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Ideological Transformations of Russian Society: Philosophical Reflection

Abstract. Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a gradual revival of interest in the re-ideologisation of the political and cultural space of the Russian Federation. The article sets out to systematise and analyse philosophical views on the processes of re-ideologisation that took place in Russia from 2012 to 2023. The conducted theoretical analysis reveals diverse reactions on the part of the philosophical community to the active processes of re-ideologisation in Russia, which has been supported by the state since 2012. While some concerns about the repressive nature of total ideology have been expressed, other philosophers sought forms of participation in discussing national issues and determining the country's future development. Some thinkers, in refusing to discuss ideology, have adopted a position of escapism, striving for freedom in their own existence outside the influence of society or any particular ideology. While transformations in ideas about the role of ideology in the life of society and the state open new perspectives for philosophical self-reflection, discussions about the necessity of "withdrawal" from addressing political problems and ideological confrontation lead to a "crisis of philosophical identity" that represents an important epistemological challenge.

Keywords: ideology; re-ideologisation; philosophy and state; ideological consensus; social consolidation; philosophical community

The present work sets out to analyse the reaction of the philosophical community to the re-ideologisation processes of the Russian Federal state over the last decade. In this connection, a conceptual analysis of philosophical publications and the discursive environment that influences the act of philosophising itself is undertaken. In the intellectual history of post-Soviet Russia, the period

of the 1990s was characterised by the paradoxical coexistence of two divergent tendencies. The rejection of state ideology, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993 (Article 13 of the RF Constitution), determined the normative-value framework of political-public and academic debates about the country's development prospects throughout the first post-Soviet decade. On the one hand, official state representatives and members of the liberal public appealed to the principle of the de-ideologisation of the state as a necessary condition for the transition to a democratic system aimed at overcoming the totalitarian past and ensuring the state's ideological neutrality; at the same time, a concept of ideological pluralism was taking shape that assumed the inadmissibility of a dominant ideology and the primacy of personal autonomy in determining value orientations.

On the other hand, calls from within the political and publicist discourse for the restoration of the semantic and value integrity of the social body were gradually intensifying, which inevitably returned to the issue of ideology as a form of symbolic order and social self-awareness. For example, opposing himself to both liberalism and the classical ideologies of modernism (Marxism and Fascism), the philosopher Alexandr Dugin has argued that the coming new era will require a synthesis of geopolitics, traditionalism and Orthodox eschatology. As argued by Kirill Tovbin, Russia cannot exist without ideology since it is not merely a state, but also bearer of messianic meaning that is opposed to the secular West (Tovbin 2014). Dugin's critique has been analysed in terms of an attempt to restore the ontological status of ideology as a form of world order, in which man comprehends his place in history, culture and cosmos, freeing it from the historical context of the 20th century (Suslov, Tikhonova 2024).

From the point of view of Sergey Kara-Murza, the declaration of "de-ideologisation" in the 1990s itself served as a form of ideological manipulation. According to this analysis, while under the guise of "liberation" from ideology, in reality, one coordinate system was being surreptitiously replaced by another, predominantly of the Western liberal type, without any awareness of its normative and authoritarian nature (Leksin 2014). Viktor Martyanov and Leonid Fishman noted the tragic coincidence of Russia's post-Soviet transition in the 1990s with the exhaustion of the moral

impulse that had legitimised the political project of capitalism. The researchers argued that to create a new ideology capable of preserving human values from degradation and crisis, a moral transformation (revolution) of Russian society is necessary (Martyanov, Fishman 2010).

However, during the first decade of the 2000s, nominal adherence to the course of de-ideologisation continued at the level of official state rhetoric. The constitutional principle of an “ideologically neutral state” remained in force and was voiced as a legal guarantee of political pluralism. However, by the mid-2000s it had become obvious that the ostensible rejection of ideological design results in a symbolic vacuum, which is spontaneously filled either by externally borrowed value matrices or by archaic forms of mass consciousness. Against this background, increased concern in academic and socio-political discourses was expressed in terms of the lack of clear conceptual and ideological framework to support the life of the state and society.

