

Bimonthly November-December No 6 (XLIX)/2021

20 PLN (w tym 8% vat) | 10 EUR | 12 USD | 7 GBP

www.neweasterneurope.eu



New Eastern Europe

2011-2021

THE ROAD TO PAX CAUCASIA

ISSN 2083-7372



06

9 772083 737128

Contents

The road to Pax Caucasia

- 7 Infrastructural connectivity of the South Caucasus. A chance for a community of interests?**
Mariusz Maszkiewicz
The prospects for development, prosperity and peaceful coexistence between the peoples of the Caucasus are still overshadowed by territorial and ethnic conflict. Despite this, they do not match the aspirations and dreams of the societies present in this region.
- 10 A new corridor, a new impetus**
Ali Hajizade
The South Caucasus has serious potential to become a full-fledged logistics hub of regional significance. While opposition to developing a new corridor remains, the potential benefits for all countries in the South Caucasus and beyond will outweigh any costs or perceived risks.
- 14 The South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War**
Valery Chechelashvili
The trilateral co-operation format – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – has inexhaustible potential.
- 21 Understanding the Kremlin's logic after the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**
Volodymyr Kopchak
- 27 Caucasian geopolitics: Finding a path towards stability and peaceful coexistence**
Vakhtang Maisaia
The Caucasus region is a wealthy area in terms of its geopolitical position, strategic importance and history. Certainly, the geoeconomic relevance of the region has once again become clear following the end of the latest fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.

- 32 The Zangezur corridor. An Azerbaijani perspective**
Murad Muradov
The opening of the Zangezur corridor will play an important role in the security of Azerbaijan's newly liberated lands.
- 37 The Armenian view on the opening of the South Caucasus after the 2020 Karabakh War**
Benyamin Poghosyan
- 43 The position of Georgia within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**
Victor Kipiani
Georgia has great interest in advancing peaceful and neighbourly relations with the other countries of the South Caucasus.
- ## Opinion and Analysis
-
- 47 Vladimir the historian. Putin's political revision of Ukrainian history**
Joshua R. Kroeker
For Putin, Ukraine has always been and will always be a part of Russia.
- 54 Who benefits from the CSTO?**
Tiziano Marino and Tatevik Hovhannisyan
The CSTO has been promoted as a regional counterpart to NATO ever since its creation in 1992. Despite this, the purpose of the organisation remains unclear.
- 60 The Central and Eastern European natural gas market 2013-19. Trends and implications**
Dwight Nystrom and Geoffrey Lyon
- 73 The public diplomacy of the Associated Trio. Singing in unison?**
Maria Protsiuk

Interviews

- 83 The new Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre is a Trojan horse for Putin's hybrid war.**
An interview with Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern

History and Memory

- 91 Novgorod, violence and Russian political culture**
Miłosz Jeromin Cordes
The themes of violence, plots and suspicion are integral parts of Russian political culture. Although it is not easy to trace the origins of these issues, they appear to partly stem from the times of Ivan the Terrible.
- 99 Blindspots in Second World War History**
Kristina Smolijaninova

Stories And Ideas

- 107 Lithuania fumbles with 4,200 migrants, pushing human rights aside**
Linas Jegelevicius
As of September 28th 2021, 4,163 migrants have illegally crossed Lithuania's border with Belarus. To deter migrants – now and for good – Lithuania has pinned its hopes on a fence along the frontier.

Thirty years after the fall. The legacy of the Soviet Union

- 116 The disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful**
A conversation with Serhii Plokhyy
- 125 Legacies of the real and imagined Soviet Union 1991-2021**
Alexander Libman and Anastassia Obydenkova

- 130 Russia's young generation and the Soviet myth**
Victoria Odissonova

- 145 History never ends**
Andrii Portnov
People never know exactly how to change history. But they should try, and try hard. This is because history is very much unpredictable, it loves to surprise and is often ironic, sometimes in a bitter or even cruel way.

- 150 A History of Europe Fraught in Contradictions: 1989-2021**
Wolfgang Eichwede

- 159 After the Soviet Union. A melancholy of unwanted experiences**
Bakar Bereakashvili
When perestroika emerged and the Soviet Union gradually collapsed, a lot of people fell prey to great illusions.

