

Yeltsin Misread the Elections

Interview with GALINA STAROVOITOVA

As one of Russia's most renowned politicians, and certainly its most famous woman public figure, Galina Starovoitova speaks in this interview for Demokratizatsiya about Zhirinovskiy, lustration, the KGB, Russian federalism and nationalities, the new Constitution, and Yeltsin. She argues that Yeltsin was wrong to slow down the pace of reforms after the poor showing of the reformers in the December parliamentary elections. She has worked on nationalities issues even before perestroika, mainly in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and Crimea; has introduced legislation regarding KGB oversight; and was one of the most vociferous proponents of democratic reform in parliament and in the Kremlin, where she served as Yeltsin's special advisor on Nationalities Affairs. Starovoitova was a member of both the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, where she was a member of the Inter-Regional Group and worked closely with Sakharov, Shchekochikhin, Yeltsin, Afanasyev and other figures; and of the Russian Supreme Soviet, from where she co-founded the Democratic Russia Movement, which propelled Yeltsin to the Russian presidency in June of 1991. She is now a fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., and also a member of the Demokratizatsiya editorial board. The interview was conducted in early February 1994 by Demokratizatsiya founder Fredo Arias-King.

Arias-King: What are you doing here in Washington?

Starovoitova: I won a strong competition to win this fellowship because I decided not to run for the Duma—I had already served two terms in both the USSR and the Russian parliaments, and had been an advisor to Boris Yeltsin. I sent a draft of my project on the improvement of peaceful resolution in interactive conflicts. I wanted to base this research on my practical experience as a politician and as someone who has had background in many of these disputed areas in conflict. For example, I was in Abkhazia, in Nagorno-Karabakh, in Transdnistria, in the northern Caucasus, and I wanted to write a sort of guide for the world's decision-makers since we have a serious lack of laws and legislation devoted to these problems, and many contradictions. For example, we have contradictions in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which was very important in overcoming many aspects of the Cold War, but it must be rethought since it contains aspects for the inviolability of borders of Europe, but does not take into account the realities from the dissolution of the USSR, of Yugoslavia, of Czechoslovakia, the reunification of Germany, etc. Another principal aspect of international law is the principle of self-determination of emerging nations. Now we find these two principles in strong contradiction, so many laws and agreements have to be reconsidered. I am now trying an ambitious undertaking to fill this vacuum by doing this research and writing a book. One chapter of this book is a comparison between the different players in this field. Just the other day, for

example, I interviewed Sam Nunn, Margaret Thatcher, Jack Matlock, Sir Roderich Braithwaite—the former British ambassador in Russia and then the Cabinet minister responsible for the armed forces and MI5 and MI6—and other interviews will follow. At the same time, I continue to have good contact and communication with my colleagues in the Democratic Russia Movement who unlike myself decided to run for office this time, such as Father Gleb Yakunin, since I am still co-chairman of this movement. I shall try to help them from abroad now—by organizing public opinion, giving lectures, explaining our position vis-à-vis Yeltsin's steps, and I have some contact with Thomas Simon, who is responsible for the package of aid to Russia, as well as with colleagues of Strobe Talbott. I have met already with Secretary Christopher and President Clinton. So I think I am doing useful things for my country from here as a scholar.

Arias-King: What do you think of the recent parliamentary election results in Russia? Did they shock you?

Starovoitova: I was in Moscow for those elections at the end of December. Yes, I am upset at the results of the elections, and I think that there were several reasons for that result. First of all we have some objective preconditions for the strengthening of these right-wing national extremists, and not only due to the economic crisis, nor to the shock therapy—which was not a shock therapy at all since reforms were postponed for too long due to the resistance of the old structures such as the old Supreme Soviet which was officially dissolved in September. Another reason for the unexpected victory is the ideological change, the ideological vacuum which resulted in the destruction of the old system of values. Democracy itself is too abstract a concept for most Russian people, and many of the concepts of Western democracy are in apparent contradiction with the realities of everyday life in Russia—crime, corruption, the very rapidly developing stratification of society. All this occurs in the background of decades-old Soviet habits such as the pretense of equality—which was one of the slogans of both our and the French revolutions. But now very new slogans, very new values are being suggested to us, and it is resulting in a very real psychological shock. The third reason is a feeling of humiliation, which results not only from the destruction of the superpower status many were accustomed to, but also due to the oppression and discrimination many Russians feel in the other newly independent states—which occurs not only in the Central Asian states but also in very civilized Estonia and Latvia. So these are the main elements which allowed a success of the ultranationalists. There are other reasons, of course, such as the large financial support Zhirinovskiy and Co. found from different sources in our country and abroad. The external support has been well documented in the Western press.

