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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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HISTORICAL MEMORY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF RUSSIAN-ESTONIAN RELATIONS

D. A. Lanko*

This article contributes to the discussion within the "Towards the Common Past" international academic network bringing together scholars from Russia, the Baltic States and the Nordic countries. It assesses the relationship between globalization and historical memory, thus contributing to the discussion on globalization and the roles and applications of history. On the basis of an analysis of academic discourses on globalization and historical memory, the author arrives at two conclusions. On the one hand, the proponents of globalization use historical memory as one of their arguments: they claim that the history of globalization in international relations stretches back to the 19th century, thus globalization is an irreversible process. On the other hand, globalization attaches international significance to historical events that were earlier considered as being of local importance. The author proves the latter statement through comparing Russian and Estonian discourses on the relationship between the events which took place in Tallinn in September 1944 and April 2007. Highlighting the differences between the two discourses may help Russian scholars understand the reasons behind the political decisions made by the Estonian authorities in April 2007. It accounts for the practical significance of the research conducted, since one of the most important objectives of international relations as a discipline is not to explain what decision would have been the most appropriate in the given situation, but to further the understanding of the reasons behind the actually made decision. *The author expresses his gratitude to his counterparts from St. Petersburg State University and the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, as well as those from the Universities of Lund (Sweden), Tampere (Finland), and Tartu (Estonia) for their comments on the earlier versions of the article. At the same time, the author alone bears all the responsibility for the conclusions drawn in the article.*

Key words: globalization, history, policy of memory, Russian-Estonian relations, historical monuments

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The authors of a great number of research works on globalization emphasise that globalization, despite the fact that this category entered the scientific vocabulary only in the 1990s, took place 100 years earlier — in the late 19th century. For example, K. Waltz does not only state that the processes known today as globalization were characteristic of international relations of the time; he also claims that the globalization of international relations of the early 20th century was deeper than that of the end of the century [21]. It is one of the most important arguments of the advocates of globalization among the intellectual elite: globalization has a long history, thus, it should be perceived as an objective process and, hence, there is little sense in asking whether a certain state should take part in the globalization processes — there is a need to start a practical discussion on the specific steps to be taken in that direction.

This logical conclusion rests on the erroneously interpreted principle of historical determinism: if this or that phenomenon has existed over a long period, hence, its existence is predetermined by the "course of historical development". This argument is often used by the advocates of conservative approach to different issues, although the history of conservative thought is rich in examples of criticism both against this argument and the principle of historical determinism in general. Historical determinism is associated with the name of G. Hegel. In his work *Philosophy of history*, he, first of all, outlines the principle of dialectics in terms of historical development, which claims that conflicts are the driving force of history and, secondly, suggests that the emergence of a new political system is politically determined by the conflicts that existed within the preceding political system [4].

The concept of historical determinism borrowed from Hegel formed the basis of Marxist ideas of history. As shown above, they are still relevant and make it possible for the adherents of globalization theories to develop a comprehensive idea of modern international relations and the role of globalization in them from the leftist point of view. However, these ideas are strongly opposed by the advocates of conservative perspective on the course of historical development. For instance, Edmund Burke considered historical development not as progress predetermined by an external force, but believed that it depends on the ideas and behaviour of certain people [17, p. 40]. This assumption explains the interest shown by American historians to individual historical figures. It underlies the central thesis of conservatism found in the rhetoric of Russian conservatives of the early 21st century — the "human factor" thesis.

Indeed, the notion of conservatism has been used in the rhetoric of the leaders of the United Russia political party since its foundation in the late 2001. The same year, the future chairperson of the party's Supreme council, Boris Gryzlov, defended a PhD thesis which, in particular, identified the prerequisites for the formation of the conservative component of the Russian political spectrum [6]. In 2002, when B. V. Gryzlov was elected the chairperson of the party's Supreme council, references to conservatism in the context of the party's ideological framework became constant. Conservative objectives are still actively used a decade later [5]. Simultaneously with the

emergence of the conservatism thesis in the rhetoric of the United Russia's leaders, they started to use the "human factor" thesis. However, the meaning of this notion in the interpretation of Russian conservatives of the 21st century proved to differ essentially from that attached to it by Burke.

