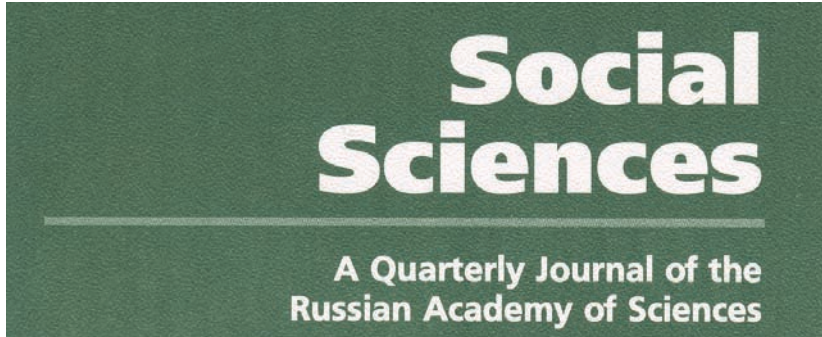


FROM THE CURRENT ISSUE OF



No. 1, 2010. Pages: 116-128.

**ALCOHOLISM AND ALCOHOL ABUSE IN RUSSIA:
WAYS OF OVERCOMING THE CRISIS**

Author: Grigory ZAIGRAYEV, D. Sc. (Sociology), professor, leading research fellow, the RAS Institute of Sociology. The article was first published in Russian in the journal *Sotsiologicheskkiye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)*, No. 8, 2009.

Alcohol abuse has become a highly poignant issue in Russian society although it has always been an acute problem in Russia.¹ The present level of the alcoholization of the population has by far exceeded past levels in terms of its disastrous impact on people's lives and the physical and moral health of the nation. Alcohol abuse has affected nearly every aspect related to it. It has led to a sharp rise in alcohol consumption, incidence of disease, mortality rate, alcohol-related crimes and the number of teenagers and women with a predilection for alcohol. It has seriously undermined the economic and moral foundations of the functioning of the Russian state and society and national security. For example, the main indicator—per capita alcohol consumption—went up 1.4 times in 1989-2008 alone to reach 15 liters of absolute (pure) alcohol.² This is nearly 1.9 times the level recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as posing a special threat to people's health (8 liters). In the early 21st century Russia has become the world's leader in alcohol consumption coupled with a very unfavorable structure of the alcoholic beverages consumed.³

The high incidence of alcoholism and deaths directly related to alcohol abuse are the most obvious indications of the unfavorable state of affairs. According to medical statistics, 2.6 million people in Russia are suffering from alcoholism. However, the real number is far in excess of the number of patients undergoing regular medical checkups. Expert estimates put their number at five million or 3.4% of the entire population. The figure is 1.5-2 times higher than corresponding indicators in most European countries. The spread of alcoholism is not the only indicator of the adverse situation. According to statistics supplied by law-enforcement bodies between 10 and 12 million people or 7-8% of the population regularly commit alcohol-induced crimes and offenses. The spread of alcohol abuse and alcoholism poses a serious threat to the life and security of broad

sections of the population. It undermines the moral principles and well-being of families. Each year 90 to 100 thousand people die from alcohol-related causes. This figure includes up to 10,000 dying of chronic alcoholism, an average of 33-34 thousand deaths caused by alcoholic intoxication, 23-24 thousand people murdered by drunks, up to 25,000 people dying as a result of drunk driving, etc. 4

A growing number of teenagers and women turning to alcohol is another indicator of the fact that Russia is in serious trouble. According to sociological surveys, in the last quarter of the 20th century the highest spike of mass alcohol consumption shifted from 16 and 17-year-olds to the 14-15 age groups. This is fraught with critical effects on the physical and intellectual development of the younger generation and the health of people across Russia in general, including their capacity for work. The growing alcohol consumption by women is just as dangerous for the physical and moral health of the people. In the last ten years of the 20th century the incidence of deaths from accidental alcoholic intoxication among men went up by 31.1% and by 53% among women (per 100,000 of population). Alcoholism showed similar figures. During that period the number of alcoholic patients under medical care for the first time has gone up by a total of 12%. Women account for 28% of the total. 5