- 165 Society vs the elite. Belarusian post-Soviet experiences**
Anton Saifullayev and Maxim Rust

Eastern Café

- 174 The pain of Gongadze's unsolved murder**
Clémence Lavialle and Iwona Reichardt
- 177 Deconstruction on the (semi)periphery**
Michał Przeperski
- 181 Happiness in small doses**
Adam Reichardt

PUBLISHER

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College
of Eastern Europe in Wrocław
office@kew.org.pl, www.kew.org.pl



Zamek Wojnowice
ul. Zamkowa 2, 55-330 Wojnowice, Poland
New Eastern Europe is published in partnership
with the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk.

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE

pl. Solidarności 1, 80-863 Gdańsk, Poland
<https://ecs.gda.pl/>
ecs@ecs.gda.pl

EDITORIAL BOARD

Yaroslav Hrytsak, Paweł Kowal, Ivan Krastev,
Georges Mink, Cornelius Ochmann, Mykola
Riabchuk, Eugeniusz Smolar, Lilia Shevtsova,
Roman Szporluk, Jan Zielonka

EDITORIAL TEAM

Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-Chief
Iwona Reichardt, Deputy Editor, Lead Translator
Daniel Gleichgewicht, Editor,
Anastasiia Starchenko, Editorial Researcher
Contributing Editors: Mackenzie Baldinger,
Maciej Makulski, Wojciech Michnik,
Maxim Rust, Anna Efimova
Editorial Interns: Arzu Bunyad, Nino Kvirikashvili

COPYEDITING

Niall Gray

ILLUSTRATIONS AND COVER

Andrzej Zaręba

COVER LAYOUT

Do Lasu s.c

SUBSCRIPTION:

www.neweasterneurope.eu/subscribe

LAYOUT AND FORMATTING

Małgorzata Chyc | AT Wydawnictwo

EDITORIAL OFFICES

New Eastern Europe
ul. Szlak 26/12A, 31-153 Kraków
editors@neweasterneurope.eu



Content with the notation (CC) is licensed
under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0
License. All attempts are made to give
proper and appropriate attribution to the
author and source.

Circulating texts without the Editors' permit
is strictly forbidden. The Editors bear no
responsibility for the content of advertisements.

Copyright © by the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański
College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław
(Kolegium Europy Wschodniej
im. Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego
we Wrocławiu), 2021

Texts and opinions published in *New Eastern
Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views
of the funders, publishers and editors.

The section titled "The road to Pax Caucasica"
is supported by the Embassy of the Republic
of Poland in Georgia/NATO CPE.

New Eastern Europe is co-financed by the
Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

Ministry of
Culture
and National
Heritage of
the Republic
of Poland



NARODOWY
PROGRAM
ROZWOJU
CZYTELNICTWA

The theme "Thirty years after the fall The legacy
of the Soviet Union" is co-financed by the
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Representation in Poland.
The views expressed in the publication are not
necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
Commercial use of all publications and media
published by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is not
permitted without the written consent of the FES.

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**
PRZEDSTAWICIELSTWO W POLSCE

Legal Services Provided by KOKSZTYS S.A.



K O K S Z T Y S

Circulation: 3000

Printing: Zakład Poligraficzny Moś i Łuczak sp.j.


International Distribution: www.pineapple-media.com

Printed in Poland


Published since 2011

Novgorod, violence and Russian political culture

MIŁOSZ JEROMIN CORDES



The themes of violence, plots and suspicion are integral parts of Russian political culture. Although it is not easy to trace the origins of these issues, they appear to partly stem from **the times of Ivan the Terrible**. His oprichnina and the sack of Novgorod marked the beginning of institutionalised oppression on an unprecedented scale.



Every autumn, the city of Veliky Novgorod hosts the Valdai Discussion Club. Introduced 17 years ago, these talks have focused on the country's present and future and provide an arguably open and democratic environment for expert dialogue.

Meanwhile, Russia's political system has been evolving into an autocracy where basic civic freedoms are greatly limited and state violence is on the rise. Poisoning of those proclaimed foes and defectors, long prison sentences for peaceful protesters, and intimidation have become everyday realities for those who oppose the current state of affairs in the country.

It is often said that the tradition of mass oppression in Russia dates back to the Mongol invasion of Rus' in the 13th century. Although I do not question the importance of this event, I believe that these issues really began after the sack of Novgorod in 1570 by Ivan the Terrible and his repressive oprichnina policy. The factors that drove his actions against the city have been paramount to the emergence of Russian political culture. As a result, what many call Putinism today is ultimately a system that draws heavily from the seeds of violence, distrust and fear of foreign conspiracy that Ivan's oprichnina planted 450 years ago.

