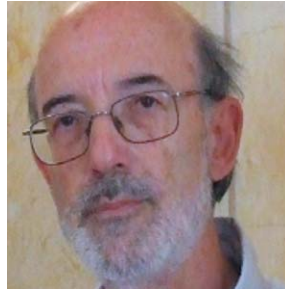


society, because they no longer do. One needs to be elected to represent the interests of the population. And that's exactly the major provision of democracy - citizens elect those who will represent their interests. Human rights activists take the function of human rights protection upon themselves, yet they are not authorised to do so by other citizens. They are not chosen in the course of democratic elections. Human rights activists represent a certain sociological category, they are not a random sample of the population. Of course, they may have different educational profiles, and live in different geographical locations, but there remain many sociological similarities between them.

Whether these people are perceived as representatives of public interests in the future largely depends on the given society and specific situation. Indeed, despite all the negatives related to the activities of human rights activists, they can still come to represent public interests. Let's remember what happened in 1989 in Czechoslovakia. Human rights activists became political representatives, and the society perceived them as such. Historically, this situation did not last for a very long time, but it did happen, and for some time human rights activists represented the interests of the majority. However, human rights activists better not associate themselves with political activities unless they are ready to be held accountable for their actions by their citizens. ■

*Exclusively for Russian Institute*

## DEMOCRACY IS WORTHLESS WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS



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**H**uman rights are constitutive of democracy. Democracy is more than just a system of government where legislators are elected by a universal and equal ballot, it also includes, among other things, constitutionally protected human rights.

Human rights organizations are important factors in determining international standards for human rights and for monitoring their enforcement, while democratic politics are an important safeguard for human rights, which are not sufficiently protected without strong and vigilant opposition. **But even strong opposition alone does not protect human rights;** other safeguards include an independent judiciary, free press, and human watch groups. Human rights groups often defend the rights of unpopular minorities and sometimes those who they defend are not in reality their allies but in fact their enemies. For example, they defend

the right to free speech for individuals whose views they may find despicable.

It is no wonder that, at times, they provoke popular hostility, even in constitutional democracies based exactly on the protection of unpopular minorities' rights. **In my opinion, it is not the job of human right activists to consider issues of national security. They must defend human rights** rather than seek compromises between their needs to successfully fulfill this duty and other interests. Human rights groups do well to seek influence on politics, but the influence they have to strive for is not that of lobbyists. Their power is that of publicity.

The standards for democracy include more than those of human rights. Nevertheless, human rights organizations are important factors in establishing international standards for human rights and for monitoring their enforcement. ■

