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Riccardo Mario Cucciolla
Editor

Dimensions and Challenges of Russian Liberalism

Historical Drama and New Prospects

 Springer

Editor

Riccardo Mario Cucciolla
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Preface and Acknowledgements

Giancarlo Bosetti

The “Russia Workshop”: A Platform for Free Debate on Contemporary Russia

Since 2005, Reset DOC has been active in promoting dialog between different cultures and the exchange of ideas. Over more than a decade, our seminars, international conferences, educational activities, and the online journal *Reset DOC* (www.resetdoc.org) have supported the collaboration of hundreds of intellectuals and promoted a synergy between networks from different cultural, religious, and political backgrounds all around the Mediterranean, the America, and Asia. The impressive results of these initiatives have encouraged us to forge ahead.

In the aftermath of the 2014 Crimean crisis, the Western world was evidently caught unprepared, seemingly ignorant of the underlying reality in a country that had historically been a key protagonist of European culture but which suddenly appeared as an unknown entity. Russia, to the surprise of many, has reemerged in the twenty-first century as a conservative power state with global ambitions and a model for right-wing populists and other illiberal forces in Europe and elsewhere. In this era of ratcheting tension, instability, and sour relations between the West and Moscow, Reset DOC launched the “Russia Workshop” in 2015 under the scientific coordination of the Italian historian Andrea Graziosi. The initiative seeks to build an open platform for free debate on contemporary Russia while attracting some of the foremost international scholars, intellectuals, and experts in Russian studies.

The first test of this project was an international workshop, *The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991*, held in Berlin at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP) on 22–23 June 2015. This event marked the beginning of a much longer journey, triggering a series of subsequent events, such as the roundtable, *The Political Culture of Today’s Russia: The Power State is Back?*, held at DGAP on 25 June 2015. This second meeting tracked the first while adding the direct testimony of some prominent European policy-makers regarding the question of Russia’s power politics. After the Berlin events, the Russia Workshop initiative continued to grow, attracting the attention of additional partners and sponsors and

the participation of prestigious research institutes. Some of the most impactful contributions presented at the first Berlin workshop were collected in the volume *The Power State is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991* edited by Riccardo Mario Cucciolla and published by Reset DOC in the spring of 2016.

The next successful collaboration was with the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES). We co-organized a second workshop *Locating “Conservative Ideology” in Today’s Russia* at George Washington University (31 March–1 April 2016). This event focused on Russian “conservatism,” closely analyzing its language, values and implications in order to explain its weight in the Russian political system. The various presentations at the workshop spoke to the diversity and plurality within the Russian “conservative” firmament, with contributions covering a range of themes including its influence in Russian literature, art, social life, and the Orthodox Church, its statism, its geopolitical-ideological expression (such as Eurasianism), and its vision of the world order. The Washington workshop gave new impetus to the efforts, underscoring the worth of an open platform to analyze the features and cultural influence of Russian political discourse. Hence, in less than a year, Reset DOC organized the third event of the Russia Workshop, *The State and Political Discourse in Today’s Russia*. Held in Venice, a city that has always represented a bridge between West and East, on 17–18 June 2016, the conference was hosted by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

This 2-day workshop was well attended by a wide audience, involving more dozens of international scholars, experts, and students in a context of academic freedom and open dialog. The debate focused on the multiplicity of political discourses found within the various organs of the Russian state and the institutions surrounding it—the administration, media, and political parties—so as to analyze those concepts and “sacred” ideological references which are sponsored by Moscow. Some of the most relevant debates emerged in the framework of the Venice conference were published as *The State and Political Discourse in Today’s Russia* edited by Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, published by Reset DOC in the spring of 2017, and launched at an open public forum at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy on 26 April 2017. Furthermore, the Venice event launched a discussion on the failure of liberalism and the pluralistic approach, embodied as it had been in perestroika, in post-Soviet Russia, with a view to assessing the current situation and charting the possible future of democracy in Russia.

To be sure, Russian liberalism has always had a checkered history and knows well the experience of failure. The last years have been especially challenging. In the 2016 Duma elections, not a single candidate associated with liberal parties was elected, and during the 2018 presidential elections, a liberal alternative to Putin failed to emerge. What is more, the very definition of Russian liberalism is problematic and has long been the subject of intense debate. Nevertheless, Russian liberals have remained a significant historical and political movement that deserves attention. Values and practices traditionally associated with modern liberalism such as individual freedom, property rights, and the rule of law often emerged ambiguously in the Russian historical experience through different forms and combinations. Liberal projects have been shaped by circumstances—typically in response to crisis

or watershed events—and have emerged within fluid institutional settings and an always dynamic international context. Economic and political liberalism have often appeared disjointed or in opposition to each other. Even during the late Soviet Union, after the physical destruction of the prerevolutionary liberal intelligentsia, a subterranean discourse of human rights emerged under the official ideology.

As in other political and historical realities, Russian liberalism presents a hybrid, multifaceted character. It is evident that no single Russian—or, for that matter, Western—“liberalism” exists. To assume—more or less implicitly—that there is a single liberal or “Western” intellectual paradigm limits our understanding of the political and historical dynamics. Therefore, empirical and intellectual contextualization of what liberalism has meant at different times is crucial, requiring a dialog between past and present, historians and political scientists. Consequently, the long-discussed idea of organizing an event on the past, present, and future of Russian liberalism was finally realized with the international workshop *Dimensions and Challenges of Russian Liberalism* held at the University of Turin on 26–28 October 2017. This third volume¹ aims to collect parts of the conference proceedings and showcase some of the most relevant arguments and conclusions that emerged from the discussion.

The growing participation in the abovementioned events gives us great hope for the future of this open and ambitious platform on Russian studies. In just 3 short years, this dynamic format has expanded vividly—and inclusively—taking on new partners and respectfully embracing corpus of ideas and perspectives; the result is what we hope has become a unique and worthy space for dialog and free debate. Our goal is to overcome prejudice, banalization, and divisions between supposedly different worlds, to surmount the barriers of mistrust and incommunicability between cultures, and to promote a real dialog on civilizations. This is no easy task, and we still have a great deal of difficult ground to cover. However, the feedback we have had on the Russia Workshop to date bodes very well for the future.

¹We thank Simon P. Watmough (Centre for Southeast European Studies–University of Graz) for his English-language revisions to the volume.

Who We Are

Reset Dialogues on Civilizations is an international association founded in 2004 committed to research, seminars, and publications, with the goals of generating scientific insights on cultural pluralism; analyzing the root causes of cultural, religious, and ethnic conflicts; connecting different cultural viewpoints in scholarly research; and promoting culture of pluralism, toleration, and human rights.

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The international workshop was organized by Reset DOC in partnership with the University of Turin, the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at George Washington University, and the College of William & Mary. Alongside these, the organization of the event involved the following international partners: the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; the Cold War Studies Program, Harvard University; the London School of Economics; the Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, College of William & Mary; and the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow. The project was directed by Giancarlo Bosetti (Reset DOC) with the scientific coordination of Andrea Graziosi (ANVUR–University of Naples Federico II) and Alberto Masoero (University of Genoa) and a scientific committee composed of Gianmaria Ajani (University of Turin), Alexey Barabashev (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), Giancarlo Bosetti (Reset DOC), Andrea Graziosi (ANVUR–University of Naples Federico II), Stephen E. Hanson (Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, College of William & Mary), Mark Kramer (Cold War Studies and Davis Center, Harvard University), Marlene Laruelle (European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University), Andrei Melville (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), Alexandra Vacroux (Davis Center, Harvard University), and Vladislav M. Zubok (The London School of Economics and Political Science). After the welcoming addresses by Gianmaria Ajani (University of Turin) and Giancarlo Bosetti (Reset DOC), the conference divided into four sessions. The first, entitled *Pre-revolutionary Liberalism and the Challenges of Modernity*, was moderated by Peter Holquist (University of Pennsylvania) and Alberto Masoero (University of Genoa) and involved Igor Khristoforov (Princeton University), Alexey Kara-Murza (Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow), Olga Zhukova (Higher School of

Economics, Moscow), Ekaterina Pravilova (Princeton University), and Alexander Semyonov (Higher School of Economics, Saint Petersburg) as speakers. The second session, entitled *Liberal Undercurrents in Soviet Times*, was moderated by Andrea Graziosi (ANVUR–University of Naples Federico II) and Stephen E. Hanson (College of William & Mary) and involved Benjamin Nathans (University of Pennsylvania), Vladislav Zubok (The London School of Economics and Political Science), Svetlana Savranskaya (National Security Archives), and Viktor Sheynis (Institute of World Economy and International Relations) as speakers. The third session, entitled *The 1990s: “Time of Troubles,”* was moderated by Alexey Barabashev (Higher School of Economics, Moscow) and Mark Kramer (Cold War Studies and Davis Center, Harvard University) and involved Alexander V. Obolonsky (Higher School of Economics, Moscow) and Guillaume Sauvé (EURUS, Carleton University) as speakers. The fourth session, entitled *Liberalism Under Pressure: 2000–2010s*, was moderated by Andrey Melville (Higher School of Economics, Moscow) and involved Igor Klyamkin (Liberal Mission), Sergey Medvedev (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), Kirill Rogov (Liberal Mission), and Valeriy Solovey (MGIMO) as speakers. The fifth session was a concluding roundtable, *Russian Liberals and the World Order*, chaired by Roberto Toscano (Former Italian Ambassador to Teheran and New Delhi) and involved Gianmaria Ajani (University of Turin), Giuliano Amato (Judge of the Italian Constitutional Court and Former Prime Minister of Italy), Andrea Graziosi (ANVUR–University of Naples Federico II), Andrey Melville (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), Ekaterina Pravilova (Princeton University), and Svetlana Savranskaya (National Security Archives).

Introduction: The Many Dimensions of Russian Liberalism

Riccardo Mario Cucciolla

Abstract Liberalism in Russia is one of the most complex, multifaced and, indeed, controversial phenomena in the history of political thought. Values and practices traditionally associated with Western liberalism—such as individual freedom, property rights, or the rule of law—have often emerged ambiguously in the Russian historical experience through different dimensions and combinations. Economic and political liberalism have often appeared disjointed, and liberal projects have been shaped by local circumstances, evolved in response to secular challenges and developed within usually rapidly-changing institutional and international settings. This volume provides a broad set of insights into the Russian liberal experience—through a dialogue between past and present, and intellectual and empirical contextualization, involving historians, jurists, political scientists, and theorists. The first part focuses on the Imperial period, analyzing the political philosophy and peculiarities of pre-revolutionary Russian liberalism, its relations with the rule of law (Pravovoe Gosudarstvo), and its institutionalization within the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets). The second part focuses on Soviet times when liberal undercurrents emerged under the surface of the official Marxist-Leninist ideology. After Stalin’s death, the “thaw intelligentsia” of Soviet dissidents and human rights defenders represented a new liberal dimension in late Soviet history, while the reforms of Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” became a substitute for liberalism in the final decade of the USSR. The third part focuses on the “time of troubles” under the Yeltsin presidency, and assesses the impact of liberal values and ethics, the bureaucratic difficulties in adapting to change, and the paradoxes of liberal reforms during the transition to post-Soviet Russia. Although Russian liberals had begun to draw lessons from previous failures, their project was severely challenged by the rise of Vladimir Putin. Hence, the fourth part focuses on the 2000s, when the liberal alternative in Russian politics confronted the ascendance of Putin, surviving in parts of Russian culture and in the mindset of technocrats and “system liberals.” Today,

R. M. Cucciolla (✉)

National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

e-mail: rcucciolla@hse.ru

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however, the Russian liberal project faces the limits of reform cycles of public administration, suffers from a lack of federalist attitude in politics and is externally challenged from an illiberal world order. All this asks us to consider: what is the likelihood of a “reboot” of Russian liberalism?

