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“Time Slavophiles”: The Russian expectations regarding the First World War between irrationalism and pramatism”

“The time promotes Slavophilism”. This is how philosopher Vladimir Ern summarized the developments in Russia in 1915. “[...] We actually enter a Slavophilic era of our history and it is closely related to the destiny of the whole world. [...] What we thought was pure Slavophilic fiction and patriotic dreaming is beginning to come true¹.”

“Slavophilic Fiction” is an escape of the Russian religious and philosophical thought of the political life after 1905. It was disappointed both with the Left and the Right and seized by “a catastrophic feeling”, nourishing its expectation of “great spiritual revolution” and “spiritual liberation”.

The current report will present the “Slavophilic expectations” from the war of the religious thinkers, Vladimir Ern, Fyodor Stepun, Evgeny Trubetskoy, Vasily Rozanov, Sergey Bulgakov and Nikolay Berdyaev, reviving the Russian messianism, of the one part, and, of the other, the pragmatic views of Russian Liberals Konstantin Arseniyev, Lev Slonimsky, Pyotr Struve and Pavel Milyukov.

In the article, the definition “Slavophilic” is conditional for the beginning of the 20th century and summarizes the religious and philosophical interpretations of the war in the Russian society, which are neither related to the early Slavophilism of the 1840s, nor to the neo-Slavism of Alexandr Pogodin of his Romantic period from the beginning of the 20th century to 1912–1913.

¹ Эрн, В. Ф. Время славянофильствует. Война, Германия, Европа, Россия. М., 1915. – В: Эрн, В. Ф. Сочинения. М., 1991, 371–372.

A.L. Pogodin was a professional Slavic studies scholar and his approach differed considerably from the one of old Slavophiles, from whom he differentiated himself², and from the religious philosophers, who promoted Slavophilism in the eve and during WWI and whose opinions were unprofessional and influenced by the wartime background.

The main topics constituting the irrational ideological tissues of the Slavophilic religious philosophies for the war are: the Slavophilism, the religious messianism, the new dichotomy and the Slavic idea.

1. Slavophilism

V. F. Ern equalized the Slavophilism to the “pan-humanity” [всечеловечность] of F. M. Dostoyevsky: “The time promotes Slavophilism in the meaning that the Russian idea of pan-humanity is gaining popularity”³.

V. V. Rozanov denied the use of “Slavophilism” and “Western orientation” as “censoring and useful terms”⁴. He proposed the following definition of Slavophilism: “love towards the Russian in Russia, which is immortal”⁵. Therefore, in his opinion, the war was the beginning of the “Russian Renaissance”.

Berdyayev got close to the interpretation of V. V. Rozanov accepting Slavophilism as a synonym of Russophilia. Yet, he saw mostly the Slavic idea in it: “the Slavic idea can be found only in the Slavophilia... [...] For the sake of precision, Slavophilia should be called Russophilia”⁶.

2 *Лантева, Л. П.* Александр Львович Погодин (1872–1947) как исследователь истории славян // *Средневековый город: межвузовский научный сборник*. — Саратовский государственный университет, 2006. – В. 17, 166–184.

3 *Эрн, В. Ф.* Время славянофильствует..., с. 372.

4 *Розанов, В. В.* Война 1914 года и русское возрождение. М., 1915, 45–46. www.prlib.ru

5 *Розанов, В. В.* Мимолетное. 1914 год. – В: Розанов, В. В. *Собрание сочинений. Когда начальство ушло...* М., 1997, с. 441.

6 *Бердяев, Н. А.* Славянофильство и славянская идея. – В: *Судьба России. (Сборник статей, 1914–1917)*, с. 105.

Berdyayev disputed the main idea of V. V. Rozanov of revival of Slavophilia as a main result of the war, developed in his book “The War of 1914 and Russian Renaissance” (1915).

Berdyayev expected from the war to replace the Slavophilia with universal pan-humanity through the genuine Slavic idea, which rather than opposing the Eastern Orthodox to the Catholic religion, marked the beginning of “new Renaissance”: “Today's historic events destroy both the Slavophilic and the Western platforms and obliges us to adopt the art of the new self-awareness...”⁷.

Another result of the war, according to N. A. Berdyayev, should be the intellectuals' denial of the “Liberal imperialism”⁸, which he interpreted as imitation of the Western European and distancing from the Russian.

Both F. M. Dostoyevsky and N. A. Berdyayev accepted the new Renaissance of the pan-humanity as equivalent to the genuine Russian culture.

S. N. Bulgakov denied the provincialism in the “extreme Slavophilia” separating the West from Russia, being an integral part of Christian Europe: “Russia is a major and requisite part of Europe's spiritual organism rather than its common province.”

2. Religious messianism

The religious and moral concept played a key role in the “Slavophilic expectations” from the war.

