

Research on Russia from a Finnish horizon. Avoiding collapse by framing institutions

linism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents, New Haven & London 2004.

- 16 Cf. Stefan T. Possony, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary*, Chicago 1964, pp. 151–184, on Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' contacts with Russian reform-minded millionaires, with the Austrian and German authorities on matters of financial support for the Party's newspapers and organization; for a modern account of Lenin that rejects the foreign, and purportedly German, control of the Bolsheviks, see Helène Carrère d'Encausse, *Lénine*, Paris 1998.
- 17 Natalia Narotshnitskaïa, *Que reste-t-il de notre victoire? Russie-Occident: Le Malentendu*, Paris 2008, pp. 43–60.
- 18 See Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918–1930*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1994.
- 19 Edvins Snore, “The Soviet Story”, DVD, 2008.
- 20 Oleg Khlevniuk, *Khoziain: Stalin i utverzhdienie stalinskoi diktatury* [The boss: Stalin and the consolidation of the Stalinist dictatorship], Moscow 2009, pp. 237–239.
- 21 Vladimir Khaustov & Lennart Samuelson, *Stalin, NKVD i repressii, 1936–1938 gg.* [Stalin, NKVD, and the repressions, 1936–1938], Moscow 2008.
- 22 Sergei Sluch, “Rech Stalina, kotoroi ne bylo” [Stalin's speech that never was held], *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 2004:1, pp. 113–139.
- 23 Narotchnitskaïa, *Que reste-t-il*, pp. 129–131.
- 24 Viktor Suvorov, *The Ice-Breaker: Who Started the Second World War?* London 1985. The Russian debate in defense of Rezun-Suvorov's theses may be found in, for example *Pravda Viktora Suvorova: Perepisyvaia istoriiu Vtoroi Mirovoi*, [Viktor Suvorov's truth: to rewrite the history of World War II], Moscow 2006. Arguments against Rezun-Suvorov have been put forward by, among others, Alexander Pomogaibo, *Psevdoistorik Suvorov i zagadki Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny* [The pseudo-historian Suvorov and the enigmas of World War II], Moscow 2002, and Aleksei Isaev, *Anti-Suvorov: Desiat mifov Vtoroi Mirovoi* [Anti-Suvorov: Ten myths about World War II], Moscow 2005.

**Russia Lost or Found?
Patterns and
Trajectories**
Edited by Hiski
Haukkala and Sinikukka
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Helsinki: Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
& Edita 2009
217 pages

IN THE SUMMER OF 2009, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged a conference to mark Finland's annexation to the Russian Empire 200 years earlier. The volume *Russia Lost or Found?* is based on papers from the conference, written by six Finnish and three foreign scholars. They analyze present-day Russia and its domestic and foreign policies from economic, political, and historical perspectives in an effort to better understand what is currently happening in Russia.

The geographical proximity of Finland to Russia posed a problem for Finland and set limits on Finnish politics throughout the last century. This proximity also influenced Finnish research on Russia, which, up to the early 1970s, avoided any serious study of Soviet society. The ever-intensifying economic ties at that time created a need for knowledge and stimulated research. But in his overview of Finnish Russian studies, Raimo Väyrynen notes that such research did not actually commence until the 1990s. As a member of the EU, Finland made a commitment to conduct research on Russia; the Aleksanteri Institute was founded in 1996 as the hub of a research network, and the Finnish Academy provided generous funding. A number of research centers with a focus on Russia developed. Finland's proximity to Russia now became an asset.

ANALYSES OF RUSSIA tend to share a common weakness. Researchers and journalists often base their work on declarations by the Russian government rather than actual policies and the results of these policies. This book also contains contributions where the conclusions are based mainly on declared policy. It is, in my view, difficult to describe Russian foreign policy as successful in the first decades of the 21st century if you follow what has occurred. The rhetoric of Russian leaders may have become more militant, but Russia has in reality become politically isolated, unable to develop an economic policy that is attractive to states on former Soviet territory, and has experienced several foreign policy setbacks.

The authors have mostly avoided the trap of declaratory policies, or historical determinism, generalizations or schematic trend extrapolations. They exhibit methodological awareness. The book focuses on the structures, institutions (in the sense of ground rules), processes, and actors that could contribute to a change of the system.

The main message of the book is that Russia is in need of profound structural reforms. A number of contributors make it clear that the Russian political and economic system has run aground. They emphasize the severity of the situation by noting that the systems lacks incentives for change. Those in Russia who could have an impact have no personal interest in change, while those who want to change the system have no influence. The relative prosperity that resulted from the high world-market prices for energy products in the early 21st century made the small group of people who controlled natural resources extremely wealthy, while a portion of the surplus trickled down

to the population and contributed only to a certain increase in the standard of living.

WHENEVER A SINGLE natural resource so totally dominates the income of a country like energy in the case of Russia, it always becomes a curse. In Russia it is even worse, says Alexander Etkind, who characterizes the situation as a “dual curse of raw materials”. According to Etkind, the Russian regime is dominated by old-fashioned geopolitical thinking, and winks at the soft sectors in the society. The demographic trends are frightening, with extremely high mortality rates, a bad healthcare system, an under-financed educational system, and a totally inadequate social safety net. Living conditions are unnecessarily harsh for many Russians, which explains the extremely high levels of alcohol consumption.¹ Etkind asserts that a commitment to soft sectors has played an important role for positive economic development in many countries.

The “curse” inherent in the dominance of one natural resource derives from the fact that energy extraction employs only a small part of the population (1.6 percent of the workforce), and occurs in isolation. It is controlled by only a few oligarchs, state officials, and politicians, who also control the welfare revenues and their distribution. This elite has no personal interest in improving the quality of the workforce and its standard of living, or in investing in other industries. For them, it is enough to make the necessary investment in the energy sector. The rest is used for consumption or to buy property in the West. Nor does the elite have any interest in coming to grips with corruption, since that is part of the system. It permits no opposition to its policies, and expands the security apparatus. Moreover, says Etkind, the population as a whole also prioritizes private consumption, maintains a passive attitude, and does not seek change.

