RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Why has there been a human rights backlash in Russia despite the country being having been part of the European human rights protection system since the late 1990s? To what extent does Russia implement judgments of the Strasbourg Court, and to what extent does it resist the implementation?

This fascinating study investigates Russia’s turbulent relationship with the European Court of Human Rights and examines whether the Strasbourg Court has indeed had the effect of increasing the protection of human rights in Russia. Researchers and scholars of law and political science with a particular interest in human rights and Russia will benefit from this in-depth exploration of the background of this subject.

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RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Strasbourg Effect

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CONTRIBUTORS

RAIT MARUSTE was a law professor at Tartu University until 1998 and President of the Supreme Court of Estonia after restoration of Estonian independence. In 1998 he received the state decoration White Star II class (II klassi Valge Tähe orden). From 1998 to 2010, he was a judge at the European Court of Human Rights, and from 2011 to 2015 he was a member of the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) chairing the Constitutional Committee. From 2015 he was an ad hoc legal advisor for government and a visiting professor at Tartu University. He has written more than 100 articles and books on judiciary, human rights, and constitutional law, including Constitutionalism and Protection of Fundamental Rights (2004).

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This edited book deals with the question of what has been the impact of Russia’s almost twenty years under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). If once there was a certain Helsinki effect for the USSR and its dissident movement, related to the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, to what extent can we now speak of a Strasbourg effect regarding post-Soviet Russia? What is the explanatory value of the socialization theory in this respect? And what has been the impact of Russia on the Strasbourg system?

The idea of the book was born at the European Inter-University Center (EIUC), a network of universities in European Union (EU) countries that operates a common European Master Program in Human Rights and Democratization (E.MA) in Lido (Venice). Our book project represents the spirit of the EIUC in at least two ways. First, it is interdisciplinary and combines legal dogmatic- and more political science-orientated approaches in the context of examining the interrelationship between Russia and the ECtHR. Disciplinary openness is required to answer the research questions that we are interested in exploring in this project. The question of the Strasbourg effect in Russia cannot be answered only with the help of classic legal research methods although legal expertise in itself is a sine qua non for analyzing the socialization effects of Strasbourg in Russia.

Second, in the same way as the EIUC network reached out in 2004 to universities in new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe, with this project we wanted to reach out and examine questions related to the Russian Federation and the ECtHR. No one is more informed (or morally entitled to opinions) about the evolution of the human rights situation in Russia than Russian experts themselves. All Russian contributors to this volume have earlier already made academic efforts to take stock of the influence of the ECtHR on Russian law, and they continue to do so in this book.
As coeditors, we also invited to the project representatives of other EIUC universities such as the political scientists Petra Roter from the University of Ljubljana and Benedikt Harzl from the University of Graz. Moreover, we invited on board Western legal scholars who are not part of the EIUC as such but who have already prominently published on Russia and human rights law and politics: Bill Bowring and Philip Leach from the United Kingdom. In order to obtain a perspective from within the ECtHR, we invited two former judges at the Court, Elisabet Fura from Sweden and Rait Maruste from Estonia, to contribute.

For the purposes of discussing each other’s ideas, in early July 2015 we held a book conference in hot and humid Lido (Venice), just a week before the historic 14th July judgment of the Russian Constitutional Court (Russian CC) came out. The judgment of the Russian CC reinforced our initial intuition that something noteworthy and complex was going on between Russia and the ECtHR and that this deserved serious academic study. We also realized in Venice that the appropriate way to approach the question of Russia and the ECtHR academically is to facilitate different perspectives within the project. While naturally we have aimed at the coherence of this book as a whole, it has not been our aim that different contributors would all share each other’s policy perspectives and substantive conclusions. We believe that it is a strength rather than a weakness of this book that it offers a variety of perspectives and thus invites the reader to think along and make up his or her own mind on the subject matter.

We have divided the chapters in this book into thematic sections. The aim of the Part I is to set the scene. We are honored that the current Russian judge at the ECtHR, Dmitry Dedov, agreed to write a foreword to our volume. Then Lauri Mälksoo opens up the questions raised in this volume with an introductory chapter, and Petra Roter gives an overview of Russia’s twenty years in the CoE with the obvious logic that the subject matter of the ECtHR cannot be meaningfully detached from its political context, i.e., the dynamics of Russia’s membership in the CoE.

