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## 14. LEGITIMIZING AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

### *Dynamics of History Education in Independent Russia<sup>1</sup>*

History narratives have played an increasing role in political discourse in the Russian Federation over the past two decades (Bialer, 1989; Davies, 1997; Sherlock, 2007; Smith, 2002; Wertsch, 2002). This can be seen in political discourses, mass media, and “approved” course texts for schools. On May 15, 2009, President Dmitry Medvedev established a commission to investigate and analyze attempts to “falsify history against the interests of Russia.” The new commission meets twice a year and consists of representatives from various government ministries (including the Defense Ministry, the Federal Security Service, and its foreign intelligence counterpart, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Agency), the State Duma, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and civic organizations. In his speeches and interviews (for example, Medvedev, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), President Medvedev has emphasized the role of history in domestic and international affairs and confirmed his intentions to defend official Russian historic narratives. Moreover, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, while promoting their vision of Russian history, have had multiple meetings with Russian historians and have visited conferences of historians and social scientists. In his interview on August 30, 2009, President Medvedev pointed out that “history is completely muddled in the minds of schoolchildren. I think that we need to bring some order to this process” (Medvedev, 2009c).

The employment of history narratives is one of the most important mechanisms in the continuous process of establishing the authoritarian state. These narratives aim to form the belief that the history depicted by a state is, in fact, the only truthful version of events. As such, every historical narrative employed by the authoritarian state reflects a specific rationality of history; “the historian’s subjectivity intervenes here in an original way as a set of interpretative schemata” (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 26). These judgments are influenced by the ideology of a ruling regime that favors some events and interpretations over others because they are deemed significant and essential foundations for the regime’s ideas, norms, and goals. Apart from providing information about the collective past, history narratives also define the meaning of current situations and affairs and establish a vision of a shared future. This is achieved through development of specific meanings of national identities, where history narratives are central for the nation’s “self-contained process of coming-to-consciousness” (Hill, 2008, p. ix).

Scholars have described several channels through which a state can promote desirable historical narratives. Many researchers, including Davis (2005), Bourdieu

(1991), Foucault (1980), Habermas (1984), Hill (2008), Hosking and Schöpflin (1997), Lewis (1987), Lowenthal (1985), McNeill (1986), and Sherlock (2007), have analyzed the role of historic narratives at the state level (including in political discourses and myth making). Many scholars have stressed the importance of teaching about the shared past in the formation of national, ethnic, religious, and regional identities (Anderson, 1991; Cajani & Ross, 2007; Cole, 2007; Hein & Selden, 2000; Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Schissler & Soysal, 2005; Smith, 2005; Vickers & Jones, 2005). History education is described as one of the mechanisms in the formation of political foundation myths (Sherlock, 2007), politicized historical memory (Davis, 2005), and writing on national history (Hill, 2008). As Hein and Selden (2000) pointed out, history textbooks provide the most commonly articulated and widely disseminated ideas about citizenship and nationhood, while reinforcing a common past and speaking of a promised future.

Authoritarian government and a centrally run education systems easily tend to adopt hegemonic representations of officially desirable knowledge in history textbooks (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Lewis, 1987; Davis, 2005; Sherlock, 2007). Different types of authoritarian states use history textbooks to demand and enforce obedience to their authority (Howard & Roessler, 2006; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Mann, 1988; Slater, 2003; Wedeen, 1999), and “to affirm the rights and merits of the group which they lead” (Lewis, 1987, p. 53). Moreover, school history curricula promote certain basic social values and beliefs and support a specific ethno-political order. History education transfers to new generations established conceptions of power and society as well as official knowledge about the society’s past and present (Boon & Gopinathan, 2005). The historical content of school curricula can play a significant role in fostering loyalty to those in power, supporting the legitimacy of ruling parties, and articulating their worldviews and positions.

This paper analyzes history narratives created under state supervision as a practice of a specific kind of nation building using the case of post-1989 Russia.

In authoritarian societies in which political decision making is shrouded in secrecy, studying the state’s efforts to restructure historical memory provides a window through which to gain insights into its internal political struggles ... and the central issues of who is considered a worthy citizen, whose cultural norms are seen as contributing to society’s ends, and who should be politically and socially privileged as a result. (Davis, 2005, p. 11)

Thus, this paper investigates how a state used history education to legitimize a particular type of regime. This analysis is particularly important for understanding the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Russia at the end of 2010 (Sherlock, 2007; Trenin, 2005).

