



The twelfth issue this year of 'RJ - Standpoint of the Week' is devoted to a discussion that originated at the Yaroslavl Forum, 'The modern state: standards of democracy and criteria of efficiency' (September 10-11, 2010). The issue of democracy and its determination and standards became the nucleus of that discussion. We return now to the topic and give the floor to Todd Landman, political scientist, British sociologist and director of the Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution at the University of Essex

MODERN GLOBAL STANDARD

Todd Landman

Democracy is the standard with which all countries of the world align. Due to objective circumstances some countries do not comply with this standard. So they invented the term 'illiberal democracy.' It's a bit of a misnomer. I would call 'illiberal democracy' a **'dysfunctional' one**. By **'dysfunctional'** I mean a level of institutional failure of state capacity to protect the basic provisions and rights of people that is failing in all democracies around the world and it's not just the new democracies. There are 'rights gaps,' if you will, which, of course, the human rights community is happy to point out. When you see inequalities, you see problems of access to justice, you see mistreatment of racial minorities and other things taking place in well-developed democracies that raise questions about the quality of democracy.

The wrong solution to this problem would be to resort back to the sort of oligarchic democracies with a high level of participation for a very low number of people. We've seen this in 19th century Latin America. But we can hardly expect the 'old democracies' to turn into 'liberal dictatorships.' I think the history of the 20th century shows a gradual extension of suffrage: the civil rights movement in the US as well as the universal suffrage movement in Europe and America in the 1920's. There's been a gradual extension of citizenship rights and guarantees of participation within a democratic system. However, what you also see is in some countries a disproportionate distribution of wealth upwards and, of course, the people with that wealth demonstrate particu-



lar vested interests and the power to protect them. Democracy has struggled to combat against this in the sense that if you're wealthy and you have influence over political parties and decision-making, you can protect your vested interests within a democratic system. An example of this is land ownership in Brazil. As much as that country needs reform, getting land reform passed through the parliament where these vested interests are represented in various seats in parliament poses a big challenge. In the case of Brazil, landowners have their own militias and they do commit acts of violence against peasants who want land.

Another wrong solution to the question regarding the quality of democracy in the modern world is to tempt the powerful and the wealthy into having great expectations for 'post-democracy.' There are also transitional countries where a market economy has been introduced without regulations and there has been massive speculation and enrichment of a very small

number of people who want the political system to benefit them at any cost. This is true with many of the Central Asian regimes that we had early hopes for open democratic procedures but has ultimately amounted to the reelection of strong men for long periods of time who have consolidated authority and undermined democratic gains.

However, the extent of possible damage inflicted by 'liberal dictatorships' or 'post-democratic formations' can be remedied by the development of modern communication technologies. With the advent of Facebook and other social networking mediums, and what we call Web2 activity user-generated content, we have users all around the world; and while most of this information being generated is completely useless, some of it is quite useful. Now everyone can find their friends from high school, everyone can communicate through various channels in ways that could not be imagined before, forming coalitions and pressure groups that transcend national boundaries and can bring about real democratic challenges to oligarchy and authoritarianism.

And there has been really good positive stories in this vein, but the downside is that **all social networking software is quite open to state interference, to surveillance and other activities that opens users to a level of scrutiny never before faced.**

So, whether or not it's a new form of democracy, I'm unsure. But what I do believe is that it represents an old form of social mobilization with new means. ■

Issue Editor
Dmitry Uzlaner

Executive Editor
Valentina Bykova

Design
Sergey Ilitsky

Page proofs
Gleb Shuklin

Additional contributors
Konstantin Arshin, Kseniya Kolkunova,
Yulia Netesova

Project director: Alexander Shpunt