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The Emerging International Ideocracy and Russia's Quest for Normal Politics

Alexander Lukin

Abstract: This article analyses modern Western society from the standpoint of the concept of 'ideocracy'. The author suggests that the development of mass societies and mass ideologies—noted by a number of theorists and philosophers since the end of the 19th century—led to a qualitatively new level of social development in the second half of the 20th century. The globalisation of the economy and mass communications has led to the globalisation of the masses, beyond the confines of national borders. That, in turn, has served as the basis for the appearance of a new social structure: the international ideocracy. This article describes the primary features of that structure, the path of its likely development and its interaction with the non-ideological world—as defined by the notion of 'normalcy'. It also examines Russia's possible path of development as a state that finds itself on the borders of ideological societies.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the world entered a period of international conflicts and military actions that claimed the lives of numerous people and destabilised entire regions. These are fundamentally different in nature from Cold War conflicts and share a common basis. During the Cold War, local armed conflicts that were caused by, for example, territorial disputes between smaller states or by internal destabilisation resulting in a coup or civil war, often led to intervention by the two major camps of world politics led by the United States and the Soviet Union. On the one hand, such interventions exacerbated the situation, but on the other hand, they were carried out within the framework of certain rules. For example, the two camps were able to reach an agreement concerning their respective spheres of influence, such that the West recognised the situations that developed in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as falling within the Soviet sphere; while Moscow understood that events in France in 1968, Grenada in 1983 and in Panama in 1989 were part of the US sphere. This practice basically perpetuated the idea of dividing the world into spheres of influence that was enshrined in the agreement reached at the Yalta Conference.

Protracted wars mainly occurred in buffer areas that did not clearly fall within the sphere of influence of one or the other of the power centres, and those therefore became points of geopolitical rivalry. The two sides made attempts to reach peaceful settlements, acting as overlords pressuring their client states—sometimes unsuccessfully, as in Vietnam, and at other times successfully, as in Korea. Although these conflicts had a serious ideological basis—namely, the struggle between the Soviet ideology of communism and the Western ideology of 'democratism'—for both the

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ultimate goal was to spread their system throughout the world. This can also be viewed from the standpoint of foreign policy realism: the theory of the struggle for spheres of influence and toward a balance of power.

The situation changed fundamentally after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet ideology disappeared along with the country that had spawned it. Russia no longer viewed the world as a stage for spreading its own ideal political model. It began gradually returning to the traditional approach of the post-Westphalian world of protecting its sovereignty and influence, especially in its own region. Most of the states not falling within the West's sphere of influence, including those that retained communist regimes, continued to view the world in the same way. For example, China and Vietnam rejected traditional Stalinist communism in domestic policy, and the communist messianic approach toward the outside world.

The expanding Western camp interpreted the collapse of the Soviet Union as a victory for its own ideology, an attitude that only strengthened the ideological foundations of Western foreign policy. Both domestically, and in its foreign policy, the West increasingly turned into an international ideocratic system in which ideology almost completely overshadowed realism and the ability to assess problems pragmatically. According to the new Western foreign policy ideology, all spheres of influence except its own are a thing of the past. According to the West, the world itself is not so much a sphere of influence, as it is a stage for disseminating what it believes is the very best social model—one that the people of every country of the world should naturally want to adopt. It is therefore not only acceptable, but necessary, to interfere in other countries' local and inter-state conflicts to vindicate this social model. The only annoying exceptions to this rule are a handful of major countries, especially those with nuclear weapons: Russia, China and, to some extent, the other BRICS states. Although it turned out to be impossible to democratise those countries quickly, it was nonetheless necessary to at least deny them the right to have their own interests in the larger world, because they were working against progress—that is, against the dissemination of the only legitimate model of social organisation. Taking advantage of its predominant influence in international organisations, the United States and its allies have tried to reconstruct the entire model of international law to conform to this model by promoting the concepts of, 'humanitarian intervention', 'responsibility to protect' and 'global governance' and interpreting the ideas of 'international community', 'universal values' and so on, in this spirit. In fact, the very idea of global governance was intended to confirm the West's dominance in the world. Other countries, and especially the largest states, responded only half-heartedly at first, but then began more actively advocating the reform of the system in order to acquire a greater role and influence. That is the main thrust of BRICS, the largest association among those states.

