

RUSSIAN ULTRANATIONALIST PARTY-POLITICS AND «UNCIVIL SOCIETY»

The relative electoral impotence of Russian extreme right so far and a certain decline in Russian ultra-nationalist party and parliamentary politics since the mid-1990s cannot be interpreted as a sure sign for a lasting disappearance of the extremely right-wing threat in Russia. For instance, late 19th and early 20th century German history has shown that a decline of extreme right-wing parties may, in some instances, represent an indicator not of diminishing anti-Semitism or other xenophobias, but, instead, of their deep infiltration into civil and political society. An inclusion of non-party organizations and networks espousing various kinds of extreme right-wing ideas might thus be helpful in reaching a more comprehensive estimation of the strength of ultra-nationalist ideas and forces in contemporary Russian society, and the future political potential of Russian extreme right.

This short survey uses some findings of research into non-Russian civil societies and ultra-nationalisms to illustrate that the relative decline in radically nationalist party politics in the late 1990s should not be seen as an unequivocal indication that «anti-liberal statism»¹ has lost its appeal in Russia.

It also attempts to indicate that the considerable diversification in the non-governmental, not-for-profit sector of Russian society since the mid-1980s cannot be regarded as exclusively beneficial in terms of Russia's polyarchic consolidation, and further democratization [13]. Not only is a Russian «civic public» [16, 221] or «civic community» [57] developing only slowly. Some of the more significant pre- and post-Soviet groups, movements, and trends within the Russian voluntary sector are unsupportive, or explicitly critical of liberal democracy. A number of major non-state institutions and networks in Russian society contain ultra-nationalist, fundamentalist, and, partly, proto-fascist² sub-sectors that question the adequacy of the construct «civil society» to designate them. These organizations' or groupings' primary function is less - or not at all - to enhance peoples' inclination and ability to participate effectively in political activities that could promote further democratization. Instead, they provide - sometimes expressly so - a medium for the spread of radically particularistic world views, ascriptive notions about

human nature, and illiberal or/and bellicose political ideas, as well as an organizational training ground for potential political activists holding such views³.

Therefore the paper argues the necessity of continuing attention to Russian right-wing extremist tendencies in general⁴, and to such trends in civil society, in particular - in spite of an apparent recent decline of extremely right-wing parties. It does so by referring to both, certain particulars of Russian politics today, and some analogies from contemporary West European history.

It specifically addresses the issue of an adequate interpretation of the altogether paltry performance of the four major ultra-nationalist parties of the 1990s, the LDPR, RNE, KPRF, and NBP and their frequent failures to achieve high offices during elections in the 1990s. It argues that their leaders' party-building efforts have, from their inception, been hindered by certain fundamental inconsistencies in these parties' public image. In assessing the temporary decline, of extremely right-wing party politics in Russia in the late 1990s, it refers to the experience of pre-Nazi Germany that faced the disappearance of most of its antisemitic parties, but not of antisemitism around 1900. It further notes that specific attention to non-party activities on the extreme right has been called for by scholars of contemporary Western ultra-nationalism and fundamentalism too. It finally introduc-

¹ This is the (arguably improvable) concept that is used in the pioneering article by Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein [31].

² For lucid definitions of fascism, and its proper and diminished sub-types, such as proto-fascism, see [30].

³ The construct «uncivil society» (a concept that can, probably, be improved upon) was introduced to the study of Russian ultra-nationalist tendencies seemingly by Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Stephen E. Hanson, see [39].

⁴ Most of the relevant secondary literature published on the subject until 1996 is reviewed in [3].

es the distinct phenomenon of groupuscules which have become prominent in post-war international right-wing extremism, including Russia.

