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FAREWELL TO THE PAST CENTURY?

RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES AND SOCIETY CONSIDERING THE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF ALEKSANDR ISAYEVICH SOLZHENITSYN'S BIRTH

ABSTRACT The Russian authorities, supported by the representatives of the Russian cultural circles, celebrated 2018 as a year of harmonious reception of their literary traditions. Accordingly, the 100th anniversary of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's birth was included into the series of commemorations and jubilees, minimizing, however, the problem of Russian literature's profound heterogeneity and inconsistency. Disregarding differences between literary currents, equalizing various, often contradictory intellectual phenomena can manifest that the Russian authorities search for a kind of cultural synthesis which will become a solid foundation of the Russianness in the 21st century. Nevertheless, their integrative ambitions are somehow static or demobilizing. Moreover, these seem to be based on the conviction that cultural policy is not about determining and enhancing directions of further literary development but about assimilating and even restricting various artistic forces and traditions.

Key words: cultural and literary policy of the Russian Federation, politics of memory in the Russian Federation, memorizing literary jubilees in Russia in 2018, the one hundredth anniversary of Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn's birth

INTRODUCTION

On December 11, 2018, on the 100th anniversary of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's birth, the President of the Russian Federation took part in the unveiling of the writer's monument in Tagansky district in Moscow. Giving a short speech, Putin called the author of *The Gulag Archipelago*: *a true and genuine Russian patriot*, who *did not let anybody to speak contemptuously nor ill about his Motherland* and *opposed any manifestations of Russophobia*. According to the President of the Russian Federation, Solzhenitsyn *clearly distinguished between true, national Russia and the specificity of the totalitarian system*. Moreover, Putin said, *His heart, soul, and reflection were full of pain for the Motherland as well as love for it*.[1]

Simultaneously, in light of the presidential characteristic, Solzhenitsyn had never been trying to be convenient for anybody, but *openly and honestly was presenting his opinions and beliefs, focusing his attention on the moral principles which should be fundamental for any society*. Staying true to himself, added Putin, the writer was stubbornly searching for *ways of rebuilding Russia* which would prevent Russians from repeating the tragedies of the past as well as allow *our multinational people to live in dignity and justice*. Due to this, considered the Russian President, *the voice of Solzhenitsyn is reminiscent in the minds and hearts of people*. Nevertheless, according to Putin, the writer's works wait to be popularised among new readers, especially among the young generation. In consequence, the date of the 100th anniversary of the writer's birth should be understood as an occasion to turn attention back to his legacy, *which is woven into the material of the 20th century and stays contemporary also for us – for Russia and the whole world*.[2]

The quoted words pretend to be non-controversial and deeply rooted in the common sense of contemporary Russian society. Nevertheless, for many Russians, the position of their President seems incomprehensible, questionable, even dishonest and offensive. What is more, his gesture was made in the atmosphere of a heated discussion on the role played by Solzhenitsyn in contemporary Russian culture.

IN SEARCH OF SOLZHENITSYN'S LEGACY. THE MEANING IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

The discussion on Solzhenitsyn's position in Russian literature and culture as well as on his influence on contemporary Russian mentality has lasted almost three decades and has various layers, dimensions, and aspects. Nevertheless, one of the most crucial parts

[1] "'Александр Исаевич противостоял любым проявлениям русофобии'", *Русская народная линия*, 12 December 2018, at <http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2018/12/12/aleksandr_isaevich_protivostoyal_lyubym_proyavleniyam_rusofobii>; "Путин назвал Солженицына истинным патриотом России", *РИА Новости*, 11 December 2018, at <https://ria.ru/20181211/1547797642.html>.

[2] "'Александр Исаевич противостоял..."; "Путин назвал Солженицына..."

of this debate regards the aim, scope, and presence of the writer's works in national education.

