
In Search for the Russian National Identity: Do History Textbooks Hold the Answer?

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Abstract: *The main aim of this article is to examine the ways in which Russian national identity has been constructed by contemporary Russian historians and reflected upon in the widely disseminated official texts, such as school history textbooks. The very nature of these debates implies the existence of a set of complex questions, if not contradictions. In this study the authors do not attempt to resolve the contradictions in order to explain what ‘Russia’ and ‘Russianness’ are. The main rationale instead is to provide evidence on whether or not, and how contemporary political elites and intellectuals employ school history textbooks to position Russia, its national ‘self’ or constituent ‘other’, not least in relation to the concepts of “West” and “Eurasia”. This paper maintains that the debate on Russian national identity lies not so much in the conclusions, but in the nature of the discussions and arguments.*

Keywords : *Russia, National Identity, History Textbooks, Post-Soviet State*

1. Introduction

The modern image of Russia as a powerful economic, military and geopolitical player in the world is somewhat disturbed by its continuing difficulties to construct a post-Soviet national identity. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the situation when Russian elites and intellectuals as well as ordinary people witnessed the crisis of identity. Such a crisis of identity can be connected to the unresolved issues of a three-fold dimension:

The first dimension is about *accommodating the legacies of the Soviet past*: the formation of the Soviet Union was an attempt to build and maintain a large, multinational state without either establishing a new form of imperialism or a nation-state. Rather than merely nation-destroying, the Soviet state appeared to galvanize nation-building as well (Suny & Martin, 2001). The USSR was one of the few states that allowed national formation not at the level of the state itself but at the level of the secondary units within the state - the union republics (Brubaker, 1994). In reality, the outcome of the Soviet government's policy to create nations on the basis of culturally defined non-Russian ethnic communities was the strengthening of non-Russian nationalism in the 1960s. The latter came in response to the construction of a new form of Russian nationalism, which was anti-imperial. Its proponents tried to draw clear boundaries between 'Russia proper' and the non-Russian areas and even urged their independence (see also, Rabow-Edling: 2006). These are the legacies from Russia's past which make the process of national identity construction problematic today.

Second dimension is concerned with *the dilemmas of civic or ethnic nation-building*: another major problem that creates hurdles to country's nation-building is how to reconcile civic identity (*Rossiiskiy*) based on inclusive citizenship and exclusive ethnic identity (*Russkiy*) based on such objective characteristics as culture, religion, language (Tolz, 1998). The problem takes us again back to the Soviet Union with its widely accepted definition of nations basically in ethno-cultural terms, referring to a common history, culture, and language as well as a certain 'ethnic territory' (Tishkov, 1997: 230). Despite the fact that in the Soviet period Russian ethnic identity was, sometimes unintentionally, advanced through government policies (Tolz, 2004; Hosking, 2001), the process of ethnic identity formation was still far from complete in Russia after 1991.

Third dimension of Russia's belonging is linked to *West and East dichotomy*. The problem is about the ways in which Russia, the Russians and their identity have been defined. On the one hand, positioning Russia as a country with Western origins, culture and values, and on the other

hand, considering Russia as preserver of a unique multi-ethnic community which considerably differs from European and Eastern nations. Indeed, throughout the post-communist period, intellectuals and political elites have constantly raised the question of Russia's relations with the "West" when trying to define the affiliation of the Russian nation and develop a concept of the post-communist Russian nationhood. Along with depicting Russia as inherently 'western', it was not difficult to overlook how Western Europe, especially the United States, have been regarded as Russia's "other" against which its identity has been constructed (Tolz, 2004).

The proponents of the latter vision suggested that "for those who positively memorialized Russia's history as a civilizing force for backward peoples, the assimilation of a multitude of peoples into a multinational Eurasian empire capable of harmonizing East and West lent Russia a distinctive, if not unique, path of development that ruled out full assimilation into the West" (Clunan; 2009: 57). This paper maintains that the afore-mentioned competing views of Russia's belonging did not only evolve and persist within the intellectual debates, but were and are often reflected in the contemporary political and cultural discourse. Given that the Russian identity for decades has been a topic of frequent argumentation and conflicting views, we shall therefore explore the subject as an arena of political and cultural discourse.

2. Why history textbooks?

According to Loftsdottir, school textbooks are designed as tools to transmit knowledge that is generally not contested but more or less accepted as "true" or at the very least not harshly questioned, and thus play a powerful role in interpreting and giving meaning to the world (2010: 30). To be specific, there are several important factors that highlight the usefulness of such school textbooks vis-à-vis the projects aimed at constructing nation's identity.

