MILITANT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA

LEGACIES, FORMS AND THREATS

Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš
Militancy continues to be characteristic of many supporters of the Russian far right, encompassing a belligerent rhetoric, a strong perception of participants as political warriors and often the use of physical violence. How serious a threat does Russian militant right-wing extremism pose to Russia and the World, and how has the level of threat changed over time?

This book addresses this question by exploring right-wing extremism in Russia, its historical context and its resurgence over the past thirty years. Outlining the legacies and forms presented by current right-wing extremism, with a particular focus on militant extremism, it employs a historical, descriptive method to analyse the threats and risks posed. Presented within the framework of research on extremism and political violence related to Russian political thought, the book outlines the key criteria of identifying threats, such as the level of violence, ability to gain supporters and penetration of governing elites.

Primarily aimed at researchers and academics in political science, extremism, security studies and the history of Russia and Eastern, Central and South-East Europe, this book will also be of interest to political journalists and practitioners in international security.

**Jan Holzer** is a Political Scientist, Professor in the Department of Political Science and Principal Researcher in the International Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. His research interests include Modern Russian Politics; Comparative Area Studies, Political Systems/Regimes of the East European Countries and former Soviet Republics; Theory of Undemocratic and Hybrid Regimes; and Theory of Democratization.

**Martin Laryš** is the Chairman and Co-founder of the Centre for Security Analyses and Prevention, Czech Republic, since 2012. He previously worked in business development in post-Soviet countries and as a foreign correspondent for a Czech newspaper in Moscow. He has published several articles on right-wing extremism, on Russian politics and the politics of the former Soviet republics (particularly the Caucasus and the Ukraine). In 2009, he earned a
degree in Political Science from the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.

Miroslav Mareš is a Political Scientist, Professor in the Department of Political Science and Principal Researcher in the International Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. He is a member of the International Association of Political Science, the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (chair of the subgroup on right-wing extremist, left-wing extremist and separatist violence in Europe) and the editorial board of the Radicalisation Awareness Network. His research interests include political extremism and terrorism as well as security policy in East Central Europe.
The last decade has seen rapid and fundamental change in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Although there has been considerable academic comment on these changes over the years, detailed empirical and theoretical research on the transformation of the post-Soviet space is only just beginning to appear as new paradigms are developed to explain change.

Post-Soviet Politics is a series focusing on the politics of change in the states of the former USSR. The series publishes original work that blends theoretical development with empirical research on post-Soviet politics. The series includes work that progresses comparative analysis of post-Soviet politics, as well as case study research on political change in individual post-Soviet states. The series features original research monographs, thematically strong edited collections, and specialized texts.

Uniquely, this series brings together the complete spectrum of work on post-Soviet politics, providing a voice for academics worldwide.

The Politics and Complexities of Crisis Management in Ukraine
From a Historical Perspective
*Edited by Mykola Kapitonenko, Viktor Lavrenyuk, Erik Vlaeminck and Greg Simons*

Crises in the Post-Soviet Space
From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Conflict in Ukraine
*Edited by Tina Olteanu, Felix Jaitner and Tobias Spöri*

Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin’s Russia
Legacies, Forms and Threats
*Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš*

For more information about this series, please visit: https://www.routledge.com/Post-Soviet-Politics/book-series/ASHSER1198
Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin’s Russia
Legacies, Forms and Threats

Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš
Contents

List of tables ix
Acknowledgements x

Introduction 1

1 Russia’s militant right: Notes on the historical, systemic and ideological conceptualisation of a specific political actor 4

2 The Russian militant right: A historical reflection on a specific political phenomenon 24

3 Militant right-wing extremism from the beginning of the Putin era to the war in Ukraine (2000–2018) 46

4 Right-wing extremist subcultures in the Russian Federation 81

5 Terrorism committed by militant Russian nationalists and violent racist gangs 107

6 Russian militant nationalism and the war in Donbass 126

7 Contemporary pro-Putin Russian militant nationalism in Russia and Ukraine 152

8 Contemporary anti-Putin militant right-wing nationalism 181
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9    Russia’s support for militant nationalism abroad</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion – The Russian militant right and Vladimir V. Putin’s conservative authoritarianism</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*References* 248

*Index* 275
List of tables

3.1 Violent clashes instigated by Russian extremist organisations 2006–2015 72
4.1 Russian football clubs and hooligan groups 97
5.1 Overview of hate crimes and physical assaults according to the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis 119
5.2 Violent racist gangs 120
Acknowledgements

This book has been written as part of the project “Russia in the Categories of Friend/Enemy: A Czech Reflection” (MUNI/M/0921/2015), funded by the Grant Agency of Masaryk University. Indeed, the Russian extreme right has a strong impact on contemporary Czech–Russian relations. The authors would therefore like to express their gratitude to the Grant Agency for their support of this project. They would also like to thank Patricie Mertová for her help with the formal aspects related to the preparation of the manuscript. Many thanks go also to Olga Pospelova, PhD student at the Department of Political Science (Faculty of Social Studies) at Masaryk University, for her remarks on current Russian conservatism and for sharing several texts that deal with this issue. Last but not least, our thanks go to the translator, Štěpán Kaňa, who was able to resolve issues caused by the interactions between the Czech, Russian and English languages, as are encountered in examining a complex political topic.
Russia has been closely involved in world events for centuries. Its policies have been determined by a number of internal influences, from many parts of the political spectrum. One of these influences is the extreme right, which is being watched very carefully today. The evolution of the extreme right in Russia in recent years has been characterised, in part, by its opposition to President Vladimir V. Putin’s government, but also by its cooperation with this regime, as some on the extreme right help Russia’s leaders achieve their ambitions for power in both domestic and foreign policy.

Militancy, based on a belligerent rhetoric; a strong perception of themselves as political warriors; and, often, the use of physical violence have been and continue to be characteristics of many supporters of the Russian far right. In the second half of the 2000s and the early 2010s, Russia was blighted by a wave of extreme-right attacks against ethnically and politically defined enemies; these attacks claimed hundreds of lives and resulted in many injuries. At the same time, a war erupted in eastern Ukraine, in which thousands of Russians participated as combatants, largely on the side of the separatists, but some of them—due to their anti-Putin position and their neo-Nazi beliefs—fought, and are still fighting today, on the Ukrainian side. In recent years, pro-regime vigilante groups have appeared in Russia. The extreme right and its supporters abroad have become involved in what has been described as ‘hybrid war’.

