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THE EURASIAN SCHOOL: BETWEEN METAPHYSICS AND SCIENCE

Lev Gumilov was eyewitness of most tragic events that occurred in the 20th-century Russian history. He is believed to have uttered the significant words, so characteristic of contemporary Russian nationalism: "If Russia is going to be saved, she can only be saved as the Eurasiatic power and solely through Eurasianism"¹. The Eurasiatic School constituted the last chapter in the history of Russian nationalist ideologies of the past two hundred years. Its ideology is the quintessence and the fullest expression of modern Russian political thought. On the Russian "market of ideas", it outstripped other concepts based on Slavophilism, Occidentalism, monarchism or Bolshevism. Despite its 19th-century origins, Eurasianism is a typically 20th-century concept. It first appeared in the circles of Russian political émigrés in 1920's, found its continuation in the views of Gumilov, the creator of the theory of ethnogenetic; at present its basic ideas are pursued by the most reactive nationalists including the leading geopolitician of the post-Soviet era, A. Dugin.

The Eurasian School originated in the circles of Russian post-revolutionary emigration in the late 1920s in Sofia; and was later influential in Prague, Berlin, Paris and other emigrant centers in Western Europe. Its most outstanding activists were the linguist and ethnologist M. Trubetskoy, the geographer P. Savitskii, the Greek clergyman and theologian G. Florovskii, the philosopher and musicologist P. Suvtsinskii, the philosopher L. Karsavin, the historian G. Viernadskii and others. It is worth pointing out that most members of the movement achieved outstanding results in both domains they practiced, namely science and philosophy, irrespective of their political engagement in the movement activity. Polemics concerning the reasons for the

¹ L. Gumilov, *Ritmy Jewrazii, Epochy i ciwilizacii*, Moscow 1993, p. 31.

Bolshevik Revolution, which burst among Russian émigrés in the 1920s, were the source of the movement. The two million Russian emigrants in respect to their political orientation could roughly be divided into two fighting camps: the liberals and the monarchists. The liberal camp accused the fossilised monarchist circles of being responsible for the revolution, they were incapable of carrying out modernisation and democratisation of the country, which was backward in many respects, at least tens of times compared to West-European countries. The monarchists considered the revolution to be degradation of the state and society and an apocalyptical disaster, and looked for the way back to the lost pre-revolutionary reality. They resembled the 20th-century French traditionalists pining for the ancient regime of the kind of J. de Maistre or L. de Bonald.

The Eurasiatists constituted the third force, imperceptible at the beginning but in time gaining in popularity. They searched for the deep and hidden reasons for revolution and came to the unexpected and paradoxical from liberal and monarchist point of view conclusion that the Bolshevik Revolution, despite its tragic, was not an accidental phenomenon but was deep-rooted in the Russian history especially in the 18th and 19th century Petersburg Russia. The revolution was initiated by a handful of revolutionists who did not count on political stage but were able to release the hidden forces ingrained in the Russian mentality, and therefore was the phenomenon that was necessary and not accidental, contrary to the statements of most of historians. The principal cause of the revolution was the drive to Europe developing since the times of Peter I as well as the constant degeneration of the Russian Empire. This interpretation of the Revolution coexisted with another, equally original, according to which the revolution was *sensu stricto* a Russian and not a universal event. G. Florovskii wrote, "Revolution is a Russian business – on account of its genesis, sense, objective meaning – what is disclosed in it is the Russian truth, the truth about Russia"². The Eurasian interpretation of the Bolshevik Revolution and especially the theory about its folk and national character aroused a scandal and ideological isolation of Eurasiasits among representatives of Russian emigration.

It is turn to the West taking place since the reign of Peter I and the departure from Eurasian roots that were responsible in Eurasiatists opinion for the majority of Russian social and political conflicts which happened during the 19th and 20th centuries preceding the "sadness" of the period of the revolution and the civil war. Two centuries of St Petersburg Russia prepared the revolution. It could have taken a different shape and broken out at a different time but its outbreak was inevitable. The Bolsheviks, unaware of the real character of their revolution, initiated in fact Russia's return to the Eurasian sources. It is generally accepted that the year 1920 marked the beginning of the Eurasian movement M. Trubetskoy's book entitled *Europe and Humanity* was published in Sophia in which the concept of Eurasia did not appear yet but the message of the book was significantly anti-European³. Thus,

² G. Florovskii, *O patriotizmie praviednom i griehovom*, [in:] P. Savitskii, A. Kartasev, A. Suv-tsinskii, N. Trubetskoi, G. Florovskii, P. Bitsilii, *Na putiah. Uvierzhdienie yevraziytsev. Kniga vtoraiia*, Berlin 1922, p. 278.

