

## A SET OF PRECONCEPTIONS

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The Russian ruling elite does not have a coherent concept of national politics, but instead has a set of prejudices that were inherited from the Soviet times. At that, these are the very prejudices that make the State's approach with respect to the national sphere rather ambiguous.

The first contradiction in this regard is between the idea of a unified political nation and the principle of the State's multinational makeup. There are representatives of various ethnic minorities living in practically all states, but by no means does this fact make these states 'multinational'.

**We are 'multinational' not because we have ethnic minorities, but because we essentially raised them to the rank of nations and gave them the status of having their own state.** This logic of 'raising' ethnic nations is in distinct contradiction with the logic of a civil nation, which actually implies that the ethnic identity of minorities is their own private affair.

The second antinome is the contra-

diction between the 'state status' enjoyed by national minorities and the absence of a similar status when it comes to the nation comprising the majority. Neither the Russian Federation as a whole, nor some of its separate parts represent a form of national self-determination for the Russians as a nation, even to the extent to which Chechnya is a form of self-determination for the Chechens, that Tatarstan is for the Tartars, that the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) is for the Sakha (Yakuts), and so forth.

These two contradictions have created a specific frailty and an acuteness of the national issue in the Soviet Union and in Russia. On that note, the position of Russia in this relation is more complicated than for the Soviet Union, because the latter, as a state, possessed a certain supranational source of legitimacy. It was basically an ideocracy. In essence, the party, acting on behalf of a global ideology, was the bearer of sovereignty. It was just like how the dynasty, rather than the people, was the bearer of sovereignty in the pre-revolutionary era.

**When the government authorities have a transcendental source of legitimacy, they can afford to play with the concept of multinationality, as their foothold is outside of the nation.** The problem of modern-day Russian authorities is that they have lost this ultimate foothold while, at the same time, retaining the principle of multinationality. As it turns out, this is exactly the very principle that is hindering the democratic evolution of the Russian authorities.

The national and the democratic principle of justification on the part of the authorities go hand in hand in this modern day in age. The idea of nation in this context expresses the fact that the authorities cannot take root based on the people if the people do not possess an affinity of consciousness and a cultural uniformity among themselves, which are required, as a minimum, to secure mutual understanding and trust among people,

and, as a maximum, for the occurrence of the effect of 'common fate' and 'common will'. At the level of local communities and local government, democracy can do rather well without an overarching concept of nation, but this is not the case when we are talking about the level of a large society.

Hence, the principle of multinationality, inherited by us from the Soviet Union, is effectively a barrier to the process of democratisation. This is the main reason why we constantly seem to reproduce the traditional structure of a 'supreme power' exalted over the society, only this time it was done without any traditional or ideocratic backbone and foundations to support this structure.

**Nowadays, the existing Russian ruling elite is just the nomenclature without communism; they are the federal nobility, so to speak, void of the idea of divine law. This is a rather ambiguous situation.** It seems to me that the government's unhealthy attitude with respect to the national question is specifically related to this groundless and futile position on the part of the authorities in the national frame of reference.

At this time, I do not see any signs of gains in Russia in terms of national grounds. However, there are signs of a certain productive consternation, which is basically the realisation of the frailty of the existing structure. I believe that the authorities (and here I primarily mean the president) have perceived the threat of the Soviet inertia with respect to the national issue, which once led to the dismantling of the Soviet Union. By the way, I support the decision not to reinstitute the Ministry for Nationalities, because today any departmental, bureaucratic solution of the national issue, without its political rethinking, will only be pressing us deeper into the impasse of Soviet national politics, at the same time exacerbating the contradictions that I have already mentioned. ■