



DEFENDERS OF THE BESIEGED FORTRESS

NOTES ON THE HISTORICAL LEGITIMISATION
OF RUSSIA'S SPECIAL SERVICES

Jolanta Darczewska

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Content editor
Adam Eberhardt

Editor
Anna Łabuszewska

Co-operation
Małgorzata Zarębska, Katarzyna Kazimierska

Translation
Jim Todd

Graphic design
PARA-BUCH

DTP
GroupMedia

Photograph on cover
Peyker/Shutterstock.com

PUBLISHER

Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia
Centre for Eastern Studies

ul. Koszykowa 6a, Warsaw, Poland
Phone: + 48 /22/ 525 80 00
Fax: + 48 /22/ 525 80 40
osw.waw.pl

ISBN 978-83-65827-25-8

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INTRODUCTION

In this text, I will examine the main trains of thought in the narrative of the historical memory of the Russian Federation's special services, which demonstrate the attempts to reconcile the traditions of the Tsarist-era services with those of the Soviet services. I will proceed from the assumption that the history of the special services is part of the history of the state apparatus, and more broadly, of the state's political systems. In this context, the work of Russian historiographers focuses not only on combining these two, in many respects contradictory identities of Russia – the Tsarist and the totalitarian – but above all on the creation of parallels between the historical and contemporary situations. This is because the historical legitimisation of the services is an important factor that gives legal validity to the current ruling elite, whose roots largely lie in the KGB, and which operates under the conditions of a new system of governance based on state capitalism.

This linking of the traditions is a derivative of the logic and continuity, imposed from above, of the Russian state, which also lay at the basis of the historical-cultural standard establishing the 'canonical' version of Russian history which is compulsory for the authors of history textbooks. The paradox is that the Russian historiography of the special services locates their origin in the first Soviet security service: the All-Russian Commission for Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (*Всероссийская Чрезвычайная Комиссия по Борьбе с Контрреволюцией и Саботажем*, commonly abbreviated to ЧК – ЧеКа). The activities and structures of the ЧеКа and its successors were subordinated to the logic of the revolution, which broke with the pre-Bolshevik traditions of the state. Out of necessity, the contemporary Russian historiography of the special services is a continuation of Soviet historiography, artificially forced into a new historical-civilisational framework. Its controversial and superficial reinterpretations cover both the Chekist tradition and the legacy of the Tsarist security services. The civilisational context, however, permits a depiction of the historical

political-social processes as being a phase in the Russian state's struggle against internal challenges and external threats, which the special services have effectively repelled.

The interpretation and reinterpretation of the history of the Russian special services embedded in the historical-cultural context draws upon categories such as: the Russian spirit, the Russian Orthodox community, conservative values, the mission of uniting a multinational and multi-confessional society, the community of experiences, the experiences of wartime, the spirit of service to the state, the dictatorship of law, and others. Historical memory treated in an ideologised way (in the works of the theoreticians of information warfare, this is described as the so-called historical weapon) has become an important, if not an essential element of the manipulative technologies used to emphasise the distinctiveness of Russian civilisation and the perennial civilisational confrontation between East and West. From this viewpoint, the Russian services seem in fact to be more appropriately described by the use of categories used in systemic methodology: centralised authorities, the authoritarian system of government, the police state, strategic culture, et al.

This text consists of three parts. The first outlines the foundation of the institutional memory of the Russian special services, the ideology of 'Chekism'. The second part describes elements from the history of the Tsarist services being used today to demonstrate the continuity of the historical memory of the Russian special services. The third is a critical summary of the specific image of the special services' past as a victorious battle against their opponents.

THESES

1. The history of the special services and the ideas which organise it in the symbolic sphere are an important part of the reflection on their contemporary role and position. Over the centuries, the secret services defined Russia's relations with the outside world, shaped the domestic situation, and influenced the fate of the people and the nations that made up the Russian and Soviet empires. Many generations of their subjects and citizens were raised in the cult of state security: in this way, the services' negative image (as a powerful machine of repression) was washed out of public awareness, and their successes and contributions to the modernisation and building of the country's power were emphasised. This kind of emphasis on the services' unique role and importance is a well-tried instrument of social manipulation. Its return has been marked by the axiom, disseminated since the mid-1990s, that 'a strong Russia must have strong special services'.
2. The contemporary reinterpretations of the history of the Russian and Soviet special services are aimed at obliterating the memory of the police state. There is no tradition of democratic institutions in Russian history, and any attempts to change the government or conduct independent politics were and still are considered a crime against the state. For this reason at least, the authorities have always had to seek support from the special services. These, in turn, as a pillar of state power, not only defended the interests of the state, but also controlled its 'uniform spaces': the political, economic, social, administrative, legal, informational, spiritual, and even the physical spaces of historical consciousness. This is the main mark of the distinctness of the Russian special services (in the mental and organisational spheres, in their *modus operandi*) from their counterparts in the West.
3. Running to some extent against the aforementioned thesis about the continuity of the Russian state, as well as the

continuity of the methods and experiences of the Tsarist and Soviet services, the Russian special services of today derive their origin from the first Soviet security institution, the Che-Ka. In the symbolic space, this imposes radical, usually chaotic reinterpretations of Chekist ideology. Their perception in society is carefully supervised: individual elements are modified, some are removed, and new ones appear – depending on the needs of the authorities. One significant manifestation of this was the departure from the image of the services as the elite of society (the ‘new nobility’) created at the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s first term (2000) in favour of an image as ‘defenders of the fatherland’ towards the end of his third term (2012-2018).

4. The services’ departmental historiography, as represented by a fairly numerous group of scholars, treats history as a convenient platform for PR and the historical legitimisation of the contemporary services. The positive image created of them is in line with the expectations of the authorities. The self-stereotype which is disseminated therein – that is, the set of attributes attributed to their professional group, their symbolic image of themselves – also serves additional purposes: shaping a sense of the uniqueness of Russian service personnel, creating the desired capabilities, attitudes and values, and building intergenerational bonds. This image thus fulfils the following functions: providing identity, integration, didactics and socialisation.
5. President Vladimir Putin’s manner of exercising power has been characterised as ‘Chekistocracy’, that is, the power of a *nomenklatura* whose roots lie in the former KGB (which is sometimes mistakenly described as the seizure of power by the so-called power structures); the contemporary historiography of the special services thus also performs the function of legitimising the regime. The linking of the imperial and Soviet heritage – the rehabilitation of the past, which emphasises

the imperative of the power structures' stability, and bridges the historical and cultural differences of the multi-ethnic and multi-faith society of the Russian Federation – is part of a wider, long-term process of building a 'new' heritage of Russian political and ideological models, subordinated to the strategic goals of its policy, among which the dominant objective was and still is to maintain its role as a superpower.

I. 'A NEW TYPE OF CHEKIST': PATRIOTS AND DEFENDERS OF THE HOMELAND

The celebration of the centenary of the founding of the All-Russia Special Committee for Counter-Revolution and Sabotage has become a convenient opportunity to display the new essence of Chekism. The day of the CheKa's creation (20 December 1917) is officially a holiday commemorating the employees of the security organs, commonly known as Chekist's Day. It is celebrated by the contemporary descendants of the CheKa: the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Federal Security Service, and the Main Board for the President's Special Programmes. This institutional continuity is particularly emphasised by the FSB and SVR, which have had their own histories since the times of Feliks Dzerzhinsky. They thus perpetuate the Chekists' self-stereotype, which – like any ideological construct – is a simplified, positively and emotionally evaluated image of themselves as a professional group. At the same time, the need to raise the level of their self-assessment is met by demonstrating the centuries-long tradition of the Russian security system. This is manifested particularly in the anniversary issues of the magazine "FSB – for and against". In an article entitled 'Unchanging values'¹, Mikhail Buriyev, a Ph.D. in psychology, presented a contemporary, somehow universal suite of the desired values of an officer (high professional ethics, solidarity with his professional group, loyalty to the state, legalism, humanity, a comprehensive education, and excellent, timely specialist and psychological training). The features postulated (courage, bravery, dedication, heroism, and honour) were embedded in the ethos and history of the special services, and identified with a patriotic attitude. "Observing these principles", as he writes, "has always favoured the successes of our national services at the various stages of historical development in Russia".

