the national and regional level. The results of the analysis on regional councils also demonstrates that their predominantly patronal-subordinate role and function in relation to presidential administrations can be clearly traced. Furthermore, despite the election results and different possible coalition configurations available, the “party of power” regularly captures the biggest share of real power and, ultimately, becomes the key coalition player, whereas regional councils de facto acquire the function of “offices” whose only job it is to confirm the decisions of regional administrations.

Key words: coalitions, factions, coalition formation theories, patronal politics, Ukrainian parties, parliamentarism.
The parliamentary majority of the 8th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada that was formed on the basis of the results of the 2014 parliamentary elections has demonstrated instability in its third year. Accordingly, it has rather aptly been described as the "Schrödinger coalition"\(^1\)—i.e., to an external observer, it is both alive and dead. After three parties ("Liashko's Radical Party," "Samopomich," and "Batkivshchyna") left the coalition "European Ukraine," its "half-life" began and did not lead to re-election. Parliament now continues its work under the control of a spontaneous parliamentary majority, instead of "European Ukraine."

As in most parliamentary-presidential republics, coalitions play a key political and institutional role in policymaking. However, in the context of the Ukrainian neopatrimonial state, not only are the institutional status and actual functions of coalitions changing, but also the process of forming coalitions both at the national and regional levels. Thus, this article focuses on the logic of the formation of parliamentary alliances in Ukraine and aims to methodologically analyze the principles of coalition formation in Ukraine through the lens of classical theories of coalitions.

The following article is divided into two sections. In the first section, the basic theories of coalitions and an analysis of their potential empirical purchase are presented. The second section examines the institutional

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\(^1\) See, for example: "How the Ukrainians studied the new term - the Schrodinger coalition" [https://politeka.net/news/346820-kak-ukraintsy-izuchali-novyj-termin-koalitsiya-shredingera/](https://politeka.net/news/346820-kak-ukraintsy-izuchali-novyj-termin-koalitsiya-shredingera/)
peculiarities of coalitions in Ukraine. In particular, the latter section examines coalitions in the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd-8th convocations (1998-2018) and acting regional councils. This section addresses the following key questions:

- What determines the process of coalition formation in Ukraine? Calculation (pragmatic strategies) or values (ideological proximity)?
- What is the influence and significance of the presidential patronage network for the coalition formation process? Is it possible to form an anti-presidential (anti-gubernatorial) coalition in Ukraine?
- Is the format of regional coalitions determined by the configuration of the parliamentary coalition?

**Classical coalition formation theories: size vs. ideological proximity**

The formation of party coalitions first became an object of political analysis in the 1950s. In his 1951 work *Political Parties*, French political scientist Maurice Duverger examined party unions from the point of view of classical or "old" institutionalism.\(^2\) Noting that multiparty regimes without coalitions exist only as exceptions, Duverger singled out the peculiarities of the party and electoral system as the driving forces for coalition associations (electoral, parliamentary, or governmental).

The theory of political coalitions was further developed, on the one hand, by the establishment of the American paradigms of rational choice and game theory, and, on the other hand, by the development of analytical and

\(^2\) Duverger, 1951.
value-focused approaches by representatives of the European school of political science.\(^3\) Both traditions tried to create universal theories that would explain the logic of the formation of coalitions based on the motives of political actors.\(^4\) Coalition participants are guided by different motives and goals, a variable that underlies the distinction between these two classical theories of coalitions.

**1. Power maximization theories** proceed from an assumption of actors' rational, pragmatic, and calculated goals of seeking to obtain maximum possible power and, accordingly, political dividends. The key factor in this group of theories is the size of the coalition: the more coalition participants there are, the more necessary it becomes to "share" power. The basic conceptual models in this theoretical group are presented below.

1) **Minimal winning coalition** (Riker, 1962). The formation of political coalitions can be considered similar to the process of playing chess or poker, wherein players apply rational strategies in order to maximize their own profit. According to Riker, parties try to choose configurations of coalitions that meet the threshold criterion of minimum size, since this approach offers a maximum share of profits among participants. Thus, the minimal-winning coalition is the one that fails (loses majority) when at least one of its participants leaves the coalition.

2) **Minimal size coalition** (Gamson, 1962). Gamson's proposed concept is a logical conclusion based on the theory of the minimal-winning coalition.

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\(^4\) The possible configurations of coalitions based on the classical coalition formation approaches were profoundly summarized by A. Lijphart. See: Lijphart, 2012.
In a situation where it is possible to form several minimal-winning coalitions, rational political players choose the configuration that is closest to the minimum required for a majority (50% + 1).

3) *Coalition with the smallest number of parties* (Leiserson, 1966). This theory is also known as the "bargaining proposition." Leiserson proceeds from a simple principle: the fewer the parties, the easier it is to agree on the creation of a coalition and to maintain its stability in the long run. Thus, the most optimal coalition is the one which includes the fewest number of parties.

2. *Policy-based theories* focus on the value priorities of the coalition's participants. Ideological proximity as the grounds for party unification serves as the main analytical factor in these theories, which assume participants are interested in forming particular coalition strategies and introducing particular kinds of policy. To this group of theories can be referred the following models of coalitions:

1) *Minimal connected winning coalition* (Axelrod, 1970). Axelrod proposed a model in which parties are located on an ideological scale. A party's location on that scale determines whether it becomes a member of a given coalition or not. The parties that are closest to each other on this scale are potential coalition partners, so long as they are "bound" to each other by a similar vision of the political course.

2) *Minimal range coalition* (Swaan, 1973). Swaan's theory argues that the policy a coalition would implement is represented by a point on an ideological scale, and this point is roughly in the middle of the gap between the positions of the coalition's extreme parties. Following this, the most
advantageous strategy for interested parties is to create a coalition with the absolute minimum amount of ideological distance between its members.

3) Policy-viable coalition (Laver and Shepsle, 1996). The spatial model of Laver and Shepsle starts with the idea of a structurally introduced equilibrium. Since every minister in the government represents the interests of a party, he or she tends to pursue a "dictatorial" policy, despite the positions of coalition partners. As a result, the government comes to an agreement on certain policy areas that suit most of the coalition’s members, or, an "equilibrium" pool of parties.

Several contemporary theories of coalition formation have emerged as an attempt to improve upon their classical predecessors. Here we find it worthwhile to highlight a few of these newer theories:

- **Actor-oriented coalition formation theories** include B. Peleg’s theory of the dominant player (Peleg, 1980), as well as A. Van Deemen’s theory of the dominant player within the minimal-size coalition (Van Deemen, 1991). These theories often include mathematical formulas that aim to calculate the "dominance" of a political player in the coalition--see, for example, the indexes of Shapley and Shubik, Banzaf, and Tomiyama⁵.

- **Multi-dimensional coalition formation theories** are those such as Schofield’s solution theory (Schofield, 1993), Grofman’s protocoalition formation theory (Grofman, 1982), the competitive solution theory of R. McKelvey, P. Ordeshook and M. Winer (McKelvey et. al, 1978), and De Vries’s maximal satisfaction solution theory (De Vries, 1999).

– Institutional theories of coalition formation include the theory of institutional constraints on cabinet formation, as set out by Ström, Budge and Laver (Ström et. al, 1994), as well as Tsebelis’s veto player theory (Tsebelis, 1990).

The research on coalition formation in Ukraine, it should be noted, is mostly theoretically and analytically oriented. Ukrainian scholars, for instance, predominantly analyze the constitutional and legal status of coalitions,⁶ the institutional and party aspect of coalitions,⁷ and the ways in which stable coalition governments are formed.⁸

**Coalitions in Ukraine: formal and legal uncertainty**

Now we consider the formal and legal aspects of coalition regulation in Ukraine. The legal regulation of coalitions and opposition institutions in Ukraine was introduced between 2006-2010. Within the framework of constitutional reform and in accordance with amendments to the Regulations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine,⁹ the 2006 and 2010 versions of this law stipulated norms for the regulation of coalitions (Chapter 12) and parliamentary opposition (Chapter 13).

However, following amendments to the Regulations, these chapters were completely removed from the document. At present, the legal status of coalitions in Ukraine are defined in rather general terms by the Constitution,

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⁷ Baranovsky, 2008; Yakymenko, 2015; Panchak-Byaloblotska, 2016.  
⁹ The Law of Ukraine “On the Regulations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine”
decisions of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, and separate articles of the Regulations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (in particular, regarding the formation of parliamentary factions).

Article 83 of the Constitution of Ukraine\textsuperscript{10} defines the procedure for creating a coalition in parliament. According to this article, a coalition is an association of parliamentary factions based on the harmonization of political positions and formed on the basis of Verkhovna Rada elections results. A coalition should include a majority of deputies from the constitutional composition of the Ukrainian parliament. However, a parliamentary faction, if it independently has the majority of deputies from the constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada, may also obtain the rights of a parliamentary faction coalition. A parliamentary coalition is formed within one month from the opening day of the first session of the Verkhovna Rada, or, within a month of the day the previous coalition ceases to act (during the legal parliamentary term).

Regarding the actual function of coalitions, the Constitution only states that a coalition can make proposals to the President of Ukraine regarding candidates for the office of Prime Minister of Ukraine, as well as proposals for candidates for the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Article 90 of the Constitution allows the president to terminate the powers of the Verkhovna Rada early, in the event that a coalition is not formed within a month, or, in the event that no composition of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has been formed within sixty days after the resignation of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.
The decision of the Constitutional Court in 2008\textsuperscript{11} resolved the issue of how to treat a "coalition of parliamentary factions." The Constitutional Court emphasized the decisive role of deputy factions in the formation of a coalition: only deputies who are members of parliamentary factions may be part of the coalition. However, in 2010, the Constitutional Court stated\textsuperscript{12} that it is possible for non-factional deputies to be members of a coalition. In this decision, the formation of a coalition was recognized as a prerequisite for parliament’s legal authority, and grounds for the termination of the coalition’s activity were noted (i.e., when it has a minority from the constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine after the parliamentary elections).

At the same time, the specific mechanism of formation, organizational provision of work, detailed functions, and legal status of parliamentary coalitions are not clearly regulated by current legislation in Ukraine. In accordance with the existing legal norms, parliamentary coalitions are considered solely from the narrow point of view of government formation and are not regarded as key actors or policymakers in the political process.

A similar situation is found regarding the definition and legal status of coalitions at the level of regional, district and local councils. The law lacks any conception of a "coalition of the regional/district/local council." However, Article 26 of the Law of Ukraine, "On Local Self-Government,\textsuperscript{13} states that village, town and city councils may decide on "uniting into

\textsuperscript{11}Decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine dated September 17, 2008 No. 16-rp / 2008
\textsuperscript{12}Decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine dated April 6, 2010 No. 11-rp / 2010
\textsuperscript{13}Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government"
association or joining associations and other forms of voluntary associations of local self-government bodies and the leaving them." Regional and district councils have similar powers (Article 43).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that coalitions at the regional level have certain peculiarities:

- they are, one way or another, "politically dependent" on the process of formation of coalitions in the Verkhovna Rada;
- they are epiphenomenal in nature, as they are mainly created to solve specific issues (i.e., party factions are temporarily united in order to have enough votes for a specific decision or for the election period).

Typically, formal coalitions at the regional level are created through the signing of an agreement on the creation of a coalition of deputies' factions. Regional coalition can also be created through the signing of an agreement on the formation of a multi-factional coalition, the peculiarities of which are determined in accordance with the rules of a specific council.

**Principles of parliamentary coalition formation in Ukraine**

The uncertain formal and legal status of coalitions as an institution in Ukraine leads to a methodological problem—namely, it creates complexity in determining the composition of a coalition majority. Although the notion of "coalition of parliamentary factions" (that is, "factions," and not a simple majority of deputies) is stated in the Constitution, the formal legal approach to analyzing coalitions is not relevant in the Ukrainian context: it is not enough to investigate signatures on coalition agreements; instead, it is
necessary to trace the real voting patterns of deputies who de facto enter coalitions.

On the one hand, this gives researches a methodological advantage and allows for the tracking of the dynamics, "the life of a coalition," whose state changes with each session of the Verkhovna Rada. On the other hand, such an approach is extremely labor-intensive (since it is necessary to analyze tens of thousands of votes), and, moreover, may lead to erroneous conclusions, because not all voting gives an idea of the actual composition of the coalition.

One solution to this methodological problem was provided, for example, by analysts of the "CHESNO" civic movement. They developed an "index of opposition"14 that shows the percentage of votes "against" or "abstained" from the total number of votes of a deputy/faction. However, the percentage values obtained are extremely low for all actors, since oppositionists often choose the option "did not vote" or "absent" rather than "against." Opposition members also periodically vote in synch with the party of power on populist or economic issues.

Therefore, in our opinion, it is more logical to propose a reverse approach to fix the percentage of votes "for," interpreting it as a "coalition index" or "index of solidarity with the authorities." However, this also does not solve the technical problem of the analysis of tens of thousands of units of data arrays, nor the meaningful problem of various "weights" of vote issues. To vote with the majority for an ordinary issue does not mean

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becoming part of a coalition. Thus, in our study, we reproduced the chronology of Ukrainian coalitions of the 3rd-8th convocations of the Verkhovna Rada of (1998-2018) and analyzed "key voting," which we take to include votes on budget approval and on approval of the prime minister/government. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1 (compiled on the basis of data on named votes taken from the website of the Verkhovna Rada; see Appendix).

We applied classic theories of coalition formation to the analysis of 32 "key voting" cases (20 budget votes and 12 government votes) and asked several questions of the data. What is the most typical factor in the formation of parliamentary coalitions in Ukraine? In terms of calculation, which associations are more typical across these 20 years of Ukrainian parliamentarism: the minimal-winning coalitions, broad (or super-size) coalitions, or something intermediate? In terms of values, how does the ideological distance between the parties affect the choice of potential partners?

The size of the winning coalitions of the Verkhovna Rada (1998-2018) are presented in Figure 1 (see Appendix).

Our analysis has shown that the average of the size of the 32 coalition is 266 deputies, or, 59% of the constitutional composition. At the same time, 53% of coalitions are of the minimal-winning sort. It should be noted that the "faction" or "parliamentary group" itself is not the atomic unit for analysis: "non-factional" deputies are almost always co-opted into the coalition, and the factions themselves often do not give 100% mobilization
to the vote (although this problem of coalition is "fought" by means of "button pushing").

But it is worth noting that the size of the coalition is not a guarantee of its stability and duration. For example, the 2005 budget was adopted by a record number of votes (339), and, a few months later, another coalition in the parliament of the same convocation was formed and voted for the appointment of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (373). Despite such great support, Yulia Tymoshenko’s first government lasted a little more than six months, while Tymoshenko’s second government worked for more than two years, even though it became possible due to 226 deputies’ votes.

Attention should be paid to the fact that a "broad coalition under the prime minister" was formed more often than "under the budget." Presumably, in the first case, "extra votes" were the initiative of the deputies/factions themselves, who expected to receive the prime minister’s support in this way. In the second case, only the beneficiary fractions of this budget voted for it, and, in this situation, the logic of maximizing benefits stimulated a minimal-winning vote.

There were two main conclusions reached from this study of parliamentary coalitions in Ukraine. First, Ukrainian parties are inclined to form minimal-winning coalitions, which allow participants to increase their own "winnings" when playing with a zero-sum game. Secondly, one can assume that some of these minimal-winning coalitions were originally conceived as MWC-Light, but "narrowed" on election day due to lack of mobilization or one-sided rupture of arrangements amongst the factions. In practice, this intermediate type occurred in about one-third of all cases. Its
benefits include lowering the costs of the coalition-initiating party (most often, presidential forces) during negotiations with partners, as these partners (as opposed to the MWC model) do not have veto-player status. That is, blackmail from small factions—owners of "golden shares"—is impossible and such a coalition is more stable.

An analysis of the value aspect of coalition formation in Ukraine has shown that the traditional, binary, ideological "right—left" opposition seems to be irrelevant for the Ukrainian party system, so it is worth examining 22 "key voting" cases (starting with the one after the so-called "orange revolution") by dividing all parties into two categories of "pro-Maidan" and "anti-Maidan" blocks.

The calculations show that, in 9 out of 22 "key votes," coalitions united ideologically polar or remote parties. The most striking examples of this were: the vote of the "Regions of Ukraine" faction for Yulia Tymoshenko’s government in February 2005; the vote of the "Party of Regions" faction for the government of Yuriy Yekhanurov and the actual alliance with "Our Ukraine" in September 2005; the betrayal of the "democratic coalition" on the part of Alexander Moroz and the formation of a majority in the "Party of Regions" + "Communist Party of Ukraine" + "Socialist Party of Ukraine" in 2006; the vote of the majority of the "Party of Regions" faction (!) for the first government of Arseniy Yatsenyuk in February 2014.

Elected in 2014, the 8th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada is an illustration of the "ideological pluralism" of the newest Ukrainian coalitions: for the last three years, key parliamentary elections have been possible only due to the votes of two parliamentary groups formed of "fragments" of the
"Party of Regions" faction of the 7th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2012-2014). Without the votes of the "Party of Regions" from the "Vidrodzhennia" and "Volia narodu," the state budgets of 2016, 2017, 2018 would not have been adopted, and Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman also would be obliged to these groups for votes. Although, from the point of view of "value theories," the BPP and the "People’s Front"—being the core of the coalition—had to pick up voices in more ideologically adjacent "Samopomich" or "Batkivshchyna" parties.

Another peculiarity of Ukrainian parliamentary coalitions is their high degree of fractionalization. This was particularly evident in the 3rd and 4th convocations of parliament (1998-2006), when the number of actors forming a coalition ranged from eight to twelve. The number of actors has since declined, but there remains, to the present day, a tendency toward the establishment of parliamentary groups and factions (often of the same names with the existing parties that did not get to parliament) for whose programs voters did not vote—for example, it characterizes the group/party "Vidrodzhennia."

Regarding relations between the parliament and the president, there were rare precedents of anti-presidential coalitions in Ukraine, but often their activity paralyzed the work of the Verkhovna Rada (for example, the political crisis of 2001-2002) and did not lead to the development of alternative policy. In fact, one of the few examples of the work of an anti-presidential majority was the 5th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2006-2007), in which a coalition of the "Party of Regions," the "Communist Party of Ukraine," and the "Socialist Party of Ukraine" confronted the opposition of
"Yulia Tymoshenko’s Bloc” and the presidential "People’s Union Our Ukraine."

