

Summary

The 138th *NZ* issue opens with *NZ ARCHIVE*, in which our regular columnist Alexander Kustarev presents a fascinating historical document: a memorandum from the secret agent and international adventurer Sidney Reilly to Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War, sent in late 1919. In this report Reilly makes suggestions to solve what he calls “the Russian problem”, which, in his view, not only implies the necessity to counter Bolshevism, but also defines the very political and economic future of the former territory of the collapsed Russian empire. Besides the Entente states, Germany, anti-Bolshevik armies and national movements, the key factor here is what Reilly believes to be deep religiosity typical of the native population. These themes – Russia as a hard international “problem”; political, social and cultural developments unfolding in the post-imperial space; and the role of the church in these processes – are all central to this issue.

CULTURE OF (INTERNATIONAL) POLITICS continues the issue in which Vladislav Inozemtsev analyses the sanction policies introduced by the EU and the US against Russia, discovering both logical and substantial mistakes stemming from a lack of reflection on the intentions and aims of the Western sanctions. Russia’s home and foreign policies are both determined, first and foremost, by the nature of its power system built over the past twenty years, one that pursues its own interests in various areas.

An autocracy similar to other autocratic regimes, both past (Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, Perón in Argentina, and so on) and present, still requires elections. Why does an authoritarian regime need them? This is the question addressed in the first thematic section, which title, “THE ELECTORAL AND THE RITUALISTIC: TOWARDS THE 2021 ELECTION”, makes clear, the pieces in this section focus on the situation in the country on the eve of the autumn 2021 State Duma election; it is also suggested that the authoritarian regime employs electoral mechanisms to support and strengthen its power in a way that in many regards is ritualistic. The section opens with “A «Fatigue Election» and a Conservative Duma” by Alexei Makarkin. Stepan Goncharov and the regular *NZ* contributor Alexei Levinson look at Russian politics and society on the eve of the election. Sergei Ryzhenkov analyses strategies used by the authorities and by the opposition in the current electoral process, while Danila Krasnov returns to the questions why the authoritarian regimes of the last and this century really need elections and how they arrange desired results.

Setting aside political processes characterising the regime created on the ruins of the Russian empire and the USSR, the main theme of this issue is the role of religion and the church – a permanent, though constantly changing, factor – in the social, political, cultural and economic life of these territories. Within the post-Soviet space, you can observe remarkably similar processes,

even in countries that oppose each other politically and ideologically. The first of our two topical sections is titled "CHURCH, STATE AND SOCIETY: UKRAINE AND RUSSIA". It begins with a long article by Nikolai Mitrokhin that traces the creation of "national" Orthodox Church of Ukraine, devised by the authorities during the war with Russia, and assesses the political, opportunistic dimension of this process. Denis Brilev's piece is about the impact of the current political situation of the organisation and activities of Ukrainian Muslims. Two further articles in this section are on Russia-related issues. Alexei Makarkin outlines transformations undergone by the response of the Russian Orthodox Church to the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dmitry Oparin's article, "*Obsession and Exorcism in a Migrant Islamic Context*", is based on his years of sociological research into exorcism practices among migrant Muslims in Moscow.

The second section dedicated to the place and role of religion and the church in the post-Soviet space features articles on Georgia, Latvia and Belarus. Silvia Serano, a professor of Soviet and post-Soviet studies at the Sorbonne University, writes about Georgia in "*Orthodox Mobilisation and Political Identities in Post-Soviet*

Georgia"; the Latvian journalist Maria Kugel considers the relationship between the Latvian Orthodox Church and the state; and Alexei Lastovsky talks of the Belarusian Catholic church changing its stance as the opposition protests in the country grow after the 2020 presidential election.

Among the few articles in this issue unrelated to Russian and post-Soviet questions is Richard Marshall's interview with the American philosopher Paul Woodruff, a professor at the University of Texas. "*What Trump Forgot: Reverence, Empathy, Leadership, Education, Philanthropy*" is published in our regular NZ INTERVIEW section.

The 138th NZ issue ends with a NEW BOOKS section, including two longer pieces. First, Dmitry Skorodumov offers a detailed response to the transcript of the last (unfinished) lecture course by the British theorist and cultural critic Mark Fisher, published posthumously. (One of Fisher's texts appeared in NZ at the end of the last year, and his book "*Ghosts of My Life*" came out with New Literary Observer earlier this year.) Further, Polina Kolozaridi unpicks danah boyd's "*It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*", an extremely timely book.

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