V. V. Rozanov saw the glory of the war in the launching of “moral and educational” and the “great racial and cultural” fight⁹. The main enemy – Germany – was presented by V. F. Ern as a symbol of the “deicidal energies of the West”, the Western culture after the epoch of the Revival

7 *Бердяев, Н. А.* О “вечно-бабьем” в русской душе. – В: Судьба России (Сборник статей, 1914–1917), с. 32.

8 *Бердяев, Н. А.* Война и кризис интеллигентского сознания. – В: Судьба России (Сборник статей, 1914–1917), с. 43.

9 *Розанов, В. В.* Война 1914 года и русское возрождение..., с. 33, 31–32.

with its “internal and external secularization”, opposed to the “transcendental”¹⁰ Russian culture prior to the Europeanization of Peter I.

S. N. Bulgakov expected a “new grand stage in the history of the Russian self-awareness, namely, spiritual liberation of the Russian mind of the admiration of the West” from the war¹¹.

E. N. Trubetsky focused on the war as “Christian settlement of the national question” and “super-popular universal task of overall political revival of all enslaved nations”¹². Russia's “super-popular” goal is the fight of “Russian patriotism with the German nationalism”¹³.

F. A. Stepun, who developed later in his emigration period the religious and philosophical movement *Novy Grad* [the New City], initially accepted the definition of the war as “sacred” and “fair”, sacrificing the “divine idea” rather than being “man's whim”. However, when he personally faced it at the front already in April 1915, he confessed the difference between dream and reality: “There is nothing in common between the war that we are experiencing and the war that I imagined”¹⁴.

The Liberal public did not share the enthusiasm of the “Slavophilic” philosophers with the war. The journalist from “Europe's Paper” [“Вестник Европы”], L. Z. Slonimsky, categorically denied messianism and Slavophilia as a leading ideology: “The idea of national messianism leads peoples to the same results as the megalomania of the Roman emperors. The claim of playing an exceptional role is not innate of the Germans only. In the past it would also occur among the French and the English. It was

10 Эри, В. Ф. *Время славянофильствует...*, с. 382, 388.

11 Сергей Булгаков. *Война и русское самосознание...*, с. 42.

12 Кн. Е. Н. Трубецкой. *Война и мировая задача России*. М., 1915, с. 11.
<http://www.runivers.ru/>

13 Кн. Евгений Трубецкой. *Смысл войны*. М., 1914, с. 7.

14 Степун, Ф. А. *Из писем прапорщика-артиллериста*. Томск, 2000.
<http://militera.lib.ru/db/stepun/index.html>

also in the basis of our old Slavophilia as well”¹⁵. The leader of the Liberal Cadets, P. N. Milyukov, was no less sceptical¹⁶.

3. *New dichotomies*

The religious and messianic interpretation of the war also prompted new dichotomies: the opposition “Europe-Russia” and “East-West”, typical of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, was replaced by “religious-secular”, “spiritual-material”, “Slavic-German”, “idealism-positivism” and “patriotism-nationalism”.

In the “Slavophilic” interpretation Russia was a symbol of the religious, the spiritual [the “Holy Russia” [Святая Русь], the Slavic, the idealistic and the patriotic, while German – of the secular, the material, the positivistic and the nationalistic.

The positivism and atheism were condemned by V. V. Rozanov as bearers of death along with revolution and Socialism. They were symbolic of the “sun of the Western orientation”, while the war was supposed to raise the “sun of the East”¹⁷.

S. N. Bulgakov concluded that modern Europe resembled “cultural epicueranism” in any respect: “Providing such comfort, Europe impresses and attracts the 'Barbarian' peoples... ..During the epoch of Peter the Great our compatriots also headed for it [...]. I have found modern Europe disagreeable for quite a long time and have stopped travelling to it. The European attitude towards life suggests mystic fear.”

S. N. Bulgakov opposed “the element of the Steppe Nomad living in the Russian soul” to the European “settled meshchanstvo”¹⁸.

15 *Слонимский, Л.З.* Новое язычество на почве национализма. – Вестник Европы, 1915, № 5, май, 341–342.

16 *Милуков, П.Н.* Как принята была война в России. – В: Милуков, П.Н. Воспоминания. Т. 2. М., 1990, с. 157. Milyukov quotes part of a poem by Nikolay Nekrasov of 1857 mocking at the enthusiasm of the Peasant Reform of Alexander II.

17 *Розанов, В. В.* Мимолетное. 1914 год. – В: Розанов, В. В. Собрание сочинений. Когда начальство ушло... М., 1997, с. 197, 213–214.

18 *Сергей Булгаков.* Война и русское самосознание..., с. 9, 30.

