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THE HOLY GRAIL AND THE PROMISED LAND: CONSTRUCTION OF THE RUSSIAN GREATNESS THROUGH THE BALKANS AND THE BLACK SEA REGION

1. Methodology

The Balkans and the Black Sea region have drawn the attention of international community as troubled European periphery. The war in Bosnia, Kosovo, Abkhazia and Ossetia draw Europe to seriously consider the two regions as the source of various threats for Europe. In some regards, European identity was reproduced and sustained in dealing with the problems coming from the Balkans and the Black Sea region. Post-modernity and European values were reproduced in the juxtaposition with pre-modernity, embodied in underdevelopment, traditionalism and hatreds persistent in these two regions. In addition, Balkans and the Black Sea region have another significant aspect. The urgent problems coming from Europe forced Russia and the European Union to engage in an interaction aimed at dealing with the conflicts that broke out here.

As much as Europe used the two regions to construct its own identity, Russia has long used two regions to sustain its own specific identity. The present paper sets out to look at the question what role was attributed to the both regions in the Russian identity, how it was constructed and how it was related to Europe. The paper employs the methodology of discourse analysis in the study of the main texts, which define Russia's self-perception as an international actor. The paper will particularly look into the question what role is attributed in this discourse to the Black Sea region and the Balkans.

In order to reconstruct the dominant discourses underpinning the key elements of Russian identity and linking them to those prevailing historical ideas which formed an intellectual background that defined how the Russian society and policy-makers perceived Russia, Black Sea region and the Balkans, the present paper will employ discursive analysis of

the most widely-read texts that introduced the notions of Russia, Europe, Balkans, and Greatness and described relations between these notions.

In order to identify the pool of ideas on which the Russian people drew their understanding about the international affairs, this chapter focuses on the intellectual trajectory, which an average Russian citizen and elite member would go through. The reconstruction of these ideas will be done through the reading of school and university text books on Russian and Soviet foreign policy and international history, and historical novels that were highly popular in the USSR in the period of 1960.

The paper will analyze texts that were produced, circulated and consumed in the 1960's. The specific time period is selected because it was in this period when, in the aftermath of Stalin's rule, Russian literature and history undertook an attempt to reconsider its past and new books on the history of Russia and the Soviet Union were written. It was in this period that the generation of Russians, who were to become active citizens, experts and policy-makers in the new independent Russia, arrived at their understanding of such concepts as the World, the Soviet Union, Russia, Europe and Great Powerhood.

Turning to the key historic texts, which have been instrumental in shaping the understanding of the Russian 'Self' and Russia's 'Others', attention is focused on the standard textbooks which were the fundamental sources of the information under Soviet rule. Instruction in schools under the Soviet education system was heavily regulated production and reproduction of knowledge. The strictly defined school curricula, a single framework for analysis, strictly drawn up bibliographies and one official textbook officially approved by the top Communist leadership, published by the state publishing houses and supplied to all schools, created the environment in which the understanding of international reality was shaped.

In the case of high schools, such a source of authoritative information about Russia and the USSR was the 3-volume text-book *Istoriya SSSR* (History of the USSR) written by a team of senior history professors and edited by academician Anna Pankratova¹. In 1947, Pankratova was awarded the highest prize for intellectuals and artists – the Stalin Premium (1947). Her book was a primary source of information internalized by 15-17 year old Soviet youngsters. Two other examples of authoritative texts are the 10-volume *Vsemirnaya Istoriya* (History of the World), which was prepared by four special research institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and published under the umbrella of academy between

1955-1965, and 3-volume *Istoriya Diplomatii* (History of Diplomacy) prepared by a number of senior academics, edited by the very senior Soviet diplomat and pedagogue Vladimir Potemkin and published by the State-Economical Publishing House in 1941-1945². These voluminous works were source of authoritative conceptual information for school teachers, university students and professors and, thus, significantly affected the mindset of the Soviet intellectuals and mind-makers (journalists, university professors, school teachers).

Of the three founders of the historiography of the Russian state of the 19th-20th centuries – Sergey Soloviev, Mikhail Karamzin and Vladimir Kluchevskiy - the present paper considers only Sergei Soloviev, who was frequently quoted and suggested for reading in the faculties of history during the Soviet period³. Karamzin's works, according to Pankratova's textbook was a reflection of the feudal mindset of its author and was not suggested for quoting and reading⁴. Soloviev on the other hand was considered an authoritative scientist although he was professor of Moscow University in Russian Empire. His fundamental work *Istoriya Rossii s Drevneishikh vremen: v piãtnadtsãti knigakh* (*History of Russia since the Oldest Times: in fifteen books*) was republished by the Soviet government between 1959-1966. Although the Soviet editors of the new version of Soloviev's work stressed that Soloviev's bourgeoisie methodology was alien to the Soviet reader, they still couldn't but acknowledge the amount of interesting and necessary material collected in his works⁵.

Finally, the paper turns to Russian fiction which has always played an important role in the construction of Russian identities. The paper therefore focuses on one of the most influential and widely-read Soviet writer of historic novels Valentin Pikul. Pikul was pronounced the absolute best-selling author in his category. According to surveys conducted by the All-Union Library of Foreign Literature, the sale of his works reached more than million items.⁶ Some other sources range the overall sales of his historic novels from 20 to 500 million items over the period from 1954 to the mid-1990s⁷. Even 20 years after his death, Pikul's books are still being republished, uploaded and circulated in the Internet. Russian TV has produced and screened several action movies and TV series based on Pikul's novels. Other indications of the influence of Pikul's ideas on Russian society and its elite can be seen in the fact that the Ministry of Defence established a special Pikul prize for the best military-patriotic literature works. Several military vessels of the Baltic and the Black Sea Fleet of Russia were named after him. No other writer has received such

an honour. In addition, several civilian ships, streets, libraries and even a planet bear Valentin Pikul's name.

