

SOCIETY DEMANDS NOT FEAR BUT STANDARDS

Ella Paneyakh

SPECIAL OPINION



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Fears have determined Russian social life in the late 1990s – early 2000s. Putin came to power, supported by the fear that everything could get even worse and that everything is about to collapse. For the time being, society has become a bit better off during the years of the boom and has survived the crisis, which turned out to be not as dreadful as it was expected to be – it was indeed an apocalypse that everybody had been expecting to arrive, as was the case in the 1990s.

I would not say that social attitudes are now motivated by fear. They are more so motivated by the fact that humanitarian norms and standards of living are growing much faster than the level of real improvement in the current situa-

tion and the growth of income. It is also noteworthy that society is also maturing incommensurably faster than the state. Thus, it has become clear that – as the address delivered by Leonid Parfenov showed, for instance – we are no longer OK with censorship practices. Society has been improving and the state has been deteriorating for all this time. Who is the most popular journalist? It is a person who suits the expectations of the mass audience. Parfenov, who did not feel any urge to immediately oppose TV censorship a few years ago, felt it necessary to do so this time. These are the developed standards, according to which **it was proper to endure censorship just a short time ago, and now it is seen to be rather improper. This is a formed stratum of people who consider themselves entitled to live according to the standards of the civilised world and want to be treated according to these standards.** The moment has come for a transition from quantity to quality. And people, who never previously cared about such things as politics or democracy, turned out to be interested in affairs in relation to such fields as law, liberties, independence and dignity. In my view, this is how the mainstream of the social attitude looks now. The bosses ride cars

in the role of fear in modern social life. **Now only something very frightening can manage to raise a wave of fear, something drastic, such as when 12 people, including children, are massacred in the village of Kushevskaya, it is quite understandable that everybody has goose bumps.** Such savage stories can give rise to a fear of streets and bandits, who will come and from whom you should be protected by a kind and strong state.

But, notwithstanding the objective process of reducing the importance of fear, they still play a certain role in modern Russian society, but that role is much less significant than used to be the case a decade ago.

Reminiscing on the country's unstable past also produces fears. For instance, public opinion polls indicate that perestroika is identified with the idea of collapse. If this word is pronounced, the first thing that comes into people's minds are empty shops, then the transition crisis of the early 1990s and everything connected with it, unemployment, and three-digit figure inflation. At the same time, the active part of society saw a window of opportunities in terms of the potential for liberalisation.

I cannot agree with the President, who, in his video address, defined the present situa-

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with flashing light atop, just as they used to do, but society does not see this conduct as proper.

It was this coming-of-age process that provided a reduction

tion as a standstill. A rash and burst-type degradation of all the social self-organisation institutions, including the state itself, has been occurring in our country

for a decade. Who experienced a standstill? Those who have a so-called wide horizon, who want to do something more not only in their private lives, but also in business, the social sphere, and charitable activity. It was ambitious people who were at a standstill. I think they were the target of the presidential address: we are currently at a standstill and we are going to have a non-standstill, space for opportunities, social lifts, and, at least, a partial untying of hands.

Society in general, mass society, has not felt any standstill at all. Rather, it has felt two things. The first one is economic growth, which has changed the way of life during these years. And although now the economic crisis made everyone tighten the belts, the way of life and the idea of the way of

afraid of. In the same way, in well-to-do societies, most people die of heart diseases - nobody tends to get killed in car accidents and nobody dies at the age of 50. When people have no actual fears, they place the issue of crime as the first order of importance. The same way as businessmen – in the case that everything is more or less fine in the economy – put the taxation issue above all else. There is also a fear of immigrants, people of a different culture who are interpreted as posing a dangerous; it is not clear what to expect from them. But such fears have always existed and everywhere. The Russian fear, which is uncharacteristic for other civilised societies, is no doubt fear of the militia and the state in general.

People are afraid of various things and behave in various ways

every business centre as if it were a besieged fortress. Here this fear is more actual. In what way can they be compared? **I suppose Americans spend more money on average in relation to their fear of terrorism than Russians do. But we cannot compare such things such things as the amounts of money spent.** These are basically different fears.

I do not think that fears, as such, affect the democratic nature of a society, or the attitude of private individuals to rights and liberties. But if the government managed to somehow scare the population, then indeed this will affect one's rights and liberties. When the National Security Act was introduced in the USA right after the downfall of the twin towers in New York, the government skillfully used the heightened fear and took a great piece of the pie for itself in terms of authority, which it otherwise had little chance of obtaining.

This is a classic way of executing power: to make a threat, and then to offer a protection against its fulfilment. This strategy is typical for the current Russian authorities. I believe that it is currently very inefficient. They made a fuss but won the barbwire garter. The usability of Machiavelli's idea that fear is an effective tool in political power depends on the applicable historical period and on the type of power. Machiavelli wrote that about a prince of what is, in our view, a small population and small town - a regional centre at most, where everybody knows everybody, where not only groups of people but individuals can be frightened, where there are family clans, and where it is sufficient to touch one person in order to affect everyone. To rule with the help of fear in the atomised modern society, it is important to unleash terror – no more, no less. It is possible, however hard, expensive and extremely inefficient that may be. ■

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life that human beings deserve are not going to disappear. Everybody wants their children to receive higher education. Those people, who by and large would normally hand down the trade of a skilled carpenter to their children, are now aiming at providing them higher education. Mass society has felt the space for opportunities widening and the economy growing. At the same time, it recently felt the same political process that had been felt significantly before by the educated part of society – the degradation of the state and its expansion into the private space of the country's residents.

In all the countries, there is the fear of a possible economic collapse and the fear of being subject to a very-very frightening crime. **In general, the growth of the fear of crime is a good sign, since such a fear tends to become evident when there is nothing else to be**

for that reason. I have been observing the fear of terrorism in America. It is demonstrated in one simple thing – everybody is inspected at the airports, and this examination is getting more intensive year by year. At that, there are virtually no terrorist attacks, as they have been staved off for a decade. Indeed, they catch some suspects from time to time, and people are ready to invest much to avoid the slightest chance. But nobody sees the building in central New York collapsing in his/her nightmares, except for, of course, those who were personally traumatised by this event. The fear of terrorism is not on the list of actual fears. These are measures taken at the state level.

The Russian fear of terrorism expresses itself in the fact that each firm stations a bunch of men wearing bulletproof vests at the door and the fact that you enter

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