¹ М. Буренков, *Неизменные ценности*, "ФСБ: за и против" № 1 (47), 2017: osfsb.ru/materialy/k-100-letiyu-organov.../neizmennyye-tsennosti/

In order to confirm this thesis, the author of this article recalls the names of “the outstanding theoreticians and practitioners of Russian intelligence and counterintelligence”: Stanislav Turlo², Nikolai Batyushin³ and Sergey Zubatov⁴. By thus expanding a perspective of the tradition of the patriotic attitudes of Russian officers which reaches beyond the revolutionary period of 1917, the author highlights another pillar of this tradition: service to the state. Here, service to the state is identified with defence of the country: the author has granted the officers of the security organs the honourable title of defenders of the fatherland, which previously had mainly been reserved for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Defender of the Fatherland Day is celebrated on 23 February as a separate celebration of the professional army.

The qualities of patriotism (sacrifice and dedication) and defence of the homeland, as the two main distinguishing features of the personality profiles and motivations of the officers of the Russian special services, were also the main message of the anniversary publications, including the interviews given last December by Aleksandr Bortnikov⁵, the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Sergei Naryshkin⁶, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service. The latter placed particular emphasis on the high

² An officer of the CheKa and OGPU from 1918-1924, author of the books *Шпионаж* [Spying] and *Красная контрразведка* [Red counterintelligence], first published in 1924, and later repeatedly republished. Arrested in 1938 on charges of counter-revolutionary activity; died in an NKVD labour camp.

³ A long-time head of the intelligence division in the Warsaw Military District, and considered to be one of the co-founders of Russian military intelligence – see below.

⁴ Presented here as the creator of the Russian school of espionage; for more on Zubatov, see below.

⁵ *ФСБ расставляет акценты*, „Российская газета”, 19 December 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/12/19/aleksandr-bortnikov-fsb-rossii-svobodna-ot-politicheskogo-vliianiia.html>

⁶ *Глава СВР Сергей Нарышкин: Мне всегда нравился памятник Дзержинскому*, „Московский комсомолец”, 19 December 2017: <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/12/19/glava-svr-sergey-naryshkin-mne-vsegda-nravilsya-pamyatnik-dzerzhinskomu.html>

intellectual level of Russia's intelligence personnel "combined with a healthy, soldierly discipline", as well as "decency and dedication, the ability to work in stressful situations". In his opinion, Dzerzhinsky was "the leading activist in the first stage of the construction of the young Soviet republic. He played a huge role in creating a native intelligence service. He was also the author of many social and economic projects". Recalling the historical trauma of violence and civil war, Naryshkin expressed the hope that "Russian society will never again be divided into Whites and Reds".

According to the FSB's head, today's officer is distinguished by his professionalism, legalism, a special bond with society and social trust. Bortnikov also stressed the importance of creativity, as well as the intergenerational bond among the ranks of the security personnel: "The current generation of officers intelligently uses the experience accumulated by their predecessors in their operational work, develops it and introduces innovations. It will be passed on to a new generation of officers, which will secure the continuity of the process of improving our ministry's work".

President Putin has also modified his message to his officers. He had previously characterised them as people who "treat the service of the state as a holy matter"; during the anniversary celebrations, he stated that "Chekists are the real patriots and defenders of the homeland, raising a permanent barrier of security against foreign interference in our social and political life".

The annual rituals accompanying Chekist's Day suggest that the Russian state is not only equipping its special services with the necessary tools, but is also surrounding them with a special, sacral, ideological aura. The idea is to make the services aware that the whole of Russia stands behind them, including the ruling elite, with its roots in the KGB, and which also nurtures the Chekist traditions. This intricately woven stereotype also serves to build up Russian society's respect for and consent to the specific methods which the secret services employ. One could say: in today's militarised and

mobilised Russia, everyone is defending the besieged fortress that is Russia; the heirs of the Chekists defend it not only out of patriotic duty, but do so in a competent manner, using methods sanctified by centuries-old traditions. This attitude should be interpreted in three ways: 1) as a mechanism for building cohesion and closeness within the officers' ranks, 2) an appreciation of the special services as a key element of the system of state management created by Putin, and 3) emphasising their role in the current mobilisation strategy of legitimising Putin's authoritarian regime.

1. Continuity and modification

It is obvious that the features and values of Russian officers as presented are independent both of their own experiences (many examples of their actions which are doubtful from the point of view of ethics and legalism can be witnessed on a daily basis), and of the image of these experiences in Russian popular opinion, in which work in the security organs is associated not so much with ideological but with material motivations⁷: exceptional social status, the right to use violence with impunity, and the possibility of resolving difficulties in everyday life. Nor is there any deeper reflection upon the mutually exclusive nature of the old and new elements of contemporary Chekism. The current officer class is far from leading the ascetic lifestyle of Dzerzhinsky; his people were also, above all, bearers of the cult of the revolution. Soviet propaganda perpetuated not only the myth of “pure hands, hot hearts and a cold mind”: the Chekists claimed to be a “new type of security organ”, which was to differ radically from both their predecessors and their Western counterparts. This purely ideological thesis was absurd, but it has been repeated for decades up until today. The Chekist ethos was also a product of the struggle against

⁷ This is indirectly demonstrated by a set of novelty items prepared for Chekist's Day. For this occasion in 2017, the Russian company Caviar produced a golden iPhone X smartphone with a portrait of Dzerzhinsky, and the inscription ‘100 years of the CheKa’ on a crocodile leather case. See <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/12/18/phone/>

the imperial idea. From the middle of the 19th century, it was based on a triad of autocracy, Orthodoxy and the peasant spirit; and it emphasised the separateness of the ‘Russian soul’, i.e. the separateness of Russia from the West.

The fact that the ‘Russian soul’ (the model of Russian spirituality) was an ideological project of the Tsarist state, emphasising a system of values and development model that was separate from the West, was well understood by its opponents, just as they understood the instrumental role of the Okhrana, which was a constant target of attacks in their ideological war with the Tsarist state. For example, Leon Trotsky, in a St. Petersburg newspaper article from 1882 appealing for “a solution to the workers’ question in a purely Russian spirit,” unmasked as “ultra-reactionary a nationalistic newspaper closely related to the Ochranka”:

“It has long been known that the ‘purely Russian spirit’, for which the patent is issued by the Police Department, combines three elements: police autocracy, police Orthodoxy and the police peasant spirit. I believe, however, that – in view of the current mood among the working masses – the Orthodox priest is too anachronistic and discredited a figure to be sent to the workers’ quarters bearing the olive branch of ‘social peace’. Mr. Zubatov’s agents are more useful here. (...) In St. Petersburg, as before in Moscow, ‘legal’ meetings of workers will be organised, during which Zubatov’s men will – on the one hand – try to reconcile what is irreconcilable (autocracy and the proletariat), and on the other – to persecute workers speaking against the ‘purely Russian spirit’. As a result, the discussions which started at legal meetings will end up in the Department of the Okhrana”⁸.

In 1917, the stigmatised methods of the police state were taken over by the Bolshevik security apparatus, the CheKa. From the

⁸ Л. Троцкий, *Зубатовщина в Петербурге*, „Искра”, nr 30, 15 December 1902, <http://www.magister.msk.ru/library/trotsky/trotl996.htm>

beginning, Soviet Russia was governed by decrees, and the one-man decisions of the political leaders became binding on all organs of state power. The slogan of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was a form of ideological protection concealing the unlimited, force-based rule of the Bolsheviks. Over time, especially during the civil war and the Second World War, the Bolsheviks began to appeal to an eternal Russian messianism, propagating the slogans of 'the historical mission of the Russian nation' which in the twentieth century was to export revolution and establish Communism in the world. Nevertheless, they still contrasted the 'spirit of proletarian internationalism' with the 'purely Russian spirit'.

