

# POLITICAL EXPERTS SHOULD OVERCOME RIGIDITY

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The appearance of a large number of political reports lately is quite explicable. The general situation in Russia remains quite uncertain and there is covert competition within the 'leading tandem', which is distinctly felt by the political elite. Each of the leaders has his own vision of the country's future. Accordingly, political and expert communities are presenting their proposals for the future of Russia. Such is the case with the proposals put forward by the Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) and those from the Centre for Strategic Research Foundation (CSR), for instance. Both reports attempt to comprehend, on the one hand, developments that are currently going on in the political and economic spheres and, on the other hand, to suggest future scenarios. The appearance of these manifestos is an obvious

reflection of the impending serious and momentous changes in the life of the Russian state.

Each of the reports has its own distinctive features. They are quite differently oriented and dissimilar. For example, the report by INSOR is essentially some sort of a comprehensive programme to bring about transformations and, although it is not free from certain internal contradictions, they do not appear to be very important to me. It presents a complex vision of a certain positive future for Russia. In this respect, **the report by INSOR is probably the only statement that has a noticeable positive component to it. This component might be rather too 'heavy' and excessively detailed, but it can serve as a basis of a complex political programme for a potential presidential candidate in the coming election.** Dmitry Medvedev could become such a candidate if he decides to run for a second term and if he is ready to consistently hold on to those ideas of modernisation and liberal approach that he has declared and is now promoting.

**The report by experts from the CSR is, to a great extent, an analysis of the current political situation in Russia, rather than an election programme for a potential presidential candidate.** It does offer some ideas for minimising those negative tendencies that are plainly visible today by the public. In other words, one of the reports represents a sort of programme, while the other is merely a reaction to the alleged loss of legitimacy by the ruling power. Here I would agree with Valery Fadeev and other experts, who deny the existence of the problem of the lack of political legitimacy in Russia, as is described by our colleagues from the CSR. This is the

reason that I reiterate that it would be wrong to regard these reports as one set of varying programmes. This is simply because some of them are policy statements, while others are not.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the differences, there are certain points of consensus, which have to do with potential transformations and, on these points, the differently positioned members of the expert community agree upon them. However, we should take into account the fact that they are somewhat void of meaning. Suppose that no one objects to the process of modernisation and that nobody objects to the need for economy to make a transition to an innovation level and away from being dependent on raw materials. Everyone speaks against corruption, everyone speaks for greater civil freedoms and in favour of improving efficiency. We do not see any contradictions here, as everyone speaks for the same ideas. However, once we start to discuss policy measures that could actually produce such results, some would say that only democratic measures, realised within the framework of competition between parties, can accomplish that end, while others would claim that positive results are only possible given the strict monitoring of the economy on the part of the state. They would insist that this is the only way to uproot corruption and to make the state and the economy more efficient. Clearly the experience of recent years has not proven that state control is conducive to an efficient economy, but neither it is obvious that complete economic freedom is capable of transforming the country into a leader in terms of technological development. Thus it is possible to

acknowledge that **generic issues do not provoke disagreements. Disagreements are triggered, above anything else, by the methods and practical steps that are being proposed toward the resolution of such issues.**

We can hardly expect future reports to be written in a strictly liberal key. The report written by Yurgens is certainly of such a nature. The report by the CSR also contains distinctive liberal tones, since its authors are apparently not content with the existing situation, which is the direct result of the screws being tightened during recent years. The document 'Programma-2020', which is currently being prepared, is obviously not going to be liberal. But this report actually constitutes an official update of government policy. For the reasons highlighted above, these documents are so different from each other that we shouldn't even try to put them together into one 'bunch' or claim that they are bound by one dominant idea.

Meanwhile, the market for political ideas was already formed a long time ago. If we take a look at the 'brain centres' or 'think tanks' existing in Russia today (INSOR, the Institute for Social Planning, the Foundation for Effective Politics, the CSR, the Centre for Political Trends), anyone who follows their publications would be able to predict the general tone of their next research. In other words, the market for political experts has already essentially been formed. People from the ruling elite, wish-

ing to obtain certain advice, have a clear understanding of whom they should address, depending on the sort of estimate they want to get.

This is, in fact, an unfortunate circumstance due to the fact that these centres are persistently clinging to the positions they had adopted sometime in the past, indicating that they are not developing in any way. It would have been much more interesting and productive to see an ongoing fruitful dialogue between such centres, which could potentially result in a gradual meeting of minds. In fact, if we look at scientific centres in the West, we will see that they agree on most of the key or initial positions, while differing on

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various specific points. **However, in our case, we see agreement only on some generic considerations, which do not actually carry much meaning.** The expert community is divided and it is not looking for ways to interact, likely because, if it were to bring its ranks closer, I suppose its cumulative influence on the ruling authorities would be much more serious.

Unfortunately, as long as everyone continues to make his own claims, as occurs now, he reiterates longstanding convictions that he has had for the last few years, unwilling to abandon such ideas and approaches.

Such divisions within the Russian expert community reflect the specifics of its activity and the peculiarities of its financing in particular. In Russia, we practically do not have independent centres that are capable of realising serious research programmes and have access to financing provisions other than those provided by the state. When we speak of the expert communities in the West, we realise that western experts operate in a very wide field, which involves vast financial opportunities that are sufficient to cover their activities.

Both in Europe and in the U.S.A., we see a huge number of centres that procure their funding

from both commercial and non-commercial organisations and, as a consequence, the spectrum of opinions there appears to be much wider. They are free of the many constraining elements that prevent our centres from making claims that would otherwise contradict the official state policy lines. This is the reason why I do think that the fragmentation of our political expert community is a derivative of rather specific methods of attracting financing and of occupying certain niches that are clearly related to the policy pursued by the state. ■

*Exclusively for RJI*

**The Institute of Contemporary Development** is an organisation that, according to its statements, aims to 'bring together foremost experts for the purpose of formulating recommendations and producing documents on the major directions concerning state policy'. The Chairman of the Management Board is **Igor Yurgens**. The Board of Trustees is headed by the President of Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev. Its key experts include **Evgeny Gontmakher, Alexander Auzan, Ruslan Grinberg, and Alexander Oslon**. In March 2011,

the Institute published its latest political report, entitled '**Finding the future. Strategy-2012. Conspectus**'. This document essentially recommends that the future president of the Russian Federation to establish a new social contract with society, which would minimise interference on the part of the ruling power into public affairs and provide the public with the freedom to participate in affairs of the state.

