

RUSSIA DOES NOT NEED POLITICAL CORRECTNESS, IT NEEDS TOLERANCE

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■ *Today, political correctness is widely criticized in the West and many experts describe it as in a state of crisis. In your opinion, does a policy of political correctness require protection as an important part of Western culture?*

I believe the term **political correctness** needs to be somewhat clarified: *to be correct* in a civil sense means to be *polite, attentive, and cultured*; at the same time, being *precise, predictable* and, finally, *capable of correcting* (changing) one's own behavior. It is possible that the latter is the main trait of *political correctness*, i.e. it is the ability to change the rules of *correct* behavior depending on the political situation.

Indeed, the ideology of political correctness is currently being discussed in many books and articles. However, quite often the criticism of this **ideology** eclipses its very

essence. Political correctness is an evolutionary and cultural notion. The demand for it came from the lowest layers of culture, from where social contradictions are especially strong.

But when the upper circles, the so-called elites, borrowed this notion, it became a weapon of manipulation in relation to the differences, which have existed, currently do exist, and will continue to exist in any society. As a result, we find ourselves in a strange situation. On the one hand, political correctness is a form of recognition of the 'Other' and of our differences and it demonstrates a respect for the boundaries existing between people (national, ethnic, political, religious, etc.), and advocates universal human equality, which was the dream of all Enlightenment theorists. On the other hand, the parasitical image of political correctness is also revealed, and this is being continuously manipulated by various governments, public structures, religious and political leaders, business corporations, the university community and so forth.

The first cultural and ethnic basis of political correctness should not be rejected, because it participates in alleviating the deeply seated contradictions in modern society. However, it falls victim to the battle against the second image of political correctness, the image that has today transformed into an ideology of hypocrisy. According to the initial design, political correctness was to change the traditional outlook of Western ethics, due to its incapacity to change, and to preserve the faith in higher human values under new conditions. However, the decline of this faith is indicative in external

human behavior, following certain moral rules that change depending on the political situation.

■ *Modern society is becoming more and more complicated. How should this society be managed? Are there any mechanisms that can eliminate the contradictions that threaten to destroy society?*

Ms. Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, quite unexpectedly admitted that past Western European immigration policies were a mistake, and that the deep contradictions, which have been exacerbated in German society during recent years, cannot be blurred any longer by the hypocritical and deceitful form of political correctness that dominates contemporary politics.

But how does one meet the challenges of time without allowing the contradictions to run even deeper? Indeed, it is quite a serious problem! Western countries simply don't know what to do with the influx of immigrants that cannot be integrated or assimilated. As of now, the authorities of western countries have partially shut down their borders, decreased immigration quotas, enacted new prohibitions, and established new requirements that are to be met by non-citizens. But, in my opinion, an efficient immigration policy has not yet been developed. However paradoxical it may sound, both Western and post-Soviet societies are becoming more simple in becoming more complicated. Some simple solutions are needed, and they are the hardest ones to adopt, because they affect too many interests. A noticeable disin-

tegration of norms for political correctness in Western society requires new solutions from governments. However, if these governments continue to stall and do not accept these changes, then these countries will be threatened by social catastrophe.

■ *Can it be claimed that Russian society has also adopted political correctness? If so, is it as hypocritical as its Western counterpart? If not, is it needed by Russian society at all?*

The nature of Western political correctness is related to the traditional protestant sanctimony that the Anglo-Saxons established for themselves as a form of behavior. A constant smile on the face became the corporal manifestation of this form of behavior. Keep smiling and a person cannot violate the common satisfaction from life, i.e. violate the boundaries of politically correct behavior. He is always happy in the eyes of another person no matter how bad he feels. It is as if political correctness began to protect the 'feelings' of other people, but actually it also makes us invulnerable in the competition battle. Such is the hidden logic of the politically correct behavior in the West.

We live in the East, in a country where nobody is happy with life, a country disliked by quite a number of us. This is probably why we are sort of more open, more sincere, or more apparent in a sense. We do not need the hypocrisy and the sanctimony of Western political correctness and as a result, we actually don't have anything similar. Our mass media criticizes society and its authorities as stubbornly as they want, without any mercy, thus ending up without a reliable future. Nowadays we have a society 'without shame and conscience,' devoid of any moral responsibility, of any values that allowed people to survive in a

totalitarian regime without losing human dignity.

Only in a family (of average income, something not completely destroyed) does one still have the values that allow one to become a conscientious and responsible citizen. **Political correctness is a set of temporary ethics and a relative set of present day behavior rules.** What can and cannot be done, what, where and how to say something — all this is given the 'correct' form of behavior that is constantly changing. However, currently, only the forms of civil behavior that satisfy the ruling political class can be deemed as politically correct. However, I would like to note here, that even when looking at the problem of traffic jams in Moscow, the public behavior of the ruling class is permeated with a nihilism that was unheard of earlier.

■ *You apparently heard a funny anecdote where one person (Mr. Idiot) tells another: 'You know, everybody knows me here in the city, all the drivers even stop to talk to me personally.' The other person goes:*

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'Oh, really? Tell me more.' 'For example, I was crossing the road a while ago, and a driver almost ran me over, but then he got out of the car and started talking to me: 'There are plenty of road crossings that have been built for you, idiot, there is no need to run around on the highway.' You see, he was worried about my safety!' Does this story convey wishful thinking on the part of pedestrians? Isn't the desire of the new mayor of Moscow to get rid of traffic jams an example that demonstrates that the state can also develop political correctness?

[Laughing].

Maybe, for example, when drivers begin to let the pedestrians use road crossings will this mark one of the norms of Russian political correctness? Yes, some drivers do this. However, there is also an explanation which is not quite 'moral' — I am standing in a traffic jam anyway, why not let them cross the street?

I don't know how reasonable the program for eliminating traffic jams is and I don't know what the outcome will be. I also don't know how well this process is controlled. But, in any case, something definitely needs to be done about traffic jams. A traffic jam is an anti-social event, meaning that it erases social differences. Different people driving different cars are in a rush to get somewhere. It makes all these people equal at this particular point, but also alienates them from one another. I don't know, maybe it is natural when a driver, infuriated by having to be stuck in a traffic jam, is eager to get out of it as soon as he can, maybe running over someone or shooting at someone in the process. Affected by the

destructive power of traffic jams, the population is becoming anti-social. Traffic jams take up our precious time and eat up our positive human energy.

I remember that once a significant place in the economy of social deficit was delegated to *queues* (*queues for anything*). What is the difference of a traffic jam and a queue on the evolution scale of post-Soviet development? At first glance, there are no differences. **A traffic jam is also a queue, but the deficit now is free space, along with a car one must purchase the time of the trip, the road and the destina-**

tion. A foreign car is a sign of well-being, prestige, consumer narcissism, but it is also a sure way to draw you into a traffic jam and leave you there forever. Such is the fee.

A man in a traffic jam is an anti-social animal and, of course, he cannot be saved from this moral abyss merely through a haphazard norm of political correctness. As soon as we begin to assess the reasons behind it, we immediately stumble on the active class of corrupt Moscow officials, who are the main perpetrators and orchestrators of city life management including its traffic jams.

This class has made kickbacks, deeming construction and traffic jams an inevitable evil, so we better come to terms with it since there are, supposedly, no other ways to govern. Such is the topsy-turvy

are a part of society and they are learning to govern under new conditions. It is not just that they have never encountered the problems they are currently trying to resolve, but that they are trying to resolve them with the usual authoritarian 'manual' methods. Any problem can be resolved upon consideration, but at the moment we encounter them so often that they seem insurmountable.

When we are judging the nineties today, we forget that back then people simply did not understand what was going on. These individuals acted 'by default,' in essence, without resorting to any laws of civil society. Even the pitiful 'civil society' that managed to survive the Brezhnev and Gorbachev era was immediately destroyed by a new, even more radical social inequality that was established by

There are many problems on the household level. It could be that political correctness is a somewhat weak term for labeling the common path of societal development. To be more specific, political correctness is a chance to develop the all-state ethics of a society, because it represents the acceptable norms of behavior, the institution that fixes it in society, and the practice of its application on various social levels. In the West, as we know, political correctness is based on the formalization of traditional religious feelings. But we don't have this here, although ethnic and religious differences today create the basis for the co-existence of many different types of 'political correctnesses.'

The other name of political correctness is *tolerance*. Most likely, only tolerance is applicable to the set of universal ethics that appeases various forms of political correctness. The acceptable range of values belonging to the Judaic-Christian culture do not 'work' anymore, or they 'work' only locally, and even then only barely. I think that today, tolerance only determines the status of political correctness in our post-Soviet state.

However, let's not forget that, both in the West and in the East, political correctness has served as a reference point to wealth, to the economic and political position of the elite. Consequently, it involuntarily emphasizes class division within a society and its relative 'mitigation' of social relations by the acknowledgment of the rich made to the poor: 'You are just like me, only you don't have as much money or power, but is this really that important?' ■

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morality of politically correct behavior. I would like to also point out our slavish habit of seeing something that is 'less bad' as something that is 'very good.' It is probable that certain layers of our society view life according to some unwritten rule as an acceptable and politically correct behavior.

■ *Is Russian society ready for political correctness? If not, how much time does it still need to ripen?*

The verb 'to ripen' does not fit very well here. Our society evolves in a certain way, it does not 'ripen.' And, naturally, we face a whole lot of problems, which cannot even be blamed on the authorities, because they cannot behave correctly, either, under such circumstances, since they have never faced such problems earlier. The authorities

the authoritarian oligarchic regime. That is one of the reasons why we cannot use Western political and ideological recipes. We are different, if only because we currently do not live well and do not know how to go on living.

The ruling class, which is alienated from society, should, if it is still possible, regain its senses and **stop the civil war. Democratization is one of the results of the restoration of civil peace.** There should not be enemies in our country and the authorities should appeal to their common sense, and not to their temporary right to power. They should be open, clear, and frankly, accessible to society.

■ *Thank you. In finishing, what problems of political correctness trouble Russian society today?*

Valery Podoroga was speaking with Alexander Pavlov