Keywords Liberalism · Rule of law · Ideology · Dissidents · Reforms · Post-Soviet transition · Bureaucracy · System liberals · Federalism · Illiberal world order

Liberalism has never been in such a profound a crisis as it is today. Surprisingly or not, its decline occurs in the aftermath of its recent triumph. Indeed, the history of the twentieth century has been marked by the competition between two different universalistic ideologies—one that Marxism ultimately lost to the open society. In the late 1980s, the perestroika revolution and the end of the Cold War heralded the success of liberal values like democracy, individual freedom, the market, the rule of law and human rights; while ideals of open societies, capitalism, post-modernism, international cooperation, globalization and the Western lifestyle became the new ideological framework of a sort of universal “liberal revolution” at the global level, whose expansion seemed unstoppable at “the end of history”.¹ In 1991, Samuel Huntington even foresaw the fourth wave of global democratization as a natural process that would inevitably crash over the last autocracies of the world, while conservative values, economic dirigisme and authoritarian tendencies seemed relegated to the history books.²

The impression of the inevitable progress of liberalization across the world would last for another 20 years until the failure of the Arab Spring, when another set of countries “lost in transition” emerged.³ Moreover, the 2008 global financial crisis and the implementation of austerity policies left a very serious wound in the heart of the West, where new illiberal trends quickly surfaced. In the European Union, xenophobic and populist groups have moved to center stage in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Austria and Germany and quasi-authoritarian regimes have consolidated in Hungary and in Poland, while anti-EU feelings have brought in their wake Brexit and the election of a populist government in Italy. All these factors undermine the credibility of the communitarian project and are frighteningly reminiscent of nationalist resentments and anti-system politics of the inter-war period.

This progress from global liberal revolution to illiberal sovereigntist counter-revolution was particularly fast and pronounced in Russia, a country that experienced with great enthusiasm—and then with even greater disillusionment—the post-Soviet transition. Reforms aimed at opening the USSR on the economic and

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992).

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

³ See Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia lost in transition: the Yeltsin and Putin legacies* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).

political levels were initiated during Gorbachev's perestroika and accelerated in the early 1990s after the Soviet collapse when Russian society looked expectantly toward a democratic and market-oriented system. Nevertheless, the authoritarian turn of the Yeltsin regime already in the early 1990s, a series of rolling economic and financial crises, criminality, poverty and institutional failure marked the incomplete transition and created a sense of disillusionment with the whole project of liberalization. At the same time, the conservative reaction heralded by the rise of Vladimir Putin in the 2000s boldly announced itself the only option for Russian society and—more brazenly still—claimed to be a potential alternative model for Western conservatives and populists alike.

Reassessing Liberalism in a Conservative Framework

After 1991, the extraordinary enthusiasm of the perestroika generation—which had placed so much hope in the “wind of change”—quickly fell away as it became clear that the transition to the open society had not been realized in post-Soviet Russia. Without doubt, the failure of the Soviet ideological, political, economic, cultural and military alternative to the democratic and capitalist world left a vacuum that was hard to fill in the short term, while the opportunity seemed to have been missed for a transition “towards a prosperous, democratic society” as the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had aspired to in his resignation speech.⁴ Thus, after hopes, delusions and disenchantments, democratization and the development of a true rule of law system has gone away. For this reason, genuine electoral competition, the emergence of alternative voices and democratic change have been forestalled, the Russian state earns harsh judgment abroad for violations of human rights and individual freedoms, warning levels of corruption and pliant judiciary, as well as the inhibition of independent media,⁵ NGOs, civil society organizations and opposition

⁴ See William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His life and times* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2017), ch. 18.

⁵ In Russia, the early enthusiasm of perestroika and the intellectuals' expectations for a changing society, for a free press and for the first openings after decades of authoritarian rule, vanished. Hence, the older generation of journalists formed during *glasnost* appears as the bravest, most liberal, and most critical voice against the regime. This small group of professional journalists resists by defending freedom of information and remains devoted to realizing a sustainable democratic regime. See Nadezhda Azhgikhina, “When dreams come true: Liberal trends and liberal mythology in Russian media”, in Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia* (Rome: Reset, 2017), pp. 178–192; Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Media* (London: Routledge, 1991); Anna Politkovskaya, *A Russian Diary: A Journalist's Final Account of Life, Corruption, and Death in Putin's Russia* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007); Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, “Fighting Putin and the Kremlin's grip in neo-authoritarian Russia: The experience of liberal journalists”, *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, May 2017 (prepublished online); Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, “Aleksandr Minkin: A Pioneer of Investigative Journalism in Soviet Central Asia (1979–1991)”, *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, January 2018 (prepublished online); Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, *Russia's Liberal Media: Handcuffed but Free* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018); Michael Urban, *The Russian Free Press in the Transition to a Post-communist Society* (Washington, DC: National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1992).

groups.⁶ Evidently, the liberal principles formalized in the constitution of the Russian Federation are often worth less than the paper they are written on in a regime that has transformed into a conservative-authoritarian.

At the economic level, the “shock therapy” recipe of the early 1990s failed to achieve the desired outcomes, degenerating into a chain of emergency situations characterized by hyperinflation, declining incomes, rising unemployment and poverty, demographic and social indicators moving in the wrong direction. This general decline fed further despair for an exasperated population that, having already lost the stable and secure reference points of the Soviet social system, abandoned all hope in reforms. The erstwhile enthusiasm many Russians had felt for a market economy and democratic transition thus dissipated through the 1990s as the negative consequences of the economic reforms bit and Russia descended into internal wars, authoritarianism, oligarchism and financial crisis.⁷ Insecurity, anxiety and the false promises of prosperity seared a negative view of liberal reforms in the collective Russian mind, distorting the process of political and economic liberalization. At the same time, the remarkable economic resurgence witnessed in the second half of the 2000s—underpinned by high oil and gas prices—underpinned a return to the “Russian way” of national economy—still dirigiste, welfarist, extractive and highly dependent on energy exports.⁸

The failure of the Russian liberal revolution has thus reflected the spectacular botching of successive reform initiatives. The result has been a fatal path dependency that pits a discredited set of values identified as “American” against the majority of Russians who prefer to sacrifice their civic freedom for the sake of security and stability. This lack of success has also reflected the complicated relations with nationalism and the Russian elite’s myriad failures—to move quickly to reform; to institute basic “check and balances” instruments and cultivate preconditions for state governability; and to overlook the lessons from past failures and mistakes.⁹ In Russia, the ideological delegitimization of liberalism is also related to

⁶ See Richard Rose, *Elections Without Order: Russia’s Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Richard Sakwa, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism, and the Medvedev Succession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018); Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also the 2018 report of the American NGO Freedom House critically assesses Russia as a “Not Free” country. See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis – Russia* (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/russia>)

⁷ See Andrei Melville, “Post-Communist Russia: Democratic Transitions and Transition Theories,” in Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *The Challenges of Theories on Democracy: Elaborations over new Trends in Transitology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 147–179.

⁸ See Vladimir Shlapentokh and Anna Arutunyan, *Freedom, repression, and private property in Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Joachim Zweynert, *When ideas fail: economic thought, the failure of transition and the rise of institutional instability in Post-Soviet Russia* (London-New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁹ See Vladislav Zubok, “‘Unsuccess’ of Russian Liberalism: Contemporary Reflections,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 193–208; Olga Malinova, *Liberalnyi natsionalizm (seredina XIX – nachalo XX veka)* (Moskva: RIK Rusanova, 2000).

the plethora of conservative—and sometimes ideosyncratic—values that find fertile ground in the mentality¹⁰ of a great part of the population for whom a fear of change, a general subjection to inertia and a perception of crisis in its merely negative connotation was seen to justify the undemocratic liberalism of the Yeltsin years and the “illiberal democracy” of the Putin era.¹¹ In the 2000s, the rise of Putin was cast as a popular response to uncertainty, and Russian political discourse became increasingly nationalist and heterogeneously conservative, connecting with the innermost feelings of Russians while rejecting a liberal alternative that appeared politically fragmented and economically unsuccessful.

The Russian conservative discourse is not monolithic.¹² The ideological constellations that turn around cultural references of Russian conservatism—in all its contradictions—often recall features of pre-revolutionary thought and now provide the backdrop for Putin’s public utterances and political choices. Indeed, this plurality and fluidity of values within the party, state, presidential and ministerial administrations, the media—and even academia—reflects the active role within the policy-making process of many actors, experts as well as the bureaucracy and its hidden influence in transforming (and sometimes mitigating) the harshest populist feelings and the sharp tones of presidential politics.¹³ In this regard, we have to read the mes-

¹⁰ A general belief is that the Russian mentality has been deeply influenced (or traumatized) by the dramatic history of a country torn by cycles of wars, revolutions, famines, state violence, economic crisis etc. This would explain the common fatalism and conservative mentality of the Russian people, who generally fear big changes, identifying them as constraints and problems and not as opportunity and challenges. This pessimistic outlook for the future—and the general lack of a future dimension, even in the Russian language—would thus constitute the (unconscious) basis of the Russian conservative attitude.

¹¹ See Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (eds.), *New conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2018); Vladimir Gel’man (ed.), *Authoritarian Modernization in Russia: Ideas, Institutions, and Policies* (London: Routledge, 2017); Richard Pipes, *Russian conservatism and its critics: a study in political culture* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2007); Cameron Ross and Vladimir Gel’man (eds.), *The Politics of Sub-National Authoritarianism in Russia* (London-New York, Routledge, 2016); and Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The strong state in Russia: development and crisis* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also Nina Khrushcheva, “Cultural Contradictions of Post-Communist Russian (II) Liberalism,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 163–177.

¹² In Lev Gudkov’s account, Putin’s neo-conservative ideology based on “restoration of the moral and political unity of the authorities and the people – boils down to the following ideas: ‘stability’ – unchangeability of the authorities – overcoming ‘chaos’ caused by Yeltsin’s reforms; ‘traditionalism’; a special role of Orthodoxy and its importance in the matter of society’s ‘moral upbringing’; fighting Western influence – civil society organizations as well as constitutional state and human rights movements are appointed ‘agents’ thereof by the Kremlin political engineers.” Lev Gudkov, “The ‘Great Power’ Ideologeme as a Condition of Putin’s Regime Legitimacy,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, p. 56. See also Boris Makarenko (ed.), *Konservativizm i razvitiye: Osnovy obshchestvennogo soglasiya* (Moskva: Alpina, 2015); and Andrei Melville, “Russian Political Ideology,” Irvin Studin (ed.), *Russia: Strategy, Policy and Administration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 31–41.

