

Russian Emigration on The Balkans: The “Limnos Episode” (On Memoirs and Verses of Representatives of White Army)

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Abstract: The article traces the role island Limnos (Greece) in the fates of representatives of “white movement” which has arisen after revolution in Russia in 1917 and during civil war. Parts of Russian Army were on Limnos since February 1920 till November 1921. It represents the results of analysis of memoirs and verses by some representatives of Russian Army, among which Ivan Kalinin, Erast Giatzintov, Ivan Sagatsky, Nikolay Turoverov. The author of the paper revealed features of the description of landscapes of Limnos in memoirs and verses those who passed through Limnos. It is shown what difficulties were endured by Russian Army on Limnos (cold, hunger, isolation from the world). It is proved that the Russian Army under the direction of Wrangel has shown moral courage, unity, patriotism. Authors of memoirs and verses concern problems of mutual relations of Russians and Greeks, the inhabitants of Limnos, what has found reflection in various forms of spiritual and cultural dialogue.

Key words: Russia – Greece, Russian emigration of the first wave, memoirs, poetry, features of a landscape, the image of difficulties and courage, spiritual and cultural dialogue

Introduction

It is commonly known that Limnos (Λήμνος) is an island in the Aegean Sea, belonging to Greece. Why in this case can that far away Greek island be called «Russian»? Why today for the Russian mind is Limnos a short, but exciting, special chapter in the history of the civil war in Russia, that had began after the year 1917? The answers to this question can be found in the present article.

Well, as early as in the beginning of 1920 during the battles with Red Army the armed forces of the South Russia under the command of Anton Denikin suffered a defeat after defeat. General Denikin took a decision to transfer abroad the injured and ill military men, as well as members of their families and of those who kept fighting. The first ships with the ill and injured, including to Limnos, left Novorossiisk in the middle of January, 1920. Later, since November 1920 till October 1921 on Limnos so-called «Limnos sitting» of Cossack army of General Petr Wrangel was taking place: more than 24 thousands of Kuban, Don, Terek, Astrakhan Cossacks found themselves there after Crimean evacuation. Thus, Limnos became the focus of the tragedy of civil war and at the same time – the symbol of courage, stout-heartedness, patriotism. We would try to prove this, basing on the memoirs and verses by the representatives of Russian army (White Army), passed through Limnos – Ivan Kalinin, Ivan Sagatsky, Erast Giazintov, Nikolay Turoverov. Besides, we would refer to the content of the book of command staff of Don’s Corps «Cossacks in Chataldge and Limnos in 1920-1921».

Limnos in the ancient Greek mythology and in the history of Christianity. Ivan Kalinin about Hephaestus and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker

Limnos was known as an island of Hephaestus, a god of Fire. According to legend, Hephaestus was born ugly and lame, and the baby was thrown by his mother Hera from the Olympus to the Earth on the Limnos island. Limnos people saved Hephaestus, and to express his gratitude he taught them the basic metallurgy and blacksmith's work.

Limnos was also visited by Odysseus. When Argonauts headed by Jason during their quest for the Golden Fleece, arrived to the island, it was ruled by women. Ipsipila, the head of Limnos Amazons, wanted to make armed attack on them, but was persuaded to admit them in peace. In honour of arrival of the heroes Ipsipila established competition on Quinquertium – pentathlon.

The island Limnos appeared to be connected also with the history of Christianity, namely – with the destiny of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. There is a legend, that during the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, when Arius’s heretical teachings were criticized, saint bishop Nicholas,

willing to protect the purity of Orthodoxy, hit Arius on his cheek. Council's Fathers considered this conduct redundant, withdrew advantages of his pontifical rank – omophorion – and locked him up in the prison tower on Limnos. However, soon they were convinced in rightness of saint bishop Nicholas and freed him.