Russia’s extreme nationalism has a long tradition dating back to the tsarist era, the post-1917 revolution émigrés and World War II anti-Stalin activities; and the ideological sources of contemporary Russian neo-Nazism can be seen in all these periods. The historical inspiration is strong and conspicuous in many activities that have developed time and again after significant periods in Russian history, from the perestroika-era of communism, the turbulent period of Boris N. Yeltsin’s regime, the early phase of Putin’s Russia and up to the present day, when the Russian militant extreme right has been significantly affected by the conflict in the Donbass and the various factions of the extreme right have responded in their own ways to the tightening of the domestic regime. Historical traditions and positions on contemporary issues continue to inform the stratification of Russian militants.
All these phenomena pose challenges for scholars; first, those analysing modern Russian history and politics; second, those studying far right and right-wing extremism worldwide (although the application of concepts typical of the West is not necessarily meaningful in the Russian context); third, those interrogating the regime-opposition relationship in transitional, hybrid or non-democratic regimes (including the current discussion of modern authoritarianism); and fourth, those taking a broad view of political violence, including terrorism and armed conflicts. It is the perspective of specifically militant ways of behaviour and rhetoric that provides the main research paradigm for this book, distinguishing it from other works on the Russian extreme right.

Since the 1990s to the present day, a large number of important papers, articles, studies and books have been written about the Russian far right, and many are quoted in this book. Of those that have informed later research, Walter Laqueur’s 1993 monograph *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* can be considered a classic. Then, in 2008, came the results of Andreas Umland’s long-term study of the ideological background and conceptualisations of the Russian extreme right (Umland 2008). Marlene Laruelle (Laruelle 2008) was among those who studied Aleksandr Dugin’s Eurasianism, an important ideological current that was used to legitimise the activities of certain elements of the Russian extreme right, including its international influence (Laruelle 2015). Russia’s support for the far right internationally (including the use of Russian pro-regime extreme-right entities) has been clarified by Anton Shekovtsov (2018). In the broader context of Eastern Europe, the Russian extreme right has been studied by Michael Minkenberg (most recently Minkenberg 2017a). Particular issues pertaining to the Russian far right have been examined by Ivanov (2007), Kozhevnikova and Verkhovskii (2009), Zakharov (2015), Herrera and Butkovich Kraus (2016) and many, many others.

A specific focus on the violent dimension has hitherto been limited to few works. Several books have analysed the militants (Arnold 2016; Kelimes 2012; Likhachev 2002). Two of the authors of this book sought to provide an overview in a jointly written article (Laryš and Mareš 2011). They later supplemented this article with an analysis of the transnational relations of the Russian extreme right, with an emphasis on its militancy (Mareš and Laryš 2015). Some aspects of the violence committed by the Russian far right have been analysed in several papers and books (Zuyev 2013; Tipaldou and Uba 2014; Enstad 2015; Glathe 2016; Likhachev 2016; Arnold and Markowitz 2017). Russian extreme-right violence has been examined in some broad studies of right-wing extremism worldwide (Koehler 2016).

This is the context in which we have sought to analyse comprehensively the contemporary Russian militant extreme right, with a focus on its organisational aspects and forms of activities. Given the difficult application of the notions of the extreme right and militancy in the Russian environment, the book opens with a conceptual chapter, offering a historical, systemic
and ideological conceptualisation of the political right in Russia. Because many contemporary entities have deep historical links, Chapter 2 provides a historical reflection of the Russian far right and its militancy until the end of the Yeltsin era. The next chapter presents militant right-wing extremism from the beginning of the Putin era to the war in Ukraine. Further chapters are dedicated to extreme-right subcultures, terrorism of the extreme right, the ties between Russian militant nationalism and the war in Ukraine, contemporary pro-Putin Russian militant nationalism in Russia and Ukraine, and contemporary anti-Putin militant right-wing nationalism. Given the international influence of the Russian extreme right, one chapter is given to this issue. The conclusion summarises the book’s findings.
1 Russia’s militant right

Notes on the historical, systemic and ideological conceptualisation of a specific political actor

The issue of identifying the main ideological currents or *familles spirituelles* remains one of the most interesting, but also most knotty, challenges in the study of modern Russian politics. It is not necessary to frame the issue by questioning whether Russian politics has created sufficiently well-defined and lasting ideological and programmatic options; on the contrary, ideologies have always been and continue to be present and put to intensive use in Russia’s politics. In this respect, Russia is no anomaly—not even the Russia of today, classified most often as an authoritarian regime, headed by Vladimir Putin and led by elites who are allegedly pragmatic and non-ideological in their outlook and actions. How strong and stable were and are these ideological options in modern Russian politics; what potential do they have, now and historically, to mobilise the populace; and how have they influenced and continued to influence the practical exercise of political power in Russia—these remain the salient questions.

Be that as it may, modern Russian politics have produced many actors with remarkable ideological profiles, and they have taken their ideologies very seriously. Indeed, given the experience of the twentieth century, one might even say that they have produced too many of them. The authors of this book have aimed to provide a testimony concerning one such product of Russian politics, namely the country’s militant right. This aim is not just contingent on current scholarly or any broader demand for an analysis of such segments of the political spectrum in European countries: in Russia, the issue of the militant right is both highly topical and fully grounded historically.

Thus, the objective of this book is, on the one hand, to consider the peculiarities of Russia’s past and present and, on the other hand, to conceptualise the topic of Russian right-wing extremism by means of the broadly conceived terminology and typologies of political science, even though these have often been created primarily on the basis of comparing Western European countries. This ambition testifies to the authors’ conviction that it makes sense to compare Russia’s culture with those of other areas, above all, with those of Western and Central Europe. For that matter, this is a procedure ‘methodologically very advantageous’, as Tomáš Garrigue
Masaryk, a Czech sociologist, politician and outstanding scholar of Russia of his era wrote more than a century ago in his book *Russia and Europe*, because ‘Russian analogies bring the Europeans’ own issues into sharper relief’ (Masaryk 1996 II: 430).

So, what does this imply for the terms *militant* and *right*, with respect to both the contemporary social-scientific terminology and this monograph?

**Russia’s pre-revolutionary right**

The term *right* is primarily connected with the phenomenon of political pluralism. It announces that there is a *coherent*, yet *partial*, view of politics, that there are those who espouse this view (and the ideas and interest that it represents, and who thus legitimise it) and are ready to defend it in confrontations with those who espouse other (dichotomically speaking, *left*) views (Bobbio 1997). Of course, phenomena such as tensions and conflicts among various actors holding power have a long, pre-political history. Expressing the fact that the monolithic politics of the absolutist monarchies were being overcome, and that political competition was emergent, pluralism was born in a wave of European revolutions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And the division of the countries’ political spectra into the left and the right became the constitutive element of pluralism.