A few figures will suffice to illustrate the disastrous impact of growing alcoholization on relations within family and the raising of children. The total number of orphans in children's homes (720,000) includes 600,000 social orphans, i.e., children whose parents are still alive. As a rule, their parents have been stripped of their parental rights because of alcohol abuse. According to the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, each year some two million children are abused by their alcoholic parents; 50,000 children flee their homes.6

According to a survey conducted by us in six Russian regions in 2009, 1,600 people (nearly 2/3 of respondents) expressed serious concern over the growth of heavy drinking and the negative consequences associated with it (crime, chronic alcoholism, alcohol-related deaths and the like). The greatest people's worry is the troubled state of the family as an institution, alcoholic parents neglecting their children and teenagers turning to alcohol. This suggests the following pertinent questions. Why does widespread alcohol abuse pose a great threat to Russian society? Given a roughly the same level of alcohol consumption in different countries, why are its negative consequences more severe in Russia than in other countries? Needless to say, inordinately high rates of growth of alcohol consumption in Russia have played a crucial role. But alcohol consumption in itself is not the only factor determining the extent of the entailing consequences. For example, the level of per capita alcohol consumption in France, Portugal, Italy and Spain is only slightly lower than it is in Russia, but "drunken" crimes and alcoholism are much rarer occurrences than in this country.

Most researchers agree that severe climatic conditions, a rigorous natural (climatic) environment and especially an alcohol-favored state policy over several centuries (16th—20th) have created very adverse conditions conducive to widespread alcohol abuse. These conditions have gradually led to a distinct structure of alcohol consumption dominated by hard liquor, i.e., a "vodka-based" model of consumption. On the other hand, they have produced a peculiar culture of alcohol consumption. It is characterized by the consumption of large quantities of alcohol at a time and the existence of widespread dining and wining traditions and customs requiring people to

drink alcohol on a broad variety of occasions thereby turning it into an indispensable attribute of everyday life. Vladimir Bekhterev summarized the role of the above factors in widespread alcohol abuse in Russia when he made these notes: “The Russian people have had the unfortunate privilege of consuming 40-degree vodka and being in far less favorable conditions than the peoples of the West, who consume wine and beer. It is a fact that concentrated alcohol solutions are strong irritants of the stomach and intestines thereby causing a strong afflux of blood to the walls, absorb into the blood very rapidly and produce a very ruinous effect. But weak solutions of alcohol do not have such a harmful property.” Noting that a more uncivil form of alcohol consumption is practiced in Russia, the scientist goes on to say, “The quantity of consumed alcohol is one thing, but methods of its consumption is another. Given our backwoods culture, people here as a rule drink vodka by a full tumbler and on top of that they often go without a chaser and even on an empty stomach. In this case alcohol produces a much more harmful effect than if consumed in the same quantity but under other conditions.”⁷ The growing threat of widespread alcoholization is seen from the fact that its negative consequences have gone far beyond the ruinous effect of alcohol abuse on the personality of the consumer and his immediate circle. Its negative effects are increasingly spreading to various aspects of people’s life, primarily affecting the social and legal security of broad sections of the population. Mass alcohol abuse and alcoholism are a growing factor curtailing people’s right to life and security, and their right to an adequate education and an occupation providing them with a well-fixed existence and protecting them from the violence and encroachments on the part of persons abusing alcohol. The only conclusion to be drawn from the above is as follows: at the turn of the 21st century the widespread alcoholization that had been steadily growing for many years achieved the proportions of a true national disaster for Russia. This creates a real threat to people’s social and legal security.

The sharp aggravation of the alcohol situation over that period primarily stems from the objective difficulties and negative consequences of a large-scale radical reform of the economic, social and political foundations of society now taking place in Russia. As can be seen from history, turning points in the development of society have always been accompanied by an outbreak of crime and alcohol abuse. The situation has become even worse due to mistakes and miscalculations made by the government while pursuing the policy of reform. The living standards of scores of millions of people have taken a sharp downturn; their unsettled state socially and the sense of unprotectedness, insecurity and uncertainty that has transpired in mass psychology have objectively prompted the population to increase demand for alcoholic beverages. In this way many are trying to escape from reality, “overcome” discomfort and stress and “forget” their problems.

