

## RUSSIAN AND NON-RUSSIAN FEARS

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**F**ear, envy and hate – those are the three feelings that form the basis of any politics and, naturally, of any society. The reason behind this is simple.

**As a rule, a society in which people are not afraid of anything tends to live poorly and is short-lived. Any society, even the most prosperous one, lives in a situation of strong fear.** For example, if we count the number of antidepressants that are used by Americans, we can draw the conclusion that the USA lives in a situation of constant fear. It is, of course, another thing that their fears are not our fears. An American tends to fear some of the things that we can only dream about. For example, an American is afraid of losing his high-paying job, of not fulfilling his ambitions, and of not gaining success. However, due to this fear, Americans strive to fulfil their ambitions and, naturally, to obtain a high level of life. At the same time, this feeling of fear also makes Americans generally con-

servative. They are afraid of losing hope that they may gain something.

In a totalitarian society, people are afraid of rather specific things. They fear a painful death, tortures, hunger, torments, the death of their children and so forth. In a democratic society, people are afraid of not getting a proper education, of not fulfilling their ambitions, of making a mistake in their choice of future profession, of falling in love with the wrong person, and of other such dangers. These represent different fears, but they can be equally strong.

Of course, fear alone does not make a society function. However, fear is the last resort for bad, clumsy, incompetent, bungling government authorities. The only thing such authorities can attribute to themselves is that people fear them. Along with that, there is another sort of fear. **There are states, in which people are also afraid; however, they are not afraid of their authorities. On the contrary, they are afraid of losing them. For example, the topic of defending democracy is an important one in a democratic state.** People fear that the rule of democracy will be violated by

For example, such fears are very characteristic for the United States. Americans are suspicious, including towards their own state authorities. They constantly suspect their government of holding the desire to violate the democratic freedoms of its citizens. In essence, they view the scenario, in which a cunning demagogue gains power via democratic means, as a genuine horror story.

The fear for one's state authorities is much more productive, because, if the opposite is true, when instead, a certain leader is feared, he is naturally, not only feared but also hated. **Eventually, people begin to think that being delivered of this constant fear is, most likely, worth sacrificing everything else.** Gradually, this fear is substituted by madness and desperation, which affects the sustainability of political regimes in a quite negative way.

The current fears that are characteristic of democratic states are largely capable of pushing people onto a path of madness and desperation. For example, the fear of terrorism - a justified fear - has largely contributed to the curtailment of a whole range of freedoms and democratic institutions in the

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some other power rather than by their own authorities.

United States. This, in perspective, can prove fatal for democra-

\*I would like to note that the phrase 'to gain success' exists in our society only in the vocabulary of the cheap and vulgar. As they say, 'the dude wanted success...' – *Author's note.*

'The dude wanted success' is an internet meme, which denotes the aspiration of certain youth subcultures to gain success despite any hindrances. This internet meme became famous after a video that appeared on the internet, in which a group of young people, who were found guilty of assault, were sincere in their lack of understanding as to why they were sentenced to such long prison terms. – *Editorial note.*

cy. This has resulted in a decrease of one's physical feeling of freedom. Undoubtedly, this all happened because people felt a rough, almost animalistic fear for their lives.

As to the fears related to migrants, which are quite popular nowadays in the West, these are fears of a different nature. They are often explained by the existence of so-called xenophobia, which is a falsity. For example, Swiss society has demonstrated its fear of migrants, but this society cannot be xenophobic in principle, because it consists of three communities that speak different languages. What exactly are the Swiss afraid of, then? They are afraid that some strangers may establish their own rules in their country - rules that are incompatible with Swiss democracy.

A prevailing sense of fear is characteristic for the Russian society, where people don't have much of anything, but they are terribly afraid of losing the little of what they still have. Such a society cannot be revolutionary. It is always conservative, even in cases when it seems to be revolutionary. In particular, the so-called desire for security is actually a desire to cease being afraid of something terrible, and there indeed are a lot of terrible things in Russia.

It is another matter that **everyone who offers protection, as is quite often discovered later, has really been the one who should have been feared.** In this respect it should be said that our society is full of distrust, not just fear. As a rule, Russians are afraid that the situation may become even worse. And this thought, 'What if they make the situation even worse?' is the underlying stream of thought in Russia.

**One of the main fears tormenting today's Russian society is the fear of change, because in the past the changes that everyone wanted and expected eventually turned into such a nightmare that many people are still suffering from it even today.** The problem here lies in the fact that such a fear, on the one hand, paralyzes society and renders any positive change impossible, while, on the other hand, it does not release the society from the need to undergo change.

Everyone who is afraid of a new perestroika today, or who hopes for a new perestroika, should think about this: 'Why did the perestroika under Gorbachev fail?' Those who want a new Perestroika should introduce one that will succeed. And those who are against it should offer a clearly understood alternative. What is actually happening? There is a lack of action.

Everyone actually understands that we live in a temporary structure, which does not allow for any development. But we will still be forced to make changes. The changes should take place at the structural level. For example, the change of personalities as such will not give us any positive results if we continue playing by the same rules that are in place today. ■

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## MEDVEDEV AND THE FEAR OF BACKWARDNESS



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Our society is not held together on account of any shared fear but is rather imbued with fears of everything around suddenly collapsing or exploding. Such fears can not be perceived as a systemic stabilizing factor for any long period of time; such fears transform themselves all too quickly into a sense of despair, which in turn descends into a personal and then later a collective fearlessness or apathy. In the longer term, there develops a forgetfulness and a loss of any historic memory of traumatic experiences that otherwise might prevent a nation from committing the same mistakes all over again.

It remains true that a well-organized and developed industrial market economy is supported by fear. Being a social state, it is held together by a fear of financial crisis. Being a democratic state, it is supported by its fear of social collapse, of the catastrophe of fascism, etc. An authoritative state, on the other hand, is supported exclusively by a fear of repression.

**The shortcoming of Russian society is the absence of those fears characteristic of democracy, as well as those fears that characterize authoritarian regimes. Our people are not afraid of repression, and they are not afraid of the advent of fascism or of the country's disintegration into violence.**

The only fear that really held the country together in

the first decade of the twentieth century was a fear of terrorism and a fear of the external environment. The fear of terrorism was felt by ordinary people at a time when the elite was fearful of the events relating to the 'orange revolution,' and when they were apprehensive of the fate of leaders like Miloshević. This external fear was very significant and it played a positive role by enforcing the legitimacy of the state. Alongside its cohesive force, the fear of illegitimate violence made it possible in those 'zero years' to conduct some constructive activity. However, this fear of the external environment has evolved into a certain feeling of placidity in the current epoch of 'rebooted' relations with the West. At the same time there are now fewer self-sustaining fears available. As a result, many social problems have begun to resurface yet again.

**Dmitry Medvedev has tried to replace all the old fears that the elites no longer have with one single fear: the fear of backwardness.** He has commented at length on how bad it is to be leaders of an economically and socially backward country. He has tried and is still trying to play up this new fear. Hence the now prevalent impulse towards modernization. But will this impulse be enough? There are still no indications that the state apparatus is really worried about this future danger. ■