Russia, however, experienced a political revolution only in the twentieth century. The pre-revolutionary Russia of the Romanovs existed, in fact, in a pre-political era. Naturally, it knew divisions in terms of opinions and power. These were often the effects of various reform projects, brought to being by the recurring feeling on the part of some Russian elites that their country was lagging behind other great powers. Consider the famous reforms spearheaded by Peter I (the Great) in the early eighteenth century. These projects often elicited disapproving responses, which in turn either defended the status quo or even advocated a return to some idealised model from the past. Such tensions between the *progressives*, i.e. the advocates of change, and the *traditionalists*, i.e. the supporters of the unchangeable old order and customs allegedly proven by ages, produced in Russia’s society certain fundamental positions, in which one might identify the nuclei of future right-wing and left-wing stances. However, proposing reforms was a prerogative of the Tsar, the aristocratic and subsequently bureaucratic elite of the court that served him, and senior church figures. Thus, these tensions concerned only a narrow circle of actors; the broader popular strata served merely as extras in their disputes. This did not prevent the people from identifying with some of the competing sides and thereby becoming radicalised, as was the case as early as the second half of the seventeenth century, when a church reform (presented, incidentally, as a modernising step) split the nation and created the *Raskolniki* movement.

Even the famous Decembrist uprising of 1825 was only an isolated revolt.1 It was the later dispute between the *Zapadniki* and the Slavophiles
that became the first truly ideologically defined, general cleavage to split the slowly-nascent Russian society according to the desired future course for the country. This dispute came to be partly under the influence of the Enlightenment adventures undertaken during the era of Catherine II (the Great), and partly as a reflection of the experience of the Napoleonic wars. Both camps first constituted themselves on socio-cultural lines. However, the contemporary seeking of answers to the classic Russian existential questions, 'Kto vinovat?' (Who is at fault?) and 'Chto delat?' (What to do?) gradually led to the establishment of pre-political positions that already reflected the key Russian value dichotomies, of which the most important were autocratic despotism versus political freedom, and elitism versus the common people. The Zapadniki (Pavel Vasil'evich Annenkov, Vissarion Grigor'evich Belinskii, Vasilii Petrovich Botkin, Aleksandr Ivanovich Gertsen, Timofei Nikolaevich Granovskii and others) understood Russia's lagging behind the developed world and the country's unwillingness to embrace modern (for which one might read Western-European) experience and trends as Russia's greatest misfortune. By contrast, the Slavophiles (for example, brothers Konstantin Sergeevich and Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov, Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov, brothers Ivan Vasil'evich and Petr Vasil'evich Kireevskii, and Yurii Fedorovich Samarin) advocated allegedly autochthonous Russian traditions. In them they saw a pure, untainted source of their own identity, and hence the only truly functional model for Russian society as well as a mythical wellspring of moral force for Russia's future conflict with secularising Western society, a conflict many of them thought was historically inevitable.

For us the relevant question is this: Does it make sense to interpret the Zapadniki and the Slavophiles in terms of the right and the left? This must be answered in the negative. If we were to use the Western terminology of political doctrines, we might perhaps speak of liberal and conservative options respectively, but on the part of those who espoused them, both of these options were intuitively understood worldviews rather than ideologically fully-fledged strategies. The so-called conservatives, in particular, certainly did not worry about formulating their own programme; a sweeping critique of all their opponents, seen as voluntaristic revolutionaries who lost their national identity, sufficed. It is evident, however, that the future Russian conservatism broadly conceived did emerge from Slavophilia, and it offered a colourful spectrum of personalities and doctrines, ranging from reactionary traditionalists to militant anti-Semites (Pipes 2005). And, as Martin Malia noted, while the rhetoric of the Zapadniki brought the 'light' of the West to Russia, it was not a camp strongly defined in ideological terms, rather it was an ideologically non-selective effort to open Russia to outside influences (Malia 1994: 538).

Against the background of the events and trends of the second half of the nineteenth century (Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the disintegration of the Tsarist monopoly on presenting modernising projects and the growing
self-awareness of the Russian *intelligentsia*, largely idealist in outlook and increasingly active), the dispute between the *Zapadniki* and the Slavophiles was gradually replaced by new themes, above all by the ‘social question’. The search for the practical solution to this question continued even after the long-awaited abolition of serfdom in 1861 and produced the first truly political actor in Russia, the so-called revolutionary democrats. From this camp gradually emerged both the specific phenomenon of the *Narodniki* movement (*khozhdenie v narod*) and, in the late nineteenth century, the authentic Russian political left: the Esers and the Social Democrats as well as terrorist organisations such as *Narodnaya volya*. Slogans such as ‘repaying the debt to the nation’ (Berdaiev 1990: 49) suggested the chiliastic mentality of this left segment of Russia’s nascent polity, a mentality that was influenced by Marxism, itself imported from the West. These leftists were determined to promote their idealist revolt by any means possible, including radicalism and violence. Paradoxically, their efforts to forge genuine links with Russia’s society tended to fail, as this society remained largely unstructured in socioeconomic terms and perhaps for that very reason essentially apolitical.

It is therefore a historical fact that it was the left, aptly understanding itself to be in a position ‘more remote from power and closer to the gallows’, which in the late nineteenth century became the dynamic element in the processes of establishing Russia’s party politics and of the very politicisation of Russian society. In this sense it is no mistake to describe the birth of the Russian right and of its segments that chiefly interests us in this book as a *reactive* act. The power of the Tsar was above criticism, and this fundamentally limited the establishment of Russia’s right at the time. The conservative elites found themselves in a schizophrenic situation: they could not act in the Tsar’s name, but neither could they ignore the growing ambition of the left. The premise of the Tsar’s monopoly on power thus in fact depoliticised a potential right-wing conception of the public sphere and, as suggested above, removed from the right the task of formulating a positive programme. The right therefore made do with two themes: (1) the defence of the Tsarist-authoritarian or socially-hierarchical status quo (Vydra 2010: 33–51) and (2) a critique of modern society, as epitomised by Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev (Dmytryshyn 1974: 337–352; Vlček 2012: 92–101).

In short, negative responses to stimuli created by left-wing actors were typical of the nascent right-wing section of Russia’s polity at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The fundamental distinction between Russia’s left and right that formed itself during this period was therefore as follows: there was a *resistance of the right against the left’s progressive, activist conception of politics and the public sphere that did not rule out the use of revolutionary tools*; on the part of the right, this was in fact a *resistance against politics as such, against politics as a way to resolve power struggles among the various actors*, or even a *resistance against the very admission that anyone but the Tsar could be concerned with the phenomenon of power*. In sum: before 1905, Russia’s right
was characterised by its defence of the authoritarian status quo and rejection of any proposals for political change.

