

Analysis

Fascist Tendencies in Russia's Political Establishment: The Rise of the International Eurasian Movement

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Abstract

Aleksandr Dugin, a prominent advocate of fascist and anti-Western views, has risen from a fringe ideologue to deeply penetrate into Russian governmental offices, mass media, civil society and academia in ways that many in the West do not realize or understand. Prominent members of Russian society are affiliated with his International Eurasian Movement. Among Dugin's most important collaborators are electronic and print media commentator Mikhail Leont'ev and the legendary TV producer and PR specialist Ivan Demidov. If Dugin's views become more widely accepted, a new Cold War will be the least that the West should expect from Russia during the coming years.

The Rise of Aleksandr Dugin

In recent years, various forms of nationalism have become a part of everyday Russian political and social life. Since the end of the 1990s, an increasingly aggressive racist sub-culture has been infecting sections of Russia's youth, and become the topic of numerous analyses by Russian and non-Russian observers. Several new radical right-wing organizations, like the Movement Against Illegal Emigration, known by its Russian acronym DPNI, have attracted extensive attention from domestic and foreign journalists, scholars and monitors. Parallel tendencies within Russian intellectual life, in contrast, have received less national and international notice although their repercussions can increasingly be felt in the political thinking and behavior of Moscow's rulers. It is generally acknowledged that a shrill anti-Americanism, as well as various other phobias, today characterize not only marginal groups, but also the Russian mainstream. However, in many analyses, the sources of, and channels for, such tendencies in Russia's elite strata remain obscure.

Among the dozens of extremely anti-Western publicists and pundits present in Russian official and public life today, Aleksandr Dugin and his various followers stand out as a network of especially industrious political ideologues and activists who have managed to penetrate Russian governmental offices, mass media, civil society and academia. Dugin's bizarre ideas have been analyzed in dozens of scholarly and journalistic texts (see the Suggested Reading at the end of this article). At the same time, instead of being treated as a political phenomenon, the Duginists are sometimes presented as peculiarly post-Soviet curiosities. Occasionally, they are used to illustrate the degree of Russia's confusion after the collapse of its empire rather than perceived as engines of broader trends in contemporary Russian dis-

course that must be taken seriously. Dugin's numerous links to the political and academic establishments of a number of post-Soviet countries, as well as institutions in Turkey, remain understudied or misrepresented. In other cases, Dugin and his followers receive more serious attention, yet are still portrayed as anachronistic, backward-looking imperialists – merely a particularly radical form of contemporary Russian anti-globalism. Many such assessments downplay the manifest neo-fascism of Dugin's bellicose ideology. Neither the stunning public appeal nor the grave political implications of Duginism are well-understood in Russia or the West today.

The Members of the Supreme Council of the International Eurasian Movement

A marginal conspiracy theorist in the 1990s, Dugin has, during the last 10 years, become a respected commentator and writer on contemporary world affairs, in general, and Russia's foreign policy, in particular. This has happened in spite of his frank praise of the *SS Ahnenerbe* institute (Heritage of the Forefathers), enthusiastic prophecy of a Russian "fascist fascism," and numerous similar statements during the early and mid-1990s. Dugin's rise began in 1998 when then State Duma Speaker Gennadii Seleznyov, a leader of the Communist Party, appointed him as an advisor. Dugin's unexpected appearance as an official employee of the presidium of the parliament's lower house marked the radical rightist's breakthrough from the lunatic fringe into the political establishment of the Russian Federation (RF). Since then, Dugin's presence and weight in Russian political and academic life has only grown.

Since its foundation as the Socio-Political Movement "Eurasia" in 2001, Dugin's main orga-

nization, the *Mezhdunarodnoe "Evraziiskoe dvizhenie"* (MED; International Eurasian Movement), has included a number of high-ranking government officials, such as:

- former RF Minister of Culture Aleksandr Sokolov,
- Chairman of the Federation Council's Committee on International Relations Mikhail Margelov,
- former advisor to President Yeltsin and RF Ambassador to Denmark Dmitrii Riurikov,
- former Head of the RF Ministry of Justice Department on Political Parties and Social Organizations Aleksei Zhafiarov, and others.

