

The aim of the research project is to show liberal nature of the nineteenth century Russia. Contrary to popular connotations it was not only a bastion of backwardness. Liberalism gained unexpectedly high popularity then, and it was not accidental. It had been influenced by foreign literature: fiction, scientific works, socio-political journalism. Typically, it reached the Russians through bibliographic reviews published in liberal press. Liberal columnists acted as messengers of Western Europe and thanks to them the Russian Empire was getting close to Europe. Also, owing to their activity many Russians recognized the European ideals – freedom and equality. The research project shall shed light on the process in question. In order to do this, the reviews of new foreign publications that were published in daily newspapers and periodicals will need to be analyzed.

The research project aims to show the Russian liberalism as a powerful ideology and social movement. The starting point is 1855, when, after the death of ‘gendarme of Europe’ - Tsar Nicholas I, Russia entered the "era of great reforms". It was not until that moment in the history of the Russian Empire that public opinion gained in importance, and liberal ideas have gained wide popularity. The final caesura is the Revolution of 1905 which closed the first stage of the formation of Russian liberalism. The subject of the analysis will include bibliographic reviews printed in major liberal newspapers and magazines in the second half of the nineteenth century. The aim of the analysis is to demonstrate meanings that liberal columnists gave to the reviewed works, intending to promote their vision of Russia’s development. Without the knowledge of major titles of journalism it is barely possible to understand the popularity of liberal ideas before the Revolution of 1905.

The research project is based on carrying out basic research in the field of political history and history of political thought. Until now, historians have focused on the work of the most outstanding liberal thinkers and did not show any interest in the press. The research project seeks to ‘break’ with the tradition of describing Russian liberalism as an elite phenomenon. The implementation of the project shall bring practical benefits. First of all, it will allow to invalidate a stereotype of Russia as a country of only two extremes: reactionary conservatism and revolutionary radicalism. Secondly, it will prove many Russians’ commitment to universal values (freedom, equality), on which the European civilization has been founded. Thirdly, it aims to show space for dialogue between Europe and Russia – based on recognizing liberal values. After all, it is possible that Russia will finally choose liberal way of development.