Yuriy Lazarev points out some crucial moments which constitute the history of introducing Solzhenitsyn's works to the Russian school curricula. These, according to the author, are:

1) the publication of the issue 5/1989 of "The Literature in School" – a journal for teachers of the Russian language and literature – which informed that the decision on excluding Solzhenitsyn from the Union of Soviet Writers was cancelled; moreover, Pyotr Palamarchuk has published a short article entitled *Alexander Solzhenitsyn – a guide*, including brief characteristics of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *Matryona's Place*, *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Additionally, four variations of a new curriculum of literature classes were also part of the issue; in two of these there were mentions of Solzhenitsyn: the first was a proposition by the Department of the Russian Language and Literature Teaching Methods at the State Leningrad Hercen Pedagogical Institute (where in the chapter entitled *Review of the 50s and 60s* the notion on *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was made). The second was a curriculum by the Institute for Education Research under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education of the RSFSR (where in the chapter entitled *Restored names* Solzhenitsyn was mentioned together with Brodsky, Voinovich, Nekrasov, Vladimov, and Korzhavin;[3]
2) the entry into a new curriculum of literature classes in 1991; the document became a basis for including *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *Matryona's Place*, pieces of *The Gulag Archipelago*, and *Rebuilding Russia* into the set of lectures for 11th form; according to the curriculum, teachers and pupils were also expected to choose some more texts by Solzhenitsyn to discuss during classes;[4]
3) the adoption of "the standards in literature" and *the examples of teaching curricula* in 2004; due to these documents in the middle cycle a pupil should be acquainted with *Matryona's Place* and in the senior period with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; moreover, on the profiled level the fragments of *The Gulag Archipelago* were also added; the examples of curricula proposed additionally *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, "*The Red Wheel*;[5]
4) the death of Solzhenitsyn in 2008; following it the Department of State Policy in the Field of Education, answering the recommendation of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, sent a letter to the regions of the country entitled *On the technical recommendations about the spread of teaching of A.I. Solzhenitsyn's creative legacy in the institutions of general education*; the letter

[3] Ю.В. Лазарев, "Изучение А.И. Солженицына в школе в контексте проблем современного литературного образования (по материалам полемики в средствах массовой информации)", *Вестник Рязанского государственного университета имени С.А. Есенина*, no. 32 (2011), at <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/izuchenie-a-i-solzhenitsyna-v-shkole-v-kontekste-problem-sovremennogo-literaturnogo-obrazovaniya-po-materialam-polemiki-v-sredstvah>.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

attracted media attention, causing a broad discussion on locating Solzhenitsyn's works in contemporary Russian school; in the frame of this discourse, the writer's widow, Natalia Solzhenitsyna, announced that due to the instruction of her husband, she was working on a one-volume edition of *The Gulag Archipelago*; moreover, Solzhenitsyna took many efforts to make this edition a compulsory position in the Russian school programs of literature classes; her endeavours were supported by state authorities as well as teachers, intellectuals, and artists. The main arguments in favour of Solzhenitsyna's initiative were based on a conviction that *The Gulag Archipelago* truly shows the Russian history of the 21st century which should be known and not be forgotten; however, there were also a lot of opponents who persuaded against presenting *The Gulag Archipelago* to young Russians in schools; in a radio programme entitled "The School Meeting" and broadcast by Echo of Moscow radio station on 31 of October 2008, the host informed that in a survey regarding the issue of Solzhenitsyna's proposal, 50% of the respondents were for, and 50% were against including *The Gulag Archipelago* into the school canons.[6]

The discussion on Solzhenistyn's position in contemporary Russian education and culture is still open, especially on the Internet. The opinions expressed by its participants remain strongly diversified and polarised, often formulated in a radical, extreme way. Amongst the arguments favourable to the writer, the most common are claims that:

- he belongs to the Russian literary classics, so each Russian should know his works to some extent,
- his works remind about the past,
- his works do not allow to forget about the injustice of the USSR system,
- he exposes the essence of totalitarian regimes,
- he should be a moral compass for contemporary Russians,
- his works are a medium of universal values.[7]

The list of the most frequent arguments against commemorating Solzhenitsyn's legacy presents as follows:

- *The Gulag Archipelago* and works by Solzhenitsyn are too complicated, especially for young people,
- his works have no artistic value, being an example of a poor literary style,
- his defence of universal values is apparent,
- he praises anti-values, anti-patriotism, lack of devotion to the motherland, and even national treason,
- the inclusion of Solzhenistyn's works to the school curriculum was decided mostly by a narrow circle of officials and bureaucrats, without real and in-depth consultations with organizations of parents, teachers, peoples of culture, and civil society,

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

– Solzhenistyn's presence in a contemporary Russian school and public discourse confirms ideologisation of these spheres.[8]

Interestingly, Vladimir Putin personally supported the attempts of the writer's widow to include the one-volume edition of *The Gulag Archipelago* into the school curriculum of classes in literature. Solzhenitsyna even claimed that without his assistance, the book would have never been part of the education of young Russians. Moreover, she highlighted that deciding to help in the process of implementation of her proposal, the President of the Russian Federation did not follow suggestions of his advisers but his personal opinion. This information met a comment of S. Volkov, who said that *it is somewhat sad that in the great country these events are carried out on request and according to the will of one man*.[9]

However, Putin's gesture can be treated as an effort to cut down polemics between the contemporary supporters and opponents of Solzhenitsyn. Additionally, it is to be located in the frame of a much broader and continually evolving idea of the Russian authorities' reference to national literature, culture, and history as essential triggers of legitimizing power and uniting society.

