

THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S HISTORICAL ECONOMIC  
POSITION ON RUSSIAN IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

*It can be suggested that the formation of Russian national identity is shaped in line with economic developments and political nationalism with intersections where they have influence over one another. One important question to be answered at this point is how the economic developments in Russian Federation following the Dissolution of the Soviet Union affected the national identity of Russia. The main goal of this study is to fill in the gap between economic and political discourses, while revealing the historical connection between capitalism and nationalism in Russia. The study is primarily divided into three main periods and the events are explained based on such chronologies. The first one of these periods comprises modernization movements in Tsarist Russia and Russia's articulation across the global economy; the second one focuses on the socialist regime that began with the Soviet Union; and finally, the third one focuses on the time of Russian Federation.*

**Keywords:** Russian Identity, Nationalism, Soviet Union, Capitalism, Modernization.

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## RUSYA'NIN TARİHSEL-EKONOMİK KONUMUNUN RUS KİMLİĞİ VE MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

### ÖZ

*Rusya'da ulusal kimliğin şekillenmesinde ekonomik gelişmeler ile politik milliyetçiliğin yan yana gittiği ve birbirlerini etkilediği söylenebilir. Özellikle Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Rusya Federasyonu içinde yaşanan ekonomik gelişmelerin Rus ulusal kimliği üzerinde nasıl bir etki yaptığı, cevaplandırılması gereken önemli bir sorudur. Ekonomik ve politik yorumların arasındaki farkın kapatılması ve Rusya'da kapitalizm ve milliyetçilik arasındaki tarihsel ilişkilerin ortaya çıkarılması ise bu çalışmanın temel amacını oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma esasen üç ana döneme ayrılmakta ve yaşananlar bu tarihsel bölümlendirme üzerinden açıklanmaktadır. Bu dönemlerden ilki, Çarlık Rusya'sındaki modernleşme hareketleri ve Rusya'nın kapitalist dünya ekonomisine eklemlenme süreci, ikincisi Sovyetler Birliği ile başlayan sosyalist rejim ve üçüncüsü Rusya Federasyonu dönemidir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rus Kimliği, Milliyetçilik, Sovyetler Birliği, Kapitalizm, Modernleşme.

## INTRODUCTION

Discussions on the economy's impact on the formation of Russian identity are currently characterized largely by two different approaches. The first one comprises the "liberal" wing relating Russia's welfare and growth to the market economy of the West, whereas the second comprises the "nationalist" wing suggesting that such an economic integration would eventually destroy the political institutions and cultural norms that are central to Russian identity. Advocates of the latter state that the economic impact of the West must be eliminated in various ways to create an alternative trade block, which would otherwise even result in dissolution of Russia. Debates continued during chaotic economic reforms undertaken by Yeltsin in 1990s and the successful Putin model in 2000s, until the uncertainty period that began with the financial crisis in 2008. They still continue within the frame of Western sanctions, beginning with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 and Russia's counter-sanctions (Rutland, 2016: 336).

Essentially, Putin's attempts to build a third roadmap entailing the combination of state corporatism and international integration could be observed during the period between 2000 and 2008. However, this model could not survive the 2008 financial crisis and not many alternatives were left upon the country's economic recession in the aftermath. As a result, a model of "Eurasian Economic Union" was aimed to function within the free trade rules as a third alternative in an attempt to create a regional trade block under the control of Russia although this was not put explicitly. Therefore, a possible structure distancing the Western-influenced global organizations would pave the way for Russia's growth and a *Lebensraum* (living space) for Russia to develop further, while yielding a resistance point against the West's economic threats. However, this model did not prove successful either. With the change of the government in Ukraine, the new ruling party abandoned the idea of economic integration with Russia, turning towards the European Union, which led to disagreement between the two countries to an extent that a military conflict was involved as well. As a result of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia gradually ended up falling out with the West and eventually canalized itself across the East by furthering relations with China (Rutland, 2016: 337).

The aforementioned economic models are not only complex models but they also have an opposite nature. It therefore seems extremely difficult to culminate in a solid strategy therefrom to revive Russia's proud and identity for Kremlin. With an outsider's look into Russia, a large number of observers suggest that the nationalistic intelligentsia in Russia is usually squashed into a point between historical theories and geopolitical strategies in its arguments. Economic policies are rarely addressed around this periphery and such nationalist approaches are observed to be based on emotional and irrational perspectives. Fueled by universal principle, liberal economic models are therefore suggested as an alternative that is more rational and bloodless. However, Western researchers watching the Russian transformation overlook the issue of national identity which is the foundation of nationalism. Neoliberal criticism as well as some social democrats in particular still tend to follow the idea of globalization. The argument is based on the idea that globalization renders nation-state pointless and that economic policies are now the only determining factors. However, the truth is different (Rutland, 2016: 337).

In real life, there have usually been intersections between nationalism and economy. Nationalism and capitalism evolved concurrently in the early modern Europe. This is also evident in how Adam Smith titled his famous work "The Wealth of Nations", focusing on the principles of capitalism. Moreover, the book was published on the same day with the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence as a forerunner of nationalism. In this sense, it can be suggested that the formation of Russian national identity is shaped in line with economic developments and political nationalism with intersections where they have influence over one another. One important question to be answered at this point is how the economic developments in Russian Federation following the Dissolution of the Soviet Union affected the national identity of Russia. The main goal of this study is to fill in the gap between economic and political discourses, while revealing the historical connection between capitalism and nationalism in Russia (Rutland, 2016: 338).

