

Gerhard Mangott

My first question to you, as one of the key participants of the coming Global Policy Forum, so, what problems seem to you more topical? What are you going to speak about, and what would you like to hear from your Russian colleagues? What problems would you like to discuss with the Russian colleagues?

I've decided to attend the panel on current challenges to international law, and will address the question, how international law is capable of managing current security threats emanating from nuclear and chemical proliferation, states of concern and transnational terrorism. Are these sorts of threats, which can still be handled by traditional deterrence or do they require new approaches to self defence or collective defence. I will debate the concepts of anticipatory self-defence in both variants – pre-emption and pre-vention. I will talk about the impact of this anticipatory self-defence approach to the principle of state sovereignty, and if it is at all possible to harmonize the concept of preventive defense with the basic norms of international law. Furthermore, in my presentation I will link this issue with the debate on humanitarian interventions ('responsibility to prevent').

Another question, problem, which will be discussed at this conference will be concerning the European security treaty. This is the idea of president Medvedev. So, how can you evaluate this initiative? Do you think it is perspective, or it is just another idea, which will lead to nothing?

Well, I was very surprised that President Medvedev made this proposal as one of his first foreign policy initiatives, because this is not a topic to score points with. In the past 15-20 years we've seen numerous Russian proposals to supplant the Cold War bloc organization of Europe with sort of a pan-European security umbrella within the framework of the OSCE. Most European countries, however, consider NATO as the core guarantor of security. Well, Russia is not a member of NATO and most likely will hardly ever be. NATO members are reluctant to enter into a substantive debate on Russia's proposal of a new European security treaty. The main western powers did not outright reject the Russian initiative, but decided use the OSCE as a framework for such talks. It goes without saying that these debates will lead nowhere.

So, you think that today it is not perspective, that it will be just talks and no results?

It will be just talks with no substantial results. I don't think that Russia or the Russian president, for that matter, should invest more time, energy and, after all, its prestige in this idea. There is nothing to gain for the Russian side, except some polite words from NATO and most countries of the European Union.

Ok, thank you. And my next question concerning Russian-Georgian conflict, and you mentioned this in the answer to the first question, this responsibility to protect. So, two years ago this happened, this war, and so, how can you evaluate this conflict?

Was the behavior of Russia, I don't know, right, when it broke the border of Georgia and intervened? And how can you compare this case with Kosovo case?

Well, under international law Russia had the right to intervene and to protect its citizens, first and foremost Russian peacekeepers. The Georgian side launched the assault on Tskhinvali and about 12 Russian peacekeepers got killed in those first hours of fighting. Georgia, according to international humanitarian law must not use unproportionate and indiscriminate force to regain the control over its territory. At the same time, however, Russia's response to Georgian actions was indiscriminate and disproportional as well; so it was a violation of international law as well.

And what do you think about recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia? Do you think there are some perspectives that these countries will also be recognized by Europe, by world community? Or this problem will remain frozen for many, many years?

Well, I think it's the latter scenario we'll have to face in the years to come. Actually, I was quite surprised when the Russian government decided to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in late August 2008. At that time, almost no gains, but many risks seemed associated with that step. Russia already was in full control of the economy in both Abkhazia and Ossetia, it had considerable influence over the regional elites, it already had troops on the ground (based on CIS or UN missions) and it was able to use both entities as bargaining chips in her relations with Georgia. Indeed, I was surprised by the recognition, as quite a lot of risks lay at hand. It was to be expected that only a few countries will endorse the Russian move. Actually it is quite embarrassing for Russia that only three other countries (Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru) have recognized the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia so far, and it is unlikely that too many will follow.

In addition, Russia is now entangled in quite a lot of contradictions. Russia has strictly opposed the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state. But one cannot have it both – accepting Abkhazia's independence, but opposing the independence of Kosovo. This, however, is true for the US and the majority of EU member states as well. How can they argue that Kosovo's independence is compatible with international law, but that of Abkhazia and Ossetia is not.

But we should not wait for some quick resolution, so it will remain frozen, yes, like Turkey and Cyprus, for example?

It will remain frozen, but this is preferable to a renewed violent confrontation between these entities and Georgia proper. South Ossetia's independence is not sustainable without Russian financial and economic support. Russia will, however, stick to its position, not to allow South Ossetia to join the Russian Federation. This sort of annexation would be very harmful for Russia's international status.

The case of Abkhazia is quite different. In principle, Abkhazia is capable of sustaining its independence. It does have both the economic and social prerequisites for sustained economic growth. Russian support, however, is still indispensable. The

Russian government has allocated substantial financial funds for both entities. However, a great deal of the money gets lost with corrupt and unprofessional officials on the ground.

Ok, thank you, and my next question concerning the Russian political system, because one of the topics of this forum will be standards of democracy. So, how can you evaluate the Russian political system? What do you think about the system of tandem. Did it prove to be a sustainable form of ruling? What challenges may be it faces today? And do you think it will be able to overcome this campaign of 2012 without crisis?

Well, when Putin was elected president of Russia in 2000 it was clear from the outset that he was to stabilize and modernize Russia, first and foremost its financial and economic sectors at any cost. It was not to be expected that Putin was about to enhance the responsibility of Russia's elites to its people, nor enhance the public's involvement in domestic politics. On the other hand, the Russian people did not long for promoting the democratic credentials of the state, but desperately asked for stability in both the economic and the political realm. So Putin's rule was based on sort of a clandestine pact between the elite and the public: In exchange for an increase in household income and stable economic conditions, the further democratization of the country will be put on the backburner. In some fields the government turned even less transparent and responsive. At the same time, however, we don't see quite a strong eagerness by the vast majority of Russia's people to engage politically.

