

# *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*

## *Deliberation Knowledge Ethics*

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## Brief

Dear Editors of *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*,

Within the discussion of Roger Griffin's theory of fascism in *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004), I initiated an exchange with A. James Gregor concerning the issue of whether the post-Soviet Russian ultra-nationalist Aleksandr Dugin could be classified as a fascist or not.<sup>1</sup> As I started the debate, it would have been preferable to let Professor Gregor have the last word. However, for two reasons, I would like to continue this discussion. First, as indicated below, the prominence of Dugin in the Russian elite discourse has, during the last months, further risen. Thus the issue of an adequate interpretation of his ideas too has become more relevant. Second, Professor Gregor has chosen to comment not only on Dugin's goals, but also on my intentions. In view of Professor Gregor's below quoted unusual speculation about the purposes of my research, I now regret to have written my previous contributions in German language. Hopefully, the below English-language clarification will set the issue, for Anglophone readers of *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*, straight.

\*\*\*

### Some Addenda on the Relevance of Extremely Right-Wing Ideas in Putin's New Russia

((1)) In general, I found Professor Gregor's rebuttal to my critique of his assessment of Aleksandr Dugin in *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004) valuable. I have learnt from his dense description of Julius Evola and the relationship of his ideas to Italian Fascism as well as Dugin's ideology, and found this to be an informative contribution.<sup>2</sup>

I was less intrigued by Professor Gregor's guesswork concerning the motivation of my research in his last sentence. Professor Gregor concluded his article suggesting that

[i]f Dr Umland wishes to suppress Alexander Dugin's freedom of expression, he will have to find more compelling grounds than that he thinks Dugin is a fascist.<sup>3</sup>

As non-German readers of our controversy in *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004) might not be able to reconstruct my previous arguments in German-language to which Professor Gregor here refers, I have chosen to respond once again, and to do so now in English.

((2)) I cannot recall to have, either in my critique of Professor Gregor's assessment of Dugin or in my previous publications, indicated that Dugin or any other Russian anti-democrat should be silenced. I do not know where Professor Gregor got this idea from. I did mention, in my critique, briefly some court cases that involved Russian ultranationalists and concerned the issue of whether Vladimir Zhirinovskii, the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity (see below) or other similar actors can be labelled "fascist" or not. Yet, such proceedings were, usually, initiated by these Russian ultranationalists themselves. They specifically targeted those democratic activists or politicians who had dared to call the ultranationalists "fascists." More often than not, the resulting court decisions meant the suppression of the freedom of expression of the activists who had used the fascist label as they were ordered by the courts to publish apologies and, sometimes, to compensate the plaintiffs. It was in view of such circumstances that I found Professor Gregor's categorical statement that Dugin (among some other non-Russian figures) could not "by any *reasonable* measure, [...] *ever* count" as a fascist unhelpful.<sup>4</sup>

((3)) I can thus only suspect that Professor Gregor's above quoted speculation about my intentions is rooted in some misunderstanding of why I am interested in Dugin and similar figures in Russia, in the first place. It is uncommon in non-Marxist scholarly controversies to comment on the political agendas that contributors to such debates may have. Yet, as the question of my personal objectives was raised here by a senior professor at a leading political science department, I feel pressed to clarify them.

The foremost reason that a publicist like Dugin or, for instance, a politician like Zhirinovskii should be taken, interpreted, and criticized more seriously than this is usually done in Western assessments of Russian politics lies *not* in the nature of their ideas or the particular category, such as „fascist" or „non-fascist," one chooses to apply to them. The primary rationale for attention to them is, instead, that the impact that these actors may have on the political development of their country (and the Northern hemisphere as a whole) could be deeper than the potential influence of comparable figures in the West. That is not only because the Russian political system – whether one regards it as democratic or not – is far from consolidated. It is also because the positions that some ultra-nationalists occupy on the Russian political and social ladder is relatively high today already. The implications of, for instance, Zhirinovskii's recent electoral success – 11.45% in the 2003 State Duma elections, his second best result in federal-level elections ever – as well as of the simultaneous entry of a new ultra-right-wing grouping, the Motherland Bloc (9.02%), into the Russian parliament's lower house are self-evident. The political relevance of Dugin's bizarre ideas, in contrast, might be, for an outsider, less obvious.