Indeed, the "human factor" thesis is used in modern Russia predominantly to explain the negative phenomena occurring in the country, which serves two purposes. On the one hand, it helps overcome the irresponsibility integral to the Russian politics of the preceding period, when all negative phenomena were explained by objective reasons or, if none were found, by the nature of transition period. On the other hand, it contributes to the legitimation of the existing political regime: one gets an impression that positive phenomena prevail in the country, whereas individual negative ones are determined by the "human factor". It diverges from the interpretation of the "human factor" notion given in the works of E. Burke who believed that it lies behind all phenomena in history — both positive and negative ones.

Historical determinism is also unacceptable for another conservative historian — A. de Tocqueville. Alongside the "human facor", his works pay significant attention to the role of coincidence in history. It will be shown below to what extent the ideas of political leaders about the role of coincidence in historical development influence their foreign policy and how these ideas change from region to region. As to historical determinism, A. de Tocqueville uses the term "doctrine of necessity", which, in his opinion, can "paralyze the activity of a modern society" [11, p. 367]. Historical determinism, according to de Tocqueville is integral only to the historians of "democratic ages"; he cites American historians as an example. Indeed, the principle of historical determinism is found in the works of the American historian B. Adams published at the turn of the 19th century [14].

It is not surprising that, in the situation of coexistence of at least two approaches to history (historical determinism and the so-called conservative approach), theorists of history start posing questions about the functions of history. F. Nietzsche was one of the first to address this issue in an early work of his [9], which reflects the crisis of historical knowledge characteristic of the 19th century Europe. On the one hand, this crisis posed the question about the function of historical knowledge, which might not have arisen in other circumstances. On the other hand, this crisis generated attempts to overcome it through transforming history into a science in accordance with the requirements of positivistic philosophy. Actually, the mentioned work was written by F. Nietzsche in the context of these attempts, for, in his opinion, it is impossible to make history an objective science, as positivistic philosophy demands. Moreover, such attempts could be harmful to the existing society.

The revision of Nietzsche's work resulted in a large number of publications aiming to answer the question about the functions of history; one cannot but mention *Being and Time* by M. Heidegger [13]. To an extent, another example of such publications is the historical works of F. Braudel, where the idea of impossibility of objective understanding of history underlies the thesis about the multiplicity of history: each civilization creates its own history

and all these histories are true [3]. At the same time, Braudel is, first of all, a teacher of history rather than a researcher, thus he writes about the impact of teaching history. In his opinion, this impact can be both negative and positive: teaching history as multiple histories that are different for different civilizations can facilitate a dialogue between them, whereas teaching history in the context of determinism will, on the contrary, hamper it.

Historical determinism is still a popular concept — both among professional historians trying to turn history into an objective science (which was strongly opposed by F. Nietzsche), and those authors who use historical knowledge to corroborate their theories relating to the problem fields of other sciences, including political science. A good example is the F. Fukuyama's concept of "the end of history" [12]. He bases his theoretical reasoning on the historical fact, according to which there were few democratic states in the early 19th century and their number increased to several dozen by the end of the 20th century. Therefore, Fukuyama concludes, democracy is a historically determined process; later, he focuses on the analysis of possible consequences of democratisation.

R. Kagan, when criticising F. Fukuyama, also uses historical determinism to corroborate his ideas. As most critics of F. Fukuyama, R. Kagan addresses the first part of his work, which postulates that the world history is essentially a history of wars, whereas wars ceased against the background of universal democratisation. The second part of F. Fukuyama's work, which accounts for the phrase "last man" in the title, is ignored by R. Kagan. Even the structure of R. Kagan's work exhibits features of historical determinism. Indeed, democratisation has a certain history, therefore (as the principle of historical determinism suggests), it has a future. It is a different issue that, in R. Kagan's interpretation, the future of democratisation does not seem to be as bright as F. Fukuyama saw it in the early 1990s, since the autocratic tradition has "a long and distinguished past" [7, p. 32].

