

2016-08-05. Interview of the Head of the House of Romanoff on the role of the study of history and the challenges of historical interpretation in Russian history

Interview of the Head of the Russian Imperial House, H.I.H. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia, with the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper *Monarchist* [*Monarkhist*], M. N. Kulybin

1. History has long been considered a second-tier Humanities discipline, interesting only to a narrow circle of specialists. But recent events have clearly shown that history, historical interpretation, and, more broadly, the collective national memory all play a vital role in national identity. Your Imperial Highness: what do you think is the role of history in the rebirth of Russia?

Neglecting the study of history always leads to unhappy consequences. After all, the past is not just a collection of facts but a wealth of experiences, both positive and negative. If one doesn't study the past, one can't make good decisions about the present or predict with any hope of accuracy the course of events in the future.

Moreover, history is a continuous, on-going process. Our very lives are history, determined by a set of events that took place in the past and which become the reason for actions in the future. Therefore, the connection between the study of history and the spiritual, political, social, economic and any other conditions we experience today—that is, between the study of history and the reality we experience—is undeniable.

Two British historians in the 19th century, Sir John Robert Seeley and Edward Augustus Freeman, elaborated very clearly the link between the study of history and contemporary politics. Seeley said that “Politics are vulgar when they are not liberalised by history, and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to practical politics.” Edward Freeman was even more succinct: “History is the politics of the past, and politics is the history of the present.”

These statements are often misunderstood or taken out of context, however, and as a result, some have used them to make the case that history, in a way, has the task of serving the political powers that be and their ideology. George Orwell was getting at this problem in his dystopian novel *1984*, when he wrote that “He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.”

However, history itself has shown that tampering with the past entails a high price for the people, and that, in the same way, even the most powerful totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, which attempted to rewrite history for their own needs and ends, could not, in fact, “control the future,” and so collapsed.

That is also history. It is lived historical experience, from which we must learn useful lessons for today and tomorrow.

History, like any scholarly discipline, must strive to understand objective reality. There is, of course, a place in it for subjective opinions, but only in the realm of the interpretation of facts. The facts themselves should be precisely established on the basis of historical evidence—on the basis of historical documents.

When the sources begin to be ignored or, even worse, falsified; when unsubstantiated hypotheses and political viewpoints begin to be presented as “commonly known facts”; when events of the past are interpreted in terms of today’s short-term opinions and popular trends—then we are dealing no longer with history as a discipline, but with charlatanism.

Genuine historical analysis should, firstly, fulfil its most important and basic responsibility as a discipline—the objective and even-handed portrayal of the past. Secondly, and in a broader, public sense, it should function as a kind of social tuning fork, setting the pitch of society’s political trends and popular perceptions about the past.

2. Unfortunately, at present, some of the wildest interpretations of historical events, and even the most outrageous historical falsifications, have become entirely commonplace. How can one resist such distorted interpretations when the distribution of these ideas so much depends on money?

There is no better medicine to cure falsehood than the truth. And just as even the smallest drop of medicine can kill trillions of dangerous bacteria, so too one word of truth can eradicate the flow of falsehood, no matter how powerful that falsehood appear seem to be.

What is most important, however, is that in the struggle for truth and in refuting the falsehoods of others, we do not begin to spread our own untruths. In doing so, we become like our dishonourable opponents and destroy the moral

foundations of our own position. If we firmly believe in our ideals, truth alone will be our only and best weapon.

One must be able to accept fair criticism, to have the courage to recognize our own errors and to admit our mistakes and ask for forgiveness. But slander—that is, groundless and false claims—must be exposed for what it is and firmly rebuffed, citing convincing evidence and proven facts.

3. In Russia some are discussing the idea of producing a single “correct” history textbook. What do you think about this idea?

Textbooks should definitely be written in accord with a single, high standard. They should not include unsubstantiated claims, unproven hypotheses, exotic opinions, or the doctrine of some political party, which are then foisted onto the unsuspecting students using the textbook.

And, moreover, the educational process cannot omit treating the history of pluralism, of freedom of thought, and of a healthy, diverse intellectual discourse.