First, because school history textbooks are usually widely distributed and used as educational material in institutions, legitimized by the state. As a result, history textbooks establish and promote a 'legitimate' knowledge on which pupils build upon in the later stages of their education. In our view, this is what makes history textbooks vitally important when compared with history monographs, novels, essays, biographies and other forms of history narration that usually do not expose the official view of 'history'.

Secondly, as Müller (2011: 1) points out, although history is not the only school subject related to official projects of national identity formation, it is often the prime curricular vehicle for official promotion of the national 'self'. From this perspective, history textbooks -especially, if approved of by state authorities - constitute a medium in attempts by the government to define or shape national 'memory', and produce an image of the nation cleared from any problematic episodes. In other words, history textbooks include, present and represent all of the functions of the historical memory, such as construction of the national and cultural identity, exclusion and demonization of 'the other' within and outside the nation, creation of collective self-esteem and legitimization (Kizilyurek, 2001).

The key here is what has been known in the national identity studies as a "historical narrative." As opposed to a 'factual history', which normally depicts facts, dates and historic figures, a "historical narrative" provides broad interpretations of the national past and links it to the present. Therefore, it constitutes a cognitive lens that helps members of a national community make sense of the nation's place in the world and serves as an important tool in the construction, re-construction, and contestation of national identity. Following this argument it can be suggested that the historical consciousness in modern society has been excessively framed by the nation-state, and such a historical narrative depicts not only the history of nationalism, but constitutes the master narrative of much

modern history, allowing the nation-state to define the framework of its self-understanding (Bukh, 2007).

In this paper, eleven school history textbooks provided a testing ground for the discursive construction of a Russian national identity. Because from the outset we were interested in examining the textbooks which expressed the official political orientation/discourse, our criteria for selecting the above-mentioned textbooks were based on the fact that they were formally approved of by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Academy of Sciences between 2005-2008, yet published and re-published between 2005-2011. In addition, we selected primarily those textbooks that were published by the largest state-run publishing house “Prosveshenie” (“Просвещение”) rather than by numerous private publishers.

3. Narratives of Russian National Identity

Stemming from the study by Wodak et al (2009), this paper will distinguish three core areas in the discursive construction of the Russian national identity, which in our case include, but not limited to the (a) narration of a common political past, (b) construction of a common political present, and (c) construction of a common culture.

3.1. Construction of a common political past

The theoretical sources from which the study derives its conceptual lens describe ‘the construction of a common political past’ as a means to revolve around founding myths and myths of origin, mythical figures, political successes, times of prosperity and stability, defeats and crises (Wodak et al 2009: 31). Indeed, from an initial brief excursion through to a more detailed examination of the Russian history textbooks, we could glimpse the principal role that these aspects play in narrating the history of a nation, yet not without contradictions and inconsistencies.

For exploring the narratives concerning a common political past one has to start with examination of the two widely-used textbooks aimed at the 6th grade pupils written by Sakharov (2010) and Danilov and Kosulina (2011) both of

which share a similar title “История России с древнейших времен конца XVI века” (“History of Russia from the ancient times to the end of sixteenth century”).

Staying in line with the Russian historiography traditions, these textbooks begin with focusing on the origins of the Slavs. The Slavs, who became distinct from other Indo-European peoples in the second millennium B.C., were usually assigned a common homeland in the general area of the valley of the Vistula and the northern slopes of the Carpathians. The split among the Slavs has been dated to the sixth century A.D., and the settlement by the East Slavs of the great plain of European Russia to the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries (Sakharov, 2010: 13; Danilov and Kosulina, 2011: 13).

Both textbooks consider the East Slavs at this historical period not as a homogeneous community of peoples, but as numerous tribal groups dispersed across the vast territory whose main occupation varied from agriculture to hunting. Despite the internal differences within the East Slavic tribal groups, the authors tend to emphasize *the unifying potential* of these peoples against external challenges and *a harmonic coexistence* at times of peace. The East Slavs, write Danilov and Kosulina “were skilful fighters, they loved freedom and settled all disputes collectively” (ibid). Sakharov’s textbook stresses that “from time to time there occurred confrontations between the East Slavs and the Slavs living to the West, yet, all in all, the nature of relations between them was peaceful...and against an external enemy they preferred to fight as a single force” (Sakharov, 2010: 19).

Such descriptions take us to the point where Russian history textbooks begin positioning the East Slavs against nomadic tribes of Asiatic origin, thereby starting to focus closely on the factor of ‘Otherness’. It is often mentioned that beginning from the middle of the sixth century a new wave of nomads came from the steeps of Asia: the *avar* tribes - a numerous Turkic horde. By referring to the chronicler of the time, the textbook stresses that ‘the avars tormented the Slavs, harassed their women, harnessing them to carts instead of horses’ (Sakharov, 2010: 17). A similar narration

can be found with regard to another external enemy of the East Slavs – the *khazara* tribe – a Turkic horde which had occupied the Lower Volga (*NijneePovolje*) region and Northern Caucasus (ibid).

