

The Soviet Model of Modernity and Russia's Post-communist Political Transformation

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Sovětský vzorec modernity a postkomunistická politická transformace Ruska

Abstract: The article discusses political processes in post-Soviet Russia from the perspective of the multiple modernities theory. A study of Russia's political transformation on the basis of this approach allows us to reconsider the obstacles to democratization that existed in the 1990s and the socio-cultural preconditions for de-democratization in the 2000s. The author draws on Johann Arnason's analysis of the Soviet model of modernity. From this perspective the Soviet model possessed only some civilizational traits and did not lead to a sustainable civilizational pattern. Nevertheless, remnants of that model and the imperial legacy of the Soviet period influenced Russian politics of the last two decades. The dynamics of democratization and de-democratization in Russia represent a case of path dependency which is both post-communist and post-imperial.

Keywords: civilizational analysis; modernity; Soviet model; Russia; political transformation

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Political processes in post-Soviet Russia have been discussed mostly from the positions of transitology as a branch of political science which tends to lack the historical dimension. It has been argued that transitological approaches usually ignore the historical legacies that influenced the course of social and political transformations in Eastern Europe [Blokker 2005]. But it should be admitted that the limits of the 'transition paradigm' were already recognized by some political scientists after the first decade of post-communist transformations [Carothers 2002]. In historical sociology recent political processes in Russia were analyzed by Charles Tilly who considered them an example of de-democratization [Tilly 2007].

Approaches to the study of post-Soviet Russian politics have been classified in different ways. According to Motyl [2011: 10–11], political transformation in Russia can be explained as the result of 1) political culture, 2) structural or institutional forces, or 3) elite decisions. The first viewpoint rejects the possibility of genuine democratization on the grounds that Russian political culture remains non-democratic. The second approach emphasizes the incompatibility of the construction of stable democratic institutions with the institutional legacies of totalitarian and imperial collapse. The third explanation focuses on the role of elites in dismantling democratic structures. As far as the cultural approach is concerned the main focus in most studies is on political culture but not on the broader issues of socio-cultural change. At the same time research on Russian politics still insufficiently uses the theoretical approaches of political sociology.

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Since the middle of the 20th century mainstream political sociology has been developing within the modernization paradigm influenced by structural functionalism. However, some alternatives to this paradigm also emerged. According to Spohn [2010: 50], the main counter-trends against functionalist evolutionism include critical political sociology focused on political power and inequality; neo-Marxism focused on class conflict in capitalist development; post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches; and, finally, global political sociology in which a special place belongs to the civilizational multiple modernities perspective. Richard Sakwa has emphasized recently the importance of the civilizational perspective for the study of Russian politics. This scholar discusses the advantages of civilizational analysis over the mainstream transitological approaches in the field of post-communist studies [Sakwa 2012: 45–50]. However, Sakwa does not make a distinction between different versions of the multiple modernities theory. The differences between two most elaborate formulations of this theory have been considered by Wolfgang Knöbl [2011].

The present article is seeking to contribute to sociological analysis of the transformation processes in post-Soviet Russia on the basis of the multiple modernities approach. The article draws on the version of this perspective that considers both cultural and political factors of social dynamics. Particular attention is devoted to evaluation of utility of the multiple modernities theory for analyzing the impact of civilizational and imperial legacies on Russian transformations. It is assumed in the article that for a better understanding of Russia's post-Soviet trajectory of development it is necessary to transcend the boundaries between theoretically oriented historical sociology and the current perspectives on post-communist societies.

The Soviet model of modernity from the perspective of civilizational analysis

Civilizational analysis as a paradigm of historical sociology has been developed by Shmuel Eisenstadt and elaborated by Johann Arnason, Björn Wittrock and other scholars. Eisenstadt's theoretical contribution consists first of all in his analysis of the Axial Age civilizations but it is his discussion of multiple modernities that is most relevant for contemporary political sociology [Eisenstadt 2001]. Thus Eisenstadt demonstrates the influence of the cultural programme of modernity on the formation of constitutional-democratic regimes and reveals the role of cultural factors in the peculiarities of political institutions in non-western states [Eisenstadt 1998]. But it has been argued that Eisenstadt tends to over-emphasise the role of cultural-religious mechanisms that programme the processes of social and political change and mostly follows the 'path dependency' thesis [Knöbl 2010]. According to Peter Wagner, Eisenstadt's strong idea of 'cultural programme' can be applied to 'classical' civilisations rather than to contemporary versions of modernity [Wagner 2010].

The relevance of civilizational analysis for political sociology has been discussed by Willfried Spohn. He argues that civilizational foundations and frameworks 'generate different programmes of political modernity and processes of political modernization'. From this perspective empires, world religions and regional economies 'have a crucial impact on state formation, nation-building, national integration, political cultures, public spheres and collective identities, and thus contribute to the varying constellations and trajectories of

political modernization' [Spohn 2010: 60]. However, in contemporary Russia it is the Soviet civilizational and imperial legacies that seem particularly important. It can be assumed that Johann Arnason's version of civilizational analysis that focuses on both cultural and political factors of civilizational dynamics is most relevant in this case.

