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Dedovshchina : From Military to Society

Introduction by Françoise Daucé and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (1st Issue Editors)

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“*Dedovshchina* : from Military to Society”

1 The term “*Dedovshchina*” is widespread in post-Soviet Russia but difficult to translate into foreign languages. Indeed, translation itself does not convey either the polysemy of this word nor reflect the complexity of practices it refers to. *Dedovshchina* is not only hazing, bullying or bizutage. Formed from the root “ded”, which means “grand-father” in Russian, *dedovshchina* is manifested as violence exerted by older conscripts on younger ones. It is a military phenomenon but influenced by social, political and economic realities of Russia. Inherited from the Soviet period, *dedovshchina* is nowadays nurtured with post-Soviet practices and new values.

2 The purpose of this first issue of PIPSS is to provide insight into the problem of «*dedovshchina*». Based on scientific research and practical experience, we wish to explain the nature of the problem, its origins and how it is being managed. We intend, not only to study *dedovshchina* as a military phenomenon, but also to place it in the broader context of Russian society today. *Dedovshchina* appears at the centre of tensions between conflicting trends in Russia today: liberalism, communitarianism, capitalism, and patriotism. Is *dedovshchina* comparable to violence in other state institutions (prisons, schools, etc.) ? Is *dedovshchina* a specifically Russian problem, or is harassment of young soldiers a universal phenomenon? Consequently, and to conform to the plan of the journal, we provide a comparative and multi-disciplinary analysis of the problem.

3 The papers published in this issue deal with the following questions:

Dedovshchina and social violence

4 This first part is dedicated to the sociological dimension of *dedovshchina*. In his paper, an original translation of the last chapter of his book *The Anthropology of Regimented Society. Relations of Dominance in Social Interactions among Russian Soldiers* (published in Moscow in 2002), Konstantin Bannikov analyzes the consequences of the dissemination of archaic violence produced by the Russian army among the society. Anna Lebedev, in “L’*épreuve du réel. Comprendre la tolérance des familles vis-à-vis des mauvais traitements subis par les conscrits de l’armée russe*» studies families’ letters to the Moscow-based Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers in order to understand the perception of military violence in Russian society. She deals with the ambiguities of Russian society wherein *dedovshchina* is considered as the principal reason for draft evasion but accepted as a social necessity too. Anton Oleynik, one of the best specialist of Russian prisons, proposes in “*Dedovshchina* as an element of the ‘small society’: evidence from Russia and other countries” a comparison of informal relationships among prisoners and among conscripts. His concept of “small society” is useful to describe what Bannikov calls “archaic rituals” in the army. Thanks to these three contributions, *dedovshchina* appears as a useful case for understanding the transformation of social realities in post-Soviet Russia.

Dedovshchina frameworks in Russia

5 The second part of the issue is devoted to *dedovshchina* frameworks in Russia. Indeed, this phenomenon can only be understood in the more global context of Russian history and culture. Vadim Mikhailin, in “Russian Army *Mat* as a Means of Code Speaking”, shows that language carries on a rather specific function connected with creating a man’s identity as a ‘military’, i.e. a member of the armed forces. The military milieu has always been absolutely adequate for the ‘*mat*-speaking’ (slang). In “*Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers under Gorbachev”, Julie Elkner provides an historical account of *dedovshchina* in the transformation of the Soviet military in the late 1980s.

Dedovshchina and hazing abroad

6 In order to participate in the debate about the specificity of *dedovshchina* in Russia, two papers are devoted to foreign cases. The first one is devoted to a former Soviet-ised army, that of the Czech Republic. The second article is devoted to a Western European army, this time that of the United Kingdom. In her paper on Czech conscripts, Hana Cervinkova shows social phenomena close to Russian ones: army service is informally divided into four separate parts and the person's place in the hierarchy is fully determined by the time that they have spent in the military. This reality clearly echoes the Russian army. However, the military service in the Czech army appears as to be wasted time for young people and will soon be given up in the framework of NATO. Will professionalization of the army resolve hazing problems? In his article on the British army, James Wither suggests that recruits in professional armies can be as vulnerable to mistreatment as those in conscript militaries. Because basic training deliberately isolates soldiers from wider society and necessarily stresses physical toughness, it intrinsically creates an environment in which bullying can occur.

7 These papers are enriched with a selected bibliography on *dedovshchina* and with book reviews relating to this theme. We hope they will usefully contribute to the better knowledge of post-Soviet society and military, seeing as the Army, to paraphrase Trotsky, "suffering from all [society's] diseases; usually at a higher temperature".

8 Françoise Daucé (1st Issue Editor)

9 Elisabeth Sieca-Kozłowski (Chief Editor & 1st Issue Editor)

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