The highlighting of the image of ‘Other’ in the textbooks is understandable as it provides an important historical underpinning for the articulation of the *myth of the historical origin of the Russians*, which proclaimed the KievanRus - the union of East Slavic principalities to be the first Russian state. As it is seen from the history textbooks, the unification of the East Slavs into principalities with centers in Novgorod and Kiev respectively, and eventually their fusion into a centralized KievanRus became possible primarily because of the need to join hands in order to resist ‘other’ tribal groups. It is noticeable that these ‘others’ are often portrayed as being ‘violent’ and ‘aggressive’ who always brought destruction and sorrow, while ‘self’ is described in more positive terms.

The last stage in the life of the KievanRus is narrated in the textbooks as a transition from times of prosperity and stability to decline and crises. Indeed, the Mongol invasion of the Russian lands and a total destruction of Kiev in 1240 are stressed by the Russian authors as the ultimate end of the Kievan period. The textbooks generally take a descriptive stance vis-à-vis the events and facts related to the actual invasion and a more critical approach in relation to the consequences of the Mongol domination.

Sakharov’s narrative stands out in this sense. His text maintains that “the invasion resulted in Rus rolling back in every sphere of life, with the agriculture and peoples’ culture suffering earlier unseen losses, when cities were depopulated, most of the craft professions were lost, for a long period of time the chronicles remained unwritten... and in many provinces of *our country* the population reached its pre-Mongol level only in five hundred years, in the eighteenth century” (Sakharov 2010: 114).

The period between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries is viewed by the textbook as 'one of the most tragic in the history of Russia'. It shows to the young readers that the Mongol invasion virtually 'undercut the origins of Russian civilization and undermined the country's stable development' (ibid: 125). The narratives on nation's own victimhood are not only depictions of the past but also play an important role in the construction of contemporary Russian national identity by instilling the sense of unity through emphasizing common suffering of the Russian *nation*. It is also notable that the textbooks not only tend to advance the narratives of victimhood, but also those of self-sacrifice. For instance, Danilova and Kosulina write that although "the Mongols generally represented a well-trained, persistent and cruel force (2011:104)" ... "the heroic resistance of the Russian peoples for their freedom significantly weakened the enemy's capabilities, so that it could not accomplish the conquest of the entire Europe" (2011: 110). In a similar vein, yet with more emotional colors, Sakharov suggests that "the resistance of the Russian lands exhausted and undermined the morale of the Mongols... For these reasons they were left without assault power and strong will to invade the Western Europe... In fact, Rus covered its Western neighbors as a shield against cruel invaders, despite facing harshest conditions itself (Sakharov 2010: 125). This narration is aimed at heroization of the Russian nation in the eyes of young readers.

3.2. Construction of a common present

The construction of a common political present through the lens of Russian history textbooks can be explored by unfolding the issues of citizenship, political achievements, crises and dangers, political objectives and virtues (Wodak et al, 2009). Two topics which are particularly important for the construction of this political present are Russia's Soviet historical legacy and Russia's political and cultural transformation after the break-up of the Soviet regime.

Construction of 'self' and 'other' is especially visible in the stories of the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany (1941-1945) which arguably strengthened a common identity among citizens of the Soviet Union and became a key Soviet national 'myth' for uniting the people. Danilov and Kosulina, for example, tell their young readers that "while masterminding the assault against the Soviet Union, Hitler was strongly convinced that the multinational Soviet power would collapse as 'a house of cards' under the might of the German military machine. But this did not happen. On the contrary, the multinational Soviet peoples managed to join hands at the time of a deadly danger. The defense of the single state was widely considered as a vital national duty of each of its constituent peoples" (2011: 225).

Shestakov, Gorinov and Vyazemskiy's textbook for the 9th grade too emphasizes the significance of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War that "blocked the way to the global superiority of the German fascism...Thank to the Victory the Soviet political system and ruling establishment strengthened considerably. The Great Victory in the minds of *our* people was strongly associated with the name of Stalin" (2011: 207-208). Such narratives show that the German attack on the Soviet Union and the beginning of the Great Patriotic War seemed to confirm the fears of the Soviet leaders and added credibility to Soviet propaganda statements. To put in the words of Tolz (2001: 73) "the USSR's eventual victory appeared to prove the strength of the Soviet system and the correctness of Stalin's policy of industrialization".

