

IDEOLOGICAL DEBATES IN THE 19TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN EMPIRE

19. YÜZYIL RUS İMPARATORLUĞU'NDA İDEOLOJİK TARTIŞMALAR

ИДЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ СПОРЫ В РОССИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ 19-ОГО ВЕКА

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ABSTRACT

The *Decembrist Uprising of 1825* is a critical point in Russia's history. Developments of the first quarter of the 19th century, particularly the exposure to Western culture and its worldview, provoked significant intellectual activity within Russian society, especially among its intellectuals. Liberal principles that originated in the West were increasingly articulated in public discourse. However, it cannot be claimed that the dissemination of liberal ideas was positively welcomed. On the contrary, among Russian thinkers and state authorities, some adhered to conservative views regarding the organization of the state and social life in the Russian Empire. This tension manifested both among the Decembrists, whose oppositional activities catalyzed further intellectual reflection, and in the works of subsequent representatives of ideological groups such as *Conservatism*, *Liberalism*, *Slavophilism*, and *Westernism*. All adherents of the aforementioned ideological currents upheld the necessity of establishing a state model which, while incorporating European experience, would not compromise Russian cultural distinctiveness.

In this regard, the article aimed to examine the impact of the events of the first quarter of the 19th century, in particular the European influence on ideological and political thought in the Russian Empire, as well as the attitude of Russian intellectual circles of that period toward this process. The work includes not only the works of prominent thinkers and public figures, but also decrees issued by the state's rulers and contemporary Russian materials that reflect views on past events throughout the centuries. In addition, the works of Turkish scholars, who draw on Russian classical literature to address the problem examined in the present study, are also referenced. The outcome of the research was an understanding of the principal causes and driving forces behind the events of *December 1825*, the essence of the ideological and political dilemma, and the evolution of some individuals' views as the 20th century approached. Furthermore, in the *Conclusion*, an analogy was drawn with the ambivalence of reflections on the role and place of the Russian Federation in the global world after 1991.

Keywords: Russia, Decembrists, Conservatism, Liberalism, Slavophilism, Westernism.

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ÖZ

1825'teki Dekabrist Ayaklanması, Rusya devlet tarihinde bir dönüm noktasıydı. 19. yüzyılın ilk çeyreğinde meydana gelen olaylar, yani Batı kültürü ve dünya görüşüyle tanışma, Rus toplumunu, özellikle de Rus aydınlarını harekete geçirmiştir. Batı'nın liberal görüşleri giderek daha sık duyulmaya başlanmıştır. Liberal fikirlerin yayılmasının tartışmalara katılan herkes tarafından olumlu karşılandığı söylenemez. Aksine, Rus düşünürler ve ülke liderleri arasında, Rus İmparatorluğu'nun devlet yapısı ve sosyal yaşamı konusunda muhafazakâr görüşlere sahip olanlar vardı. Bu çelişki, hem muhalefet faaliyetleriyle daha fazla entelektüel düşünceye ivme kazandıran Dekabristler arasında hem de Muhafazakârlık ve Liberalizm, Slavcılık ve Baticılık gibi ideolojik grupların sonraki temsilcilerinin çalışmalarında ifadesini bulmuştur. Yukarıda adı geçen ideolojik hareketlerin tüm taraftarları, Avrupa deneyimini benimserken Rus kimliğine zarar vermeyecek bir devlet modeli geliştirmenin gerekliliğini savundular.

Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı, 19. yüzyılın ilk çeyreğindeki olayların, özellikle de Avrupa etkisinin, Rus İmparatorluğu'ndaki ideolojik ve siyasi düşünce üzerindeki etkisini ve o dönemin Rus entelektüel çevrelerinin bu süreçte yönelik tutumlarını incelemekti. Kullanılan kaynaklar arasında yalnızca tanınmış düşünürlerin ve kamu figürlerinin eserleri değil, aynı zamanda üst düzey hükümet yetkilileri tarafından çıkarılan kararnameler ve yüzyıllar boyunca geçmiş olaylara dair bir bakış açısı yansitan çağdaş Rus kaynakları da yer almıştır. Ayrıca, klasik Rus klasik edebiyarına dayanan ve bu çalışmada tartışılan konuyu ele alan Türkçe kaynaklarına da atıfta bulunulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın sonucu, Aralık 1825 olaylarının altındaki nedenleri ve itici gücü, ideolojik ve siyasi ikilemin özünü ve 20. yüzyıla yaklaşırken bazı şahsiyetlerin görüşlerindeki değişimleri anlamaktı. Ek olarak, çalışmanın son bölümünde, 1991 sonrası Rusya Federasyonu'nun küresel dünyadaki rolü ve yerilarındaki düşüncelerin ikircilikle bir benzetme yapılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rusya, Dekabristler, Muhafazakârlık, Liberalizm, Slavcılık, Baticılık.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Восстание Декабристов 1825 года стало поворотным событием в истории российского государства. События происходившие в первую четверть 19-го века, а именно знакомство с западной культурой и мировоззрением всколыхнуло российское общество, в частности русских интеллигентов. Всё чаще стали слышаться либеральные постулаты Запада. Нельзя утверждать, что распространение либеральных идей было воспринято позитивно всеми участниками дискуссий. Напротив, среди русских мыслителей и руководства страны находились те, кто придерживался консервативных взглядов на государственное устройство и социальную жизнь Российской империи. Это противоречие выражалось как среди Декабристов, оппозиционная деятельность которых послужила толчком к дальнейшим интеллектуальным размышлениям, так и в трудах последующих представителей таких идеологических групп как Консерватизм и Либерализм, Славянофильство и Западничество. Все последователи упомянутых идеологических направлений отстаивали необходимость формирования государственной модели, которая бы при условии перенятия европейского опыта не нанесла бы вред русской самобытности.

В связи с этим, задачей данной работы явилось изучение влияния событий первой четверти 19-го века, в частности европейского влияния на идеолого-политическую мысль в Российской империи и отношения к этому процессу русских интеллектуальных кругов того периода. Были использованы труды не только известных мыслителей и общественных деятелей, но и Указы первых лиц государства,

а также российские материалы нынешнего периода отражающие взгляд на события прошлого сквозь столетия. В дополнение, были упомянуты труды турецких учёных, которые, опираясь на русскую классическую литературу, также освещали рассматриваемую в настоящем материале проблему. Итогом проделанной работы явилось понимание основных причин и движущей силы событий *декабря 1825 года*, сути идеолого-политической дилеммы и изменения ближе к 20-му веку взглядов некоторых персоналий. Вдобавок, в заключительной части работы была проведена аналогия с двойкостью размышлений о роли и месте Российской Федерации в глобальном мире после 1991 года.

Ключевые слова: Россия, Декабристы, Консерватизм, Либерализм, Славянофильство, Западничество.

1. Introduction

The victory in the *Patriotic War of 1812* had a profound impact on the subsequent course of events in Russian history. The defeat of *Napoleon*'s army significantly enhanced the standing of the Russian Empire and of Emperor *Alexander I*, who was increasingly regarded as a proponent of liberal ideas. At the conclusion of the war, *Alexander I* initiated a series of measures aimed at reaffirming the empire's orientation toward liberalism. As a result, several prominent conservatives of the period were removed from office.