No fourth Rome will emerge

Novgorod holds a special place in the history of Russia. Along with Kyiv, it became the cradle of medieval Rus'. In 862, the city's citizens summoned the Scandinavian warrior Rurik to put an end to domestic quarrels and establish a strong state that in the centuries to come would be able to withstand the pressures of Livonia, Sweden and nomadic tribes.

Novgorod was a powerful regional player. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, however, it was clear that the city was past its heyday.

Novgorod also managed to survive the Mongol invasion in the early 13th century. The Mongols sacked Kyiv and razed vast parts of Rus', which contributed to the rise of Moscow. Initially part of the Grand Duchy of Vladimir, it quickly became independent. In 1325, the Orthodox Metropolitan Peter transferred his residence to the modern capital. Moscow gained a powerful ally in uniting Rus' under its auspices.

As the process gained pace at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, Moscow's dukes sought to use ideology to strengthen their rule. They ultimately found it in the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Many in Europe this event a sign of Doomsday, a punishment for the betrayal of the real Christian faith just like in Rome a thousand years before. For many Eastern Orthodox clergy, it was a sign that Moscow represents the sacred truth of Christ and his followers. "Two Romes have fallen, the third stands, and there will be no fourth", wrote Philoteus, a monk from Pskov in the early 16th century.

Although it was purely a religious prophecy, Moscow's dukes soon forged it into a political weapon against any internal forces that might deny their power.

Novgorod, on the other hand, was a merchant republic. Its livelihood relied as much on trade as on a delicate balance of power between the main trading families, the Orthodox Church and the wider population. Only a direct military threat would lead to a gathering of all the city's citizens, the Veche, to choose a prince. This procedure had a proto-democratic dimension and stood out in a world that had just been ransacked by the Mongols. At this time, anyone who aspired to receive an investiture from the Golden Horde risked being murdered.

Unlike many other Rus' principalities, Novgorod was able to remain a powerful regional player. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, however, it was clear that the city was past its heyday. The source of Novgorod's wealth – the Hanseatic League – was in terminal decline. Northern Europe's commercial centre was increasingly shifting from the Baltic to the North Sea. Trade routes to the east either crossed south-eastern Poland and the Black Sea or the Mediterranean.

Novgorod became vulnerable to external pressure. In 1478, Ivan III conquered the city. He dissolved the Veche and deported many of Novgorod's aristocrats, merchants and landowners to what is now central Russia. Yet Moscow's reign was not completely repressive. Since Ivan III strived to benefit from Novgorod's trade ties, he retained elements of the local political system. The conquest was decisive but its consequences did not turn out to be extremely violent, at least not immediately.

Conspiracy and paranoia

Things began to change decisively during the reign of Ivan IV. Due to personal experiences, he remained suspicious of his counsellors and their backstage influence on state affairs throughout his reign. He particularly despised the *mestnichestvo*, a traditional system of seniority between the aristocracy that even went so far as to describe the seating order at the tsar's table. Ivan also never trusted the *zemshchina*, an institution that allowed for vast parts of Russia to be ruled by boyars, not the state. Driven by his anxieties, Ivan created a masterplan to get rid of his real or imagined opponents once and for all. In 1564, he left Moscow and announced his abdication. He wrote two letters, one to the aristocracy, in which he accused its members of treason. Simultaneously, he wrote another to the citizens of Moscow, in which he declared that he held no grudge against them. This event provided the origins for the famous "good tsar – bad boyars" dichotomy in Russia.

Ivan's move left the boyars in dismay. They feared that the people of Moscow might organise a popular uprising directed against the noblemen so they asked the tsar to return. He agreed upon the condition that he would be given a free hand in persecuting traitors, which he believed were everywhere in the country.

In short, this is how Ivan created the *oprichnina*, a system outside of the traditional *mestnichestvo* and *zemshchina* that was a completely new style of rule for the whole state. This system created a separate territory within the country that was ruled directly by the grand duke and his henchmen – the *oprichniki*. They were recruited mostly from ambitious low and middle-grade noblemen, whose desire for power only encouraged their willingness to commit atrocities.

The initial role of the *oprichnina* was to weaken the old landowning and merchant families, as well as the Orthodox Church. Only Ivan himself decided who would be suspected and accused of opposing his rule. Until 1568, the *oprichnina* relied on various mechanisms embedded into the *zemschina*. From then on, however, it

Ivan created the *oprichnina* and *zemshchina* that was a completely new style of rule for the whole state.

was free of any restraints. Oprichniki were free to do whatever they wanted and were restricted only by their imaginations.