The deep-going polarization of society in terms of property status and the emergence of clear-cut poles of wealth and poverty have entailed the alienation of a sizable section of the population, which has largely been responsible for the emergence of a negative attitude to social norms in the mass consciousness, including moral and legal restrictions in the sphere of alcohol consumption. The current social structure contains a large share of marginal people providing the most favorable breeding ground for increased crime, alcoholism and drug addiction. According to experts at the Institute of the Socioeconomic Problems of the Population, the number of dispossessed people who have broken off habitual social ties now stands at nearly eleven million. 8

However, a mistaken state policy has been largely responsible for the sorry state of affairs with alcohol because it has resulted in a virtually uncontrollable process of alcoholization of the population. The lifting of the state monopoly on the production and sale of wine and other liquor and the transition to a market economy in January of 1992 have resulted in total chaos in this sphere. This policy has been aimed at ensuring broad access to alcohol and has in effect renounced state control over alcohol consumption. To a certain extent this policy has been responsible for the rapid spread of alcohol abuse in the country and its more serious implications for society. The absence of state control in combination with excessive taxes on liquor has triggered an outbreak of illegal production, an illegal turnover of alcohol on a large scale, and a massive influx of cheap vodka which is often unfit for consumption. This in turn has led to mass poisonings. The threat fake vodka poses to people's health and lives is seen from figures issued by the State Statistical Committee of the Russian Federation (Goskomstat): alcohol poisoning rose from 16.1 thousand instances in 1991 to 55.5 thousand in 1994; in 2005 it dropped to 35 thousand.

The illegal production of alcoholic beverages reached enormous proportions (up to 60% in 1998). The share of illegally made alcohol is still quite big (according to the Ministry for Economic Development—about 40%) even though the Government has adopted a series of measures designed to remedy the situation. Besides, Russia is confronted with a new spiral of mass home brew (“moonshine”) manufacturing. According to our polls of the population and experts, between 60 and 70% of the rural population mainly consumes home brew. The fact that current legislation does not ban its manufacture for personal use means that efforts to combat home brew for sale are severely jeopardized. Small wonder that 42% of respondents noted that by relying on this policy the authorities would be unable to ease the problem of massive alcohol abuse.

The pertinent question is whether this kind of state policy will bring about any significant changes in the alcohol situation and reduce its negative impact on society's functioning. The entire record of fighting widespread alcohol abuse in Russia demonstrates that the most significant efforts made by the state in that area (four “drinking” reforms before 1917 and high-profile measures taken by the Soviet Union in 1958, 1972 and 1985) did not produce expected results. Moreover, each time more stringent measures were taken to fight alcohol abuse Russian society was confronted with another round of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

In our opinion, the ineffectiveness of the large-scale actions taken against widespread alcohol abuse so far is largely the result of inadequate implementation of ways, means and methods of overcoming this social evil. Failed attempts to resolve the problem by prohibiting alcohol (the 1914 “prohibition law” in Russia) or rigid restrictions on manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages (1958-1960, 1985-1987) or tougher penalties for breaching moral and legal norms in a state of alcoholic intoxication are the result of traditionally limited and lopsided explanations of the origins of passion for alcohol that put the main causes of pervading alcoholization down to widespread accessibility of alcoholic beverages, weak social control over persons abusing alcohol and inadequate upbringing. On top of that, antialcohol activities have as much as ignored the progress made by scientists in this field. In a significant departure from previous theories it was acknowledged during the 20th century and especially during its second part that people consuming alcohol are primarily satisfying some of their human needs—

alcohol consumption is rooted in the sphere of human ties and relations, everyday culture and the circumstances of their lives and lifestyles. In other words, most researchers now reflect the causal complex of alcoholization in a more in-depth way. A scientific concept of alcohol liking is the result of considerable efforts by sociologists, psychologists, medics and legal experts in the past 50-60 years. It is noteworthy that massive sociological research has been largely responsible for the emergence of the concept of alcohol predilection as a sophisticated social phenomenon.