Increasingly, attention was devoted to the prospects and necessity of reforms, which included the abolition of serfdom and the introduction of a constitution (Grosul, 2021, pp. 4-43). Overall, the confrontation between Russia and Europe during this period stimulated extensive discussions concerning national self-awareness and the socio-political order. In other words, following the end of 1812, Russia turned inward in an effort to comprehend its own essence and to determine the path of development most suitable for Russia (Gavrilova, 2004, pp. 57-72). The *Decembrist Uprising*, which took place on *14 December 1825*, became a turning point in the confrontation between the "old" and the "new." Many of its leaders had witnessed Western European liberal views and lifestyles firsthand. Inspired by what they saw and heard, this group of Russian officers was strongly opposed to the monarchist regime and advocated the establishment of a republic (Rubanik, 2009a, pp. 73-82). Overall, the period of *Decembrist* activity extended from the mid-1810s, when the first secret society was formed. The activities of the *Decembrists* came to an end in late 1825 as a result of their unsuccessful anti-government actions. Among the causes that contributed to the *December events* was the issue of the dual monarchy, when both *Nicholas I* and *Konstantin I* had claimed the Russian throne (Kiyanskaya, 2009, pp. 71-81). The second reason, which may also be defined as a goal, consisted in the aspiration to achieve estate equality, which would have granted the lower estates not only equality before the law, but also the possibility of professional fulfillment and advancement in service (Kiyanskaya, 2017, pp. 42-56).

The *Decembrists* initiated their activities within the framework of an organization known as the "*Union of Salvation*"/ "*Soyuz Spaseniya*" (St. Petersburg), which operated from 1816 to 1817. In 1818, it was transformed into the "*Union of Prosperity*"/ "*Soyuz Blagodenstviya*" (Moscow), which ceased to exist in 1821. The dissolution of the "*Soyuz Blagodenstviya*" was caused by its division into the "*Northern Society*"/ "*Severnoye Obshchestvo*" (1821) and the "*Southern Society*"/ "*Yuzhnoye Obshchestvo*" (1822) as a result of internal disagreements among its members. In 1825, the "*Yuzhnoye Obshchestvo*," based in Ukraine, merged with the "*Society of United Slavs*"/ "*Obshchestvo Soyedinonnykh Slavyan*" (1823, Ukraine). The fundamental documents of the *Decembrists* included *Pavel Pestel's* (*Yuzhnoye Obshchestvo*) *Russian Truth*/ "*Russkaya Pravda*," which emphasized the necessity of establishing a *republic* through the overthrow of the monarchy. An alternative

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

position was expressed in *Nikita Muravyov's (Severnoye Obshchestvo) Constitution*, which, while preserving monarchic authority, implied a strengthening of government powers. The representatives of the *Northern Society*, adhering to less radical approaches, advocated for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (Zavrazhin, 2007, pp. 81-89).

Thus, based on the key projects aimed at the state's reorganization, it can be understood that in the first quarter of the 19th century, there were two main possible paths for transforming the socio-political life of the Russian state. The *Constitution* was intended to protect and preserve the federal structure of the Russian Empire, maintaining the *Tsar's* authority and expanding the powers of the executive branch along with certain rights and freedoms (the abolition of serfdom, the affirmation of freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech and the press). As for the "*Russkaya Pravda*," it aimed to establish common equality among citizens at all levels. The achievement of this goal was considered possible through the abolition of estate-based divisions. In addition, a significant distinction from *N. Muravyov's Constitution* was the necessity of uniting all national subjects of the Empire into a single whole, which implied the assimilation of smaller peoples (Struve, 2013, pp. 230-237).

The *Union of United Slavs*, initially formed as an independent secret society, comprised mainly *impoverished nobles* (*dvoryane*) along with members from other social estates. The activities of this association were characterized as nationally liberatory, since it promoted the idea of Pan-Slavic unity (Petrovich, 2018, pp. 52-55). The secret organization was established at the end of 1823 and, in September 1825, merged with the "*Yuzhnoye Obshchestvo*." As a result, the original idea of establishing a federative Slavic state faded. It can be argued that the unification of the two organizations served the interests of both. The "*Southern Society*," for instance, possessed a stronger ideological, numerical, and organizational base. Although the "*Union of United Slavs*" was ideologically weaker, it had the necessary determination and commitment to pursue radical changes. The primary differences between the two organizations can be attributed to their composition. In particular, the *Southerners* included wealthier and more prominent *Nobles*. Moreover, the two groups held differing conceptions regarding the implementation of the state's reorganization. For example, the *Southerners* relied on soldiers, while the *Slavs* counted on the ordinary people. Additionally, the "*South*" did not support the idea of establishing a federation (Pavlov, 2017, pp. 79-89).

In general, the discussion of ideological disagreements in Russia remains a highly relevant subject. This issue has been explored not only by Russian scholars but also by foreign researchers, including Turkish academics. For instance, *Ümmet Erkan*, in his article "*19. Yüzyıl Rus Edebiyatında Modernleşme Eleştiri*," examined the socio-political fragmentation of the 19th-century Russian Empire, drawing on the works of Russian literary classics such as *Alexander S. Pushkin*, *Nikolai V. Gogol*, *Nikolai G. Chernyshevsky*, *Fyodor M. Dostoevsky*, and *Lev N. Tolstoy*. The study reflected the concept of "*Modernization*," its meaning, origins, and consequences. The author further addressed Russia's early history and its distinctive features during its formative period. *Autocracy* was identified as one of the inherent characteristics of the Russian polity, the existence of which was explained by the vastness of its territories and, consequently, the logistical difficulties. Moreover, the geographical location and the associated harsh climatic conditions played a significant role. Under such circumstances, effective governance of the country was considered possible only in the presence of strong centralized authority (Erkan, 2017, pp. 21-46). *Sevgi Ilıca*, in the work "*1812 Anayurt Savaşı ve 19. Yüzyıl Rus Edebiyatında Dekabristler*," also explored Russian literature. The author discussed the works of Russian poets such as *Kondraty F. Ryleyev*, *Wilhelm K. Küchelbecker*, *Fyodor N. Glinka*, and *Alexander I. Odoevsky*, whose

writings reflected the events of the *Decembrist Uprising of 1812* (Ilıca, 2021, pp. 71-228). *Nejla Yıldırım*, in the article “*A Look at Russia in the 1840s in the Light of V. A. Sollogub’s ‘Tarantas’*”, focused on the naturalism (a combination of realism and romanticism) of the 1840s in Russian literature. In the article, *N. Yıldırım* also referred to another Turkish scholar, namely *Turgut Olcay*’s work “*Doğalçı Okul*”. This study similarly examined 19th-century naturalism and cited *Vladimir A. Sollogub’s Tarantas* as an example. In “*Tarantas*,” written in the form of travel notes, *V. Sollogub* reflected the socio-political and moral realities of Russia two centuries ago (Yıldırım, 2020, pp. 193-200).

Overall, the study was structured into five sections. The first, *Introduction*, briefly addressed the causes and consequences of the *Decembrist events of 1825*. In particular, the *Introduction*, “*Northern*” and “*Southern*” *Societies* sections examined the organizational structure of the Decembrists and the essential documents that articulated their vision of Russia’s future in detail. The “*The Emergence of Russian Conservatism*” section analyzed the works of key Russian conservatives who advocated for the preservation of Russia’s cultural identity. In the “*Slavophilism and Westernism*” section, the liberal orientation of both groups regarding the necessity of modernization, taking into account Russia’s specific characteristics, is discussed. The “*Conclusion*” synthesized the ideological and political discussions presented throughout the study and considered their consequences. Additionally, the study established connections between the events that occurred in the 19th-century Russian Empire and those in the Russian Federation after 1991.

