

# Russia: To Be or Not to Be

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## **Farewell to the Myths**

A large country is getting strangled by a cruel crisis. Millions of people are living in humiliating misery. These people were ruthlessly robbed by the so-called radical reformers for the sake of the next “bright future.” Science is dying and old spiritual traditions are being killed by the low level of mass culture. The Russian people, who created the greatest state in the world during a thousand years of history, are mutilated by irrational boundaries and thrown back to the geopolitical development of four hundred years ago. Democratic values are purposely being deformed in the eyes of the people. But these values are absolutely necessary for the healthy and civilized development in the modern world. Industry is being destroyed and Russia's unique economy, created by the heroic labor of several generations, is being degraded. Society is on the brink of a social explosion. These are the notable results of the irresponsible and unpopular policies of the ruling regime. This regime has managed to bring one of the richest countries to bankruptcy and to destroy its strong statehood.

One of the most conservative Russian thinkers of the 19th century, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, high prosecutor of the Holy Synod, commented on the situation in Russia before the revolutionary explosion. His words written many years ago still ring true today:

Our life has become extraordinarily disgusting, crazy, and deceptive. Any hint of order has disappeared. Our development is inconsistent. The discipline of thought, feeling, and morality has been debilitated. Our society has accumulated an enormous amount of falsehoods, which have contaminated even the air that we breathe. They have contaminated the environment we live in, our ideas, and our words. The ideas about life and about its goals are turning into lies, relationships are getting more complex, and life is being deprived of its balance, which is necessary for its development and normal activity.

These words help to understand the plagues of hypocrisy, cynical deception, evil lies, unlimited ambitions, greed, and power hunger, that are tearing our lives apart. These plagues have gone to such a terrifying extent that the question “Russia: to be or not to be” has become a frightening reality of our every-day social, state, and political life.

## **Between Different Camps**

During the last few years, because of my position as the chairman of the Constitutional Court above all, I have had the most broad opportunity to watch the development of events from a close distance as well as from the inside, and to have complete information on the situation inside the country as well as on the processes taking place in the highest echelons of the government. Having understood the

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dangerous tendencies that were getting more and more noticeable on the Russian political stage, I tried as much as I could to keep the ship of our statehood away from the whirlpools of political adventurism. These whirlpools have been and are still threatening Russia with chaos, state decomposition and the horrors of fratricide.

I tried to refrain as much as possible from intervention in the political rivalries and the struggle for power among Moscow's "noble" groups and clans. No fair

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***"God be my witness, I did everything I could to prevent the collision and to pacify the opposite sides."***

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critics can accuse me of sympathizing with either one side or the other. I was equally disgusted by the greedy corruption of the most odious figures of the presidential entourage. I was also disgusted by the crazy and thirsty aspiration of some part of the people's elected officials to get to the political

Olympus of Russia at any cost. Nobody wanted to pay any attention to the fact that the wave of hard confrontation between the branches of power was getting bigger and bigger. The result of this wave is well-known: a massacre in the center of Moscow, which cost hundreds of human lives. This was a terrible crime because of its cynicism and senselessness. It is absolutely clear now that none of the Russian problems were resolved. On the contrary, the bloody knot of the deadly confrontation, which became tighter during "Black October," has aggravated the critical situation in the country with no end in sight.

God be my witness, I did everything I could to prevent the collision and to pacify the opposite sides. Maybe this was the reason why both sides dislike me. This has been especially obvious in the actions of the "victors," who decided to take revenge on this "uncomfortable" witness of their immorality and lack of principles.

I did not betray my principles. I categorically reject any form of political extremism regardless of the form in which it is presented. If we do not restrain adventurers who are able to get society into a civil war for the sake of their unlimited ambitions, we will not make a step towards restoration of our suffering motherland. I still think that national reconciliation and civil accord are not topics for political speculations, but are very necessary conditions for the survival of Russia. However, there is something I do blame myself for. Sometimes I was too naïve and not resolute enough, too trusting, and inclined toward ill-considerate compromises. The burden of power is a heavy load, and, upon retrospect, I have to say honestly, I was not prepared well enough for this burden. In some respects, I have overestimated my ability to have an influence on events. In other respects I have underestimated the threat and the strength of the destructive processes in the country. Now, however, unlike before, I am absolutely sure that we have only one motherland, and only criminals and scoundrels could play with the faith of this motherland for the sake of their personal well-being. I am sure we are one people, one family, with a common history and fate, and nobody but ourselves is able to restore Great Russia.