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When I was a member of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, I was a witness to this. Anatoly Lukyanov, Supreme Soviet chairman, who was to become one of the chief plotters in August 1991 against Gorbachev—who by the way still

has not been brought to justice and who now has won a seat in the Duma and enjoys deputy's immunity—was one of the main players in the creation of Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party. When I mentioned this fact recently to Margaret Thatcher, she was deeply astonished, shocked that Lukyanov was still not brought to justice. When I told her that he also enjoys immunity, she replied that politicians should live in accordance to the same rules as ordinary people. For democratic governments it is very difficult to formulate a new system of national values. As an ethnologist and a psychologist, I can say that the Russian national, ethnic identity has some peculiarities which differentiates us from other peoples. First, the geographical factor played a large role in the formation of the Russians' national character. Although we do not know as much as we should about our 1000-year history, the fact that Russia has been a large land mass has played a role in its people's psychology. For many Russians it is a very touching and painful problem now that the space they were so accustomed to calling their own has been reduced suddenly. Russian democrats are against chauvinism, and the Democratic Russia Movement immediately after the August coup recognized the independence of the Soviet republics and voluntarily rejected the role of the so-called “big brother” for Russia. So it was very difficult for my democratic colleagues in this last campaign to take up nationalist slogans. They were afraid to be connected in the people's minds to some chauvinistic ideology, so they left the flag-waving to other parties and other people. Zhirinovsky easily filled this vacuum. His campaign on top of that was waged far more professionally and far more successfully than others; he addressed each group individually—to the young he compared politics and sex; he spoke to women, to Cossacks, to Russians living abroad. He promised something more important than just cheap vodka and a quick economic miracle. He promised to the Russian people to bring back a meaning, a significance to their lives.

In my opinion, Zhirinovsky cannot win the coming presidential elections. His life, I believe, is in danger. He was brought to power by very definite political forces, and if he is not successful enough or if he is too successful, that same power can withdraw him.

Arias-King: The mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak says it was Gorbachev's idea to create Zhirinovsky. Others say it was the full Politburo, the KGB, etc. Who are these forces that created him?

Starovoitova: As I mentioned, it was Lukyanov, as far as I know, and I also know for sure that Gorbachev did not reject this idea to create the Liberal Democratic Party and register it even before the Communist Party itself was officially registered. This was done at the beginning of 1990, when we democrats through huge rallies managed to get the infamous Article 6 revoked—the article in the USSR Constitution which granted a political monopoly to the CPSU. The main idea behind the creation of the LDP was to show to the world that the USSR was already a multi-party state. When he began to organize this party at the beginning of March 1990, they held a “multi-party” roundtable where several groups were invited to, including Zhirinovsky and Gorbachev. We democrats did not come. Gorbachev by then was beginning to disapprove of this LDP. Only Voronin came, not the Voronin from the

government but another Voronin who has since disappeared—a very indecent figure, who created a so-called Sakharov Foundation despite the fact that he had no connection to the man and that all of Sakharov's friends and relatives disapproved. Gorbachev by now was denouncing Lukyanov for having a close connection to such a clown as Zhirinovskiy. I have learned this from the witnesses to this very heated conversation between them. So yes, Gorbachev agreed to the principle of creating an obedient multi-party system under his control, but he himself was not the main sponsor, author or protector of Zhirinovskiy. But Lukyanov was very active.

Arias-King: So the CPSU's strategy was to create a very obedient, multi-party system for the world to see, or was it to create a monstrous party on the far Right to make the CPSU look like the responsible middle?