((4)) Professor Gregor would be right if, by suspecting me of an urge to censor Dugin, he meant to highlight an heightened degree of concern, on my part, with regard to the Dugin phenomenon. I have indeed become increasingly interested in, and, perhaps, even worried about, this figure. Yet, the reason for my growing attention is, only in the second instance, the particular content of Dugin's numerous texts, my preference to classify him as a fascist, and some aversion to his ideas.

In fact, I think of Dugin as a publicist with certain talents – though, probably, not quite as eloquent a writer as his one-time brother-in-arms Eduard Limonov, leader of post-Soviet Russia's infamous National-Bolshevik Party.<sup>5</sup> I would go as far as to admit my *agreement* with certain aspects of Dugin's critique (as well as of that of some other figures whom I would regard as fascists too) of contemporary Western civilization. Though Dugin's, Limonov's and other fascist diagnoses of the causes of various defects in modern Western societies are ridiculous, their descriptions and analyses of these ills are not always trivial. Fascist „(final) solutions“ to the problems of contemporary societies, to be sure, are reprehensible, frequently dangerous, and, more often than not, would lead to the death of thousands, if not millions of people through war or genocide or both.

((5)) The primary reason why I am more interested in an adequate political classification of Dugin than of, for instance, Limonov is that the latter's (and similar figures') political influence is, in spite of Limonov's outstanding creative writing skills, limited to certain parts of the Russian youth scene, especially its counter-cultural milieu.<sup>6</sup> Dugin, to be sure, reaches these audiences too. But he is, in contrast to Limonov, also read among the Russian elite. To be precise, I am not even so much intrigued by the attention, as such, paid to Dugin's books and articles by a number of Russian politicians, academics, civil society actors, or military men. What puzzles me is the seriousness and respect with which Dugin's esoteric mumblings and fantastic schemes are considered by highly educated and, worse, placed Russians. What is baffling in the Dugin phenomenon are not any of his ideas *per se*, but that his manichean theories are seen as relevant for Russia's domestic affairs, especially her nationality issues, and her foreign policies towards both, the „near“ and „far abroad“ (a terminology that may sound familiar to students of Weimar Germany).

In view of his reception in the elite, it becomes important that Dugin's world view should, as Professor Gregor might agree, not be misunderstood as some kind of abstruse Russian caricature of the universe created in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Dugin's „thalassocracy“ is not „Mordor,“ but refers to the really existing contemporary West. Dugin's most demonized enemy is not some elusive „Sauron,“ but the United States of America. The sympathetic heroes in Dugin's books are no „Hobbits“ of „Middle Earth,“ but the living Russian people occupying the Eurasian „pivot of the world.“ And the final victory over Russia's enemies will not come about through the destruction of some mysterious ring, but as a result of a confrontation that would be nothing less than World War III.

((6)) As I am writing these lines I am forwarded, by one of the West's best informed experts on the Russian extreme right, Robert C. Otto, an article which claims that yet another prominent politician has expressed his readiness to become a member of Dugin's International Eurasian Movement. Allegedly, Aleksandr P. Torshin (b. 1953), one of the four Vice-Speakers of the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament,<sup>7</sup> has declared he would accept an invitation to enter the governing body of Dugin's Movement, i.e. its Highest Council.<sup>8</sup> According to this article, Torshin would join in the International Eurasian Movement's Highest Council, among others,