³ N. Trubetskoi, *Yevropa i tselovietsiastvo*, Sophia 1920.

the Eurasiatists refer in their radical anti-Occidentalism to the tradition of Russian nationalism and the intellectual history of the school begins with Trubetskoy's work where the latter concept was emphasised. Eurasianism is as anti-Western as it is pro-Asian, and it is hard to define unambiguously which of the two trains of thought prevails.

The ambiguous attitude towards Bolshevism, the condemnation of revolutionary terror on the one hand with the conviction that the Revolution was subconsciously right reaction at the progressive Westernisation of the Empire on the other, was determining the history of the movement in the period between wars. Eurasiatists were convinced that the days of Bolshevik ideology based on specific Lenin-Stalin version of Marxism were approaching the end and that Eurasianism could fill the void. In the Soviet state which emerged as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, Eurasiatists accepted nationalism, etatism, idiocracy meaning the state and society based on particular ideology, isolationism, and, to a great extent, even industry nationalization and agriculture collectivisation. The positive attitude towards Eastern Christianity presented by Eurasiatists was beside the condemnation of terror one of the basic difference between Bolsheviks and them. The role of the Orthodox Christianity cannot be restricted to religion only; in the future Empire it should constitute the integral part of Eurasiatic idiocracy. Because of the convergence of many Bolsheviks' and Eurasiatists' opinions the latter were convinced that in the presence of devaluation of the Russian version of Marxism the convergence of the two ideological movements and slow reduction of negative elements of the Soviet State were possible. The Soviet State as a result of such evolution could be converted into Eurasian Empire. The Eurasiatists started to get in touch with the representatives of the Soviet authorities and intelligence service in the West. One should mention here especially philo-Bolshevik stream of the movement clustered round the *Yevrasia* magazine, represented by, among others, L. Karsavin, D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii, and S. Efron. All of them were in touch with the Soviet authorities and all returned to the Soviet Union and were executed or died in Soviet camps⁴.

The starting point of Eurasiatic historiosophy was conviction that Eurasia situated between Europe and Asia is a separate territory from geographical and historical point of view. For Eurasiatists the term "Eurasia" did not mean just a simple sum of two continents but their interior in the sense provided by the English geographer H. J. Mackinder's Heartland. Western Europe, India, China or Japan did not belong to thus understood Eurasia. Centrality (*sredinost*) was the most essential feature of Eurasia. The Eurasian territory demanded union for geographical reasons. The union took place three times during its history: for the first time it was united in the 7th century under the Old Turkish Khanate, then in the 13th century within the Mongolian Empire, and for the third time in the Russian Empire. The Russian messianic ideology has never avoided expressing its ideas in geographical categories. A good example is the 19th-century concept of R. Danilevskii, a Slavophile, who in the work entitled *Russia and Europe*, postulated the construction of a Slavonic

⁴ R. Paradovski, *Eurasian Empire of Russia. A study of ideas*, Toruń 2001, pp. 47-48.

Empire with the capital in Tsarograd (Constantinople), and its complete isolation from Western Europe. The representatives of Eurasianism fully developed the idea of geographical justification of Russia's separateness using the concepts of the 20th century political geography and geopolitics.

The Russian national messianic ideologists who were under the influence of Christian millenarianism perceived Russia as the third and the last Rome. The vision of history as developing through three successive epochs, the last of which is simultaneously the final one, is a constant component of millenary and semi-millenary ideologies since Joachim of Fiore times until the 20th-century totalitarianism⁵. The idea of the Third Rome originated in the 16th-century Russia when a monk called Philoteus wrote a letter to the Great Duke of Moscow, Vasil III, in which he described the fall of the first two Romes, and Moscow as the third and the final one. For Eurasiatists, Russia is rather the third "Steppe Empire" than the third Rome. It is connected with the change of the perspective of Russian messianic thought, which was accompanied by specific historiosophical revolution. One of its symptoms was the departure from the 19th-century pan-Slavism. The basic Eurasiatic conviction that Russia from geographical point of view is a separate territory was expressed by permanent references to geography and especially to the classics of geopolitics. The dualistic geopolitical models opposing maritime and land powers that originated from Mackinder's concept were particularly popular. The essence of Russia cannot be reduced either to the Orthodox religion or to ethnic separateness of Eastern Slavs. Eurasiatists often connected it with geographical space and landscape. It is in a sense the continuation of the mediaeval idea of the "Holy Family". So far, none of the Christian nations called its land the holy one reserving this designation to Palestine. The first Eurasiatic politician who introduced and justified the concept of Russian imperial space was the geographer, P. Savitskii⁶.

