



## Ideologies of the Russian modernization

Last year during the “Forward, Russia!” appeal, Dmitry Medvedev, calling on Russian society to adopt a fresher look at its own history and future, introduced the concept of modernization in the public sphere. The issue, analyzed so far only by some experts, is today playing the role of a political slogan, and is the subject of hot debates. The ruling elites are taking advantage of the ideology of changes for their internal games within one ruling camp. Thus, how do Russians understand modernization?

In the current issue of our policy papers Robert Cheda tries to answer the question how do Russians understand modernization. “One may find the roots of this need for modernization in the third cycle of development that contemporary Russia is just about to enter. Looking back at the transformation of the 1990s caused by the social interests in the midst of radical changes to the system, the last decade – beginning from 2000 – has shown an opposite trend: the need for stability has been prevalent. Both these cycles have contributed to the creation of a hybrid system, connecting the elements of superficial westernization with the Soviet past. The main result appeared to be an adjusted auto-modernization of elites which led to the authoritarianization of the system. Government elites have transformed into a new possessing class, today called “biurnes” – a symbiotic cluster of bureaucracy, defense and law enforcement institutions and corporate business connected with an umbilical cord of administrative and resource rent. Its interests are decisive for Russia.”

I encourage you to read the new issue of the “Pulaski Policy Papers”!

**Dominik Jankowski**

Chief Editor of the “Pulaski Policy Papers”

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*Translated by:*

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The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is an independent, non-partisan institution with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out such activities as conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders in Poland and abroad. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is one of only two Polish institutions that have a partnership status with the Council of Europe and is a member of the Group Abroad – a umbrella organization of top 40 Polish NGOs working outside of Poland.

## Robert Cheda

### Robert Cheda

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Last year during the “Forward, Russia!” appeal, Dmitry Medvedev, calling on Russian society to adopt a fresher look at its own history and future, introduced the concept of modernization in the public sphere. The issue, analyzed so far only by some experts, is today playing the role of a political slogan, and is the subject of hot debates. The ruling elites are taking advantage of the ideology of changes for their internal games within one ruling camp. Thus, how do Russians understand modernization?

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This is precisely the reason Russian sociologists attribute to the deep crisis in the country. The modern authoritarian project, aiming to provide the possibility of a civilization leap into the 21st century, has become a barrier. In fact, it has lost its reformatory orientation, and the concept of conservative modernization, sanctioning protection and prolonging the status quo, has become a symbol of the ruling powers' good esteem. Obviously it has nothing in common with its western counterparts. It also tends to be compared to the obstructionist and reactionary displays of Russian history – the epochs of stagnation.

There are numerous negative effects, e.g. legal nihilism, but the scale and the systematic character of corruption is the most common denominator. One of the main personalities in the country – the Chairman of the Constitutional Court – Valery Zorkin, publicly admitted: “Russia has been transforming from a criminalized country (crime being ingrained in the state apparatus and economy), into a criminal country (the individual interests of the state apparatus and business running parallel with the interests of criminal circles, and so jointly defining the national interest)”.

It would be even more worthwhile to quote the conclusions made by the Kremlin think-tanks: the Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) and the Center for Strategic Analysis (CSR). The crisis of the country results both from corruption and disrepute of its apparatus in the eyes of the people. Also the ruling power has “slept through” the social changes. With the global adoption of mass communication technologies and access to independent information steaming ahead, the so far hibernated majority has started to evince grassroots self-organization. Society itself has undergone substantial changes in its structure. The middle classes and youth, radicalized by the lack of opportunities, have both joined the oppositionist intelligentsia. In fact, the stereotypical lack of preparation to take responsibility for the country is collapsing, and the façade-like character of the country has caused the creation of parallel institutions. Social networks and such projects as an online parliament have been winning a growing popularity, often brought about by a political need. The legal validity of today's elites, when ruling the country, has been constantly decreasing. Therefore, CSR predicts that the years 2013-2015 will bring forth social

dynamics of an oppositionist character, and its extent will exceed the analogous issue from the period of the fall of the USSR. A certain catalyst here might be the deterioration of the economic situation and further unfavorable course of events in the Northern Caucasus.

Moreover, international conditions play an important part here as well. Global interdependence has caused the external position of Russia to depend to a greater extent on the parameters of economic growth and competitiveness on the world markets. Meanwhile, the world crisis has painfully disclosed the fallibility of the market of resources. The decrease in GDP by eight percent has brought about the realization that not only is proper diversification necessary, but also a thorough modernization, since educational, science and technology potential, and also the production potential inherited after the USSR, have been exhausted and destroyed.