It is interesting that those facts became the object of portrayal and renderings of one of the «Limnos sitting»'s participants Ivan Kalinin. In his most exciting memoirs he wrote about the island in the context of the history of culture and Christianity the following: «the Limnos island extruded from the abyss of the Aegean Sea not far from the Dardanelles estuary. <...> Greece mythology had given this clot of lava to the possession of Hephaestus, the god of blacksmith's work. If we believe to Gomer and Hesiod, permanent local winds create here giant bellows, which are blown on the highest mountain of the island, Thermos, by a lame god-blacksmith. There had also been preserved the godly legends from the very early times of Christianity. There had been suffering Nicholas the Wonderworker, "rule of faith and an example of meekness", who had been sent here in exile in 325 for scandal behavior and scuffle with a heretic Arius during the Council in Nicea» (Kalinin 2003: 335).

Limnos «pages» in Russian and world history

Limnos with some lines of its history is connected with the history of Russia. In 1770 the Russian fleet of the First Archipelago Expedition under the guidance of count Alexey Orlov, what had got a victory in the Battle of Cesme earlier at the same year, laid siege and took the Castro castle (Myrina) and had been using Myrina a for some time as resting base. On the 19th of June (the 1st of July) in 1807 between the coasts of Limnos and the peninsula Aion-Oros (Athos) the battle of Russian and Turkey fleets took place, which went down in history as the Athos battle. The Russian fleet was commanded by Vice-admiral Dmitry Seniavin. Nowadays in Myrina, the capital of Limnos, on one of the embankments there situated a monument to the Russian naval mariners, who liberated Limnos from the Turks – it is a monument to count Orlov and vice-admiral Seniavin.

During the First World War on the island the garrison of Atlanta forces was situated. The garrison disposition on the island in 1915 was supervised by Winston Churchill. Limnos is sadly connected with Dardanelles Campaign, or Gallipoli battle, which had begun in the morning of the 19th of February in 1915. The allied forces suffered a defeat, the Turks got a victory. Dozens of thousands of the British, the Scotch, the Australian, the New Zealanders, the Sikhs, the French, the Arabs were lost during the fight in the Gallipoli peninsula. Nowadays on entering the Moudros town there situated a military cemetery, where the participants of that battle were buried.

After the First World War on Limnos the English and French armies stayed to control the island. In 1920 Ivan Kalinin wrote about the international state of the island, that it was «most absurd. It constituted a part of the possessions of Hellene's state and at the same time was rented by the Englishmen. However the French, again appeared on the island due to our presence, found themselves the owners» (1; 337). Precisely this was the situation on Limnos when in winter, and later in autumn of 1920 refugees from Russia and the Cossack troops of Wrangel's Army starting arriving there.

The year of 1920: arriving of the Russians to Limnos

Thus, the first ships with the injured and the ill started leaving for Limnos from Novorossiysk as early as from the middle of January 1920. After that the ships from Odessa and Sevastopol joined them. During the First World War on the island appeared mostly the injured, the ill, the cripples, women, children and the civilian.

The second wave of emigration to Limnos was formed in November 1920, when the units of Wrangel's Army left the Crimea. The decision was taken to send to Limnos first the Kuban Cossack corps, and later – the Don Cossack corps, that was previously located in Turkey, in Chataldge. Precisely at that time the island was destined to become «asylum» for a part of the Russian army. The approaching to the island is shown in the memoirs of the military people in the following way: according to the description of Ivan Kalinin, the ships were coming to «a spider-like island, not more than 25 versts long» [about 25 km] (Kalinin 2003: 336.); Ivan Sagatsky's imagination gave birth to other associations, and he assured that «its outlines looked like a irregular shaped human heart» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 402).

Thus, the Russians found themselves on Limnos. Hardly could a great many of the Cossacks know about the existence of the Limnos island on the earth, and surely nobody had ever supposed that on the island he would happen to suffer sorrowful fate of exile. An unknown poet-emigrant, whose lines Leonid Reshetnikov quotes in his book «Russian Limnos» (Reshetnikov 2009: 12), wrote afterwards:

On those islands we began our roams,
As if by distant voice we were called,
And there happened parting with Russia ...