Starovoitova: Yes—I think so. Both of these have elements of truth. Now the successor to the Communist Party, the new Communist Party of Russia under the leadership of Zyuganov, cannot in all fairness call itself Communist since it recognizes private property, which is a Marxist taboo. So in reality they are social democrats, and they shift from left to right whenever it is convenient. Further in the Left we have the so-called Bolsheviks headed by Nina Andreeva, plus Maoist and Trotskyist parties and the like. But the new Communists now are social democrats. I regret that the real Social Democrats, those that registered their party about three years ago have scattered—people like Rummyantsev, Obolenskiy and Leonid Volkov. In their founding congress they invited several Russian democrats, including myself. They even offered me the post of vice-president of their party, even though I had declined to be a member. They also invited members of the Social Democratic Party from the beginning of the century who survived Stalin's purges, who are more than 80 years old now. I regret that this party is now very weak due to quarrels in its leadership. The problem is that the Communists can take advantage of the vacuum and end up dominating this niche, so I hope the real Russian Social Democrats awaken and become organized once again. I am even thinking seriously of joining the Social Democratic Party of Russia, if it becomes organized once again, in order to strengthen it, just because somebody has to fill in this niche in Russia.

Arias-King: Tell us about the Democratic Russia Movement.

Starovoitova: Democratic Russia is now in crisis. I just sent them a fax urging them to convene a party congress as soon as possible to discuss our current problems, possibly to reelect the current leadership, to change the slogans and make some amendments in our program. We have five co-chairmen, three of whom were elected to the Duma. Lev Ponomarev lost the election and I decided not to run in these elections despite the fact that I was nominated by six regions of Russia. Amid this crisis in our Movement, in our cause and our ideology, I decided to take a step back and reflect upon the situation and our course. I also urged my colleagues to be more bold and more decisive.

Arias-King: For many it was a big disappointment that Russia's Choice, Yabloko

and other democratic parties did not do as well in the last elections. Yet Yeltsin seems to be creating parallel structures and staffing them with some key democrats who served in the Supreme Soviet, since the chairs of many of the committees in the Duma were lost to hardliners. The Yeltsin commission which jumps to mind is the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, headed by former dissident and staunch democrat Sergei Kovalev. Are you encouraged by this?

Starovoitova: In general, I believe that most such decisions should be left to the legislature. I am troubled by such parallel presidential groups as the Security Council, which is now written into the new Constitution. Yet, the powers and duties of this structure remain unclear, and I am afraid that this powerful structure which can decide problems of peace and war, as well as some strategic questions, is out of civil

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control, just like the rest of Russia's power structures. I think it is a mistake to undermine the State Duma simply because the composition of the deputies is not appealing to the executive power. The president should work with the Duma regardless of the composition, since if he does not the Russian people may lose respect for the legislature and fail to see the need for a powerful parliament. Currently we lack such respect for the legislative power and that is our main obstacle preventing real rule of law in Russia.

The biggest mistake made by President Yeltsin after the elections was to change the course of economic reforms, to slow them down. This unfortunately he assumed was the message of the people following the defeat of the democratic forces. If people voted for the anti-reformers, he concluded that reforms needed to be slowed down. But I think he misunderstood the message from the voters. Because the most important element which deprived the democrats of a majority of votes was the ideological vacuum I explained before—not economic reasons. When I was in Moscow this past December and January, I spoke to many people in the streets and in shops, as well as my former constituents. But they were doing better as the result of reforms. My mother had serious surgery and I had to get her caviar, which is usually given to recuperating surgery patients, which I obtained in the Yeniseevsky shop—considered the most luxurious. But there was no caviar even for dollars. So I went to see the manager. It was an elder woman who survived the Siege of Leningrad in the Great War, who ran to embrace me. She did not even ask why I was there. After giving me caviar from her own personal stock, we spoke as to why the Russian people voted for such awful men in the elections. She mentioned that she knows what it is like to suffer, to starve. She buried many of her own relatives during the Siege. But now she is the manager of this luxury shop, and she sees thousands of ordinary people each day buy out the caviar, the salmon, the salamis. Yes indeed, the shop was overcrowded with ordinary people, middle-class people. The millionaires were in the hard currency shops, this was a ruble shop. So no, people did not vote against the reformers for economic reasons.

