

REGIONAL STUDIES

**NATIONAL IDEOLOGY
IN THE INDEPENDENT STATES OF
CENTRAL ASIA AND
THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS:
ITS PHENOMENON, SPECIFICS, AND PROSPECTS**

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Introduction

The political processes underway in the independent Central Eurasian republics call in particular for a detailed analysis of the emergence, functioning, and development of their national ideologies. Throughout world history, no reform, modernization, or democratization during the formation and development of nations could have succeeded, nor can ever succeed, without majority support for a set of clearly formulated and desirable aims and easily grasped ideas. In fact, at all times, states with a national ideology left those states which rejected ideology as part of their policy far behind in every respect.

The following fairly succinct comments are intended as an analysis of the past, present, and future of the national-ideological complexes in eight independent republics of Central Asia and the South-

ern Caucasus (including Georgia); they are compared with what is going on in this respect in other CIS countries (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine).¹

In view of the fundamental role of the state² and weakness of civil society in practically all the

¹ Because of the far from unambiguous recent political regime change in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, I limited my contemplation of the national ideology in these countries to the forecasts about “the change in format.” I also had to ignore similar problems in Moldova due to the still vague sociopolitical trends and presence of a separatist region in its territory. Finally, I decided it would not be entirely correct or unbiased to give particular attention to the ideology of national independence in Uzbekistan, my own country.

² Certain complicated issues—the correlation between the national idea and state ideology, a common CIS ideology, positive nationalism, and some others—which deserve an independent analysis are only touched upon here in passing.

CIS countries, I concentrated on the official position in the particular country, because it is this position, and not the alternative platform³ of the

systemic and non-systemic opposition, that has so far attracted the attention of the academic and expert communities.

³ One such platform was formulated by well-known writer and philosopher Mikhail Weller in his highly popular essay entitled "The National Idea" (2005) (see: [www.weller.ru]). He has pointed out, in particular, that a "national idea cannot be invented, constructed, or formulated out of nothing to be planted in the minds by political technologists. A national idea emerges as an element of nature—this is the country's shared idea" (see the web site of the Ekho

Moskvy radio station [www.echo.msk.ru], 9 October, 2005; "a national idea cannot be invented; it is an element of nature; it is a task related to the psychology of the nation" (see: *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 12 October, 2005). Great Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote: a national idea should not be invented in the corridors of power or imposed on the nation by force (see: "Napisano krovyu," Interview with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Izvestia*, 24 July, 2007).

1. Evolution, Periodization, or Expansion? The Cornerstones of National Ideas Interpreted

The leaders of Tajikistan have offered the most complete description of *the starting point* of the country's national idea which, Dushanbe believes, existed before everything else (it was born along with the nation, or rather, along with its language, irrespective of *the national market and industrial epoch, the two main prerequisites for the emergence of a nation*). President Rakhmon has pointed out that the national idea reached unprecedented heights under the Samanids and rested on "political" (I. Samani) and "spiritual" (A. Rudaki) foundations. Avicenna, Beruni, and other prominent figures of the Muslim Renaissance "developed and strengthened" the national idea of the Tajiks. S. Ayni, A. Lakhuti, B. Gafurov, and others are hailed as "intrepid scholars and writers" who managed "to preserve the national idea, develop and strengthen it." The legal act of 1989, which made Tajik the state language, and the 16th Session (twelfth convocation) of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Tajikistan (1992) are accepted as the starting points of Tajikistan's recent history and the latest stage of the development of the national idea.⁴

The logic of the Tajik leaders, though obviously time-serving and very vague when it comes to establishing the "beginning" of the nation's historical destiny and genetic roots, has one strong point which opponents are prepared to accept: it connects generations and ties together the contradictory periods of history; the most complicated issues are pushed aside, while history is separated from ideology. (President of Armenia S. Sargsian, likewise, believes that this approach is desirable and even indispensable.⁵)

The national idea is closely connected with *a strong state*. This much is obvious in the official positions of the leaders of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Belarus. (Contemporary international law, likewise, associates the nation with the state, but there is hardly an expert or historian prepared to equate ethnic identity with the national state.)