The Eurasian historiosophy in spite of its inveteracy in the tradition of Russian nationalism is quite different from the past projects of Russian historiosophy. It is connected with revisionist reinterpretation of Kievan Rus and the Russian Empire. The previous Russian historiosophy, even anti-Western, turned away from Asia too. The Slavophil apology of Orthodox Christianity and Slavonic nations despite its anti-Occidentalism stressed the genetic relationships between Russia and Eastern Europe renouncing the connections with Asian, Turanian tradition. Finding cultural and civilization Asian elements in the Russian State was nothing new among western historians while in Russia it was ignored as if the fact was embarrassing. H. Kamiński, as far as Polish 20th-century philosophers are concerned, pointed out the genetic relationships not only between Russian and Eastern Slavonic people but also, for example, with peoples of Asian steppe in his book entitled *Russia and Europe. Poland*. The most outstanding 20th-century Polish philosopher of civilization F. Koneczny shared his opinion. In reference to F. Koneczny's concept of civilization pluralism one can notice several analogies between the Polish philosopher's Turanian civilization and the concept of Eurasia developed by Russian ideologists.

⁵ N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London 1957.

⁶ R. Paradowski, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Turanian civilization based on the model of social life based on camping and military nature originated from political and social systems of Eurasiatic nomadic peoples, and its 20th-century manifestation was Bolshevism which attempted to destroy Latin civilization. It seems that the concept of "Turanism" in Konieczny's philosophy of civilization and "Eurasianism" are largely synonymous.

The reinterpretation of Eastern European history manifested itself in the friendly attitude towards nomadic peoples, the awareness of ethnic discontinuity of the Moscow State and Kievan Rus, and even in the treatment of the relation between medieval Russia and the Mongol Golden Horde in the category of defensive alliance. The choice made by Alexander Nevsky long before the Principality of Moscow had been shaped was a crucial moment in the history of medieval Russia. Confronting the double threat, Tatar from the East and Swedish from the West, he surrendered to the Tatars and directed his forces against Western enemies. It was – according to Eurasiatic historians – the right choice, which saved Russia against cultural and civilization dependence on the Latin West⁷. The subordination of the Russian Principalities to the Golden Horde enabled them to save their Russian and Orthodox identity, which was not possible in the case of Ukraine and Belarus, subordinated to Poland and Lithuania.

L. Gumilov, a historian, geographer, ethnologist, and well-known investigator of the steppe peoples' history continued Eurasiatic thought in the Soviet Union. He declared himself the last Eurasiatist⁸. Gumilov underpinned Eurasiatic thesis concerning geographical separateness of Russia with the theory of ethnos – great historical units connected with the geographical space in which they can be found. Ethnos came into being in the natural process of ethnogeny. Every ethnos develops through a few phases; from a *pasyonaric* impulse ("pasyonarics" are the ethnos founders) through the phases of strain, inertness, acme, reactionary, to the memorial phase of its decline. The periodicity of the process of ethnogeny is similar to the concepts in the philosophy of culture and civilization, especially to those of N. Danilevskii and O. Spengler, and to those developed by English theoreticians E. Huntington and A. Toynbee. One of the great ethnoses is the Russian "super ethnos" which consists of Slavonic, Finno-Ugrian, and Altaic ethnic elements. Gumilov, like his Eurasiatic predecessors, is aware of the severance of ethnic continuity between Kievan Rus and Russia. Great Novgorod was the last ethnic splinter of Kievan Rus but the Moscow State is not a continuation of the Great Kiev tradition⁹. The consolidation of huge territories from the Baltic countries to the Pacific Ocean under the power of Moscow was the beginning of the homogeneous Russian State, which consisted at the same time of many ethnic elements of the Russian super ethnos. The short outline of the history of Eurasiatic school and its ideological characteristics presented above brings out the differences between Eurasianism and other historic schools of Russian political thought. The Eurasiatic school did not emerge in an ideological vacuum, its features include radical anti-Europeanism, nationalism, and

⁷ G. Viernadskii, *Dva podviga sviatogo Aleksandra Nevskogo*, "Nash sovremennik" 1992, no. 3.

⁸ L. Gumilov, *Ritmy Jewrazii, Epokhi i civilizacii...*, p. 10.

