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journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud)Imperial ambitions of Russians<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This article is based on the findings of the Political Ideas of Russian Society project realized by the Laboratory for Political Studies since 2008. The Laboratory has already conducted about 1000 in-depth interviews with respondents of various age cohorts and various social-economic statuses. All respondents demonstrated the Great Power pathos formed by two basic components — Russia is a great power and/or nostalgia of the lost Soviet might — serves the leitmotiv of authoritarian sentiments.

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Twenty years ago the Soviet Union disappeared from the maps of the world together with its political and economic institutions to be replaced with newly independent states of a radically different political and economic makeup. Today, the citizens of the Russian Federation have a much wider range of self-realization potentials than 20 years ago; there is no longer an iron curtain to prevent them from traveling all over the world and studying abroad; the market economy filled the shops' empty shelves, while harsh censorship was lifted to open gates to flows of alternative information. This, however, did not quench nostalgia for the collapsed empire and its grandeur; on the whole, the Russians are still devoted to the memories of the past. According to the public opinion poll the Yuri Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center) carried out in March 2011, 58% of the Russians still lament the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>1</sup>

Political science calls this "post-imperial nostalgia" or "post-imperial syndrome", its key element being the desire to see the great power restored; this alleviates an acute feeling of inferiority and an awareness of humiliations. Egor Gaidar wrote that the country's leaders found it expedient to exploit the imperial complex to improve their ratings. Indeed, people tend to believe that the rapidly collapsed empire can be as promptly restored (Gaidar E., 2007).

The compensatory response is fed by dwindling self-confidence and an awareness of loneliness deepened by the mounting mutual mistrust among the Russians. All sorts of national public opinion polls revealed that about 70% of the Russians did not trust each other and were convinced that wariness was advised where dealing with others (Dubin et al., 2008).

Post-imperial nostalgia can be interpreted as one of the manifestations of the authoritarian syndrome the conception of which was elaborated by E. Fromm, T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer and other members of the Frankfurt School. The authoritarian personality (an antipode to the democratic personality) is a vehicle of the authoritarian syndrome. In several of his works Erich Fromm (1992, 1994) described the authoritarian personality as a concept, analyzed the psychological roots of Nazism and discovered that the authoritarian personality is woven by contradictory features: inferiority complex, impotence and an awareness of personal worthlessness, on the one hand, and the desire to dominate "much weaker" people and humiliate them. The authoritarian personality shuns responsibility out of conviction that human life is guided by outside forces.

In his *The Authoritarian Personality* Theodor Adorno analyzed in detail the main features of the authoritarian syndrome such as: the fixed superiority idea; irrational attitude to power; blind faith in authority and unwillingness to critically assess

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<sup>1</sup> 'O raspadе SSSR', Levada-Center, 18–21 Mart 2011, available at: <http://www.levada.ru/press/2011041103.html>, accessed 3 May 2011.

the country's leader; search for external enemies and self-assertion by humiliating weaker people, that is, the readiness to attack those who look weaker and whom society accepts as a victim. Psychological rigidity is one of the typical features of the authoritarian syndrome, that is, an inability to adapt to new conditions, penchant for stereotypes, thought patterns and mythologemes (T. Adorno, 1950).

The authoritarian syndrome has much in common with the open/closed belief systems conception formulated by Milton Rokeach (1960). People with the closed belief system are submissive to authority; they reject variety; inclined to fatalism, underestimate themselves and discern threats where there are none. He described the fear of anybody or anything as the key element of the closed mind, which is highly intolerant and obsessive about its own superiority.

Today, the authoritarian syndrome and its studies are as topical as ever. A simple analysis of what is written in the best journals dealing with the humanities testifies that the subject remains in the center of academic attention. In their cross-national investigation J.L. Napier and J.T. Jost relied on quantitative data from 19 countries to conclude that the authoritarian syndrome is directly related to the person's economic and social status. The respondents with the low social and economic status were much more disposed to obey the leader and revealed a much higher degree of ethnic intolerance (Napier J.L. and Jost J.T., 2008).

In his "Flight into Security: A New Approach and Measure of the Authoritarian Personality" Detlef Oesterreich has looked at the key classical works dealing with the authoritarian personality and the authoritarian syndrome as well as more recent writings on the same subject. All of them, in one form or another, pointed to the negative features of authoritarian personality: it is neurotic, dogmatic, rigid, antidemocratic, hostile, etc. The author is convinced that the authoritarian syndrome and some of its manifestations (rejection of everything new, rigidity and disadaptive behavior) may be either part of person's psychology or caused by stress in "healthy" persons. In some cases authoritarianism is a response to specific situations (Oesterreich D., 2005).