The meaning of the ideological processes underway in Uzbekistan is best revealed by what is said about the personality and deeds of statesman and military leader Amir Temur, who built a "great and mighty state in Turkestan."⁶ The position of Ashghabad is "perfectly adjusted:" the state is described as a "mechanism for realizing the national idea."⁷ Minsk believes that the national idea should

⁴ See: E. Rakhmon, Speech at the gala meeting dedicated to the 11th anniversary of Unity Day, 27 June, 2008, available at [www.president.tj].

⁵ See: S. Sargsian, Speech at a meeting of representatives of the Armenian diaspora in America, 24 September, 2008, available at [www.president.am].

⁶ I.A. Karimov, Speech at the gala meeting dedicated to the 2200th anniversary of Tashkent, 1 September, 2009, available at [www.press-service.uz].

⁷ G. Berdymukhammadov, "Economic Strategy of Turkmenistan—Relying on the People for the Sake of the People," 9 May, 2010, available at [www.turkmenistan.gov.tm].

be rooted in the nation's awareness of its statehood and acceptance of the priority of national interests.⁸ President Rakhmon, too, said practically the same.⁹

In similar cases, the capitals of the republics mentioned above tend to forget that the term “*national interests*” applies to the ideas formulated by a nation-state. The leaders of the most of the CIS states seem to be convinced that the state is the main reformer even though in many of them there is a legal ban on treating any ideology as the state one.

President Ilham Aliev, however, seems to disagree with the idea about the synchronous emergence of the national state and the national idea: “For centuries the Azeri people lived within other countries or empires,” said he. “At times their land was a colony. However, they preserved their national specifics, national spirit, and native language. This is a firm foundation for any national state.”¹⁰

The academic community has repeatedly pointed out that the historiography of the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics remains *in the clutches of what has become the classic definition of the nation* with its five common features—language, territory, economic life, psychic makeup, and culture—*supplied by Stalin*, even if the Soviet past has been rejected, at least in words. So far the regional expert community (raised, on the whole, on the tenets of scientific communism) has not moved away from the post-Lenin formula.

World history has shown that all attempts to describe

- (1) any pre-national (including early medieval) state as national;
 - (2) any nation or nationality as specific;
 - (3) any religion or confession as dominating; or
 - (4) any language as a specific language of religious worship
- are doomed.

We should bear in mind that nearly every empire was created by sword and fire, capturing and annexing territories and nations to it by force.

It is futile

- (1) to base the national idea on Aryan roots or
- (2) on the allegedly “mono-ethnic” nature of a medieval empire;
- (3) to ignore the fact that conquests served as the national idea in such empires;
- (4) to describe a religious teaching or madhhab as “national”;
- (5) to indulge in selective historical analysis by lauding the feats and achievements of one's own people while pushing crimes aside;
- (6) to describe one's people as “chosen,” etc.

The leaders of Kazakhstan realized the futility of these attempts much earlier than others; their realization proved to be much more profound because the very first attempts to create a national idea *ran into the multi-national and multi-confessional nature of the republic's population*. From the very first days of independence, President Nazarbaev has been warning against “hurting the feelings of other people”¹¹ when addressing the problems of the Kazakh language, people, and traditions. President Saakashvili is exercising an identical approach in his monoethnic country and admits that it needs a

⁸ See: A.G. Lukashenko, Speech at the Third All-Belorussia People's Assembly, 2 March, 2006, available at [www.president.gov.by].

⁹ See: E. Rakhmon, Speech at a meeting of lecturers and students on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the State University of Law, Business and Politics of Tajikistan, Khujand, 9 September, 2008, available at [www.president.tj].

¹⁰ I. Aliev, Speech at the ceremony dedicated to the 87th birthday of national leader Heydar Aliev and the 6th anniversary of the Heydar Aliev Foundation, 10 May, 2010, available at [www.president.az].