#### INCREASING CONTROL OVER RUSSIAN HISTORY EDUCATION

In the beginning of the 1990s, old Soviet history textbooks were supplemented by a special leaflet that provided information on specific periods of history “spoiled” by the Soviet ideology. Essentially, the entire Soviet era was depicted in this way. By

the middle of the 1990s, new mechanisms for textbook preparation, supervision, and authorization gave rise to private publishing houses (Eklof, Holmes, & Kaplan, 2005). New textbooks in the humanities were published thanks to international financial support. The quantity of history textbooks offered for each year of secondary schools was overwhelming: “Dozens of history materials for the secondary schools were published and reprinted every year. These included school textbooks, readers, workbooks, compendiums of tests and a variety of other source materials” (Shevyrev, 2005, p. 273). As a result, in 1994, the Department of History Education of the Institute of General Schools at the Russian Academy of Education developed the Provisional State Standard in History aimed at resolving the contradictions between competing demands for unity and diversity within educational institutions. It promoted the creation of different models of history education through various programs and textbooks, but also stressed the importance of developing a shared conceptual line and common view of historical development and the fundamental elements of historical knowledge.

In 1999, the Compulsory Minimum of the Content of Education for secondary schools was established. This standard provided the Ministry of Education with a primary tool for assessing history textbooks. Textbooks that fulfilled the Compulsory Minimum were endorsed by the Ministry of Education. The use of recommended books, although not obligatory, led to increasing standardization of textbooks. In 2001, following a report presented by the Minister of Education at a meeting of the Government of the Russian Federation, a special commission on history textbooks was set up by President Vladimir Putin. In 2002, a history textbook writing competition was announced: only three textbooks would ultimately be recommended for each grade. But as a result of the competition, only one textbook each for the ninth and eleventh grades, both offered by private publishing house *Russkoe Slovo* (Russian Word), were officially approved.

Government control over history textbooks became stricter still following a scandal surrounding the seventh edition of *National History: 20th Century* by Igor Dolutsky (2002). The textbook described crimes, terror, and exploitation in the Soviet Union and asked 10th-grade students if they could assess Putin’s style of leadership as an “authoritarian dictatorship” and Russia’s present-day regime as a “police state” (Dolutsky, 2002, p. 351). Putin’s reaction was, unsurprisingly, negative: he stressed that history education should emphasize the nation’s great achievements and not its mistakes or offenses. He argued that history textbooks “should inculcate a feeling of pride for one’s country” (Putin, 2002). In November 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science revoked the textbook’s license and proclaimed that, to support the new standards of education, all history textbooks had to be examined and evaluated by experts from the Federal Experts Council on History, the Academy of Sciences, and the Academy of Education.

A second level of expertise was organized at the Ministry of Education and Science. “Accepted” textbooks were tested in selected schools and following assessment, could receive the official stamp “Recommended.” This list of recommended textbooks was established by the Department of State Policy and Legal Regulation in the Sphere of Education. Detailed curricula approved at the

national level were published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science and were required for use in all schools. The list of recommended textbooks was also published on the ministry's website. For every school grade, about five textbooks published by five major publishing houses were available for the courses on Russian history and world history (see [Table 1](#)).

*Table 1. Number of Approved Textbooks for Each Grade of Secondary School\**

| <i>Textbooks</i>       | <i>Grade</i> |          |          |          |          |           |           |
|------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
|                        | <i>5</i>     | <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> | <i>8</i> | <i>9</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>11</i> |
| On Russian history (n) | 5            | 5        | 5        | 5        | 5        | 7         | 6         |
| On world history (n)   | 5            | 5        | 5        | 5        | 5        | 5         | 5         |

\* Based on a list published by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation for 2008–2009.

#### METHODS

This project is grounded in the view of discourses as practices of the production of power, identity, and knowledge through language, as seen by Fairclough (1993), Foucault (1980), or Hall (2001). Methodologically the study contributes to our understanding of the dynamic interactive processes of meaning-making that take place in the process of the construction of historical discourses by the state and the formation of narratives of state dominance during this process. This case study is based primarily on analysis of 13 history textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation for use in secondary schools. The selection of the textbooks was based on their widespread circulation in schools. The textbooks were accessed during the author's trip to Russia supported by a Spenser Foundation grant. In addition, the study analysed methodological recommendations for teachers issued by the Ministry of Education and Science, materials used in student examinations, as well as analysis of secondary sources assessing history education in Russia.