The level of inflation in Russia last year was about 850 percent, according to a neutral study done by the World Bank and Anders Åslund with his institute in Stockholm. In the previous year it was 2,500 percent. There is no question the living standards in Russia were *better* in December of 1993 than they were in April of that year, when our people voted for the continuation of the reforms. I then should state that President Yeltsin did not interpret the voters' message correctly. Of course it's true many have suffered as the result of shock therapy, it's also true about one-third of the population have seen their living standards reduced. But it is more an *ideological* starvation which inflicted Russia—the deprivation of values which not long ago were the absolute truth. Yeltsin's task should be to show people a light at the end of the tunnel once again, and slowing down reforms is not the way to do it. Yeltsin regretfully interpreted the electoral results with the Marxist mindset with which he was educated—as a *materialistic* paradigm. He should have interpreted the results as an *idealistic* paradigm.

Arias-King: You mentioned something about the lack of civilian control over the power organs. You were involved very directly in correcting that mistake, with your Law on Lustration. But can lustration work in Russia as it did in the Czech Republic, or even in a milder form, in post-War Japan?

Starovoitova: There are many varying degrees of lustration, yes. Germany, for example, even Lithuania. We analyzed all these models when drafting the law. Recently I sent to a couple of groups in the Duma with which I have relations—the Yabloko or Yavlinsky block party and Gleb Yakunin of Russia's Choice—a list of priority legislation that must be considered first in the next parliamentary sessions. These are about 15 treatises which I drafted based on my experiences in both the Soviet and Russian parliaments, ideas which really had no chance of passing either of those parliaments and even now may face more difficulties in the new Duma. But still I believe the democratic factions have to shape up, unite and propose a common strategy and fight for these ideas anyway to provoke public debate on these issues. Among these suggestions, these treatises, was the Law on Lustration. But my idea is that it be brought to the Duma only to be discussed. I don't insist that this law be adopted at this time. This would be impossible anyway because of many political reasons, but even still I don't think it should be adopted in Russia—it would be unrealistic. Even our own “Nuremberg”—the trial on the crimes of the CPSU, was unsuccessful and nobody was punished as a result. The physician who tortured Andrei Sakharov is free and even retains all his medals and honors. The agent who tortured Academician Nikolai Vavilov, who died in prison, is still around and was never punished, as was discovered by the investigative reporter Yevgenia Albats. All this is of course troubling, especially knowing that many in our society feel uncomfortable having these people—the perpetrators of the totalitarian regime—around unpunished. It seems many other people are more concerned with the psychological comfort of these criminals than they are with the well-being of their victims. This mentality also made it difficult to punish the plotters of August 1991, and I am not sure if the plotters of this last October's uprising will also be punished. So for all these reasons, it would be realistic to conclude that while the Law on

Lustration cannot pass, public debate should be generated.

Russia is now passing through a period of de-communicization, just like post-War Germany passed a period of de-nazification. But they had an American occupying army which forcefully exposed the German people to the crimes that had been committed, forcing a repentance of sorts by showing holocaust footage to a new German generation in the schools. But Russia's situation is very different, as this process is coming from within. There is no occupying army to impose democracy on us.

Recently I went to Stuttgart in Germany, and met up with a local official who happens to be Marshal Rommel's son. Rommel Jr., who is now in his sixties, told me that when he was 13 he belonged to the Hitler Youth and wrote letters to his father in the front. He recently recovered those letters and was astonished that it could have been him who wrote them—with all the hate, the anti-Semitism and all. He showed me the bronze statue of an anonymous American soldier outside of his offices. He said it was dedicated in memory of their grateful period of occupation by the Americans. So the paradox is that democracy can sometimes be imposed. But we Russians are trying to impose democracy from within in our destroyed and demoralized country. So a discussion, and just a discussion, of lustration will help heal some wounds.

Arias-King: You once mentioned that the Czech Law on Lustration was too harsh.

Starovoitova: Yes, I took into account the Czech law and what were, in my opinion, some of its shortcomings. For example, in my draft law there were no restrictions on the perpetrators of the totalitarian regime to participate in private enterprises or even some state enterprises, or even have positions in the state or government—but only when they are directly elected. Yeltsin, for example, was a candidate member of the Politburo, and the people chose to elect him on the basis of his transformation. Alexander Yakovlev was also a member of the Politburo, but was also the architect and promoter of perestroika and other reforms. So when people vote, they know these individuals' biographies.

