

Russian Foreign Political Thinking and The Minority Issue

Russians and Other Nationalities in Russian Foreign Policy

1828 - 1892

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In Russia the classical national thought in its 19th century understanding was formed later than in the case of most European nations. The reason of it was that orthodoxy partly fulfilled those functions which other 19th-century nationalisms set as a target. The orthodoxy in Russia, because of its fight against the Tartars, had as much prestige as Catholicism had in Poland. However, the Greek fight for freedom in the 1920s made Tsar Nicholas and his circle realize that St.-Petersburgh's efforts to fight the Turkish Empire did not influence the Russian general public. Thus the Minister for Public Education Count Uvarov realized that besides orthodoxy and monarchy „nationality” could provide those ingredients which could have produced a solid basis for the tsarist monarchy.¹

Perhaps „official nationality” seemed, to some extent, a category which marked the scope of activity for the Russian thinkers beyond the Russian borderlines. In the 1830s and 1840s Russian travelers rambled all over Central and South-eastern Europe. They made the Russian readers aware of the Slavs living in those areas similarly to the „Russian Slavs” in Russia. It seemed obvious to have the Russian Government and Tsar encouraged to bestow their patronage on them.²

This task was not free from contradictions as Russia's core element was to have been said the (Great) Russian population. The languages of the Little Russians and White Russians, i.e. the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, were conceived as Russian dialects. Not even did the Decabrists think that either the Ukrainians or Byelorussians were separate nations.³ All the same could be said about Central European Slav nations; in 1835 departments of „Slavic dialects” were founded at four Russian universities. Russians did not conceive at this time the Slavs living on the territory of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires as separate nations.

The decisive majority of the non-Turkish European nations who lived on the territory of the Ottoman Empire were orthodox. Russian Tsar Nicholas I thought that the rule of Constantinople had to be over, and the Russian state could be a heir to the legacy of the European Ottoman Empire. However, the British were not keen on having a Russia possessing the straits and so becoming a power in the Mediterranean Sea. Nor did the Habsburgs want it, and at least for the time being, Vienna did not want to expand there either.

As a result of Russia's precipitated declaration of war, the Ottoman Empire had the military support of the British and the French, and the theatre of war was shifted to the Crimean Peninsula, i.e. to Russian territory. After his father's, Nicholas I's death, Alexander II followed him on the throne during the war.

Nonetheless, the Anti-Russian Alliance made serious mistakes in the Crimean battlefield, and in the end, in 1855 the Russians were defeated. It should be emphasized that this happened for the first time since the victorious war against Napoleon in 1813, after which Russian soldiers were marching in the streets of Paris. No one must forget that after this time the Russian Army was a victorious active agent in European affairs so the unsuccessful outcome of the Crimean War was a shock to the

¹ Walicki, Andrzej: *The Slavophile Controversy. History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*. Oxford, 1975. p.46.

² One of these travelers after 1835 was a Historian, the professor of Moscow University Mikhail Pogodin, who taught the latter tsar, Alexander II. In 1839 he advised the tsar to establish a slav union with separate communities with Russia at the head of it. In: Барсуков Н. П. *Жизнь и труды М.П.Погодина*. Кн.4. СПб, 1891. 313-316. Pogodin suggested taking serious measures both in the Ottoman and also in the Habsburg Empires to help the Slavs in two of his letters in 1839 and 1842. In: Погодин М.П. *Историко-политические письма и записки в продолжении Крымской войны, 1853-1856*. М., 1874. p.15, p.21 and pp. 46-69.

³ It is extremely interesting because the Decabrists were to give full independence to Poland. See Szamuely, Tibor. *The Russian Tradition*. Secker and Warburg, London, 1974. 185.

Tsarist administration. Consequently, the new Russian tsar, Alexander II decided to start a new policy, which was something like democracy. The moment of crucial importance was the wartime, when Russian governing circles, such as Mikhail Pogodin, who had been the teacher of Prince Alexander the subsequent tsar, came to the conclusion that reforms became inevitable.

