

Andrey Loshak

The Magnitsky list puts the fear of God in them

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The writer Dmitry Bykov once wrote that Russia is subject to its own unique curse, which he called its “inane cyclicity”: the government commits acts of violence, liberal opinion opposes it and are inevitably defeated, after which the power of the government increases. In Russia, victory is always on the side of reaction, which, in its own deformed way, is embodied by the state.

The cycle has only been broken on two occasions. The first time was in February 1917, for the eight months of the existence of the Provisional Government, until the Bolsheviks took control and the state reverted to a cold-blooded monster. The second occasion was in 1991, when a democratically-elected parliament appeared in the country. Fifteen years later, Speaker of the State Duma Gryzlov uttered the renowned phrase: “Parliament is not a place for discussion,” and amidst patriotic caterwauling, the leak in the “inane cyclicity” was patched up.

Bykov himself wrote an article at the beginning of last spring in the hope that everything would come together for us, the long-suffering Russian liberals. Back then, people acted as if they were waking from a dream, and in the squares of major cities tens of thousands of people came out demanding an end to the state’s lies. “Putin’s a crook!” was the central slogan of the

demonstrations. After a year, it became more or less clear that nothing would change for the liberals. It looked as if the centuries-old curse was an unchangeable, even karmic matter, and the good will of several hundred thousand Europeanised Russians was not enough.

Russian liberals were faced with a well-known problem: the ignorance and incomprehension of their own people. This also falls under the category of eternal curses – just as Lenin wrote of the Decembrists that they were too far from the people. The people didn't support the protests of 2011–2012; on the contrary, they voted for Putin – not because they loved him, but because they were led to believe that without him things would be even worse. Russians simply don't know what the good life is, but they understand quite well what “even worse” can mean at any time, so they will fight tooth and nail to maintain their miserable Putin-esque stability, considering even the pitiful crumbs from petrodollars that fall on their table to be manna from heaven.

The democratic movement ended up in its own cognitive dead end. Facebook, having demonstrated its capacity for mobilisation at the peak of the protest activity, looked too Western, and by bringing tens of thousands of people together at meetings, Facebook totally exhausted its resources. A wave of protest never materialised beyond the limits of the social networks, as it smashed against the wall that has historically existed between the active but comparatively thin crust of urban Europeanised people and the rest of Russia. How to knock down that wall is one problem in that long line of accursed Russian questions, like “What to do?” and “Who is to blame?”

The Oprichniki evaluated the situation quickly, and went on the defensive. They framed the protest leaders for crimes they did not commit, and the people, as usual, kept quiet. Having detected weakness, the regime went wild, and is now trying to strangle anything that it can't control. A malleable Duma turned into one more instrument of repression, adopting and issuing insane legislation at the speed of a printer out of control with a single goal: strangling the civic awakening of the general public. Even the most innocent public initiatives were subjected to repression, such as NGOs which help sick children.

Active citizens who refuse to sanguinely accept the regime's con game won't be brainwashed – they know how to think. The Kremlin understands this, and has responded by spitting on the disaffected. On the one hand they say, “the

hell with them, you can't throw everybody in jail"; and on the other hand, they say, "that there are too few of them for us to be afraid of them and try to placate them". In the end, Putin bet on the "lumpen-electorate". distancing himself from the thinking, educated portion of the population.

Given the social composition of the populace and petroleum prices worldwide, this situation may persist for quite a long time. If, at the time of last year's demonstrations, the world saw a frightened and bewildered Putin for the first time, then this spring during the "Direct Line" television broadcast with Vladimir Putin, we saw once more a confident head of state with everything under control. When tens of thousands of Muscovites came out on 6 May 2013 for the anniversary of last year's famous demonstration, they looked bewildered, and nobody found the right words to say. It was clear to the naked eye which side had won.

The Kremlin had frustrated civil society - but they weren't afraid of it any more. On the contrary, it would appear that the harder you pressure them the more aggressively they react. They act like street thugs: "Am I a jerk? You're the jerk! Ha! In your face!" The press secretary of the Investigation Committee openly observed that if Navalny hadn't made so much noise, maybe the criminal case against him would not have been initiated so quickly. So, in your face - and not just one criminal case, but four all at once. These are their methods.

The General Prosecutor observed recently that journalists should be forbidden to criticise the courts - what follows this observation can only be courts like the Soviet era NKVD three-judge panels. Domestically, the regime behaves like a gang free to act with impunity, like the Tsapoks from Kushchovka, knowing full well that the victims have no opportunity for complaint. There isn't a single independent authority in the country, including the judiciary, which can control these government thugs. The system is a closed circuit. We don't have the time to wait until it devours its tail, like the ancient Ouroboros. The only real counterweight - the public - is still too weak to mount a serious opposition. However, people are trying and there are some results; indeed, the very fact of the development of critical public opinion, despite the efforts of the regime to silence such dissent, shows that Russia has a future.

Perhaps the only thing that Putin's thugs fear is being declared *persona non-grata* in the West, because after plundering our resources, they want to

feather their own nests overseas. They don't believe in Russia and its people, in whose moral corruption they have actively participated. The louder the patriotic rhetoric, the greater the historical pessimism in the souls of these oprichniki. They're certain that Russia has no future, which is precisely why they live for today - they plunder her resources, trying to manually keep the country from collapse. They want no systemic changes, because this entails the restructuring of the political system, and that would be the end for them. They are ready to tolerate the sleepless working nights, the cretinous behaviour of their underlings and the slings and arrows of the democratic press for one goal - a comfortable haven on the Cote d'Azur or in Miami, and a stable future for their children, far away from "Rashka". This is exactly the kind of life that the man responsible for the ban on US adoptions of Russian children, the children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov, has set up for himself. While engaging in strident patriotic talk, aggressively anti-Western rhetoric, he is happily settled in a villa in Monte Carlo, where his wife spends most of her time, in order to be close to the ombudsman's daughter, who is being educated in Switzerland. Putin's daughters are also somewhere in the West - he's no enemy of his own children.

Depriving state functionaries of their assets abroad is like castrating a serial rapist. Life will immediately lose all colour and meaning. A rapist isn't afraid of God; that's what this gang is like. The Magnitsky list puts the fear of God in them. The adoption of this list by the European Parliament would be an outstanding humanitarian act, which would keep the current regime from perpetrating many new wicked acts against its own people.