While these figures are today no longer listed on the MED's website (<http://evrazia.info/>), and may have cut their ties with Dugin, the MED still boasts a number of prominent personalities as members of its Supreme Council. They included in early April 2009:

- Federation Council Vice-Speaker Aleksandr Torshin,
- Presidential advisor Aslambek Aslakhanov,
- South Ossetia President Eduard Kokoity,
- *Odnako* (However) TV show host and editor-in-chief of the weekly political journal *Profil'* (Profile) Mikhail Leont'ev,
- former Deputy Foreign Minister and current RF Ambassador to Latvia Viktor Kaliuzhnyi,
- Yakutiia (Sakha) Minister of Culture and Rector of the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Art, Andrei Borisov,
- Head of the RF Territorial Directorate's State Committee for Property responsible for Moscow State University Zeidula Iuzbekov,
- Chief Mufti of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Russia and European Countries of the C.I.S. Talgat Tadzhuddin,
- President of the National Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters and member of the Directorate of the Academy of Russian Television Eduard Sagalaev,
- Head of the RF Council of Ambassadors and President of the Russian-Turkish Friendship Society "Rutam" Al'bert Chernyshov,
- Editor-in-Chief of the Russian army newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star) Nikolai Efimov,
- President of the Consulting Firm *Neokon* and founder of the website *Worldcrisis.ru* Mikhail Khazin,
- Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Vice-President of the Society of Georgians of Russia Severian Zagarishvili,

- Head of the Congress of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus and Secretary for National Issues of the Union of Writers of Russia Brontoi Bediurov.

In addition, the MED's Supreme Council contains political and academic functionaries from various CIS countries. Among them were, in early April 2009, the:

- Rector of the Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University of Astana (Kazakhstan) Sarsyngali Abdymanapov,
- Ambassador of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Head of the Council of Directors of *Postnoff* Ltd Apas Dzhumagulov,
- Director of the Academy of Management attached to the Office of the President of Belarus and Director of the Research Institute on the Theory and Practice of Government of the Republic of Belarus Evgenii Matusevich,
- Rector of the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University of Bishkek Vladimir Nifad'ev,
- Director of the Akhmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Tajik Academy of Sciences Rakhim Masov,
- Rector of the Makhambet Utemisov Western Kazakhstani State University of Uralsk Tuiakbai Ryzbekov,
- Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine Nataliia Vitrenko,

Finally, it is noteworthy that a number of public figures from countries outside the former Soviet Union have, according to MED's website, also agreed to enter the Supreme Council of the International Eurasian Movement. They include the

- Head of the *İşçi Partisi* (Labour Party) of Turkey Doğu Perinçek (currently in prison),
- French Air Force General (ret.) and leader of the Forum for France Pierre-Marie Gallois,
- Director of the Center for Central Asian and Caucasian Studies at Luleå, Sweden, and Editor-in-Chief of the scholarly journal *Central Asia and the Caucasus* Murad Esenov,
- Lecturer of the Faculty of Policy Studies of Iwate Prefectural University, Japan, Iukiko Kuroiwa,
- conspirologist and author of the book *Vladimir Poutine et l'Eurasie* (Charmes: Les Amis de la Culture Européenne, 2005), Jean Parvulesco,
- Editor-in-Chief of the Milano journal *Eurasia: Rivista di Studi Geopolitici* (of which Dugin is an editorial board member) Tiberio Graziani,
- Head of the Congress of Serbs of Eurasia (KSEA) Mila Alečković-Nikolić, and

- General (ret.) and former functionary of the Serbian Radical Party Božidar Delić.

Dugin's Public References to Fascism

While the ties linking some of these figures to Dugin are obvious, the reasons for the MED affiliation of others listed here remain a mystery. As indicated, throughout the 1990s, Dugin repeatedly eulogized, in disguised or open form, inter-war European and contemporary Russian fascism (sometimes, under his pseudonym as a poet "Aleksandr Sternberg," he did so in rhymes!). The most explicit apologies for fascism can be found in Dugin's programmatic articles "Left Nationalism" (1992) or "Fascism – Borderless and Red" (1997) which are, as of April 2009, still openly accessible on the MED leader's official web sites <http://arcto.ru/> and <http://my.arcto.ru/>. Moreover, a number of these articles from the 1990s are, by now, available in Western languages. Some of them have been repeatedly quoted, in Russian and English language scholarly and journalistic analyses of Dugin and his movement.