Pogodin wrote in 1855 that the „overall remedy which would help Russia was „glasnost“. But whilst Herzen, the former leader of Russian democratic opposition who at this time lived in exile in London, thought almost the same but he found that „glasnost“ was to be needed so that there would be a democratic society in Russia. At this same time Pogodin openly wrote that Russia should have had „glasnost“ so that she had „better field-guns“⁴.

The tsar's bureaucrats realized it was impossible to fight and win against European powers due to a large technical gap and Russia's backwardness. „Glasnost“ was to be thought „the means, the medicine“ by which the whole society could be made „active and fresh“.

Despite the restrictions one can admit that from Alexander II's ruling to the 1890's, what concerns Russian foreign policy, there was, by and large, free press in Russia..⁵

In such circumstances, having had mostly slavophil roots, a serious foreign political doctrine appeared in Russia.

The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism

In the late fifties and early sixties the Italian and German movements for national unity influenced this Russian ideological thinking tremendously. Especially the German one, as Germany bordered Russia, and the borderland districts were in the central parts of a divided Poland. For Russians the German unity meant a deteriorative power, which had grown from nothing into a tremendous state, and was getting modernized very fast.

Because of the same interests in divided Poland Russia and Prussia had been close friends for a long time. But, as a matter of fact, the German unification movement involved the possible incorporation of the Baltic provinces, which at that time were part of Russia.

Influenced by the Italian and especially German unification movements, and based on the traditions of the old slavophile school, Russian intellectuals developed Pan Slavism, which is a foreign policy doctrine, and the goal of which is to unite Slav people in Europe at least in a (con-)federation with the considerable support of Russia. Russia was the only independent Slav power at this time. Although Pan Slavism as a foreign policy programme in its new 19th-century meaning appeared not in Russia but was discovered with a big revelation and improved mostly in Russia.⁶ It became one of the most popular Russian ideologies after the 1860s as it provided an excellent pretext for the Russian elite to expand Russian influence in Central-Europe on the territory of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, where the majority of Slav peoples lived at this time.⁷

The peculiarity of the situation was that the Slavic peoples were minorities of the above mentioned empires, although in some parts of it, on a local, regional level they might have been and were the majority. Not only was Russia a Slav power but an orthodox one as well so she could claim to safeguard them relying on two principles.

On the other hand, speaking about Russia itself we must admit that its core population was the Great Russias but they had only a relative majority in Russia itself. In fact Russians were a minority in their empire, although no any other population could be

⁴ Зайончковский П.А. *Правительственный аппарат самодержавной России в XIX веке*. М., 1978. 179.

⁵ *История СССР XIX - начала XX вв.* М., 1981. p.227.

⁶ In 1858 was established the Moscow Slav Benevolent Society, ten years later the Saint-Petersburg Benevolent Society. See Никитин С.А. *Славянские комитеты в России в 1858-1876 гг.* М., 1960.

⁷ See the editorial in the first volume of *Den (The Day)* edited by Ivan Aksakov in October 1861. In: Аксаков И.С. *Славянский вопрос, 1860-1886. // Сочинения И.С.Аксакова*. М., 1886. pp.5-6.

compared to the total number and proportion equal to that of Russians in the empire of the Romanovs. To be honest, Russia, or to be even more precise „Rossia“, was a multiethnic state.

Based only on the ethnic composition one can admit at once that any Russian state-expansion should have been very fragile and depended on more factors than if Russia had been a nation state. Though the economic advance of the Romanov Empire was serious, and the growth of the population was even more intense, this brought about a big tension and the almost permanent dissatisfaction with the regime, which made this policy very vulnerable.⁸ Controlled from Saint-Petersburg the state could not revive until World War One. Summing it up it can be said that the economic basis for a serious expansionist policy was awfully weak in Russia.

From an ideological point of view the Russian Pan Slavism is not only a doctrine but also a legitimizing ideology of the Russian state, a national feeling, and a belief in the uniqueness of the Russian Nation.⁹ The territory is a very important factor.

Consequently, there is a difference between the territory of the Empire of the Romanovs and the Empire-perceptions of the followers of different types of Pan Slavism.