Pikul's first widely popular historical novel "Bayazet" was published in 1961.⁸ The novel describes the heroic deeds of the Russian regiment operating in the Caucasus which took over and defended a strategically located Turkish fortress, Bayazet, during the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The paper studies how the novel complements or challenges the textbooks identity discourses.

All the abovementioned textbooks and works vary in the time, scope and methodology. However, their reiterated messages construct a certain social reality and narratives for individual or social existence. The key discourses produced in these books provide the basis for Russia's special role in international relations. Rather than the ideological basis of the Soviet textbooks, the focus here is on the representation of Russia, its Greatness and its relationship with Europe as well as the Black Sea and the Balkans. The paper will look into the discourses which define these representations, how they are reproduced and/or mutually neutralized.

2. Construction of Russia through the Balkans and the Black Sea Region

2.1. Black Sea as the Promised Land

2.1.1. Final point of the North-South movement

The construction of the Black Sea as Promised Land is taking place through numerous description of the region in teleological terms. One of the most first examples is the construction of the region as an entity in the movement from the North to the South. Any historical introduction of the Russian or Soviet lands has the same feature - it goes from North to South, it starts in the North and ends in the South. When Pankratova or Soloviev introduce the big Eurasian plain, they start from the North (the Baltic region) and end up in the South - at the Black Sea coast⁹. Later descriptions of such a North-South axis also reproduce this direction of movement. Thus, the detailed description of the Dnepr - Black Sea part of the famous historic roots from "Varangians into Greeks" reproduces this North-South movement. The legendary Viking leaders came from the North. As long as they were ruling from the North Slavic centre of Novgorod, they were simply regional rulers. But once they moved to the

South they founded the Medieval Slavic state and became rulers of this new Slavic Power.

The concept of the North has a significantly positive connotation in Russian history. The North is linked to the ideas of self-improvement and self-making in Russia. The Slavs invite the Vikings from the North to come to rule their dispersed and warring lands. The Vikings come and create the Medieval Slavic state. Other challenges from the North are successfully faced once and for all when the Swedes and the Teutonian Knights are crushed by Alexander Nevsky in 1240 and in 1242, respectively (those are mentioned only briefly by Pankratova)¹⁰. The Northern War which Peter the Great waged with Sweden, drives him to modernize the army, the fleet and industry in general. As a result, Russia eventually crushes Sweden, gains access to the Baltic Sea and (according to Iver Neumann¹¹) became an Empire and a Great Power. But according to the Russian textbooks as the result of the victory in the Northern War Russia again became a strong *sea power*, which attested only to growing power and strength of the Russian state¹². Obviously, some other texts suggest that Russia had crushed the Swedish Great Powerhood in the Northern War these events are mentioned as a prelude for Russia's entry into Great Power club. To be accomplished this prelude was to be succeeded by Russia's victories in the South¹³. After that decisive period, no further grave challenges to Russia emerged from the North, at least according to the textbooks.

The arrival to the Promised Land in the South to be more dramatic. The concept of the South is constructed as in contrast to the North. It carries stronger elements of uncertainty for most periods of Russian history. On the one hand, the South, and the Black Sea region in particular, is of higher significance than the North for the history of the Russian territory and culture – as the locus, for example, of World history for Russia, Christianity etc. that are analysed below. On the other hand, the Black Sea region is also an arena of regular challenges to and the site of failures of the pre-Slavic, Slavic, Russian and even the Soviet state.

Scythians and Kievan Rus failed to repel the nomadic tribes. The Russian Tsardom could not successfully neutralize the Crimean Tatars for many centuries. Even when the successful periods of the Russian expansion southwards are described, there is always an element of uncertainty. Peter the Great fails to protect Orthodoxy in Constantinople and his Azov campaigns *“did not lead to the completion of the war. Turkey had a strong fleet and continued to overlord the Black Sea”*¹⁴. In the 18th and 19th century the Russian Empire was either defeated by

Turks or was deprived of its conquests by European powers. The Soviet Union failed to establish "normal" relations with Romania, Yugoslavia, Albania and faced threats from the USA and NATO via Turkey. Even when Russia failed in the North, it was mostly because the North managed to manipulate the threat from the South, as when, for example, the Swedes and Poles defeated Russia in the Livonian War having allied themselves with Crimean Tatars and Turkey in the late 16th century. And this situation is repeated in later stages of interaction between Russia and Europe. This way, the element of uncertainty in the South is reinforced. These failures look even more dramatic because they imply that Russia or its various historic embodiments (Scythians, Slavic tribes, Kievan Rus, Russian Tsardom, Russian Empire, USSR) failed to defend the very regions from where they had originated and where they had established themselves.

The course of Russian history can be viewed as unfolding along an axis from North (positive, certainty) to South (negative, uncertainty). Russia grows and develops by moving from the North to absorb the South. This endless movement has another important feature: it is constructed as an example of troubled "organic" development. Although Russia's expansion to the South is presented as a natural process, a necessary stage in the development of the Russian state, this expansion has actually never been successful. It encountered a number of failures and setbacks, which eventually drains the power of the Russian Empire. The country had to retreat to its previous borders and start to concentrate again, to use the words of the Russian Chancellor Gorchakov uttered after the Congress of Berlin where Russia lost some of the achievements it gained in the Russian-Turkish War.

Important features of this movement are the ever increasing stakes and costs involved. It begins with the peaceful co-existence of pre-Slavic and Slavic tribes, continues as the growing need of Kievan Rus to expand and defend itself; and, subsequently it manifests itself in an organic, urgent need to gain access to the Black and Mediterranean Seas to accomplish the historic mission of Slavic and Orthodox liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The stakes become higher after unsuccessful raids and the death of one specific leader, Svyatoslav. They grow into international humiliation of Russia in the Crimean War, with the exhaustion of state resources, rebellions and finally collapse of the Russian state in the First World War. So the South appears as an unattainable mission, as well as a compelling task and destination of Russia, the place to which it always

strives and aspires, but which it never quite manages to reach, to conquer or to achieve.

