

# History, Memory and National Identity

## Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands

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**Abstract:** Over the past several decades, the “politics of history” has become a significant aspect of domestic politics and international relations within Europe and around the world. The politicizing and instrumentalizing of history usually pursues two main objectives: first is the construction of a maximally cohesive national identity and rallying the society around the powers that be; second is eschewing the problem of guilt. The two are clearly interlinked; having liberated oneself of the sense of historical, political, moral or whatever responsibility, it is arguably much easier to take pride in one’s newly minted “unblemished” identity based on the celebratory interpretation of one’s country’s “glorious past.” This article intends to explore how the memories of some momentous developments in the tumultuous 20th century (above all, the experience of totalitarian dictatorships, World War II, the “division” and “reunification” of Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union) and their historical interpretations relate to concepts of national identity in the post-Soviet lands.

**Keywords:** history, memory, identity, politics of history, Russia, Eastern Europe

*Tell me what you remember and I'll diagnose your condition*

—Aleksandr Kustaryov<sup>1</sup>

**A**t the end of June 2010, a remarkable text appeared on the website of the Russian liberal radio station *Ekho Moskvy*. Its author, the prominent Russian lawmaker Konstantin Kosachev, suggested that it was time for Russia to elaborate upon what he called a comprehensive “set of principles, an ‘historical doctrine’ of sorts” that would help Moscow

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to disclaim, once and for all, any political, financial, legal or moral responsibility for the policies and actions of the Soviet authorities on the territories of the former USSR and the states of Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Kosachev's proposal is simple, blunt and seemingly effective. In a nutshell, it boils down to the two key points: (1) Russia fulfills all international obligations of the USSR as its successor state; however, Russia does not recognize any moral responsibility or any legal obligations for the actions and crimes committed by the Soviet authorities; and (2) Russia does not accept any political, legal or financial claims against it for violations by the Soviet authorities of international or domestic laws enforced during the Soviet period.

To be sure, Kosachev's proposal didn't emerge out of the thin air. His idea should be placed into the broader context of Russia's attempts at crafting and pursuing the robust "politics of history." Like other members of the country's ruling elite, Kosachev appears to perceive memory and history as an important ideological and political battleground: Russia's detractors—both foreign and domestic—allegedly seek to spread interpretations of past events that are detrimental to Russia's interests, and there is an urgent need to resolutely counter these unfriendly moves. Several elements of such politics of history have already been introduced in Russia: a set of officially sponsored and centrally approved textbooks with the highly pronounced statist interpretation of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian history;<sup>3</sup> the attempts to establish the "regime of truth" using legislative means; and the creation of a bureaucratic institution to fight the "falsification of history."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, only one year before Kosachev's initiative, on May 15, 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced the formation of a new presidential commission dedicated to "analyzing and suppressing all attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russia's interests."<sup>5</sup> The Kremlin's move appeared to be just the next logical step in Russia's ongoing history wars with its neighbors—a step that came hard on the heels of a proposed law to criminalize the questioning of the Soviet Union's victory in World War II and the "rehabilitation of Nazism."<sup>6</sup> Aleksandr Chubaryan, the director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of World History and a member of the newly formed presidential "history commission," has readily acknowledged the ongoing "hostilities" on the "historical front": "In Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States," noted he, "there is a problem of politicization of historical knowledge, which contributes to the [creation of] hostile images and representations of some countries as *Others*."<sup>7</sup>

There appears to be a consensus among professional historians and political analysts that over the past several decades, the "politics of history" has become a significant aspect of domestic politics and international relations, both within Europe and in the world at large.<sup>8</sup> One could thus suggest that Russia's latest moves should be seen in perspective and perceived as a manifestation of a Europe-wide trend, their clumsiness and cartoonish character notwithstanding.<sup>9</sup> This trend toward politicizing and instrumentalizing of history might take on various shapes and forms in different countries, but there are basically two main objectives that are usually pursued. First is the construction of a maximally cohesive national identity and rallying the society around the powers that be. Second is eschewing the problem of guilt.<sup>10</sup> The two are clearly interlinked: having liberated oneself of the sense of historical, political, or moral responsibility, it is arguably much easier to take pride in one's newly minted "unblemished" identity based on the celebratory interpretation of one's country's "glorious past," which is habitually regarded as "more a source of comfort than a source of truth."<sup>11</sup> I would thus argue that it is extremely important to investigate the vital

links between history, memory and national identity. The main objective of this article, then, is to explore how the memories of some momentous developments in the tumultuous 20<sup>th</sup> century (above all, the experience of totalitarian dictatorships, World War II, the “division” and “reunification” of Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union) and their historical interpretations relate to concepts of national identity in the post-Soviet lands. Identities are understood here not as something immutable; by contrast, I proceed from the premise that identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed in the course of historical process. “As communities and individuals interpret and reinterpret their [historical] experiences ... they create their own constantly shifting national identities in the process.”<sup>12</sup>

I will begin with the analysis of the reasons underlying the intensification of “history wars” between Russia and its neighbors. I will then discuss the prominent role that the reinterpretation of the history of World War II plays in the politics and geopolitics of identity in post-Soviet Eurasia. The analysis of Russia’s symbolic politics will come next. I will conclude with exploring possible ways of reconciling national memories and historical narratives.

### Why Escalation?

All is *not* quiet on the Eastern (European) front. The past two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union have witnessed an escalation of memory wars in which Russia has largely found itself on the defensive, its official historical narrative being vigorously assaulted by the number of the newly independent ex-Soviet states. Suffice it to recall just the most important episodes of this monumental “battle over history.” Following the Soviet collapse, Museums of Occupation were set up in Latvia and Estonia; one of the museums’ main objectives is to highlight the political symmetry between the two totalitarian regimes that occupied the Baltics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—German national socialism and Soviet Communism.<sup>13</sup> In May 2006, a Museum of Soviet Occupation opened in Tbilisi, Georgia, following the Baltic States’ example. That same month, the Institute of National Memory was established in Ukraine, inspired by the Polish model.<sup>14</sup> In November 2006, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law recognizing the Holodomor (the disastrous famine of 1932–1933) as genocide of the Ukrainian people perpetrated by the Soviet communist regime.<sup>15</sup> In May 2009, a landmark academic and political event took place in Vilnius—over 80 representatives of European cultural journals convened in the Lithuanian capital to discuss the topic of “European Histories.” The event’s participants agreed that a comprehensive 20<sup>th</sup> century European history has yet to be crafted, and that the first step toward this goal should be the integration of Eastern Europe’s tragic totalitarian experience into the overall European narrative.<sup>16</sup> That same year also saw the adoption of two international documents that couldn’t fail to rile official Moscow—a resolution of the European Parliament entitled “On European Conscience and Totalitarianism”<sup>17</sup> and a resolution passed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe entitled “Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>18</sup> Both resolutions branded Nazism and Stalinism as similar totalitarian regimes, bearing equal responsibility for the outbreak of World War II and the crimes against humanity committed during that period. The resolutions strongly called for the unconditional international condemnation of European totalitarianism. Moscow’s reaction to all of this was unambiguously negative; in particular, Russian lawmakers, incensed at Stalinism and

Nazism being lumped together, called the OSCE resolution an “offensive anti-Russian provocation” and “violence over history.”<sup>19</sup>

It would appear that the lawmaker Kosachev’s programmatic initiative was also prompted by yet another perceived snub against Russia. Just days prior to posting of Kosachev’s blog entry, the acting President of Moldova Mihai Guimpu issued a decree proclaiming June 28 as the “Day of Soviet Occupation of Moldova.”<sup>20</sup> Guimpu’s move seemed to be the last straw. Having conceded that in the ongoing grandiose “battle over history” the “official Russia” and most of its neighbors more often than not end up at the “opposite sides of the barricade,” Kosachev appeared to have decided that something urgently needs to be done about this and set forth his blueprint of Russia’s “historical doctrine.”

There appear to be two sets of reasons behind the increasingly acrimonious disputes over history in which Russia is pitted against the former imperial borderlands. First is what might be called the “classical” politics of identity following the collapse of a multinational empire. Second, there is a specific geopolitical conjuncture primarily connected with the expansion of the European Union and the growing rivalry between the EU and Russia over their overlapping neighborhoods. An important subplot linked with both the Soviet Union’s unravelling and the EU’s eastward thrust is the struggle over the contested issue of Russia’s own shifting identity.

Students of anthropology, political science and postcolonialism have long explored history writing (and mythmaking) as part of an overarching problem of nationalism, national identity and nation-building. Their key premise has been that (re)writing history and (re)making myths is what nation-states generally do, history being a principal tool to construct national identity.<sup>21</sup> It has also been argued (particularly forcefully within the field of postcolonial studies) that any regime change inevitably entails a confrontation with the past: “a new future requires a new past.”<sup>22</sup> In cases when regime change, state-creation and nation-building coincide, the confrontation with the past becomes particularly acute. This is precisely the situation in which the countries that emerged from under the rubble of the Soviet Union found themselves.<sup>23</sup>

The key problem here is this: new states have emerged from the debris of the Soviet Union, but in many cases they exist without clear-cut identities or links to logically conceived “nations.” Yet, identity, as some scholars argue, is decisively a question of empowerment. As Jonathan Friedman has perceptively noted, “The people without history ... are the people who have been prevented from identifying themselves for others.”<sup>24</sup> So what were, realistically, the available strategies that the newly independent ex-Soviet countries could resort to?