The Chekists' contemporary heirs, however, strongly reject the idea of a revolution that could threaten the KGB elite currently wielding power. The myth of the revolution which was prevalent in Soviet Russia was deconstructed long ago. In the official narrative, the 'colour revolutions' represent chaos, destabilisation, and the evil imposed on Russia by the West. This explains the rather modest celebrations of the centenary of the CheKa: these coincided with the centenary of the revolution, which did not find any reflection at all at the official level. The revolutions of 1917 and 1991, as having led to the disintegration of the state, have already been described by Putin as the two greatest geopolitical catastrophes of the 20th century. Moreover, the Kremlin fights other people's revolutions ideologically, such as the Orange and Dignity revolutions in Ukraine and the Georgian revolution. The Chekists of today have also restored the 'Russian spirit' by building the 'Russian world', something which is apparently more just than the world of the West.

Chekism as an ideological construct has many other drawbacks: as it served the Communist state, it liquidated 'capitalist relics' and fought capitalism as its class enemy, while today's Russia is actually engaged in building state capitalism. Revolutionary Chekism abolished all constraints, social (the gentry, the Russian aristocracy) and cultural (breaking with the Church as the

basis of tradition), whereas contemporary Chekists emphasise their attachment to the Orthodox Church and the titles of the nobility⁹. Another important shortcoming is the memory of repression, which still remains vigorous. This leads to ambiguous situations: in October 2017, President Putin unveiled the imposing Monument to the Victims of Repression (which has been called the 'Russian Wailing Wall'), while in December of that same year the head of the FSB Aleksandr Bortnikov relativised the repression, underestimating the number of their victims based on departmental statistics¹⁰.

The persistence of the Chekist myth as a 'foundational' myth should be linked to the institutional memory of the current ruling elite, the 'KGB generation': it is their emblem (the symbolic shield and sword of power) which appears on the emblem of the FSB. All the Soviet secret services have drawn upon the CheKa as their founding myth. Various means have been used to sustain it: from pop culture, through media and art, to literature and official historiography. The Chekist cult has had its own pantheon of saints, its own iconography, its own separate rituals legitimising the political police, as well as its boss in the Kremlin. Sometimes, as in

⁹ The noble titles have been recognised by Princess Maria, the heiress of the imperial Romanov family. Together with the Order of Saint Anna, such titles have been granted, among others, to the head of the SVR Sergei Naryshkin, the former head of the SVR Aleksandr Lebedev, the head of the FSO Evgeny Murov, and the former head of the FSB Sergei Stepashin. See <http://www.saintanna.ru/?lang=rus&id=60>

¹⁰ This is evidenced by the protest by professors of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as by journalists and writers, against the FSB head Aleksandr Bortnikov's relativisation of the repression in his interview on Chekist's Day on 19 December 2017 (*ФСБ расставляет акценты, op cit.*). For more on this subject, see e.g. *Российские ученые написали письмо с критикой интервью Бортникова, „Ведомости”, 22 December 2017, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2017/12/22/746278-rossiiskie-uchenie-napisali>; Такой подход является надругательством над памятью бесчисленных погибших. Литераторы и журналисты высказали свой протест из-за слов Бортникова о репрессиях, „Интернет газета Знак”, 25 December 2017, https://www.znak.com/2017-12-25/literatory_i_zhurnalisty_vyskazali_svoe_protest_iz_za_vyskazyvaniy_bortnikova_o_repressiyah*

the final years of the KGB's existence, the more radical methods of action were avoided and the aggressive propaganda was replaced by softer forms. 'Miss KGB' contests were held, and literary & film competitions were announced. The emphasis on the Chekists' unique role has led to the consolidation of a kind of national security cult among the general public¹¹. This cult is constantly being renewed: from among the experiences of the past, those desirable from the point of view of the authorities' current needs are selected; inconvenient events are rejected as "ideological garbage"¹². The icons which appear in the pantheon of the Russian services are constantly being replaced: the 'great reformer' Yuri Andropov has been replaced by a figure identified with Russia's neo-imperial policy, Yevgeny Primakov; Lavrenty Beria and Sergei Zubatov have been restored to grace. Russian symbols also change their meaning easily. If the measure of the Chekism of Dzerzhinsky's time was the proletarian ethic (according to which 'Red terror' was a reaction to 'White terror'), that of today is supposedly based on Orthodox ethics, which – as it is emphasised – binds Russian society together (and which claims that all power comes from God).

Chekism, like every ideology, exploits a mythologised version of history. Its durability as the basis for the cult of security is a derivative of its adaptive ability, i.e. its ability to be modified. The legendary (in the literal sense) traditions of the Russian services are also an important element of the intergenerational transmission of experience. This is because the services were always assigned a key role in the system: that of the praetorian, the bodyguard, the new nobility, the revolution's sword of retribution

¹¹ For more on this topic, see Дж. Федор, *Традиции чекистов от Ленина до Путина. Культ государственной безопасности*, Петербург 2012, <http://readli.net/traditsii-chevistov-ot-lenina-do-putina-kult-gosudarstvennoy-bezopasnosti/>

¹² An expression used by Putin during a meeting in January 2014 with the authors of the concept of the new historical standard. See <http://expert.ru/2014/01/17/iz-uchebnika-istorii-vyibrosyat-ideologicheskij-musor/>

– that is, the predominant element in the strategies to legitimise the system. It is enough to recall the celebration of Chekist’s Day in 2000; the then head of the FSB, Nikolai Patrushev, justified their key role with the following words:

“The appearance of the Chekists in the Old Square¹³, in the Kremlin and in the regions (...) was dictated by the necessity of life. It was essential to let fresh blood into the administrative body of Russia, to launch a spirit of service to the state (...). Chekists are people of service, the modern new nobility; thinking, educated people, who understand the logic of the development of international and domestic political events, of the ripening contradictions and threats. They understand perfectly that a return to the past is impossible, they understand the need for the country to develop based on a rational combination of liberal and traditional, conservative values”¹⁴.

During Putin’s last term, liberal values have been discredited in the public space as being an element of Western ideology and the so-called intransigent internal opposition to Putinism, i.e. as an obstacle to the authoritarian system. Today the Kremlin and the special services display anti-Western and anti-liberal identities; they proclaim imperial conservative values, while at the same time re-evaluating the traditions of the period of the CheKa and its successors. The current strategy for legitimising Putin’s power is being dictated by a return to the experience of Stalin’s times and his mobilising variant of development.

¹³ Старая Площадь, Staraya Square the seat of the Russian government.

¹⁴ Н. Патрушев, *День чекиста*, „Комсомольская правда”, 20 December 2000.

II. THE IMPERIAL TRADITION: A DICTATORSHIP OF THE HEART, OR A DICTATORSHIP OF FEAR?

There are further examples of the manipulation of historical memory and the content of fixed stereotypes which draw upon the legacy of the Tsarist special services as cited by historiographers. More: we find many examples of similar manipulation within the heritage itself. According to the authoritarian political-ideological constitution of the Russian Empire, all power rested in the hands of the monarch. He was the highest instance in the state, he was the fount of the law, and his decisions (decrees and proclamations) were carried out with the help of a gradually expanding state apparatus, including the Tsarist police services, the size of which increased as new threats and challenges to Tsardom increased. For example, the rise of the Decembrists (1825) resulted in the appearance of the Third Department of the Imperial Chancellery, which the modern historiography of the Russian services treats as a modern service, modelled on the Western counterparts that had appeared in Europe during the Napoleonic era. However, while the tasks of the European police involved carrying out investigations and transferring them to the judiciary, the Third Department had its own judicial powers, and could arrest and exile suspects without a court sentence. Today, it is characterised as the first operational and investigative service in political matters, and as the information service to which all data on crimes against the Tsarist authorities obtained by the police and the gendarmes of the War Ministry were to be sent.

The creation of the political police was accompanied by the centralisation of power: the Third Department, also called the Supreme Police, was intended to serve as a centre for the coordination of the state security forces (the Gendarmes' Corps, the palace security services, the Cossack troops and others). Its founder and long-time head Alexander Benckendorff, a German from Estonia, entered the history of the Russian special services not only as a forerunner of the Russian police state, but also as an 'engineer of

social affairs' (as he described himself). The legend, as recorded by Tsarist historians, says that when General Benckendorff turned to Nicholas I for instructions, his Imperial Majesty held a handkerchief in his hand. He supposedly presented it to the head of the newly-formed Supreme Police with the words: "Here is my only order. Wipe away the tears of my people with this handkerchief". This legend was quoted by Burienkov, in whose version the Tsar said: "The more of my people's tears you wipe away with this handkerchief, the more faithfully you will have served my purposes". This alleged historical fact was interpreted unequivocally by Burienkov:

"In this way the first person in the state underlined the humanitarian purpose of political investigations in Russia: to secure the stability of the functioning of state power. Its weakening, as we know, results in internal conflicts, potential civil war, attempts to seize the country by other states, which brings about ruin and enormous casualties among the people, as well as the loss of national identity"¹⁵.