2.1.2. Holy Grail: the gate to the World and European history

The Black Sea and the Balkans are constructed as Holy Grail is also constructed when the textbooks describe the Black Sea region as a unique and sometime *key locus* where Russian history is connected to key phenomena of world and European history. Textbooks have proposed such a connection is constructed by asserting that all the important moments of world history have their analogues in the Black Sea area, starting with the first camps of primitive people, the first agricultural villages, the first cattle-breeding settlements or the first Bronze slave-owning states discovered in the Caucasus, Transcaucasia or Crimea¹⁵. Describing the first ancient *Urartu Kingdom* at territory of the USSR in Transcaucasia as well as the contacts between Urartu and the Greek world or Assyrians, the *History of Diplomacy* explicitly states that “*through Urartu the history of the nations of the world is organically linked to the past of the nations of the Soviet Union*”¹⁶.

This discourse is repeated by the pre-Soviet historian Soloviev who described the Black Sea plain as a unique point of contact between civilization and barbarity. Pankratova repeats this thesis when she describes the Eastern Black Sea region – Transcaucasia, i.e. Georgia and Armenia - as the locus of a clash between Europe and Asia, represented by the Roman Empire vs. Persia, or the Byzantine Empire vs. Persia¹⁷. The notions of Europe and Asia are linked in relations of equivalence through the corresponding opposites, such as settlers vs. nomads, rivers vs. steppes, civilization vs. barbarity, or courage vs. cruelty¹⁸. Russia, either through direct statements (as in Soloviev’s works) or through its alignment with suppressed nations could establish relations of equivalence with Europe and civilization:

Crowds of nomadic people conquer the deltas of the rivers Volga, Don and Dnepr... Eventually farming tribes of European origin settle on the banks of Dnepr...But Asia does not seize to send predatory hordes, which want to live at the expense of a settled population...The history of the latter is defined by its permanent fight with the steppe barbarians...In Russian history these periods of fights are marked as follow: from the first half of the XIth century to the middle of the XIIIth century – there are no definite successes in either side...From the 40s of the XIIIth century until the end

of the XIVth century Asians as represented by Mongols succeed. From the end of the XVth century Europe represented by Russia is taking over...¹⁹

The same discourse is reproduced when Pankratova describes other later states in the Caucasus - Colchis, Iberia and Albania²⁰ which were first to adopt Christianity in the third century from Saint Nino of Cappadocia who arrived from Constantinople²¹. With the Christianisation of the region and the establishment of regular trade with Europe, the clash between the local population and the Asian tyrannies (Arabs and Turks) is then represented as symbolic of the clash between Europe and Asia.

Although the key mode of interaction with Europe in the Medieval Ages flows mainly through the conflict with the Livonian Order, Sweden and Poland, the description of the international position of Moscow is again linked to the South. The references to the dealing with South conclude the sections devoted to the question of the foreign policy. It was through the Black Sea that Russian established trade relations with the Venetian Republic, Genoa and Naples²². It was again through the dynastic marriage with the neice of the last Byzantine Emperor, Sophia Paleolog, that the ruler of the Russian State Ivan III could centralize his power²³ and claim the role of the Third Rome²⁴.

Even in the period of the Napoleonic Wars, the Black Sea and Mediterranean was represented as the link between Russia and world politics. Although most of the battles between Russia and Napoleon took place in Europe or in Russia, the textbooks do not omit to describe the glorious victories of the Russian squadron commanded by Admiral Ushakov as it conquered the French stronghold on Corfu Island and landed in Italy to support the national liberation movement there²⁵. The Black Sea was the place where Russia aspired to special status in international relations. In this effort it challenged, defeated and was in turn defeated by Turkey and Europe. It acquired a vital symbolism, a Russian odyssey that required it, again and again, to engage in conflict with Europe. According to the textbooks, Russia even engaged in WWI because *it considered that the road towards Constantinople lay through Berlin, i.e. through the destruction of the German Empire*²⁶.

The Black Sea became a place where the most significant developments in Russian history had taken place. It is a place where Russia aspired to a better future and self-transformation. The famous Decembrist uprising of pro-European Russian officers took place both in Saint Petersburg and in south of the Empire. Most of the popular uprisings and the movement of

kozaks in the Russian Empire mentioned in the books take place in the Black Sea region. In the early 20th century the revolutionary movement took place in the Black Sea as well as in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The mutiny in Sebastopol headed by Captain Pyotr Shmidt was the first attempt of the army to demand liberal reforms from the Tsars in the 20th century. In the description of numerous strikes in the Russian Empire special attention was paid to especially intensive workers' strikes, peasant insurgencies and the Revolution of 1903-1905 which all took place in the Black Sea provinces of Russia, or involved the Black Sea fleet, the Caucasus and Transcaucasia²⁷.

The representation of the Black Sea region as an existential extreme for Russia was reproduced in the description of the defeat of the first Russian revolution. The description of repressions and reactionary revenge (taking the forms of Jewish pogroms, arrests and assaults against workers' leaders) in Odessa were summarised by quoting Lenin that false *reactionary Russia [Czarist government] ridiculed itself not only in the sight of Europe, but also in Asia*²⁸. In the description of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Black Sea region was represented as the locus where the clash between Russia and imperialist Europe took place. It was in the Black Sea region that the true, Soviet Russia created a true Europe by turning the French occupying troops in Odessa into revolutionaries²⁹.

Thus, the Black Sea is an important link between Russian and World and European history either because it is the place of a direct historical interaction of Russia or because it is a locus of important events that can be considered analogues of European benchmarks. But there is also another important link in the descriptions provided by the Russian textbooks – the link between the Black Sea and the Balkans.