Arias-King: But what about KGB agents?

Starovoitova: The law is much stricter on them. And for those who committed the crimes, the Law and other laws should be applied. But then there are the KGB agents who repented, such as Oleg Kalugin—you have to make exceptions in their cases. But you have to put the whole thing in front of the population—that these KGB people made a dirty and bad job. So the new generations, which are becoming even more cynical than the last ones, will by example see what is good and what is bad. In my draft Law on Lustration there are even stricter restrictions placed on secret agents, active KGB officers, staff. The Law of course does not place restrictions on technical personnel, such as the old ladies that clean the floors of the KGB cafeteria, for example.

One very thorny question is that of the KGB archives. This was included in the list of proposals I sent to my colleagues in the Duma recently. The proposal included

to take away the control of these archives from the KGB, even if that means physically taking them out of Lubyanka and taking them to the archives institute headed by Rudolf Pikhoya. Whether the files will or will not be made public as in Germany will be left to decide in the future. The immediate step would be to wrest control of these files from the KGB and place them under civil control. The KGB can still make alterations in these files, as was done in Germany and Czechoslovakia, or even destroy files, as was done to those pertaining to Sakharov. I still hope that Sakharov's file is not destroyed, but hidden somewhere. When I requested the files on Sakharov from former KGB chiefs Chebrikov and Kryuchkov, they both looked at me straight in the eye and told me that the KGB held no files on Sakharov. But it was later revealed that more than 500 volumes of Sakharov's files existed and were taken somewhere after the failed putsch. We are still looking for them. I am disappointed that President Yeltsin has not demanded these files.

Arias-King: Some say that Yeltsin made a pact with the devil, so to speak—made a pact with the army and the KGB in order to secure his presidency. This was demonstrated by the lack of enthusiasm in dismantling the KGB after the coup, by his firing of the able reformer Vadim Bakatin after only three months at the helm of the organization, by his tolerance of all the KGB-written laws which govern the “civil oversight” of the very organization. What do you think of this idea?

Starovoitova: That is yet another of the recommendations to my colleagues, to reconsider the laws pertaining to the Ministry of Security, especially the amendments to these laws passed by the Supreme Soviet on 6 August 1993, which give the KGB the right to search private homes and individuals without a warrant. Also, all those laws on so-called state secrets, the Law on Operational Investigative Activities, as well as the rest of the body of laws on the KGB and army, including the military doctrine adopted by the Security Council, should be scrapped or at least reformed, and the agencies placed under strict civilian oversight and control. A few days ago I saw on TV the proceedings of William Perry's confirmation to be the new U.S. defense chief. I noticed that the questioning had to do with everything, including his personal life, his private finances, his connections to the military-industrial complex, his family—a lot of very sharp questions. This is real civilian control over the armed forces. In Russia unfortunately we still have no such practice.

Yeltsin was a strong opponent of the KGB because he was a victim of the KGB, and was being observed by them just like many other perceived threats to the regime, like myself. But there came a point when he acquired some trust towards them, when Barannikov was its head. I then was still his advisor in the Kremlin, and several times I told him, I warned him, that Barannikov and other KGB leaders were playing a double game. I had some information about that. He then became very angry at me, at those things I told him because it destroyed all the fantasies of security which the KGB leaders had skillfully duped him into believing. Barannikov had been his partner and personal friend. But then Yeltsin received his own evidence of his friend's treachery and Barannikov was fired. But unfortunately, so was I. In the beginning of 1992, in a session of the Presidential Council, I told Yeltsin that the KGB was skillfully taking back all of its previous powers and authorities. I had some

informers inside Lubyanka who told me this, and even they said it was a real danger. When I told him this he harshly interrupted me and said that that was not the question at hand and that because it was not on the agenda, it would not be discussed any further. It was the first time Yeltsin had been harsh with me. He had always been very polite to me. This issue was apparently very sensitive for him. After that incident in the Presidential Council, he never again received me without other people present. It ruined our relationship and our previous friendship. After a while, he received his own evidence proving me correct and fired Barannikov. Nonetheless, he kept overestimating the role these structures, the KGB, can play in building his democracy.

