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Traces of Russia in Boston Bombing

By Georgy Bovt

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When television footage of the explosions in Boston was first broadcast, I happened to notice that one of the blasts occurred directly under the Russian flag. (Flags were posted from every country whose citizens were taking part in the marathon.) But I did not attach any significance to it at the time. After all, how could there be any connection between Russia and the events in Boston?

Then I saw a link on Facebook that led me to an online forum where people were discussing, in all earnestness, the idea that corrupt businesspeople and officials responsible for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi were behind the attack. The theory is that their own corruption had made it impossible to finish preparations on schedule, and that the Boston bombing would give them a legitimate pretext for raising the threat of terrorism and moving the venue for the Games while pocketing the money that Moscow has already poured into the project. This whole discussion struck me as conspiratorial nonsense, as the latest evidence that some of my compatriots still believe that the sun revolves around the Earth and that everything that happens in the world is either an organized plot against Russia or else the result of corrupt Russian officials pursuing their own selfish interests.

While I was reading that drivel, I lost sight of one thing: Many of the millions of people conversing through social networks are ignorant and uninformed, and so it is inevitable that any manner of delusional thinking will eventually gain such a following as to become world news. That is how the "Russian factor" in the Boston bombing first appeared.

The Czech ambassador in Washington hurriedly issued an official statement in which he asked Americans not to confuse the Czech Republic with Chechnya. "The Czech Republic and Chechnya are two very different entities," the message read. "The Czech Republic is a Central European country. Chechnya is a part of Russia." The reason for his concern is that many social network users do not differentiate between Chechnya and the Czech Republic. For those who do know the difference, the U.S. media has clarified that the brothers and suspected terrorists Dzhokar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev are from a "region near Chechnya."

The reason they are not more specific is that Americans are generally familiar with Chechnya — thanks to reporting from two past wars there — but know nothing about nearby Dagestan, the region where the brothers were living when their parents applied for and received political asylum in the U.S. They know even less about Kyrgyzstan, the former Soviet Central Asian Republic to which the Tsarnaev family was deported during the rule of former Soviet leader Josef Stalin and where the brothers were born and spent their early childhood.

The average person thinks that since Chechnya is in Russia, the Boston terrorists suspects must be Russians. A Russian friend of mine planning a business trip to Boston might therefore be justified in fearing that U.S. passport control officers will question him closely concerning the purpose of his visit. Russia's image in the U.S. has never been good during the 10 years President Vladimir Putin has been in power, and now a pair of "Russian immigrants" blow up innocent people on the streets of Boston. That will only tarnish Russia's image even further. That is probably why Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov rushed to write on his social network page that the Tsarnaev brothers have no connection to Chechnya, that they grew up in the U.S. — where, in fact, they did spend the last 10 years — and that the roots of this problem must be found there.

Of course, political leaders are all very clear on the situation. Putin called U.S. President Barack Obama to offer help in the investigation of the terrorist attack and to remind him of the importance of cooperation in the fight against global terrorism. We don't know if Obama reminded Putin that in January, Moscow cancelled a number of agreements on sharing each country's law enforcement resources and information that could have reinforced the fight against terrorism. After all, greater mutual trust engenders more effective cooperation. Nor is it clear whether either of them mentioned the fact that in 2011 the FBI questioned Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the eldest of the brothers, at the request of the Federal Security Service. The FSB was looking into his possible connection to Chechnya's criminal underground. But it is also possible that the FBI did not interrogate Tamerlan as thoroughly as it might have because the U.S. media at the time portrayed Chechen insurgents as "freedom fighters" resisting Putin's authoritarian Russia. The family was probably given refugee status for having been "persecuted" by Russia.

In any case, one series of propagandistic stereotypes and myths has now spawned another set of untruths. Together, they contribute to a situation in which civilized states have become hostages to their own political correctness and mutual distrust, rendering them helpless

to present a unified front against Islamic radicalism and terrorism. That movement sets out to destroy all of Judeo-Christian civilization, most of which lies in the West, but part of which is also in most of Russia.

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