The deadliness of Ivan's invention was showcased in the town of Izborsk, just a few kilometres away from Pskov. In 1569, a small Polish-Lithuanian regiment seized the local fortress. Even though Muscovites retook it with little difficulty, Ivan was convinced that the whole incident happened as a result of treason. His oprichniki executed not only the local garrison, but also those from the surrounding fortresses.

This, however, was not the end of Ivan's wrath. The tsar was convinced that the loss of control over Izborsk was orchestrated by local elites in neighbouring Pskov and Novgorod. The incident gave him a convenient pretext for taking decisive steps against both his real and imagined opponents.

The cradle of Russia on fire

Shortly thereafter, Ivan IV decided to march against Novgorod in early 1570. Having arrived on the eve of Orthodox Christmas, he directed his first attacks against the surrounding monasteries and Archbishop Pimen. The tsar's oprichniki beat several hundred monks, as Ivan believed the church was involved in plotting with Poland-Lithuania.

Ivan then set out his camp in Gorodishche, just outside of Novgorod's city walls. Initially, it served as a trial place for the clergy. The hell of the oprichnina, however, was soon unleashed and affected the whole population of the city. First, the oprichniki arrested and tortured boyars and merchants. They threw their families off the bridge over the frozen Volkhov river. Then, they pillaged the city's churches and richest houses. A few days later members of the city's lower and middle classes met the same fate.

The tsar and his butchers eventually departed in mid-February, leaving Novgorod devastated and its population massacred. The city never regained its former glory and importance. Its centuries-old institutions were destroyed and so was its population. Novgorod subsequently became a simple regional centre with little to no influence.

Ivan IV's punishment of Novgorod resonated across all of Russia, as many of those who survived were resettled in other regions. The country was deeply torn and shocked. Ivan IV ruled until his death in 1584 and historians subsequently called him Ivan the Terrible. The following decades showed that the oprichnina and the sack of Novgorod laid the foundations of the Russian political culture that we know today.

Since Ivan's sons were unable to rule and the Rurik dynasty died out, Russia experiences two decades of turbulence known as the Smuta. For a short while, Moscow was captured by Polish-Lithuanian forces. The customs that were brought to the city were frowned upon and even regarded as the work of the devil. After the Smuta had ended the mere suggestion of collaborating with invaders could lead to someone being brutally murdered.

Wariness of external interference rose after the young tsar Peter introduced reforms that were supposed to modernise Russia. Rumours even spread that he had been replaced by a Western doppelganger. This theory was further strengthened by the presence of foreigners in the tsar's vicinity in charge of the reforms.

Foreign actions have also been used to explain defeats experienced by the Russian army. Two large-scale military conflicts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Crimean (1853–56) and Russo-Japanese Wars (1904–05), were supposedly lost as the enemy had successfully infiltrated Russia's intelligence network. Enemy plots provided a convenient explanation for any humiliation.

Conspiracy also became an important way of justifying military interventions in areas that Russia considered its sphere of influence. When the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth adopted its constitution in 1791 and attempted to set itself free from Russia, Catherine II accused the state of plotting with Turkey and breaching the extraterritoriality of the Orthodox church in Warsaw. She gave herself a pretext to start a war that would liquidate the Commonwealth in 1795.

After the
assassination of
the rather liberal
Alexander II in 1881,
the counterreforms
of Alexander III
were adopted.

For Russian rulers, accusations of foreign connections were also a way of dealing with internal opposition. Right after the Napoleonic Wars, parts of the Russian aristocracy and gentry were repressed because they expected reforms in the spirit of enlightened absolutism. Attempts to abolish serfdom in the late 18th and 19th centuries were often presented as “un-Russian” and non-traditional, aimed at weakening the Tsarist autocracy.

After the assassination of the rather liberal Alexander II in 1881, the counter-reforms of Alexander III were adopted with slogans about going back to Russian roots. These were contrasted with the supposedly pro-Western changes introduced by his predecessor. Alexander III sought to remain true to the “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” triad. Everything foreign was suspicious to him, including Russia's inhabitants of different ethnic and religious background. As a fierce anti-semitic, he brought about the forced migration of Russian Jews to the United States.

Throughout the 19th century and up until 1917, Poles living in Russia were believed to be constantly conspiring against the tsardom. As Russian nationalism was gain-

ing strength in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Poles were often considered a Western element who betrayed their Slaviness in favour of Latin civilization.

Furthermore, at the end of World War Two, soldiers returning from the West were imprisoned in large numbers as they were seen as possible revolutionaries. Nobel Prize winner Alexandr Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to eight years in the gulag for having shared some critical remarks with his friend in a letter from the field. The famous wartime poster with a shushing woman and the caption “don’t gossip” greatly exemplifies this attitude.