To be sure, Dugin has, for obvious reasons, been eager to disassociate himself from German Nazism, at times strongly condemning Hitler's crimes, and now often introduces himself as an "anti-fascist." Yet, at certain points, he seemingly could not help but acknowledge the relevance of, above all other regimes, the Third Reich as a model for his own ideological constructs, like for instance, in his seminal analyses "Conservative Revolution: The Third Way" (1991) or "The Metaphysics of National Bolshevism" (1997) at <http://my.arcto.ru/>. As late as March 2006, at a point when he was already a full member of Moscow's political establishment, Dugin, in a KM.ru online conference, publicly admitted that his ideology is close to that of the inter-war German brothers Otto and Gregor Strasser. In that interview, the transcript of which was re-produced on MED's website, Dugin introduced the Strasser brothers as belonging to the anti-Hitler branch of German left-wing nationalism. Dugin, however, "forgot" to mention that the Strassers were once themselves National Socialists and played an important role in the rise of the Nazi party (NSDAP), in the late 1920s. They subsequently indeed opposed Adolf Hitler, but did so first *within* the Nazi party. Gregor Strasser's one-time personal secretary, Joseph Goebbels, in spite of his once also "left-wing" inclinations, went on – as is all too well-known – to become one of Hitler's closest associates. Today, Strasserism is an important branch within the world wide network of neo-Nazi groupuscules – a pan-national movement to which Dugin,

in view of his stated closeness to the Strassers, would seem to belong.

Mikhail Leont'ev and Ivan Demidov as Dugin's Accomplices

Normally, such details would be sufficient for serious students of international security to dismiss this figure and his organization as objects worthy of deeper political analysis. Dugin and Co., it would appear, are phenomena better left to the scrutiny of cultural anthropologists, psychopathologists, sociologists, or, at best, historians of current affairs. Yet, as illustrated by the list of former and current MED Supreme Council members, Dugin is, by now, firmly located within the mainstream of Russian political and intellectual life. He publishes in major newspapers and is regularly invited to top-notch political and academic round-tables and conferences.

Among Dugin's most important collaborators is electronic and print media commentator Mikhail Leont'ev. Once called Vladimir Putin's "favourite journalist," Leont'ev officially entered the Supreme Council of the MED only recently, although he had participated in the foundation congress of Dugin's movement in 2001, after which he was also briefly listed as a member of the organization's leadership on Dugin's website. Since then, Leont'ev has provided for Dugin, numerous times, a mass audience by letting the MED leader present his views on prime time television shows broadcast by Russia's First Channel. One of Russia's most well-known propagandists of anti-Americanism, Leont'ev's frequent tirades against the West, in general, and the US, in particular, are obviously informed by Dugin's Manichean schemes. To be sure, Dugin himself appeals to an only limited circle of political activists and young intellectuals. Via television shows like Leont'ev's *Odnako*, an encrypted and somewhat softer from of Duginism, however, reaches much of Russia's population on an almost daily basis.

Another consequential figure with unofficial, but apparently equally close ties to Dugin is the legendary TV producer and PR specialist Ivan Demidov. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, Demidov worked on national television and became famous for his participation in a number of popular TV projects like *Vzgliad* (View) or *Muzoboz* (Music Cart). At that time, he appeared, like Leont'ev in his early years, to be a representative of the new generation of anti-Soviet young, Westernizing media figures who helped to emancipate Russian public discourse. In the new century, Demidov's profile, however, changed as he became the anchorman of one of Russia's most brazenly nationalistic TV shows