I feel pain and shame when I see what we did with the country and with ourselves. It is immoral and impossible to keep silent under the formal pretext of non-intervention in politics when your own motherland is perishing before your eyes under the heavy load of hate and hostility.

### The Great Lie of Our Time

When Pablo Picasso wanted to emphasize the value of art, he mentioned its ability to create “independent” worlds, parallel to their reality. “I paint not what I see but what I think about,” he said. It looks like this artistic method to create a parallel reality is used by some politicians who would like to make zombies of our ill society. It is clear for every independent and objective analyst that the present political regime is based on lies. Now, after the regime's overwhelming defeat in the elections for the State Duma, it has become obvious that the previous policy led the country to a dead end. We have become witnesses to a surprising picture: the regime is like a chameleon constantly adjusting to the ongoing changes. At the same time, regime leaders were trying to introduce some myths that could help keep the situation under control as well as to manipulate public opinion. Here are some of the myths:

—The present leadership of the country shares the values of a civilized society (democracy, legal state, market economy, division of powers, human rights, etc.). —The totalitarian Communist past in the political, social, and state-building spheres has been overcome.

*“Every word said about the democratic character of the present regime is an outrageous lie.”*

—The existing state institutions based on the popular mandate of trust to the president and the Constitution, are irreproachable.

—The present power deserves credit for ending the Cold War and for its ability to provide Russia with a dignified place in international relations based on the partnership with other leading world powers.

—The regime is concerned about the state-national interests of the country as well as about its evolution in the direction of enlightened patriotism and the building of statehood.

Let us try to consider things in order. First, the myth about the civilized and democratic character of the present power. This myth, which is being imposed on public opinion inside the country and abroad, has helped to create a “smoke screen,” thereby concealing successfully the outrageous political cynicism and terrifying corruption of our leadership from the people.

Every word said about the democratic character of the present regime is an outrageous lie. How can those, who dissolved two parliaments during the last two years, those who put their speakers in jail, having destroyed the greatest world power, and then having put the country on the brink of a civil war, speak about democracy and division of powers? When the concepts of “law,” “rule-of-law state,” and “legitimacy” are used by a small group of politicians who have literally wiped their feet off on the Constitution while creating their own version of a constitution at the same time (which it is my duty to guard the same way I guarded the previous one), having put it into effect with the approval of only 25 percent of the electorate, I am getting scared thinking about possible outcomes.

How can you talk seriously about the creation of a full-bodied market economy in Russia when the arbitrariness of bureaucracy is increasing, when a bribe is the only

dependable solution for any issue, when Russian industry is dying, when the Russian peasant can hardly feed himself, and when a handful of *nouveau riches* keep getting richer in their hungry country that is progressively getting poorer? How can you talk about human rights if the basic rights like the right for housing, education, health care, and pension are undermined as the result of the general public disorder? I am not talking about the fact that even the right for life in our “civilized” country has no meaning because of the unlimited growth of criminality and gangsterism. In regard to political rights, the last half year has shown the true cost of the declaration of their stability. Those who were put in Lefortovo prison by Yeltsin, the editors of opposition papers and relatives of those killed at the White House, know about it.

### **Myth About the Victory Over the Totalitarian Past**

The previously mentioned “democratic” myths represent one side of the coin, the myth about the victory over the totalitarian past represents the other side. In this instance, anticommunist rhetoric seeks to accomplish two goals: first, it was used as a potent propagandistic weapon which facilitated access to power for the present ruling elite on the wave of the endless uncoverings of the horrors of Leninism, Stalinism, and stagnation. This flamboyant campaign had nothing to do with the real concern about the fate of the country. People's sufferings were used as a trump card in the big political game of the hoodlums fighting for the *nomenklatura* privileges and offices in the Kremlin.

