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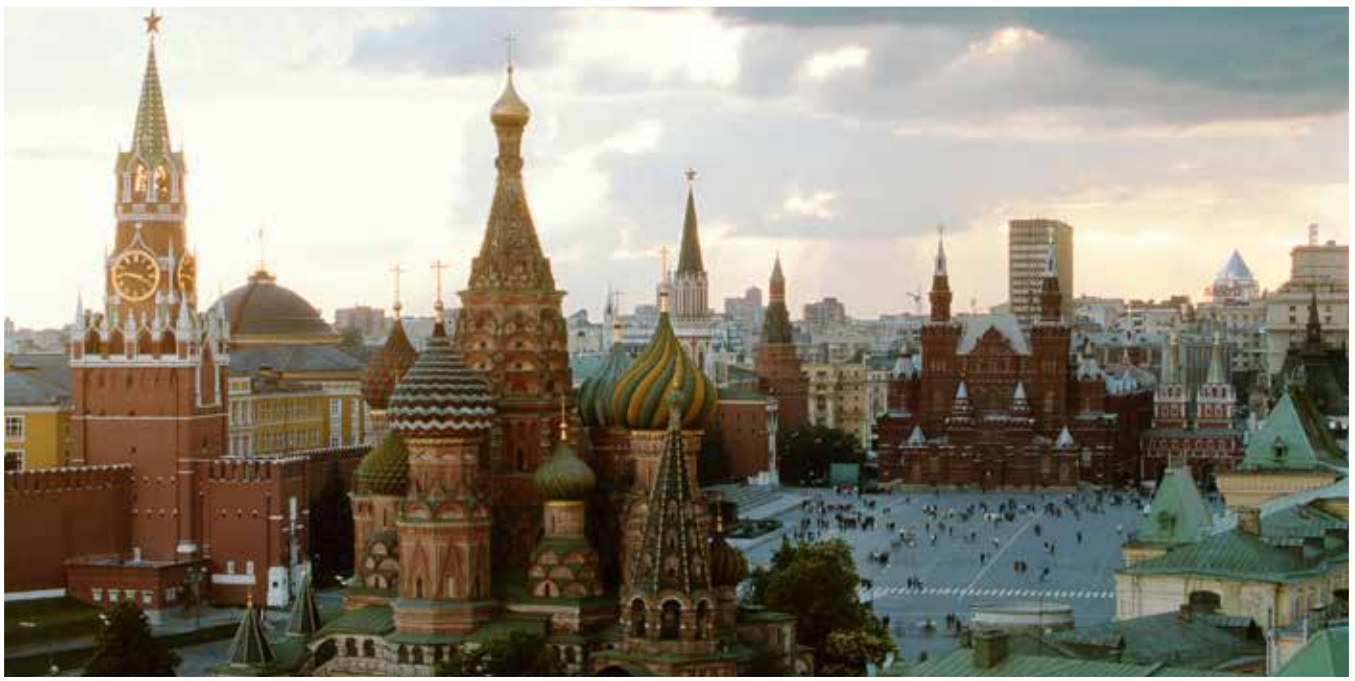

Russia *and* The Baltic States







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EDITOR'S LETTER

THE BALTIC ACCENT



How wonderful it was just a few decades ago to set off for the Baltic states! Departing from the pristine, uncrowded, and cosy Riga railway station (no wonder the director Eldar Ryazanov's *Station for Two* was filmed there), the express train would whisk you away to what felt practically like foreign soil. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were, of course, Soviet republics, yet you could never shake the feeling of travelling to another world. It was a realm of delicious coffee, exquisite delicacies, European fashion, Raymond Pauls' music, amber, and pine trees, all set to a calm, measured pace of life! There were no border guards, no passport control, and no baggage checks…

Yet, alas, even back then, in that faux-European world, the locals would greet you with a trademark Baltic coldness, and shop assistants were often slow to answer questions asked in Russian.

Now, there is no way to travel or fly to Riga, Tallinn, or Vilnius without special reasons. The history of relations between the Baltic states and Russia has long since become a history of hatred. Russian pensioners in Latvia have found themselves outlawed – passing the language test is virtually impossible; schoolchildren are being forcibly detached from the Russian language; and our numerous compatriots are strictly barred from any constructive initiatives. Naturally, all facts of discrimination are rigorously documented in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' annual analytical review reports. It is noted that the Baltic states have set a grim precedent in modern Europe: under the banner of European values, they have built state machines for the mass suppression of the Russian language and the expulsion of citizens who have dedicated decades of their lives and work to these countries.

This special issue of the *Russian Mind* magazine features numerous pieces on the current state of Russia-Baltic relations and the root causes of the conflict. We look back at the Baltic figures who played a significant role in Russian history and culture, as well as the remarkable poets whose work was brilliantly translated in the Soviet Union. We also write on the dismantled monuments to the liberators and the attempts to erase the memory of Russian cultural figures who once lived in the Baltic states.

The poet Rimma Kazakova's verses came to mind:

You come, O Baltic coastlands,
Like a ship out of the mist,
From Peter the Great's little boat,
From the ocean's wastes.
You stretch out, slate-grey,
Unclear and weather-beaten.
Not mine, not Russian,
Yet Russian all the same.

That's what we have to live with.

By *Leonid Kolpakov*

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RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC STATES: CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

As part of their state strategy to shape national consciousness, the Baltic ruling elites pinned their hopes on the demonisation of Russia.

By ANDREI SKACHKOV,
PhD in Politicc



Participants in a picket defending Russian schools outside the Ministry of Education of Latvia. Riga, Latvia. 2014 ***Photo: Vladimir Starkov***

The difficulties in relations between Russia and the Baltic states carry certain inter-civilisational components. On the one hand, Russia is geographically adjacent to the Baltic region, which for long historical periods was an integral part of our civilisational – that is, political, economic, cultural, and even ideological – space.

On the other hand, as the events of recent decades show, these shared periods not only failed to unite us but, on the contrary, distanced us from one another as much as possible. The Balts have managed to exacerbate old, long-forgotten contradictions, adding new grievances and complexes to them.

At the same time, a closer look will reveal that inter-civilisational fault lines (to use Samuel Huntington's terminology) have always existed between us; they were simply obscured by an ideological veil during the Soviet era. In essence, we have always been distinct in historical terms, owing to strong Polish, German, and Swedish influences in the Baltic states; religious terms, as Lithuanians

are Catholic, while Latvians and Estonians are Protestant; and cultural–historical aspects, given that we were communal peasants whereas Baltic peoples were homesteaders with a distinct smallholding mindset.

And yet, despite the obvious differences, the Baltic peoples, during long periods of coexistence with us, had the opportunity to utilise the advantageous location of their states between Russia and Western Europe for their own national well-being and development.

However, after the collapse of the USSR, the reactionary, essentially nationalist elites who came to power in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, set a course for an accelerated rupture of historical, economic, and cultural ties with Russia, demonising our country and positioning it as the successor to the "Soviet empire". As a result, the geographical advantages of the Baltic region, which had been shaped over centuries, were destroyed overnight.

It was precisely then, during the epochal shift of the 1990s, that the newly emerged Baltic rulers made what we consider to be a strategic misstep in their choice of development path. Instead of building good-neighbourly relations with the new, democratic Russia from scratch, they chose to vilify their eastern neighbour, fuel hostility, and pursue isolation from it.

Yet it is well known that in the early 1990s the Russian leadership sought to establish non-confrontational, highly pragmatic partnerships with its Baltic neighbours. For Russia, the benchmark was the decades-long experience of successful co-operation with Finland, which was seen as an ideal model for interaction with the Baltic states. Objectively, this was encouraged by the absence of ideological contradictions and a mutual desire to integrate into the Western community as swiftly as possible.