As a result, the majority of international conflicts have taken on a new character. The reason for their escalation—and sometimes even their occurrence in the first place—is not the interference of two roughly equal power centres striving to support the warring parties, but the clash of two different but no less antagonistic factors: the ideocracy of the West and the traditional approach to government and the international order. In Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine, the West has been dealing with world views it finds outdated and completely baffling. According to Western ideology, people of all the countries of the world should yearn for the 'right' social and political model because it corresponds to the innate aspirations of all people—'freedom', 'democracy' and 'prosperity'. If it proves difficult to establish this model

somewhere, it means that ‘the people’ there do not have power over their own country: a tyrant, dictator or an external force that is hostile to ‘democracy’ is imposing its unnatural views on them. Every internal and international conflict is seen as a struggle between the pro-Western democratic forces of progress and the anti-democratic forces of regression: this or that faction, group or state is considered progressive and the others regressive—and every possible form of assistance is extended to the progressive player, up to and including military aid. Western media loudly trumpets the progressive side in the conflict while demonising the other side.

That approach worked well in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, when the United States and its allies were dealing with peoples of similar cultures who, while recalling the recent Soviet domination, saw an accession to Western alliances and associations as a guarantee against imaginary new threats from the East. And despite some differences with Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland—whose culture and values differed somewhat from the accepted canon of ‘European values’—the expansion of NATO and the European Union into Eastern Europe went fairly smoothly. However, the West ran into more serious problems further east.

The ‘progressive’ pro-Western forces in Eastern Europe quickly toppled the lingering communist regimes that had only maintained their hold on power with the help of repression and Soviet support. But far more importantly, the ‘civil society’ that came to power established a new system that more or less corresponded with the Western ideological model. Some difficulties associated with corruption, the influence of traditional religious values and so on were viewed as temporary phenomena stemming from inexperience. However, most of the former Soviet republics had already overthrown their communist regimes and the political systems that came to power in their place did not live up to expectations. The fate of Turkey was also unclear, but the most acute problem arose in the Arab world where the wars and ‘colour revolutions’ in Iraq, Libya and Syria replaced authoritarian regimes, not with democracies, but with chaos and civil war.

The reason for this is the clear contradiction between Western ideology and reality. The people of most states have different cultural traditions, different understandings of the optimal socio-political model and different ways of resolving conflicts. Almost nowhere are those perceptions—that are often based on a variety of deeply rooted religious and philosophical values—congruent with those held in the US and Europe.¹ Leaders of most non-Western countries do not see the world as the West does. According to tradition, they consider themselves as having an absolute right to sovereignty and do not want to change their policy as demanded by Washington or Brussels. In part, this really is due to their desire to remain in power, but also in part because they have a better understanding of their own people and the situation in their country. For example, former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi—one of the most brutal and cynical dictators of the Middle East who went to great lengths to unite Libya and suppress Islamic radicalism—warned that in the event of his overthrow, Libya would become a base for terrorism and thousands of refugees would flood into Europe.² He agreed to make significant concessions for the sake of economic cooperation and expected that the West would act pragmatically in pursuing its interests. However, he underestimated the extent to which Western policy was ideologised and, as a result, he was killed. But he turned out to be right about the future of his country. The same thing happened in Iraq and Syria.

The ideological approach of the West is extremely primitive. Even communist ideology assumed that the ideal social system for each country would emerge at a

particular stage of historical development, when its productive forces attained a certain level of advancement. Of course, in a number of specific cases, Soviet aid to local ‘progressive’ and pro-communist forces was seen as a means of accelerating that process. But in more ‘backward’ countries, Soviet officials recommended the gradual building up of communism, after a transition period during which the people were allowed certain bourgeois indulgences: private property, some elements of political pluralism, etc. The current idea of the West that the people of every country are immediately willing to accept the values of ‘democracy’ in their entirety—including the moral aspects, that contradict the beliefs of the absolute majority of the world’s religions—is far more naïve and potentially destabilising.

This ideology dominates and will continue to dominate in the West. In fact, the West will be unable to carry out any other policy in the foreseeable future because its ideologised foreign policy is only part of a comprehensive Western ideocratic system based on the long-term development of underlying socio-economic processes.

Ideology

Although the study of the concept of ideology is not part of mainstream Western thinking, several intellectual traditions have closely examined the issue of the indoctrination of Western society at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century. Ever since the time of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, questions have been raised regarding the transformation of ideas and theories that were previously considered objective, into a certain system of clichés and stereotypes, that perform a specific function in society associated with the character and interests of those who formulate them. Whereas Kierkegaard opposed religious dogmatism, Nietzsche criticised the cultural system as a whole. Marx, the first to refer to these functional systems as an ideology (the term previously had a different meaning), considered them as a whole system used by the dominant culture to justify the privileged position of the ruling classes.³

This marked the emergence of an approach that Paul Ricoeur later termed the ‘school of suspicion’⁴: suspicions that thoughts and their systems were not as they are presented—that is, that they are not the result of individual and original work, but are ready-made clichés that deceive others, as well as their authors, about their true nature. In reality, these clichés stand for nothing more than the interests of social groups (according to Marxists), or psychological personality traits (Sigmund Freud or Vilfredo Pareto).

