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Евгений Мороз. История «Мёртвой воды» -- от страшной сказки к большой политике. Политическое неоязычество в постсоветской России. [Evgenii Moroz, The Story of "Water of Death" – from scary tale to big politics. Political Neo-Paganism in post-Soviet Russia], Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2005, 172 pp., EUR 22.00, ISBN: 3-89821-551-2 (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.

Of the three works, the short book by Evgenii Moroz (a 65 page article plus a selection of documents) is the most original contribution to the field of nationalism studies. Moroz provides one of the best available surveys of Russian neo-paganism and describes the activities of the Dead Water/Internal Predictor group, which ran in the 2003 Duma elections under the label of Unification Party [Edinenie], garnering over 700,000 votes (1.3%), the best result of any political groupuscule. Moroz gives an account of the organisation's peculiar mix of Stalinism, neo-paganism, anti-Semitism and belief in an age-old global conspiracy against Russia. He analyses the social milieu (essentially post-Marxist academics and former military or secret service officers) that nurtures such ideologies. He also cites details about Dead Water's influence on academic curricula and the group's links with members of the political elite.

Moroz's excellent article offers much-needed background about a party that seemed to come out of nowhere just before the elections, but his short account leaves many issues open. A more detailed description of Vladimir Puzakov's Anastasiite sect, which teamed up with Dead Water in 2003, would have been useful (see Aleksandr Shubin, Khrupkost' normalizatsii, Neprikosnovenny Zapas No. 6/2003), as would have been a word or two about the international context of the neo-pagan revival, which Moroz discusses only in the context of the 1930s and 40s. Moroz has interesting things to say about the social and intellectual conditions of the emergence and spread of 'lunatic fringe' groups such as Dead Water and provides other examples, such as the pseudo-scientific torsion field theory. However, to assess the long-term impact of groups such as Dead Water one would need to compare them to the other lunatic fringe groups that abound in Russia today, from small sect-like organisations such as PORTOS to wide-spread theories such as Anatolii Fomenko's New Chronology.