In the economic sphere, the benefits for Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia of co-operating with Russia, primarily in the transit sector, were also obvious. In essence, the Baltic states could easily have become a transit bridge to Europe, just as in days gone by, securing steady budget revenues and ensuring long-term prosperity for their countries and peoples.

Let us not forget that, amid the emergence of the new Russian statehood, our country's leadership



A march in defense of Russian schools in Latvia. 2003



The Monument to the Soviet Army Soldiers — Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the Nazi Invaders. Demolished on 22-25 August 2022

made unprecedented concessions: it unconditionally recognised the independence of the Baltic states, completely withdrew troops from these countries by 1995, and guaranteed non-interference despite the course these nations had already declared towards securing membership in NATO and the EU.

In his memoirs, Yevgeny Primakov noted: "When the Baltic states declared independence, we withdrew our military presence without any preconditions."

However, as is well known, no gratitude followed for our more than peaceable approach. On the contrary, the focus was shifted to exaggerated historical grievances and myths. State-building was based on the concept of "Soviet occupation", which is untenable from the perspective of international law. Hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking residents of Latvia and Estonia fell victim to this: overnight, they found themselves treated as outsiders or "non-citizens" in the land where they were born and had spent most of their lives.

Subsequently, this injustice escalated into a full-scale inter-communal confrontation between militant identities worshipping different historical figures and events.

The above applies primarily to the conflicting interpretations of the circumstances surrounding the incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia into

the USSR in 1940, the outcomes of the Second World War, and the liberating role of the Soviet Army. It is all perfectly straightforward. Since the nationalists dominant in the Baltic states interpret Soviet history as a period of "occupation", Soviet soldiers are branded there as nothing other than "occupiers", while volunteers from the fascist Waffen-SS battalions and the "Forest Brothers" partisans are romanticised as "fighters for national independence".

It is clear that all this is absolutely unacceptable for the majority of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states, as well as to some of the Baltic people themselves who are not prepared to view the Soviet period in a purely negative light.

The most distressing aspect is that this entrenched antagonistic situation precludes any inter-ethnic consensus on historical matters, condemning these countries to a debilitating confrontation between their largest national communities. Furthermore, this concerns not minor issues, but the most fundamental worldview reference points.

In this regard, the assessment made by Janis Urbanovics, one of Latvia's longest-serving politicians and the long-time leader of the Russian-speaking National Harmony Party, is entirely justified: he noted that in a country where the demos is divided, democracy cannot exist.

The Latvian historian Andrejs Plakans also believes that relying on ethnic nationalism proved to be a mistaken and ruinous path for the Baltic peoples. State policy should have aimed to create a society of equal rights and opportunities for all residents. For example, the Scandinavian democracies provided clear evidence of how small countries can preserve their national uniqueness while simultaneously ensuring that their residents – both citizens and "non–citizens" – receive a fair reward for



The Monument to Alexander Pushkin in Kronvalds Park in Riga (Latvia) was dismantled on 30 May 2023

their labour, medical care, state pensions, and a good education. A. Plakans is convinced that, in order to create such prosperous states, it made immense economic sense for the Baltic republics to orientate themselves towards both the West and the East, given that many residents of the Baltic countries maintained linguistic, cultural, and historical ties with Russia.

We can also agree with Plakans that the Baltic countries should not have used a certain "uniqueness of their history" to justify discriminatory policies against national minorities. Past hardships cannot grant special rights to exclusivity.

It is also crucial to note the deeply destructive role played by the Baltic national elites' policies, which aim at the forced assimilation of ethnic minorities through the imposition of linguistic terror. Language has been turned into a sword of Damocles in the ruling class' domestic strategy, weaponised against everything Russian and any form of dissent. Meanwhile, the linguistic and educational rights of non-Baltic peoples – primarily Russians – have been completely ignored. The justification, of course, remains unchanged: it is claimed that the Balts face a unique historical situation where their language must be protected to maintain the foundations of their identity. Naturally, the fact that such discrimination would damage the identity of the Slavic community was entirely disregarded by the proponents of historical revenge.

The discriminatory status of Russian as a foreign language has hit the older generation particularly hard, as they do not speak the Baltic languages fluently. Elderly members of national minorities cannot use Russian for official communication with municipal authorities and face serious difficulties when seeking medical care – for instance, patient information leaflets for medicines do not include a Russian translation.

Such segregation has only exacerbated inter-ethnic and social division in Latvia and Estonia, fostering an oppressive atmosphere of permanent nationalistic conflict within these States. In Lithuania, where the Russian-speaking diaspora is significantly smaller and the issue of mass statelessness does not exist (following the collapse of the USSR, the Lithuanian authorities granted citizenship to all residents), inter-ethnic conflict appears less dramatic.

To understand the motives behind rising russophobia in the post-Soviet Baltic states, it is crucial to keep in mind that the shaping of historical consciousness here was heavily influenced by the so-called "Western Balts" – post-war emigrants and their descendants. Having repatriated from Western Europe, the USA, and Canada, many of them assumed key positions in the state apparatus – both the legislative and executive powers – of the Baltic states. Notable examples include former Presidents T. H. Ilves of Estonia, V. Vike-Freiberga of Latvia, and V. Adamkus of Lithuania, alongside numerous members of parliament. As an ideological imperative, this stratum, detached from the everyday life of its ethnic homeland, introduced a deeply hostile vision of the role of the USSR, and subsequently Russia, in the history of the Baltic states.

In his book The Latvian Candidate, the prominent Italian journalist and public figure Giulietto Chiesa characterises in detail the development of the ruling elites in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia under the influence of Western repatriates charged with anti-Russian sentiment. He notes, in particular, that what occurred was neither a coincidence nor a mistake, but rather a deliberate effort to engineer governments composed of individuals hostile to Russia.

The presence of "Western Balts" in the post-Soviet establishment of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia largely explains these countries' persistent efforts to glorify and present as "freedom fighters" their relatives who stood on the other side of the barricades – namely, those who loyally served Hitler and took part in the post-war resistance against Soviet rule.

It is understandable that such historical falsification has met with outrage and rejection in Russia.

In the Baltic states, holding an alternative view on post-war history is regarded as an act of disloyalty, often resulting in criminal prosecution and actual prison sentences for denying the so-called "Soviet occupation".

For instance, the prominent Lithuanian politician A. Paleckis, the Latvian academic A. Gaponenko, and the journalist Yu. Alexeyev were all sentenced to long prison terms. The anti-fascists I. Koren and V. Engel, the well-known Latvian politician and public figure T. Zhdanok, and many other activists from the Baltic Russian-speaking community have also faced persecution.

Essentially, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have set themselves the task of settling the "Russian question" once and for all, while simultaneously utilising outright terror to eradicate everything in these countries associated with Russia. Russian-speaking public and cultural organisations have been liquidated, and their leaders either arrested or forced to flee abroad. Barbaric laws have been enacted to completely destroy Soviet memorial and cultural heritage, while the Russian language has been banned in both educational and public spheres. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have effectively closed their borders with Russia and Belarus, banning travel even for humanitarian reasons. Lithuania is

creating all manner of visa, customs and administrative obstacles to restrict Kaliningrad's freight and passenger transit to the absolute maximum. The vital supplies and sustenance of the Russian Federation's Kaliningrad exclave remain under constant threat.

In the Baltic states, not only have hundreds of monuments to Soviet liberator soldiers been destroyed (including the demolition of Riga's main landmark, the obelisk in the city centre), but also symbols of Russian culture, such as the monuments to Alexander Pushkin and General Michael Barclay de Tolly, the memorial to the Academician Mstislav Keldysh, and plaques dedicated to the writer Valentin Pikul, Emperor Peter I the Great, and the noblewoman and memoirist Anna Kern, among many others. In the Baltic capitals, Russian street names have been changed to Latvian and Ukrainian, while the names of Russian cities have been erased from road signs.