The Russian had to settle in tent camps, that they had to pitch themselves under severe wind. The Kuban Cossacks pitched tent camp in a desolate and waterless district Kaloeraki. Erast Giazintov remembered: «We were disembarked in the evening, given folded tents, and we hurryingly set them up on stoned and spent a first night» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 412). The whole territory, taken by the Cossacks, was surrounded by French army, mostly by the Senegalese and the Moroccans. The Don Cossacks Corp, arrived in December 1920, located in another camp – along the hill-sides at Mudros, on the other from Kaloeraki side of Big gulf of Mudros. There they also strengthened their tents. «It was hard work; <...> the camp was situated along the mountain slope, and we had to level the ground and ditch in rocky soil ...» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 299), – this is the way to describe the situation by people on Limnos at that time.

Limnos as «Death island»

The Greek island Limnos, known in mythology as Hephaestus's island, and certainly beautiful and picturesque in ones own way, among the Russian emigration was called differently – the Death island. For many Russian refugees and 24 thousands of Kuban, Don, Terek, Astrakhan Cossacks that picturesque corner of the world became a real hell.

The island greeted the Russians inhospitably. They saw it rocky, unoccupied and blown with the winds. The book of command staff of Don's Corps «Cossacks in Chataldge and Limnos in 1920-1921» reads: «The look of island was uncheerful. Small mountains, scarcely having any vegetation, of indefinite, isabelline colour, boarded a huge bay, absurdly hulked up one on another and in the distance died away with sea-fog. That is all. No forest, no high or projecting mountain, nothing to catch an eye» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 320).

Memoirists note that most torturous were days when severe wind were blowing. According to Ivan Kalinin's statement, «the main enemies of refugees were winds ...» (Kalinin 2003; 339). Erast Giazintov noted: «Terrible wind on the rocky Limnos's coasts was the bane of our life» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 412).

The winter was especially difficult. In common memoirs of the Don Corps we found the following lines: «... Limnos winter was approaching. It rained more frequently, sometimes was snowing, and northeast wind became stronger and more fretful, severer. Sometimes it gained such strength that tore off tents and pulled apart old half-rotted clothes» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 301). «Terrible wind on the rocky Limnos's coasts was the bane of our life», – echoes Erast Giazintov (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 412).

Against the background of difficult climate conditions the Cossacks lodging looked pitiable. Tents, «Limnos houses», are a special theme in the memoirs of military men. The description of the tents in which the refugees were to lodge gives us the opportunity to feel the tragedy of the situation: «The incomers were partially lodged in tents, that were given by the French in limited quantity, <...>, besides, many tents were ragged, halve-rotted, providing no protection from wind or rain <...>. Due to the absence of construction materials and glasses, those bunk houses were dark, cold in winter, in summer <...> – stuffy because of heating of metal parts» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 299). The memoirists noted that in winter «due to continuous rains the underground waters close to the surface splayed out, the moisture in tents gradually turns into permanent mud. <...> In heavy rains large steams of water, coming from mountains, overwhelmed the camp, despite the numerous ditches» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 301-302).

In autumn, in winter and early in spring the Russians emigrants were tortured with cold. They had to take care of getting the firing. «The situation with firing was bad. On the island there were no forests. Both aboriginals and new-comers went to the mountains for «koluka» – scrubby thorny shrub. The Greeks loaded their donkeys with those unpleasant burdens, the Russian – their backs», – Ivan Kalinin wrote (Kalinin 2003: 340).

On Limnos the Russian were dreadfully starving. It was more torturous against unsettled living and hard climate. Erast Giazintov remembered «extremely short rations», distributed by the French: «For a tent (eight officers or soldiers) we were given one can of sweetened condensed milk (so that one person got about one spoon), extremely insignificant quantity of tinned meat, kidney beans, lens or something like this and little bread » (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 412). Ivan

Sagatsky wrote in his dairy: «People wasted away and weakened from bad food» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 405).

Let us note that the Russian on Limnos faced not only material difficulties, but also with non-material ordeals: informational «blockade», ideological «attacks» from the allies' side. We refer to the lines from the book of command staff of Don's Corps «Cossacks in Chataldge and Limnos in 1920-1921»: «The life was difficult, but the complete detachment from the world seemed more painful; there came no news from outside, not a single Russian newspaper was delivered to Limnos at that time. On a wild island, with desert rocky mountains, from all sides surrounded by water, the Cossacks felt like in prison» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 293).