4. *The Slavic idea*

The fact that the war was named already at the beginning as “Second Patriotic” and “Liberating” was related mostly to the Slavic idea. “Russia's unity and integrity and the liberation of the kindred Slavic peoples – these are the two slogans, in the name of which the war is waged,”¹⁹ Prince E. N. Trubetskoy wrote in August 1914, to which V. V. Rozanov added in 1915: “...behind the back of all Slavic people that we are protecting with our breasts”²⁰.

The Slavic ideology in the war was based on two key notions: the Polish question in Russia and the protection of the Slavs against the German oppression.

The Polish question

The incumbents' official position on the Polish question was publicized on 3 August 1914 in the proclamation of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich, to the Polish people, in particular, concerning the uniting of the Polish lands into a single state within the Russian Empire.

V. V. Rozanov fully agreed with the speech of the Commander-in-Chief and opposed the Polish ambitions about independence. “Of course, the Poles will find destruction, if they do not comply with the words of the Commander-in-Chief”²¹.

E. N. Trubetskoy paid special attention to the Polish question: “Poland’s resurrection is a mandatory condition for our Russian national revival”. Only through the expiation of “its historical sin”, as E. N. Trubetskoy described the division of Poland, Russia would be able to implement “its liberating mission among the Slavic peoples”²². E. N. Trubetskoy, however, fully agreed that Poland should remain within the Russian Empire.

19 *Кн. Евгений Трубецкой. Смысл войны...*, с. 20.

20 *Розанов, В. В. Война 1914 года и русское возрождение...*, с. 5.

21 *Розанов, В. В. Война 1914 года и русское возрождение...*, с. 131.

22 *Кн. Евгений Трубецкой. Смысл войны...*, с. 13, 42.

N. A. Berdyaev saw the war as the beginning of the awareness of the Slavic idea “in the face of the dreadful danger of Germanism”. Yet, he did not idealize it and confessed its “pitiful” status in the Russian society, where, in his view, it existed only at subconscious level.

This was also the case with the other Slavic people that were also disunited. The Russophilism of the old Slavophiles hindered Slavic unification as the Eastern Orthodox religion was opposed to Catholicism. “The Slavophilism would scare simultaneously the Poles, the Slavs and the progressive layers of the Russian society”.

According to N. A. Berdyaev, the Slavic idea would not be implemented only through “the Russian spiritual universalism and the Russian pan-humanity”²³.

The Russian-Polish contradictions could be overcome only through the pan-humanity, which N. A. Berdyaev explained with the division of the Slavic world into “Slavic West”, which included Poland, and “Slavic East”, having Russia as its centre²⁴.

The Liberals accepted positively the speech of Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevich. Unlike the “Slavophilic” public figures, however, some of them propose granting autonomy to united Poland. In January 1915, P. N. Milyukov suggested that the Government would submit a bill to this end.

The main editor of “Europe’s Paper”, K. K. Arseniyev even compared the proclamation of 3 August 1914 in terms of importance with the manifesto of 17 October 1905. He said the speech marked the beginning of new Russian-Polish relations and described the Poles as “resurrected nation”.

Standing apart from the euphoria of V. V. Rozanov and E. N. Trubetskoy, however, K. K. Arseniyev did not idealize the Russian-Polish relations and noted that the war was fratricidal given that there were Poles (as well as Lithuanians) in both camps²⁵.

23 *Бердяев, Н. А.* Славянофильство и славянская идея..., с. 108, 110.

24 *Бердяев, Н. А.* Русская и польская душа. – В: Судьба России (Сборник статей, 1914–1917), с. 123.

25 *Арсеньев, К. К.* Война и национальности. – Вестник Европы, 1914, № 9, сентябрь, 343–345.

In his memories, P. N. Milyukov confessed that during the war “persecution of nationalities persisted and the promise, given to the Poles, was not kept...”²⁶.

While accepting that Poland and Finland were not subject to assimilation due to their “specific destiny”, Right Liberal P. B. Struve considered them as integral part of Great Russia: “the affiliation of the Kingdom of Poland to Russia is a matter of purely political strength for the latter. [...] Russia needs to keep the Kingdom of Poland within the Empire”²⁷.

While the Russian ideal involved the inclusion of Poland within the Great Russia, the Polish ideal entailed united and independent Poland. The Russian-Polish historical discrepancy doomed in advance the Slavic idea during the war.

The Slavic cause

While the first delusion of the “Slavophilic” public circles was in regards to Poland and Russia’s Slavic mission in the war, the second delusion was the parallel drawn between the 1914 war and the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War.

At the beginning of the war, when Bulgaria was still neutral, V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote an address to the Bulgarians: “Bulgarians! Where are you? Why are you not with us in this bright and happy hour of common generous sacrifice?! Hurry up! Tomorrow may be too late”²⁸. The “Slavophilic” circles opposed Serbia’s heroism to Bulgaria’s hesitation.