The most important elements of the sociological approach explaining the causal complex of mass alcohol predilection are as follows:

- Economic elements relate to manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages (high profitability, broad access to alcohol, and an unfavorable structure of alcoholic beverages on sale (dominated by hard liquor);
- Socioeconomic elements as objective factors prompting alcohol consumption (unfavorable conditions affecting people's jobs, everyday life and their lives generally—upbringing and cultural development, social inequality, tensions, alienation and loneliness);
- Sociopsychological elements forming stable attitudes in people's minds. Irrespective of other reasons they are oriented toward alcohol consumption (potatory customs and traditions like toasting “our get-together,” “your health” or drinking “to beat fatigue” or “for the eternal peace of his/her soul” or “to bathe” a purchase, a bonus payment or a salary. This is a sociopsychological mechanism of imitation, especially characteristic of the younger generation);
- Psychological elements reflecting man's inherent desire for fun, merrymaking, pleasure and peace of mind;
- Sociocultural elements influencing the formation of the urge for alcohol and methods of its realization (a low level of culture, intellectual and cultural requirements and interests, shortcomings in moral upbringing);
- Psychopsychological elements triggering alcohol addiction (a weak nervous system, hereditary idiosyncrasy, faulty metabolism, etc.).

This means that mass alcoholization is caused by a complex combination of conditions and factors which are different in substance and importance. The current situation could only be changed in a positive way if all of those factors are properly dealt with. Regrettably, the state antialcohol policy has as before been confined to administrative and legal measures to curtail alcohol availability and tougher penalties for various offenses and immoral behavior resulting from alcohol abuse.

But can a state-sponsored policy control the process of de-alcoholization at all?

Throughout landmark campaigns against alcohol abuse in the Soviet Union (1958, 1972 and 1985) in pursuing its antialcohol policy the state clearly ignored the population's objective needs and living standards. It also ignored the fact that mass consciousness regards a moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages as a social norm and part of everyday culture and lifestyle.

In the absence of a comprehensive impact on the entire range of factors causing the population's alcoholization, the policy of the state has as a rule ignored quite a few aspects of this social phenomenon. Unlike several other negative phenomena, alcohol

consumption stems from certain human needs and ways and means of satisfying them. People turn to alcohol to enjoy themselves, cheer up, relax, rest, dissolve a sense of dissatisfaction, establish contacts, etc. Although such sensations are short-lived, illusory and represent self-deception, subjectively tipsiness is pleasant—most people take a positive view of it. This attractiveness constitutes the psychological basis for craving for alcohol. Uncertainty in everyday life and social insecurity normally stimulate people's craving for alcohol as a means of ousting their problems and concerns from their mind, as a means of escapism. The undeveloped state of socially acceptable standards of alcohol consumption or the absence of experience in using them compels guardians of sobriety to resort to an easily imposable ban—alcohol consumption rationing.

To understand better why recurrent attempts to combat widespread alcohol abuse have failed, we need to look at historical experience and concrete measures that have further aggravated the situation with alcohol instead of easing it.

In this sense the lessons that could be drawn from the 1985-1987 antialcohol campaign are most instructive. That most thoroughgoing Soviet campaign had the most ruinous aftermath—it created an even more complicated alcohol situation.

The most radical measures were taken to achieve its purpose ranging from strict restrictions and bans in the sphere of alcohol manufacture and sale to powerful administrative, moral and political pressure. The main outcome of the campaign was a sharp cut in the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages (per capita sales in Russia in 1985-1987 went down from 10.4 to 3.8 liters). This caused enormous shortages of alcoholic beverages, considering that the level of consumption remained the same. This shortage triggered mass profiteering and widespread home brewing, an outbreak of nontraditional alcohol-related offences, i.e., illegal manufacture of alcoholic beverages became a mass phenomenon.