In 30 of the 32 cases considered “key votes,” the presidential faction was part of a parliamentary coalition. This was largely due to the presence of a large number of pressure instruments on the parliament in the presidential branch of the government, including both the "power bloc" and the option for the dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada, which leads to the penetration of the legislative body by a pyramid of patronage and client networks—at the top of which is the president.

**Principles of regional coalition formation in Ukraine**

Within the analysis of the peculiarities of regional-level coalition formation, it is interesting to explore whether the logic reproduced at the parliamentary level remains the same. It is also important to investigate whether the parliamentary coalition influences the configuration of regional alliances and, if so, in what manner. To answer this question, we analyzed the "key votes" (for the head of the council and for the last budget) in the regional councils formed after the 2015 elections in the southeastern regions (the data for analysis were obtained from the sites of regional councils and are presented in Table 2).

The results of this analysis pointed to an interesting occurrence in the Sumy region, where, after the elections of 2015, a coalition with the core of "BPP Solidarity" and "Batkivshchyna" and with its head (Semyon Salatenko) from the party of Yulia Tymoshenko was formed. However, growing conflict
between the head of the council and Governor Mykola Klochkov led to the presidential faction initiating the resignation of Salatenko in December 2016; having received the support of "Vidrodzhennia," "Lyashko's Radical Party," and "Volia Narodu," the presidential faction's candidate, Volodymyr Tokar, won the election (35 votes "for," where 33 were necessary). The new head succeeded in removing political tensions in the regional council and turning the "minimal-winning coalition" into the "broad" one—the regional budget-2018 was adopted by 52 votes (the members of all factions voted "for," except "Svoboda").

The Poltava region verified the thesis on high political fragmentation. Ten parties in Poltava immediately went to the regional council, greatly complicating the process of coalition formation at the beginning. Olexander Bilenky, a representative of "BPP Solidarity," became the head of council, after alternative candidates were nominated by "Ukrop" and "Agrarian Party." The core of the coalition was formed by "Batkivshchyna" (received the position of the first vice-chairman of council), "Vidrodzhennia" (received the budget commission) and the "Party of ordinary people of Sergei Kaplin" (in exchange for the commission on gas fields). A year later, a split began in the coalition: at first, "Batkivshchyna" initiated a statement of mistrust by the council to the governor of the region, Valery Golovko, and, after a month, "BPP Solidarity" tried to remove the first vice-chairman of the council from "Batkivshchyna." However, both attempts failed without finding support from other factions. The budget for 2018 was passed almost unanimously (71 votes "for"), and it seems the hatchet has been buried and the council now
has a broad coalition. Olexander Bilenky, in a recent interview, called voting for the budget "evidence of the consolidation of the regional council."\(^{15}\)

The high results of the "Opposition Bloc" in the elections to the Dnipropetrovsk regional council (46 mandates out of 120) could have changed the status quo of the "reign" of the party of power at the regional level, but it appeared that there was no place for the bloc in the formed coalition. "BPP Solidarity," which took the third place, signed a coalition agreement with "Vidrodzhennia," "Ukrop," "Batkivshchyna," and the "Lyashko's Radical Party" (i.e., all except the "Opposition Bloc" and "Samopomich"). The head of the council, Gleb Pigunov, was elected the representative of the presidential party. However, during voting for the regional budget in 2018, half of the "Opposition Bloc" faction supported the draft proposed by the regional administration.

In the Mykolayiv regional council, the starting model of the "all against the Opposition Bloc" coalition led to the appointment of "BPP Solidarity" representative Viktoria Moskalenko as head of the regional council, while the leader of the "Batkivshchyna" faction, Mikhail Sokolov, received the post of first vice-chairman. However, a year later, the deputies passed a vote of no-confidence in Mikhail Sokolov (39 votes "for," the main promoters being "BPP Solidarity" and the "Opposition Bloc"), and the post of the first vice-chairman went to the presidential faction. "Batkivshchyna" subsequently went into opposition. After the appointment of Oleksiy Savchenko as the head of the Mykolayiv Regional State Administration, relations between the

\(^{15}\) See publication of Hromadske radio on 28.02.2018
"Opposition Bloc" and "BPP Solidarity" began to worsen, and the faction of "oppositionists" was divided in two: those who cooperate with the party of power and those who oppose it. The regional budget for 2018 was adopted by a minimal-winning coalition of 39 deputies ("BPP Solidarity," about half of the faction of "Opposition Bloc," "Nash Krai," "Ukrop," "Vidrodzhennia").

In the Odessa region, due to the results of local elections in 2015, a broad pro-presidential coalition was formed on the principle of "all against the Opposition Bloc," and Anatoliy Urbansky, a representative of "BPP Solidarity," was elected as the head of the council. From the point of view of "ideological theories of the coalition," representatives of the "anti-Maidan camp" could successfully form their own coalition: "Opposition Bloc" + "Vidrodzhennia" + "Nash Krai" + "Trust the Activities" of Odessa Mayor Gennady Trukhanov = 51 deputies, when 43 are necessary. Mykola Skoryk, who lost the election for head of regional council, directly accused16 "Nash Krai" and "Trust the Activities" of having been sold to the authorities. Two years later, all factions (including the "Opposition Bloc," but without full internal mobilization of factions) voted for the 2018 regional budget, although Mykola Skoryk publicly continues to criticize the authorities for the region's unbalanced budget, among other things.

In the Zaporizhia region, the "Opposition Bloc" won the election in a similar manner as they did in the Dnipropetrovsk region, but Grigory Samardak ("BPP Solidarity"), the former head of the regional state

16 "Skoryk: 'Trust in activities' and "Nash krai" were sold to the central authorities’", http://timer-odessa.net/news/skorik_doveray_delam_i_nash_kray_prodalis_tsentralnoy_vlasti_375.html
administration, was elected head of the regional council, and the "Opposition Bloc" received the position of the first vice-chairman. However, after the appointment of a new governor, Constantin Bryl, an alliance with the "Opposition Bloc" in the presidential team collapsed. According to the claims of the new head of the regional council, it is the "Opposition Bloc" (and "Samopomich") that are his main opponents in the council. Escalation of the conflict occurred in the summer of 2017, but, in November 2017, due to 14 votes of the "Opposition Bloc" (half of the faction voted "for") and 4 votes from "Samopomich," the regional budget for 2018 was adopted. This alone illustrated the fact that the opponents had the ability to negotiate. A distinctive feature of this vote was the position of the unconsolidated factions: the vote split not only the "Opposition Bloc" in half, but also "Batkivshchyna" and "Ukrop." Most likely, this indicates agreement not at the level of "head of the council – faction," but at the level of personal negotiations with individual deputies.

In the Kherson regional council, initially a pro-presidential coalition was formed, which supported the appointment of the former governor, Andriy Putilov, as the head of the council. Putilov received his votes from "Nash Krai," "Lyashko’s Radical Party," as well as the "Opposition Bloc." Still, 2016 year turned out to be unsuccessful for the head of the regional council: first, as a "BPP Solidarity" candidate in additional elections to the Verkhovna Rada, he lost to Yuri Odarchenko from "Batkivshchyna," and, on September 9, the regional council passed a vote of no-confidence in Putilov. On

17 "The head of the Zaporizhzhya Regional State Administration declares the threat of destabilization in the region”
September 27, 2016, a minimal-winning coalition among "Batkivshchyna," "Ukrop", "Samopomich," "Lyashko’s Radical Party," as well as the majority of the "Opposition Bloc" faction, appointed Volodymyr Manger, a representative of "Batkivshchyna," as the head. Moreover, due to Manger's support, problems began\(^{18}\) with the regional organization of "Lyashko's Radical Party"—i.e., Oleg Lyashko demanded that local parties support Putilov and not the candidate from "Batkivshchyna." Between the new head of the regional council and the head of the regional state administration, Andrei Gordyev, a tense relationship developed. Nevertheless, the regional council approved the draft budget for 2018 proposed by the governor. The current format of a broad coalition includes all factions (without full mobilization) except "Samopomich."

In Kharkiv region, the coalition core consisted of the election winner, the party of the Mayor Gennadiy Kernes, "Vidrodzhennia," and the presidential "BPP Solidarity" party. At the same time, in addition to these two factions, "Nash Krai" and the "Opposition Bloc" voted for the re-election of the head of the council, Serhiy Chernov. As in the case of the Odessa Regional Council, a "Vidrodzhennia" coalition with the "Opposition Bloc" or "Nash krai" was also possible, but Gennady Kernes preferred to cooperate with the presidential forces. "Samopomich" obtained the status of main oppositional force in the regional council.

The Donetsk and Luhansk regions were not included in our study. Following the law "On military-civilian administrations," elections for

\(^{18}\) "Kherson "radicals" dispersed ... radically" [http://nk-online.tv/hersonskie-radikalyi-razoshlis-radikalno/]
Regional councils in 2015 were not held there. Alternatively, we considered the coalitions in the city councils of Mariupol and Severodonetsk.

Due to the political position of the presidential team's local representatives, elections to the Mariupol city council in 2015 took place a month later than scheduled and were on the verge of collapsing. The city electoral commission (the majority of which consisted of representatives of the "pro-Maidan forces") refused to accept ballots, citing numerous errors as the reason. In October 2015, Pavel Zhebrivsky, the head of the Donetsk military-civilian administration, also spoke about a possible cancellation of the elections in Mariupol. Nevertheless, the elections took place, and their results showed that the fears of the presidential team were justified: "BPP Solidarity" did not overcome the 5% barrier, and 45 out of 54 seats received the "Opposition Bloc."

In Severodonetsk, the "Opposition Bloc" won the largest number of mandates as a result of the 2015 elections (16 out of 36), but the coalition was formed on the "all against the Opposition Bloc" principle. Then, eight deputies from the "democratic coalition" (representatives of various factions, including the full faction of "Lyashko's Radical Party") moved to the side of the opposition, after which the city council thrice voted no-confidence inValentin Kozakov, the mayor of Severodonetsk. The court thrice renewed Kozakov to his post. In 2018, under the influence of people's deputy Sergei Shakhov, a pro-mayor coalition against the "Opposition Bloc" was formed again, and Elvira Marinich ("Nash Krai") was elected the new secretary of the city council.
Based on an analysis of 10 regional cases, we also tested hypotheses for "calculated" and "ideological" coalitions (see Figure 2).

In the case of regional coalitions, the average calculated value of the coalition size that voted for the head of the regional council is 64.7% of the deputy corps. Of the 11 examples (eight regional councils with two different votes in Kherson region, and two city councils), the minimal-winning coalition was formed in five cases, a MWC + 1 (one faction "insures") was formed in two cases, and a large majority was formed in three cases (in the context of a one-party majority in Mariupol, mentioning the term "coalition" is inappropriate, as in the case of the Kharkiv city council).

At the same time, the average calculated value of a coalition that adopted a regional budget for 2018 was 78.3% of the full membership of the deputy corps. In practically all the examples examined, a broad consolidation took place, which was supported by the persuasion of deputies by the head of the council and the regional administration. It is likely that not only deputies from the "core of the coalition" or direct beneficiaries of the budget (who receive "money in the district" or some resource for their enterprises) vote for the local budget, but also those wishing to demonstrate their loyalty to the governor and not lose the right "to resolve their questions" with the regional state administration.

In terms of the ideological or value aspect of coalitions, we tested the alliances in the southeast on the presence of "unnatural unions" of representatives of the "anti-Maidan" and "pro-Maidan" blocs. In all the eight regional councils considered, the election of the head of council became possible at the expense of simultaneous voting by "BPP Solidarity" and
former "Party of Regions" representatives from "Vidrodzhennia" and "Nash Krai." In three cases, the "Opposition Bloc" faction also participated in this coalition, although, in the year 2015, alliances against the "Opposition Bloc" were formed. Any ideological taboo against cooperation with the "Opposition Bloc" finally disappeared closer to 2018: during the vote for the regional budget, the "opposition" faction (in full or in part, but by the majority of the faction) everywhere acted as part of the coalition.

On this basis, we can make the following important conclusion: the coalition process at the regional level is free of any ideological factors. "Right" and "left," "Party of Regions" and "Maidan" representatives, pro-government and opposition are all are united in regional councils in different configurations, despite the ideological differences of political forces. In 6 out of 8 regional councils considered in this study, the council heads were elected from the "BPP Solidarity" party, although, in only two of these six regions the presidential force won the 2015 election. Thus, conflicts between the regional state administration and the regional council in these cases are not a matter of concern.

In the Kherson region, relations between the head of the council from "Batkivshchyna" and the governor are quite tense, but they have not yet entered a critical phase. In the Kharkiv region, there is complete mutual understanding (at least publicly) between the head of the council from the party "Vidrodzhennia" and the head of the regional state administration. A revealing episode occurred in the Sumy region, where a deputy from "Batkivshchyna" elected as head of the council entered into an open conflict with the governor appointed by the president; the latter won and influenced
the format of the coalition in the regional council, leading to the decision of the council to vote no-confidence in the "Batkivshchyna" representative. Thus, despite the negative attitude of voters in the southeastern regions toward "BPP Solidarity," the presidential party finds ways to remain in power in the regional councils, where, in most cases, large coalitions are formed, autonomous both from the configuration of "enemy-friends" in parliament and from the ideological concerns.

Furthermore, our analysis of regional councils demonstrated that their predominantly patronal-subordinate role and functions in relation to presidential administrations can be clearly traced. This empirical evidence illustrates Hale’s concept of "patronal politics," according to which the whole political system (distinctive amongst Post-Soviet regimes) operates due to the presence of hierarchically organized "power pyramids" with a chief patron atop; the key principle of their existence and reproduction is the distribution of material rewards and punishments (Hale, 2015). The case of Ukrainian coalition formation at the regional level suggests a trend: despite the election results and different available possible coalition configurations, the “party of power” ("BPP Solidarity" at present) usually obtains the largest share of real power and ultimately becomes the key coalition player, whereas regional councils de facto function as “offices” rubberstamping the decisions of regional administrations.

Conclusions

Summarizing the results of this study, we highlight the following conclusions. At the national level, the 3rd-8th convocations of the Verkhovna
Rada (1998-2018) formed primarily "minimal-winning" or "minimal-winning with one securing faction" coalitions; the average size of coalitions was 59% of the full membership of the deputy corps. The "European Ukraine" coalition is illustrative of this. "European Ukraine" initially formed as a broad coalition at the beginning of the 8th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2014) and eventually shrunk to the "minimal winning coalition with one securing faction" format of "BPP Solidarity" + "People's Front" + "Vidrodzhennia" + "Volia narodu" + "Lyashko’s Radical Party." Another distinctive feature of Ukrainian parliamentarism is the formation of coalitions "under the president." This usually occurs after presidential elections, when cardinal reconfigurations take place in the parliament of the same convocation - i.e., the coalition "under Viktor Yushchenko" in 2005, and "under Viktor Yanukovych" in 2010. Regarding "commonality of values," parties that are part of the parliamentary coalition often are forced to take into account ideological issues when creating alliances, due to the high reputational losses that result from coalition building and which are unacceptable to their voters.

The analysis of the situation at the regional level has shown that, in general, regional councils form broader coalitions than in the Verkhovna Rada (the average size of the coalition is 71% of the full membership of the deputy corps). This may be explained by several factors:

- The idea of "depoliticization of local councils," which is often expressed by the leaders of regional councils. This kind of desertion of politics opens up a broader range of options for parties in their choice of potential allies.
- The circulation of political elites at the regional level, more often, is slower than at the national level. Long-term links between local politicians who temporarily represent franchises of Ukrainian party projects allow them to negotiate without considering the actual party-coalition condition in Kyiv.

The longevity of local political elites who "survive" one presidential regime after another can be explained by the relative autonomy (vis-à-vis the configuration of the parliamentary majority) of the coalition process of the regional councils. The situation in the Kherson regional council, where local "radicals" supported the candidate from "Batkivshchyna" for the position of head of the council, is indicative, despite the demands of Oleg Lyashko to vote for the presidential protege. In general, all except one coalition in the regional councils are contrary to the parliamentary format (i.e., they include alliances of parties that are opponents at the central level; for example, "BPP Solidarity" and "Batkivshchyna" or "Opposition Bloc").

It is worth emphasizing that a tendency toward the gradual expansion of regional coalitions is also clearly visible. Two or three blocks are formed during the first stage of voting and during the election of the head of regional council, where the representative of one bloc wins. Later, however, the coalition winner co-opts new members—often, not at the level of factions, but at the level of deputies, which results in fracturing factions. As a result, for example, the actual size of the coalition during voting for 2018 regional budgets was substantially larger than its original format.

At the regional level, where less public attention is focused, the risk of reputational costs is significantly lower, which explains relatively large
"ideological flexibility" in the regional coalition. However, the formation of coalitions between parties that are ideologically antagonistic is typical of both levels (to a different extent, though). Nine out of 22 (41%) of the "key votes" in the parliament (for the new prime minister or for the budget) included alliances of "pro-Maidan" and "anti-Maidan" parties. In the last three years, the so-called "Democratic coalition" has functioned only through the votes of former "Party of Regions" representatives from the deputy groups "Vidrodzhennia" and "Volia Narodu."

In general, the conducted study demonstrated that the classical theories of coalitions do not take into account the specifics of neopatrimonial post-Soviet political regimes. As a result, their explanatory and prognostic efficiency is reduced, since they do not consider huge, non-competitive advantages for the presidential party of power. Representative bodies and their fractional balance of forces cannot be reflected in isolation from pressure resources (including controlled prosecutor's office, courts, Security Service of Ukraine, etc.) of the presidential vertical. At the parliamentary level, 30 of the 32 coalitions explored during the period 1998-2018 included a presidential party. Coalition formation in regional councils of southeastern Ukraine, where support for the party "BPP Solidarity" is on average less than 3%, is nevertheless based on the principle that "the BPP will be the commander of the parade." In six of the eight regional councils in the southeast, the head of the council is a representative of the presidential faction, despite the fact that "BPP Solidarity" won elections in 2015 in only two of these six regions. The authority of "BPP Solidarity" vassals in the regions is the product of consensus between local elites and
patron-client agreements with the president, but it is not supported at all by electoral legitimacy.