Under Communism, studies of nationalism or national identities were not a terribly popular topic. “National question” in the Soviet Union was routinely explored as an aspect of class paradigm. As it has famously been postulated, liquidation of class distinctions (creation of classless society) would automatically lead toward the solution of national problem—through the creation of the “new historical entity” (the “Soviet people”) in which national/ethnic differences would be preserved in their harmless (i.e., non-political) ethnographic form. National histories of the Soviet Union’s multifarious peoples were secondary (and highly controlled) narratives—the component parts of the Soviet grand narrative.

Following the demise of Communism and the Soviet Union’s unraveling, the incipient nation-states either returned to national historiographic tradition (where it existed)

or hastily set about creating one. One common feature has been the “nationalization of history” whereby the history of a newly born post-Soviet state is conceptualized as the history of a titular nation, the latter being associated with the titular ethnic group.

Yet this strategy of nationalizing history inevitably leads to strains, both internally and externally. As Clifford Geertz noted, defining the national particularism may be fraught with inherent difficulties because “new states tend to be bundles of competing traditions gathered accidentally into concocted political frameworks rather than organically evolving civilizations.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, “nationalization” of history centered on a titular nation cannot help but produce what can be called “mutually exclusive” histories, whereby national minorities are excluded and/or designated as *Others*. In the situation when all post-Soviet states are multiethnic and multicultural, the exclusivist narrative is counterproductive at best and outright dangerous at worst.

In fact, as many students of nationalism have pointed out, the construction or reconstruction of identity is indeed a violent and dangerous process for all those involved—both *within* the newly-emerged state and *without*. According to Friedman, “The emergence of cultural identity implies the fragmentation of a *larger unity* and is always experienced as a threat.”<sup>26</sup> Roman Szporluk, a leading historian of Eastern Europe at Harvard University, agrees. The making of one nation entails the unmaking of another, argues he: for example, the rise of particularist identities in the ex-Soviet republics leads to the demise of the overarching Soviet identity; nation-building in Ukraine compels the remaking of the Russian nation.<sup>27</sup>

A recent Russian study based on the examination of nearly 200 school history textbooks and teacher guides from Russia’s 12 post-Soviet neighbors demonstrated that the trends toward nationalizing history and “othering” are gaining momentum in most new independent states. The report, released in Moscow in the end of 2009 and entitled “The Treatment of the Common History of Russia and the Peoples of the Post-Soviet Countries in the History Textbooks of the New Independent States,” argues that Russia’s neighbors are now using textbooks that present Russia in all its historical incarnations as the enemy of the peoples of these countries. The study’s authors note “with regret” that “except for Belarus and (to a lesser degree) Armenia, all the remaining countries have moved to present the rising generation with a nationalistic view of history, based on myths about the antiquity of one’s own people, about the high cultural mission of its ancestors and about “the cursed enemy”: the Russians. “If these tendencies continue,” the report concludes, “then after 15 to 20 years, the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be completely forgotten by the population. In the consciousness of the peoples of the former USSR will be formed an image of Russia as an evil empire which for centuries destroyed, oppressed and exploited them.”<sup>28</sup> Remarkably, several surveys of history textbooks from the ex-Soviet republics conducted by local scholars (for example, the analyses carried out in Ukraine by Viktoria Sereda and Natalya Yakovenko, respectively)

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revealed the same prevalent trend—namely, the active use and abuse of the negative images of the *Other*.<sup>29</sup>

Some Russian historians appear to have been unpleasantly surprised, even hurt, by what they called the blatantly nationalistic and viciously anti-Russian interpretations of Russian imperial and Soviet history by non-Russian scholars from neighboring states. “It is a revisiting, at a new level, of the theory of ‘absolute evil’ which used to be popular during the early Soviet period,” contends Moscow University Professor Aleksandr Vdovin. “Back then, this nefarious role in Soviet historiography was played by the [Russian] Tsarism that ‘oppressed the peoples of the empire.’ Now it is Russia that is painted as the ‘absolute evil.’”<sup>30</sup> But more perceptive Russian and international commentators seem to agree that a certain degree of anti-Russian bias in the new independent countries’ historiographies was all but inevitable. It should not be treated as an “unexpected phenomenon,” argues one Russian analyst; rather, it should be understood as a “norm.”<sup>31</sup> In their efforts to assert their still shaky and fragile national identities and root them in the (re)invented national traditions, the new countries were bound to “push against” Russia’s official historical narrative. “The shaping of an image of the ethnic or cultural Other has become an inalienable part of the cultural and political mobilization as well as of the politics of memory pursued by the newly independent states,” writes the prominent Ukrainian historian Georgiy Kasyanov.<sup>32</sup> It should come as no surprise, adds Kasyanov, that in the post-Soviet space it was “Russia and the Russians” who ended up being the “absolute champions” as far as the forming of negative ethnic stereotypes and “othering” are concerned. Thus the ground for “history wars” was in fact inherent in the post-imperial situation. These conflicts could have been somewhat attenuated had Russia—a former imperial overlord—had at least a modest success in what Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, meaning coming to terms with the past.<sup>33</sup> But it hadn’t. I will address Russia’s stance in greater detail below.

### Geopolitics of Identity

There is also an important geopolitical angle to this already tangled story. Over the past decade, Europe’s geopolitical landscape has changed dramatically. The changes involve, above all, the EU’s eastward enlargement and the accompanying shift in Russia’s position in Europe. With these momentous developments, the reinterpretation of history—particularly during the wartime and postwar periods—has come to be the focus of historical and political controversies across Europe. As the *Eurozine* editorial aptly put it, “Throughout Europe, history is ceasing to be something for historians alone. Instead, it is becoming both a public issue and an instrument of politics.”<sup>34</sup>

Why this sudden spike in the politicization of history? It would appear that the EU enlargement has undermined a historical consensus that used to exist within and among the Western European countries with regard to World War II and postwar experiences.<sup>35</sup> As some scholars have pointed out recently, three main narratives of war and dictatorship exist in regard to Europe: a Western European story, a Soviet/Russian story, and an Eastern European story. Interestingly, the first two are somewhat similar in that both tend to highlight the glorious victory over Nazi Germany, successful postwar reconstruction, and the long period of postwar peace and economic development. By contrast, Eastern Europeans were largely focusing not so much on “liberation” as on the dark years of Soviet occupation and dreaming of their eventual “return to Europe.”<sup>36</sup>

The leading Western historians of Eastern Europe, such as Norman Davies and Timothy Snyder, long argued that the West badly misunderstood the East European experience. “What seems to have happened is that western opinion was only gradually informed about the war in Eastern Europe over forty to fifty years and that the drip-feeding was insufficient to inspire radical adjustments to the overall conceptual framework,” Davies argued several years ago.<sup>37</sup> But it is precisely Eastern Europe’s devastating war experience that needs to be “recovered” and reintegrated into a European historical narrative. One has to remember that arguably the most awful acts of carnage and violence in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred in what Snyder calls the “bloodlands”: the territories of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> The sad irony, though, is that because after the war’s end these countries found themselves behind the Iron Curtain and under Stalinist rule, their histories were marginalized or expelled altogether from a general European account. This “postwar exorcism,” to use Michael Geyer’s term, was carried out through a particular organization of knowledge about Europe. The latter, neatly following the postwar division of Europe, was split into *national histories* of Western Europe and *area studies* for Eastern Europe. Thus, “historiographic elision” was firmly institutionalized.<sup>39</sup> Curiously, it appears to linger on, even more than twenty years after the Wall fell. As Snyder contends, “[E]ven as East Europeans gained the freedom to write and speak of their own histories as they chose after 1989 or 1991, and even as many East European countries acceded to the European Union in 2004 and 2007, their national histories have somehow failed to become accepted as European. Their histories have failed to flow into a larger European history that all, in East and West, can recognize as such.”<sup>40</sup>

But now the enlargement has made the accommodation of the Eastern European perspective inevitable—as a necessary precondition for the solidarity of the extended EU. Pushing aside “the other half” of European history runs the risk of undermining the project of Europeanizing national histories. Furthermore, “it thwarts an assessment of Europe as a whole.”<sup>41</sup>

But as Eastern Europeans are pushing for the reintegration of their disastrous war experience into a (pan-)European narrative, they rarely manage to resist the temptation to turn the reinterpretation of World War II into the key element of their countries’ politics of history. The reason behind this is simple. Most Eastern European nations now view the wartime and postwar period as a “useable past”—crucial for strengthening separate identity, giving a boost to populist nationalism, externalizing the Communist past, and casting their particular nation as a hapless victim of two bloodthirsty totalitarian dictatorships. The German historian Wilfried Jilge specifically points to the tendency of Eastern European intellectuals to construct what he terms the “national Holocausts” and thus confer on their nations a status of victim—and the perceived moral high ground that goes along with it. “From this position of moral superiority, the crimes of one’s own nation are justified as defensive actions,” writes Jilge in an article tellingly titled “The Competition of Victims”—the phrase he borrowed from the former Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski. “In this context,” Jilge goes on, “national stereotypes serve to distance ‘one’s own’ national history from ‘false’ Soviet history and thus to ‘cleanse’ ‘one’s own’ nation of everything that is Soviet.”<sup>42</sup>