In anticipation of an "imminent aggression" from the East, the population is being prepared for guerrilla warfare. Bomb shelters are being hastily equipped in cities, while echeloned fortifications are being built along the border with Russia. NATO forces have been deployed across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and legislation is being drafted to allow the future deployment of nuclear weapons in the Baltic region.

Given these revanchist approaches, bilateral relations between Russia and the Baltic states will continue to develop along a negative trajectory over the medium term. Russia's task in this complex situation is to maintain composure and refuse to be provoked, while keeping its powder dry and remaining prepared for any unexpected turns.



A monument to the nineteenth-century master of world literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky, has been preserved in Tallinn (Estonia)

THE UDALTSOV TOUCH

The Diplomat Alexander Udaltsov on Time, His Loved Ones, and Himself

The interview was conducted by VLADIMIR SUKHOMLINOV



Alexander Ivanovich Udaltsov

Much is known about this man and prominent public figure, but it is always better to learn more firsthand.

Alexander Ivanovich, you are a well-known diplomat. However, you entered the diplomatic service in 1973 after graduating from the Department of History at Moscow State University. This is a rather atypical path, as the children of diplomats usually go through MGIMO (Russian State Institute of International Relations). How did it come about?

It is hardly surprising. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recruits graduates not only from MGIMO, but also from other universities and cities. This is crucial: the diplomatic service should not confine itself strictly to its own educational system. Furthermore, by many rankings, Moscow State University is the leader among Russian higher education institutions. As for me, I graduated from the Department of History (the Subdepartment of History of Southern and Western Slavs), which later proved highly useful in my diplomatic career – particularly in Czechoslovakia, and subsequently in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In 1985, I graduated from the Diplomatic Academy of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs – not to mention the dozen different courses I completed while working at the Ministry, including those for departing ambassadors, as well as language and regional studies programmes.

From my own experience, I can say with certainty that a thorough knowledge of history is the ultimate guide that helps find the optimal path to any goal. Today, such a historical navigator is needed more than ever by people of various professions, especially those occupying the highest rungs of the hierarchical ladder.

You worked for a long time in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: first Soviet, then Russian. For five years, till 2011, you served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to Latvia, followed by a posting as Ambassador to Slovakia, and for over seven years, till mid-October 2020, you headed our mission in Lithuania. Over this period, you must have developed an understanding of what matters most in the work of a diplomat, especially one holding the rank of ambassador. What are the boundaries of his courage and independence?

People answer this question differently. The most important thing in this line of work is to be a true diplomat and live up to this responsible and highly significant mission. There are numerous criteria for evaluating performance, particularly that of ambassadors, and I believe they should expand given the increasingly complex international environment, bilateral relations with a number of countries, and so forth. In this context, I believe an important role should be played by relevant inspections of the work

of Russian foreign missions, as well as other forms of analysis.

Sometimes, when asked this question, people might answer that the most important thing for a diplomat is to know the host country: its history, culture, traditions, and, of course, the language. This is correct. However, in my view, it is even more critical that every Russian diplomat and ambassador first and foremost knows his own country inside out, including its real needs, which must be the priority in the work of foreign missions. And of course, one must not get carried away by lobbying for the interests of host countries, even friendly ones. A balance of interests is the best path for developing bilateral relations. This balance may be delayed in time, asymmetric, or prioritised for the partner at a certain stage, but it must exist nonetheless.

The limits of independence are generally defined; to a certain extent, they are enshrined in the 2016 Law On the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation, as well as in directives and other documents regulating the activities of foreign missions and their heads. As for courage, its boundaries are nowhere prescribed, and therefore must be guided chiefly by common sense. Seriously speaking, an ambassador's courage should be welcomed when it is calculated, actionable, and not just an emotional outburst. By the way, an ambassador has a unique opportunity to convey his courage in dispatches to the country's leadership.



Alexander Udaltsov, the then Russian Ambassador to Slovakia, with the Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico (right), at a reception

To clarify my previous question: the countries you served in may not be considered major global powers. However, time shows that even a small country (or a slightly more prominent one like the Ukraine or Lithuania) can suddenly play a role that seems far above its weight. Am I right to look at it this way? And what can a diplomat's role be in such situations, given that there have also been notable failures?

History shows that individual countries can trigger, or even provoke, a major conflict, even on a global scale. Take, for example, the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis or the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia. Incidentally, it was the year I graduated from the Soviet secondary school at the USSR Embassy in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, as my father was serving as the Minister-Counsellor at our diplomatic mission at the time, so I witnessed the beginning of the Prague Spring firsthand.

As it happened, both conflicts arose from the USSR's confrontation: with the US in the first instance, and with NATO and the "collective West" in the second. The West was actively fuelling the Prague Spring, seeking to dismantle the socialist system there. This scenario failed to materialise because on 21 August 1968 troops from the USSR and five Warsaw Pact member states (totalling about 500,000 personnel) entered Czechoslovakia. NATO, as it turned out, was caught off guard and missed the manoeuvre entirely.

The role of an ambassador in critical situations is immense. In the vast majority of cases, Soviet and Russian envoys rose to the occasion; some later became prominent political figures, even ascending to the position of General Secretary of the CPSU (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Central Committee. Here, I am referring to Yuri Andropov, who served as Soviet Ambassador to Budapest during the height of the 1956 crisis.

I am not sure which specific failures you mean. They have occurred only on the rarest of occasions, and not just among ambassadors, but among leaders at all levels. On the whole, drawing from over fifty years of diplomatic service, I can confidently state that the majority of Soviet and Russian diplomats – and



As the Russian Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania, Alexander Ivanovich Udaltsov repeatedly visited the burial site of twelve Soviet border guards who lost their lives during the opening days of the Great Patriotic War.

ambassadors in particular – have always been distinguished by their high level of professionalism, intellect, strong communication skills, and goodwill.

You are currently the Executive Director of the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, an organisation of unique importance. It recently celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. I have often heard words of gratitude directed at you from people you have quite literally saved. However, you face no shortage of challenges. Which of them are the most acute?

Before discussing the challenges, I would like to briefly outline what the Foundation has achieved over the past fifteen years. A great deal has been done. Today, the Foundation is an active and highly sought-after instrument for implementing state policy regarding our compatriots living outside the country. It is worth noting that there are about 30 million such Russians globally!

The Foundation's Board of Trustees is headed by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself is our main partner. The primary objective is to provide on-the-ground support to people and protect them from persecution. A support system is in place comprising fifty-three legal aid centres across thirty countries, which compatriots refer to as a "legal emergency service". When necessary, we fund legal counsel: our lawyers are currently involved in forty-three court cases and, as a rule, successfully.

We also fund the operation of information portals, websites, and legal columns in Russian-language media, which attracts approximately 270 million visits a year. The Foundation finances the publication of books, textbooks, legal reference guides, and periodicals. I consider our joint project with Literaturnaya Gazeta to publish special issues of the Russian Mind magazine to be highly successful; these are published in both Russian and English and distributed abroad free of charge. Over recent years, fourteen issues have been released on various topics, including the history of the Great Patriotic War, the life and work of Fyodor Tyutchev and Emmanuel Kant, and the history of relations between Russia and the USA, among others.

We recently opened a branch of our Foundation in Kaliningrad, bringing us geographically closer to the countries where the authorities have begun forcing out Russian-speaking residents. While providing consultations remains our core priority, the branch will also engage in informational, outreach, and exhibition work, serving as a welcoming meeting point for people, including those from neighboring countries.