The processes mentioned above seemed to be easily observable in 2017 when the Russians were coping with various symbolic and ideological challenges generated by the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolution(s). The state authorities had recognized the conflictual potential of the disputes over the meaning of the 1917 events in Russian history and were pursuing to propose a consensual terminology to describe the revolutionary past. They also offered to the society a narrative which was designed to sum up the 20th century, reducing divisions and contradictions which had arisen and had been fixed for one hundred years.

Such an intention, among others, is noticeable in a speech given by Putin during the meeting of the Valdai Club in Sochi in 2017. The President of the Russian Federation stated then: *today, turning back to the lessons from a hundred years ago, to the Russian revolution of 1917, we see, how densely the negative and, it must be said, positive consequences of these events are intertwined*.[10] However, he added also that *a revolution always manifests the responsibility deficit of those who would like to persevere, to freeze an obsolete order of things, clearly requiring to be rebuilt as well as those, who pursue to stimulate changes, not yielding to domestic conflicts and destructive confrontation*.[11] Furthermore, Putin claimed that it would have been better if in 1917 Russia had chosen a way of evolution, *a way of gradual, consequent movement forward*, without paying *the price of statehood destruction, merciless violating of millions of human fates*.[12] In his opinion, it is obvious that the events of 1917 have stimulated profound global changes. The Russian

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 "Путин неоднозначно оценивает итоги революции 1917 года", *ТАСС*, 19 October 2017, at <http://tass.ru/politika/4661166>.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

revolution, according to him, *released a serious reassessment of developmental models, giving rise to rivalry and competition, which were mostly rewarded with advantages of the so-called West*.[13] Attributing the benefits of the process being described by him, the President of the Russian Federation pointed out *not only the political victories resulted from the so-called Cold War*. According to his interpretation of history, *the USSR's challenge was answered by many of the Western XX century achievements – an increase of level of life, a strong middle-class formation, labour market and social sphere reforms, development of education, human rights guarantees, including minority and women rights, breaking down racial segregation, which just a few decades ago was still a shameful practice in many countries, also in the United States*.[14] Moreover, said Putin, the end of the Cold War was a unique occasion to *truly turn over a new page of history*. However, due to his narrative, the chance was missed. The source of this misfortune, claimed the President of the Russian Federation, should be seen in the attitude of the United States and its Western allies towards international relations. These countries, according to him, feeling like the winners of the Cold War, had believed in their infallibility. In consequence, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they did not search for consensus and a new balance of power, ignoring others in the process of constructing frames for the future world. They started to impose their standards to others, often interfering into the internal affairs of non-Western states.[15]

This narrative conflicts with many other interpretations, particularly popular to the West from the Russian Federation's boundaries. Additionally, the dispute over an evaluation of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR includes much potential for identity creation processes. Diverse interpretations of the past from 30-40 years ago are rooted in different hierarchies of values. Also, increasing consciousness of their discord leads to the creation and strengthening of mental as well as ideological barriers between Russia, America, and Europe.

The issue has a fragile and controversial character which is well manifested in the event from July 2019. At that time, Donald Tusk, as the President of the European Council, firstly, at an international conference in Georgia and then on his Twitter account, referred to Putin's words, who claimed on various occasions that the collapse of the Soviet Union is *the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the XX century*. According to Tusk, this statement is untrue. Moreover, the President of the European Council added, *Today in Georgia I want to say loud and clear: the USSR collapse was a blessing to Georgians, Poles, Ukrainians, and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. And also to Russians*. Commenting on this announcement, the spokeswoman of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, described it as *an anti-Russian dig* and *another attack of Russophobia*. She also stated: *I would like to remind Mr. Tusk that – as the President of the Russian Federation repeatedly emphasized – the collapse of the Soviet*

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Union had led to numerous human tragedies when tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots in a moment found themselves abroad.[16]

The position of the spokeswoman seems to indicate that the representatives of the Russian state treat the interpretation of history created by Putin as the authoritative and unquestionable one. Probably, the authorities of the Russian Federation put much hope in it. This narrative can be distinctly perceived as mitigating divisions which were established and fixed in the past. This peculiar reconciliation is expected to help in reintegration of the Russian society and focusing it around a coherent and enhanced vision of patriotism, which would be used as an essential source of feeling of the national unity.