Second, the anticommunist hysteria was supposed to let the West know about the uncompromising break of the new leadership of Russia with the expansionist geopolitical policy of the USSR and to provide the regime with strong international support and sympathies of the foreign public. Nobody cared that this ill-considered campaign insulted the feelings of millions of honest people and deformed the historic memory of society.

At the same time, it is obvious that the politics of the new regime, in contrast to its propagandistic rhetoric, are Bolshevik. This regime gets easily annoyed about “uncomfortable” legal norms. It pretends to justify its actions in terms of “political rationale” and prefers to resolve its confrontations with the opposition by force.

### **Myth About the Irreproachable Legitimacy of the Present State Institutions**

I should make one proviso. Being a judge of the Constitutional Court, I was absolutely loyal to the existing law in all aspects. But this does not mean I have not seen the outstanding discord in this field, which is very important for the life of society and the state.

The Russian legal conscience is very sensitive about the moral and ethical side of the issues. Foreign scholars could never understand the enigmatic combination of the unlimited Russian patience and obedience to laws all the while people constantly distrusted judiciary norms. This feature of the Russian national character could explain people's readiness on the one hand to sacrifice for “justice” and on the other to reject formal legal norms. Bolsheviks, like their current successors in the Kremlin, always accompanied their political games with the smoke screen of demagogic slogans. The only difference is that the calls for the “universal brotherhood of workers” and for the “bright future of social justice” have been replaced by the calls for the triumph of freedom and democracy.

The problem is that the frightening reality is so different from the official rhetoric that power has lost any credibility and respect. It means that in the people's conscience none of the existing institutions of power are legitimate. The endless manipulations with the mechanisms of democratic statehood— referendums, elections, parties, mass media, and a total neglect for any “rules of the game”— finally resulted in the people's understanding that the regime was concerned only about itself and not with the people. The legal nihilism of the state has finally undermined its own legitimate roots in the eyes of the people. It is needless to speak about the consequences of this process considering that the “class” character of the regime as the main protector of the *nouveau riches* is becoming more and more obvious.

### **Myth About the End of the Cold War and the Friendship With the West**

The efforts of the Soviet Union to make a “social camp” of the entire world community became one of the important reasons for the over-straining of its strength and the predetermined sad outcome in 1991. It is unquestionable that the positive result of the last years was the lowering of the level of global confrontation and the end of the Cold War, an attempt to switch from hostility to partnership to cooperation. This is absolutely true, but the most important thing is that the present regime has nothing to do with all these positive changes.

The most important steps in the direction of overcoming the Cold War confrontation were made within the framework of the USSR long before the present leadership of the country came to power. The success of these steps was provided above all by the strength of the unique Union superpower that was standing behind the Soviet delegations during all negotiations. The present so-called “partnership” is provided by the capitulating position of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the uncovered abuse of our national interests. What we see now in the field of foreign policy is a shameful market where the present regime trades long-term Russian strategic interests for the opportune political support from abroad.

It is no secret that influential circles in the West are seeking to weaken Russia to the maximum. Therefore, it would be premature to speak about the full and complete overcoming of the confrontation and the beginning of the peace era. We are without a doubt very interested in good neighborly relations and cooperation with leading world powers. However, we should face the reality: there is still a long and difficult way to go.

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Moreover, every Russian citizen asks himself: Did we win or did we lose, now that we have become friends with the West with the end of the Cold War? At the same time, we are paying the cost of the decomposition of the USSR and are involved in “hot” wars almost along the whole perimeter of the new Russian borders. How long will we be able to maintain this friendship given the growing instability and the obvious threat for all of Eurasia coming from the hot points of the post-Soviet territory? Could it be that the final result of the international “achievements” of the present regime will become a new aggravation of the international situation?

