

THE YAROSLAVL FORUM HAS BECOME MORE FOCUSED



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Doris Naisbitt recently took part in the 2010 Global Policy Forum in Yaroslavl

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I don't know enough about Russia to judge how difficult it is for the Russian government, and personally for the President, to do their work. It is one thing to have a plan, but the implementation of that plan is something else entirely.

How many problems does the President have to overcome, how many struggles does the Russian government have, and how capable is the government to take personal responsibility for itself? All of these questions are very important. In Austria, we have a very good social network on which people can rely without going into poverty. Perhaps in Russia there are many reasons why people don't have hope, and then use it as an excuse for not really doing the hard work that is necessary to achieve things.

Theoretically, Russia should be able to start down the path of successful development. Just look at how many talented, smart, and energetic people there are in the country. In order to achieve this development, however, the government has to create an environment in which

these talented people can flourish.

I visited the conference about Skolkovo, which described an implementation plan and everything else, but then I talked to a group of students, and one of the students told me: 'You know, there will be corruption, and then there will be, you know, all this friendship thing.' These students couldn't really believe that such a forum can truly be a platform where they can achieve whatever they want to achieve. This is something that has to change.

Fortunately, the forum has become more open and more focused this year. Last year, although we attended a limited number of forums, there seemed to be considerably more Russian bureaucrats who only seemed interested in presenting their speeches rather than engage in any debate, to have their say without listening to anyone else. But all of this seems to have changed this year.

The professionalism of all the participants was very high, but I believe that the practical organization of the forum could be improved upon somewhat. ■

LET'S DISCUSS MORE THAN JUST DEMOCRACY AT YAROSLAVL



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In Russia today, the biggest ideological conflicts are often obscured by discussing them under **'the rubric of whether or not democracy is the correct name to describe the current arrangement of Russia.'**

Many of the participants at the Russian forum claimed that if only the current Russian arrangement were a democracy, then everything in the country would no doubt improve. First of all, this is not a very good premise. And secondly, the conclusions it draws are, overall, usually rather silly. After all, the more you believe there are certain things that really must change in Russia, the better it is to talk about them directly, rather than subjugate them to very loose and often misleading categories.

Alas, it is evident that the Russian state is failing its citizens considerably. But there is no particular reason to believe that it would stop failing its citizens if the conditions of political competition were all of a sudden set according to the recipes decreed by 'the

expansion of democracy' — though some American experts who talked about the values of liberal democracy would argue otherwise. In any case, we need to be realistic and realize that such development is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future.

The most urgent questions facing Russians today are existential in nature, and rarely focus on the basic shape of the country's political regime. People are much more interested in seeing the police become a public service rather than a private threat.

Of course, the state still needs to worry about the well-being of its citizens. I have somewhat of a professional interest in this issue, and it is something that I have spent great deal thinking about. Ultimately, in tackling this problem, **it is never a good idea to use the category of democracy as a general organizing category in relation to political values. It is a conceptual mistake,** and carries with it some very negative political implications. ■