Arnason's approach to the multiple forms of modernity is widely discussed in contemporary historical sociology. At the same time his analysis of the Soviet version of modernity has attracted relatively less attention than some other aspects of his work. Thus in a special issue of *European Journal of Social Theory* devoted to Arnason's theoretical contribution there is no article discussing exclusively his study of the Soviet model although Willfried Spohn considers his interpretation of non-western civilizations including the Soviet case. As Spohn notes, Arnason's book *The Future that Failed* should be seen as 'a highly original civilizational approach to the communist regimes in Russia and other parts of the world that deserves further theoretical development and comparative research' [Spohn 2011: 30]. It is true that Arnason's book was written before the full elaboration of his civilizational theory. However, he also addressed the problematic of communist modernity in several other works [Arnason 1995; 2002; 2003; 2005].

First of all Arnason considers the Russian cultural and political tradition which combined a peripheral position within the western world with some traits of a separate civilization. In particular, he focuses on the character of the imperial modernization in Russia. He argues that the origins and the later transformation of the totalitarian project could only be understood with reference to that background [Arnason 1993: 21]. A parallel can be drawn with the approach of Richard Pipes who considers Soviet totalitarianism the result of 'the grafting of Marxist ideology onto the sturdy stem of Russia's patrimonial heritage' [Pipes 1994: 501]. But Arnason believes that the Weberian concept of patrimonialism is insufficient for understanding the character of imperial rule in pre-revolutionary Russia. In his view, Eisenstadt's work on the social and political structures of empires is more relevant for this purpose.

According to Arnason, the Soviet model incorporated both the legacy of imperial transformation from above and the revolutionary vision of a new society. Their synthesis led to a 'reunified and rearticulated tradition' which served 'to structure a specific version of modernity' [Arnason 2002: 87]. For Arnason, the impact of the imperial legacy was manifested in the fact that the Bolshevik government inherited the geopolitical situation and internal structural problems of the Russian empire but also the tradition of social transformation from above. In his view, the civilizational aspect of the Soviet model can be seen 'in the twofold sense of a distinctive version of modernity and a set of traditional patterns which it perpetuated in a new setting' [Arnason 1995: 39].

Arnason distinguishes between two types of communist regimes: the charismatic variant leading to autocracy and a more rationalized oligarchic one. For Arnason, the Soviet regime was not simply a more extreme form of bureaucratic domination. While arbitrary rule of the party apparatus did not correspond to the standards of rational bureaucracy, its methods of control and mobilizing capacity were beyond the classical Weberian model. Arnason draws the conclusion that the Soviet mode of legitimation included elements of all three Weberian types but, nevertheless, it represented a new and original phenomenon. At the same time charismatic legitimation was essential to the Stalinist autocracy. In fact, Arnason regards the Stalinist dictatorship as a new form of charismatic domination. He

agrees with Robert Tucker that Stalin's main achievement was the invention of a new strategy of revolutionary transformation from above.

However, a different interpretation of the concept of charisma has also been used in the study of Soviet communism. According to Stefan Breuer, the Soviet political regime represented a specific form of charismatic domination. He draws on the concept of 'charisma of reason' which was applied by Weber to the French revolution of 1789. Breuer argues that the Bolshevik regime that tried to reconstruct the whole society according to a rational plan could be considered the embodiment of such charisma of reason [Breuer 1992]. He regards the early Bolshevik government as a 'charismatic community of the ideological *virtuosi*'. Breuer analyses the early Bolshevik government and provides a general account of the Soviet system as a whole but he does not discuss in detail the character of the Stalinist dictatorship. Nevertheless, the concept of charisma of reason is hardly applicable to the Stalinist regime [Maslovskiy 2010: 11–12].

In the early 1920s the Bolshevik leaders did not see Stalin as a potential head of the party. As Gudkov [2011: 492] claims, Stalin's charisma was an 'artificially produced authority of the infallible leader'. The myth of the 'great Stalin' was the result of mass propaganda, total control over information and systematic terror. Apparently one could speak of a clash between the impersonal charisma of reason of the 'old Bolsheviks' and the largely artificially produced Stalin's personal charisma in the second half of the 1920s. By the middle of the 1930s the emphasis was shifted from manufacturing of Stalin's personal charisma to invention of the new tradition. This culminated in publication of the Stalinist 'holy scripture' *The Short Course of History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)* in 1938. As Arnason notes, this book published at the end of the great purge 'gave the charismatic leadership a traditional basis through a mythical account of party history' [Arnason 1993: 111].

