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RETHINKING ALEXANDER PANARIN: A RUSSIAN POINT OF VIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREAT GLOBAL TRANSITION

Abstract: The paper deals with the views of a Russian political philosopher A. S. Panarin (1940 – 2003) on the West, the East, modernity, post-modernity, globalization, western liberalism and possible alternatives to the “end of history”, declared by an American politologist F. Fukuyama. Panarin analyzed the basic principles of the Western civilization and criticized the political culture of the West for its technocratic individualistic ultra-activism and the desire to spread westernization around the world. He saw the alternative to the American unipolar world in the Eastern tradition, as well as in the social ideas of justice and solidarity. The authors have made an attempt to integrate Panarin’s legacy into the continental European paradigm of political philosophy, comparing his views with the ideas of such European conservative thinkers and of the western New Left.

Keywords: Panarin, political theory, westernization, European conservatism, new left, critique of globalization, western thinking, post-soviet era

A Russian political philosopher A. S. Panarin (1940 – 2003) wrote most of his works in the post-Soviet years, characterized by the transformation from communism to free-market capitalism. In one of his

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works he pointed out: “Nowadays we are facing a great revolution in the process of development of Russian political thought. For a long time the efforts of our scientific community have been focused on overcoming the ideological monopoly of official marxism as well as on absorbing the western scientific classics, including the latest achievements of political theory. In a whole these efforts gave a positive result. But there was a significant danger of replacement of the previous dogmatics with the new one, related to the hopes of finding in the modern West another variant of all-knowing "great doctrine". The new dogmatics has manifested itself in attempts of mechanical transfer of Western ideas on Russian soil”³.

At this period Panarin, like other Russians, faced the collapse of the Soviet Union, an extreme social inequality and injustice, the westernization of the Russian culture, the political domination of the new liberal elite. We can remember, for example, the organization of the early 1990s called the National Salvation Front which was imprecisely defined in the West as a “red-brown” alliance. The National Salvation Front united, on the one hand, the sector of nationalists and conservatives who supported the state power and were against the loss of sovereignty, with, on the other hand, defenders of the Soviet political and legislative order who were aware of the economic disaster and social catastrophe that were coming in the soviet ex-territory⁴. At a global level the destruction of the world socialist camp led to the replacement of the bipolar international system by the unipolar American world, often known as “new world order”⁵, the intensification of the processes of the global americanization and westernization⁶, the mutation of classical modernity into post-modernity. This mutation, although dubious and hard to define as far as

³ Alexander Panarin, *Political science. The Western and Eastern traditions*, Moscow: Universitet, 2000. P. 3 (In Russ.) [Panarin A. S., *Politologija. Zapadnaja i vostochnaja tradicii*]

⁴ Igor Safarevic, *La setta mondialista contro la Russia*, Edizioni all'Insegna del Veltro, 1991.

⁵ Described like that by the representatives of the ruling political class of the United States of America, like George Bush-senior.

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, 2009.

ideological comparison is concerned, in terms of politics and international relations means a very specific thing: the transition from the world order based on the balance or competition between nation-states to a global order based on the race for world domination with the help of the existence of an hegemonic actor. Alexander Panarin wrote on this matter: "According to the new theory of a "global world" , national sovereignty has become completely obsolete, first of all, in the sphere of economy, where the nation-state is losing control, ceding ground to the transnational capital, world banks, the International Monetary Fund etc. All attempts to protect national economy and culture from the aggression of shameless and greedy "external environment" – more precisely, from the expansionism of consolidated Atlantic system, are condemned as retrograde traditionalism, not compatible with progress, the new world order, the laws of modern development"⁷.

Ideologically these changes were reflected in the theory of the "end of history"⁸ by an American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, a theory that implicitly justifies the hegemony of the USA as the centre of a global liberal democracy⁹. According to him, the collapse of the Soviet socialist system was an evidence of the final triumph of the liberal free-market values¹⁰, and there is no alternative to global liberal society (similar to the Open Society as the Popper's ideological project¹¹), as well

⁷ Alexander Panarin, *Political science. About the world of politics in the East and the West*. Moscow, 1999, P. 167. (In Russ.) [Panarin A. S., *Politologija. O mire politiki na Vostoke i na Zapade*]

⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books.