This is yet another example of how Russia’s Eastern European neighbors, while reinterpreting their most dramatic 20<sup>th</sup> century experiences, are also reshaping their identities. They craft their historical narratives in such a way as to reposition themselves in Europe, seeking to strengthen their own sense of Europeanness and distinguish themselves from Russia, which is often cast as a non-European, Eurasian power—in a word,

as Europe's constitutive *Other*. This is, of course, a problematic historiographical strategy. A number of Eastern European intellectuals note that almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, the new ruling elites chose to base—in varying degrees and shapes—their ideological legitimization on the conservative counterrevolutionary tradition that was dominant in the region during the interwar period, as well as on the mythology of the “national resistance” whose multifarious forms also included the collaboration with Nazi Germany, perceived as a suitable ally in the struggle against “Russian Communism.” For this purpose, the Eastern European elites seek to (re)construct their countries' wartime histories as a story of the “national liberation struggle.” In these new historical narratives, says Tamas Krausz, one of the leading Hungarian specialists in Eastern European history, “Russia is made a scapegoat.” Another negative consequence of this historical reinterpretation, Krausz and other like-minded Eastern European intellectuals argue, is that it is being accompanied by the rehabilitation of the ethnic nationalist thinking.<sup>43</sup>

Some Russian policymakers and analysts have taken to accusing Russia's neighbors of a “perverse habit” of nurturing and cultivating their collective “complexes and syndromes” in order to charge Russia with “imperial ambitions” and present it as a hostile Other. What they ignore, however, is that those countries do have real and deeply ingrained syndromes that are being fed by what they see as Russia's reluctance to come to terms with its past. In his brilliant 1946 essay “The Misery of the Small East European Countries,” the outstanding Hungarian political thinker Istvan Bibo specifically noted a peculiar psychological trait common to all nations of the region. This common trait, he argued, is an existential fear of the ultimate destruction of a national entity born of the centuries of catastrophic experiences: foreign conquests, partitions by stronger neighbors, ruthlessly crushed revolutions, violently suppressed liberal reforms. This fear, Bibo tells us, was linked to the concrete policies of a number of great powers that used to throw their weight around Eastern Europe: Ottoman Turkey, Hapsburg Austria, Germany and Russia.<sup>44</sup> But while the first three have undergone profound transformations and have ceased to be perceived by the “small East European countries” as a threat, nervousness about Russia appears to persist.

I would argue that the Eastern Europeans' lingering wariness of Russia is directly linked to the present-day Russia's ambiguous international identity. On the one hand, Russia claims legitimacy in Europe as a post-Soviet *European* state; on the other, it presents itself as the legal continuation of the Soviet Union. The latter stance entails two important implications: Russia's claim to a status of great power with a sphere of “privileged interests,” and its reluctance to fully recognize Soviet/Stalinist crimes.

### **Russia's Predicament: Facing Up to the Difficult Past While Coming to Terms With the Great Loss**

There is no question that Russia is seriously affected by this new historiographic situation stemming from the confluence of the post-imperial controversies and the history debates born of the recent geopolitical changes in Europe. It should not then come as a surprise that Moscow responds, sometimes very harshly, to what it perceives as a challenge to its national interests. The latter are believed to be particularly gravely threatened by the “hostile interpretations” of World War II (or what is better known in Russia as the “Great Patriotic War”). My key point here is that, similar to its Eastern European neighbors, Moscow's conduct, too, can only be properly understood within the context of Russian

identity politics.<sup>45</sup> After all, what is at stake—as it is perceived by the Russian elites—in the ongoing history wars with the former Eastern Bloc satellites and ex-Soviet republics is no less than Russia's status as a "European nation."

So long as the erstwhile historical consensus remained intact, Russia's victory over Nazism legitimized its "great power" status in Europe and its sphere of influence in the eastern part of the continent. The new historical controversies over the nature of the Soviet "liberation" of Eastern Europe effectively undermine Russia's status as the "liberator of Europe" and erode whatever symbolic capital it might claim to prop up its "Europeanness." What we are witnessing is basically a "clash" of two very different notions of "liberation." In today's Europe (and, for that matter, the United States), the liberation of Europe in World War II is inseparably welded with the idea of democracy—the restoration of democratic order in that part Europe which was cleansed by the Western Allies of the "brown plague." Such interpretation presupposes that whatever the Soviet Union did in the eastern half of Europe that fell under Stalin's control could be called anything but "liberation."<sup>46</sup>

Nowhere was the Russian official narrative—and the identity based upon it—challenged so vigorously of late as at the 2009 Vilnius Conference on "European Histories."<sup>47</sup> Addressing the gathering, Valdas Adamkus, the outgoing president of Lithuania, reminded his audience that for Eastern Europeans, it is not just the defeat of Nazi Germany that comes to mind on May 8, 1945. "For Lithuania, like many other eastern European nations, May 8 of 1945 did not bring victory over violence, but simply change of oppressor," Adamkus has forcefully stated. "Once again, history was turned into the handmaiden of politics and ideology and thrust upon Lithuania and its people to cover up injustice and crime, distort facts, slander independence and freedom fighters." Yale historian Timothy Snyder would completely concur. Attacking in a 2005 article what he called a "common European narrative"—which is largely shared by Moscow—Snyder asserted that 1945 "means something entirely different in most of Eastern Europe—for most citizens of the states admitted to the Union in May 2004. For them, 1945 means a transition from one occupation to another; from Nazi rule to Soviet rule." Now, participating in the Vilnius gathering, Snyder offered his reinterpretation of Europe's tragic 20<sup>th</sup> century experience that, according to one observer, "in key respects threw into question the established historical consensus."<sup>48</sup>

Such treatment of the wartime and postwar developments is regarded in Moscow as a direct attack on Russia's image as a great *European* power—a status that the Kremlin leadership values highly. To get a better sense of the true extent of Moscow's wrath, one has to understand that 1945 represents the absolute pinnacle of Russia's geopolitical might: some scholars have argued that following its defeat in the Crimean war in 1856 and until the Soviet victory in WWII Russian power has been in a relative decline.<sup>49</sup> "Don't forget," Tony Judt reminded us,

that as seen from a historian's perspective, a historian of contemporary Europe, Stalin was in many ways the natural successor to Catherine the Great, and the tsars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, expanding into the Russian near west, and to the Russian southwest in particular—territories that Catherine began her expansion into, which have always been regarded as crucial by Russian strategists, both because of access to resources, access to warm water ports, and because it gives Russia a role in Europe, as well as in Asia.<sup>50</sup>

Just consider two plain historical facts: Russia was among the biggest losers in World War I, and saw its statehood crumbling and the borderlands seceding, while World War

II results confirmed at Yalta and Potsdam turned Russia (in the form of the Soviet Union) into the world's second superpower—a status that included Moscow's immense geopolitical clout in Europe. However, Russia's four-decades-long dominance over Eastern Europe was brought down in a series of “velvet revolutions” in 1989. As one pithy comment put it, “Russia was the main victor in WWII and the main loser in 1989.”<sup>51</sup>

But what is particularly important for my discussion here is that, unlike most of its Eastern European neighbors, the post-Soviet Russia has refused to view the EU as a norm-maker and is reluctant to accept its standards and values.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Russian leadership adamantly insists that its country is inherently European—as European as any other major European state. One cannot find a better expression of this attitude than a defiant passage in Vladimir Putin's 2005 Annual Address to the Federal Assembly. As if reiterating Catherine the Great's famous dictum, Putin forcefully asserted that “Above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power”:

Achieved through much suffering by European culture, the ideals of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy have for many centuries been our society's determining values. For three centuries, we—together with the other European nations—passed hand in hand through reforms of Enlightenment, the difficulties of emerging parliamentarianism, municipal and judiciary branches, and the establishment of similar legal systems ... I repeat we did this together, sometimes behind and sometimes ahead of European standards.<sup>53</sup>

Such a stance, naturally, implies that Europe should be held to *Russian* standards of Europeaness, too. So when Moscow castigates the “rehabilitation of fascism” in certain parts of Europe or lashes out at the “glorification of Nazi collaborators” in some Baltic states or in Ukraine, it claims it protects *European* values—the ones that the EU itself allegedly chose to ignore. Thus Russian leadership's jeremiads against the “inadmissible revision of WWII results” should be read as an element of its strategic ideological ambition to advance an alternative interpretation of what *Europe* means.<sup>54</sup>

There is also a very important domestic dimension of Russian leadership's struggle against the “revision of World War II history.” Here, a myth of the “Great Patriotic War” or, more precisely, a myth of the “great Victory” plays a pivotal role. Created in the 1960s, this myth—in which the memory of *war*, with all its unbearable everyday hardships, untold number of victims, millions of POWs, chaos of evacuation, etc., had been replaced by the memory of *victory*—was successfully exploited by the Soviet Communist rulers.<sup>55</sup> First, it provided an effective means of legitimization for the political power. Second, it was a powerful instrument of identity politics as it told an uplifting story of a “birth of the Soviet people in the crucible of the total war.”<sup>56</sup>

Since the Soviet collapse, however, both the rulers and the Russian public at large have found themselves in a tight spot: while the former were facing the crisis of legitimacy, the latter was experiencing the crisis of identity. The Yeltsin regime, particularly in its early years, sought to build both its legitimacy and Russian identity on the idea of “democratization” and “joining the civilized world.” During the Putin “fat decade” of energy revenues' windfall, the cornerstone of legitimacy and identity building was seemingly apolitical—the *narod* was encouraged to “get rich” and swap political freedoms for the unbridled freedom to consume. Yet by the mid-1990s, one could perceive a gradual return to the concept of Great Russia—a country that remains a great power throughout all the trials and tribulations of its turbulent history. This image inevitably entails an evocation of epic struggles with powerful

and perfidious foes from which Russia would emerge triumphant under the stern leadership of strong and benevolent rulers. In this sense, the officially peddled myth of the “great Victory” becomes an indispensable tool for the reconstruction of Russian identity.