Another kind of manipulation involving the projection of the majesty of the 'first person in the state' onto the services subordinate to him was used by Benckendorff in a note justifying the creation of the new service. In it he suggested the creation of an elite centre in St. Petersburg, served by a network of agents who would "cover the entire Empire, they themselves will be subject to strict discipline, and at the same time they will arouse fear and respect. The moral authority of their superior will inspire them."¹⁶ In turn, his instructions for the employees of the Third Department include sentiments that were also expressed during last year's Chekist's Day celebrations: "Your noble feelings and principles will

¹⁵ М. Буренков, *Уроки русских спецслужб*, „ФСБ: за и против”, 3, 2016, p. 62: <https://www.osfsb.ru/upload/iblock/668/6681728c6d648412be26601d23ad6530.pdf>

¹⁶ From Ch. A. Ruud, S. Stepanov, *Strach. Tajna policja carów* [Fear. The secret police of the Tsars], Warsaw 2001, p. 32.

undoubtedly help you gain the confidence of all the estates, and then your vocation, supported by universal trust, will achieve its goals and bring obvious benefit to the state”¹⁷.

The direct heirs of the Third Department have displayed similar abilities to deceive reality. Nikolai Loris-Melikov – a distinguished general who served in the Russian-Turkish war (1877-8), the initiator of a thorough reform of the Tsarist security organs, including the creation of the Okhrana (1881) – was known as the ‘viceroy’, and his term in the interior minister’s office was called ‘the dictatorship of the heart’¹⁸, which was allegedly characterised by less violent methods than those used during the Benckendorff era. However, history teaches us that Fontanka Street in St. Petersburg (the headquarters of the Third Division, and then the Okhrana) aroused the same emotions as the later Lubianka did in Moscow.

These reforms were a response to the crisis of absolute power after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, and were intended to improve the inefficient state security services. They were based on the concentration of all intelligence information from the gendarmerie, police and other civilian (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and military structures (the War Ministry) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as on coordinating their operational and investigative activities, a task entrusted to the secret Special Department, the Okhrana’s intelligence and counterintelligence headquarters, as it is known today. (In fact, the intelligence and counterintelligence functions were not separated until the Okhrana’s dissolution in 1917; eventually they were subordinated to its policing function). The reforms also had a purely pragmatic aspect: the Tsarist government had been surprised by the tumultuous development of the terrorist movements and needed emergency measures to combat them, as well as to limit their destructive

¹⁷ After А. Калганов, *В поисках истины*, „ФСБ: за и против”, 3, 2016: <https://www.osfsb.ru/materialy/zhurnal-fsb-za-i-protiv>

¹⁸ Ruud, Stepanov, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

influence on public opinion. The democratic changes in the West forced by revolutions also had an equally destructive impact.

The gradual expansion of the network of the Okhrana's district departments subordinated to one centre (according to data from 1907, it had 31 provincial and 8 regional departments) led to the creation of a police state. Politics was recognised as the domain of the state and its senior officers; any unauthorised interference was a crime punishable by law. The enforcement of this principle was entrusted to the Police Department and the Gendarmes' Corps, which were given the right to inspect, arrest, question and exile guilty parties or those suspected of political activity. The Police Department obtained the right to refuse to issue a certificate of 'right-thinking' to the citizen, without which his life would be significantly limited; among other things, he could not study at universities or be employed in public, state or other institutions. The Police Department also supervised all kinds of cultural activities and approved the statutes of public associations. The Police Department and the Gendarmes' Corps were not subject to supervision by the judicial authorities; they were also excluded from the jurisdiction of the civil administrations in which they operated. Thanks to various instruments of repression, such as surveillance, deportation to Siberia and penal servitude, the political police apparatus isolated the 'wrong-thinking' from the rest of society. Without the consent of the censor's office, no book or magazine could be published in Russia or imported from abroad. The Minister of Internal Affairs had the right to declare a state of increased security in any part of the empire, suspending ordinary rights and institutions, and to subject the inhabitants of such an area to the competence of the military authorities.¹⁹

This briefly outlined period in the history of the Russian secret services enjoys the clear sympathy of their contemporary historiographers. Particular attention is paid to the

¹⁹ R. Pipes, *Rosja carów* [The Russia of the Tsars], Warsaw 2006, p. 321.

Gendarmes' Corps and the Okhrana; much work has been carried out on them in recent times. The common conclusion is as follows: the precursors of the contemporary Russian services were imbued not only with a reforming spirit, but also with the Russian idea, which from the rule of Nicholas I was 'the mission to defend the highest interests of the state'. The model example of a creative officer-reformer is Sergei Zubatov, the long-time head of the Okhrana's Moscow district, who in recognition of his outstanding merits was next appointed head of the Special Department, i.e. to its headquarters in St. Petersburg. He owed his successes to recognising human weaknesses and his skilful manipulation of them, as well as to his more humane treatment of his victims compared to the Okhrana's other officers.

1. The 'Zubatovshchina': a significant redefinition

There was a one-sided and schematic picture in Soviet historiography of the period when Sergei Zubatov ran the secret service, known in Russian as the 'Zubatovshchina'. Sergei Zubatov was presented as the 'gravedigger of the revolution', i.e. the creator of a 'police socialism' who was engaged in the struggle against the revolution. On contemporary historical websites, however, Zubatov's image has acquired many hues: he is presented as an outstanding reformer of the Okhrana, the creator of the Russian school of espionage, an official of outstanding organisational skills, active, entrepreneurial, with the reputation of a professional, and above all a state-runner who displayed absolute loyalty to the Tsar and the state/monarchy, who committed suicide at the news of Tsar Nicholas II's abdication. We also read on Orthodox websites that he was the man who could have stopped the revolution and saved Russia.

The redefinition of the 'Zubatovshchina' problem has been reflected not only in specialist literature, but also in history textbooks and the publishers of encyclopedias, which means that the created (official) historical message, as adapted to the needs of the

authorities' current policy, is being addressed to the broader public. In the latest historical dictionary, the 'Zubatovshchina' was described as "the policy of police socialism implemented by Sergei Zubatov, the head of the Moscow Department of the Okhrana (from 1896) and the Special Section of the Police Department (1902-3). It consisted in the creation of legal workers' organisations operating under secret police supervision, aimed at distracting workers from their political struggle with autocracy, and directing the workers' movement into the mainstream of economic demands. **The legal workers' organisations carried out extensive educational and cultural activities among the marginalised layers, as well as their enculturation**"²⁰.

The 'police socialism' implemented by the Okhrana, a political experiment involving the inclusion of the opposition into the political system under the slogan of defending the interests of the monarchy (Zubatov legalised workers' organisations and their trade unions under the direction of Okhrana agents; he also founded political parties, such as the Jewish Independent Workers' Party, organised patriotic demonstrations, anti-SR and anti-socialist counter-propaganda, etc.), is not particularly well publicised today, although the concept itself is not questioned, just as it was not questioned in the times of the Okhrana²¹. As an ideological construct, it did not make much sense: after all, Zubatov was supposed to be fighting socialism. As he explained, "It was all about getting the confidence of the workers. The revolutionaries were

²⁰ А. Орлов, Н. Георгиева, И. Георгиев, *История России: словарь-справочник*, Москва 2011, <http://nashol.com/2016061589685/istoriya-rossii-slovar-spravochnik-orlov-as-georgieva-ng-georgiev-va-2011.html>

²¹ A student of Zubatov summed him up in the following way: "Zubatov's idea was right, and nothing new, but the way in which his cottage-industry police implemented it went beyond the competence of the ministry. For the professional labour movement, a national leader was not found at the right moment (...), the government did not display any understanding of the workers' issue, nor any interest in it, nor any sense of *raison d'état*" (А. Спиридович, *Записки жандарма*, https://royallib.com/book/i_spiridovich/zapiski_gandarman.html).

strong in their trustworthiness, and it was essential to take it from them at all costs”²². Zubatov believed that it was necessary primarily to use the services of the intelligentsia and the educated workers. “When the revolutionaries raised the alarm, out of fear of losing their monopoly of influence on the workers, they scared off the teachers (...). In order to preserve the workers’ organisations, there was nothing left to do but ask the religious intelligentsia for support”.

