

MODERNISATION AS REALITY — THE AGENDA FOR 2012

Leonid Radzikhovsky



LEONID RADZIKHOVSKY is a well-known Russian journalist and commentator. He is a Member of the Moscow Writers' Union, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Political and Economic Communications Agency, and the winner of the 'Russia's Golden Pen' Prize. He is also a columnist for such periodicals as the 'Rossiiskaya Gazeta' ('The Russian Newspaper'), 'Vzglyad' ('The Vision') internet-edition, and 'Evreisky Mir' ('The Jewish World') newspaper

RJ Dear Mr. Radzikhovsky, can we rightfully consider that the presidential election campaigns, in both Russia and the USA, have already begun? Can we at least presuppose what the respective political agendas of these campaigns are going to be? Since 2008, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has made modernisation one of the key issues. Do you think that this topic will lose its relevancy at this time or will it remain among the problems of first priority?

Many events are going to happen during the next three years. Let us hypothesise that an important discovery will be made in the field of atomic

physics, allowing everyone to turn to uses of nuclear energy. Then let's hypothesise that an important building will be bombed in a large city, so the main topic will, once again, become terrorism. The destiny of the Russian election campaign does not depend on such issues as these.

It is preposterous to say that we have already modernised so successfully that this goal has become an issue of the past. The problems of scientific and technical progress were discussed during the XXIII, XXIV, and XXV congresses of the CPSU, during which everybody began to speak about the scientific and technical revolution. This topic is eternal. I saw the results of scientific progress, which were first imported from the West and then from the East. It has showed itself in the form of tape-recorders, cars, TV sets, personal computers, and a wide array of clothes, medicines, etc. The results of our own scientific and technical progress could recently be seen during the Victory Day Parade on Red Square in the form of SS-20 medium range missiles and the 'Topol-M' intercontinental ballistic missile. I have yet to enjoy the fruits of the scientific progress achieved in the domestic sphere in everyday life. **Thus, the issue of modernisation will remain as urgent in 2012 as it is prior to that.**

RJ What political ideas do you think will largely influence the election campaign in 2012?

The mover of modernisation in Russia, like in all other countries, is always the one, who it is worth acquiring knowledge from. For modernisation to actually occur, and not just idle talk about it, we need an external primary driver. Through the process of elimination, only one country - the USA - remains a candidate for being the main primary driver. We just have to realise this and decide what concessions we should make in their favour

If we speak about Russia and its return to the liberal ideas of the 1990s,

any fluctuations are possible in terms of ideas. **Despite ideas, our country's policy has not radically changed at the level of specific political decisions during the last ten years.** The elite structure has changed. There are now more officials in it, and also people originating from the KGB. The role of government corporations has increased. The specific weight of small-scale business has decreased. In other respects, the economic and social structure of society has remained practically the same. Even relations with foreign countries, in my opinion, have remained the same as they had been.

RJ You say that Russian foreign policy hasn't changed. What about the widely-spread statement that there has been a certain trend in Russia's foreign policy from the USA towards Europe?

Unfortunately I don't really have a clear understanding of what the expression 'Russian foreign policy' actually means. I know about trade. We sell oil and gas and we sell it to Europe, because the USA doesn't need it. We also buy goods partly from China, and partly from Europe. So regarding trade, that is rather straightforward.

I also know a bit about PR. Europe is now being criticised less. It was not so long ago that the USA was criticised severely, but that has not been the case in the last few months. Can we still speak of a so-called Russian policy?

There are negotiations over Strategic Arms, which are continuing with the

USA. But is this really policy? It doesn't really have any fundamental sense, because we are not going to attack the United States in the next 100 years and they are also far from the idea of launching an H-bomb at us. There is not much of a real practical sense in carrying out these negotiations.

What could become a political agenda, if this entailed real politics, instead of just PR? I think that only one thing can: if we could miraculously realise that, after 50 years of talks about scientific and technical progress, modernisation and so on, it is time to stop talking and start doing something. **We can't modernise by ourselves.** We have never been able to modernise without assistance. Peter the Great studied in Holland and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Germany and Great Britain were at the lead in terms of modernisation. In the 1930s, the Americans helped us to modernise. **The mover of modernisation in Russia, like in all other countries, is always the one, who it is worth acquiring knowledge from.**

For modernisation to actually occur, and not just idle talk about it, we need an external primary driver. Theoretically, there could be three such movers: China, the EU and the United States.

China as a driver of modernisation is the most dangerous one, since we have excellent relations now, but they may forget who Siberia belongs to at some point, and we'll have to show them this once again. This could be a very painstaking and insecure process.

With respect to the European Union, it is currently wrapped up in its own complicated and almost unsolvable problems.

Through the process of elimination, only one country - the USA - remains a candidate for being the main primary driver. We just have to realise this and decide what concessions we should make in their favour.

In its current state, Russia is more than convenient for the rest of the world. Nobody wishes us harm while, at the same time, nobody wishes us well. Live your lives, sell your oil, do whatever you want in your own country, don't threaten anybody, and nobody will threaten you. But it is a different thing to help you.

A strange thing has happened to Russia and one phrase can basically



sum up the result of the twentieth century: 'We have lost our main advantage'. One hundred years ago, the advantage that Russia had was an enormous peasant country with a very undemanding and cheap labour pool, while, at the same time, the country had a core of rather strong and educated intellectuals. Nowadays, it seems that every country can offer inexpensive manpower with the exception of Russia. What other advantages do we have to offer? This is an absolutely obscure question that our political elite should consider and work on.

RJ *Let us imagine a hypothetical situation, where the decision about who is going to be the next President is made during the general elections and not behind-the-scenes. Let's imagine that your vote really counts. What would you like the future President to be like and what agenda would you personally vote for?*

First of all, it is important to realise that we should stop telling vague stories about modernisation and start doing something in this regard. Otherwise, the remnants of the Russian civilisation will go under water very quickly. The quality of life will finally become lower than that which is seen in the BRIC countries and Russia will essentially become a Third-World country.

This means one thing: it should be explained very clearly that, for real modernisation to occur, one needs to pay the price. It should be made clear to the public exactly who will pay for this, how it should be paid and what the currency is, so to speak. Russia under Peter the Great paid the necessary price and this price was also paid under Tsar Alexander II. It was once again paid under the Bolsheviks and now it is time that we should also pay the price for modernisation. This would excite real discussion on this theme. In my opinion, this is the most important agenda existing today and in the next few years.

If we speak about personalities, then I am not an admirer of any acting politician. But I do not suffer from any phobia in relation to any of them either. **I do not see any figures on our political scene.** I also don't see them in the world either. I think there will only be one candidate. I don't believe that Putin and Medvedev will run for office at the same time. One of them, whoever is the successful candidate, will become President and gain his 70-80 percent of the votes. This is what public opinion polls tell us today. I also don't think that the situation will change over the next two years. ■

Leonid Radzikhovsky was speaking with Boris Volkhovsky