**Myth About the Enlightened Patriotism of the Russian Leadership**

The present leadership of Russia uses words like “national interests,” “state traditions over centuries of Russian history,” and “protection of the compatriots living abroad.” It is very sad if you consider that those who say these phrases played a decisive role in the decomposition of the USSR and forgot about the fate of 25 million Russians who found themselves “abroad” against their will. These games have nothing to do with the true Russian interests.

These interests consist in the termination of the internal confrontation and the restoration of the unique integrated economy of the post-Soviet space. It is necessary to put together the mutilated parts of the Russian people and restore the 1,000 year-old Russian state as a responsible and predictable member of the world community and as a very important guarantor of the global geopolitical balance. It is very important to understand that the logic of the reality is developing in this direction, and anyone who will neglect it will be wiped off the political stage in the near future.

How do we begin? How can we help Russia get rid of libelous myths, which distort reality, deceive public opinion and are in the way of healing our national conscience? Maybe it makes sense to look in the past. “State power, regardless of how strong it is,” said Pobedonostsev in the beginning of the century, “is based on the unity of conscience between the people and the government, on the people's belief.” In present-day Russia people do not believe each other. State power and the people exist as separate entities. Therefore, it is necessary to find ways to unify society and restore the mutual trust by using the remaining democratic institutions and state mechanisms.

We cannot make any more mistakes. Russia has run out of its limits for social cataclysms. And further irresponsible experiments will be deadly dangerous for the country. It is time to stop the destruction and start creating!

**Enlightened Patriotism as a Ground for the Restoration of Russia**

The most dangerous feature of the present political situation in Russia is the split between the ruling strata of society and the hostile ideological groups and political clans. This confrontation could result in social conflicts between tremendous destructive forces. The Black October of 1993 testifies to this observation. Thank God people still remember the Civil War and its catastrophic consequences. Thank God Russia did not rebel but rejected those who were pushing it to the brink of fratricide.

Everybody calls now for civil peace and national reconciliation. The problem is that everyone thinks of different things when making such calls. It is obvious that to achieve this reconciliation, a general philosophical basis is required. This basis should unify the most irreconcilable enemies and opponents. Only the idea to restore Great Russia as a flourishing, civilized, free and responsible world power could become such basis.

It is time to stop taking revenge on each other. It is time to prioritize the interests of the motherland but not of the Party strata or other aspirations of self-interest.

**Society as an Organism**

The most important task for the restoration of Russian statehood is to educate the

healthy national conscience. This task can be resolved only through the joint work of all social and political forces. Years will be necessary to fulfill this task. To begin with, let us think about a few obvious and well-known truths from the rich Russian historical, cultural, and philosophical tradition. Russian thinkers from Nikolai Karamzin to Ivan Ilin considered all the social problems of Russia in their totality. The problem of almost all the Russian liberal reformers (in the past and in the present) became their primitive mechanistic understanding of Russian society. However, it is necessary to understand that reality is more complicated than any scheme, and the traditional and tested time-space relationship of the organism is the precious infrastructure which is the only one able to support the heavy burden of our transitional era.

Is it not clear that all the social phenomena—the moral-religious ideals of the people, the economic and state forms of its national character, and stereotypes of the legal conscience—are interrelated through the thousands of invisible but strong threads which cannot be broken without killing the system itself?

Let us be honest: it is a utopia to believe that the very specific Russian reality will accept and perceive ideals, values, and social forms worked out by Western civilization. This utopia is dangerous not only for Russia but for the whole world, especially when they try to apply this utopia to real life under the extremist slogan, “Reforms at any cost!”

### **House Built on Sand**

The regime responsible for the humiliation of our strong power and for the explosion of the radical national chauvinistic mood in society is starting to look for a way out of the existing dead end. However, the present political regime has deprived itself of any opportunity to use the benefits of a democratic state, has handicapped the legal conscience of the ruling elite and of the Russian society, and has imposed on them the jungle psychology of the cruel. The major stake in the game is power. The principal rule is a game without rules.