Arias-King: So he repeated Gorbachev's mistake?

Starovoitova: Yes, indeed he repeated the mistake he so often condemned when Gorbachev, then his archrival, was in power. After last December's elections and when the new Russian Constitution was approved by the voters, he signed a decree on the dissolution of the KGB. But that is only a sheet of paper. I was in Moscow at the time, and Yevgenia Albats, who is not only a journalist but also an expert on the KGB, wrote that these people if ever fired need to be

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protected socially from unemployment because otherwise their disillusionment will only fill the ranks of Zhirinovskiy. And these *chekisti*, with expertise, with a network, with contacts, with files, have enormous power well beyond their sheer numbers. Actually, Vadim Bakatin was very smart to step by step dismantle the KGB, he did not hope to destroy it but in the three months he was there he did manage to divide the agency very carefully. He was confronted with a state within a state, and he had to move one millimeter at a time, like clearing a minefield. It was the most dangerous job. Bakatin did a very good job given the little time he was there. But don't forget that he was a competitor against Yeltsin during the elections for the Russian presidency. I am sure Yeltsin never really forgave him for that. I really regret that this very democratic, intelligent, influential and experienced person is out of power now. When I was still at the Kremlin I suggested that he occupy another position—the post of minister of Nationalities Affairs. When I suggested it Bakatin laughed and said that he was not brave enough to tackle such an issue—this after bullfighting the KGB! Indeed he is a funny man. He told me that even at gunpoint he would reject the position to handle such an explosive affair. So that job ended up going to Sergei Shakhrai.

So yes, now we should definitely do something to reign in the KGB, and signing a piece of paper will not do it.

Arias-King: What are the possibilities of another coup occurring in Russia right now?

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Starovoitova: A coup can take another form now. A creeping coup is how I would describe it, much like what was happening to Gorbachev before the actual coup in August of 1991. Unfortunately, I don't believe the potential opposition to a new coup will be as decisively organized today as it was before. In a year or two there could be another coup, this time very nationalistic and fascistic in nature. It could be headed not only by Zhirinovskiy but also by people like Nevzorov, Yuri Belyaev—the St. Petersburgite head of Russian Nationalists who recently gave an interview to *Nevskaya Vremya* and told them that they could have joined the October uprising in Moscow but decided against it because Ruslan Khasbulatov and Alexander Rutskoi did not adopt enough nationalistic slogans. He concluded that the October conflict was the struggle between two corrupted Communist Party groups, not nationalists. Don't forget that these groups have trained units that are organized and armed, and can make a lot of trouble in the months ahead.

Arias-King: What are the chances that the Russian Federation will divide?

Starovoitova: I don't think the destiny of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics awaits the Russian Federation. A couple of years ago it did seem that way, or maybe that we would follow the nightmarish Yugoslav scenario. But this is no longer true. We discovered that according to international law, Russia can almost qualify as a nation-state. Despite the many nationalities, 87 percent of the population is ethnic Russian, or assimilated Slavs such as Ukrainians and Belarusians, such as myself technically speaking—my father being an ethnic Belarusian. We have more than 100 indigenous nations in Russia, plus groups from other former Soviet nations that live in Russia. We have three Buddhist nations—the Kalmyk, Tuva and Buryat, the Kalmyks being the most western Buddhist nation in the world. Lenin was one-fourth Kalmyk by the way. We have Muslim nations in Tatarstan and the northern Caucasus, plus Jews, pagans—and even complicated mixtures of all these faiths. Many in northern Russia are only superficially Christianized and many in the Caucasus are also superficially Islamicized.



Fredo Arias-King interviewing Galina Starovoitova, 4 February 1994.