It was primarily, but not exclusively, Marxist philosophers—who criticised the official theories of capitalist society—that developed this theme in the 20th century. This is understandable because, as part of the official ideology, official social sciences—and especially the political science that emerged in the United States—continued to regard the ‘scientific’ (primarily Western) view of the world as the only true and objective perspective. Their critical approaches toward the existing ideology, despite all their differences, can be summarised in the following points:

- (1) Ideology is a system of ideas, norms and principles that act as a mechanism for the preservation and propagation of a given social system and, accordingly, reflect the interests of those wanting to preserve it.⁵

- (2) Ideology performs the crucial function of integrating individuals in society by giving them reference points and creating an understandable picture of the world.⁶
- (3) Although ideology has existed at all times, industrial (capitalist) society significantly increased its integrative and accordingly consolidative role, leading to significant changes in the character of that society. For example, György Lukács pointed out that labour changes fundamentally under capitalism: it is abstracted from something concrete and takes on the nature of a commodity—strictly rational and concisely calculated. Lukács writes: ‘Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man.’⁷

The meticulous analyst of consciousness Merab Mamardashvili identified similar conditions for the appearance of modern ideologies: (1) the emergence of ‘ideological social structures’ or ‘mass society’ (a significant segment of the population with a relatively high standard of living based on the creative and high-tech work of others, and making possible the mass commodity production; (2) mass cultural production, intellectual labour of an impersonal character due to its specialisation and industrialisation. That makes the deliberate fabrication of consciousness possible and necessary ‘to influence people’s minds so that they carry out various social projects and tasks’, with the result that ‘by virtue of their uniformity, their thinking becomes as uniform as their behaviour’.⁸

Mass communication media, which first appeared in the 20th century, plays a special role in this process. With the basic issue of education already resolved through the elimination of illiteracy and the democratisation of culture, anyone can now act as a producer or consumer of products of cultural production.⁹ In that new society, ideology provides vital reference points for mainstream consumers, giving meaning and significance to their life as part of society and thereby forcing them to voluntarily justify and perpetuate the existing social structure.

Ideocracy

The course of historical development has shown that although, initially, the totalitarian Soviet and Nazi systems were indeed the most radical examples of the rule of ideology, the so-called ‘democratic’ state also followed the path of ideologisation, albeit in a somewhat milder and less outwardly evident form. Ideocratic systems also developed in those states.

A social system based on ideology is commonly called an ideocracy. The authors of one of the few monographs on ideocracy, Yanush Pekalkevich and Alfred Wayne Penn, write:

The legitimacy of an ideocratic political system derives from the principles of its monistic ideology. It is assumed that the decision makers of the system have a strictly defined framework of reference that allows them an absolutely correct interpretation of events.¹⁰

The distinctive feature of monistic ideology is that ‘reality can be interpreted by a universally true and exhaustive set of ideas.’¹¹

While agreeing that the most studied ideocracies are the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century (Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union), the authors identify a second 'ideal type': the populist ideocracy. This ideocracy 'derives its voluntary acceptance from a high level of support for a commonly held monistic ideology'.¹²

Pekalkevich and Penn recognise that all societies, including democratic ones, have ties to some form of ideology. However, a democracy differs from an ideocracy by virtue of its ideological pluralism: the opposite of ideological monism. They cite the example of the United States, whose political system 'involves a set of generally held beliefs that encourage a selective interpretation of history, present day reality, and the principles on which the system is founded'.¹³ But the difference between the pluralistic US system and monistic ideocracy is that the 'conflict over the meaning of these beliefs and their application has abounded throughout American history',¹⁴ while such debates are impossible in a monistic system.

American theorists are surely correct in arguing that the US and modern European political systems are far more pluralistic than, say, those of Stalin and Hitler. But the question here concerns the degree of pluralism. It is wrong to say that totalitarian societies did not discuss their own histories and political systems. They did have such discussions, even heated debates, but they took place within a very narrow space and the scope of those discussions was severely limited. And although the limits of what is permitted in Western society are much wider, limits do exist and they are constantly becoming narrower.