In terms of methodological difficulties with this analysis, it should be noted that "shadow coalitions" exist, and the lists of these coalitions are unpublished. For a parliamentary-presidential republic in which the notion of "coalition of parliamentary factions" is specified in the Constitution, this is unacceptable. Our analysis suggests that an open register of coalition members should be maintained on the Verkhovna Rada’s website, thus limiting the possibilities for populist demagogues to publicly declare their opposition and de facto support the viability of the current political regime.

Furthermore, considering that the Constitution of Ukraine specifies the notion of a "coalition of parliamentary factions" and not the notion of a "coalition of deputies," it is necessary to adhere to this principle in practice; coalitions that conflict with this principle should be recognized as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. This step should reduce the level of political corruption by limiting the personal bribing of deputies (direct or indirect, through allocation of budgetary funds to the district). In this case, decisions on the entry or exit of a faction from the coalition would be made by a two-thirds vote of deputies at the faction’s meetings and not by the sole mandate of its chairman.

As for the regional level, it should be necessary to make legally legible the concept of "coalition" by way of an open register of its members, as well. This would increase the reputational cost for alliances between ideologically opposed factions and bring value into local politics. Further, such innovations would help to reduce the level of political corruption in local
councils. Local councils are currently politically dependent on state administrations—a relationship that mimics the breached balance of power between the president and the parliament. At the same time, local councils have electoral legitimacy, in contrast to the heads of regional and district administrations, who are appointed by the president almost directly. We conclude that it is necessary to strengthen powers of local self-government via decentralization of power: votes of no-confidence in the heads of regional or district administrations, when adopted by two-thirds of the composition of the relevant council, should result in automatic dismissal, without the right to re-submit the candidacy to the president.

**Bibliography**


Appendix

Tables

Table 1 Budget approval and approval of the prime minister/government voting of Ukrainian coalitions in the 3rd-8th convocations of the Verkhovna Rada (1998-2018)

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<td>7th Convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2012-2014)</td>
<td>Yatsenyuk government №2</td>
<td>BPP + NF + RPL + Bat + Sam + Volia + ED</td>
<td>OB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th Convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2012-2014)</td>
<td>Yatsenyuk government №1</td>
<td>Bat + UDAR + Svo + SEU + ED + PR</td>
<td>CPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2007-2012)</td>
<td>Budget - 2012</td>
<td>PR + Ref + BL</td>
<td>BYT, CPU, NUNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>Azarov government №1 2010</td>
<td>PR + BL + CPU</td>
<td>BYT, NUNS</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2008</td>
<td>Budget - 2009</td>
<td>BYT + BL + NUNS</td>
<td>PR, CPU</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>Budget - 2008</td>
<td>BYT + NUNS</td>
<td>PR, CPU, BL</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>Tymoshenko government №2</td>
<td>BYT + NUNS</td>
<td>PR, CPU, BL</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2006-2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 June</td>
<td>Budget - 2007</td>
<td>PR + SPU + CPU</td>
<td>BYT, NUNS</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 August</td>
<td>Yanukovich government №2</td>
<td>PR + SPU + CPU</td>
<td>BYT, NUNS</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Convocation of the Verkhovna Rada (2002-2006)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 June</td>
<td>Budget - 2006</td>
<td>NU + NP + UNP + PP + DN + SPU + RP + BL + Puh</td>
<td>BYT, CPU, SDPU(о), PR</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Government/Party Affiliations</td>
<td>Groups/Parties</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Yekhanurov government</td>
<td>NU + NP + PR + UNP + SPU + TU + PP + BY + NDP + Puh</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Tymoshenko government Nº1</td>
<td>NU + Reg + SDPU(o) + Agr + BYT + EU + Volia + DU + Centre + DI + Union + NDP</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Budget - 2005</td>
<td>NU + Reg + Agr + CPU + SDPU(o) + EU + TU + Union + DI</td>
<td>BYT, SPU, Centre</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Budget - 2004</td>
<td>Reg + PP + TU + SDPU(o) + Nar + DI + Agr + NV + NDP</td>
<td>BYT, SPU, NU, CPU</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Budget - 2003</td>
<td>NU + ПП + TU + SDPU(o) + BYT + НДП + Nar + NV + Agr + DI</td>
<td>CPU, SPU, ЄВ</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Yanukovich government Nº1</td>
<td>PP + TU + SDPU(o) + Reg + EV + DI + Agr + Nar + NV</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Budget - 2002</td>
<td>TU, SDPU(o), Ruh, Per, Ednist, Yabluko, Solidarity, Dem. union, Zeleni, NDP, Bat</td>
<td>CPU, SPU</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Faction</td>
<td>Id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Kinakh government</td>
<td>TU, SDPU(o), Dem. union, Solidarity, Reg., Zeleni, SPU, NDP, Yabluko</td>
<td>CPU, Bat, Ruh, RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Budget - 2001</td>
<td>TU, ViR, Bat, Solidarity, Ruh, NDP, Zeleni</td>
<td>CPU, SPU, Yabluko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Budget - 2000</td>
<td>TU, ViR, Bat, Ruh, NDP, Zeleni, Gromada, RP</td>
<td>CPU, SPU, Sel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Yushchenko government</td>
<td>TU, ViR, Bat, SDPU(o), NDP, Zeleni, Gromada, RP, Sel</td>
<td>CPU, SPU, PSPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td>Budget - 1999</td>
<td>NDP, Ruh, Zeleni, SDPU(o), Sel, RP</td>
<td>CPU, SPU Gromada, PSPU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of applied abbreviations:

* only fractions are included in the table (without taking into account the non-factional deputies, who from time to time have joined different coalitions);

** in the table, the faction refers to a coalition if most of its deputies voted for a budget/government;

*** M - the number of mandates in the coalition (for example, in line 2017, M stands for the number of deputies who voted in December 2017 for the budget-2018).
Table 2 Voting for the head of the council and for the last budget in the regional councils formed after the 2015 elections in the southeastern regions of Ukraine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Fractions of head and 1st vice-chairman of council</th>
<th>Voted for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Head (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dnipropetrovsk</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>BPP Vidrodzhennia</td>
<td>68: BPP + Vid + RPL + BYT + Ukrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaporizhia</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>BPP Opposition Bloc</td>
<td>62: BPP + OB + NK + RPL + NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mykolaiv</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>BPP</td>
<td>44: BPP + BYT + NK + Ukrop + Vid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odessa</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>BPP Batkivshchyna</td>
<td>55: BPP + BYT + NK + Vid + DD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poltava</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>BPP</td>
<td>46: BPP + BYT + Vid + Kaplin + Svo + RM + Agr + OB + Ukrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Batkivshchyna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumy</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>BPP</td>
<td>35: BPP + Vid + RPL + Volia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BPP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkiv</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Vidrodzhennia</td>
<td>96: Vid + BPP + NK + OB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BPP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kherson</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Batkivshchyna</td>
<td>2015 – 43: BPP + OB + RPL + NK; 2016 – 33: BYT + OB + Sam + Ukrop + RPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RPL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariupol</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>secretary:</td>
<td>Acting coalition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city council</td>
<td></td>
<td>OB</td>
<td>45: OB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severodonetsk</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>secretary:</td>
<td>Acting coalition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city council</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nash Krai</td>
<td>20: HK + BPP + RPL + BYT + Sam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of applied abbreviations:

* voting for the head of the council is secret, but in most cases it is possible to understand who voted, from the open vote for approval of the protocol of the counting commission and the comments of the deputies;

Figures

Figure 1. Size of the winning coalitions of the 3rd-8th convocations of the Verkhovna Rada (1998-2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of majority</th>
<th>Budgets</th>
<th>Governments</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MWC</td>
<td>11 (55%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
<td>17 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWC-light</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
<td>10 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
<td>5 (16%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*MWC - the minimal winning coalition, that is, when any faction leaves it, coalition loses the status of "winning"; under the "broad coalition" the constitutional majority (> 300 votes) is understood in calculations; the intermediate version of the MWC-light indicates cases of voting in 250-300 votes, provided that the coalition was not the minimal winning.*
Figure 2. Size of winning coalitions at the regional level (regional councils formed after the 2015 elections in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine)

* Due to the different number of mandates in the regional councils, it is more correct to give data as a percentage of the full membership of the deputy corps, and not in absolute values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of majority</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MWK</td>
<td>5 (46%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWK -light</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
<td>9 (90%)</td>
<td>12 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-party</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Two different coalitions (2015 and 2016) of the Kherson regional council were counted in the column "head"
THE MAGIC SPELL OF REVANCHISM: GEOPOLITICAL VISIONS IN POST-SOVET SPECULATIVE FICTION (FANTASTIKA)

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Abstract. The various genres of speculative fiction elaborate models for aesthetic “re-enchantment” of the world, in which the role of programmatically irrational and fantastic elements ranges from the uncanny menace to the aesthetic ideal. While in the Western fiction the literary tropes of time travel, monsters or sorcery function as the elements of the unreal “secondary world” and thus construct a distance between the fantastic and the mundane, contemporary Russophone authors exploit the generic conventions of fantasy or science fiction in order to suggest a continuity between fiction and reality. Focusing on geopolitical and social modeling in post-Soviet speculative fiction, the paper claims that the images of the Other, the archaic communal structures and the transformations of historical time provide here an aesthetic ground for a large patriotic consensus of a community united by common resentment.

Key words: speculative fiction, modernization, Eurasianism, time travels, monsters, aestheticization, estrangement, geopolitics.
1. Why literature matters

Literary texts model social and political realities in a way that is fundamentally constituted by aesthetic form.

Although this axiomatic statement already establishes a link between literature, politics, and ideology, we still must try to further clarify the basic concepts of "form" and "model." As functional abstractions, models represent and visualize more complex objects and processes (they are models “of” something). Conversely, as ideals and prescriptions for future production, experiment, regulation, and evaluation, they also bring about the elaboration of new objects—in other words, they are models “for” something (cf. Mahr, 2004).

The aesthetic modelling of reality in literary texts deploys its epistemological potential in two directions. With the help of fictional formats that defuse the pragmatic compulsion towards decision-making (fictionality) or open up new fields of application by way of virtual testing (simulation), aesthetic modelling provides a space for epistemological negotiations. Secondly, its representational practices are highly relevant for the epistemic design of non-aesthetic and non-literary discourses (genesis and transfer of terminology, heuristic metaphors, and rhetoric). By putting

19 For more information on literary modelling see the web-portal of the Muenster Research Training Group "Literary Form": https://www.uni-muenster.de/GRKLitForm/en/Profil/Forschung/index.html
community models to test through the characters of a fictional tale, literature develops into an area of systematic and dogmatically unfettered search for ideals of social and political order. Thus, beyond the well-known function of social criticism, literary artifacts manifest specific forms of pragmatics by staging the narratives that justify political practices or accompany them rhetorically.

In the context of literary aesthetics, the idea of modelling is of particular importance for the formation and establishment of literary genres. At the same time, in terms of both poetics and politics, the understanding of genres as key categories for the classification of literary texts constantly revolves around the notion of modernity (Wiemann, 2008: 41). However, even within the genres, which are commonly defined as modern or post-modern, one frequently comes across a variety of fantastic, counterfactual or surreal forms, which openly contradict the common presuppositions of modernity as a historical and cultural phenomenon.

If, following Max Weber, we describe our reality of modernized, bureaucratic, secularized society as disenchanted (in German: entzaubert), then a number of literary genres, ranging from magical realism to fantasy, aim at playful, literary re-enchantment of the world and therefore represent a strong antimodernist gesture in the midst of contemporary culture. While pointing to “natural” restrictions of the objective, rational perception of the world and often questioning rationality as such, fantastic elements of literary texts normally aim at sharpening the reader’s awareness to the limitations of the customary approach towards reality, thus potentially enabling a new look on social, political and cultural problems of the “real” world. Therefore,
the importance of fiction is not restricted to the genres, which realistically “describe” or “reflect” the world, but also refers to texts which transfer the social and political phenomena to the realms of the uncanny, the grotesque and the fantastic.

In a way, the existence of fantastic tendencies within the modern genres of literature highlights the ideological ambivalence of literary forms as such. No literary genre is intrinsically pro-democratic or pro-authoritarian, rational or irrational, modern or archaic. At the same time neither form of literature allows for the author’s unlimited creativity; on the contrary, a literary form establishes an effective framework of what can be said and how it should be said.

A technical concept of form (Burdorf, 2001: 2) requires that authors employ those aesthetic devices best suited to realizing the intended effects of their respective texts, picking the most appropriate form on the basis of an informed choice from all relevant traditions and developing it experimentally and creatively. Against this backdrop, the circulation of mass literature which openly advocates archaization and de-modernization of the (post-Soviet) societies requires a closer look as to its genre specifics and the models of reality that it proposes. While the reasons for the choice of topics and forms may belong to the sphere of context, the process of aesthetic modelling of anti-modern realities can be traced in the texts and therefore remains a legitimate object of literary analysis.

In this paper I am going to address the problem of how and to what extent the anti-democratic, imperial and ultimately antimodernist narratives of the post-Soviet era are influenced by the aesthetics and generic
conventions of literary works that English scholarship addresses as “speculative fiction” and that in Slavic cultures are commonly known as _fantastika / fantasyka._

2. “The Literature of Free People”

Fantastika is here an umbrella term for a large variety of different literary genres, such as science-fiction, fantasy, gothic fiction, alternative or counterfactual history, etc. While the term fantastic is not frequently used in the Anglophone studies (the same is true for German term Phantastik or French littérature fantastique), in the post-Soviet cultures, it is firmly anchored both in literary studies and in everyday usage.

Apart from the formal specifics, the term fantastika refers to a kind of literature which (1) aims at commercial success and therefore at a mass audience, (2) relies heavily on marketing infrastructure and performative events (e.g. festivals and game conventions) and finally (3) addresses largely the same subculture (fandom).

In a way, the success of fantastika as literary discourse and of fandom as an organized subculture unites the European East and West. However, in our discussion, we must also account for the specific Soviet tradition of speculative writing. While any sort of literature dealing seriously with the supernatural (be it gothic novels or magical realism) was rejected by Soviet censors, the Soviet era was the golden age of a specific speculative genre—science fiction. Despite the limitations set up by state censorship, Soviet sci-fi writers were numerous, prolific, and innovative. One of the notable
common grounds shared by the genre of science fiction and the Soviet state was their preoccupation with futurology (future studies): the communist idea of economic and political planning, the ideologically marked obsession with “scientific prevision” (научное предвидение) and, finally, the rapid development of systems science—all that found its literary and aesthetic counterpart in science fiction writing. Although most of the Soviet writers portrayed the future Earth optimistically (i.e., as a communist utopia) and therefore tended to place post-apocalyptic and dystopian plots outside the known world, the settings of their “fantastic” texts occasionally bore allusion of the real world and could serve as a criticism of contemporary society.

One of the most significant inventions of Soviet science fiction, which exhibits both its zeal for progress and the critical reflection of the modernizing drive, is the trope of the progressor—an agent of a highly developed civilization secretly planted into a repressive and backward society. The concept of the progressor appears in late Soviet times in the texts of Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii. The idea of progressorism is to facilitate the development of primitive civilizations and to diminish casualties, inflicted by historical processes or inevitable crises. As the progressors are aware of possible side-effects of their activities, they try not to interfere with the natural course of “alien” history, but to help or alleviate the suffering of select representatives of the alien society—mainly intellectuals and their loved ones. According to Mark Lipovetsky (2016, 29f), the progressor trope primarily offers the intelligentsia reader an identification not with a “colonized subject,” but with a “colonizer,” a bearer of progress to the passive and backward community of “natives.” While
ethically and aesthetically legitimizing the practices of colonial subordination, the progressor also presents a form of imaginary self-identification for liberals who opposed the communist regime in the 1980s and who confronted the authoritarian, nationalist, and neo-imperialist tendencies that emerged in late Soviet and post-Soviet politics (ibid.)

In its ambivalence the trope of progressor exemplifies the dual nature of the science-fiction scene, which, paradoxically, was both loyal to the Soviet state and had acquired a strong flair of non-conformism, manifested in its self-proclaimed motto as “the literature of free people” („литература свободных людей“). This freedom was obviously not ideological, but first and foremost aesthetic—freedom to use and produce a literary form, which was different from officially imposed socialist realism.

No doubt, these aesthetic liberties were functioning only within the broader regulatory boundaries of Soviet literary production. Thus, the major part of Soviet speculative fiction (fantastika) was classified as “literature for children and youth” (“для старшего и среднего школьного возраста”), which made it possible for the official critics to treat the genre as a sort of modern fairy-tales or entertaining adventure stories. More importantly, such classification implied the publication of literary works by selected publishing houses (e.g., “Detskaia literatura”, “Molodaia Gvardiia”, “Veselka/Raduga”, “Molod’”) and journals (“Tekhnika molodezhi”, “Khimiya i Zhizn”, “Iunost’”); finally, the readership and the growing subculture were organized in the network of literary clubs («клубы любителей фантастики», КЛФ) under the guidance of the Komsomol and ultimately under the careful surveillance of the KGB. All these factors undoubtedly contributed to a particular in-group
mentality of the readers and fostered the perception of fantastika as a single whole, despite the variety of different subgenres, literary forms and aesthetic tendencies within its larger discursive framework.

After the fall of state censorship in the late 1980s, which allowed publishing numerous translations of Western books and films that had not been released in the USSR, the popularity of traditional science fiction was in decline, and fantasy, with its distinctive Western (i.e., British and American) features became the new trend-setting genre. Marina Galina, a science fiction author and careful observer of the contemporary Russian literary scene, summarizes the late Soviet readership’s acquaintance with fantasy as an experience of an almost divine revelation (Galina, 2015):

And then people had found out that there was such a thing as fantasy and—my goodness!—this was a totally different world, where one could become an elf or a goblin. That was a world one could dive into, like one dives into a religion, a world, where one could stay and live.

[И вот люди узнали, что есть фэнтези — и, Боже мой, это какой-то другой мир, и в этом другом мире можно побывать эльфом или гоблином, можно уходить в этот мир, как в религию, жить там.]