2. The “*Northern*” and “*Southern*” Societies

The period of existence of these two associations dates back to the first half of the 1900s (1821-1825). The *Constitution of N. Muravyov* at “*Northern Society*” and *P. Pestel’s “Russian Truth”* at “*Southern Society*” are mentioned as fundamental documents. Based on the names of the papers, the first organization, located in Moscow, advocated the idea of a *Constitutional Monarchy*. The second one, with its headquarters in *Kyiv*, considered it necessary to maintain the abolition of the *Tsar’s* institution and the establishment of the *republic* (Pavlov, 2021, pp. 63-76). Overall, the main distinction between the “*Severnoye*” and “*Yuzhnoe*” *Obshchestvo* lay in their methods for achieving the common goal of state reorganization. In joint correspondence at the end of 1822, the “*North*” advocated the continuation of peaceful propaganda aimed at reforming the existing situation. The “*South*,” in contrast, considered revolution, including regicide, to be the most effective way. It is essential that both organizations continued their independent and coordinated activities despite the ban on secret societies and Masonic lodges, which was enacted in August 1822 (Pavlov, 2020, pp. 81-92). The process of formation and functioning of the two secret associations generally took place against the backdrop of an unstable internal political situation in the Russian Empire. Following the conclusion of the *Patriotic War of 1812*, *Alexander I* retreated from further liberalization by transitioning to a reactionary regime that aimed to strengthen autocratic authority. A significant role in supporting this decision was attributed to *Count Alexey A. Arakcheev*, who, unlike the liberal *Mikhail M. Speransky*, adhered to a conservative view of the country’s socio-political structure. Factors prompting this shift in ideological course included post-war tensions with European allies during the *Napoleonic campaigns* and anti-Western sentiments among members of the ruling dynasty and the bureaucratic corps, who advocated for reducing foreign influence in the Russian Empire (Sakharov, 1998, pp. 24-39). A separate and significant issue was the issue of peasant emancipation. Between 1803 and 1805, documents regulating the process of granting freedom to serfs were enacted. The documents included the allocation of land and the payment to be made by the peasants for the land allotments. Later, in 1816, the stage of

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

landless emancipation was initiated. However, the measures taken did not reach a logical conclusion (Ruzhitskaya, 2018, pp. 53-64). In the early 1820s, the condition of ordinary people and peasants deteriorated significantly. During that period, the prohibition on lodging complaints against landowners was reinstated. Harsh measures were also renewed within the army and academic circles. In practice, this included the use of corporal punishment, exile to Siberia, and censorship in the press and publications (Timoshina, 2009, pp. 104-109).

Nikita Muravyov's Constitution (1821) consisted of 13 Chapters. The content of the document presented the author's vision of the most suitable political, administrative, and social organization for the Russian Empire. The first three chapters of the *Constitution* addressed the freedom and independence of the people, who were considered the principal source of supreme authority. Notably, the term "*Citizenship*" was used to refer to the people, whereby citizens - that is, the inhabitants of the country - would receive the right to elect representatives to governing bodies. The Chapter "*On Rights and Responsibilities*" outlined the principle of equality before the law through the abolition of serfdom and class division. Administratively, the country was divided into 13 *Derjava*, each with a designated capital and endowed with self-governing rights. According to the *Constitution*, the principal representative body was the *People's Assembly (Narodnoye Veche)*, which consisted of two chambers - the *Supreme Duma (Verkhovnaya Duma)* and the *Chamber of People's Representatives (Palata Narodnykh Predstaviteley)*. Both chambers retained a considerable degree of autonomy in their activities. As for the monarch, the right of hereditary succession through the male line was preserved. The Russian Emperor continued to serve as the *Supreme Commander-in-Chief*. The Emperor had to obtain the approval of *Narodnoye Veche*, despite the authority to appoint ministers and consuls, as well as to conclude peace treaties with opponents, make decisions on the deployment of armed forces, and distribute lands (Yakushkin, 1906, pp. 104-117). The *French Revolution* and the liberal processes that occurred in Europe had a significant influence on *Nikita Muravyov's* views. As a result, his draft *Constitution* represented a synthesis of ideas embedded in the state documents of France, the United States, Spain, and Poland. In particular, during the preparation of the *Constitution*, *N. Muravyov* used the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789) and the *French Constitutions of 1791, 1793, 1795, and 1799*; the *Constitutional Charter of the Kingdom of Poland*; the *Spanish Constitution of 1812*; the *Declaration of Independence* (1776); the *U.S. Constitution* (1786) and the *constitutions of 23 North American states*; *Meyer's Review of Judicial Institutions*; the *Napoleonic Code* (1804); and the *Justinian Code* (Rubanik, 2009b, pp. 106-110).

Pavel Pestel, the author of the "*Russkaya Pravda*," by contrast, opposed a federative structure and the diffusion of autocratic power. In his view, the state was to function as a unified mechanism. According to *P. Pestel*, the primary task of the state was to ensure the security of its citizens and the general welfare. In matters of security, the state's role was dominant. The provision of welfare, however, could be ensured by private individuals, whose economic activities the state was not to impede (Startsev, 2018, pp. 26-34). The "*Russian Truth*" was a main program document of the "*Southern Society*" prepared in 1822 (Pokrovskiy, 1958, p. 9). One of *Pavel Pestel's* central ideas was the achievement of political and national unity among the empire's citizens. This, in turn, was closely linked to the status of national minorities. According to *P. Pestel's* reflections, the entire population of the country was to be subject to a single set of laws and a single ruler. National unity was to be achieved through the assimilation of all peoples into a single Russian ethnos, united by a common language (Russian), moral values, and traditions. This perspective also extended to the administrative-territorial division, whereby no particular ethnic group was to dominate any specific region of the empire. To this end, it was necessary to ensure the most ethnically

diverse population possible. In this way, a unified and indivisible Russia could be established (Denisova, 2005, pp. 12-23). In addition, *Pavel Pestel*, like *Nikita Muravyov*, opposed the existence of estate-based stratification and the privileged status of any particular social group. In this regard, instead of the term “*Estate*,” the people were to be referred to as “*Citizen*” (Moshchelkov, 2018, pp. 136-144). In conclusion, *Pavel Pestel* became acquainted with political thought while studying in *Dresden, Germany*. Among his teachers were *Hans Karl Dippold*, a professor of German History and Geography, and *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, the author of several political treatises (Edel'man, 2022, pp. 69-79). In addition, *Karl F. Hermann*, who lectured on the introduction to political science, and *Alexander S. Shishkov*, an advocate for the purification of the Slavic-Russian language from foreign borrowings, had a significant influence on the formation of *Pavel Pestel*'s political views. *P. Pestel*'s personal library contained several works by *A. S. Shishkov* in which the language issue was discussed, including “*Rassuzhdeniye o Starom i Novom Sloge Rossiyskogo Yazyka*,” “*Razgovory o Slovesnosti*,” “*Pribavleniye k Sochineniyu, Nazvyvayemomu, “O Starom i Novom Sloge Rossiyskogo Yazyka*,” and “*Pribavleniye k Razgovoram o Slovesnosti, ili Vozrazheniya Protiv Vozrazheniy, Sdelannykh Na Siyu Knigu*” (Edel'man, 2025, pp. 143-174). In addition, the idea of Slavic unity was reflected in 1823 in a programmatic document of the *Society of United Slavs*, which later merged with the “*Southern Society*” – “*The Rules of the United Slavs*”/ “*Pravila Soyedinonnykh Slavyan*” (Koren', 2017, pp. 165-168). The 17 points of the “*Rules of the United Slavs*” were defined as a set of rules and moral guidelines for the members of society. The document contained provisions regarding the necessity of developing science and crafts, as well as the education and upbringing of the younger generation. Particularly noteworthy is 9th Point, in which, despite the Slavic conceptual framework, the need to respect other religions and traditions was emphasized (Borisov, 1951, pp. 71-72).