In the historical illustrations of the Russia's patriotic war against the German invaders there is one additional aspect that must not be neglected. Although the historical narratives that we mentioned above are generally consistent with the official Soviet view that the great successes were made because of the collective action and solidarity of *the Soviet people*, however the contemporary textbooks also tend to underline "that the decisive contribution in defeating the enemy was made by *the Russian people*" (Danilov, 2011 : 225). For instance, the textbook by Shestakov et al develops the same storyline by referring to Joseph Stalin's speech in

the Kremlin several days after the declaration of the victory on May 24, 1945, as follows: "...Our government made a few mistakes and we had moments of despair in 1941-1942. Other people might have said to the government: you have not met our expectations, go away, we shall put another government, which is to make peace with Germany and give us peace. But the Russian people did not do that, because it believed in the correctness of the policy of its government and made sacrifices to ensure the defeat of Germany... I propose a toast to the health of the Russian people, not only because it is the leading nation, but also because it has a clear mind, a staunch character and patience" (2011: 209). By quoting Stalin's speech this narrative shows how post-Soviet textbooks attempt to portray the Russian people (*Ruskiynarod*) as the vanguard of the Soviet people and their aspirations.

We can also look at some narratives related to Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* which stirred up the debate over Russia's attitude towards the West. It has to be noted that all of the three earlier examined Russian history textbooks seem to provide a relatively similar account of this crucial period and its role in bringing Russia to where it is now. These textbooks show that the apparently Westernizing focus of Gorbachev's policies in political, economic and cultural spheres provoked strong opposition on the part of many Communist apparatchiks, who rejected Gorbachev's "new thinking" ("новое мышление") in favour of a Stalinist Russia and the glorification of its pre-revolutionary history. The textbooks tend to agree that despite a variety of newly formed social and political movements, the political debates over 'Russia's future', as in 1917, was centred on the two main groups – liberals (Western-oriented reformists) and conservative groups that included communists and others who stood for the protection of 'Russian uniqueness' and political status quo (Danilov et al 2011: 308). By narrating this historical period distinguished with an unprecedented nature of Gorbachev's liberal reforms considered by the conservative opponents as a complete destruction of the Russian tradition and values, the textbooks highlight a renewed debate between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles.

Finally, the latest chapter of the Russian history commencing on 1991 up until present days, and the ways in which it is narrated in the history textbooks has to be mentioned. This latest period that starts with the account of Eltsin's Russia facing numerous crises and goes on to the Putin's policies of "stabilization and development", is rather briefly elaborated on in the textbooks. However, several important observations follow after examining the key narratives:

Firstly, it is noted in the textbooks that after the break-up of the USSR, Russia's position in the world had changed. The country lost a number of important seaports and military bases while finding itself within the new national borders. It has become more northern and continental country. Therefore, the most imperative task for the Russian leadership was the revival of the Russian state. Having had almost 60 percent of the population and economic potential of the former USSR and occupying 76 percent of its territory, it is claimed that Russia in the USSR did not have a full-fledged statehood, its own political and managerial structures, and most importantly, it lacked clearly defined national interests. The situation in other former Soviet republics was much better since "their choice was already made in favor of the national idea" (Shestakov et al, 2011: 308). Thus, this narrative suggests that Russia and its national identity fell victims to the "Soviet project" of the Communist regime and the collapse of the USSR only further undermined its search for "Self".

Secondly, and perhaps another reason why Eltsin's Russia failed to unite its citizens around the common cause was the deepening stratification of the Russian society that came as a consequence of the chaotic experiments with the market reforms. Shestakov and his co-authors write that "by 1994 a new category of rich people emerged and became widely known as *'the new Russians'* who emerged in the Russian society in the form of arrogant and ignorant men" (2011: 342). Thus, the rush for market reforms caused the vanishing of the Soviet era's 'middle class' whose lesser part joined 'the new Russians', whereas the greater part joined the emerging 'new poor'.

Thirdly, it comes as no surprise that one of the main priorities for president Putin, who succeeded Boris Eltsin, was to ensure social cohesion and provide equal opportunities for all. For example, Danilov, Kosulina and Brandt maintain that “instead of dividing society into ‘us and them’ or ‘supporters and opponents’ of proposed reforms, Putin undertook a number of important measures aimed at uniting the society”. The textbook refers to the case of adoption of the new Russian state symbols the fruitless debate about which lasted over ten years. In authors’ view the latter effort was a compromise designed to reconcile the positions of various opposing groups. The Law on the National symbols of Russia passed in 2000 adopted the Russian flag (tricolor) and national coat-of-arms in the form of two-headed eagle both of which remind us about the millennial history of Russia. The National anthem, based on the music of the Soviet hymn, is supposed to symbolize the unity of the generations, inextricable link between the past, the present and the future of our country’ (2011: 359).