Allies' active campaign on deconcentration of Russian army, but actually on its demolition contributed to the depressive mood of the army. The French, not willing to support Russian Army any more, tried to demoralize it and «disperse». According to Ivan Sagatsky's words, «there was posted an order by General Brousseau, the French governor of the island, that stated that France did not recognized the Russian Wrangel's Army and on that reason the French command took a decision to feed the Russians only till the 1st of April, because it was not able to support such a large army. The French government stops giving credits and assistance to General Wrangel in his actions against the Soviet system. The Russian officers were offered either 1) to return to the Soviet Russia, or 2) go to work to Brazil, or 3) provide for their living by themselves» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 395).

The general mood of the Russians on Limnos was certainly depressed and gloomy. «Everyone was hungry, bitter and uncommunicative», – states Ivan Sagatsky (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 401).

Spiritual opposition of the Russian on Limnos

Nevertheless, despite all the impossible difficulties that the Russian faced on Limnos, they kept resisting to the circumstances. The island turned out to be hell where their resistance to it was effected. «Limnos sitting», which is better to call «Limnos standing», is an example of strength of mind, courage, will. And – an attempt to save its identity. Leonid Reshetnikov wrote: «Huge tent camps were living – they prayed, worked, studied» (Reshetnikov 2009: 32).

The Russian's faith played a great part in their opposition to the circumstances on Limnos. It spiritually guided the refugees' will.

Every day was opened and finished with the regiment prayer: «...“uprisal” was sounded <...> units lined up at color line. The camp stood still. Communal prayer was singing», «At eight o'clock <...> regiments lined up for inspection <...>. “Daybreak” was clearly beaten throughout the calmed down camps and further on, over the mountains and the bay, the prayer out of thousands of bosoms was running harmoniously and nobly» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 337-338, 339).

Church was of great importance in the life of Limnos. In every regiment the churches were organized by Cossacks' and officers' initiative. Those were tent and bunk house churches. Out of incidental materials they built altars, for icon-stand private and family icons were given. This is the way one of Limnos tent churches looked like: «In a large tent a church was created. The icon-stand, lampads and all the churchware were made of incidental materials, out of sheets, blankets, can boxes» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 295).

The Russians also visited Greek orthodox churches in Mudros town, namely, – the Cathedral of the Annunciation and the Church of Holy Archangels. The Russians were glad to hear prayers in Old Church Slavonic during the service in the Cathedral of the Annunciation.

The old church of the Holy Archangels in fact was presented to the Russains by the Greeks. According to the remembrances of the “Russian Limnosers”, «the Greeks gave an old church in Mudros town at the disposal of Russian clergy, where the service was hold according to Russian tradition, by Russian clergy and with Russian chorus. <...> The abandoned church was put in order, washed, cleaned from longstanding dust; the ancient, magnificent carving icon-stand was renewed, icons were placed in dehiscent hollows, thanks to this the church looked cosy» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 336).

Religious holidays, celebrated by the Russians on Limnos, were times when their patriot feelings dawned in especially acute way, the belonging to Russia felt more deeply. The holidays gave spiritual impulses, that saved from despair and melancholy. The memoirs of the Russian army representatives witness that Easter became the holiday celebrated on Limnos with special warmth. The description of Easter is filled with flickering feelings: «Easter was celebrated nicely. Morning Easter prayer went on the ascent, lightly and joyfully. For the first day after a fast lots of Easter cakes and

coloured eggs were ready» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 336-337). Ivan Sagatsky pathetically remembered: «On Easter Imperial Cossacks had morning prayer in their camp church. Everyone was in exhilaration. After that there were kisses of peace» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 397-398).

Striving for creative work and education

What else supported the spirit of the people in exile? It turned to be creative work and striving for education.