1. Some Peculiar Dilemmas of Russian Ultra-Nationalist Politics in the 1990s

There is a multitude of factors that have inhibited the emergence of a fully-fledged post-Soviet party system, in general, [21-22] and the growth and rise of ultra-nationalist parties, in particular, in Russia [49]. Among the reasons for the latter is a notion often invoked by Russian observers that, supposedly, there is a peculiarly Russian antipathy against ultra-nationalist ideas. Whether this is an appropriate interpretation or not, the relatively poor performance of many extremely right-wing individuals, and parties in Russia's elections so far can, for the below reasons, not be seen as indicating that the prospects of ultra-nationalist politics in Russia are principally negligible.

Concerning the limited electoral success of right-wing extremist parties or politicians during the twentieth century's last decade in Russia, it is noteworthy that all four major political organizations that promoted ultra-nationalist ideas of various types and took, to various degrees, part in elections in this period, i. e. the *LDPR*, *RNE*, *KPRF* and *NBP*, suffered from certain basic impasses rooted in their particular history or leadership:

First, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the supreme, dictatorial leader of the *LDPR* [64], has a Jewish father. Though V. Zhirinovskiy cannot be regarded as being Jewish in any meaningful sense, and though he sees himself as being fully Russian, his family background constituted a principal predicament for Zhirinovskiy's acceptance by many right-wing extremist politicians, intellectuals, activists, and voters. It seems not too far-fetched a speculation that a majority of Russia's ultra-nationalists would regard a Russian president with a Jewish father as undesirable (to say the least).

Second, the party that came to occupy most of the lunatic fringe section, i. e. the explicitly anti-systemic, counter-cultural, violence-prone, outermost right niche, of the Russian party spectrum was the *RNE* [17; 35; 61]. This party used prominently (though not exclusively) some barely modified German Nazi symbols, such as the swastika and Roman salute, as well as ideas, such as biological racism. I shall not go here into the details of the various problems that an as explicitly neo-Nazi profile as the *RNE's* would

encounter everywhere in the world (including Germany), and did encounter in Russia. It may suffice to say that this particular characteristic predestined the *RNE*, from its creation, to political isolation, and, arguably, eventual failure⁵. When, in autumn 2000, the *RNE* finally fell apart, one of its major successor organizations, the All-Russian Socio-Political Movement «*Russkoe Vozrozhdenie*» (which has in the meantime also fallen apart), demonstratively abandoned the swastika as its emblem.

Third, the political profile of the *KPRF* - if indeed one regards its ideology as essentially right-wing and extremist - remains fundamentally compromised by ideological inconsistencies stemming from its originally left-wing roots. This is in spite of the CPSU's impregnation with crypto-nationalist ideas already under Stalin, and the sophistication of the *KPRF's* gradual switch to an increasingly explicit ultra-nationalist discourse represented by the ever more elaborate russophile ideology developed in the numerous publications of its political leader and major ideologist, Gennady A. Zyuganov. A. Zyuganov's bold, undisguised adoption of the ideas of prominent Russian and European right-wing thinkers, including, for instance, the emigre monarchist political theorist Ivan A. Il'in (1883-1954), has led him to move the *KPRF* in a more and more obviously non- and even, implicitly, anti-communist direction. This, notwithstanding, the party has not repudiated its role as the main successor organization of the CPSU. It is thus seen by leading right-wing politicians, and, presumably, a considerable number of nationalist voters as not only being responsible for many of Russia's misfortunes in the 20th century. It is, correctly or not, perceived as not representing a genuinely anti-universalistic party that, moreover, has an ideological heritage going back to the theories of a German Jew. At least, as long as the party keeps the attribute «Communist» in its name, it will remain vulnerable not only to liberal, but - what is more important - also nationalist critique referring to its Marxist roots, and Soviet past.

A fourth, lesser researched, but, at least, temporarily important ultra-nationalist group that seemed to be on the rise in the late 1990s [45], is the National-Bolshevik Party *NBP*. This party belongs, as the *RNE*, to the counter-cultural, expressly anti-systemic current in Russian ultra-nationalism. Nevertheless, this party is still bound to refrain from violating some basic strictures of the political spectrum it aims to occupy in order to achieve larger support. In other

⁵ It is for these reasons that it seems that, in some surveys of the Russian extreme right, rather too much attention has been paid to the *RNE*. See, for instance, [60]; [59, ;13-189, 264-266].

words, it too has, in spite of its distinctly novitistic profile, to remain within some basic ideological fix-points of right-wing extremism in order to gain wider acceptance among nationalist voters.