Still, despite the enormous Western influence, it was exactly the genre of fantasy and the newly organized fandom of the 1990s, which in their core preserved the continuity of the Soviet literary discourse and Soviet cultural space. The possible reasons for this are twofold: first, speculative fiction

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*20 All translations from the Russian are my own (O.Z.)*
aimed at entertainment and commercial success; therefore, it could survive the transition to market economy and adapt to the new realities of the commercialized publishing system. Secondly, the fans and consumers of speculative fiction were already associated institutionally and could be easily approached as a target group (at least in terms of marketing and advertising). Thus, among other Soviet subcultures, the fandom was one of the few which not just survived, but also managed to grow bigger. Fantastika beyond the newly drawn national borders and supposedly beyond politics was “naturally” written in the Russian language, although a large part of modern post-Soviet speculative fiction is produced in Ukraine, especially in its unofficial “sci-fi capital,” Kharkiv. Most Ukrainian and Belarusian authors of fantastika, however, write in Russian and usually publish their books via Russian publishing houses (AST, Azbuka, Eksmo-lauza), which gives them access to a broad Russophone audience of the post-Soviet countries.21

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21 While the author’s “belonging” to a national community and a corresponding national literary scene is often an object of deliberate “construction” (both by the critics and the author himself), one significant factor affecting this overall sense of belonging remains the choice of a publishing house. Thus, in Ukraine, there are a number of renowned authors, who despite writing in Russian publish their books in Ukraine and are widely perceived as part of Ukrainian literary discourse (e.g., Andrei Kurkov, Boris Hersonskii, Aleksandr Kabanov). On the contrary, in the sphere of fantasy fiction one comes across the highly successful duo of Maryna and Serhii Diachenko, who early on began to rely on Russian publishing houses and, increasingly, on a Russian audience. The Diachechkos occasionally write in Ukrainian and borrow extensively from the works of Ukrainian classics (such as Lesya Ukrainka and Mykhailo Kotsyubyns’kyi). Hence they produce a kind of fantastic imaginary, which is deeply rooted in the Ukrainian literary tradition (from romantics to magic realism)—yet despite all these factors, their works remain an integral part of the Moscow-centered literary scene and a corresponding cultural tradition, to which the texts of Maryna and Serhii Diachenko contribute with a commercialized form of Ukrainian ethnographic exoticism.
Starting from the early 1990s the modified and westernized literary discourse of fantastika will successfully withstand and reject the new post-imperial situation. Moreover, in the turn of the century, it will eventually come up with new revanchist and imperial narratives that rely predominantly on the literary models, rhetoric devices and images provided by the best-selling works of contemporary Anglophone speculative fiction. This seemingly paradoxical situation may appear less surprising, if we take into account that, alongside with Western fantasy, the post-Soviet readership of the early 1990s was introduced into what German literary scholar Niels Werber (2005, 227–229) calls “pre-1945 bio- and geopolitical modes of thinking,” i.e. the descriptive and analytical models of the classic geopolitics of the interwar period, as unfolded in the works of Halford Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer, Carl Schmitt, and others. These models, in turn, were then enhanced by the tremendous success of Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings.”

3. The Middle Earth of Eurasia

Despite their emphasized fictitiousness and the programmatic “irreality” of fantasy forms as such, Tolkien’s novels (but also their adaptations in movies or computer games) convey a certain political knowledge of racial and civilizational incompatibility: first of all, races are different not only in terms of skin color but also in moral worth and political integrity. The races are either hereditarily good and wise like Elves or genetically evil and dumb like Orcs, and therefore they make “natural-born” enemies. This worldview already turns the Other into an enemy and a threatening figure that is against
“us” simply because he is not one of “us.” Thus, in “Lord of the Rings” the absolute and insurmountable hate between Elves and Ores is not outlined as a consequence of political decision-making but is both essential and existential: warfare is their “natural” destiny and peace between them is always just a temporary “respite” to gain new strength for the upcoming battles.

In the universe of “Lord of the Rings,” the racial Othering is being emphasized by spatial connotations. The respective realms of Tolkien’s Middle Earth (pretty Shire, proud Gondor, beautiful Imladris, and terrible Mordor) mirror the racial differences of their inhabitants, as these regions have been molded through years of control in such a deep way that they should be counted as important parts of the political and military power of Middle earth’s races. Space and nature are politicized to a degree that transforms “natural borders” like rivers or mountains into a living periphery of the society, thus making it possible to understand society as a living organism or political body (Werber, 2005: 228).22

22 In fact, in the world of the Middle Earth, rivers, forests and mountains can distinguish friends from foes and take active part in the warfare. For instance, the river Bruinen protects the Hobbit Frodo by attacking his pursuers – the monstrous Black Riders – with “a cavalry of waves,” while leaving Frodo’s companions unharmed (Tolkien, 1995: 208-209). Similarly, the “Old Forest” on the border of the province Buckland prevents Hobbits from entering the neighbouring realm (ibid: 108) and the mountain of Caradhras attacks the Fellowship of the Ring out of dislike for Elves and Dwarves (ibid: 285). Not only do all sovereign realms take part in the Ring wars; beasts, plants and other living species, too, are mobilized and fight for one side or the other. Fairy tales might have been Tolkien’s model of a living nature, but the political concept of total mobilization is unknown in fairyland. Furthermore, the warfare in the Middle Earth is distinguished by the same “totality”, which rejects any neutral position as well as any moral or legal boundaries for the annihilation of the enemy. The Orcs must be killed in the same numbers as they are produced by Sauron. The fact that the Orcs are being massacred even when on the battlefield they turn into a fleeing, wounded, or surrendering enemy, casts
In fact, fantasy books like “Lord of the Rings” provide an aesthetic and narrative framework for one of the basic models of classic German Geopolitik, which goes back to an essay that Carl Schmitt published in 1939 under the bulky title “The Ordering of Great Spaces by International Law and the Ban on Interventions by Foreign Powers” (in German: “Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte”). One of Schmitt’s central arguments is the assumption that politics must submit to the imperatives inherent “in the order of continental spaces” (Großraumordnung), i.e., the organization of countries into large territorial blocs or empires under the guidance and political control of a number of hegemonic “core states” (Kernstaat). The “core states” shall have a free hand within the subordinate geographical space and should, therefore, have a right to organize this space both economically and politically, while at the same time refraining from all interference into the areas of other “core states.” While Schmitt draws the geopolitical borders of the different orders and powers alongside the cultural boundaries (thus making a “culture” into an essentialized factor of separation between human communities), he also defines his “greater region” as an empire (Reich).

Although Schmitt’s geopolitical vistas unequivocally refer to the practices of imperial domination, their primary significance resides in their peace-keeping function. Schmitt holds that a ban on the inference from alien (“raumfremd”) powers is the only alternative to worldwide warfare and to the mutual extermination of the “greater regions”. As Niels Werber (2005) no dark shadow on Tolkien’s protagonists. The classical ius belli of sovereign states that defines the enemy as an honest foe is programmatically abandoned here in the favour of the biopolitical image of the absolute Other, which deserves neither mercy nor respect.
persuasively shows, this is Tolkien’s option as well. In “Lord of the Rings” the breach of the interference ban by Sauron and his Orc armies and their invasion into the realms of the West culminates in an unlimited war, in which all parties are heading for the extermination of “the other”, while looking forward to the “final battle” – the “war to end all wars”.

Carl Schmitt’s Großraumordnung, as a unit for describing and conceptualizing world politics, found its second life in the notion of “political orbits” coined by Walter Lippmann and, later, in the “cultural zones” of Samuel Huntington, in which those respected researchers ultimately divided the entire globe. But the most inconspicuous niche for the “obsolete” or “taboo” discourses of the prewar geopolitics remained fantasy fiction, where under the guise of entertainment these discourses could address the suppressed or rather unconscious geopolitical anxieties of the readership.

23 This, of course, does not mean that Tolkien explicitly or deliberately advocates the assumptions of German geopolitics or provides a fictional background for actual history and politics. Tolkien himself states in the foreword to the second edition of his “Lord of the Rings” (published in 1965) that the events in the book by no means correspond to political theories or real historical events and he expresses his annoyance over such interpretations of his writings. Yet this response already illustrates the fact that the author’s intentions do not reflect the impact and the reception of a literary text as a cultural phenomenon with political implications; on the contrary, the range of interpretations of Tolkien’s work shows that writing and creator are unrelated, thus providing a perfect illustration of Roland Barthes idea of “the death of the author.”

24 The notion of “interference” appears extremely problematic when it comes to its concrete manifestations in the contemporary world. While for Schmitt (as well as for Tolkien) the prohibited “interference” means a direct act of military aggression, in today’s globalized world of mutual informational interdependence and interconnectedness the political interference may have a broad range of possible realizations (not to mention the popular slogans of “hybrid warfare”). Consider for example the scandalous “punk-prayer” of the Russian band “Pussy Riot,” which has been publicly branded as an interference of the “hostile” Western aesthetics into the “sacred” sphere of the Russian Orthodox faith.
From this perspective, the unholy alliance between post-Soviet speculative writing and Russian geopolitical theories—above all the Eurasian doctrine—appears somewhat predetermined, if not inevitable. Eurasianism can be broadly defined as an ideology which affirms that Russia and its “margins” occupy a median position between Europe and Asia and that Russia should specifically highlight its Asian features. Eurasianism rejects the view that Russia is situated on the periphery of Europe, and on the contrary, interprets the country’s geographic location in the “heart” of the Eurasian continent—a gigantic middle world between Occident and Orient.

The Eurasian doctrine revolves around the narrative of an irresolvable conflict between a thalassocratic i.e. sea-borne, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, market, individualistic civilization, and a continental civilization embodied by Russia based on an authoritarian government turned towards tradition and the collectivist mindset. The theoretical presuppositions of Eurasianism, yet again, were largely inspired by German Geopolitik of the interwar time. Their most notable common features are (1) a rejection of “Atlanticist” (British-American) domination, considered disastrous for the rest of mankind; (2) the idea that the central geographical position of the Eurasian space naturally and inevitably entails an imperial form of political organization, and that any secession is destined to fail, leaving newly independent states no choice but to revert to a unified authoritarian entity; and (3) a belief that a living culture (bios) takes possession of a landscape in such a way that geographical space and human culture form a symbiosis (a permanent living community). Thus, within the theoretical framework of Eurasian doctrine, bios, and nomos, the fundamental notions of early twentieth-century
political science, fuse in the same way as they do in Tolkien's novels and the writings of his countless epigones.

Eurasianism has its origins in the Russian émigré community in the 1920s when it was considered an innovative theory, and many highly reputed scholars contributed to the development of its concepts (among them Nikolai Trubetskoi, Roman Jakobson, Petr Savitskii). However, due to internal conflicts and splits by 1930 the Eurasianists had ceased publishing their periodical and as a movement had quickly faded from the Russian scene. Their thoughts seemed almost forgotten for many decades until in the 1990s the Eurasian doctrine made a spectacular return into Russian academic and political discourse, where it was eagerly and uncritically adopted as “forgotten national heritage.” One of the key roles in the Renaissance of Eurasianism was played by Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), whose works and ideas served as a bridge between the Russian scholars of the interwar time and the up-and-coming radical ideologists of the post-Soviet Russia (e.g., Aleksandr Dugin).

Gumilev’s main theory of “ethnogenesis,” attempts to explain the nature of ethnicity and the rise and fall of civilizations throughout history. Gumilev viewed ethnic groups as biological organisms (and therefore as a part of the biosphere), which come into being through mutations resulting from the irradiation of solar energy to the Earth’s surface. This energy, which Gumilev called passionarnost’, is then absorbed by certain individuals, creating passionarii—uniquely dynamic persons, who adopt supernatural behavioral patterns and the readiness for greater self-sacrifice. “Charged” with the cosmic energy, passionarii are ultimately capable of influencing the
very course of world history (Bassin, 2016: 58f; Wojnar, 2012: 9–12). Despite this seemingly fantastic, if not bizarre, nature of Gumilev’s theory, his passionarnost’ has received a high official endorsement in recent years – president Putin himself invoked the concept of passionarnost’ in one of his yearly addresses to the state Duma (Putin, 2012).

Throughout most of his life, Gumilev was denied this high level of recognition. The scholar, son of the renowned poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, spent fourteen years of his life in Stalinist prison and labor camps; after being released in 1956, he remained officially outcast and professionally shunned. His teachings were never fully approved by either his professional colleagues or the political authorities, most of his writings circulated only in the form of samizdat. It was only in the late 1980s, when Lev Gumilev came to attract broad publicity, galvanizing the readership with the themes of ethnic vitalism, cosmic energetics, and the genetic element of ethnic life. While claiming to propose an objective scientific approach to heatedly debated questions about the imperatives for Russia’s national development, Gumilev skillfully mixed natural science with history, geography, and ethnography. No less unique was the style of his publications, in which the phraseology of natural sciences was saturated with figurative images, literary tropes and apodictic statements, thus providing a significant source of inspiration for post-Soviet fantasists not only regarding topics but also in terms of language and narrative forms.

More importantly, this source of inspiration became fully available in the 1990s, i.e., precisely at the time when the Russian book-market was literally flooded by Western fantasy, of which “Lord of the Rings” was
definitely the most spectacular and long-lasting success. From now on the popularity of both discourses (the fantastic and the geopolitical one) were on the rise, so that naturally many authors made attempts to combine them.

4. Literary World-Making as Geopolitical Reasoning

The chief element of speculative fiction, which provides space for (geo)political reasoning, is world-building. Developing an imaginary setting with coherent qualities such as history, geography, cultures, and ecology is a crucial task for many science fiction and fantasy writers. Literary world-building, as a modelling process, often involves the creation of maps, artifacts, a backstory and living species for the world. To be sure, the plot, the fable, the development of characters—all that are important factors for assessing the quality and the success of all kinds of speculative fiction, but in the center of the narrative the readers always find a fictional universe and thus a fictional geopolitical reality, which they explore through reading, but also performatively (e.g., through roleplay or reenactment).

In general, literary heroes and their narrative environment incite various forms of reader response. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the theorists of the Constance school of reception aesthetics, introduces a new understanding of the term “catharsis” in order to define the projection of the reading self onto the fictive self, which is presented in a literary work. Far beyond its original meaning of “tragic purification,” catharsis designates here aesthetic experience as the result of the communicative efficacy of literary texts (Jauss, 1982, 92–111 and 152–89). In the case of speculative genres, such aesthetic experience is enhanced by a variety of performative and ludic
forms of interaction with literary narratives (e.g., video and online games), which provide a number of ways for readers' identification with the characters and the plot.

However, unlike the critics, who tend to establish a direct link between the political visions of speculative fiction and the extra-literary reality of the readers, I would like to emphasize the number and the importance of specific devices, which produce an effect of distance and defamiliarization: these are, for instance, quasi-medieval settings and magic (in the genre of fantasy) or teleportation and interstellar journeys (in science fiction). Being an integral part of speculative genres, the fantastic elements significantly contribute to an estrangement (German: Verfremdung, Russian: ostranenie) of their political subtexts. In general, estrangement is a device, which hinders the readership from simply identifying itself with the characters of the story and with its setting, thus creating worlds that feel too far removed from the world in which we live. Obviously, the defamiliarizing effects of fantasy are the most important reason, why all over the globe the readers and viewers of Tolkien's mythopoeia are able to enjoy the pleasures of stories based on soil, blood, and racial annihilation without the smallest amount of a bad conscience.

In the theoretical essay "On Fairy Stories," Tolkien highlights the programmatic importance of distancing effects when he defines fantasy as occurring entirely in a separate "secondary world" (Tolkien, 1981: 216). This does not mean, however, that the two worlds cannot be connected with each other: readers may live in the primary world, but as the plot unfolds, they may realize that a secondary, fantastic world is all around them, previously
unfamiliar and unseen. This is especially true for post-Soviet fantasy, which unlike its Western counterpart, often deliberately tries to bridge the gap between the real and the fantastic and it does so mostly by means of geopolitical and social modelling.

The post-Soviet speculative texts with obvious geopolitical allusions are typically characterized by conflating elements of the Eurasian doctrine with the formal conventions of the fantasy genre and aspects of the gothic aesthetics. This merger can be traced back to the publication of Pavel Krusanov’s novel “An Angel’s Bite” (“Укус ангела”) in 1999. While a large portion of the story deals with magic, mystical and esoteric experiences, the novel also belongs to the genre of counterfactual history (i.e., a genre, in which one or more historical events occur differently than in the historical record). In the world of “An Angel’s Bite,” the crucial historical moment is the Russian revolution of 1917, which did not happen; thus, the Russian monarchy not only subsisted down to the present times, but it managed to fulfil its long-standing dreams of conquering Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In the novel, the reader witnesses the ascent to power of the demonic and enigmatic protagonist Ivan Nekitaev (literally: “non-Chinese”), son of a Russian officer and a Chinese woman, who becomes emperor of Russia and, allied with China, launches on an endless war of aggression against the Western states—a war, which accompanied by macabre atrocities and violence, threatens to bring about the end of the world.

Arguably, “An Angel’s Bite” shows the failure of an empire as a politically structured living space. This leads to the assumption that Krusanov did not write his book with the sole purpose of promoting
Eurasianist imperialism. In fact, the author thoroughly explores the philosophical and aesthetic limits of empire as a concept, but this exploration leaves no space for any forms of ethical or legal judgment. In Krusanov’s novel, peace is secured not by international law or by universally applied norms and values, but by the balance of regional powers. Obviously, by trying to conquer Western Europe, Russia is not only into a geopolitical zero-sum game with the West at large; it also disregards Schmitt’s ban on interventions in foreign “Great Spaces” and pushes the world on the verge of the apocalypse. Still, in the context of the novel this scenario appears both acceptable and legitimate, simply because the Eurasian Empire led by Russia is described as the sacred Last Kingdom; its fall would consummate the end of humanity’s cultural and spiritual history (Krusanov 1999, 188). Hence the destruction of the rest of the world, as collateral damage in this struggle, would make no big difference anyway. Or to say it in Vladimir Putin’s words: “Why do we need a world without Russia?”

A much more optimistic scenario is drafted by two other highly successful writers, Viacheslav Rybakov and Igor’ Alimov, who at the beginning of the 2000s launched a series titled “There Are No Bad People. A Eurasian Symphony” (Плохих людей нет. Евразийская симфония)— a semi-parodistic homage to Robert van Gulik (1910–1967) and his novels about

25 In Russian original: “Россия — третья часть света материка Евразия, она — то самое Последнее Царство, падение которого будет означать конец духовной истории человечества.”