The study did not set out to analyze the impact of history textbooks on students' beliefs and attitudes, or the process of the formation of national identity and historic memory among students. Students' perceptions of national history and national identity develop under the influence of many factors besides public education, including popular literature, mass media, the Internet, movies and documentaries, memorials and museums, and conversations with family members and friends. Even within a school system that exerts strong control over history textbooks, teachers can use various additional materials and lead discussions based on their own beliefs and values, and students construct their own understanding.

LEGITIMIZING AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME—  
THREE STAGES IN RUSSIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOK DEVELOPMENT*First Stage: Early Years of Independence, 1990–1994*

After the fall of the Soviet Union, history education in Russia faced the enormous task of revising and rewriting textbooks to adjust to a new social reality. The heated debates and discussion over the content of history textbooks that took place in the mass media and numerous professional forums resulted in formal proposals for a new conception of history education that was published in the journal *Prepodavanie Istorii v Shkole* (Teaching History in School) in 1989. This conception called for reconsideration of the ideological approach to history education, but did not propose complete de-ideologization. In 1990, the Committee on the State of Education (*Gosobrazovanie*) stressed the importance of terminating the “bluntly ideological and mythologized course on history, based on the dogmatic construction of an unvaried worldview” (Na kollegii Gosobrazovaniya SSSR, 1990, p. 4). With the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), this task of destroying Soviet ideology was transformed into a search for a new ideology that would support the formation of a new Russian national identity and stress the succession in historic development of Russia.

During the first stage (1990–1994), history textbooks presented Russia as one of the key world civilizations, stressing general similarities among civilizations but also the uniqueness of Russia. The old approach that put the state at the center of history was abandoned; the new teaching methods were based on the examination of relationships between individuals and society as a whole. The new form of history education aimed at developing responsible citizens, critical thinkers, and active participants in social change. The texts stressed the importance of history education for the formation of positive values and the development of moral choice through the shift from state-centered history education to society and human-centered history (Kaplan, 2005, p. 249).

Textbooks at this stage presented the Soviet regime quite unfavorably, criticizing its inefficient and outdated economic practices and its corrupt totalitarian political regime (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 1999). They showed how the planned economy led to inflation, deficits, low production rates, and low general levels of material well-being. The agricultural and ecological policies of the Soviet Union were described as challenging areas of constant concern, ineffective in resolving problems as they arose. These textbooks also stressed the role of the political opposition (including Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov) and the repression they suffered.

The aggressive nature of Soviet foreign policy was also emphasized. Thus, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was presented as a decision made by the Soviet communist elite to preserve their power and as an aggressive action against a sovereign nation. (Previous textbooks, by contrast, had described this event as the protection of virtuous communist ideals in agreement with other countries in the Communist Bloc.) Soviet military assistance to Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, and Libya was now presented as support for unpopular regimes,

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as manipulation and expansion. The war in Afghanistan, in the same vein, was described as an invasion that led to the death of 1 million Afghan people.

*Second Stage: 1994–2004*

In 1994, this civilization-based approach to history, which illustrated the similarities between Russia and the world at large, was gradually replaced with the presentation of Russia as an original, distinctive nation with its own path in history. Thus, the end of the Soviet regime resulted in the disappearance of Soviet ideology and development of loyalty to the Russian nation (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 1999). For example, history education in this period emphasized the uniqueness of the Russian nation, glorified the Russian national spirit, its values and lifestyle, and presented the political culture of Russia as distinctive from Western traditions of democracy and political compromise (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 1999). Russian history textbooks depicted the unique path of Russia, arguing that it would not repeat or follow Western models of development. These textbooks encouraged appreciation of the economic and democratic achievements of Western countries, as well as their role in the destruction of communism, but strongly objected to the West having any influence on the culture and values of the Russian people.

The task of forming a distinctive Russian national identity and set of values required the “return” of the state into history education. The state was again introduced as a key concept in historical development. However, the fundamental meaning of the concept “state” shifted from an ideological to a national one—based on national rather than socialist ideals. The symbols of the communist ideology gave way to symbols of Russian national identity. Tellingly, the word “Russian” came to be used more often in textbooks of this period than in those published during the first years of independence and was deeply connected with the terms “nation” and “national character.”

The idea of using history education to develop critical thinking gradually declined, and introducing students to fundamental historical knowledge was stated as the main task of education. A one-sided approach to history education was decried as pro-Soviet and out-of-date. Nevertheless, the state reserved for itself the task of formulating the primary content of history textbooks (see Vodianskii, 1995; Gribov, 1993).