Thus, both *Nikita Muravyov*'s *Constitution* and *Pavel Pestel*'s “*Russian Truth*” exhibited similarities as well as differences. Both documents endorsed the idea of the necessity of modernization. At the same time, there were distinctions in the methods proposed for implementing their respective projects. It is noted that *P. Pestel*'s approach had a more radical nature. This assessment is linked to the fact that he supposed the establishment of a dictatorship at the initial stage, to implement and consolidate all the reforms outlined in “*The Russian Truth*,” which were directed toward the creation of a monoethnic, unitary Russian state (Kuznetsov, Lotarev, 2021, pp. 149-157). The leader of the “*Southern Society*” also opposed the federal system, which, particularly in the context of the Russian Empire, would have contributed to weakening ties between provinces and the center. This, in turn, would have created problems in the effective implementation of state functions and posed a threat to the country's stability and unity (Sonina, 2002, pp. 15-23). Despite the ambitious nature of their objectives, the *Decembrists* were ultimately unable to implement their constitutional projects. The reason for their defeat lay in the divergence of views among the *Decembrists* regarding the methods of the revolutionary movement. In this context, the Emperor's role was pivotal. In other words, with the strengthening of the *Tsarist institution*, the views of the rebels shifted from revolutionary goals aimed at overthrowing the monarchy to a focus on dialogue with its representatives (Volkova, 2006, pp. 100-111). In addition, the reasons for the failure also included the *Decembrists*' weak agitation and propaganda among the population, particularly among soldiers and the ordinary people, which was evident in the spontaneous nature of the uprising. This circumstance was further complicated by the fact that, at the last moment before the onset of events, some direct participants and organizers of the secret societies refused to take part in the actions, which affected the implementation of the uprising plan (Nechkkina, 1955, pp. 260-342).

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

In the first quarter of the 19th century, initial attempts at liberalization within the Russian Empire aimed to expand human rights and freedoms, as well as limit the power of the *Tsar*. An important factor that influenced Russian intellectual thought of the period was the *Patriotic War of 1812*. The course of military operations and its outcome acted as a divisive factor, as opinions among intellectuals were split between the need to abolish the *Institution of the Tsarist authority* and the necessity of strengthening it to preserve the Russian state.

3. The Emergence of Russian Conservatism

The first quarter of the 19th century, during the Reign of *Alexander I*, could be characterized by contradictions between those who advocated liberal reforms and those who wanted to preserve the old order. Between 1801 and 1825, the views of the Russian monarch underwent significant changes. While he initially supported the country's liberalization efforts, his stance had shifted in his final years. Thus, by the *Tsar's* will, the activities of printing houses and printed publications were renewed. In 1808–1809, he issued decrees prohibiting the sale of peasants. In addition, Alexander I implemented a reform in the field of education, which included the introduction of free primary education and the establishment of universities in *Kharkiv*, *Kazan*, and *Derpta*. Between 1802 and 1811, a ministerial reform was carried out. Such changes prompted the conservative camp to express its discontent, as it sought to maintain the elevated status of the *nobles* (*dvoryane*), who had lost their monopoly on land under the *1801 Decree*. As a consequence of these inherent contradictions, two distinct trends emerged by the mid-century, both of which continued to advocate for the same objectives initially established at the beginning of the century. This was, on the one hand, a *Liberal-Conservative* group that reflected on ways to introduce liberalism into public life without compromising the autocracy, and on the other hand, a *Reactionary-Conservative* group that defended the strengthening of *tsarist power*, the preservation of class divisions, and the privileges of the nobles (Nachapkin, 2002, pp. 36–58). It is well-known that the year 1812 marked a turning point in the country's liberalization and the emergence of Russian Conservatism, prompting the Russian Emperor to reconsider his ideological and political views. Evidence of these changes included the removal of *Alexander I*'s associate, *Mikhail M. Speransky*, who had been directly involved in implementing liberal reforms, and the strengthening of the position of the renowned historian and advocate for the preservation of autocracy, *Nikolai M. Karamzin*, who enjoyed the favor of members of the imperial family. Notably, members of the ruling dynasty, particularly *Alexander I*'s sister, *Ekaterina Pavlovna*, as well as the author of "*The History of the Russian State*" / "*Istoriya Gosudarstva Rossiyskogo*," also adhered to conservative-protective views aimed at preserving the status and power of the Emperor and the privileges of the higher estates. Another significant figure who upheld a conservative vision of the socio-political structure of the Russian Empire was *Alexander S. Shishkov*, who, as noted above, opposed the introduction of foreign elements into Russian life (Grosul, Itenberg, Tvardovskaya, Shatsillo, Eymontova, 2000, pp. 34–65). Both *N. M. Karamzin* and *A. S. Shishkov* were among those who criticized the liberal initiatives of *Alexander I* and *M. M. Speransky*. According to *N. Karamzin*, the enlightenment of the populace was far more critical than the bureaucratization of the state, which formed the core of the *Tsar's* reforms. In addition, he regarded the idea of imposing the legacy of the *French Revolution* onto Russian realities as inadvisable. During the *Patriotic War of 1812*, conservatives such as *Fyodor V. Rostopchin*, Moscow's *Governor-General*, drew the *Emperor's* attention to the geographical and cultural particularities of the Russian Empire. Moreover, *F. Rostopchin*, like his contemporaries *N. Karamzin* and *A. Shishkov*, considered it necessary to preserve the nobility as a social estate, since, in their view, this class served

as the main support of the *Empire* in both state administration and the socio-cultural sphere (Kozhurin, 2015, pp. 128-142).

Overall, the origins of conservatism date back to the time of *Catherine II*, a *Reactionary Conservative*. Her “*The Instruction*” or “*Nakaz*” clearly reflected the existing contradictions and cautious attitude to liberal ideas already in the XVIII century. “*Nakaz*” was the code that its predecessors had attempted to compile, and it covered a wide range of state issues and social order (Yesukov, Chestneyshin, & Chestneyshina, 2009, pp. 18-20). In *Chapter I*, the Russian state was defined as a European power. Exceptional merit in the rapprochement of “*European*” *Russia* with the rest of Europe was attributed to *Peter the Great*, who helped to establish closer contacts with the West. *Chapter II* secured the sole rule of the Russian monarch, i.e., *Autocracy* (*Samoderzhaviye*), the most suitable form of government for the Russian monarch. *Chapter V* emphasized the free will of citizens and the equality of all before the law, which was supposed to reduce the pressure on the “*weak*” from the rich and their excess of power. Based on the above-mentioned “*Freedom of Speech*,” in *Chapter XII*, the right to possess serfs by the wealthy people was still preserved (Vulgar, 1771, pp. 3-6, 11-14, 121). Discussing the purpose of the issuance of the “*Nakaz*,” it is noted that this document represented a codification of laws aimed at ensuring order within the state, as well as regulating and systematizing internal processes and social relations. Nevertheless, the *Empress*’s well-intentioned efforts did not receive approval and support. For example, the Church’s representatives opposed *Catherine II*’s attempts to separate the clergy from the state. Criticism also came from government officials involved in drafting the imperial document. The essence of their objections concerned nuances in distinguishing between “*state*” and “*civil*” laws, as well as judicial procedures. The “*Nakaz*” faced broader criticism from *Alexander P. Sumarokov*, a *State Councillor* who also participated in reviewing the document. He expressed discontent with the extensive powers granted to deputies under the “*Nakaz*,” including exemption from capital punishment, torture, and corporal punishment. Furthermore, there were disagreements regarding the introduction of a parliamentary system and potential conflicts between civil and natural rights. As a representative of the higher estate, *A. Sumarokov* also opposed the liberation of peasants, since the preservation of serfdom was considered a guarantee of social stability (Stennik, 2006, pp. 125-143). The final point to note is that the works of European philosophers had a significant influence on *Catherine II*’s political views. During her reign, translations of such works as “*On the Citizen*” (Thomas Hobbes) and “*A Discourse Upon the Inequality Among Mankind*” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau) were published. It is also mentioned that the *Empress* maintained contact with prominent representatives of French philosophical thought, such as *Denis Diderot*, *Voltaire*, and *Jean le Rond d’Alembert* (Starkova, 2012, pp. 9-16). In addition, the “*Nakaz*” exhibited clear borrowings from the work of another French thinker, *Charles-Louis de Montesquieu*, and his “*The Spirit of Law*.” Specific textual and conceptual influences of the French work can be observed in sections that discuss forms of government, state organization, and the concept of freedom (Chumakova, Zlatopol’skaya, 2006, pp. 109-127).

