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A Fascist Establishment in Bloom

Comment by Andreas Umland

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Russia's Top Political and Cultural Figures Are Subscribing to Alexander Dugin's Fascist Ideology in Greater Numbers

During the last few years, various forms of nationalism have turned into aspects of everyday Russian political and social life. A marginal conspiracy theorist in the 1990s, for instance, the ultra-nationalist theoretician Alexander Dugin has, over the past ten years, become a respected commentator and writer on contemporary world affairs and Russia's foreign policy in particular. But where is Russia headed for if such people lead the way?

Since its foundation as the socio-political movement "Eurasia" in 2001, Dugin's main organization, the International Eurasian Movement (IEM) has included a number of high-ranking officials. Among them were Vice Speaker of the Federation Council Aleksandr Torshin, Advisor to the Russian President Aslambek Aslakhonov, President of the Republic of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity, former Deputy Foreign Minister and current Ambassador to Latvia Viktor Kaliuzhnyi, Chief Mufti of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Russia and European Countries of the CIS Talgat Tadzhuddin, the President of the National Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters Eduard Sagalaev, and Editor in Chief of the Russian army newspaper "Red Star" Nikolai Efimov.

While the basis of the closeness of some of these figures to Dugin is obvious, the reasons for the IEM affiliation of others listed here remain a mystery. Throughout the 1990s, Dugin repeatedly eulogized European and contemporary Russian fascism. The most explicit apologies of fascism can be found in Dugin's programmatic articles "Left Nationalism" or "Fascism – Borderless and Red," which are still accessible on the IEM leader's official Web sites. Dugin acknowledged the relevance of, above all other regimes, the Third Reich as a model for his own ideological constructs in his seminal analyses "Conservative Revolution: The Third Way" or "The Metaphysics of National Bolshevism."

Moreover, a number of these articles from the 1990s are, by now, available in Western languages. Some of them have been repeatedly quoted. 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, 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 NSDAP in the late 1920s. They subsequently indeed opposed Adolf Hitler, but did so first within the Nazi party.

Among Dugin's most important collaborators today is prominent electronic and print media commentator Mikhail Leontyev. Once called Vladimir Putin's "favorite journalist," Leontyev officially entered the Highest Council of the IEM only recently, although he had participated in the foundation congress of Dugin's movement in 2001. Since then, Leontyev has provided a mass audience for Dugin by letting the IEM leader present his views during primetime TV shows on Russia's Channel One. One of Russia's most well-known propagandists of anti-Americanism, Leontyev's frequent tirades against the West in general and the United States in particular are informed by Dugin's Manichean schemes. To be sure, Dugin himself appeals to a limited circle of political activists and young intellectuals. But via television shows like Leontyev's "Odnako" (However) an encrypted form of Duginism 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 "Vzglyad" (The View) or "Muzoboz" (Music Cart). In the new century, Demidov became the anchorman of one of Russia's most brazenly nationalistic TV shows "Russkii Vzglyad" (The Russian View). 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 request by Vladimir Putin – he was named the leader of United Russia's official youth organization the Young Guard. He also directed the so-called "Russian Project" by United Russia – an attempt to attract ethnocentric Russian youth and intellectuals to Putin's regime.

In 2008, Demidov was promoted to head the Ideology Section of the Political Department of United Russia's Executive Committee. 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, 15 years earlier, Dugin had, in the original version of his seminal article "The Great War of the Continents," characterized SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich – the Holocaust's chief organizer (the phrase was deleted in later editions of that article).

In March 2009, Demidov was promoted as the head of the Department for Humanitarian Policies and Public Relations of the Domestic Politics Directorate of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation. 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.

Dugin himself recently managed to make further inroads into Russian public life. In 2008, he was made Professor at the Sociology Faculty of Moscow's renowned Lomonosov University (MGU), where he is now directing the Center for Conservative Studies. This promotion was an important step in Dugin's further penetration of the mainstream, as it provides him with a respected title and a 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.

When being at the fringe of Russia's political life, in the early to 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 sharply diverts 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.

In view of the depth and multifariousness of Dugin's connections with 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 talk and actions indicate that, if compared 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 high politics and society at large, a new Cold War will be the least that the West should expect from Russia during the coming years.

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