Interestingly, problems of social development—including the low quality of medical service, education, and social welfare—that were described in textbooks of the early 1990s as faults of the Soviet government were completely erased from these second-generation textbooks. Such changes served as an ideological tool to justify the new regime and develop loyalty to the new government. Thus, according to Lisovskaya and Karpov (1999), the greatest disapproval voiced about the new textbooks was connected with policies of the Soviet Union that began improving during the new Russian government, including the transition to a market economy and democracy and impartial foreign policy. The textbooks

retained previous criticism in the areas where the new regime cannot claim achievements but also cannot be directly blamed for the deteriorating situations (agriculture and ecology). Finally, the textbooks bypassed areas in which the new regime can be blamed for making situation worse (social problems, education, health, and relationship between central and local authorities). (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 1999, p. 532)

Authors of history textbooks during this period highlighted the idea of modernization—movement from a traditional to an industrial society—and emphasized the role of a strong state in unifying contemporary Russian society. One such textbook, *The Newest History of Russia* edited by A. Kisilev and E. Schyagin, offered a very positive view of Russian history, glorifying such historic figures as Nicolas II and blaming his court and government (rather than him) for mistakes in foreign and domestic policy (Zubkova & Kupriyanov, 1999). The textbook emphasized the importance of Russian unity and a strong central government for successful economic development. It showed that landlords and peasants alike hoped a strong unified power would bring resolution to their needs. The power of the state was presented as “the criterion of historical progress; and the good of the state is, for the most part, identified with the national good” (Shiryayev, 2005, p. 277). The images of Peter I and Catherine the Great were glorified, and their role as “servants of the state” who devoted their lives to the worthy goal of national unification was emphasized. All wars that helped Russia gain access to the Baltic and Black Seas and to enlarge its territory in general were justified as reasonable measures to achieve national goals. The annexation of present-day Belarus and Ukraine was presented as unification and of one Slavic people sharing a common fate.

Through most of the history textbooks, “students are reminded that history is about patriotism and citizenship, and that Russia became a ‘great nation in the world’” (Zajda, 2007, p. 294). In almost every history textbook of this generation, one can find statements such as “not a single issue of the world’s politics could be decided without Russia” (Danilov & Kosulina, 2000, p. 253). Based on the Provisional Requirements for the Compulsory Minimum Content of Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 1998), the concepts of “slavery” and “feudal and capitalist relations” were completely removed from every description of Russian history, and any negative reference to them was avoided (Ionov, 2005).

In textbooks on the history of prerevolutionary Russia, the presentation of the unifying factor in Russian history shifted from depiction of class struggle to an emphasis on the idea of religious Orthodoxy. In comparison with Soviet materials—which depicted the ruling classes, the state, and, especially, the Orthodox Church negatively—new Russian textbooks of the late 1990s presented the Russian Orthodox Church, and historic figures associated with it, in a very favorable light. Particular attention was given “to historical figures, who have been canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church, noting their devotion and their willingness to martyr themselves for their faith” (Shevyrev, 2005, p. 274). For example, a sixth- and seventh-grade textbook authored by A. Preobrazhenkii and B. Rybakov (1997) asserted that the Russian Orthodox Church demonstrated a high

degree of humanity and a low level of persecution when compared to its Western counterpart. In addition, the textbook justified the policies of landlords toward peasants, amounting to servitude or slavery, concluding that “such an order was the only solution for a peasant who had fallen into ‘inevitable misfortune’” (Preobrazhenkii & Rybakov, 1997, p. 17). Nevertheless, the authors demonstrated sympathy toward rebel movements and peasant uprisings, including movements led by Bolotnikov, Pugachev, and Razin.