26 Quoted from an interview for a Russian documentary “The World Order 2018,” (“Миропорядок 2018”), produced and aired by the TV channel "Russia-1"; this particular statement was Putin’s comment on Russia’s nuclear doctrine, see also: https://www.rt.com/news/420715-putin-world-russia-nuclear/ (accessed on March 27, 2018).
the adventures of Judge Dee. Like “An Angle’s Bite,” the “Eurasian Symphony” series is also an “alternative history” in which Russia and China have formed an enormous united empire. This time, the crucial event that never occurred is the Mongol invasion. Instead, the Golden Horde (Орда) concluded an equal alliance with medieval Russian principalities (Русь), which, subsequently joined by China, developed into a united Eurasian state called Ordus’ (Ордусь).

In the series, the proximity between the fantastic and the mundane is achieved mostly by means of metafiction. In the foreword to the opening novel of the series the publisher claims that the original text of the “Eurasian Symphony” was written by a Dutch Orientalist, Khol’m van Zaichik (Хольм...
ван Зайчик), in Chinese. Van Zaichik (and not the duo of Rybakov and Alimov) is also a person, who is referred to as an author on the book cover. The foreword, written by the book’s alleged translators, even gives details of van Zaichik’s turbulent life—according to the foreword he served as a Dutch diplomat, while working as a spy for the Soviet Union. Thus the reader of the series is invited to accept two levels of fictitiousness: the level of the fictive author and his biography, which is settled in our political reality of the 20th century with real countries like the USSR and the Netherlands, and the reality of his novels, which are alternative histories with entirely different political reality full of mystics and mythology. However, throughout the text, this division is constantly broken, and two realities appear closely intertwined and sometimes impossible to distinguish. This impossibility allows for integrating the fantastic elements into the realm of the mundane. Moreover, by placing the real historical events in the unreal, “secondary” world, the story shifts the limits of what can be said or imagined: the imaginary elements range from depicting the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a foreign conspiracy, up to the denial of the Holocaust.27

The protagonist of the series is a gentle Russian intellectual, who (similar to his prototype, Judge Dee) is working in the judicial system (“department for ethical control”). Together with his Chinese partner, he copes with difficult investigations, following the plotlines of ironic and

27 In the short story “Agar’, Agar’!...” (Агарь, Агарь!..), published in the literary magazine “Neva” (2004, No. 10), the Holocaust is “imagined” as a result of conspiracy launched by American economic elite, in order to provoke the Jewish exodus from Europe to America, where the arriving Jewish labor force was supposed to give a new momentum to a stagnating US economy. The full text of the story is available here: http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2004/10 (retrieved on March 27, 2018).
entertaining detective stories. For example, in the first volume, “The Case of a Greedy Barbarian” (Дело жадного варвара, 2000), an American billionaire, reminiscent of George Soros28, conspires to steal rare artifacts of the Ordussian cultural heritage. The second book entitled “The Case of the Independent Dervishes” (Дело незалежных дервишей, 2001) depicts a plot involving the independence movement of the Aslaniv people, which in the course of the events is being suppressed by the imperial forces. Interestingly enough, the word “independent” in the title of the novel is not Russian, but a Russified Ukrainian word (“nezalezhnyi”). Indeed, in terms of language and culture, the peripheral province of Aslaniv offers a peculiar mixture of Ukraine and Chechnya, while the province’s quest for national sovereignty is described both as a geopolitical anomaly and a conspiracy of ruthless local elites.

The political allusions are all too evident here, although they are usually narrated in an ironic or even humoristic mode, making it often impossible to tell whether these political implications are a form of sincere support or subtle ridicule. Similarly to Krusanov’s novel, “Eurasian Symphony” applies an ironic mode of narration both as a formal “package” for an explicitly conservative, revanchist agenda and as a particular technique of estrangement, which confronts the readership with a certain “anxiety of belief.” By contrast, the fictive Eurasian Empire as such is described with a clear affirmative stance and has signs of totalitarian utopia.

28 In the book the billionaire is referred to as “Hammer Tsores” (Russian: Хаммер Цорес). The name of his henchman, Landsbergis (Ландсбергис), who is supposed to steal the treasures, is a direct reference to Vytautas Landsbergis—the first head of state of Lithuania after its independence from the Soviet Union.
On the one hand, it is a polity, where hundreds of nationalities and dozens of religious confessions peacefully coexist, but on the other hand, this coexistence is guaranteed by an authoritarian government, an enormous bureaucratic apparatus, and a refined surveillance system.

An allegoric figure behind these political visions is Aleksandr Nevskii (1221–1263), a medieval ruler of the Russian principalities of Novgorod and Vladimir, who is also one of the key characters in the historiographic schemes of Lev Gumilev. In Russian popular culture, Aleksandr rose to legendary status on account of his (fictionally exaggerated) military exploits against Sweden and the Teutonic Order while agreeing to pay tribute to the Mongol Khans of the mighty Golden Horde. Naturally, this “geopolitical orientation” has been a constant source of inspiration for the proponents of the Eurasian doctrine. Lev Gumilev (2001, 482) claims that Aleksandr Nevskii was welcomed by the Horde not as a vassal, but as an ally, and even fraternized with the Great Khan’s son, Sartaq (the future ruler of the Horde). While Gumilev fails to provide any reliable sources to confirm this story, the legend of Aleksandr’s friendship with Sartaq is fully adopted by the authors of the “Eurasian Symphony” and provides the founding myth of the united Ordussian state.

According to Gumilev, by stopping European knights and merchants Aleksandr Nevskii sheltered the north-western regions of Rus’ (i.e., the future Russia) from European influences like the Latin Christianity or the anthropocentric culture of the Renaissance, thus preserving Russia’s civilizational uniqueness and cultural independence (Gumilev 2001, 111 and
passim, Gumilev 2002, 159-160.)

29 In “Eurasian Symphony” a reader witnesses the hyperbolized realization of this geopolitical utopia. For example, the capital of Ordus', Aleksandriia Nevskaia, represents a particularly “orientalized” version of St. Petersburg and is a profoundly Asiatic megalopolis. Furthermore, on the book cover of the first instalment of the series, the Bronze Horseman – an equestrian statue of Peter the Great in the Senate Square in St. Petersburg – is substituted by a strikingly similar statue of Aleksandr Nevskii. Thus the notorious “westernizer” Peter is literally replaced by a historical figure who supposedly directed the course of Russian history eastwards.

29 Interestingly enough, this view on the historic role of Aleksandr Nevskii received a remarkable illustration in December 2008, when Aleksandr was voted the greatest Russian in the “Name of Russia” television poll. Since Aleksandr is also a canonized saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, his candidacy in the TV show was promoted by Metropolit Kirill (who would be elected the Patriarch of Moscow 2 months later, on 1 February 2009). In his speech, Kirill highlighted Aleksandr’s role as a ruler, who successfully defended Russian “national identity and cultural code” (национальную идентичность и культурный код) from western influences. Paradoxically, already in this short phrase, Kirill makes use of 4 Latin words and not a single Russian one. The video with Kirill’s speech is available under: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Frz-WQ4HjFE (Имя России: Митрополит Кирилл о Александре Невском – accessed on 4 April 2018).
In “An Angel’s Bite” Aleksandr Nevskii plays a somewhat different role: he appears in a strange and tumultuous dream of the novel’s protagonist, Ivan Nekitaev. In this dream, the archangel Gabriel bites Aleksandr in his Adam’s apple (Krusanov 1999, 80). If there is any common knowledge about angels in fiction, then it is that angels normally do not bite. In fact, this allegoric scene offers a fusion of vampirism and Gumilev’s idea of passionarnost’: the angel in Krusanov’s novel obviously resembles a vampire, while being marked by the bite of the vampire means here the mixed blessing of staying beyond good and evil as a ruler destined to decide about life and death of the ordinary humans.

Despite the ironic self-reflection and various devices of estrangement, in terms of geopolitical reasoning both “An Angel’s Bite” and “Eurasian symphony” manage to provide an aestheticized literary framework for some
of the central postulates of Eurasianism: 1) Territory is power. The empire can only be conceived of as indefinite expansion. 2) The enlargement of the empire is felt as a natural movement carved in Russian history, just like its tropism toward autocracy. Especially a very detailed and well-elaborated world of the “Eurasian Symphony”, with a number of maps and artefacts (e.g., the passport of Ordussian citizen), was key to the success of the series, ultimately manifested in the hallmark of the fictive universe of Ordus’ as “a country you’d love to live in” (страна, где хочется жить—van Zaichik 2005, 5).

Fictionalized Eurasianism reached its climax in a very specific literary project titled “Etnogenez” (Ethnogenesis, Russian: Этногенез). Launched by the media expert and “political technologist” Konstantin Rykov, “Etnogenez” boasts to be commercially the most successful literary project in the post-Soviet history of Russian literature. According to the project’s web-page, already by 2011 no fewer than 3 million copies of “Etnogenez” were in circulation.30 While the “project” character of literary production with a team of writers developing and exploiting the same fictive universe is by no means untypical for speculative genres, the sheer scope of the “Etnogenez” project is astonishing. Between 2009 and 2015 more than a dozen authors have produced a cycle of 60 novels that creates a fictional history of the universe, from millions of years BCE to the (Russian-dominated) far future. The books, which fall into several different subgenres, are loosely bound together by Gumilev’s theory of ethogenesis and, oddly enough, by his own lineage. In fact, most of the protagonists of the series are the direct descendants of Lev

Gumilev. While in real life Gumilev had no children, “Etnogenesz” creates a fictional Gumilev dynasty, including a son Andrei, a daughter-in-law Eva, and numerous descendants of his granddaughter Marusia, who inhabit the distant future.

Gumilev’s concept of passionarnost’ runs through the entire series and is perceived as a vital key to the mystery of the rise and fall of nations. Although Gumilev himself maintained that passionarnost’ originated out of the energy from distant cosmic bodies, “Etnogenesz” takes a different view, placing this cosmic energy in magical artifacts scattered all over the universe. Thus the readers of the novels are invited to follow the exploits of protagonists, who are entangled in time-traveling, interstellar voyages, and political conspiracies while trying to gain access to those mysterious artifacts and to obtain different superpowers. Moreover, the hunt for artifacts “liberates” the characters of the novels from traditional moral categories. Not only the Gumilevs, but also historical figures like Hitler, Genghis Khan, and Stalin are all depicted neutrally, as mere instruments of history, motivated and controlled by supernatural objects. Similarly to the authors of the “Eurasian Symphony” the “Etnogenesz” project capitalizes on the idea that nobody is purely evil or good. This demonstratively neutral stance towards all ideologies and political practices (including those of utmost brutality), effectively shows that Konstantin Rykov’s literary undertaking is not merely a commercial enterprise with entertainment appeal, but a project with a clear propagandistic dimension.

In their detailed analysis of “Etnogenesz” project Mark Bassin and Irina Kotkina (2016, 57) conclude that the common subtext of the novels “draws
heavily on tropes and discourses relating specifically to the cultural politics of the current regime and to the zeitgeist of Putin’s Russia in general.” With its positivist scientific perspective and clear orientation towards a teenage audience, the project shows some parallels to the works of Soviet science fiction authors. Despite these superficial similarities the “Etnogenzez” project effectively accomplishes a process that Bassin and Kotkina (2016: 65) have defined as a counterrevolution in Russian science fiction:

Completely abandoning any irony or multidimensionality, it reverts to the more simplistic and unnuanced tradition of “serious literature” intended to be taken entirely at face value. Without any pretense of ambivalence or ambiguity, it thrusts official government discourses uncritically into the very center of what in the USSR had been a detached and potentially quasi-dissident genre.

The explicit “patriotic” pedigree of the series is based on a fictionalized Eurasianism, placing the themes and tropes of this geopolitical doctrine within the popular and recognizable framework of Western fantasy. Unsurprisingly, the cornerstone of this literary edifice is the biologization of ethnicity, which reduces complex social and political problems to the simple prospects of a “biological threat,” thus creating the image of a community surrounded and endangered by enemies. While the sense of threat captivates the emotions of the reading audience and creates a feeling of patriotic solidarity, the texts of “Etnogenzez” also stage a geopolitical struggle with the implication that there can be no common moral or legal ground between
different nations and civilizations since the right of the strongest will always prevail.

Furthermore, “Etnogenez” provides a strong implication that not all human beings are biologically equal. While the protagonists of the novels often represent different nations and civilizations, the members of the Gumilev family are described as bearers of the high-value extraterrestrial, alien genes. On the contrary, the other human communities, the so-called biomasses, have a less valuable genetic makeup (ibid: 59).

Apart from literary texts, the project disseminates its central themes and images through computer games, audio podcasts, and web-platforms for fandom discussions. The browser-based games voina.ru and especially maidan.ru, launched in 2015 (where the players’ goal is to tear apart the territory of Ukraine), establish direct links to real political events. Besides, the ludic forms represent here more than just a prolonged version of literature: across all the literary works of the series, the plots are designed to resemble a computer game in which the principal task of the protagonist is to move from start to finish, acquiring as many magic artifacts as possible. Thus the gargantuan dimensions of “Etnogenez” disguise the fact that its literary universe only superficially seems to be vast and filled with diverse characters—on the contrary, it remains rather linear and simple. With Bassin and Kotkina (2016: 68) one can argue that “the plot’s development is not driven by the thrill of the unknown, a sense of adventure, or any genuine fascination with technological progress. This is science fiction whose purpose is not scientific and intellectual but, rather, exclusively ideological and commercial.”
5. A Social Code of Conduct

While the books with obvious Eurasianist subtexts address the post-Soviet readers’ longing for a just and stable geopolitical order, other texts, which are set in a more realistic environment, capitalize on the loss of democracy and of the rule of law within a single society or a national community.

The social aspect is probably best illustrated by the texts, which deal with monsters and different non-humans. To be sure, Russian-language authors have neither invented a new genre nor have they created a new aesthetic canon in which the monsters replace humans. However, in some crucial aspects, most post-Soviet non-humans are entirely different from the hobbits and the dragons of Tolkien’s mythopoeia as well as from the non-human characters of other speculative genres. The highly popular cult novels—Sergei Lukianenko’s “Watch” series—serve as examples. The first novel of the series, “The Night Watch” (“Ночной Дозор”), was published in Russia by AST publishing house in 1998 and was made into a film in 2004. The computer game with the same title was released in Russia in 2005. The success of the original novel and the movie adaptation inspired Lukianenko to write a series of five more novels with the final book “The Sixth Watch” (“Шестой дозор”) being published in 2014.
Despite some fantastic elements and creatures, in all the novels of the series, the plot unfolds in contemporary Moscow, while offering a set of strikingly realistic characters and scenes from everyday life. Average men on the street, cops and gangsters, clerks and administrators—all of them convey the atmosphere of recognizable “primary” world, while providing a background for painstakingly portrayed positive heroes, with whom the reader may fully identify on account of the realistic setting and of the first person narration (Khapaeva, 2009: 373-374). Yet beneath the surface of the daily routine, the novels unveil a hidden magical realm of the Twilight (Сумерки), which can be approached only by a small group of people with supernatural abilities. These individuals are literally referred to as “Others” (Иные) and may appear in text as magicians, vampires, witches or werewolves. The Others are divided into two rivaling casts: the keepers of light and the army of darkness. Despite a seemingly clear-cut line between the Light and the Dark the methods and goals of two opposing camps are explicitly compared and
judged to be the same (Lukianenko, 2006: 45). Thus at the heart of the plot, the reader is confronted with a remarkable equality of good and evil. While morality is considered an irrelevant atavism and as something that can influence the hero’s life in the most negative way (Khapaeva, 2009: 377), cynicism and moral flexibility are, instead, valued as signs of maturity and true freedom. As the protagonist of “The Night Watch” apodictically concludes: “The more morality, the more misfortune” (Lukianenko, 2006: 44).

Such attitudes towards morality cannot be reduced to the difference between fiction and reality. With Dina Khapaeva (2009) one may argue that, if we remove the vampires, werewolves, and witches from these narratives and substitute them with cops, gangsters, and their victims, if we parenthesize the witchcraft and the magic, the story would not differ much from a pale description of everyday post-Soviet life.

Regarding the narrative functioning of the supernatural and uncanny elements, “Night Watch” exhibits a tendency drastically different from the Western literary tradition of the fantastic. In the West, most speculative genres usually assert the sharp contrast and juxtaposition between the fantastic and the mundane. Especially the characters of Western gothic and neo-gothic fiction are so disturbed by the uncanny breaking into their lives that they doubt their own sanity and often fail to return to the world of the mundane. Starting from Horace Walpole’s “The Castle of Otranto” (1764) up to Ann Rice’s “Interview with the Vampire” (1976), gothic aesthetics creates a narrative setting where the fantastic does not just infiltrate the reality of the characters, but ultimately destroys it (and consequently substitutes it with a new, entirely different reality). At the same time, the characters of
“Night Watch” easily adapt to the fantastic creeping into their lives and do not exhibit significant disturbance. Furthermore, they normally treat the fantastic in the same way as they deal with the mundane, blending the boundaries between the two realms. This attitude is characteristic for the Western fantasy, where the heroes may occasionally encounter orcs or dragons as a part of their daily routine and magic is witnessed and wielded without a shrug; but, as Tolkien puts it, fantasy plots unfold in an entirely new, unfamiliar, “secondary world” and not in the heart of a modern city like Moscow.

By downplaying the estrangement effects, the novels of the “Watch” series create a situation, in which the norms and rules of the fantastic world of the Twilight constitute an applicable and, in fact, the only functional code of conduct for the real world: “Life against death, love against hate, and force against force, because force is above morality. It’s that simple” (Lukianenko, 2006: 75). Thus the entire gothic aesthetics of the series celebrates the farewell from the society based on values and legal norms: the casts of vampires and other nonhumans, who follow the archaic principles of clan loyalty and the rule of force, appear far superior to the humans and their society organized by moral and legal judgement. It is the nonhuman “supercommunity” which presupposes the arrival of the nonhuman superhero.