¹³ See Olga Malinova, “‘Experts’ and Pluralism of Political Ideas in Russia (2008–2016),” in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 116–130; Alexander Sungurov, Nikolai Raspopov, and Alexander Beliaev, “Instituty-mediatory i ikh razvitiye v sovremennoi Rossii,” *Polis*

sianic rhetoric of Putin's regime where, after decades of state atheism, religion and other "sacred" motifs have moved into centre stage.¹⁴ This sacrality casts the Russia of today as a sort of *katechon*—a "restrainer" and protective agent against the forces of chaos in the world. And it renders orthodoxy a highly political religion, emphasizing the connection between the Russian church and war and building the myth of a Russia that imposes its atomic orthodoxy and defends the supposedly "true" Christian morality against the evil of multiculturalism and postmodernism by force.¹⁵ This messianic ideogeme is claimed to be a national idea while its actualization and the extensive use of collective cultural memory in contemporary political discourse become one of the main factors accounting for the popularity of Putin's politics of ideological sovereignty in foreign and security policy among the elite and ordinary Russian citizens alike.

The failure of the post-Soviet Russian liberal revolution was not only at the domestic level, but was even evident even in the country's external relations. In the 1990s, the chief heir to the Soviet Union acknowledged political responsibility for "defeat" in the Cold War and assumed a secondary role in a world system globalized and monopolized by the American hyperpower. The consequent desire to redeem this humiliation and to recover the geopolitical role that had been ceded with the fall of communism remained strong. After all, many features of its former imperial shape have remained and the old habits learned over seventy years leading the globalist and universalist project of communism have died hard.¹⁶ In this context, the

4, 2012, pp. 99–116; Olga Malinova and Philip Casula, "Political and National Identity in Russian Political Discourse," in André Lecours and Luis Moreno (eds.), *Nationalism and Democracy. Dichotomies, Complementarities, Oppositions* (London-New York: Routledge 2010), pp. 170–183; and Alexey Barabashev, "The Discourse of Russian Bureaucracy and its Influence on the Political Discourse," in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 91–102.

¹⁴In the current Russian political discourse holy elements of the Orthodox Church appear, together with other "sacred" topics closed for discussion such as the purity of the victory in World War II. On the influence of religion on Russian politics see: Geoffrey Evans and Ksenia Northmore-Ball, "The Limits of Secularization? The Resurgence of Orthodoxy in Post-Soviet Russia," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 4, 2012, pp. 795–808; Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia: religious policy after communism* (London: Routledge, 2013); Pankhurst, Jerry G., and Alar Kilp. "Religion, the Russian Nation and the State: Domestic and International Dimensions: An Introduction," *Religion, State and Society* 41, no. 3, 2013, pp. 226–243; Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Katja Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014); Adriano Rocucci, *Stalin e il patriarca: Chiesa ortodossa e potere sovietico, 1917–1958* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011); Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2014); and Mikhail Suslov, "The Genealogy of the Idea of Monarchy in the Post-Soviet Political Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church," *State, Religion and Church* 3, no. 1, 2016, pp. 27–62.

¹⁵See Maria Engström, "Russia as 'Katechon': Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy," in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 131–145.

¹⁶See Robert Conquest, *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet future* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2017); John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Sven Eliæson, *After the Soviet Empire: Legacies and Pathways* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016); Silvio Pons, *The global revolution: A History of*

2014 Crimean annexation was announced to great fanfare, heralding the reestablishment of Moscow's hegemony over a coveted sphere of interest and the return of the "power state" to Europe.

Putin's Russia forcefully repudiates the global (liberal) world order and reproduces the dynamics, values and narratives that were typical of the previous century, such as the continuous search for the legitimation of power, sovereignty, territorial and political space, national chauvinism, the geopolitics of resources, security culture, militarism and (internal, external and hybrid) war.¹⁷ Evidently, the system of international relations is perceived as a realist zero-sum game in which Moscow promotes an alternative Westphalian world order based on the supremacy of state sovereignty. No interference in the name of universalist values and no "regime change" is to be countenanced and the recognition of national spheres of influence is to be encouraged. Indeed, the Kremlin's foreign policy—dominated by geopolitics and security cultures—closely reflects the domestic political dimension insofar as "fortress Russia" becomes the core of a neo-conservative ideological consensus between the power state, the elites and the population.¹⁸

International Communism 1917–1991 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁷See Alisher Ya. Babadzhanyan, *Voyenno-politicheskoye sotrudnichestvo postsovetskikh gosudarstv. Problema sochetayemosti natsional'nykh podkhodov* (Moskva: Aspekt, 2013); Pavel K. Baev, "The Interplay Between the 'Hybrid War' Narrative and the 'Sovereignty-Territory-Resources' Discourse," in Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991* (Rome: Reser, 2016), pp. 98–107; Aleksandr B. Bezborodov and Olga V. Pavlenko, "Voennotekhnicheskiye aspekty natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii," *Vestnik RGGU. Seriya Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya. Zarubezhnoe Regionovedenie* 140, no. 18, 2014, pp. 133–153; Constantin P. Danopoulos & Cynthia A. Watson (eds.), *The Political Role of the Military: An International Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996); Mark Galeotti, *Russia's War in Chechnya 1994–2009* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014); William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600–1914* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); Mark Galeotti, *Time to think about 'hybrid defense'*, War on the Rocks, 30 July 2015 (<http://warontherocks.com/2015/07/time-to-think-about-hybrid-defense/>); Alexander Golts, "State Militarism as a Basis for Russian Identity," in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 91–97; Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mark Kramer, "War and its Impact on Politics and Political Thought," in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 79–90; John P. Moran, *From Garrison State to Nation State: The Russian Military and Political Power under Gorbachev and Yeltsin* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Brian Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations 1689–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Marcel van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

¹⁸See Andrei Kolesnikov, *Russian Ideology After Crimea* (Moscow: The Carnegie Moscow Center, 2015) (http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kolesnikov_Ideology2015_web_Eng.pdf); Andrei Melville, "'Fortress-Russia': Geopolitical Destiny, Unintended Consequences, or Policy Choices?," in Albert J. Bergesen and Christian Suter (eds.), *The Return of Geopolitics* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018), pp. 97–112; Olga Pavlenko, "Transformation of Security Culture in Russia: Domestic and Foreign Factors," in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 121–135; Andrey P. Tsygankov, *Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya: traditsii russkoy politicheskoy mysli* (Moskva: AI'fam, 2013).

These complementary—albeit frequently contradictory—sets of values combine in a peculiar nation-state discourse that occurs in a multinational context and are functional to the regime’s stability in terms of consent. The negation of individualist values and the promotion of a national “Russian”¹⁹ identity is also evident in the continuous claim of “great power” status. This leverages Russian nationalist sentiment through nostalgia for the USSR and for the splendor and greatness of the former Russian Empire, creating a sense of collective identity that a great part of Russian society considers a safe haven and a guarantee of the paternalistic socio-political order.²⁰ This obviously has implications for both self-perception and, crucially, Russia’s neighbors—be they allies or adversaries—as well as the various international actors perceived as geopolitical competitors and, potentially, military foes.

Relations between Moscow and the West have soured bitterly as the EU and NATO have expanded eastward and Russia has reasserted a right to a sphere of interest in neighboring countries. Recent interventions in the Ukrainian and Syrian crises have further exacerbated diplomatic tensions between Moscow, Washington and Bruxelles.²¹ What we observe in Putin’s approach to the West since the end of the 1990s, then, is a progressive shift from an apparent liberal to a pure realist stance and a return to an aggressive geopolitics reminiscent of the Cold War while “otherizing” the West, disregarding its hegemony and condemning its self-styled idealisms.²² In parallel, the aggressiveness toward an imaginary “West” that is cast

¹⁹The concept of the “Nation State” – along its ethnic (russkiy) and civic (rossiyskiy) declinations – in a multiethnic state such as the Russian Federation is quite contradictory. See Alexey Miller, “Nation, Nation-State, State-Nation and Empire-State in Post-Soviet Russia,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 62–67; Alexey I. Miller, “Debaty o natsii v sovremennoy Rossii,” *Politicheskaya Nauka* 1, 2008, pp. 7–30; Valeriy A. Tishkov, “Chto yest’ Rossiya I rossiyskiy narod,” *Pro et Contra* 11, no. 3, May 2007, pp. 21–41. See also Andrei Melville, “Neo-Conservatism as National Idea for Russia?,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 146–160.

²⁰Gudkov, “The ‘Great Power’ Ideologeme,” pp. 49–61.

²¹See Mark Bassin and Gonzalo Pozo (eds.), *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia’s Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); David Cadier and Margot Light, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: International Perceptions, Domestic Politics and External relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

²²See Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-century Russia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003); Anton Barbashin, “Post-Crimean Political Discourse and Russian Foreign Policy Narratives,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*, pp. 103–115; Glenn Diesen, *EU and NATO Relations with Russia: After the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (London-New York: Routledge, 2015); Alexei Levinson, “America as «Significant Other»,” *Pro et Contra* 11, no. 2, March–April 2007; James W. Peterson, *Russian-American relations in the post-Cold War world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Liliya F. Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava. Pochemu Rossiya ne stala Zapadom i pochemu Rossii trudno s Zapadom* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2010); Angela Stent, *The Limits of*

as “degenerate” has become a central characteristic of Russian political discourse and a tool of legitimation for the regime.

The return of the Russian power state together with a hyper-conservative, traditionalist, chauvinistic discourse across politics and society has turned Moscow into one of the most trenchant ideological superpowers in the world.²³ In this space, the very word “liberal” is popularized as a radical, reactionary catchphrase, the most pejorative of derogatory condemnations in the conservative arsenal, or as a synonym for the decadence of the postmodern, globalized and cosmopolitan West.²⁴ Moreover, this hyperconservative narrative has appeared in a moment when the liberal alternative is particularly weak and under attack even from inside, producing a certain degree of external affirmation for Russian regime in parts of the Western public. Hence, together with the ideal of decisionness and authoritarianism incarnate in the figure of Putin, these anti-liberal campaigns have effectively appealed to the conservative, xenophobic, extremist and populist elements in Europe and become key weapons of the Kremlin’s soft-power. However, these anti-liberal campaigns in the West—fed with conspiracies and fake news—often overlap with local protests or ad hoc hatred campaigns against democratic institutions or social groups, such as immigrants, NGOs, gender, religious, ethnic and other social minorities, which degenerate into feelings of distrust towards democracy and sometimes into more tragic episodes of intolerance.

The current Putin regime appears to be as illiberal as it is unyielding, points that were the focus of the previous debates led by Reset DOC.²⁵ However, the vision of a country condemned to conservative authoritarianism is reductive and does not reflect the complexity of the Russian context. Indeed, the rich history of this European state has been marked by cycles of authoritarianism, revolution and rapid change where, in various iterations, the liberal tradition has served as a political, economic and cultural alternative for parts of Russian society. While it remains a challenge to assess such a hybrid, multi-faceted phenomenon as Russian liberalism,

Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the 21st Century (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014); Andrei P. Tsygankov, “The Russia-NATO mistrust: Ethnophobia and the double expansion to contain “the Russian Bear”,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, no. 1, 2013, pp. 179–188; Victoria I. Zhuravleva, “America as the ‘Other’ in Russian Political Discourse: Post-Soviet Reality and International Challenges,” in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 108–120.