Last, but not least, the textbooks provide different point of views on the subject of Russia’s relationship with ‘the West’ under the current circumstances. On the one hand, one can still witness the prevailing traditionalist approach in the arguments claiming that “since the beginning of 1990s some circles in the West called for supporting Russia economically and politically... But the West had chosen a different policy. The Western powers began to create ‘a new sanitary cordon’ around Russia in an attempt to gain benefits from the changes that took place in the world’ (Shestakov, et al 2011: 327). On the other hand, one easily can note the unfolding of a more balanced view based on the idea of a Eurasian ‘third way’ for Russia. Levandovski, Shetinov&Mironenko tell their readers that “the historical experience has convincingly proved the fallacy of attempts to position various geographical vectors of Russia’s interests against each other. The simple fact of Russia’s unique geopolitical position as the largest *Eurasian power* dictates the need to expand cooperation in equal terms with the

West, the East and the South” (Levandovskiy et al, 2011: 363).

3.3. Construction of a common culture: case of the Orthodox faith

According to Wodak et al (2009: 32) the construction of “a common culture” embraces a wide range of topics from language, religion, art, science and technology to everyday culture.

From this perspective, it is worth going back to Sakharov’s textbook that covers Russian history from ancient times to the sixteenth century. The narratives about the beginning of baptism of Rus, emphasized particularly in the textbook, help understand why Orthodoxy is not only a faith, but also a powerful identity-presenting factor. The textbook observes that ‘the adoption of Christianity by the people of Rus was one of the main achievements of the Prince Vladimir of Kiev... The interests of the emerging unitary state necessitated the rejection of paganism with its numerous tribal gods, and on the contrary, it facilitated the adoption of a religion that would be capable of uniting the people around *a single state, a great prince, and a single omnipotent God*. Interestingly, the textbook also provides the second explanation relating it to the fact that ‘almost all of the European principalities of the time had already adopted Christianity, and the Rus could no longer remain *a pagan margin*’ (Sakharov, 2010: 42). In the beginning of their history the East Slavs were split into separate tribes and after the break-up of the Rus they were divided into several principalities. Regardless of the local peculiarities they shared common culture (Sakharov, 2010: 83). Thus, from ‘a common culture perspective’, the Orthodox Christianity had a profound impact on the *strengthening of the unity of Rus*, not least because it opposed the violent confrontations and made peace between the princes (ibid: 45).

Another historical period that is essential in terms of the evolution of the role of Orthodox Christianity in the formation of the Russian national identity is the reign of Peter the Great and the social changes that followed his

reforms. The history textbooks concerned are generally analogous in portraying this period and assessing it as the most 'West-oriented' or 'Westernized' chapter of the Russian history, which after all could not leave the centuries-long powerful religious institution unaffected.

Danilov writes that "one of the main features of the cultural development in the Petrine period was the strengthening of *its secular principles* as well as vigorous penetration and the imposition of Western lifestyles. However, the culture in the era of Peter the Great wore a more transient nature which combined the innovations of Peter and traditions of old Russia. Moreover, the new innovations and achievements were known only to the privileged circles, whereas the bulk of the population perceived such developments no more than a freak of the king and lords' (Danilov, 2009: 63). In addition, the realization of Peter the Great's secularization project assumed an even greater departure from the centuries-old Orthodox traditions that have existed in Rus. Therefore, as Danilov suggests 'the king saw in the Old Believers (*Starobryadtsy*) the impediment to national development... During the reign of Peter the Great many parts of the European North of Russia, the Middle Volga region, northern Ukraine had seen numerous rebellions of the Old Believers-peasants against the authorities and the imposed reforms (ibid).

These narratives are similar to the ones in the textbook by Baranov, Vovona and Lebedevawho too claim that one of the main outcomes of Peter the Great's reforms on the cultural life of Russia "was the emergence of the secular culture, which continued up until the first quarter of the eighteenth century...the outcome was that the Church ceased to be a dominant force in education and the arts" (Baranov et al, 2009: 163). In this textbook's account "the Peter the Great and his endeavours were and are being ambiguously evaluated by his contemporaries and later . Some thought he was great, the other regarded him an "anti-Christ", one said that he was the creator, while others called him the destroyer' (ibid, 174).