Putin's speech given during the session of the Civil Society Development Council on October 30, 2017, can be framed in the context described above. The President of the Russian Federation hoped that the date of giving his speech will allow Russians to recapitulate *the dramatic events which divided the country and the nation as well as will become a symbol of overcoming the split, a symbol of mutual forgiveness and accepting the native history as it is – with its great victories and tragic pages*. He underlined also that the meeting of the Council was held on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions when the memorial "Wall of Grief" („Стена скорби"), commemorating the victims of political repressions in the USSR, was unveiled on the corner of the Academician Sakharov Prospect and Sadovoye Koltso.[17]

During this ceremony, the President of the Russian Federation said that *the horrible past is not allowed to be thrown away from the national memory. All the more, it cannot be justified by anything: by any higher so-called goods of the nation. When it comes to speaking about the repressions, about death and sufferings of millions of people, it is enough to visit the Butovo Firing Range or other twin graves of the repression victims, not uncommon in Russia, to understand that there is no possible way to justify those crimes*.[18] He added that *the repressions spare neither talents or merits to the Motherland, nor a sincere devotion to it. It was possible to formulate false and completely absurd accusations against everybody"*.[19] The speech was concluded with a quotation of Natalia Solzhenistyna's opinion, who

[16] "'Antyrosyjski przytyk' i 'atak rusofobii'. Moskwa odpowiada na słowa Tuska", *tvn24*, 11 July 2019, at <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/donald-tusk-mowil-o-rozpadzie-zsrr-odpowiada-rosyjskie-msz,952095.html>; "Захарова предложила Туску обратить внимание на положение русскоязычных жителей Прибалтики", *Рамблер*, 11 July 2019, at <https://news.rambler.ru/other/42483517/?utm_content=rnews&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink>.

[17] "Путин открыл 'Стену скорби'", *Lenta.ru*, 30 October 2017, at <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/10/30/thewall/>; "Путин назвал 100-летие революции символом преодоления раскола", *Lenta.ru*, 30 October 2017, at <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/10/30/revoluciya/>; "Дата столетия Октябрьской революции станет подведением черты и символом взаимного прощения – Путин", *YouTube*, 30 November 2017, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd46jifRAtY>.

[18] В. Одиссонова, Г. Лиманский, Е. Рачева, "'Страшное прошлое нельзя оправдать никакими высшими так называемыми благами народа'. Владимир Путин открыл 'Стену скорби'", *Новая газета*, 30 October 2017, at <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/10/30/74387-vladimir-putin-otkryl-memorial-stena-skorbi-zhertvam-bolshogo-terrora-v-tsentre-moskvy>.

[19] Ibid.

said that the dark sides of the past should be "known, remembered, judged, and only then forgiven".[20]

It is important to notice that aiming to strengthen his message, Putin often and gladly builds up his position with references to the words of Solzhenitsyn or his widow. Doing so – seemingly – the President of the Russian Federation continues to convince the audience that he treats Solzhenitsyn's legacy as an inspiration which helps to determine the imponderables of contemporary Russian reflection on the past. What is more, he tries to co-create an atmosphere which would motivate the use of Solzhenitsyn's works as patterns of thinking on the collapse of the USSR as well as on the lessons which should be derived by Russians from this process.

Interestingly, in December 1998, Solzhenitsyn refused to accept a decoration with which Boris Yeltsin wanted to honor him. Years later, the writer's widow was justifying this decision, claiming that her husband was against being granted by the authorities which caused a profound crisis in Russia and ruined the country. However, in June 2007, during the second term of Putin's presidency, he accepted a state reward for outstanding achievements in humanities in 2006. In connection with this event the President of the Russian Federation visited the writer. Then he commented on the meeting: "We talked about Russia, about today's current situation, about the country's future", noticing that Solzhenitsyn affirmed some of Putin's political choices.[21]