***

This distinction continued to hold even after the great political concession made by the Romanov autocracy in the revolutionary year of 1905. From 1905 to 1917, however, the real power continued to be in the hands of the Tsar, as even the October Manifesto brought only quasi-constitutional change. The left, therefore, continued to attack not only government policies, but also the legitimacy of the whole political and social system. However, even under these circumstances, a political alliance failed to be created between the contemporary right and the throne. The Tsar and those around him viewed the social groups whose interests and values were evidently close to his own as unimportant inferiors and not as full actors. What is more, the continuing over-representation of the nobility and under-representation of the unprivileged social strata—a situation that Robert A. Tucker described as the ‘dual Russia’ (Tucker 1971: 122) and which precluded broader social support for right-wing ideas and interests—was in fact convenient for the right. They were either unable or unwilling to respond to Russian society’s emphasis after 1905 on pressing social and economic issues. This was connected with the fact that, at the time, Russia still found itself at a stage where its socio-economic, and hence also class, stratification and profiles were incomplete. During World War I, this was accompanied by an increasing awareness of how weak Russia’s position internationally truly was (as already suggested by the Russo-Japanese War). Yet the contemporary Russian right failed to use even this nationalist theme (i.e. it was necessary to renew the ‘greater’ Russia) for political mobilisation. The right continued to be passive, settling for a rejection of a left-wing, activist conception of politics that questioned the status quo. The right did not provide its own political alternative, one that would go beyond the horizon of Tsarist authoritarianism. Its position and potential were fully determined by the existing privileges of the Tsar’s power—and it was precisely this model for which the death-knell was soon to be rung.

Throughout the 1910s the fundamental characteristic of the Romanov monarchy was the unwillingness on the part of the Tsar and his circle to consider power-sharing with other institutions, above all with the State Duma. This created an explosive atmosphere, full of frictions and disagreements, in which both the leftist camp—from the constitutional liberals to the revolutionary radicals—and the rightist camp (the monarchists, nationalists and conservatives) took delight. So when an individual (Petr Arkad’evich Stolypin) came up with a practical programme of prudent steps to be taken that did not call tsardom into question, he was opposed not just by the left (as could have been expected) but also by the right and by the strata represented by the latter, starting with the aristocracy. In other words, the political culture of the majority of Russia’s political parties prior to 1917 was
dominated by radicalism and by acts and behaviours that were extreme (for more detail, see e.g. Droste 2001: 37–54). This tradition of Russia’s modern political history was not represented by an ideologically coherent party family but by encompassed actors avowing diverse ideological standpoints. On the one hand, they were anti-system in their view of the existing model of politics; on the other, they differed fundamentally as to how the model should be reconstructed. And when such actors showed willingness to use violence as a tool of political struggle, we come closer, in the corresponding context of the time, to the definition we hope for in this book, that is, of a militant left/right. One could also claim that, in the hesitantly emerging Russian polity at the time, there was a dichotomy—power versus subordination, or holder and executor (the subject) of power versus the object of power—that towered above all other cleavages. By contrast, what did not become established before 1917 was the conflict of regime versus opposition, which would suggest that the political arena was truly open. No early-democratic model was formed that enjoyed the respect of the majority of actors.

But it is precisely the emergence of such a model that is a prerequisite if the placing of actors on a left-to-right scale is to make sense. This, at least, is the argument that comparative politics has made concerning the historical realities of the models which established themselves in Western Europe. The left and right segments of the political spectrum, theoreticians argue, are not distinguished by their approach to power but by the solutions they propose to their constituencies to enact should they win power, solutions that are underpinned by the supposed or real values and interests of these constituencies. In theory, both the left and right enjoy equal access to power. Thus, most of the relevant segments of society are thought to be able to influence political processes, or, expressed differently, it is the majority of the actors of the already-born polity, themselves representing the various social strata, who are able to exert such influence.

In this context, the historiographical argument, according to which the process of building the modern Russian political nation was unachieved by 1917, assumes a special importance. A substantial community of authors writing on the issue of nation and nationalism (including Benedict Armstrong, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Anthony D. Smith) evidently found it problematic to categorise the birth of the Russian nation. It is as if the classical schemes for classification suddenly ceased to apply, as if the example of Russia eluded the conventional models of national genesis (models, let us admit, that were largely conceived on the basis of European nations). One possible solution is offered by a key authority on the issue, the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch. Of the nation-building categories he proposed, that of ‘state-nation’ does not correspond to the path Russia took. Though it fulfils the fundamental criterion, i.e. state identity did precede national identity, it lacks another of the defining characteristics of the type because it was not liberal (Hroch 1999: 13). However, Hroch also defines a category of models in which the state’s awareness of its own power played a
dominant role in the creation of the nation. In this ‘imperial’ path to identity of the Tsarist multi-ethnic Russia, we find the following institutions in the state-making role: the Romanov dynasty, other power holders (the army being the prime example) and the Orthodox Church, established as a state church (Hroch 1999: 23–24).6

Such a model for the forming of the Russian nation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries corresponds to the non-liberal, conservative character of pre-revolutionary Russian political nationalism (Schapiro 1967) and explains the partialness of the project of the right, which failed to include important segments of Russian society. That is why the contemporary Russian left focussed on socio-economic issues, which it viewed as a different space in which it could formulate its own demands for modernisation and democratisation, and thus a different (and, again, partial) path towards the establishment of a Russian political nation. Thus, the state-building process in Russia was not closed by 1917; rather it remained open. And when, after the February 1917 revolution, Russia’s political arena did become truly open, this was a merely episodic arrangement, accepted by only some actors from the left (the Mensheviks) and centrist (the Kadets) segments of the political spectrum. By contrast, the major part of the increasingly dominant left (the Esers and the Bolsheviks) viewed it only as an interim step on the path towards implementing their own dreams of socialist revolution. The right was entirely unable to get its bearings in the new situation, let alone to adapt to it; it quickly stopped being a real participant in Russia’s politics, and in a few months, after October 1917, ceased to exist entirely.