Probably, historical determinism does not lose its popularity owing to the impact on the society, as a result of which the notions of "pre-existent" and "outlying" become identical [10, p.32]. In other words, thanks to historical determinism, people believe that, if something existed before, it will exist after and, if something did not exist before, it can be considered (at best) a fad that will disappear in a short-term perspective. As to political science, the phenomena and processes of the political world, whose history can be traced, are classed as firmly established, whereas those phenomena and processes, whose history cannot be traced, can be ignored. Thus, the function of historical knowledge underlies most of the cases of history used for political purposes; recently, sociologists have registered an increase in the frequency of historical references in political rhetoric.

So, A. Astrov aspires to find the reasons (other than Russophobia) of an increased attention paid by the government of modern Estonia to what is called the "legacy of totalitarianism" [2]. Indeed, over almost three centuries, the relations between Russia and the title nation of Estonia have been very controversial, and the Soviet Estonian period is considered by the majority of the title nation in terms of conflict, thus, it is not surprising that most Es-

tonian citizens share anti-Russian sentiments. One can get an impression that these sentiments make the government of a small European country refer to the legacy of totalitarianism at all accessible international fora to exert pressure on Russia — the legal successor to the largest totalitarian power of the past. As A. Astrov, whose opinion we share, emphasises, this conviction is erroneous, and the reasons for historical references in the rhetoric of Estonian political leaders should be sought for — in concordance with F. Nietzsche's views — not in the past, but in the present. As of today, Russian-Estonian relations cannot be called friendly — they rather gravitate to irrational animosity.

In this connection, it seems that the reason for such scrupulous attention of Estonia to the issue of totalitarianism should be sought for not in the East — in Russia, but in the West. Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonian foreign policy was aimed at being recognised by the West as an integral part of it. And this aim was achieved: at costs considerable by the measurements of a small state with modest budget and through an active anti-Russian campaign, which was targeted at "foreign audience", Estonia acceded to NATO and the European Union — the most important communities of the West. However, this time was plagued with certain doubts regarding the future of the united West, which could be replaced by conflicting Europe and America. Consequently, Estonia faced a difficult choice — what part of the West to remain with. Among political elites, the thesis is advanced that the unification of the West could be facilitated by reviving the image of a "common enemy" — in the age of the Cold War, the West was united in its opposition to totalitarianism. Hence the aspiration of the Estonian government to raise the question of condemning totalitarianism at all international fora putting emphasis on its "eastern" manifestations; at the same time, Estonian leaders believe that the references to "western" totalitarianism, for instance, fascism, will lead to the disintegration of the big West.

Far away from Estonia, in Australia, we find another example of a political leader relying on the policy of memory [18]. It is J. Howard, who held the position of Australian Prime Minister in 1996—2007; his term in office coincided with the launch of the "global war against terror" proclaimed by the US President G. W. Bush after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. At the time, Australia faced a difficult choice. On the one hand, Australia was a consistent ally of the USA throughout the period of the Cold War; on the other hand, the accession to the coalition headed by the USA would make Australia vulnerable to terrorism, as it did happen several years later, when Australian citizens lost their lives as a result of a terrorist attack on the island of Bali. Prime Minister J. Howard decided on joining the coalition and, in order to legitimate this decision among the voters, he rested on the policy of memory.

