

## LIBERALS AGAINST NATIONALISTS



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Exclusively for RJ

Today we can again hear opinions to the effect that the liberals should not have handed over the patriotic and the nationalistic agenda to other parties and that they are actually the real patriots, which is something that, in general, I agree with. It is exactly the liberals who are the real statehood-oriented patriots, since they have built the new Russia and have never accentuated the phenomenon of Russophobia in their policies. But, objectively speaking, the current circumstances have unfolded in a way that do not allow the liberals to lead the national movement. Nikolay Mitrokhin, a left-wing liberal representing the left-wing liberal party “Yabloko”, is a vivid example of this. He tried to head the nationalist – in the positive sense of the world – event devoted to the commemoration of Egor Sviridov. However, he failed to do so, because the real nationalists were quick to straddle this topic – they are stronger in this sense. Unfortunately, it is hard for the liberals to compete

in this area, and probably they should try to steer clear of it.

In actuality, meetings that take place in promotion of human rights and greater democracy are, in many ways, suppressed in our country. As well, this suppression has given life to another political force, which is ultimately much more horrible for the current authorities and poses a real threat. It is nationalism, which has come onto the city’s squares; nationalism, which has resorted to taking direct action; and nationalism armed with crow-bars. **Nationalists have abandoned *ad hoc* actions related to inflicting bodily harm on persons of other nationalities and have instead embarked on the path of a serious political struggle.** As of now, this wave has not taken on any specific form and it has not been organised into a political party, for instance. But one of the ways for its legitimisation and by which it is moving forward is to participate in a real political struggle, primarily in the city’s streets and squares, of course. This is actually the reason why they are so dangerous.

Due to the fact that it is virtually impossible for the liberals to compete with the nationalists, no matter how hard they try to “get in on the act”, whether in a good or bad sense, an alliance of these two forces is simply out of the question. This is so because it contradicts the concept of modern Russian liberalism, both organisationally and ideologically. ■

## NATIONALISTS AS TRUE LIBERALS



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Ideologically speaking, the liberals – be they true liberals – should be the most consistent nationalists of them all. For liberalism as an ideology is very closely associated with nationalism everywhere in the world, Russia being the only exception. After all, it was nationalists who perpetrated all the liberal reforms that took place in Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, a great deal of prejudice remains. It is generally believed, for example, that nationalists favour authoritarianism, rigidity and the whip, and revere the likes of Hitler and Stalin. The constant anti-nationalist propaganda is but one culprit of

many – **unfortunately, Russian nationalism is in fact guilty of such behaviour during a certain period.** These days are long gone, yet the notoriety remains.

I have witnessed many an exchange of the following nature: a liberal trying to debunk a few opinions addresses a nationalist with the claim that the latter reveres Stalin or Hitler. The nationalist looks surprised and expresses his amazement, whereupon he is promptly accused of sympathising with the Fascists. The nationalist says: ‘Actually, we aren’t fond of Fascism at all – we stand for freedom of speech and assembly, unions and the democratic values that our nation sorely needs.’ **Mutual prejudice, ignorance, and lack of comprehension by either party are largely to blame for this.** I sincerely hope that a healthy portion of the liberals will eventually become more nationalistic, and that the nationalists will gain a better understanding of the logic behind liberal values and realise that a certain part of them is truly of paramount importance to the process of modern nation-building. ■