In particular, in 2004, a notable phenomenon was the publication of two monographs – Dugin’s “The Eurasia Project” (Dugin 2004) and Vladimir Kuznetsov’s “Russian Ideology 21” (Kuznetsov 2004), which asserted the possibility of creating and establishing an ideology designed to unite Russian society. In these works, the prospects of the new emerging Russian ideology were assessed as positive; moreover, it was argued that it is only through an ideology of consolidation that the goals, ideals and values of citizens can be enriched and imbued with significance. The ideology was thus endowed with the ability to formulate the “Russian dream” based on the preservation and strengthening of historical memory and patriotism.

During the first decade of the 21st century, public debate continued to unfold between two poles. On the one hand, supporters of maintaining the de-ideologisation of the state (liberals) insisted that ideology in any form carries the risk of repression, the substitution of dogma for thinking and the limitation of free reflection. On the other hand, the position of thinkers and publicists who view ideology as an inevitable element of any form of collective existence, a form of articulating national interest, historical memory and the cultural mission of the Russian people, continued to go from strength to strength. In this context, a special role was played

by the concept of “sovereign democracy”, articulated by Vladislav Surkov in 2005, which essentially represented an institutionalised form of re-ideologisation, albeit one that was not explicitly acknowledged as such.

Already the outlines of a general intellectual and political-cultural shift from liberal universalism to forms of conservative traditionalism had started to become noticeable. Alexander Rubtsov observes changes in official and media discourses in 2010–2011 associated with the replacement of modernisation-oriented terms (innovation, knowledge economy, human capital) with concepts that appeal to the spiritual, cultural, and historical foundations of Russian statehood – traditions, spirituality, cultural codes, identity and social cohesion (Rubtsov 2018: 68). This transformation was not exclusively rhetorical: it was accompanied by institutional changes in the spheres of education, culture, information policy and state-confessional relations.

The political and rhetorical project of re-ideologisation of the state that began in the 2010s gradually covered an increasing number of spheres of public life, making adjustments to school textbooks, patriotic education and cultural policy strategies that sought to legitimise the present through a heroicised past.

One of the most important instruments of re-ideologisation involves a rethinking of the historical narrative on the part of the state (Efremenko 2023). The consequent transformation of history into a form of civil religion results in it forfeiting its status as an autonomous scientific discipline. The approval by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation in 2020 of the “Concept for Teaching the Course ‘History of Russia’” and the subsequently introduced single history textbook serve to consolidate this vector. History becomes not a topic of discussion, but a field of civil mobilisation and an instrument for legitimising the present through a reinterpretation of the past.

During the 2010s, the re-ideologisation of the state was already being transformed from a subject of intellectual reflection into a real political process. The philosophical community faces a fundamental challenge in understanding the possibilities of reconstructing ideology following the collapse of grand narratives. In this connection, philosophical analysis cannot confine itself to the framework of abstract concepts and normative reasoning, but must take into

account the broader context of the formation of ideological meanings in post-Soviet Russian society. This approach allows not only a deeper interpretation of philosophical positions, but also an identification of latent forms of their dependence on the political and cultural background, as well as the degree of their critical distance in relation to it.

The theoretical analysis of philosophical approaches to the phenomenon of re-ideologisation in modern Russia discussed here is based on publications included in the Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI). The use of RISC is determined by its representativeness for scientific discourse in the humanitarian and socio-philosophical sphere. When selecting sources, principles of relevance and citation were applied. Relevance is understood as the substantive focus of publications on the topics of ideology, political philosophy, social theory and philosophical self-reflection under the conditions of postmodernity. Citation rate, in turn, is considered as an empirical indicator of the degree of scientific attention and discussion of a particular position in the philosophical community. However, a high level of citation is interpreted not as a marker of the “truth” of a position, but rather as an indicator of its visibility in the intellectual environment, according to which its influence on the emerging academic discourse may be evaluated. Thus, it is assumed that philosophy, despite its claim to autonomy and universality, does not exist in a “timeless horizon”, but is included in the historical and social fabric of the era.