So yes, Russia's nationalities issue is complex. As you know, we had several discussions about the centrifugal tendencies in these nations, especially during the negotiations for a new constitution last summer. Then, several autonomous republics in the Federation adopted their own constitutions and declared them sovereign over whatever federal constitution that came out of Moscow. Many give themselves the right of secession, such as the Tuva. You know, the Tuva are an interesting case, because they are a Turkic-speaking Buddhist nation, and they joined the USSR quite late—in 1944. They have very close ties to their southern neighbors, the Mongols. They form about 68 percent of the population of their republic, unlike the majority of the other ethnic autonomies where the titular group is actually in the minority. But you have demands not only coming from them but also from regions inhabited by Russians. Even Yeltsin's hometown, Yekaterinburg, wanted to declare a Ural Republic and have more power within the Federation. St. Petersburg, Volgograd and other cities and *oblasti* demanded the same. So in the Constitution Moscow gave these autonomies more power—a sort of symmetric relation. Before we had an asymmetric relation. Several “bilateral” treaties with these republics also have given them rights. Yakutia for example, now called Sakha, as well as Bashkortostan signed the Federation Treaty with Moscow but only with certain preconditions and concessions.

But now these autonomies are growing wiser by watching the disadvantages disintegration has brought to the neighboring countries of the former USSR. They

are now less prone to demanding secession, and they are also worried about the Russian population in their republics, which in many cases is actually the majority. And unlike the Soviet republics, many of the Russian autonomies are enclaves inside of Russia with no borders with anyone else. Yet, Russia is still concerned about the loyalties of many nations because of their cultural proximity to the Buddhist and Islamic south. I for one would not be against the establishment of special self-ruling zones, such as in the northern Caucasus. But in the end I don't believe the autonomies will secede, they will continue negotiating with Moscow for concessions and special favors but I don't think it will go beyond that. In the Constitution we adopted several articles from the German Constitution, which provides generous powers to the regions, to the Länder. We want the same in Russia.

Arias-King: If you could change anything in the Constitution, in terms of regional vs. central powers, what would it be?

Starovoitova: First, I would really pay attention to the enormous powers that are concentrated in the Russian presidency, since we don't know who the next president will be. Second, I would also look at renegotiating the special relations with certain regions and autonomies in Russia. I don't think that specific relations are a matter of constitutional law—I would include such provisions in lesser laws, and through bilateral treaties. For the most part the Russian Constitution is a good one, but there are still certain elements of a socialist state. There exist protections for human rights, of course, but in addition you have protection against unemployment, for example. Market liberalization, yet, is also fixed into this Constitution. So there are many conflicting and even contradictory provisions in the Constitution. Now the Security Council has also been formalized through the Constitution. Despite the fact that I was one of the authors of this document, being a delegate in the Constitutional Assembly representing the Democratic Russia Movement for those three long summer months, I could not vote for the final draft because it contradicted in many ways the ideas that us democrats put forward. I kept my ballot. The final draft was not the position of Russia's Choice, but it was the position of another reform party—Yabloko, or the Yavlinsky/Lenin party. But the fact that a constitution was adopted was a positive event, given the months and years of deadlock.

“For the most part the Russian Constitution is a good one, but there are still certain elements of a socialist state.”

Arias-King: As an expert on this issue in particular, and as an eyewitness to the fact, what do you think of the whole Crimean issue? What damage did the vote in the Supreme Soviet, demanding back Crimea for Russia, do to Russian-Ukrainian relations?

Starovoitova: We have yet to see if the new parliament, the Duma, votes in a similar way. The whole argument centered on the legality of Khrushchev's 1954 decision to give Crimea as a gift to Ukraine in commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the so-called “reunification” between the two Slavic giants. This decision was made on

