

MOSCOW IS NOT A BANANA REPUBLIC

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The ‘corruptocracy’ grown on the fertile soil of metropolises has a weakened instinct of self-preservation, but still it possesses it to some degree, and therefore takes steps to appease society and prevent potential outbursts of discontent. These steps are usually imitations; although they cause a chain reaction that the authorities are not able to control.

This is what happened with Moscow’s general development plan. The very fact that the authorities publicly offered the opportunity for citizens to express their opinions on such a significant issue set the ball rolling on real discussions about the prospects of city development.

At the moment, residents of Moscow only have an opportunity to influence the solving of certain particular problems. **There is no talk of citizens taking part in the governance of the megapolis, of course.** There is no really local self-government, town referendums are in fact impossible, and there are other means to block

the expression of the free will of the citizens — all of this plays its part.

I would not like to refer to the social-political situation in the Moscow using military terms such as ‘urban resistance’. Fortunately, **there is no war between the Moscow bureaucracy and the citizens right now.** However, against the background of very little radical opposition activity there is a growing estrangement from power among educated and the more or less well-to-do strata of Muscovites. It is a rather positive process proving that civil society is maturing, though the situation in general cannot be considered stable.

The radicalization of peaceful and constructive social forces is possible if the authorities, who have lost their sense of reality, rouse it through actions which cause overall indignation. This is the way the downfall of all corrupted regimes comes about. In such moments, those leading public opinion, authoritative intellectuals and public figures with clean reputations can take the positions of the political leaders. But this role is unnatural for those who normally occupy a different, not less important niche. Development according to this scenario — through a disaster — seems to me extremely undesirable.

Speaking about Moscow, we should not forget that **it is not a sovereign banana republic but a part of a federation**, which means that the federal authorities cannot ignore their responsibility for what is happening in the capital either. Eventually the limits of the Moscow authorities’ abilities are defined exactly by the limits of the federation’s patience. The situation in Moscow depends on the political will of the federal center.

Civil influence on power resulting from the non-violent and non-political actions of various groups is the natural mechanism of a democratic society. Such a mechanism is beginning to form in our country — but it would be unreasonable to rush things. Muscovites have little experience in self-organization, and the residents of

АРХНАДЗОР
ОБЩЕСТВО, КТО ХОЧЕТ СОХРАНИТЬ ПЕРСОНАЛЬНУЮ ИСТОРИЮ

ArchNadzor is a social movement; a voluntary association of citizens willing to contribute to the preservation of Moscow’s historical monuments, landscapes and views. The movement was founded on February 7, 2009, and its aim is to unite the efforts of people and organizations aimed at preserving and studying the cultural heritage of the capital. ArchNadzor has been consistently fighting against the new Moscow general development plan.

many cities lack it completely. Today’s agenda is to bring about extensive growth of civic organizations, in order both to increase manpower and broaden their range to help them master different technologies of civic influence.

The idea of uniting all the active public forces against the common enemy is a utopia in my opinion, except for the situations developing according to the worst case scenario. **The new general urban plan of Moscow is certainly not going to push society towards social-political disaster.** On the contrary, the variety of platforms is a sign of a healthy civil society.

Of course, the Russian Public Chamber did not interfere in the issues of the general urban development plan of Moscow, it simply held hearings — i.e. it acted within the limits of its remit. The fact that the discussion of the general plan has gone beyond the borders of urban planning and become an emotional debate on the specific administrative culture of the Moscow authorities is rather natural, since, on the city level, there are no legitimate places where such issues can be raised. Potentially, the city Duma and Moscow Public Council (regional Public Chamber) could be such a place, but certainly not in their present-day state. ■

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