Now, regarding the challenges. The primary issue is the escalation of the Russophobic policies and practices across most EU nations and several others. This has led to a deterioration in the situation of our compatriots, a violation of their rights, and intensified persecution for expressing sympathies towards Russia. A key component of this archaic approach is the EU's sanctions against our Foundation; it was recently included for the third time in their anti-Russian sanctions package (already the twentieth). Brussels' objective behind these restrictions is clear: to intimidate our people, discredit the Foundation, and isolate it.

However, this remains unachieved, as evidenced by the growing number of appeals from our compatriots to the Foundation and its centres. To be frank, the sanctions have taught us a great deal. We have become more proactive, more professional, and more cautious. And we will continue to learn.

There are certain "in-house" issues which I am sure can and must be resolved. Here are just a couple of them. Firstly, the never-ending stream of people wishing to lead the Foundation, which, frankly, complicates matters and fails to take into account the status and advantages of a non-governmental organisation, which our NGO is. Secondly, another crucial issue is financial. A paradoxical situation has arisen: the year before last, President Vladimir Putin supported an appeal by Sergei Lavrov, resulting in a doubling of the Foundation's core funding. However, the Ministry of Finance flatly refused even a minor salary increase for the NGO's staff, whose wages have not been raised for fifteen years. As a result, our main backbone remains pensioners (estimable and experienced individuals), while attracting younger, highly professional staff poses a major challenge. And there are only twenty-five of us in total!

No doubt your family and its traditions played a huge part in helping you. As the saying goes, We are all products of our childhood. I know this holds a special meaning for you personally. Could you share a few pages from the Udaltsov family history?

Every family history has its unique features, and the Udaltsov saga is no exception. Let me begin with my grandfather, Ivan Dmitrievich Udaltsov – a revolutionary, educator, prominent scholar, and statesman. As a student at Moscow State University, he became involved in revolutionary activities, joining the RSDLP(b) (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) in 1905 and becoming the secretary of the university's social democratic faction. In 1907, my grandfather was arrested and held in Butyrka Prison for six months. By order of the Minister of Internal Affairs, he was subsequently sentenced to a two-year exile in the Vologda governorate. However, as he was a hereditary nobleman, this was commuted to banishment abroad. For two years, I. D. Udaltsov lived in Germany, France, and Switzerland. He continued his studies at Leipzig University and joined the work of the Social Democratic Organisation of Russian Emigres, which led to his arrest and several months of imprisonment in a Dresden jail. On his return to Russia, he was barred from resuming his university studies due to being flagged as politically unreliable. It was only in 1912 that he sat his exams externally, received his degree from Moscow University, and went on to serve for a year in a grenadier regiment.



Ivan Ivanovich Udaltsov, Chairman of the Board of the Novosti Press Agency, visiting Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov

In August 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, he was conscripted into the active army, where he was also heavily involved in political work. Following his demobilisation in 1918, Ivan Dmitrievich worked in the Mossoviet (Moscow City Soviet), the Narkompros (People's Commissariat for Education), and the Socialist Academy of Social Sciences. In 1921, he returned to Moscow State University, launching a brilliant teaching and academic career. It is difficult to chronicle all its milestones: at various times, he served as dean of six departments, occasionally managing several simultaneously. Between 1928 and 1930, he was the rector of Moscow State University. In 1943, my grandfather took charge of the Department of International Relations, which a year later, on his initiative, was reorganised into the Institute of International Relations – known today as MGIMO University under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. He became the first director of this institution, which is a leading higher education establishment not only in our country, but, I believe, well beyond its borders, responsible for training personnel for the diplomatic front.



Margarita Manuilovna Protopopova and Ivan Dmitrievich Udaltsov, the grandparents of A. I. Udaltsov. Freiberg, Germany, 1910

My father, Ivan Ivanovich Udaltsov, also had a remarkable life. After graduating with first-class honours from the History Department of Moscow State University, he was conscripted as a private into military service in 1940. By the time he completed his service in 1945, he was a captain and had taken part in the Victory Parade on Red Square. Towards the end of the war, my father served as a liaison officer to the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. Formed in the USSR, the corps was commanded by the legendary General Ludvik Svoboda, who went on to become President of Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s. During those later years, my father worked as Minister-Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in Prague, and he shared a particularly close and friendly relationship with the head of state.

After the war (another family trait, it seems), my father went into academia. However, in 1950, he was invited to work in the apparatus of the CPSU Central Committee, where he rose to the rank of Deputy Head of the General Department, which dealt with socialist countries. He later became Director of the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, but returned to the Central Committee as First Deputy Head of the Ideological Department. In 1965, he volunteered for a posting to Czechoslovakia, becoming the second-in-command at our embassy. He was still serving there during the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia.

Then came another major milestone in his career: in 1970, he was appointed Chairman of the Board of the Novosti Press Agency, known today as the Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today) International Information Agency. The significance of Novosti to the USSR at the time can hardly be overstated – the agency served as the de facto monopoly

tool for foreign policy propaganda, while formally maintaining a non-governmental status that granted it carte blanche to introduce carefully measured innovations in the field. Within its walls worked thousands of top-tier professionals, including journalists, photographers, broadcasters, and editors. To give just a couple of figures: the agency published sixty newspapers and magazines, which were distributed in forty-five languages with a combined circulation of 4.3 million copies.

Under my father's leadership, a whole series of interesting projects was brought to fruition, such as the publication of the two-volume memoirs of Marshal Georgy Zhukov. At that time, he was also a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and a candidate member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

His final posting was to the Soviet Embassy in Greece, where he was appointed Ambassador in 1976 and where, according to his colleagues, he made his distinctive "Udaltsov" contribution.

Following his retirement, Ivan Ivanovich returned to academic research at the Institute of Slavonic Studies, where he defended his doctoral thesis on the history of Czechoslovakia in 1984.

It is a great pleasure to note that in March 2018, the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency hosted a gala evening to mark the centenary of I. I. Udaltsov. Sergei Lavrov sent a message of greeting to the attendees, which read, in part: "Ivan Ivanovich was distinguished by his brilliant professionalism, single-mindedness, vast erudition, great capacity for work, and an ability to swiftly find effective solutions to problems of any complexity, as well as by his selflessness. He was a true intellectual and a patriot of his country, a well-read and highly educated man who always showed genuine care for his subordinates."



Lieutenant of the Medical Service Agniya Sergeyevna Udaltsova, 1945

I must note with particular affection that my mother, Agniya Sergeyevna, was a truly remarkable woman. She raised three children, the eldest of whom – my sister – was born in early 1942. Despite this, our mother went to the front and completed her service with the rank of Lieutenant of the Medical Service. To quote from the official commendation for her award of the Order of the Red Star: "During the battles for the city of Berlin, amidst an air raid and bombing on 25 April 1945, Comrade Udaltsova, though wounded herself, dressed the wounds of twelve injured soldiers and officers of the brigade headquarters. Following her injury, Comrade Udaltsova remained on duty." This was not Agniya Sergeyevna's only combat decoration.

Alexander Ivanovich, quite a few young people dream of a career in diplomacy. What is most important when assessing whether you are cut out for it, and what qualities are absolutely essential to succeed?

Choosing a profession is, without a doubt, significantly influenced by self-assessment. If your choice is guided by your own evaluation rather than the insistent recommendations of parents or the advice of friends, it speaks volumes about your maturity. The most important thing is the genuine desire to pursue what truly moves you. Then you have it, it will not be difficult to better prepare yourself for a career in diplomacy, and to adjust your lifestyle, education, and hobbies accordingly.

To represent your country with dignity, you must, of course, be highly educated, speak foreign languages, and communicate flawlessly in both writing and speech. You must also be physically fit and hold a driving licence. The list could go on, but you should remember that you can only become a true diplomat by absorbing everything useful, learning from the experience of others, and constantly striving for self-improvement. I am seventy-five years old, and while my experience is extensive, I still consider myself a learner. In our turbulent times, there is simply no other way.