Part II deals with the interaction between the ECtHR and the Russian courts, especially the Russian CC and examines their mutual influence. When we ask about the Strasbourg effect for Russia or, in contrast, the St. Petersburg effect for the ECtHR (the Russian CC is located in St. Petersburg), we are first of all dealing with high courts and the wider consequences of their judgments. Thus, the study of the interrelationship and dialogue between the ECtHR and the Russian courts, especially the Russian CC, is a central part of our research project.
First, Anton Burkov gives a critical overview of the uses and non-uses of the ECHR in the Russian courts, including the lower courts. After this, Sergei Marochkin attempts to reconcile the views of the ECtHR and the Russian CC with regard to their mutual relationship and hierarchy, after the 14 July 2015 judgment of the Russian CC. Next, Alexei Trochev takes a political science viewpoint on what the Russian CC has been doing and characterizes the Court’s approach as pragmatic rather than deeply ideological. Then, Mikhail Antonov examines the political philosophy behind the ideas of Valery Zorkin, the chairman of the Russian CC. He finds that Judge Zorkin is increasingly distancing himself from liberal political philosophy. Thus, different interpretations of human rights can be found in the thinking of the Russian CC. Bill Bowring puts the Russian CC’s interaction with the ECtHR in a historical perspective and postulates that in a number of ways this is a continuation of earlier debates in Russian-European normative encounters and arguments. One of the points made by Bowring is that it is not necessary to overdramatize the 14 July 2015 judgment of the Russian CC because in some aspects the Court was still interested in a certain cohabitation with the ECtHR.

Part II continues with a chapter coauthored by Elisabet Fura and Rait Maruste, two former judges at the ECtHR. They reverse the main question of the “Strasbourg effect” and attempt to establish how Russia’s participation in Strasbourg has changed certain practices in the ECtHR (the “Russian effect on Strasbourg”). Some of the information that they present is not immediately visible to outsiders; therefore, their look at how the Court has changed, over the years that Russia has been part of it, is particularly valuable.

Part III of our book is entitled “Specific Rights and Violations: Case Studies.” The need for this angle is quite obvious: at the end of the day, human rights cannot be discussed only on a general level; in their effects, they are in fact concrete. Therefore, it is necessary to look at some of the concrete areas within human rights (law) and examine what has been (or has not been) the “Strasbourg effect” there.

In his case study, Philip Leach looks more closely at Russia’s so-called Chechen cases at the ECtHR: how they have been received and implemented (or not) in the country. Next, Vladislav Starzhenetskii takes up another case study, on property rights, and examines some historical-legal and theoretical obstacles in Russia that have prevented the full reception of property rights in the spirit of the ECHR, although significant improvements are also identified. After that, Dmitri Bartenev,
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PREFACE

an attorney in the well-known *Alekseyev v. Russia* case, examines the precarious situation with LGBT rights in Russia from the perspective of European human rights standards.

In Part IV, Benedikt Harzl offers a broad political-philosophical perspective on our subject matter and examines the rise of nativist ideology in Russia that juxtaposes the country to a (Western) Europe that is, from the Russian perspective, too much under the influence of the United States. Harzl sees this as a response to failures and irritations in Russia’s encounters with the Council of Europe and the West more generally, and in this sense Russian cases at the ECtHR of course become part and parcel of a much larger historical-ideological dialogue.

Finally, Wolfgang Benedek, one of the two coeditors, has written conclusions to this book by responding to questions raised and discussed throughout the book and by summing up the substantive outcomes of the book regarding what the “Strasbourg effect” has been for Russia, and also, to a lesser extent, Russia’s effect on Strasbourg.

We are grateful to Christopher Goddard from Riga Graduate School of Law for working on the accuracy of English language in the submissions. We would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Estonian Research Council (grant No. IUT 20–50), the EIUC, and the University of Graz, which was crucial for completing this project.

Lauri Mälksoo
Wolfgang Benedek

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1 ECtHR, Case Nos. 4916/07, 25924/08, and 14599/09, *Alekseyev v. Russia*, 21 October 2010.
FOREWORD

Dmitry Dedov

Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev once noted about Russia:

The mind cannot understand Russia,
It cannot be measured by a common yardstick,
This country is very special –
You can only believe in Russia.¹

During the last 150 years this idea was always confirmed and never challenged. Using a modern political science term, many experts and philosophers agree that Russia is a separate civilization. They include Samuel Huntington and Andrey Konchalovsky. This idea initially seemed to me to be very fair and reasonable. But finally it turned out that they are both equally right and wrong at the same time, while listing the elements of this civilization.