Pekalkevich and Penn themselves refer to those limits and explain that in American society it is permissible to hold discussions on only a certain limited and selective set of viewpoints. Discussions on any other viewpoints are next to impossible. A vivid evidence of this is the emergence of the idea of 'political correctness' and, most recently, the spread of various such codes that give rise to new phenomena such as 'vindictive protectiveness' and 'creating a culture in which everyone must think twice before speaking up, lest they face charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse'.¹⁵ The Chancellor of the University of Oxford and last Governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten has pointed out the similarity between attacks on freedom of speech in Hong Kong universities by the Chinese government, and the situation in some UK and US universities. The danger, he notes, comes from within as 'some students and teachers now seek to constrain argument and debate' by introducing rules of 'no-platforming' and 'safe spaces' (i.e. those whose opinions they strongly dislike should not be given a platform to speak and students should be protected from such opinions).¹⁶ In some European countries censorship begins as early as at school.¹⁷

Absolute freedom of speech is nothing more than an ideological cliché in Western society. People in the US and Europe can freely discuss the type of democracy that is better and how to achieve it, but not whether democracy is desirable in general. They can speak about the best ways to fight for the equality of men and women or white and black people, but not whether they are actually equal in their natural abilities. It is still possible to debate the wisdom of homosexual marriage, but it is unacceptable to suggest that homosexuality is an illness or deviation. Of course, you will not be sent to a labour camp or tortured by the Gestapo for holding an incorrect opinion, but you might very well get fired from a prestigious post, ostracised by the press and excommunicated from decent society. A person might still be subjected to administrative or criminal prosecution for expressing certain opinions: for example, for denying the Holocaust (and, in some countries, the genocide of the Armenians), for

refusing to recognise homosexuality as normal, or for the distribution of unsanctioned information.

In addition to a narrowing of the scope of what is permitted, the dominant ideology is moving toward monism. Take at least the theory of the natural, inalienable rights of the individual and the concept of universal human values that emerged from it. Just one and a half centuries ago, that was only one of the existing theories, and the founder of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, termed natural law 'rhetorical nonsense' and natural and inalienable rights as 'nonsense upon stilts'.¹⁸ Today 'human rights' are taken as an article of faith, as the centre of a dominant ideology that allows for no doubt. The notions of 'democracy', 'the market economy', 'globalisation', 'humanitarian intervention' and so on have similarly become articles of canon. In effect, the dominant ideology has transformed into a secular religion, with its own sacred concepts as objects of worship as well as fetishes (but now in the literal and not the Marxist sense of the word). And this new religion has expanded beyond the confines of the state to become the ideology of the entire Western world and, just like Soviet Marxism, tries to pass itself off as scientific and universal.

The scope of Western ideology expands in full accordance with the definition of monism formulated by Pekalkevich and Penn: it not only affects politics, but also regulates family relations and relationships between co-workers and colleagues, determines the form of education and upbringing for children, and so on. Various aspects of societal life and scientific knowledge are fully merged with it: the medical field conforms to the ideology by proving that homosexuality and many mental disorders are no longer deviations, but the norm. Anthropology does the same by denying the existence of separate human races and other sciences do likewise. The line between scientific knowledge and ideological postulates is blurring: behind each there stands not objective scientific research, but the interests of lobby groups. Is global warming fact or fiction? Is alcohol beneficial or harmful? Are genetically modified organisms (GMOs) unhealthy? Is this or that drug beneficial or harmful? The answer is determined by the advertising battles between the manufacturers of this or that product and those of their competitors, as well as the politicians and media outlets that sponsor the relevant research.

Of course, Western society is far less repressive than totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. But that does not mean its ideology is not monistic. Its nearly universal dominance instils in its adherents a much greater degree of conviction and facilitates society's acceptance of its postulates. (In fact, this level of conviction never existed in the Soviet Union, especially in the final years of its existence.) Thus, brutal repression is not applied, not only because it would violate the ideological postulates, but also because there is naturally no need for it. This system is consistent with the model of a populist ideocracy.

'Information society' and globalisation

The movement of Western ideology toward monism is based on significant advances in technological development and the evolution of social structures in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. First, the market economy in combination with increased productivity created more opportunities for a large portion of the population to live comfortably, without the need for excessive labour.

That part of the population known as ‘the masses’—and whose growing influence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was noted by ‘the revolt of the masses’ theorists Gustave Le Bon, José Ortega y Gasset and others—increased significantly, contributing in no small measure to the creation of the so-called ‘welfare state’. At the same time, the development of a market economy has made the elites who govern production dependent on the growing masses and therefore given to flirting with them and indulging their interests and tastes.

This has led, in particular, to a lower level of education that, according to the new ideology, should be affordable, simple and such that students find it amenable and not particularly difficult. The same process has led to the virtual elimination of the high classical style of art—a style that is no longer needed and cannot be sold. The cultural dregs have paired with the cultural elite while the clownish and bawdry that was previously meant for the entertainment of the uneducated segment of the population, has overtaken opera houses and exhibition centres, and primitive pseudo-philosophical discussions have gained currency along with romance and detective novels. This trend is also reflected in aesthetics—for example, in the concept of performance as eye-grabbing and pointless actions that, in contrast to static pictures, are able to hold the interest of the common man. The idols of this world of mass culture are not those who strive for perfection in their art through long training and hard work, but so-called ‘models’ that gain fame for their beautiful appearance and slinky walk, singers with mediocre voices and untrained musicians who perform primitive music with lyrics that are easily understood by the majority of people.