¹¹ N. Nazarbaev, Live program with participation of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [www.akorda.kz].

national ideology: "We want to build the country not from an ethnic standpoint, but from the standpoint of statehood."¹²

Strange as it may seem, corruption (which has not decreased in these republics over the last 20 years) and the struggle against corruption affect the relations between the national idea and the state. Indeed, a corrupt state contradicts the national idea; a corrupt state shamelessly calling on the people to close ranks for the sake of vague and distant aims creates nothing but a revolutionary situation (Egypt and Tunisia being recent pertinent examples).

2. Slogans, Phenomenon, or a System of Values? On the Meaning and Content of National Ideas

Slogans are used with a great deal of success to express the gist of national ideas in the regions discussed here. Indeed, people find it easier to grasp the meaning of simplified formulas rather than academic deliberations. A well-developed ideology, as a rule, comes forward with fairly attractive ideas. A regional slogan which dominated in the first half of the 1990s only to disappear later for obvious reasons was "Turkistan is Our Common Home"; today, slogans vary from country to country: "The State for Man" and "The State for the People" in Turkmenistan; "Uzbekistan is a Country with a Great Future," "Progress for the Motherland!", "Peace in the Fatherland!", and "Prosperity for the People!" in Uzbekistan; "The World is our Home; Armenia is our Hearth," "For a Strong and Prosperous Belarus!", etc. Slogans are useful: they put economic, political, social, and spiritual goals in a nutshell.

No matter how inspiring, the official slogans have several shortcomings:

- (1) they do not inspire the drive needed to oppose the negative trends in state- and society-building,¹³ sometimes these trends are merely ignored;
- (2) they suffer from affirmation but never call to action;
- (3) they are too bombastic;
- (4) they are deliberately insulated and do not take into account the slogans of neighbors;
- (5) they simplify the situation and present one side as the complete picture, etc.

Significantly, in 2009 the construction project of the Rogun Hydropower Plant became the "high-est national idea" and the "most important factor of the unity of the Tajik people;"¹⁴ the de facto new official Tajik slogan is nothing but a strong irritant for neighboring states living on the lower reaches of the same river.

A few words about the important role *philosophy* has to play in the ideological overtones (ranging from ethnic to transcendental) of the national idea concept; the range of definitions stretches from the mechanism of state governance to a sort of Messianism.

Ilham Aliev, who became president of Azerbaijan after his father Heydar Aliev (1993-2003), described a strong state, sustainable economy, a nation united around the national idea and *the philos-*

¹² M. Saakashvili, *Speech at the Meeting with Members of Supreme Council of Abkhazia*, available at [www.president.gov.ge]; idem, "The President of Georgia Congratulated the Georgian Population with New Year," available at [www.president.gov.ge].

¹³ President Medvedev enumerated some of these trends: lack of initiative, lack of new ideas, outstanding unresolved issues, poor quality of public debate, including criticism, and paternalistic attitudes. This is true of the other Soviet successor states (see: D. Medvedev, "Go Russia!" 10 September, 2009, available at [www.kremlin.ru]).

¹⁴ A. Sharifzoda, Z. Sirojov, "Emomali Rakhmon and the Commemorative Year of the Great Imam," 26 January, 2010, available at [www.president.tj].

ophy and ideology of Azerbaijani specifics, and a contemporary state based on national spiritual values as the main results of his father's presidency.¹⁵ In Turkmenistan, the so-called new ideology (more details below) formulated by its leader is based on a "*new philosophy of being* (italics mine.—B.E.)."¹⁶ The "new ideology" is based on peaceful disposition, humanism, and social justice.¹⁷ These examples prove that those who formulate national ideas are scrupulous when elaborating them; they go into the minutest details of their methodologies.

The question is to what extent are the leaders of the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics aware of the correlation between this philosophy and

- (1) world outlook;
- (2) lifestyle;
- (3) science (including contemporary science);
- (4) religion; and
- (5) art?

Philosophy as a handy instrument divorced from adequate knowledge and its latest achievements invariably produces nothing but chaos or ideological dogmas. We should always bear in mind that *national ideologies, even those based on philosophy, are never purely scientific* (even though brimming with scientific knowledge): science is impartial and unbiased while ideology is inevitably subjective.