It is often suggested that Peter the Great laid the basis upon which a Russian national identity could eventually be constructed. Among all of the paradigm shifts of the period the most revolutionary change was the Europe-originated idea that the state was separate from and superior to the personality of the monarch. It was this idea of service to the state and to the common good that provides a new compound secular identity for his subjects, while the Church was put into a situation of dependence on the monarchy greater than ever before, and thus had even less chance of becoming a centre of power independent of the state. In general, Peter's reforms in the areas of communications, education and culture in Russia *paved the way for the first attempts to construct the idea of a nation* (Tolz, 2001: 42).

The history textbooks covering Russia in the twentieth century are interesting from this perspective too. For example, it is frequently thought that the Soviet period did represent a consistent continuation of the Petrine policy of secularization, albeit under a different ideological system of belief. For example, Danilov, Kosulina and Brandt suggest that 'the Bolsheviks had the aim of bringing up 'a new man' who would deserve his or her place in the communist society. Thus, the idea of oppressing the religion rested not only on the atheistic principles of the regime, but also on the intention to eliminate a serious competitor in the spiritual life of the country. The initial formal step against the Orthodox Church was made in 1918 through passing of the Decree on separation of the Church from the State as well as the School from the Church. Almost all of the temples and monasteries were closed down and their properties were confiscated for "purposes of the revolution" (Danilov et al, 2011: 156).

The collapse of the Soviet state in 1991 was associated with an extremely swift re-emergence of the Orthodox Christianity into public sphere. This process was facilitated between 1980s – 1990s because of the Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms which even paved the way for unprecedented celebration of the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Russia in 1988 (e.g., Shestakov et al, 2011; Levandovsky et al, 2011). Ever since, and the textbooks that

we examined are partially indicative of this trend, the Orthodox Church began to be perceived as the natural and even indispensable component of the Russian state and its identity.

4. Discussion

In the examined history textbooks, Russia and 'Russianness' are constructed through narratives of the past which emphasized a holistic identity of the community, often expressed under the expression of 'Russian people' (*russkiynarod*), assuming that in many cases, various minorities are marginalized in these narratives. It seems to be a common practice that the narratives of the past are used to present a cohesive homogenous image of the nation which ignores ethnic, religious, and language diversities in order to cultivate a unified identity or provide victorious stories that are supposed to nurture a sense of national pride and belonging in citizens from the school age. Maybe this could also explain why Central Asian, South Caucasus or Baltic states are somewhat 'left out' generally by the historical discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth century. According to Puri (2004) it is "through such narratives that states call upon particular dimensions of identity and repress those aspects that are deemed threatening to the official portrayal of the nation". In general, our study seems to support the postulation that the discursive constructs of national identity, including through textbooks, emphasize foremost uniqueness and intra-national uniformity, and largely tend to ignore intra-national difference (Wodak et al, 2009: 186).

In the context of Russian textbooks one can also explore the re-presentation of historical events or reinvention of historical narratives by providing an emotional connection between the student and the country's past through bringing to light the notions of *pride*, *feelings* and *a sense of continuity*. For example, one textbook while describing the early history of Russia explicitly stressed that "during their participation in the defense against foreign invaders, the people from the East Slavic lands felt their kinship and were proud to say "We are of the Russian descent!"

("MiizrodaRusskogo!"). The emphasis on continuity is evident in narrating the story of Rus after the death of Yaroslav when "the fragmentation of the ancient Russian state did not lead to the dissolution of Rus as a shared cultural space, and on the contrary, in all principalities there lived people who felt culturally attached to the Russian *narodnostas* they kept sharing a common language and faith" (DanilovandKosulina, 2011: 52).

The analysis of scrutinized texts also suggests that reinvention of historical narratives is also dependent on the frequency of instances through which the positive image of a nation is being created. Some authors call this process 'a discourse of national uniqueness' which is assigned entirely positive attributes, sometimes compensating for the unfulfilled need for individual uniqueness (Wodak et al, 2009: 27). Thus, the study observes that self-presentation of Russia and the Russians is regularly anchored in positive emotional connotations. The textbooks' narratives related to the early historical periods tend to underscore the unifying potential of ancient Russians against external challenges and their aspiration for harmonic coexistence at times of peace (Danilov&Kosulina, 2011: 13). Another textbook depicted the ancestors of modern Russians as "skilful warriors, who loved freedom and preferred to settle all disputes collectively and peacefully". The same text claims that "as it occurred many times in *our* history, the harsher became the conditions for the survival of the Russian people, the stronger and more resilient grew its internal powers" (Sakharov, 2010: 19, 125).

