

DEMOCRACY IS A VERY EXPENSIVE TOOL

Alexander Auzan



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is a Russian economist, chairman of the department of applied institutional economics at the economics faculty of MGU, and President of the institute of the national project 'Public agreement.'

From an economist's point of view, the question of democracy in Russia sounds like this: is there a demand for democracy or a supply of democracy? **The answer is that the demand for democracy is influenced by such factors as the level of education, distribution of property, and development of non-political institutions in civil society.** A large property stratification, poor education, and weak civil society significantly decrease the demand for democracy.

But it is often forgotten that supply is also a factor of the demand for democracy. Those who claim that there is a low demand for democracy in Russia thus begin deny its right to exist at all. **But the supply of democracy should be diverse in order for there to be adequate demand.**

At the moment, perhaps it is true that the demand for parliamentary democracy is not quite

developed in Russia. As such, some rather unpleasant phenomena may occur in this sphere. But the factors of demand for other types of democracy, such as cooperative, municipal, corporate, and so forth, are quite important by themselves, hence it is equally important to develop their supply in order to stimulate their demand.

The relation between democracy and taxes is also important for the democratic agenda. The demand for democracy is often assumed on the basis of the question: 'Do you want to live under democracy?' But answers to this question cannot in themselves imply demand. If one asks more specific questions about what one is ready to do, to accomplish, to pay and to give up on in order to live under democracy, then the answers will look different. Democracy is effective, but it is also expensive.

In order for democracy to work effectively, one needs to make the right decisions. Education is important because it decreases the costs of learning new variations in decision making. Property is important because it stimulates and encourages people to make decisions. But if we want to influence the development of democracy, we need to take a closer look at taxation.

When people begin to pay taxes they begin to realize their importance in the state, and naturally they begin to wonder how their money is being used. People try to find out about the decisions being taken by the authorities regarding their money and often seek to influence these decisions. By providing an opportunity to pay taxes in one's own municipal district, and by sending some of this money to non-commercial organizations to support their activities, the authorities can significantly boost the development

of well-balanced democratic institutions.

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Some forms of leadership are at the moment rather miserable structures aimed at minimizing the efforts of voters. **The switchover to an institutionalized division of power and to a parliamentary control with feedback and accountability cannot take place under the influence of a sermon.** According to Max Weber, modernization implies a switchover from religious to more secular and rational values.

A positive line of Russian development is rooted in the 'anti-deficit revolution' of the early nineties, the establishment of a consumption society in the nineties and in the first decade of this century, and the development of a mass behavior of rational consumption, which now only remains to be instilled in politics.

People have learned to use a similar legislative system. In the nineties they were solving their consumption problems in courts. Nowadays, consumers have to think of themselves as the consumers of state services and as the consumers of information and projects. **Switchover to better institutions must be transparent and pragmatic.**

Whether this switchover will later be made sacred in the form of a certain value or arch-value depends on how the process develops within the public philosophy and public consciousness. Ultimately, nothing exists without a form.

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There were attempts in the nineties to turn democracy into a value, even an arch-value, similar to that of communism or ortho-

doxy, and transform it into a sort of political panacea. The expectations cherished under communism were all shifted to democracy. **However, democracy is not an arch-value, but rather a tool that can be perceived differently and ought to be treated pragmatically,** with a real understanding of what it can and cannot do. The conclusion that democracy is both the most effective and costly way of making decisions is quite evident. Only relatively successful nations can allow themselves to develop such an effective decision-making tool as democracy.

Freedom is an axiomatic notion, whereas democracy is an instrumental one. Of course, democracy provides a certain method of fulfilling freedom, sovereignty, power, interests of certain population layers, etc. But the public consciousness exists in real life, which is important for democracy, because we need to clarify and decide into which aspect of this consciousness it should be placed.

The paradox of civil society in Russia lies in the fact that people actively use its services (they know when to address the society of consumers, the 'Memorial,' the environmentalists or the movement of car owners), however, they give a negative answer when asked whether a civil society exists in Russia. **In essence, there is no understanding of what the civil society is in the Russian public consciousness, as no public philosophy has yet to describe it.**

The same goes for Russia's historical consciousness. For example, historical movies omit Kozma Minin entirely from the Times of Trouble. Pozharsky brandishes his sword, while Susanin saves someone, and people are elected to the Assembly of the Land. A great deal is remembered with the exception of Kozma Minin and without any understanding that the main factor in overcoming the Times of Trouble was a certain form of socialization. Again we return to the issue of the need for a public philosophy.

Civil society is often presented to the public consciousness either as a hidden form of politics or as a certain commercial transaction, because the public philosophy has yet to clarify it in the public consciousness. And this is exactly where this real and applied notion could be understood, accepted, and turned into a value. The task of the public philosophy then is to open the 'drawers' and 'cabinets,' and discover where the public consciousness may be hiding certain factually existing ideas. ■

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THE MAJORITY TODAY IS MUCH MORE ADVANCED THAN THE ELITE



MIKHAIL REMIZOV

is a Russian political scientist, political philosopher, General Director of the 2020 Strategy Civil Initiative Support Foundation, and President of the National Strategy Institute (INS).

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The term 'populist democracy' has gained a bad reputation, owing in large part to the rule of Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, which have done much to discredit its legitimacy and the left populist project that it represents. In fact, in the context of Latin America, the only thing that has saved this project from being viewed a shameful failure is the **positive experience of Brazil.** There are people who consider any form of socialism to be nonsense, but president Lula da Silva has managed to realize the benefits of a 'wise socialism' and a socially orientated strategy of modernization.

One should certainly distinguish between 'social democracy' and 'populism' — these are two different things from the logical point of view. The trouble is that they often presuppose one another, since the turn to social democratic policy first requires the formation of a strong social coalition, carried through by populist mobilization. But if populism can work for a 'wise' socially orientated project, then it should be considered historically reasonable and legitimate.

The use of populist mobilization should be measured and studied in Russia today. **Populism is quite effective for managing intense social troubles, for mobilizing society and curing it of its depression, but it is a bad system for rou-**

tine social management. For leaders such as Chavez, populist mobilization is the Alpha and Omega of a state's life, while Napoleon Bonaparte created the institutions of a regular state, such as the Napoleonic Code, on the basis of the energy he received from the French society.

In regards to Russia, it seems reasonable to state that the rule of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, as well as that of Dmitry Medvedev, were not and are not entirely populist, despite employing some populist methods from time to time. In fact, Russian mechanisms that support the popularity of its leaders tend to encourage demobilization, and inhibit the majority, preventing them from entering into real politics or from influencing the real policy of the Russian state.

Putin's ongoing pattern is that of a 'shield,' protecting himself from wide participation in politics. It would be wise, however, for him to revisit this pattern. **The majority today is much more advanced than the elite in terms of its values and sense of civil culture.** It is important therefore to look at the benefits of populist democracy. However, in order to avoid the negative experiences of Latin America, populist methods must be used sparingly and not as the guiding principle of an entire government. ■