According to the National Research Institute for Retail Market and Trade Demand and our own estimates, the amount of home brew equaled the amount of alcoholic beverages produced by state-run enterprises. At the same time there was a very unfavorable structure of consumed liquor (from the point of view of the ensuing consequences): in the early 1990s the share of hard liquor (vodka, home brew) amounted to over 80% as against 49% in 1980.⁹ Another effect of an ill-conceived antialcohol campaign was a considerable worsening of the crime situation resulting from alcohol abuse. Although the incidence of nearly all types of alcohol-induced crimes showed a short-lived downward trend in 1985-1987, soon after that it demonstrated a rapid and sustained increase: the total number of offenses committed under alcoholic intoxication went up more than 20% in 1989-1990 alone. Underage crime went up by more than one third. Severe shortages of alcohol led to widespread nontraditional types of offenses—in 1988 alone more than one million people were punished for wine-line brawls, alcohol-related profiteering, theft of components for the manufacture of alcoholic beverages, manufacture and sale of home brew, organizing criminal haunts and the like.¹⁰

Another negative result of the antialcohol campaign is also worth mentioning. In our view, it produced the most negative effect on the state of the campaign against alcohol abuse and its prospects. The fact is that the campaign brought about serious shifts in mass consciousness which resulted in the population showing a much lower level of support for the state's antialcohol policy and a growth of negative attitudes. Annual polls conducted by the National Research Institute of the Ministry of the Interior (with the

author's participation) revealed that an average of two thirds of respondents took a negative attitude to the state's alcohol policy as a whole, including more than 80% of respondents who condemned its policy in the sphere of manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.

Since then alcohol abuse has become an even more pressing issue. The need to look for ways and means of resolving this problem confronted researchers and practitioners with the need to explain the causes of the unfavorable outcome of the antialcohol campaigns. One of the most important causes was the fact that when the Government started dealing with this most complicated issue it had neither a clear-cut concept of how to prevent and stamp out alcohol abuse, nor a scientifically grounded program of practical work. From the very start this allowed a good deal of leeway in defining the main directions, tasks and phases of the antialcohol campaign and in identifying ways and means of achieving its objectives. The absence of well-defined concepts, ambiguity of basic initial positions and intermediate and long-term goals resulted in a serious mistake in practical work—campaign organizers did not see alcohol abuse as an antisocial phenomenon as distinct from habitual drinking bouts involving moderate consumption of alcohol, something that the overwhelming majority of the adult population does not perceive as amoral and unlawful.

Long-standing norms, customs and traditions, those most important regulators of human behavior, have never made it incumbent on people to give up alcohol altogether. This being so, persistent government attempts to impose the unreal slogan of absolute sobriety could not but evoke a very negative reaction from the population. This had an effect on the tactics and strategy of the antialcohol policy: the poor scientific backing of the antialcohol campaign was largely the result of the Government's obvious unwillingness to make use of scientific achievements and the experience gained over years of concrete work to combat alcohol abuse and alcoholism rather than inadequate research in the country. Analysis of that experience has enabled researchers to draw several conclusions concerning ways and means of tackling the issue. These include the following conclusions: an antialcohol policy must not be based exclusively on measures to restrict or ban the availability of alcoholic beverages; the root-cause prompting the masses to turn to alcohol does not lie in the sphere of manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages; rather it lies in the sphere of interpersonal relations and concrete conditions of life; if antialcohol efforts are mainly channeled into reducing or banning alcoholic beverages they can only draw a negative reaction resulting from a conflict with people's interests and well-established habits and stereotypes of behavior and communication. There is no scientific analysis of the obviously unfavorable situation that took shape before the 1985 reform and triggered snowballing alcoholization, which was partly the result of wide-ranging prohibitive measures¹¹ in the sphere of liquor sales.¹² All that pushed alcohol consumption out into the streets, squares, entrance halls and basements. This entailed not only growing consumption but also a rapid increase in antisocial behavior. We estimate that "outdoor drinking" increases the probability of offenses by an average of 2.7 times. This gave birth to some negative developments in public morals. The most unpleasant and repulsive aspects of alcohol consumption by groups of people in public places became a matter of public notice. At the same time the mass consciousness began to regard alcohol abuse as a routine phenomenon that does not evoke any serious protests from other people.