Therefore, if by the term “single history textbook” you mean a kind of narrow, dogmatic text, that is adopted to the exclusion of all other textbooks, I am convinced that that is the wrong path to take. Something very much like that happened during the Communist regime, and nothing good came of it.

The government certainly can establish standards for the writing of history textbooks, which might insist that it cover the most important

achievements in the history of the nation and which employ today's most effective pedagogical methods. In that case, there is no need for coercion. The textbook will naturally, on its own, become the go-to standard textbook for the classroom.

But to prohibit other textbooks and to introduce by fiat a one-and-only textbook, that would be utterly detrimental to the educational goals of teaching history in the classroom and, moreover, would be, in fact, illegal, since Article 13 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees freedom of thought and forbids the establishment of any formal state ideology.

This prohibition pertains also to interpretations of our nation's past. One cannot establish one version of history, declare it to be the sole correct one, and then outlaw the rest.

There should be many different history textbooks available to our students, so that there will always be the opportunity to compare and choose from among them.

4. The image that many ordinary people in Russia have about Russian history is in many ways built on myths, which continue to be circulated even today. Yet we can hardly expect to avoid the mistakes of the past if we don't understand the reality of our history. What myths in particular do you think are in this sense the most harmful to our country?

First we have to determine what we mean by the word “myth.” In common parlance, the meaning of the word myth can run the range from fairy tale, to fables, to outright lies. In point of fact, the notion of myth is very complex and one should not always treat it with disdain.

It would be a little naïve to expect ordinary people to understand their nation’s history in a way that strictly derived from scholarly monographs and from academic published editions of historical documents. That has never been the case, and never will be. Popular perceptions of history can, to be sure, be characterized as a collection of oversimplifications, generalizations, and the selective omission of a host of important factual details, but also, and more charitably, as a kind of shared “sketch drawing” of a picture of the past, an idealization and dramatization, with some themes exaggerated, others deemphasized, and so on.

Myth literally means legend. That is, historical events that have been permanently inscribed in the historical consciousness of the people. In this form, myths themselves become a powerful factor in the historical development of a country and a people.

Myths are different from falsifications and fictional tales in that they are formulated around actual historical facts and do not spin out beyond the “gravitational pull” of those facts. They tend not to contradict the logic of the underlying historical process.

We can look at a few concrete examples to explain what I mean. There’s the story of Ivan Susanin, which has become imbedded in the Russian national memory and in various forms of art: a peasant from Kostroma willingly accepts a horrific martyr’s death to save the young tsar, leading the

foreign occupiers into the dense forest and perishing by their swords, all the while holding fast in his heart to his firm faith that his country will by his actions be liberated and that it will regain its greatness and power.

But in fact, it is entirely possible that Ivan Susanin had not yet heard that the Assembly of the Land had selected Mikhail Romanov as tsar, and that he was saving the life not the tsar but the young boyar who would, unbeknownst to him, later become the tsar. It's likely that Ivan Susanin hoped he would be spared. It's unlikely that he uttered the words attributed to him, or that he was thinking about the geopolitical situation between Russia and Poland at the time. Most likely, much of the story of Ivan Susanin is nothing more than heroization and mythologizing. Still, the essence of the events and of the concrete sacrifice he made remains unchanged. Whatever he may have known, thought, felt, or expected, Ivan Susanin forfeited his life, and the life of the legitimate tsar was thereby saved. And thus, the violence and conflict of the Time of Troubles were not reignited, but came to an end with the Romanoff dynasty on the throne. Even if he did not understand that it was the tsar's life he was saving, his sacrifice is perhaps only all the more laudable. After all, a person who risks his life for a rich and powerful ruler might in his heart of hearts expect either for himself or for his family some kind of reward for his actions. But he who sacrifices himself for his friends and family, following only the dictates of one's own conscience, is worthy of far more respect and praise.

But even so, the mythologized image of this national hero as depicted, for example, in the opera *A Life for the Tsar* makes for a better popular role model. That mythical image isn't so much false as it is ideologically embellished.