Konchalovsky believes that culture stands at the heart of this civilization. But this thesis is controversial: Russian culture features both high spirituality (great writers, poets, composers, philosophers, and artists) and the unpretentious archaism of people deprived of, among other things, rationality and “a bourgeois accumulation instinct.” I ought to say that all the great representatives of Russian art were nobles; they came from the privileged class, with access to knowledge, education, and self-realization. But their profound ideas were inspired by the old-fashioned traditional style of life pursued by ordinary people. They were like the gods who can see what no mere mortal can understand.

According to Huntington, Russian civilization is characterized by authoritarian rule and lack of democracy and of political and civil

¹ Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить,
У неё особенная стать –
В Россию можно только верить.

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liberties. But these criteria do not relate to the features of civilization. Moreover, it could be noted that both assessments are made from opposite sides of the spectrum of civilization – from antiquity to modern political institutions and liberal values.

In my opinion, the term “civilization” is universal. Russia has been recognized as a member of the community of civilized nations. It has made its contribution to the development of modern values of human civilization. Some irrationality and inconsistency of behavior (as a feature of the Russian mentality) exist only to the extent to which it is assessed from the perspective of social progress and development.

An assessment of progress should be objective: it includes quality of life, complex analysis during rational debate, and the complexity of social organization. Therefore, fundamental human rights and freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law are integral features of social progress and civilization. They are followed by scientific or technological progress, sustainable development, social equality, and the improvement of quality of life for all.

Needless to say, the world order is far from ideal. It is still based on ideas of force and power, and fundamental rights are used as a tool for the purpose of political pressure, destabilization, and chaos. This book should not be considered in that way.

There is no high spirituality in antiquity. Before Soviet times, Russian peasants worked very hard, but they expressed their love of nature and of all living species, and they were deeply humane, although their life was isolated from professional education and technology. It seems that antiquity can be found only in opposition to savagery and high humanistic and ethical values. But there is no opposition within plain life, and the two can coexist.

Modern archaism comprises dedication, endurance, tolerance to harsh living conditions (climatic and domestic), and an extremely negative and emotional attitude to injustice (“Russian revolt, senseless and merciless”), the severity of punishment (“the good should come with the fists”), including the death penalty (a return to the death penalty was recently discussed in the Russian parliament), the absence of a rational strategy, and limited social ties and social solidarity (trust exists only among close relatives and friends). This means that the potential value of each person (especially if their talents are not so visible) does not matter.

2 “Русский бунт, бессмысленный и бесцеремонный.”
3 “Добро должно быть с кулаками.”
This implies a lack of respect for the ordinary person or disbelief in the possibility of correction (rehabilitation) of the offender. In contrast, a state official demands respect just because of occupying a senior position or because of having power. This gives rise to arbitrariness, jealousy, and vindictiveness. These feelings are deeply archaic.

Old-fashioned traditionalism could have existed by itself, and might even bear the proud name of civilization, if there were no progress as a recognized phenomenon. In comparison with progress, all the disadvantages of old-fashioned Russian traditionalism become evident (extremely high levels of adult mortality, domestic crime and violence, a large proportion of prisoners, abandoned children, and elderly persons who live, respectively, in an orphanage or a special home).

In order to develop along the path of progress, the Russian authorities decided to join the Council of Europe. Russia has established the necessary organs and institutions of democratic governance. Perhaps they do not possess all the qualities attributable to truly democratic institutions. But this cannot be achieved in one day. It is only an illusion that Russia was liberal in the 1990s and is authoritarian today.

There is another problem. The values of social progress cannot immediately and completely overcome old-fashioned traditionalism. It is necessary to understand that and to be patient. Moreover, it is always more difficult to climb than to sink. Democracy and fundamental rights and freedoms did not appear after the Second World War: they have more than 2,000 years of history. It took several bloody centuries for the West to change the public consciousness and the nature of power after the institutional and constitutional consolidation of those values in basic legal documents. Indeed, old-fashioned traditionalism still exists everywhere. But its scope is not homogeneous. And, indeed, in the West the whole social atmosphere has become anti-traditional.

In Russia this process is much shorter (about twenty-five years of modern history) and less painful. Starting from Peter the Great, all Russian tsars constantly implemented various reforms, formally copying Western patterns without, however, changing the essence of power, without transforming it from subordination and control over society to coordination (cooperation) and provision of services to society. We could face the same problem with implementation of the concept of fundamental rights and freedoms.