Klaus-Georg Riegel has offered a Weberian analysis of Marxism-Leninism as a political religion. This scholar discusses the transition of the Bolshevik party as a community of 'ideological *virtuosi*' into a 'hierocracy' under Stalin. Riegel argues that the Lenin cult already established during his own lifetime 'laid the foundations for a political and sacral tradition which could be selectively used by the Stalinist hierocratic power' [Riegel 2005: 109]. Riegel draws a parallel with Weber's analysis of the rise of professional priesthood. For Weber, the emergence of a church is accompanied by rationalization of dogma and rituals. Accordingly, the holy scriptures are provided with commentaries and turned into objects of systematic education. On the other hand, Arnason believes that there was rather 'a partial functional equivalence between Marxism-Leninism and traditional theological systems' [Arnason 1993: 116]. He emphasizes that the Soviet ideology continued both the scientific trend and 'redemptive visions' in Marxism.

In historical studies of Stalinism two approaches can be identified which stress the modernity of the Stalinist regime or its neo-traditionalist aspects. On the one hand, the modernity approach focuses on such phenomena as planning, 'welfare-statism' and techniques of surveillance. On the other hand, the neo-traditionalist approach concentrates on the 'archaicizing' phenomena like patron-client networks, ascribed status categories and 'mystification of power' [Fitzpatrick 2000: 11]. In fact, this distinction reminds us of the discussion in Weberian sociology of two possible ways of routinization of charisma: rationalization and traditionalization. But most historians of the Soviet period do not refer

to theories of historical sociology. It has been noted that representatives of the 'modernist' approach to Soviet history 'are implicitly beginning to participate in a methodological shift towards "multiple modernities", even though Eisenstadt and his edited volume on the multiple modernity theme has apparently not yet drawn their attention' [David-Fox 2006: 538]. Nevertheless, the civilizational perspective in historical sociology can bridge the gap between the two above-mentioned approaches in Soviet studies.

According to Arnason, there were significant differences between 'the prewar and the postwar constellation'. As he writes, 'the autocratic regime and the enlarged empire seemed to reinforce each other: Stalin's rule was re-legitimized by victory and expansion, and his charismatic leadership served to contain centrifugal trends within the bloc' [Arnason 1995: 46]. On the other hand, the imperial legacy re-emerged as a more independent factor after 'downgrading' of the totalitarian project. During the stage of 'oligarchic stabilization' the Soviet system turned to global expansionism instead of internal mobilization. At this stage the international prestige of the Soviet regime was particularly important for its legitimizing effort at home [Arnason 2002: 79].

This part of Arnason's analysis can be compared with the neo-Weberian perspective on the problem of legitimacy of power offered by Collins [1986] who discusses the influence of international prestige of the state on the legitimacy of its political regime. But it should be noted that Collins does not consider ideology an independent variable. In his view, ideology always follows geopolitics. On the other hand, Arnason believes that the ideological component of the Soviet foreign policy reinforced the discrepancy between ambitions and resources. In particular, Arnason considers the consequences of the Sino-Soviet split for the fate of the global communist project. Soviet hegemony was questioned when a challenge came from China as an alternative geopolitical centre. Evidently, the conflict between the two geopolitical centres undermined the global position of the communist model. Arnason argues that there was a civilizational side in the Sino-Soviet split as well as in the crisis of 1968 in Czechoslovakia. In both cases the forces in conflict were separated by 'cultural barriers to communication' [Arnason 1995: 48].

In his discussion of the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s Arnason distinguishes between two main trends in the dynamics of the Soviet regime: the internal one of re-traditionalization and the external one of globalization. While Arnason has referred to re-traditionalization connected with reactivation of the imperial legacy by the Stalinist regime, he also discusses it during the Brezhnev period. In his view, this trend was evident in attempts to present the 'Soviet way of life' as a specific tradition [Arnason 1993: 213]. In the ideological sphere there was a conservative shift towards defense of 'really existing socialism'.

Finally, Arnason's analysis of the Gorbachev reforms should be considered. Arnason disagrees with those observers who regarded the reformist turn of the Soviet leaders as the triumph of civil society or a kind of 'revolt of the middle classes'. He believes that the reformist centre was not acting in response to civil society but rather following its own strategy. As he argues, the reformist leadership remained confident that the communist project could be 'revitalized'. Thus the idea of *glasnost* reflected 'an optimistic view of Soviet culture as an established tradition and of its self-reflective potential' while underestimation of the national problems could be seen as a result of 'belief in the unifying and assimilating power of the Soviet culture' [Arnason 1995: 51]. For Arnason, economic

experiments of the Gorbachev period also confirmed the Soviet leaders' belief that the civilizational framework remained solid.