At the forefront are those who manage to attract attention through such primitive and shocking actions as presenting broken toilets as art objects and making art installations from used Coca-Cola cans. Music becomes increasingly primitive and, to become more accessible to the masses, louder and more rhythmic. Objective criteria for artistry disappear along with criteria for product quality, the genuineness of this or that statement and the veracity of this or that news item. And because anyone can now become an artist, actor, writer or musician, the cultural-entertainment business and related media determine who becomes famous.

Ideas that art must be clear and ‘relevant’ coupled with the struggle against ‘elitism’ become part of the official ideology that views art products as ‘commodities’ sold in the ‘market’. Art as a form of independent and creative self-expression is completely replaced with the production of ‘cultural products’ for fulfilling the needs of the mass market. This also applies to the spectator sports industry that has become an integral part of state ideology. There is nothing abnormal about desiring the success of a group with which your life has some connection (your town, athletic team, school, university, country and so on), but taking exaggerated pride in the success of the collective rather than in your own, and identifying yourself completely with that group plays the same illusory and compensatory role as involvement in social networks. In place of individual work and personal effort, individuals rejoice in others’ accomplishments and thereby create the illusion of having made the effort themselves and of belonging to a great cause.

In addition, participation with a group of sports fans—or, for example, the fans of pop singers, actors and other personalities—creates a sense of community based on primitive common symbols. It organises the masses and is therefore useful for maintaining and perpetuating the existing order. Flash mobs—a phenomenon that has only become possible during the Internet era—perform the same function by uniting people previously unknown to each other—‘netizens’ who come from the

scattered rooms and offices of a metropolis—albeit in a meaningless but collective activity, that entertains and even stimulates the public.

The further development of so-called ‘democracy’—that is, the participation of an increasing number of citizens in the ideologically condoned ceremony of influencing the authorities through elections—has changed the very nature of politics. Modern democracy has little in common with democracy as it was originally practised and with its theoretical foundations. From the time of Aristotle to the mid-19th century, democracy was understood as direct government by the people—and by ‘the people’ was meant the most responsible members of society: adult citizens possessed of their personal freedom and property. This was facilitated by a variety of eligibility criteria. But most theorists considered democracy a dangerous ‘rule by the many’ that might seek to impose its will on creative minorities. Aristotle had a name for the current system, in which the people participate in political life through representatives: oligarchy.

Oligarchy is inevitable in today’s world due to population growth and the constant expansion of the electorate, as the qualifying criteria that once denied whole groups access to the political process are removed. Anticipating the threat of dictatorship by this growing majority, US founding fathers James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay evolved a system of ‘checks and balances’ and the separation of powers. (They did not yet use the term ‘democracy’ in a positive sense, but spoke of a ‘republic’.) And although that system is formally preserved in the US Constitution, ideologically and in practice the line advocated by Thomas Jefferson—who insisted on the inalienable right of the majority to rule by its will—has clearly won out.

This has increased the interdependence between politicians and voters, making the former increasingly dependent on the immediate needs of the latter. It gave rise to a new type of populist politician that cared not about solving real problems, but about his own ratings—a policy without strategic thinking that constantly postpones unpopular but necessary decisions.

The marketing of the electoral process and the attitude toward candidates, as if toward a market commodity subject to the choice of consumers, have contributed to this degenerative process. This system is far from the ideal of democracy and it is therefore no surprise that in a recent study, scholars from Princeton characterised it as oligarchy. (The study dealt specifically with the US.)¹⁹ Compare today’s lacklustre leaders in England, the US and France with Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt and the concept becomes immediately clear. The mass of voters, in turn, prefer weak politicians who are completely understandable and do not stand out from the general background.

At the same time, voters usually have a limited choice. What official ideology calls a consensus is, in fact, the result of strict restrictions. What were once differing party platforms have now become almost indistinguishable. It is no simple task to identify the differences between the policies of Labour and the Conservatives during the rule of Tony Blair, or the differences between Germany’s Social Democrats and Christian Democrats (that have teamed up in one government several times). What’s more, it often happens that not a single one of the parties elected to power reflects the interests of voters, on a number of issues. For example, all surveys indicate that most British citizens are ‘euro sceptics’, and yet barriers built into the electoral system keep ‘euro sceptic’ parties out of the political mainstream. The same thing happens in Germany, where the majority of the population is not anti-Russian, and yet all

political parties adopt an anti-Russian stance. In the United States, at least 4–5 candidates formally take part in presidential elections, but voters never know anything about them because TV channels only broadcast debates between the two acceptable parties.

