

Russia's Constitutional Revolution: Legal Consciousness and the Transition to Democracy, 1985-1996

Robert Ahdieh



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Robert Ahdieh assesses here the troubled history and uncertain future of constitutionalism in post-communist Russia. He argues that the development of Russian constitutionalism and legal culture, long ignored as secondary to the economic and political transformation of the country, is critical to the survival of democracy.

The discussion first focuses on the history of the Soviet Union and Russia from Gorbachev's selection as General Secretary in 1985 to the adoption of the new Constitution in December 1993. Addieh analyzes those decisions and events that impacted upon the development of constitutionalism, positing that Mikhail Gorbachev's and Boris Yeltsin's narrow focus on institution-building impeded the development of legal consciousness. He then presents an alternative model for constitutionalism's development under the 1993 Constitution.

Based on interviews with scholars, legal practitioners, and government officials intimately involved with the constitutional processes over the last decade, Ahdieh concludes that constitutionalism's emergence in Russia can occur only through an "evolution from below."

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