

FOREWORD

Nationalism, Tribalism and Fundamentalism as Political Science Subjects

As the subjects of the papers for this special issue of the *CEU Political Science Journal* illustrate, nationalism, tribalism and fundamentalism have recently – some would say: finally – become major topics in mainstream political science. An outside observer of the recent history of Anglosaxon political science would, perhaps, be surprised to learn that this was not always the case. During the years of the Cold War, both International Relations and the study of domestic politics were dominated by approaches and themes derived from economics. Whereas the left saw nationalism and religion merely as the bourgeoisie’s instrument to manipulate the working classes, proponents of rational choice and other economic models seemed, sometimes, to ignore the issue of political fanaticism altogether. While such an approach was always strange as it left a major event of the 20th century, World War II and the Holocaust, largely unexplained within political science (narrowly understood), it has become untenable today.

I would venture to claim that one of the reasons why, lately, we have been so unprepared for the rise of various forms of right-wing extremism across the globe is that many political scientists preferred to leave the study of “marginal” movements representing this phenomenon to historians,

ethnographers, sociologists, anthropologists as well as students of culture, region and religion. Mainstream political science chose to concentrate, instead, on “real” political issues such as tax reform, diplomatic bargaining or retrospective voting. As a result, Anglosaxon mainstream political scientists today constitute a minority among those scholars analyzing and commenting on what current world politics is about. Take such prominent potential objects of study as Al’Quaida, the Serbian Radical Party, the European “New Right,” or Zhirinovskii’s misnamed Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). While there is a lot of journalistic and historical literature as well as some papers or chapters in political science journals on these players,¹ we do not seem to have a

¹ For instance, the number and superficiality of research papers on Zhirinovskii by political scientists or in political science journals illustrate the relative lack of attention to the issue of Russian ultra-nationalism in mainstream political science. See, Alexander Motyl, “Vladimir Zhirinovskiy: A Man of His Times,” *The Harriman Review* 7, no. 7-9 (1994): 11-18; Andreas Umland, “Wladimir Shirinowskij in der russischen Politik: Einige Hintergründe des Aufstiegs der Liberal-Demokratischen Partei Rußlands,” *Osteuropa* 44, no. 12 (1994): 1117-1131; T.D. Clark, “The Zhirinovskiy Electoral Victory: Antecedence and Aftermath,” *Nationalities Papers* 23, no. 4 (1995): 767-778; Alan J. Koman, “The Last Surge to the South: The New Enemies of Russia in the Rhetoric of Zhirinovskiy,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 19 (1996): 279-327; Roger Eatwell, “The Rebirth of Right-Wing

single narrowly focused English-language book-length academic study on any of them – neither a monograph by a political scientist, nor a collected volume with contributions from political scientists. This is in spite of the fact that the above-listed are quintessentially political actors who are, if I am allowed to make such an evaluative assessment, responsible for much of the trouble humanity is in today.

Even with regard to as eccentric a figure as Zhirinovskii, sometimes seen as a clown and phenomenon of subculture rather than politics, one could argue, as for instance the prominent Russian democrat Grigorii Yavlinski did, that without the LDPR's rise in the early 1990s, the Yeltsin administration would not have become dominated by the "party of war" faction, and made the decision to intervene in Chechnya in 1994.²

Charisma? The Cases of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Zhirinovskii," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* 3 (2002): 1-23.102

² *Itogi*, Nezavisimoe televidenie (NTV), 18th December 1995. See also Elena Klepikova and Vladimir Solovyov, *Zhirinovskii: The Paradoxes of Russian Fascism*. Transl. by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Viking/Penguin Group, 1995), VII. A leading Russian specialist on contemporary Russian nationalism, Nikolai Mitrokhin, too has stated that the 1993 elections (i.e. Zhirinovskii's victory) exerted a principal impact on the "ideology of Russian stateness," and that the resulting processes led to, among other things, the intervention into Chechnya. See his "Ot

Arguably, it was Yeltsin's Chechnya adventure that constituted a crucial birth defect and pre-determined the decline of Russian democracy we are observing in the new century. One could say: No Zhirinovskii, no Putin (and add that they are both KGB products). Without the prominent role of nationalism in Russian politics, the chances of democracy in the world's largest country would, it seems, today be much better.

It might be noteworthy that the relative inattention of political science for nationalism and fundamentalism for many years was only facilitated, but not determined by a seeming lack of prominence of these subjects in world politics during the Cold War. For instance, in the case of the Soviet Union, as recent historical research has shown, the role of cryptic forms of Russian nationalism in the formation of the Soviet leaders' outlook was apparently higher than previously assumed.³ Thus, at least on the Soviet

'Pamyati' k skinkhedam Luzhkova: Ideologiya russkogo natsionalizma v 1987-2003 godakh," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 5(31) (2003): 37-46, here 40. On the "party of war" within the Kremlin, see *Die Zeit* 50, no. 2 (1995), and John B. Dunlop, "The 'Party of War' and Russian Imperial Nationalism," *Problems of Post-Communism* 43, no. 2 (1996): 29-34.

³ Alexander Yanov, *The Russian New Right: Right-Wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, 1978); *idem*, *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000* (New York: Blackwell, 1987); Robert C. Tucker,

side, the commonly assumed core conflict between the West and East as that between a planned and market economy as well as between a monistic and pluralistic political system was less prominent and the role of cultural factors more prevalent than commonly held.

The major reason why nationalism and fundamentalism were, for decades, located at the margins of mainstream Anglosaxon political science has, probably, less to do with any empirical issue, than with research methodology and techniques: As Western political studies were seen on their way to

Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941 (New York: Norton 1992); Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); David L. Brandenberger and A.M. Dubrovsky, "The People Need a Tsar': The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinis Ideology, 1931-1941," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 5 (1998): 873-892; E.A. Rees, "Stalin and Russian Nationalism," in: Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism: Past and Present* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1998), 77-106; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2002); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaya partiya: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

becoming a social science comparable to political economy and business studies (if not a field of study similar to physics or astronomy), the use of formal mathematical models and advanced quantitative techniques evolved into a hallmark of the scholarly value of papers submitted to the major journals of the discipline.

Students considering the entry of a Ph.D. program in political science might have thought of political extremism as one of the more fascinating and relevant issues in the study of politics. Yet, they were confronted with the challenge that approaches derived from economic models are only partly (if at all) applicable to the behavior of political fanatics. The willingness and ability to engage in such modeling, however, was and, often, still is one of the preconditions for a successful academic career, if not, already, an entry-ticket into the doctoral program of a leading political science department. One of the more interesting topics in the history of contemporary political science would be how high the number of graduate students is who were forced to make a choice between studying what they were interested in, and focusing on what was "doable" within the formal modeling paradigm.

This odd situation seems changing today as the public demand for systematic knowledge of the origins, nature and consequences of nationalism and fundamentalism has been rising during the last years. This was, not the

least, a result of 9/11 which could, even by hard-core “realists,” not be left simply aside as another irrational action by the “lunatic fringe.” Today, as the following papers demonstrate, nationalism and fundamentalism are hot topics that allow political scientists to reach beyond the limits of the Ivory Tower, and give them keys to understanding some of the core conflicts in world politics.

ANDREAS UMLAND

Lecturer in German Studies at the
National Taras Shevchenko University
of Kyiv, Ukraine