So is the picture completely bleak? Soili Nysten-Haarala hopes that the actors in the market economy, the companies, will be agents of change. When formal institutions are weak, and laws and regulations are not enforced, informal institutions (practices, attitudes, unregulated processes) tend to take over. Such informal institutions have a long tradition in Russia, and they have en-

joyed extensive freedom of action over the last two decades. Nysten-Haarala believes that individual companies can assume continued importance in such a context. They often rely on the goodwill of local governments to be able to operate, but they also play an important role in contributing to the social services in the given area. Local governments are poorly financed, and are unable to offer satisfactory social services to their citizens. As a legacy from the Soviet era, this responsibility rests with the companies. It is a heavy responsibility, but it does give the companies a means of exerting influence at the local level and, through their actions, an opportunity to help reshape informal institutions. We may recall that the Ikea furniture company became a popular role model when it fired three Russian managers in the fall of 2009 for turning a blind eye to corruption and bribery.

MARKKU KIVINEN TAKES a look at efforts by the Russian government to reform the social welfare system. The old system provided small but reliable benefits to a host of weak social groups. It was a complicated system which was to be replaced with cash benefits. Because the government failed to embed the reform via political discussion, it was met with strong popular protests. Russian pensioners took to the streets in early 2005, and the government backed down. Such public reaction is an indication that there exists a potential for change. But popular protests are still a rarity.

From a theoretical standpoint, the growing middle class could become a force for change. Kivinen concedes that, so far, there are no signs that this is the case in Russia. The middle class seeks individual solutions. When it becomes politically active it does so within the framework of the loyalist United Russia party.

I WOULD SUPPLEMENT Kivinen by noting that any close examination of the behavior of the middle class reveals a spirit of total resignation which characterizes Russia at present. Not only does the middle class obtain private insurances, use private doctors, send children to private schools or, even more preferably, schools abroad, buy apartments in the rest of Europe, and settle in oases of housing tracts on the periphery of Moscow named after Western countries and isolated from the rest of society. Opin-

ion polls show that a majority of young, well-educated Russians want to settle abroad, not only to qualify for better future jobs in Russia, but because they have no comfort, security, or confidence in a good future in their homeland.

TIMO VIHAVAINEN is a historian who views current Russian society in terms of the legacy from the past. Even though he carefully discusses how this legacy of many centuries could conceivably impact on the present situation, his chapter displays a spirit of historical determinism. It is obvious that the shadow of history hangs over Russia. But Vihavainen looks at opinion polls showing strong popular support for Stalin, a belief in Russian exceptionalism, a Russian *Sonderweg*, and imperialistic dreams of a Great Russia in light of the country's long tradition of a dominant authoritarian state. He offers a similar explanation for the heavy voter support garnered on TV shows (such as "Russia's Name") by people who have defended Russia against invasions from the West, such as Alexander Nevsky, or tsarist Russian conservative ministers like Peter Stolypin. I disagree with Vihavainen's analysis, because he cannot explain the changes in public opinion over time, such as the fact that support for Stalin in public opinion polls rose in the early 21st century after having declined over the preceding decades. Leading Russian sociologists point out that this support was to a large extent a product of the number of TV programs. With encouragement of the political regime, the programs influenced the more than 80 percent of the population for whom TV is the primary information source. TV series, documentaries and fiction have explained, comprehended, and humanized Stalin, to say nothing of how his name has been linked to the government's intensified political rhetoric over the last ten years regarding Russia's victory in World War II.

THERE IS ANOTHER aspect to this. Vihavainen looks only at one tradition in Russian political thought. He forgets that there has been and remains another tradition, one that, while certainly significantly weaker, has run parallel to the dominant tradition of thought over the centuries. In his great work on Russia and Europe from 1492 to 1921, the Russian-American historian Alexander Yanov argues that for centuries there existed two schools of thought in Russia, and he shows how the pendulum has swung from one to the other. If the first school falls back on "conservative" conceptions of Russian uniqueness, then the second is based on more "liberal" ideas about how Russia can be reformed by and learn from the experiences of other nations. Yanov does not date these viewpoints to the late 19th century struggles between "Slavophiles" and "Westernizers"; he finds them also in the 16th century. According to Yanov, every "liberal" attempt to reform has failed. Each half-implemented reform program has been followed by a reactionary backlash and a period of political restoration. Even though the "liberal" alternative has not always been accorded its proper place in the public sphere, it has been present in the political discussion among intellectuals.

After having followed Russian cultural life *in situ* in Moscow for over four years, I can vouch for the existence of a dynamic spirit of innovation and creativity in Russian cultural life that bodes well for the future, albeit over the long term. Culture in the form of art, film, and theater communicates a different perspective on the future than the lamentable stagnation that characterizes Russia's political life, with its destructive consequences in terms of both social development and individual life.

Etkind summarizes the book and the concerns of its authors in the following way:

Deep changes in Russia will follow deep changes in the world. The best hope is that in response to these changes, Russia will not collapse, as did the Soviet Union, but will engage itself in a deep and productive perestroika, which will transform the economic and biopolitical foundations of the nation.

To help Russia carry out this process, both the authors and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommend that everything should be done to create a framework for a lasting and mutually cooperative relationship in order to reduce the threat both from and vis-à-vis Russia. With this we can only strongly concur.

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¹ See "Na zdorovye! Gender and binge drinking in Russia", *Baltic Worlds*, vol.II:1.