The *NBP* faced, in this regard, not only the dilemma that its eccentric leader, the novelist Eduard Limonov, had spent a large part of his earlier life in the West. Before becoming involved in politics, E. Limonov had described his sexual encounters with men in the United States in his, perhaps, most infamous novel «*Eto ya - Edichka*» («Its me, Eddie»). A comment of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn may suffice to illustrate the dominant view in mainstream Russian nationalist intellectual circles on E. Limonov: «a little insect who writes pornography»⁶.

Last but not least, one has to mention the new electoral bloc *Rodina* (Motherland) that was created in 2003, and entered, in December of that year, the State Duma with the surprisingly high result of 9.02 %. It also managed to win eight further seats in single-member district elections, and to attract another directly elected independent deputy to its faction - the notorious defender of the Soviet unitary state Viktor Alksnis. While *Rodina's* faction does include a number of prominent ultra-nationalists [63], it remains unclear, as in the case of the *KPRF*, whether the whole bloc should be categorized as a fully extremist right-wing force. One of its first leaders, Sergei Glaz'ev, for instance, started his political career as a member of Egor Gaidar's team of liberal pro-Western reformers in 1992.

Although *Rodina's* nationalism is, nevertheless, manifest, and it is linked in several ways to the «lunatic fringe» of the Russian anti-Western spectrum, the bloc somewhat resembles the *KPRF* in occupying an ambivalent position in the Russian ideological spectrum: it supports the government in a number of ways; it opposes the Putin regime on certain issues; and it constitutes a clearly anti-systemic force in some other regards. Moreover, according to the perception of many observers, the *Rodina* bloc constitutes merely a creature of the Kremlin (i. e. the Presidential Administration) solely formed to draw votes away from both, the «communists» and the liberals, in the 2003 State Duma elections. It is, by some, also perceived as a force unlikely to survive a withdrawal of support from the Kremlin - all the more so as there will be a new 7 %-threshold in future State Duma elections. The recent conflict between the pro-Kremlin *Rodina* leader Dmitrii Rogozin, and the more independent-minded S. Glaz'ev seems to support such prognoses.

Does all this, in conclusion, mean that right-wing extremism is and will remain a minor phenomenon in post-Soviet Russian politics?⁷ A glance on the history of ultra-nationalist movements elsewhere would caution against a quick answer.

2. Evaluating Declining Ultra-Nationalist Parties: Some Lessons from German History

For instance, modern German political antisemitism is marked by a fundamental discontinuity - one could say, paradox - in its history that might be suggestive for an evaluation of the recent relative decline of Russian radically nationalist parties. At the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, the young German party system experienced a significant change by the descent of its most explicitly antisemitic components [42]. Only a few years before, some seemingly vigorous ultra-nationalist parties, founded during the 1870-1880s, had been on the rise, and, together with the increasingly antisemitic Conservative Party, won a majority in the 1893 *Reichstag* elections [24]. Also, a multitude of antisemitic literature had been circulating in Germany for more than two decades at this point [37, 245-272]. Yet, «the electoral fortunes of the antisemitic parties, other than the Conservative Party, declined in the first decade of the twentieth Century» [24, 76]. Otto Kulka specifies that «the diminishing importance of the antisemitic parties towards the end of the nineteenth century... does not indicate a parallel decline underlying their critique of Judaism. Rather it suggests the penetration of this criticism into the ideologies of most of the large political parties at the end of the imperial age and during the Weimar era» [40, 204-205].

What is even more relevant for the present analysis is that the latter development was, in the words of Daniel Goldhagen, «trae not only of political institutions but also of the Tocquevillian substructures of society, the associations that provided the staging ground for people's political education and activity» [24, 72]. Werner Jochmann even writes that «a wealth of examples shows how, in the [18] 90s, antisemitism infiltrated in this way into every last citizens' association, penetrating folk clubs and cultural societies» [36, 52-53].

