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Вячеслав Лихачев, Владимир Прибыловский. Русское Национальное Единство I: История и идеология, 1990-2000 [Viacheslav Likhachev, Vladimir Pribylovskii, Russian National Unity Vol. I: History and Ideology, 1999-2000], 308 pp.; Русское Национальное Единство II: Документы и материалы, 1990-2000. Под редакцией Вячеслава Лихачева и Владимира Прибыловского [Viacheslav Likhachev, Vladimir Pribylovskii (eds.) Russian National Unity Vol. II: Documents and sources], 272 pp., Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2005, EUR 39.90, ISBN: 3-89821-523-7 (for both volumes, pbk)

Reviewed by Mischa Gabowitsch (Berlin)

Fortunately for students of extremism and the far right, ibidem's book series on Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society is edited by Andreas Umland, himself a well-known and prolific expert in the field of post-Soviet extreme-right movements. The three books under review are part of a whole range of volumes in this series that are relevant to the topic of nationalism and xenophobia.

Viacheslav Likhachev and Vladimir Pribylovskii, probably the most knowledgeable experts on Russian extreme-right parties and groups, have produced a work that is likely to remain the definitive study of Russian National Unity for a very long time. RNU was the closest thing Russia has had to a nationwide Nazi-type paramilitary organization, and the most graphic illustration of the still-popular thesis that some kind of a Weimar scenario may be in stock for the country. Likhachev and Pribylovskii have systematised their earlier work on RNU, charting the party's history from its creation in 1990 to its dissolution into numerous splinter groups (which could have been treated in some more detail) in 2000. The sources used range from press reports and party leaflets to personal observations and interviews. Some of the data comes from Labyrinth, a database on parties and politicians in Russia and the other post-Soviet states maintained by the Panorama Centre, making it hard to trace some of the original sources. The material from that database has enabled the authors to include brief profiles of most if not all regional branches of RNU. Still, as with all organizations mainly known through unsystematic press reports and interviews, a general discussion of the respective value of different sources would have been useful, although there seems to be no reason to question the authors' use of their sources.

The second volume contains a comprehensive selection of documents, many of them previously unpublished, as well as an extensive bibliography. An index would have made the two volumes easier to use as a reference work. It is also unfortunate that the book includes no discussion of reactions to RNU in Russian society at large, or the conditions of its emergence: after all, its apparent success throughout the 1990s was largely due to extensive (and welcome) media attention to a group whose potential was obviously overestimated. Mikhail Sokolov will apparently address these issues in a forthcoming book in the same series, which will deal specifically with the larger societal context that facilitated the 'rise' of Russian National Unity and the National Bolshevik Party.