As a specific genre convention of fantasy and gothic fiction, the superiority of the nonhumans is by no means a post-Soviet or Russian invention. Indeed, in the contemporary Western literature and pop-culture the supernatural creatures, like vampires, represent a compelling aesthetic
ideal—in terms of intelligence, artistic talent or physical abilities they shine brighter than ordinary human characters. Still, post-Soviet speculative fiction, while maintaining this post-anthropocentric canon and capitalizing on it, eagerly introduces new perspectives and narrative frameworks, which allow the authors to address the hopes and problems of their societies created by the fall of the Soviet Union and the turbulent change of the political and economic systems. Thus being portrayed as the community of the Others in Lukianenko’s “Watch” series, the vampires and other non-humans no longer offer an updated, “gothicized” version of a Byronic hero (a lonely and enigmatic outcast from the era of Romanticism), instead they provide an aesthetic sanctioning for archaic forms of social interaction and, more importantly, offer a model of a society, which is organized neither by the established institutions, such as the police, school or government (which in the novels are all realistically portrayed as dysfunctional), nor by moral or legal reasoning (which is totally and programmatically rejected). What keeps the non-human society together is a precarious balance between the informal clans and corporations, who are fighting for power and resources (literally—human resources), but who are also willing to keep their struggle to a limited scale in order to prevent mutual annihilation.

Inherent in Lukianenko’s novels and typical for the entire genre, the idea of a balance of powers provides an aestheticized alternative to liberal concepts of tolerance and the rule of law. When the forces of the Light and the Dark take to battle and realize they are equally strong, they decide to make a truce. The forces of light establish the Night Watch, an organization preoccupied with policing the actions of the Dark Others, and the forces of
darkness, in turn, found the Day Watch for supervising the actions of their “light” counterparts. The Day Watch and the Night Watch monitor each other to make sure this truce holds. But the compromise reached by two opposing clans remains situational—it is justified not in terms of universal values but in terms of the personal relations between the heads of the clans. The rigid hierarchies of two communities, their internal subdivision into “races” with higher and lower status, finally, the peculiar way of decision-making, which transfers the power of political and moral judgement solely into the hands of the leader (while other members of the community are expected to respond with blind loyalty)—all these motives valorize the informal practices of social and political interaction, which are all but unfamiliar to the post-Soviet politics and society. Being placed in the fantastic setting, they receive both a higher aesthetic value and a social relevance, which are testified by huge print runs of Lukianenko’s novels.

While vampires offer an example of undeniably positive othering in contemporary pop-culture, on the opposite side of the aesthetic spectrum one comes across its negative counterpart manifested in the figure of a brain-dead, flesh-eating zombie. According to Kim Paffenroth (2006: 13), zombies are fully and literally apocalyptic: more than any other monster they signal the end of the world as we know it. Starting from George Romero’s seminal film “Night of the Living Dead” (1968) a “zombie apocalypse” represents a particular scenario of the breakdown of modern society, caused by a widespread rise of hostile species united in an assault on human civilization.
This assault has no political grounds whatsoever. While the theories about the origins of zombies vary significantly, ranging from voodoo sorcery to a pandemic spread of a virus, a zombie infestation is typically conceptualized as a sort of plague and not as a result of conscious decision-making (of which traditional zombies are not capable of). Nevertheless, the narrative of a zombie apocalypse offers a strong political metaphor, which historically refers to the turbulent social landscape of the United States in the 1960s when the originators of this genre, like Romero’s film, were first created (Clute, 1999: 1048). Similarly, for the post-Soviet societies, the trope of zombie apocalypse provides a narrative framework for the stories about an unexpected and unstoppable transformation of the society, in which one’s neighbor suddenly turns into a hostile and aggressive “other.”

In the context of the turbulent post-Soviet political changes of the recent years (most importantly, the ideological divisions caused by the so-called “Ukrainian crisis”), the powerful metaphor of “zombification” (Russian: зомбирование; Ukrainian: зомбування) epitomizes a supposedly devastating impact of the media and, above all, TV propaganda on human psyche and consciousness. An informationally “zombified” person ceases to be a valid interlocutor and cannot be engaged in a meaningful exchange of arguments. Naturally, since 2014 the metaphor of “zombification” was equally applied both to the supporters of the Euromaidan and the participants of the Antimaidan rallies.

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31 In the post-Soviet fiction the trope of “zombification” can be traced back to Viktor Pelevin’s early essay “Zombifikatsiia. Opyt sravnitel’noi antropologii” (“The Zombification, or Comparative Anthropology”, 1990).
Sergei Lukianenko, an active commentator of the political events in Russia and Ukraine, reacted to these newly drawn ideological frontlines in his recent novel “Kvazi” (2016). The plot of the novel unfolds in the year 2027. Since a mysterious catastrophe that took place ten years before, humans live side by side with resurrected dead, who, however, managed to overcome their initial condition as zombies, turning into smart and unemotional “quasi-people”—the kvazis. The story focusses on Moscow policeman Denis Simonov, whose wife and son were once killed by the undead, but who now tries to uncover a conspiracy aimed at destroying the fragile peace between the humans and the kvazis. In order to succeed, Denis must learn to control his grief and his desire for vengeance; he must cooperate with some of the kvazis, thus learning to view former enemies as partners. In the novel, this mutual understanding remains on a very limited scale and is constantly overshadowed by an atmosphere of suspicion—after all, who would trust a former brain-eating monster? Against this background, an idea of separation, non-interference, and balance of power, indeed, seems to be a much more realistic alternative (Skorkin, 2016).

32 Original Russian title: "КВАЗИ."
More importantly, the novel hints at a possible application of this model to the division between the pro-European, liberal strata of the contemporary post-Soviet societies, and their Soviet nostalgic, conservative counterparts. In fact, the subtext of “Kvazi” offers a single political allusion to this ideological split: eventually, the reader learns how humans desperately try to survive the zombie apocalypse behind the walls of the war museum near Moscow, where their only shelter are the old Soviet T-34 tanks; or how those few, who actually survived, decide to abandon modern technologies like radio and computers in order to guard themselves against a possible “zombification.” While the society of the humans tries to preserve its identity by turning back into the new archaic, the kvazis are, by contrast, presented as a bunch of highly rational, technologically advanced, bicycle riding vegetarians. Thus, the true horror vision of Lukianenko’s novel can be
reduced to a simple question: what if the future of the world belongs to a society of liberal “quasi-humans”?

6. The Thinning of the World and the Rise of the Empire

As we discuss different social and geopolitical models, we should also address the ways in which speculative fiction deals with the notion of time and how it treats the related concepts of “past” and “modernization.”

Ilya Kukulin (2018: 232) summarizes the most essential changes in the post-Soviet evaluation of the past as follows:

In Stalin’s time, the present was regarded and represented as the highest point of history, a point of breakthrough to the “shining future”. In today’s Russia, the present, while not considered less valuable, is not considered more valuable than the past; thus, the encounter between present and past turns into an endless mise en abyme, where each new action appears as a symbolic re-enactment of the past.

The valorization of the past is hardly a new trend in the post-Soviet space. In “The Future of Nostalgia” Svetlana Boym registered that in Russia, already “in the mid-1990s [...] the word old became popular and commercially viable, promoting more goods than the word new” (Boym, 2001: 65). Following Kukulin, one may conclude, however, that nostalgia of the 1990s gradually turned from a widely accessible good into an object of performative re-enactment with political implications.
While the scenarios of such re-enactment may vary considerably, their possible ideological messages are defined by the inherent qualities of nostalgia as an aesthetic resource, of which Boym distinguishes two main types: the restorative and the reflective. While restorative nostalgia attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home (nóstos), its reflective counterpart thrives in the longing itself (álgos) and delays the homecoming. Furthermore, restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth or tradition, while reflective nostalgia, on the contrary, dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity (Boym, 2001).

In the field of literature, the re-enactment of the past acquires some additional qualities, when nostalgia fuses with the uncanny, thus producing an aesthetic trend, which Alexander Etkind (2009, 2013) defines as “magical historicism.” In contrast to the historical novel, magical historicism doesn’t try to imitate the past, but rather struggles with history. The visible outcomes of this struggle are narratives, in which the past is perceived as an “exotic and unexplored terrain, still pregnant with unborn alternatives and imminent miracles” (Etkind 2009: 656). This is exemplified in the novels of Vladimir Sorokin, Viktor Pelevin, Dmitriy Bykov and Vladimir Sharov. Although in their works “the historical past unfolds into a cyclical narrative that obscures the present rather than explains it” (Etkind, 2013: 236), this kind of speculative fiction still relies predominantly on reflective nostalgia. In the texts of these best-known Russian authors the re-enactment of the
past normally lacks any apological undertone and functions rather as a counter-narrative to a pro-authoritarian nostalgic discourse.³³

By contrast, the following lines will address those narratives, in which the resource of nostalgia is being applied solely and exclusively for restorative (or even utterly revanchist) purposes. Again, the post-Soviet fantastika follows here some of the basic conventions of Western fantasy—especially its reliance on a distinct structural device which the relevant scholars use to call thinning.

The term “thinning” refers to the weakening of some aspect of the world or character which then enables the story to be structured as a recovery fable (Clute, 1999: 942). The classic way in which fantasy uses this device is to present a world in some form of decline, while the reversal or slowdown of that decline becomes the object of the plot. This narrative structure is characteristic for much of Tolkien’s prose, for the novels of C.S. Lewis about Narnia, but also for recent commercial productions like the HBO-series “Game of Thrones,” based on the novels by George Martin.

Naturally, in the post-Soviet narratives, the motives of lost glory, of cultural degradation, and of a declining world receive very specific connotations. No matter which genre of the post-Soviet speculative writing

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³³ Another important example of the “reflective” counter-narrative to the Kremlin’s hegemonic discourse on history is the work of Boris Akunin, who, as summarised by Anne Liebig (2018), turns the popular genre of crime fiction into an impressive countercultural device for challenging the neo-imperialistic trends in Russia’s official politics and culture. Having chosen one of the major eras for Putinist nostalgic myth-making as the backdrop for his work, i.e. the late Imperial period, Akunin not only unveils some of contemporary Russia’s most pressing nostalgia issues, but also invites his readers to participate in a discussion of these (Liebig, 2018: 6).
we focus on, each of them will provide examples of alternative historical concepts, which necessarily and inevitably evoke the motif of the fallen empire: this is true for the remnants of Soviet science-fiction (e.g., Viacheslav Rybakovs “Gravilët Cesarevich”, 1992), heroic fantasy (e.g., Iurii Nikitins series “Troie iz Lesa”, 1993–2003) as well as for the so-called Slavic fantasy (e.g., “Volkodav” series by Mariia Semenova, published between 1995 and 2014).

Contemporary Russophone authors apply the model of a recovery fable not only in fantasy (with its inherently retrospective and nostalgic undertone), but also in the typically futuristic genres, like science fiction and space opera (a subgenre, which combines space warfare with melodramatic adventures or travelogues). One of the most telling examples of this tendency is provided by the work of Nikolay (Nik) Perumov—an author who started his literary carrier in the 1990s with homages to Tolkien’s Middle Earth. Perumov’s fantasy books were a huge success: according to his personal website, more than 4 million copies have been published in the 1990s. However, already in the 2000s, Perumov switches to the genre of space opera and to outspokenly “patriotic” themes and motives. His masterpiece is the series of novels titled “The Empire above all” (“Империя превыше всего”), published between 2002 and 2004, which tells the story of a Russian “space soldier” and a patriot, who tries to stop the ongoing civil war and thus to prevent the collapse of the Empire. The giant imperial state is in danger because some unspecified insurgents have infected its inhabitants with the ideas of absolute freedom and independence and, by doing so, inspired an uprising against imperial rule. Although the Empire is

described as a German-dominated Fourth Reich, with a corresponding military entourage and totalitarian ideology (yet without racism and concentration camps), for the Russian protagonist this state appears a far lesser evil than the hordes of “liberal” rebels. The last resort of the loyalist imperial forces is the planet called New Crimea (Новый Крым), from where they launch an attempt to reconquer the territories of the Empire. Thus the Crimea and the city of Sevastopol turn into a sacred place and a symbolic “bridgehead” for the recovery fable.

Although the ultimate goal of such literary modelling is an image of Russian imperial state or a Russian-dominated world, the literary works, which provide this kind of imaginary settings, are not exclusively the products of Russian literary scene. In fact, a large part of the revanchist fiction is being produced outside Russia, mostly in the former Soviet republics and here first and foremost in Ukraine. The novels of Aleksandr Zorich provide a good illustration of this particular kind of prose.
Aleksandr Zorich is a collective pen name of the two writers: Iana Botsman and Dmitrii Gordevskii, who until 2004 both worked as assistant professors at the Philosophy Department of the Kharkiv National University. In their literary work, the duo relies predominantly on the largest Moscow publishing houses, like EKSMO and AST. Zorich’s most significant success was the trilogy “War is for Tomorrow” ("Завтра война"), published between 2003 and 2006 in the genre of space opera.

In the trilogy, Zorich presents an image of the future, in which Russia ends up dominating the entire outer space. The reader follows the adventures of the spaceship pilot Aleksandr Pushkin, who fights aliens in the name of Mother Russia. What sounds like a sarcastic parody is, in fact, a seriously narrated story about Russia’s struggle to control the population of its extraterrestrial colonies, who, for their part, are either too mean or too stupid to fully understand the pleasures of imperial rule. One of the key concepts provided by Zorich (2003, 2004) is the notion of “retrospective evolution” – a term borrowed from the works of Isaac Asimov but placed in a slightly different context. While in his “Foundation” series Asimov applies this term to describe the technological degradation of stellar colonies that lost their connection with the metropolis, Zorich emphasizes social and cultural dimension of “retrospective evolution” by modelling human communities in which culture, religion, language, or the customs of the past are being revived without any visible political preconditions and, more importantly, without being coupled with technological degradation or backwardness. For example, the planet Khosrov experiences the revival of
the Zoroastrian tradition and turns into a futuristic replica of Zoroastrian Persia, while one of the Russian colonies “reactivates” the customs and traditions of the pre-Christian Rus’.

The departure from the modernizing impetus of former Soviet science fiction is completed most clearly and extensively in one of Sergei Lukianenko’s early projects—his space opera “Stars are Cold Toys” (“Звезды холодные игрушки,” 1997) and the subsequent novel “Star Shadow” (“Звёздная тень,” 1998).

Lukianenko’s dilogy represents a science fiction narrative with a strong revanchist subtext. In the novel, the people of the Earth discovered the technology for interstellar voyages only to find out that the universe had already been divided between different alien races, which are technologically far more advanced than the human late starters. So humankind is forced to cooperate with a conglomerate of non-humanoid races, known as the Conclave. Races of the Conclave are divided into the Strong, and the Weak—the former are ancient, powerful civilizations and the real rulers of the universe. Although the Conclave needs humankind for specific auxiliary tasks, the humans, as one of the weak races, are trapped in their specializations and their minor role within the Conclave. This situation changes dramatically when the scientist Andrei Khrumov—a great patriot of humanity, biased against the strong races—comes up with the plan of conquering a desperately needed living space for the people of the Earth. He then unleashes an epic interstellar war, which ultimately ends with the admittance of humanity into the Conclave as one of the strong races.
Lukianenko’s space opera unequivocally addresses the desire of his Russian readership to be accepted as an equal part of the “first world”, but more importantly, his text also mocks the communist utopia carefully constructed by Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii in their book “Noon: 22nd Century” (“Полдень. XXII век”) first published in 1961. Lukianenko transforms this futuristic Noon universe into a dystopian world of the so-called Geometers—a perfectly planned system of square and round planets, populated by hierarchically organized societies. The hyperbolized rationality of the Geometers is illustrated by the fact that their communities don’t have families: instead, children are brought up by professional Mentors, who help them to socialize, but also suppress their personalities.

“Stars are Cold Toys” and “Star Shadow” by Sergei Lukianenko

Finally, one of the key innovations of Lukianenko is the figure of “regressor” who, unlike the progressors featured by the Strugatskii duo, downgrades the level of technological development of alien races and civilizations, thus
making them vulnerable for colonization or a peaceful take-over. The typical
sci-fi setting and the rhetoric of thinning are being applied here to address
the horror vision of former Soviet citizens confronted with the technological
superiority of the West (Lukianenko, 2007: 12):

From the point of view of inhabitants of the Motherland, we are
entirely wrong. And we’ll be downgraded—so quietly and
insensibly that we won’t even notice that. Cosmodromes will
become empty, factories will stop—for instance, to rescue the
wrecked ecology. Then Geometers will help us with their Mentors—
the best in the world. For example, they will introduce our future
generations to high knowledge. Or they will apply their
bioengineering, beating our diseases, our excessive emotionality as
well as our aggressiveness. [...] As a result, the Earth will become a
new Motherland for those, who will be unable to understand this
word properly.

С точки зрения обитателей Родины мы абсолютно неправильны.
И нас опустят, так тихо и незаметно, что мы этого даже не
заметим. Опустеют космодромы, встанут заводы — ну, например,
чтобы восстановить порванную экологию. Потом Геометры
помогут нам своими, лучшими в мире, Наставниками. Например,
чтобы приобщить будущие поколения к высоким знаниям.
Подключат свою биоинженерию, побеждая наши болезни, а
заодно и чрезмерную эмоциональность и агрессивность. [...] И
Земля станет новой Родиной для тех, кто уже не способен понять
это слово по-настоящему.
Replacing Marxist determinism by geopolitical constraint, Lukianenko sets a new trend in dealing with the desperately needed modernization of the post-Soviet societies and completely reassesses the idea of the “post-Soviet transition.” While the phenomenon of “regression,” as a technological and societal return to archaic stages, is still considered both a weapon and a threat, Lukianenko’s text already rejects the cult of progress typical for Soviet science fiction, thus abandoning any idea of social modernization as a possible scenario for the post-Soviet countries. As we have seen, ten years later Aleksandr Zorich (re-)introduces “retrospective evolution” as a concept with much more ambivalent historiosophic flair. Similarly, the narrative of equal partnership with the advanced societies (of the West) has gradually been outstripped by utterly revanchist plots featuring one’s own superiority and imperial domination over one’s own living space and its vicinity.

The most visible outcome of both these tendencies is a specific figure of a post-Soviet time traveler, commonly referred to as popadanets. The noun popadanets (попаданец) derives from the Russian verb popadat’—“to get somewhere, to reach a specific place”—and marks the special case of stories about time travel, when a protagonist from our time, or from some period in the past, suddenly and accidentally founds himself in some other historical epoch from where he tries to change the course of history. A typical feature of these narratives is a combination of time travel and reincarnation, i.e., when the protagonist dies physically in his time, but his consciousness, i.e., his “mind and soul”, are transferred into the body of some historic character of the past (e.g., into the body of the Russian tsar or of a Soviet leader). The idea of progress, which was so typical for Soviet science fiction,
is not simply rejected here but is substituted for a “revanchist” utopian past, which is subsequently projected into the future (through alternative history and time traveling).