We can look at another example, this time drawn from more recent history. There is firmly fixed in popular memory the image of 28 Panfilov's Men, who stopped an advance of German tanks near Moscow in 1941. They are even mentioned in the anthem for the city of Moscow. This is a myth that is rather like the one about the 300 Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae. But do we really need to "debunk" this myth? True, there were more heroes than just the 28 involved in this engagement. True, not all 28 died on the field of battle. There is evidence that at least one of the 28 was captured and went over to the German side and was later convicted of high treason. There are definitely a number of errors and distortions in the popular accounts of this entire episode. Still, these were real people, they did display valour and heroism, and Moscow truly was saved thanks to the courage of these men. Of course, it was saved not thanks only to them, but to the courage and sacrifices of many. But the fact that popular memory about the Battle of Moscow includes this episode, with this precise number of men from this precise unit, indicates nothing bad or deceitful. And nothing prevents historians from telling the whole story of the sacrifices of our other countrymen during this immense, multi-day battle.

If we go back further, to ancient history, we encounter even more historical myths that are unsubstantiated by sources. We today have many historical accounts, some of them about the sacred or foundational character of the State, the Church, or society, which have come down to us today in the form of legends, with no documentary basis in original sources from those times, but recorded only in much more recent sources.

We do not have today the original document that summoned the Varangians to "come rule over us," no original document appointing the first Metropolitan of the Russian Church, St. Michael I, no firm proof that the

Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Grand Prince Vladimir was baptized in Kherson and not in Kiev, no materials at all connected to the murders of Ss. Boris and Gleb or St. Filipp, Metropolitan of Moscow. We accept these legends because they do not contradict contemporary historical documents, because they are more or less corroborated by later sources, and, in general, because these legends fit with what we know about those times. But this is all indirect evidence. The basis for our acceptance of these facts is not firm documentary evidence that they are true, but rather the legends themselves, which we hold so dear in popular memory—which is to say, myths.

Myths often reflect reality. Sometimes they are quite removed from reality, playing the role of a decoration on the tree of life. However, if this “decoration” does not harm the tree or deform its appearance, then there’s really no point in exploding the myth. Of course, a botanist who studies, for example, the nature and characteristics of fir trees should understand where the decorative tinsel and bulbs end and the actual tree begins, and that the tinsel and bulbs did not grow as part of the tree but were hung on it by someone. He should be able to recognize the wood from a fir tree even if it is varnished to look like mahogany or rosewood. A scholar would indeed look rather odd defending the truth of his discipline by removing the Christmas decorations from the fir tree or by scrapping off the varnish from the wood.

Academic historians must strive for truth. It is important in academic works to point out that some information is conclusively supported by historical evidence, and some other claims are more speculative. Which is to say that, in academic works, the boundary between proven facts, speculations, and myths is clearly drawn and the differences between them should be carefully noted.

But delving too deeply into the question of how historical reality gets distorted in the popular consciousness of the ordinary person can have the effect of tarnishing important ideals and role models, which are the sources of patriotism, honour, and courage.

The kinds of myths that are harmful are those that are created artificially—those that stand in stark contrast to the truth and were created only for the sake of inciting hatred, enmity, and other destructive emotions. Sadly, we know of many examples of times when the slander of malicious men has captured the imagination of the majority of the people and acquired mythic qualities. These “antimyths” do not produce an elevation of the soul nor further the things that are good and holy in this world, but rather incite only confusion, profanity, and slander, and cultivate only the basest of human emotions.

The most reliable criterion for distinguishing the good myth from the deceitful one is the test of time. The Bolsheviks began by trying to depict all the rulers, saints, and national heroes over the 1000-year-long history of Russia as exploiters, traitors, and villains. But in spite of their widespread propaganda and the force used to impose it, they failed; and in their hour of greatest peril the Bolshevik leaders were forced to “rehabilitate” St. Alexander Nevsky and St. Dmitrii Donskoi, Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov, and even many Church hierarchs and saints. This was because the memory of their actual deeds and the myths surrounding them in the popular memory of the people proved to be far stronger than any Bolshevik propaganda against them ever could be.