The Liberal position about Bulgaria was deprived of emotional reprimands and analyzed impartially the discrepancy between the Bulgarian and the Russian positions: “The Bulgarians cannot forget that Greece has deprived them of part of the Macedonian lands, that Romania has even seized part of their own territory and that these conquests have

26 Милуков, П. Н. ”Священное единение”. – В: Милуков, П. Н. Воспоминания. Т. 2. М., 1990, с. 166.

27 Струве, П. Б. Великая Россия. – В: Струве, П. Б. Patriotica: Политика, культура, религия, социализм. М., 1997, с. 57.

28 Цит по: Крачкович, Петр З. Великая Россия и общеевропейская война. М., 1915, с. 24.

been sanctioned by the Treaty of Bucharest of 28 June 1913 with the silent approval of the Russian diplomacy. [...] The Macedonian Bulgarians, having forcefully fallen under Serbian power, rebel against their oppressors and, naturally, seek refuge in Bulgaria's border regions, where they are patronized for humane reasons"²⁹.

Conclusion

The comparison of the 1914 war with the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War remained only within the “Slavophilic” publications. While the Slavic idea saw its peak in 1877–1878 and throughout the whole 19th century and the period of the Romanov dynasty there was unique unity of power-society-people around the moral cause of the rescue of the Balkan Slavs³⁰, the situation was considerably different in 1914.

Germany and Russia had too many points of contact, and regardless of the war they waged, they belonged to a common culture – the one of Christian Europe. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire was a cultural antipode of the Russian one. The clash of Germany and Russia in 1914 was not between two civilizations, as was the case in the 1877–1878 war (between the European, represented by Russia, and the Oriental, represented by Turkey).

The war of 1914 opposed European cultures, of the one part, and Slavic peoples, of the other, which rendered the Slavic idea incapable of turning into a leading ideology for the Russian society, for which the lack of a moral cause made its participation in the military actions meaningless.

The Russian society did not find an uniting idea and WWI could be defined as one of the most meaningless for Russia (with the exception of the temporary liberation of the Russian population in Galicia that was subjected to cruel persecution by the Austrian authorities during the war).

29 *Иностранное обозрение*. – Вестник Европы, 1915, № 5, май, 368–369.

30 *Григорова, Д. Г.* „Дело славян нам дорого”: Русские либералы и консерваторы о Русско-турецкой войне 1877 – 1878 годов. – *Родина*, 2009, 6, 43–45.

The lack of ideological motivation for the Russian participation in the war was consistent with the fears of F. A. Stepun, which he voiced while at the front line in March 1916: “Since the very beginning of the war I cannot dispel the fear that, finally, all European peoples – both our allies and enemies – will reach understanding in a somewhat ‘European’ manner and will all oppose the misfortunate Russia. Mark my words!³¹”.

The winning ideology for Russia in the 1914 war was the one of the revolution. P. B. Struve turned out to be right when he said: “It is not a mere chance that the world war has a democratic ideology. While waging this war the states appeal to the people as never before. During the war the people and, in particular, the Socialist-minded among them feel their strength”³².

However, if there is anything common for the Russian public thought in the 1914 event that was the irrational expectation that the war would unite the Russian nation. The Russian national-educational process has remained open up-to-date and this is one of the specific features of the Russian identity. The Russian nation is in a condition of continuous self-identification. It is a “phoenix-nation”, which re-discovers itself after the successive historical cataclism (1917, 1941–1945, 1991)³³.

The ideological disputes within the religious and philosophical “Slavophilic” circles in the eve of the war prompted the only original concept of a Russian national project in the 20th century, developed by Russian immigrant thinkers – the one of Eurasianism.

It was namely in 1914 that one of the founders of Eurasianism, historian Georgi Vernadsky, published his paper “Towards the Sun”³⁴. G. V. Vernadsky proposed a new interpretation of the Russian history denying its Europe-centered periodization.

31 *Степун, Ф. А.* Из писем прапорщика-артиллериста..., пак там.

32 *Струве, П. Б.* Размышления о русской революции. – В: Струве, П. Б. Избранные сочинения. М., 1999, с. 265.

33 *Григорова, Д. Г.* Евразийството в Русия. София, 2008.

34 *Вернадский, Г. В.* Против солнца. Распространение русского государства к востоку, Русская мысль, 1914, № 1, 56–79.

The very term “Eurasianism” was coined by Prince Nikolay Trubetskoy, who was a linguist. His Eurasian ideas emerged already in 1909–1910. N. S. Trubetskoy developed a new Eurasian mythology based on denial of the Slavic idea as a leading one in the Russian national question and the Russian geo-political orientation. In this context, the Eurasianism offers an alternative to the Russian national identity it was not accidental that it replaced the Soviet ideology in modern Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Paradoxically, it was namely the Eurasianism that has survived as a pragmatic idea from the irrational disputes in the Russian religious and philosophical circles during WWI.