One aspect—the correlation between the national and ideological complexes and *social justice*—has escaped the attention of the architects of national ideas in all eleven republics. Social justice, meanwhile, is the core of the Central Asian Muslim philosophy of the Middle Ages, its heyday; in many countries social justice is one of the constitutional principles. Why is this important? The social ills of the 1990s caused by "shock therapy," mindless privatization, social stratification, and the appearance of oligarchs have made most people more aware of embezzlement and stirred up protest sentiments resulting in

- (1) an urge to ravage in order to restore social justice,
- (2) xenophobia, and
- (3) national isolation.¹⁸

For this reason, the national ideological complexes should pay more attention (this has not happened yet) to social consolidation; fighting poverty, social alienation, and unemployment; respect for human dignity; and the concerns of the man-in-the-street and the needs of the destitute and vulnerable social groups.

Interrelations with liberalism, liberal ideology, and liberalization as part of the philosophy of the national idea are not easy to grasp or explain. The liberals treat the national idea as a fairly primitive method for mobilizing the nation to address a public project and put human rights higher than the rights of the state. Treated as a state instrument, the national idea puts the rights of the nation above human rights. This means that whether we want it or not, the priority of national interests infringes on human rights to a much greater extent than the ideology of liberalism. This will require of the leaders of all republics to identify where liberalization ends and the national idea in its concentrated form begins.

¹⁵ See: I. Aliev, Speech at the Ceremony dedicated to the 87th birthday of the national leader Heydar Aliev and the 6th anniversary of the Heydar Aliev Foundation.

¹⁶ President of Turkmenistan called on the scholars of the country to work on the state ideology of a New Renaissance, 15 September, 2010, available at [www.itar-tass.com].

¹⁷ See: Sitting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, 29 September, 2008, available at [www.turkmenistan.gov.tm].

¹⁸ Any discussions of destructive methods should bear in mind that nationalism (the linchpin of any national idea) can manifest itself positively and negatively.

The experience of Armenia has fully revealed *the complexities of methodological substantiation* of the quest for a national idea. President Sargsian calls on the nation to strengthen national unity by rallying around the Armenian national identity; to create a new type of Armenian free from the stereotypes of the past¹⁹; and to develop a diaspora that is united on Armenia's behalf. The Armenian president pointed out that the new Armenian identity "should not be complicated and mysterious; it should be free from linguistic, religious, party, or ideological biases;" it should be based on "diversity and tolerance."²⁰ He is prepared "to make his modest contribution" to the cause of strengthening the Armenian Apostolic Church, "which should remain one of the main pillars of the Armenian spirit and national specifics."²¹

President Rakhmon has pointed out that the national idea in Tajikistan "is a moral *phenomenon* (italics mine.—*B.E.*) shaped by fully grasped national interests"²² which determine "everything the state and state structures and bodies are doing, as well as the main directions of the people's activity."²³ Alexander Lukashenko, in turn, describes the national idea as *a system of values*²⁴ that is still bombastic yet "great and lofty."²⁵ President Medvedev has described the national idea of Russia as *a set of values shared by the majority of the country's population in the given historical situation* (more details below).

The president of Kazakhstan has offered a general formula for the national idea: competitiveness of the nation²⁶ and "to be one of the best countries,"²⁷ and enumerated the necessary conditions:

- (1) development of state sovereignty;
- (2) a strong competitive economy;
- (3) stronger unity of the nation;
- (4) an intellectual society; and
- (5) Kazakhstan's image as a respected state.²⁸

President Berdymukhammedov specified the tasks of realizing the "new ideology" of Turkmenistan as a law-governed and secular state in politics; free market in the economy; social security for all in the social sphere; and preservation of national legacy and restoration of the national spirit in culture,²⁹ etc. President Yanukovich of Ukraine believes that the European choice is his country's "integral national idea,"³⁰ although all ideas and initiatives should be aimed at creating a better life for the people.³¹

¹⁹ See: S. Sargsian, Speech at a meeting with representatives of the Armenian diaspora of Belgium, Brussels, 5 November, 2008, available at [www.president.am].