In his brief account of the situation in post-Soviet Russia soon after the collapse of the USSR Arnason mentions decomposition of both state and society and social vacuum that was left behind by the Soviet model. He also observes that post-communist transformations in Russia can be seen as 'a new phase of the ongoing interaction between the Russian and the Western trajectory, rather than as the coming of age of an indigenous society or a wholesale conversion of an imported model' [Arnason 1993: 211]. While Arnason does not discuss in detail the processes of social and political change in Russia, his approach can be applied to the problematic of post-Soviet transformations. As Spohn argues, the evolutionary modernization theory which is mostly used in transition studies cannot account for reversals in economic and political liberalization but Arnason's ideas can add new explanatory dimensions to transformation research [Spohn 2011: 32].

The Soviet civilizational legacies and Russian political culture

Civilizational approaches to Russian politics tend to emphasize the influence of non-democratic cultural heritage. This is also characteristic of Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis [Huntington 1993] which became influential in political discourse in the 1990s. However, representatives of civilizational analysis in historical sociology criticized Huntington's approach as one-sided, ideologically motivated and lacking a solid theoretical foundation. It has been argued that in contemporary world 'there are no intact civilizations of the kind presupposed by those who prophecy a clash between them' [Arnason 2006: 52]. Huntington tends to oppose the West as a kind of apex of modernity to other presumably non-modern civilizations. According to Casanova [2011: 259], the main flaws of Huntington's view of civilizations are 1) an assumption that the world religions have some unchangeable core essence; 2) considering civilizations as territorially bounded geopolitical units; 3) assertion of western hegemony that can turn the prediction of clash of civilizations into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Huntington's thesis has been widely debated in Russian social sciences and referred to by some members of the political elite. But the perception of Huntington's ideas depended on the position of Russian scholars and politicians in the ideological spectrum. Representatives of the liberal camp appreciated Huntington's interest in the cultural aspects of the world politics but most of them were dissatisfied with the way he defined civilizations and interpreted their interactions [Tsygankov 2003: 63]. From this viewpoint, Huntington overlooked the processes of globalization and overemphasized civilizational conflicts. The picture of world politics as a series of clashes between civilizations was considered a manifestation of Western ethnocentrism. At the same time proponents of the statist ideological position were mainly in agreement with Huntington's thesis. Most of them accepted Huntington's view that civilizations were the key units in the world politics fighting for power and prestige. However, it was argued that Huntington's actual goal was 'to counterpose the West against all other non-Western civilizations rather than to warn about the clash of various civilizations with each other' [Tsygankov 2003: 65]. Unlike Huntington, the Russian statist intellectuals tended to stress not so much Orthodox but Eurasian identity of the Russian civilization.

From the perspective of civilizational analysis in contemporary historical sociology post-Soviet Russia can hardly be considered a distinct civilization. The idea of 'Orthodox civilization' which was shared by Huntington and some Russian traditionalists seems to be ill-founded. While the civilizational identity of the Soviet system was formed by Marxism-Leninism as a kind of political religion, there is no such identity in today's Russia. From the viewpoint of the multiple modernities approach one can speak of a Soviet model of modernity that possessed only some civilizational characteristics. According to Arnason [2002: 68], the 'secular religion' of Marxism-Leninism did not penetrate society to the same extent as historical religions. Unlike Stephen Kotkin and other historians who regard Stalinism as a civilization [Hedin 2004], Arnason focuses on the process of re-traditionalization during the Brezhnev period. But he argues that this trend did not lead to a sustainable civilizational pattern.

Nevertheless, some traces of the Soviet model can still be seen in today's Russian society. Thus the impact of the Soviet legacy on Russia's post-communist political culture has been emphasized in the works of researchers from the analytical Levada Centre particularly Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin. They largely draw on the model of Soviet person as a social type that was elaborated by Yurii Levada who was generally perceived as the foremost Russian sociologist of the 1980s and 90s. But although Levada's intellectual authority is widely recognised in Russian social sciences the actual influence of this scholar's works remains rather limited. Nevertheless, his theoretical approach is central for Gudkov's and Dubin's analysis of post-communist transformations in Russia.

For Gudkov, the 'Soviet person' can be regarded as an ideal-typical construction on a par with *homo economicus*, 'authoritarian personality' and the like. Gudkov [2011: 56] believes that this type should be seen as paradigmatic for non-western variants of modernization and disintegration of totalitarian regimes. He regards the 'Soviet person' as a normative pattern that had influenced the mass of population of the totalitarian state. The key features of this pattern were 1) exclusiveness or specificity of the Soviet person, incompatibility with other types of personality; 2) 'belonging' to the state, expectation of paternalistic care and at the same time taking for granted arbitrary actions of the authorities; 3) levelling, anti-elite dispositions; 4) combination of superiority and inferiority complexes [Gudkov 2011: 57]. These contradictory, antinomian characteristics presumably defined the behaviour of the masses of population in the USSR.