The post-war spy hysteria was also artificially exaggerated by Soviet state propaganda to a striking extent. In Kaliningrad Oblast, a region freshly conquered by the Soviet Union, inhabitants were warned of the presence of many NATO spies during the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is despite the fact that this territory was saturated with Red Army soldiers and security forces.

The suspicion of today

During the winter between 2011 and 2012, Vladimir Putin published a series of articles in preparation for his presidential campaign. He painted a gloomy picture of Russia in the 1990s, which was seen as a time of malevolent elites, corruption and paralysed state institutions. At the same time, Putin presented himself as a leader taking steps to restore order.

In the following years, the ruling elite has consolidated its power, introduced new forms of domestic oppression and pursued a belligerent foreign policy. Yet, the

In 2011 and 2012
Putin published
a series of **articles**
in preparation for
his presidential
campaign.

system they have created is not entirely new. It draws heavily upon existing mechanisms deeply embedded in Russia’s state institutions and its citizens. In many ways, they resemble patterns introduced by Ivan IV.

In order to see these parallels, we need to consider two paradigms that are followed by the Kremlin. The first is of a quasi-constructivist nature: Russia is a unique (almost civilisational) entity that needs a strong central power to survive. The second is the ultra-realist notion of the “besieged fortress”: the country has been surrounded by enemies ready to wreak havoc, just like they did in Izborsk.

Such perceptions have far-reaching domestic consequences. They justify limiting civic liberties, controlling the information space and imposing narratives on issues of vital interest to authorities, such as history. These moves have been made under the auspices of the “sovereign democracy” doctrine. As a result, these be-

liefs have weakened or effectively annihilated most of the civil society institutions that began to function during the late 1980s thanks to perestroika and glasnost.

This culture of suspicion also helps us to understand why Russia is predominantly a destructive force in international relations. The conquest of Novgorod in 1478 and its sacking nine decades later stemmed from the conviction that Russian territory exceeds Russia itself and spans over the historical Rus'. The Kremlin therefore has the right to defend its interests whenever and wherever it deems necessary.

Such philosophy has been visible in Russia's actions towards Belarus and Ukraine. Whereas the tradition of negating the idea of a separate Belarusian nation is deeply rooted among Russian political elites, underlining the historical unity of Russians has become increasingly important since the Euromaidan. This feeling was expressed in Putin's essay published in July this year.

Thanks to both paradigms, the Kremlin has given itself the right to denounce the enemies of Russia and persecute them no matter who and where they were. Sergey and Yulia Skripal and Alexei Navalny are perhaps the most prominent victims of this policy in recent years. Similar victims can be traced back to the 2000s, such as Anna Politkovskaya.


Moreover, today's Russian elites use the system they created in the name of the nation but above the heads of the people. An almost autarkic sense of sovereignty allows them to deny international obligations they deem uncomfortable, partly because they have got used to applying domestic law selectively. In this sense, they are very much alike Ivan's oprichniki.

In the struggle for autarky, the Kremlin also aims to become independent from the global digital space, testing cutting off the internet under the pretext of external interference in Russia's internal affairs.

Indeed, the web has demonstrated its abilities to support transparency and openness. Thanks to webcams present at polling stations, foreign observers were able to uncover the Kremlin's election tactics. With TV and traditional media under control, the time has come to deprive Russians of access to independent, non-partisan media. This is similar to Ivan's suppression of Novgorod's more inclusive political system, which was influenced by trade interactions with the outside world.

Epilogue

In 1862, the Monument of the Millennium of Russia was erected in Novgorod. Russian emperors and historians declared the city the birthplace of Russian statehood. This was an interesting take, considering that the tsars owed their absolute power to the forces that crushed the Novgorod Republic and its democratic institutions.

Today's Russia portrays its history as unbroken despite many ruptures. In the official narrative, the dukes of Moscow, tsars, emperors and Bolshevik commissars form an uninterrupted succession of national leaders. Although the elements of this story seem to have very little in common, the legacy of Ivan the Terrible links them together more than anything else. It is thus a striking paradox that the Valdai Club meetings first took place in a city that was crushed precisely because of its openness. 

Miłosz Jeromin Cordes (née Zieliński) holds a PhD in Cultural Studies.

He studied in Warsaw and St Petersburg. He is a career diplomat and worked in Warsaw, Brussels, Valletta and Kaliningrad. He currently resides in Frederiksberg, Denmark. Starting from December, he will be researching the history of Central and Eastern European nationalisms at Lund University.