⁹ It can be added that this prediction, broken by the re-opening of history after the terrorist attacks of the 11th September 2001 on the World Trade Center and War on Terror of George Bush junior, was re-thought and overcome by Fukuyama himself, who didn't find it representative of the reality anymore.

¹⁰ About the usage of the concept of "values" in the liberal society you can read: Carl Schmitt, *La tirannia dei valori*, Adelphi edizioni.

¹¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Routledge, 1945. We should remember that this text of Popper was written because of anticommunist more than antifascist intentions. Taking into account the context of the discourse and comparing it with the epoch when it was published, it preceded the coming of "Iron Curtain" (Winston Churchill) and aimed to create a

as no further historical way of development. The history has ended forever with the victory of liberal capitalism over the soviet communism.

Professor A. S. Panarin thought differently. In his opinion, such conceptions as the western “end of history” and the unipolar world, based on the social-darwinist aspects of the classical liberalism, mean the planetary civilizational crisis of modernity. This political philosopher advocated a thesis that history hasn’t ended, and a future, different from the worldwide free-market capitalism, is possible. He defended the multiple-option, non-linear and pluralistic character of history, whereas the liberal “end of history” was regarded by him as the road to nowhere. The Russian philosopher emphasized the important role of Eastern and Southern civilizations: “In the struggle with paganism of new social Darwinism, worshipping the rich North and despising the poor South, the great monotheistic triumvirate of the Continent – Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Hinduism – gets new grounds of its moral and religious fiery spirit, new global objectives”¹².

According to Panarin, there are many civilizational, social and political alternatives of historical development. We can also find this idea inside various currents of the European continental thought developed in the 20th century, in the works of such fundamental authors like Oswald Spengler who hypotesized the plurality of civilizational cycles as the driver of the story (understood not in the sense of linear time)¹³. Panarin underlined that the maintenance of the cultural diversity is the best guarantee for the future of humanity, and such a maintenance can be even

long genealogy of the predecessors of the final totalitarianism, represented by communism.

¹² Alexander Panarin, *Global political forecasting*, Moscow: Algoritm, 2002, P. 280 (In Russ.) [Panarin A.S. *Global'noe politicheskoe prognozirovanie*]

¹³ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Null Papier. Interestingly enough, this text, being a milestone of German conservatism, for the first time was published in Russia by Bolsheviks, hypothetically for two reasons: the first was to testify the end of the West as a fundamental actor of the world history; the second, connected to the first one, was to testimony the re-opening of the story to different possibilities and the rise of those whom Spengler called “the young peoples” (Slavo-tatarian Bolsheviks can be identified as part of them for sure).

compared, according to an organical analogy, to the biological diversity which guarantees the existence of life on Earth. In his search for alternatives, he addressed to the Eastern civilizations and the ideas of justice, equality, solidarity and brotherhood.

Trying to understand the roots of the global expansionism of the West, Panarin formulated a conceptual model of the western political culture: he highlighted the very principles of the political life of the West, explaining that the western civilization more as an ideological phenomenon rather than as geographical one. For him the West is identical to liberalism, capitalism, modernity and post-modernity. Nowadays all these theories are very influential in Russia. And it is interesting to see how, despite the fact that they seem specifically to be a connection between different Russian points of view on the West, both conservatives and post-sovietic, these ideas correspond to the major part of the European conservative thought as for the opposition to the Anglosaxon world, often considered as the “Extreme West” of Europe¹⁴.

Anyway, the first principle of the Western civilization, formulated by A. S. Panarin, is the understanding of politics as a technology. Since the Renaissance, the West turned into a technocratic society, trying to make a mechanism and not an organism out of the world. Plato, widely rediscovered after the aristotelic phase of the medieval scholastics, defined politics as the *royal technique*¹⁵, and this

¹⁴ We can consider, for example, the negative vision of the “West” as opposed to Europe in the philosophical thought of the German Conservative Revolution, represented by Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger in “The Gordian Knot” (cfr. Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, *Il nodo di Gordio. Dialogo su Oriente e Occidente nella storia del mondo*, Il Mulino). It can be added that when the European conservatism accepted the concept of the West in the opposition to the East perceived as a kingdom of indistiguiness, mass society and collectivism (for example, italian traditionalist Julius Evola and the post-burkian school of moderate conservatism), there was a paradox of identification of this concept with social consequences of the market society – the same that were mentioned by Panarin! From our point of view, this comes out from conceptual errors of the conservative-traditionalist discourse, which have a very profound historic discourse (cfr. Orazio Maria Gnerre, *Prima che il mondo fosse. Alle radici del decisionismo novecentesco*, Mimesis Edizioni, 2018).