We can say for sure that the Russian society started to follow the way of ideological modernization after the Crimean War. It is more interesting to assess if it was enough for a successful expansion. I am absolutely convinced, it was not. What extra means was to be needed for it then?

The Slav presence in Europe can be chosen as an external factor of this ideology. From Saint-Petersburg's position the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were potential reliable Russian allies, as they were not only Slavs but also mostly orthodox believers. From the confessional approach the citizens of the Habsburg Empire were less reliable as with the Serbs, Rusins, Ukrainians lived other Slav nations, just to name a few: the Slovaks, Bohemians, not to speak about the Poles, who were not orthodox at all. To overcome these ambiguities the confessional issue should be overshadowed. So it is not a wonder that the first and strongest type of Russian Pan Slavism was the ethnic one.

The first best known and most efficient popular Russian ethnic panslavist journalist was Ivan Aksakov. Nikolai Danilevsky, who first organized the Pan Slavic views into a whole system in 1869, was also the supporter of the ethnic Pan Slavism, which had an absolutely complete plan to reorganize the whole Central European region.

„Russia and Europe“

In Danilevsky's work¹⁰ the traditional Slavophil concept about the opposition of East and West was completed by a scientific system of the French scholar Cuvier, whose theory was about the cultural-historical types. As for Danilevsky there are homogeneous German-Roman and apart from it, absolutely homogeneous Greek-Slavonic civilizations. In his view Europe is equal to the German-Roman civilization with flourishing culture, which declined necessarily.

As he stated it the young civilisation, the Greek-Slavonic world, would have a glorious future. As most Slavs lived in Turkey and Austria, in those two „pseudo states“, as he called them, they should have been destroyed, and Russia was entitled to destroy them.

Danilevsky's forecast about the future of Central Europe, the birth of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and of a great Romania, a great Bulgaria, and a small Hungary turned out to be true. Hungarian Russia or Ruthenia in his words should have been the

⁸ Let us have a look at the structure of import to the newly independent Bulgaria in the first part of 1880-ies. 41 % of it came from Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 38% from England and only 5% from Russia. In: Niederhauser Emil, *Bulgária története*. Budapest, 1959. p.137.

⁹ These terms are used by scholars to describe modern state. See: Schöpflin, Georg *The Modern State* came out in Hungarian: Schöpflin György: *A modern nemzet*. Máriabesnyő-Gödöllő, 2003. pp.9-11.

¹⁰ Данилевский Н.Я. *Россия и Европа. Взгляд на культурно-политические отношения славянского мира к германо-романскому*. Спб, 1871.

part of Russia, but as for Poland's position he was not clear. Like the slavophiles he allowed an independent Poland in its ethnographic limits if the Poles were ready to accept it. But there was another alternative of a non-existent Poland.¹¹ The Belorussian and Ukrainian languages are dealt with by him as Russian dialects.

It is very interesting that Danilevsky did not want Russia to annex these Central-European territories because in that case these states would have become Russia's enemies. He just wanted them to be Russian allies.

The capital of the future Slavdom should have been Constantinople called Tsargrad by him.

In this unity he strongly hated two nations: the Hungarians and the Poles, in contradiction to the fact that the latter were Slavs. As for Romanians and Greeks he said that together with Hungarians they should be the part of this new kind of federation because of their „geographical position“.

As for him there are two countries in the World with bright future: Russia and the U.S. This Slavdom would have given Russia the opportunity to balance the future power of the USA in this hemisphere of the Globe. There is very little said about the Germans. Russia's main task is to solve the big issue by occupying Constantinople.

From this date on the Slav era should begin in the World History, and Russian hegemony in Europe as well, as Dailevsky stated.

The 1863 Uprising of the Poles

Amongst different types of Panslavism appeared the one which became the most important component of the Russian state's strength.