Additionally, some years ago Natalia Solzhenitsyna regretted in a TV broadcast "Pozner" that Mikhail Gorbachev had ignored the writer after the essay *Rebuilding Russia* was published. In the light of her narrative, publishing this work, Solzhenitsyn wanted to share his experience gained during his in-depth studies on the Russian political and legal tradition. Unfortunately, according to Solzhenitsyna's opinion, Gorbachev belittled her husband's reflection practically without reading the essay. As a result, he omitted a vital inspiration which would have helped to prepare reforms viable to improve the living conditions of the USSR citizens.[22]

Solzhenisyna seems deeply convinced that the essential thoughts formulated in *Rebuilding Russia* as well as in other texts of the writer are still essential. Due to this, she welcomes the attention of the Russian authorities and elites towards her husband and his works with satisfaction. She also hopes that Solzhenitsyn's reflection will remain a meaningful signpost for them. For these reasons, the writer's widow

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20 Ibid.

21 "Почему Солженицын отказался от награды Ельцина, но принял другую во времена Путина", *Заголовки*, 3 August 2009, at <http://www.zagolovki.ru/daytheme/solshenitsen/03Aug2009>; "Владимир Путин побывал в гостях у Солженицына", *Вести.ру*, 12 June 2007, at <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=125771&tid=22181>; "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.06.2007 г. № 699 'О присуждении Государственной премии Российской Федерации за выдающиеся достижения в области гуманитарной деятельности 2006 года'", *Президент России*, 5 June 2007, at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25621>.

22 "Познер Наталья Солженицына 15 12 2014", *YouTube*, 16 December 2014, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o1h1w00C2E>.

sincerely approved the decree of the President of the Russian Federation from December 2014. This document stipulated that in 2018, because of the 100th anniversary of Solzhenitsyn birth, Russians should focus their attention on his legacy.[23] Referring to this document, Solzhenitsyna claimed that the jubilee should be perceived as an opportunity to undertake a belated polemics around the questions formulated by her husband. It would help Russians a lot, she persuaded, if they decide to develop in-depth debate concerning the writer's ideas, *quoting him without distortions* and *reading more*.[24]

PURSUING CULTURAL AND LITERARY RECONCILIATION IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY?

Solzhenitsyn is, therefore, a central literary figure, invoked by the Russian authorities, and promoted by his wife who approves and urges the state to support her endeavours. However, the decree regarding the 100th anniversary of the writer's birth is not the only document which the Russian authorities proclaimed aiming to stimulate the society's attention on literary issues in 2018.

In this context, activities of the portal ГодЛитературы.РФ seem particularly interesting. Initially, it was devoted to informing the broad public about any initiatives which were held as a part of the Year of Literature in 2015. Moreover, the portal was expected to create and disseminate original materials which would encourage readers to participate in organized events. It was supported financially by the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media. The portal was founded by the Organizational Committee for Conducting the Year of Literature in 2015. The establishment of the Committee, in turn, was based on the decree of the President of the Russian Federation.[25]

What is essential, the activity of the Organizational Committee did not end after 2015. The body was converted into the Organizational Committee for Supporting Literature, Cinematography, and Reading, led previously by Sergey Naryshkin.[26] At the same time, ГодЛитературы.РФ became a special project of "Rossiyskaya Gazeta", devoted to literature and reading development.

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[23] "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 27.06.2014 г. № 474 'О праздновании 100-летия со дня рождения А.И. Солженицына'", *Президент России*, 27 June 2014, at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38618>; "Идет масштабная подготовка к празднованию 100-летия со дня рождения Александра Солженицына", *Телеканал "Россия – Культура"*, 24 April 2017, at <https://tvkultura.ru/article/show/article_id/174768/>.

[24] "Познер Наталья Солженицына..."

[25] "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 12.06.2014 г. № 426 'О проведении в Российской Федерации Года литературы'", *Президент России*, 12 June 2014, at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38558>.

[26] "Распоряжение Правительства Российской Федерациот 6 февраля 2016 г. N 173-р", *Российская газета – Федеральный выпуск*, no. 34(6902), 18 February 2016, at <https://rg.ru/2016/02/18/literatura-dok.html>.