¹⁵ Platone, *Politico*.

concept was strengthened during this period. As a result, people have alienated themselves from their nature. According to the technocratic approach, all the environment, known in the Greek philosophy as cosmos, is just an object of exploitation. In the political sphere this mechanistic theory excludes from politics everything connected to idealism, metaphysics, some philosophical or sacred matters. Politics has become purely rationalistic, utilitarian, pragmatic and realistic, having power and money amongst its key priorities. These are the effects of the so called “realist revolution” in the political analysis, represented by Machiavelli, who proposed a discourse based not on the idea of what the politics and social relations should be, but on what they really are¹⁶. This proposal was strongly criticized by Christian rulers and Popes, including Federic II of Prussia¹⁷. Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s work was studied both by the Prussian king as well as in the Vatican. It is not possible that the holistic Christian society of the East wasn’t aware of this knowledge. Without any doubt, Machiavelli would have been highly interested in such a “machiavellic” figure like tsar Ivan Grozny. The point that Panarin understands very well is the extension of the realist discourse as the “cynic” foundation of philosophy, where it moved from the sphere of “means” to the sphere of “goals”¹⁸.

The second principle of the Western civilisation, underlined by Panarin, is the perception of politics as a game with unknown results. This principle is connected with the previous one, and it is still machiavellic¹⁹, because, since all idealistic and spiritual motivations are excluded, and no one knows the absolute truth, the political sphere is just

¹⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*.

¹⁷ Federico II, *L'antimachiavelli*, Edizioni Studio Tesi.

You can see also: Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Il Principe cristiano*, Effedieffe edizioni.

¹⁸ The same discourse that Marx did about money mean in “The Capital”, which according to him defines the modernity.

¹⁹ Machievelli told that politics is made of such different parts as ability and fortune, and it’s never possible to exclude fortune from the political life.

a competition, where the fittest and the strongest one wins²⁰. Panarin pointed out that the perception of politics as a game with unknown results goes back to the period of early modernity, the Renaissance as we said and the Protestant Reformation during which the processes of secularization and desacralization took place²¹. This conception of politics has become fundamental for the liberal-democratic ideology, where the elections take on the appearance of the game, a national lottery. However, as Panarin stated, the principle of the perception of politics as a game with unknown results has often been violated. Both the western Marxists and liberals pointed out that they know the absolute truth. F. Fukuyama's conception of the "end of history" is an example of liberal dogmatism (although it is a dogmatism "without theology"²²), trying to monopolize not only the present but also the future. As far as international relations are concerned, the West is even less pluralistic: there is no tolerance towards the non-Western cultural diversity and no

²⁰ There is however a difference to be made between the conception of competition on the basis of strength, which assumes Darwinist and biologicist traits as much as the concept of community-organism in Panarin, which is also present in Western-European political discourse, to the point of paroxysm which it can be read in Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and the liberal view that truth is not defined by the "ordeal" of force, but is in itself indefinable because it does not exist in a totalizing sense (for liberals only "natural law exists", which however does not prove itself in nature but in the individual consciousness that assumes universal value). It is not by chance that the concept of "inalienable property" is based on this second principle which is then reversed in ruthless economic competition. Liberalism is a mixture of the defense of certain rights (individual rights) and ruthless competition, where chauvinism and the illiberal biologicist conception of society foresee the fierce competition between groups that would defend their right to existence (sic). But it is true, and in this Panarin is right, that chauvinism is not the perfect antithesis of liberalism, and that, although it is not liberal in an absolute sense, it is in part a form of national liberalism, "group" liberalism.

²¹ Max Weber, *L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*.

²² Cfr. Donoso Cortés, *Saggio sul cattolicesimo, il liberalismo e il socialismo*, Rusconi Editore.

respect to the national and civilizational sovereignty²³. The East is labeled as “barbarian”, “undeveloped”, “non-democratic” etc.