Practically all recent works dealing with the authoritarian personality and the authoritarian syndrome are empirical interdisciplinary studies at the crossroads of psychology and political science. This is best illustrated by James Butler's "Personality and Emotional Correlates of Right-wing Authoritarianism" (Butler J.C., 2000), Gidi Rubinstein's "Authoritarianism, Political Ideology, and Religiosity among Students of Different Faculties" (Rubinstein G., 1997) and others.

This article is based on the findings of the Political Ideas of Russian Society project realized by the Laboratory for Political Studies of National Research University "Higher School of Economics" since 2008. The Laboratory has already conducted about 1000 in-depth interviews with respondents of various age cohorts and various social-economic statuses (school-children, students, the military, employed middle-aged Russians, pensioners, State Duma deputies, children of the street and adult homeless people)<sup>2</sup> to find out what they thought about Russia's present and future. We deliberately avoided formal interviews and relied on conversation with open-ended questions; when restructured, similar stories told by respondents revealed the key subjects. Each interview lasted for about 30 min.

In this research we used the grounded theory formulated by American sociologists B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss; it operates almost in a reverse fashion from the traditional research and at first may appear to be in contradiction of the scientific method. Rather than beginning by researching and developing a hypothesis the first step is data collection on which mini-theories are based. From the data collected, the key points are marked (codes) to be later grouped into similar concepts which are the basis for the creation of a theory. The grounded theory relies on induction by moving from the simple to the complex (Glaser B.G. and Strauss A.L., 1967).

The scope and dimensions of the Political Ideas of the Russian Citizens research project and its findings are too vast and too varied to be fit into the limits of one article therefore we concentrated at the place the Great Power pathos holds in the Russians' authoritarian syndrome manifested as their passionate desire to see Russia a respected and feared country with a great role to play in world politics and economics. Our maximally detailed discussion of the Russians' Great Power discourse is based on the ideas of three key groups: "common" Russians (schoolchildren, students, the military, middle-aged employed people, pensioners); "social outcasts" (children of the street and homeless people) and State Duma deputies. The traces of authoritarian thinking in what members of the three groups had to say offer a comprehensive idea of the degree of authoritarian consciousness in Russian society as a whole.

## 1. Schoolchildren

We started our project in 2008 by interviewing Moscow schoolchildren of lyceum and classical classes; 150 teenagers between 13 and 18 were polled. This means that our respondents were born after 1991 (when the Soviet Union collapsed) while their primary political socialization coincided with the emergence of contemporary Russia.

They described Russia as a "large, vast, boundless and huge" country and associated it with a strong, mighty and dynamic power with a worthy place on the international arena:

*Our country is a strong power with no rivals in the world (a schoolgirl of 14).*

*Russia is one of the new centers of power; it is gathering its economic might and restoring its statehood to become an equal and strong player on the world scene (a schoolgirl of 16).*

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Zarubina, Marina Maksimenkova, Anton Sobolev, Valeria Yakimova, Maria Knyzher, Lilia Khakimova, Mark Simon, Georgy Knyzev and Olga Gasparyan were also involved in the project as interviewers.

*Russia relies on its scientific achievements; it has a good military potential, educational basis and foundations for the further development of agriculture to become one of the central powers in the near future (a schoolboy of 16).*

Despite their positive feelings about the present the schoolchildren revealed nostalgia for the Soviet past (strange in their age group); they pined after the country in which they had never lived and which they knew from what their parents and history textbooks told them. The schoolchildren imagined that the Soviet Union had been a “large and closely-knit family” with no national strife:

*There was no nation question in the USSR because the communist system rejects the idea of nations in principle. All peoples belonged to one single family, no matter how bombastic this sounds; they lived in a great country, had equal rights irrespective of their nationalities (a schoolboy of 16).*

The teenagers approved of the multinational Soviet Union yet were not alien to xenophobia and an obvious rejection of all “non-Russians” expressed in nationalist slogans: “Russia is for the Russians!” “We should tighten control over migrants!” “We should be on the alert when dealing with other nationalities”.