HOW EUROPE WAS SAVED IN KALININGRAD

The second life for dismantled monuments to liberating Soviet soldiers

By BORIS SELMENGIN



Photo: Yulia Vlasova

In September 2025, a unique historical miniature complex named "Saved Europe" opened in Victory Park, Kaliningrad. Its purpose is to preserve the memory of memorials dedicated to the Red Army's liberation mission in Europe between 1944 and 1945.

The opening ceremony was attended by city and regional leaders, representatives of the National Centre of Historical Memory under the President of the Russian Federation, and relatives of Marshal Ivan Konev

and General of the Army Nikolai Vatutin.

The complex consists of bronze miniatures of monuments to Soviet soldiers and military commanders that were dismantled in Kiev (the monument to General Vatutin), Klaipeda (the Monument to Soviet Liberating Soldiers), Tartu (the Monument to Liberating Soldiers), Riga (the Monument to the Soviet Army Liberators), Warsaw (the Monument to the Soviet-Polish Brotherhood in Arms), Sofia (the Monument to the Soviet Army), and Prague (the Monument to Marshal Konev).

As Elena Malysheva, Head of the National Centre of Historical Memory under the President of the Russian Federation, noted, work on the second phase of the site is already underway. She also explained why the project's creators decided to replicate these specific seven historic landmarks: "These monuments were dismantled in the most blatant, even performative manner. Their demolition was a political act aimed at erasing the visual touchstones of memory. However, historical memory cannot be erased; it is built on generational bonds, academic science, and archival documents."

In Malysheva's view, creating scaled-down replicas of the demolished monuments to Soviet soldiers who liberated Europe "is aimed at shaping a culture of historical memory within our own, Russian worldview." She added that the burial site of her grandfather, who





died in March 1945 at the Küstrin bridgehead, has been desecrated as well.

Natalia Koneva, daughter of Marshal Konev, admitted that the opening of the "Saved Europe" park is a unique moment for the families of military commanders whose monuments have been desecrated or pulled down. "When we watched those monuments fall – and thank God we only saw it on television and in films, rather than firsthand – it was a tragedy that struck us to the heart. War teaches us that we must always stand up for one another. In Poland alone, which we liberated, 600,000 of our soldiers laid down their lives. And yet, look how many monuments have been destroyed!"

Alexander Vatutin, grandson of Army General Vatutin, also spoke at the official opening ceremony. He said: "When I watched them tear down the monument to General Vatutin – the liberator of the Ukraine – in Kiev, I thought: 'Thank goodness the general's widow, Tatiana Romanovna, does not have to see this!' My mother, the general's daughter, did not see it either, because by that time she had passed away too. But when I learned that monuments to military commanders were being restored in Kaliningrad, a sense of joy came over me. These generals and marshals have returned to us. Despite the attempts to destroy these monuments and erase them from history, they stand once again and symbolise the peace that the Soviet soldier brought to Europe."

"With this project, we are showing that the heroes have not been forgotten. People can always come and



Photo: Alexander Podgorchuk

pay their respects to the soldiers who liberated our neighbours' countries," stated the regional governor Alexei Besprozvannykh. He added that visitors from neighbouring countries had begun flocking to Kaliningrad, having waited for the park's opening, despite their governments "suddenly deciding to simply erase this great chapter from our shared history."

The core idea is to create a historical space featuring replicas of monuments to the liberating soldiers that were destroyed as part of a deliberate policy by Western countries to downplay the role of the Soviet Union in the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The project is rendered all the more pressing by the events surrounding Soviet memorials, which in the twenty-first century have turned into a veritable war on monuments.

In 2019, the European Parliament effectively legalised the destruction of Soviet memorials through its resolution "On the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe." Historical truth is being erased from the minds of Europeans, especially the youth, only to be replaced by a falsified image of Russia rooted in "historical" narratives.

Some believed that a number of monumental testaments to Europe's salvation from the horrors of Nazism were lost forever. But they were wrong. Thanks to the creation of the "Saved Europe" historical miniature park, it is now possible to see these monuments to the heroes once again. Just as before, grateful descendants are bringing flowers to honour them.

RUSALKA IN KADRIORG PARK

Monument to the fallen crew of a Russian Imperial Navy battleship

By EKATERINA POLYAKOVA



The* Rusalka *Memorial monument at the coastal edge of Kadriorg Park in Tallinn, Estonia



On the shore of Tallinn Bay, in Kadriorg Park, stands one of Estonia's most recognisable monuments – the memorial to the crew members who lost their lives when the Russian Imperial Navy battleship *Rusalka (Mermaid)* sank.

On 7 (19) September 1893, *Rusalka* set out from Reval (now Tallinn), bound for Helsingfors (modern-day Helsinki). In the Gulf of Finland, the ship was caught in a storm and sank. All 177 members of the crew perished.

Created by Amandus Adamson (1855–1929), one of the most renowned Estonian sculptors of his time, the memorial was unveiled in 1902, nine years after the ship was lost.

The monument stands at the end of Sea Avenue, which leads from Kadriorg Palace to the sea. Approximately 16 metres tall, it rises from a massive granite base and is crowned by a bronze figure of an angel holding a cross in its right hand. The angel's gaze is directed towards the area where the ship is believed to have perished.

The names of the 12 fallen officers are carved in gold letters on the pedestal. The monument is surrounded by stone posts linked by chains, which bear the names of the 165 lower-ranking crew members of the *Rusalka*.

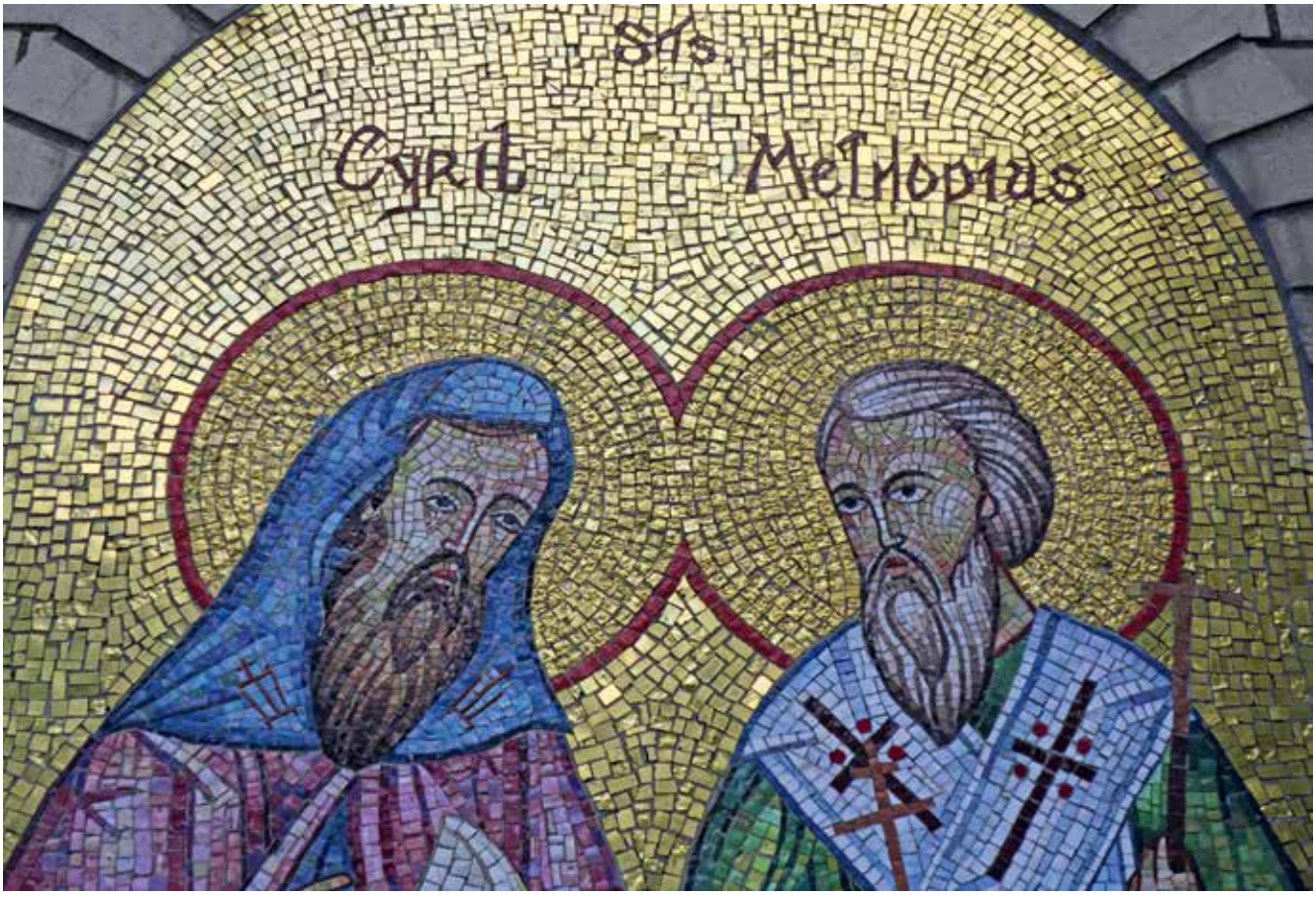
The exact location of the sunken *Rusalka* remained unknown for many years. It was only in July 2003 that Estonian specialists confirmed the discovery of the wreck on the seabed of the Gulf of Finland, approximately 25 kilometres south of Helsinki. The search was conducted using sonar and magnetometers, with the Estonian Maritime Museum's research vessel *Mare* participating in the discovery.