***

Let us now try to conceptualise the phenomenon of Russia’s right in the era prior to the Great October Socialist Revolution. First, it was born in response to the more dynamic process in which Russia’s political left was formed. Second, it showed little willingness to formulate a positive political programme; one could term this an ideological negativity. In terms of its position in the system, Russia’s right ‘snuggled up’ to the Tsar and those around him, and advocacy of the Tsarist-autocratic model was fundamental to its programme. During this time, it did not embrace a more open model, and a reactionary defence of the status quo was its essential strategy. Corresponding to this was its non-democratic and illiberal, or even apolitical, notion of politics and power. This was a defence of existing mechanisms of power, which, from the point of view of the right, were working; a defence that could be located on the scale of tradition versus progressivism. During the period described, Russia’s right made its appeals to the Russian people (a historical category) rather than to the Russian nation (a political category), and therefore it makes sense to describe it as a nationalist right, or more precisely a conservative nationalist right. It was a non-political conservatism that resisted political modernism and prevented the achievement of Russia’s state-building process.
Russia’s militant right

The Soviet era

The Great October Socialist Revolution provided the opportunity to implement an international project in which there was no space for the concept of nation, at least initially, as the project relied on other socio-political categories. Lasting for seven decades, the Soviet era in Russian society was presented in the contemporary propaganda as a period where the historical rights of the hitherto oppressed, yet historically chosen, actor—the working class—would be definitively fulfilled. Everything was to be aimed towards the implementation of the classic Marxist thesis of a classless society, one that overcomes all antagonisms, and is therefore united and conflict-free as far as the needs and opinions of individuals are concerned (Bezancon 1998: 223–248). The construction of a paradise for Soviet nations precluded a nationalist rhetoric, at least in theory. However, in many respects, the centralist practice (Silnitskiĭ 1990) showed anti-internationalist tendencies. The Soviet Union stood on a nationalist foundation of the Greater Russia (Barghoorn 1956) ever since the Soviet Union was attacked by the armies of Hitler’s Germany (if not earlier), and the Stalinist elites understood well what the concept of nation offered in terms of legitimacy and mobilisation. In any case, the rise of Soviet power after 1917 implied a closure of the existing political arena. It did not, however, spell a depoliticisation of the public sphere. Rather, the public sphere was mobilised in the extreme through a super-ideological instrument, the Bolshevik (Marxist-Leninist) worldview. From the 1920s to the 1960s, and possibly beyond, Soviet power operated on the basis of a permanent and total ideologisation of everything, including the private sphere. Hence the various attempts to reform or reconstruct the Soviet model—in short, the contemporary struggles for power—had ideological subtexts and were presented as clashes of ideas, calling for a return to the ‘original’, or even better the ‘true’, -isms.

For that reason, in eliminating its various real and imagined enemies, Soviet power used (among others) the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’, whether it was concerned with the various factions within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Kommunisticheskaia Partia Sovietskovo Soiuza, KPSS) during the 1920s and 1930s, the nationalist platforms following World War II or the opposition of the 1960s and 1970s. For example, during the 1920s and 1930s, the so-called old Bolshevik opposition, groups of democratic socialists and the so-called working opposition were labelled as ‘right deviation’ (Priestland 2007: 236–241), whereas after World War II this same designation was applied to nationalist oppositions in Ukraine and other regions in the Soviet Union. In the context of the functioning of the totalitarian Soviet regime, these labels were entirely twisted and abused, and this is not the place for their analysis.

The ideological self-identification of some independent actors during the Soviet era is another question altogether. Soviet attempts to equalise society, though persistent, did not lead to the total liquidation of that society’s natural ideological identities, their mythologies or their founding stories.
It is extremely interesting in this respect that the term left largely prevailed on the contemporary independent scene. One might even argue that the contest for a contemporary or timeless Russian ideological Holy Grail took place exclusively on the left. By contrast, the right, positively understood, practically disappeared from Russia’s political dictionary during the Soviet era—its attractiveness was nil.

Incidentally, this was also true of the Brezhnev era, when Soviet power began to give up on the ideological instruments of mobilisation and increasingly focused on formal adherence to the communist code. Using Juan J. Linz’s terminology, it transitioned into a post-totalitarian phase (Linz 2000: 245–261). And yet, even during the 1960s and 1970s, the self-identification with the left continued; consider the ‘bizarre situation’ of the time, when the KPSS was a left-wing party, yet small groups of dissidents were described as ‘left-wingers’ (Danks 2001: 196–197) in the sense that they offered an antithesis to the petrified structures of the party and the state. In sum, a contest for a leftist (that is, a revolutionary or progressive) conception prevailed not just in official circles, which continued to see themselves as a historically privileged avant-garde of the world’s left, but also in Russia’s non-official intellectual circles.

And so it came to be that another Russia, represented by the post-revolution émigrés, became after 1917 the bearer of Russia’s right-wing tradition, the actor that kept it alive. Though dotted throughout Europe, together the émigrés yearned for Russia, for the home which soon became a paradise lost. It probably will not surprise anyone that the nostalgic mentality of the Russian exile worked with a traditional, right-wing image of the true Russia. And yet this environment produced not just a defence of the old model but, during the 1920s, also a new, original ideological conception, which expressed many values and theses of a right-wing programme.

Eurasianism, which conceived of Russia as a leading constituent in a culturally autochthonous Eurasian continental entity, combined a number of traditional right-wing values (above all, an authoritarian exercise of power and a rejection of liberalism) with a newly-formulated territorial ambition. It also expressed evident identitarian consequences. Its ability to identify a coherent essence of Russia’s historical mission was its unquestionable advantage. Peter the Great’s reforms of the early seventeenth century, which started to alienate Russia from Asia, and for which the Bolshevik revolution provided an epilogue, were described as crucial for this historical mission. The key for rediscovering Russia’s identity, by contrast, was to admit that the peculiarity of the Russian nation consisted in its Eurasian mentality (Laqueur 1993), to which Tatar invasions made a contribution; as such they should not be viewed as having impeded the development of the Russian nation. By defining a multi-national imperial Russian identity, one that called into question none of the periods of Russia’s historical development, Eurasianism opposed both the cosmopolitan/internationalist and
the nationalist conceptions and provided a constitutive contribution to the discussion about the varying identity of the Russian political community.

The founders of Eurasianism, such as the economist and geographer Petr Nikolaevich Savitskii, the linguist and ethnographer Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoii, the philosopher Lev Platonovich Karsavin and the philosopher and theologian Georgii Vasil’evich Florovskii, were critical of both Bolshevism and the Tsarist model. And even though their initial impulse lost much of its energy as early as the late 1930s, it did leave an ideological legacy that proved relevant and stimulating for further development of Russian political thought.