### **View of the Future**

In light of the above, it is clear that the most important issue at this point is the way that Russia's state-building strategy will proceed in the near future. In a society that is overcoming the long traditions of class struggle, proletarian internationalism, and rejection of private property, this issue cannot easily be solved. If we want to survive, we have to build the future not based on fear but based on conscience. Our state should be able to overcome the destruction and economic chaos, criminality, the falling of the living standard, discord among the Russian people, and the threat to the integrity of the country in a short period of time. At the same time it should be able to ensure the free, natural and civilized development of society in the framework of common values, religious ideals, moral and ethic norms.

It sounds paradox, but Russia is now getting into the “pre-statehood” period of its history. This situation requires the unification of the society on the basis of a healthy legal statehood. According to the Russian philosopher Chicherin, this “statehood” can protect the development of the reasonable freedom and ethical personality. When these concepts stand by themselves, they destroy each other. The state, said Chicherin, is the superior form of social discourse.

It has become clear that the problem of combining the advanced social

technologies of the modern West with the thousand years of Russian historical tradition is the key problem to be solved in order to build a great and flourishing Russia.

Aristotle emphasized three main forms of state: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Another ancient thinker, Polibis, believed that people intentionally

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deformed fundamental laws of the functioning of state power for the sake of their interest. According to this theory, monarchy is the power of the religious moral character. If it loses its spiritual content, it may turn into tyranny. A tyrant is, as a rule, overthrown by the political elite of a society. It means the beginning of

“aristocratic” rule (the power of the “best” people). This power in its turn could convert into oligarchy (the power of a small limited group of the strongest, most outrageous, and richest). Democracy from this point of view is a protest of the broad masses of the people against the power of the oligarchical *nomenklatura*. However, this democracy can also turn into mob power, which can lead society into chaos. The solution of the problem is the restoration of monarchy, and thus, we have a vicious circle.

There is a large number of forms of state. However, history knows only two basic kinds of state structures: democracy and autocracy. To combine the best teachers of these structures considering Russian specifics is the task of the new doctrine of Russian state building. Let us call it the doctrine of the enlightened patriotism. This doctrine implies harmonic combination of democracy and personal freedom with a strong and responsible state power.

### **Tradition and Modern Times**

The Russian state and the Russian people are familiar with the deep and stable traditions of democratic and authoritarian rule. The popular view that Russians are unfamiliar with democracy and that the Russian state has not really experienced democratic institutions does not correspond with reality. Elements of democracy in the period of ancient Russia, the Russian Empire, and even in the Soviet period existed in the Russian state.

However, the Russian mentality has deep traditions of authoritarianism. For nine out of ten centuries of its history, Russia was developing as a monarchy converting from the fragmented union of duchies into the Moscow tsardom and Russian Empire. During the last four centuries, our ancestors perceived monarchy as the only reliable form of state power. This tradition went into the Soviet period in the caricaturistic form, when the political will of the general secretary of the CPSU was presented as Party politics and was the only source of social development.

It is stupid to assume that you can govern such a large, complex and enigmatic country like Russia ignoring its strong historical inertia and the laws of internal development. The Communists managed to stay in power for 70 years because they understood this and adjusted their ideology according to the features of the Russian conscience. The present regime cannot do this, and that is why it is doomed. Thinking about the restoration of the deprived country, we have to take reality into



consideration. Without a renaissance of the Russian conscience, social justice, state patriotism, national interests, and lands rejoining, no politician will be able to stay in power in Russia.

### **Recipe for the “Elixir of Life”**

Will the concept of enlightened patriotism become a basis for the accelerated overcoming of the present disorder or will it become a launching site for near totalitarianism? It depends on the balance and accurate combination of its democratic and authoritarian elements. In order to come up with a good recipe, you have to have a clear idea about the advantages and defects of democratic and authoritarian state mechanisms.

*Democracy.* Its recognized and indisputable advantages are the broad development of the self-governing, open elections of the leaders at all levels of power, different forms of public control over bureaucracy, and stimulation of the political activity of the citizens. However, at the same time, democratic statehood has a number of serious defects, which are an outgrowth of its advantages.

