

HUMAN RIGHTS IN YAROSLAVL?



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Exclusively for the Yaroslavl Forum

The problem of human rights is typically discussed in either strictly juridical terms, when particular issues are involved, or in religious and dogmatic terms, when we extend our judgment to the outside world from a high moral standpoint of a once-established canon. Given this background, **we obviously lack political discussion that would allow us to highlight the internal dilemmas or conflicts that exist in the domain of 'human rights'**. Such conflicts certainly do exist.

For example, according to the revolutionary 'declaration of rights', the term 'human' is traditionally accompanied by the term 'citizen', which is nowhere to be seen nowadays. What about citizen's rights and dignity when human rights 'demand' an armed intervention against a sovereign state, for example? Another pressing question has to do with a precise definition of a 'human' who is entitled to inalienable rights. For instance, should or should we not regard a foetus in the womb of a mother to be a human? Should his right to life be guaranteed or is this an absurd suggestion?

I am not saying that uniquely correct answers to these questions indeed exist, but rather, I am saying that their mere existence doesn't allow us to regard 'human rights' discourse as an internally monolithic and unshakable canon. If we perceive it in this way, it will damage, before anything else, the real politics of legal guarantees. We will be performing ceremonial rites for the cult of human rights instead of actually safeguarding the political, social and citizens' rights of particular people in specific situations.

Then again, it is curious to see the issue of social rights sweepingly receding into the background in the discourse of human and social rights. Its priority in contemporary global canon is pretty low. However, **if we put social rights aside, then political rights acquire a purely fictional character**. This is why, in my opinion, it is necessary to question the foundations of the concept of human rights in order for them to work better, instead of merely exchanging ritualised formulas of allegiance to global ideals. ■

RUSSIA IN SEARCH OF INTELLECTUAL LOANS



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The event known as the Yaroslavl Forum is only a few years old. Nevertheless, an idea that, only three to four years ago would have seemed to be an absurd idea, namely discussing global challenges and Russia's developmental strategy in a provincial town on the Volga River, is today a habitual element of our intellectual and political landscape. In this sense, if we regard this Forum as one of the projects aimed at bringing life to the Russian province, it should certainly be given a positive assessment. Our province is *terra incognita*. We are still living in a country that, according to Yurii Andropov, we do not know. The joke about no life existing beyond the boundaries of Moscow is very close to our political reality. Our province has been turned into one giant internal colony, while Russia, as the dwelling place of Russian culture, is sweeping closing in around the Moscow environs. It would be great to see the Yaroslavl Forum breaking this tendency by hosting stars of the international intellectual scene.

By the way, it is already possible to observe some facts and developments that allow us to say that this Forum is not merely a promotional event. In

the course of the last year, I have met with a number of young people who live in Yaroslavl and they earnestly think that they can contribute to world politics and save Russia from its chronic maladies. These sort of young people probably exist in every Russian city but, in Yaroslavl, they have a somewhat different environment. Apparently inspired by the Forum, the young reformers from Yaroslavl manage to fund their trips to Moscow in order to deliver their message in the capital and take part in political debates. Political thought in Yaroslavl is distinctly pure and open-minded. The youth of Yaroslavl believe in the modernisation of Russia like no one does, for they have witnessed this process first-hand in reality.

There's also a tragicomical side to this development. I am not aware how many political scientists are produced in an average Russian city, but this year as many as 120 political scientists graduated from Yaroslavl State University. Of course, most of them will end up working at some Moscow office as a sales manager. Or perhaps, can it be that the sun of Russian political science is emerging on the Volga River? ■