It is quite obvious that it is almost impossible to bring down alcohol consumption and the negative consequences ensuing from alcohol abuse in any significant way, considering that in the short term most of the population will continue to be affected by objectively unfavorable economic and social conditions, given a high degree of their social uncertainty and considering that many human values have been lost and people's intellectual and moral culture has been on the wane. And yet it is quite possible to stabilize and ease the alcohol situation. But if that goal is to be achieved the primary task is to make radical changes in the state's policy toward the alcohol issue and overcome the uncertainty, inconsistency and lopsidedness inherent in it.

What is needed is an effective alcohol policy aiming at a comprehensive view of its task and taking full account of the specific aspects of these social phenomena and what causes them to spread. It should also take account of the real possibilities of society and the historical experience, cultural traditions and customs of the peoples of Russia. If this policy is to be effective, the state must make a clear-cut statement of its official position concerning the mass consumption of alcohol. We suggest that the most important initial positions should recognize the following tenets before an alcohol policy can be developed and implemented.

1. Widespread alcohol consumption is a very contradictory social phenomenon. For that reason it requires a flexible policy with regard to alcohol and different measures in terms of their content. On the one hand, abstention from alcohol consumption, moderate consumption and a more civilized culture of consumption should be recognized as the fundamental principle. On the other hand, alcohol abuse should be treated in a more uncompromising manner, including the adoption of sanctions against it.
2. Considering that alcohol consumption and heavy drinking are conditioned by social and sociopsychological factors, prophylactic measures should be coupled with simultaneous efforts to transform people's current conditions of life, enhance their cultural and moral levels and create a corresponding moral and psychological atmosphere around manifestations of alcohol abuse. If alcohol is to be gradually ousted from its positions, a great deal will depend on the success of ongoing transformations in Russia and a radical change in economic and sociopolitical relations in society. The implementation of the present policy of improving the material and cultural standards of the people and promoting social justice will broaden people's cultural horizons and help the emergence of reasonable and accessible alternatives to alcohol consumption. All that will create the groundwork for a process leading to the ousting of heavy drinking.

Once the social aspects of measures to prevent and overcome alcohol abuse have been recognized as a priority the pertinent question is how general and specific prophylactic measures should relate to each other. Both should discourage people from consuming alcohol and reduce its harmful effects to a minimum. It is noteworthy that better conditions in various spheres of human endeavor do not lead to overcoming alcohol abuse or to significantly reducing it. They only create objective opportunities and prerequisites for this process. The extent to which such opportunities will be realized largely depends on the maturity of specific prophylactic measures and on how public consciousness will treat alcohol.

3. Creating truly favorable conditions and prerequisites that will completely oust alcohol abuse from the life of society is a long-term task. Therefore, an effective program of practical measures aimed at preventing and curtailing alcohol abuse at the present stage of the social development of Russian society requires an objective analysis and inventory of current conditions and opportunities and the formulation of achievable aims and tasks. These include the need to ensure the prophylactic upbringing and education of the population, develop and introduce an extensive system of educational measures designed to discourage the younger generation from alcohol consumption, strengthen social control over persons committing offenses triggered by alcohol abuse, develop and introduce basic principles regulating prophylactic measures and measures to stamp out alcohol abuse, encourage broad sections of the population to take a conscious and active part in the effort to oppose heavy drinking and alcoholism and the like.

4. The unfavorable key factors that have brought about a sharp aggravation of the alcohol situation include one that has played a special role. It is the fact that the state has virtually lost control over the situation, not least because of widespread corruption in administrative and power structures which impedes the establishment of law and order in the sphere of alcohol production and sales.