⁹ Idem, *Od Rusi do Rosji. Szkice z historii etnicznej*, Warsaw 1996, pp. 128-132.

the apology of the Orthodox Christianity common to other schools. Still, the most interesting elements of its ideological structure are new themes including the following:

- geographical, or in Gumilov's ethnogeny even biological, starting point in historiography formation;
- revisionist (in relation to the traditional Russian historiography) attitude to the history of Russia, both medieval and the 20th-century;
- the reinterpretation of the concept of Russian nation: it is not a monolith any more (which it was in Gumilov's theory) but consists of ethnic and national elements concentrated in the same super ethnos;
- the concept of idiocracy according to which the power of differently comprehended *a priori* idea will be the essence of the system of future Eurasiatic Empire contrary to the Western democracies;
- the rejection of eschatological problems, which were the central axis of almost all currents of Russian political thought, and especially the departure from orthodox millenarism and the interpretation of the Bolshevik revolution not as a global event but a local, specifically Russian one;
- specific naturalism in opposition to eschatologism which brings Eurasiatic ideology close to the classics of philosophy of civilization (e.g. O. Spengler and A. Toynbee), who often used spatial and geographical categories in their historiosophical reflections.

The evaluation of the work of Eurasiatic school is undoubtedly a complicated question. The subjective estimation of geographical and political location of Russia, nationalism and radically anti-Western attitude undermine the scientific value of Eurasianism. Nevertheless, in the Eurasiatic thought one can find threads going beyond the one-sided ideological point of view. The reinterpretation of the history of the Russian State since its emergence in the late Middle Ages from Kievan Rus until the revolution and the Soviet Union, independently of ideological intentions, is an interesting attempt of solving the basic problems of Russian history. The Eurasiatic way of solving these problems is consistent in essence with the opinions of Western historians. Another problem is the justification of such rebellions from the point of view of traditional Russian historiography and historiography and the formulation of the problem of genesis of the Russian State and the Bolshevik Revolution. Maybe its reasons can be found in the real estimation of geographical and political potential of Russia. If Russia was not able to become either the third Rome according to Russian messianists' wishes, or the leader of Slavic confederation, which was the Slavophiles' political aim, then it had to remain the "steppe empire". In such an approach, one can see the attitude of resignation but Eurasiatists' political realism as well. Eurasiatists rejecting eschatology focused their attention on Russia not on the world as Bolsheviks did. A similar position was taken, for example, by Solzhenitsyn who claimed that Bolsheviks forgot Russia while conquering the world¹⁰. The Soviet Empire fell into decline because it was created according to the Leninist inter-

¹⁰ A. Solzhenitsyn, *List do przywódców Związku Sowieckiego (Letter to the Leaders of the Soviet Union of 5th September 1973)*, [in:] „Żyć bez kłamstwa”. Publicystyka z lat 1973-1980, Warsaw 1995.

pretation of Marxist eschatology to spread the communist ideology all over the world but this task surpassed its strength.

The scientific interpretation of the history of Eurasia, most clearly developed in Gumilov's theory of ethnogeny, despite its pretentious or sometimes even bizarre elements still deserves attention. L. Gumilov was an outstanding geographer and historian, investigator of Russia and peoples of "the Great Steppe" and their history using in his investigations methods of the natural sciences. The process of ethnogeny is according to Gumilov's views, a natural one. This surprising statement can be elucidated by the fact that Gumilov focused his attention on steppe peoples i.e. living in different geographical conditions than, for example, peoples of Europe. Gumilov's theory of ethnogeny may come true on the Great Steppe but does not have to in Western Europe. Similarly, sociological theories of Chicago School, for example, may come true in Chicago but not necessarily in Stockholm or Helsinki. Chicago school has been even criticised that the Chicago fitting concept of "natural city zones" does not fit other American cities. The investigator of Black Americans' life should concentrate his attention on different questions than the researcher of English workers' life. A Statement true in one situation can be false in another: "verite endeca, erreur au-dela" as Pascal noticed.

One should emphasise that Gumilov's views are as original as those of the Western representatives of environmental movement in historiosophy if only to mention "The Pulse of Asia" and "Civilization and Climate" by E. Huntington. Western sociologists limited by their exploratory horizon and methods kept 20th-century environmentalists, as e.g. E. Huntington and T. G. Tylor, at a "methodological distance" treating them as anachronistic eccentrics. In the light of the latest anthropological and ethnological achievements, one can try to "rehabilitate" Gumilov's theory of ethnogeny. The outstanding Russian anthropologist W. Alekseev investigating the process of race genesis used the concept of genetic focus. It denotes the primary territory limited by natural barriers on which a given race has taken shape under the influence of local physical and geographical factors¹¹. The genetic focus is similar to Gumilov's ethnogeny and there are much more analogies between the two theories which cannot be discussed here for lack of space. In such a genetic focus, the process of race genesis would be correlated with the process of origination and formation of languages, ethnogeny and the genesis of social and economic relations.