²⁰ S. Sargsian, Speech at a meeting of representatives of the Armenian diaspora in America, 24 September, 2008, available at [www.president.am].

²¹ S. Sargsian, The inaugural speech, 9 April 2008 [www.president.am].

²² E. Rakhmon, Speech at a meeting of lecturers and students on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the State University of Law, Business and Politics of Tajikistan, Khujand, 9 September, 2008, available at [www.president.tj].

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ See: A.G. Lukashenko, *Address to the Belarusian Nation and the Parliament of the Republic of Belarus*, 16 April, 2003, available at [www.president.gov.by].

²⁵ A.G. Lukashenko, Verbatim report of the press conference of the president of Belarus to the regional media of Russia regional media, 2 October, 2009, available at [www.president.gov.by].

²⁶ See: N. Nazarbaev, Speech of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev at the 12th Session of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, available at [www.akorda.kz]. President of Russia Vladimir Putin spoke about competitiveness as a national idea on 12 February, 2004.

²⁷ N. Nazarbaev, Press Conference of 23 January, 2006, available at [www.akorda.kz].

²⁸ See: N. Nazarbaev, Live program with participation of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

²⁹ See: Sitting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, 29 September, 2008, available at [www.turkmenistan.gov.tm].

³⁰ V. Yanukovich, *Address to the Ukrainian People*, 2 June, 2010, available at [www.president.gov.ua].

³¹ See: V. Yanukovich, *Maximum De-politicization of All Departments is a Condition Needed for People to Be Able to Perform Their State Duties. Our Policy should Ensure the Efficiency of Our Work*, 12 March, 2010, available at [www.president.gov.ua].

It seems that *the economic calls* which predominate in the national-ideological complexes of most of the CIS countries open up no new horizons for the simple reason that they are short-lived. Mikhail Weller was quite right when he pointed out that consumerism (the true meaning of the calls for a comfortable and satiated life) cannot serve as a national idea.³² None of the national ideas in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus mentions diligence and entrepreneurship as one of the aims, even though world history and the history of the East offer positive examples, Japan being one of them.

Whether they want it or not, the leaders of all the republics rely on the thesis about the nation as the highest form of social unity and the key factor of state formation; that is, they rely on *nationalism* (in its state-forming and liberal, rather than extreme, versions; none of them promotes ethnic, cultural, or religious intolerance. *A national ideology can be either conservative or liberal or radical depending on the nature of its nationalist core; not infrequently, democracy needs nationalism as one of its elements*). In all eleven republics, nationalists and not cosmopolitans feel very much at ease.

The very different approaches to the form of the national idea are explained not only by the “richness” of history, the nature of the ruling regime, and its pragmatic aims, but also by the level of the expert communities and the nature of their contacts with power, acceptance of the entire wealth of international experience, and the people’s political culture.

3. The Individual, Society, or Religion? On Certain Still Untapped Reserves of National Ideologies

The Tajik national idea relies on the teaching of great Islamic theologian Abu Hanifah³³ (from a noble Persian family which lived in northern Afghanistan): this is one of the most specific features of the official Tajik position. He is an unquestionable authority for all followers of the Hanafi madhhab and the founder of a comprehensive school of Muslim law. This is very important because religion plays a special role in uniting people. It should be said that since Abu Hanifah is revered as a spiritual teacher by many other nations and peoples and the founder of a tolerant madhhab in Islam (Emomali Rakhmon agrees with this),

- (1) this figure brings the national ideologies of the Central Asian republics closer together and
- (2) his method of legal decisions based on the most convincing argument or opinion of the majority plays an important role in accumulating democratic sentiments.

The president of Turkmenistan operates with the ideas of the “great Renaissance” and “new Renaissance” to formulate his own version of the national idea. He calls on the nation “to preserve national specifics and to borrow the best achievements of other nations, world civilization, and the Turkmen’s own experience of the period of independence.”³⁴ The leaders of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also call on their nations *to bring together the values created by mankind and national values*; this is a tolerant, correct, and well-substantiated position.³⁵ The Russian leaders, on the other hand,

³² See: *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 12 October, 2005.