The main representative of this „state-centered" panslavism was Mikhail Nikiforovits Katkov.¹² His tremendous impact is dated back to the Polish uprising in 1863, when he came to a conclusion that the whole Russian Empire, including the Poles, had to be strictly unified and Russified.¹³ He emphasized the power of the Russian State, and did not pay a really serious attention to the ethnic Slavs in the Balkans.

The man who improved state Panslavism into a system was Stronin¹⁴. He shared Danilevski's position concerning the organic life of societies (birth, flourishing, and decline), but he pointed out that the whole process was going on within the framework of nations but not within the so-called cultural-historical types.

He wrote that German and Roman civilizations were very much apart from each other. He found that English society was something like a link between the French and German societies.

He wrote about Prussia with a sympathy comparing the geniality of the Moscovian and Prussian states. He was forecasting an increasing power of Germany and Russia similarly. But Russia should have had the main historical task after Germany. He was thinking of a Russian attack reaching the Atlantic Ocean. But in this process the main role should have been held by the strength of the Russian state. Stronin's book came out in 1872.

Crises on the Balkans between 1875 and 1878

Ethnic Panslavism especially had been trying to influence the Tsarist Government to intervene in the interest of Slav minorities who were fighting against the Turks after 1875. When Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Turkey, Katkov's journal and newspaper wanted the same.

¹¹ The Poles supposed to be the „traitors of the Slav issue". Данилевский р.106.

¹² Katz, Martin, *Mikhail Katkov. A Political Biography (1818-1887)*. University of Alberta, The Hague-Paris, 1966.

¹³ About the measures taken in Poland see Theodore R. Weeks: *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2008. pp.96-103.

¹⁴ Стронин А. *Политика как наука*. СПб., 1872.

Tsarist Russia was not ready for a war against Turkey but could not deny taking part in the war as its own bureaucracy pushed itself in this direction. The tsar himself could not think of not fighting against the Turks. We can prove it if we compare the Budapest Treaty of January 1877 and the San Stefano Treaty of March 1878.

To form a big Bulgarian state was opposing the points laid down by them a year before. It was forbidden for them to form such a state for the first time in Reichstadt in the summer of 1876.

On top of all that there was not even a single word written about Austro-Hungary's role in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it also contradicted the points of the Budapest Treaty.¹⁵

One can admit that Russian diplomats behaved as Panslavs wanted them to, and did not pay any attention to Austro-Hungary's interests. They followed the path of free action".

The Berlin Congress and Russian Fiasco in Bulgaria 1878 - 1887

The Berlin Congress helped to change the situation in accordance with the points laid down in Budapest between Russia and Austro-Hungary. Russia was given new territories in Asia Minor. Instead of a big Bulgarian state two smaller polities were formed. Serbia was also given territories, and the independence of the Balkan states was strengthened. Turkey's positions became weaker but Russia's positions became stronger in the region.

However, public opinion in Russia summed up the process to the contrary. Panslav Russians made comparisons between the results of Berlin and San Stefano. So many Russians seemed to be disappointed very much. Ivan Aksakov declared that Russian diplomats betrayed Russia in Berlin.¹⁶

Anti-German tendencies aimed directly at Prussia can be dated back to 1878, whilst until 1878 these notions were aimed against Austria, the Habsburg's Empire. Later on a saying appeared which ran as follows: „*The path to Constantinople leads across Berlin*”.

Bismarck was not a supporter of Austria-Hungary at these times, but Russian public thought him to do so, as the Russians expected they failed in Berlin in 1878.

In early 1878 terrorists organized several assaults so we can speak of crises at this time.

A group of panslavs became isolationists, as Pobedonostsev did, who started to deal especially with home policy. This period in Russia can be characterized by russification, and anti-jewish laws.¹⁷

Such panslavs, as for example Dostoyevsky, pointed out in 1881, that „*the path to Constantinople was leading thorough Asia*”. It was absolutely contrary to what he had said a year before.

Danilevsky stated that „*the path to the Dardanellas and Bosphorus was leading through Calcutta and Delhi*”.

Ivan Aksakov further on found the main task to liberate the „*slav brothers*” but he was to write few articles, and his attitude became more servile.