It must be noted that Zubatov’s experiment became the reason he was removed from his duties. His immediate superiors accused him of inciting strikes, and sent him to the provinces under surveillance. He became the scapegoat for the wave of strikes in 1904, and then for the ‘bloody Sunday’ that led to the revolution of 1905.

Zubatov himself blamed this revolution on his agent, Father Gapon, as well as the leadership of the Ministry of Home Affairs, accusing it of running their agents incompetently. “After handing over the workers’ issue to Gapon, they rested on their laurels. Deprived of support in the confrontation with the St. Petersburg entrepreneurs, he began to act independently, out of control. This is how the idea of handing over the workers’ petition directly to the tsar was born”²³.

As mentioned, Zubatov’s school of espionage deserves wider publicity today. These ‘schools’ were defined as courses lasting from 3 to 6 months, during which the Okhrana’s policemen and agents were taught basic police skills and the principles of conspiracy, as well as techniques for fighting the ‘kramola’, the subversive activity conducted by opponents of the monarchy. The most talented gendarmes were sent for internships to Zubatov’s Moscow school, which was considered to be the model. Zubatov was the initiator

²² *Былое* 4, 1917, http://www.hrono.info/libris/lib_z/zubatovschina.php

²³ *Вестник Европы*, том II, March 1906, pp. 432-436, http://www.hrono.ru/libris/lib_z/zubatov_vestnik.php

of in-depth training: his interns were required to have a knowledge of revolutionary literature and the history of the opposition movements. In Moscow, and then in St. Petersburg, he founded libraries in which specialist literature was kept, as well as forbidden books, campaign literature, work by the theoreticians of the labour movement, leaflets, etc. He hired professors from Moscow and Saint Petersburg Universities to train the gendarmerie, and also employed scientific experts. Following the example of Western police forces, he implemented novel surveillance techniques, and organised files containing data on suspects, including photographs, fingerprint data, anthropological measurements, lists of nicknames, codenames and aliases. He introduced a system of safe houses, and above all a system of agents, which he divided into agents of the external service (the so-called *filery* – observation) and agents of the internal service (the so-called *seksoty* – from *sekretniye sotrudniki*, secret collaborators). He also organised the so-called flying branch of the *filery*, who were ready to operate in every corner of Russia, and if necessary abroad. To this end, sums of money necessary to purchase tickets and cover other operating costs were deposited in, for example, safe deposit boxes in railway stations. He used a combination of observations by pedestrians and horse-riders to set up posts for *filery* working as coach-drivers. Zubatov is credited with the principle of the strict protection of agents. Those guilty of leaking about them were punished in a demonstrative manner: the head of the Police Department, Aleksandr Lopuchin, who at that time helped journalists to expose the famous double agent Yevno Azef, was sentenced to five years' exile in Siberia.

The Okhrana's distinguishing features were its secret agents, its extensive use of paid informers, and the use of methods of provocation which had been brought to perfection. The requirements to register suspects led to the organisation's bureaucratisation: according to an Interior Ministry circular from 1907, the measure of its effectiveness was not the number of 'liquidations' (proceedings ending with the conviction of the suspect), but the number

of investigative proceedings initiated, which were also treated as a method of prevention, and the way in which agents were recruited. The growing number of enemies of the regime, in turn, justified the need to expand the Okhrana, increase its funds and radicalise its methods.

The very reform that led to its creation was adopted with some ambivalence, and with outright hostility in the Gendarmes' Corps and its staff, writes Spiridovich:

“Only the youth who had been given access to interesting work were satisfied. The heads of departments, who had considered themselves gods, were offended. Their position in the eyes of the local administration and the police was diminished, because the funds allocated for the agency's expenses passed to the newly appointed bodies. Above all, the staff saw the growing influence of the police in this reform. Some of the gendarmes departed from their subordination to the staff. To describe this group, the contemptuous terms ‘the department's boys’ or ‘the protectorators’ were used”²⁴.

2. Innovations in espionage activities

The methods developed by the Okhrana led to the rapid development of Russia's foreign espionage. Contemporary historians of the secret services portray General Nikolai Batyushin as the exemplar of Tsarist Russia's intelligence service. As a distinguished officer, he was delegated to the Nikolayev General Staff Academy, after which he was sent to the Warsaw Military District in 1901. In 1905, he headed the military intelligence office in Warsaw. “This is what happened historically”, writes Gen. Aleksandr Zdanovich²⁵, a former FSB spokesman and currently a leading representative of

²⁴ А. Спиридович, *Записки жандарма*, *op. cit.*

²⁵ See the foreword to Н. Батюшин, *Тайная военная разведка и борьба с ней*, Moscow 2002, militera.lib.ru/science/batushin_ns/index.html

Russian secret-service historiography, “on the western frontiers of Russia, in the Kingdom of Poland, on whose territory the Warsaw District was located, like a wedge thrust into the territories of two neighbouring states, Germany and Austria-Hungary, the first specialists of the [military intelligence and counterintelligence] services were raised”. The foundations of the military intelligence and counterintelligence operations led from Warsaw were founded by his predecessor Nikolai Monkevich. According to Zdanovich’s findings, Monkevich and Batyushin were also the first Russian generals “from the special services”.

Zdanovich attributes excellent characteristics to Batyushin: “He was distinguished by his diligence, initiative, systematic operational thinking; he had broad specialist knowledge, which allowed him to take unconventional decisions”. One particular reason for this praise of Batyushin was his agent Alfred Redl, who provided the Russians with an operational plan in the event of war as well as many other documents from the Austro-Hungarian General Staff. Batyushin is also regarded as an outstanding practitioner and theoretician, whose book *Тайная военная разведка и борьба с ней* [Secret military intelligence and how to combat it] is a Russian contribution to the ‘global’ theory of intelligence and counterintelligence which was developed after the beginning of the twentieth century.

Understandably, Zdanovich emphasises Batyushin’s counterintelligence successes, which were testified by the detection in 1900-10 of “over a hundred and fifty foreign spies”. However, he notes that only 17 cases were taken to court. At all the trials Batyushin acted as a prosecutor and military expert: the legal basis was very poor, and the act on espionage prepared at his initiative and under his guidance was only accepted by the Duma in 1912. In this context, it should be noted that the notorious legalism of the Russian services, which is based among others on announcing the legal acts related to them, has a long tradition.

The active expansion of Russian espionage before the First World War is demonstrated by the statistics collected by Max Ronge, the head of intelligence of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff²⁶. In 1913, the Records Office selected about 6000 cases requiring investigation (in 1905 the figure was just 500), and 560 arrests were made (compared to 32 in 1905); nearly one-seventh of those arrested received a conviction. The espionage trials allow us a glimpse into the Russian intelligence system. The Austro-Hungarian intelligence study was directed from two centres, Kiev and Warsaw, from where intelligence activities against Germany were also coordinated. In Warsaw, Col. Batyushin's house on Saski Square "housed the entire enterprise, employing many directors, department managers, recruit agents, inspectors and women. The latter were most readily used as intermediaries and recruiters (...). The Russians, perhaps as a result of the relations prevailing in their domestic politics, possessed special talents. Batyushin's recruiters and intermediaries sometimes ran entire offices".

In Ronge's opinion, Batyushin's spies worked flawlessly, although the equipment they used was too standardised. For example, everyone whose task was to reconnoitre fortifications was given an American pocket Expo camera, which unmasked them. The espionage work was focused on quantity, not quality: "As numbers were always of great importance to the Russians, Batyushin maintained a whole army of confidants, people offering accommodation, housekeepers and other helpers".

