

## Sergey Stepashin

Chairman of the Association of Lawyers of Russia (ALRF), PhD in History, Doctor of Laws, Professor, Honourary Lawyer of the Russian Federation, State Adviser on Justice of the Russian Federation, Colonel-General. Director of the Federal Counterintelligence Service (since 1995 known as the Federal Security Service) (1994–1995), Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation (1997–1998), Minister of the Interior of the Russian Federation (1998–1999), Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (1999), Chairman of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation (2000–2013)

# First Among Equals

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DMITRY BULIN



**Mr Stepashin, how has the attitude towards the law and the legal profession changed in Russia and in the world over the past 30 years? What “epochs” have you noticed in this regard?**

Firstly, what we call “international law” has undergone a serious test. Unfortunately, many of the approaches that were developed after the WWII, during the establishment of the United Nations and other international and public organisations, have not withstood the test of time. Therefore,

new head of the Supreme Court having assumed office. ALRF, in fact, occupies a special place in this regard, in terms of providing free legal aid.

**You have degrees in economics and law. In your opinion, is it fair to say that economics is primary, and law comes after economics? If so, how would you assess the willingness of lawyers, including those involved in the legislative process, to consider the needs of economic actors?**

By the way, I have a degree in history and military science as well. So, as they say, there is a lot of education, every little bit helps. Generally, I think that a perfect option for practical work would be to have both economics and law degrees. It did help me a lot when I led the Russian Accounts Chamber. What is primary, economics or law? I would not raise such a question in principle.

From the historical materialism perspective, it is clear what is primary and what is secondary. We already learned about the base and superstructure at the institute. But, of course, I think that today everything should be connected.

**On what platforms and in what formats could lawyers and economists engage in an open and constructive dialogue?**

We have two excellent forums that address these issues: Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum and Saint Petersburg International Legal Forum. An interesting forum Russia — the Islamic World is taking place in Kazan, as well as the events hosted by ALRF, including our upcoming Congress this year, which marks the 20-year anniversary of our organisation.

Sergey Stepashin, Chairman of the Association of Lawyers of Russia, shared with Evgeniya Chervets his views on the challenges facing the legal profession, how to successfully reunite the Russian legal community over the years, and what we can learn from our colleagues from the BRICS countries.

I would describe the past 20–30 years as an “epoch of testing of international law”. A new term has emerged — not law but rule.

As for the legal profession, I believe there is a problem with a large number of law universities and schools that do not correspond to the modern approach to education and the relevance of these professionals in life. We dealt with this issue within the framework of the ALRF activities and Commission on Legal Education operating under the Association. There were 55 universities and schools in the Soviet Union. And then there were 1,200. Some of them were shut down as a result of our efforts. However, today, more than 400 universities and law schools remain, which is certainly a significant number. We recently discussed this topic with Valery Falkov, Minister of Higher Education and Science, who is also a lawyer. He expressed concern, too, about the fact that, if we talk about numbers in legal education, over 300,000 lawyers graduate each year. Who can say where most of them end up going? This does not mean that we do not need lawyers. We have a strong and effective bar association community. Work is underway to improve notary offices and develop the judicial system, particularly with the

As soon as we started diving into BRICS+ topic while working on the Almanac, it quickly became clear that BRICS+ legal cooperation is closely associated with your name and organisation's activities. Many lawyers, not just in Russia, but also in other jurisdictions, deal with national laws and are therefore not interested in BRICS+ initiatives. Only time will tell whether this approach has been forward-looking or not. However, what impact do you think such processes in BRICS+ are having or could have on national legislation and, consequently, on the legal profession in a particular country?

I do not think it has anything to do with my name or activities. The fact of the matter is that the BRICS Summit, now in its expanded format, was originally an initiative of the leaders from several countries, primarily China, Russia, then Brazil, India and South Africa. As you know, five more countries have joined so far. The BRICS Legal Forum, which was held in Moscow last year and will take place in Brazil this year, was established above all from the need to develop specific forms of cooperation between the BRICS countries from a legal perspective. We do not aspire to unify the legal education in all countries — it is specific. For example, Iran has a Sharia court.

Nevertheless, there are two very important aspects to consider. First, the experiences of other countries in legal education, their approaches to it, and the format of legal education can be valuable. I spoke at the Hanoi Law University in Vietnam, and it was quite interesting to hear from the representatives of their law school. Although Vietnam is not a full member of BRICS at present, they actively cooperate with its member states. We have a lot to learn from our colleagues in other countries. And they do have a need for this cooperation. Moreover, students from BRICS countries study in our law schools. Secondly, and most importantly, we need to find common ground in terms of legal cooperation to avoid legal obstacles in trade, exchange of academics, personnel, migration, other issues, as well as protection of intellectual property. This seems to have practical implications in the context of legal education.

**ALRF brings together representatives of various legal professions. In this sense, it is arguably the most universal pro-**



**fessional association of lawyers today. How does the Association manage to find common language among attorneys, legal consultants, corporate lawyers, legal scholars and government representatives?**

Very easily, indeed. Everyone performs their assigned task and acts in accordance with the existing laws and regulations.

**You have more than once been responsible for projects that are important not only for a particular region and country, but also for the entire world. I assume that addressing these challenges depends greatly on the effectiveness of your team. How do you approach selecting specialists to work side by side with? What principles do you follow when managing your team?**

The Association of Lawyers of Russia is not a government agency, but a voluntary organisation that was founded 20 years ago. Let me remind you that the original three co-chairpersons were myself and the late members of the Academy of Sciences Veniamin F. Yakovlev and Oleg E. Kutafin, all were outstanding legal minds, outstanding personalities in principle. Today we are working side by side with new co-chairpersons, excellent lawyers — Viktor V. Blazheev, Pavel V. Krashennnikov, and Vladimir N. Pligin. They are, first of all, of course, distinguished by their knowledge and great professional training, expertise in their respective fields. Pavel Krashennnikov specialises in civil law, while Vladimir Pligin is a brilliant attorney with work experience in the State Duma, Viktor Blazheev is the rector of a leading law university.

The second important thing is that these people, as well as those who work with them, including our Presidium, Board, and Staff, are willing to work hard. Our job is mainly creative. And thirdly, the people must be decent, with an unblemished reputation, as they are persons who represent the Association of Lawyers of Russia.

**If you had the chance to write just one book, what would it be about?**

In fact, I did write one. Three years ago, for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday — *Going into Politics and Coming Back*. Coming back from there as a human. If you read it, you will see it is a story about the 90s — as it really was, especially since I was an active participant in those events. There are so many scribblers nowadays who write about what happened back then without knowing anything about it — who were not there, but picked up rumours from somewhere.

For now, I have limited myself to this book. Although, when I worked at the Accounts Chamber, I had some books on value-for-money auditing, constitutional auditing, and all aspects related to financial controls. These are specialised literature used, among others, at the Financial University and Higher School of Public Audit, which we created together with the Moscow State University.