The third principle of the Western civilization, put forward by professor Panarin, is atomistic individualism and liberal-democracy. The Russian politologist stated that the western society has become atomized. As a result, it consists of autonomous atomistic individuals who have no bonds with collective identity. Individualism is based on the idea that an individual doesn't have any obligations to the society (nor the society to the individual, saying it with Margaret Thatcher). Touching on liberal representative democracy, Panarin made a conclusion that within this system people don't have an opportunity to solve their problems themselves and have to give complete control over politics to professional politicians who turn into oligarchy. This is the concept of “technocracy” which was taken, for example, from the European Union according to the principles of the “managerial revolution”²⁴ but without a political goal, either national, collective or transcendent²⁵.

The fourth principle of the western political culture in Panarin's scheme is the separation of powers. Interestingly enough, this principle doesn't take into account the economic authority, whereas in the capitalist system the economic financial power has a dominant rule on politics²⁶. A famous economist and sociologist Karl Polanyi in his book *The Great Transformation*²⁷ showed an important role of the international banking oligarchy within liberal capitalism²⁸. Thus, there is a contradiction between

²³ In the liberal society, even when liberal democratic, there is no respect for national sovereignty even of one's own people. This is the thesis of the intrinsic separation between the democratic and the liberal principle already underlined by Robespierre during the French Revolution, when the revolutionary front had already split into these two parties (liberal and democratic), explained at the beginning of the 1900s by the Catholic conservative Gilbert Keith Chesterton (Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Politics*, NovaEuropa Edizioni) and to date clearly reaffirmed by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek.

²⁴ James Burnham, *La rivoluzione manageriale*.

²⁵ Carl Schmitt, *La Dittatura*, Edizioni Settimo Sigillo.

²⁶ Karl Marx, *Il Capitale*.

²⁷ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

²⁸ According to Marx, financierism as the final stage of (the western) capitalism.

the separation of political power among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the authority and a completely deregulated status of the economic financial power. Saying it with Schmitt, only who is united, undivided, can command²⁹. Due to Karl Marx we know how the financial Capital is accumulating and concentrating.

To A. S. Panarin's mind, the systematic and functional principle is the fifth in political culture of the West. As the political philosopher pointed out, the Western civilization is dominated by activism of a mechanistic, technocratic type³⁰. The world is perceived as a passive object, which should be systematized, organized, regularized, rationalized as a mechanism, as a giant factory by the will of an active subject. This perception has created the specific titanic activism of the West. Everything organic is regarded by the West as chaotic, and the western people have turned it into an artificial technosphere. As far as the human society is concerned, it should also become machinery, not organic, within the systematic and functional worldview. These topics were also covered inside the European philosophical discourse, which criticized the *will to power* first³¹ and the nihilistic technique after³². For example, the famous conversation between Jünger and Heidegger about nihilism ("Über die Linie") focused on two aspects of the European thought about this problem: the first belongs to Jünger who favors the subjectivist order of the world (the function of the Worker, that is the titan of the totalitarian modernity), the second position is represented by Heidegger, who points out that Jünger's book completes the evolution of the *will to power* that was described by Nietzsche³³. The less dichotomic vision rather than the position of Heidegger and Panarin is represented by Carl Schmitt who, in

²⁹ Carl Schmitt, *La Dittatura*, Edizioni Settimo Sigillo.

³⁰ Interestingly, the concept of "activism" was condemned by the Catholic Church, to be precise by Pope Leo XIII, as part of the heresy defined as "Americanism".

Leone XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae, Lettera apostolica al Cardinale James Gibbons di Baltimora*, 22 gennaio 1899.

³¹ All of Nietzsche's work, for example.

³² As in Heidegger's work.

³³ As in Heidegger's work. On the connection between will to power and nihilism: Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger, *Oltre la Linea*, Adelphi Edizioni.

synthesis, reminds us that the problem of technical nihilism in the West is connected to the end of the goal (the technical goal in this case, but also the economic goal)³⁴. There are similar problems that come from careful analysis: the loss of the sense of the world in favor of the technical sterility, that is not only anti-natural but also profoundly anti-human. For all of them the source of the loss of the sense was the West.