Russkii vzgliad (The Russian View) shown weekly on the *Moskoviia* (Muscovy) Channel. In 2005, Demidov was one of the co-founders of the new nationalist cable channel *Spas* (Saviour), where he provided Dugin with his own show called *Vekhi* (Landmarks). In the same year, Demidov became a politician when – allegedly, upon the request of Vladimir Putin – he was named leader of United Russia’s official youth organization *Molodaia gvardiia* (Young Guard). He also directed the so-called “Russian Project” of United Russia – an attempt to attract ethnocentric Russian youth and intellectuals to Putin’s regime. In 2008, Demidov was promoted to be the head of the Ideology Section of the Political Department of United Russia’s Executive Committee, i.e. Putin’s party’s chief ideologist. A few months earlier, Demidov had, in an interview for Dugin’s website *Evrazia.org*, admitted that Dugin’s appearance was a “deciding factor, a sort of breaking point” in his life, and that he wants to use his talents to implement Dugin’s ideas. Demidov called himself, with explicit reference to these ideas, a “convinced Eurasian.” Oddly, this is the same phrase with which, fifteen years earlier, Dugin had, in the original version of his seminal article “The Great War of the Continents” (1991–1992, <http://my.arcto.ru/>), characterized *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich – the Holocaust’s chief early organizer (the phrase was deleted in later editions of that article). In March 2009, Demidov was promoted to be the Head of the Department for Humanitarian Policies and Public Relations of the Domestic Politics Directorate of the RF Presidential Administration. In this function, Demidov will have special responsibility for the president’s relations with religious organizations, i.e., above all, with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Mimicry Tactics of the “Neo-Eurasianists”

Dugin himself recently managed to make further inroads into Russian public life. In 2008, he was appointed professor in the Sociology Department of Moscow’s renowned Lomonosov University (MGU) where he now directs the Center for Conservative Studies. This promotion is an important step in Dugin’s further penetration of the mainstream since it provides him with a respected title and prestigious site for conferences and

other meetings. Dugin’s active use of the term “conservatism” also continues his earlier strategy of camouflaging his doctrine with terminology that fits Russian and international political correctness. While at the fringe of Russia’s political life, in the early-mid 1990s, Dugin described his own ideology frankly as a program of the “Conservative Revolution,” a construct he explicitly used to define fascism, or as “National Bolshevism” – a Russian version of National Socialism as the colors of the flag of the National Bolshevik Party, which Dugin co-founded in 1994, suggested. When he started drawing closer to the establishment, however, Dugin put more emphasis on labels like “Eurasian” or “Traditionalist” although his “neo-Eurasianist” ideology, in important regards, sharply diverges from both classical Eurasianism and Integral Traditionalism. Today, Dugin poses front-stage as a proponent of “conservatism” while his back-stage agenda is still unabashedly revolutionary. The success of Dugin’s and his supporters’ tactic of political mimicry was recently illustrated when one of the activists of Dugin’s youth organization, *Evraziiskii soiuz molodezhyi* (Eurasian Movement of the Young), the artist Aleksei Beliaev-Gintovt was awarded *Deutsche Bank*’s Kandinsky Prize (in view of the rather different styles of Kandinsky’s art and Beliaev-Gintovt’s paintings – an odd choice, in any way). That one of their supporters won the prestigious German award was proudly presented by Dugin’s organizations as another confirmation of the substance and seriousness of their intellectual project.

In view of the depth and multifariousness of Dugin’s connections into Russia’s highest political and cultural echelons, it is difficult to imagine how his current influence could be limited, or, at least, his future advance contained. At the same time, Dugin’s recent political words and deeds indicate that, in comparison to his openly fascist phase in the early and mid-1990s, today only his terminology and public behavior, but not his ideology and aims, have fundamentally changed. Should Dugin and his followers succeed in further extending their reach into Russian politics and society at large, a new Cold War will be the least that the West should expect from Russia during the coming years.

Information about the authors and suggested reading overleaf.

About the author

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Suggested Reading

- Galina Kozhevnikova in collaboration with Alexander Verkhovsky and Eugene Veklerov, *Ultra-Nationalism and Hate Crimes in Contemporary Russia: The 2004–2006 Annual Reports of Moscow’s SOVA Center*. With a foreword by Stephen D. Shenfield (Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society 77). Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag 2005.
- Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Translated by Mischa Gabowitsch (Baltimore and Washington, DC: The Johns Hopkins University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press 2008).
- Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*. With a foreword by John B. Dunlop (Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series). London: Routledge 2009.
- Anastasia Mitrofanova, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy: Actors and Ideas*. With a foreword by William C. Gay (Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society 13). Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag 2005.
- Andreas Umland, ed., *Theorizing Post-Soviet Russia’s Extreme Right: Comparative Political, Historical and Sociological Approaches* (Russian Politics and Law 46:4). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2008.
- Andreas Umland, ed., *The Nature of “Neo-Eurasianism:” Approaches to Aleksandr Dugin’s Post-Soviet Movement of Radical Anti-Americanism* (Russian Politics and Law 47:2). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2009.