And there is still one more powerful example we can cite: that of Emperor Nicholas II, the Holy Royal Passion-Bearer. He was attacked and vilified for almost his entire reign, except perhaps for the first years of it. Then he was deposed and subjected to humiliation and abuse and, in the end, was executed together with his entire family, many of his contemporaries either feeling utterly indifferent about it or even gloating over it. Then, over the course of more than 70 years, his memory was blackened in every possible way. For nearly a century, the regime created the myth of the bungling, stupid, and weak-willed tsar, who was somehow also maniacally brutal and bloody.

And now what has happened? Now he is canonized by the Church as a saint and icons with his likeness are venerated in every Orthodox church. He is spoken of with reverence and his life and reign are honoured by members of many different traditional religious faiths.

Of course, in venerating the Holy Royal Passion-Bearer Nicholas II, there is, indeed, a fair measure of idealistic mythologizing. Some exalt him as completely flawless, as a kind of Heavenly Angel in the flesh who was utterly incapable of making a mistake. Obviously, this is very much an exaggeration.

The Tsar-Martyr was a deeply pious Christian, a genuine patriot, and possessed a coherent belief system. His heart was full of love, compassion, and a spirit of self-sacrifice. In the enormous moral sufferings that he endured with such true humility before God and with such perseverance, in the martyr's death he suffered—in all this he put on the crown of holiness. But as a man, he sometimes committed sins, and as a ruler he sometimes made mistakes.

And so in Nicholas II we have a case where the genuine truth about the Tsar-Martyr and some of the more positive myths above him have overpowered the antimyths that had been conjured up to slander him.

And so to sum up, I would say that, in my opinion, myth as legend is a part of the national consciousness of a nation and has the right to exist, but only if it does not contradict historical evidence, and is adopted only for public perception.

Myths that deliberately distort the historical truth and that ignore reality for the sake of feeding ill-will and confrontation among peoples are harmful and must be rejected.

5. I'd like to ask you about a number of historical events that have enormous social and political significance today. Perhaps the most egregious recent example of the distortion of historical truth, which has already produced tragic consequences, is the view, widespread in Ukraine, that the Ukrainian people have no historical relationship with the Russian people, and that the Ukrainian people have always been oppressed by the Russians. What is your view on this and how do you think we can change this situation, which has led to such hostility between these two fraternal peoples?

The ancient Rus'ian chronicles, the written accounts of the lives of saints, epic tales, and other literary monuments, as well as non-Slavic literary sources, all unmistakably show how, over many centuries, the Rus'ian

people originated among the East Slavic tribes, and how three great nations—the Ukrainians, Russians, and Byelorussians, emerged from them.

In the Appanage Period, the Russian people experienced political decline. In the 13th century, all the various principalities that had formed in northeastern Rus' had lost their independence as a result of foreign invasion. The most independent of these principalities was Novgorod; but even there, despite all the complex and dramatic events that resulted from the unification of Novgorod and Pskov, and later, of these two principalities with the centralizing monarchy of Ivan III and, especially, Ivan IV—despite all these historical processes, there did not develop in Novgorod (or anywhere else) any separate identity, and certainly no local nationalism.

The course of history in this space was such that it was the Great Russians, not either of the other East Slavic peoples, who would become the ones to form the powerful and independent Russian state, and later to construct the Russian Empire, which united not only the East Slavic peoples, but also many other peoples on the principle of unity in diversity. Some areas were conquered, and some populations voluntarily united themselves to Russia, seeing in Russia a protector against enemies that sought to conquer, enslave or destroy them.

In Ukraine, which remains for all of us the very heart of the Russian nation and East Slavic civilization, with Kiev still very much thought of as the Mother of Rus'ian Cities (as it is even called in the chronicles), and in Belarus, which is likewise glorious in its many historical accomplishments, the majority of the people endured national and religious persecution from outsiders and sought unification with the Great Russians, who were of the same religion and same ethnicity as them. The unification of Ukraine with

Russia in 1654, and the acquisition of other parts of Ukraine and Belarus by Russia in the 18th century, were events that had been hoped for by all three East Slavic peoples—Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians.