The official commemoration of the “Great Patriotic War” also appears to be the sole ideological mechanism that can be employed to foster Russia’s social cohesion. According to Carnegie Moscow Center analyst Nikolai Petrov, “There is absolutely nothing else in the whole of Russian history that can be used to unite the nation.”<sup>57</sup> Petrov’s remark is significant in that it reveals what arguably constitutes Russia’s most formidable “historiographical” problem—namely, the lack of even a minimal consensus within the Russian society as to the interpretation of the country’s turbulent past, following the century of violent political upheavals. To achieve a healthy degree of cohesion, within any society there should be a certain public agreement as to the basic values system upon which rests the whole edifice of historical memory of the given society. After all, any “memorial construct” is a system of values; the “memory as such” simply does not exist. As the Russians fail to agree on how to treat the most significant episodes of their country’s past, the “victory myth” is being used by the ruling elites as a kind of “social glue.”<sup>58</sup>

Treating the “Great Patriotic War” as a “usable past” also fits into a broader strategy of “normalizing” Soviet history which has been vigorously pursued under Putin. “Normalization” of the Soviet past as a “part of our glorious thousand year old history” contributes to the revived ideology of statism as a perennial source of Russian identity.<sup>59</sup>

Integrating the Stalin period into a greater Russian story is not just an elite project—the polls demonstrate that it is generally supported by the masses. For the West in general and Russia’s Eastern European neighbors in particular, the process appears both puzzling and menacing; increasingly, there is talk about Moscow’s backlash and imperial comeback. There is, however, a compelling psychological reason for the rise of such public attitudes, and some more astute commentators contended that a backlash in one form or another was inevitable. One has to understand, notes Judt, that for the majority of Russians, the demise of the Soviet Union involved the loss of not just territory and status but also of a *history* that they could live with. “Everything has been unraveled before their eyes,” says he, adding that any other nation would have been morally devastated by such an experience.

If this had happened to Americans, or Brits, it would have been culturally catastrophic; to lose the equivalent of, say Texas and California, to be told that all the founding fathers right down to FDR were a bunch of criminals, to discover that you are regarded as on the par with Hitler, in terms of the accepted description of 20<sup>th</sup>-century evils that we have since overcome.<sup>60</sup>

No wonder, then, that the “trope of loss,” as Serguei Oushakine demonstrates so well in his *The Patriotism of Despair*, has become the most effective and widely used symbolic device which Russians employ to make sense of their Soviet experience in the post-Soviet context.<sup>61</sup>

There is, of course, a vexed question about the interrelation between the glory of the “Great Patriotic War” and the horrors of Stalinist terror.<sup>62</sup> Some liberal Russian scholars have skillfully demonstrated how the memory of the war is being (ab)used to construct a kind of “blocking myth” in order to suppress the memories of the totalitarian regime’s terror, of the Gulag and other crimes of the period. If the atrocities perpetrated by the Soviet regime do occasionally pop up in the official narrative, they are presented as some insignificant episode in the otherwise heroic and glorious Soviet history.<sup>63</sup> But one also must

bear in mind the existence of significant differences in the ways the trauma of the Soviet collapse affected public perceptions and memories of Russians and those of their neighbors in Eastern Europe: “In Russia itself, the disintegration of the USSR was linked much more closely with the painful immediacy of everyday survival than with archived horrors of the Great Terror... The need to equate the Soviet Union with the Stalinist regime, which was so crucial for many Western [and East European] commentators, was less obvious in the midst of [Russia’s] post-Soviet changes.”<sup>64</sup>

And yet, the ambiguity of a Russian official position, rooted in the inability of making a comprehensive and honest assessment of the nature of the Soviet regime, makes it extremely difficult for Moscow to approach the crucial issue of responsibility that appears to be at the heart of history wars in the post-Soviet space.

### **Warring Histories and the Question of Responsibility**

Remarkably, while arguing for the need to craft Russian “historical doctrine,” the lawmaker Kosachev has correctly defined the core reason of Russia’s current predicament: it lies, he notes, in the simple fact that the present-day Russia is a legal successor to the Soviet Union. He also notes, again correctly, that this legal continuity involves both positive and negative implications. But then, when he spells out the key points of his “historical doctrine,” he takes on a markedly contradictory stance. Russia, Kosachev suggests, can carry on as the USSR’s successor state but is not responsible—politically, morally, financially or otherwise—for any criminal acts committed by the Soviet regime.

But this stance is untenable. As some leading scholars (such as, for instance, Andrei Zubov) have long pointed out, the issue of legal continuity is the crux of the matter and this is exactly what differentiates Russia from all other countries of Eastern Europe.<sup>65</sup> While in 1991 Russia chose to become, in legal terms, the continuation of the USSR, all ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe (including some former Soviet republics) opted to reestablish historical continuity with their pre-communist state entities. Thus, if today’s Russia is a direct successor of the Soviet state—the fact all Russia’s ruling bodies willingly accept—then it bears full responsibility for the actions and crimes committed by the Soviet regime against both its own people and foreign citizens throughout that regime’s entire history.

The correlation between Russia’s legal continuity and historical responsibility remains a hotly contested issue even within the liberal segment of Russia’s scholarly community. As Valery Tishkov, Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences, has passionately argued recently, “Russia’s being a legal successor [to the USSR] in terms of external debt, property abroad or international agreements does not mean that, say, my relatives from the Urals who were victims of Stalinist repressions and I as their descendant bear responsibility for the grave errors or criminal policies pursued by the Soviet ruling clique that to a significant extent consisted of the migrants from Georgia and Ukraine.” Yet Tishkov does agree that the “problem of [Russia’s] historical responsibility in all its aspects merits a new discussion.”<sup>66</sup> However, within the Russian liberal milieu there is a more subtle and nuanced understanding of responsibility than the one suggested by Tishkov. The proponents of this understanding talk not so much of “historical guilt” as of the “civic responsibility for the country’s past.” This means that contemporary Russians are not literally “guilty” of the crimes committed during the Soviet rule, but that they have accepted the inheritance and, along with it, all its debts.

Without this moral act, the argument proceeds, any civic responsibility for the present and the future is simply unthinkable.<sup>67</sup> The unwillingness of official Moscow to even discuss this issue—which Kosachev’s proposal unambiguously declares—will only raise the suspicions among Russia’s neighbors.

Yet even more important, of course, is the issue of Russia’s own identity. Back in 1991, Russia, too, had two options: to reestablish legal continuity with the 1917 pre-revolutionary Russia or to choose to become a legal successor to the USSR. The choice, as is well known, was made in favor of the second option. Although some commentators hold that “it is unlikely that those who took this decision really understood the consequences,”<sup>68</sup> Boris Yeltsin appeared to have understood (if only post factum) the difference between the two options as well as the possible implications. In his memoirs, having explained the reasons for the actual choice that the Russian leadership made at the time, he then mused about what might have happened had the Russian Federation chosen to become a successor to the pre-revolutionary Russia: “Now I think to myself, what kind of Russia would we be living in had we chosen another path, if we had revived the legal succession of pre-Soviet Russia—the Russia that the Bolsheviks destroyed in 1917.” Russia, Yeltsin suggested, would have become a different country, living according to different set of laws that would give priority to personality and not to the state: “We could have lived according to completely different rules—not by the Soviet principles of class struggle ... but by laws and principles that respect individual rights.” “It would have been a bold step to admit our historical mistakes and restore the country’s historical succession,” Yeltsin asserted and then added, tellingly: “The outside world would have treated us differently too.”<sup>69</sup>