For politicians, historical determinism is a means to legitimate their decisions. When explaining a certain decision, political leaders form an idea in the public opinion that it was not made of their own accord, but was predetermined by history itself. Examples of using this principle are found beyond the process of political decision making. So, arguments based on historical

determinism are often put forward by leaders of extreme nationalist movements. At the same time, scholars still discuss the origins of nationalism. The advocates of the so-called primordial approach emphasise that nations are formed on the basis of objective factors that have existed since time immemorial, such as shared territory, race, religion, language, traditions and customs, economic system, etc. [19]. They are opposed by the adherents of the so-called modernist approach [1]. From their point of view, the European nations formed in the 18th—19th century as a result of the Industrial revolution, urbanisation, and modernisation; later nationalism accompanied by modernisation spread throughout the world.

Extreme nationalists deny the mere fact of existence of the modernist theory. For them, nations emerged long before the beginning of modernisation in Europe in different periods; and a superior status is granted to the nation that formed earlier. Thus, extreme nationalists use historical knowledge to prove the fact that their nation had existed long before the contiguous lands were populated by neighbouring nations and to emphasize their national superiority over the neighbours. This technique is used by extreme nationalists of different countries, which results in a certain “war of histories”, in the course of which representatives of different nations try to prove the antiquity of their origin by all means available.

An example of applying the historical determinism principle is the theory of democracy. An increase in the number of democratic states on the planet resulted in almost all the world countries proclaiming themselves democracies (an exception is the absolute monarchies of the Middle East), including North Korea, which is officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Thus, there emerged a need to create a classification of democratic regimes; one of the approaches was the division into “old” and “young” democracies. “Old” democratic regimes are believed to contain no threat to democracy, while “young” democracies are unstable and require protection, at least, the presence of international observers. Some researchers even pinpoint the date when the threat to “young democracies” reaches its peak level — it is the date of the second parliamentary elections after the adoption of a democratic constitution [15].

The principle of historical determinism was not taken into account by the American administration in the period of the above-mentioned crisis of the West, which occurred in the first decade of the 21st century. Back then, certain European countries opposed to the US policy in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular, whereas other European states supported the USA. This support was provided, first of all, by Central European and Baltic countries. As to these states, the ex-Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld used the metaphor of “the new Europe”, implying that "the new" means "progressive" [16]. Those opposing the US policy were correspondingly proclaimed “the old Europe”, which implied their incapability of further development. It seems that D. Rumsfeld ignored the principle of historical determinism, according to which, the “old” is more attractive than the “new”. The rhetorical device did not yield the desired result: “old” Europe did not want to become “new”.

As to the field of international relations, one cannot but recall the discussion initiated by experts in international relations on the prospects of the Westphalian system of international relations. Some scholars maintain that it will soon be replaced by a new system of international relations; others believe that there are no alternatives to states in the modern world, thus, the Westphalian system will remain intact for many years to come. It is remarkable that those predicting the imminent fall of the Westphalian system emphasize that, in 1648 — the official birth year of the system, only the mere principle was formulated, whereas relations within Europe started to conform to it not earlier than the 20th century. The advocates of the Westphalian system, in their turn, stress that, although it started to develop in 1648, its individual components emerged long before that, during the Hundred Years' War [20].

In a similar way, the history of globalization gives its adherents an additional argument in the disputes with the critics of this process: they maintain that, since globalization has a long history and its existence is predetermined by the "course of historical development", criticising this phenomenon is futile. It seems to be the way historical knowledge affects the discussion on globalization. At the same time, globalization affects historical knowledge. Thanks to globalization, the international community learns about historical events that earlier were of significance only for individual peoples or even local communities. Moreover, interpretations of these events lead to international conflicts, thus, the "end of history" predicted by F. Fukuyama has not taken place yet; historical issues are increasingly addressed within international relations.