The study is primarily divided into three main periods and the events are explained based on such chronologies. The first one of these periods comprises modernization movements in Tsarist Russia and Russia's articulation across the global economy; the second one

focuses on the socialist regime that began with the Soviet Union; and finally, the third one focuses on the time of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin within the frame of Russian Federation. Boris Yeltsin leadership marked the beginning of the economic recession in 1990, which later manifested itself through an institutional chaos, but Vladimir Putin achieved an institutional stability and turned this into economic growth in the early 2000s. It must be noted that the latter was, however, heavily damaged by the political and economic developments in 2008. Russia endeavored to overcome the Russo-Georgian War on one side, while surviving a huge financial crisis on the other. The effects of both incidents still continue in that the situation got even more complicated with economic and political pressures resulting from the Ukrainian crisis and the Annexation of Crimea. Following its intervention in Syria, Russia also showed de facto involvement in the Middle Eastern War, which adds to the uncertainties. With oil and natural gas being the primary revenue sources in Russia, whether Russia will turn into an Autarchist model is not clear due to recession in oil prices and the restrictions sanctioned by the West. Besides, the developments in the global economy and politics mark a process where neo-mercantilist models find favor. Brexit and economic policies of the U.S. President Donald Trump demonstrate popularization of a new kind of approach that shatters neoliberal strategies and revitalizes nationalistic choices. Predicting the implications of these developments and Putin's choices on the stability of political regime in Russia is not very easy but a historical analysis can help enhance our foresight. Therefore, the historical role of the economic factor on Russia's modernization and evolution into a nation-state should be revisited.

## **1. NATIONALISM AND MODERNIZATION IN RUSSIA**

In the eastern societies and Third World countries that did not undergo an economic, political and social transformation (such as Russia), unlike Western Europe in the early modern period, social institution always goes through a process of peripheralization as a result of losing its autonomous nature before evolving into a modern (nation) state. According to Giddens, expansion of nation-state system and spreading of nationalist movements across the globe, not only in Europe, is caused by the global expansion of capitalism as well as dominance of military forces of the West. Nationalist movements around the globe—both in the colonial and the post-colonialist

worlds—have heavily been built against the Western supremacy in general, and specifically against the erosive effect of capitalism on traditional life styles (Giddens, 1981: 195-196).

In this context, the nationalist movements that emerged during periods of the Tsardom of Russia and the Soviet Union are observed to be of a reactive nature and massify under a systematic of economic exploitation and political pressure, rather than primordial motives, creating a phenomenon of "invention" or "discovery". In fact, even Kohn, who discusses nationalism in terms of ideological and moral dimensions instead of modern perspective elements, notes the belatedness of nationalism in Russia when compared to the progress in the West and actually, in the Eastern Europe as well. In doing so, he refers to this aforementioned "inventive" nature to a certain degree. According to Kohn, neither the grand palace nor the government extended support towards nationalists and Pan-Slavists in Russia during the 19th century. These groups were rather encouraged only by a small group of intellectuals that acted as if they had been reinventing the wheel during that period. The degree of this indifference dominated the society as well as political elites so much that the only Slavic community gripping the Russian was the Polish whom they approached as an enemy (Kohn *et al.* 1953). Nationalist movements emerged in Russia were therefore acted upon before the nations they claimed to represent.

This is actually not surprising. As a political transformation product, nationalism functions as a mitigator of sufferings experienced in the transition from the conventional to the modern when discussed within the context of a transition-specific ideology. Smith suggests that such "collective" ideologies as nationalism can indeed eliminate the suffering and troubles experienced in transitions and can instead bolster stability and reintegration. Furthermore, this also explains why nationalism unfolds in the periods of crisis (Smith, 1983: 49-50).

Individuals usually attempt to achieve a transcendence over their own mortal nature by identifying themselves with the nation they belong to in this global system where nation-states are primary political actors. The relative decline of "supernatural" religions especially during modernization gave rise to the emergence of a "civil" religion. Public rituals, political or civil acts of worshiping and loyalty were diffused into the society in order to maintain the order in

heterogeneous societies and further solidify the identity with nationalism. This brought about the sanctification of certain aspects of social life (Guibernau, 1996: 46; Giner, 1993).

Giddens states that this aspect of nationalism places it onto a different platform than the nation-state concept. Unlike the institutional concept of nation-state, nationalism arises as a psychological phenomenon that entails making sense of requirements and tendencies to a significant extent. Sustaining the sense of secure existence for an individual means survival of one's own cognitive beliefs in environments and conditions accommodating daily activities. Ordinarity has substantially replaced conventions in daily life conditions where sustained sense of secure existence is furthered by a common language, the feeling of belonging to a national community and other similar factors. Individuals pursue a retreat towards "mass rituals" in usual living spaces where almost any element is commoditized within a capitalist economic system (Giddens, 1981: 193-194). Consequently, attempts are made to either eliminate or restrain possible unexpected maneuvers in the periods of abrupt social changes. This process is composed of such attempts as building new institutional structures (e.g. festivals, sports, industrial unions), inventing new statute systems (hierarchical education system or royal ceremonies) and creating societies (such as nation) that determine and symbolize integrity of natural/artificial groups. That explains the "fictional" nature of the majority of nation and nationalism phenomena (Hobsbawm, 1990: 141-143).

Capitalism's pressure on Russia is crystal clear, so is the interconnection between modernization processes and nationalism in Russia as well as the existence of a social structure emphasizing the Russian identity. There has always been a connection between modernization strategies—including industrialization, urbanization and centralization—and the nationalist foreign policy followed in the country throughout the period spanning from Tsarist Russia through Soviet Union, and eventually, the Russian Federation. Gellner finds this unsurprising. Nationalism is a "sociological requirement" in the modern world only. Above all, nations can only emerge when general social conditions require high cultures controlled by a sole standard center with a homogeneous nature dominating the entire population. Such conditions exist only in industrialized societies. The need of "high cultures" is impossible to meet in differentiated and illiterate

societies characterized largely by strong local ethnic identities and relations (Gellner, 1983: 35-38).

With that being said, a consideration of the emergence of Russian nationalism and Russian identity basically through the relationship between nationalism and industrialization demonstrates that there are certain aspects remaining uncovered. Nationalism is primarily known to exist in regions where industrialization is not embarked on. Nationalism emerged in regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire which cannot be considered industrialized. Furthermore, only the "internal" movement patterns are considered when it comes to a perspective focusing on change models based on internal economic dynamics such as industrialization and industrial society. The competitive environment fostered in capitalist global economies are projected onto the military realm in a way that it requires consideration of "external" production and change relations preceding industrialization and remaining in effect and continuity. This process brings forth an international network of economic exploitation leading to unequal change relations in the upholding nationalistic movements and national identities as amplified by globalization, geopolitical threats and a tension of center-periphery shaping international policies.