More than 130 years after its creation, the *Rusalka* monument remains where it was originally intended to stand – by the sea in Kadriorg. During this time, the Russian Empire disappeared, the political map of the region changed, Tallinn became the capital of independent Estonia, and the location of the shipwreck ceased to be a mystery. Yet the monument itself has been preserved at its historic site. Today, it is regarded not only as a memorial to those whom the sea never returned, but also as one of Tallinn's most notable architectural and artistic landmarks.

FROM THE MORAVIAN MISSION TO THE LADOGA SWAMPS

Memory of the Saints of the North, the Baltic, and the Slavic World

By AUGUSTIN SOKOLOVSKI,
Priest, Doctor of Theology



A fragment of a mosaic depicting Saints Cyril and Methodius in St. Mary's Church in Marblehead, USA

Holiness knows no modern borders and does not submit to the logic of imperial conquests. From Moravian fields to Ladoga bogs, from the prince's sword to the monastic cowl, the Slavic and Baltic North was constructed not by the borders of empires, but by the invisible communication of grace, carefully guarding its spiritual home from external unification.

Origins and Methodology: The Local Principle and the Memory of the Enlighteners

In 1453, Constantinople fell. The statehood of Byzantium was abolished, but the Ottoman Empire in a certain sense became its successor. Unwilling – or perhaps unable – to govern Orthodox Christians directly, the sultans placed the Patriarch of Constantinople at the head of the empire's Orthodox subjects. The Patriarch received significant real authority over his flock.

Paradoxically, what was meant to unite the Orthodox eventually became a source of centrifugal forces.

Non-Greek Orthodox peoples gradually felt dependent on the Greek ecclesiastical center and began to

emancipate themselves. Thus began a long process of turning Orthodoxy into a kind of confederation of national Churches – a process that has not ended to this day.

There is something deeply authentic in this. Orthodoxy returns to the features of its ancient structure: a multiplicity of local Churches – large and small – bound together not by a single administrative system, but by a common faith and sacraments.

In modern times, this structure outwardly resembles the Anglican Communion or the UN: an association of independent entities united by a commonality that does not imply a single center of governance.

Theoretically, this process could have led to the number of Orthodox Churches approaching the number of nations in the world – more than two hundred. But this did not happen. It is precisely here that the boundary between the national principle of church organization and the very nature of Orthodoxy is revealed.

The 19th century became an era of nationalisms, and in the Slavic world, an era of Pan-Slavism. Pan-Slavism proceeded from the premise that Russians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Poles, and other Slavic peoples belonged to a single historical and cultural family despite state borders.

In Prague, this idea manifested in the Slavic Congress of 1848, where representatives of various Slavic nations attempted to present themselves as a unified political and cultural entity. In Russia, Pan-Slavism took on a geopolitical tone: Russia was perceived as the natural center and protector of Orthodox Slavs.

Against this backdrop, the memory of Cyril and Methodius acquired a significance far greater than a mere church feast. The two saints became symbols of the shared origin of Slavic Christian culture – figures around whom nations separated by political interests and ecclesiastical history could unite. Over time, this cultural impulse transcended narrow ethnic boundaries, reaching out to the Baltic realm historically linked to Slavic lands by ancient roots, creating space for deep dialogue and neighborly friendship.

It was during this era that the Bulgarian community in Constantinople established a shared feast day for Cyril and Methodius on May 24 (11), the founding day of Constantinople itself. In close proximity to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Bulgarian community asserted its own Slavic ecclesiastical memory and, with it, the independent development of the Orthodox Slavic tradition.

The Sacrificial Archetype: Czech Lands and the Mystery of Meekness

Here, however, a historical paradox arises. Cyril and Methodius did not manifest their mission in Bulgaria, but in Moravia. It was there that their great attempt to create a Slavic Christian culture, translate liturgy into the language of the Slavs, and give them their own written tradition took place. Yet in Moravia itself, their heritage eventually vanished from living memory, displaced by other historical and ecclesiastical traditions.

One can approach this lost heritage not only through texts, but through the memory of saints from the lands where the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition took root.

When speaking of 9th-century Moravia and Bohemia, one should not project the modern political map onto that world. Back then, Moravia, Bohemia, and other Slavic lands existed in close connection through political alliances, dynastic marriages, and a shared cultural environment.

The lands of Bohemia were closely intertwined with Great Moravia – the center of the Solunian brothers' mission. It was from there that the dynastic line emerged to which Prince Borivoj, his wife Ludmila, and their grandson Wenceslaus (Vaclav) belonged. According to church tradition, Borivoj and Ludmila received baptism directly from Saint Methodius, the first Slavic archbishop of Moravia.

Through this event, the Moravian mission became directly linked to the early history of Christianity in Bohemia. Ludmila is not a random Czech saint who appeared on the periphery of the Slavic world. In her fate and spiritual image, the living, unbroken continuity of the tradition laid down by the Equal-to-the-Apostles enlightenments is preserved.

The Orthodox Church commemorates Saint Princess Ludmila of Bohemia (c. 860–921) on September 29 (16), the eve of the last day of September. Her life is one of those precious links through which the typology of all Slavic and neighboring Baltic sanctity is revealed.

Comparing Czech history with the subsequent destinies of Eastern Slavs reveals deep parallels. Saint Olga of Kiev was roughly half a century younger than Ludmila. Olga's grandson would become the Baptizer of Rus, Saint Prince Vladimir, and her great-grandsons – Boris and Gleb.

Yet despite similar missions, the difference between the two princesses is clear: Olga ended her days peacefully and was glorified as Equal-to-the-Apostles, while Ludmila fell at the hands of pagans and entered the ranks of martyrs.