Finally, the development of new information technologies plays an enormous role. The official ideology created the theory of a progressive ‘information society’—a borderless international community of well-informed, active and responsible citizens that make sensible decisions.²⁰ However, for the majority of the population, the Internet—that provides useful information only for those who want it—plays a very different role.

In the reality of today’s economics and politics, people are even more alienated from products and from the authorities. Working in large companies that employ thousands of people, they often do not see the ultimate meaning or results of their activities, even while earning good salaries as cogs in the huge machine. That is what drives the modern global economy: mid-level managers sit from 9 to 6 in countless offices all over the world and only really unwind on the weekends. (Anyone who has seen the wild drunken crowds of white-collar workers filling the streets of London, New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo and every other major city of the world on a Friday night, knows what I mean.)

It would seem that such a fate, while marked by material ease, is unenviable in terms of self-esteem. Participation in social networks, where a person has several hundred ‘friends’ who are often in other cities and countries and whom he has never seen—and who might not even be who they claim to be—constantly exchanging ‘likes’ with them and the occasional meaningless ‘commentary’, and finally, the opportunity to ‘publish’ any of his own ‘works’ and opinions—all of this creates the illusion of significance and of belonging to some important process, the illusion of relevance and importance to the world and other people. Whereas in the past, when journals and publishing house editors rejected a work, that person was not admitted to, for example, the department of theatre direction at a university, for lack of talent. But today, each person is himself an author, publisher and director. Each has an audience consisting of a small number of ‘friends’ who read his work and leave feedback. A critic of the modern Internet ideology Andrew Keen claims that while it ‘worships a creative amateur’, in reality it is very similar to the Marxist utopia and creates an atmosphere of creeping narcissism which is ‘inherently dangerous for the vitality of culture and the arts’.²¹

It is interesting in this regard how attitudes have changed toward diaries. In the past, diaries and personal letters were considered intimate, and it was thought shameful to read someone else’s diary. But today, most of the text on the Internet is essentially the same information normally found in a personal diary, and even comes accompanied with photos and videos explaining who ate what, who slept with whom, what people bought and so on. The reason for this is a psychological need to feel important in a world where you actually mean nothing. And as a direct source of entertainment, the Internet spreads stereotypes far and wide, only serving to further consolidate the new masses. Thus, social networks, that are essentially a part of the dominant ideology, perform an invaluable adaptive and propagandistic role for the ideocracy. Of course, the Internet contains other content, including calls for the overthrow of everything imaginable, but those are not the main messages found there.

New trends in social evolution are also tied to the development of the Internet. As early as the late 1990s, Serge Moscovici noted the beginning of a new process that he

aptly called ‘the globalisation of the masses’—that is, the emergence of ‘a global mass’. That process involves the creation of a supranational community ‘with gigantic nuclei of cities and markets consisting of millions of people who are encouraged to live and consume in the same type of way’, and, in the heyday of electronic and television networks, that ‘on one hand, connect people located at great distances from each other, and on the other hand, penetrate into the very depths of the personal lives of each’. The French sociologist predicted that ‘the rapid development of multimedia systems will accelerate this process with maximum speed.’²²

Thus, the most important aspect of the new system is that it transcends national boundaries. It is a truly globalised ideology that follows in the wake of a globalised economy and that makes it possible to speak of an ideocracy spanning the entire ‘Western’ world. The positive theory of globalisation belongs to the same part of the new ideology as the theory of an ‘information society’. In fact, a variety of interests advocate ideological globalisation: multinational corporations that need a homogeneous labour force speaking a single language; the growing international bureaucracy; and, finally, the sincere convictions of ideology-driven subjects who really believe that their governments bomb neighbouring and distant states out of noble intentions, and to make the world a better place.

In this new community of ideocratic pluralism (as opposed to ideocratic totalitarianism) it is extremely difficult to determine who is actually the perpetrator and who is the victim, who is the beneficiary (the exploiter, in Marxism) and who is the loser (the exploited). Even in a totalitarian society, there is a search for a concrete party guilty of a crime. At the Nuremberg trials, for example, it was difficult to determine who actually gave a particular order, and in what form, and who carried it out, because the crime took on an industrial nature that was based on the division of labour and the degree of each person’s participation was only loosely defined in any legal sense. As a result, it was necessary to declare that an entire organisation was criminal.

But in a strictly centralised totalitarian state system, there is at least a ‘chief ideologist’ who, along with his colleagues, creates the forms and methods of indoctrination. There is also a ‘chief executioner’ who oversees all subordinate executioners and who develops the strategy of repression. But who develops the indoctrination strategy in a pluralistic ideocracy? At whom is it directed? The higher classes of society—that is, the so-called ‘elite’—are most probably the beneficiaries in this system. However, that grouping has no clear boundaries. What’s more, for subjective reasons, its members might understand the objective consequences of their actions, sincerely believing them to be beneficial for society and humane, when, in fact, they cause misery and suffering. In this sense, this class is also a victim of ideocracy. On the other hand, the representatives of the lower strata, sincerely believing the current system to be perfect or, at least, the best possible, and working to strengthen it through reform, can also be considered a pillar of the ideocratic regime.