Of course, in life things don't always work out as they might, and in the process of unifying the East Slavic peoples there were not only many great achievements and genuine joy, but also sometimes some deal-making among slippery statesmen, resentments, misgivings on both sides, the dashing of the best hopes of the people, the breaking of promises, and many other unfortunate things. Of course, these were all conflicts within a single family—between brothers and sisters. Until the 20th century, there was no clear element of anti-Russianness in Ukrainian and Byelorussian nationalism. And those strong adherents of Ukrainian and Byelorussian national identity, who opposed the Russian Empire and who during Soviet times were labeled “bourgeois nationalists,” would look on with horror at the pseudo-historical “theories” being spun today that reject the historical facts, as well as the attempt to incite hatred of Great Russians.

However, simply to get angry about all this does no good. And even worse would be to respond to this hatred in kind, denigrating the national dignity of Ukrainians and Byelorussians, rejoicing in their misfortunes, and looking down on them.

If we analyze the situation, we will understand that the explosion of anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine and the igniting of those same feelings in Belarus were not spontaneous happenings, but were carefully and methodically orchestrated over many years. Our geopolitical rivals and local political actors, who have chosen the path of extreme nationalism, are hard at work re-molding the younger generation into the form of their choosing.

And we have made blunderous mistakes, and we are ourselves responsible for a lot of what has happened. We failed to strengthen the cultural and historical connections with those states that once were part of the USSR, evidently thinking that “Well, they’re not going to go anywhere any way.” That was a disastrous mistake.

Today, the situation in Russian-Ukrainian relations has become very complicated. Now we have not only historical propaganda and historical falsifications working against us, we now have actual acts, perpetrated by both sides, that have done great harm to our relations. Terrible, bloody wounds have stained our relations in the Donbass and Luhansk. And worst of all, all these conflicts are painted with the broad brush of nationalist fervor. For me, this is a most painful sorrow, as if my own children—related by blood and linked together by the travails of their common experiences—suddenly became filled with anger and began killing each other.

Even so, I believe that not all is lost. If we—Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians, plus the other nations and peoples of the former Russian Empire and USSR—if we were once able to come together and to defeat foreign invaders who brought such sorrow and destruction upon us, then we all the more should be able to find in ourselves the courage to forgive each other.

That which unites us is far greater than that which tears us apart. We must focus on our common values. Then there will be a chance that we will come to our senses.

I have been following the discussions which have been going on in Russia on the Ukrainian issue. Regrettably, I see that some Russian

politicians and public figures are responding to the present American, European, and Ukrainian anti-Russian propaganda in like manner: replying with their own propaganda that is neither convincing nor grounded in evidence, but which only gives rise to mutual animosity.

But I am very pleased also to see that, in all these discussions, with rare exceptions, a clear distinction is being made between the anti-Russian policies of the present government of Ukraine and the brotherly Ukrainian people. One would like to believe that in Ukraine the majority of citizens remember that while we have different governments now—in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation—there remains only one homeland. Our ancestors together defended our common homeland. We remain brothers and sisters to each other, even if we do not agree with each other in all things. It is time to stop this conflict. We must go no further down this path of hatred and bloodshed, but we must find the will to make peace, to forgive each other, and to resume working together.

6. The ideological heirs of the godless Communists, exploiting the patriotic feelings that erupted as a result of our victory in the Second World War, are actively promoting the view that the mass repressions of the Stalin regime were nothing more than a fabrication of the liberal Russophobes of the “Fifth Column,” and if someone was executed—well, they had it coming as enemies of the state. Such views one encounters today even among people who consider themselves Orthodox. What is your opinion about such views and such people?

The victory in the Second World War and the massive repressions of the Communist regime are two entirely different topics.

Defending the country from foreign invasion, regardless of what the form of government may be or what the political regime does, is always going to be a national duty and a national act of courage.