Nairn suggests that nationalism emerged as a result of the unbalanced and unequal development of capitalist global economy since the 18th century. The reality is that "central" countries with economic supremacy dominate over the underdeveloped "peripheral" countries. The gap between developed and underdeveloped countries is too huge to fill in. However, this does not eliminate development expectations of their people. This is where elites of the peripheral countries nourish and feed the nationalist feelings to overcome this expectation, leading to the exercise of reactive nationalism by the entire society. Nationalism in central countries becomes as inevitable as the rise of nationalism in the peripheral countries only when it evolves into being the new norm of global system in the long term. Imperialist expansion of capitalism therefore caused the "basic contradiction" to manifest itself through international conflicts instead of class struggle (Nairn, 1981: 332,352).

The impact of unequal economic development on the rise of nation and nationalism is much better understood especially in the frame of



imperialist relations. Economic and social inequalities fueled by the capitalist global economy regularly pave the way for the kind of climate that can accommodate development of nationalism. Minc argues that the capitalist world system fails to resolve the crisis it plans to overthrow. There is the "power play" between international monopolies on the one hand. On the other hand, consumption demands turned into a life purpose; wealth into top value; and money into an absolute reference, together with uncertainties in transition towards market economy, appalled the society, intensifying the need to resort to ethnic fantasies (Minc, 1995: 16).

These insights demonstrate how the capitalist economic process outside the Western Europe could determine the relationship of dependency. Confronted with actual imperialism or such threats by the ever-strengthening West, these countries are opposed to independent economic and social structures by means of continuous dominance with political control mechanism internally. In fact, adoption of a controlled economic approach has always prevailed in the Tsarist Russia as well as in Soviet Russia and Post-Soviet Russia heavily under state control. There were several attempts during the terms of office of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. However, the capitalist economic structure could not be fully developed or, even at the times it was developed, social and cultural integration could not be achieved through specialization and division of labor unlike the Western economies. Therefore, the minimum conditions were enough for Russian political system to become ample for nationalist movements, rendering the Russian nationalistic identity as the main uniting element.

## **2. RUSSIAN IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAPITALIST WORLD ECONOMY**

An analysis of the past five centuries' Western hegemony demonstrates that the presence of European supremacy goes beyond its internal dynamics, relying on a non-European colonial mechanism as well. The wealth created by capitalism cannot be explained solely and simply by the local labor class of "central" countries. It is particularly emphasized that the exploitation of the "periphery" accounts considerably for this wealth (Wallerstein, 1983). Framing this idea, Wallerstein suggests two different models, namely, the world-empires and world-economies, arguing that the world-economies

developed during the 16th century Western Europe are characterized by this factor which consists of a great many sovereign countries, rather than single political sovereignty, under the dominance of trade and change. In other words, he emphasizes that the process was determined and shaped by the rise of the capitalist hegemony. He states that capitalism was spread in this era by exploiting the mine- and agriculturally-abundant regions, such as Eastern Europe and Latin America, by means of a wide range of colonial methods including use of military force (Wallerstein, 1974: 14-63).

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Emergence of capitalism in Europe, along with its expansion and evolution into being a global system is primarily resulted by a new kind of military organization defined within the frame of European power balance system and nation-state. Modern Europe is distinguished from all other non-European world civilizations— including former civilizations—for having this kind of a competitive environment and military force (sea forces in particular) in Europe. In fact, Giddens describes capitalism as a military arena where expansion and competition in industrial production is vital to survival (Giddens, 1981: 190).

### **2.1. Modernization in Tsarist Russia**

In this context, the Tsarist Russia was concerned about the progress achieved by the West and resorted to an economic and political modernization process which also included military modernization. However, the modernization program to follow was determined according to the demands of administrative elites (the palace) and the army rather than considering the needs of people due to drawbacks in social infrastructure and technological backwardness. Confronted with the systematic pressures from the West on one side, and struggling with internal shortcomings and reactions against change, Russia strove to maintain its “central” position while distancing itself from the “periphery” as much as possible. This process entailed a reactive kind of nationalism and a national identity which should be reinforced, and was amplified even more with internal developments caused by competition with the West. In an attempt to claim its position amongst central countries of the capitalist global economy, Russia followed similar colonization policies undertaken by the West, imposing them across a wide region spanning from the Eastern Europe to Caucasia. For instance, upon coming into power, Peter the

Great (Peter I) (1627-1725) initiated a structural change policy in the country's economy and simultaneously, Russia followed a systematic expansion policy for raw material possession and reaching warm waters. With that being said, neither Peter the Great had a concern to build a capitalist economy structure, nor Russia had access to an environment that could foster it. However, new lands were captured and the country's population increasingly grew as of the early 18th century, resulting in increased trade activities domestically and the birth of a state-central community acting on bourgeois reflections due to the mercantilist policies of Peter the Great. This way, pioneers of a capitalist order were created to build to economic infrastructure of national identity. Military conquest policies were the initial sources for economic transformation that was built around the frame of political concerns and ideals. They later were gradually being shaped by the goals of this new economic structure and expansion of commercial capitalism (Wallerstein, 1989: 184-187).

Nevertheless, the border expansion of Russia implied more than the birth of a new economy model. The tremendous size of Russian territories as well as the need to defend whole new lands captured required allocation of a huge state budget and brought about continuous military issues that had not existed before, marking attempts to abandon the Asian type despotism by adopting a European type of absolutism instead (Giddens, 1981: 184-185). However, this could not save Russia from its position where civil economic hemisphere was continuously dominated by the political hemisphere not only in the pre-capitalist economic periods but also during the commercial capitalism and the successor industrial capitalism. During the time of Peter the Great, the state directly laid the foundations for various industrial institutions and gradually operated them to meet the military requirements. However, these industrial institutions obviously fell well behind the organizations of the Industrial Revolution, which could only take place at the end of 19th century in Russia, reflecting the underdevelopment in the country (Falkus, 1972). Nevertheless, such structures were also the forerunners of the potential production relations and political developments in Russia (Wallerstein, 1980: 218).