The schoolchildren were convinced that Russia had enemies, the United States being the main of them. Their discourse revealed such speech constructs as “the West is afraid of strong Russia”, “the West accuses Russia of all mortal sins” and “time has come to show America its place”. This brought to mind the Cold War rhetoric when the USSR was presented as one of the two superpowers:

*The United States should be removed from the pedestal; the English language should be banned” (a schoolgirl of 16).*

*The West is afraid of strong Russia and is resolved not to allow the huge country to rouse from the knees; it keeps it away from the world power centers (a schoolboy of 15).*

The schoolchildren with no personal experience of the Soviet period inherited values and political orientations from their parents and schoolteachers: the teenagers are not free from the authoritarian syndrome.

Political psychologists think that during the Soviet period “it was primarily ideological clichés that interfered with an adequate reflection of politics in the people’s minds” (Shestopal, 2007, p. 265). Our survey revealed that teenagers had not moved too far away from Homo Sovieticus. The Soviet ideologemes (“Russia is a great power; it will control the world which will fear it” or “The US is an enemy of Russia; it is weaving a web of international coups against our country”) are still very much alive in their minds.

## 2. Students

In 2011, we polled 150 students (between 17 and 32) of different educational establishments scattered across 50 regions of Russia: the top Russian universities (Moscow University, MGIMO, National Research University “Higher School of Economics” and St. Petersburg University) and non-top universities.

The top university students demonstrated an adequate assessment of the situation in Russia; they were critical of its economics and social policy and did not describe Russia as a great power because of “its dependence on oil”, “degradation of its population” and because “the country is steeped in corruption” while “its democratic institutes are undeveloped”. They betrayed no nostalgia of the Soviet past; there was no “we–they” dichotomy; they looked at other states as rivals or partners and never as enemies (the concept being absent from their discourse.) They are cosmopolites prepared to contemplate employment in other countries upon graduation.

Students of non-top universities the enrollment to which is much easier think differently. These universities attract those who never did well at school and who are, therefore, poorly educated. Their chances of adequate post-graduation employment are slim: their diplomas carry no weight with employers. They were never taught to think critically, therefore, there is every reason to describe their consciousness as mythologized. They betrayed a penchant to stable speech constructs such as “Russia’s special road” which they invariably failed to specify:

*I think that Russia follows its own road in the world therefore it should not be compared with the West or the East; it is a special country (female student of 18).*

According to the respondents Russia is facing a great number of serious social and economic problems which, however, does not prevent them from talking about their country as a “great power”; this means, that no matter what, these young people continue looking at Russia as state No. 1:

*Russia is a vast and beautiful country yet cluttered up and neglected along the fringes. It can still be described as a great power. I cannot explain this; this is subconscious; I think I got this feeling from my mother (female student of 25).*

*The level of corruption is very high in Russia; the living standards are far from ideal while the reform of education caused degradation among Russia’s population. I do not look at Russia as the best of all possible places yet I think it can still be called a great power because it can resolve conflicts on its territory and outside it (male student of 18).*

*Russia is great because its territory is vast and its people are strong-willed: there are many of us and together we are strong (female student of 23).*

They admitted that they knew next to nothing about the Soviet Union and found it hard to compare it with Russia. They also admitted that their historical knowledge was practically non-existent:

*I know practically nothing about the USSR. I know that there were food coupons and that Khrushchev sowed maize everywhere (male student of 18).*

*I know about the Soviet Union from the textbook of history yet I remember practically nothing (female student of 19).*

Inadequate knowledge about the Soviet Union does not prevent students of non-top universities from saying “the Soviet Union was a great power”. Students and schoolchildren appeal to the imperial past because their political socialization has not yet been completed; nostalgia is impossible in the young people of these age groups. Their answers revealed that their political consciousness was still in the process of formation: young people are very responsive to stereotypes and influence of the media, parents and teachers.

*My Mum says the USSR was a great power. She knows best because she lived at that time (a female student of 25).*

*The Soviet period was one of the most productive (a male student of 19).*

When talking about the Soviet Union students of non-top universities relied on banalities: everybody respected the Soviet Union because they feared it:

*The USSR was a great power despite its faults. We were feared, we were respected, we were self-sufficient. The faults were numerous yet the Soviet Union remained a great power. After all, it was the USSR that liberated the world from fascism (a male student of 24).*

These students said a lot about the cheerful and friendly atmosphere which (they believed) had been present in the USSR and which was absent from contemporary Russia:

*The USSR was a great power because at that time we all were together; there was cohesion absent from the mess we live in. Everybody was doing his best; everybody contributed to the country and pulled all together. Today, people pull in different directions (a male student of 22).*

The students were convinced that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union an enemy determined to weaken and destroy it:

*The US is an enemy of Russia. It has been provoking us all the time. It was proved that in the 1990s the Soviet Union had collapsed because of America's policies, among other things (a male student of 21).*