Here, it is crucial to indicate the role of *Mikhail M. Speransky*, a supporter of a *Constitutional Monarchy*, who in the “*Project of Laying Down of State Laws of the Russian Empire*” (“*Proyekt Ulozheniya Gosudarstvennykh Zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii*”) of the “*Projects and Notes*” (“*Proyekty i Zapiski*”) secured the indivisibility of the monarchical state, governed by power divided into legislative (State Duma/ Gosudarstvennaya Duma), judicial (Senate/ Senat), and executive (Ministry/ Ministerstvo) and united by the *State Council*. All state processes, including the adoption of law, its implementation, and control over their implementation, as well as justice, were carried out on behalf of the Russian Emperor (Speranskiy, 1961, pp. 222-225). According to *M. Speransky*, the government, in

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

the proper execution of laws, relied on the Police, whose functional responsibilities were to facilitate the implementation of laws and maintain internal public order (Fedneva, 2021, pp. 412-424). In the “*Plan of State Transformation*” (“*Plan Gosudarstvennogo Preobrazovaniya*”), the statesman reiterated the supremacy of the Law on behalf of the Emperor, which serves as an indicator of commitment to autocracy. The Council was responsible for reviewing and approving bills, which had to be approved by the ruler (Speransky, 1905, pp. 272, 275-276). It is essential to note that *M. Speransky*’s activities occurred during a period of dynastic and political crisis, as well as shifts in foreign policy aimed at strengthening Russia’s position in the West. Additionally, there was a need to implement administrative reforms and regulate relations between the supreme authority and the higher estates. Taken together, these factors raised the issue of creating mechanisms for controlling the internal structure and governance of the Russian Empire, which would ensure internal stability and facilitate Russia’s integration into the European community of states (Andreeva, 2023, pp. 880-898). However, *Mikhail Speransky*’s project was never implemented despite initial favor. Among the main reasons that impeded the realization of *M. Speransky*’s initiatives was his removal from state service, as Russian society of the first quarter of the 19th century, particularly the *nobility* and the *Emperor* himself, were not prepared for the changes considered radical for that period. It should be recalled that the reforms he advocated directly involved the limitation of the rights and powers of both the higher estates and the country’s ruler. Moreover, in the context of confrontation with France, implementing such sweeping reforms was also considered untimely (Gorozhankina, Panteleev, 2022, pp. 15-18).

Overall, the rise of conservatism can be understood as emerging in reaction to the growing influence of European culture and lifestyle on Russian society. This process raised concerns among traditionalists, who viewed these influences as a threat to established norms and values. As a result of the modernization of the 18th and early 19th centuries, liberal views gained popularity among intellectuals, which later found their reflection in constitutional drafts and a growing affinity for the French language and culture (*Gallomania*), a trend that, as mentioned, undermined the Russian way of life. In this context, conservatives regarded the centralization of power, the preservation of class divisions and serfdom, and the strengthening of the *Orthodox Church*’s role - encapsulated in the triad “*Orthodoxy (Pravoslaviye) – Autocracy (Samoderzhaviye) – Nation (Narodnost’)*” formulated by Count *Sergey S. Uvarov* - as the only means of safeguarding the state (Minakov, 2014, pp. 67-77). *S. Uvarov* emphasized Russia’s unique position, which, in his view, prevented it from being considered either a fully European or Asian state. This distinctiveness, he argued, stemmed not only from geographical location but also from specific national, religious, socio-economic, and political characteristics (Ilyin, 2018, pp. 33-35). It is claimed that the *Orthodoxy*, mentioned in the *Uvarov formula*, was “*a source of cultural, ethical and political unity*”. *S. Uvarov* himself considered *Orthodox Christianity* as an integral element of strengthening brotherhood, moral equality, the origin of faith, and the national identity that distinguished the Russian people from other Europeans (Gayda, 2021a, pp. 32-46). Moreover, the *Count*’s contemporaries suggested that, due to their national faith, Russians were immune to the wave of revolutions that rocked Europe in the first half of the 19th century, mainly because of their anti-Christian character (Pipes, 2008, pp. 134-135). The element “*Nation*”/“*Narodnost’*” served as an alternative to the French “*Brotherhood*” in the triad “*Freedom. Equality. Brotherhood*”. Furthermore, if, in the French interpretation, “*Brotherhood*” referred specifically to the French people, *Uvarov*’s “*Nation*” or “*People*” carried broader meaning intended to serve as a unifying force around the ruler. The author himself pointed out that this element, as the antithesis of cosmopolitanism, embodied national

identity and fully reflected the Russian spirit (Gayda, 2021b, pp. 155-161). The formation of S. S. Uvarov's philosophical views reflected in his formula, took place against the backdrop of revolutionary events. He rejected the political tendencies that emerged in European states because, as he observed during his stay in Vienna, they ultimately had a detrimental impact on culture. In this regard, he considered the national code preservation to be the most appropriate and necessary path for Russia (Gavrilov, 2019, pp. 131-191). Hence, since the *French Revolution* was regarded as a period of turmoil and calamities, S. Uvarov maintained that all changes and innovations had to be implemented, taking into account the established principles and traditions (Malinov, 2016, pp. 519-526). As a diplomat, he argued that, the development of the Enlightenment on Russian foundations was one of the principal mechanisms for preserving the Russian state. At the same time, he believed that denying the achievements of the Western Enlightenment and its blind imitation could become a destabilizing factor for the Russian Empire (Udalov, 2006, pp. 77-85). Additionally, S. Uvarov, who regarded the *Decembrists* as a factor undermining the state and national foundations of the country due to their limited understanding of the Russian essence, was influenced by another conservative, Nikolai M. Karamzin, who advocated the expediency of adhering to the monarchical order and promoting the Russian Enlightenment with an emphasis on national tradition (Uvarov, 2014, pp. 25-27). As for Sergey Uvarov, he was considered a representative of a new generation of conservatives, as he was more familiar with European philosophical thought than earlier representatives (Meshcheryakova, 2014, pp. 46-52). Moreover, elements of Uvarov's *Triad* were further developed in the reflections of the *Slavophiles*, particularly in the works of A. S. Khomyakov, who interpreted his understanding of "Nation" as a set of distinctive features inherent to a given people (Badalyan, 2018, pp. 51-66).

The most prominent representative of *Russian Conservatism* was Nikolay M. Karamzin, a supporter of autocracy and an opponent of Mikhail M. Speransky on the issue of state structure. In "Notes on the Ancient and New Russia"/ "Zapiski o Drevney i Novoy Rossii", N. Karamzin emphasized the role of the ruler as the only acceptable way for Russia to govern the country. From the author's point of view, the main threat to Russia was the external forces that shook up the stability of power and the state. European ideals, which had been reflected in almost every sphere of life, from culture to the army and government, could replace the steppe invaders, shake national foundations, and weaken the monarch's institution. According to N. Karamzin, the Church, whose power had weakened during Peter's time, worked together with the ruler and supported him in state affairs. The reign of Catherine II was presented as an example of true autocracy, in which the monarch carried out state affairs with complete autonomy. As a result, the Autocracy was the essence of Russia, which had both good and bad aspects, of which are the nobility and the clergy, providing support to the state in the mission entrusted to it to ensure the common good (Karamzin, 1991, pp. 17-20, 31-34, 36, 42-44, 105, 108-109). The Tsar's power must be exercised within the framework of a law that does not contradict Russian realities. In other words, N. Karamzin considered any experiments and innovations that could conflict with Russian society's traditions and thus damage it to be unnecessary. Hence, the *Parliamentary Republic*, whose establishment was advocated by M. Speransky, would instead give rise to a power struggle. Any changes in the state had to be carefully considered to match Russia's design and not pose a threat to its security (Kuvshinova, 2020, pp. 42-45). Since the formation of conservative ideology based on Europe's historical and political experience, the Russian traditionalists saw N. Karamzin as a threat to Russia's identity that was radically different from its Western neighbors, in the unnatural Russian-like attitudes that spread over its lands. As differences from the European historian indicate not only the presence at the intersection of different western and eastern