Some of the empirical studies of Levada Centre conducted in the 1990s and 2000s were supposed to demonstrate what traits of the Soviet person persisted in the situation of large-scale social change and to what extent they continued to influence people's behaviour. On the basis of these studies Gudkov makes a conclusion that the anthropological type of Soviet person should be considered the main obstacle to the modernization processes in post-communist Russia. As he argues, the Soviet person's fundamental distrust to the world and the experience of adaptation to violence make this human type incapable of accepting complex social relations of modern society.

Gudkov applies the concept of 'abortive modernization' to the Russian transformation. He emphasizes that in sociological systems theory modernization means the processes of functional differentiation of the social system and the emergence of more complex forms of integration and communication between its parts. At the same time Gudkov claims that in Russia modernization has been systematically blocked. The strains and conflicts

within the social system that required its further differentiation has been resolved instead by rejection of complexity, simplification of the system and pushing it on a more primitive level. Such 'restoration' effects were not accidental but represented an intrinsic trait of this socio-cultural system [Gudkov 2011: 378].

According to Gudkov, the transformation process in Russia has not been accompanied by a genuine change of the old totalitarian institutions but rather by an 'exposure' of those institutions in a new context. As a result of this process the social system has been replaced by an agglomeration of 'enclaves' which are mechanically united into a weakly integrated whole. Despite the attempts to build the 'vertical of power', the centralized state is losing control over different segments of society. For Gudkov, disintegration of the totalitarian system is an uneven process. The new trends are mostly visible in the economic sphere while the army, police and legal institutions have changed very little since the Soviet period. On the whole the transformation process in post-Soviet Russia has been characterized by degeneration of institutions, absence of mechanisms of horizontal integration in society, conflicts of different systems of values and the resulting *anomie*, spread of corruption at all levels of the administrative apparatus [Gudkov 2011: 370–371].

Gudkov claims that the political regime in Putin's Russia is specific since it is the result of disintegration of totalitarianism which was a unique political phenomenon. He regards it as a novel type of regime with a new legitimation system and new technologies of power. On the one hand, Gudkov refers to 'imitation traditionalism' substituted with 'modernization rhetoric' and imitation electoral democracy as the means of legitimation of the regime. On the other hand, he believes that the basis of the regime is not some traditional institutions but the structures of political police. Gudkov defines 'Putinism' as a 'system of decentralized use of the institutional resources of violence belonging to the violence structures that have not changed since the period of totalitarian regime but have been appropriated by the power holders in their private or group interests' [Gudkov 2009: 16].

Another scholar from Levada Centre, Boris Dubin, considers the issues of collective identity and historical memory in post-Soviet Russia. In his works the formation of imaginary collective identity in Russia is discussed in relation to the 'others' represented by the countries of East Central Europe and former Soviet republics. As Dubin argues, in the 1990s the idea of Russia's particularity and specific way of development was spreading in public opinion and the discourse of power. The basis of identification in this period was 'symbolic alienation' from 'others' [Dubin 2011: 11–12]. The traces of totalitarian mentality and the 'besieged fortress' psychology characteristic for the Cold War period continued to influence Russia's public opinion in the 2000s [Dubin 2011: 38–39].

In discussion of historical memory Dubin largely focuses on memory of the war. According to the data of numerous public opinion surveys, the victory in the Great Patriotic War is regarded by the majority of Russia's population as the most important event in Soviet history. Dubin poses the question of when and how the image of war was constructed in the public opinion. In his view, this image was formed particularly from the middle of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s. Soviet literature, cinema, mass media and the system of education contributed in varying degree to the construction of this image. While the official myth of the war remained predominant there were also alternative viewpoints presented in non-conformist literature and art. However, it was the official Soviet myth that was largely revived in the 2000s.

It is noteworthy that Gudkov [2011: 493–495] draws similar conclusions as a result of analyzing the dynamics of the ‘Stalin myth’ in Russian public opinion. He devotes particular attention to the Brezhnev period when there was a conservative shift in the Soviet ideology. The victory in the war became the focus of the new version of legitimation of the political regime and the core element of collective identification. For Gudkov, the image of Stalin as military leader which had been formed during that period largely persisted in the post-Soviet years. As Gudkov emphasizes, the variety of attitudes to Stalin in today’s Russian society points to the existence of different forms of political culture and different moral positions. At the same time the legacy of Stalinism has not been overcome in Russian society and there is still too little critical reflection on the nature and consequences of totalitarian rule [Gudkov 2011: 498–500].

The formation and preservation of collective identity represent a kind of symbolic politics. Dubin refers to ritualistic and ceremonial character of Russian politics. The specific features of such politics include: ‘symbolization of the absence of alternative’ represented in the figure of the president; ‘memorization of collective identity’ connected with the growing importance of symbols of the past; mediatization of politics that presupposes the existence of a mass of non-participating ‘viewers’ [Dubin 2011: 240–241]. A vivid example of these trends can be seen, according to Dubin, in the political rituals connected with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the victory in the war in 2005. The victory was presented as an integrative symbol which was supposed to demonstrate the historical continuity of the state from the Soviet epoch to the present moment.