In the meantime, provision of labor force for new entrepreneurship areas arose as a problem as part of the "forced industrialization" policy of Peter the Great. This problem was soothed by cementing the

serfdom connections in the 17th century Russia. Petro incorporated the serfdom institution into industrial relationships to meet the need for labor force in the industry, which meant that the working class was approached as the "factory serfs" and usually worked under much worse conditions than agriculture serfs (Zelnik, 1968). However, these practices gave rise to incredibly deeper issues in the long term, including identity problems, ethnic tensions and nationalist riots.

According to Hechter, there is a close connection between economic imbalances and cultural differences among communities. This connection explains the degree of resistance shown by cultures, falling inside the country's periphery, to being drained by national culture, as well as the degree of strength of ethnic cultures. Contrary to what might be argued, industrialization as the core element of national development as well as prosperity which is anticipated to increase in long term fail to eliminate regional differences. In other words, arguing that industrialization would render center and periphery culturally homogeneous would be wrong (Hechter, 1975: 3-14). Social integration cannot be achieved due to imbalances caused by differentiated distribution of resources or geographical conditions. In contrast, center imposes an economic and political hegemony over periphery, adopts a nepotist approach in division of social roles and assigns prestigious roles to the group falling inside the scope of periphery. Either established legally or actually, this cultural division, in time, leads individuals to identify themselves with their groups and ethnic differences become apparent. Periphery regions fail to integrate with the cultural structure imposed by the center under these conditions, and a "nationalist" movement is brought about to gain independence once groups in the region achieve sufficient communication with one another (Hechter, 1975: 341-351).

When the economic and political competition undertaken by Russia against the West causes the Tsarist system to spread across the spaces in its own periphery, such regions witness opposing groups and nationalist movements. Under the state dominance, serfs who were made to work in state properties were selected among the periphery regions where labor force costs were at minimum, which brought about economic and cultural disintegration. Instead of the integration and Russian nationalism imagined by state elites against the West, different types of ethnicities sprang, politically standing against the state and culturally against Russian identity. Russian identity was

therefore shaped under a two-way pressure determined by West-centered competition and ethnocultural rebellions within the country.

With that being said, the beginning of this process can be considered as the late 18th century and the early 19th century. A large part of the industries established by Peter the Great were demolished after his passing, which was followed by a period of recession by the beginning of the Catherine the Great (1762-1796) period. The term of Peter the Great was mainly shaped by the war industry and all sources were mobilized for the army-palace. After 1725, following this process, many companies engaged in direct or indirect provision of supplies for the army had difficulties with the beginning of a peacetime (Falkus, 1972). The industrial system in the Tsarist Russia could grow only with the war economy, which would be the case in the Soviet Union later as well, and in time, would turn into something unsustainable. Throne of Catherine the Great in 1762 enabled to fill this gap, and a new expansion policy was adopted accordingly, which was maintained by the successor Tsars ruling the country. Throughout the 19th century, Russia grew by 140 square kilometers per day as the fastest-growing expansion power of the globe. It expanded its lands approximately by 5 million square kilometers in less than a century (Taheri, 1989: 52).

Despite these political and military achievements, Russia's desire to claim a position across the "central" countries in Western Europe would imply a whole new direction for the country, placing it onto a "semi-peripheral" position rather than a "central" one. In fact, Wallerstein clearly notes that Russia could reach only a "semi-peripheral" position during the span of time between late 18th century and early 20th century (Wallerstein, 1979: 77, 87). By the beginning of the 20th century, Russia would barely maintain its "semi-peripheral" position even, facing the danger of being dragged into the "periphery" as a whole. At this point, one can well argue that the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was substantially manifested as Russia's rigorous reaction against such a danger. Transition to communism could be explained as the last move resorted by the country to be one of the powerful "central" countries of the global economy (Wallerstein, 1979: 30-31).

Russia's rigorous attempts to absorb the Western European aspects politically and socially and to achieve an equal position with such countries were actually shaped by its concern to reverse the process

from dragging towards the "periphery" at all times. Eventually, it can be suggested that these policies proved successful to a certain extent. Absorbing a peculiar identity particularly due to the conditions, the Russian modernization movement, in the least, could survive the armpit of "semi-periphery" position. It should however be noted that the resulting Russian identity was developed under a continuously vigilant social structure due to the traumas faced in the process (e.g. revolutions, wars) as well as internal and external pressures. Currently, one of the reasons lying behind the "liberal" and "nationalist" dichotomy observed in the Russian politics is Russia's level of incorporation into the capitalist global economy.

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Russia continues to remain in the semi-periphery position to date. In 1997, immediately after the Cold War, Russia made its way into the central countries referred to as the "Group of Seven" (G7); nonetheless, this decision was considered to be a part of political choices rather than economic data. This membership was believed to enable dominance over Russia. In 2014, however, Russia's membership was suspended at the first opportunity upon the Annexation of Crimea.

## 2.2. "Bureaucratic State Capitalism" and Homo Sovieticus

Although the Bolshevik Revolution helped Russia parry the danger of being drawn back to the periphery country position, Soviet Union fell short of not having a powerful alternative economic model against capitalism. International balances undoubtedly had a major role in this process. According to Hobsbawm, the most powerful states of the capitalist world endeavored to tear down this model as soon as possible, eliminating its solidification as an alternative against the global system. In fact, the USA did not recognize the Soviet Union on diplomatic terms until 1933 (Hobsbawm, 1995: 375). Even at the times of peaking terms of foreign trade, only 4% of the exports by "market economies" were transferred to "centrally planned" economies (Hobsbawm, 1995: 374). However, the Soviet Union did not intend to avoid building closer relations with the rest of the global economy. Such strict ideological distances were also not accommodated in conditions following revolution and civil war. New administrative elites expressed their desires to make substantial concessions towards foreign investors in return for assistance in the country's economic development (Hobsbawm, 1995: 375).