However, ruling Russia along these conceptual lines, entails serious risks: What if the government can no longer deliver a rise in real incomes? What if the emerging strong middle-class starts demanding not just economic, but also political rights? If the government cannot deliver on the economic and social front, it will lose legitimacy and acceptance with the people quite quickly. I think Russia should enter a second stage and expand the rights of its citizens to take part in public affairs. At the moment that the Russian government is doing enough in order to lead the country into that direction.

In order to strengthen the democratic credentials, greater freedom of information and a viable competition between various parties is indispensable. Frankly speaking, it is not acceptable that small demonstrations of dissenters are regularly dispersed. It is neither wise nor democratic to control public discourse via state-controlled (electronic) media. Dissenting voices have to be visible for the audience. In the long run, social stability cannot be maintained without it.

As to your question about the relationship between Putin and Medvedev: It seems that both act with a lot of mutual respect and collaboration seems quite smooth for an outsider. Both leaders have known each other for almost twenty years, and over time they seemed to have established an excellent working relationship in various functions and positions. However, relations between *supporters* of both have often been quite tense and we've seen quite a lot of turf wars between the various clans. I

had not ruled it out that the rivalries could actually wreck the executive, would spoil the personal relationship between Putin and Medvedev. But so far both have managed to control their minions and followers.

The most important question however at the moment is, who will run in the presidential elections 2012. I expect that this will be decided only late next year. I don't think that the decision was made already. However, it can be ruled out, that both of them will contest the election in 2012.

I know that you wrote a lot about Russian democracy, and I know that you criticized it as mismanaged and defective. So, I would like to ask, do you think that in Russia, in new Russia, there was ever real democracy, or it has always been some sort of mismanaged or defective?

I consider it a false assessment, that under Yeltsin's rule Russia embarked on a full-fledged democratization project. Russia did not manage to build an elite consensus on a democratic constitution. It was by military force that Boris Yeltsin suppressed his opponents and got a handwritten constitution adopted. This document provides the executive with strong powers and marginalizes the State Duma. Still, Yeltsin did not always abide by the constitution; more importantly however, an intransparent elite cartel took control over Russia, when Yeltsin was physically unable to reign. Soon the Russian media got controlled by powerful oligarchs; at the end of the nineties Russia had no longer free media, but at least media pluralism. Particularly disturbing was the influence of business tycoons, who had amassed their fortunes by rigged auctions. Besides, it was the so-called democratic Russia which started the war against Chechnya in 1994.

Besides, the governments of Boris Yeltsin committed a lot of mistakes in rebuilding the country's economy. The neoliberal economic and financial reform package - based on what then was called the 'Washington consensus' - caused enormous social distress and unleashed a humanitarian and demographic crisis.

These are just few remarks underlining my argument that Russia in the nineties was not yet a nascent democracy. So the succession of Yeltsin by Putin did not mean a break with democratic rules but was shaped by many continuities. Still however, we have to acknowledge that Putin recentralized political affairs, curbed pluralism and made politics less transparent. The democratic character of Russia's political system was certainly not enhanced by Vladimir Putin. It was both due to favourable parameters - the rise in prices for oil, gas and metals on world markets - and smart economic and financial reform, that Putin could expand the social transfer system and allowed household incomes to rise steeply on an average.

So, you mean, as far as I can understand, that Russia is still moving to democracy, so it is not going away from democracy in the nineties, it is still trying to find its way to some democratic involvement of people in policy, and so on, and so on.

I think Russia is in transition to a democracy, albeit slow and this transition is not irreversible. It is somehow protracted. We could think of scenarios where Russia would actually leave the path of democratization. However, I would not argue that

Russia made a strong leap towards democracy under Boris Yeltsin and reversed course with Vladimir Putin, let alone by Dmitri Medvedev. However, I think Putin and Medvedev, could have been braver and more daring to push forward democratization of Russia. But, overall, democratizing a country, which had no democratic experience ever before, takes time, it takes generations. So, in this regard, it was always unrealistic to expect Russia to turn in a liberal democracy quickly. It's a gradual process, and I don't see why Russia should not be successful in becoming a democracy in the future. There are some Western observers who say, for various reasons (political culture, historic experience and the like), Russian society will not be able to establish real democracy. I don't share this view. I think that Russia, like any other country with a strong and self-confident middle class, a functional bureaucracy, a responsive political elite, will be able to establish democracy. It will take time and we should be patient.

And I think that my last question will be concerning the interaction between intellectual community and policy makers. So, what forms of communication are urgently needed for this interaction? Are you satisfied with the way this communication is organized now? For example, with the way as you as a Russian expert can meet the Russian political elite, the Russian intellectual elite. So, are you satisfied with the format of such discussions?

Well, debates like the forthcoming conference in Yaroslavl are very important, it's a public discourse between Russian and western experts and the Russian political and economic leadership. However, we should be aware that such public exercises, conferences and meetings, are not sufficient. It is of utmost importance to establish an institutionalised dialogue between Russian and foreign experts to transfer expertise. Through those encounters, Russian experts get capable to provide substantial expertise and advice to the political class in Russia. In the end, however, it is the ruling elite which has to make use of this valuable expertise.

Ultimately, of course, it will be politicians to decide, making use of the expertise and knowledge of think tanks.