For, among others, these reasons, Peter Pulzer warns that an emphasis on the overall meager direct political influence of the German antisemitic parties and their leaders until 1918 would miss the point: «Thirty years of incessant propaganda had been more effective than men thought at the time; antisemitism

⁶ As quoted in [41, 3/5].

⁷ A leading Russian specialist on Russia's ultra-nationalist scene came, in summer 2001, to the conclusion that «the time of the national-radicals is over» [2, 15].

was no longer disgraceful in wide social and academic circles... Insofar as they had impregnated wide sections of the population with antisemitic ideas, the antisemitic parties had not only succeeded in their object but also worked themselves out of a job» [56, 282, 291].

Goldhagen concludes that «the decline of the antisemitic parties was therefore not symptomatic of a decline in antisemitism, for these particular parties had already performed their historic role of moving antisemitism from the street and the beer hall's *Stammtisch* into the electoral booth and the seat of parliament, into, in Max Weber's formulation, the house of power. The antisemitic parties had rendered themselves moot. They could quietly disappear, leaving the political terrain to more potent successors who were fit for the next upsurge in antisemitic expression and activity» [24, 76].

It would be misleading to draw far-reaching parallels between the type, salience and radicalness of antisemitism in pre-Nazi German and post-Soviet Russian society. Nor would it be adequate to claim that exactly the same process of transfer of ultranationalist ideas from waning fringe parties to the political mainstream as well as to civil society sectors is taking place in Russia today. However, this example - and there were more such cases in pre-fascist Europe - illustrates that a deterioration of the electoral and organizational performance of right-wing extremist parties cannot in every case be seen as an unequivocal indication of a diminishing appeal of their ideas. It also indicates that attention to developments within civil - and not only political - society may assist in drawing a fuller picture of the spread, nature, and radicalism of anti-democratic ideas in a given country.

3. Civil Society's Role in Democratic Transition, Consolidation, and Breakdown

Not only can declining nationalist parties, in a certain context, create misleading impressions about a population's propensity to support anti-democratic politics. In some recent research, there has also been some serious questioning of the contribution of a strong civil society to the creation and fortification of polyarchies. Whereas a mainstream approach - sometimes called «neo-Tocquevillian» and principally inspired by Robert Putnam's seminal study «*Making Democracy Work*» - assumes an important positive effect of civil society on democratization, some dissenting voices have argued that a strong civil society may have only limited relevance for certain attempts to establish polyarchies, or may, in particular circumstances, even contribute to the break-down of unconsolidated polyarchies. For

instance, Omar G. Encariyn showed in a recent paper that «Spain constructed a viable and very successful new democracy with a notable deficit in civil society development as reflected in the absence of the conditions most conducive to the production of social capital» [19, 55]. In as far as Spain constitutes «the paradigmatic case for the study of democratic transitions» [43, 87], and as it has been said that, for Eastern Europe, «the optimistic scenario is to retrace the path of Spain» [55, 8], this finding, if correct, should have significant consequences for our understanding of how polyarchies emerge.

What is even more relevant for the present context is that another paradigmatic case for the comparative study of regime change, namely the fall of the German Weimar Republic in 1930-1934, is marked by the presence and active involvement of, by both historical and comparative standards, an exceptionally varied and thriving voluntary sector [23]. As Sheri Berman has noted, «in contrast to what neo-Tocquevillian theories would predict, high levels of associationism, absent strong and responsive national government and political parties, served to fragment rather than unite German society... Weimar's rich associational life provided critical training ground for eventual Nazi cadres and a base from which the National Socialist Workers' Party (*NSDAP*) could launch its *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power). Had German civil society been weaker, the Nazis would never have been able to capture so many citizens for their cause or eviscerate their opponents so swiftly... The *NSDAP* rose to power, not by attracting alienated, apolitical Germans, but rather by recruiting highly activist individuals and then exploiting their skills and associational affiliations to expand the party's appeal and consolidate its position as the largest political force in Germany» [9, 402, 408].