Political repression is an evil act perpetrated by a totalitarian regime: the murder and persecution of fellow citizens not for any crime they may have committed, but because of their belief in God, or for their political convictions, or on account of their social class or social origins—that is, for things that a person cannot change about himself no matter what the circumstances in which he finds himself.

The fact that political repression had taken place, had taken place on a massive scale, and was a criminal act, was all acknowledged even by the Communist Party itself and by the government of the USSR. Many wrongly condemned people were subsequently rehabilitated even in the 1950s. But this acknowledgement nonetheless proved only partial inasmuch as it laid the blame for these systematic crimes at the feet of only a few people: Joseph Stalin, Lavrentii Beria, and a number of less important figures in the party and government who had “distorted the Leninist ideal.” In fact, the massive terror was an integral part of the ideology and political philosophy of the atheistic totalitarian regime from its very inception.

In Russia today, the criminal nature and massive extent of the repressions of the Communist regime have been recognized on an official, legal level. In the Preamble of the Federal Law “On the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression,” we read: “During the years of Soviet rule, millions of

people became the victims of the tyranny of the totalitarian state and were persecuted for their political and religious beliefs, for their social and ethnic backgrounds, and for other reasons. Condemning this long period of terror and the mass persecution of its people as a violation of the ideas of the rule of law, the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation expresses its deepest sympathy to the victims, their families, and their friends on this unwarranted repression, and declares its unswerving resolve to provide effective, legal guarantees of the rule of law and human rights.”

To deny that repression took place, that it was widespread and unlawful, is, first of all, a lie and an illegal act, and secondly and most importantly, it is a blasphemy against the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, who have been canonized as saints by the Church. It is a blasphemy against the millions of people who were condemned to death and executed in inhumane conditions, who had their best years taken away from them in prisons and labor camps, or who had their lives ruined by official harassment, which made it impossible for them to reach their full potential. Among these last ones were ordinary rank-and-file Communists, who sincerely and honourably served their country and people, but fell victim to the ever-widening repressions.

Political repression also occurred during the Russian Empire. It would be pointless to deny that there was no persecution for political and religious reasons before the Revolution in Russia. Persecution of this kind also has taken place even in modern democratic states, although it is now often disguised by calling it something other than what it is.

Some ideas, such as, for example, the justification and glorification of terrorism, are in fact nearly as bad as the acts themselves. But there are some governments (and not only authoritarian governments, but also fully liberal and

democratic ones) that are so determined to deal with its opponents that they don't even bother to justify it. So, in this regard, everyone has something to repent.

But of course, the scale and sophistication of the political repression of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, including the Communist regime in the USSR, cannot be compared with the repressions that took place in other periods and in other countries.

To understand the difference, one need only compare the fate of the Ulianov family with the fate of Nicholas II's—or with the fates of millions of families of the “enemies of the people” in the Soviet period.

Alexander Ulianov was convicted and executed for terrorism, for having conspired to murder the emperor. The conspiracy was foiled only because the terrorist cell was discovered in time. Still, Ulianov appeared in court and was given due process. He had a lawyer. In accordance with the laws of the land, he was afforded the opportunity to have his death sentence commuted, provided he submitted a formal written request. He himself refused this opportunity, reasoning that it was not the honourable thing to do—that if he had his chance to “take his shot” at the government, then the government had the perfect right to take its own at him. Nonetheless, he did have the opportunity to avoid execution. Afterward, his brothers and sisters were still educated and continued to enjoy their full rights to live and work in their own country. His mother continued until her death in 1916—that is, for more than 30 years after the legal case against her terrorist son and his accomplices—to receive her deceased husband's generous pension from the government, which gave her the means to send her children, including her other son, the revolutionary Vladimir Lenin,

abroad. Were the “enemies of the people” and their families treated as well during the USSR?

Speaking in terms of numbers, the political repression committed by totalitarian regimes far exceeds any persecution of dissidents that took place in previous periods in our history.

Sometimes you encounter clearly exaggerated estimates of the number of victims of Communist repression. Some writers have produced fantastic figures, approaching as much as 100 million victims. This happens because some writers are just irresponsible and some others are trying to take the conversation to an absurd level. These exaggerations make little sense, and they only do damage to the effort to make an accurate assessment of our past.