The post-Soviet era

The era of perestroika, symbolised by the figure of Mikhail Gorbachev, opened a transitional period, which brought about the conclusion of the Soviet experiment on Russian society (Suny 1998) and an opportunity for a thoroughgoing reconstruction of its state-nation model and its political regime. Naturally, the period of the late 1980s and the early 1990s also produced complaints about the alleged ‘spiritual degradation of Russian society’ and ‘a crisis of nation-state values’ (Medvedev 1998: 288) as well as scenarios of catastrophic future developments, based on the alleged lack of a clear vision as to ‘what society we are building and goals we are pursuing’ (Volkov 1998: 250). In reality, however, ‘Russia’s ideological field’ was filled with unprecedented alacrity with the most varied programmes for a new Russia, ranging from those proposed by individuals (consider Solzhenitsyn’s famous essay ‘How we should arrange Russia’; Solzhenitsyn 1990) to the manifestos of newly-founded political parties to broad, non-partisan conceptions such as Eurasianism (see Laruelle 2008 and Bassin, Glebov and Laruelle 2015), in the words of O. A. Misyurov, ‘the most varied teachings of “all times and nations”’ (Misyurov 1996). The search for rules to guide the political contests of the colourful, nascent spectrum of political currents—from traditionalists to modernists, from conservatives to revolutionaries—was a fundamental feature of Russia’s transition.

With a multitude of opinions in place, one could also expect the new actors to have identified themselves as the left or the right. However, according to the transitology paradigm of democratisation studies, the process of division into the left and the right tends to be an effect of the post-transition phase. It was no different for post-Soviet Russian politics, with two key lines of conflict during the transition—the ‘old’ Soviet regime against the ‘new’ regime, which can also be expressed as the advocates of the status quo against the reformers (Cotta 1992; Beyme 1994: 285)—that continued to establish actors’ identities with reference to the Soviet era. This was also reflected in the political vocabulary of the time. Thus the leaders of the group Democratic Russia (Demokraticheskaya Rossiya; DR), which wanted to liberalise the political system, and the economic
reformers headed by Egor Gaidar understood themselves as located on the left because they sought to define themselves in opposition to what they viewed as the reactionary communist elite, whom they described as ‘red-brown’ conservative imperialists (Pashentsev 1998: 7).5

There are multiple interpretations of the point at which Russia’s transition was complete. According to some authors, it ended in August 1991, when the permanent clashes between the advocates of ‘conservative stabilisation’ and the reformists led to an unsuccessful coup, which Boris El’tsin overcame thanks to the power he had received when he was elected president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in June 1991. According to other authors, the end of Russia’s transition came later, in the dramatic events of internal politics in the autumn of 1993, when the parliament was vanquished by the president’s camp, which codified the Russian model of limited pluralism. Even during this period, however, the overwhelming majority of the contemporary descriptions of Russia’s party politics focused on identifying the poles in the party system and tended to be rather sceptical about the feasibility of a deeper doctrinal analysis,9 one that could distinguish Russia’s left-wing and right-wing parties (e.g. Oleshuk, Pribylovskii and Reĭblat 1996). The ideological profiles of many Russian parties of the time were incoherent amalgams and were subject to rapid change. The classic notion of ideological distance (polarisation) of the actors in the system could therefore provide only limited information about the changes occurring during the first years of Russia’s post-transition politics.

The broad academic consensus therefore was as follows. During the 1990s, there were four party-political camps: the ex-communists (above all, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Kommunisticheskaya partiya Rossiiskoi federatsii, KPRF) and the Agrarian Party of Russia (Agrarnaya partiya Rossii, APR); the liberals (DR; Russia’s Choice (Vybor Rossiya, VR); Blok Yavlinskii-Boldyrev-Lukin, Yabloko); the supporters of the president (a group most diverse in its make-up10); and the nationalists and patriots (represented by the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (Liberal’nomokraticheskaya partiya Rossii, LDPR).

In terms of conceptualising the post-transition Russian political right, we need to focus on two poles: the supporters of the president, and the nationalists and patriots. By contrast, the contemporary liberal Russian parties of the period deserve only a brief note. In the early 1990s, their reform- and market-oriented programmes challenged Russia’s communist and ex-communist left, but the vision of future Russia as proposed by DR— and subsequently, in the parliamentary election of December 1993, by Vybor Rossiya— was one of broad democratisation, which one might read as anti-communist. A division based on socio-economic issues, in which the liberal camp could have established a right-wing role for itself, lasted only for a few months in 1992, and quickly lost relevance with the departure of Egor Gaidar and the arrival of Viktor Chernomyrdin in the office of
Russia’s militant right

prime minister. In the following period, Russia’s liberalism—for example, the Blok Yavlinskii-Boldyrev-Lukin—adopted a social-democratic position on economic issues and a modern liberal position on questions of values; it was, in short, pro-Western. Its potential continued to wane, however, and in the late 1990s (let alone the 2000s) it was no longer a relevant actor. In other words, the liberal camp failed to contribute to the establishment of a permanent left–right cleavage in Russia’s politics, as it simply failed to win sufficient electoral support.

The pro-presidential camp, by contrast, is extremely important for an analysis of post-Soviet Russian politics. This camp consisted of the so-called ‘parties of power’, which brought together party politics and the executive branch of government in a peculiar manner. The basic framework was provided for this camp in the 1990s by the semi-presidential form of government in Russia, dominated by a strong president, who for many in society represented a much-desired point of reference in a volatile situation as a sort of paternalist refuge. Incidentally, this model did not create a situation favourable for the constitution of a stable and ideologically distinctive party spectrum; yet it did not exhibit an open desire to drift towards a model of government that would be closed and lacking in pluralism and freedom. It was, first of all, a reliable institutional mechanism, allowing for effective governance. The parties favouring the president did not tend to transform themselves into full-fledged political parties, either of the parliamentary type or the presidential (American) type (Ryabov 1998: 89–90). They largely provided information about the support for the president and were involved in solving the issue of who would occupy the most powerful office; consider the events of the turn of 1999 and 2000.

As far as programmatic options were concerned, the parties supporting the president liked to present themselves as non-ideological. More specifically, if they had a defining characteristic in this respect, it was their ability to adapt themselves to any attractive external ideological stimuli, even if they were contradictory. What is more, over the various elections, a significant number of parties, with programmes entirely different from each other, sought to play the role of the main pro-president party. Thus, I. N. Barygin could describe the 1995 programme of the pro-president party Our House Russia (Nash dom Rossiya, NDR) as centre-right, without implying that NDR was a member of an actual party family. V. S. Chernomyrdin, a NDR member and Russia’s prime minister from 1992–1996, said of the same programme: ‘We will not build socialism, communism is a utopia, and capitalism—from the viewpoint of developed countries—that is a phase long since finished’ (Barygin 1999: 104).