Given that alcoholic beverages are still in great demand among the population, and considering the objective need to meet it, the government is confronted with an urgent task: on the one hand, it must ensure effective control in the sphere of alcohol production and marketing (i.e., it must maintain a monopoly on alcohol production and sales and pursue this policy with a firm hand). On the other, it must step up government control of alcohol consumption to restrain its growth and reduce the negative aftereffects generated by it. This will require measures to reduce alcohol accessibility in terms of price and time and place of sale (according to a report by a committee of WHO experts, alcohol's broad accessibility doubles the number of alcohol abusers); work out and enforce economic and legal measures to eliminate illegal alcoholic businesses; revise the state policy which has in effect legalized making moonshine and encouraged its wide spread, especially in rural areas.

5. As we see it, efforts to change the specific culture of alcohol consumption existing in Russia (vodka model), as a key factor of widespread alcoholization, constitute the most promising method of staving off the critical state of the alcohol situation. This is a far more difficult task, one requiring considerable efforts by the state and a long time.¹³

This area of antialcohol efforts occupies a special place and for that reason it deserves more careful examination. State antialcohol policies during the previous stages of Russia's development are known to have played a decisive role in the formation of this culture. Successive alcohol-related reforms (wine monopoly, tax farming, excise-duty and wine monopoly once again) have inevitably ended up in higher state revenues accruing from alcohol sales but have also resulted in increased heavy drinking becoming ever more widespread and ugly.

The wine monopoly that emerged in the late 15th century and took root in the late 17th century had a deplorable effect on the Russian people. It was then that taverns (korchma) (where people took food as well as alcoholic beverages) and free sales of liquor were eliminated and the so-called tsar's pubs (kabak) became overwhelmingly

dominant. Only alcoholic beverages were served there but no food, which resulted in early intoxication. That situation promoted the view that Russia was engulfed in heavy drinking and that alcohol abuse was a national trait of Russians. The enforcement of the vodka model of consumption was accompanied by repressive measures to curtail the production of light home brews (like braga, beer and mead). The policy of imposing a wine monopoly compelled people to look for an excuse to get permission for the production of home brews and implanted in everyday life a multitude of new drinking traditions and customs, which sometimes were quite absurd. Today too, these customs and traditions are largely responsible for the fact that a massive number of people have turned to alcohol. Widespread psychological attitudes to alcohol consumption as a compulsory norm of behavior under certain circumstances lend it a habitual and socially endorsed character. As a rule, a breach of this social norm entails moral sanctions.

The system of tax farming (1765-1863) reduced to naught beer and mead production, with the result that the Russian people were doomed to consume vodka most of all.¹⁴ As a result, the share of vodka in the structure of consumed beverages accounted for 93% by the early 20th century (the figure by the early 21st century was 80%; today it is 72.3 %). Given the critical state of the situation with alcohol in Russia and its massive negative effects, there is an objective need to replace the model and culture of alcohol consumption as the most important instrument of overcoming the troubled situation in this sphere. The State Duma roundtable debate held in November 2007 under the aegis of the Security Committee is one sign of serious public concern. For the first time deputies concerned about the critical situation with alcohol minced no words in acknowledging as a matter of fact that consumption of hard alcoholic beverages in such quantities posed a mortal threat to Russia. The deputies stated that the vast quantity of surrogate alcohol aggravated the alcohol situation. Per capita consumption of surrogate alcohol was up to five liters. The deputies came to the conclusion that Russia could only be saved if there was a switchover to a different model of alcohol consumption such as the beer model.

The pertinent question in this connection is whether this task is feasible in Russia, a country where, apart from the need to overcome an ages-long drinking stereotype—the vodka model of alcohol consumption—there are no favorable conditions for the production of grape wines. Grape wines have deteriorated sharply in recent years not only because the viticulture areas are now outside Russia as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union but also because of the unsatisfactory state of Russia's economy and the antialcohol campaign of 1985-1987, which wiped out a large area of vineyards. The production of grapes has dropped more than five times in recent years (for example, the Kuban region is now producing not more than six million dekaliters of wine materials as compared with twenty-two million in the mid-1980s.¹⁵). This means that in Russia there is no chance of hard liquor being replaced with grape wines at the present time. The only possible way is to develop beer production as much as possible. The record of a number of Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden and Finland) shows that it is possible to get positive changes in the structure of alcohol consumption with the share of vodka demonstrating a significant decline.