³³ See: E. Rakhmon, Speech at the International Symposium on the Subject “The Great Imam and the Contemporary World,” 5 October, 2009, available at [www.president.tj].

³⁴ *Neytralniy Turkmenistan*, 27 September, 2008.

³⁵ Here are several convincing examples: the *World Literature* journal is published in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (on the initiative of Islam Karimov and Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov) in the national languages (see: Sitting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, 4 February, 2011, available at [www.turkmenistan.gov.tm]).

say: "We must and we will also base our endeavors upon the moral values that our people have forged over the more than 1,000 years of their history."³⁶

Uzbekistan is living under the slogan of "Man, His Rights, Freedoms, and Interests are the Highest Value." The "new ideology" of Turkmenistan relies on the formula "The State for the People." Why? Because during the years of independence, the successful reforms and social renovation were associated in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus with man as the linchpin of all the changes, with the majority of the people being involved in the process, and, to use a term popular during perestroika, with *the human factor*. This means that economic growth is intended to promote harmonious development of the individual, while the individual and his higher political culture are expected to lay the foundations of a civil society.

Armenia and Belarus made *friendship with Russia their ideology*.³⁷ The other nine republics are implementing their national ideological projects within their own borders. Acknowledging the right to pursue this approach and with all due respect for the Armenian experience, there are, however, certain flaws:

- (1) "inertia of following the lead of another country" when developing one's national ideology;
- (2) the national idea being part of geopolitical theories, while foreign policy factors strongly affect ideology;
- (3) ideology being tied to the economy of one particular country.

4. In Lieu of a Conclusion: How do the Events in the Russian Caucasus and the Attitude toward Guest Workers in the RF Affect the Development of National Ideologies in the CIS?

The official positions of the CIS countries are very much influenced, in one way or another, by what is going on in Russia. The following five specific features of Russia's national ideology (as the key CIS country) affect the corresponding spheres in its CIS neighbors:

- (1) the national idea is represented as a set of values;
- (2) strong reliance on the European tradition;
- (3) traditional negative forms of conduct which should be eliminated;
- (4) national ideology is described as a process (in temporal and meaningful terms); and
- (5) new Russia resolutely condemns Stalinism and never tries to defend its ideology and practice.

It should be said that while criticizing idle talk about the national idea, President Medvedev favors *a set of values* voluntarily shared by a large part of nation.³⁸ The Russian leader has pointed out that a "set of ideas accepted by consensus" cannot be "too different from those in European tradition:" he referred to fundamental human rights, a civilized market economy, and an Anglo-Saxon social and state order. The president is aware of the "persistent social ills" of Russians³⁹ (see above). Vladimir

³⁶ V.V. Putin, *Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, 26 April, 2007, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

³⁷ See: S. Sargsian, Speech at the meeting with Russian politologists and heads of mass media, 24 June, 2008, available at [www.president.am].

³⁸ See: D.A. Medvedev, "On the National Idea," available at Dmitry Medvedev's personal site [Medvedev.kremlin.ru].

³⁹ See: D. Medvedev, "Go Russia!" 10 September, 2009.

Putin, in turn, had the following to say: “Here in Russia we have this old tradition, a favorite pastime of searching for the national idea;”⁴⁰ earlier, however, he admitted that the outlines of a new national ideology were becoming clearer.⁴¹

In December 2010, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, when speaking about ethnic relations in Russia, pointed out that in Soviet times much more was done to avoid excesses: first, “there was a struggle against law-breaking” and, second “much more effort was poured into education and upbringing.”⁴² Earlier, in July 1996, President Yeltsin started talking about a national idea; in Uzbekistan, the leaders formulated the task of creating an ideology of national independence in April 1993. On the whole, informal organizations talked about the need for national renaissance in the late 1980s. Independence stirred up nationalism, which helped to strengthen and protect the newly independent nations. The informal structures were caught unprepared, while their leaders (L. Ter-Petrosian, Z. Gamsakhurdia, and A. Elchibey) lost power.