Thus, when discussing the pro-president camp, it makes little sense to assume that these parties developed their own ideologies. Rather, one might speak of their pragmatic approach to party programmes, showing an ability to understand the mentality of Russian society and adapt themselves to it. Contemporary political science could perhaps seek to apply the notion of
populist parties. With reference to an earlier work by the present author, one could also suggest the notion of synergism, expressing a certain programmatic pell-mell (Holzer 2004: 166). In any case, the key to understanding is provided by the notion of mentality, which can be profitably applied not just to the authoritarian phase in Russian politics starting with Vladimir Putin’s victory in the 2000 presidential election. Putin was seeking the votes of precisely those segments of Russia’s post-Soviet society that pro-presidential parties appealed to before 2000.11

What, then, was it that the corresponding and important part of the Russian electorate demanded (and continues to demand)? It is: (1) a strong, paternalist, providing state, one that (2) favours the interests of the collective over those of the individual and (3) guarantees social security and stability. In the domain of foreign policy, this mentality is dominated by (4) a varied (sometimes reticent, sometimes even chauvinist) anti-Western orientation, not precluding a realist’s ability to enter into pragmatic alliances.

Any attempt to express the orientation of Russia’s pro-presidential parties using the classical vocabulary of Western European ideologies is fraught with difficulties. One could write that these parties combined statist, social-democratic views of society and the economy with conservative values; it is probably not coincidental that, during the 1990s, which was a period of relative openness in Russian politics, no social-democratic or conservative parties had established themselves (Holzer 2004: 242–262). The camp supporting the president fostered a post-Soviet, post-ideological mentality (Holzer and Balík 2010), one that cannot be placed on the left-to-right scale and whose true long-term potential became apparent after 2000, when a depoliticised, consolidated authoritarian regime was quickly established.12

The second case crucial for any attempt to define the post-Soviet Russian right is the so-called national-patriotic camp; it is of special importance when we focus on the radical right. However, the task of defining this camp is yet another complex challenge posed by modern Russian politics to political science. This is because nationalism in Russia cuts across political divides; the most important political actors have all used nationalist rhetoric and continue to do so, but they refer to various periods of the country’s history. This situation is related to the stumbling nation-building process in Russia, as already noted in this chapter; a process that was not completed under the monarchy, in the very brief parliamentarian phase, or in the subsequent Bolshevik era.

Nationalism’s extraordinary ability to mobilise was already apparent in Russia’s politics at the end of the 1980s. Indeed, throughout the 1980s, organisations such as Pamyat or the so-called Russian Party (Minkenberg 2009: 445–458; Laqueur 2015: 171–176) established themselves on nationalism. Externally, nationalism was used to overcome the frustration arising out of the Soviet Union’s disintegration and to help Russia find a new position in the international system (whether considered in its post-Soviet,
European, Eurasian or global aspects), as republics that were formerly part of the Union sought to emancipate themselves and countries of Central Europe embraced pro-West policies. Internally, nationalism was able to explain many contemporary economic and social ills using that time-proven technique, the search for an enemy. Appearing most often in this role were ‘the West’—a vehicle for liberalisation and globalisation trends—and its potential domestic ‘exponents’, i.e. the liberals, Jews and non-Russians, originally members of the Transcaucasian nations and later the Muslims.

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive commentary on Russian nationalism; we are only interested in certain segments of the national-patriotic camp. Two fundamental divisions within contemporary Russian nationalism as described by the Polish political scientist Jaroslaw Bratkiewicz (1998: 29–59) are useful for our endeavour: first, the National Bolsheviks versus the anti-communists, and second, the All-Russians versus the Greater-Russians, corresponding to the rossiiskii–russkii dichotomy and referring to Roman Szporluk’s terms, ‘empire savers’ and ‘nation builders’ (Szporluk (1989: 17).

As far as our topic is concerned, we can ignore the National Bolsheviks of the first division outlined above. During the 1990s the National Bolsheviks were a group of parties headed by the KPRF, which originally emerged from the disintegrating KPSS (Gill 1994) and sought to revive the Soviet model, if possible within the frontiers of the former Soviet Union, if not then within those of the Russian Federation. This programme was often espoused by coalitions or broader platforms such as the Coordinating Council of the National-Patriotic Forces of Russia (Koordinatsionnyi sovet narodovo-patrioticheskikh sil Rossii) and the National Salvation Front (Front narodnogo spaseniya), representing the anti-El’tsin camp in 1992–1993; the Congress of the Nations of the Soviet Union (Kongress narodov SSSR) founded in 1993; and the Front of the Working People, Army and Youth (Front trudyashchegosya naroda, armii i molodezhi). These entities included nationalist rhetoric in their programmes, but their negative views of the contemporary situation in Russia were largely driven by Soviet nostalgia. This current has been and continues to be Bolshevik first and nationalist second.

What Bratkiewicz (1998) calls the ‘classic nationalists’ suggests a presence in Russia’s politics of an ideological current compatible with certain Western-European parties. In the Russian context, however, classic meant anti-communist; in other words, in its xenophobic and chauvinist programmes this movement was not nostalgic for the Soviet past. These parties considered the contemporary political practice, which up to 2000 was at least partially competitive and plural, as ‘conventional’ and did not intend to respect and defend it. Crucial for their establishment were their visions of enemies who allegedly rejected Russian values and developmental models. An emphasis was placed on the idea of a Greater Russia, which was to revive national consciousness, to be guaranteed by the state as well as the Orthodox Church (Papkova 2011: 118–151). Rhetorically, entities such
as the Spas movement, the Party of Russia’s Spiritual Revival (*Partiya duch
hovnogo vozrozhdeniya Rossii*), the Russian Party (*Rossiyskaya partiya*) and
the Movement of Patriotic Forces—Russian Cause (*Dvizhenie patriotich-
eskikh sil—Russkoye delo*) were often militant and did not rule out violence.
However, typically they were marginal, with the exception of Vladimir
Zhirinovskii’s LDPR, a party with a relevant position in Russia’s party sys-
tem. Though rhetorically radical, in practice it did not oppose the system,
either before or after 2000.

The previous paragraph finally suggests an environment where we might
find the actors with which this book is concerned: Russia’s militant right.
There is no need to complicate the conceptualisation of the militant right
by applying theories widely discussed in political science that are connected
with the analysis of extreme manifestations in contemporary politics, i.e.
theories of extremism and radicalism. For our definition, the concepts of
radicalism (understood as a tendency to adopt unconventional approaches
and behaviours that reject compromise, but not a commitment to violence)
and of extremism (an extreme position within the system and an anti-system
mind set of the given actor) are not sufficient or cardinal for the post-Soviet
system. In radicalism, as compared to the notion of the militant right, the
element of violence is clearly absent. And an application of the notion of
extremism, with its key question—extreme vis-à-vis what?—would only be a
step towards identifying the fluid ‘margins’ of Russia’s political system, but
it would say nothing about the presence of such a specific ideological cur-
rent in contemporary Russian politics. The environment of classic national-
ism has nevertheless evidently produced such currents (see below).