Therefore, Bolshevik Revolution did not imply disconnection from the capitalist global economy for Soviet Union. Relations were weakened for a period of time heavily due to political reasons; however, they were restored in 1970s in particular. In fact, the "socialist camp", which emerged as a result of the October Revolution, failed to offer a substantial alternative against the capitalist global economy no matter how assertive its ideological program had been. Developed under the Soviet Union authority, the socialist block failed to go beyond the unequal change relationships in trade activities. Moreover, it could not solve the two contrasting extremes of center-periphery internally. Class and regional contradictions were tried to be eliminated with a type of "bureaucratic state capitalism" mindset which increasingly strengthened central hierarchy (Cliff, 1974). A whole new dimension came out as a result of regulations such as nationalization of territories on November 1917, extension of such policy in 1918 and state monopoly on trade as well as the execution of "New Economic Policy" in 1921. Executed during 1921-1927, this economy program was incepted with an aim to cure the wounds caused by revolution and war to some extent, demolishing the remainder social order from Tsarist Russia, while putting an end to the ideological expectation as to organizing production powers to achieve a new social order. This way, Russia moved in line with the capitalist norms within the international system and, inevitably, had to incorporate a new system that can keep up with such a development into its internal economic and social structure. As a result, the actual equality in wages was abandoned with the adoption of "New Economic Policy". Penetrating into the social structure day by day through historical habits, bureaucracy grew into a function of capitalist class, turning itself into a class. According to Hobsbawm, the "New Economic Policy" actually restored market relations, resulting in a retreat from "war communism" to "state capitalism" in Lenin's view (Hobsbawm, 1995: 378).

With possession of the state and control over its accumulation, Soviet Bureaucracy was no longer restrained by the proletariat, using the relations of distribution for its own good by atomizing it, whereas it was supposed to serve the proletariat (Cliff, 1974). Peasantry accounted for the majority of population; however, they had been made to reconcile themselves to a second class statute both legally and politically with subject to more strict taxes undertaken until the 1936 Constitution. Upon repeal of the "New Economic Policy", a

collectivization process was adopted by replacing it with a basic agricultural policy, bringing about serious famine during 1932-33 as a result of even lower productivity which had not been in promising abundance in the first place. Once self-sufficient, Soviet farming lost its capacity to feed its own population by the end of 1960s. As of the early 1970s, the country was, from time to time, already relying on the global grain market to meet one-fourth of its own needs (Hobsbawm, 1995: 383).

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Evidently, sprouts of developments in the Tsarist Russia would soon grow in the jars of Soviet Union which was established with very different ideals, with surpassing capitalism being the primary goal. "Bureaucratic state capitalism" functioned as the backbone of the system, while reformation demands often arose. However, no radical change was gone through by the mid-1980s as those in power were in fear of losing power. Precautions taken during that period did not prove helpful except for temporary solutions. Indeed, the Russian president of that time Mikhail Gorbachev explicitly admitted that in the 27th Congress of the Communist Party in 1986 (Kennedy, 1988: 489). According to Gorbachev, economic challenges grew apace during the 1970s as a result of the considerable degree of decline in economic growth rates. Therefore, the Communist Party program objectives and even the lower end of objectives in the 9th and 10th Five-Year Development Plan could not be achieved. A social program was adopted to improve science, education, healthcare, culture and living conditions but it could not be successfully implemented. It was nothing but a paradox for a country to act on the assertion of eradication of capitalism, which constituted that country's foundation motive, when it actually could not stand free from global economy cycles through overlapping relations with international capitalism. Moreover, such a paradox reaches an ultimate point when considering that this very country adopted a peculiar "capitalist" economy as an internal policy (Kennedy, 1988: 489-490).

An authoritarian regime was tapped into along with the implementation of an identity-based policy in an attempt to veil this paradox in line with the historical heritage of Russia. The time of Stalin in particular saw this kind of a system which imposed absolute control over the lifestyles and thoughts of its citizens, entailing dependence, as much as possible, on the objectives defined and determined solely by higher authority for all their existence and



assets. However, the system could never evolve into a fully-fledged “totalitarian” quality. “Thought control” could not be achieved per se, let alone exercise “thought flipping” effectively, unlike totalitarian regimes establishing a perfectly centralized society through methods that included not only physical control over people but also successfully imposing internalization of its own values vis-a-vis society through propaganda and education monopoly. What was built was only a society model where citizens were excluded from politics. Official Marxist-Leninist teachings could not reach out the majority of population. The majority of Soviet citizens might have deliberately defied the compelling assertions on politics and ideologies mostly because these assertions would not directly relate to their everyday issues – such relation was really rare (Hobsbawm, 1995: 393-394). This was inevitably reflected in the identity and nationality policies of the Soviet Union.

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According to Olivier Roy, the Soviet system was “more totalising (bringing everything within its order and its registers) than totalitarian (gathering the whole of society into the state)” (Roy, 2000: xix). Those in power in the Soviet Union allocated a new and stable area for everyone in the society by taking ethnic differences into account along with social structure; however, they did not pay full attention to the management of this whole. The paradox of Sovietization lies behind the fact that the exercise of nationality policy lead to a political embodiment area for a wide range of ethnic groups with a wide range of artificial elements. Thus, the nation-state model was imposed on a huge geography which was not fully aware of this concept of nation-state model at all. Russia faced its tragedy as a result of failing to run its own wheels in the process of creating a nation-state (Roy, 2000: xiv).