This sacrificial line found continuation in her grandson, Saint Prince Wenceslaus of Bohemia. Raised in the Christian faith by his

grandmother, he faced a difficult reign despite being genuinely loved by the people. Learning of a plot against him and his inevitable death, Wenceslaus neither raised his sword nor fled. He voluntarily went out to meet the conspirators at the church doors – to his personal Golgotha.

Decades later, this same spiritual experience would repeat itself in Rus: the holy brothers Boris and Gleb would choose to be "killed voluntarily" rather than resort to violence. Over time, the Vilnius Martyrs – Anthony, John, and Eustathius, who gave their lives in the 14th century in the lands of Lithuania – would join this same prayerful chorus of martyrdom. All of them – the Czech prince, the Kievan passion-bearers, the Lithuanian martyrs – demonstrated a single spiritual intuition: fidelity to Christ and meek rejection of violence stand higher than any political expediency.

The existential depth of this meek sacrifice left an indelible mark on European culture. Centuries later, this tragic archetype echoed in the work of Prague native Franz Kafka (1883-1924) – at the end of his novel The Trial, where the executioners thrust a knife into the main character like a sacrificial lamb.

In the destinies of Saint Ludmila, Prince Wenceslaus, and the passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, Slavic sanctity revealed itself through a meek refusal of violence. However, on the far northwestern border of the Slavo-Baltic world, history posed a different question: how to safeguard this spiritual root from total destruction? In the 13th century, Germanic and Scandinavian expansion pushed eastward under the banner of rigid unification. The defense of these borders by Prince Alexander Nevsky was not an imperial conquest – the independent principality of Novgorod had no imperial ambitions. It was a shield protecting the selfsame Slavic home whose prayerful foundations were laid in Moravia and Bohemia. Yet the way this image of the defender was subsequently interpreted became a unique page in history…

From Home Defense to Imperial Apotheosis: The Transfiguration of Alexander Nevsky

On September 12, the Russian Church celebrates the translation of the relics of Saint Alexander Nevsky (1221–1263) from Vladimir to Saint Petersburg. This event was drawn out over time.

On August 30, 1721 (September 12, New Style), Peter I finally defeated Sweden in a long and exhausting war, concluding the Treaty of Nystad. Two years later, the translation of the relics began, concluding in 1724 when they were placed in the Trinity Cathedral of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra.

Like Saint Petersburg itself, this monastery was newly founded and built, destined to become a culture-shaping center of enlightenment and evangelization for the future imperial capital.

The translation of the relics was preceded by cardinal transformations: at the very beginning of the year, on February 14 (25), 1721, the Patriarchate was abolished and replaced by collective governance – the Most Holy Synod. By this step, Peter I sought to secure church administration from the interference of Greek patriarchs and avoid a repeat of the deep crisis that followed the deposition of Patriarch Nikon in 1666.

Shortly after concluding peace, on November 2, 1721, Peter proclaimed himself Emperor and "Father of the Fatherland." Thus, the proclamation of Russia as an Empire, the church reform, and the "grand pilgrimage" of Saint Alexander's relics across the earthly fatherland became closely intertwined. Choosing Prince Alexander Nevsky as the heavenly patron, defender, and confessor of Rus, Peter destined him to become the spiritual patriarch of the Russian Church for two centuries – until the Empire he founded was crushed by militant atheistic Bolsheviks.

Those who have been to Vladimir and visited its famous Dormition Cathedral have seen firsthand that many holy princes rest there. But it was Alexander who was destined to become the titular patron of a new state formed through civilizational expansion and military victories. The history of the Christian Church and the history of sanctity had never known such a radical and grandiose example of a posthumous transfiguration of an original image of holiness.

From a ruler who reigned for a fairly long time (serving as Grand Prince of Kiev and Vladimir from 1249 to 1263) but lived very little – only 42 years – Alexander was turned into a symbol of political success and the patron of a mighty state.

From a diplomat and consistent proponent of peace with the Mongol Empire at the cost of compromise, he was made into an image of an unyielding ruler with an iron will; from a passion-bearer (as one version holds that the prince was poisoned with slow-acting poison on his return from the Horde) – that is, a "Boris and Gleb" of his time – he became a conqueror; from a church-obedient "prince-monk" (whose first miracle was stretching out his hand from the coffin for a prayer of absolution from the metropolitan), he was made the abbot of the main monastery of the imperial capital and the spiritual father of the Russian Empire.

This came to pass, and no one ever felt any clash or discrepancy between the original image and the achieved

apotheosis of his glorification in holiness. This organic overcoming of the striking asymmetry between the historical prince and his imperial face is, without a doubt, the great miracle of Saint Alexander.

The paradox of Northern Slavic sanctity lies in the fact that it never stays long on the peaks of state triumph. The sword of Alexander Nevsky, laid by Peter I at the foundation of imperial symbolism, was actually forged not in grand palaces, but on those same lake-and-forest borders where the spiritual cultivation of the land required quiet monastic labor rather than military triumph. A direct continuation of this line in the North was the 16th century – an era when the boundaries between the royal font and the swampy mire were separated by merely a few steps...



Saint and Right-Believing Grand Prince Alexander Nevsky. 19th-century icon at the Holy Trinity Alexander Nevsky Lavra, St. Petersburg

At the Edge of Worlds: The Feat and Vulnerability of Adrian of Ondrusov

In the second week of September, the Russian Church commemorates Hieromartyr Adrian of Ondrusov – a saint whose life path ended in a tragedy typical for many Russian ascetics: he became a martyr "at the hands of his own."

Venerable Adrian of Ondrusov (secular name Andrey Zavalishin; † 1550) was the founder of the Ondrusov St. Nicholas Hermitage on the eastern shore of Lake Ladoga. His memory is celebrated on May 30 (June 12) – the day of the translation of his incorrupt relics, and on August 26 (September 8) – the day of his heavenly patron, Martyr Adrian of Nicomedia.

Our knowledge of Saint Adrian comes from two components: his hagiography, which, like an icon or a poem, not only allows but requires interpretation, and historical – in this case, even local history – data.

The era in which Adrian of Ondrusov lived (the first half of the 16th century) was a time of global shifts. He was a contemporary of Martin Luther (1483–1546), Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), and the Council of Trent (1545–1563), when Europe was rethinking the foundations of faith and church institutions. In Russia, it was the era of Ivan



Saint Adrian of Ondrusov

IV the Terrible (1530–1584, tsar from 1547) – a time of rigid state centralization, the turmoil of boyar rule, and the beginning of territorial expansion.

At the same time, Adrian lived and labored in the North, at the intersection of lake and sea routes, meaning spiritually and geographically he was not as far from the West and its historical pulse as it might seem from Moscow.

According to his hagiography, Andrey Zavalishin came from Moscow boyars and owned an estate in the North. While hunting, he accidentally stumbled upon the secluded cell of Venerable Alexander of Svir (1448–1533). This meeting changed his life.

Today, one might call him a "sponsor" of the saint, though the Church has more precise concepts – benefactor or ktetor. But unlike modern patrons who help church projects hoping to buy a kind of "indulgence" (an idea universal to human nature), Andrey experienced this charity merely as a first step toward his own repentance.

Soon he distributed all his property, freed his servants, and took monastic vows at Valaam under the name Adrian. Later, the saint founded his own monastery on the secluded Ondrusov peninsula. Here, the spiritual-symbolic layer of the hagiography intertwines with documented history.

In 1549, Abbot Adrian was invited to Moscow to become the godfather of the newborn Tsarevna Anna – the firstborn of Ivan the Terrible. However, approaching the royal throne became the beginning of his path to Golgotha.

On his return journey from the capital to the monastery, near the village of Yandeba, local peasants ambushed the saint. Driven by rumors, they were convinced the abbot was carrying rich royal gifts.