In summary, in Russia’s politics prior to 2000, there were two broad
camps that sought to represent the country’s right wing. The first of them,
the so-called pro-presidential camp, tended to deploy a rhetoric of depoliti-
cisation, suggesting a trend that was to become dominant in the next decade.
Thus, its right-wing identity largely referred to the historical mentality of
the Russian right, as it was described above in the context of pre-1917 devel-
opments. The national-patriotic camp, by contrast, was a right-wing actor
that presented itself in ideological terms. The relationship between these two
camps is interesting: the pro-presidential camp was pro-system, but so was the
most important party of the national-patriotic camp, Zhirinovski’s LDPR.
However, the majority of the entities in the national-patriotic camp were
strongly anti-system and were very critical of the pro-presidential parties.

The Putin era

Our task—to conceptualise the phenomenon of Russia’s right from the view-
point of scientific-political analysis—has become more complicated since the
rise in the early 2000s of an authoritarian regime essentially linked with the
figure of Vladimir Putin. Two topics came under intense discussion: (1)
the question of typologising Putin’s regime, including its ideological identity;
Russia’s militant right

and (2) the related issue of this regime’s sympathies for the European extreme right (e.g. Orenstein 2014). The academic consensus has only gradually been achieved that the term authoritarianism is appropriate to describe Putin’s regime—it was in fact reached after 2012, when Putin returned to the office of Russia’s president. Initially, the debate was dominated by hybrid-regime concepts (semi-authoritarianism, semi-democracy, electoral authoritarianism, etc.), which reflected the ultimately unfounded expectations connected with the allegedly liberal preferences of Dmitri Medvedev, who replaced Putin in the presidential post for the 2008–2012 term. In parallel, there appeared in scholarly literature attempts to categorise the hegemonic discourse of Putin’s regime as a conservative one (Prozorov 2005), i.e. using a concept from the domain of ideologies, even though Juan J. Linz’s classic approach rejects a connection between authoritarianism and ideology (Linz 2000: 162–165). Essentially this was a way of defining the prevailing mentality in Russia’s polity and the path taken in the building of this polity.

What these steps had in common was their tendency to see the key actors in Russia’s political model as right-wing ones. A crucial and negatively constitutive category opposed to the description of Putin’s regime as conservative was then the notion of liberalism. This statement conforms to the fact that a characteristic trait of Russia’s politics since 2000 has been its increasing authoritarianism, but also (and this might go hand-in-hand with the former) that it attempted to complete the processes of nation-building and state-building. During this period these processes faced many uncertainties and alternatives. Unlike the 1990s, the dichotomy of Soviet versus anti-Soviet was no longer able to mobilise the electorate. However, the tension between an internationalist (multi-ethnic, all-Russian) model of a political community and a nationalist one (ethnic purity and Greater Russia; see the division of Russian nationalism according to J. Bratkiewicz above) and, to a limited extent, also a Eurasianist versus a nationalist model were (and perhaps still are) choices to be made between alternative visions, which provide meaningful guidelines appealing to substantial segments of Russian society (Tsygankov 2014: 169–177; Rojek 2015).

In these respects, the dichotomy between conservatism and liberalism noted above can be productive. It reminds us of the non-liberal, conservative version of Russia’s national political project, dating to the phase prior to 1917, intellectually preserved by the exiles and after 2000 re-formulated as the so-called new Russian nationalism (Clover 2016). This new nationalism seeks to challenge contemporary liberal democracies (e.g. Roylance 2014 or Pomerantsev 2015), and in this respect it finds itself in agreement with the contemporary European extreme right (e.g. Laqueur 2015: 190–198).

These notes are compatible with the thesis formulated by Marlene Laruelle (2009), according to whom the notion of nationalism has offered a broader range of options to the Russian elites both before and after 2000. In addition to the populist, conservative-centrist and socially-consensual dimensions/applications of nationalism in Russia’s party politics, Laruelle
also notes that there has been *nationalism as opposition*, used by those outside the parliament. Included in this segment, according to Laruelle, is the radical right which, she argues, restructured itself after 2000 and also became more radical in that it became more explicit in its willingness to use violence (Laruelle 2009: 58–83).\(^{15}\)

In this context it makes sense that, in its struggle with opposition (largely but not exclusively left-wing opposition,\(^{16}\) as there is right-wing opposition, too), the Putin regime has produced legislation targeting ‘extremism’ (a 2002 law, amended in 2007). Thus, the opposition movement, The Other Russia (*Drugaya Rossiya*), for instance, was labelled as extremist (Horvath 2013: 171–205). The majority interpretation is that the anti-extremism legislation is a tool for fighting Putin’s opponents; it is nonetheless evident that it has also been motivated by the need to deal with the growing prominence of individual and organised racist and xenophobic activities (White 2011: 338). In this respect, Putin’s administration faces problems that are well known in the Western World,\(^{17}\) and a conceptualisation of Russia’s right again becomes more complicated.

***

Let us now sum up our initial notes on the historical, systemic and ideological conceptualisation of Russia’s militant right as a specific actor in modern Russian politics. We can start with the famous thesis of the outstanding scholar of Eastern Christian spirituality, Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík, who argued that there is in Russia ‘a different view of man’ (Špidlík 1996), a thesis that many internal and external observers of Russian public life share. With reference to this viewpoint, one may then argue that the contest over who gets to formulate the exclusive national idea of Russia is as typical of the country as it is of any other national community, but is also a phenomenon *sui generis*. It also seems that historically these ideological contests have taken place in Russia within less clear-cut, rather undefined boundaries, or that perhaps the contenders have not yet agreed on the definition of these systemic boundaries. This was true of the Soviet era, too. Though its model was already consolidated, it was not competitive; rather it excluded a number of actors, and therefore the Russian dream about a state-national consensus was not fulfilled but left open. Hence the competition was quickly renewed after 1989, but even then it did not mean a definitive realisation of a tendency towards an open political model. In sum, the processes of nation and state building continue in contemporary Russia.

In recent years, since the turn of the twenty-first century’s first and second decades, a new factor came into play. Western democracies, traditionally the main frame of reference for Russia, have faced fundamental internal questions about the legitimacy of their own political consensus, and, admittedly or not, find themselves in a period where they are reformulating the identity of their polities (their values, degree of inclusiveness, scope of rights, etc.). This has, of course, revitalised some of Russia’s actors, especially those who