The attempts by the state to establish its own version of 'a fact', in which its value system prevails and its preferred identities find a way to thrive and proudly develop, can also be observed and studied in comparisons of the representations of controversial issues in the textbooks. The foundations of national identity narratives can be found in different representations of the same event which works for as an important historical event, but with different, if not conflicting interpretations. Earlier we mentioned the importance of a historical narrative which in contrast to a 'factual history' (with its focus on the facts, dates and

historic figures) provides broad interpretations of the national past and links it to the present. It was presumed that a historical narrative constitutes the cognitive lens that helps members of a national community make sense of the nation's place in the world and serves as an important tool in the construction, re-construction, and contestation of national identity. The content-analysis of the Russian textbooks revealed that, in general, various Russian authors provide fairly analogous account of different events, historical dates and historic personalities. However, what the study has spotted in a number of cases was that despite the existing similarities, some textbooks interpret or narrate the same events, episodes, historic figures and their impacts differently. In some instances they even tend to contradict each other.

In addition to the afore-mentioned issues, this study has also come across yet another inescapable subject: the foundation of national identity and re-invention of historical awareness in most examined textbooks are established implicitly through manipulation of historical facts. Some studies suggested that “those historical moments in which one's own nation could be blamed for undesirable events are either completely ignored or, by omission of certain and emphasizing of other facts, they have been presented as less important or even as the responsibility of ‘others’”. Eventually this leads to the creation of an image of one's own nation as ‘eternally righteous’ (Stojanovic, 2001: 28).

One purpose of history texts is to identify or dismiss various agents' role in different events and activities and to position various agents in different situations. According to Gee (2005) such recognition and positioning contribute to the construction of the text's projected notion of identity. In the textbooks of the Russian history, the representation of ‘Russian people’ (russkiynarod) can particularly express a specific projection of national identity. Textbooks can convincingly define the role of people, and therefore, that of the students, through their historical representation of the lives of the ordinary people. Thus, among the various types of stories, both factual and fictional, created by historical narratives, the story of ‘people’ is crucial in providing

meaning and identity to individuals. It was already mentioned earlier that the goal of history textbooks is to illustrate the tendency to present a homogenous image of the country's history and to downplay various building blocks accounting for diversity, including the ethnic origins, religion or language, thereby fostering a unified identity and to nurture a sense of 'patriotism' and 'belonging' in schoolchildren.

Russian history textbooks seem to have adopted the same approach in their presentation of the past. Throughout the textbooks, people are often presented as a homogeneous group who have always had a common aspiration – or aspirations. The term 'peoples' (*narod*) is repeatedly used to represent the wishes and dreams of the whole in explicit terms. In the sentences talking about 'people' and their stories, the verbs often definitively create a sense of certainty about people's thought and feelings. Phrases such as 'people were dissatisfied', 'people united against the danger', 'people shared a common language and faith', 'people were oppressed', 'people showed heroic resistance against the enemy' are frequently used in the textbook's narration of people.

5. In lieu of a conclusion: Is there a dominant discourse in Putin's Russia?

In the Soviet period, the image of the capitalist West as the main antagonist had been transformed into an overwhelmingly hostile attitude toward Western Europe and North America. This sharp division of the world was reconsidered in Mikhail Gorbachev's era of *glasnost* and *New thinking*, and it was replaced by the idea that the Soviet Union/Russia was undoubtedly part of Europe and that isolation from Europe was harmful for Russia (Tolz: 2004, 167). In the early 1990s, this approach was held up by Boris Yeltsin and members of his administration, who viewed Russia's integration into Western political, security, and economic structures as their primary goal. The enthusiastic association of the new Russian leadership of Yeltsin with the leading western powers, and the United States in particular, seemed to display Russia's commitment to a process of

transition that would lead it eventually toward some variation of the western model.

By attempting to abandon the imperial legacy and the associated expansionism, Eltsin's new government sought to repair Russia's post-communist image. To a certain extent, it can be considered as Eltsin's response to Russia's critics who defined autocratic governance and expansionism as complementary aspects of the Russian state tradition that rested on a strong and centralized authority, uncontrolled either by law or parliament. Rather than serving as a basis for a fundamental reorientation and change, however, the first phase of post-communist transition led directly to a severe economic depression, a breakdown of civic order and public morale, and a widespread perception of the lost identity. The slogan "democratization, market economy, and the rule of law," far from imposing a new sense of meaning based upon the material civilization of the West, created what was widely felt to be a social anarchy in Russia (Nation & Trenin, 2007).