The peculiarity of German civic associations of this time was that, instead of representing indicators for the depth of the democratic inclinations of the German population, they grew «during periods of strain. When national political institutions and structures proved either unwilling or unable to address their citizens' needs, many Germans turned away from them and found succor and support in the institutions of civil society instead... This growth of associations during these years did not signal a growth in liberal values or democratic political structures; instead, it reflected and furthered the fragmentation of German political life and the delegitimization of national political institutions» [9, 411, 413].

A somewhat similar argument has been made for the case of Northern Italy where the post-World War I Fascist movement too emerged from a relatively well-developed network of civil society institutions

[20] - thus calling into question Putnam's famous thesis [57].

These findings indicate that the role civil society plays in a regime change is conditioned by the concrete political circumstances, such as the strength of political institutions, as well as - not only the nature, but also - the degree of legitimacy of the existing political regime. Berman concludes that, «perhaps, therefore, associationism should be considered a politically neutral multiplier - neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but rather dependent for its effects on the wider political context» [9, 427].

A partial solution to the dilemma of the simultaneously democratization-furthering and - inhibiting role that civil society may play can be found in analyses that tried to distinguish between different types of non-state/not-for-profit institutions, i. e. between those that have democratic and anti-democratic inclinations [51]. For instance, the most prominent among the rapidly growing organizations within the voluntary sector of the Weimar Republic were the various nationalist associations that became popular after World War I. These nationalist associations are best viewed as «Symptoms and agencies of change. They were formed as distinctive organizations within a space which the difficulties and obsolescence of an older mode of dominant-class politics had opened up» [18].

Non-party institutions such as these nationalist associations were not only peculiar in that they came to substitute political parties - a pattern that, since World War II, has become again relevant in, among other countries, Germany [66]. They should also be seen as not representing manifestations of civil society proper, but as constituting «uncivil groups» [19, 67-68], or «uncivil movements» [50].

This issue has been recently specifically addressed in a paper by Ami Pedahzur and Leonard Weinberg that proposed to introduce the previously known, but hitherto insufficiently elaborated concept of *uncivil* society in the comparative study of right-wing extremism [52]. Pedahzur and Weinberg observe that, since the early 1970s, non-party forms of linkages between state and society have become more prominent in general, and argue that not only civil society proper has thus gained importance. Non-party challengers of democracy, i. e. various permutations of *uncivil* society, too have - whether as substitutes for strong right-wing extremist parties [7] or as complementary players of anti-democratic political

actors - become more relevant in established democracies.

4. Electoral vs. Other Activities of the Western Extreme Right Today

Already before these theoretical arguments were made, attention to the non-party realm has been called for in empirical research on recent developments in German and other Western ultra-nationalisms. In distinction to Herbert Kitschelt who focused in his path-breaking book on - what he called - the «New Radical Right» in Western Europe of the 1970s-1990s mainly on political parties [38]⁸, Michael Minkenberg in his subsequent comparative study of right-wing radicalism in post-1968 Germany, France and the US, for instance, considers, apart from parties, a wide variety of groups within uncivil society [46]. These include intellectual circles, sub-cultural milieus, religious organizations, youth gangs, publishing houses, and other institutions. M. Minkenberg's attention to these phenomena is not only useful in that it provides the basis for a more adequate assessment of the penetration of right-wing radical ideas into society - especially with regard to those countries that have not experienced as impressive surges of radically right-wing parties as, for instance, Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*), Italy (*Alleanza Nazionale*), or France (*Front national*). M. Minkenberg also addresses, more adequately than Kitschelt, the fact that activists espousing such ideas have been using different strategies in promoting their views depending on the particular socio-political contexts, cultural traditions and legal-institutional settings within which they operate [4]. M. Minkenberg, for instance, notes that, in the US, certain xenophobic and fundamentalist groups have, instead of forming their own parties, used Republican front organizations to penetrate the state via the Republican Party⁹. In Germany, a «New Right» intellectual discourse on national history and identity has become influential in public debates [54]. Instead of engaging in party-building, this section of the German radical right has had considerable success in affecting German political culture in general, and the agendas of the moderate right-wing parties, in particular. The «New Right» has done so, moreover, quite consciously by way of adopting the well-known Gramscian notion of the necessity for an ideological group to achieve first «cultural hegemony» in a society in order to acquire subsequently political