Russia’s first president was right on the mark. Nothing undermines trust and sours the relations between Russia and its neighbors more than the reluctance of Russian policy elite to fully come to terms with the Soviet past, recognize the crimes of Stalinist regime and acknowledge all the wrongs it did both to Russian people and the other peoples of the former USSR and Eastern Europe. Kosachev and other Russian politicians argue that the Kremlin leadership has already condemned Stalinism and, besides, Russia is one of its many victims. Indeed, certain liberal-minded segments of Russia’s political leadership who are interested in the strengthening of their country’s ties with the West seem to have embarked on their own, as yet rather feeble, de-Stalinization campaign.<sup>70</sup> In an apparent attempt to politically mend fences with Poland, the Russian Duma officially recognized that the Katyn Massacre—the execution in 1940 of about 22,000 Poles by the Soviet security police—was committed on direct order by Stalin and other Soviet leaders. Prior to this unprecedented statement, the Polish film “Katyn” was shown on Russian television, and President Dmitry Medvedev, on his visit to Warsaw last September, awarded the Order of Friendship to Andrzej Wajda, the film’s celebrated director.<sup>71</sup>

But these declarations are definitely not enough. Russian human rights activists have long asserted that in Russia, the memory of Stalinism is invariably a memory of *victims* but not of the committed *crime*. Twenty years after the end of Communist rule, there isn’t even one legislative act in which the state terror would be unequivocally characterized as crime.<sup>72</sup> Nowhere is it stated that the extra-judicial bodies created during the Soviet period were a bad thing: since they were formed on the orders of the supreme organs of the Soviet power, they are deemed to be perfectly legal. As a result, Russia finds itself in a vicious circle. Without the legal assessment of the crimes committed by the Soviet regime it is

impossible to advance public education based on the liberal values, but the present-day Russian authorities are reluctant to pass a legal judgment on the Stalinist misdeeds.<sup>73</sup>

Some more enlightened members of the Russian elite, however, appear to clearly see where the problem lies. It is rooted, the chairman of Russia's influential Council on Foreign and Defense Policy Sergei Karaganov states bluntly, in "the legacy of Soviet socialism"—that is, "Stalinism" and its consequences. In his recent essay published in the government newspaper under the telltale title "A Russian Katyn," Karaganov argues that, so far, Russians "have not found in themselves the strength to recognize that *all Russia is one large Katyn*" filled with "the nameless graves of millions of victims of the regime" that ruled over the Soviet Union for most of the last century.<sup>74</sup> "Over the past year," Karaganov noted,

both the president and prime minister have condemned Stalinism. And all the same, we have not dared to fully reject its inheritance, to repent for the outrages committed by us and our ancestors over ourselves and our own people. ...Without bowing before the victims of Stalinism and without recognizing the guilt of their own country before them, we will remain inheritors only of another part of our people—their executioners, guards, and snitches, of those who voluntarily de-kulakized [the country] and destroyed the churches.<sup>75</sup>

Remarkably, Karaganov has made a direct link between Russia's inability to face up to its "dark past" and the country's international image: "The anti-Russian sentiment is strong also because we ourselves are unable to part with the worst in our history." This is what Russia's liberal scholars and rights activists have been arguing for years. But such a statement, coming from a person of Karaganov's stature and appearing in a government daily, becomes significant.<sup>76</sup> It appears to indicate that, although in today's Russia there is no open and nation-wide discussion of the country's unpalatable past comparable to the famous *Historikerstreit* in Germany in the 1980s,<sup>77</sup> the acute struggle over the interpretation of history does take place even within the establishment. This largely internal struggle accounts for the seemingly contradictory moves that the Russian authorities are making. Notably, President Medvedev who signed the infamous decree on the creation of the "commission against falsifications of history," appointed last October Mikhail Fedotov, previously head of Russia's liberal-leaning Union of Journalists, the Kremlin's top human rights advisor. Upon his appointment, Fedotov wasted no time to declare his sweeping de-Stalinization agenda. Russia has no future, he argued, unless it can overcome its totalitarian mindset and understand the full scale of Stalin's repressions. He further contended that Russia's Soviet legacy was inextricably linked with its main problems such as corruption and lack of press freedom. He also announced that he would soon present Medvedev with a package of proposals to eradicate "totalitarian thinking."<sup>78</sup> This was apparently done at the meeting of the Council on Civil Society and Human Rights in Yekaterinburg on February 1, 2011, which was attended by President Medvedev. There a group of liberal intellectuals headed by Karaganov and Arseny Roginsky, head of Memorial, announced the launch of an ambitious project titled "On the Perpetuation of the Memory of the Victims of the Totalitarian Regime and on National Reconciliation." This project, which should become a "mass movement for restoring historical memory and justice," is aimed at no less than the radical transformation of the consciousness of both Russian society and the Russian elite.

Remarkably, what is at stake, according to the project's leaders, is the (re)creation of a *new Russian identity*, without which, they contend, "progress will be impossible."<sup>79</sup> The direct link that is made between de-Stalinization and the forging of Russia's new post-Soviet identity is instructive. Drawing on the German postwar lessons, liberal-minded Russian intellectuals and political thinkers argue that, like the de-Nazification and the campaign of the collective guilt in Germany following the Nazi era, the ideology and politics of de-Stalinization should become an instrument of the thorough reforming of Russia's political and social system. For Russia, this de-Stalinization agenda is both urgent and strategic as it should constitute, according to one comment, an important aspect of the country's "new identity, new 'national idea,' if you wish."<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, a new social norm should take root that would reject excessive violence and the primacy of the state interests over those of the individual and instead uphold the principles of tolerance, compromise, and societal dialogue. As a result, Russia's entire political culture will have been transformed. It would appear, though, that Russia is in for a long haul. The country's elites seem to be divided over the kind of identity they wish for Russia: either that of a *derzhava* that bosses around in its geopolitical backyard or that of a law-governed European state in peace with its neighbors. Thus Russia's contradictory "politics of history" is likely to continue. If anything, President Medvedev, judging by his remarks at the Yekaterinburg meeting of the Human Rights Council, was not terribly impressed by the proposals advanced by a group of Russian liberal thinkers. He reiterated that both he as president and Russian parliament have already made political statements with regard to Stalinist period and its crimes, while it is up to the courts to pass any legal ruling in these matters. So it's unclear, he argued, what else could be done here.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, Russian public attitudes also indicate that there is an uphill struggle ahead. According to the 2009 survey of the Levada Center, Russia's well-respected independent pollster, around 49 percent of Russians believe that Stalin played a largely positive role in the country's history, while only 33 percent hold that he was a negative historical figure.<sup>82</sup> In a sense, suggests the liberal political analyst Kirill Rogov, Russia "finds itself in a situation similar to the one that West Germany experienced in the beginning of the 1950s, when seven years after the destruction of Hitler's Third Reich and the actual completion of de-Nazification campaign it turned out that Nazism had remained part of the national political consciousness, and one third of Germans were ready to justify it one way or the other."<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

Is it realistic to believe that post-Soviet states will ever do without politics of history and that the memory wars between them will eventually end? I would begin discussion of this question by suggesting that while national images of the past will never fully coincide, it appears feasible to reach some reconciliation between them and thus avoid creating negative identities. Such reconciliation can be achieved in the course of a broad and mutually respectful dialogue between national memories and historical narratives. All the participants of this dialogue would agree that while national memories are not congruent and historical narratives might diverge, one's image of the past could only be enriched through the knowledge of alternative interpretations.

Such dialogue, however, will only be possible if three formidable obstacles are overcome. The most important obstacle is authoritarian political culture. As Karl Schlögel argues,

“Authoritarian conditions are hostile to memory. A mature historical culture and a civil culture belong together.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, scholars have noted the close correlation between regime type and the degree of regime’s reliance on historical myths.<sup>85</sup> True, all regimes resort to and rely on myth-making. But in liberal democracies, political legitimacy is much less dependent on the unifying historical narrative that would foster compliance with government policies than it is in authoritarian regimes. Genuine democracies are thus much more tolerant of dissent, controversy, competing ideas and can afford the luxury of treating history that challenges habitual assumptions with relative equanimity. This trait, in the words of the eminent British historian Michael Howard, is a mark of maturity. By contrast, authoritarian leaders prefer to feed their subjects with what Howard calls “nursery history.” In his view, “[A] good definition of the difference between a Western liberal society and a totalitarian one—whether it is Communist, Fascist, or Catholic authoritarian—is that in the former the government treats its citizens as responsible adults and in the latter it cannot.”<sup>86</sup>

The second problem is the widespread perceptions that mass publics hold about what history actually is. Sociological surveys demonstrate that in most post-Soviet states, people are largely unaware of one fundamental thing—that studying history is a complex and continuous process in the course of which what used to be perceived as “historical truth” can (and should) be refuted as new evidence emerge or new interpretations are advanced. According to the recent data provided by VTsIOM, a Russian pollster, 60 percent of the respondents hold that history should not be revised, that past events should be studied in such a way which would exclude “repeat research” leading to new approaches and interpretations. Only 31 percent of those polled believe that the study of history is a continuous and open-ended process. Furthermore, 79 percent spoke in favor of using one single textbook when teaching history course in schools—lest the young minds get confused by alternative interpretations. Symptomatically, 78 percent supported the creation of the presidential commission charged with fighting “falsification of history,” and 60 percent said the passing of a “memory law” criminalizing the “revision of WWII results” would be a good thing. Ironically, when 61 percent of Russians say that “national interpretations” of the past are inadmissible, they appear to be oblivious of the fact that their own interpretation is no less “national.”<sup>87</sup>

This picture of public attitudes should correct an oversimplified perception of symbolic politics in the post-Soviet lands as basically a one-way street whereby the discourse that serves the interests of ruling elites is being imposed upon society. In more ways than one, the prevalent attitudes toward history and memory demonstrate the meeting of the minds between the rulers and the ruled in Eurasia.