6. There is an urgent need for a scientifically defined concept of a state alcohol policy for the Russian Federation. The concept needs to take account of both the positive international experience of tackling the issue, the main characteristics of the current

situation with alcohol in the country and the factors shaping it. If the concept is legally formalized it might provide the basis of a wide-ranging set of measures to increase the effectiveness of government efforts to deal with the issue of drunkenness and alcohol abuse.

It might be assumed that such measures will encourage various government agencies, public organizations and social institutions to step up their efforts and make for better control and coordination of their activities. Interdepartmental commissions with a staff provided by the Government of the Russian Federation and similar commissions under heads of regional administrations responsible for the development and enforcement of antialcohol programs might direct and coordinate diverse antialcohol efforts. If antialcohol efforts are to be fully effective it is also necessary to

1) back the antialcohol policy with financing and fund the programs of concrete measures ensuing from it. The success of dealing with such a difficult social issue will be jeopardized without financial backing. In many countries such programs are financed from a special fund set up at coordination centers. The fund is replenished with a percentage of the money accruing from sales of liquor (2-3%).

2) it is also essential to back the alcohol policy with scientific and informational resources. The development of effective programs of concrete actions or other administrative decisions on the issue are inconceivable without such resources. The current state of government-sponsored statistics and research into various aspects of alcohol consumption do not make it possible to create an objective picture of the spread of alcoholization in Russia by social and ethnic groups and in different regions of the country. A board of researchers and methodologists at the interdepartmental commission would improve this situation. The board would organize and coordinate research, collect and analyze statistics and sociological surveys concerning the alcohol situation in Russia as a whole and in its regions and make suggestions and recommendations to improve prophylactic measures and deal with problems related to alcohol consumption.

Finally, a Federal law could ease the very unfavorable situation with alcohol in Russia and its devastating effect on various spheres of society's vital functions. It would legally formalize entirely new and scientifically sound approaches to dealing with the issue of alcohol abuse and alcoholism, clearly define the goals and substance of the government's alcohol policy and ways and means of achieving those goals. It would also define the social priorities of an alcohol policy, organize a ramified system of measures designed to dissuade young people from turning to alcohol, ensure health protection for the people and prophylactic measures against alcohol abuse, introduce social rehabilitation of alcoholics and provide a legal basis for adequate organizational, financial, scientific and informational support of this policy.

NOTES

1 According to numerous researchers, alcohol abuse was not widespread among Russians (up until the mid-16th century). The situation underwent radical change when liquor sales became an item of state revenues, with the authorities encouraging liquor production in every possible way. The result was a policy of forcible alcoholization of the population.

2 The level of alcohol consumption includes vodka, home brew (moonshine) and various surrogates produced legally or illegally.

3 In Russia the share of the hard liquor consumed by the population accounts for 72.3% as distinct from 25-30% in most other countries.

4 Figures issued by Russia's State Statistical Committee, Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Public Health.

5 Proceedings of the Federation Council's working group on measures to combat drug addiction, alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

6 Argumenty nedeli, June 5, 2008.

7 V. Bekhterev. Alcoholism and a Struggle against It, Leningrad, 1927, pp. 7-8 (in Russian).

8 Nezavisimaya gazeta, September 26, 2000.

9 Figures issued by the State Statistical Committee.

10 Figures issued by Russia's Ministry of the Interior.

11 For instance, a decision adopted at the time of Nikita Khrushchev's rule (1958) banned sales of vodka from all stores and public catering establishments (with the exception of restaurants) situated at railroad stations, airports and surrounding areas. Vodka was not on sale close to industrial plants, junior and high schools, hospitals, sanatoria and places where people gathered en masse on public holidays.

12 Vestnik AN USSR, No. 8, 1991.

13 At a time of growing well-being and improving social welfare West-European countries took up to thirty years to achieve a stable tendency toward a drop in alcohol consumption and its negative effects.

14 Vodka was the main instrument of increasing budgetary revenues. Consequently, the state took measures to ensure beer and mead production in lesser quantities.

15 Argumenty nedeli, November 22, 2007.