⁸ Another more recent, important book that, although displaying a less narrow approach to the radical right's ideology than H. Kitschelt's study, also largely limits itself to the analysis of political parties espousing ultra-nationalist ideologies is [48].

⁹ See also [47].

power [14; 53]. On the territory of the former GDR too, to the surprise of many observers, right-wing radical parties have, with some notable exceptions, not fared well in elections so far. Yet, East German ultra-nationalism has become disturbingly strong on the grass-roots and sub-cultural levels, and, especially, in the youth scene [58].

5. The Groupuscule

An important sub-sector of post-war uncivil society - namely the multitude of minuscule and relatively closed ultra-nationalist and often fascist groupings across the world - has, recently, been extensively conceptualized in a novel, and, it appears, heuristically fruitful way by Roger Griffin as «groupuscules» [26; 28]. Distancing himself from approaches that have dismissed this spectrum of small extremist groups as hardly worth studying, Griffin argues that there is a certain sub-category of minor ultra-nationalist groupings that should, in spite of their unimpressive magnitude, be taken seriously as objects of study in their own right. This class would include such Western organizations as the Groupe Union Défense, White Aryan Resistance, or European Liberation Front. These particular groupings that Griffin labels «groupuscules» have either, after an unsuccessful performance in electoral contests, left high politics, but continued to thrive as parochial associations. Or they were never conceived to become fully-fledged parties in the larger public realm, and constituted, from their inception, relatively clogged organizations serving mainly the small circle of its members and supporters. Although some of these groupuscules call themselves «parties», they should be conceptualized as belonging, at best, to a diminished sub-type¹⁰ of the generic political party. «The term "groupuscule" is being used... to refer to a political organization which by the standards of national party politics has minute active membership, and may have an extremely low or non-existent public profile, yet is a fully ripened fruit within its own ideological vine-yard... Its diminutive size, marginality, and relative inconspicuousness bestow on it qualities which suit the purposes of its Organizers» [26].

It is thus not useful to consider groupuscules solely as the remnants of abortive attempts of party-building. Instead, they should be regarded either as a peculiar sub-sector of uncivil society, or as representing hybrid phenomena fluctuating between political and civil society - the latter, shifting pattern being typical of a number of voluntary sector organizations in modern societies, in general [16, 224].

The form of the groupuscule has been chosen for their organization by many extremely right-wing activists in the West, as they had to adapt to an increasingly depoliticized and «de-nationalized» public in the post-World War II context. The groupuscules thus largely define themselves by their «renunciation of any aspirations to create a mass membership base, appeal to a wide political constituency in the general public, or to enter into alliances or compromises with other political actors in the pursuit of maximum influence» [26]. Instead, groupuscules have taken the form of cadre organizations run by small elites of activists, which keep «alive the prospect of having an impact on society by remaining open to linkages with kindred spirits on the extreme right and publicizing its existence through effective propaganda directed at the chosen few. [The Internet, moreover] allows the creation of a "virtual community"... cocooning its members against contacts with the outside world... Each groupuscule, no matter how small, [can] act as a nodal point in a vast, constantly evolving network of extremist organizations of far greater significance than the sum of its parts: the groupuscular right... Perhaps the most important aspect of the groupuscular right for political science lies [thus] in the structure it has come to adopt in order to act not as a single corporate body, but as a network of ideological formation and activist coordination made up of self-contained grouplets... Cumulatively these "groupuscules" can be conceived as constituting a new type of political subculture or actor, the "groupuscular right", which has an aggregate substance, influence, and longevity disproportionate to the size, impact, and stability of any of its components)) [26].