It would appear that these attitudes can be changed only slowly through the changes in the way national histories are written in Russia and other ex-Soviet republics. And this is the third big problem that needs to be tackled. It would be naïve to believe that national governments (or die-hard nationalists, for that matter) will one day stop regarding (and exploiting) historical narrative as a useful means of nationalist mobilization. After all, common history is what holds the imagined community together. So an ethnic-centric, “nationalized” history is likely to persist. But what is needed, assert some leading historians, is to supplement a traditional national narrative by *multiethnic* or, better still, *transnational* approach. “Transnational” or “transcultural” history, argues Andreas Kappeler, would be based on “multiperspectivity and comparison, investigate interactions, communications and overlapping phenomena and entanglements between states, nations, societies, economies, regions, and cultures.”<sup>88</sup>

These new approaches would probably still not help overcome the divide between memories in the post-Soviet world. But as I have stated above, there is no need to try bridging the gap between national memories. This goal is unattainable. The objective to be pursued is much more modest: to promote understanding of other perspectives and interpretations.

#### NOTES

1. Aleksandr Kustaryov, "Skazhi mne, chto ty pommish," *Neprikosnovenny zapas* 64, no. 2 (2009).

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4. For a discussion of history politics in Russia and in some of the ex-Communist states, see Alexei Miller, "Istoriya imperiy i politika pamyati," *Rossiya v global'noi politike* 6, no. 4 (2008); "Istoricheskaya politika' v Vostochnoi Evrope: plody vovlechenogo nablyudeniya," *Polit.ru*, May 7, 2008, available at [http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2008/05/07/miller\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2008/05/07/miller_print.html); "Istoricheskaya politika: update," *Polit.ru*, November 5, 2009, available at [http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2009/11/05/istpolit\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2009/11/05/istpolit_print.html); and Mikhail Logvinov, "Istoricheskaya politika na postsovetskom prostranstve, ili: Na vostochnom fronte bez peremen," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropskoj istorii i kul'tury*, no. 1 (2009), available at <http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/inhaltruss11.html>. See also four thematic publications: *Russian Analytical Digest* ("History Writing and National Myth-Making in Russia"), no. 72, February 9, 2010; *Pro et Contra* 13 ("Politics of History"), no. 3-4 (2009); *Evropa: Zhurnal Pol'skogo instituta mezhdunarodnykh del* 9 ("Trudnoe nasledie proshlogo: Rossiya v poiskakh istoricheskoi pravdy"), no. 2 (2009); and *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 8 ("Writing National Histories: Coming to Terms with the Past"), July 17, 2009.

5. See the text of the Russian President's decree No. 549, "O Komissii pri Prezidente Rossiyskoi Federatsii po protivodeistviyu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v ushcherb interesam Rossii," at <http://graph.document.kremlin.ru/page.aspx?1;1013526>. The new "history commission" consists of representatives from various government ministries (including the Defense Ministry, the FSB and its foreign intelligence counterpart, the SVR), the State Duma, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and "public organizations," but includes only three professional historians.

6. For a comprehensive discussion of the attempts to pass a "memory law" in Russia see Nikolai Koposov, "Istoriya i pravosudie: Kak istoricheskaya politika pytaetsya prikryt'sya Nyurnbergom," *Polit.ru*, April 26, 2010, available at [http://www.polit.ru/institutes/2010/04/26/koposov\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/institutes/2010/04/26/koposov_print.html) (accessed May 23, 2011).

7. Irina Granik et al., "Rossii garantirovano proshloe," *Kommersant*, May 20, 2009.

8. The Politics of History and Its Variations in Post-Socialist Countries, Seminar in Kazan, March 5-6, 2010.

9. Georgiy Kasyanov, "'Komissiya Medvedeva': Vzgliad s Ukrainy," *Evropa: Zhurnal Pol'skogo instituta mezhdunarodnykh del* 9, no. 2 (2009): 23.

10. Ian Rachinsky, "Istoriya kak pole boya," *Evropa: Zhurnal Pol'skogo instituta mezhdunarodnykh del* 9, no. 2 (2009): 47.
11. Timothy Snyder, "Introduction," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 4.
12. Sarah J. Purcell, "War, Memory and National Identity in the Twentieth Century," *National Identities* 2, no. 2 (2000): 188-189. For a detailed discussion of the interrelation between history and identity see Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), particularly Chapter 4, "History and Identity," 53-78.
13. See, for example, Gundega Michel and Valters Nollendorfs, "Das Lettische Okkupationsmuseum, Riga" in D. Ruge, ed., *Der Kommunismus im Museum* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2005); Valters Nollendorfs, *Museum of the Occupation of Latvia* (Riga: Strelnieku laukums, 2002).
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16. "Eurozine Conference Held in Vilnius," *Eurozine*, May 20, 2009, available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-05-20-summary-en.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).
17. See "European Parliament resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism," available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090401IPR53245+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (accessed May 23, 2011).
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23. See Rawi Abdelal, "Memories of Nations and States: Institutional History and National Identity in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002); Taras Kuzio, "History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 2 (2002); "Nation Building, History Writing and Competition over the Legacy of Kyiv Rus in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 33, no. 1 (2005); and Kataryna Wolczuk, "History, Europe and the 'National Idea': The 'Official' Narrative of National Identity in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 28, no. 4 (2000).
24. Friedman, "The Past in the Future," 837.
25. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993): 244.
26. Friedman, "The Past in the Future," 854.
27. See Roman Szporluk, "From an Imperial Periphery to a Sovereign State," *Daedalus* 126, no. 3 (1997).
28. *Osveshchenie obshchei istoriy Rossiy i narodov postsovetkikh stran v shkol'nykh uchebnykh istoriy novykh nezavisimyykh gosudarstv* (Moscow, 2009): 5, 12. For their part, authors of

Russian history textbooks often seek to depict Russia as a homogeneous civilization that leads to the biased representation of certain non-Russian ethnic communities. See Victor Shnirelman, "Stigmatized by History or by Historians? The Peoples of Russia in School History Textbooks," *History and Memory* 21, no. 2 (2009); and "Rossiyskaya shkola i natsional'naya ideya," *Neprikosnovenny Zapas* 6 (50) (2006).

29. See *Shkil'na istoriya ochyma istoriykiv-naukovtsiv: Materialy Robochoi narady z monitoryngu shkil'nykh pidruchnykiv istoriy Ukrainy / Uporyadkuvannya ta redaktsiya Natali Yakovenko* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo imeni Oleny Telihy, 2008); and Natalya Yakovenko, "Kontseptsiya novogo uchebnika ukrainskoi istoriy," *Polit.ru*, March 18, 2010, available at [http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2010/03/18/uchebniki\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2010/03/18/uchebniki_print.html). To get a sense of how heated the public debate over the concept of school history textbook in Ukraine is, see the polemic between Yakovenko and Prof. Yuri Mytsyk: Yuri Mytsyk, "Novoe ili podzabytoe staroe," *Zerkalo nedeli*, February 7-13, 2009; and Natalya Yakovenko, "Likbez dlya professora," *Zerkalo nedeli*, March 7-13, 2009.

30. Aleksandra Samarina, "Istoriya umolchaniya," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 2, 2009.

31. Aleksandr Karavayev, "'Novy istoricheskiy mif' i konflikty interpretatsiy," *PROGNOSIS.ru*, June 29, 2007, available at <http://www.prognosis.ru/news/nacional/2007/6/29/histiry.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).

32. Georgiy Kasyanov, "Natsionalizatsiya istoriy ta obraz Inshoho," *Krytyka*, no. 1-2 (2006).

33. The vigor of the German debate on the country's terrible past is as yet unimaginable in today's Russia. The latest example of the frank process of national self-scrutiny in Germany is the exhibition "Hitler and the Germans: Nation and Crime" that opened in the German Historical Museum in October 2010. The show, the first to focus on Hitler since 1945, explores the sensitive issue of how the German society nurtured and empowered the Nazi dictator. See Michael Slackman, "Hitler Exhibit Explores a Wider Circle of Guilt," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2010; and Chloe E. M. Paver, "Exhibiting the National Socialist Past: An Overview of Recent German Exhibitions," *Journal of European Studies* 39, no. 2 (2009). One should not forget, though, that it took the Germans at least 20 years to start debating the Nazi past in earnest. See, for example, Hans Mommsen, "Changing Historical Perspectives of the Nazi Dictatorship," *European Review*, 17, no. 1 (2009); and Wulf Kansteiner, "Losing the War, Winning the Memory Battle: The Legacy of Nazism, World War II, and the Holocaust in the Federal Republic of Germany," in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

34. "European Histories: Toward a Grand Narrative," *Eurozine*, May 3, 2005, available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-eurozine-en.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).