*I think that America is Russia's enemy. I am very much frightened by the fact that the Americans stationed their military bases along Russia's borders and in Europe. Americans are occupying everything. Their desire to have finger in every pie is maddening — nobody wants it everywhere. It is in everybody's way (a girl of 19).*

The authoritarian syndrome of the students of non-top universities (with the educational level very much inferior to that of the top universities) is dominated by the desire to see Russia a great power, feared and respected by others. It seems that this is explained, to a great extent, by the students' dissatisfaction with their own status and future employment and wages which they recompense with the feeling of “belonging” to a large and strong country: “we are strong together.” Lack of self-confidence is justified by looking for an enemy (embodied mainly by America).

### 3. The military

In 2007, we polled 150 young men (between 18 and 27) from 38 regions serving in the RF armed forces.

When analyzed, their answers revealed that their ideas about Russia were fairly contradictory. They were very critical about the country and its social and economic situation. They said that it was a “deceitful” country “steeped in lies”; there was no “stability and order” yet a lot of “corrupt officials”. There is “no development strategy” therefore people do not “live in it but survive”. The respondents were convinced that “the population is degrading” because of alcoholism and drugs. Economically, Russia is a “source of raw materials” with “low competitiveness” and “undeveloped economy”. At the same time, the respondents were convinced that these problems did not affect Russia's military might which explains why the military described Russia as a “great power with large resources”:

*Russia is powerful, mighty, invincible and strong in the military–political sense (a serviceman of 19).*

*Great, strong and vast country with a huge military potential (a serviceman of 22).*

Some of the contradictory assessments of contemporary Russia border on absurdities. Russia “for some reason sells latest weapons to other countries” while its army has “to use old weapons” yet it is “a strong state” in military respects. On the one hand, Russia still “holds the first place in the world rating of superpowers”, on the other, according to the respondents, in the next 10–15 years Russia will “fall apart” or will lose its sovereignty:

*If nothing changes we shall die out (a serviceman of 19).*

*In about 15 years we will unite with China or they will buy us and we will become a developed country (a serviceman of 25).*

According to the military the United States which wants Russia's territory and raw materials is the main enemy of "invincible" Russia. The respondents told us that the United States followed a "special plan of liquidating Russia" and "pours a lot of money into it":

*Russia's enemies are trying to undermine us and penetrate our country (a serviceman of 18).*

Among the military, nostalgia for the Soviet Union acquired "professional" hues. When talking about Soviet times they pointed to the highly developed military-industrial complex and excellent weapons thanks to which the Soviet Union had scored its victories:

*The Soviet Union was a great power because it had weapons (Russia inherited part of them.). Nothing better has been invented in the last 20 years either by us or our potential enemies. I know what I am talking about (a serviceman of 24).*

Our interviews revealed that the military missed the law and order, moral norms and values which, they said, had existed in the Soviet Union and which they could no see in modern Russia:

*The iron curtain was, on the whole, a good thing: the cultural level in the Soviet Union was by an order higher than in Russia. Today, debauchery and foul language are everywhere... The freedom of speech and conscience did nothing good to people (a serviceman of 22).*

The poll revealed that the military nurtured imperial ambitions: they described Russia as "one of the strongest military-political powers" while being aware of the numerous problems which might, after all, bury the "great power." The military have displayed a clear phenomenon of an "enemy image" embodied by the United States seeking to undermine Russia's might "according to a well-substantiated and clear-cut plan".

#### 4. Employed middle-aged Russians

In 2011, we carried 150 in-depth interviews with the respondents between 25 and 55 whom we conventionally described as "common" Russians. They live in different regions; have secondary professional or higher education and are employed in the budget sphere or by private companies.

Irrespective of what they thought of contemporary Russia all respondents tended to great power rhetoric based on the country's vast territory, military might and natural riches. Our results coincide with the data produced by the public opinion poll the Yuri Levada Center (Levada-Center) conducted in November 2010: 55% of the Russians are convinced that Russia is a great power mainly because of its territory, natural riches and nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup>

*Contemporary Russia is a great power because it has oil, gas and other resources. Its geopolitical situation is no less important as well as the nation's awareness of its greatness and its determination to hold an important place in the world (male software engineer of 28).*

*Contemporary Russia is a great country because we live on a vast territory, have a strong army and brains. The Russian man is great and long-suffering (a militiaman of 37).*

*Russia is the greatest of powers; its great people live on a vast territory with a great history. Everybody knows that the civilized world fears us because of our size (miner of 49).*