The problem with this society, as with any ideocracy, and with monopolies in general, is its tendency toward stagnation. Having successfully extended the dominion of the ideology over all of society, the authorities themselves became its victims. Living in an illusory world, they are often unable to objectively analyse problems that arise and find effective solutions for them.

The basic tenets of ‘democratism’ are simple: (1) the Western political system is the most advanced and offers the highest level of freedom and well-being to all members of society; (2) that system (‘democracy’) makes it possible for all people to participate in power structures by exercising their inalienable right to select their

leaders through fair elections; (3) the state guarantees the rights of not only the majority, but also of various minorities (the specific list of which continually expands); (4) all the countries of the world will eventually adopt this system, and the West should help them in this process; (5) various destructive, anti-democratic forces interfere with this natural process, and the West must fight against them to ensure the happiness of the people oppressed by those forces.

However, some of the real problems of the West find no place in this ideology: persistent poverty and social stratification, migration issues, the worsening levels of education, the rise of nationalism, etc. Moreover, as Russian philosopher Alexander Zinoviev pointed out, the existence of the Soviet Union posed a serious challenge that prompted the Western elite to make concessions and expand social programmes, but following the Soviet collapse, the need for those concessions vanished. That is why the 'left' and 'right' parties began to merge and develop a unified programme, in the interests of the ruling elite.²³

Despite its outward strength, the modern Western system began losing its popularity due to its inability to solve actual problems. That led to the current rise in the popularity of parties representing the political extremes: the right, calling for a solution to the migration problem and for preserving traditional morality; and the left, unhappy with the growing inequality in society. It is not yet clear if the centre will manage to withstand this growing discontent.

A normal state system

Unlike the West that moved with redoubled speed toward ideocracy following the Cold War, Russia transitioned from a totalitarian ideocracy into a 'normal' state. By 'normal' is meant a non-ideocratic state that is not trying to impose its model on others, that does not hold itself up as a social ideal and the crown of social evolution, but that is simply trying to solve its pressing, day-to-day problems—like most states of the world. They have a variety of regimes: most often authoritarian, of varying degrees of severity, but also democratic such as those in India or Japan.

It is difficult to define the term 'normal'. It is simpler to give examples of what is normal versus abnormal than it is to arrive at a commonly accepted definition of 'normalcy'. In social life, abnormality is the desire to build social interactions on the basis of man-made ideological norms that contradict laws of nature, time-tested social habits and the nature of human psychology. For example, if people have cultivated wheat at a particular latitude and using a particular soil for thousands of years, but ideology dictates that they plant corn there instead (as happened in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev), that is abnormal. And if, for hundreds of years, it has proven most effective for peasants to work their own farms, but ideology demands they be herded together into communes, forced into a single social unit and paid according to 'man-days'—despite millions of people starving to death in the process—that is not just abnormal, but even absurd. If nature created man and woman differently and made it necessary for them to have a sexual relationship in order to reproduce, but ideology requires that society considers them identical and pronounces it normal for someone to belong to a gender that does not, in fact, exist and to promote sexual relations between members of the same sex—that is abnormal. Similarly, any system based on terror and the murder of innocents is abnormal: after all, the people of every culture are not normally inclined to senselessly kill their friends and loved ones. It is also abnormal when ideology demands that adults and even children who are seriously ill

or deeply disillusioned with life not receive treatment and relief for their sufferings, but are killed, because even the choice to die is a 'human right'. After all, it is considered normal in all human cultures to help those who are ill, suffering or wounded, and not to kill them. And any society is abnormal that, for ideological reasons, does not lock up dangerous lunatics, but leaves them free to walk the streets as people with 'alternative intellectual development'. This has nothing to do with some lofty religious principles, but with simple natural, biological and psychological norms, the violation of which is characteristic exclusively of perverse totalitarian and ideocratic systems. A characteristic feature of an abnormal society is that people live in constant fear, not because of actions they have taken, but for expressing 'incorrect' words and thoughts that can lead to very dangerous consequences if they become known to government spies of the dominant ideology that invades the innermost aspects of human life.