It is obvious that the identity policy exercised in the period of Soviet Union did not have anything to do with the doctrines. It was "sovietism" that marked the country – not communism or socialism per se (Roy, 2000: xxi). The initial aim was to create regional and national identities, and then to conceive a type of Russian speaking citizen, without any affiliations with a nation, that does not question the Soviet order. The degree of cultural and economic transformation projects implemented was a lot higher than that those in Tsarist Russia. Any element from mass migration policies to education system would be made use of to only achieve one single type of

identity desired by the Soviet Union: *Homo Sovieticus* (Roy, 2000: xx; Fitzpatrick, 2000: 229).

This strategy underwent changes in time but the state's main objective of homogenization would not change. To give an example, integration policies of Soviets were replaced by assimilation (Russification) of minorities during the time of Stalin. The first examples of exercising such a campaign included isolation of minor nations and forced adoption of the "Great Russian" culture without even questioning it. Stalin, therefore, built an oppressive bureaucratic party state where minor nations were deemed secondary and dependent with forced acceptance of Moscow as an administrative and cultural center (Hansen, 1992: 11-25).

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Post-Stalin period witnessed increased problems regarding nationalities and emerging approaches that were unorthodox. In the earlier stages, Leninist objectives and Stalinist methods had still been in place with limitations during the power of Nikita Khrushchev; however, these ambiguous reformation policies led to an economic recession in the Soviet Union, which was followed by the process leading to Khrushchev's deposition in 1964. The former policy of nationalities adopted by Khrushchev with the claim of exercising reformations was found to be pointless and reactions against it were increasing. Therefore, dramatic changes took place during the power of Brezhnev. This period would include unfastening the tight belts of the central administrative structure to a certain extent, considering reactions of elites from the minorities and emphasizing the Leninist norms under the theme of "collective leadership". In other words, part of the central power would be divided and shared between the elites. Granting these elites with various roles of the political and economic decision-making authority of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev would turn them into semi-independent clients of the Moscow government. The so-called democratic and egalitarian nature of this program would, however, be the main reason behind the economic and political recession which became chronic during the last half of Brezhnev's time. Regional and/or ethnicity-driven organized crime syndicates would rise with a growing impact on the official expenditures of economy as a result of the patronage tradition in the system and endorsement thereof both centrally and locally across the Union republics. Therefore, economic, social and moral values would shrink

and constitute the most obvious weakness of the system (Hansen, 1992: 11-25).

According to Matuszewski, the loyalty towards regime is basically achieved by building a system where a possibly and relatively higher level of prosperity, material well-being, is maintained and elite circulation is not restrained; where it is rather made attractive (Matuszewski, 1989: 96). However, the patronage mindset seen in the time of Brezhnev brought about lower performance on both of these terms. A systematic network of interests emerged, spanning from local elites of the Union Republics through the top level party authorities in Moscow because of the economic recession and political corruption which created crime groups that could be considered almost "official" in the bureaucracy (Thom, 1989: 21).

With Gorbachev coming into power, he first intended to take this system under control and overcome the economic recession as well as corruptions. To this end, he implemented a set of programs serving this purpose including *glasnost* (political liberalization), *perestroika* (structural economic reform), *demokratizatsiya* (democratization) and *uskoreniye* (acceleration) (Hansen, 1992: 11-25). It should be noted that Gorbachev had never intended to change the system and abandon the Leninist legacy. What he wanted to achieve was reformation, rather than a revolution; he strove for taking the system under control with a socialist Puritanism. That is why the "problem of nationalities" was where he was caught unawares. Movements of sovereignty, independence and nationalism were blossoming one by one as of 1989, which was completely a surprise for him (Armaoglu, 1991: 229-236).

However, this was not a surprising development. The reasons behind it become extremely clearer when one looks into the impact of policies implemented as part of the reform strategy on the peripheries of Soviet Union. In his attempt to resolve economic corruption and political obstruction in the country, a major policy Gorbachev undertook included adoption of far-ranging bureaucratic regulations at federal level across the Union Republics. Such regulations would, however, cause conflicts between the local elites and central administration. Reactions would abruptly turn into nationalist riots when Gorbachev purged and dismissed regional leaders and replaced them with new administrators from the central power mechanism in

order to eliminate the destructive impact of patronage, unrecorded economy and ever-widening crime networks. Leaders lacking ethnic connection with the local people would draw negative attention. Following these appointments and under the provocations by unseated leaders, people would feel that they were confronted by a cultural besiege, believing that even the fate of own leadership elections was in the hands of the Russian. Losing hope against the corruption in economic structure and nepotism, masses of people would put aside the accountability of former authorities affecting the situation and vilify the nationalist faction, which could undoubtedly be voiced with a lot more effectively thanks to the partial freedom created with the *glasnost* and *perestroika* programs, soon igniting the wick for series of similar riots in all Soviet Union regions (Hansen, 1992: 11-25). Many of the deterritorialized and displaced people from the Stalin period would voice their demand to return home. Former territories would not be favored. Hence, new issues regarding land disputes would arise. The relentless ravage against the former structure and the state being off guards against that in the Soviet Union would break the last remaining branches of the weakening tree of "loyalty" in the Soviet Republics with increased acceleration on the end of nationalist movements. Therefore, ethnicity-based border clashes would be involved as well as in the case with Azerbaijan and Armenia, going beyond a resistance simply against Moscow only.

Although Gorbachev followed a moderate approach towards the issue of identities and nationalities, he abandoned this soft attitude and replaced it with stricter policies upon seeing the growing degree of separatist nationalist movements. For instance, he did not hold himself back from engaging the army to call a halt against the independence declarations of the Baltic Republics and to turn regional governments from this decision.

Consequently, the *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies had a direct impact on the rise of minority nationalism in the Soviet Union and failure of forced imposition of Russian identity on minorities. Above all, political liberalization unearthed the piles of complaints and issues one by one. The initial tolerance paved the way for such developments as well. Furthermore, continuous criticism of Stalinism, together with the attrition campaign, disrupted the historical pressure on nationalities abruptly. Most importantly, it

triggered nationalistic feelings and Russian identity of not only the Russian but also non-Russian people.