35. For a very comprehensive analysis of the memories of World War II, as well as of the postwar politics of memory in Europe, see Lebow et al., *The Politics of Memory*; and Mikhail Gabovich, ed., *Pamyat' o voine 60 let spustya: Rossiya, Germaniya, Evropa* (Moscow: NLO, 2005).

36. Timothy Snyder, "The Historical Reality of Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 1 (February 2009): 11.

37. Norman Davies, "Russia, the Missing Link," *The Sunday Times*, May 1, 2005. Quoted in Martin Evans, "Memories, Monuments, Histories: The Re-thinking of the Second World War since 1989," *National Identities* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 331. See also Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

38. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Tony Judt, the author of the well-received *Postwar* (2005), has persuasively argued that "those [states] which suffered the worst in World War II in Europe were the states that ended up under the Soviet Union; East Central Europe had a much worse war than Western Europe—more people killed, more damage, more destruction, more collapse of structures, etc." See "Interview with Historian Tony Judt," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 1, 2009.

39. Michael Geyer, "Historical Fictions of Autonomy and the Europeanization of National History," *Central European History* 22, no. 3-4 (September 1989): 331.

40. Snyder, "The Historical Reality," 11.

41. Geyer, "Historical Fictions," 334. The British historian Timothy Garton Ash concurs, pointing to the lingering gap between the historical narratives in Europe's west and east. "I do think that in

our schools,” says Garton Ash, “we should have history books which tell us the horrors of Nazism and the horrors of communism. And that absolutely isn’t happening at the moment across Europe. We have very different historical stories...” See Ahto Lobjakas, “For Timothy Garton Ash, Europe Means Shared History,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 7, 2009.

42. Wilfried Jilge, “Zmahannya zhertv,” *Krytyka*, no. 5 (2006).

43. See Tamas Krausz, “Etnos, natsiya i istoriya,” *Strategiya Rossiy*, no. 7 (2010).

44. Istvan Bibo, “O bedstvuyakh i ubozhestve malykh vostochnoevropeskikh gosudarstv,” in Istvan Bibo, *O smysle evropeiskogo razvitiya i drugie raboty* (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2004): 155-262.

45. A similar approach is pursued in Viacheslav Morozov, “Protecting ‘Our’ History: Politics, Memory, and the Russian State,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 64* (2009); Andrei Makarychev, “Pamyat’, simulyakry i ‘bor’ba s fal’sifikatorami,” Eurasianhome.org, June 17, 2009, available at <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=ru&nic=expert&pid=2049&qmonth=06&qyear=2009>; and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “The Geopolitics of Memory,” *Eurozine*, May 2007, available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-05-10-zhurzhenko-en.html>.

46. What had actually happened “on the ground” was, of course, much less neat than the stark dichotomy of the “Western liberation” and the “Soviet suppression” that is currently being advanced by many Western policymakers and ideologues. In Eastern Europe, for more than half a century, “Yalta” has become a grim symbol of betrayal with the Western allies being perceived as accomplices in Stalin’s expansion and, in Milan Kundera’s words, the ensuing “tragedy of Central Europe.” Eastern Europeans have a point. After all, John Kenneth Galbraith, then a top official in the U.S. Office of Price Administration, who appeared to consider the Soviet Union a compelling social experiment, suggested that “Russia should be permitted to absorb Poland, the Balkans, and the whole of Eastern Europe in order to spread the benefits of Communism.” For his part, George Kennan, at the time a counselor of the American embassy in Moscow, privately advised Charles Bohlen, Roosevelt’s interpreter and adviser on Soviet affairs in Yalta, to “divide Europe frankly into spheres of influence—keep ourselves out of the Russian sphere and the Russians out of ours.” Ultimately, it was Realpolitik and not the lofty ideals of freedom that defined the contours of post-war Europe. See Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); S. M. Plokhyy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010); Alonzo L. Hamby, “Endgame: How the Big Three Concluded the Good War,” *Weekly Standard* 16, no. 1 (2010).

47. The Vilnius Conference was preceded by a conference in Tallinn, Estonia, held in January 2008 and called “United Europe, United History.” The conference’s very title presupposed that the continent’s unity depends on elaborating a common view on “European history,” particularly on the history of World War II and its aftermath.

48. See “Eurozine Conference;” Timothy Snyder, “Balancing the Books,” *Eurozine*, May 3, 2005, available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-snyder-en.html>. To be sure, not everyone in Europe shares Snyder’s “revisionist” approach towards the analysis of the causes and consequences of World War II. Some scholars argue that Snyder’s thesis of the Nazi-Soviet equivalence and of a “double genocide” blurs the undeniable fact that ultimately it was Nazi Germany and not the Soviet Union which was responsible for the outbreak of World War II and the ensuing carnage. The critics also assert that Snyder unwittingly helps the far right politicians in the Baltic region (and in some other “new accession” states in the eastern half of the EU) to pursue their “politics of history” fueled by anti-Russianism and the desire to exculpate the region’s Nazi collaborators and participants in the Holocaust. See Efraim Zuroff, “A Dangerous Nazi-Soviet Equivalence,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2010; and Dovid Katz, “Why Red Is Not Brown in the Baltics,” *The Guardian*, October 1, 2010.

49. See Winfried Baumgart, *Der Friede von Paris: Studien zum Verhältnis von Kriegsführung, Politik und Friedensbewahrung* (München, 1972). This thesis is also discussed in Leonid Luks, “Predchuvstvie zakata Evropy i strakh pered Rossiei,” *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeskoï istoriy i kul’tury*, no. 1 (2005), <http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/inhaltruss3.html>.

50. “Interview with Historian Tony Judt.”

51. “European Histories.”

52. Hiski Haukkala, "A Norm-Maker or a Norm-Taker? The Changing Normative Parameters of Russia's Place in Europe" in Ted Hopf, ed., *Russia's European Choice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

53. Vladimir Putin, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, The Kremlin, Moscow, April 25, 2005, available at [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml) (accessed May 23, 2011).

54. For a discussion of this issue, see Richard Sakwa, "Russia and Turkey: Rethinking Europe to Contest Outsider Status," *Russie.NEI.Visions*, no. 51 (May 2010), available at [http://www.ifri.org/?page=contribution-detail&id=6065&id\\_provenance=97](http://www.ifri.org/?page=contribution-detail&id=6065&id_provenance=97) (accessed May 23, 2011).

55. See Thomas C. Wolfe, "Past as Present, Myth, or History? Discourses of Time and the Great Fatherland War," in Lebow et al., *The Politics of Memory*; and Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). A useful work based on the analysis of personal accounts is Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: The Red Army 1939-45* (London: Faber, 2005).

56. In fact, Geoffrey Hosking argues that during the war period the Soviets nearly succeeded in forging a new identity—a notion of (Soviet) "nationness" based on the feeling of Russianness that is held by most Russians and non-Russians alike: "We may say that during 1941-1945 "Russianness" crystallized in that way, as an ethnic amalgam, a blend of *russki*, *rossiiski*, and Soviet elements. In 1945 the USSR was closer to being a compound neo-*rossiiski* nation-state than ever before—or, as it turned out, ever after." "[T]he *russkii* and *rossiiski* had largely coalesced and this coalescence took the form of the *sovetskii*. . . . People from all nationalities. . . saw that legitimacy [of a Soviet state] as grounded in the recent victory, in the USSR's super power status, and in the momentous project of building Communism, not just for the Soviet peoples, but ultimately for the exploited and oppressed of the whole world." See Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press, 2006): 210, 226. For a more general discussion on how warfare contributes to the creation of the nation as a "sacred community of sacrifice," see John Hutchinson, "Warfare and the Sacralisation of Nations: The Meanings, Rituals and Politics of National Remembrance," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 2 (2009).

57. Roland Oliphant, "No Doubt Allowed," *Russia Profile*, May 21, 2009.

58. The best-selling British military historian and author of *Stalingrad*, Antony Beevor, recently recalled how he was reprimanded by the top Russian official for what was perceived as the "blackening" of Russia's victory in Beevor's latest volume, *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. Beevor's recounting of the mass rapes committed by the Red Army in Germany sparked controversy in Russia. "As the Russian ambassador pointed out to me," Beevor told the *Financial Times*, "'You've got to understand -- the victory [over Germany] is sacred.'" See York Membery, "In the War Room," *Financial Times*, February 12-13, 2011.

59. As Thomas Sherlock has perceptively noted, under Putin, a new "forceful narrative" was being constructed "whose central theme was the organic connection among the tsarist, communist, and postcommunist periods, with the Russian state as the unifying element." See Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 161.

60. "Interview with Historian Tony Judt."

61. Serguei Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009). As Vladimir Putin famously stated, "We should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama." (See Putin's 2005 Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation at [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml)) Thus, "it was the shared memory of loss, along with the firsthand experience of living through the *bespredel* of the 1990s," argues Oushakine, "that ensured the widespread positive reception of this revitalized patriotism in postmillenarian Russia." See Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair*, 7.