In the absolute majority of cases and irrespective of age and occupation the respondents were nostalgic of the Soviet Union; positive comments were mostly related to law and order in the Soviet Union:

*I can count the Soviet Union a great country at least because people were protected against vulgarities which are pouring in from the West. There was order in the country! (a priest of 36).*

*In the Soviet Union each and everyone had a place in life; there was no disorder while street waifs were unimaginable. Order and discipline reigned in the Soviet Union (a woman of 43, editor in a publishing house).*

*The present scope of alcoholism and parasitism was unimaginable in the Soviet Union because people were afraid of public reprimand (a security guard of 50).*

The middle-aged people tend to idealize the emotional atmosphere in the Soviet Union; they call it friendly and non-aggressive and assert that people were closely-knit and always ready to help:

*There were a lot of problems in the Soviet Union but people were not as hostile as now. They were friends; they were not aggressive (man of 25, journalist).*

*In Soviet times shops were empty but people were always ready to help (a man of 36, engineer).*

*People were not rich in the Soviet Union yet the families enjoyed a sincere and heartfelt atmosphere (a man of 38, employee of a municipal structure)*

<sup>3</sup> 'Resursy i territoriya strany-osnovnaya gordost' rossiyan', Levada-Center, 2 December 2010, available at: <http://www.levada.ru/press/2010120202.html>, accessed 3 May 2011.



Very much like all other polled groups, these respondents are also convinced that the United States “wants to seize our resources”.

The average statistical Russians whom we have conventionally called “common” Russians are the usual target audience of the largest sociological services of Russia (Levada-Center, FOM, VTsIOM) and their regular national opinion polls the quantitative results of which coincide with our results: people want to live in a great power. In fact our results illustrate the figures which sometimes are left without interpretation.

## 5. Old-age pensioners

In 2011, we conducted 150 interviews with people of pensionable age (over 55).

As a rule they were very critical of the social and economic situation in Russia yet, out of habit, still called it a great state mainly because it was successor to the Soviet Union, the source of their pride:

*Russia is also great but it was cut down on all sides like a head of cheese [reference to the Soviet Union's disintegration]. We are great yet cut down (a man of 72).*

Irrespective of what older people think about contemporary Russia they still associate greatness with the Soviet Union because of its “military might”, “the great Russian people”, “great scientific discoveries”, “great culture”, “great history” and social guarantees.

For the pensioners, the fact that “all other states took the Soviet Union into account” because they “feared it” was the sure sign of the Soviet Union's greatness. The Soviet people had been inspired by their conviction that they lived in a powerful state; this boosted their self-respect and self-assertion:

*The Soviet Union was a great power because other countries took us into account. Our army and our armaments ensured its greatness. Greatness is might (a man of 72).*

According to the older generation “the great Russian people” can “endure everything” and bear all hardships:

*Russia is a great country which survived in all wars because we have strong people, hard workers ready to restore the country from the ruins. Russia revived because people always closed ranks in the face of severe tests (a woman of 62, teacher).*

The Soviet Union's collapse changed much in the life of the older respondents; they are no longer sure of the future. They are especially concerned with the loss of social guarantees of Soviet times: free education and medical services as well as guaranteed employment. They are convinced that only a great state could afford the high level of social security that existed in the Soviet Union.

*Free education, free medicine and free housing — this says a lot about the state (a man of 72).*

In the older generation nostalgia of the Soviet Union is intensified by an acute awareness of social vulnerability; people feel that they are not needed in Russia. They said that “they were working all their lives for the sake of the country” which no longer cared about them:

*I am a war veteran yet my pension is barely 12 thousand rubles [about \$400]. Who respects me in this country? I am nobody! Nobody helped me rise to the feet when I had heart attack (a man of 80).*

*I was working hard at the plant so that to see the bright future and enjoy care and attention. I am an old and ailing man. Do you know how much I get by way of pension? Do you know how much I can afford? Thank God, I have children who pay for my medicine but I am sick and tired of being a burden to them (a man of 78).*

Those of the elderly who have no children able to support them find themselves below the poverty level. The respondents spoke with pride about the Soviet past when there had been no homeless; all pensioners had been guaranteed dignified existence:

*The USSR was the best of the states because there were no hungry people; all families were well-off and there were no waifs (a man of 80).*

The older respondents obviously missed the emotional atmosphere of the Soviet past described as “joyous”, “happy” and “sincere”.