Autonomy, which is good and useful at the level of the administrative territorial unit, social group, and ethnic group, becomes a source of endless disputes and discords which are mechanically applied to a large economically complex and socially fragmented country like modern Russia. Elections become pernicious when politicians convert electoral campaigns into a national circus.

The unavoidable formalism in such cases makes equal the voices of the industrious and lazy, of the virtuous and the villains, of the patriot and the traitor, of the honest and dishonest. Moreover, the elector, who is sometimes absolutely incompetent about the questions he is supposed to answer (let us recall the endless “Do you approve . . . ?”, “Do you agree . . . ?”, “Do you trust . . . ?”, which were used in numerous referendums) becomes an easy spoil of politicians who manipulate public opinion with the help of the mass media.

Ivan Ilin, a very intelligent and shrewd person, once said that “Democracy deserves recognition and support only because it ensures true aristocracy (helping the best people get to the top); aristocracy does not hurt the state because it is composed of the best representatives of the people.”

*Authoritarianism.* Before we start talking about the advantages and defects of authoritarianism, we have to be clear that authoritarian forms do not necessarily have a connection with totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is a political structure where all spheres of social life, every kind of activity of the citizens, including their ideas, ideological preferences, and religious views, are controlled. This concept is more likely to be applied to state control than to state structure.

A totalitarian regime can exist both in a sultanate and in a republic. It is characteristic that both totalitarian monsters of the 20th century, Stalinism and Hitlerism, were born from democracies—the February Revolution of 1917 and the Weimar Republic, respectively.

As to authoritarianism, its main characteristic is that the electoral mechanisms on the territory of the authoritarian state are restricted (sometimes through the use of strict legal methods). However, its unquestionable advantage is the unity of will, the accurate work of the executive chain of command, personal responsibility for the

actions and decisions of the leaders, broad possibilities to prevent separatism, and aspiration to create an accurate social hierarchy of society. At the same time, the weak spot of such state structure is the inevitable growth of bureaucracy, the problems of control over the bureaucracy, and the constant danger of the bureaucratization of social life. The famous theorist of the monarchy, Leo Tikhomirov, wrote in the beginning of the 20th century about the need to combine all three principles of power in the field of state building: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

### **Conclusions**

I. Modern Russian society is a complex organism. As an organism, it has its specific features and characteristics which are rooted in its ancient historical traditions. At the present time, this organism is seriously ill. And the reason for this illness is the endless attempts of the present regime to force Russia into a “civilized paradise.” Today's Russian rulers take the primitive ideas of this paradise either from Hollywood, a low culture, or from the advertising brochures of Western tourism companies. The saddest part is that a long-term and stable allergy to the really valuable Western experiences, which can be applied to the Russian reality, could become the result of such reformism.

II. The ruling regime has become rotten. This became obvious when the radical “democrats” of the past years started to destroy with fury the democratic social institutions to which they had sworn allegiance. Agony could continue for a while, but its result, which is the abandonment of the politics of suicide, is unavoidable. In order to achieve this in a less painful way, all the healthy forces of society and all politicians must unite on the platform of enlightened state patriotism, which implies combined work to restore the great and flourishing Russia.

III. The concept of state building in Russia, which could unify all the forces that really care about the fate of our motherland, should be elaborated as soon and as thoroughly as possible. If the political elite of the country does not have a clear idea about the ideal of Russia, it can bring society to a dead end. The exit from this dead end will be related to mass violence and brutal social conflicts.

IV. The platform of enlightened patriotism, which can harmoniously unify different political, ideological, and economic elements of capitalism and socialism, tradition and modern times, democracy and authoritarianism, national specifics and general human values; is the most promising basis for the ideology of the Russian renaissance. Emergency means to prevent economic collapse, growth of criminality, discrimination of Russians in the other post-Soviet countries, and the termination of separatism threatening the Russian state should be prioritized.

V. In order for these goals to be achieved, the evolution of the situation in Russia should take place in a predictable, peaceful, and progressive framework. If we are unable to achieve this, we will be doomed to witness an unlimited number of cataclysms and coups d'état, which could eliminate the last possibility for the Russian renaissance to succeed.