

Yegor Gaidar, former Prime Minister of Russia

Dear friends, I can tell you that I like the books of Professor Padma Desai. There's a lot of truth in them, a lot of information in them, about what happened in my country. It would be easier to understand my statement if I will comment [on] it with the fact that I think that a majority of things written in this country about Russian transition [are] absolute nonsense.

See, in 2003, I tried to explain to the American authorities that they do not understand what they will find in Iraq. Yes, they knew how they would deal with the army, how the generals will be prepared to fight Saddam Hussein. All of this was clear. I just wanted to explain to them what will be the mess after they would destroy the terrible regime, the absolutely unpleasant regime - but existing regime - so that they could understand the problems with which they would be confronted because I was confronted with the problems of the destructions of a terrible, extremely unpleasant regime. It is impossible to do it because the majority of those who lived all their lives in stable, well-organized, democratic market economies could not understand the connection of what is the mess connected with the fact that the policeman is no longer in the street. It is impossible to explain. The difference with Padma is that she somehow, maybe because of her background, understood at least a significant part of the problems connected with the fact of the institutional vacuum. You can read in any sensible textbook that to create institutions you need the decades, you need the traditions. It's a splendid, absolutely perfect idea. The problem is that the destruction of the institutions of the previous regime lasts one day, three days. In Russia, after the 300 years of exile regime, it needed three days. In France it needed one day. In the Soviet Union it needed three days. It is very [good] to discuss the discussions of a very good American professor who will tell you that you need decades to create well-functioning institutions.

Well, I'm told by very well intentioned professors how it is sensible to make the reforms last long term. And all the time I am trying to understand whether he is prepared to shoot at the people, whether he is absolutely aware that he controls one single regiment which is prepared to shoot the people, whether he is seriously prepared to take responsibility. I know that there was a lot of discussion on if Russia should choose the Chinese path. I know very well how the Chinese authorities were confronted with the very difficult problems of mobilizing the forces which would shoot the people in '89. They decided that the Beijing garrison wasn't good enough, that they would have to bring the forces from the Soviet border. Maybe I would find one single person who would tell me that he would take responsibility for the order to shoot the couple million people by Beijing. Somebody?

So when we are discussing the issues connected with the collapse of the previous regime, we have to be serious. We have to take responsibility and have a clear picture of the events. Padma Desai had his clear picture. Thank you.