One discovery for Ronge was the use of 'spies in priests' robes'. Moreover, he noted that their extensive use of methods of agitation and propaganda was a speciality of the Russian services. Espionage spread particularly in Galicia. Russia's intelligence penetration was adapted to local conditions: in Galicia, the pan-Slavist agitators had support from the Russophile Rusyns, who "saw their

²⁶ M. Ronge, *Dwanaście lat służby wywiadowczej* [Twelve years of intelligence service], Warsaw 1992, pp. 46-49.

homeland in Russia, and their ruler in the Tsar, praying for him in churches built with Russian money”; in Bohemia and Moravia they based themselves on the support of advocates and propagators of anti-war movements. Czech agents were trained in Russia and then sent back to their home country, where they organised anti-war demonstrations. The methods of provocation used by the Tsarist services also involved getting anarchist and pacifist organisations to cause problems for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. And not only that: in 1914 they brought about the separation of Galicia from the Austro-Hungarian empire.

At that time, Russia’s foreign intelligence activity was not only based on acquiring information: a significant part of its activity already involved creating political movements and events which were desired by St. Petersburg. Both military and civil intelligence were involved in such activities; both were subordinate to the Special Department of the Okhrana.

Ronge’s observations are confirmed by General Batyushin in his book *Secret military intelligence and how to combat it*, published in exile (Sofia 1938). As Batyushin writes in the preface, it was “a modest response to the grumbling from Colonel Ronge caused by the persistent silence of Russia’s military intelligence”²⁷. On the eve of World War II, Batyushin wished to draw attention to the “immense importance of the secret services both in peacetime and during war”, “to show the place of intelligence and its secret weapon – political propaganda”.

²⁷ In 1930, Max Ronge published a book entitled *Kriegs- und Industriespionage* [War and industrial espionage]. A book on the role of intelligence, *Geheime Machte* [Secret forces], was also published in 1923 by Walter Nicolai, the head of intelligence of the German General Staff. Both books were translated into Russian and repeatedly republished. According to the findings of Russian historiographers, Ronge and Nicolai met Batyushin in 1926 in Vienna. By the way: in 1945 Gen. Nicolai was abducted by the NKVD and taken to Moscow, where he died in 1947. [See О. Хлобустов, *Разведка и контрразведка Первой мировой войны глазами асов шпионажа*: <http://www.chekist.ru/article/4885>]

Interestingly, it is to propaganda (understood as a diverse range of intelligence instruments) that Batyushin, describing his experiences from the First World War, devotes special attention. The goals of propaganda are broadly understood as “raising the spirits of one’s own population, for example by trumpeting one’s own successes”, as well as “lowering the opponent’s fighting spirit as a result of direct actions, or via the agency of third countries”. The choice of propaganda objects is not easy, because “one cannot demolish the moral foundations of a nation without taking its psychology into account”²⁸. As examples of well-organised Russian propaganda, he mentions the long-term Slavophile propaganda, conducted through the Slavic Charity Association, which was directed at Poland at the time of the partitions.

The general warns that “the Bolsheviks, who do not skimp on money in order to keep the Russian masses in the dark, and the Germans, who have systematically re-educated their nation under the direction of their propaganda minister Goebbels, have noticed the great importance of propaganda. This is achieved through the work of an entire army of propagandists.” This leads Batyushin to the conclusion that “the psychological weapon – the word – is a tool as powerful as firearms”.

In his reflections on intelligence and counterintelligence, the general underlines the importance of “espionage activity in which a large circle of people, brought up in a patriotic spirit, represents valuable assistance to the services”, which leads to the conclusion that intelligence and counterintelligence (civil and military) somehow arose organically out of the political police. Generally speaking, Batyushin performed a kind of synthesis of his own experiences and the experiences of the theoreticians of his times. This is evidenced by the terminology he uses, borrowed in part from the Okhrana (external agent, internal agent), and in part from Walter Nicolai, the head of section III-b (intelligence) of the

²⁸ Н. Батюшин, *Тайная военная разведка...*, р. 39.

German General Staff. Like Nicolai, he distinguishes between active intelligence and passive intelligence, i.e. counterintelligence. In conclusion, Batyushin showed his solidarity with the representatives of Europe's military intelligence corps at that time: as he stated, "Gen. Ronge and Colonel Nicolai are figures of historical importance in the field of intelligence".

A characteristic feature: in translating these historical theories into contemporary language, Oleg Khlobustov, a lecturer at the FSB Academy, identified the term 'active intelligence' with the term 'active measures':

"In addition to traditional intelligence, whose task is to collect information about one's opponent, his intentions and resources, during World War I the countries involved used active intelligence, the essence of which was attempts to influence the opponent's plans and intentions, including by methods of disinformation, propaganda, sabotage, subversion and terror"²⁹.

However while drawing upon tradition, he ignored an essential fact: the assumptions and *modus operandi* of the Tsarist secret service were already well-known to the officers of the CheKa and its successors (the GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MB, KGB). The Soviet state, which treated intelligence as a key element of foreign policy, applied these methods on an unprecedented scale.

The last years of Tsarist Russia brought disaster to Batyushin. He was under arrest during both the revolutions of 1917 as a political enemy of Tsarism. The extraordinary anti-espionage commission which he supervised detected betrayal at the highest level: the threads of a spy scandal and speculative trade in sugar with Germany led to Grigory Rasputin, and this was seen as a plot by the Police Department to limit the influence of the Tsar's favourite.

²⁹ О. Хлобустов, *Разведка и контрразведка Первой мировой войны глазами асов шпионажа*, *op. cit.*

In a fierce information campaign, Batyushin's commission was discredited and accused of corruption. This was part of the struggle between the SR's Provisional Government and the Tsarist secret services – which, by the way, he himself had dissolved. As is emphasised today, Batyushin's escape from custody at the end of 1917 was assisted by the Bolshevik Vladimir Antonovich-Ovseyenko, with whom he had shared a cell. He did not participate in the Civil War; he lived in Belgrade, where he gave lectures in military courses, the fruit of which was his aforementioned book. During World War II he went to the Netherlands; he died in an old people's home in 1957. In 2004 his ashes were brought to Moscow by the Society for the Study of the History of Russian Special Services, supported by the Association of Special Service Veterans. In the reporting accompanying this event, as well as later media reports on the subject of Gen. Batyushin, the words of General Aleksander Zdanovich were repeated: “a patriot remains a patriot in exile too”³⁰.

³⁰ Сценарий передачи Невидимый фронт, 18 January 2008, <http://chekist.ru/article/1984>

III. A CONTEMPORARY SKETCH: THE SPECIAL SERVICES AS A 'COMMUNITY OF VICTORY'

Towards the end of the existence of the Soviet Union and the KGB, the cult of security was severely tarnished: during a demonstration in August 1991, the statue of the 'first Chekist' Feliks Dzerzhinsky was removed from its symbolic space. This was related to the authorities' crisis of legitimacy and the radicalisation of society after the break-up of the USSR, as the people sought those who were responsible for the state of the country. The special services quickly emerged from their ideological impotence (their 'humiliation' after the dissolution of the KGB). In order to blur their uncomfortable founding myth (the political climate was not conducive to emphasising the role of the special services), they turned towards the imperial legacy. Reconciling this with the Soviet legacy turned out to be a long process, one which is still unfinished today. This process had already begun in the 1990s: one of its first signs was a conference of representatives from the security ministries held in 1994 under the slogan 'A strong Russia needs strong special services', as well as the *White Book of the Russian Special Services* printed after the conference. In its introduction, we read: "In times of crisis, the tsar and the ruling circles fighting for influence were often unable to specify their own political goals or the ways of implementing them. At that time, the internal security services were forced to demonstrate their political independence, and set the priorities of their own activities themselves, sometimes to the detriment of their own careers, and even of the lives of high-ranking state officials and members of the monarch's family. For example, the maintenance of strong undercover positions in the SRs' terrorist organisations was considered more important in the Okhranka than preventing attacks on members of the government"³¹.

³¹ *Белая книга российских спецслужб*, Moscow 1995, p. 12.