### **2.3. Russian National Identity between East and West**

After the Soviet Union fell, there have been arguments that a "new" identity crisis came out in Russia, which is actually not something new. The truth is that Russia has eventually had to confront what has been always there for centuries. Although its policies were in line with keeping up with modernization, it still lacks an open democracy system and a fully functional market economy. Russia's underdevelopment and dependence on the West was inevitably acknowledged, recognizing that the country is still not a part of the "center" of the global economic system. Failure to keep up with the Western standards led to favoritism of more autarchic policies not only by the ordinary people but also by the political elites with the added effect of disappointment resulting from a failed goal to become a developed country. Currently, the Russian identity is magnified more than ever before. There is a focus on the historical legends, epic heroism of Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union, the tremendous size of lands owned once, and the military achievements. On the other hand, longing for utopian Western dream is still present in the collective subconscious as much as these heroic discourses are. The resulting picture is, therefore, an emotional rollercoaster between a denied feeling of failure and the deep powerful roots of the Russian national identity as a result of a continuous dilemma (Gudkov, 2016).

Essentially, Russia put genuine efforts in pursuit of modernization and set a considerable goal towards integration into global system. This pursuit was partly the result of the economic and political benefits to be obtained from positioning in the center within the global economic system. However, dissolution of Soviet Union was already felt at a much earlier stage. Its people could feel that the country was bogging down, which caused loss of hope. Disintegration of the communist project between 1989 and 1991 completely destroyed the confidence of Russian people. In the aftermath, Yeltsin government lost control for ten years. Especially the internal conflicts in Chechnya implied the dissolution possibility for the Russian Federation, together with the economic corruption represented by the new Russian oligarchy, leading to favoring of nationalist policies and election of a leader who could help society overcome these traumas.

When Putin came to power in 2000, he voiced the idea that the Russian have a longstanding history and they have no reason to feel ashamed. He would fuel and trigger the revival of national pride with a stance against the West. Anti-Western sentiment would grip the people even more powerfully after a series of events particularly including the 2008 conflict with Georgia, 2014-2015 disputes with Ukraine and finally the annexation of Crimea. It should be noted at this point that this nationalist transformation of the Russian society is welcomed by the majority of people. There is no significant difference between the views of an ordinary Russian and those of the political elites on Russian identity. The Russian people today believe that their country ultimately regained its statute as a powerful giant country, expecting the rest of the world to respect that (Gudkov, 2016).

One point to emphasize here is the external factor, in other words, Russia's relationship with the West, which is important to question in terms of its effects on the Russian identity. The majority of Western sources address the drawbacks in Russia by explaining them through the country's cultural structure and historical-bureaucratic habits that could not be amended internally. This kind of approach may partly prove accurate; however, it is crystal clear that, throughout the history, the West has intended to keep Russia outside the center both culturally and financially, which inevitably causes reactions in Russia. Therefore, the West does not only create an impression of a common enemy consolidating power in Russia, but it also has a major role in determining the Russian identity. Throughout their modernization history, Western relations have been critical to the Russian, and therefore, the West functioned as an internal mirror for them; the Russian had to figure out how this mirror perceived them. The situation does not change today no matter how different it seems with ongoing tensions and opposing discourses employed today as well. This suggests that Russian-Western relations have had a vital role in shaping the Russian identity (Gudkov, 2016).

Therefore, it would be quite early to claim that Putin's "Eastward Orientation" policies to steer the country substantially towards the East have found favor. The impacts of such a strategy have not been visible on the national identity yet. A look into the population would suggest that not a big part of it feels excited about the relations built between Grand Kremlin and China. Russian people perceive "Eastward Orientation" more like a last resort for the country than a

guiding policy for civilization to determine the fate of the country. This is mainly because all values and goals internalized by the Russian during modernization are related to the West. The attractive "center" for Russia is not the East; it is rather the West. Political and cultural conventions in Russia suggest that Asia represents underdevelopment, backwardness, poverty and ignorance. As they collaborate with the West and internalize the Western system, Japan and South Korea are approached as exceptions in these conventions while the rest of Asia is associated with backwardness. A pragmatic approach is utilized towards the extensive cooperation with China in fields of military, politics and economy and China is never considered a civilization model that can inspire Russia (Gudkov, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Internal variables play an undoubtedly important role in the emergence of nationalism and in the formation of national identities. However, the determining role therein is assumed by external conditions and global economic relations. In particular, the capitalist world economy, which constitutes the most important ring of the modernization chain, has an overall impact on the historical, political and cultural life of the regions that it penetrates into. The tension of center-periphery within the capitalist system also determines the severity and shapes nationalism in the course of time. As a result of the economic prosperity and the hegemonic advantages of the center, it is transformed into an attractive aim and a vital purpose for any society.

In this context, unlike the developments in Western Europe, the loss of the autonomy of the social construction in Russia and the peripheral drift took place earlier than the formation of the modern state, while Russia could not attach itself to the position it once had desired in the capitalist system. Russia is solidly positioned across the semi-periphery, between the developed capitalist core, and its own underdeveloped post-Soviet periphery. Economic competition, military and political threat perception was being felt much more intense. In an attempt to respond to that, Russia embarked on a series of modernization and transformation efforts but unfortunately, failed to change its "semi-peripheral" position within the global economic system. The economic model she pursues, disappointments experienced in the process as well as conflicts with central states are only intensifying the uncertainty of the Russian national identity.

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## ÖZET

Tarihsel olarak Batı Avrupa'nın geçirdiği ekonomik, politik ve toplumsal dönüşümleri yaşamamış Rusya'da, toplumsal kuruluşun özerkliğini kaybederek "çevreselleşme" sürecine girmesi modern devletin oluşumundan önce gerçekleşmiştir. Bu çerçevede Rus Çarlığı'ndan, günümüze, Rusya'da ortaya çıkan milliyetçi hareketlerin tepkisel bir nitelik taşıdığı ve *primordial* dürtülerden öte, dünya ekonomik ve politik sisteminin baskısı neticesinde kitlesellenen, bir "icat" ya da "keşif" konusu olduğu söylenebilir.