"Popadantsy": post-Soviet time travelers

Despite a common genre originator (with a specimen in Mark Twain’s “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court”, 1889), the revanchist post-Soviet time travels, being a specific subgenre, treat the past in a way drastically different from Western fiction, where altering the course of history is often viewed as a taboo-breaking. Ray Bradbury’s short story “A Sound of Thunder” (1952) was definitely a trend-setter with regard to time paradoxes: in this story, an accidental crushing of a pre-historic butterfly by a time-traveler leads to irrevocable changes of history.

This “informal” restriction inherent to the genre, proved especially fruitful for addressing different national traumas. Thus, in the novel “Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus” (1996) by Orson
Scott Card, a time traveler makes Columbus head East instead of West, a change of course that helps protect the Americas from the devastating effects of European colonization. As a result, the Tlaxcalan Empire of Central America successfully underwent an industrial revolution and grew powerful enough to invade Europe, subjecting the Old World to a blood-thirsty regime of human sacrifice. Similarly, the protagonist of Stephen King’s novel “11/22/63” (2011) travels back in time in order to prevent the assassination of J.F. Kennedy. He succeeds, but the resulting changes lead to a catastrophe for the entire humankind: with Kennedy in the White House the Vietnam War escalates to a full-blown nuclear apocalypse. Eventually, in both novels, the time travelers have to abandon their initial plans and set things right again.

While both authors can hardly be accused of legitimizing the atrocities of European colonial rule over Native Americans or justifying Kennedy’s assassination, their texts provide genuinely “alternative” scenarios of coming to terms with the traumas of one’s history. Being described in all its ambivalence, “a past, which never occurred” ceases to be a fetish and a resort for revisionist dreams of a traumatized national ego.\textsuperscript{35} Needless to say, the

\textsuperscript{35} In Eastern Europe, this “therapeutic” effect is usually achieved by means of alternative history (without time travels). In Ziemowit Szczerek’s “Rzeczpospolita zwycięska” [The Triumphant Republic] (2013) Poland wins the world war and becomes a new superpower, but as a militaristic and authoritarian state, it quickly turns into a threat to the entire continent. In a recent novel by Oleksandr Irvanets’ “Kharkiv-1938” (2017), Ukraine successfully defends its independence from the Bolsheviks, only to build a collectivist society (with a peculiar mixture of Marxism and ethnic nationalism) under the rule of a decadent elite. Far from justifying the German occupation of Poland or Stalinist crimes in Ukraine (and in the rest of the Soviet Union), both authors point at the limitations and dangers of an “alternative” utopian past that is promoted as a viable model for the future.
authors of the contemporary Russophone time travels advocate an entirely different strategy of dealing with the past.

Once sent back in time, the typical Russian popadanets is usually preoccupied with saving and strengthening a metaphysical Russian statehood, which may appear in all its historical incarnations. The dominant theme and the most frequently applied historical setting is the Second World War, which resonates with the Soviet concept of the "Great Patriotic War" as the main legitimizing narrative of the Soviet Union. However, the genre openly transports the idea that the real enemy in this war was not Nazi Germany, but rather the Western democracies—Great Britain and the USA. In some novels, the USSR may even cooperate with the Third Reich. At least after the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004, the role of the enemy was more frequently ascribed to the Baltic states, Georgia, and Ukraine itself—the supposed “puppets of the West”.

According to the web-portal fan-book.ru., no less than 145 new books featuring the trope of popadanets have been published in Russia in 2014, followed by 66 new novels a year later (Averin, 2016). While most of these texts are rather plain and simpleminded stories with comparatively small print-runs, the sheer scope of this literary production reveals the cumulative effect of a phenomenon which goes far beyond mere graphomania and potentially influences various other forms of popular culture. One of the most prominent examples for the genre’s success is Andrei Maliukov’s film

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“Black Hunters” (original Russian title: “Мы из будущего”, engl. transl. “We’re from the future”) which shows four 21st century treasure seekers, who dig near St. Petersburg in search of hidden medals of soldiers fallen during the war. All of a sudden, they travel in time to the Second World War and take part in the battle for Leningrad as Red Army soldiers. The film received favourable reviews from Russian critics and was also nominated for the high-ranked “MTV Movie Awards” in 2009. Trying to build on this success, already in 2010, the producers issued the sequel “Мы из будущего-2” (“We’re from the future-2”). The plot of this second movie is set in Ukraine and focusses mainly on the treacherous and bloodthirsty nature of Ukrainian nationalists, who are portrayed both as the absolute evil (e.g., they force the protagonist to execute innocent civilians) and as the ideological forerunners of the contemporary Ukrainian state.

The narratives about the upcoming war in Ukraine (written mostly between 2003 and 2010) comprise another large segment of the genre. Although the fantastic elements are here kept to their minimum, together with the stories about time travels these books belong to the series titled “voenno-istoricheskaia fantastika” (military and historical speculative fiction), which was launched in 2008 by the Moscow-based publishing house Eksmo/Iauza.

What makes this categorization surprisingly plausible is the fact that alongside with alternative history and extensive war scenarios, these books apply a rhetoric device typical in fantasy stories—thinning. In these books, the readers are witnessing the contemporary post-Soviet world in decline, a process that is manifest in growing social tensions, in the fading of cultural life, and in the slow collapse of the remnants of the Soviet heritage. Against the backdrop of this decline, the reader is confronted with the existence of dark forces, which are planning to invade this vanishing world and thus to finish it off. These forces may appear either as NATO troops or as another kind of Western conspiracy. The territory of Ukraine turns here into a battleground and the place where the recovery fable starts. The plot of those novels is usually leading the reader not just to the well-deserved victory against the foreign invaders, but also envisages the reestablishment of the new mighty Empire or a new social order as a result of this heroic fight. The imperial backlash is thus being presented as an emotional ersatz for the missing modernization.

Probably the most notable books of the series were written by two authors from Eastern Ukraine, Fëdor Berezin (from Donetsk) and Gleb Bobrov (from Luhansk). Bobrov’s novel “The Era of the Stillborn” (“Эпоха
мертворожденных," 2008) and Berezin’s “War 2010: The Ukrainian Front” (“Война 2010: украинский фронт”) provide extensive military exploits, often with lengthy footnotes containing detailed description and performance characteristics of various kinds of weaponry.

Both books treat the Ukrainian state as a “deadborn” geopolitical anomaly, which shall give way for the rise of a new (Eurasian) empire—a theme, which unites them with the stories about time travels and other typically “fantastic” counterfactual histories.37

37 Interestingly enough, alongside with Berezin, many other authors, who write predominantly in the sub-genre of “boevaia fantastika” (military speculative fiction) and have eagerly and eloquently envisaged the destruction of the Ukrainian state, are not just Ukrainian citizens, but were formerly active participants and laureates of the Kharkiv “Star-Bridge Festival”—one of the largest science fiction festivals in Eastern Europe, which was sponsored and chaired by Arsen Avakov, the current Ukrainian minister of the Interior.
While life in the USSR is being perceived here as the pre-thinning condition, the narratives of the series evolve from emotionally and nostalgically romanticizing the Soviet past towards outright resentment. Nostalgia does not mean here the intention to return or regain the lost object but instead refers to a political program which considers the Soviet past as a possible source of a new imperial patriotism (which, although predominantly Russian, is at least potentially an option for other former Soviet republics).

The Soviet past loses its historical specifics, its leftist and Marxist connotations and becomes an integral part of some broader national heritage. The genre already establishes a special understanding of the Soviet times as an era which has reached its ultimate conclusion and can be considered as a glorious chapter of history. This perspective resembles the phenomenon Georg Lukács (1971, 57-60 and passim) defined as “epic distance,” which means in our particular case that Soviet history exemplifies a high (and currently almost unreachable) ideal of righteous conduct. Thus the authors transform a comparatively well documented historical period into the myth of a Golden Age or a Classic Era.

This scheme goes far beyond the domain of speculative fiction and is also present in mainstream literature. Probably the most telling example is Eduard Limonov’s (2014) poetry book titled “USSR is Our Ancient Rome” (“СССР—наш Древний Рим”). If the USSR is Rome, then the post-Soviet historical situation might be defined as the “Dark Ages”—a period, in which the recovery story unfolds, and the anticipation of a Renaissance appears quite natural. In this re-semanticized form the Soviet past ceases to be an
element of ideological choice, which previously used to be a marker for the division of political forces (pro-Soviet vs. anti-Soviet), but, on the contrary, delivers the common ground for a large patriotic consensus of a community united by collective trauma and common resentment. Naturally, this mobilized community can hardly be satisfied with a laid-back contemplation of political reality but requires action in which it can take part performatively.

7. Novorossiia: Turning Fiction into Facts

The Russian annexation of Crimea and the military onslaught on Eastern Ukraine echoed with a readiness of the Russian media and the public to accept the language and the imaginary of speculative genres as a sort of informational standard.

As a highly politicized genre the post-Soviet fantastika makes the borders between fiction and political reality blurred and permeable. Another reason for this proximity is the fact that many authors of speculative fiction, especially the Russophone writers from Ukraine (e.g., Fedor Berezin, Vladimir Sverzhin, Gleb Bobrov, Lev Vershinin, etc.), are also active political analysts and journalists, although their analytical texts are not less speculative than the fictional ones. And even political commentators, who are not active fantasy or science fiction authors, still try to build on the aura and the popularity of these genres. Consider, for instance, Anatolii Nesmiian and Boris Rozhin—two prominent Russian bloggers and publicists, who are actively commenting on the war in Ukraine and on the Russian involvement in Syria. Each of them has tens of thousands of subscribers and followers in
the social networks\textsuperscript{38}, yet as bloggers and book authors they are best known under their pseudonyms El Murid and Colonel Cassad, which both refer to the heroes of speculative literature: El Murid is the protagonist of Glen Cook’s fantasy series “Dread Empire”, while Colonel Cassad is a character from Dan Simmons’ science fiction novel “Hyperion”. While both Nesmiian and Rozhin are political commentators, who often make use of deadly serious stylistics, already their pen-names are a message of belonging to a particular subculture and in-group.

Despite the overall political and military bias of fantastika, it is still surprising, how many writers seized the occasion to take an active part in the war in Eastern Ukraine, grasping the chance to become the heroes of their own stories or rather to turn those stories into self-fulfilling prophecies. Probably, the most striking example is provided by Fedor Berezin, who in 2014 actually made it up to Deputy Minister of Defence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic.

Yet, in its most eloquent manifestation, the narrative of the new Russian irredentism undoubtedly came from the pen of Aleksandr Prokhanov (2014). It is worth quoting in length:

Fascism [...] rises again and is marching eastwards building crematoriums and gas chambers in the cities of Ukraine. The new state [Novorossiia] born in the fight with the fascist beast accomplishes a vital mission: without any help from outside [...] it defends the world from fascism. The history of Novorossiia goes

\textsuperscript{38} See the Facebook-profile of Nesmiian: www.facebook.com/el.murid.3 or the Twitter-Account of Rozhin: https://twitter.com/colonelcassad (retrieved on 09 April 2018)
back to the mysterious depth of ancient Slavdom, Greek city-states, and Scythian barrows. These lands carry the primeval mystic energy which gave birth to the whole Russian world from the Black Sea to the Baltics, from the Carpathians to the Urals. The culture of Novorossiia embraces Homer and Lev Gumilev, Babel and Pushkin, Skovoroda and Vernadskii [...] The state which is being created in Eastern Ukraine, is in its spirit truly a people's state. They are children of the people's war, who fight for justice. They fight for social justice (in a country), where there will be no hierarchies, no rich and poor. They fight for a national justice (in a country), where all peoples will be equal and unified. And they also fight for divine justice, for the fight against fascism is a cosmogonic war of the forces of light against the forces of darkness, the forces of love against the forces of hatred, the forces of heaven against the forces of hell.

Фашизм [...] вновь возродился и пошел на восток, устраивая в украинских городах крематории и газовые камеры. Новое государство [Новороссия], рожденное в схватке с фашистским животным, выполняет грандиозную миссию. Одно, без внешней поддержки [...] оно защищает мир от фашизма. У государства Новороссия громадная история, которая погружает это государство в таинственные толщи древнего славянства, греческих полисов, скифских курганов. На этих землях и на землях Крыма возникла первозданная мистическая сила, которая породила весь русский мир от Черного моря до Балтики,
от Карпат до Урала. [...] Культура Новороссии — это Гомер и Лев Гумилёв, Бабель и Пушкин, Сковорода и Вернадский. [...] Государство, которое создается на Восточной Украине, народное по своему духу. Это дети народной войны, которые сражаются за справедливость. Справедливость социальную, где нет иерархии, богатых и бедных. Справедливость национальную, где все народы равны и едины. И справедливость божественную, ибо схватка с фашизмом — это космогоническая война сил света и сил тьмы, сил любви и сил ненависти, рая и ада.

Starting from its pretentious title, “Novorossiia the Fireborn” (“Новороссия — рожденная в огне”), in terms of rhetoric and tropes, this short text would already make a perfect plot for a fantasy story. First, it operates with the equally original and fictive geopolitical concepts of Novorossiia (New Russia) and the Russian World (Russkij Mir), which both comprise a half-historical, half-metaphysical space attributed to Russia. Secondly, this text constructs the image of an absolute Other (Ukrainian fascism), thus enabling the scenario of a “cosmogonic war” between Good and Evil. And finally, it envisages a social utopia, which is held worth fighting for.

Far from harmless literary speculations, the proponents of Novorossiia proved eager to constitute a new (geo)political reality with military means, establishing the self-proclaimed separatist “republics” in Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine. Against this backdrop, the major problem with Prokhanov’s text is that it was published not in the comics’ book or a fantasy magazine, but in the reputed newspaper “Izvestiia,” in the column for
“international politics.” Despite this context, the author does not even try to give a semblance of plausibility to his story about “death camps and gas chambers,” simply because due to its genre specifics this text cannot be an object of any fact-checking whatsoever. Its aim is not mimesis, but simulation, not the recognizable representation of the world, but the construction of a new, parallel reality. Being omnipresent in various media, this aestheticized, counterfactual reality captivates its consumers and is arguably capable of substituting the real world, thus making it possible to read and interpret current geopolitical conflicts through the prism of speculative fiction.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that one of the key elements in conceptualizing the war in Eastern Ukraine is the idea of time travel. A very telling example is provided by the Russian movie “14/41: The Lesson Unlearned”. Here is a quote from the synopsis:

This is a story of Nick, a 5th grader of Donetsk school, who stays in the classroom during the bombardment. All alone with his fear he suddenly finds the support. The most common school board becomes a portal to the past. Nick meets the same little boy but from 1941. They both are locked in the school under fire, and both want to live, be happy and enjoy their childhood.

However, while the story unfolds the viewers learn that not only the boys are "the same," but also the forces they are actually afraid of—the
military units of the German Wehrmacht from 1941 and the Ukrainian government troops from 2014 are implicitly put together and evaluated as “the same” fascists.

Furthermore, it should not be disregarded that the books with a stereotypical figure of “popadanets” are not only stories about time travel. More importantly, they are also narratives about upward social mobility and personal reincarnation from an average loser into an epic hero. This model of literary time travels was carefully applied by the Russian state-controlled media, their war journalists, and by authors like Zakhar Prilepin (2016) and Marina Akhmedova (2014)—with the aim of constructing the idealized biographies of the most renowned separatist warlords of the Donbas “republics”. These are the stories, in which a poor fellow like Arseniy Pavlov alias “Motorola,” who barely makes ends meet by working at a car wash in Russia, suddenly finds himself in Eastern Ukraine, where he becomes a renowned war commander and an unbending fighter against fascism. A story, in which a former bricklayer Pavel Drëmov receives a sort of divine revelation and turns into a brave and noble Cossack ataman fighting for the Orthodox Faith. The list can be continued...

This programmatic literary modeling transforms the designated country of Novorossiia into a fantastic Neverland, where modern arms and modern warfare are being applied in the fight for the geopolitical utopia of a united Eurasia.

8. Final Remarks
The summary of the post-Soviet speculative fiction, which focuses exclusively on its poetization of authoritarianism, militarism and the archaic, may be criticized for the overall demonization of speculative genres developed by the post-Soviet literatures. To counter-balance this criticism, I would like to emphasize that large segments of fantastika do not contain political messages and are dedicated solely to their reader’s entertainment, so that they cannot be found guilty of deliberate “formatting” of political reality. Nevertheless, the correlation between the popularity of the literary models provided by some speculative texts and their anti-democratic and antimodernist orientation is too marked to be ignored.

For any market-oriented literature, the fulfillment of their readers’ expectations is crucial to their success. Thus, the simple-minded rigidity of many of the analyzed texts and genres makes them more attractive for a popular readership and significantly less attractive for intellectual elites, which is probably the reason why the current anti-liberal trends of the fantastika remained largely underestimated, if not completely unnoticed, by the academia.

Meanwhile, these trends are a significant part of the literary process (at least) in Russia; they prompt “serious” writers to address them. One may think of Vikor Pelevin’s “Empire V” (2016), which describes modern Russia as being ruled by a cast of vampires, or Vladimir Sorokin’s “Telluriia” which—quite in line with the conventions of fantasy—describes a post-apocalyptic Europe and Asia, where alongside with technical innovations medieval and totalitarian mentalities persist and blossom. Far from valorizing this state of affairs, Pelevin’s and especially Sorokin’s prose highlight the new
configurations of time and space within contemporary culture in a way that prompted Dirk Uffelmann (2017, 360f) to conclude that the new chronotope of Eurasia is eventually the retrofuture.

Without the steady impact exerted by mass literature, the crystallization of such a chronotope would hardly be possible. While addressing the desires and expectations of a mass audience, speculative fiction also provides the aesthetic form which effectively shapes these expectations (for what is beautiful cannot be wrong). The highly popular web-portal and online magazine "Laboratoriia fantastiki" (fantlab.ru) already in its name metaphorically grasps the essence of speculative writing as a laboratory, where the new literary forms are being developed and put to the test. Thus, over the last two decades Russophone speculative fiction provided the discourse setting, the aesthetic framework, and ultimately the “language” for fuzzy ideas of imperial revanchism, clan societies, and for various otherwise incompatible forms of geopolitical reasoning, placing them all together under the guise of entertainment and Western pop-culture in the middle of the post-Soviet societies.