- Aslambek Aslakhonov, Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation,
- Mikhail Margelov, Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs of the Federation Council,
- Viktor Kaliuzhnyi, until recently Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the RF,
- Albert Chernishev, Russia's Ambassador to Turkey and Head of the Association of Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary Ambassadors of the RF,
- Apas Dzhmagulov, former Prime-Minister of Kyrgyzstan,
- Eduard Sagaljev, Chairman of the National Association of Television and Radio Stations, and others.<sup>9</sup>

In another recent piece sent to me by Otto and titled „It is time the Russians Wake Up!“, Dugin makes known that his newspaper *Evrasiiskoe obozrenie* (Eurasian Review) will henceforth appear as a supplement to *Literaturnaja gazeta* (Literary Newspaper) – once Russia's equivalent of the *The New York Review of Books*, *Die Zeit* or *Times Literary Supplement*.<sup>10</sup>

If these two announcements indeed preview real developments, Dugin's status within the Russian political and intellectual elite will be even higher than suggested in my first response to Professor Gregor's critique of Griffin.

((7)) To return to Professor Gregor's reply and his speculation about the intent of my research, I do not wish to suggest the necessity of a suppression of Dugin's freedom of political expression, but, only if that were possible, to

- (a) draw attention to the political impact that Dugin already now has,
- (b) point out that, in view of this impact, the question of how to classify Dugin's ideology in a comparative perspective should be of some interest,
- (c) recall the special meaning the term of fascism has acquired in Russia, and
- (d) caution against as categoric a classification of Dugin as a *non-fascist* as Professor Gregor has done.

While I would admit to a certain pettiness about these issues on my part, the content or style of my critique of Professor Gregor's statements should not give the impression that I am an advocate of censorship.<sup>11</sup>

((8)) It is because of the above issues that I also mentioned Professor Gregor's lack of familiarity with Russian language, a

concern that Professor Gregor described, in his reply, as „undue” (endnote 13). I now regret my remark. Normally, lacking knowledge of Russian would not be something I would see as problematic for adequate research on the Russian extreme right as there have, recently, appeared a number of very good books and articles in, as well as some translations of Russian primary sources into, Western languages (mainly English and German).<sup>12</sup>

In 2002, I have, for example, explicitly quoted Professor Gregor’s recent work as being one of the few, laudable exceptions in post-Cold War comparative research on fascism in which an attempt is made to integrate Soviet and post-Soviet Russian political phenomena.<sup>13</sup> I regard Professor Gregor’s comparative work as more adequate than many other recent Western analyses of contemporary international ultra-nationalism that tend to mention Russian tendencies only *en passant*. The immense effort spent on describing and theorizing the contemporary West European and North American extreme right in hundreds of books and articles looks somewhat odd against the background of the scant attention that is, at the same time, paid to the Russian equivalent and the potential consequences a further consolidation of ultra-nationalist tendencies in the Russian parliament and society could have. Thus, I would not only like to leave Dugin his freedom of expression, but also wish that Professor Gregor continues to do research the way he does (while also hoping that he will take less of an interest in the political motives of his academic colleagues than he showed towards mine).

It was because of the apodictic tone with which Professor Gregor made a statement regarding a potentially political issue in the interpretation of the post-Soviet Russian extreme right that I did remark upon Professor Gregor’s lack of Russian-language proficiency and his, at that point, apparent failure to consult knowledgeable Russian-reading colleagues. The reason for my indication of a potential inadequacy of Professor Gregor’s sources was that, while he discussed a number of relevant English secondary works in his rebuttal to my critique, he had failed to do so in his previous initial response to Griffin. Had Professor Gregor mentioned that, and detailed why, Russian-reading Western specialists on post-Soviet right-wing extremism tend to classify Dugin as a fascist in his first response to Griffin, and had Professor Gregor formulated his opposing assessment as a reply not only to Griffin (who also does not read Russian), but to these Russianists too, I might, actually, not have bothered to write a response to his classification of Dugin as a non-fascist.