The selection of publications based on their significance, as expressed in the number of scientific responses and discussions, makes it possible to reconstruct the most influential or representative philosophical reactions to the processes of re-ideologisation in the period 2012–2024. The stages and directions of the evolution of philosophical attitudes towards the processes of the Russian state are evaluated based on the analysis of the philosophical texts included in the study.

Since the early 2010s, Russian society has been gradually returning to the search for an ideological core capable of uniting the nation and responding to the challenges of a fragmented global modernity. This movement was accompanied by an increase in the dual roles played by the state as both commissioner and curator of societal meaning-making – from supporting patriotic narratives

to promoting traditional values. In 2014, in the context of events related to the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation, new semantic dominants appeared: “Russian world”, “reunification”, “historical justice”, “multipolar world”, etc., which began to play the role of value coordinates in state policy.

The reaction of the philosophical community to the processes of re-ideologisation in the 2010s involved several distinct conceptual strategies. Some researchers criticised the changes taking place in the ideological sphere in terms of the reproduction of authoritarian forms of political regulation. Thus, Alexey Kara-Murza emphasises the danger of the totalisation of ideology in the absence of a fully-fledged civil society and independent institutions of civil control. Ideology, in his opinion, inevitably takes on a repressive character, replacing rational discussion with coercion into normative unanimity (Kara-Murza 2012). Erikh Soloviev, in turn, identifies a range of key mechanisms for ideological manipulation of mass consciousness, including the formation of an enemy image, exploitation of geopolitical myths, encouragement of xenophobia and the sacralisation of historical narrative. As a philosophical antidote, he proposes the development of a culture of scepticism, a critical distinction between ideals and programmes, as well as an activation of the concept of open history as a sphere of polyphonic and open-ended dialogue (Soloviev 2016: 10-12).

However, along with such criticism, a position has emerged in the philosophical community that is focused on a positive understanding of the ongoing processes. Representatives of this approach proceed from the premise that ideology is inevitable as the form by which collective consciousness is necessarily structured; consequently, the task of philosophy lies not in denying the phenomenon as such, but rather in developing normative foundations for a legitimate and open ideology capable of consolidating society on the basis of national values. V.N. Shevchenko suggests considering philosophy not as the antithesis of ideology, but as its critical-reflexive component, which is capable of introducing elements of public rationality into public consciousness, thereby neutralising the risks of dogmatism (Shevchenko 2014). In this context, the political and spiritual concept of the “national idea” is gaining popularity as a form of semantic consolidation in the context of a fragmented and atomised society. Such efforts are also supported in the concept

of the “value core of the nation” within which Russia is conceived as the bearer of a special civilisational mission that stands in opposition to Western universalist expansion. An additional contribution to understanding contemporary forms of ideological production is made by interpretations of ideology as a factor of geopolitical sovereignty, the widespread use of which indicates the demand for integrative narratives in the context of the ideological vacuum of the post-Soviet period of development of Russian society.

In their collective monograph “Russia in Search of Ideologies”, colleagues at the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences set out to answer the question: is there an alternative to ideology as an instrument of social management? According to the philosophers, success in a modernising ideology is expressed in terms of the correspondence of the desired present and future to the ethical principles of not only individual groups of society and Russia, but also of all humanity (Martyanov, Fishman 2016). The above position is also supported by Yuriy Volkov, who notes that it is difficult to dispute the role of ideology as a force capable of uniting and mobilising society. However, questions arising regarding the development of the ideological sphere are overcome through efforts to humanise and legitimise the ideas of social creativity, self-realisation and altruism (Volkov 2016). The researcher sees an important difference between the ideology of humanism and traditional ideologies in the absence of violent impacts leading to political conflicts in the process of implementing humanistic ideas. Leonid Fishman argues that it is possible to reach agreement on common criteria of social belonging and receive remuneration for social activity expressed in participation in public affairs, taking into account the limited opportunities for employment in the traditional production of material goods and services (Fishman 2016).

