

Abstracts

Dmitrii Furman

Russia at the Crossroads

Logic and the End of "Imitation Democracy"

Russia in 2008 once again has the chance to embark upon a democratic path. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which contradicted the will of the people, and the unconstitutional dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in 1993, the Kremlin has followed the iron law of imitation democracy. Russia's autocratic original sins force those in power to discard the separation of powers and to intensify control over society. Putin has created a way out of this vicious circle: By forgoing an unconstitutional candidacy for another term of office, he has taken a decisive step toward the "desacralisation" and the "depersonalisation" of power.

Open Letter from Sergei Kovalev

On the eve of the acclamation that was called an "election" and made Dmitrii Medvedev Russia's new president, human rights activist Sergei Kovalev spoke out with an open letter in which he sharply criticised the regime established by outgoing President Vladimir Putin. Kovalev, a biologist born in 1930, draws from considerable experience. In 1956, he protested the Soviet intervention in Hungary; in 1968, he interceded on behalf of dissidents who had been arrested for protesting the suppression of the Prague Spring. Kovalev himself was sentenced to seven years in a camp for anti-Soviet propaganda in 1975. From 1990 to 1993, he was chairman of the Supreme Soviet's parliamentary committee for human rights, from 1994 to 1995 human rights plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation. He resigned from this office due to the Russian military's conduct of the first war in Chechnya, which he sharply criticised as much as during the second conflict in the northern Caucasus. We document Kovalev's letter here in a slightly amended and editorially annotated form.

Roland Götz

Economic Power Russia

Oil, Economic Upturn, and Stability

Russia's economy has been booming for several years. In 2008, its gross domestic product ought to be larger than that of Great Britain. In 2016, Russia may have overtaken Germany and become the world's fifth largest economic power after the United States, China, Japan, and India. The sheer size of its GDP, however, is not a sufficient indicator of the productivity of its national economy. Russia's growth is highly dependent on the development of the oil price. The massive export of resources is leading to an appreciation of the rouble. This has the effect of dampening the economy, because it limits export possibilities for industry. The symptoms of the "Dutch disease" and a "resource curse" are making themselves felt in this way. A stabilisation fund created in 2004 is supposed to create a corrective. Whether this will succeed is debatable.

Mischa Gabowitsch

Sociology of Knowledge Instead of Adulation

The Levada School Obstructs Reception on Its Own

The sociologists of the Moscow-based Levada Centre are working to codify the intellectual legacy of their deceased teacher. But this will hardly put an end to the isolation of Levada, Gudkov, & Co. For this "disturbance in dialog" is not only a problem of international scientific communication. It also has to do with Russia's debate culture. The universal claim of Levada's functionalist theory, the dubious status of key terms, its confinement to Russia as the object of research, as well as the explicit claim to being normative place additional hurdles in the way of the Levada school's greater reception.

Iris Kempe

The Baltic Countries, Russia, and the European Union

Bilateral Problems as European Challenges

Relations between Russia and its Baltic neighbours are marked by distrust. The reasons are differing interpretations of history and the Russian-speaking minority. Since the accession of the Baltic countries to the European Union, these bilateral issues have become EU matters. The Baltic states face the challenge of using their exposed position constructively for a common EU Russia policy.

Mirjam Sprau

Gold and Forced Labour

The Camp Complex *Dal'stroi*

The area along the river Kolyma is inextricably linked to forced labour. Under Stalinism, the industrial camp complex *Dal'stroi* exploited people, gold, and other raw materials. From 1931 until 1957, 876,043 people were incarcerated in *Dal'stroi*. At its peak, the complex made up a seventh of the Soviet Union's territory. Administratively, economically, and politically, the camp enjoyed a special status. In their literature, Varlam Shalamov and Evgeniia Ginzburg bore witness to the wretchedness of forced labour there. The history of the gulag is inseparably connected to *Dal'stroi*.

Stefan Auer

The Prospects for Revolution

Political Thinking in the West and East in the 20th Century

Numerous Western intellectuals became apologists for totalitarian regimes during the 20th century. East Central European philosophers and thinkers such as Jan Patočka, Václav Havel, and Czesław Miłosz, who knew both National Socialist and Communist tyranny, enjoyed a special immunity against such misled thinking. But their knowledge did not lead them to withdraw from politics. Rather, they searched within the European philosophical heritage for points of contact for another understanding of politics. Using their power of the powerless, they made an essential contribution to the collapse of the Communist system.

Laurynas Katkus

On Both Sides of the Stream

Literary Representations of the Memel

In literature, rivers are a multilayered motif: They stand for nature and time, are cultural and political borders, and establish links. As a European river, the Memel is a topic of German, Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian literature. In German culture, it was often perceived as a border between west and east European culture. In the work of Johannes Bobrowski, the river acts as an ambivalent element that creates both ties and divisions; it also plays a central role as an existential place. For Lithuanian literature, the Memel symbolises national identity and history.