*Today, there is a veritable abundance of everything. In the past life was more modest; there was practically nothing to buy; a personal car was a sensation; lace curtains, a sign of wealth. Today when there is everything people look sad. A great country means friendship, peace, smiles — that's what we want. Today there is everything: flats and cars and a lot of sadness (a woman of 78).*

The pensioners spoke warmly about Soviet official holidays and massive demonstrations which bred the feeling of unity and stressed the grandeur and might of the Soviet Union:

*Our young people should be shown our demonstrations when happy people marched along the streets. Today, there is nothing of the kind — everybody looks abandoned (a woman of 78).*

The respondents missed the law and order in the Soviet country “when people never feared to get out from their homes” and life was safe. According to pensioners, law and order and discipline make the Soviet Union very different from contemporary Russia:

*I think that the Soviet Union was a great power because there was order! (a man of 63)*

Fully aware that the Soviet Union cannot be restored within old borders the old people indulge in reminiscences of the Soviet past which they idealize and prefer to dwell on the best moments in their lives.

Significantly, many pensioners, just as schoolchildren, associate the “great Soviet Union” with the multinational state based on the “friendship of peoples”. Many of them, however, are intolerant of the migrants from former Soviet republics, a cheap workforce which “takes jobs away from Russians”

*I believe that it is a wrong policy of our government to let too many people from Central Asia and the Caucasus to live in Moscow and the environs. They come with families while Russians cannot find unqualified jobs for the simple reason that they have been taken by migrants (a woman of 74).*

Typically, old-age pensioners need a strong state which can “protect them and offer social guarantees” to its citizens. They are nostalgic of the Soviet Union, unquestionably a great power and an ideal of a strong state. The respondents idealized the Soviet past and tended to forget the problems with which they had coped in Soviet times.

They are fairly pessimistic of the developments in contemporary Russia even if they referred to it as a great power.

This ambiguity and the habit of idealizing the past is a product of many years of brainwashing to which people were subjected in the Soviet Union.

## 6. Russian homeless

We have identified the ill-adapted respondents living at the social margins (children of the street and adult homeless) as a highly interesting target audience. Indeed, as distinct from “common Russians” they are practically excluded from the political context.

### 6.1. Children of the street

In 2008–2009, we conducted 150 in-depth interviews with children of the street (between 13 and 18). We use the generalized term “children of the street” in a broad sense to describe not only the homeless and neglected children without parents or homes but also those whose parents have severe drinking problems or are behind the bars. They do not attend school and live on what they can earn by manual labor, begging, stealing and prostitution; not infrequently they commit crimes and minor offenses; they smoke, use alcohol and/or narcotics. In fact, they are sliding into the abyss of the lowest social stratum (Kasamara and Sorokina, 2010).

This socially vulnerable group is still convinced that Russia is a “great” and “strong” country:

*Russia is a superpower, one of the strongest in the world (a boy of 15).*

*Russia is a great power because it is a mighty country which has survived many wars, revolutions and crises and remained standing. We have endured everything: our Russian soldiers fought the enemy and never retreated; they were fighting tooth and nail (a boy of 14).*

*Russia is a great country because it is the world's largest (a girl of 15).*

The majority of the children of the street knew next to nothing about the Soviet Union. Those who heard bits and pieces about it concentrated at the law and order and social guarantees:

*In the USSR nobody abandoned children; they never sold liquor and cigarettes to them; there were not as much drugs as today. Now you can see debauchery at every step, there is violence; nobody cares about orphans; people are indifferent (a boy of 13).*

Very much like adult Russians, children of the street look at the United States as Russia's main enemy. They also spoke of *Churki* [an ethnic slur referring mostly to people of swarthy complexion] as another enemy of Russia. By *Churki* they mean non-Russians (Azeris, Kyrgyzes, Tajiks, Chechens, and others) with whom they clash at markets, railway and underground stations over “zones of influence”:

*The Churki who live here are destroying us, it won't be long before we will be working for them (a boy of 15)*

The respondents came up with nationalistic suggestions: “Moscow should be divided into quarters for wealthy, poor, and the *Churki*” (a girl of 17); “all *khachiki* [rough equivalent to “slant-eyes”] except the Ossets and Tatars should be kicked out” (a girl of 15), “all non-Russians should be expelled to Tajikistan” (a girl of 12), and “we should fight the Azeris”.

The above suggests that the children of the street are not free from the authoritarian syndrome which crops up in the form of xenophobia and aggressive intolerance and which can be interpreted as a compensatory response to the dire social and economic conditions in which they found themselves.