The importance of the individual groupuscule stems not only from being embedded in a larger network of similar components, but also - resembling the function of many other civil society organizations - from its potential as a training ground and school for future political activists. The Groupuscule «can have a formative impact on the careers of particular individuals in search of grand narratives and total truth by playing a crucial role in transforming ill-defined resentments into a personal sense of higher mission to "do something about it." In extreme cases the groupuscule has made decisive contributions to turning a disaffected loner into a fanatical "lone wolf ready to carry out ruthless acts of terrorism at symbols of society's decadence whatever the cost in human life, as Timothy McVeigh and David Copeland dramatically illustrate» [26].

¹⁰ On the concept of «diminished sub-type» see [11; 12].

For the case of Russia, this category of groupings within the ultra-nationalist spectrum has, as has been illustrated in an article by Markus Mathyl [45], been clearly relevant too.

It was gaining further importance when a new Law on Parties was adopted in July 2001. The law required that political parties that wished to register as such with the Justice Ministry had to document, apart from other things, significant organizational capacity across Russia such as an overall membership of at least 10,000, and 100 or more members in more than half of Russia's 89 regions. As this official registration was indispensable to take fully part in high politics, and especially in elections, the high threshold for registration created by the new Law on Parties pushed dozens of political organizations that had regarded themselves as power-seeking organizations into the non-electoral realm where most of those that continued to exist as organized groups have remained locked. Moreover, an amendment to the law introduced in December 2004 has aggravated the situation for the smaller parties further: the minimum membership number for a party to be registered is now 50,000 while in more than half of the subjects of the Russian Federation a registered party has to have at least 500 members. These regulations add two further problems, to say the least, to the political ambitions of leaders of all minor parties, including the ultra-nationalist ones [5]. Adopting a back-stage/groupuscular, rather than front-stage/electoral strategy may constitute a pragmatic option for many extremist organizations if they want to continue having, at least, a minor impact in today Russia. Above all, it might be a way to survive organizationally, and remain prepared for situations that would allow them to re-enter high politics.

Griffin's concluding remark in his first publication on this issue concerns the Western context, but is, at least, equally relevant for Russia. The groupuscular right «is a political force which guarantees that if conditions of profound socio-economic crisis were ever to emerge again in the West's democratic heartland to make mass support for revolutionary nationalism a realistic possibility, then many countries would have not only the dedicated cadres prepared to lead it, but a plentiful reserve of ideological resources to fuel it» [28, 46].

Conclusions

The fact that ultra-nationalist political blocs or politicians had so far only sporadic electoral appeal and organizational success can, in view of the weighty dilemmas the parties currently occupying this spectrum face, be neither taken as a proof for some fundamental lack of susceptibility of the majority of

Russians to extremely right-wing ideologies, nor be interpreted as an indication of some principal incapability of Russia's ultra-nationalist forces to eventually convert putative, potential popular support into political power. One might even argue that such figures as V. Zhirinovskiy and A. Barkashov had a beneficial effect on Russia's democratization. They quickly occupied the intra- and extra-parliamentary fascist niches in the new post-Soviet political spectrum in the early 1990s, and may have thus helped to prevent the rise of a leader with an, in Russian nationalist terms, more acceptable family back-ground than V. Zhirinovskiy's, and a party with less offensive political symbols than the *RNE*'s.

In Russia today, we could be observing a somewhat similar development as that described above in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany. Opinion polls tell us that the Russian population has made a shift from a largely pro- to a predominantly anti-Western, especially anti-American stance in the course of the 1990s [32; 33]. Notably, many of those Russian voters who can be otherwise characterized as liberals have, in the late 1990s, especially in connection with NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and bombing of Yugoslavia, become critical of the West. Moreover, Russian elite attitudes seem to be more anti-American than those of the masses [68]. In spite of these trends, Russian right-wing extremist parties have, at the same time, lost electoral appeal since their best performances in the State Duma elections of the 1990s (*KPRF*, *LDPR*), or/and suffered from more or less significant splits (*RNE*, *NBP*, *KPRF*).