But to reduce the number of those who suffered from political repression only to those who were condemned in formal legal proceedings would be an unforgivable sin against the truth. Political mass repressions in the Soviet era are distinctive in that there were a large number of killings for class-based, social, religious, and ethnic reasons, all committed precisely outside the legal norms but, without a doubt, still very much with the government’s approval. Among those who fell victim to repression were not only those who were condemned in a courtroom in full observance of the legal formalities of that time, but also those who were executed by the pronouncements of extra-judicial bodies, those who were killed on the authority of decrees issued by the Soviet government during the “Red Terror,” and those millions who were summarily shot, thrown into prison, stripped of their possessions, deported, and so on.

Mass political repression brought tremendous harm to our people and was a kind of genocide. It decimated an entire generation. This is an indisputable

fact, which cannot be denied by honest and honourable people, including members of leftist parties—if, that is, they truly put first the good of the nation and not their dogmatic and ideological diagrams and narrow party interests.

7. The 100th anniversary of the catastrophe of 1917 is approaching, which elicited in the public a debate about the revolution, its causes and its consequences. Two interpretations of these events have become popular in the discourse about the revolution. The first blames the liberal revolutionaries in February for everything, and presents the Bolsheviks as strong proponents of the State, who saved the sovereignty of the State and its territorial integrity, who brought order to the chaos that resulted from the weakness and ineptitude of Nicholas II. The second interpretation denies the involvement of members of the Duma and generals in the events of February, considering them rather spontaneous acts of the people, which were exploited by radicals in the revolutionary parties. What is your view on this question?

February and October 1917 were stages in a single process. I have many times argued that the Revolution was, first and foremost, the result of a profound spiritual crisis in the national consciousness of the whole traditional system of values. A crisis not only of the monarchy, but also of faith, family, and the other major moral foundations of the nation. In all layers of society there came to dominate an unhealthy rejection of tried and true ideals and principles, and a crass craving for something—anything—different. This was not so much a striving for innovation, renewal, and the rectification of injustices, as it was a determination to destroy everything and construct a kind of “new world.”

As with any utopia divorced from the actual historical path of a country, this trend, in all its incarnations, not just the Bolsheviks', brings only sorrow and bloodshed.

In actual fact, the scenario unfolded in the following way: the situation in the Russian Empire in 1917 was far from catastrophic and hopeless. In fact, quite the contrary. The situation on the front was getting better significantly, and the hardships back home were not any worse than those being experienced on the home front in other countries engaged in the war. The radical revolutionaries were by then feeling quite discouraged. But it was precisely a spiritual crisis, a diminution of faith and fidelity, that undermined the throne. The first blow on the monarchy was inflicted by members of the elite, people with moderately liberal, and sometimes even outwardly monarchical, political views. It was they who decided to "switch drivers while the car was still moving." But, having obtained the abdication of the Emperor, they displayed their own utter incompetence to rule Russia, and so were forced to concede place after place in the government to the radical revolutionaries. All the while, the Bolsheviks were gaining strength as a result of this political turmoil.

Popular discontent and revolutionary propaganda also played a role in the Revolution, as well as the betrayal of the elite at home and the interference of Russia's so-called allies in the First World War. However, I say again: none of this would have brought down Imperial Russia if there wasn't also at the same time a deep spiritual crisis.

The Holy Royal Passion-Bearer Emperor Nicholas II is blamed by many for succumbing to the pressure and abdicating the throne. They claim that all he had to do was hang a few hundred troublemakers and traitors and there would

have been no revolution. But I am quite convinced that if it had been that simple, he would never have abdicated. Nicholas II was an extraordinarily responsible man and entirely faithful to his duty. But, I think it is clear that in his mind and heart he understood that, at that moment, nothing he might have done would have prevented the lack of faith, cynicism, and thirst to destroy that were consuming society. He understood that the revolution was unavoidable. He might be able to delay it by spilling blood and by deepening the underlying crisis by exploiting the worst spiritual faults in the people, but even that would not have prevented the catastrophe in the end. And so he attempted to do all he could to lessen the evil that the Revolution would bring. Alas, he didn't succeed, and the Russian Revolution of 1917 became one of the most brutal revolutions in world history.