## 6.2. Adult homeless

In 2010, we conducted 100 in-depth interviews with marginalized people living on the social fringes of Russia. One hundred homeless of whom 17 were under 35; 49, between 36 and 55; 34, over 56 represented those surviving at Russia's social margins. In Russia, marginalized individuals are called *bomzhes* [persons without permanent domicile]. They prefer warm railways stations, underground passages and metro stations and keep soul and body together by begging at churches and in the streets; they are mostly drunk and filthy; at all times they have all their belongings with them packed in dirty bags on wheels.

Strange as it may seem the socially marginalized who spoke with a lot of feeling about their privations ("they have to asleep in entrance halls"; "they go hungry for days" and "are battered by the militia") still called Russia a "great power" contrary to their obvious dissatisfaction with their everyday existence:

*Russia is a great country because it is a vast continent (a homeless woman of 23).*

*Russia is a great country! No other country is higher than we are (a homeless man of 49).*

*Russia today is the strongest power which has always been and will remain invincible (a homeless man of 61).*

The homeless are obviously hostile to other countries, including the United States, a collective image of all and everyone guilty of Russia's misfortunes; of those who envy Russia and "plot against it":

*America does not need stronger Russia (a homeless man of 30).*

*The US with its ideology of immorality, corruption and sleazy politics intends to destroy Russia; it is unquestionably an enemy (a homeless woman of 35).*

*Today, in the West they published a book "Kak my razvalivali SSSR" (How We Pulled Down the Soviet Union); a journalist interviewed all former American leaders who explained how they had destroyed the Soviet Union. They also destroyed Yugoslavia. It is in their interests to split everything. They want to split Russia (a homeless man of 36).*

According to the homeless of Russia the United States does not fight with Russia because the Russian national character is unpredictable:

*They do not bomb us because they fear us. Bismarck said in one time: Never go at war with Russia because it will parry each of your stratagems with utter stupidity (a homeless man of 36).*

*They are afraid of us because they do not know what to expect. We are crazy, with no brains at all. Anybody can throw a felt boot on a nuclear weapons control panel (a homeless man of 30).*

The homeless who do not want to work on principle; who have no habit of regular employment and who look at the state, charities and private persons for help regard the Soviet Union in which all citizens enjoyed "high social guarantees" as an ideal:

*We lived much better in the Soviet Union; now life is much worse. Russia is perishing after the Union's disintegration. The way I lived when I was young and the way I live now are two major differences. The shops are full yet everything is imported. I tell you this: everything was much better in Soviet times because there was stability. I was socially protected under Soviet power; today I am not (a homeless man of 62).*

Their nostalgia of the Soviet Union is fed by the need to push responsibility for their lives on the state; they look for external enemies to justify their personal failures.

Their idea of Russia as a great power is a psychological trait of the authoritarian personality and a strong compensatory response of the socially vulnerable people.

## 7. Deputies of the State Duma of the RF Federal Assembly

We paid particular attention to the third category of the respondents, whose social status refers them to the political elite.

In 2009, we conducted 31 in-depth interviews with deputies of the State Duma of the RF FC (5th convocation) (18 members of the United Russia faction; 6 members of the Fair Russia faction and 6 members of the CP RF faction) who represented the political elite of Russia. They were polled on the condition of absolute anonymity which explains why the references are limited to the respondent's party affiliation.

The respondents tinged their positive descriptions of Russia with imperial pathos worded as a "great", "invincible", "mighty" country with a unique geographic location.

*Russia is a great country with traditions and culture of its own which serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia (a deputy of the United Russia faction).*

Members of the political elite invariably stressed that Russia is an important and respected player on the world scene, "the country without which no important world problems are discussed". Imperial pathos betrayed itself in the statements of the deputies who stressed that in international politics Russia was not merely realizing its own foreign policy interests but was always ready to help others:



*At all times the Russian people was fighting for the freedom of other countries, it always helped, for example, the Balkan states and always defended what was fair (a deputy of the CP RF faction).*

*Dissatisfied with the international order of the last few decades many countries pin their hopes on Russia (a deputy of the United Russia faction).*

*Russia wants friendship with all countries. The president and the prime minister use peaceful terms: partners, allies. At all times Russia always preferred to settle all the problems peacefully; this is true of the situation in South Ossetia, Iraq, Iran and Yugoslavia (a deputy of the United Russia faction).*

The respondents unanimously supported the opinion that Russia owed its “economic prosperity” mainly to its natural riches and “fuel prices”; that the natural riches were the object of the Russians’ traditional national pride and a reason to regard Russia a state of the “world level”.