One of the forms of collective creation became singing songs in chorus. Singing was favourite occupation both of young and old Cossacks. Often they were singing Russian folk songs. In spring and in summer, when evening came, they began their favourite Cossack songs together. Those songs were «either quick and joyful <...>, or lingering, sad and dreary, like life on Limnos life». What did the Cossacks sing about? As eyewitnesses remembered, Cossacks were singing «... about Cossack glory, feats of arms, <...>, about the dear Don <...>. The Cossacks sang about everything. And about Bolsheviks, who expelled them from their native land, and about killed and tortured by them friends. Songs conveyed either a complaint of bitter fate, or gloomy menace to a fare away hateful enemy, and the whole Cossack soul, perturbate and pressed, but not destroyed, flowed out in those songs» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 339).

It is amazing that in such incredibly difficult conditions on Limnos Russian refugees realized their creative potential and satisfied esthetic needs with the help of ... theatre. On Limnos two (!) extemporary theatre emerged – drama theatre and cabaret theatre. It is written about the former: «The stage was created in one of the bunk houses alongside the quay, the curtains were made of blankets <...>. The repertory was selected extremely thoroughly, with great scrupulousness. Chekov's things, even Ostrovsky and drama extracts from Pushkin (“The Coventous Knight” and others) and other classical plays were staged » (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 343). There exists the following evidence about cabaret-theatre: «Among Don people there appeared to be lots of perfect singers and story-tellers, dancers, there were even consummate musicians. <...>. The main part in the concert program took choral singing.<...> In cabaret tricks and novelties from the capital stages were shown» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 343-344). The theatre was rather popular both among the Cossacks and the Greeks, as well as among the island principals, the English and the French.

On Limnos there were even «universities». Many who found themselves on Limnos had serious gaps in education. It is typically that since the first days after the arrival of the staff of Don's Corps on Limnos the enormous culture awareness education had begun in the units. The book «Cossacks in Chataldge and Limnos in 1920-1921» reads: «Meeting the Cossacks' needs<...>, the command, represented by informational department, organized a set of periodical lectures of sporadic character and on different areas of knowledge and science. <...> The readers were found among the friends. In army units there were many persons with higher education, who shared their knowledge with others in a clear and understandable manner. There were also lectures on political topics. <...> Generally speaking, all the lectures, even on astronomy and cosmography (they also happened to be) were willingly visited by the Cossacks. <...> On those courses, apart from special military subjects, such disciplines of general education, such as the history of Russia and Don, Russian literature, economic geography, jurisprudence and others were also taught» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 342-343).

Pleasures of Limnos life

Severe staying on Limnos was prettified with little joys, which certainly were parts of Russian outcasts' everyday life.

The Cossacks «revived» in spring and summer. Tired of winter cold, winds and hunger, they cheered about the sun, light, warm sea. Ivan Kalinin remembered: «With the beginning of spring on Limnos the Cossacks got warm and washed themselves at last» (Kalinin 2003: 340).

The authors of the book «Cossacks in Chataldge and Limnos in 1920-1921» added to that: «In the beginning of warm season the swimming in the sea brought much liveliness in monotonous camp life. As early as in the middle of April the water in the Aegean Sea became so warm, that some most challenging Cossacks started to swim. <...> It was becoming hotter and hotter. The south sun was burning mercilessly, the stones heated up <...> All the territories which provided swimming facilities

were spangled with bathing and lying on sand Cossacks... » (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 340-341).

From time to time the promenades around the island were organized. The Cossacks went to adjacent villages and to the island north-west top end, to the place where at one time a town of Hephaestiada was situated. The Cossacks were interested in the relics of the ancient civilization. They were interested to see «the wreckages of columns, bas-relieves, pottery fragments and statuettes» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 342).

Sometimes, when the French gave out passes, the outings to villages were possible. The Cossacks liked those outings, for – as memoirists stated – «the Greeks-inhabitants <...> met the Cossacks hospitably, treated them, in village taverns it was possible to get cheap local wine» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 342).

Of course, the Russians also managed to notice the beauty of the island. The meeting with it gave pleasure to one's soul. The peculiar charm of Limnos found its reflection in Nikolay Turoverov's poetry. In lyrical opus «Archipelago» (Turoverov 1999: 37-38) the poet imprinted winter Limnos expressively «in lines and colours»:

A February day, both still and pearly
Whity in water surface was reflected.
... shortly went a last sunray through the clouds.
The sea gave watery salty breathe,
And colours flowered suddenly and richly
Aslope the tawny steeps.