At least one of the five specific features of Russia’s national ideology enumerated above (Eurocentrism) does not reflect Russian reality and cannot be borrowed by other (especially non-Slavic) countries. According to Nikolai Danilevsky (1822-1885), Russia stands apart as a highly specific cultural-historical type. This explains the distinctions between Russians and Europeans and points to Russia’s close ties with the Asian-Turkic world. All the other CIS countries are too small and too weak to talk about the need to get rid of “persistent social ills.”

The ethnic disturbances in Moscow in December 2010 and several other events (the terrorist act at Domodedovo Airport on 24 January, 2011, etc.) can be described as a turning point in the building of an ideology of national relations in the Russian Federation. There are other opinions. The president of Georgia sees the events of August 2008 as the point when “Georgia became the first target of imperialism and ideology of the past.”⁴³ Some think that the riots in Kondopoga in 2006 raised the wave of xenophobia in the Russian Federation.

Moscow’s official position has nothing in common with reality; this much was said by Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia Rawil Ğaynetdin. The statements made by the high-ranking public figure are nothing short of a sensation: it was thanks to the Golden Horde khans that the Russian principalities united; the alliance of Slavic and Turkic peoples ensured Moscow’s greatness (September 2009); labor migrants are hardworking; the Russian Federation has begun falling apart (December 2010). In December 2010, Vladimir Putin admitted that Orthodox Christianity was closer to Islam than to Catholicism; in January 2011, he pointed out that traditional Islam should receive greater support and attention from the state.

Russia’s nationalities policy is heading for an even deeper hole, which will largely affect the national ideologies in Russia’s CIS neighbors. There is no shortage of “extravagant” statements by top Russian political figures who insist on

- (1) official recognition of the special role of the Russian people in creating the Russian state;
- (2) the state-forming role of the Russians, which should be set forth in the RF Constitution;
- (3) separation of destructive ethnic nationalism from constructive civil nationalism;
- (4) special attention to the Russian culture “as the backbone of the entire national culture”, etc., which, however, never remedied the position of the Russian leaders that can best be described as a jumble of Marxism-Leninism and Great Power chauvinism.

⁴⁰ V.V. Putin, *Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, 26 April 2007 [www.kremlin.ru].

⁴¹ See: V.V. Putin, Interview to *Izvestia*, 14 July, 2000, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

⁴² Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin held a working meeting with head of the Republic of Daghestan M.M. Magomedov, 27 December, 2010, available at [www.premier.gov.ru].

⁴³ M. Saakashvili, “The President of Georgia Congratulated the Georgian Population with New Year.”

This should not shock or amaze: nationalism, as Adam Michnik, outstanding Polish publicist writer, has written, is the last stage of communism.⁴⁴

Everything being done by some Russian politicians to marry the “European choice” with the plans of reestablishing domination in a large part of Asia, to revive political ambitions, and to insist on the right of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to engage in active proselytism will echo in the other CIS countries and their national policies. One tends to agree with Mikhail Weller who has written: “By pushing Orthodox Christianity to the core of the national idea, we are dismissing all of Russia’s other religions as second-rate. This smacks of inequality; this is undemocratic and can hardly be described as being in line with the trends of the day. In this form, the ‘national idea’ will stir up national pogroms or religious wars.”⁴⁵ Moscow is turning a blind eye to Russian reality, while much inside the country and many of what are presented as Russia’s foreign policy achievements depend solely on oil and gas prices. This does nothing for national and confessional peace in the CIS.

* * *

In the near future, the CIS will remain a patchwork of national ideologies hardly affected by globalization and integration into the world community. Tolerance of the lifestyle, behavior, customs, feelings, ideas, and religions of others comes hand in hand with a developed economy. So far, this stage is out of even Russia’s, the largest of the CIS countries, reach. It is unlikely that the regional leaders will stumble across a common denominator, time-tested human values, that could serve as the cornerstone of conflict-free coexistence any time soon.

⁴⁴ See: A. Michnik, “Natsionalizm: chudovishche probuzhdaetsta,” *Vek XX I mir*, No. 10, 1990, p. 22.

⁴⁵ M. Weller, “Velikiy posledniy shans,” available on the Biblioteka Maksima Moshkova [lib.ru] website.