In this way Russia is again facing a historic dilemma: what direction should it pursue, as the phantom of unfinished modernization has been circling since the times of Peter the Great. Indeed, when comparing the past and present dilemmas of the ruling elites, they are identical and refer to the goal and limits of changes. In both cases the answer is to seek the protection of the political and economic status quo. At present it is commonly believed that a return to the situation from before the crisis would be impossible, while inertia would result in an uncontrolled chain reaction. The role of Cassandra has been assumed by INSOR and CSR. Despite differences regarding details, the alarmist reports have one common denominator: the conclusion that deep political changes (included in two terms: democratization and liberalization) are necessary for economic and social sanitation or healing. Only such a perception of modernization will enable the cultural threshold to be crossed in a way decisive enough for the creation of modern identity, and, from an institutional dimension, of a legal state, which would mean a return to westernization and to an adequate system of values. We should also remind ourselves that the division of the ruling elites into factions – conservative and liberal – is something of a simplification, as the modernist debate has many more shades of grey. Nonetheless, the reactionary Kremlin faction defines modernization as an optimization of the present system mainly through improving its ability to exercise power, with the aim being to create a more effective means of distributing goods to the people, as the basis for a more stable contract between the power and the people. It does not exclude using mobilization to improve economic modernization in order to catch up with and surpass the West. In foreign policy, the conservative faction perceives Russia as being similarly to the Huntingtonian centre of civilization in multilateral world where the base is more of a military power than soft power. 'Conservationists' (as they are called by the Russian media) are not a homogenous group. There are the advocates of system cosmetics and ultras in their ranks. The Chekists and Orthodox factions believe that democracy and liberalism pose a deadly threat to Russia. In this way conservative modernization is ideologically getting close to the thoughts of the Russian traditionalists, including the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. No surprise that the chief groups of bureaucracy, defense and law enforcement institutions, army and big corporate business (representing the branches of natural resources and a military-industrial complex) belong to conservationists. The ruling party – “One Russia” is an institutional emanation, i.e. the past and the new nomenclature. The liberal faction treats modernization according to think-tanks' recommendations, and evolutionary practice is perceived as a way of preventing inevitable revolution. Not without reason does it refer to the wasted historic chances of such personalities as Nikolai Speranski, Pyotr Stolypin and Boris Chicherin or the program of the Kadet party. During the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation of the Serfs not long ago, Dmitry Medvedev aligned himself with the modernizing tsar Alexander II. Present day liberals are loyalists who adhere to the statement of Pushkin (the only European in Russia) on the government, explaining the necessity of giving an impulse from above to the cultural process that come

from below. The enlightened technocrats assume integration with trans-Atlantic institutions (although left unspecified), whereas they introduce westernization as a civilization choice, considering Russia to be an integral part of Europe. Their hope for finishing the work of Peter the Great is to be found in the establishment of a middle class. As for the issue of economic improvement, the liberal faction presents Medvedev's program of the four "T's": institutional, innovative, infrastructural, and investment reforms, for example through creating conditions for the development of small and medium businesses.

It seems that democratic opposition will become a natural ally of this Kremlin faction, with cooperation leading to the creation of a social modernist platform. Still, the oppositionist intelligentsia considers loyalists to be a PR project only, serving to strengthen the existing status quo. A famous historian, Yuri Afanasiev published an essay undermining the sense of such a perceived liberalization mission. Moreover, the Moscow Carnegie Center is asking whether the Medvedevian depiction of modernization is not too abstract for the average Russian, who – being afraid of social costs of changes – is eager to see more real benefits in the future.

The conflict between Kremlin factions has been intensifying as political prognosis differs only in the various evaluations of the advancement in the present crisis. Under such circumstances, squabbles about ideas regarding modernization are being used for an elite game aimed at strengthening the position of both camps. Spilling into the public space are single issues such as questions of ownership, changes in personnel, and legal changes connected with the fight for influence. This are becoming especially visible in the run-up to the elections to the State Duma (December 2011) when an elitist candidate for the presidential post in 2012 will emerge.

Finally, one should state that the scenarios of solutions to the present situation drawn by various research centers are rather pessimistic. They lack faith in the self-preservation instinct of the Russian elites, who evince almost suicidal tendencies, characterized by a certain inertia when it comes to intervening in the course of events. If this is the case, the use of modernisation as a slogan serving to canalize society's energy is sure to misfire. The dissonance between modernising expressions and real action is on the increase. Sociologists agree that along with political and social-economic changes the Russian identity needs to change, only then will modernization cease to be an empty term. Russia lacks a modern, integrated binding force. The myths of the Great Patriotic War and imperial past have stopped playing a major part. Hopes lie in the initiative of the presidential council for civic society regarding de-totalitarianization of Russia. It assumes de-communization and de-Stalinization, but also an idea of national reconciliation. Will the fruits of this be a modern, well-perceived nationalism? This factor seems to be another chance for the modernizers. However, if used instrumentally, it may turn out to be deadly for Russia.

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is an independent think tank which specializes in foreign policy, with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out activities both in Poland and abroad, among others in Central and Eastern Europe and in North America.

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