Before the Revolution, the Bolsheviks certainly were an anti-government and traitorous political force. They actively engaged in destructive acts, plotted violently to overthrow the government, organized riots, robbed and stole, and, during the First World War, openly advocated the defeat of their homeland and of the "transformation of the war from a war of imperialism into a civil war." Having seized power in October 1917, they embarked on an unprecedented social experiment, willing to engage in the worst kinds of atrocities and illegalities in pursuit of their goals. They rejected religion and morality, and the idea of the rule of law was transformed into a notion of revolutionary expediency. Their regime was openly atheistic, totalitarian, and terroristic. They barbarically destroyed the centuries-old cultural heritage of the nation. To deny this history would be pointless because they themselves with pride and celebration admitted to all this before all the world.

However, in all this, the Bolsheviks remained human beings. Over time, their regime was exposed to the effects of life, to human feelings, to objective realities—none of which was accounted for by their totalitarian ideology.

One can compare the Bolsheviks to pirates who have seized the ship after part of the crew had removed the captain. Exploiting the vacuum of power, the pirates grab the ship, kill the captain and a large part of the crew and passengers, pillage the ship's holds, and throw overboard the icons from the ship's chapel. But you find yourself still having to sail the ship, to defend it from other pirates, ride out and recover from natural disasters, and so on. And so the pirates are forced to interact with the remaining crew members and passengers. And as a result, the pirates are themselves exposed to their influence. A certain degree of solidarity develops between the villainous pirates and their victims during storms that batter the ship or when attacked by enemies. But later the pirates again show their true nature. But all this is intertwined in the complexities of human relations, in the mechanisms of government, and in confronting the important issues in life. And to the extent that the pirates are familiar with the ship's business and because there aren't any other experts available—mainly because they've all been exterminated—one could say that the ship has not sunk thanks to the pirates.

No analogy is, of course, perfect, but you'll agree that the comparison here works.

The Soviet period in our history is perhaps the most difficult to understand. The centuries-long historical Russia, with its faith and culture hardwired into its very essence, continued on, while at the same time the country was governed by a political regime that trampled on all these traditional values and strove to create the "new Soviet man," without religion, without any sense of national

identity, and without other “superstitions.” There was a great boundary in the realm of ideas between Russia and the Communist experiment, as stark as the boundary between day and night, between light and darkness. But in fact, everything was intertwined, intermingled, and combined in the most unexpected and surprising ways. Some say that Communism irrevocably disfigured Russian national identity, but others say just the opposite: that Russia “broke down and digested Communism.” I prefer that second view.

Of course, decades of atheistic and totalitarian rule cannot help but leave its mark on the Russian mentality. But even my grandfather, Emperor Kirill Vladimirovich, was convinced that Russia would move beyond Bolshevism, preserving the positive things that originated during the Soviet period, and restoring the most important and valuable things that had been created during the more than 1000 years of history before the Revolution.

This will be a long and complex path. The fall of the Communist regime freed us from one evil, but gave rise to others. Instead of Red Bolshevism, we have now a kind of “White Bolshevism”—that is, the same desire to conduct social experiments (although in an entirely different direction) without regard to the suffering and hardships of the people, the same habit of ruling the country without regard to religious and moral principles, and a contempt for the rule of law.

Even so, I believe that my country will return one day to its historical path. I would emphasize, however, that this means not moving back to the past, but proceeding along our traditional path, which means to move only forward, and not backward. Sure signs that the transformation of Russia has begun can be seen during the presidency of Vladimir Putin and in the work of the more sensible members of the Russian government. The contributions to this return

to Russia's traditional path can also be seen in the influence and role played by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. This return is also supported by the leaders of other traditional confessions in Russia. And only by returning to its traditional path can Russia regain its legitimate place in the world and achieve again its national greatness and prosperity.