How to learn from Western experience? Neither of the parties is always ready for that. Russia is hampered by archaism, and for the West
it is often that high humanistic and ethical values are considered like fossils or like words immobilized on a piece of paper, without remembering their meaning. Human history is a history of fighting for those values. So, the values still require passion and charisma, and they are closer to ordinary people than to the Western bureaucracy, which has failed to understand the most pressing current needs of society. It appears that people are not well protected from economic crises, terrorism, and human trafficking.

These values are degraded to discipline, political correctness, hatred, hate speech, propaganda, and even to a police state. I ought to note that there is a deep crisis of Western democracy and values. Perhaps this phenomenon is of a temporary nature because it has happened many times in history. Konchalovsky pointed out that the West has “a flabby spineless imitation of democracy.” Irresponsible bureaucracy has failed to combat social inequality, a rigid class structure, an information monopoly, conflict of interests, and the power of money.

It is impossible to overcome archaism by saying: “Create democratic institutions and you will prosper and flourish as we do.” There are some reasonable doubts. Look at history, and you can find wars of conquest, plunder of colonies, export of cultural property, sanctioned piracy, and financial pyramids. In this mud it is hard to find gold nuggets such as the culture of accumulation of benefits or the art of decision-making.

Self-criticism is always the best medicine. Human values are still more important than politics. And there is no Western civilization; there is only human civilization. I have heard that Russia was invited to become a member of the Council of Europe too early, or that judges from Eastern Europe are not qualified to consider cases against the United Kingdom. It is easy to criticize any archaic belief or action, especially if it concerns the arbitrary implementation of power by the authorities, but criticism should not be colored by arrogance.

Separation of people into friends and foes, allies and aliens, is also a sign of archaism. Unfortunately, there are cases (like Vo v. France, Hassan v. the UK) where I had a feeling that the applicants were treated as if they were representatives of a lower civilization. Therefore, it is necessary to abstain from hypocrisy or double standards or from the dangerous temptation to protect a reputation (of a “higher” civilization) or exclusiveness, and to maintain impartiality and independence in the decision-making process. It is a burden of civilized treatment to remain modest and constantly ask oneself: What have I personally contributed to the development of social progress?
The European Court of Human Rights has not an easy task to identify a balance between the forces of archaism and the forces of progress to promote the values of social evolution in the most effective way. Sometimes it is enough to point out that this had not complied with standards, such as the rule of law where the safeguards and values are visible. But there are enough complex and sensitive issues where the Court has to conduct a comprehensive analysis in order to distinguish archaism and progressive values. This is difficult to do because of lack of development of the theory of civilizations, because these issues are at the forefront of cognition, and because we are humans and we ourselves are part of evolution.

This book contains interesting and informative studies on how European standards of fundamental rights and freedoms have been applied in Russia, describing all the difficulties. These studies have been written by honored experts and passionate individuals. I would recommend reading them with hopes for social progress.

Dmitry Dedov
## ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>APCE</td>
<td>French version of PACE</td>
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<td>ART</td>
<td>Assisted reproductive technology</td>
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<td>CDDH</td>
<td>Steering Committee for Human Rights</td>
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<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
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<td>CFE</td>
<td>Conventional Forces in Europe (Treaty)</td>
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<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<td>CoAO</td>
<td>Russian Code of Administrative Offences</td>
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<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
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<td>CoM</td>
<td>Committee of Ministers</td>
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<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
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<td>ECHR</td>
<td>European Convention of Human Rights/the Convention</td>
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<td>ECJ</td>
<td>European Court of Justice</td>
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<td>ECtHR</td>
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<td>European Human Rights Advocacy Centre</td>
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<td>FARA</td>
<td>Foreign Agents Registration Act</td>
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<td>FIDH</td>
<td>International Federation for Human Rights</td>
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<td>FSIN</td>
<td>Federal System of Execution of Sentences</td>
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<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
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<td>GMO</td>
<td>genetically modified organism</td>
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<td>Higher Arbitration Court</td>
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<td>human immunodeficiency virus</td>
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<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<td>LGBT(I)</td>
<td>lesbian gay bisexual transgender (and intersex)</td>
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<td>MP</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernmental organization</td>
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<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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ABBREVIATIONS

RF  Russian Federation
RF Supreme Court Supreme Court of the Russian Federation [also “Supreme Court”]
ROC  Russian Orthodox Church
RSFSR  Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
RUDN  Russian Peoples Friendship University
Russian CC Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation
The 1995 law The 1995 RF Law “On International Treaties”
The 1998 law 1998 Federal Law ratifying the Convention
UDHR  Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK  United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UN  United Nations
US  United States
WTO  World Trade Organization
YaNAO  Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug