

## RULES OF PROTECTION OF RIGHTS AND RULES OF DEMOCRACY

Following the terrorist attacks in the Moscow subway, not only ordinary people came to honor the memory of the victims, but so too did a group of people known as human rights activists. However, with the head of the dissident and human rights movement, Ludmila Alexeyeva, leading the way, their advance on the site did not gain the approval of the crowd – one man, who called himself “an Orthodox patriot,” tried to physically attack Alexeyeva.

Why didn't the tragedy in the subway cause Russian society to recognize human rights activists as the people whose major task is to struggle for the protection of human rights? **Why does the majority of the population reject human rights activists as the representatives of their own interests?** How can we explain the fact that, within society, human rights activists are perceived as the people who lack the ability to influence anything? Such a perception is customary not only for Russia, but for many countries with developed democracies around the world, including the United States. It seems ironic then, that the values defended by

human rights activists are generally in line with those of a standard democratic model.

The human rights movement has a long tradition in the world. And for some time it appeared as though the push to outline moral and ethical guidelines for societies and nations was becoming reality. Between 1980-1990, many human rights activists in some East European countries were the ones who contributed the most to the transition from authoritarian states to democratic ones. Perhaps the irony of the overall experience is that human rights activists seem more effective in authoritarian countries and in those states just approaching democracy, than in the countries of established and developed democracies.

Is it normal that human rights activists participate in the political life of their own country? According to the views of some experts, **human rights activists-turned-politicians have in some cases contributed to the democratization of parts of Europe. Overall, however, such a metamorphosis seems to be of little relevance in already democratic societies.**

## PROTECTION OF RIGHTS WITHOUT POLITICIZATION

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Vladimir Lukin

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There is no doubt that human rights activists defend principles of democracy. Their efficiency (as well as the efficiency of other people) depends much on their personal and professional characteristics. In the sphere of human rights and freedoms an important role is also played by the activity of society itself.

Universal standards of democracy were defined many decades ago. Their distinct manifestation is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. **Democratic standards are regulated not by human right activists, but by the public opinion of the countries in the world as well as international organizations.**

In democratic countries, the

opposition is preoccupied with the struggle for political power, while human rights organizations defend particular rights and freedoms of the individual and the citizen. As I wrote in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* some time ago, real human rights activists do not struggle for power, they struggle for the legal, democratic and fair *nature* of power. Accordingly **we need to avoid two equally grave risks: the excessive politicization of human rights activity and intolerance towards human rights activity on the grounds of its excessive politicization.**

As for the failure of human rights organizations in Russia and the USA, the problem itself seems to be artificial. The main criterion

in the work of any human rights activist is the effectiveness of its impact on the government. From this point of view much has been achieved both by Russian and American human rights activists.

Solidarity between human rights activists from different countries is a matter of reality, and it developed long ago. But this solidarity is not expressed in their attitude to particular isolated cases. It is in the universal attitude of all true human rights activists to illegal acts performed by authorities of any country towards their own [or foreign] citizens. In other words, we are talking here about a kind of professional solidarity of the human rights organizations of the whole world.

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Demands of the state order and national interests by no means always coincide with demands of human rights activists. However, some human rights activists – like other people – are smart and educated, and some are not. That is why the attitude of the human rights activists towards certain issues is shaped in accordance with their ability to assess appropriately what is going on around them.

We should also mention that the notions of state order and national interests are themselves very vague. Their interpretation is sometimes very much affected by the current political environment. There is a famous example of a ‘prominent’ Latin American politician who used to characterize the state order in his country (which he had established himself) as follows: ‘Everything for friends, law for foes’. And he was absolutely sure that there was ‘genuine democracy’ in his state.

**A human rights activist who takes national security requirements into consideration does not cease to be a defender of human rights. On the contrary, he proves his dedication to the defense of human rights.** This is because a human rights activist understands national security as equal security for all citizens, including protection against government arbitrary rule.

The greatest threat to the contemporary human rights movement anywhere in the world is



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come to understand the positive value of civic and human rights activities. Government institutions in both countries put pressure on undesirable human rights organizations and try to classify human rights activists as ‘loyal’ or ‘disloyal’. On the other hand, some NGOs – sometimes in defiance of generally accepted human

tions are an inherent element of civil society, in the full sense of this word. With all the ‘disadvantages’ that it brings to particular government institutions or civil groups a civil society is not a formation of obedient and like-minded people. It is a union of diversity and dissidence.

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Among the international human rights organizations, the most effective is probably Amnesty International.

Needless to say, nothing is perfect. Human rights organizations make mistakes from time to time as well. But it is better that they exist and make mistakes than if there were no such organizations at all.

The long history of the active human rights movement itself proves its importance in the overwhelming majority of the countries in the world. The contribution of human rights activists in the development of democracy and boosting standards in the sphere of human rights and respect of human rights is beyond doubt. Human rights activists like Chekhov’s famous ‘man with a bell’ are often the first ones to alert society to people who need help and support; they highlight those problems that demand an immediate solution.

Only faultless ‘human rights organizations’ do not help society.

A human rights activist is not a dissident. Actually we could call any independent-minded person a dissident. But a human right activist advocates other people’s rights and freedoms efficiently.

Nietzsche said ‘everything that has been established dies’. Among contemporary human rights activists – both Russian and foreign – there are many worthy men of principle, who know the nuances of human rights work. As a Russian Ombudsman I try to support their difficult work in every way, while at the same time remaining as unbiased and as politically uncharged as possible. ■

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We need to avoid two equally grave risks: the excessive politicization of human rights activity and intolerance towards human rights activity on the ground of its excessive politicization

public apathy towards the work of human rights activists and to the issues they touch upon. This problem is unfortunately very relevant in our country. It is also relevant for China.

Neither in Russia nor in China have the government and society

rights principles – politicize their activity and statements too much; they consciously seek confrontation with the government.

We should however understand that alongside other non-profit organizations (NPOs), non-government human rights organiza-