The portal delivers elaborated information on literary life in Russia and abroad as well as on literary competitions and prizes. Moreover, it is a space for bloggers who create literary works or are interested in literary issues. It works as a platform for literary opinions exchange as well as a resource for lectures on literature. ГодЛитературы.РФ mediates between writers and readers, encouraging reading, writing, and critique.[27]

Essentially, in 2018, ГодЛитературы.РФ accentuated the anniversaries of three Russian writers. In so doing, it was referring to the decision taken during the 39th Session of the UNESCO General Conference, held in Paris from October 30 to November 14, 2017. During this event – as the portal administrators highlighted – the organization had accepted 48 anniversaries to celebrate in 2018 and 2019. Not only can Solzhenitsyn's jubilee be found on the list but also the 200th anniversary of Ivan Turgenev's birth and the 150th anniversary of Maxim Gorky's birth.[28]

The Turgenev's jubilee, as well as Gorky's, was previously noticed also by the President of the Russian Federation. Putin signed two decrees referring to these anniversaries.[29] The first appreciates *the great importance of I.S. Turgenev's works for native and world culture*. The second emphasizes *the outstanding input of Maxim Gorky in native and world culture*. All of this means that the head of the Russian state had decided to encourage society to celebrate three very different figures of the literary world. Differentiation among them regards not only Turgenev's, Gorky's, and Solzhenitsyn's works but also their world-views, attitudes, and positions. However, the opinion can be easily risked that each of them can be recognized as a symbol of different and often competitive traditions within the universum of Russian socio-political thought.

It is hard to deny that Turgenev's biography and works are saturated with elements of noblemen's liberalism connected with a genuine love of the Western style of life and the images of all-European culture. The writer wanted to create bridges between Russian and non-Russian patterns as well as traditions. He was permanently searching for paths of popularizing Russia in Europe and Europe in Russia.

Gorky's legacy cannot be read separately from his radical views and decisions. He was a writer who wanted to create the Soviet ideology and was doing so, proclaiming the revolution as a process of shaping new humankind. His legacy remains an important point of reference for all of those who concentrate on searching for uncompromised ways of establishing social equality.

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27 "Информация", *Год литературы*, at <https://godliteratury.ru/informaciy-orgkomiteta>.

28 "Юбилеи Горького, Тургенева и Солженицына – в списке ЮНЕСКО", *Год литературы*, 15 January 2018, at <https://godliteratury.ru/events/yubilei-gorkogo-turgeneva-i-solzhenic>.

29 "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 5.03.2014 г. № 114 'О праздновании 200-летия со дня рождения И.С.Тургенева'", *Президент России*, 5 March 2014, at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38153>; "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 13.07.2015 г. № 360 'О праздновании 150-летия со дня рождения Максима Горького'", *Президент России*, 13 July 2015, at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/39884>.

As for Solzhenitsyn – despite a complicated personality and biography – he has to be interpreted as a traditionalist. Traditional are his views on Russianness, ways of its cultivation, and protection. Traditional is also his vision regarding the fate of Russia, its opportunities and threats, duties and temptations, allies and enemies. Herein is the source of his distrust towards Western values and standards. Herein lay the roots of the Russian lifestyle idealized and supported by the writer.

During the 2018 celebrations, all discrepancies between Turgenev, Gorky, and Solzhenitsyn did not seem to be fundamental for the federal authorities. The organizers of many events were pursuaded not to emphasize the tensions existing between three literary legacies. The problem of ideological distance or even conflict of the writers' world-views was being touched upon very superficially or just ignored. One of the most popular comments to this issue was that their attitudes and positions were obviously different, but it does not mean that they should not be celebrated as great Russian writers. This opinion often served as a sophism which was helping to inhibit a serious discussion on the intellectual, moral, social or political meaning of Turgenev's, Gorky's, and Solzhenitsyn's texts. It contained a presupposition that they were classics, so their works must be treated as masterpieces, saturated with precious notions and profound remarks. In consequence, the suggestion is imposed that any attempt to compare, asses, and rank their achievements has to be considered inappropriate.

This equalization seems to harmonize with Putin's expectations. His opinions regarding the world of culture and literature have been expressed on many occasions – one of them was the Congress of the Russian Literary Association. During the event, Putin gave a speech, emphasizing the integrating function of the Russian language and literature. He claimed, among others, that the Russian language is a means of unifying Russians as well as an instrument of communication between the nations of the Russian Federation.[30] Moreover, in his opinion, *preservation of the Russian language, literature, and culture is a problem of national security, of saving identity in a globalized world*. It is so, because *classic Russian literature, as well as the excellent Russian language, are the basis of historical, spiritual values*.[31] Their cultivation – the President of the Russian Federation emphasized – many times allowed Russians to survive various axiological crises and *to remain a nation with its character and traditions*. The national literature and language, he considered, are necessary not only for a common understanding between Russians but also to ensure their connection with Russian history, to involve them into *the faith of their Motherland*. Therefore, according to Putin, everything should be done *to make the acquaintance of classic and contemporary literature as well as accurate speech inherent parts of the country's life*.[32]

