

## INTRODUCTION

### Perspectives on Russian nationalism

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The article by Julie Fedor and Rolf Fredheim examines how Putin’s propaganda machine has adapted to the post-modern age by sponsoring, directly or indirectly, viral videos that help cultivate patriotic sensibilities about Russia’s past and her role in the world. They focus on the case of Iurii Degtiarev, a pioneer of viral marketing whose “I am a Russian occupier” video clip went viral in 2015. Oppositionists themselves increasingly used video clips to ridicule the Kremlin leadership, who chose to respond not only through repression and censorship, but also through their own creative operations, from publicity stunts to viral videos, tailored for online search algorithms.

Fedor and Fredheim’s article shows us that images are just as important as ideas in trying to understand the phenomenon of nationalism. A similar approach runs through Fabrizio Fenghi’s article on the aesthetic stance of Eduard Limonov, a representative of an earlier generation of nationalists which included the still-influential Aleksandr Dugin. In the pre-internet Russia of the 1990s, newspapers played a key role in marshalling opposition forces (who were mostly excluded from television screens). Fenghi examines the ideological content and appearance of the National Bolsheviks’ newspaper, *Limonka*, which went beyond a political program in creating an “alternative cultural canon” to appeal to those disaffected and disoriented by the social, economic, and political shocks of the 1990s. In the end, it was Putin’s Kremlin, and not opposition groups, that created a plausible cultural narrative around which society could rally. Limonov’s playful and not-so-playful invocation of totalitarian and militarist aesthetics was part of the anti-liberal backlash which made Putinism possible.

Steffen Kailitz and Andreas Umland revisit the big and important question of the parallels between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia. They argue that fascism failed to take root in contemporary Russia because the context was radically different. In Russia the state was too powerful, and there never really was a liberal-democratic regime which could have created the space for fascist mass political parties to emerge. Somewhat ironically, the weakness of civil society and the prevalence of clientilistic political practices may have inoculated Russia against fascism.

The following article by Veera Laine analyzes recent developments in the “Russian march,” which takes place every year on 4 November, “The Day of National Unity,” since the latter was introduced in 2005, effectively as a substitute for the 7 November commemoration of the October Revolution. Increasingly the march became a platform for radical ethno-nationalists, with the state monitoring but tolerating their actions. In 2014, in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, the regime organized a large pro-state rally in

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central Moscow, which dwarfed the marches of the radical nationalists, while tightening repression further marginalized the movement.

Aleksandr Kuzmin and Anastasia Mitrofanova present a case study of a Russian nationalist group in the Komi Republic, in Russia's far north. The author's anthropological approach provides a welcome balance to heavily political and ideological, top-down framing of nationalist movements. The ideologically eclectic group, Frontier of the North, has had some success by addressing pressing social issues in the remote republic. Interestingly, this Russian nationalist group incorporates ethnic Komi as leaders and members.