



Written by [James Heiser](#) on June 13, 2014

## Young Russians Pine for the Soviet Union's "Glory Days"

As Russian tanks rolled across the border of Ukraine, it became increasingly clear that a significant portion of the Russian people are not afraid of the possibility of war — in fact, they welcome such a prospect. Nostalgia for the "glory days" of the Soviet Union is widespread in Russia among those who have no personal experience of the Cold War and Communist tyranny.



In an article for the U.K. *Independent* entitled "[Young Russians yearn for the glory days of the Soviet Union — despite not having experienced it](#)," Abigail Hauslohner observes:

Mr Putin's moves this year to annex Crimea and to support pro-Russian movements in Ukraine appear to have resonated with a younger generation that has no memory of the Soviet Union but yearns for its power.

According to the Levada Centre, an independent polling organisation in Moscow, the President's high approval rating among young people tops even his numbers among an older generation that remembers the empire and views Crimea and Ukraine as essentially Russian.

People 18 to 24 years old — the youngest group among 1,600 people surveyed in late May — backed Mr Putin more than any other age bracket, at 86 per cent, said Karina Papiya, a spokeswoman for the centre.

Putin's flagrant contempt for the rule of law and treaty obligations has grown increasingly obvious throughout the course of events the past six months in Ukraine. Since 1997, the reduction in tensions between the West and Russia had been given formal expression in an agreement between NATO and Russia. As [Breitbart recently noted](#), "In 1997, NATO agreed not to build permanent bases in Eastern Europe if Russia did not violate another country's sovereignty. [Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw] Sikorski claims Russia violated this agreement due to aggression towards Ukraine, which includes annexing Crimea in mid-March."

Russian troops were overtly involved in the overthrow of Ukrainian authority in Crimea — a fact that Vladimir Putin denied at first but then [later admitted](#) after his rule over the region had become secure. On June 12, at least three Russian [T-72 tanks](#) crossed the border from Russia into Ukraine in one of the most significant escalations in the continuing crisis in eastern Ukraine. The tanks were allegedly part of an entire column of Russian armored vehicles. The aggressive act was met with a formal protest by the newly elected Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, only to have that protest countered by a classic example of "the big lie," with the Russian Foreign Ministry denouncing the Ukrainian accusation as "[another fake piece of information](#)."

In 2005, [Putin declared the collapse of the Soviet Union to be a "geopolitical catastrophe"](#): "First and foremost it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical



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catastrophe of the century. As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory.” According to Hauslohner, that sentiment has been inculcated in a generation which has no personal knowledge of the Soviet Union. Hauslohner quotes the words of 18-year-old Oksana Chernysheva as typical of such sentiment:

The image of a vast military power that commanded global respect is particularly appealing to Ms Chernysheva. “I believe that the world should be afraid of us,” she said, sipping a hot chocolate in a café near her university. “To be afraid means to respect.”

Putin’s efforts to form a replacement to the Soviet Union have found expression in the Eurasian Union, which will begin as an economic union in January 2015, but which [Putin acknowledged in October 2011](#) will develop into something much more. In announcing his plans for the Eurasian Union, Putin claimed that “none of this entails any kind of revival of the Soviet Union. It would be naïve to try to revive or emulate something that has been consigned to history.” However, an overt attempt to revive an empire which slaughtered over sixty million of its own citizens (including at least six to eight million Ukrainians in the planned famine of 1932–3) would be viewed by many of the citizens of the former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact nations as something more aptly described as ‘criminal’ rather than ‘naïve.’

Putin’s Eurasian Union owes much to the Evraziia (Eurasian) Movement established in April 2001, which set forth [Aleksandr Dugin](#) as the chief ideologist of the new Russian Eurasianism. According to Dugin’s 2001 “[Manifesto](#)” for the Eurasian Movement, Eurasian foreign policy “implies a wide process of strategic integration. Reconstruction on the basis of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] of a solid Eurasian Union (analogue to the USSR on a new ideological, economic and administrative basis).” Such a Eurasian Union — which seemed like an implausible dream in 2001 — is quickly becoming a reality.

In 2004, the Eurasian Youth Union was created as a means of expanding the influence of Eurasian ideology among the young, and the union reportedly has 47 offices through Russia and nine offices abroad. The Eurasianist doctrine is tailor-made for young people who are nostalgic for the “good old days” of the Soviet Empire. The “[Eurasian Catechism](#)” for these Eurasian youth declares, in part:

In the world today there is a force — great and serious — that stands in our way. It smashed to smithereens our Fatherland, threw the continent on the world wide web of a dark presence.

This civilization is in the far West, on the other side of the ocean. USA....

There, everything changes for money and money for things. Momentary flash of ephemeral pleasures, the lingering warmth of degeneration. There rule lies and deception, counterfeit products and fast food, fabricated interviews, exit polls. And this abomination they call a “new order,” and impose it on a great culture and proud people....

*Everything that comes from America, sated poison.* Everything they say, lies and infection. All that they do there is break and throw away. To maintain our “I,” we must introduce strict *anti-American* hygiene. This is the first step in the great war of continents: *Eurasia against the Atlantic*. [Emphasis in original.]

A generation which has little understanding of the realities of the Soviet Union is being sold on the virtues of a Eurasian Union, and the old rhetoric of the “class struggle” has been replaced by the language of “the great war of continents.” As the Ukrainians were some of the first victims of Bolshevism, suffering the denial of their national identity and the slaughter of their population,



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observers must ask whether a similar fate is intended for Ukraine once again, as Putin begins to build his new union.

A recent Pew Research Global Attitudes Project poll has echoed elements of the Levada Centre poll mentioned previously. [According to Pew:](#)

A 55%-majority agree with the statement: "It is a great misfortune that the Soviet Union no longer exists." Views on this question have been relatively steady since Pew Research first asked it five years ago. In 2009, 58% described the collapse of the USSR as a great misfortune, and 50% expressed this opinion in 2011....

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a redrawing of political maps throughout the former Eastern Bloc, and Russians clearly believe that parts of their country were unfairly lost in the process. Roughly six-in-ten (61%) agree with the statement "There are parts of neighboring countries that really belong to us." Only 28% disagree.

Views on this question have remained largely consistent since 2002. However, results were quite different in the early 1990s, as the Soviet empire dissolved. For instance, in a fall 1992 poll, conducted by the Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press less than a year after the Soviet Union's demise, just 36% agreed that parts of neighboring countries belonged to Russia while 26% disagreed. Nearly four-in-ten (37%) offered no opinion.

The 2002 change in "public opinion" demonstrates the shift in mindset which has been inculcated during the years of the Putin regime. If Eurasianism finds expression through the barrels of Russian rifles, it seems likely that a firm majority of Russians will support such steps toward a restoration of empire, for, to repeat the words Oksana Chernysheva, "I believe that the world should be afraid of us... To be afraid means to respect."



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