2.2. Black Sea and its link to Balkans

2.2.1. Ways of construction of the regions

A study of the above mentioned texts helps to identify several ways in which the Balkans and the Black Sea regions are constructed. First and most noticeable is the frequent mention of contacts and borrowings between the two regions. In fact one might argue that the Black Sea and the Balkans were intertwined with each other when both these regions were constructed. In early references to some parts of the Black Sea coast, the Northern Black Sea area (*Severnoe prichernomorie*) in particular is

used in the context of close contacts with Ancient Greece³⁰. This pattern is repeated in descriptions of close interaction between the ancient Transcaucasian states and Byzantine and in the description of Greek colonisation of the Northern Black Sea region and Crimea. Eventually we find that the Black Sea region is constructed out of four sub-regions – Caucasus, Crimean, the Northern Black Sea coast and the Azov Sea.

The next discursive move is the construction of a part of the Black Sea coast as part of a different region – the Balkans. This feature can be identified in the descriptions of contacts between the Slavs and Byzantine and the Bulgarian Kingdom. When the textbooks describe contacts between the Kiev Principality and the Bulgarian Kingdom or Byzantine, the latter states are never described as the Black Sea although they cover a major part of the Western and South Black Sea coast. The major points of conflict between Kiev and these states are about Black Sea trade and navigation routes. But the fact that the major counterparts of the Kievan Rus are constructed as the Balkan or Danube countries turns their interaction from bilateral into an inter-regional relations. Once Byzantium is constructed as the Balkan and European state its relations with Rus are constructed as intra-regional Black Sea affairs, but also as the relations between Rus and the Balkans, Rus and Europe. This is how, Black Sea politics opens for the Slavs the door to World history and to European geography. In this way Black Sea politics goes beyond the Black Sea.

The same discursive move can be identified centuries later if we analyse the same “forgotten” parts of the Black Sea region. In the Pankratova textbook, for example, Russia is mentioned as a Black Sea power whereas Turkey just as an Asian power that could impose its control over the Black Sea³¹. Bulgaria and Romania are two Balkan countries on the Black Sea but the studied textbooks mention them predominantly as Balkan rather than Black Sea nations. The exclusion of Bulgaria and Romania from the Black Sea region, and inclusion of these countries into the Balkan complex, leads to the construction of the Balkans and the Black Sea regions as two adjacent entities linked together through various commonalities, e.g. shared destiny, common threats or common missions.

Linking the Black Sea and the Balkans through a joint destiny and effort is more flexible and makes for a stronger discourse. It is more flexible because it allows constructing Black Sea politics in several ways. Any Russian victory in the Black Sea can be constructed as part of the Russian-Turkish conflict and used to sustain Russian Greatness. At the same time any failures or victories in the Russian-Turkish wars can be

constructed as a part of a joint effort of Russia and the Balkan nations. The discourse of joint effort constructs Black Sea politics and the Balkans as two separate, but mutually-justifying agencies. The discourse of liberation fight of the Balkan nations fighting together with Russia against Turkey attaches to the Balkan nations a greater agency and thereby justifies Russia's Balkan ambitions, and retrospectively also justifies Russia's Black Sea expansion.

2.2.2. The shared origin and source of identity and inspiration

The fact that one part of the Black Sea region is constructed as the Balkans (i.e. Bulgaria and Romania) helps the texts to link the two regions through the discourse of source of identity. The Balkans are constructed as an 'Ancient Ego' and source of identity for Russia. Russia was created according to a Balkan vision. Slavs were converted into Christianity by Byzantine. They received their alphabet from Byzantine³². The first international treaty signed by the Kiev Principality was with Byzantine. By getting married to Byzantine princesses, Slavs could increase their status to that of a state equal to other European states. With the Third Rome concept they use Byzantine as a reference point to claim their special position in international affairs³³. Even the Vikings came to Russia after having enjoyed the achievement of civilization in the Mediterranean.

The Balkans and Russia share the same destiny: tragedy. They are both victims of Asia - Russia a victim of Barbaric Asia (the Tatars), the Balkans conquered by the Ottoman Empire. Russia was luckier in being able to overthrow the Barbarians. But now it has to help its Ancient Ego. This heroic liberation movement as a source of inspiration for True Russia was manifest by the public support through Slavic Committees. This thesis was repeated in Pikul's writings³⁴. Sometimes the lives of the Balkan heroes become a role model and destiny for Russia. Russian officers serving in the Caucasus dreamed about death as beautiful as the death of the Balkan heroes.

Both Russia and the Balkans has shared victimhood. As much as Russia has to sacrifice its soldiers to satisfy or save European powers³⁵, so the description of the Balkan wars reproduces the link between Russia and the Balkans through describing the Balkan states as the one-million-bayonet-reserve for the Entente whereas the national liberation movement of the Balkan peoples was used *by the imperialist powers – France and Germany*³⁶. This shared victimhood leads to military partnership as a natural survival strategy, and adds more legitimacy to

Russian stirring up revolts in the Balkans in order to assist its expansion to the Black Sea. In fact the first reference to a military partnership between Russia and the Balkans is articulated as an urgent need for Russia. In 1710, trying to repel Turkish and Tatar invasions in South Russian lands and Ukraine, *Peter the Great tried to bring to his side Christian and Slavic nations of the Balkan Peninsula. Manifestos of Peter the Great, circulated in Serbia, called for a revolt against the Turkish yoke, and thirty thousand rebels were ready to join Russians... Russian troops under Peter's command marched to the Moldovan borders*³⁷. Thus, Russia's involvement in the Balkans was caused by the gravity of the threat in the Black Sea region. A huge discursive field was opened up when the joint military partnership is launched.

2.2.3. The link through battles and peace treaties

Given the number of descriptions of Russian-Turkish wars in the textbooks, battles constitute probably the most powerful linking element between the Black Sea and the Balkans. The regions are fused into a single strategic space by numerous descriptions of military actions at the three fronts of Crimea, Transcaucasia and Danube³⁸ and are added to by the description of parallel successes of the Russian navy in the Mediterranean³⁹. The pantheon of heroes also reinforces the link. The commanders of the Russian armies and its fleet in this war were Count Alexey Orlov *Chesmenskiy* (Chesme Bay - Mediterranean), Count Rumiantsev *Zadunayskiy* (Trans-Danubian – Balkans), and Prince Grigoriy Potemkin *Tavricheskiy* (Tavria - Crimea). The peace treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji which concluded the war reinforced the link between the Black Sea and the Balkans⁴⁰.

Russia gained lands on the Northern Black Sea coast, in the Crimea and Caucasus, received the right of free passage through the straits and established its protectorate over Moldova and Walachia.⁴¹ Some 13 years later, the nexus between the Black Sea region and the Balkans was reinforced by parallel references to the siege of the Turkish Black Sea ports of Ochakov and Ismail which were followed by the victories at Rimnik and Focsani in Romania. The title of Rimnikskiy was bestowed on the Russian Commander A. Suvorov for his victory. The Russian fleet first defeated the Turkish fleet in the Northern Black Sea at Ochakov and Ismail and then close to the Rumelian coast at Cape Kaliakria in Bulgaria (Black Sea but

imaginary Balkans). These actions help to recreate the link between Black Sea and the Balkans in most descriptions of the Russian-Turkish wars.⁴²

This link is fixed through a mechanism of reverse causality introduced in the description of the Crimean war. It was not only the victories and expansion, but also the simultaneous defeats and losses that linked the Black Sea and the Balkans regions into one strategic complex. The passage from the description of the Paris Treaty illustrates this well:

Russia was deprived of the right to maintain military vessels in the Black Sea or hold fortresses on the Black Sea coast. South Bessarabia was given to Turkey... Serbia, Moldova and Walachia were subjected to the protection of European powers. The Dardanelles and the Black Sea were proclaimed neutral and open for merchant shipping of all countries... Tsarist Russia lost its commanding role in international politics⁴³.

In the descriptions of WWI, the link between the two regions is again reinforced in references to the battles in Tarnovo (Bulgaria) and the shelling of Odessa (Black Sea), the conquest of the Turkish fortresses Sarakamys, Erzurum, and Trapesund with the successful offensive of Russian troops in the Carpathian Mountains and Hungary⁴⁴. In his novel *“Iz Tupika”*, Pikul adds to this link description of the Russian fleet fighting in the Mediterranean, Russian troops being stationed on the Thessaloniki front and the Russian army in action in Ukraine⁴⁵.

Another Pikul’s novel *“Bayazet”* endorses the discursive construction of the link. First, the link between the Balkans and the Black Sea region is constructed in a dialogue between an experienced commander of the Russian unit operating in Transcaucasia, and colonel Khvoshchinskiy who introduces Lieutenant Karabanov to the local state-of-affairs by saying:

The Balkans will backfire on us here... We are like a patch now. The more Turkish troops we will pull here the easier it will be for Gurko and Skobelev [the Russian Generals commanding the troops in the Balkans] in Bulgaria.⁴⁶

This link is repeatedly reproduced with absolute priority given to the Caucasian front. Russian troops in the Caucasus were not only saving Christians in Transcaucasia, they were simultaneously supporting the noble cause of the Slavs in the Balkans and helping the Russian troops in the Balkans. In addition, the Russian troops and their heroism in the Black Sea region were the source of Russia’s strength in the Balkans whereas

the Balkans represented a challenge and threat for Russia in the Black Sea region. Russian troops operating in the Caucasus were fighting in much more difficult conditions than their comrades in the Balkans. The gravity of the challenge and significance of the mission is stressed when Russian soldiers are quoted to be much closer to the Sultan than their comrades in the Balkans who probably did not even know about the suffering of the Russian troops in Transcaucasia⁴⁷. The link between the Balkans and the Black Sea region is reinforced even by accidental remarks of second rank figures, who state that it does not matter whether to die for the Slavs in Bulgaria or in Transcaucasia.⁴⁸

With the identification of the discourses linking the Black Sea and the Balkans into one strategic region, we shall now turn to analyses of what role these two regions played in shaping the Russian identity and its relations to the rest of the world.

3. The concept of “Power” and the Black Sea

The concept of “Power” in the intellectual trajectory does not appear immediately as in the combination “Great Power”. It went through an evolution linked to one set of signifiers to another. Some of the meanings may vanish, some may remain unchanged and some may transform into something new. This section studies the evolution of the meaning of the term “Power” in terms of international actor-ness and identifies the meaning which remains embedded in the term Great Power. The significance of the Black Sea in this concept will also be studied.

3.1. Inception of the concept

The Soviet texts construct a clear hierarchy of social organisation. In the hierarchy of the forms of social organisation, the term *state* was higher than the term *country*, with the key difference resting in the ability to conquer and expand. At the initial stage of the development Urartu is referred to as a country. Later on, when it reaches the peak of its might it has become a state. The concept of state is then linked to the concept of *power*. University textbooks use the term power with reference to the ancient states that had strong military organization and expanded at the expense of other countries, for example Power of Schumer and Akkad,⁴⁹ Babylon, Chet and Assyrian, Egypt Military Power, Persian Military Power,

Power of Colonial Carthage,⁵⁰ Power of Genghis-Khan, Mogul or Moravian Power,⁵¹ etc. The same criteria apply to the Slavic tribes. As long as the Slavic tribes lived mostly in dispersed principalities they were referred to as Slavs or Slavic tribes. But once Varangian warlords expanded the power of Kiev over several neighbouring tribes and named themselves Great Russian Prince (*Velikiy Kniaz Ruskiy*), the textbooks qualify the new entity as the Kievan state⁵² or *Power of Ryurikovich (Derzhava Ryurikovichei)*.⁵³ This important element equates the concept of statehood with the concept of power.

Thus, the concept of power is linked to the ability to expand. Only in the case of Kievan Rus expansionism is represented as urgent and a matter of survival for the Slavic tribes in order to repel the raids of nomads. Expansion brings about the creation of a myth about the reunification of Slavic principalities which was used centuries later. Although there is no mention of any pre-existing state or union of all the Slavic principalities or tribes, which were once dispersed and needed to be reunited, the conquests of Oleg are represented as the natural and inevitable way to form a state. More than that, the expansion is described as the only way to face a fatal challenge and to survive. In the same logic, Oleg's successors Kievan princes Igor, Oleg, Svyatoslav, etc. are judged by this standard, namely by the capacity to incorporate new Slavic territories into the Kievan state⁵⁴. This ability allows Russian and Soviet historians to elevate the Medieval Russian state to the level of European Empires. They compare these deeds of Vikings to the creation of Empire of Charlemagne which raised Europe's gravest concerns.⁵⁵

Subsequent descriptions of how the lack of unity among the Slavic princes lead to the decline of Kievan Rus and its enslavement by the dispersed Mongol and Tatar tribes united by Chinghiz Khan⁵⁶ fixes the causal mechanism: *unification / expansion => powerhood => existence*. If a state is not a power and is unable to expand into adjoining areas or to unify tribes, it will fall prey to the threat from the South⁵⁷. At the same time, the idea of unified lands is introduced as elements of the fragility of the Kievan state. The concept of unification and greatness is linked to the concept of decentralisation and demise in a long description of how uneven development and personal ambitions led to decentralisation of the country, its decline and finally its enslavement by the Mongol Power.⁵⁸ The linking of the above terms takes place in subsequent descriptions of a new *Russian state* under the aegis of Moscow Principality,⁵⁹ Ivan the Terrible,⁶⁰ Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. Over time the two notions were

linked not only logically, but also phonetically – the term *velikoderzhavie* (great powerhood) sounds similar to the term *samoderzhavie* (absolute power, absolutism). The importance of the Black Sea in this process is indicated through regular Slav raids on the Black Sea and to Byzantine, as well as to the lower Danube.

3.2. Russia - sea power

The next stage of the evolution of a *Powerhood concept* for Russia was the linking of the idea of power with that of access to the seas. This type of expansion is again justified as an organic need for trade and urgent challenge linked to spatial constructions of Russia as an entity trying to break the restraints which inhibited its development, as *Turkey locked Russia in the Black Sea and inhibited Russia's Black Sea trade*⁶¹ and did not want Russia to become a **sea power with a strong fleet in the Azov Sea**⁶². The question of maritime access is seen as part of international politics. The struggle between the major European states and Russia takes place around access to the sea, both the Baltic and the Black Sea. Turkey was assisted by other *sea powers* – *England, Holland as well as the Roman Empire who were interested in weakening Russia, to tie its strength in the South.*⁶³

The significance of access to the sea is once again stressed in the description of the success of Peter the Great who after the conquest of Azov allowed Russia to claim a leading position among the European states.⁶⁴ The concept of sea power was linked to the concept of an outstanding great power. The intermediate stage was the ability to reform itself as Peter the Great achieved. Once Russia is a Black Sea power the concept undergoes certain changes. The concept of a Black Sea power does not only mean current access to the sea, but retrospectively it is used to claim the right for usage of the Black Sea transit routes. Seventy-five years after another long war with Russia, Turkey opened the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles and the same statement is pronounced again: *this peace treaty turned Russia into the Black Sea power.*⁶⁵

3.3. Russia - Black Sea-born Great European hyper-power

Russia's quest for Black Sea powerhood acquired a momentum of its own - the future of the Ottoman Empire becomes the subject of discussions between the leading European states. The concept of **Great European**

power is introduced in the textbooks as an outcome of the Russian policies in the Black Sea region.⁶⁶ Russia's Great Powerhood and other Great Powers are born in the Black Sea. Although subsequent descriptions of British and French intrigues remind the readers about the systemic constraints on Russia's Great Powerhood, there is another element which generates the discourse of the exceptionality of the Russian Powerhood. Russia is constructed as the **only power** which can help the nations of Transcaucasia to avoid extermination by Iran and Turkey.⁶⁷ Within the club of Great Powers Russia has special status – it can do something that other Great Powers can not. It is the strongest of the strongest and also *primus inter pares*. Special abilities allow special responsibilities and special rights. Russia's Great Powerhood is a mission rather than a privilege, a burden rather than a special right.

The discourse of Russia's exceptionality is reinforced by the descriptions of Napoleonic wars. The fact that Napoleon had to go into war against Russia because without crushing Russia Napoleon could not aspire to world hegemony,⁶⁸ reinforces the discourse about the exceptional role of Russia in international politics. The victory of Russia over Napoleon is proof that Russia gained the commanding role in international politics. Russia's feeling of superiority is complemented by a derogatory attitude towards the congress of Vienna, where *European powers, which under disguise of restoration of legitimacy were redrawing the map of Europe whilst disregarding the national interests of Europe's peoples.*⁶⁹ Having defeated France and having encouraged a wave of revolutions around Europe, Russia feels too strong to respect diplomatic bargains and negotiations. It is described as the European hyper-power capable of unilateral action. Russia's Great Powerhood at the peak of its glory is its capability of unilateral action. It is not arrogance of power, but it is the humble pride of a crusader.

In the mid 19th century Russia's Black Sea powerhood was challenged. The next stage that Russia would explore in its Black Sea Power trajectory was to impose control on the Black Sea straits. This step was justified by its Black Sea power status and strategy to create such a regime which would not allow hostile states to use the Straits for attacks on the Russian territories in the Black Sea region.⁷⁰ The fact that these attempts were opposed by England and France reinforced the discourse of immoral Western Great European Powers. Their policies are not constructed through regular balance of power considerations, but as a deliberate anti-Russian policy aimed at blocking Russia's access to the East and to the Mediterranean.⁷¹

Such an interpretation of British policies elevated its status from spoil-sport to a major threat for the Russian Black Sea coast. The Black Sea becomes an arena of the clash between the Great European Powers. The Crimean war demonstrates that Russia is no longer a hyper-power. The fact that Russia was defeated in one Crimean War is constructed as *Tsarist Russia lost its commanding role in international politics*.⁷²

For Pankratova, the ability to control the Black Sea Straits, Black Sea fleet, Black Sea fortifications and the recognized right of other European powers for protection of the Balkans province were major attributes of Great European Power for Russia. When Russia loses these attributes of European power, it also loses its commanding role in international politics. The web of meaning fixed new terms around the concept of Great Powerhood: control over Balkans and the Black Sea straits is linked to the notion of European power, European power is linked to the ability to command in international politics. The Crimean war shows that when Russia seeks to realise its Black Sea powerhood dream, it endangers its status as European hyper-power and indeed the very existence of the Russian state.⁷³

4. Conclusions

Although most of regional experts and researchers on Russia agree that the Black Sea has been an important element in creating the Russian identity, most of them still referred predominantly to the era of Catherine the Great or the Russian-Turkish War of the 19th century. A closer look to the Russian textbooks allows a different conclusion. The Black Sea has a much more complex and therefore a much more significant meaning for the Russian identity than just a glorious Imperial past. As different as they are, all the textbooks construct a set of unique features for the Black Sea region and the Balkans as those that constitute Russia as existing international actor.

The analysis of spatial discourse shows that, the Black Sea and the Balkans played an important role in contextualization of Russia's geographical localization. Russia was constructed as an entity situated at the route of historical flows from the North to the South. Russia itself is sometimes constructed as a body in motion from the North to the South. The North was introduced as linked to the concept of something stable and sometimes civilizationally superior to Russia in material terms. In

contrast the Black Sea constitutes the part of the concept of the South which is considered a locus and the source of uncertainty for Russia. It was the source of both challenge and prospect for Russia. The representation of success followed by the failure of challenge still reinforces the image of instability.

The Black Sea and the Balkans became Russia's Gate to the World history. This is where Russia had to face the challenge of Barbarity, whether it was represented by nomads, Mongols or Turks, or had to compete with European powers. The victories of Russia followed the concept of instability and threat was reinforced through new references to new challenges. But those challenges and threats constituted the international context, in which Russia could construct itself as an international actor and could engage in interaction with other international actors.

Another important finding of the research is the fact that the texts also produce the link between political developments in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. The link is produced through the creation of causality between the certain political developments in one region and Russian gain in another region. Parallel descriptions of the Russian victories and symbol of these victories in the Balkans and in the Black Sea region constitute another mechanism of causality.

Last, but not the least, the Black Sea and the Balkans have become the arena where Russia could claim its international subjectivity. The international subjectivity of Russia (whether it is just Slavic tribes, state, power or Great Power) is defined by its ability to expand and control adjacent areas. The idea of being power was linked to the ability to obtain access to the sea – initially to the Baltic and then to the Black Sea and the Balkans. Later on, it was also related to the concept of being able to face challenges from other European powers and meet the challenge by defeating the strongest of them. In general, the concept of Greatness is linked to Russia's ability to claim its right in relations with other European powers.

Having identified the prevailing historical ideas which formed an intellectual background of the Russian society, the research will turn to the analysis of more recent textbooks and newspapers, in order to track the evolution of the discourses and those policy choices in Russian-European relations which they made thinkable and imaginable.

NOTES

- ¹ A. M. Pankratova (ed.), *Istoriya SSSR: Chast Pervaya: Uchebnik dlya 8-ogo klassa sredney shkoly*, (*History of the USSR: Part I: Textbook for the 8th grade of secondary school*), Uchpedgiz, Moscow, 1947; A. M. Pankratova (ed.) *Istoriya SSSR: Chast Vtoraya: Uchebnik dlya 9-ogo klassa sredney shkoly*, (*History of the USSR: Part II: Textbook for the 9th grade of secondary school*), Uchpedgiz, Moscow, 1958.
- ² E. M. Zhukov (ed.), *Vsemirnaya Istoriya v Desiati Tomakh*, (*World History in Ten Volumes*), Akademiya Nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1955-1965; Potemkin V. P. (ed.), *Istoriya Diplomatii* (*History of Diplomacy*), OGIZ, Moscow, 1941.
- ³ It should be also noticed that the faculties of histories were the primary faculties where the experts in the spheres of humanities were trained. There were no schools (faculties or departments) of political science, sociology or anthropology etc. Couple of area-studies and international relations institutes in the Soviet education system was mostly based in Moscow and were also dominated by this approach.
- ⁴ A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 191.
- ⁵ S. M. Soloviev, *Istoriya Rossii s Drevneishikh Vremen: v piatnadsati knigakh* (*History of Russia since the Oldest Times: in fifteen books*), Izd-vo sotsialno-ekonomicheskoy literatury, Moscow, 1959-1965.
- ⁶ Natalya Ivanova, «A New Mosaic out of Old Fragments: Soviet History Re-Codified in Modern Russian Prose» at *Conference Papers*, Stanford University, October 1998, p. 25, available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume/pdf/ivanova.pdf>, last accessed on 22 April 2010
- ⁷ <http://www.russika.ru/ctatjajv.asp?index=31&pr=3>.
- ⁸ V. Pikul, *Bayazet*, Moscow, 1961, online version available at: <http://lib.aldebaran.ru>, last accessed on 23 April 2010.
- ⁹ A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 1-4.
- ¹⁰ Although Pankratova provides detailed descriptions of the invasion of the Livonian Teutonian Orders and Swedes in the Baltic lands, the both battles of Alexander Nevsky with Teutonians and Swedes are described at one page. See A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 87-90.
- ¹¹ Iver Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815–2007", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11, 2008, pp. 128–151.
- ¹² A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 22.
- ¹³ E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, p. 14.
- ¹⁴ For long quotation of the correspondence Peter the Great received from the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople (with detailed description of European envoys bribing Sultan and Tatars to conspire against Russia) see e.g. S. M. Soloviev, book 5, 1962, pp. 525-530; see also A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 9.