In assessing the Soviet era, post-Soviet Russian history textbooks during the second stage maintained critical tendencies. A textbook on the history of Russia in the 20th century, authored by V. Ostrovskii and A. Utkin (1995), strongly criticized socialism for bringing terror, totalitarian rule, and violence to Russian society, portraying it as an alien ideology ill-suited to traditional Russian culture and values. The textbook *History of the Fatherland*, authored by I. Mishina and L. Zharova (1999), provided vivid descriptions of repression, particularly the arrest and execution of workers, farmers, and Soviet officials. The authors viewed socialism “as a purely utopian event, distinguishing it entirely from the realm of real economic and political experience. They argue that this reality was not socialist, but totalitarian” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 260). The textbook listed the number of top military officers who had been executed: three marshals and 154 generals (Mishina & Zharova, 1999, p. 386). Illustrating the mass dimensions of the tragedy, this text pointed out that more than 3 million people became victims of communist repression, with around 800,000 executed. In a similar vein, the textbook *Russia During the 20th Century*, authored by A. Levandovski and Y. Shchetinov (2001), described the history of Russia as full of terror, anguish, and the sacrifice of the people during long years of the October Revolution, the Civil War, Stalin’s regime, and World War II. The Civil War was described as “a struggle between the ‘two evils’—the Reds and the Whites, which resulted in the death of eight million people, who perished as a result of famine, the Red Terror, or were killed on the battlefields” (Zajda, 2007, p. 297). This textbook not only questioned the importance and appeal of the Bolsheviks’ ideas to the majority of the population, but also presented the ideology of the “White” movement as similar to that of present-day Russia. The main slogan of the White movement, “for the united and solidary Russia,” was presented as timely for the new Russian situation and as representative of the Russian soul. In another textbook on the 20th-century history of Russia, authored by A. Danilov and L. Kosulina (2002), the execution of the tsar’s family was described as an evil action reflecting the terroristic nature of Bolshevik power. The textbook provided critical analysis of the Russian past: the words used in the textbook emphasized the horrific nature of these actions: “a bloody tragedy” in which the royal family was “executed and thrown down the mine shaft” (Danilov & Kosulina, 2002, p. 115).

In contrast to these textbooks, the textbook authored by I. Dolutsky (1994) presented the complexity of socialism, stressing the differences between the theoretical concept and its methods of implementation. This approach gave the author an opportunity to positively assess socialism as a movement aimed at achieving justice, positive development, and freedom, while also criticizing the



violent and tragic role of the Soviet regime in Russian history. Another textbook on the history of Russia in the 20th century, authored by V. Dmitrenko, V. Esakov, and V. Shestakov (1995), similarly depicted positive aspects of the Soviet era, including the struggle for peace, the defense of Moscow during World War II, and postwar economic recovery. While the Soviet regime was criticized, the overall assessment of the Soviet state was positive.

Textbooks during this second stage, interestingly, provided a generally unfavorable picture of the Soviet Union in World War II. They showed that many Soviet troops were defeated or captured as prisoners of war in 1941–1942. Emphasizing huge losses, these textbooks provided impressive numbers: 2 to 6 million Red Army soldiers captured, with 600,000 taken prisoner during the battle for Kiev and 663,000 in the battle for Moscow (Ostrovskii, 1992, pp. 22–61); the battle of Stalingrad, it is written, took the lives of 470,000 soldiers, while 253,000 soldiers died in the battle for Kursk.

During the Soviet period, the notion of the “friendship of peoples” required a positive presentation of the policies of the Russian Empire toward different ethnic groups. Soviet-era history textbooks described czarism as a discriminatory regime when it came to the working class and farmers. Nevertheless, they emphasized positive relations with other peoples and contrasted Russian tolerance with Western policies of dishonesty, deception, and violence toward ethnic minorities. Expansions of the Russian Empire were described as progressive national liberations of ethnic peoples from various aggressors, encouraged by desire among local populations for the support of a gracious, tolerant, and powerful protector (Bordyugov & Buharev, 1999).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, the history curriculum reflected different and sometimes contradictory interpretations of the conception of national identity in czarist Russia. Thus, one textbook described policy toward ethnic minorities as discriminatory and unjust:

Representatives of non-Russian ethnic groups that inhabited the territory of the Russian Empire were contemptuously called *inorodsti* (non-Russian born). The czarist government did not want to acknowledge differences in the cultures of the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, considering all of them “Russian” and denying the existence of the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages. Self-interest in national policy consistently strengthened contradictions between Russians and Ukrainians, Georgians, and Kazakhs. Nevertheless, these contradictions were denied. On the contrary, the glorification of the Russian state was a norm. (Ionov, 1994, p. 259).