This kind of pressure, which increasingly often appeals to a sense of historical responsibility for the fate of Russia, was not only a declaration that the special services' political role was to be revitalised, but was also a sign of a change at the summit of power in Russia: one of President Putin's strengths was his ability to 'listen to the ministries of force'. Boris Yeltsin, especially at the beginning of his presidency, did not enjoy authority among the special services: he often criticised them, he reformed the Lubyanka three times, he changed its leaders seven times. It is not surprising, therefore, that from the beginning the pro-Putin campaigns were based on the dichotomy of chaos *versus* stabilisation. The historical legitimisation of the services was also meant to restore public trust in them. At that time the Foreign Intelligence Service initiated a monumental series of publications entitled *Sketches on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence* (volume 1, discussing the history of pre-Bolshevik intelligence, was published in 1996, and volume 6 in 2006; publication was resumed in 2014-17), and the FSB organised an annual conference under the name 'Historical Lectures on the Lubyanka', organised by the Society for the Study of the History of Russian Special Services, which even today is still led by Aleksander Zdanovich, the former press spokesperson and head of the FSB's department for communication with the public, and now a professor of history at the Moscow Pedagogical University and a member of the Academy of Military Sciences. The active members of the Association are lecturers at departmental universities (Oleg Khlobustov, Aleksandr Plekhanov, Andrei Plekhanov, Yuri Ovchenko, Oleg Mozokhin, Vladlen Izmozik and others), and their articles are regularly published in the multi-volume series 'Works of the Society for the Study of the History of Russian Special Services' and disseminated on specialist websites (chekist.ru, lubyanka.org, hrono.ru and others), as well as being widely available on social media.

This group laid the foundations for the historical legitimisation of the services, which is also a kind of political and ideological didactics, which sustains within society the cult of security, the cult of the uniform and of victory. The list of books they have prepared

is impressive, although the vast majority of them concern the Soviet period³², being a continuation of the Soviet historiography of the services. This tradition is reconciled with the Tsarist tradition through the glorification of selected figures, facts and events from the past of the Russian Empire which can be used in a pragmatic manner. The project of the historical legitimisation of the special services has been included in the wider legitimisation strategy of the Russian authorities. During Zdanovich's presentation of the Association's achievements, he did not hide that "the main criteria of his work are the strengthening of state power and the legal order in the Russian Federation."³³ The instrumental treatment of the history of Russia's services, seen through the prism of selected events and selected heroes, primarily serves the creation of desirable patterns of public behaviour. This has resulted in a return to 'the sources of success': Russian culture is not in the habit of discussing its own failures to any great extent. The historiographers of the services invariably demonstrate that the eternal causes of any such failures are, on the one hand, the weakness of power and/or the anarchisation of society, and on the other, the intrigues of external forces causing catastrophic shocks in Russia's history. One result of this is the confrontational vision of international relations, as well as the confrontational course of Russia's foreign policy.³⁴

³² For example, see the bibliography of works by Oleg Khlobustov: <http://www.hrono.ru/avtory/hronos/hlobustov.php>. Out of interest, it may be mentioned that students of the FSB Academy learn, among others, from his repeatedly republished book О. Хлобустов, *Госбезопасность от Александра I до Путина* [State security from Alexander I to Putin], Moscow 2005.

³³ For more on this, see for example *В культурном центре ФСБ состоялась презентация Общества изучения истории отечественных спецслужб*, РИА Новости, 17 December 2001. The Association of Special Service Veterans, in turn, stresses on its website that the future of the Russian services depends on "the proper understanding by officers of their role in the mechanism of power, and in the development of the Russian State and society in various historical periods": <http://www.a-lubyanka.ru/page/article/100>

³⁴ For more on this subject, see M. Domańska, *Conflict-dependent Russia. The domestic determinants of the Kremlin's anti-western policy*, "OSW Point of View", nr 67, 6 November 2017: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2017-11-06/conflict-dependent-russia-domestic-determinants-kremlins-anti>

The project of institutional memory places the special services at the centre of this confrontation. “Throughout the centuries”, we read in the FSB ministerial letter cited above, “covert and overt forces inimical to our homeland have manipulated historical events, treating this as a way of striking at the authority of the Russian state both within the country and on the international arena. One of the main targets of the information war against Tsarist and Soviet Russia, as well as in contemporary democratic Russia, was and remains its state security organs”.³⁵

The new historical identity which the officers of the Russian services are being equipped with is eclectic and incoherent; it is continually being adapted to the current needs of the regime, and is based on the search for common experiences between the Tsarist services and those of the Soviet state. Even though the institutional memory in both traditions (imperial and Soviet) was interrupted as a result of the Bolshevik revolution, the principle of one-man (autocratic) leadership was emphasised; in both traditions, the secret services constituted the dominant instrument of power, performing functions beyond the role and competences of Western services (such as creating political, social, economic reality). In both traditions, the authorities’ ideological safeguard was the security of the state. In both traditions, all the security institutions had the same task as they do today: protecting and strengthening the authorities. And in both traditions, the officers were recruited from the elite of society; they were ‘the best, the most educated and the most patriotic’ of its representatives.

The significance and uniqueness of the Russian services is emphasised by an imposed cultural (civilisational) approach to history (in Russian, *историко-культурный стандарт*). In this perspective, “one historical trait of Russian civilisation is, in comparison to the West, the higher role of the state, and in effect its security

³⁵ А. Калганов, *В поисках истины*, *op. cit.*

organs”, as for example writes A. Sushko, a historian from Omsk³⁶. “The civilisational approach”, we read further, “explains the role of the Russian special services in carrying out necessary modernisation, enabling Russian civilisation to respond adequately to external challenges and resolve difficult internal problems”. In the cases of the modernisation of Russian society which this author cites (during the rules of Ivan the Terrible, Peter I and Joseph Stalin), this appears as “a state-organised response to the challenges and threats [posed] to Russian Orthodox civilisation”.

In accordance with the official interpretation, the historical-cultural standard is intended to serve the unification of the Russian Federation’s different nations and cultures, that is, to construct a new foundation of historical consciousness in the majority of Russian society. In practice, however, it is yet another attempt to fill the ideological emptiness left after the fall of Communism, from whose heritage the new Russian authorities have never clearly cut themselves off. The fundamental (unifying) features of Russian civilisation are to be the Russian language, the Orthodox community, common historical (war) experiences, and common values: patriotism, family, and the security and sovereignty of the Russian state.

Ideology has always caused tensions between the visionary and reality. One manifestation of this was, and still is, the use of a kind of phraseological ‘mutant’ (expressions such as the ‘dictatorship of the heart’, ‘police socialism’, the ‘revolutionary rule of law’, the

³⁶ А. Сушко, *К вопросу об использовании цивилизационного подхода для изучения истории отечественных спецслужб*, <http://www.rummuseum.info/node/5804>. It is worth noting that this approach lies at the foundation of the historical and cultural standard for the teaching of history in Russia. Its development continued in a project revived in 2012 by the Russian Historical Society, which is headed by Sergei Naryshkin, the current head of the Foreign Intelligence Service [<https://historyrussia.org>]. Incidentally, in the proposed standard, both the revolutions of 1917 were united in a single ‘Great Russian Revolution’, while Stalinism was described with the euphemistic phrase ‘the Soviet way to modernisation’.

‘new nobility’, ‘Orthodox Chekism’, the ‘dictatorship of the law’ and others). These expressions are illogical, incoherent; they appear and disappear like ephemera, but they have a practical value: characterised by emotional pathos, they are used as arguments in the ideological struggle. These transitory, unstable notions testify first of all to the successive ideological reversals that characterise the authorities’ new legitimisation strategy. In 2000, this strategy was based on the ‘dictatorship of the law’ and the ‘new nobility’, and in 2008, during the initial period of Dmitri Medvedev’s presidency, on ‘liberal modernisation’. During Putin’s previous term as president (2012-2018), a mobilisation strategy emerged based on the militarisation of society and the military organisation of the state. The officers of the special services were included in the defence system, and were presented in the symbolic space as defenders of the homeland, thus becoming the beneficiaries of the victory cult prevailing within it. In fact, as always, it was a matter of strengthening the mechanisms for the crisis-period, emergency rule of Russia, its security, economy and society. Today, it has been inscribed in the mobilising model of the state, which has also absorbed a vast cultural, informational, educational sphere of ideas. It is being implemented by all the ministries of force, led by the Ministry of Defence, which in the symbolic sense has the most resources for the patriotic education of society which must take place in the public space. Hence the conclusion that their high position is primarily determined by Russian authoritarianism. This position is not endangered, because the sense of threat to the ruling team’s interests will continue to rise. This will probably create a need for new forms and measures to protect the *status quo*, which will be presented as the defence of the neo-imperial statehood of Russia.