However, it is impossible not to notice a third position, which can be characterised as post-ideological escapism. Its representatives proceed from the conviction that contemporary philosophy, having lost its status as universal knowledge, is becoming a form of existential communication, a kind of individual or “local” ideology. For example, Vadim Mezhuev asserts that philosophy is becoming less and less capable of influencing the public space and is increasingly turning into a means of self-expression for individual intellectuals. This position does not deny the importance of ideo-

logical processes, but deliberately places them outside the scope of philosophical reflection (Mezhuev 2017: 178-179). However, in the context of increasing polarisation of society and the growing importance of ideological constructs as instruments of power, such a strategy risks acquiring marginal status. As Pavel Gurevich emphasises, excessive criticism of ideology can in itself become an obstacle to dialogue, replacing communication with a multitude of autonomous and cliquish voices (Gurevich 2018). In this regard, the task of philosophy is not to destroy ideological foundations, but to create conditions for their critical transparency, openness and ability to apply self-limitations.

The institutionalisation of discussions about re-ideologisation finds reflection in academic initiatives. On 1 March 2018, a round table titled “Philosophy and Ideology: The Illusion of De-ideologisation” was held at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, continuing discussions that began in 2016, which testifies to the recognition of ideology as a necessary, albeit problematic, component of social life. The reports presented at the round table showed that ideology serves both as a tool of manipulation and as a means for symbolically articulating the collective experience necessary for the functioning of the political body (Syrodeeva 2018: 207-208).

Thus, in the 2010s, contemporary Russian philosophy finds itself drawn into the field of socio-political transformations associated with the return of ideology (re-ideologisation), not only as an observer, but also as a participant. Under these conditions, socio-political philosophy acquires new relevance as a field capable of conceptualising the mechanisms of ideological influence, developing criteria for the legitimacy of ideological programs and defending the autonomy of thought as a fundamental value.

Indeed, the question posed in the present article as to whether ideology is necessary from the point of view of philosophy is not only theoretical and epistemological, but also existential and practical in nature. For philosophy, which is traditionally oriented toward truth and the critique of dogmatism, ideology threatens to reduce diversity of thought to the only acceptable worldview. However, the philosophical tradition also incorporates the opposite impulse: the desire for a normative statement about a just structure of society, for the formation of a telos of shared existence.

Thus, in the course of the analysis it becomes obvious that the attitude towards the re-ideologisation of the state in the philosophical community in the 2010s underwent a transformation: from harsh criticism and detachment to an attempt to understand ideology as a phenomenon with which philosophy cannot help but deal, but also cannot completely merge. In this context, ideology is understood not as a tool of manipulation, but as an expression of the fundamental human need to organise the world and provide it with conceptual integrity. From a philosophical point of view, then, we are talking here about the need to restore collective subjectivity through a return to the archetypes of the “big we”, the actualisation of a historical narrative, the sacralisation of the past and the mobilisation of “traditional values”.

The end of the 2010s and especially the beginning of the 2020s marked a new stage in the transformation of Russia’s ideological space. The events of this period – including the constitutional reform of 2020¹, the escalation of international confrontation and militarisation of public rhetoric, along with an intensification of cultural-value politics – create a qualitatively different context for the philosophical understanding of the processes of re-ideologisation.

In 2022, against the backdrop of a radical change in the international situation, ideological construction started to acquire the features of a mobilisation – and, in many ways, a militaristic orientation. This ideological mobilisation saw previous euphemisms replaced by direct and categorical formulas such as “national dignity”, “combating the unipolar world”, “protection of the Russian world” and “value sovereignty”. Against this background, the thesis about a “metaphysical confrontation” between Russia and the West starts to be increasingly heard in public discourse. Such statements take ideology beyond the bounds of utilitarian rationality and impart it with an eschatological orientation: the struggle of ideas also turns out to be a struggle of worlds.