²³ See Mark Bassin, Sergei Glebov and Marlene Laruelle (eds.), *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson, *Identity, Nationalism, and the Limits of Liberalism in Russian Popular Politics*, PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 323, June 2014; Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (New York-London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁴ See Andrei Arkhangelsky, *Is Liberalism the Future for Russia?*, Open Democracy, Russia and beyond, 2 February 2016 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/is-liberalism-future-for-russia>)

²⁵ See the volumes collecting conference proceedings of the previous “Russia Workshop” events organized by Reset DOC in 2015–2016: Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*; and Cucciolla (ed.), *State and Political Discourse in Russia*.

we are enjoined to do so as long as its development serves as a bell weather of the health of progressive ideals globally.

Three key questions emerge in this framework: What precisely are the contours of the evolution of Russian liberalism historically? How has the past course of Russian liberalism influenced the condition in which we find it today? What are its future challenges and prospects? Empirical and intellectual contextualization of what liberalism has meant at different times requires a dialog between historians, philosophers and political scientists, and this volume—which gathers contributions from some of the best scholars, witnesses and experts in the field with their personal experience and perception of Russian public—aims to re-assess the evolution of Russian liberalism in a critical and multi-disciplinary way.

The Historical Dimensions of Russian Liberalism

The definition of Russian liberalism is problematic and has long been debated. In Russia, there is no univocal paradigm of liberalism and it has taken the form of monistic radicalism in certain periods and of moderate pluralism in others. It has reflected a large family of values, concepts, and ideologies that share—at least loosely—the principles of individual freedom, pluralism, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, tolerance and democracy. It has presented a variety of attitudes toward justice, the state and society and even contradictory political orientations, as evident in the dialectic between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism (and, indeed, nationalism) in discussing “national questions” during the late empire.²⁶ The category of liberals in Russia is so broad that there is even a corpus of “liberal conservatives”—including Boris Chicherin, Petr Struve, Semen Frank and, lately, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. They have been marked out at times as “modernist nationalists”—who combined liberal ideas with nation-building—in the context of the broad Russian modernizing project in the nineteenth century and beyond.²⁷ Liberalism has also come in for criticism from the Russian moral tradition that emphasizes the epic contest between good and evil as it finds expression in the works of Russian writers such as Lev Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, of philosophers such as Nikolai Berdyaev and Vladimir Solovyov, and of course in the doctrines of the Russian Orthodox Church. Evidently, economic and political liberalism often appeared disjointed or in opposition to each other, while liberal projects in Russia were shaped by circumstances—typically in response to crisis—and developed within fluid institutional settings and a dynamic international context.

²⁶ See Elena Chebankova, “Contemporary Russian Liberalism”, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 5, 2014, pp. 341–369.

²⁷ Philip Boobbyer, “Russian Liberal Conservatism”, in Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (eds.), *Russian Nationalism: Past and Present* (Basingstoke-London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 35–54; Susanna Rabow-Edling, “Liberalism and nationalism in Russia. Boris Chicherin as a modernist nationalist”, *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 4, October 2012, pp. 701–718.

The first part of this volume, entitled *Pre-Revolutionary Liberalism and the Challenges of Modernity*, focuses on the dilemmas of liberalism in the Russian imperial context. The birth of liberalism in Russia is the object of debate among historians and political theorists, who date it back to specific authors of the nineteenth century—such as Timofey Granovsky, Konstantin Kavelin, Chicherin and even Alexander Herzen, who is associated with socialism and populism—or to various moments of reformism in the history of the Russian imperial autocracy. Modernization during the reign of Peter the Great, the enlightened role of Catherine II, the liberal political views of Alexander I and his advisor Mikhail Speransky, the Decembrist revolt, the death of Nicholas I in 1855 and the reforms of Alexander II—who eased censorship and emancipation of Russia’s serfs in 1861 and promoted the reorganization of justice and local self-government through the system of *zemstvo* (institution of local government)—the end of privileges for nobility and the reforms under Stolypin are all moments of opening and “reform from above” that were followed by reaction and conservative revanchism.²⁸

The first chapter by Alexei Kara-Murza and Olga Zhukova introduces the debate from the perspective of political philosophy, remarking how the history of Russian liberalism reflects the transformation in intellectual and political culture that took place in Russia from the 18th to the beginning of the twentieth century. The emergence of liberal ideas in Russia, they note, “was primarily the result of comprehension of the causes and consequences of internal Russian crises associated with extreme instability of the authoritarian system and its vulnerability to the so-called ‘new barbarism’” (p. 9). Their reassessment of the legacy of Russian liberal thinkers allows us to formulate the most important and relevant question: is the liberal project even possible in Russia? Kara-Murza and Zhukova analyze the main ideas of Russian liberalism, considering the peculiarities of national liberal models in Europe—especially in England, France, Germany, and Italy—and their relations with traditional cultural values. The chapter proposes a new reading of the intellectual tradition of Russian liberalism—distinct from the Soviet interpretation—that also offers an evaluation of the problem of implementing the liberal project in Russia.

Unlike the tradition of British liberalism—with its focus on individual freedom—Russian liberalism takes as its concluding theme “the importance of legality in government, the state’s positive role as guarantor of civil liberty, and the gradual achievement of social justice through reform”.²⁹ In this regard, in the second chap-

²⁸ See Julia Berest, *The Emergence of Russian Liberalism: Alexander Kunitsyn in Context, 1783–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Peter Eenticott, *The Russian Liberals and the Revolution of 1905* (London-New York: Routledge, 2016); Aleksei Kara-Murza (ed.), *Rossiyskiy liberalizm. Idei i lyudi. V 2 tomakh* (Moskva: Novoye izdatel’stvo, 2018); Victor Leontovitsch, *The History of Liberalism in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772–1839* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1957); Konstantin I. Shneider, *Mezhdru svobodoi i samoderzhaviem: Istoriia rannego russkogo liberalizma* (Perm: Permskii gosudarstvennyi natsional’nyi issledovatel’skii universitet, 2012).

²⁹ Gary Hamburg, *Liberalism, Russian*, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1998 (<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/liberalism-russian/v-1/sections/the-revival-of-liberalism-in-post-soviet-russia>)

ter, Gianmaria Ajani examines the developments of jurisprudence in imperial Russia where “by adopting evolutionary methodology and historicization of forms of government, Russian scholars were able to launch an implicit attack on the autocracy” (p. 23). In so doing, Ajani reconstructs the scholarly debate on the concept of *pravovoe gosudarstvo* (usually understood as a counterpart to the notions of “rule of law” and the German *rechtsstaat*) especially focusing on the crucial debate that came immediately before and after the introduction of the 1906 Constitution. At the turn of the century, the faith of old liberals such as Boris Chicherin in the *pravovoe gosudarstvo* was replaced by hopes for a state that was not only legal (*pravovoe*), but also (and above all) fair (*spravedlivoye*). Over time, however, this notion aged and withered away before it could be fully developed in the political sphere, undermined by new doctrines such as the sociological analysis of law and Marxist scientific materialism, which had a polar attraction for the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the century. Hence, Ajani asserts the impossibility of setting the doctrinal concept of *pravovoe gosudarstvo* into action because of the fiasco of the 1906 Constitution, leading to a rapid impoverishment of liberalism in Russia.

While protagonists and examples of liberal thinking can be found in modern Russian history, these subsisted for the most part in a rarified, underground intellectual realm. Indeed, organizations were clandestine (or in exile) and infused with radicalism with no institutional dimension until 1905 when Nicholas II promised civil liberties and the creation of an elected duma, and political parties were born. This institutionalization of liberalism in Russia passed through the establishment of the Constitutional Democratic or Kadet party. Taking up the discussion, the third chapter by Alexandr Semyonov examines the peculiarities of Russian institutional developments and the organization of the Kadets in the context of emerging mass politics - the 1905 revolution and political reforms. Against the genealogical approach, Semyonov stresses the contingency and novelty of party liberalism in the early twentieth century and reveals the heterogeneity within Kadet ranks. Foregrounding the concept of rupture and the plural ways the nascent liberal party represented itself, he explores the techniques of compromise and negotiation in the pluralist political setting that allowed the party and its platform to cohere. The political and ideological pluralism of the context in which Kadet party formation took place was mirrored by the diversity that existed in the imperial space, where a chorus of national, regionalist and autonomist voices could be heard. Through the analysis, Semyonov shows how “the major historical paradox is the non-transformation of the Kadet party into a party of national liberalism; in other words, its failure to follow the European logic of development in the context of democratization and mass politics” (p. 41). In so doing, he finds that mobilized imperial diversity both inhibited and aided liberal politics in the final stages of Russian imperial history.

Then, the 1917 October revolution, the dissolution of the constituent assembly and the demotion of liberal forces during the Bolshevik terror marked the end of the early stage of Russian liberalism, instituting a monolithic ideological hegemony that would last until the end of the 1980s. Moreover, three decades of totalitarian terror, famine, violence, genocide, mass deportations and purges under Stalin obliterated the vestiges of the liberal elite formed before 1917, leaving liberalism a spent

political and intellectual movement for the remainder of Soviet history.³⁰ As Solzhenitsyn asserted, for Russia the twentieth century was time wasted in a dead-end communist experiment. Nevertheless, after the physical destruction of the pre-revolutionary elite, a subcutaneous liberal discourse emerged within the post-Stalinist intelligentsia, among groups of dissidents and human rights movements and in the new generation of reformists who led the USSR in its final decade.

In this regard, the second part of the book, entitled *Liberal Undercurrents in Soviet Times*, begins with the fourth chapter by Vladislav Zubok on the post-Stalin intelligentsia; a remarkably tenacious collective subject that embodied real and imagined liberal qualities. Zubok explores these traits, as well the structures of Soviet life and experience that engendered and shaped them. The core mission of the intelligentsia was to transcend the state and society created under Stalin to create “socialism with a human face”, based on intellectual and cultural freedoms. Russian liberalism evolved and changed through the prism of the technical-scientific intelligentsia organized in informal crews (*kompanii*), groups of “scientists and intellectuals in general, became the new ideal types of a new imagined community: a Thaw intelligentsia” (p. 49). Nevertheless, their rationalistic and human rights oriented conceptualization in any case excluded the possibility of market and capitalist reforms of the Soviet system. Then, 1968 became a watershed for a concept of liberal-minded intelligentsia, inspiring the reforms of Gorbachev’s perestroika two decades later. Consequently, Zubok argues that the intelligentsia’s liberal aspirations possibly stood in the way of an authoritarian reformation of the Soviet system, meanwhile—paradoxically—its beliefs and choices contributed to the rapid demise of the one-party system and the collapse of the Soviet state. This outcome, Zubok notes, was never predestined. He comments how “for many educated ex-Soviet emigres, who ended up in the United States and Israel, the intelligentsia of the 1960s remained a key social and cultural model. Many of them hoped to recreate the liberal world of *kompanii* and dissident circles, opening literary journals and convening conferences. Yet they soon found both worlds evaporating before their eyes: the imagined West and the milieu of intelligentsia” (p. 59). Hence, both the intelligentsia and its “Soviet liberalism” perished under the rubble of this collapse of the USSR and finally disappeared in the wake of the failed transition.