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

cultures, but also the special nature of relations between the ruler and the people, in which, if we make an analogy, the *Tsar* acts as a “*Father*,” whose duty is to care for the good of his acolytes, which is more characteristic of the Eastern worldview, according to which people should give because of respect and obedience to the ruler and not resort to actions that undermine his status. However, it cannot be said that the ideologist completely denied everything Western; on the contrary, he was positive about the idea of the Enlightenment and saw in it a benefit for the development of civil society (Alevras, 2008, pp. 42-47). According to *Nikolay Karamzin*, the *Polish Issue*, a sensitive matter for the Russian Empire in the 19th century, became more topical after the defeat of the French army in 1812. The conquering policy of the Russian emperors justified the annexation of Polish territories. This state, by the way, was considered by *N. Karamzin* as one of the rivals in the foreign policy arena, created a threat to the integrity of the state borders, which was confirmed in his 1819 conversation with *Emperor Alexander I*, during which he warned the *Tsar* against the desire to restore the Polish state within the limits approved by the Congress of Vienna, as it would instead play off the appetite of opponents concerning Russian lands, thus increasing the threat of Russia’s disintegration (Narezhnyy, 2018, pp. 82-87). It is essential that the *Great French Revolution of 1789* and the *Patriotic War of 1812* exerted a significant influence on *N. M. Karamzin*’s socio-political views. While in the early years, *N. Karamzin* assumed the position of an observer, the events of 10 August 1792 and 21 January 1793 - when *Louis XVI* was dethroned and subsequently executed - marked the collapse of the Russian conservative’s expectations for the peaceful attainment of the common good and the advancement of the Enlightenment. As a result of these events, the *Revolution* appeared as an act of disorder, devastation, and violence. Hence, fears arose regarding the possibility of similar undesirable developments in the Russian Empire. *N. Karamzin* saw the prevention of revolutionary sentiment and the destruction of the state order once again in the advancement of the Enlightenment and the strengthening of morality among the population (Kislyagina, 1976, pp. 84-131). Nor can the events of the *Patriotic War of 1812* be overlooked. The confrontation with France was perceived as a struggle between good and evil embodied in the figure of *Napoleon*. For *N. Karamzin*, the *War of 1812* was regarded as an opportunity for Russia’s awakening and its revival as a powerful and enlightened state (Sapchenko, 2022, pp. 77-89). Finally, it is worth mentioning the contrast between the views of *N. M. Karamzin* and *M. M. Speransky*, who represented the conservative and liberal camps, respectively. The main difference between the two contemporaries lay in the fact that *M. M. Speransky* advocated for the modernization of the Russian Empire’s socio-political structure. To achieve this, he proposed limiting the ruler’s power by separating authority into three branches (legislative, executive, and judicial) and granting greater freedoms, including economic liberties for peasants who had previously been in a dependent position. *N. M. Karamzin*, by contrast, opposed a pro-European, specifically a pro-French foreign policy. He regarded centralized governance as the key to the expansion, resilience, and stability of the state (Sverdlov, 2018, 188-203).

In this connection, it is impossible not to mention the State Official *Nikolay N. Novosiltsov*. After the proclamation of the *Polish Constitution*, *N. Novosiltsov* was appointed as a commissioner representing the Russian government in the newly formed administrative unit. It cannot be said that the *Tsar*’s decision to grant legal autonomy to the Poles was met positively by the diplomat. In his view, this decision represented an imposition of inequality between the constituent parts of the Russian Empire. His position regarding the *Kingdom of Poland* was reflected in the “*State Charter Letter of the Russian Empire*” / “*Gosudarstvennaya Ustavnaya Gramota Rossiyskoy Imperii*,” which he prepared in 1820 on behalf of *Alexander I*. In this document, the Russian monarch’s companion equated the

Kingdom of Poland to other administrative regions of Russia, thereby highlighting the need to repeal the *Polish Constitution* (Lyubeznikov, 2012, pp. 163-171). In particular, in *Chapter 1, Article 1* of its constitutional draft, N. Novosiltsov stated the indivisibility of an empire that consists of sub-regions (regions) and provinces. *Chapter 2, Article 9* referred to the heredity of power, which under *Article 11* of this *Chapter* was not subject to division. *Chapter 3, Article 78*, defined Orthodoxy as the dominant religion and the embodiment of the ruling dynasty. *Chapter III, Article 91*, provided for the establishment of a Bicameral Parliament, without which the ruler under *Chapter IV, Article 101*, could not enact any law (Shil'der, 1898, pp. 499-500, 510-511, 513). The senator had a strong stance on the *Jewish Issue*. The relevance of this *Issue* was related to the isolation of the *Jews*, whom the government wanted to integrate into public processes. *Nikolay Novosilotsov*, as a member of the *Jewish Committee*, was directly involved in solving the task. Thus, in 1806, *Jews* were resettled from the country to the city. It is known that a significant portion of the *Jewish* population resided in Poland. Therefore, after the promulgation of the *Polish Constitution*, namely in 1816, attempts to equalize the *Poles* and the *Jews* were made. Such a project was the "*Règlement organique des Israélites qui habitent le Royaume de Pologne*," which consisted of two parts. The first part, "*About religion*," guaranteed the *Jewish* community the right to follow *Judaism* without the threat of punishment and oppression. The second part of the "*Civil Law*" gave *Jews* equal civil rights and duties with other ethnic groups. However, the senator's proposal was not approved by the Polish State Council (Lyubeznikov, 2013, pp. 135-140). Considering the role of the *Polish Issue* in Russian history, its significance increased in the second half of the 19th century, when the so-called "*Tribal*" *policy* gained popularity in the country, promoting the development of ideas of Slavic unity. In this context, the *Polish Issue* was one of the key issues. This process unfolded against the backdrop of an intensified struggle for self-determination in certain parts of Europe. Importantly, this trend was negatively assessed by conservatives, who argued that people were being depersonalized and losing their national distinctiveness through democratization and Europeanization (Ivanova, 2014, pp. 190-203). Interestingly, resolving the *Polish Issue* was among the principal objectives pursued by the Russian government. According to several prominent scholars of the time, *Poland's* distinctiveness, the expansion of its privileges, close ties with Europe, and the dominance of *Catholicism* hindered the administrative-territorial, legal, and cultural integrity of the Russian Empire (Belousov, Abdullayev, Chikina, 2019, pp. 328-346). Thus, Poland was regarded as the main confessional and civilizational obstacle for the Russian Empire, which aspired to establish leadership within the Slavic world (Kruczowski, 2022, pp. 10-34).

Here, a continuation of the debates concerning the most suitable form of governance and path of development for the Russian Empire is examined. The events of 1812 prompted the ruling authorities and supporters of the existing regime to consolidate their positions. At the same time, despite the conservative approach, the idea of the necessity to promote the internal Enlightenment was expressed.