As such, the Russian state is in the process of definitely abandoning the post-Soviet attitude towards ideological neutrality, re-

¹ The constitutional amendments make explicit reference to “ancestors who transmitted to us ideals and faith in God”, affirm the concept of “traditional values” and define the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

taining only the external vestiges of a constitutional ban on state ideology. Meanwhile, at the level of state policy, key elements of the new ideological canon are being formed. The foundations of state policy for the preservation and strengthening of traditional spiritual and moral values approved in 2022 define 17 basic concepts ranging from “patriotism” and “service to the Fatherland” to “family”, “dignity” and “acceptability of social justice”. These concepts are presented as supra-historical, universal and non-controversial – that is, they do not imply the need for philosophical or cultural debate. Here, ideology finally abandons its open discursive character and turns into a normatively fixed, symbolically hermetic framework.

The philosophical reaction to the institutionalisation of ideology (re-ideologisation) taking place in the 2020s turns out to be, on the one hand, necessarily restrained, and on the other, internally split. In the public space, philosophers increasingly rarely appear as authorities for interpreting what is happening, instead either employing a strategy of loyal support or resorting to silent distancing.

Some philosophers today explicitly recognise the need for interaction with the state in the matter of creating a national ideology. For example, for the purposes of developing a future Russian national project, A.L. Nikiforov proposes to abandon the principles of liberalism and capitalism, which are mainly oriented towards private profit, in favour of a new collectivist ideology, which assumes the limitation of private property and market relations. The researcher believes that the main task of Russian philosophy at present is the creation of a new social project that will give people’s lives deep meaning (Nikiforov 2021). However, Leonid Fishman expresses scepticism regarding the potential for ideological self-identification of the political elite, pointing to the combination of characteristics of bureaucracy, bourgeoisie and Soviet nomenclature in the contemporary Russian ruling class as a factor hindering the creation of an ideology fundamentally opposed to the Western liberal-universalist project (Fishman 2023).

Against this background, an epistemological challenge arises that is not limited to political criticism: how can philosophy maintain its identity under conditions where language, values and images are already determined in advance? Thus, the 2020s pose a fundamentally new question for Russian philosophy: is non-ideological

philosophy possible under conditions when ideology has not simply returned, but has become an obligatory form of thinking, speaking and acting?

Considering the institutional and substantive connection of philosophy with the state, Yu.M. Reznik identifies three forms of interaction: financial, normative and substantive. Noting the important role of philosophy in the formation of cultural ideals and the civilisational mission of Russia, he emphasises the need to maintain a certain critical distance and autonomy of philosophical thinking (Reznik 2022: 30-31). L.A. Musayelyan argues that Russia needs a clear state ideology that expresses the country's interests and is attractive to young people; such new values and ideals should be reflected in the educational system (Musayelyan 2023).

Reflecting on the legacy of the philosophers expelled from the USSR in 1922, A.A. Guseynov calls their deportation an “experiment” that proved the failure of the attempt to merge philosophy and ideology. In his opinion, the transformation of philosophy into an instrument of state policy leads not to consolidation, but to disaster: philosophy should be a space of an autonomous spirit, and not a derivative of a political order (Guseynov 2023: 11-12).

Andrei Loginov and Dmitry Rudenkin note a lacuna in terms of the philosophical desire to describe ideology in terms of classical models (conservatism, liberalism, socialism) and the absence of an object for such a description in modern social reality. The researchers point to an “identity crisis” in philosophy itself, which is faced with the need to rethink its own role in the post-ideological era (Loginov, Rudenkin 2020).

Thus, socio-political philosophy finds itself at a crossroads. On the one hand, there is an obvious public demand for the development of meanings and values capable of forming the basis of a national ideological project. On the other hand, there remains a fear of political instrumentalism, which turns philosophy into an ideological resource of the state. This contradiction becomes a point of philosophical tension, transforming the problem of ideology into a challenge that addresses itself to philosophy itself as a discipline.

In entering the field of ideological discussions, contemporary Russian philosophical thought demonstrates growing reflexivity and awareness of its responsibility for shaping the future. But at the same time, there is a need for extreme caution: participation in

ideological design necessitates maintaining autonomy of thought, preserving the ability to criticise and rejecting the temptation of final answers.

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