Evidently, liberal discourse survived below the surface, to reemerge after decades of persecution and marginalization. Therefore, the fifth chapter by Benjamin Nathans focuses in the dimension of Soviet liberalism within the movements of dissidents known as “rights defenders” (*pravozashchitniki*). This heterogeneous group—which even counting nationalist and religious figures as members—included people “who rejected violence and revolutionary conspiracy and instead demanded that the Soviet government observe its own laws” (p. 64). Nathans then

³⁰ See George Fischer, *Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin. Volume 2, Waiting for Hitler, 1929–1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017); Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Andrea Graziosi, *Istoriya SSSR* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2016).

recalls how “rights defenders also practiced the liberal ethos of speaking on behalf of persecuted groups other than themselves [...] and various national minorities seeking greater autonomy. They became the Soviet Union’s most eloquent and most visible speakers of the language of universal human rights” (p. 64). Their version of liberalism, however, can be understood only when situated in the specificities of the late Soviet setting. Rather than regarding liberal ideas as an imported product, Nathans suggests that rights defenders developed an indigenous version of liberalism that creatively deployed Soviet constitutional norms—themselves a reworking of Western rights discourse—while remaining wholly detached from such traditional liberal values as private property and market relations. In the relentlessly politicized circumstances of Soviet life, the dissidents’ most radically liberal gesture was to insist on the non-political nature of their activity.

In the 1980s, the need to reform a system that was floating adrift was perceived in the new generation of Soviet leaders who emerged after Brezhnev’s death and the new reformist approach that emerged also at the official level. Therefore, in the sixth chapter, Svetlana Savranskaya focuses on the transformations within the echelons of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the 1980s when Gorbachev’s perestroika eschewed the Chinese model and launched an experiment that attempted to reinvigorate the USSR by opening the political system. The new General Secretary was profoundly inspired by his personal story, which was marked by Stalinism, famine, war, destalinization, 1968 and Eurocommunism. Although his initial idea was to reform the sluggish economy and to end the arms race, the reform transformed the entire political system. Hence, the New Thinking that Gorbachev launched as “his main platform domestically and internationally was not a comprehensive plan of liberalization, but rather a proto-liberal pluralist program” (p. 73), a liberalization from above, promoting a liberal vision in an illiberal society. Through the campaign of transparency (*glasnost*) and democratization, New Thinking brought substantial outcomes: by 1990, the Cold War was over, elections had been held, and the USSR was abandoning communist ideology and building a social-democratic state. At that time, Russians supported the liberalization wholeheartedly and passionately. However, when in the 1990s the new Russian government launched radical economic reforms, the enthusiasm for perestroika’s liberal revolution drained away.

A system based on a precise organization of economic planning, institutionalized violence and the authoritarian role of the party could never be reformed. Hence, the only possible solution was a complete reset and the reconstruction of the system from scratch. Nevertheless, the legacies of the Soviet order were evident and remained also in the following decades, affecting the course of transition. Indeed, one of the the main factors limiting linear transformation towards the open society was the still influential legacy of Soviet ideology. Therefore, in the seventh chapter Mark Kramer refelects on the autocratic nature of Bolshevism and how it gave rise to the mass violence of Stalinism. Although the ideology moderated somewhat after Joseph Stalin’s death, it continued to impose severe constraints that blocked the rise of deep-rooted liberal thought in the USSR. Then, Gorbachev’s plan of wide-ranging reforms shook the foundations of the Soviet system, and many erstwhile staunch adherents of Marxism-Leninism began to have doubts about its legitimacy.

The collapse of the Eastern bloc greatly reinforced those doubts, causing many to begin renouncing what they had long believed. Nevertheless, the process happened so rapidly that it did not permit the rise of genuine liberal-democratic thought as a credible alternative. “The basic problem was that an ideological vacuum had been left by the collapse of Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology—a vacuum stemming from the autocratic nature of the ideology and its incompatibility with liberal democratic thinking. Amid this vacuum, the rhetoric of ‘democracy’ became fashionable for those in power. But without a much more solid foundation in the thinking of leading elites, the democratic rhetoric, far from bolstering the appeal of liberal democracy, severely damaged it” (p. 105). Hence, according to Kramer the “democratic” thinking that briefly took root in post-Soviet Russia was shallow and did not really fit into the liberal-democratic tradition of Locke, Kant, Rousseau, and Mill. But because officials in the new Russian government used the term “democracy”, the very concept became discredited in the eyes of many Russians, who came to associate it with hardship and instability. As a result, Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian retrenchment proceeded with little public opposition and was even widely supported. Because the autocratic nature of Soviet ideology had prevented the emergence of deep-rooted liberal-democratic thought, an ideological void was left after the demise of the USSR, and Putin stepped in to fill it with his personalistic autocratic rule.

Liberalism under Pressure in Post-Soviet Russia

As mentioned, in the late 1980s, Gorbachev’s reforms broke the monopoly of the CPSU, introducing competitive elections and the multiparty principle. At that time, liberalism represented a credible political alternative for reforming the country. Then, the Soviet Union collapsed, and some one hundred new political forces emerged in Russia, reflecting the typical left-right spectrum. Most evinced democratic, reformist and market-oriented values or claimed that their liberal orientation was a break with the recent Soviet past. After the Soviet collapse, liberal reformers became the pillars of the transitioning system and did very well at the ballot box.³¹ Nevertheless, the popularity of economic liberalization fell away rapidly: in the fall of 1991, some 47% of Russians approved a reform plan that involved austerity and would cause unemployment, while only 17% opposed the reforms. In 1992, the radical plan of price reforms and privatizations was criticized from all sides as they were perceived as being against social interests: some 55–58% of Russians said these measures were a power and money grab. In February 1992, while Prime

³¹The 1990s were characterized by liberal projects—dominated by political leaders such as the “young reformers” Anatoly Chubais, Boris Nemtsov, and Yegor Gaidar—namely, privatizations and free market reforms. These formations were crucial in building government majorities and were electorally successful. In 1993, the center-right, pro-capitalist party Democratic Choice of Russia obtained 15.51% of the vote; its successor, the Union of Right Forces, took 8.52% in the 1999 elections. In the 1995 elections, the political party Our Home—Russia of former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin won 10.13% of the electorate.

Minister Yegor Gaidar's radical reform agenda was in train, Yeltsin's popularity had fallen to 30%.³² That December, Gaidar was replaced by Viktor Chernomyrdin as the country sank into political uncertainty and instability, culminating in the shelling the Russian White House in October 1993, an event that defined the profound constitutional crisis and the liberals' disillusionment.³³ In the mid-1990s, Yeltsin tried to recover support from the liberals—and that of Western supporters—forming a government of “young reformers” led by Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, while a new class of “oligarchs” emerged.³⁴ The 1998 financial crisis brought Russia perilously close to defaulting on its debt and a destabilizing currency devaluation.³⁵ Hopes that change would be rapid and painless evaporated.

Consequently, the third part of the volume, entitled *Time of Troubles*, focuses on the 1990s as a moment of critical change under Yeltsin's presidency. At that time, “shock therapy”—the series of neoliberal economic reforms that seared the memories of the people and implicated many powerful figures—and liberalism became synonymous in Russia. These new forces had originated in the Soviet system, during which time they claimed to represent a set of pro-capitalist, market-oriented and liberal-democratic values open to international cooperation and trade. Thus, in the eighth chapter Viktor Sheynis clearly analyzes the paradoxes of the transition between 1985 and 2000 when Gorbachev's perestroika and the subsequent liberal reforms were cast as the country's path to a competitive market economy, a free political system and acceptance within the community of democratic states. Nevertheless, these objectives were never achieved, and the transition period ended as unexpectedly as it had begun: “In the twentieth century”, Sheynis notes, “Russia twice tried to embark upon the path to social modernization. On both occasions, at the start and the end of the century, the movement was interrupted” (p. 110). The country's development has thus assumed the shape of a parabolic curve: from the original, Soviet authoritarian political order toward a more open, liberal government and then back to a new authoritarian system meeting the challenges of globalization. In charting how and why this happened, Sheynis goes further and analyzes the reasons that made those forces appear so suddenly, initiating a clear and powerful reform movement that then yielded to authoritarian reaction in 1993. Furthermore, he focuses on the international isolation of Russia, on the characteristics of Russian society, and on the sustainability of the current political order starting from the

³² See Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia: Did Liberals Bury Liberalism?*, Eurozine, 23 June 2017 (<https://www.eurozine.com/russia-did-liberals-bury-liberalism/>).

³³ See Viktor Sheynis, *Vzlet i padeniye parlamenta: perelomnyye gody v rossiyskoy politike (1985—1993)* T. 1–2 (Moskva: Moskovsky Tsentr Karnegi, 2005).

³⁴ David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2002); Mark Hollingsworth and Stewart Lansley, *Londongrad. From London With Cash: The Inside Story of the Oligarchs* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009).

³⁵ See Torbjörn Becker and Susanne Oxenstierna (eds.), *The Russian Economy Under Putin* (New York-London: Routledge, 2018); Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010); Martin Gilman, *Defolt, kotorogo moglo ne byt'* (Moskva: Vremya, 2009); Vladimir Mau, *Russia's Economy in an Epoch of Turbulence: Crises and Lessons* (New York-London: Routledge, 2017).

hopes, disillusionments and defeats of the 1990s when Russian liberals were drawing lessons from the previous failures while the bureaucracy experienced difficulties adapting to the post-Soviet transition.

In the ninth chapter, Alexander Obolonsky details the ethical and sociological aspects of the transition, assessing the early 1990s, when Russia reached the zenith of liberal ethical values, romantic hopes and expectations and public demands for justice and the accountability of public authorities. The substantial underestimation of moral factors in the reform process resulted in a moral crisis, general disappointment in liberalism and other negative long-term consequences. Acquisition of intellectual and political liberties coincided with a catastrophic economic crisis and the imposition of urgent and necessary measures that hit the population hard. While these actions may have saved the country from economic collapse, they came at great political cost, because they were associated in mass consciousness with the liberal concept *tout court*. Then, Obolonsky exposes the dual and contradictory treatment of liberalism in both Soviet intellectual and bureaucratic circles, showing how the failure to clear the administration of Soviet-era cadres engendered an identity crisis and alienation among them, leading to a kind of institutional moral anomy. In his words, “the mentality of officialdom can hardly be matched organically with liberal ethical values. [...] Bureaucrats everywhere are more inclined to a paternalistic vision of their role and status in society; to so-called dirigisme” (p. 125). Indeed, these officials proved to be both morally and professionally unprepared for work under conditions of transition while systemic corruption spread. Hence, the phenomenon of broken public trust in the state and public officials undermined the credibility of honest and democratic institutions. Nevertheless, Obolonsky finds in the present period a certain ground for optimism, figuring the revival of civil society’s demands for social justice.