According to these principles, both Soviet and modern Western society are definitely abnormal. However, Russia, having abandoned monistic ideology, is today not very different from dozens of other countries where traditional structures and perceptions coexist alongside more modern ones, and the leadership, clearly not pursuing a particular ideological or social ideal, simply tries to solve problems as best it can. Of course, Russia, like all countries, has elements of ideology that are clearly abnormal. For example, the reforms implemented by the so-called 'liberals' during the early years of Boris Yeltsin's rule were essentially ideological in that they were aimed at building an abstract economic model in the country rather than solving real problems, and which therefore led to the economic collapse of 1998. In recent years, and especially after the annexation of Crimea and the West's onslaught against Russia, ideological elements are gaining force in Russian society. It is abnormal for a government to destroy banned food imports and to forbid foreigners from adopting orphans, thereby dooming them to a miserable existence.

But these elements are still very amateurish and unsystematic compared to the Soviet Union and the modern West. And despite the fact that Russian state-controlled television is clearly ideologised, it pales in comparison with such Western propaganda machines as CNN or the BBC, where alternative points of view that go beyond the ideological consensus are strictly excluded. By the way, that is why the *Russia Today* channel is so popular in Europe and the United States: it provides an alternative, albeit equally ideologised, point of view that critics on both the right and left of the existing order find interesting.

Historically, Russia has always been a part of the Greater West, but its place has been on the periphery. Today we can say that this has both positive and negative aspects. Russia's population has not deeply assimilated those traits of Western civilisation that have caused it to slide into ideocracy. Only a small portion of Russian society identifies itself with the Western ideology that fuses secularism, the Enlightenment theory of progressive social development and the idea of innate and inalienable 'natural rights'.²⁴ As countless surveys have shown, most Russians live in a different world: they care little about political rights and all traditional religions gaining popularity are increasingly critical of secular relativism and promote morals based on absolute values.

And Russia has not yet assimilated the institutions of Western social structures that provide its citizens with the highest level of personal and political freedoms: the rule

of law, the separation of powers, judicial independence, etc. Russia's economic mechanisms are also underdeveloped.

It remains unclear whether Russia can borrow the positive aspects of Western civilisation without slipping into ideocracy—that is, whether it can remain a normal country while becoming freer. But it is obvious that the levels of freedom are already changing. While Western ideologues generally confine their discussion to political freedom, there is a clear tendency in the West toward less personal freedom in the family, in personal relations and so on. Russia unquestionably lacks political freedoms, and yet Russian society is much freer than Western society in other respects. If one were to push the argument and ask people with traditional views where they would rather live—in a society with broad political freedoms but marked by what they believe is rampant depravity, or where there are fewer opportunities to participate in government, but where they are not forced to register 'non-traditional marriages', see parades of homosexuals outside their window, and where the authorities do not remove children from families that provide the 'wrong' upbringing—under certain conditions, the answer might favour the latter.

In any case, for Russia to go this route, it must make a decisive break with its own ideocratic, totalitarian and communist past, in both domestic and foreign policy—and without sliding into the Western form of ideocracy. Without fearing any condemnation of its own past, Russia must emphasise how it fundamentally differs from the Soviet Union. And if it is to contend that Russia is a successor to previous governments, then it is so not to the totalitarian Soviet Union, but to the far more legally conscientious and effective Tsarist Russia (especially as it existed during its final years).

There are as yet few examples of countries that have successfully combined normalcy with a relatively high level of freedom and rapid development. That list probably includes such diverse countries as India, Singapore and, to some extent, South Korea. In this situation, Russia should attempt to avoid the dangerous Western road toward ideocracy of the West. Its ideological monopoly makes it unable to solve pressing social problems, spurring serious discontent among the population. For example, the right might hold sway in solving the migration problem, giving it added influence and leading to a fundamental change in the already self-destructive dominant ideology—thus making it even more secretive and isolationist. Such changes would cause the collapse of existing integrative structures and lead to serious changes in the character of Western society and civilisation.

If the approach advocated by the left wins out, with its call for greater openness based on class, rather than national considerations, Western society will probably change even more radically or disappear altogether. The future could see the Islamisation of Europe or at least significant ideological compromises with an Islam that does not tolerate the current moral 'innovations'. (The United States will also change under the influence of the growing number of migrants from South America, who also bring different values.) An influx of foreigners also destroyed another Western international project—the Roman Empire where Christianity had earlier replaced the dominant state ideology of paganism. And it is difficult to say to what extent the empire changed after that, and how much it remained the same.

However, both the extreme left and extreme right operate within the existing ideological paradigm and are probably unable to constructively address the real problems of society.

Of course, it is still possible that Western ideocracy will completely overtake Russia. However, that is unlikely because only about 10–20% of the population lives

according to that paradigm now. In fact, the West is poised more to defend its civilisation than to spread it aggressively. Meanwhile, two alternative systems are growing more popular: mighty authoritarian China and radical Islam. Perhaps, in its troubled years, Russia is destined to preserve some elements of Western civilisation in the same way that Ireland, another peripheral country, preserved Christianity during the ‘Dark Ages’ of the early Middle Ages.

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Notes

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