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Preface

Préface

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Preface

Préface

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- 1 This special issue of *Cahiers du Monde russe* aims to, albeit in a partial way, present the new approaches to the Soviet Union at war that have developed over the last twenty years thanks to newly available sources. Numerous works on the period cover uncharted territory in areas as diverse as civilians in the war, frontoviki profiles, representations of the conflict, the latter's impact on the Soviet system, relationships between state and society, or even between men and women. However, these approaches, for the most part highly specialized, have not been put into perspective in such a way as to give a new assessment of World War II in the Soviet Union.
- 2 With that ambition in mind, we organized a conference in Paris between May 5 and May 7, 2011. The conference aimed to present the current state of research through investigations on the war itself, its outset, and its consequences on "high Stalinism."¹ Needless to say, the success of the call for papers² attests of the significance of these research fields for international historians. Our selection was limited to a very small number of contributions. This entailed the rejection of otherwise highly relevant approaches such as regional studies dealing with the rear areas or territories of the front. Similarly, certain highly researched topics such as remembrance or memorial sites had to be ignored so that the program could stay within the boundaries of the topic.
- 3 The issue presents the proceedings of the conference. However, the articles reflect only part of the numerous themes that were actually discussed. They are arranged both thematically and chronologically.
- 4 By way of foreword, we are using Oleg Khlevniuk's contribution, a survey of the evolution of Stalinist dictatorship during the conflict. Khlevniuk's description of the main archival funds of the period, combined with the presentation of the great tendencies in the structural reorganization of power, clarifies Stalin's role and importance during the war, the role played by his entourage in the transformation of the country's political administration and the transition toward wartime organization. The internal and external consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the forms taken by the

collaboration between the two temporary allies, the scenarios underlying the various territorial annexations and the place of nationality policy in the development of Stalin's policy in the early stages of the conflict – these and other topics have been revisited in the study of the two years preceding the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Sabine Dullin and Serhii Plokhy reinterpret the orientations of Stalin's policy between 1939 and 1941 by studying a combination of different interpretation and action paradigms, and the centrality of the nationality question. These two contributions show how instrumental nationality policy was in fashioning the Soviet leaders' representations and how it influenced their behavior both at home and abroad, determining numerous practices in the context of an imminent war. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa makes the link between the prewar and wartime periods by studying the poorly known relations between the Soviet Union and Japan. Last, David Wolff addresses the Soviet Union's international policy in the immediate aftermath of the war in a study of Soviet expansionist plans and realizations. The author describes Stalin's redrawing of the country's western and eastern borders in order to show the different strategic interests defended by Stalin and his role in fanning conflicts related to territory delimitation, particularly in Central Europe.

- 5 In the second part of the volume, wartime government practices are studied through highly diversified approaches. In a study of the propaganda deployed in the newly annexed western territories, Serhii Plokhy shows how the Soviet state used the specious argument of the role of nationalities in the construction of the country and the national liberation question to justify its current expansion. This most singular period preceding the invasion of western territories by the Wehrmacht harbingered the various scenarios of the Soviet Union at war. In recent decades, historiography has focused on how the conflict progressed in occupied regions, and has shed light on numerous hitherto unclear areas ranging from patterns of resistance and collaboration to everyday life under the occupation. These new approaches have deeply renewed our understanding of the events of the period, particularly the Holocaust on the Eastern Front. Parallel to these significant advances in the history of German-occupied territories are numerous works addressing changes in Soviet governance in the rear. They are given precedence in this volume. Yoram Gorlizki presents these mutations through a study of the implementation of the "extraordinary administration system" and its incidence on the behavior of local party committees – from political competition on the local scale to the way in which obkomy dealt with new economic governance tasks. Gorlizki argues that if party committees first offered fiefdom-like resistance to the agents of the extraordinary administration system, their failure in managing the economic development led to their relegation to a purely ideological role at the end of the war. Vanessa Voisin examines the mutations that took place inside the party from a different angle. She proposes a rereading of the loyalty criteria applied during the Kalinin party purges subsequent to the liberation of the region. The lack of activists notwithstanding, the purge was a priority, and its conduct appealed to different sets of values. Even though the applied criteria revived an archetypal conception of the bolshevik activist, the modes of verification of individual loyalty underwent drastic changes, turning into a real scrutiny of conscience and leading to contradictory results in a region profoundly destabilized at the end of the war.
- 6 Sofiia Grachova addresses the specificities of wartime government practices by studying the policy of legal proceedings and its evolution as concerns inquiries into propaganda and counterrevolutionary agitation charges. This investigation helps us understand both the significant increase of criticism against the regime during the first two years of the

war and the dilemma that the judiciary was facing, caught between severe repression and the need to preserve a gravely affected society, from the rear areas to the front.