- 15 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 4, 6, 7, 9-10, 12-13; E. M. Zhukov (ed.),
vol. 1, 1955, pp. 4, 26-27
- 16 V. P. Potemkin (ed.), *Istoriya Diplomatii* (History of Diplomacy), OGIZ,
Moscow, vol. 1, 1941, p. 25.
- 17 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 22-27.
- 18 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 23-25.
- 19 S. M. Soloviev, book 6, 1959, p. 61; see also pp. 74, 84, 90.
- 20 Albania has been a medieval Kingdom in Caucasus at the territory of modern
Azerbaijan and Iran.
- 21 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, p. 15.
- 22 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, p. 126.
- 23 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 127-129.
- 24 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 3, 1957, p. 793.
- 25 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 94.
- 26 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, p. 102.
- 27 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, pp. 12-19, 32-33, 35,39, 41-45, 55, 57, 62-63,
69; It is noticeable that big strikes in other provinces of Russia receive much
less attention.
- 28 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, p. 72.
- 29 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, pp. 195-197, 209, 211, 226-232, 260-263,
269, 361-362.
- 30 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 17-21; E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 2, 1956,
pp. 70-71.
- 31 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 240.
- 32 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, p. 43. See the same script in the chapters on
the medieval diplomacy of the Russian Princes, V. P. Potemkin (ed.), 1941,
p. 120-121; Soloviev, 1959, pp. 181-185.
- 33 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 131, 133-139; S. M. Soloviev, book 3,
1960, p. 391.
- 34 V. Pikul, *Bayazet*, 1961, p. 18.
- 35 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, pp. 89, 92-93.
- 36 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, p. 103.
- 37 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, pp. 225-226; S. M. Soloviev, book 8, 1962,
pp. 376-381. It is also important that Soloviev pointed to numerous calls
for help coming from these nations, see e.g. Soloviev, book 8, 1962, pp.
413-414; book 12, 1964, pp. 148-152, 215, 375-376, 488-490; book 14,
1965, pp. 304-307.
- 38 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, p. 652.
- 39 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 58. In more details the nexus is described
in E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, p. 658 (Kagul - Larga - Ryabaya Balka
- Azov - Crimean - Chesme - Khios Island).

- 40 It is also worth mentioning that most of Russia's victories in the Black Sea were then registered in peace treaties signed in the Balkans – Belgrade Peace Treaty, Bucharest Peace Treaty, Iasi Peace Treaty, Constantinople Peace Treaty, Adrianople Peace Treaty, Kutchuk-Kainarji, Constantinople, peace, etc.
- 41 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, p. 654.
- 42 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 6, 1959, p. 100; Also for the description of Russian-Turkish wars of 1806-1812 see A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 108; E. M. Zhukov, vol. 6, 1959, pp. 99-100; of Russian-Turkish war of 1828-1829 see A. M. Pankratova (ed.) 1958, p. 162.
- 43 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 179.
- 44 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1954, pp. 108, 115-116.
- 45 This The first small edition of V. Pikul's, *Iz Tupika*, was published by the Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) publishing house Lenzidat in 1968. The then repeatedly republished.
- 46 V. Pikul, *Bayazet*, 1961, p. 7.
- 47 V. Pikul, *Bayazet*, 1961, pp. 49, 114, 200-201, 239.
- 48 V. Pikul, *Bayazet*, 1961, p. 13.
- 49 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 1, 1955, pp. 211-212, 215, 216, 219, 227, 258, 289, 313.
- 50 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 1, 1955, pp. 290, 316, 319-320, 324-325, 326, 331, 343, 345, 348, 353, 356, 366, 369-373, 378-383, 386, 389, 393-399, 475, 484, 493, 496-7, 502-512, 534-557, 572, 574.
- 51 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 1, 1955, p. 274; S. M. Soloviev, 1959, p. 191.
- 52 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, p. 38.
- 53 Rurikovichs are descendants of Rurik, the first Viking warlord who came to rule to Slavic lands. V. P. Potemkin (ed.), vol. I, 1941, p. 111.
- 54 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 38-42.
- 55 S. M. Soloviev, 1959, pp. 58, 130; V. P. Potemkin, 1941, p. 111.
- 56 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 79-84.
- 57 S. M. Soloviev, 1959, p. 199.
- 58 Long description of decentralisation follows, see A. M. Pankratova, 1947, pp. 55-70.
- 59 Long description of unification of Russian lands constitutes one of the key themes in many volumes of Soloviev's works, see e.g. S. M. Soloviev, book 3, 1960, pp. 7-65; E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 3, 1957, pp. 768-798; A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 106-107, 119-131.
- 60 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1947, pp. 133-139; S. M. Soloviev, book 4, 1960, pp.7-190.
- 61 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 6.
- 62 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, pp. 208-209, 379.
- 63 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, pp. 208-209, 379.

- 64 S. M. Soloviev, book 5, 1962.
65 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 58.
66 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 5, 1958, p. 215.
67 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 6, 1959, pp. 101-102.
68 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 107.
69 E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 6, 1959, p. 134.
70 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 170.
71 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 170.
72 A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, p. 179.
73 Peasantry revolts in the South of Russia and Caucasus, see A. M. Pankratova (ed.), 1958, pp. 207, 228-231; E. M. Zhukov (ed.), vol. 6, 1959, pp. 476-485.

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<http://www.russika.ru/ctatjajv.asp?index=31&pr=3>