4. The Slavophilism and Westernism

The majority of researchers agree that both *Slavophilism* and *Westernism* can be considered liberal-minded based on program documents aimed at improving the social status of citizens, expanding their rights and freedoms, and strengthening the country as a whole. However, the second half of the 19th century had a protective character for liberalism, as the works of public figures demonstrated a commitment to preserving national identity. In this sense, Russian liberalism, against the backdrop of the country's internal and foreign policy situations, which the Russian state faced, could be seen as an attempt to save Russia from

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

collapse and “*humiliation*.” It is worth noting that discussions arose regarding the appropriateness of associating *Slavophiles* with liberal views. These reflections stemmed from the fact that *Slavophiles* insisted that Russia had a distinct path from the West. At the same time, their *Westernists* advocated for closer contacts with Europeans (Bagayeva & Zhapova, 2020, pp. 16-21). As mentioned earlier, *Slavophilism* was also considered as part of the liberal current. This was because its followers advocated for the abolition of serfdom, the expansion of personal freedoms and opportunities, as well as the formation of a union that would coordinate the goals they defended. At the same time, despite their solid knowledge of Europe, the *Slavophiles* believed that this development should be based on Russian principles. Importantly, they did not promote the rejection of all things Western or of contact with Europe. On the contrary, Western experience and achievements were to be applied for the benefit of Russian society without undermining its cultural distinctiveness (Grosul, 2016, pp. 33-51). Regarding *Westernism*, one point they shared with the *Slavophiles* was their strong opposition to serfdom and their belief in the necessity of liberating the peasants. The distinction lay in the fact that, according to the *Slavophiles*, the process of emancipation should have been carried out in a centralized manner, i.e., under the guidance and supervision of the authorities. Furthermore, the *Westernists* viewed globalization, integration, and universal unity positively. In this context, they considered that Russia had to be included in this process. The *Slavophiles*, as noted, advocated for the preservation of cultural distinctiveness (Nagevichene, 2016, pp. 4-7).

A significant aspect in the study of the views of the *Slavophiles* and *Westernists* was their attitude toward the “*Petrine reforms*,” which served as a foundation for the development of liberal thought and became a focal point of ideological disagreements regarding the truly suitable path for the Russian Empire’s development. As a result, the contradiction of opinions about Russia’s future, which originated during the reign of *Peter I*, became even more relevant after 1991, when post-Soviet Russia once again faced the dilemma of defining its ideological orientation. *Peter*’s policies left a profound mark on the intellectual debates of both groups. Thus, according to the *Slavophiles*, Russia had been unprepared for the sweeping and sudden changes initiated in the Russian Empire by its first emperor. Nevertheless, these reforms provided an impetus for national self-awareness and for understanding Russia’s unique historical and cultural essence. In particular, one of the recognized benefits was the introduction of the *Enlightenment*, which should have been applied for the benefit of Russian society. For the *Westernists*, by contrast, *Peter*’s reforms represented a crucial stage in the process of Europeanization (Badalyan, 2023, pp. 176-191). In assessing these transformations, the *Slavophiles* argued that the emperor’s initiatives had led to cultural stratification within Russian society. In other words, a gap emerged between the educated elite, many of whom were closely associated with state power, and the ordinary people. As a result, Russia embarked on a path of Europeanization, adopting not only Western scientific achievements but also European cultural models and ways of life. At the same time, the *Slavophiles* did not entirely reject the “*Petrine reforms*.” On the contrary, they believed that *Peter*’s measures served as a stimulus for the awakening and formation of an indigenous model of Enlightenment and state organization that would correspond to Russia’s specific interests and historical structure (Shirokova, 2021, pp. 41-46). *Westernist* thinkers, by contrast, viewed *Peter I*’s active efforts to bring Russia closer to Europe in a predominantly positive light. They argued that Russia’s primary problem had long been its backwardness relative to Western Europe, a condition rooted in its historical isolation. Consequently, through the “*window*” opened by *Peter I*, European ideas and culture began to penetrate the empire more actively. According to *Westernist* thought, the adoption and

application of these external influences were expected to have a profoundly beneficial impact on Russian society (Goryunov, 2022, pp. 291-306).

It is essential that a primary source for both *Slavophiles* and *Westernists* was the concept of the *Individual*. For example, *Westernists* noted the absence of an idea of personality in Russian society, and hence the absence of a concept of citizenship, due to the external pressure environment, i.e., the community, the need for which their opponents argued for preservation. From the Western perspective, community structure was seen as the cause of Russia's backwardness compared to Europe. In other words, while Europe was engaged in the development of individual rights and freedoms, Russia had remained firmly attached to its autocracy and peasant past, characterized by social and genealogical fragmentation. Hence, it became clear that, in the understanding of the proponents of *Westernization*, progress was achieved by developing personal freedoms (Khouruzhiy, 2010, pp. 343-370). *Slavophiles*, on the contrary, believed that detachment from the community and its foundations had a destructive effect on the *Individual*, contributing to the erosion of their integrity. The human being in *Slavophilism* was an integral part of society (Chistyakova, 2000, pp. 503-506). Special importance was placed on spirituality in *Slavophile* teachings. For *Slavophiles*, faith served as an element that demonstrated human integrity and aided in shaping the *Individual*. In turn, following the spiritual precepts of a particular group of *Individuals* contributed to the unity of its members and the community connected by a shared worldview (Ivanov, 2016, pp. 12-22). Thus, the differences between the *Westernists*' and *Slavophiles*' views on the *Individual* could be reduced to an individualistic versus a communitarian approach, respectively. In the *Slavophiles*' understanding, the existence of the *Individual* was inseparable from society, of which it is a part. The *Westernists*, by contrast, believed that the *Individual* constituted the primary foundation of both society and the state. Moreover, according to *Westernism*, societal progress was achieved through granting each person the freedom for individual development and action. Drawing on the *Slavophiles*' teachings, it was clear that, for them, the *Individual* appeared as one element of a unified organism, whose proper functioning was possible only through the coordinated operation of all its parts (Shirokova, 2011, pp. 64-67). Next, we turn to the *Theory of "Nation"/"Narodnost"*. The above-mentioned *Sergey S. Uvarov* also considered this concept. For his followers, the meaning of this term was more national-formative than for *S. Uvarov* himself, since it arose in response to the expansion of contacts with Europe and the spread of European philosophical worldviews. It was mentioned that "*Narodnost*" was a combination of genetic, climatic, historical, geographical, and religious factors, as well as characteristics of state structure. In the issue of the formation of "*Narodnost*," *Slavophiles* found support in ordinary people, who acted as the primary "*custodian*" of national language, culture, and beliefs (Bobrovskikh, 2015, pp. 101-106). Additionally, a debate arose among *Slavophiles* regarding the concepts of "Russian people" and "Russian state." National minorities, despite their non-Slavic origin and the dominance of the Russian ethnic group, which was the central pillar in the formation of the nation-state, remained an integral part of the Russian state in the understanding of intellectuals (Kudryashev, 2017, pp. 103-109).

The next important point to mention is that, in the second half of the 19th century, *Liberalism* in the Russian Empire assumed a protective or conservative character. A significant contribution to the development of *Conservative Liberalism* belongs to *Boris N. Chicherin*, who, within his conceptual framework, addressed the correlation between the individual and social institutions, including both civil and spiritual associations. In other words, he examined the role of authority in reconciling law and liberty. In this context, the author maintained that the most appropriate form of authority was that embodied in the monarch, which itself was to be limited and subordinated to the law, thereby ensuring the

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

proper implementation of state legislation and the restraint of excessive liberty. It was precisely this form of political order, or *Constitutional Monarchy*, that *B. N. Chicherin* regarded as most suitable for the Russian reality (Gnatyuk, 2013, pp. 22-29). It should be noted that this conclusion was based on the historical context and the particular characteristics of the Russian Empire. The transition to a limited monarchy was perceived as a stage in the evolution away from absolute power, which did not fully correspond to the prevailing tendencies of global development. Thus, *Constitutional Monarchy* emerged as the ideal form of governance, one that could reconcile spiritual practices with scientific progress. It was believed that Russia's adherence to such a model of state organization at that time would not only enable the country to keep pace with the times without suppressing its national identity, but also prevent the arbitrariness of power (Sukhov, 1998, pp. 64-69). In addition, this form of *liberalism* (*conservative/protective*) was contrasted with "street" *liberalism*, which was associated with excessive arbitrariness and radical opposition (Zaytseva, 2015, pp. 53-60). It is worth noting that *B. Chicherin*'s views on protective liberalism had changed by the end of the 19th century. The author of the idea of *Conservative Liberalism* distanced himself from the principles he had previously defended. The reason for this was the absence of constructive dialogue between the authorities and progressive social groups, which ultimately created obstacles to the advancement of liberal ideas and reforms (Chizhkov, 2011, pp. 148-152). Moreover, in this context, the problem did not lie solely in the abuse of power. Liberal circles often exhibited excessive radicalism, which, in turn, impacted their coordination with the state (Chizhkov, 2022, pp. 3-12).

