

Dear and respected Boris Maximovich!

I send you my congratulations – both for your 90th birthday and for the publication of your latest, very interesting, book! ‘Dear and respected’ – because you are one of those few individuals who inspire both affection and admiration. If there were more people like you, the world would be a better place.

It was in 1991 (?) that our paths first crossed. I was a visiting scholar at the Institute of Sociology; you were its director, shortly to return from a visit to America. I was intrigued. Who *was* this person who had been a raikom secretary, had found himself in difficulties as head of Len TV, and was someone to whom Yadov always turned for advice? It was a few years later before I found the answers. It was with the founding of the European University that I came to know and to work with you.

Imagination, the willingness to take risks, the ability to inspire others, to lead – and yet to remain surprisingly modest about one’s contribution – these are rare qualities in a leader. Without you, the European University would not exist today.

And, working in Russia, I always felt that if I found myself in a difficult situation, it would be to you I would turn for advice. Somehow you would know what to do. (It’s true, isn’t it, that you took the entrance examination for a friend – for a place at an institute – by using a forged identity card with your photograph instead of his?)

And now for the book, your latest, but not your last. In this, volume 1, are the interviews carried out in 1995 - 1996 with twenty Leningrad intellectuals. Part of a larger project which included Hungarian and Polish colleagues and which never came to fruition, the Russian interviews make fascinating reading. All will be grateful to you and Natalya Pecherskaya. We await with *neterpenie* volume two with the interviews carried out in 2018 with those still with us.

What do we have so far? A slice of ‘intelligentsia-thinking’ on Russia’s past, present and future from three generations, caught in a moment in time. It’s not a book *of* analysis – it’s a book of raw material *for* analysis. I find myself as interested in the interviewers as in those interviewed. What if *you* had interviewed Yadov or Travin, and if Volkov had interviewed Gordin? Would the results be different? And what a sensitive interviewer Oleg Ken was! And, I have to ask, what if one of your interviewers had been a woman?

How did I approach the book? I split the respondents by generation, marked those I knew personally, and that gave me Yadov to start with, a friend and colleague from those far-off days in the 1960s. So far I've covered those born in the 1920s, and those of my generation – born in the 1930s, those whom I came to know in the 1990s. But what if I focused on 'theme' rather than 'generation' – the respondents' views on Eastern Europe, or on the dissidents, or the new world order? Different books would appear. So how should I tell students, historians or sociologists, to read it? Perhaps just ask them to read it and write a review? Rarely has a book preoccupied me so much. And what shall I do when the second volume appears? I shan't get a wink of sleep. Dear Boris Maximovich, many congratulations, and *blagodarnost* za to chto Vy yest