The theory of genetic focus has significant scientific consequences. It undermines (among other things) J. Deniker's thesis about the lack of correlation between racial and ethnological-linguistic features of human groups. It seems that on its basis it is possible to explain an interesting phenomenon of the complete absence of any similarity between languages belonging to different families. The Indo-European or Caucasus languages do not reveal any similarity (to say nothing of the common grammatical structures as it has been proved by modern nativists and especially N. Chomsky). It probably occurs due to the fact that the process of origination of the great-grand languages of these families was taking place in separate

¹¹ W. Alekseev, *Geografia ras ludzkich*, Warsaw 1979.

focuses and the languages were not able to interact. The theory of genetic focus can be important for the methods of studying the origins and development of anthropological phenomena. From this point of view, there should be a strict correspondence between a particular branch of "genealogical tree" of a given anthropological phenomenon and a given focus. In connection with this theory, using the method of geographical location one can establish the sequence of appropriate changes of a given anthropological phenomenon.

The theory of focus can even have historiosophical consequences. It suggests the development of humanity from genetic focus to the "global village". Genetic focus like Gumilov's ethnos is precisely dependent on local geographical conditions and joint with the landscape. In the face of the total mixture of population and its anthropological and cultural features in the global village, all local geographical factors will cease to operate: the situation becomes entirely "non geographical". Socialist utopians (e.g. L. M. Deschamps) had the right intuition while writing about peoples' total unification even in the sense of physical appearance in the future society. These processes can occur in real situations. The concept of the evolution of humanity between two "ideal types" of society: the genetic focus and the global village is similar, in some respect, to well-known theories of H. M. McLuhan, P. Teilhard de Chardin and W. I. Viernadskii. However, it still requires further studies.

The last decade became the period of renaissance and reinterpretation of Eurasiatic ideology. The turn of the 1980s and 1990s of the last century shook the world so no wonder that a wide range of political concepts appeared to explain the essence of the turn and making predictions for the future as well. It is amazing that during a few years the world classic scientific and popular literature on this subject has been established. In comparison with other concepts such as F. Fukuyama's theory of the end of history or S. Huntington's theory of collision of civilizations, Russian political thought of the last few years has some special features. Its starting point is the interest in a real state, which lost the status of a world power and so to say found itself in political emptiness. This emptiness is being filled with both relatively new concepts and those, which refer to the tradition of Russian political thought.

Is the modern version of Eurasianism or even Neo-Eurasianism a creative explication or only ideological deformation and degeneration of the original thought of the school? In Russia, many circles and magazines mention the Eurasiatic tradition¹². Unfortunately, one should presume that Eurasiatists would not be able to identify themselves with the majority of them especially with extremely nationalist streams of the modern Russian political scene appealing to the tradition of geopolitics. A. Dugin, whose book entitled *Osnovii geopoliticki. Geopolititseskoie budustseie Rosii* became the kind of the Bible of the modern Russian nationalism, can serve as an example¹³. Dugin uses Eurasiatic concepts as e.g. "ideocracy" in a tendentious and selective way. The scientific value of Dugin's geopolitics is

¹² S. Mazurek, *Eurazjatyzm rosyjski – historiozofia i ideologia*, "Archiwum historii filozofii i myśli społecznej" 1996, vol. 41, p. 169.

¹³ A. Dugin, *Osnovii geopoliticki. Geopolititseskoie budustseie Rosii*, Moscow 1997.

doubtful not only because of his nationalist subjectivism and because of his political engagement but for other reasons including archaic scientific methods and referring to out-of-date scientific authorities, especially to the dualistic concepts of English geopoliticians opposing the land and sea powers. A strange mixture of elements taken from Eurasiatic, German and Anglo-Saxon geopolitics as well as R. Guenon's and J. Evoli's ideologies of integral traditionalism and the withdrawal into pre-scientific lanes of spatial mysticism and "sacral geography" are the reasons why Dugin and other thinkers or political activists who are much alike are no more than intellectual shadows of their Eurasiatic ancestors. The repeating history becomes its own parody. A process that is true for the history of science as well.