As Dubin argues, the collective identity of Russians is defined by two main symbols: the border separating ‘us’ from the ‘others’ and the power vertical which is seen as isolated from any social ties. These symbols which are characterized as archaic and non-modern presuppose the existence of non-organized, undifferentiated mass. The construction of collective identity ‘bears the traits of imperial domination that had taken root in the decades of Stalinist totalitarianism and persisted in a milder form in the last Soviet decades’ [Dubin 2011: 245–246]. For Dubin, the social processes in Russia can be seen as dynamics of ‘mass society’ without modernization of its core institutions. It is in such situation that the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of politics become particularly important.

The main trends in collective identification in Russia are regarded by Dubin as the following: growth of isolationism and xenophobia; rejection of any change and acceptance of *status quo*; the position of non-involvement and rejection of responsibility for the course of events [Dubin 2011: 235]. In the 2000s there was a decline in collective orientations connected with the outside world as a ‘generalized other’. Dubin claims that the idea of Russia’s specific way of development is perfectly compatible with what he calls ‘an agreement of mutual irresponsibility’ between the masses and the power [Dubin 2011: 260]. For the Russian authorities this idea means first of all the absence of any outside control. At the same time the majority of the country’s population prefers to choose passivity and non-involvement. Adaptation to the existing social conditions has become the basic strategy of peoples’ behaviour.

For Dubin, the structuring of the Soviet epoch was completed in the mass consciousness in Russia by the middle of the second post-Soviet decade. Public opinion surveys emphasize the importance of the beginning of that epoch (October revolution of 1917) and its end (disintegration of the USSR). Between these two events the victory in the war

and Yurii Gagarin's space flight are considered particularly significant. At the same time the Brezhnev period with its relative well-being and social homogeneity is seen by most of the population as the best time in 20th century Russian history. However, persecution of dissidents and the war in Afghanistan are not articulated in the mass consciousness. In the 2000s public opinion in Russia generally expressed nostalgia for the 'golden age' of Brezhnev's rule. It is paradoxical that the 'most mediocre period' in Soviet history has become in the collective consciousness 'a fulfilled utopia of equality, unity and well-being'. But in any case 'the quintessence of the Soviet should be seen not in Stalin's but in Brezhnev's years' [Dubin 2011: 121].

It should be noted that the multiple modernities approach to the Soviet model also focuses on the process of re-traditionalization during the Brezhnev period. Apparently this approach has much in common with the viewpoint of Dubin and Gudkov. Thus, according to Dubin [2011: 267], the Brezhnev period was the apex of the Soviet 'socio-political and civilizational order'. At the same time the discussion of Russian transformations in Gudkov's writings owes much to the Parsonian modernization theory that regards the West as the apex of modernity. Gudkov's idea of 'abortive modernization' also presupposes the existence of the only form of modernity exemplified by the West. The tendency to regard communist societies as 'pre-, anti- or pseudo-modern' [Arnason 2002: 61] which was common in western sociology of the 1990s can be seen in Gudkov's works as well. As he claims, the Soviet legacies should be identified with anti-modern elements. Nevertheless, these statements can be questioned from the viewpoint of the multiple modernities perspective in contemporary sociology [Maslovskiy 2013: 2020–2021]. The Soviet system can be seen not as a deviation from the only road to modernity but as a specific form of modern society that possessed distinctive civilizational features.

The Soviet imperial legacies in Russian politics

Within the last few years the subject of empire became rather popular in Russian political and academic discourse. It has been argued that 'imperial rhetoric' can be found practically in all parts of the Russian political spectrum. But the meaning of the term 'empire' remains different in the nationalist and liberal camps as well as in the 'discourse of Russian power' while all these ideological positions are weakly connected with interpretations of empire in the works of historians, sociologists and political scientists [Malinova 2008: 100–101]. It should also be noted that interpretations of the concept of empire by Russian researchers are often weakly connected with analysis of imperial power structures and post-imperial transformations in western social science. Thus Eisenstadt's classical study of the political systems of empires and the multiple modernities approach are hardly ever mentioned in these discussions.

An original approach to the concepts of nation-state and empire has been offered by Krishan Kumar. He argues that, on the one hand, nation-state and empire actually have more in common than is usually believed. On the other hand, the idea of a 'natural succession' from empire to nation-state should be considered misleading. From his viewpoint, empires and nation-states can in principle be seen as 'variable forms of "political imagination", alternative possibilities that were open to political elites depending on the circumstances of the times' [Kumar 2010: 120]. Apparently the focus on 'political

imagination' has much in common with the multiple modernities perspective in historical sociology.