In the tenth chapter, Guillaume Sauvé assesses the retrospective accounts of the failure of perestroika by key protagonists of the Russian transition. He outlines important tendencies in the evolution of the liberal ideological field in Russia between 1995 and 2005, when it experienced a severe crisis. The persistent disagreements in assessing perestroika illustrate the conflict between rival liberal currents today, and offer an indirect insight into their shared assumptions. The chapter argues that Russian liberalism evolved throughout this period at three levels: political, economic and moral. First, in the pursuit of political stability, Russian liberals embraced situational conservatism, a general celebration of evolution over revolution and “from bold regime transformation to prudent reformism” (p. 150). Second, “there has been a radical break with the economic ideas of socialism, and economic liberalism has moved to become the undisputed core of the liberal ideological field” (p. 150). Finally, while Russian liberals retained a commitment to the idea that the establishment of liberal order requires substantial moral prerequisites, they nevertheless generally eschewed moral restoration as a central objective in itself and “remained generally foreign to the notion of state neutrality that is currently dominant in Western theories of liberalism” (p. 151).

As evident, in Russia the narrative of the “time of troubles”—perceived, real, or built ex-post³⁶—has prevented liberalism from gaining broad appeal in the public. The fourteen months of the Gaidar administration and its liberal economic reforms became the scapegoat for a whole decade marked by crisis but were not effective in completely realizing individual rights and freedoms. Consequently, liberalism was reduced to its economic dimension, resulting in privatizations that gave birth virtually overnight to a class of state-linked oligarchs. The “time of troubles” came thus to be understood in the Russian mind through the concluding themes of constitutional crisis, internal war, terrorism, the spread of crime and corruption and instability of governance. The fragmentation and weakness of the Russian party system was evident as the political scene came to be dominated by the presidential administrations. The delegitimization of a liberal class of politicians proceeded together with the valorization of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, whose consolidated regime has now lasted for almost two decades.

The fourth part of this volume, entitled *Liberalism Under Pressure*, focuses on the dimensions, peculiarities and challenges of Russian liberalism since 2000, seeking answers to the questions of why the liberal alternative failed to thrive in Russian politics, the extent to which basic liberal values, including the rule of law, remain within Russian elite and bureaucratic mentalities and how Russian liberalism faces the challenges of the illiberal world order. In order to proceed, we have to assess some key elements of contemporary Russia and its political space. While sixty-six registered parties make up the current multiparty system,³⁷ the political arena is dominated by Putin and United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*),³⁸ a post-ideological “catch-all party” that tries to reflect popular concerns and garner support among the bureaucratic machine and large (and conservative) sections of the middle class.³⁹ This party forms the nucleus of a clientalistic coalition around the charismatic president that draws powerful economic, political and media figures close to the regime, in a “transformist” pattern of governance that to a great extent precludes genuine political competition and undermines effective checks and balances.⁴⁰ If Putin’s

³⁶ Marlene Laruelle, *Cultural Studies and Their Role in Understanding Russia’s Political Regime*, working paper presented at the Conference on Regime Evolution, Institutional Change, and Social Transformation in Russia: Lessons for Political Science, Yale University, 28 April 2018.

³⁷ The full list of officially registered parties is available at the webpage of the Russian ministry of justice. See Ministerstvo yustitsii Rossiyskoy Federatsii, *Spisok Zaregistrirovannykh Politicheskikh Partiy* (<http://minjust.ru/nko/gosreg/partii/spisok>)

³⁸ Actually 338 of the 450 delegates in the State Duma, 128 of 170 in the Federal Council, 77 of 85 governors, 3091 of 3980 representatives in the regional assemblies and 20 of 31 ministers are members of United Russia.

³⁹ See Evgeny Gontmakher and Cameron Ross, “The Middle Class and Democratization in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 269–284.

⁴⁰ See Fabio Bettanin, *Putin e il mondo che verrà. Storia e politica della Russia nel nuovo contesto internazionale* (Viella: Roma, 2018); Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Sergio Romano, *Putin e la ricostruzione della grande Russia* (Milano: Longanesi, 2016); Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014); Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, & Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

regime seems sufficiently robust to forestall democratic change and to marginalize opposition, to what extent, then, can we say liberalism persists in Russian politics?

First, concerning the Russian party system we have to carefully assess the very word “liberal”—which is too often simply used to describe whatever force opposes Putin—since not all liberal forces stand against the regime,⁴¹ only certain Russian opposition forces are, in fact, liberal, and certain forces claiming to be “liberal” are nothing of the sort.⁴² Liberal opposition exists but is fragmented in a heterogeneous constellation of small parties defending pro-free-market and anti-authoritarianism stances. However, we can identify two key liberal formations, one center-left and one center-right, that remain active in the Russian political firmament. One of the oldest is the center-left Russian United Democratic Party - “Yabloko” (apple). This electoral cartel was initially formed to contest the legislative elections of 1993 by Grigory Yavlinsky, author of the 500 Days Program, Yuri Boldyrev, then a member of the Supreme consultative and coordinating Council, and the former Russian ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Lukin. Since the 1990s, this social-liberal formation has promoted individual freedom, civil liberties, fair competition in politics and the market economy, private property, equal social opportunity, and better relations with the USA and the EU. Yabloko tried to coalesce all liberals in Russia, to become a beacon for intellectuals and the supreme symbol of anti-elitism in the country. After initial electoral successes in the 1990s,⁴³ support for Yabloko declined through the 2000s when the party succumbed to internal divisions and Putin’s popularity rose inexorably. In 2005, together with the Union of Rightist Forces, it formed the bloc Yabloko-United Democrats that obtained some 11% of

⁴¹ Some liberal formations supported Putin’s regime on several occasions. In 2002, the green liberal party called the Network Party for Support of Small and Middle-Sized Business was established. In 2004 it was renamed Free Russia and in February 2007 changed again, to Civilian Power. The party supported Medvedev in the 2008 presidential elections and the reelection of Putin in 2018. The Party of Growth—a political formation founded in February 2009—includes some members who moved from the Union of Rightist Forces, Civilian Power and Democratic Party of Russia. The party promotes a liberal free-market economy, democracy and protecting the rights of the middle class. In the 2012 presidential elections, it supported the candidacy of Vladimir Putin. Since February 2016, the Party of Growth is represented by Boris Titov who was a candidate at the 2018 presidential elections, taking 0.8% of the vote. As well, there is the liberal-conservative Civic Platform led by the businessman Mikhail Prokhorov, a figure who obtained 7.94% of the votes in the 2012 presidential elections and who has assumed more a conciliatory tone with Putin.

⁴² Despite its name, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia is in no sense “liberal” but is rather a populist, chauvinist and ultraconservative outfit led by the maverick Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. In his memoirs, Aleksandr Yakovlev describes this party as a façade project of the CPSU and the KGB founded with some three million rubles and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy as a puppet figure. See Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Sumerki* (Moskva: Materik, 2003), p. 574; Robert Service, “Zhirinovskii: Ideas in Search of an Audience”, in Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (eds.), *Russian Nationalism: Past and Present* (Basingstoke-London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 179–197.

⁴³ In the 1993 legislative election, Yabloko obtained 7.86% of the votes, sending 27 deputies to the State Duma. This share declined in the next elections: 6.89% of votes in 1995 (45 seats), 5.93% in 1999 (21) and 4.3% in 2003 (4). See Henry Hale, “Yabloko and the Challenge of Building a Liberal Party in Russia”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 7, 2004, pp. 993–1020; David White, *The Russian Democratic Party Yabloko: Opposition in a Managed Democracy* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

votes in the Moscow municipal elections. Nevertheless, this liberal alliance quickly splintered and after the 2007 legislative election, the party has no longer had representatives in the State Duma and has been marginalized, with limited electoral success and then only in local elections.⁴⁴

Besides Yabloko, another relevant force has been the People's Freedom Party "For Russia Without Lawlessness and Corruption" (Parnas), a center-right liberal formation established in December 2010. This democratic, constitutionalist federalist and human rights oriented movement included several forces and opposition leaders such as Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Ryzhkov, Vladimir Milov, Garry Kasparov and Boris Nemtsov.⁴⁵ In August 2012, the Parnas coalition dissolved and merged with the Republican Party of Russia, becoming RPR-Parnas.⁴⁶ The new party supported the wave of protests against Putin's regime (2011–2013) and in April 2015, together with the Progress Party of the popular blogger Alexei Navalny and other unregistered movements, formed the unified Democratic Coalition to take part in the 2015 regional elections and in the 2016 legislative election. This heterogeneous coalition—which even included in it ranks ultranationalists and other radicals—failed to break through electorally. In the 2017 Moscow municipal election, Parnas partnered with Yabloko in a coalition called United Democrats, taking 260 of 1502 seats.

Evidently, these elite-oriented (Yabloko) and protests-supporting (Parnas) formations are a distinctly urban phenomena that have a margin of success whenever they combine in the electoral arena. Nevertheless, these formations have not been

⁴⁴Actually, Yabloko saw three of its members elected as deputies in Karelia in 2016, one in Kostroma oblast in 2015, one in Pskov oblast in 2016, and two in Saint Petersburg in 2016. In the 2018 presidential elections, Yavlinsky obtained only 769,644 votes (1.05%).

⁴⁵Parnas was formed by the opposition forces of the Russian People's Democratic Union led by Mikhail Kasyanov, a former prime minister in 2000–2004 who tried to challenge the United Russia candidate Dmitry Medvedev during the 2008 presidential elections; the dissolved forces of the Republican Party of Russia led by the historian Vladimir Ryzhkov; the Democratic Choice led by the former deputy minister of energy, Vladimir Milov; and members of Solidarity, a political movement represented by the chess champion Garry Kasparov and the politician Boris Nemtsov. This latter was the former first deputy prime minister of Russia (1997–1998) and a liberal politician who in the late 2000s became an active organizer and participant in Dissenters' Marches (2011–2013), Strategy-31 civil actions and rallies under the For Fair Elections banner. He criticized Putin's lifestyle and harshly denounced corruption in the state apparatus and the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Nemtsov was assassinated on 27 February 2015 while he was crossing the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow.

⁴⁶In November 1990, the Republican Party of the Russian Federation was founded by reformist members of the Democratic Platform of the CPSU and chaired by Nikolay Lysenko, Stepan Sulakshin and Vyacheslav Shostakovsky. At that time, the party joined the Democratic Russia bloc and was close to the Social Democratic Party of Russia and supported the Yeltsin and Gaidar reforms until October 1993. In the 1990s, republicans survived in alliance with minor liberal groups and reorganized the party in 2002. The Republican Party of Russia was officially dissolved in 2007, but its supporters joined the The Other Russia and since October 2010 supported the liberal-democratic coalition For Russia Without Lawlessness and Corruption. In 2011, the European Court of Human Rights condemned the party's dissolution and in 2012 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation quashed its previous decision.

able to organize a united political movement to challenge the continuity of the presidential regime, which counts on extensive popular support and large electoral majorities.⁴⁷ Indeed, due to intensive use of pro-governmental media, Putin has been able to marginalize the protests that were challenging the regime's legitimacy and to divide opponents by resorting to strong nationalist and revanchist messaging. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 garnered widespread support among the Russian population and renewed trust in the government and its international policies, splitting the opposition and diverting political attention from other internal problems, such as pension reform and the modernization of infrastructure. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the Crimean affair the president's popularity rose,⁴⁸ while at the 2016 Duma elections not a single candidate associated with liberal parties was elected. In the 2018 presidential elections, Putin was re-elected with 76.69% of the vote, while a united liberal alternative failed to materialize.

