
Interview: Gennady Sklyar

'We should take the path of developing and implementing major joint projects'

Gennady Sklyar is active in the Obshchestvennaya Palata in Russia, which comprises representatives of political parties, businessmen, representatives of the religious confessions, self-governance organizations, and cultural and ethnic organizations. The function of this body he compares with that of the social-economic council in France, which is an advisory body under the French Constitution. He is thus not a deputy of the State Duma, Russia's lower house of Parliament, but represents the Socialist Party, of which he is a leader, in the Obshchestvennaya Palata. Mr. Sklyar attended the Dec. 10-11 conference of the Schiller Institute in Eltville, Germany, and was interviewed by Gabriele Liebig on Dec. 13. Rachel Douglas translated from Russian.

EIR: Let me start by asking about the Chechnya rebellion. The media over several days have been reporting that the Russian Army is using force to beat down Dzhokhar Dudayev's rebellion. Can you give us some background to this situation?

Sklyar: First of all, the events in Chechnya are a clear testimony to the dead end into which the policy of the regime now ruling Russia has come.

The problems in Chechnya, acute as they are, did not just arise. They appeared earlier, and everybody knew about them. They could have been resolved in a milder way, as we did the problems with Tataria. The power struggle in Moscow, however, has led to a decision to use Chechnya as a card in a political game, in order to achieve certain goals. Thus, Chechnya is a hostage of the power struggle in Moscow. No one will win this struggle if he lacks support in the regions of Russia. And you will not have support from the regional elites, if you don't have the support of the armed ministries, the military. So the events in Chechnya are an attempt of the ruling regime to receive new resources for strengthening its position.

The political game here is very complex, because the development of events in Chechnya can lead, not to a strengthening of the Army and its position in our country, but to its discrediting. It can lead not to a strengthening of the unity of Russia, but to the emergence of new points of friction in relations between Moscow and the republics

comprising Russia. The population may *not* forgive the government for the new tribulations it will undergo for the sake of Chechnya. The problem of Chechnya is a problem for the entire population of Russia. It is a burden on everybody, and the population of Russia will not forgive this. The government wants to blame the new misfortunes besetting the population on the events in Chechnya. But the population will not forgive the government and will not accept this explanation.

The blood of Chechnya is a problem that will last for a long time ahead. It is related to the further development of events in Russia, either on the path of democracy, or on the path to dictatorship.

EIR: Going back to the situation in Moscow: We understood that when the Chernomyrdin government wanted to push its budget plan through the Duma, there was strong opposition against it, and that the Duma vote on the budget was very close. Can you tell us about this budget discussion in the Duma, and about economic policy in general?

Sklyar: The budget is a concentrated expression of economic policy. Today the government, and not only the government but also the President of Russia, are at a crossroads. Either they will continue the current policy, in which case they have to impose a harsh budget, slash spending on social programs even more, close more factories, permit mass unemployment, and try, by these steps, to exit from the crisis. But these steps will require the suppression of popular discontent. *Or*, it will be necessary to change the priorities of economic policy, to support domestic production, tighten control over speculation, and support the social sphere (education, health care, aid to the indigent).

The budget which was submitted to the Duma expresses the former option, and the Duma cannot adopt such a budget, because the Duma cannot assume responsibility for the government's policy, a policy which the Duma did not set (and this is a policy of a government which the Duma did not appoint). The deputies have a better sense of the situation in their regions, and the mood of the population. They also have a better sense of the danger.

Therefore, the Duma proposed a revision of the budget,

and there has now been established a committee to reconcile the drafts, which is attempting to reach a compromise. It's unlikely, however, that a compromise can be achieved in the face of two fundamentally different views of economic policy, and when there are two divergent attitudes to the role of the social cost of conducting reforms.

Therefore, we expect that there may be a situation of neither peace or war, when the government is continuing to function, but the budget is not adopted.

But I think that the events in Chechnya are the factor which should elucidate the subsequent actions of the government: a state of emergency in Chechnya, emergency measures by the government—and an emergency budget. And at that point, the government will want to get rid of all the demands of the Duma, and implement an economic policy aimed at just one purpose, namely, keeping this regime in power.

Thus—it is very important—the next question that may confront us, is that under emergency conditions, elections may become impossible.

EIR: What did you think when the government came out recently and said that it would continue the International Monetary Fund [IMF] policy, that the shock therapy policy has to continue?

Sklyar: I believe there are many people in the government who understand the absurdity of such an approach, and the damage it inflicts on the Russian economy. But they're only hanging onto their positions today, thanks to the financial support of the IMF. This support is enough for the government to remain in power, but that's just for now. Tomorrow the magnitude of the economic and social problems in Russia will be too great, to be compensated for by aid from the IMF.

And meanwhile, the economy itself does not receive any stimulus for development. An unstable situation in Russia, of which the situation in Chechnya is a clear indicator, does not provide the conditions to stimulate the influx of private capital into Russia.

EIR: In the German media there have been a lot of articles recently about the mafia in Russia, and they say that even Gorbachov is mafia. How powerful is organized crime in Russia?

Sklyar: There are two levels of criminality in Russia. There's daily-life crime, and organized crime. As for the first, it could be suppressed rather rapidly. As for organized crime, it infects all the politics of Russia today. You have a merger of the state apparatus with the underground, major criminals.

