

THERAPY, NOT SURGERY

Mikhail Fedotov



MIKHAIL FEDOTOV is a Russian official and human rights activist, and the Secretary of the Union of Journalists of Russia. Since October 2010 he has been an advisor to the President of the Russian Federation and the head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights. He is the author of the draft bills “on press and other mass media,” “on mass media,” and “on copyright and related rights.” He also serves as the head of the UNESCO department on copyright and other branches of intellectual property law

RJ Your statement on the need for the de-Stalinization of public conscience is being widely discussed in mass media. Do you think Stalinization can be dubbed as the diagnosis of modern Russian society?

Let's clarify things. “Stalinization of the public conscience” is a rather relative term and a “diagnosis” implies keeping the remains of the totalitarian mentality in the society. So when the question of de-Stalinization is asked, it is not about the role of

Stalin in Russian history or anything like that, but more so about the need to overcome the remains of totalitarian stereotypes in social behaviour and conscience.

RJ Do you think that society should solve this problem on its own or does it need help from the authorities or some foreign organizations?

Certainly society should find the solution for this problem on its own. The state can and I think must assist it by, for instance, taking part in preserving building monuments that commemorate the victims of the totalitarian regime, museums like the Wall Museum in Bonn, where school-children learn about their parents' lives in the divided Germany. At the present moment there are such monuments and museums already, but in my opinion they are still too few. In other words **the state must support public initiatives but must not impose its policy of behaviour and its ideology**, especially since it is banned by the Constitution to make any ideologies, including those of a Stalinist or anti-Stalinist persuasion as well as nationalist ones in Russia.

Public efforts in this manner should result in the modernization of the public conscience, gaining it features worthy of the twenty-first century.

RJ Does the image of a more up-to-date public conscience not fall in line with an era that contains some ideological element?

No, it does not. Ideology is a certain system of views but in this case it is not about the system of views but about the relationships between individuals. I will give a simple example. Recent sociological research has shown that many young people dream about becoming an official. Not doctors, teachers, astronauts, but officials

that is to say, the ruler's people. But at the same time they have no idea as to how state service is related to service for the Motherland and its society and people. They think that an official is a person who eats and drinks well and does nothing in particular other than obtains administrative rent in the form of bribes. Here we have an absolute distortion of the mass conscience with which it is impossible to make a modern competitive country.

RJ What do you see as the means to improve the situation?

First of all, changes should be introduced to the system of education and upbringing including upbringing in the family. Second, we must permanently abandon the paradigm for the perversion of history, which was established by the “Short Course of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks' History.” It seems to me that the *Time Judgment* TV-show featuring Leonid Mlechin, Sergey Kurginyan, and Nikolay Svanidze is a concrete step in this direction and is an important contribution to overcoming the remains of the totalitarian mentality, that in its turn involves the perversion of history.

RJ How do you explain the atavisms of totalitarian conscience that survive in the context of Russian society and have been rebuilding for the past two decades?

In fact, we started to free our minds from the remains of totalitarian mentality not two but five decades ago. The beginning was the twentieth Communist Party Congress in 1956. Since then setbacks and remissions have happened from time to time. At the present moment it is time to get rid of the remains of totalitarian mentality once and for all and come back to ideas of human values,

come back to ideas of morality, to see that in the twenty-first century it is impossible to apply principles such as “if there is no person there is no problem” or “those who are not with us are against us.”

The most amazing thing is that the Presidential Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights works not only with the matter of de-Stalinizing the public conscience but also with other crucial matters including the judiciary and police reforms; defense of the family, motherhood and childhood; as well as problems of migration, etc.

But mass media does not pay any attention to these areas of the Council’s work. **Everybody is interested only in the problem of de-Stalinization, which in fact has nothing sensational to it.** This in general is a rather clear task, and the Council has been working with it for about half a year. Of course the time itself will slowly but steadily and inevitably do the work of overcoming the relics and rudiments of the totalitarian mentality, but it had better be done quickly since these rudiments are still being reproduced in new generations, and this is quite harmful for public health.

RJ *What is the reason for the totalitarian mentality to be reproduced in new generations born and brought up after the totalitarian state?*

It is connected to elements of totalitarian mentality being kept in the public conscience. Here we should consider that **there are people who exist without the stereotypes of the totalitarian mentality even in totalitarian societies.** For example, I have a lot of friends born and brought up in the USSR who are absolutely free of any totalitarian stereotypes. However, we can see these stereotypes in young people who were born in Russia after 1991. One of these stereotypes is that of dependency: the state owes me everything, but I owe it nothing. This stereotype is still very strong, especially in lesser-developed regions. Slow snail-speed development of such regions is just one of the many factors that connect it to preserving this stereotype in the public conscience. It should be fought against. But of course not with repressions but with calm discussions and explanations. It is going to take therapy not surgery.

RJ *Where will these therapists come from, and where should we be looking for them?*

There is no need to look for them. **There are already therapists in our society. There are many scientists, college and school teachers, journalists, writers, and actors, who understand the problems of Russian society very well.** The conscience of these people is absolutely free from any rudiments of the totalitarian mentality. But their efforts should be united and they should be helped. ■

Mikhail Fedotov was speaking with Ksenia Kolkunova

DE-STALINIZATION IS A SPECIAL-PURPOSE POLICY



ELLA PAMFILOVA is a Russian politician, public figure, and the former head of the Council for the Promotion of the Development of Institutions of Civil Society and Human Rights under the President of the Russian Federation.

Exclusively for RJ

I am not a supporter of easy solutions such as making a diagnosis and treating a society in accordance with it. In my opinion, efforts should be directed at forming a modern system of values. This is exactly what the Russian society needs and strict boundaries for the activities of the political, business, and creative elite should be worked out on the basis of this system of values, which would allow us to resolve the problem of “stalinization” of the Russian society. The roots of this phenomenon lie in the fact that Russians at present deeply feel the existing social injustice, the vivid symptoms of which there are appalling social inequality, double standards in the behavior of many politicians, lack of personal safety, despotism of employers, and so forth.

It is evident that we cannot resolve these problems by using the liberal bolsheviks’ methods and by resorting to surgical intervention. A moral and ethical recovery of the public climate is required, along with the creation of a just social system based on

the principles of accessibility of education. Moreover, information of TV networks needs to be changed as they presently, instead of developing our youth, make them more primitive. Changes are also needed in the public climate that will result in bringing to naught the desire of old unhappy people, of the middle-aged, and also the youths, who extol and are nostalgic about the Stalin epoch. A qualitative change in the system will naturally draw people away from the wish for a “strong hand” leader, liberating them from the illusion that order can be instituted only by applying harsh measures. In other words, **de-stalinization is the formation of different, diverse policies that oppose the current ones.**

If the state and society do not strive for developing such policies, thus reacting to the existing social challenges, if they don’t cope with the resolution of the most acute problems, especially the ones related to despotism and injustice for the common people, then nothing will prevent the emergence of “social vivisection surgeons.” ■