Khrushchev's whim, without ratification by the state bodies, without quorums, without properly made documents. At the time of the voting in the Supreme Soviet, it was closed session and I took the floor. I made a very ardent speech to my colleague deputies imploring them to defeat this bill or at least postpone a decision on Crimea. I asked them to table this motion until we discovered the real feelings of the Crimean population on this issue. I was attacked in the press by Nikolai Travkin and others as supporting the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh but not the self-determination of Russians in Crimea. I replied that I support self-determination when this wish is expressed openly and legally by the subjects in question—through a referendum maybe. But we still have no such thing in Crimea. I told them that we need to make a moratorium on post-Soviet border disputes, especially what concerns the borders of two nuclear powers—Ukraine and Russia. We have to manage inter-Slavic relations very carefully, as they can turn bloody. Look at historical relations between the Yugoslav nations, or between Poland and Russia. Crimea is a sensitive spot in the Russian psyche because it is the symbol of naval glory, many famous Russian poets, writers, comedians, have emerged from there or are intimately related to it—Akhmatova, Pasternak, Valoshin, Lev Tolstoy, Pushkin. Russia considers Crimea part of its spiritual heritage and culture. So I told the deputies that I understood their argument but to wait until other events unfold first, such as a referendum. I got to be an expert on Crimea because I had to travel there constantly with my little son as we both had chronic bronchitis and the doctor recommended a subtropical climate like Crimea's. But ever since I became a deputy I never returned to Crimea, and that was a pity. I did not return since I did not want to be blamed of agitating there. There is no question that the Russian leaders of the grass-roots movements in Crimea would have wanted to meet me there, and that would have stirred things up. I knew the grass-roots movement of the long-repressed Crimean Tatars, with whose leaders Sakharov and I worked at one point. We spoke on their behalf in the Soviet Parliament, urging that steps be taken to improve their lot and allow them to go back to their homeland. Even President Kravchuk once thanked me when we met in Switzerland. Recently the Russian leaders in Crimea accused the Russian democrats in Moscow, including Yeltsin, of betrayal. We of course did not betray them but that accusation was still very painful for me. But I told them that as responsible politicians, we have to wait for a referendum in which the whole Crimean population will participate, not just Russians, before we can take some concrete steps. This would have to be done under the umbrella of some international organization to avoid a potential conflict. We need to use preventive diplomacy.

Unfortunately things are complicated by the fact that the Russian movement in Crimea is a bit nationalistic. Democrats did not use preventive diplomacy and woo the leaders. Yet, Moscow nationalists did go there many times and had a large impact. I think that before the independence referendum in Ukraine, on the question of secession from the USSR on 1 December 1991, there was an under-the-table agreement between the Crimean *Oblast* leader Bagrov, the Party *apparatchik*, and President Kravchuk. We know that these two people are close politically, and they also play chess together. Kravchuk probably told him that in exchange for Bagrov's loyalty during the referendum, Crimea would get the status of autonomous republic within Ukraine. The Ukrainian president probably reminded him that if Crimea goes

to Russia, Yeltsin would surely replace the old Party hardliner for somebody else. Yet, Kravchuk, being not so much a democrat himself, would allow him to stay in power. So this was done. About 51 percent of Crimeans turned out to vote, of which 53 percent voted for Ukraine to secede from the USSR. After that, Crimea obtained the status of autonomous republic inside of Ukraine as planned. But then 200,000 signatures were collected in Crimea in favor of a referendum on the status of the peninsula, in full accordance with Ukrainian law on referendums. Then, people began to demand the dissolution of the Crimean Supreme Soviet. But these demands went unanswered.

The question of the Soviet Black Sea fleet stationed in Crimea is also contentious. Most of the officers there are Russian. When they heard recently that Ukraine wanted to sell part of the fleet to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, this added to their already precarious standing with the Ukrainian government.

I am also concerned about the rash of political killings that is occurring in Crimea now, especially among the Tatars which have lived repressed, having been deported by Stalin. These people have had their rights ignored and now they are very concerned with Russian chauvinism and the Zhirinovsky phenomenon, and they sympathize with Bagrov to stay in Ukraine rather than join with Russia.

My dream is now to have the possibility to go to Crimea to meet with the different leaders—Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, officers of the Black Sea Fleet, and organize a round table to begin using dialogue and preventive diplomacy. I would like to find a way to do this, since I have been neutral throughout this Crimean crisis, and nobody can blame me for taking sides. Everyone in Ukraine and Russia knows that I was very careful and responsible in this issue. If not me, then somebody else should immediately begin this process of preventive diplomacy and begin confidence-building measures in the Crimea. This would have as its goal the prevention of hostilities between two large European nuclear states, and would also aid the process of self-determination of nations, which is fixed in the United Nations Charter. Just like the U.N. helped Eritrea achieve peacefully its self-determination from Ethiopia, these same U.N. diplomats and observers must be sent to Crimea, Moscow and Kiev right away and organize some dialogue in a neutral country, perhaps Bulgaria. This is my dream and my goal.