Rus milli kimliğinin oluşumunda ekonominin etkisine ilişkin tartışmalar bugün de devam etmekte ve iki farklı görüş çerçevesinde şekillenmektedir. Bunlardan ilkinin, Rusya'nın refahını ve büyümesini batının pazar ekonomisine bağlayan "liberal" kanat, ikincisini ise böyle bir ekonomik entegrasyonun Rus kimliğinin merkezinde yer alan politik kurumları ve kültürel normları tahrip edeceğine inanan "milliyetçi" kanat oluşturmaktadır. Özellikle Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Rusya Federasyonu içinde yaşanan ekonomik gelişmelerin Rus ulusal kimliği üzerinde nasıl bir etki yaptığı, cevaplandırılması gereken önemli bir sorudur. Sovyetler Birliği'nin yıkılması sonrasında Rusya'da "yeni" bir kimlik krizinin ortaya çıktığı iddia edilse de, aslında bu durum sanıldığı kadar yeni değildir. Rusya yüzyıllardır karşı karşıya olduğu bir gerçekle yüzleşmek durumunda kalmıştır. Modernleşme sürecini yakalama mantığıyla hareket etmesine rağmen, halen tüm kuralları işletilebilen bir pazar ekonomisi ve açık bir demokratik sistem oluşturamamıştır. Rusya'nın ekonomik yetersizlikleri ve Batı'ya olan bağımlılığı, bir başka deyişle dünya ekonomik sistemindeki yarı-çevre konumu ister istemez kabul edilmiştir. Batılı standartların yakalanılmasındaki başarısızlık ve gelişmiş bir ülke olamamanın getirdiği hayal kırıklığı hem sokaktaki adamı, hem de politik seçkinleri daha üstarişik politikalara yöneltmiştir. Hissedilen ekonomik kırılma, siyasi yalnızlık ve güvensizlik duygusu, parlatılan Rus kimliği ile giderilmeye çalışılmaktadır. Geçmişin efsanelerine, Çarlık Rusyası ve Sovyetler Birliği döneminde gösterilen kahramanlıklara, bir zamanlar sahip olunan devasa büyüklükteki topraklara ve askeri başarılarına odaklanılmaktadır. Oysa Batılı olmaya yönelik ütöpik özlem, kolektif bilinçaltında en az bu kahramanlık söylemleri kadar yer tutmaktadır. Dolayısıyla ortaya çıkan durum, her daim hissedilen bir kararsızlık halinin, Rus ulusal kimliğinin derin ve güçlü kökleri ile itiraf edilemeyen bir dışlanmışlık duygusu arasında gel-gitler halinde yaşanmasıdır.

Batılı kaynakların büyük bir çoğunluğu Rusya'daki eksiklikleri onun kültürel yapısı ve iç kurumlarındaki düzeltilemeyen tarihsel-bürokratik alışkanlıklarla açıklamaktadır. Dışarıdan bakan pek çok gözlemciye göre, Rusya'daki milliyetçi entelijansiya genellikle tarih kuramları ve jeopolitik stratejiler arasına sıkışmış kısır bir biçimde tartışmayı sürdürmektedir. Ekonomik

politikalar nadiren bu çevrelerde ele alınmakta ve entelijansiyanın gösterdiği milliyetçi yaklaşımlar duygusal ve irrasyonel bir bakış açısı olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu nedenle milliyetçi yaklaşımın yerine daha rasyonel, kansız ve evrensel ilkeler üzerinden hareket ettiği varsayılan liberal ekonomik modeller önerilmektedir. Ancak Rusya'daki dönüşümü takip eden Batılı uzmanlar, milliyetçiliğin kendine zemin bulduğu ulusal kimlik sorununu ve Rusya tarihini gözden kaçırmaktadır. Özellikle neo-liberal eleştiriler (hatta bir kısım sosyal demokratlar) halâ küreselleşmeci düşüncelerle hareket etmeye meyilli gözükmektedir. Küreselleşmenin ulus-devleti gereksiz hale getirdiği ve ekonomik politikaların artık tek belirleyici olduğu ifade edilmektedir.

Ancak yaşanan gerçeklik tam böyle değildir. Rusya'nın birtakım kronik içsel sorunları olsa da, Batı'nın Rusya'yı tarih boyunca hem kültürel hem de ekonomik anlamda merkezin dışında tutmak istediği çok açıktır. Kuşkusuz bu durum kaçınılmaz olarak Rusya'da tepki oluşturmaktadır. Bu arada Batı yalnızca Rusya'da iktidarı konsolide eden popüler bir düşman etkisi yaratmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda Rus kimliği üzerinde de belirleyici olmaktadır. Ruslar modernleşme tarihleri boyunca Batı ile olan ilişkilerine çok önem verdiğinden, Batı'yı bir iç ayna gibi görmekte ve daima Batının kendilerini nasıl algıladığını anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Aralarındaki tüm gerginliklere ve karşıt söylemlere rağmen bugün de durum farklı değildir. Dolayısıyla Rus kimliğinin şekillenmesinde Rusya'nın Batı ile olan ilişkileri hayati derecede önemli olmuştur. Bu nedenle Putin'in "Doğuya Dönüş" adı altında uygulamaya koyduğu ve ülkenin yönünü büyük oranda Asya'ya çevirdiği politikaların çok rağbet gördüğünü söylemek için henüz erkendir. Bu strateji ulusal kimlik üzerinde belirgin bir etki yapmamıştır. Nüfusun büyük çoğunluğunda, Kremlin'in Çin ile geliştirdiği ilişkiler konusunda hissettiği heyecan görülmemektedir. Rus halkı "Doğuya Dönüşü" ulusun kaderi için rehber alınacak bir medeniyet çizgisi değil, daha çok ülkenin gitmek zorunda kaldığı bir yöneliş olarak algılamaktadır. Bunun sebebi büyük oranda Rus halkının modernleşirken içselleştirdiği tüm değerlerin ve hedeflerin Batı ile ilişkili olmasıdır.