Not long ago, I looked at an opinion poll conducted by a group of serious scientists in 60 regions of Russia. Almost half of those questioned believe that power in Russia is in the hands of organized crime, and that it's wielded in the

interests of the criminal structures. And people believe that the main danger for the citizens of Russia is precisely criminality.

But it's very indicative that in second place was the state bureaucracy.

As for Mikhail Gorbachov, I would not maintain that he is linked with the mafia, for one simple reason: He has no power in Russia today, and the mafia doesn't need him. Therefore, the mafia first and foremost has relations with those who *are* in power.

EIR: What do you and your party propose to get rid of criminality?

Sklyar: I would again speak of two levels here. As for street crime, we believe that the law enforcement agencies should be given the authority and strengthened in order to be able to combat this criminality, including using emergency measures.

As for the other level, organized crime, we think that steps should be taken to liquidate the conditions for the existence of such crime, in the financial sphere, the privatization sphere, control over capital flight, and control over the behavior of state officials in the area of demonopolization of production. But I would like to note that combatting the first level of crime will not succeed, if the law enforcement agencies do not see that there is a fight going on against the second level.

Moreover, it is precisely the existence of organized crime which pulls in law enforcement officers as well as others, and breeds criminality in all the other areas. I would like to say that we should put forward the slogan: "Honesty and justice in all spheres, and above all in the area of state government."

EIR: But if I understand you correctly, you don't think that the present government and President Boris Yeltsin would be the ones who would implement such measures. Where should one look for other personalities who would be ready and capable to take over leadership in Russia?

Sklyar: When the country is sick, it is very difficult to find some healthy segment, and it seems that there are no people who are not infected by the ailment that has afflicted the country. But this is not the case.

Today there are people who have been able to maintain their dignity, to preserve themselves from the rotting influence, who are free of the mafia. There is a significant quantity of such people among the elite in Moscow and in all the regions of Russia. And, as has often been the case in Russia before, which is indicated by the old proverb that the fish rots from the head, it's enough to change the head, in order to cure the whole body.

Let me be concrete about names. We look with great hope to [Speaker of the State Duma] Ivan Rybkin, [former Security Council chief] Yuri Skokov, Federation Council

I would like to underscore that we have come to understand that we don't need aid but rather cooperation. Cooperation in which Russia participates together with other countries, on an equal basis, is what will help to solve both the problems of Russia and the problems of many countries of the Eurasian space.

Deputy Ramazan Abdulatipov, and the politicians who work together with them.

EIR: You attended this Schiller Institute conference on global reconstruction and a cultural renaissance. We had a lot of discussion about economic policy, economic programs for the Eurasian continent. What are the most important ideas you are taking back to Russia?

Sklyar: First of all, the conference was extremely interesting, in our view, because both [American statesman and economist Lyndon] LaRouche and the leadership of the Schiller Institute very energetically put forward ideas, as did people who came from various countries. There's a kind of charge of optimism.

The most important thing that we will take from here, is an understanding of several circumstances. First, that we should be able to formulate and propose in our countries new, constructive ideas, which are based on a knowledge of history, on the experience of history, and on the exchange of opinions in which people came to Germany from the most diverse countries to participate.

From here follows another important circumstance, that we should take the path of developing and implementing major joint projects. In the center of everything should stand a project and the idea of this project. Around the project should be gathered people, financial resources, ideological, and moral resources.

The third aspect, is that we must better understand the situation in the West, the *real* situation in the West, as we implement our policies in the East. And the truths that we heard here, the arguments and facts that were heard at this conference, help us to determine what steps to take inside our own countries.

The fourth aspect: I think that the position which we brought from our country and our evaluation of the situation in Russia, has helped the participants in the conference to better understand what is happening there. Insofar as Russia has been and remains an important factor for developments worldwide, we think that this was very important.

This is a mutual exchange, and it seems to me that we received a kind of impulse of optimism, when you feel that the idea born in your own mind somewhere in Russia, is an idea which is present in the minds of many people living in other countries. This shows that if a person considers

himself a thinking being, if a person considers that all of his neighbors are also thinking beings, then he inexorably comes to certain common ideas on the further development of humanity. This is what we saw here.

EIR: What became clear to me during this conference more than before, is that we need Russia to say that the world financial system has to be changed. The West has not changed the financial system voluntarily, but Russia is after all a power, so they could say, "Look what you did to us, you need to change the whole system; otherwise, there's no way out for both the West and the East."

Sklyar: Of course, not so long ago, many people in Russia nourished the illusion that one must try to live as people live in the West, and that would solve all problems.

But in these few years, we have come to understand two very important things. First of all, that you can't simply transplant somebody else's schema to your own life and succeed. And second, we have seen and understood better what the West really is, that this is not a monolithic entity, but rather that here there exist the same problems, if we have in mind the problems of people.

Therefore, the experience of the last few years and the way in which we have discovered the West, and also the internal freedom of which we have become conscious, lead us to a conscious decision—not just some emotional decision, where you just want to try something regardless of the outcome—but to a decision that is based on one's own experience, reviewed and thought through. In this situation, we understand each other better, and we can go further together.

EIR: Yes, and there are big projects which need the collaboration between many countries; for example, the Eurasian land bridge, which we discussed. So the way out is through doing new things which require a totally different level of production and research and collaboration, and financial policies.

Sklyar: I would like to underscore that we have come to understand that we don't need aid but rather cooperation. Cooperation in which Russia participates together with other countries, on an equal basis, is what will help to solve both the problems of Russia and the problems of many countries of the Eurasian space.