The next point to be addressed is the division of *Slavophilism*. It should be noted that the period of most significant activity, during which the principal works of this school were published, corresponded to *Early Slavophilism*. In the second half of the 19th century, a second group of *Slavophiles* emerged, commonly identified as representatives of *Late Slavophilism* or *Neo-Slavophilism* (Belov, 2025, pp. 116-119). One of the representatives of *Late Slavophilism*, whose crisis period fell at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, was *Vladimir I. Lamansky*. His views on the role of the *Slavic Issue* and the policies of the Russian Empire in this regard became the subject of wide-ranging debates within *Slavophile* circles. In particular, the core of the criticism directed at *V. I. Lamansky* concerned his undermining of one of the fundamental tenets of the *Slavophile* doctrine—*the unification of the Slavs*. In this context, *V. Lamansky* cautioned Russia against hasty actions in resolving the *Slavic Issue* (Medovarov, Snezhnitskaya, 2019, pp. 38-47). This caution was associated with profound differences between the *West*, represented by *Europe*, and the *East*, represented by the *Russian Empire*. In particular, by the late 19th century, reflections on the opposition of the two civilizations were increasingly circulating within *Slavophile* circles. In other words, at the early stages of *Slavophilism*'s development, ideas advocating the possibility of merging European heritage with Russian cultural distinctiveness were promoted. However, later assertions began to emerge regarding the low probability of such an endeavor. Among the factors supporting this claim were the noted religious differences, as observed by the *early Slavophiles*, and the linguistic factor, discussed by *V. Lamansky*. According to *V. Lamansky*, linguistic similarity contributed to the unification of peoples. In the case of the Russian Empire, it was deemed inappropriate to speak of a Russian-European understanding due to divergences both in faith and language (Kupriyanov, 2018, pp. 21-33). The contrast between the Russian Empire and Europe is reflected in *Vladimir Lamansky*'s "*The Three Worlds of the Asian-European Continent*"/ "*Tri Mira Aziysko-Yevropeyskogo Materika*." The "*Three Worlds of the Asian-European Mainland*" presented the world divided into three parts. The first included the *Romano-German* part (*Western or Catholic-Protestant Europe*), where the *Anglo-Saxons* of the *New World* (*Great Britain and North America*) dominate. The second

consisted of the *Greek-Slavic (Middle World)*, which is neither fully European nor Asian, and for which essential aspects of strengthening include the revival of national consciousness and the desire to know one another. Special importance was attached to the development of freedom in Russia, as it contributed to the attraction of Slavic brethren. The third part was called *Asiyskaya*, a more complex in structure and composition part represented by the Asian part of modern *Türkiye*, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, as well as North Asia. By the way, Russia was presented in the text as a part of the *Middle World*. In general, *continental Europe*, also known as the *Old World*, whose power transferred to the Anglo-Saxon groups of the *New World*, was depicted as a dying civilization, losing its influence. Besides, among the influential factors that had a positive impact on the strengthening of the *Anglo-Saxons*, who were ethnically and linguistically subjugating Europe, were mentioned not only a vast territory and a large population, but also a single English language (Lamanskiy, 1892, pp. 3-4, 30-38, 44-46, 90-94). It is necessary to emphasize that this work was regarded as a foundational material for the subsequent development of *Eurasianism*. The author analyzed the vast expanse of Eurasia within the framework of a cultural, political, and geographical comparison. In *V. Lamansky*'s view, Russia occupied a central position due to both its geographical location and cultural diversity (Anokhin, Zhitin, Krasnov, Lachininsky, 2014, pp. 1-14). Hence, classifying Russia as part of European civilization was considered incorrect, as the country embodies elements of both *Western* and *Eastern civilizations*. These reflections were subsequently expanded upon in the works of the *Eurasianists* (Vakhitov, 2025, pp. 67-75). Additionally, the antagonism between the *Romano-Germanic civilization* and the *Greco-Slavic civilization* suggested the inevitability of a military confrontation in Europe, rooted in the differences between the two groups (Malinov, 2022, pp. 67-87).

This section examined another stage in the development of ideological thought in the Russian Empire. By the mid-19th century, the ideas of groups such as *Slavophilism* and *Westernism* had gained widespread circulation. Despite the *Slavophiles*' commitment to preserving cultural and national identity, both groups were classified as broadly liberal in orientation. This was because both *Slavophiles* and *Westernists* advocated for the modernization of the state. In the case of the *Slavophiles*, it could be argued that modernization implied a gradual introduction of innovations that would not significantly undermine Russian distinctiveness. Interestingly, from the second half of the 19th century up to the early 20th century, the ideological views of both *Westernist* and *Slavophile* adherents underwent significant transformations. *Westernism*, exemplified by *Boris Chicherin*, acquired a more conservative character. At the same time, *Later Slavophilism*, represented by *Vladimir Lamansky*, highlighted the existence of insurmountable contradictions between the *West (Europe)* and the *East (Russia)*, including religious and linguistic differences. During the same period, some works began to emerge that emphasized the proximity of Russia and Asia, as well as their interrelations. Regarding the *Westernists*, they came to recognize that liberalization in its pure form was difficult to achieve. This conclusion was grounded in the internal opposition within Russian society, which included individuals resorting to radical measures that were deemed incompatible with the Russian context.

5. Conclusion

So, the current study aimed to examine the ideological debates that took place among the leading thinkers of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. The *Decembrist Uprising of 1825* served as the initial point of reference for these debates, as it expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the existing internal political situation. The outcomes of the *Decembrists*' opposition activities, alongside the foreign policy context in which the Russian

Ideological Debates in the 19th-Century Russian Empire

Empire was also involved, sparked extensive discussions within Russian society. In this context, the pro-liberal stance of some representatives of public thought met resistance from *Conservatives*, who defended Russia's right to preserve its own identity. Subsequent reflections on Russia's future were continued in the works of the *Slavophiles* and *Westernists*. Although the *Slavophiles*, like the *Early Conservatives*, adhered to the necessity of preserving elements of Russian daily life and culture, they, alongside their *Westernist* counterparts, also recognized the importance of modernization as a crucial stage in historical development. One of the key aspects of modernization was the development of the *Enlightenment*, which would serve and protect Russian interests. Over time, the ideological views of both groups underwent adjustments. The *Westernists* came to realize that the adoption of *Western-style Liberalism* was problematic for Russia. By the beginning of the 20th century, the *Slavophiles* had also come to the conclusion that there were profound civilizational differences between the *West (Europe)* and the *East (Russia)*. This, in turn, led thinkers to emphasize Russia's unique position because of its historical past, geographic location between the *West* and *Asia*, and consequent cultural distinctiveness. It can be confidently asserted that debates regarding Russia's civilizational position remain relevant to this day. These reflections have become particularly significant after 1991, when Russia once again stood at a crossroads. While in the first half of the 1990s Russia sought closer ties with the *West*, by the turn of the millennium, since the ongoing ideological and political contradictions, which continue to the present day, the Russian Federation began to recognize its distinctiveness and the necessity of following its own path of development, aiming to maintain constructive dialogue with both the *West* and the *East*, of which it is part. Today, Russia's attempt to bridge the *East* and the *West* is reflected in various integration initiatives that allow it to remain one of the key global actors. Moreover, the *Pivot toward the East* and the resulting relationships, which can be characterized as relatively productive, enable Russia to secure the loyalty of a significant number of Asian countries, thereby maintaining a balance of power in its engagement with the *West*.

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