62. The problem of reconciling "Stalin the Victor" and "Stalin the Villain" appears not to be unique to Russia. Recent historical scholarship in Great Britain, for example, raises the issue of the uncomfortable co-existence of "two Churchills:" the one who led Britain through its finest hour

and the other one who was hell-bent on preserving a raw white supremacy throughout the British Empire—even at the cost of establishing a concentration camp network of his own. For a learned and well documented discussion of this issue, see Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010).

63. See Dina Khapaeva, “Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009); *Goticheskoe obshchestvo: Morfologiya koshmara* (Moscow: NLO, 2007); idem, “Goticheskoe obshchestvo,” *Kriticheskaya massa*, no.1 (2006). See critique of Khapaeva's discussion in: Mikhail Gabovich, “Kollektivnaya pamyat' i individual'naya otvetstvennost': Zametki po povodu stat'i Diny Khapaevoi,” *Neprikosnovenny zapas*, no. 6 (50) (2006).

64. Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair*, 80.

65. See Andrei Zubov, “It Is Time to Declare the Soviet Union Illegal,” *The Moscow Times*, 27 July 2010; idem, “Vostochnoevropeiskiy i postsovetiskiy puti vozvrashcheniya k plyuralisticheskoi gosudarstvennosti,” *Polit.ru*, October 8, 2009, available at [http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2009/10/08/zubov\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2009/10/08/zubov_print.html) (accessed May 23, 2011).

66. Valery Tishkov, “Istoriya i istoriki: vlast' stereotipov,” *Strategiya Rossiy*, no. 8 (2010).

67. See the round-table discussion “Kak zavershit' istoriyu SSSR,” *Polit.ru*, April 24, 2008, available at [http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2008/04/24/istpamat\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2008/04/24/istpamat_print.html). Such a stance is clearly influenced by the reflections of Karl Jaspers on the “question of German guilt” in his celebrated 1946 essay “Die Schuldfrage.” In this work, Jaspers famously discussed the four categories of guilt. In a *legal* sense, only he who committed concrete criminal acts is guilty, and this guilt should be proved in the court of law. No collective guilt could exist in such situation. However, *all* German citizens who lived under Nazi regime are *politically* guilty, even those who considered themselves apolitical or were the opponents of Nazism. Since they accepted the political system established by the National Socialists, they bear the collective political responsibility vis-à-vis the community of peoples. In terms of *moral* guilt, there are huge differences between those Germans who were adults during the Nazi era. The issue of whether one is morally guilty or not is decided individually, on the basis of individual conscience. And finally, Jaspers contends, there is a metaphysical guilt which is a “lack of absolute solidarity with people as people.” The experience of *metaphysical* guilt can and should change our self-consciousness. But no one can charge the other with such an experience—it is only God who can decide in this matter. See Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: The Dial Press, 1947).

68. Boris Dolgin, “Russia's History Wars,” *Open Democracy*, May 22, 2009, available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/russia/article/Russias-history-wars> (accessed May 23, 2011).

69. Boris Yeltsin, *Presidentskiy marafon* (Moscow: AST, 2000): 196-197. The English-language version of these memoirs is *Boris Yeltsin, Midnight Diaries*; translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

70. Masha Lipman, “The Third Wave of Russian De-Stalinization,” *Foreign Policy*, December 16, 2010.

71. Judy Dempsey, “Old Foes See Reasons to Get Along,” *International Herald Tribune*, December 9, 2010; and Dmitry Trenin, “Rossiya i Pol'sha: druzhba, kotoraya ne dolzhna provalit'sya. K vizitu Dmitriya Medvedeva v Varshavu,” *Polit.ru*, December 6, 2010, available at [http://www.polit.ru/institutes/2010/12/06/poland\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/institutes/2010/12/06/poland_print.html) (accessed May 23, 2011).

72. See Arseniy Roginsky, *Pamyat' o stalinizme: Doklad na konferentsiy “Istoriya stalinizma”* (Moscow, December 5, 2008), [http://www.boell.ru/downloads/pamiat\\_o\\_stalinizme.pdf](http://www.boell.ru/downloads/pamiat_o_stalinizme.pdf) (accessed May 23, 2011).

73. Anatoly M. Khazanov and Stanley G. Payne, “How to Deal with the Past?” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 2-3 (2008).

74. Sergei Karaganov, “Russkaya Katyn,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, July 22, 2010. Emphasis added.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Remarkably, the 2010 session of the Valdai Discussion Club—a forum co-founded in 2004 by *RIA Novosti* and Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Policy that brings together Russian and foreign scholars, journalists and public intellectuals—was devoted to discussing the topic of “Russia's history and future development.” Some Russian participants have forcefully argued that “without a full realization of Russia's horrific past, without both figuratively and physically bury-

ing Lenin, Russia cannot move forward.” See Andrei Zolotov Jr., “The Storm of History,” *Russia Profile*, September 8, 2010; and Anatol Lieven, “Reexamining Russian History,” *National Interest*, September 15, 2010.

77. Unlike in Germany, the community of professional historians in Russia has not yet evolved into a genuine “expert corporation” that enjoys the trust of the Russian society. As some commentators note—to my mind, correctly—in today’s Russia, the institutional conditions for the independent scholarly expertise and analysis are still lacking. Indeed, at bottom, institutions are norms and rules; the latter, however, cannot be abided by in the absence of trust. In a polity where people question (and for good reasons at that) the trustworthiness of the courts, the existence of the independent scholarly expertise, the ability of the professional community to pass an unbiased judgment, the possibility of holding an unrestrained discussion in the mainstream mass media as well as the very search for truth appear to be problematic. Yet in lieu of the full-blooded Historikerstreit, over the last decade Russia did see three big debates on history textbooks: the “Dolutsky affair,” the “Filippov affair,” and the “Vdovin-Barsenkov affair.” On the “Filippov affair,” see the articles by David Brandenberger (“A New Short Course? A.V. Filippov and the Russian State’s Search for a ‘Usable Past’”), Boris Mironov (“The Fruits of a Bourgeois Education”), Vladimir Solonari (“Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin”) and Elena Zubkova (“The Filippov Syndrome”) in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 4 (2009). Also of interest are Nikita Sokolov, “Vek surka, ili Kratkaya istoriya kolovrashcheniya rossiyskikh uchebnikov istoriy,” *Polit.ru*, October 15, 2008, [http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2008/10/15/history\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2008/10/15/history_print.html); and Dmitry Babich, “Stalin’s Methods Revived,” *Russia Profile*, September 22, 2010.

78. Thomas Grove, “Russia Must Exorcise Stalin’s Legacy—Kremlin Aide,” *Reuters*, December 6, 2010.

79. See the speeches by Karaganov and Roginsky at the February 1, 2011 Yekaterinburg meeting of the Council on Civil Society and Human Rights in Stenograficheskiy otchet o zasedanii Soveta po razvitiyu grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravam cheloveka, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/10194>.

80. Kirill Rogov, “Destalinizatsiya: Muzei na Lubyanke,” *Vedomosti*, February 4, 2011.

81. Stenograficheskiy otchet.

82. Rogov, “Destalinizatsiya.”

83. *Ibid.* There is, however, a remarkable sign of more salubrious winds blowing in Russian historiography—a recent publication of the two-volume textbook of Russian modern history *Istoriya Rossii: XX vek* (Moscow: AST, 2009), edited by Andrei Zubov. Three features distinguish this landmark study: it rejects the traditional statist approach by putting individual at the center of the narrative and by striving to present the history of society rather than the history of the state; it rejects the traditional stance of “wounded nationalism” that used to invariably portray Russia as a victim of foreign aggression; and it rejects the traditional aversion to using foreign accounts. Significantly, it also offers a very untraditional interpretation of World War II: eschewing the use of the symbolically laden term “the Great Patriotic War,” the authors suggest a more neutral one—“the Soviet-Nazi war,” arguing that the conflict, which started as the war between the two regimes, then evolved into the war between the two peoples. *Istoriya Rossii* has been received with glowing reviews in the West (see, for example, Richard Pipes, “A New Russian History That’s Sensational for the Right Reasons,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 5, 2009). Far more important, though, is that the book was supported by some more liberal members of the Russian elite. See Sergei Karaganov, “Drugaya nasha istoriya,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 19, 2010.

84. Karl Schlögel, “Places and Strata of Memory: Approaches to Eastern Europe,” *Eurozine*, December 19, 2008, available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-12-19-schlogel-en.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).

85. See Sherlock, *Historical Narratives*, 1-27.

86. MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, 39.

87. See “Boyazn’ proshlogo,” *Vedomosti*, October 22, 2009. In all fairness, such attitudes are by no means limited to Russia and the post-Soviet lands. History wars in the US and in a number of other Western countries, notes the American historian Eric Foner, “did underscore the basic

differences between historians' understanding of their task and what much of the broader public thinks the writing of history entails. Historians view the constant search for new perspectives as the lifeblood of historical understanding. Outside the academy, however, the act of reinterpretation is often viewed with suspicion, and 'revisionist' is invoked as a term of abuse." See Foner, *Who Owns History?*, xvi.

88. Andreas Kappeler, "From an Ethnonational to a Multiethnic to a Transnational Ukrainian History" in Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther, eds., *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009): 63-64.