Probably the most interesting thinker was Kostantin Leontiev, whose views became systematic and absolutely elaborated in the 1880s.

Having several time journeyed to the Balkan countries Leontiev already realized in the middle of 1870s that nationalisms in the Balkan countries could not stand each other.

¹⁵ Later even General Kuropatkin admitted self-critically: as a result almost war had been declared on Russia. In: Куropаткин А.Н. *Россия для русских. Задачи русской армии*. Т.2 СПб.,1910. 493

¹⁶ Speech was held on the 22rd of June 1878. In: Аксаков И.С. *Славянский вопрос, 1860-1886. // Сочинения И.С.Аксакова*. М., 1886. p. 298.

¹⁷ Byrnes, Robert F. *Pobedonostsev. His Life and Thought*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington-London, 1968. Especially pp.124-130.

He found that a Czecho-slovakian, or a Sebo-croatian unity was a complicated one because of the „*hatred these nations felt towards each other*“. So he found Danilevsky's system an unrealistic one.

By 1878 he found that the basic idea that could unite these nations should have been the orthodox religion.¹⁸ So the Church should have been the main organizing factor of a state. Whilst Pobedonostsev was thinking of the church as a „*helping power*“ for the state Leontiev, on the contrary, thought of a super strong state based on the Church.

He wrote about the nations on the Balkans that they stepped on the way of „*putrid liberalism*“. Leontiev was against any democratic society. The resurrection of the Balkan nations, in Leontiev's opinion, could have taken place if Russians had moved into Constantinople, and so had given the opportunity to step on a road of a „*national salvation*“.

In this process he was to rely on the Russian population. Coming to the end of the decade he was speaking less and less about the Russians as a Slavic nation.

In the end of the 1880s he was speaking about the Russians as a kind of „*Slavo-Turanian mixture*“.

Having had Constantinople, Russia would have been able to step on the road of a „*reactionist revival*“ that would have helped her to conquer Germany in the end, but only on the long run. In 1891 he changed his mind as he thought the conflict between Russia and Germany had been foreseen and unescapable and this made him bitter.¹⁹

In the early 1890s Leontiev became pessimistic. Throughout these years he thought the Jews were the cause of the bad conditions in Russia.

Concerning the Austro-Hungarian Empire we can not find any theories, and the same could be said about the Poles.

Conclusion

Russia succeeded to move her frontiers further off throughout the whole nineteenth century.

Which one of these theories became more domineering in the subsequent future? My conviction: it was determined by the direction the Russian Empire could expand to with the best results.²⁰

The birth of these doctrines proves that even the Russian Monarchism needed the support of a public opinion, or to put it simpler the support of the (mostly and more and more Russian) society.²¹

If we have a look at the events of the 1875 crisis on the Balkans we can come to the conclusion that an autocratic regime can not always be fully autocratic, especially in that very field which legitimized its existence. In its expansionism the Tsarist administration needed at least the support of its bureaucracy. Consequently the Russian ruler in these years became its own slave. By the beginning of 1890s many Russian thinkers got disappointed about the presumed unsuccessful expansion in the Balkans, but many of them kept on being optimistic. Many Russian thinkers started to stress only the importance of Constantinople whilst started to focus on internal affairs or find the orientation of Russian expansion in the East. The minority issue in this respect – at least temporary - seemed to be pushed into the background for a quite long time.

¹⁸ Иваск Ю. *Константин Леонтьев*. Берн-Франкфурт-на-Майне, 1974. p. 225.

¹⁹ In: Леонтьев К.Н. *Восток, Россия и славянство. Собрание сочинений*. Т.6. М., 1912. p.120.

²⁰ About the relationship of the Russian nationalism and the empire see Alexei Miller *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism*, CEU Press, Budapest-New York, 2008., Chapter 6: The Empire and the Nation in the Imagination of Russian Nationalism, especially p.166.

²¹ These doctrines influenced Russian administration. Especially Katkov succeeded to influence governmental policy of the Russian State. See „administrative Russification“. In: Andreas Kapeller: *The Ambiguities of Russification*. pp. 294-297.