

PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF DEMOCRACY

Dmitry Furman



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■ *In your opinion, are there any groups within the political elite today who can be called reactionists who are, in other words, blocking progressive development?*

I do not think that there are any big and strong groups who have clear established reactionist views. I don't think that they yet have any clearly formulated conception. But what do they have then? They do not have another ideology or other ideas, but they do have instincts. Theoretically, people in general understand that democracy is necessary. You would be hard pressed to find many people in our country who would say that there is no need for democracy, and even those who do say it is not needed cannot clearly say what is required. **But some people are physically unable to live in the context of democracy. They are afraid of democracy and of change and of everything new in general.** When people try to verbalise this set of feelings and instincts, they tend to do it in different ways. This results in the emergence of different whimsical conceptions and ideas. But this is not about ideas; it is about the fact that we do not have complete and clear reactionist ideologies. Indeed, we what we do have is a com-

plete and clear reactionist psychology.

■ *Did I understand you correctly that you consider reactionists to be those who follow their instincts rather than reason?*

No, I would not put it that way. These are people who pursue the non-democratic habits and instincts that have been elaborated throughout our own history. For Russia, democracy is something that has not actually been implemented yet, and people are simply afraid of it. They just cannot imagine exactly what it is like. Theoretically speaking, they do understand that democracy seems to be alright and that is apparently necessary, but they are nevertheless still afraid of it.

■ *Are there any public figures who represent this reactionist stance?*

There are many of them, and they do not only constitute individual figures, but the majority of the ruling elite. They all theoretically say that yes, democracy is good and necessary. However, as soon as coloured revolutions start to loom on the horizon, the very same people will be the first to say that this is a big threat for us and so on. As the opposition undergoes a revival, there immediately comes a fear that it will destabilise the situation and that everything will suddenly become out of control. The intention to squash everything is motivated not by a clear idea or an alternative ideology, whether it be fascist or communist or something else; rather, it is motivated by fears, the unwillingness to lose ones' positions, or the reluctance to leave the customary world of the non-democratic bureaucratic echelons of power.

■ *But if the majority of the political class sticks to this attitude, does this mean that the initiative is now on the side of the reactionary forces, rather than on the side of progress?*

No, it does not, because on the one hand, the reactionary instincts are very strong and they are being reproduced on a continuous basis. However, on the other hand, they are quite weak, since it is difficult for them to actually confront

a group that has a clear programme. All the more so if this group is close to the authorities or is in power. I think that opposition to progressive reforms — which theoretically can come from Medvedev — is going to be very strong. But this is not going to take the form of the opposition of a party against a party or against a programme. Rather, it will be opposition in a thousand different places where reforms are being implemented and an opposition of every individual official. **That is an opposition of cotton-wool, not one involving a counterforce.** This is a strong opposition, capable of engulfing any progressive programme or progressive reforms. However, at the same time, it remains weak since it is unable to counter by presenting anything clear and distinct of its own.

■ *Is this situation natural? Is there a specific Russian character to it?*

Yes, this opposition is emerging naturally, and certainly the Russian instance has its own specific character to it. This character shows itself in the fact that the opposition to democracy in Russia is much larger than it is in other countries. The Russian culture has its own particular features. Russia is perhaps the only country — at least in Europe — which has not had any democratic experience. All of Russian history boils down to different alternating authoritarian regimes. That is why the fear of democracy and the opposition to democracy is much higher in Russia than it is in the countries of Central Europe, for instance, which have experienced some democratic periods in their history. This very force, this very fear - the fear of the unknown, the fear of what is new, has been the main factor in promoting the fact that, notwithstanding the democratic ideals and principles that were voiced in 1990-1991, the country's development has not followed a democratic route. The same fear and the same habits are, once again, ultimately preventing any new attempts of democratic reforms. ■

Ksenia Kolkunova exclusively for the Yaroslavl Forum