Russian cemeteries on Limnos: the signs of Civil war tragedy

Still Limnos was not a “resort place” for those who turned to be there in 1920-1921. Deprivations, sufferings and often death as its natural final became just about everyday occurrence in Russian outcasts' lives. Refugee and Cossacks died. On Limnos Russian cemeteries appeared, that are one of the first in the history of Russian first wave emigration. There exists two Russian cemeteries on Limnos: one of them is situated near the town of Mudros, another – on Kaloeraki cape.

The Don's Cossack regiment was located near the town of Mudros. Close to it allies' Military cemetery was situated. Thankfully the Russian graves were also reconstructed on Military cemetery. In general on Military cemetery 29 Russians were buried (28 officers and a colonel's wife Maria Karyakina, the mother of six).

The Kuban Cossack regiment was situated not far from Pynda cape. There a large Russian cemetery appeared – «Rusiko necrotophii». The road to it is rocky and bumpy. But at present there are signposts both in Russian and Greek, which gives the direction and let us find ourselves. Before 2004 there was practically nothing, except for several gravestones on the grass. The works on cemetery reconstruction have begun, and at present the names of all people buried there are restored and some of the graves are specified.

The feelings that one has on the cemetery are special. They are born out of reading the namelist of those who rest on this mournful burying place, (more than 300 people), out of contemplation of gravestones, under which Russian people lie, out of thought about their bitter fate. One stand near children's grave for long. There are 82(!) of them on the cemetery. Tanya Muhortova was three, Lisa Shirinkina was hardly one.

The Russian and the Greeks on Limnos: from the 1920th to the present day

The Russian-Greek relationships have their own history.

Having arrived to Limnos in far away 1920, the Russians found themselves in a country, culturally and religiously related to them. The Greeks treated the Russians humanly, with understanding.

One of the special cords connecting the two peoples was Orthodoxy. The Greeks showed much interest in church services held by the Russians on Limnos. The memoirists recollects the Greeks' reaction on church services held by the Russians and their celebration oa religious holidays: «... the Greeks in numbers attended the Russian <...> church, admiring the new for them, never heard tone of Russian service, order and discipline, and harmonious singing of the Russian chorus» (The Russian Army in a strange land 2003: 336).

We consider extremely remarkable the fact that in Mudros Church of Holy Archangels the service is still – at present (!) – held before the icons that were presented to the church by the Cossacks in 1920 and left there after their departure from Limnos. On great feast days those icons are transferred to the town's cathedral of the Annunciation.

Nowadays the memory of «Limnos standing» of the Russian on the island in 1920-21 still lingers. The author of these lines happened to meet those Greeks on Limnos, whose parents witnessed the staying of Russian Army. Those unforgettable meetings took place in May, 2010.

Fotis Karamalis (born 1921), Evangelos Ahillyas (born 1918), Ioannis Patinorakis (born 1925) admitted that they remembered how their parents had told them about the Russians, appeared on the island in 1920, with obvious sympathy to them. The main features of the Russian's characteristics, given by the present day Greeks are respect to them and sympathy to their difficulties.

Thus, below you can find some of the characteristics, which give us an opportunity to imagine a «collective portrait» of «Russia Limnosers» on the background of historical time:

«They were expelled from Russia».

«All the Russians were educated, cultivated people, of high ranks».

«The Russians were starving; they worked in field for a piece of bread. The Greeks sympathized with them and gave work».

«The Greeks treated the Russian well – as people who were thrown here by Destiny».

«The Russian, appeared on the island, were decent and intelligent».

«The Russian prayed, they sang beautifully».

«The Russian and the Greeks were connected with Orthodoxy».

Conclusions

Surely there is a great distance between Russia and Limnos. However, today this distance cannot prevent us from thinking about the fates of the Russian, who stayed on the island in 1920-1921 and became involuntary Civil war victims. We necessarily should peer into those past days and try to understand the reasons why the Russian – being in exile and overcoming difficulties and unbearable tortures, suffering deeply – still kept on loving Russia and feel deep and close spiritual liaison with it.

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