Besides the political limits of the liberal opposition forces and the strength of the presidential regime, there are other contributory factors in a society affected by general indifference and lack of interest in participating in political activities and a traditional inclination to put faith in the leader. This political apathy originated during Brezhnevism, when the last vestiges of the totalitarian order of previous decades withered and a broad-based welfare state was introduced. The new system, largely financed by oil exports, was economically inefficient in so far as it created a barrier to productive diversification.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Soviet "petrostate" was highly capable of manufacturing consent, so long as it could continue to redistribute—directly or indirectly—the benefits of raw material extraction to the population. A typical "rentier state"⁵⁰ then, as now, the post-Soviet Russian political order has rested throughout on the principle of "consensus for wealth". Furthermore, in present Russia a flat tax rate of 13% is applied to incomes. With public expenditure largely covered by oil revenues and a low fiscal pressure, the population is not particularly sensitive to the value of public expenditure and costs of politics. The principle of "no taxation without representation" has therefore never really taken root in Russia where political choices are not perceived as impacting—directly or indirectly—citizens' pockets. For example, in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, there was no relevant debate about the costs of annexing Crimea, the organization

⁴⁷The regime has persisted for more than eighteen years with wide popular support re-affirmed at each election. In 2000, Vladimir Putin took 53.4% of the vote in the presidential election, rising to 71.9% when he was resoundingly re-elected in 2004. In 2008, his close ally, Dmitry Medvedev, was elected president with 71.2% of votes cast and upon his return to the hustings for a third run at the presidency in 2012, Putin won 63.6% of the ballots. In 2018, he received his best vote-share to date (76.69%).

⁴⁸Lev Gudkov, "The 'Great Power' Ideologeme as a Condition of Putin's Regime Legitimacy", in Cucciolla (ed.), *The Power State is Back?*, pp. 49–61.

⁴⁹See Nat Moser, *Oil and the Economy of Russia: From the Late-Tsarist to the Post-Soviet Period* (New York-London: Routledge, 2017).

⁵⁰See Benjamin Smith, "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960–1999", *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2, April 2004, pp. 232–246.

of international events or the expensive campaign to modernize the army and the nuclear arsenal, while reforms and debates on other social priorities were postponed indefinitely. The current *modus vivendi* between state and population—a “consensual authoritarianism” that offers little prospect of change, means the likelihood of liberal reform of the Russian system is low.

Although the regime appears solid, the opposition fragmented and the electoral base apathetic, liberalism remains, however dormant, as an extant force in contemporary Russia. In the 11th chapter, Valeriy Solovey draws our attention to the largely unseen but nevertheless influential group of “system liberals”; those “personalities [who] safeguard the performance of the Russian economy and are said to be developing a full-scale plan of liberal reforms” (p. 157). These technocratic figures work “behind the scenes”, as it were, in the Russian government, the academy and in various policy agencies, confirming how “the gravity of the state is a particular feature of Russian liberalism” (p. 160). According to Solovey, “this is arguably the only group in the Russian elite with a coherent mindset, ideologically motivated goals, managerial capacity and trust from the West” (p. 155). The system liberals are technically competent, and more open to integration with the global economy and adoption of international rules. Nevertheless, they are cogs in the state machine and will not promote regime change or rapid democratization in Russia, leaving Russian liberalism effectively in limbo. How Putin’s regime fares in the coming years will evidently reflect the strength of the elite consensus he has – directly or indirectly - gathered around him than any push by liberal forces for change.

In the 12th chapter, Alexey Barabashev and Vadim Prokofiev continue the discussion of system liberals, linking the political debate on Russian liberalism with institutional reforms and public administration. Russia has experienced two cycles of administrative reform since 1992, both beginning with bold public statements of intent in response to broad-based calls for a professional and effective public service. Then, in each case, a limited reform phase kicked in, mostly in the form of notional but ineffective changes in policy and procedure. Here, the community of experts recruited to advance reform expanded, but its role paradoxically weakened because a consolidating bureaucracy stifled its efforts. Hence, the reform turned into an instrument to increase the weight of the top levels bureaucracy, strengthening the power of the political and administrative elite. Barabashev and Prokofiev thus demonstrate that the relative failure and recurrence of these cycles is not casual or incidental, but rather is a function of elite engineering and the weakness of the expert community in Russia. Other reasons include insufficient support for reform and poor communication and coordination among technical experts. While Russian liberalism in its technocratic redoubt remains paralyzed, the key to successful public sector reform in Russia is to institutionalize and improve the quality of experts supporting it. Therefore, “reform of the Russian bureaucracy is the capstone of any general transformation of the Russian system writ large. Liberal public service reform is thus the focal point for establishing a more open system, oriented to professional values and transparent state administration. Without such reform, neither political—nor economic—liberalism does not have much chance of success” (p. 166).

In the 13th chapter, Ildar Zulkarnay reassesses liberalism in relation to center—periphery relations in the Russian Federation and the centralizing tendencies of the state. Pointing to the very problem of federalism as a pillar of liberal democracy, Zulkarnay investigates the contradictions that have arisen in Russia in the post-Soviet period between the liberal reforms of the economy conducted and the conservative approach to state building. This trend toward centralization of the federal administration was inevitable in the construction of state capitalism in Yeltsin’s Russia, where private businesses became either closely connected with the power of entrepreneurs or officials. Such a model of capitalism includes only part of the elements of the concept of liberalism acceptable to it, while principles of federalism and institutions of democracy were sacrificed, enabling the “liberal reformers” of the 1990s to implement their plans for appropriation of state property. Zulkarnay thus demonstrates how the centralistic attitude of “the entire spectrum of political parties—from the Communists to the Union of Right Forces and Yabloko—appeared in the 1990s against the decentralization of political power, especially against the acquisition by the ethnic republics of greater rights in comparison with other regions” (p. 197).

The imperial dimension in Russian liberalism has implications even on the international scenario. As mentioned in relation to the early thinkers in the imperial era, Russian liberalism has evolved along the perception of national interest, sovereignty, world order and foreign policy orientations. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, at least three significant schools of liberal thinking emerged. The first of these are the westernizers—modernizers like Gaidar and the first minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation Andrey Kozyrev, who hold that the Western model is the only option for Russia. The second school is made up of institutionalists like Gorbachev and his followers, who contend that Russia must pursue stronger integration within the various international institutions. The national democrats, who are the third school, emphasize the cultural peculiarities of Russian civilization.⁵¹ This setting further progressed in the aftermath of the 2014 Crimean crisis, when the debate on Russian liberalism became a topic of interest outside Russia, involving the very geopolitical and imperial dimensions of the country with a political discourse of restoration of superpower status. Andrei Melville in the concluding 14th chapter deals with emerging illiberal challenges—at the global and domestic levels—and their impact on the current state and prospects of liberalism, particularly in Russia where “the ongoing crisis of liberalism as ideology and policy may be one of the most obvious examples of the illiberal global and national trends, although with specific particularities” (p. 206). Therefore, the Russian case appears “very peculiar because of the historical dominance of illiberal traditions and today’s overwhelming neoconservative political and ideological ‘consensus’” (p. 218). In front of a potential defeat of the liberal world order at the political and ideological level, Melville investigates the possibilities of “rebooting” liberalism in Russia and readapting it to contemporary illiberal challenges. By providing a conceptual

⁵¹ Pavel A. Tsygankov and Andrei P. Tsygankov, “Dilemmas and Promises of Russian Liberalism”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, no. 1, March 2004, pp. 53–70.

differentiation between institutional and normative aspects of the global liberal world order, he analyzes the political and ideological context that offers at least a partial explanation for the miseries of Russian liberals today, and also a tentative blueprint for how liberalism might survive in non-liberal Russia. Therefore, the next challenges for Russian liberalism include resetting its relations with the Russian nation, state, and society; reassessing its dimension in the global scenario; and forming a real political alternative to the status quo. Moreover, that alternative must be credible, and must “overcome personal ambitions and fatal splits within the very tiny liberal camp” (p. 220), uniting the elite, speaking to the people and mobilizing popular support in developing a concrete policy and reform platform.

This book seeks to assess the dimensions and challenges of a political doctrine which, however marginal and under continuous attack in the official discourse, has proven to be a pillar of Russian politics and culture and survives in the hopes of those who still believe in the “wind of change”.

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About the Authors

Gianmaria Ajani is rector at the University of Turin and professor of Law. His main qualifications include legal reforms in the transition states, with a special focus on codification of civil and commercial law in Central and Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the People’s Republic of China, Albania, and Balkan Countries. Ajani has advised several international institutions, such as the IMF, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe, on different aspects of legal reforms in post-Communist countries, with particular reference to property and contract law and to the codification of private law. He has been visiting professor at UC Berkeley School of Law, Fribourg School of Law, and the Wuhan University. Besides several scientific articles and book chapters, his most recent publications include the textbooks of comparative law *Diritto comparato: Lezioni e materiali* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2018) and *Derecho comparado y teoría jurídica* (Lima–Santiago de Chile: ARA-Olejnik, 2017).

Alexey Georgievich Barabashev is an academic advisor of the Department of Public Administration and Municipal Management and chair of Civil Service at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. He has previously worked as deputy dean of the school of public administration of the Moscow State University (1993–2004); member of the expert group for public service reform of Russian Federation under the President of Russia (1997–1998); head of the expert group for public service reform of the Center of Strategic Research (1999–2000); member of the expert group for public service reform in the Administration of the President of Russia (2000–2011); member of the expert group for evaluation of the best practices of the civil service of the Ministry of Labor of Russia (2008–present); member of the attestation, recruitment, and rank promotion of several federal government bodies (2000–present); and member of the Expert Soviet “Open Government” (2012–2018). His recent publications include the article *Are Existing Administrative Paradigms Capable of Producing The Tools To Resolve The Contemporary Administrative Crisis?* (Public Administration 1, 2017, pp. 6–25) and the book with A.V. Klimova *Gosudarstvennoye i munitsipal’noye upravleniye. Tekhnologii nauchno-issledovatel’skoy raboty* (Moskva: Yurant, 2018).