[30] К. Латухина, "Путин объяснил значение литературы", *Год литературы*, 26 May 2016, at <https://godliteratury.ru/events/putin-obyasnil-znachenie-literatury>.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

Another statement regarding the meaning of the Russian literature and language was delivered by the President of Russia in December 2016, during the joint session of the Council of Culture and Art as well as the Council of the Russian Language. Putin concluded, then, that the Russian language and classic Russian literature produce a genuine "cultural code for Russians" which should not be only preserved but also passed on to future generations. According to him, the accomplishment of these aims depends on accurate work of schools and universities as well as on active support for diverse cultural initiatives and educational projects. In this sphere, Putin evaluated, Russia has had remarkable successes. In light of his assessments, Russian citizens more and more frequently devote their free time to associate with treasures of national culture. This growing demand, he claimed, should meet a broad and attractive offer prepared by artists in cooperation with various state agendas focusing on preservation and development of the Russian cultural heritage.[33]

Freedom of expression – according to Putin's assurance – remains the fundamental principle and is "absolutely unwavering". It means that matters of designing cultural events and products belong to artists' competence, who have their professional autonomy, protected by law. Therefore, the authorities should not only constrain themselves from influencing people of culture in their work but also protect them from unlawful pressure of society. It means, claimed Putin, that the state bodies are determined to prevent acts of hooliganism against some spectacles and exhibitions.[34]

However, the President of the Russian Federation made a reservation that he expects artists to understand the responsibility which is entangled in their vocation. Due to this, he emphasized that *the creative environment* [...] *should independently determine the borderline between cynical, offensive, shocking, and artistic action*. This ought to be achieved by creating "a code of conduct" in the sphere of culture. Self-regulation seems to him a remedy against various conflicts and controversies often arising between representatives of culture and their audiences. Justifying this thesis, Putin compared cultural activity to judo in which fights are judged according to specific criteria defined by the community of people practising the discipline. In his opinion, *such criteria are needed to be also elaborated on by the creative environment. This task is not easy, but it would be good, if not we but you could do this. And then it would be easier for me, honestly speaking, to constrain officers who cross the borders*.[35]

In his speech, Putin refers to the terrorist attack against "Charlie Hebdo". Doing this, he proceeds to justify the thesis that the administration is forced to evaluate cultural activity as a fact which can influence the level of public security. According to him, it should be remembered that art elicits strong emotions, not seldom negative, which in turn often cause extreme reactions in people who feel offended. Due to this, Putin

[33] К. Завражин, Т. Замахина, "Путин предложил выработать 'правила поведения' в культуре", *Российская газета – Федеральный выпуск*, no. 275(7143), 2 December 2016, at <https://rg.ru/2016/12/02/reg-szfo/putin-obsudil-s-deiateliami-kultury-kriterii-dlia-proizvedenij-iskusstva.html>.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

considers that the question should be asked, if "Charlie Hebdo" cartoonists indeed had to offend the representatives of Islam. Additionally, he claims that it is not essential if they wanted to do this or not. Even if intentions of the sender are not offensive, it is still the receiver who assesses a particular act of communication. It means that each artist should reflect on the audience's sensitivity and predict the possible outcomes of his creative endeavours.[36]

Motives and thoughts raised by the President of the Russian Federation are broadly accepted, multiplied, and developed by various officials at the federal, regional, and local level as well as by journalists, columnists, writers, literary critics. Their positions, to some extent, seem to be shared by Pavel Basinsky – a popular and influential figure in the contemporary Russian literary society.[37]

In Basinsky's 2017 text, published in "The Russian Newspaper" and entitled *The Year 2018 as a year of the unity of the Russian classics*, the coincidence between Turgenev's, Gorky's, and Solzhenitsyn's jubilees is emphasized. Moreover, he highlights that 2018 also means the 190th anniversary of Lev Tolstoy's birth. His article exposes the problem of ideological evolution of four writers as well as their mistakes and biographical incoherencies. Basinsky focuses on the diversity of the socio-political traditions to which the legacies of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Gorky, and Solzhenitsyn belong. Nevertheless, he does this to express the opinion that the discrepancies between them are to be known but not to be overestimated.[38]

