

Book Review

Zoltan Barany and Robert G. Moser (eds), *Russian Politics: Challenges of Democratization*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 260.

The multi-dimension as well as the complexity which constitute the structure of the Russian political edifice, through the various aspects of the Russian political life, is being thoroughly described and filtered in the work about "Russian Politics" which is edited by Z. Barany and R. Moser. It is a collective work in which the writers of each chapter, attempts to sketch the fundamental folds of the interaction among the main actors of the Russian political scene by giving special gravity in the post-soviet era.

In his Introduction titled "Challenges of Russian Democratization", R. Moser poses the main axis of each of the chapters that are going to follow and at the same time is referring to the Russian political experience, as described by each of the above chapters, through the influence of the "structural", the "institutional" and the "élite-driven" explanation of Russia's transitional phase.

The 1st Chapter focus on "Russian Electoral Trends", which M. McFaul describes and comments on them, concentrating his interest mainly on the polarization degree of the Russian electorate through the presidential and the parliamentary elections from the 1989 semi-competitive elections to the 2000 presidential vote. An analysis which makes clear not only the trends but also the volatility of the electorate, adding by this way a useful guidance for the electoral culture of the Russian people.

Regarding the 2nd Chapter, under the title: "Executive-Legislative Relations in Russia, 1991-1999", R. Moser depicts the interaction between the presidential office and the legislative bodies during Yeltsin period. Special emphasis is given on the presidential power as it flows through the adoption of the 1993 Constitution and its influence on the political institutions. The upheavals that were cultivated by specific presidential decisions, provoked an unstable framework of cooperation between the engaged parts.

Through the 3rd Chapter: "The Russian Central State in Crisis: Center and Periphery in the Post-Soviet Era", K. Stoner-Weiss on the one hand gives the context of the regional structure of the Russian state and on the other hand looks through the ways in which the governmental actions of the regions influenced the federal center and affected its institutions. The contractual federalism and the spheres of regional autonomy are being analyzed through specific cases (e.g. Tatarstan) that reflect the impact of the periphery on the center.

The 4th Chapter, titled "Russian Economic Reform 1991-1999" written by Yo. M. Herrera, gives answers to the long-discussed issue of Russia's neo-liberal program. As the writer maintains, the process of liberalization, stabilization and privatization which were adopted —as elements for building the state market— could not alone shape a stable ground for the economic activity in the new Russian era. In comparison to other post-socialist states, are becoming evident the deficiencies of the undertaken economic reform.

The 5th Chapter, having as a subject the "Politics and the Russian Armed Forces", is approached by the writer Z. Barany, as one of the pillars of the Russian state that was affected by the overall negative economic image of the country. Furthermore, although there was a significant lack of economic resources for the strengthening of the military, at the same time the intervention of military in the political life was minimum because of the inexistence of the institutional foundations.

In the end, as conclusion and under the title: "Democracy and Russian Politics", M. Fish attempts to make clear the degree of democratization of the Russian state. Having as a point of reference the predominant theories about democracy, is leaded in a correspondence with the democratic components of the Russian reality. It is proved to be useful the comparison —that takes place— among Russia and other neighbouring states that succeeded more or less to respond to the demands of the prerequisites that are posed by the traditional democratic regimes of the West.

Attempting an overall estimation of the issues developed in this bold and penetrating collective study, it should be mentioned that it could be a useful instrument for a historian or a political scientist who would like to examine thoroughly the Russian reality as it was crystallized by Yeltsin's regime. The broad reference to Yeltsin's presidency reveals the actions and the initiatives which did not facilitated the consolidation of democracy.

Furthermore, it could be a useful guidance for a researcher on contemporary Russian policy, since even the limited but quite substantial consideration of Putin's reforms and policies (e.g. establishment of the seven federal districts, the role of the military etc.) constitutes a significant counterbalance to Yeltsin's era. Although the absence of a bibliography list is noticeable, there is a quite rich reference —even on Russian primary sources— which support the views presented as well as a very useful general index at the end of the book.