### Endnotes

- 1 I replied to Professor Gregor’s critique of Roger Griffin’s theory of fascism „Roger Griffin, Social Science, ‘Fascism,’ and the ‘Extreme Right,’” *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004) in „Dugin kein Faschist? Eine Erwiderung an Professor A. James Gregor,” *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004).
- 2 A. James Gregor, „Andreas Umland and the ‘Fascism’ of Alexander Dugin,” *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15:3 (2004).
- 3 *Ibid.*, ((15)).
- 4 *Idem*, „Roger Griffin, Social Science...,” ((3)), italics in the original.
- 5 Markus Mathyl, “‘Die offenkundige Nisse und der rassenmäßige Feind:’ Die National-Bolschewistische Partei (NBP) als Beispiel für die Radikalisierung des russischen Nationalismus,” *Halbjahresschrift für südosteuropäische Geschichte, Literatur und Politik* 9:2 (1997): 7-15, & 10:1 (1998): 23-36; *idem*, “Hammer und Sichel in der Fahne Hitlers,” in: Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, eds., *Jugendkulturen, Politik und Protest: Vom Widerstand zum Kommerz* (Opladen: Leske+Budrich 2000), 211-37; Markus Mathyl, “The National-Bolshevik Party and Arctogaia: Two Neo-fascist Groupuscules in the Post-Soviet Political Space,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:3 (2003): 62-76; A. Toporova, “‘Natsboly’ v Sankt-Peterburge: obrazy i povsednevnost’,” in: V.V. Kostyusheva, ed., *Molodezhnye dvizheniya i subkul’tury Sankt-Peterburga (sotsiologicheskii i antropologicheskii analiz)* (Sankt-Peterburg: Norma 1999), 117-127; Andrei Rogachevskii, *Biographical and Critical Study of Russian Writer Eduard Limonov*. Studies in Slavic Language and Literature 20 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen 2003).
- 6 Markus Mathyl, “Das Entstehen einer nationalistischen Gegenkultur im Nachperestroika-Rußland,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 9 (2000): 68-107.
- 7 On Torschin, see <http://council.gov.ru/sostav/member/m10699.htm>.
- 8 Ernst Pliev, „Rukovodiashchie organy Mezhdunarodnogo ‘Evraziiskogo Dvizheniia’ popolnilis’ eshche odnim senatorom,” <http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1898>.
- 9 *Ibid.* I shortly introduce further relevant Russian civil society actors that were temporarily or are permanently tied to Dugin, including Mikhail Leonte’v and the late Aleksandr Panarin, in my forthcoming paper „Kulturhegemoniale Strategien der russischen extremen Rechten: Die Verbindung von faschistischer Ideologie und metapolitischer Taktik im ‘Neoeurasismus’ des Aleksandr Dugin,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 33:2 (2004), in print.
- 10 Anatolii Mel’nichenko and Aleksandr Dugin, “Russkim pora probuditsia!” *Shakhterskii krai* 20 (2004), at: <http://sh-kray.narod.ru/arhive/2004/20/pol2.htm> as well as <http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1910>.
- 11 I, for instance, regard Germany’s laws on political extremism as too restrictive and in discord with the „free-democratic basic order” (*freiheitlich-demokratische Grundordnung*) that my home country claims to have.
- 12 Andreas Umland, „The Post-Soviet Russian Extreme Right,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 44: 4 (1997): 53-61. Some of Dugin’s recent writings as well as parts of the programme of the International Eurasian Movement may be found in German language in the first 2004 issue of the extremely right-wing journal *Junges Forum* published by a certain Markus Fernbach under the imprint of Germany’s infamous *Regin Verlag*. I have the honour of being re-printed (with some mistakes) in this dubious journal, and take the opportunity to clarify here that I had no knowledge of this.
- 13 *Idem*, „Russischer Rechtsextremismus im Lichte der jüngeren theoretischen und empirischen Faschismusforschung,” *Osteuropa* 52:2 (2002): 901-913, here 902 n. 5, and 904 ns. 20 & 21.

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20<sup>th</sup> September 2004

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