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AGAINST THE NEW MIDDLE AGES:

IMPERIAL REMODERNISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN VISUAL CULTURE

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Abstract. The article focuses on contemporary Russian neo-modernist utopia in visual arts, particularly on Anton Chumak’s artistic work. In his project ‘Borders’ (2015), dedicated to Donbass, Chumak offers a vision of imperial remodernism as an alternative to the postindustrial new Middle Ages. The notion of the ‘new Middle Ages’ is often used today in socio-political discourse to characterize the new ideological role of the Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia. The ‘conservative turn’ in Russian politics and culture, the concept of traditional values and new legislative initiatives of the State Duma are sometimes described as ‘the end of the Enlightenment’ (Vladimir Sorokin). However, it is precisely the existing oligarchical globalism that is seen as the new Middle Ages through the conservative prism whereas the conservative utopia (Novorossiya, USSR-2, the Eurasian Empire) exemplifies the reemergence of the republican idea and the industrial empire.

Contemporary radical conservatives such as Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin and Maxim Kalashnikov promote imperial neo-industrialism and offer a critique of demodernization processes in Russian culture and society.
Their ‘conservative remodernism’ is characterized by a fusion of the leftist idea of social justice and the rightist idea of overcoming fragmentation and localization through the weakening of corporations and the oligarchy along with strengthening the state. Aesthetically, these ideas are manifested in a style, which can be described as ‘industrial neo-classicism.’ Industrial neoclassicists visualize the aesthetic utopia of the ‘new antiquity’ and ‘new order’ as an alternative to the chaos of neoliberal post-industrialism, which, according to them, has set us back to the new Middle Ages with its ethnic nationalism, fragmentation, irrationality, and uncontrollable emotionality.

**Key words:** radical conservatism, Donbass, Anton Chumak, neomodernism, neoindustrialism, neoclassicism, contemporary Russian art
Introduction

The ‘new Middle Ages’ has been a common term for referring to Russia’s present and near future since the publication of Vladimir Sorokin’s *Day of the Oprichnik* in 2006. In this novel, we see the post-secular Russia; it is made up of small princedoms run by government henchmen (*oprichniki*) who indulge in various sexual deviations when not practicing political violence. New information technologies feed fake news and ‘post-truths’ to the passive population, which revels in freshly dug dirt and impurities. The publication of Sorokin’s *Telluria* in 2013 and the 2014 release of *Hard to be a God*, a dystopian film directed by Aleksei German, brought this medieval analogy to wider attention. The concept of the new Middle Ages was developed by a number of Russian thinkers including Nikolai Berdyaev who penned the eponymous essay *The New Middle Ages* (1924). However, the concept’s breakthrough came after the publication of the famous essay *The Coming Dark Age* (1973) by Roberto Vacca, written amidst the oil crisis of that year. It has become the conceptual source for a number of cinematic masterpieces of the post-apocalyptic genre. The popularity of the concept of the new Middle Ages has been strongly influenced by Umberto Eco’s bestseller *The Name of the Rose* (1980) and his theoretical treatise *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (1994).

Critique from the right: radical conservatives against de-modernization
The notion of the new Middle Ages is often used to characterize the new ideological role of the Russian Orthodox Church whereas the conservative concept of ‘traditional values’ and new legislative initiatives of the State Duma are sometimes described as “the end of the Enlightenment”. However, were we to refer directly to works of the advocates of the contemporary radical conservative thought such as Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin or Maxim Kalashnikov (pen name of Vladimir Kucherenko), we would become aware that these are not medieval guilds and traditional values at all but imperial neo-industrialism which is the key metaphor in these projects. It is precisely the existing neoliberal, oligarchical globalism that is seen as the new Middle Ages through the conservative prism whereas the conservative utopia (e.g. Novorossiya, USSR-2, the Eurasian Empire) exemplifies the reemergence of the republican idea and the neo-modernist industrial empire. For example, conservative futurologist Maxim Kalashnikov describes the near future built by the global oligarchy as ‘new feudalism’ where the ‘islets of paradise’ are separated from the rest of the poor world by the wall. These ‘islets of paradise’ constitute affluent territories, which are built around transnational corporations and have their own infrastructures and armies. He characterizes the official Russian imperial and neo-traditionalist rhetoric as a fake:

“[It is] Archaic in the form of the ‘rebirth of statehood’, creation of ‘spiritual bounds’ (skrep) and so on. It is not the rebirth of USSR: on the contrary, the Union was industrially developed technocratic society with the cult of science and technics. While
here we have mere, deep-seated \( (machrovia) \) archaic multiplied by provincial ‘oil-economy’.” (Kalashnikov 2015).


Conservative utopians offer imperial remodernism and technocratic cosmism as an alternative to the postindustrial new Middle Ages. They advocate the abolishment of capitalist economy and institutions of liberal democracy and implementation of the program of a new industrialism, they wish to establish just social institutions and treat war as a tool for national revival and for creating (or resurrecting) an empire. Aesthetically, these ideas are manifested in a style, which can be described as \( neo\text{-industrial classicism} \) reminiscent of Greco-Roman antiquity, the European Enlightenment, and the Soviet modernization project, the era of industrialization and space exploration.

In this article, I would like to focus on one utopian imperial neo-industrial project—Novorossiia, or the New Donbass. While in terms of politics, the idea of Novorossiia suffered a failure (Laruelle 2014, Kolesnikov 2015), the aesthetical Utopia of a conservative revolution in Eastern Ukraine and of establishing an anti-oligarchy state as a global alternative is continuously being developed in the works of several contemporary Russian artists. Most consistently, this utopia is presented in the work of Anton
Chumak. The artist in his Novorossiia and Donbass projects combines the discourse of ‘soil’ (mineral resources, *tellurium*) and the discourse of ‘the Soviet Antiquity’, which is a unification of literal rootedness/locality with universality (universal language of antiquity and neo-classicism). His projects can thus be characterized as cosmonationalist (referring to glocality), or ‘tellurio-cosmic’ [*telluro-kosmicheskaia*] civilization, emphasizing both national identity and the global, universal context. The term ‘telluric’ was introduced in the current Russian political lexicon by Alexander Dugin, who borrows it from Carl Schmitt’s *Theory of the Partisan* (1963). Schmitt when discussing the criteria for the partisan figure writes of his ‘telluric’ character, physical attachment to the territory that he defends.

In contemporary Russian radical-conservative circles, the term is widely used not only to signify locality, sovereignty, and the ‘soil-bound’ tradition but as a synonym for a defensive rather than an invasive war. This ‘soil-boundness’ and partisan (telluric) war for sovereignty, the metaphors to which are ‘gifts of the earth’—oil, coal, gas, fresh water—are proposed by the present-day Russian radical conservatives as a world-wide alternative to the post-industrial globalism. The mineral resources economy, agrarian autochthony combined with the neo-Soviet industrial romanticism and the artistic language of the neo-classics is yet another attempt to see the future

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40 The term got a wider recognition after Vladimir Sorokin’s novel *Telluria* (2013) was published.
41 Carl Schmitt writes in his ‘Partisan’: ‘I want to insist on a fourth criterion of the genuine partisan, one that Jover Zamora has called his *tellurian* character. It is significant for the essentially defensive situation of the partisan –despite his tactical mobility– whose nature changes when he identifies with the absolute aggressiveness of a world-revolutionary or technologizing ideology’ (Schmitt 2004).
by means of returning to the modernisation processes of the 1920s and 1930s.

**Anton Chumak’s neo-industrial classicism**

Anton Chumak (b. 1980), a St. Petersburg artist, blacksmith and curator, is one of the founder of the ‘New Aesthetics’ movement, a sequel to Timur Novikov’s New Academy.\(^\text{42}\) In an interview with *Artguide* Chumak comments on the essence of the new aesthetics:

“We turn to the soil – even literally. […] We are interested in the relics of Scythian mythology; we conceptualize it by means of contemporary art. We are interested in modern heroism” (Chumak 2013).

One of Chumak’s first projects—the installation ‘Temple of Fire’ (2012)—presents a museum exhibition of the future, in which refinery ruins are interpreted as a temple by the inhabitants of the future, and pieces of equipment are considered to be relics and sacred objects of worship. In this project, as well as in his other projects, we see the possible near future through a much more distant future. This look from the future at industrial oil civilization is full of melancholy and a feeling of loss.\(^\text{43}\)

Chumak’s works refer to the rich tradition of ‘paper’, or visionary architecture as an art of the Utopia; to surrealistic projects of Giovanni

\(^{42}\) On Timur Novikov’s New Academy of Fine Arts as the first artistic community in post-Soviet Russia to promote an imperial and conservative aesthetics, see Engström 2016.

\(^{43}\) The motif of the ‘view from the future’ and of ‘the archaeology of the Soviet past’ is developed in the famous project by Russian artist Grisha Bruskin (b. 1945), ‘A Collection of an Archaeologist’, presented in 2015 on the 56th Venice Biennale.
Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728-1799), Claude Nicolas Ledoux (1736-1806) and Jean-Jacques Lequeu (1757-1826), as well as the Soviet paper neo-classicism of the 1920-1930s and 1980s, works of Jakov Chernikhov, Ivan Leonidov, Boris Iofan, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (Bass 2016). For example, ‘Reconstruction №2’ (see Figure 1) from the ‘Temple of Fire’ project is a visual quote of the spherical 'Cenotaph for Newton' by Boullée (1784); it follows the principles of the geometrical style and *architecture parlante* of European classicism.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 1. Anton Chumak, *Reconstruction №2*, from the ‘Temple of Fire’ project, 2012
Oil and Saint Petersburg are closely linked to each other in Chumak’s art. His creative activities can be interpreted as part of the ‘oil text’ [нефтетекст] of contemporary Russian culture (Kalinin 2015). The very word ‘petroleum’ is connected in his works with St. Petersburg, Peter’s city. Julia Kvasok, a Russian art critic, notes:

“[…] oil is the artist’s last subject. It unites him with Boyce’s lard and felt, and with Barney’s paraffin. Chumak’s oil is a refinement product, just like neoclassicism, as a matter of fact (Chumak, in the meantime, is a St. Petersburg guy, raised on factory blocks, a neoclassicist). It turns out that the word ‘oil’ is a St. Petersburg word. ‘Petroleum’ is derived from the Greek petra – ‘rock’ and Latin oleum – ‘oil’. Thus, it is the Northern,[…] Russian, labouring, black blood of Peter’s city. It runs through the plant’s veins and, like Chernikhov’s coal, draws and erects graceful constructivist cathedrals – either mosques, or in Gothic style for the mythical fire-worshippers. The prototype for those is a refinery outside St. Petersburg” (Kvasok 2012).

In the Donbass project ‘Borders’ (2015), in which the artist collected his works of recent years, the motif of the unification of classicism and ‘natural resources’ is fully realized. The neo-classical industrialism of the 1920s and 1930s (the years when the Soviet Donbass was built) becomes the artistic language expressing with utmost accuracy the ideology of the
'common cause' and the new industrial revolution as an alternative to the post-industrial globalism. Here the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the ‘extraction economy’ [ekonomika nedr] linked to it are described by means of arche-ofuturistic language that makes a reference both to the neoclassicism of the 1920-30s, and the avant-garde architectural utopias of the Russian ‘Piranesi’ Jakov Chernikhov (1889-1951).

The project is devoted to the trauma of new borders, to the carving up of the Homeland’s body, once whole, and to the dream of a new revival. Chumak writes:

“While driving past Mariupol I saw the industrial plants, far off in the distance, in the heat haze. They reminded me of half magic castles, half intergalactic space ports that have grown in the steppes. I imagined that for a moment I saw the Soviet utopia when a factory was a cathedral, and labour was the cult. [...] 

Humanity’s dream of space and of peace that grows from the soil just like the Donbass industrial plants grow from the black soil near the Black sea. And, most importantly, I realised that not all was lost in the bloodbath of the 90s. That much was preserved and what perished can be created anew. I believed again in the possibility of a new revival and a new ‘big project’ in the post-Soviet space and in the world as a whole. All my art since that day has been an attempt at romantic
visualisation of that project and the search for its new fundamentals that face into the future” (Chumak 2015).

One of the paintings—The Ark—is of particular interest here (Figure 2). The arc acquires the form of a submarine but it is not beasts who find salvation in Chumak’s neomodernist future, but factories and industrial cathedrals. The reflections of their domes in the water remind of the well-known images of the legendary Kitezh Town.

Figure 2. Anton Chumak, The Ark, 2014-2016

The artist examines the metaphysics of Donbass as the most ‘tellurium-rich’ region of the former “united motherland” and presents images of its mythological landscape. In a number of Chumak’s works we see mythological images of Donbass natural recourses and industrial production
(see Figure 3): hopper wagons filled with cement and equipped with wings of Hermes; and rail cars containing oil protected not only by satellites and military bombers, but also the sky itself (mythical griffins) and the earth as well (floral designs). The principle of the agro-cosmic civilisation is embodied in the images of spheres (planets, domes, sun as a sunflower) and an ear of wheat as the image of the Earth, the golden age and the resurrection.

Figure 3. Anton Chumak, from the ‘Black Earth’ project, 2013

The ancient gods are also taking side of Donbass. Chumak creates images of the Athena of Donetsk who holds explosives instead of a spear,
and the goddess Ossa\textsuperscript{44} with a loudspeaker in her hand and surrounded by satellites, radars and an air defence system (see Figure 4). Images of goddesses and female warriors hold a special status in the contemporary Russian conservative art. The visualisation of Russia in an image of a young Valkyrie (Daughterland, Rodina-Doch') was suggested in early 2000s by Alexei Belyaev-Gintovt and has since become the \textit{topos} of the neoconservative aesthetics (Engström 2017).

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ossa.png}
\caption{Anton Chumak, \textit{Ossa}, 2016}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{44} In Greek mythology, Ossa (lat. Pheme), daughter of Gaia /Terra/Earth, was a personification of prophetic voices, rumours and gossip.
Chumak’s graphic art can be seen as a visual comment to Alexander Prokhanov’s organic technicism and his industrial utopia of Novorossiya and the Fifth Empire:

“This state has a powerful technosphere, inherited from Soviet times: the grand factories that build rockets and airplanes, turbines for nuclear power plants, elements of spacecraft. This technosphere is intricately intertwined with Russian factories, space launch complexes, nuclear power plants” (Prokhanov 2014)

A detailed mythologization of technology and industrial objects can be found in Ernst Jünger’s conservative critique of modernity. Chumak’s Donbass cycle can also be interpreted as a visualization of Ernst Jünger’s late ideas, where the Worker is not only the master of technology but also ‘the son of the Earth’. Jünger pondered about possibilities for bridging the gap between the rational and mythological perception of the world in his post-war works ‘The Forest Way’ (1951) and ‘At the Wall of Time’ (1959). Alexander Mikhailovskii, one of the leading Russian experts on the German Conservative Revolution, writes about the criticism of technocratic modernity in Jünger's essay ‘At the Wall of Time’:

“Technology, when viewed from the perspective of myth, is not just ‘a world of abstractions’, but ‘geospiritual reality’ [erdgeistige Wirklichkeit]. Or simply: ‘Technology is the projected spirit’. Geohistorical optics allows Jünger to abandon the
pessimistic view of technology, according to which it is just unenviable and hopeless ‘soulless machinery’. Since there cannot be any direct link between a person as a subject and technology as a neutral means, there appears a conservative-revolutionary idea of the ‘spiritualization of the earth’ [Erdvergeistigung], in which our planet ‘takes on a new skin’” (Mikhailovskii 2010)

Figure 5. Anton Chumak, The New Earth, 2014-2016

This ‘new skin of the Earth’ often takes various forms in the works of Chumak: pipes, tunnels, rails, blast furnaces (as in the work “The new Earth, see Figure 5). According to the artist, borders should disappear not only between the disconnected parts of the former country, but also between
technology and nature, between the earth and the sky, and between myth and reality. Chumak’s paintings made in neoclassical aesthetics lack any national specifics and are universal metaphors of European culture and an alternative neomodernist globalisation.

**Conclusions**

Critics of the post-Soviet neo-conservatism often account for the world of the traditionalist Utopia as the New Middle Ages (Sorokin 2006, 2013; Saprykin 2015). However, my analysis shows that the major metaphors in the projects of the post-Soviet conservatism have nothing to do with the discourse of the ‘New Middle Ages’ but rather with neo-classicism and neo-industrialism. Conservative avant-garde supplies a myth of order and discipline where industrial order blends with Arcadia, and where the Ark(-submarine) is packed not with pairs of animals but with columns, cupolas and smoking chimneys. The images of the ‘New Antiquity’, severe rationality of neoclassicism and the industrial Order which we find in the works of Anton Chumak are designed to prevail over the chaos of the post-industrial ‘new Dark Ages’.

In the contemporary Russian radical conservatism, neo-industrialism has served as a synonym for anti-globalism since the 1990s. Nowadays the ideas of the conservative revolution have entered the official discourse, Kremlin’s symbolic politics and Russian popular culture, but in a more populist, less radical form. The metaphor of Order and rationality is a constant element of Putin’s rhetoric which slowly but steadily leads to the formation of the state aesthetics corresponding to the conservative
discourse. In terms of the official cultural policy, the effects of the conservative revolution are for example evident in new urbanism with its focus on regeneration of neoclassical architectural ensembles of the Stalin’s era (Gorky Park and VDNKh).

If the concepts of revitalising the common European heritage, common Christian roots of both Europe and Russia have recently become the priority in the cultural and the foreign policy, the ideas of second modernism and industrial sovereignty have not yet gone beyond conservative avant-garde. Although official Russian media pay a lot of attention to the country’s successes in the military and space industries as well as large infrastructural projects such as the construction of the bridge between Russia and Crimea, neo-industrialism has not yet become part of the Kremlin’s official rhetoric. Right-wing neoconservatives trace the causes for the Kremlin’s abandoning both its support of ‘Novorossiia’ and the strategy of the new industrialism precisely in the neoliberal nature of Russian economy and the ties between the oligarchic elite and the transnational corporations.

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