

In anticipation of the Global Policy Forum, which took place in Yaroslavl in September 2010, we have published the book 'Democracy and modernisation: apropos the discussion of 21st century challenges' (Moscow, 'Evropa', 2010, 318 pages). This book is the result of Russian sociologists and political scientists' reflections on the problems that both post-industrial and developing countries encounter in their political and economic development. The authors discuss the ways of democracy in Western countries and the World as a whole, as well as trends and peculiarities of economic modernisation in different regions of the world. They also discuss the prospects and opportunities of forming a new, more just and humane world order. One of the authors featured in the book is Mark Urnov, Research Supervisor in the Faculty of Applied Political Science at the National Research University - Higher School of Economics (NRU-VSE), who has come up with answers to a number of questions for the Yaroslavl Forum newsletter.

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IS LAGGING BEHIND CHANGES

Mark Urnov

One way or another, democracy today is under severe pressure. This is due, first and foremost, to the rise of intolerance, aggressiveness and nationalism. The waves of migrants from North Africa reaching Europe are undermining the basic values at the foundation of post-war European civilisation: human rights and personal freedoms. The inflow of new cultures that resist adaptation to the classical European culture results in rejection on the part of local population, provoking surges of extreme movements, resurrecting the ideas of nationalism and even undermining the idea of European integration. Moreover, the newcomers are not educated in European traditions and democratic values; they are used to living in a rather different political culture. **It is hard to say how democracy can overcome this difficult situation.** I am hopeful that it will find a way. However, the problems are numerous and, until this day, politicians are not aware of the fact that it is no longer a matter of institutions and attitudes, but that this involves a very powerful cultural shift.

The intensity of demographic and socio-cultural shifts puts us in a situation comparable to that of the great transmigration of people. Would it be possible for democratic values to spread in the conditions of



such a radical change of the socio-demographical composition of Europe? It is hard to say at this point. Some elements of the Roman Empire ended up surviving into the Middle Ages. Roman Law is one example of this. However, this was already a different type of civilisation.

It is possible to draw comparisons between the situations in Europe and Russia. In particular, we have the same process unfolding in our countries: declining birth rates, coupled with the influx of migrants. But unlike Europe, our population is, from the outset, not democracy-oriented and is not as tolerant as the European one. **I expect the waves of nationalistic attitudes in Russia to be significantly more flat and unpleas-**

ant than what we are now seeing in Europe. The inherent danger for us is much greater than for Europe, because there they have a long-standing democratic tradition, which we do not have.

Russia is an enormous country and you cannot overlook the factor of its huge territory and the need for effective federalism. Those regions that experience changes in terms of their socio-cultural composition are beginning to become alienated from Moscow and to harbour different sorts of nationalism. The situation can only become worse if we do not take their interests into account and if we do not establish an appropriate dialogue with them – one that would not be defined in terms of domination on the part of the centre.

We should pay attention to the models that exist, for example, in India. This country was once virtually on the verge of disintegration and what saved it was a transition to functional federalism. The existing dynamics are more dangerous than cultural diversity *per se*: social and political institutions evolve and change at a much slower pace than society. The political system is lagging behind the changes that are taking place in society today. ■

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