Riccardo Mario Cucciolla is a postdoctoral research fellow in the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow. He holds a Ph.D. in Political History (IMT Lucca, 2016). Since 2012, he has also been teaching contemporary history, the history of international relations, and the history of political parties and movements while coordinating a course as adjunct professor in Russian history and politics at LUISS Guido Carli in Rome. He specializes in the political history of Soviet Russia and Central Asia—particularly in the evolution of Soviet center-periphery relations during perestroika—and his research interests include the history of international relations, military history, the history of journalism, and colonial studies. For Reset, he has edited the volumes *The Power State Is Back? The Evolution of Russian Political Thought After 1991* (Rome: Reset, 2016) and *State and Political Discourse in Russia* (Rome: Reset, 2017). Currently he works on a book about the crisis of the Soviet periphery during the “Uzbek cotton affair” (1975–1991).

Alexey Alexeevich Kara-Murza is a Russian philosopher and political scientist. A graduate of the Moscow State University (Institute of Asia and Africa), he is Doctor of Sciences in Philosophy, candidate of Sciences in History, professor and senior researcher at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), and senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is the author of books and articles on Russian political philosophy and intellectual history. His special research topic is the intellectual dialog between Russia and Italy. Author of several books and scientific articles, recently he has published a work in two volumes entitled *Rossiyskiy liberalizm: Idei i lyudi* (Moskva: Novoye izdatel'stvo, 2018).

Mark Kramer is director of Cold War Studies and a senior fellow of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. Originally trained in mathematics, he went on to study international relations as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and was also an academy fellow in Harvard Academy of International and Area Studies. His latest books are *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945–1990* (Lanham: Lexington Books, Harvard Cold War Studies book series, 2013), *Reassessing History on Two Continents* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2013), and *Der Krenl und die Wende 1989* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2014), and he is the editor of a forthcoming three-volume collection entitled *The Fate of Communist Regimes, 1989–1991*.

Andrei Yuryevich Melville is the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and head of the Department of Political Science at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. His academic interests are in comparative and world politics, regime change, democratization, and authoritarianism. His previous positions were in MGIMO and in the Institute for US and Canadian Studies. He was visiting professor in UC Berkeley (1992 and 1994) and at the University of Bergen

(1997, 1999, and 2009). His major publications include as editor and coauthor *Political Atlas of the Modern World* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), as coeditor and coauthor *Russian Foreign Policy: Concepts and Realities* (Budapest: CEU, 2005), as editor and coauthor the textbook of political science *Politologiya: ucheb-nik* (Moskva: Prospekt Press, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013), *Demokraticheskiye tranzity* (Moskva: MONF, 1999), and as coeditor with Gail Lapidus and coauthor *The Glasnost Papers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

Benjamin Nathans is associate professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, USA), specializing in modern Russia, the Soviet Union, modern Jewish history, and the history of human rights. His multiple prize-winning book *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) has been translated into Hebrew and Russian. Nathans chaired the committee of scholars that helped create the Jewish Museum in Moscow, which opened in 2012 to international acclaim. He is currently completing a book entitled *To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause: A History of the Soviet Dissident Movement*. His essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *The Economist*, *The Nation*, the *London Review of Books*, and other publications.

Alexander Valentinovich Obolonsky is doctor of Law and Politics and member of the independent Academy of Humanities Research. In 1996–1997, he chaired the group for public service reform within the framework of a Presidential Commission. He has worked in the Institute of State and Law and in the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and has been an invited scholar in the United States, England, Sweden, Belgium, Australia, Finland, and Hungary. Currently, he is professor at the NRU HSE in Moscow and teaches courses on comparative public service and ethics in public life. His professional interests cover comparative civil service and theories of bureaucracy, comparative political analysis, and other historical and cultural issues. His publications include the monographs *Etika Publichnoy sfery i real'nosti politicheskoy zhizni* (Moskva: Mysl', 2016), *The Drama of Russian Political History: System Against Individuality* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), the recently edited volume “*Osoby put' strany. Mify i real'nost'*” (Moskva: Mysl' and Liberal Mission Foundation, 2018), and chapters in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State: Officialdom from Alexander III to Putin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Vadim Nikolaevich Prokofiev is an associate professor and deputy head of the Department of Public Administration and Municipal Management at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. He has previously worked in position of head of Civil Service Department and in the Executive Office of the Russian Government and the Administration of the Russian President (2003–2012) and as vice-rector of State University of Management (2012–2013). He was awarded with the Russian President Decoration (2007) and Full State Counsellor (Third Class) of the Russian Federation (2012). He has developed some 30 Bills,

Presidential Decrees, and Government Regulations. His research interests include public administration, constitutional law, presidentialism, sociology, and philosophy of power. His most recent publications are *Institut prezidentstva i politicheskiye partii, predstavlenyye v Gosudarstvennoy Dume Federal'nogo Sobraniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii*—in two parts (Konstitutsionnoye i munitsipal'noye pravo 2 and 4, 2018)—and *Konstitutsionno-pravovaya priroda vzaimodeystviya Prezidenta RF s Pravitel'stvom RF i organami ispolnitel'noy vlasti* (Gosudarstvo i pravo 4, 2018).

Guillaume Sauvé holds a Ph.D. in Political Science (Sciences Po Paris, 2016). He was a visiting student at Princeton University in 2015–2016, and he is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Political Science and at the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at Carleton University, Canada. His work, based on a combination of intellectual history and political theory, focuses particularly on political thought in Russia. He has written about the moral underpinnings of Soviet liberalism during perestroika and is conducting research on the controversial legacy of perestroika in contemporary Russia. He has edited a special issue of *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* (46, no. 3, 2015) entitled *Repenser le post-communisme: entre études aréales et sociologie politique comparative* and the article forthcoming in *Europe-Asia Studies* *The Apogee of Soviet Political Romanticism: Projects for Moral Renewal in Early Perestroika (1985–1989)*.

Svetlana Savranskaya is director of Russia programs (since 2001) at the National Security Archives at George Washington University and an adjunct professor teaching US-Russian relations and contemporary Russian politics at the American University School of International Service. She is a graduate of Moscow State University (History, 1988) and Emory University (Ph.D. in Political Science, 1998). She is the author, with Thomas Blanton, of the book *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), coeditor (with Thomas Blanton and Vladislav Zubok) of “*Masterpieces of History*”: *The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), and editor of the book by the late Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Missiles of November* (Stanford: Stanford University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).

Alexander M. Semyonov Ph.D., is professor of History and chair of the History Department at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg. He is a co-founder and coeditor of the international scholarly journal *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* and coeditor with Ronald Suny of the book series “*Imperial Transformations*” with Routledge. He has edited and authored the volumes *New Imperial History of the Post-Soviet Space* (Kazan: Center for the Study of Nationalism and Empire, 2004) and *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009). His recent publications include

The Empire and Nationalism at War (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2014), *How Five Empires Shaped the World and How This Process Shaped Those Empires* (Ab Imperio 4, 2017), and coauthored with Jeremy Smith the article *Nationalism and Empire Before and After 1917* (Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism 17, 2017).

Viktor Sheynis is professor, Ph.D. in Economics, and chief research fellow at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (1975–1990 and 2000 to the present). After graduating from the history faculty of Leningrad University, in 1958, he was expelled from scientific and pedagogical work for opposing the policy of the Soviet Union in Hungary. In 1958–1964, Sheynis worked as a metalworker at the Kirov (Putilov) Plant. From 1966 till 1975, he was chair of economics of contemporary capitalism at Leningrad University. Since 1987, he has been an active participant in the democratic movement, a member of the intellectuals' club, Moscow Tribune, and one of the founders and authors of the Democratic Russia electoral program and later of the political party Yabloko. In 1990, he was elected a People's Deputy of the RSFSR and lately became one of the authors of the 1993 Russian Constitution. In 1993 and 1995, he was elected a deputy of the first and second дума of the Russian Federation. He has published more than 350 pieces of scientific research on the contemporary socio-economic development of the Western nations and developing countries and political and constitutional development in Gorbachev's USSR and in post-Soviet Russia. His most recent fundamental works are *Vzlet i padeniye parlamenta: perelomnyye gody v rossiyskoy politike (1985–1993)* T. 1-2 (Moskva: Moskovsky Tsentr Karnegi, 2005) and *Vlast' i zakon: Politika i konstitutsii v Rossii v XX—XXI vekakh* (Moskva: Mysl', 2014).

Valeriy D. Solovey has a Ph.D. in History and is professor and head of the Chair of Public Relations at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). He graduated from the Moscow State University, Faculty of History, in 1983, and has worked at the Russian Academy of Sciences and at the Gorbachev Foundation. Solovey has been a columnist for Russian newspapers and TV and in 1995 was a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His main areas of scientific interest are Russian history, politics, and ideology, Russian foreign policy, Russian nationalism, propaganda, and the color revolutions. He has authored or coauthored seven books published in Russia and abroad, a few of them bestsellers. His most recent book is *Revolyution! Osnovy revolyutsionnoi bor'by v sovremennuyu epokhu* (Moskva: Eksmo, 2016). He has also published some 80 academic articles and a few hundred media articles and notes. Solovey runs an influential political account in the Russian segment of Facebook.

Olga Anatol'evna Zhukova is a Russian philosopher and historian of culture. A graduate of the Ural State University (Faculty of Fine Arts and Cultural Studies), she is doctor of Sciences in Philosophy; candidate of Sciences in Cultural Studies; professor of the Faculty of Humanities, School of Philosophy; academic director of the master's program in philosophical anthropology; and deputy head of the

International Laboratory for the Study of Russian and European Intellectual Dialog at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). She is the author of books and articles on Russian culture, art, and intellectual history. Her main publications include the books *Izbrannye raboty po filosofii kul'tury. Russkaja kul'tura i social'nye praktiki sovremennoj Rossii* (Moskva: Soglasie, 2014), *Na puti k Russkoj Evrope. Intellektualy v bor'be za svobodu i kul'turu v Rossii* (Moskva: Fond Liberal'naya missiya, 2013), and the coedited volume *Petr Bergardovich Struve* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2012).

Vladislav Martinovich Zubok is professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Born and educated in Moscow, between 1993 and 2012, he worked and taught in the United States. He is specialist in Cold War and Soviet-Russian history, director of Russia global affairs program at the LSE IDEAS, and head of Europe-Russia-Ukraine group in the LSE-Hertie School Dahrendorf Project. The list of publications includes *A Failed Empire: the Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), and *The idea of Russia: the life and work of Dmitry Likhachev* (London–New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2017). Currently, he works on a book about the Soviet collapse.

Ildar Uzbekovich Zulkarnay is head of the Laboratory for the Study of Social and Economic Problems of the Regions at the Bashkir State University. He graduated from the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute in 1981 and worked for a long time in the IT sector. In 1995, he graduated from the Economics Faculty at the Bashkir State University, continued his postgraduate studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and defended his doctoral dissertation in economics. He studied federalism issues in US research centers, and he has spent research periods at the Georgia State University (2004) and at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (2008) as Fulbright-Kennan scholar. His publications in English include the book chapter *Fiscal Equalization Policy in the Russian Federation* (in Sergii Slukhai ed., *Dilemmas and Compromises: Fiscal Equalization in Transitional Countries*, Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Initiative, Open Society Institute, 2003, pp. 65–106) and the recent article *Why Russia Has Again Been Sliding from Federalism to Unitarianism* (*Public Administration* 5, Special Issue, 2018, pp. 116–132).