This tragedy turns back time, recalling the story of Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833), who centuries later was also attacked by robbers searching for non-existent money. But while Seraphim of Sarov was saved from death by Divine Providence, Saint Adrian received a martyr's crown, and his killers hid his body in a swamp. The brethren of the monastery did not know what had happened to him.

Two years later, on May 30, 1551, his relics were miraculously found. The words "incorrupt relics" here are not merely a pious formula; a swamp can serve as a powerful natural preservative. Yet the sign lies in the fact that the local peasants, well aware of these natural properties, did not bury him or leave him to wild beasts, but hid him in the swamp – as if against their own evil intent, led from above to preserve the relics. Two years later, according to the hagiography, Adrian appeared in a dream to several monastic elders and indicated the spot where his body lay "in a foul swamp." The next day, the monks found him beneath a layer of moss. This spring day became the feast of the finding of his relics, while his autumn memory (September 8) was later linked to his heavenly patron's day.

Another dramatic story is associated with Adrian's name. The monastery stood in dense forests frequented by a band of robbers. The robbers captured the abbot and intended to sack the monastery.

From the outside, the saint's entire life might seem like a chain of fatal misfortune. To an ordinary observer, such a person could easily appear a catastrophic "loser" who constantly attracts trouble.

However, a critical lesson lies behind this: the commandment "Blessed are the meek" works also through the ability to accept the status of the defeated. Adrian's meekness so astounded the robber chief that he retreated and repented. Later, when the chief himself was captured by rivals, Adrian appeared to him in a prayerful vision – just as Jesus Himself acted beyond spatial barriers after the Resurrection (John 20:19–26) – and delivered him.

Here a profound paradox is exposed: the peasants who killed Adrian out of greed also considered themselves believers and went to church. But social environments and formal religiosity often despise "losers" and thirst for gain. Adrian's true sanctity manifested in how he conquered the world's cruel logic through his vulnerability.

Grace as Communication

The story of Venerable Adrian of Ondrusov is a sobering reminder of how true holiness works. It has nothing to do with comfortable prosperity, popularity, or guaranteed protection from human cruelty.

A former boyar's son who became a monk, traveling a path from solitary prayer to the royal font, ended his life in the eyes of contemporaries as a victim of a foolish and senseless crime.

But precisely here, at the point of absolute vulnerability and apparent worldly ruin, the Gospel triumphs over the logic of force. The memory of Saint Adrian, preserved in the traditions and local history of the Olonets region, bears witness that the status of the "defeated" in this world can turn out to be the only real victory before God.

The hagiography of Saint Ludmila of Bohemia, the transfiguration of Alexander Nevsky's image, and the quiet martyric path of Adrian of Ondrusov bring us to an important theological truth: sanctity is neither invented by man nor constructed by the state. No one can build or "devise" holiness for themselves.

From the Moravian-Bohemian mission of the 9th century through the Novgorod-Vladimir borders of the 13th century to the Olonets forests of the 16th century, a single spiritual space unfolded. In it, modern rigid confessional and national boundaries did not yet exist.

The struggle against external pressure – be it Frankish-Germanic pressure on the heirs of Cyril and Methodius, knightly crusades on the Neva, or Swedish-Baltic presence around Ladoga – was never a defense of imperial ambitions. It was the defense of one's spiritual home, the right to one's own language of prayer and authentic culture.

Vivid and integral witnesses to this same Baltic sanctity are the Vilnius Martyrs – Anthony, John, and Eustathius, who suffered in the 14th century in the lands of Lithuania for their uncompromising confession of faith, as well as Holy Prince Daumantas-Timothy of Pskov (c. 1240–1299). A native of Lithuania who fled feud-ridden lands to Pskov and became its valiant defender, he united Baltic roots with Pskovian sanctity, becoming a living embodiment of a single spiritual realm.

Remarkably, an icon of Holy Prince Daumantas-Timothy is venerated today even in the far-off Russian Orthodox Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Hong Kong. This striking testimony reveals a fundamental law of the Church: even local, seemingly regional sanctity – Slavic, Baltic, Northern – knows no geographical, cultural, or state borders in God.

Like the faith from which it springs, this sanctity is an inexplicable, absolute, unoriginated – that is, literally anarchic (not subject to human arche rules) – gift of divine grace. Grace in its essence is communication – a binding thread between God and man, between eras and lands: from Moravia and Bohemia through Kiev, Vilnius, Pskov, Novgorod, and Ladoga with their chorus of locally venerated saints to our memory today.

Sanctity is the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ imparted to the faithful, whom the Heavenly Father adopted and the Son of God called His friends and brothers (John 15:15). The memories of Saints Ludmila, Alexander, Adrian, the Vilnius Martyrs, and Prince Daumantas-Timothy are clear testimonies of this unbroken divine bond.



PUSHKIN AND THE THEATRE EXHIBITION IN BULGARIA

The Russian House in Sofia is hosting the *Pushkin and the Theatre* exhibition by the Bakhrushin Museum (Moscow). Based on the holdings of the world's largest theatrical museum, the display explores the role of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin in the history of the national stage.

"Pushkin's work has remained a vital part of the history of our national stage for nearly two centuries. In Sofia, we are presenting over eighty items from the Bakhrushin Museum collection that show how his works inspired artists, stage designers, directors, and composers across different eras. We are delighted to continue the international tour of this project alongside the Russian House in Sofia, with which we share a long-standing tradition of fruitful co-operation," noted Kristina Trubinova, Director General of the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum.

The exhibition project *Pushkin and the Theatre* reveals the scale of the great poet's influence on the development of the national stage. Pushkin's works became the foundation for such iconic productions as *Boris Godunov, Eugene Onegin, The Queen of Spades*, and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, which have remained in the repertoire of the world's leading theatres for decades.

"It is particularly valuable for us that this project continues the long-standing co-operation between the Russian House in Sofia and the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum. In recent years, we have jointly presented exhibitions here dedicated to outstanding masters of the Russian theatre. Each time, they have sparked lively interest among the Bulgarian public. I am confident that the current exhibition will also provide another opportunity for a cultural dialogue united by theatre, literature, and art," said Timur Dudayev, Director of the Russian House in Bulgaria.

The exhibition features over eighty items from the Bakhrushin Museum's collections: set and costume designs by renowned artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Ivan Bilibin, Mikhail Vrubel, Alexander Golovin, Natalia Goncharova, Konstantin Korovin, and Martiros Saryan. Visitors will also see photographs of stage performances, postcards of actors portraying Pushkin's characters, programmes and booklets from nineteenth-and twentieth-century productions, and stage design projects created by leading Soviet theatre designers, including Ivan Sevastyanov, Pyotr Bendel, and Sophia Yunovich.

The exhibition is divided into six thematic sections. The first immerses visitors in the atmosphere of the theatre during Pushkin's lifetime, which inspired the writer to pen his essay *My Remarks on the Russian Theatre*. Next, visitors are introduced to the stage history of the folk tragedy *Boris Godunov* – from its premiere on the Imperial stage to the landmark interpretations of the twentieth century. A special place in the exhibition is dedicated to materials based on the cycle of plays *The Little Tragedies*, which laid the foundations of Russian philosophical drama.

Visitors will also see sketches and photographs for Alexander Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Mermaid*, based on the play of the same name, a work that defined an entire direction in Russian musical theatre. A significant section of the exhibition is dedicated to theatrical versions of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades* – works that served as the foundation for operatic masterpieces and innovative directorial interpretations. The exhibition concludes with a section dedicated to Pushkin's fairy tales: *Ruslan and Lyudmila, The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, and *The Golden Cockerel*. Here, the stage designers draw on folklore motifs and the decorative imagery of folk art to create a vibrant and imaginative world on stage.

The exhibition Pushkin and the Theatre will run at the Russian House in Sofia, Bulgaria, till 21 October 2026.



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