In another textbook, however, one can find the opposite description of the policies of the Russian Empire:

New territories have never been plundered; the population has never become the tributary of the far metropolis. The previously established social order and norms of life have been preserved. ... In Russia, there was no discrimination based on ethnicity or race. ... In the 19th century, the Russian

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Empire included hundreds of tribes and peoples, each of which preserved its basic features and its own culture, traditions, and customs. (Bohanov, 1998, pp. 7–9)

*Third Stage: 2004–Present*

During the third stage, the ideology of post-Soviet history textbooks in Russia has been clearly described by Leonid Polyakov (2008), special adviser to the president on history education. He stated that the main aim of history education is not recalling history but, instead, consigning it to oblivion: “The meaning of *meaningful oblivion* is that history education in a specific period of the life of the young person liberates him or her from the need to look back” (2008, p. 24). According to Polyakov, if a student acknowledges the guilt of his forefathers, he will develop a morbid perception of the nation and its history. “We produce lots of individuals with a morbid bleeding memory. By this we provoke the development of aggressive images of national history” (2008, p. 24). Thus, Polyakov proposed teaching a new history of Russia, one focused on victory and glory. This history, he contended, is important for students as the basis of national identity, the bedrock of national pride. Polyakov did not recommend a critical approach to history education but instead proposed a “well-proven, logically well-grounded and well-reasoned version of history” (2008, p. 25). He acknowledged that 10% of school seniors, in any case, will criticize this official version, but stressed that for the remaining 90% of students, the main task to accomplish was a kind of historical “oblivion” and development of an optimistic perception of the nation.

New history textbooks have thus featured a positive view of Russian history. As Aleksander Philipov, the author of *Modern History of Russia, 1945–2006*, stressed:

The appearance of such an approach is the answer to the demands of the society. The 1990s were an epoch of changes, and during an epoch of changes a society wants to sever with its past. When the stabilization comes, the new social order is established, and the orientation toward succession and unity with the past dominates. (Starcev, 2008)

In the introduction, this textbook stated:

The Soviet Union was not a democracy; however, it was a reference point and an example of a better, just society for many millions of people throughout the world. ... During 70 years, the internal policy of Western countries was corrected toward human rights under the significant influence of the USSR, the giant super-power that accomplished social revolution and won in the most violent of wars. (Philipov, 2008, p. 6).

Descriptions of the USSR on other pages of the textbook were similar: “powerful super-state,” “highest international authority,” “might of the USSR,” “high potential,” etc.

Describing postwar economic development in the USSR, the textbook stated:

The use of the labor of prisoners and prisoners of war did play a role [in this process]. But this role must not be exaggerated—the maximum population of the Gulag was 2.8 million [in 1950] while the number of workers and office workers was 40.4 million people. (Philipov, 2008, p. 28)

There was no explanation, in this description, of why these people were in the Gulag or why their labor was used by the government. In a similar way, Stalin's repressions were described as an objective necessity in the period of postwar economic reconstruction. The aim of these policies, according to the text, was "the mobilization of the executive system to increase its effectiveness in both processes of industrialization and post-war economic reconstruction" (Philipov, 2008, p. 90). Thus, political repression against the general population as well as Soviet officials was depicted as strengthening the Soviet economy. The textbook went even further, comparing Stalin to Peter I, arguing that they both asked the impossible of their subjects in order to achieve the best results. Stalin supported the best and the most powerful people, those who could help build a powerful state. According to the textbook, Stalin, like Bismarck, cared about the increasing economic and political potential of his motherland. Assessing the role of Stalin, this text emphasized his contributions to the development of the USSR as a super-power, but also acknowledged that this success was due in part to violent repression and the exploitation of the population.

The new course, *History of Russia 1945–1990*, developed under the supervision of Alexander Danilov, the chair of the Department of History, Moscow Pedagogic State University, was created as a roadmap for new history textbooks. The methodological principles of this textbook were developed based on

new findings of Russian historians who actualize the assessment of our history based on the tasks of defending and strengthening state sovereignty and the formation of the citizen-patriot of Russia. To reach this aim, significant attention is given to the definition of the essence of the national interests of Russia, not only with the consideration of internal processes in the country, but also international challenges during all described periods. (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

One of the main trends of this new direction in history education was to change the traditional understanding of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century as a backward, undeveloped country. As authors of the new course stressed, this sense of Russia's economic underdevelopment was based on differences between social relations in Russia and Europe. In reality, Russia enjoyed its own forms of progress and excelled beyond many European countries in terms of several criteria of development. The authors of the new textbook described modernization as a weak term that does not take into account the specificity of Russian society and proposed to depict Russia at the beginning of the 20th century as one of the five most developed countries of the period, stressing that Russia had higher rates of economic growth than these five countries. "This rapid growth of Russian modernization led, on the one hand, to social tensions within the country and, on

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the other hand, to fears among the major competing states in the world (mostly England)” (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

