



**International Journal of Global Environmental Issues**

ISSN online: 1741-5136 - ISSN print: 1466-6650

<https://www.inderscience.com/ijgenvi>

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**Editorial: Can Russia democratise?**

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**Article History:**

Received:

Accepted:

Published online: 03 January 2024

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## Editorial: Can Russia democratise?

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Russia still has a long way to go (Below, 2022), if ever trying to become a ‘normal country’. Those free media in Russia who were still portrayed a couple of years ago (AnsTageslicht, 2016) either disappeared or emigrated to other countries, fleeing from the ‘power vertical’ (Tschikow, 2015).

After my decade of personal experiences in Russia, I perceive a *clear decision* against a discursive, equal, transparent, and respectful society (Ahamer, 2013, 2014, 2015) in an overcritical percentage of the population (Zakharchenko and Klitina, 2023). Thus, in my view, the bottleneck hindering democratisation in Russia (Chatterjee, 2022) is the missing collective will to do so, if measured across all society. It seems fine for too many people to remain with the current anti-liberal paradigm (Leontiev and Amarasinghe, 2022), putting Russia deliberately outside the system of international law – based on a decision for own superiority (Poushter, 2015).

### 1 The earlier conceptual, mental background ...

The fundamental idea defining the state presently is ‘legal nihilism’ (Quiring, 2010; Luchterhandt, 2006; Mehlich, 2020; Kornev, 2018): “It means for the Russian citizen that he lives in a system in which there are no rules. And that is very difficult.” Fear and fright appear as main constituents of the Russian society (Franke, 2017) – and this constituency is shared by right-wing, nationalist forces in Europe (Schmid, 2019; Schmid and Sterkl, 2019).

The deplorable effect of several singular opinions (Schmidt, 2019; Stone, 2018) drawing an idealising image of Russia and plainly sharing Russian explanations on public opinion is disastrous, especially given that the patters of action by Russian leadership morphed during the last decade (Sygar, 2015). The battleground actually was on the level of narratives (Volkov and Kolesnikov, 2022), and the target was to define the interpretation and exegesis of history, especially incited by the major thorn in the Russian flesh, the dissolution of the USSR (Ritz, 2014), as an empire to identify oneself with. Alto often direct financing of European nationalist parties was documented (Umland, 2004). On the other hand, journalists with in-depth professional analyses (Siegert, 2011) warned since decades that structural weaknesses in Russian economy are not addressed by this rent-seeking government (Trawin, 2017; Tollison, 2012), based on arbitrariness instead of on law (Loschtschilow, 2019; Himmelspach, 2019) in administration, politics, justice, social life and business (Feschtschenko, 2016; Gabowitsch, 2019; Novaya Gazeta, 2019; Michta, 2022; Saivetz, 2021; Seredina, 2022).

“It is our task, the task of those who work on the dialogue with Russia, to ensure that *things can be called by their proper name. This right must be defended: the right of free speech.*” (Scherbakowa and Schlögel, 2015)

“Deliberative democracies make citizens happy” is not only the motto of grassroots movements in Belgium but the essence of European identity (Reybrouck, 2019).

My own experiences confirm the differences of societal constituency between Russia and Ukraine: during my 2019 EU energy project in Kyiv, I interviewed a plethora of civic initiatives and self-responsible stakeholders who formed associations, networks, and broad civil-society activism – and we later had multiple contacts to create institutional structures. However, in Russia, when I was a guest docent at the oldest and highest rewarded Moscow State University, my many interview partners were not able to enter any agreement because they perceived themselves as weak-willed elements within a power-vertical system, incapable of developing any individual initiative. Only on the merely personal level, outside work, however, dialogues were open, efficient, cordial and friendly within both cultures.

For the underlying mental background of historically inspired concepts, Alexander Dugin (Geopolitics, 2023; Wikipedia, 2019; Arctogaia, 2019) is a singled-out author who wrote the book *Foundations of Geopolitics* (Dugin, 1997) in which he developed a bundle of strategies – which astonishingly enough – partly already became true:

“Great Britain should be cut off from Europe”, and “within the borders of the United States fuel instability and separatism, for instance, provoke ‘Afro-American racists’; military operations ‘he calls ‘special operations’”, and – in most concrete manner, “Ukraine should be annexed by Russia because “Ukraine as a state has no geopolitical meaning, no particular cultural importance or universal significance, no geographic uniqueness, no ethnic exclusiveness; its certain territorial ambitions represents an enormous danger for all of Eurasia and, without resolving the Ukrainian problem, it is in general senseless to speak about continental politics.” Ukraine should not be allowed to remain independent” (Geopolitics, 2023), as cited in Wikipedia (2019).

Yale historian Timothy D. Snyder (Snyder, 2010, 2018, 2021) wrote in *The New York Review of Books* that *Foundations of Geopolitics* is influenced by the work of Carl Schmitt, a proponent of a conservative international order whose work influenced the Nazis. He also noted Dugin’s key role in forwarding the ideologies of Eurasianism (Wiederkehr, 2007) and National Bolshevism. In the author’s view, these views created Russian exception-nalism and national messianism (Ahamer, 2022).

The intention of the author lies in demonstrating that the present-day protracted war in Ukraine had been *conceptually and mentally prepared since long*, and is nothing but a late fruit of long-time conscious preparation of how to shape and project (a criminal, not) a state system – and it certainly was not provoked by actors in the so-called ‘West’ but is a genuine and willed result stemming from within Russia herself.

2 ... creates its socio-political manifestations today

What we see today is the breakdown of the only seeming ‘advantage’ of the Putin system, namely stability (Robertson and Gel’man, 2019; Dekoder, 2023). The most

recent event at the time of writing is the Prigozhin mutiny (Yusupov, 2023), and historian Andrey Zubov evaluates that “if the authorities had rallied around Putin, Prigozhin wouldn’t have even reached Rostov” (Meduza, 2023a; Zubov, 2023). There is more than one expert who sees ‘the beginning of the end’ (Meduza, 2023b) of the power-vertical system based on rent seeking of Russia’s great geological wealth, based on extraction schemes, but devoid of personal courage (Klitina, 2023).

I feel personally that the constituency of Russian society is *to pretend* to jointly believe in a lie, decorated as national narrative – while only an undefined low percentage might be aware that it is a fabrication – but the social costs of publicly denying it are far too high for logically and pragmatically oriented individual citizens. The uniting band is the joint creed (Küstenmacher et al., 2010). Therefore, this house of cards is likely to crush within seconds (Smart, 2023), when the framework conditions of most brutal ‘lawlessness enforcement’ will change, and ‘costs of disbelief’ sink.

Even, true belief is not expected from any side, and every single narrative – when dismantled – does not create emotional upheaval, as in these days (7 July 2023) is the case for Prigozhine’s real location after the ‘failed’ mutiny, and even the words of a neighbouring collaborator president are proven untrue (Meduza, 2023c), but nobody cares. In present-day Russia, nobody expects that anything is true, and the mere *existence* of fact-based compliance and exactitude is deleted from public conscience and erased from expectation – this is the exact legacy of Putin’s statal system, based on systemic lies, and century-long criminal practice. Just now, two war criminals fight each other (Günther and Kaminskij, 2023; Japparowa, 2023), as most brilliantly described by the presumably best analyst (Snyder, 2023).

**Truth is most firmly defined as inexistant, unachievable and worthless.**

What we conceive<sup>1</sup> and believe is what we get.

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