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## Foreword

Igor Torbakov is a unique author and scholar of Russia and its East European and Eurasian neighbourhoods. He is of a kind that graduate schools do not produce nowadays. At a time when most political scientists—a cohort that is supposed to enlighten us on issues of the region’s political development—have taken refuge in model-building, while most historians concentrate on political, social and cultural processes that have completed their cycle of development, Torbakov brings the methods of both fields to the analysis of current events. He does so in order to answer questions about the present that neither of these fields can deal with on its own. The result is a history of the present, a penetrating analysis that draws on the past to explain current issues and developments.

Torbakov belongs to the generation of scholars who in the 1990s started the process of the transformation of the field of Soviet politics into a new field of Eurasian studies. That transformation turned scholars of the region’s pre-Soviet past into a cohort better equipped to understand and explain current developments than experts who had focused exclusively on Soviet history and culture. Torbakov, whose graduate studies were directed by one of the leading East European early modernists, the late Yaroslav Isaevych, found himself uniquely qualified to take part in this dramatic transformation of the field—the process that sought to overcome traditional shortcomings of Soviet historiography by reassessing the political importance of different areas and periods of research and opening the field to the “foreign” influences. As is apparent from the essays collected in this volume, Torbakov is perfectly at home with a vast body of Western literature on politics, history and anthropology that deals with subjects far beyond the immediate focus of his research. Yet he has never left the “home” of the literature produced in the region and draws on both bodies of scholarship to enrich his interpretation of the intellectual and political developments that he studies.

The essays collected in this volume are as much about empire as about the current problems preoccupying the societies that

emerged out of the imperial ruins. As Torbakov reads present-day Russian and regional struggles, the empire continues to maintain its intellectual grip on its children and grandchildren, whether they seek to emulate or reject its legacy. The fall of the Soviet Union removed the cladding of Marxism and the internationalist ideology inspired by it from the framework of the Soviet state, exposing the imperial elements in its structure and, most importantly, highlighting the importance of studying pre-Soviet imperial thinking and cultural tradition in order to reconceptualize post-Soviet space. In the ideological vacuum of the post-Soviet era, the region's political and cultural elites tried to get their bearings by grasping for pre-Soviet and non-Soviet ideas, tropes and paradigms. That development stimulated scholarly research on the intellectual and cultural legacy of empire—the phenomenon fully represented in this volume.

Igor Torbakov's keen interest in the Eurasianists and Eurasianism, exemplified in a number of essays collected here, reflects another trajectory of the field as a whole. As Western academic institutions sought frantically to rethink and rebrand the field of Soviet studies after the collapse of the USSR, looking for a term and a concept that would encompass the territory amassed by the Russian Empire and claimed by its Soviet successor, quite a few scholars gravitated toward the intellectual legacy of the Eurasianists. For Torbakov, however, interest in that legacy turned out to be something more than participation in a general academic trend. It was informed by his own quasi-émigré experience of living and writing in Western Europe (broadly defined) and Turkey, which had been "inhabited" by the fathers of the Eurasianist movement.

The history and current state of the Russian-Ukrainian relations is another important topic of the volume. Ukraine, a real or imagined homeland for many Eurasianist thinkers and a key element in any mental geography of imperial, post-imperial, Soviet, or post-Soviet space, is also Igor Torbakov's very real homeland—his place of birth and a country in which a good part of his intellectual maturation took place. Thus, his essays on Russo-Ukrainian relations and their role in the self-identification and



positioning of Russia and Ukraine with regard to culturally constructed Europe and Eurasia are more than a response to the growing demand for expertise on the interaction of the two largest Slavic nations. They offer an engaged analysis of intellectual and cultural concepts that, for Torbakov, entail moral dilemmas and arouse emotions. The latter never distort his balanced and well-argued texts, but his personal engagement with the subjects he researches makes his analysis more profound and incisive.

If Igor Torbakov's essays on Eurasianism, as well as on Russia's "Ukraine problem" and Ukraine's "Russia problem," reflect the outcomes of his own grappling with history, the essays on the politics of history presented in this volume allow Torbakov to look broadly at the way in which post-imperial societies in general and Russia in particular deal with their past, select usable strategies, and discard faulty or downright self-defeating ones. Here, too, Torbakov emerges as much more than a skilled and dispassionate coroner conducting an autopsy on empire and seeking out imperial DNA in post-imperial societies. To develop this metaphor, he is engaged in what may be called genetic engineering of the new post-imperial body of knowledge and identity. Igor Torbakov is a scholar who can engage in intellectual battle while remaining above it. As the essays collected in this volume demonstrate, he is highly adroit in managing that difficult intellectual feat.

**Serhii Plokhy**  
**Harvard University**