A second tendency in the new phase of Russian history curricula was to employ more comparative analysis showing, for example, the similarities between the October Revolution and the revolution in France. The authors stressed that it is important for educators to point out that the main idea of the revolution of 1917 was the liberation of the people and justice for all. In describing the Civil War, the authors acknowledged the fault of the Bolsheviks, but also insisted that the White movement held a profascist ideology that could have led to the establishment of a regime similar to that of Nazi Germany. Considering the issue of which sectors of the population were involved with the Red and White forces in their struggle, the authors showed that the White movement appealed to those wanting to restore the order associated with the czarist regime, while the “red” movement promoted agrarian reforms and was, thus, supported by the majority of peasants. Therefore, the revolution of 1917 should be characterized as a *peasant revolution*.

A third tendency in the new history curricula was to alter the perception of Russia as “the motherland of terror.” The textbooks’ authors argued that this task was especially important given the current domestic and international circumstances. First, in descriptions of the events connected with the last days of the tsar’s family, they recommended replacing the word “execution” with the word “shooting” based on the fact that no court procedure could order an execution. Second, the authors recommended depicting the Bolshevik terror from 1917 to 1922 objectively as a measure to improve the management of society.

In view of it, it can be reminded that just one year after the [Bolsheviks’] seizure of power, with the establishment of the first concentration camps, up to 96% of prisoners were workers who did not fulfill their output quotas and peasants who could not fulfill their obligation toward the state. There were also Soviet officials who were going to their jobs from concentration camps. (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

The repressions of Stalin were presented as an objective reaction to the opposition toward the modernization processes he initiated. The authors showed that the critical situation could have led to destabilization of the country, from both within and without.

Stalin did not know from whom he could expect a blow, and that is why he struck all existing groups and movements as well as those people who were not his unconditional supporters and allies. ... It is important to show that Stalin acted in a specific historic situation, acted [as a manager] completely rationally—as security guard of the system, as consistent advocate for the transformation of the country into an industrial society managed from a united center, as leader of the country that faced a big war in the very near future. (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

The authors of the recommendation further showed that the arrival of Lavrenty Beria changed the nature of these policies to support industrial development of the

country. Engineers and specialists were arrested and moved to Siberia and the Far East to provide support for national defense and economic development. The authors acknowledged that there was no excuse for such policies, but they also mentioned that they helped to motivate lazy workers. When it came to descriptions of repression, the authors recommended including only people who were shot or executed. Repressions carried out during World War II were presented as necessary to prevent looting and alarmism and to strengthen the discipline of labor and social order. The authors recommended showing that every country used such measures during war time. They also stressed that, even though it is not possible to completely justify the killing of war prisoners, it is important to mention that the “shooting in Katyn was not only a question of political expediency but also the answer to the death of many [tens of] thousands of Red Army soldiers in Polish captivity after the war of 1920 which were initiated by Poland” (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Thus, the recommendation provided a foundation for justifying the mass killing.

The authors placed specific attention on presentations of the famine (1932–1933). They particularly denied that the famine was deliberately organized in the villages of the USSR and further refuted any ethnic roots in the agrarian policies that led in the famine.

The famine was a result of weather conditions as well as the incompleteness of the collectivization processes. Collective farms were not yet able to provide the required level of bread production, while the kulaks (wealthy farmers) were “liquidated as a social class” and did not participate in production. (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

Special attention was given to the number of victims of famine. The number of 10 million victims in Ukraine as presented by Ukrainian historians was challenged. The authors insisted that only 1 to 2 million people died in Ukraine during that period, while in the USSR as a whole, they said, there were 2 to 3 million deaths.

The authors also emphasised World War II. The 1939 invasions were justified by statements that the Red Army liberated territories that had been annexed by Poland as a result of the Riga Peace Treaty of 1920. They emphasized that Poland was extremely hostile toward the USSR and that the 1939 action constituted a “liberation of part of the motherland.” The authors also recommended that educators point out the fact that England and France did not consider this situation as the USSR’s entry into the war. The description and meaning of the war, they insisted, should be clearly stated for students: “This was the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people for freedom and independence of their country, one of the most heroic chapters of our history” (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The authors emphasized that it was very important to discredit “any attempts to present the traitors of the motherland [Vlasov and others] as heroes” (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Instead, history textbooks have to present stories about Soviet people, such as heroes of battles and on the home front and members of the partisan movement.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of the development of state-controlled history education in Russia shows an increased tendency to develop among young citizens a blind patriotism and loyalty to the regime, a regime that was becoming increasingly authoritarian. Analysis of these mechanisms helps identify the main processes of nation building in the Russian Federation: concentration of power, growth of the authoritarian state, reduction of the value of the individual, primacy of the state over the people, and absence of critical analysis of the totalitarian past.