SUMMARY

Exploring the mechanisms by which Russia's modern secret services function is not an easy task. In accordance with Russian legal culture, this is a hermetic system, in which the scope of information protected as strict secrets of the state is definitely broader than in the West. At the same time, we are dealing here with a certain informational paradox. The media provides practically daily reports about the services, almost exclusively reporting their successes: detecting successive cases of espionage, thwarting terrorist attacks, detecting more cases of corruption, crimes committed by enemies of the regime, combating political extremism, etc., etc. Public opinion, historiography and sectoral analyses emphasise their instrumental force in the political, economic and social processes taking place in Russia. The services' heads present them as a 'community of successes', and they astonish public opinion with their openness. Sergei Naryshkin, appointed head of the Foreign Intelligence Service at the end of 2016, has already given several interviews; he has been the protagonist of several TV reports, showing his office and the mysterious corridors of the SVR's headquarters in Yasenevo, amazing millions of viewers with the openness and exceptional achievements of Russian intelligence (for example, on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of Department S, the 'illegals', which was celebrated in 2017).

This kind of presence for the Russian special services in the public space causes cognitive dissonance, because the declared reality is at odds with the true reality. This is particularly evident in the example of the façade of Russian legalism. Regardless of how the normative reality is portrayed, a real, 'grey' reality does exist. The right to conceal information about the services is overused: as a result, the broad sphere of state secrets serves not only the services' statutory goals, but also their extra-statutory actions (exerting influence on political, economic and social phenomena), and as a cover for their entrepreneurship. Moreover, the concept of 'state secrets' has expanded to include political and business

arrangements in which former officers and those fighting for influence within the ruling circles participate. As a result, the function of 'political guardian of the status quo' collides with the function of 'law enforcement officer'. The Russian system causes conflict by its very nature, but the majority of these conflicts are hushed up, as consistently accounting for such scandals would jeopardise the image of the state and its apparatus. The declared historical memory, national identity, historical and cultural standards are also mainly questions of public image. They are top-down, superficial and imitative in nature. Basically, they are not so much concerned with laying the foundations for a particular idea, but rather about shaping desired attitudes.

Understanding these mechanisms requires the separation of historical propaganda as a key element of Russian manipulation technology from the real historical facts as interpreted in accordance with generally adopted methodology. Meanwhile, the history of the Russian services teaches us that their position has always depended on the supreme authority in the state. The crises which led to the delegitimisation of the government (in 1917 and 1991) resulted in crises within the service: deprived of a decision-maker, they felt helpless, 'degraded', deprived of their strategic mission. At the same time, for centuries they were a key instrument for the rulers who needed the support of a coercive apparatus as a pillar of their power. President Putin does not treat the services any differently: depending on the regime's current needs, he reforms the services, appoints and dissolves them (such as the Federal Drug Control Service or the Federal Service of the National Guard Army). At the same time, without inhibitions, he grants them new powers, including those that allow them to interfere in the sphere of civic rights and freedoms.

The context of the Russian services' historical memory is also important for understanding the specific security culture of the Russian Federation, or rather its strategic culture. Generally, this can be characterised as the culture of extraordinary situations and

the culture of hierarchical subordination. This is deeply rooted in the consciousness of Russian society, and is based, among others, on the following elements:

1. the deep tradition of autocracy as the main principle of social order and social mentality: the Tsar or the 'first person in the state' is the 'guardian' of his subjects;
2. society's consent to the use of violence in the name of superior political goals: the 'rule of a strong hand' is equated with 'order in the country', and the stability of the constitutional order with the stability of the system of power;
3. the axiom that the overriding value of the state is to be a superpower, which is the source of the mythologisation of the special services and the army;
4. the belief in extraordinary goals in extraordinary circumstances - this is connected with the right of the coercive apparatus to apply extraordinary security measures, whereupon these measures, which are exacerbated in crisis situations, become the norm;
5. fixed propaganda narratives that on the one hand, Russia is destined for greatness, and on the other, that it is surrounded by enemies, which serves to maintain the siege psychosis;
6. the passivity of the citizens, whom the authorities constantly mobilise to repel external aggression; and at the same time their susceptibility to social engineering, which is the result of the 'incapacitation' of society.

In this context, the pedigree and traditionalist culture of the Russian services should be derived from the legacy of the authoritarian police state.

This manifests itself in

- (1) the mental sphere,
- (2) the organisational sphere and
- (3) the technical sphere (*modus operandi*).

It results from centuries of the mutual dependence between the authorities and the apparatus of state violence: the use of force was the basic tool for achieving the state's political, economic and social goals. Traditionalism, in the activity of the Russian special services, is a derivative of the authoritarian police regime. In addition to the typical universal functions of the services (guardians of the law, informational, control and preventive functions), they also fulfil the function of legitimising the system, as well as the resulting function of 'moderation', which consists in creating the phenomena and behaviours desired by the regime.

The timeless manifestations of this are:

(1) in the mental sphere:

- defining threats: the spectre of the delegitimisation of power and the radicalisation of society are more dangerous than, for example, the state's economic collapse; as a result, the primary task of the security sector is to isolate/protect society from external influences (ideologically this justifies the vision of a hostile environment, as well as the characteristic mythology of plots, fifth columns, foreign interventions, psychological warfare, etc.);
- the visible servility of the security sector;
- the conviction that it is essential to continually consolidate society through indoctrination: continuous use of the image of the enemy, the physical and symbolic persecution of the losers (the Whites, fascists, reactionaries, and the liberals, who today embody the intransigent opposition);

- maintaining the citizens' fear of and respect towards the apparatus of coercion, which results mainly from the authoritarian regime's fear of revolt;
- the services' emphasis on their role in maintaining the stability and sovereignty of the state; their participation in implementing state projects, for example in Russia's information warfare against the West.

(2) in the organisational sphere:

- centralisation: strict subordination to the central government based on vertical top-down relations. The services' hierarchical territorial structure (the central apparatus, regional, district and neighbourhood committees) enables structural control;
- the President's constitutional monopoly on appointing and dissolving services, and on directing them;
- the services' organisational and jurisdictional structure, enabling not only independence in the statutory sphere, but also their extra-statutory activity, as an instrument for implementing the changing political needs of the state leadership; building the potential to adapt to new tasks;
- the services' high institutional rank as autonomously managed organs of executive power, superior to other central and local organs of executive power and local self-government;
- the absence of public control over the activities of the services or the financial resources allocated to their activities;
- counterintelligence and intelligence tasks are secondary to their policing function and the function of supporting the authorities in government/community relations and home/abroad relations (hence the overriding role of the FSB as 'first among equals');

- focusing on quantity rather than quality, leading to bureaucratic excesses and bureaucratic internal reporting;
- organisational solutions enabling the services' mutual supervision, such as the location of military counterintelligence within the structures of the main civilian security service (FSB).

(3) in the sphere of *modus operandi*

- a vast area of extra-statutory activities that go beyond the competences of the secret services;
- the use of different methods according to the public mood: extraordinary measures (preventive arrests, supervision through infiltration), command-and-administrative methods (summoning citizens for warning interviews), building up networks of informers and stimulating denunciations, etc.;
- varied instruments in the confrontation between Russia and the West; the long tradition of using informational and psychological warfare (disinformation operations), methods of espionage, provocation, sabotage and terrorist methods;
- the repressive nature of statutory and non-statutory activities ('the stick and the knout' as a symbol of enforcing both obedience and reporting information);
- the so-called state/private partnership, enabling the use of the services' own resources as well as those of private entities;
- a long tradition of liquidating opponents of the regime (bo-yars, rebels, terrorists, foreign agents);
- working under a foreign flag, through intermediaries.

JOLANTA DARCZEWSKA