Organized Russian ultra-nationalism might, after a certain peak in the mid-1990s, currently experience not its endgame, but an interregnum, a phase of re-definition and formation of its ideas, position, image, strategy and structure [25; 27]. The sudden rise of the *Rodina* bloc into a notable force in the Russian parliament and the impressive resurgence of the *LDPR*-vote in December 2003 can be seen as indicating the enduring electoral potential of Russian nationalism.

Russian right-wing extremist party politics may, to be sure, remain unable to overcome its above listed dilemmas in, at least, the near future. It is worth noting, however, that when in the past both pre- and post-war ultra-nationalist parties rose, they repeatedly did so suddenly moving from - sometimes total - obscurity to considerable popularity within only a few years. When this happened, it was also often the case that an uncivil society had done some ground-work before. The German «*Konservative Revolution*» of the 1920s [10], and the French post-1968 «*Nouvelle Droite*» [28; 29] are merely the most

prominent examples of an elaborate intellectual preparation of a subsequently rapid rise of an ultra-nationalist party (i. e. the *NSDAP* and *Front national*).

These observations may be interpreted to have the following implications for research into contemporary Russian right-wing extremism. Although ultranationalist party politics is unlikely to remain as relatively insignificant as it is today, the currently still prominent, above listed parties may not be able to overcome their handicaps soon. It is thus unclear who could emerge as a possible leader in the future, and which party might be able to take advantage of Russia's already substantial, and, perhaps, further growing anti-Western electorate. Under these circumstances, greater attention to Russia's uncivil society might not only be adequate in terms of the apparently growing relevance of this object. It might, for the time being, also be a pragmatic approach: as far as we do not yet know whether, how and when Russian ultra-nationalist political society will overcome its various impasses, certain findings on Russia's uncivil society might be of a more lasting relevance than further research into its volatile party system.

The four right-wing extremist parties introduced here have already been scrutinized to some degree [1; 6]. Sometimes, the particulars of their development have, as in the case of H. Kitschelt's focus on radical right-wing *parties* in Western Europe [38], been presented as telling us the whole, or main story of the extreme right in Russia today [65; 67]. This would, in view of the above contextualization, be misleading. As long as Russia's public consciousness remains dominated by widely spread anti-Western stereotypes, and penetrated by cryptic and sometimes not so cryptic nationalist and racist ideas, it is to be expected that these attitudes will find organizational expression. At least, for the near future, we should expect to find these institutional manifestations not only, and, perhaps, not so much in the realm of political society as in the voluntary sector. In view of this, Russia's growing uncivil society might currently constitute one of the most promising topics for students of Russian ultra-nationalism and associationism alike.

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РОСІЙСЬКА УЛЬТРАНАЦІОНАЛІСТИЧНА ПАРТІЙНА ПОЛІТИКА ТА «НЕГРОМАДЯНСЬКЕ СУСПІЛЬСТВО»

Показано, що відносна слабкість крайньо правих сил Росії та певною мірою зниження з середини 1990-хрр. впливу ультра націоналістичних сил на партійну та парламентську політику не може тлумачитися як чіткий знак зникнення на майбутнє загрози з боку крайньо правих у Росії. Приклад послаблення крайньо правих партій у Німеччині в кінці XIX — на початку XX ст. свідчить, що в деяких випадках це є показником не зменшення антисемітизму та інших проявів ксенофобії, а, навпаки, - їх глибокого проникнення у громадянське та політичне суспільство. Аналіз діяльності не партійних організацій тамереж, що поділяють різного роду ультраправі ідеї, може бути корисним для більш повного з'ясування як впливу ультра націоналістичних ідей і сил на сучасне російське суспільство, так і майбутнього політичного потенціалу крайньоправих у Росії.