- 7 Last, Eren Murat Tasar addresses the question of the numerous expectations that the end of the war raised in the Soviet population by studying the encounter of Islam and Soviet patriotism. The populations of Kyrgyzstan interpreted the various measures taken during the war as a favorable context for a new adaptation of Islam to the Soviet system. The author examines these expectations and what fostered them, and reaches a more general conclusion about the “confiscated victory” and the return to a social and political control that the war had helped loosen.
- 8 War violence – ranging from the sudden upheavals suffered by society to mass crimes – is one of the most important fields of research on the period and is part of a larger historical investigation running across research on Europe and the world at war. This third thematic set opens with Oleg Budnitskii’s essay on the changes that took place in the relationships between men and women as they were perceived by combatants and described in their diaries. These entries reveal an extraordinary transformation in women’s sexual life akin to liberation at times or to a new form of slavery, particularly in the case of those who joined the frontoviki. Despite the depth of women’s involvement at the front, their presence by the side of male combatants has received little if any, recognition, and their experience may have jeopardized their postwar social reintegration. Mie Nakachi continues the reflection on the changes that took place in gender relations by focusing on the role of the war in the mutations that took place within the family.
- 9 Soviet legal sources have long remained unexplored terrain, being considered as the articulation of a totalitarian system producing a political and mainly imaginary legalist discourse. This mistrust was due to a genuine ignorance of their importance and of the tensions and contradictions that run through them. Their use has considerably increased in the last years, as Voisin’s and Grachova’s contributions demonstrate. Nathalie Moine’s analysis of the mass arson of villages by the German occupant, which figures among war crimes, deeply questions the contribution of legal sources. Her exploration of the Extraordinary State Commission’s communiqués and postwar trials archives presents a reflection on sources and the phenomenon under study, whose magnitude has long remained unknown. In the process, her study evaluates the patterns and levels of violence, which varied in intensity from one region to another, and left some regions – Bielorussia, for instance – particularly devastated.
- 10 The gathering and analysis of actors’ or victims’ testimonies is one of the new approaches to the period that has remarkably developed over the last decades. Alexander Von Plato’s collection of narratives on forced labor throughout Europe is particularly representative of this current.³ In the results of a series of interviews conducted in the Donbass region in Ukraine, Tanja Penter presents the diversity of personal experiences in a population that has partly been deported to Germany, known the occupation of the region, witnessed the Holocaust and/or antipartisan repression, and has long been branded for having been in occupied territory, regardless of what individual behaviors may have been during the war.
- 11 This issue naturally presents a very small facet of a deeply changing field. Let us conclude on what is missing. Our call for papers mentioned several topics which have not elicited proposals and are still little or poorly understood.

- 12 A detailed study of how Soviet society lived through the war in the rear and on the front would allow us better to appreciate and understand the role of the conflict in the reconfiguration of the Soviet Union and the characterization of “high Stalinism.” There still remain numerous questions on the immediate aftermath of the war – as for instance, the re-Sovietization of western territories, which was in some way a “war after the war.” The dramatic situation of a victorious country that was nonetheless terribly bruised and battered after years of war, with 25 million homeless and 27 million casualties, deserves careful scrutiny. The magnitude of the disaster was such that the way in which the society recovered, the sacrifices to which it had to consent and the ordeals that it suffered, as for instance the 1946 famine, still remain an enigma.
- 13 Scholars still have difficulty evaluating the unprecedented population movements that followed the war – re-evacuations from the rear areas; massive repatriations of Ostarbeiter, prisoners of war, and demobilized soldiers in western territories; transfers of nationalities as part of the redefinition of borders; the return of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust; and the handling of refugees. To this formidable “men moving,” one must add the new deportations of ethnic groups. What changes did the war effect on the “Gulag” and, more generally, the Soviet “world of concentration camps?”
- 14 This conclusion intends to show how numerous and fascinating the newly opened avenues of research are, and how pressing the need to gather historians working on different sources, particularly German and Soviet ones. This issue marks a step forward in this renewal and is an invitation to pursue innovative research.
- 15 Last, we cannot conclude without including Marc Ferro’s introductory talk. Ferro is one of the foremost specialists of World War II and the Soviet Union. His work has left a deep impact on the research focusing on the areas where these two important fields meet. We are happy to present the spontaneous testimony of a major historian who has greatly inspired our research on twentieth-century wars.
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NOTES

1. The program is available on <http://cercec.ehess.fr/document.php?id=1540>. The members of the conference’s scientific committee were Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Alain Blum, Dietrich Beyrau, Sabine Dullin, Catherine Gousseff, Andrea Graziosi, Christian Ingrao, Oleg Khlevniuk, Mark Kramer, Nathalie Moine, Jean-Christophe Romer, Andrei Sorokin, Alexander Vatlin, David Wolff. Funding for this conference was made possible by grants from the French Embassy in Ukraine (Kiev); CERCEC (EHESS; CNRS, Paris); le Centre franco-russe de recherche en sciences sociales et humaines (Moscow); CNRS (Paris); CRH (EHESS; CNRS, Paris); the Davis Center (Harvard University, Cambridge, MA); FMSH (Paris), IHTP (CNRS); INED (Paris); INSHS (CNRS); IRICE (université de Paris 1; CNRS, Paris); IRSEM (Ministry of Defense, Paris); Kaken, a Grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, administered by the Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University; Mairie de Paris; ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (Paris), Ministero dell’Università e della Ricerca, PRIN “Ridefinire la nazione diritti di cittadinanza et minoranze nelle crisi dello stato (1914-1999).”

2. We received 220 proposals from 20 different countries. A large number of them attested the deep renewal of this research field. Unfortunately, we selected only 30 contributions even though many of them were of great interest.

3. Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, Christoph Thonfeld, eds., *Hitlers Sklaven: lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangsarbeit im internationalen Vergleich* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008).

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