The Russian government used several mechanisms to legitimize an authoritarian regime through state-controlled history education, including emphasis on the uniqueness of Russia; glorification of “strong” historical figures; presentation of some events as historic glories; and justification of totalitarian control and state violence as necessary for successful modernization.

The critical approach to history emphasized during the first stage was gradually diminished in textbooks during the second stage. This change was justified by the importance of fundamental historical knowledge for the ongoing processes of nation building. Development of the nation, it was felt, requires that one main conceptual line and one common view of historical development be presented in history textbooks. In textbooks during the third stage, the critical approach was effectively replaced with an “optimistic” history approach. This approach insists that only a single historic narrative of Russia’s victories and glories that is approved by the Ministry of Education and Science can help avoid morbid self-criticism and promote national pride and faith among the young generation. Diminishing of the critical approach helps the Russian state generate a positive, unitary view of history and a positive view of the state in development of the nation.

The history textbooks during the first stage encouraged students to adopt a profoundly comparative approach to history and to analyze Russian history within the framework of world civilizations. During the second stage, Russia was presented in textbooks as an original and distinctive nation with its own path in history. Textbooks of the third stage stated that Russia was and can be a great and just society without developing a democracy. These textbooks stressed that Russia has its own forms of progress and, throughout history, has excelled beyond many European countries in numerous areas of development. Thus, the current shift in history textbooks aims to present the political culture of Russia as distinctive from Western traditions of democracy and political compromises. The aim of this shift is to deter discussions about democratization and human rights and to present a strong state as the historically defined social order.

The glorification of historic figures as “strong leaders” began to gain prominence in textbooks during the second stage. Peter I and Catherine II were praised and described as “servants of the state” who unified the country and turned it into a great power. This tendency increased during the third stage: leaders who executed strong state control in pursuit of modernization were depicted as saviors of the nation, true heroes who devoted or sacrificed their lives for the good of the country. Thus, sacrifice of ordinary people for the aim of great power is completely

accepted and even endorsed. These presentations promote the primacy of the state and emphasize the importance of a strong central government for the successful modernization of Russia.

Some specific events in history were also chosen to glorify Russia and its government. The central historical event for this process was World War II. If in textbooks during the first and second stages the war was criticized and huge losses were emphasized, the textbooks of the third stage instead described the Great Patriotic War as a war for freedom and independence, one of the most heroic chapters of Russia's history. Newer textbooks used the victory of the Soviet Union as a cementing and defining event for the Russian nation, as a "chosen glory" (Volkan, 1997) that made Russia the greatest world nation. Another event, the Great October Revolution, was thoroughly condemned in textbooks of the first stage, while textbooks of the second stage started a discussion of its positive implications. During the third stage, textbooks praised it uncritically, comparing it to the French Revolution and stressing common ideas of liberation and justice for all people. Similarly, the Civil War of 1917 to 1922, which was criticized in textbooks of the first and second stages, was seen during the third stage as a just fight with the profascist ideology of the White movement. The glorification of such events helps to strengthen the primacy of the state over its people, who must be proud of their nation and should not disapprove of state policies.

The concept of modernization, treated differently during each of the three stages, was now used to justify state violence. During the first stage, textbooks strongly criticized the policies of totalitarian power and Stalinism and condemned violence against people. During the second stage, the critical tendencies in the description of repression during the Soviet period still prevailed, yet textbooks began to provide some validation for totalitarian policies through Russian history. Thus, the policies of landlords toward peasants who turned the latter into slaves and servants were presented as necessary for economic development. During the third stage, textbooks ultimately developed a system of justification for Soviet autocracy and repression. Stalin's actions were described as an objective necessity in both industrialization and postwar economic reconstruction. The execution of the tsar's family, the famine, and the massacre in Katyn in particular were discussed in ways that denied the state's responsibility and decreased their importance. The main aim of textbooks during the third stage, thus, was to change the perception of Russia as "the motherland of terror" and emphasize, instead, the role of a strong state in unifying contemporary Russian society.

Thus, the study of history textbooks in modern Russia uncovers an increasing tendency to promote the prerogative of strong central power. State-controlled history education has been increasingly employed to support an authoritarian regime, the concentration of power, and the primacy of the state.

#### NOTE

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