In light of Basinsky's views, the four classics should be remembered and praised especially for their literary greatness and genuine patriotism (although their mastery and love for the motherland was of a different kind). Turgenev, Tolstoy, Gorky, and Solzhenitsyn, he argues, are equal in creating *the glory of Russian literature in Russia as well as abroad*. Moreover, they *are the most well-known Russian writers in the world together with Chekhov and Dostoevsky*. In consequence, the columnist claims that the attitude of shared respect and recognition to their legacies should entail the emergence of national unity. This unity – he convinces – ought to be achieved by inspiring Russians to contemplate and understand the wide variety of commitments to their country.[39]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Basinsky is an author of biographies of Gorky and Tolstoy, a novelist, a literary critic, a researcher and lecturer, a member of the Association of Russian Writers. He is a permanent member of Alexander Solzhenistyn's Prize Committe (from 1997) as well as a laureate of the "Большая книга" Prize (2010), and the Prize of the Russian Federation Government (2015). In 2019, he received the 2018 State Prize of the Russian Federation for his "input into development of the national literature" ("Басинский Павел Валерьевич", *Литературный институт имени А.М. Горького*, at <http://litinstitut.ru/content/basinskiy-pavel-valerevich>; "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 10 июня 2019 года № 235 'О присуждении Государственных премий Российской Федерации в области литературы и искусства 2018 года'", *Президент России*, 10 June 2019, at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60719>).

[38] П. Басинский, "2018-й как год единства русских классиков", *Год литературы*, 26 November 2017, at <https://godliterature.ru/public-post/basinskiy>.

[39] Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian authorities, supported by the representatives of the Russian cultural circles, were oriented to celebrate 2018 as the year of harmonious reception of the Russian literary tradition. Additionally, they were were honouring Solzhenitsyn by integrating him into the history of Russian literature, visibly ignoring, however, the fact of its profound heterogeneity and inconsistency.

This approach was helping to demonstrate and argue that Russians need to search for balance between various aesthetics and world-views. Followers of the argument hoped that a vision of the unified Russian literary classics would be useful in satisfying different expectations and enhancing national integration. This is why the President of the Russian Federation, his administration, and the vast system of federal institutions eagerly disseminate the message that Russians can and should be differentiated in their opinions but also unanimous in their tribute to the Russian classics' artistic genius.

Putin's statements, broadly quoted and commented above, allow a claim that the Russian federal authorities have determined the imaginarium of culture which they want to promote. The President of the Russian Federation pursues to characterize his ideas in this area in various contexts, persuading society to accept his narratives. Promotion of culture is supposed to be an important instrument of the federal governing. However, from the administrative point of view, this sphere is not an autotelic value but only a means of preserving as well as reproducing and developing certain customs and schemes of being, which are expected to constitute an essence of Russianness. Moreover, the federal authorities claim that culture helps to create a positive image of Russia in the world. It is perceived as a part of soft power which can be used by the Russian Federation to improve the attractiveness of this country in the eyes of foreigners.

Disregarding differences between literary currents, equalizing various, often contradictory intellectual phenomena can show that the Russian authorities search for a kind of cultural synthesis which will become a solid foundation of Russianness in the 21st century. Nevertheless, their integrating ambitions are somehow static or demobilizing and seem to be based on the opinion that cultural policy is not about determining and enhancing directions of further literary development but about assimilating and even restricting various artistic forces and traditions. In consequence, literature is perceived not as a catalyst of critical thinking but as a pillar of established and sanctioned patterns of behaviour.

Literature in Russia not seldom was treated as an instrument for easing the fulfillment of socio-political projects. Nowadays, in many circles, it is also expected that popularisation of classics can help to build and spread the feeling of civic unity as well as patriotic attitudes. In light of the popular opinion, policy in this sphere should be aimed at overcoming ideological divisions within Russian society. So the main strategy

of the federal authorities to achieve this objective is to embrace many tastes and systems of socio-political, aesthetic or moral values. However, embracing them does not mean a genuine reconciliation, which needs to be understood as a far more ambitious and challenging aim.

The authorities, of course, can facilitate or impede the fulfilment of the goals mentioned above. However, they cannot replace the Russian society, which should find autonomously its ways to discover new literary patterns truly uniting the most valuable elements of different legacies. Nevertheless, it is difficult to answer if, and if yes, when and how this new status of the Russian literary culture is possible to be reached. Moreover, aiming to strictly predict or determine the main features of this new face of Russianness would not be possible as well as appropriate.

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