

• Author: [Vadim Shtepa](#)

[Totalitarian postmodernism](#)



Leader of the “A Just Russia” party Sergey Mironov has recently [proposed](#) to amend the 13th article of the Russian Constitution which does not permit the establishment of a state or obligatory ideology in the country. In Mironov’s words: “I believe it would be right to have state ideology in the country.”

It is noteworthy that Mironov himself does not go into detail about the proposed “state ideology.” Most likely, some subconscious intuition is manifested here: he feels that the scope for ideological framework permitted in today’s Russia is becoming progressively constricted, although he has been unable to articulate this with precision.

Perhaps this proposal also reflects the desire of the leader of the social democrats to highlight the unconditional loyalty his party has towards the Kremlin which he himself has found useful during the run up to the election. “A Just Russia” is prepared to fully adhere to “state ideology,” only criticizing some tactical nuances of the policy of its “elder sister” – “United Russia.” The days of Fronde of 2011-2012, when social democrats participated in mass protest rallies bearing white ribbons, are a thing of the past and those who seriously considered “A Just Party” to be an opposition force (Ilya Ponomarev and Dmitry Gudkov) have been expelled from the party.

Psychologically, Sergey Mironov remains a profoundly Soviet man and hence he does not realize that today’s Kremlin does not need “state ideology” at all. It was in the days of the USSR, when Mironov was a Komsomol organizer, that everyone was supposed to believe in the truths of Marxism-Leninism and official Soviet ideology did not allow for any deviations from this doctrine.

The situation is fundamentally different today: on the contrary, the Kremlin does not want to constrain itself to any ideological framework. Its current policies are based on technology, not ideology. To be more precise, different elements of various ideologies can be utilized in order to maintain the stability of power.

For example, President Vladimir Putin [quotes](#) Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin in his speeches, known for being one of the unreconciled critics of communism. At the same time, the main public holiday in contemporary Russia, Victory Day of May 9, which entails restoration of Soviet rhetoric and symbolism, is celebrated ever more pompously year after year.

References to “multinational Russian people” and the geopolitical doctrine of “Eurasianism” are commonplace in speeches given by officials. However, this did little to prevent Russia, through propaganda, from justifying its annexation of Crimea and aggression in eastern Ukraine with the “interests of the pan-Russian world” (*Russkiy mir*) in 2014. Back in 2008, Putin [referred to](#) himself and Medvedev as “Russian nationalists” (in the positive sense). That being said, Ramzan Kadyrov’s regime is the Kremlin’s main outpost in the North Caucasus.

In recent years, Russian propaganda has been used to harshly condemn Europe, accusing it of “materialism,” “abandoning traditions” etc. From time to time, one would be forgiven for arriving at the impression that the authorities in the Kremlin are hell-bent on reviving the “iron curtain” worldview of the Cold War era. However, during the St Petersburg International Economic Forum this year, Putin suddenly softened the rhetoric [calling](#)

for “a return to trust in Russian-European relations”. However, one only has to listen to the well-known Russian TV propagandists Dmitry Kiselyov and Vladimir Solovyov in order to allay any notions regarding mutual trust between Russia and Europe. Europe (and the West in general) are portrayed as Russia’s eternal enemies on their shows.

Yet another contrast is equally telling: the Russian authorities have been calling for the “federalization” of Ukraine for several years through propaganda. They demand that “the rights of the people of Donbas are respected” etc. At the same time, calls for an expansion of political and economic rights of the regions arouse suspicion in Russia itself and are often regarded as criminalized “propaganda of separatism” despite the fact that Russia is, in fact, a [federation](#) according to its constitution.

On the other hand, no one is confused by ideological contradictions. Patriarch Kirill [justifies](#) the Stalin era today thusly: “it cannot be undermined even if its leader is marked by evil deeds.” A commemorative plaque honoring Marshall Mannerheim, who defended Finland against Stalin’s invasion, is [mounted](#) in St Petersburg and Moscow’s State University of Railway Engineering is now [named](#) after the Emperor Nicholas II. Yet, at the same time, the Orders of Lenin and the Orders of the Red Banner of Labor are proudly recognized as tenets of official history...

These hybrids show that Russia finds itself in a situation of ideological postmodernism under which legacies of past eras are intricately woven. Perhaps this should be set forth in the Constitution as “state ideology?”

At one time, philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari used the term “rhizome” to characterize postmodern society. This particular composition of the root structure lacking “the main root” by definition is made up of intertwined shoots whose development is unpredictable. Applying this botanical metaphor to socio-cultural reality, Deleuze and Guattari asserted that the postmodern era bypassed “the main” ideological narrative and offered a multitude of interpretations in the same way.

However, Jean Baudrillard subsequently corrected his colleagues who, in his opinion, had been overly optimistic. He showed that very attractive *simulacra*, “copies without originals” which nurture this “rhizome” around them and become totalitarian in nature can emerge in contemporary information society.

The image of the empire has become such a typical simulacrum in current Russian reality. It is clearly manifested in the official “Medinsky doctrine” (Vladimir Medinsky is the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation) which [establishes](#) the “continuity of historical development of contemporary Russia harking back to the Russian Empire and the USSR.”

There has obviously been no empire “in a pure form.” However, Medinsky proposes “reconciling” its differing historical interpretations (the “red” and the “white” ones), and even disregarding their fundamental differences. The overarching aim is to keep the very basic, imperial world outlook typical of the great superpower in place.

Judging by his books, Medinsky himself is a pretty mundane “patriotic” ideologist. Another Kremlin leader Vladislav Surkov, a personal adviser to the President of the Russian Federation, has likely influenced the formation of this strategy to a greater extent. His familiarity with modern philosophy and the humanities has enabled him to methodically defeat the Russian opposition, often guilty of thinking in terms which are overly straightforward, on a number of occasions.

The current political situation in Russia can be characterized as totalitarian postmodernism. On the surface, diversity and a multi-party system are even encouraged. Around 20 parties intend to take part in the election to the State Duma in September. Ideologically, you can be an Orthodox monarchist, communist, or even a liberal like the presidential business ombudsman Boris Titov and his “Party of Growth”. However, an overriding criterion exists which necessitates loyalty towards Kremlin policy. Any proponents of true oppositionist ideas will become victims of mudslinging as in the case of Mikhail Kasyanov or else will simply not be registered (like Alexei Navalny’s “Progress Party”).

It is also noteworthy that regional parties in Russia (in contrast to European countries) have been [banned](#) altogether for many years since they pose the risk of changing the entire landscape of Russian politics and could bring about a revival of real federalism which could displace today’s simulated federalism.

Russian oppositionists love ideological debates on various historical themes: some are more to the “left”, others more to the “right”, some justify the 1917 revolution, others decry it... Moreover, these debates often end with accusations that opponents “work for the Kremlin” in line with conspiracy theories. Although, in reality, the Kremlin observes both parties with amusement since it does not limit itself to one ideology but prefers to act as “the supreme arbitrator”.

The authorities do not need a “single ideology” since it would stand in the way of “hybrid” politics. However, it also lacks projects for the future - imperial restoration dominates in the Kremlin worldview. Perhaps a force which could offer a program that returns the country to contemporary times would become the most promising opposition force in Russia, but the opposition is not up to the job today. Its head has been turned by the “election campaign” despite the fact that the results of which are a foregone conclusion.

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