*We supply the EU countries with up to 50%, or sometimes even 70% of energy fuels they need which means that the Europeans cannot live without our help (a deputy of the United Russia faction).*

This group of respondents regretted that the Soviet Union had fallen apart; that the “great country” had disappeared and that Russia had lost its former might:

*Our mighty power which the rest of the world had taken into account degenerated into a Third World country with weak economy and a huge number of problems in all branches (a deputy of the CP RF faction).*

The respondents were convinced that the Belovezhie agreements, which made the Union republics independent states, had destroyed the political and economic relations rooted in several decades of Soviet history.

They firmly believed that the United States, more than any other country, wanted to weaken Russia or even to see it disintegrated:

*Today, the US will do everything to weaken Russia economically and politically; it is weaving a web of military bases along its borders (a deputy of the CP RF faction).*

According to the respondents, America’s “hostile policy” is explained by Russia being its main geopolitical rival:

*Today, they say in so many words in America that Russia is using its natural riches ineffectively. Ms. Albright says that it is unfair that Siberia belongs only to Russia. What this political witch says the American president thinks. This means that the US openly formulates its claims to Russia’s territory and its natural resources (a deputy of the CP RF faction).*

The respondents compared “lost” Russia with the Soviet Union when the majority of the polled had been sure of their future; when “each citizen” enjoyed a weighty package of social guarantees complete with free education and medical services along with guaranteed employment for high school graduates, etc:

*I was born in the Soviet Union and enjoyed many things in it. I never paid a single ruble for education. The state was rich enough to educate a young man and help him become an admiral or a navy commander. Russia today can hardly do this (a deputy of the CP RF faction).*

The respondents demonstrated post-imperial nostalgia and imperial pathos very much obvious when they were holding forth about Russia as a great power on which many other states depended and which they had to take into account. Russia’s greatness is rooted in the following: rich natural resources and unique geographic location. According to the respondents, Russia is reviving and is dynamically developing both economically and politically.

Political elite can be described as a reference group for the rest of society. Their assessments and opinions speak of their post-imperial nostalgia and betray symptoms of the authoritarian syndrome (they want to live in a “great power”, to obey a strong leader and they hate foreigners). In this context the future of Russia’s democratization and modernization is fairly vague.

## 8. Conclusion

Today, the Russian society, whether young people, the older generation, Duma deputies or homeless, suffers of the authoritarian syndrome.

The Great Power pathos formed by two basic components — Russia is a great power and/or nostalgia of the lost Soviet might — serves the leitmotiv of authoritarian sentiments.

We have identified three main arguments the respondents relied on when talking of the country’s greatness: the vast territory; huge natural riches and a “specifically Russian spirit” or “specifically Russian mentality.” On the whole, the answers were emotional and irrational: all in one breath people enumerated the headaches and hardships of their everyday existence in Russia and repeated the mantra: “Russia is great and powerful”.

Nostalgia of the Soviet Union is caused by three factors of which all respondents (whether old enough to have personal experience of life in the USSR or too young to have it) invariably spoke.

First, they all wanted law and order which they interpreted broadly from being able to get out of home without fear to labor discipline when nobody was late for work and everybody obeyed all formal rules. The respondents obviously pined for

the atmosphere of friendship in which people trusted each other and were ready to help. Mutual assistance and cohesion typical of the Soviet Union according to the respondents, is absent from contemporary Russia. Second, the widest social guarantees supplied by the state which bred confidence in the future and helped overcome loneliness. The respondents, who felt that democracy did not make them happy, were prepared to exchange some of the political freedoms for social guarantees of the state. Third, they said that they wanted to live in a “strong”, “powerful” and “great” country (implying the Soviet Union).

We feel that the Great Power pathos is a compensatory response to the respondents' insecurity; mistrust of others and the aggressive and unfriendly atmosphere in Russia.

Aggressiveness is deepened by xenophobia and ethnic intolerance which recently have developed into an acute social problem. In a multinational state xenophobia not merely negatively affects the psychological atmosphere; it threatens the national sovereignty. Many Russians take the phrase “Russia for the Russians” as an epitome of patriotism while it merely points to intolerance and the highest degree of nationalism. In his “Notes on Nationalism” George Orwell wrote that as distinct from patriotism, nationalism is “the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labeled ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and also the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil” (Orwell G., 1945).

Nationalist ideas and the Great Power pathos in the negative social context marked by moral degradation, insecurity and lack of mutual trust which weigh down on the Russians' mass consciousness bring to mind the Weimar Republic. This sounds pessimistic yet if the present situation continues Russia will never become a developed democratic state.

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