Therefore, by the time of Vladimir Putin's accession to power in 1999, the Russian political elites recognized that the weakness of the state and the crisis of Russian identity were among the main problems facing the country. In his programmatic article titled "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium", Putin warned that in the 1990s, just as after October 1917, Russian society was in a state of schism. It was essential to overcome this schism by uniting people around one common *Rossiiskaya idea*. By referring to a *rossiiskaia* rather than a *russkaia* idea, Putin demonstrated a greater sensitivity than his predecessor toward ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation (Tolz, 2004). For Putin, the "*Rossiyskaya idea*" consisted of the set of panhuman values and such traditional *Rossiyskie* values as patriotism – a feeling of pride in one's country, its achievements and its history, *derzhavnost'* (Russia as a great power), and *gosudarstvennost'* (statism, a belief in a strong state that

ensures order and is at the forefront of progressive reforms) which several authors viewed as revival of the concept of Eurasia as a foundation for the Russian national idea (see, Humphrey, 2002: 272; Tolz, 2004).

Revitalization of the idea of Eurasianism under Putin's leadership in Russia can be explained by both domestic and foreign policy factors. Domestically, given the need for immediate action to consolidate the Russian society following the political and social-economic chaos associated with his predecessor Boris Eltsin, Putin laid out such priorities. Eurasian idea allowed Putin to include Russia's 'internal East' (or 'inner Asia') with its non-Christian population as a way to consolidate the entire Russian society. Along with predominantly Muslim republics in north Caucasus, as well as Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Bashkortostan, Russia's inner Asian regions also included Kalmyk, Buryat, Tuva, Sakha-Yakut, Altai Republics. The Eurasian idea also became attractive in Russia's Asian regions because it allowed these regions to be accepted not as Russia's burden and forgotten periphery but as an important cultural and political part of Russia.

On the Russian foreign policy agenda during Putin's leadership, Eurasianist idea was also supposed to play a major role. For example, the Survey of the Russian Foreign Policy priorities released in 2007 stated plainly that developing close relations with the new independent states of post-Soviet Eurasia "is the first priority of Russian foreign policy". On a trip to Brunei for APEC meeting in 2000, Vladimir Putin himself was quoted as saying that 'Russia has always considered itself to be a Eurasian country. We have never forgotten that a greater part of Russian territory lies in Asia. But frankly speaking, we have not always used that advantage.' (O'Loughlin, 2000: 6).

Taken as a whole, the greater part of the scholarship on post-Soviet Russian national identity discourses suggested that in contrast to Boris Eltsin's continuous efforts to integrate Russia into Western political, economic and cultural space (Tolz, 2004) within which condemning the Soviet past was an act of identity creation, enabling Russian liberals to define themselves by rejecting the communist "other" (Sherlock, 2007), president Vladimir Putin's presidency was characterized by the revival of the concept of Eurasianism as a foundation for the post-Soviet Russian national idea (Humphrey, 2002). It was noted that although Eurasianism has not become the Kremlin's core ideology, yet 'it has found its place within the new patriotic doctrine, whose exceedingly vague theoretical contours highlight the Putin regime's striving for social consensus' (Laurelle, 2008: 222). Some scholarship also mentioned Putin's national address that repeated precisely the major principles of the Eurasianism paradigm viewing the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" and assertion that Russia has a special mission "in the Eurasian continent" (Shlapentokh, 2007).

Given the broader implications of the revival of Eurasianism on re-shaping Russian national identity, one can assume that the Russian political establishment under Putin (as well as Dmitry Medvedev, who essentially continued Putin's principal domestic and foreign policy initiatives after his two terms in presidential office) would seek to promote this vision among the wider public through social practices, including schools and school textbooks.

Following the examination of the school history textbooks approved of by the Russian authorities, we argued that the contemporary textbooks in fact do not provide a single grand narrative of Russia's belonging to Eurasia. In fact, the majority of the textbooks examined and their narratives tend to contradict one another in positioning Russia vis-à-vis

West and East/Eurasia. The discourse analysis of the selected history textbooks approved of/published during Vladimir Putin's presidency and premiership demonstrates that after more than twenty years since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian state has not yet been able to produce and promote a cohesive and comprehensible grand narrative of Russia's post-Soviet national identity. It should be noted that the contradictions in history textbooks on Russia's belonging should not be misunderstood as a pluralism of thoughts. Even though, there are some history textbooks which can be estimated as a pluralist with unbiased interpretation of all three main streams of thoughts on Russia's belonging most history textbooks represent only one orientation from the introduction till the conclusion. From this perspective it can be assumed that the discourses found in the textbooks mainly reflect the wide-ranging and conflicting nature of intellectual debates on Russia's belonging. In our view, this tendency persists despite continuous and urgent calls of the Russian leaders to adopt a single approach in presenting and re-presenting the unifying narratives of the Russian history instead of following certain political and ideological agendas.

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