Kumar notes that a particular ethnic group might come to identify itself with the empire it founds. He believes that the sense of identity of imperial peoples can be called 'imperial nationalism'. As he puts it: 'Like nationalists in relation to their nation, imperialists feel that there is something special or unique about their empire. It has a mission or purpose in the world. This may, again as with nationalists, endow imperial peoples with a sense of their own superiority, a feeling of inherent goodness as of a people specially chosen to carry out a task. Imperialists, like nationalists, are true-believers' [Kumar 2010: 130]. At the same time Kumar stresses that imperialist ideologies are mostly universalistic, not particularistic. He argues that imperial nationalism insists on 'a higher form of nationalism, one that justifies the nation in terms of its commitment to a cause that goes beyond the nation' [Kumar 2010: 132].

According to Kumar, empires as 'pre-modern' forms have not just been succeeded by more modern nation-states. Actually empires have persisted alongside nation-states. Moreover, although finally empires have lost ideological legitimacy 'that has not stopped them from continuing under other names' [Kumar 2010: 137]. Kumar claims that the disappearance of empires has been relatively recent and we can still see around us the traces of their existence. 'If empires belong to history, it is to that aspect of history that has an inescapable afterlife' [Kumar 2010: 139]. Actually it is the afterlife of the Soviet empire that should be the focus of our attention in discussing the political processes in today's Russia.

Post-Soviet political transformation in Russia has been analyzed in a comparative-historical context by Stephen Hanson. This scholar has emphasized the need to bring history back in the studies of Russian political processes. As Hanson [2003: 145] notes, by the middle of the 1990s post-Soviet studies became 'an ordinary part of comparative politics'. But he believes that the end of Soviet studies as an interdisciplinary subfield resulted in breaking the dialogue between historians and social scientists. On the other hand, while post-Soviet studies have moved away from the historical approach to social and political change, there was a resurgence of interest in comparative-historical studies in the field of comparative politics. For Hanson, the historical approach is essential for understanding the dynamics of political transformation in post-Soviet Russia.

Hanson considers the political regime that emerged in Russia after the collapse of communism an example of 'post-imperial democracy'. This concept is defined as 'a situation in which a new democratic regime is born within the core nation of a formally imperial polity immediately after its disintegration, and where reasonably fair and open democratic elections are held for at least a decade after imperial collapse' [Hanson 2010: xxii]. It should be noted, however, that the USSR had never been a 'formally imperial polity' and the fairness of elections in Russia was questionable even during the first post-Soviet decade. Hanson engages in a comparative analysis of political processes in the Third Republic in France, the Weimar Republic in Germany and post-Soviet Russia. In his view, there were many similarities between these three cases. He believes that the legacies of past imperial institutions constrained the new elites in similar ways since all three post-imperial democracies inherited semi-modernized economies and a great deal of social support for authoritarian politics. But it should be remembered that the routes to modernization were different in these countries.

As Hanson claims, in all three cases the imperial collapse was followed by a period of political instability and uncertainty before the consolidation of a new regime. However, the character of this new regime was different in each case: democracy in France, dictatorship in Germany and 'weak state authoritarianism' in Russia. In Hanson's view, political ideology was the main factor leading to these particular outcomes. Hanson focuses on party formation in the three countries. He claims that in France and Germany ideological parties tended to defeat pragmatic parties and the new regime consolidated along the lines of the most successful ideology. In Russia no ideological party succeeded and all parties were finally subordinated to the authoritarian state which lacked a clear and consistent ideology. As he argues, in post-Soviet Russia 'the absence of *any* compelling new political ideology – whether democratic or antidemocratic – has generated a situation in which all political parties are too weak to challenge even a very weak state' [Hanson 2006: 345].

Hanson draws the conclusion that ideology plays a crucial role in determining the fate of uncertain democracies. However, the concept of political ideology seems to be insufficient for explaining the interaction of political and socio-cultural processes in Russia. On the other hand, it can be admitted that there was no coherent state ideology in Russia in the 2000s. References to an unofficial discourse of nationalism and to the great-power rhetoric of the Russian authorities could not change this conclusion. But the great-power rhetoric increased dramatically in the course of the presidential campaign of 2012 and it became even stronger during the Crimea crisis in March 2014 and the consequent military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Apparently one can speak of the formation of a new state ideology. While this ideology lacks coherence and remains rather eclectic the mass propaganda campaigns in Russian media impose that ideological discourse on large sections of the country's population. It remains to be seen for how long the annexation of Crimea will be regarded by the population as a great achievement of Russian authorities and whether the rise of the geo-political prestige of the Russian state in the eyes of its citizens can compensate for economic decline.

According to Hanson, there were no substantial differences between the three countries considered in his work. 'Neither the formal institutions of presidential-parliamentary rule, nor antidemocratic legacies of empire, nor even levels of cultural support for authoritarianism differed substantially at the outset of the Third Republic, Weimar Germany, or post-Soviet Russia, yet the outcomes of party formation and consolidation were decisively different' [Hanson 2010: xxv]. It can be assumed, however, that some other factors affected these outcomes. In the case of Russia it was not only the imperial legacy but also the legacy of the Soviet model of modernity. Apparently the character of 'cultural support for authoritarianism' was different in the only post-communist society among post-imperial democracies. In fact, Hanson agrees that the Russian outcome partly reflects 'the cumulative cultural disgust with "ideology" in general in Russia, in a country where Marxism-Leninism has become farcical, fascism is associated with the horrors of the Second World War, and liberalism is seen by many as a plot hatched in the West to destroy the country' [Hanson 2010: xxv]. But it seems that these cultural traits deserve more attention.

