

## THE CHALLENGE OF REINSTATING THE STATE



ALEXEY KUZMIN is a political scientist and a professor at the Russian State Humanitarian University. He currently serves as the Deputy Director at the Institute of Humanitarian and Political Research and is a member of the Expert Council under the Russian Federation human rights commissioner.

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum

The economic liberalism in the form that was shaped after the 1970s, which became evenly spread everywhere in the 1990s, essentially can be explained as follows: the elite and the state divest themselves of the 'society service' function. This is happening not only in Central Asia, but also in Western Europe and the United States. At present, there is no middle class that has survived; it is nothing but a myth. **It is only one-fifth of the population, whose well being is sharply on the rise, while all other people are seeing a steady or an abrupt decline in their well being.**

The elite is busy ubiquitously privatising the state. In other words, the interests of the state begin to strictly coincide with the interests of the elite, and they both cease to, in any measure, be the interests of the rest of the population, the groups that could form a society. And on the same territory there is a stand-alone state with its elites, and the mass that could be the foundation of a society, and there is no normal communication between these two strata. The vertical mobility practically grinds to a halt, and social mobility begins to operate only in terms of one downwards direction.

**A rather strange social contract emerges: the elites surely do not fulfil their major social obligations, but the masses, on the whole, take it rather calmly.** This is

happening because everyone is ultimately on his own and there is a single god for us all. However, in mid-2008, it became evident that the elite could not fulfil even the minimal level of its remaining obligations. We do not need the social responsibility of the business in the way it is construed today but, at the least, what is required is a working, Bismarck-type legislation.

Society has simply atomised. There is no solidarity in any form or regarding any issue, except in families and similar micro-networks. **Further down the road, an active demand for solidarity comes to the forefront.** This, first of all, develops in areas where it is easy to gain trust. If we take a look at the history of trade unions, we can see that they always emerge as non-political agencies, and then they acquire a political meaning, and rather promptly. It is absolutely normal.

We are experiencing the reinstatement of our society and our state from the grassroots. This is also happening in France, in Italy and in the United States, hence the madness of the so-called 'tea parties'. Wherever the social medium has dissolved, it is once again being recreated anew, and attempts are made to reconstruct relations between this social medium and the state. ■

## CRITICISM HINDERS THE PROGRESS OF WORK



RICHARD PIPES is a sovietologist and author of over twenty books on the history of Russia. During the Reagan era (1981-82), Pipes was a member of the National Security Council as the head of the Bureau for East-European and Soviet issues. His works, including 'Russia Under the Old Regime' (M., 2004), 'The Russian Revolution' (three volumes, M., 2005), and 'Russian Conservatism and its Critics: a Research of Political Culture' (M., 2008) have been published in the Russian language.

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum

In Russia, people feel that the government should be strong and unified and that one should not criticize the government. This is a very deeply rooted notion in Russia that is confirmed by public opinion polls. For example, when asked, 'Do you think the multiparty system does more harm than good?' the majority of Russians respond with, 'More harm.' They don't believe in the diversity of political opinion. Instead, they believe that it weakens the government, and trust the government to protect them.

Russians believe that the government has to be strong and do its job, which is to protect them from domestic and foreign enemies, and **they don't want it to be criticized because they feel that it weakens the government.** This trend has continued from the 19th century up until today and is very deeply rooted in the Russian autocratic tradition.

This logically stems from the idea that the government should be kept separate and should not be criticized as it already does the best it can. Therefore,

Russians don't like people who criticize the government. Moreover, Russian citizens, due to their historic traditions, believe that intellectuals and businessmen are the layers of society that are the bearers of criticism and, while participating in the political struggle, they act out of selfish motives, not out of ones for the greater good.

Russia's attitude towards the intelligentsia must be considered in light of the fact that the vast majority of today's Russians are descendants of peasants. A hundred years ago, 80% of the Russian population consisted of peasants who lived in isolated communes. Despite the fact that today a much smaller proportion of Russians live in the countryside, these cultural attitudes have remained, and are passed down from generation to generation; and I believe that this is crucial to understanding the attitude of the Russian people towards intellectuals. ■