A representative example is the internal Estonian conflict that rapidly developed in a Russian-Estonian diplomatic battle, whose climax was reached in April 2007. Back then, the government of the Republic of Estonia led by Prime Minister A. Ansip decided to deliver on their election promises made prior to the recent parliamentary elections and relocate the Monument to the Soviet liberators from the centre of Tallinn. This monument was dubbed by the Estonian Russian-speaking community as the Bronze soldier, ethnic Estonians call it simply the Bronze man. The relocation of the monument and the way it was carried out gave rise to social unrest initiated by the Russian-speaking community. I already published my arguments as to the reasons why the Russian-speaking Estonian youth chose this form of political protest [8]. In this article, I would focus on the arguments of the Estonian government, since they seem to be a good illustration of the influence of globalization on historical knowledge.

Over the years after the social unrest in Tallinn in April 2007, numerous reasons for the relocation of the monument and relocation conducted at that particular time were given. Numerous corruption scandals within the Estonian government taking place in 2003—2005 were pointed out; there were assumptions that the expensive plot of land in the centre of Tallinn occupied by the monument drew the attention of an Estonian company. The past years

proved this version inconsistent, since nothing has been built on the site after the relocation. There were talks about the past of Prime Minister A. Ansip, who became the only high-ranking ex-communist in the country, after President Arnold Rüütel retired from his position, and had to emphasize his break with the communist past, as well as his loyalty to the Republic of Estonia.

An interesting version was put forward by A. Astrov which was mentioned above. Another version can be produced on the basis of juxtaposing the historical events significant for the Russian community and the community of modern Estonia, the ethnic Estonians and the Russian-speaking population. It shows that, when calling the Bronze soldier a historical monument, the communities of the two countries have in mind two different events that the monument symbolizes for them. For the Russian community, of special importance are two historical dates of the World War II period — June 22, 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and May 9, 1945, when the former was crushed. For the Russian community, the Bronze soldier symbolizes the second date — May 9, the Day of Victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War. For them, the relocation of the Bronze soldier from the centre of Tallinn symbolizes the disrespect of ethnic Estonians for this date.

At the same time, little attention was paid to the fact that each local community has its "own" historical dates, symbolized by certain objects of material culture, including historical monuments. As to the Bronze soldier, for Estonians, such a date is September 22, 1944 — the day of liberation of Tallinn from German occupants. Every year, many representatives of the Russian-speaking community of the Estonian capital were coming to the Bronze soldier to lay flowers not only on May 9, but also on September 22. And it was a march on September 22, not a traditional march of the Russian-speaking community at the Bronze soldier on May 9 that caused the discontent of ethnic Estonians, as a response to which the government made a decision on the relocation of the monument.

The day of September 22, 1944 did not only bring Estonians the liberation from Nazi dictatorship, but also marked the beginning of a forty-year period of futile attempts at building communism. Estonians believe that Nazi occupation was replaced by Soviet occupation. I would like to emphasize that I do not express my opinion, but describe that of most Estonian citizens of the title nationality. This discrepancy in views on historical dates which the monument was designed to symbolize and the act of its relocation underlay a conflict between the Russian community and the Russian-speaking community of Estonia on one side and the ethnic Estonians on the other. Russians and the Russian-speaking community of Estonia consider the relocation of the monument disrespect for the important for them historical date — May 9, 1945.

In their turn, the ethnic Estonians, many of whom celebrate May 9 as the day Europe was liberated from Nazism, consider the relocation of the monument disregard for another historical date — September 22.

In the conditions when the ethnic Estonians failed in conveying the importance of this very date to the Russian-speaking community, a conflict was inevitable. Thus, the new historical date — September 22, 1944, earlier of local significance (celebrated by the residents of Tallinn) — initiated an international conflict and gained international significance.

The events in Estonia are another representative example of how, in the age of globalization, earlier locally significant historical events acquire global significance and how the historical memory of this event gives rise to international conflicts.

In my opinion, the relocation of the monument and the burial site of the Soviet soldiers could have been presented for public discussion, as a result of which (with due military honours and observing international legal formalities) the actions under consideration could be performed. It would have been a compromise between the two models of historical memory and the conflict would not have escalated to such a point.

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