It is characteristic that Hanson criticizes the civilizational approach to Russian politics and culture. He considers Richard Pipes and Samuel Huntington representatives of such approach but he disregards the multiple modernities theory which focuses on the dynamics of various civilizations of modernity. In fact, Hanson [2003: 147] has discussed

the possibility that the Soviet system 'might represent a completely different *type* of modernity – a separate, and ultimately self-destructive, "civilization" (as Stephen Kotkin has provocatively put it)'. Nevertheless, he does not take into account the analysis of civilizational aspects of the Soviet model of modernity in comparative-historical sociology.

Different viewpoints on the role of imperial legacies in post-Soviet Russian politics have been presented by scholars. Thus Dmitri Trenin argues that Russia has become a post-imperial state. At the same time Russia's post-imperial agenda was to remain a great power. Russia was seeking to preserve this status even after the disintegration of the Soviet empire [Trenin 2011]. But Trenin makes a conclusion that any kind of restoration of empire is impossible. On the other hand, Marcel Van Herpen emphasizes that Russia has been an empire for the past 500 years. He claims that while there was an "empire fatigue" in Russia during the first post-Soviet years it came to an end in the 2000s and Russian leadership sought a partial restoration of the lost empire [Van Herpen 2014]. From this perspective he considers the second Chechen war and Russia's military conflict with Georgia in 2008. For Van Herpen, today's Russia is a neo-imperialist state.

The approaches presented by Trenin and Van Herpen provide two extreme positions on the issue of imperial legacies in Russia. It seems that a more balanced viewpoint should be somewhere in the middle. An original approach has been offered by Pierre Hassner who regards Putin's Russia as a 'virtual empire'. According to Hassner [2008: 11], Russia's foreign policy can be understood only if post-imperial humiliation and resentment of the people and 'neo-imperial ambitions' of its leaders are taken into consideration. However, today's Russia lacks the resources to support confrontation with the West and a coherent ideology justifying such confrontation. As Hassner claims, in this situation the ruling elite chose to pretend that Russia is again becoming a superpower. Virtual empire is intended to strengthen the legitimacy of the current political regime inside the country.

It has been argued that the Russian elite is using foreign policy for strengthening the state, consolidating itself and mobilizing the population on the basis of suspicion towards the outside world [Shevtsova 2007]. According to this viewpoint, Russia's actions on the world stage are largely caused by the regime's domestic needs. Thus opposition to the West derives mainly from the need to have a mighty opponent whose existence justifies the maintenance of a centralized state. The imperial imagery is used by the Russian authorities for increasing the level of legitimacy of the political regime.

For a long time it seemed impossible that the Russian 'virtual empire' might strike back. But the persistence of imperial imagery finally resulted in a new turn in political development of the Russian state. The annexation of Crimea apparently meant a shift from post-imperial to neo-imperial policy. A detailed analysis of this new situation is beyond the scope of the present article. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the multiple modernities perspective in political sociology will be fruitful in the study of imperial legacies of the Soviet model and its impact on today's neo-imperial policy of the Russian state.

Conclusion

The experience of Russia's post-Soviet political transformation proved to be a difficult case for democratization studies. Apparently we should be looking for new theoretical perspectives that can account for the persistence of authoritarian trends in Russian politics. The

multiple modernities civilizational approach can be seen as an important theoretical resource for understanding post-Soviet political processes. However, civilizational analysis concentrates mostly on long-term political trends. The study of Russia's transformation from this perspective can result first of all in reconsidering the obstacles to democratization that existed in the 1990s and the socio-cultural preconditions for de-democratization in the 2000s.

Political transformation in post-Soviet Russia represents an authoritarian turn of a post-imperial democracy. But this case should be seen as a specific historical constellation. On the one hand, the new political regime in Russia emerged as a result of disintegration of the communist version of modernity. This separates Russia from those post-imperial democracies which belonged to the Western world. On the other hand, Russia was the core of the former Soviet empire. In this respect it differs from other post-communist states. The dynamics of democratization and de-democratization in Russia can be considered a case of path dependency which is both post-communist and post-imperial. From this perspective the authoritarian political culture of the Soviet epoch and the Soviet imperial imagery are the main obstacles to democratization in today's Russia. Apparently the Soviet civilizational legacies are less persistent than legacies of a religious tradition. On the other hand, the imperial imagery proved to be strong enough to affect a major change in Russian foreign policy.

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