The following principle of the western political culture is the separation of values from interests³⁵. A. S. Panarin wrote that, starting from an extremist reading of Machiavelli, the western political culture has concentrated on pursuing interests, not ideals and sacred values. Politics of the West is based on pragmatism and realism, as stated before. Since there is no absolute truth, everything is relative³⁶.

The seventh principle of the political culture of the West in his thought, is the idea of "open society". This Russian philosopher mentioned such characteristics of liberal understanding of "open society" as atomization, individualism, the hostility towards collectivism and traditions, the ideology of "human rights". The political philosopher mentioned that the idea of "open society" formulated by Karl Popper is connected to the geopolitical conception of the struggle between sea and continental powers³⁷. It represents interests of Atlanticist sea powers, first of all, the

³⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Cattolicesimo romano e forma politica*.

³⁵ This is the problem of Carl Schmitt's "The Tyranny of Values" (Carl Schmitt, *La tirannia dei valori*, Adelphi edizioni).

³⁶ To be even more precise, in reality liberalism is inherently anti-relativist. Although Cardinal Ratzinger (not yet Pope Benedict XVI) had correctly spoken of the "dictatorship of relativism" within contemporary society (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily at the Patriarchal Basilica of Saint Peter, 18 April 2005), what is evident from his discourse and that applies well to the contemporary Western world is not so much the real tolerance towards various forms of discourse, that is a true positive relativism analogous to the concept of pluralism in Panarin or of "pluriversality" in Alain De Benoist, but a sort of radical agnosticism, in which it is not possible to express any strong truth. This also coincides with Fukuyama's "end of history" principle, which is demonstrated in the death of ideologies. No view of the world is possible within liberal society, and therefore no "relative" viewpoint is possible.

³⁷ Another key-concept in Carl Schmitt (cfr. Carl Schmitt, *Terra e Mare*, Adelphi Edizioni).

Anglo-Saxon axis of the USA and Great Britain. In one word: the *Anglosphere*.

In brief, the political thinker made a deep analysis of the western liberal society and its aspects and anthropology. On the other hand Panarin claimed that the Western civilization is not universal and that it has no right to declare the “end of history”, denying alternative historical ways of development to other civilizations. Response to the global americanization and westernization proposed by Panarin included addressing to experience of Eastern civilizations as a source of cultural and ethnic diversity, and promoting at a new level ideas of solidarity and social equality, which belonged to western left-wing modernity, in some convergence points between tradition, localism and social justice that were also parts of the *no-global* movement alternative to the liberal modernity.

Demonstrating how the philosophical discourse of Panarin has developed in the post-soviet context, the positive usage of that is that there are many similarities with the European culture (both “right-wing” and “left-wing”, the terms that in this phase of the modernity have much more less descriptive functionality) in the field of critics of a “certain type of modernity”, proposing other possibilities, which could indicate to us new ways of life that might help the mankind in its historic development, specifically during this critic phase of the process of globalization. Panarin can be estimated as a theorist of an alternative model of globalization. During the period of crisis of the unipolar model, to rethink globalization is the main geophilosophical task of our time.

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PREISPITIVANJE ALEKSANDRA PANARINA:
RUSKA TAČKA GLEDIŠTA U KONTEKSTU
VELIKE GLOBALNE TRANZICIJE

Sažetak: Rad se bavi stavovima ruskog političkog filozofa A. S. Panarina (1940–2003) o Zapadu, Istoku, modernosti, postmodernosti, globalizaciji, zapadnom liberalizmu i mogućim alternativama „kraju istorije”, koji je proglasio američki politikolog F. Fukujama. Panarin je analizirao osnovne principe zapadne civilizacije i kritikovao političku kulturu Zapada zbog njenog tehnokratskog individualističkog ultraaktivizma i želje da se vesternizacija proširi svetom. Alternativu američkom unipolarnom svetu video je u istočnoj tradiciji, kao i u društvenim idejama pravde i solidarnosti. Autori su pokušali da integrišu Panarinovu zaostavštinu u kontinentalnu evropsku paradigmu političke

filozofije, upoređujući njegove poglede s idejama evropskih konzervativnih mislilaca i zapadne Nove levice.

Ključne reči: Panarin, Zapad, Istok, politička kultura, liberalizam, evropski konzervativizam, nova levica, kritika globalizacije, zapadno mišljenje, postsovjetska era

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