

# **Boris Kagarlitsky (Russia): A plea to my Western progressive friends – Stop helping Putin with your conciliatory and ambiguous statements**

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**A long-retired Russian military man was discussing current events by phone with a former colleague living in Ukraine. Both resented the war between the two recently fraternal countries and expressed the hope that this madness would soon end. A few days later, representatives of the special services raided the Russian. He did not give out any military secrets, and no one accused him of this. He was charged, however, with publicly discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. In turn, the former officer, who knew the laws, objected that the conversation had been a private one. And such a charge was meant to apply to public statements only. “But it was public,” objected the intelligence officers. “After all, we heard it!”**

This is not a fragment from a story written by a modern imitator of Franz Kafka or George Orwell, but news that is now being discussed on Russian social networks. There you can also find numerous reports of fines imposed on people who had inadvertently painted their fence yellow and blue many years ago, now risking undesirable associations with the Ukrainian flag, or who thoughtlessly went out into the street in blue jeans and a yellow jacket. It got to the point that the police considered writing a denunciation on a box of apples. The fruits were guilty of the fact that the same “enemy colors” were present in the package.

Perhaps Western readers may find all these episodes ridiculous. But try to imagine what it is like to live in a state where you can be detained and prosecuted for wearing the wrong clothes, for liking a “seditious” post on social networks, or simply because the incoming police chief did not like your appearance. As a matter of principle, Russian courts do not pass down acquittals (in this regard, the situation is much worse than in Stalin’s time), so any accusation, even the most absurd, is considered proven as soon as it is brought. And this applies not only to political matters, which would be at least somewhat understandable in a war, but in general to any criminal or administrative case.

To my Western colleagues, who, after more than a year since the beginning of the war, continue to call for an understanding of Putin and his regime, I would like to ask a very simple question. Do you want to live in a country where there is no free press or independent courts? In a country where the police have the right to break into your house without a warrant? In a country where museum buildings and collections formed over decades are handed over to churches, heedless of the threat of losing unique artifacts? In a country where schools drift away from the study of science and plan to abolish the teaching of foreign languages, but conduct “lessons about the important,” during which children are taught to write denunciations and are taught to hate all other peoples? In a country which every day broadcasts appeals on TV to destroy Paris, London, Warsaw, with a nuclear strike?

I don't think you really want to.

We in Russia also do not want to live like this.

We resist or at least try to preserve our beliefs and principles based on the humanistic tradition of Russian culture. And when we read on the Internet about another call to "understand Putin" or "to meet him halfway," this is perceived inside Russia as complicity with criminals who oppress and ruin our own country.

Such appeals are based on a deep, almost racist contempt for the people of Russia, for whom, according to Western liberal pacifists, it is perfectly natural and acceptable to live under the rule of a corrupt dictatorship.

Of course, when someone tells you that the Putin regime is a threat to the West or to the whole of humanity, this is complete nonsense. The people to whom this regime poses the most terrible threat is (aside from the Ukrainians, who are bombarded daily by shells and missiles) the Russians themselves, their people and culture, their future.

It is clear that Putin and the system he leads have changed over the past few years; these same people in the mid-2010s could look quite decent compared to other world politicians. Certainly, they pursued the same antisocial policy, lied the same way, tried to manipulate public opinion just like their Western counterparts. But the crisis that has been going on for the past three years, the war and total corruption, have led to irreversible shifts, in which the preservation of the existing political regime turned out to be incompatible not only with human rights and democratic freedoms, but simply with the elementary preservation of the rules of modern civilized existence for the majority of the population.

We must deal with this problem ourselves. How quickly this will happen, how many trials will come along the way, how many more people will suffer, no one can know. But we know exactly what will occur. The decay of the regime will inevitably lead the country to revolutionary changes, which the supporters of the existing government will write about with horror.

And from the Western progressive public, we only need one thing - stop helping Putin with your conciliatory and ambiguous statements. The more often such statements are made, the greater will be the confidence of officials, deputies and policemen that the current order can continue to exist with the silent support or hypocritical grumbling of the West. Every conciliatory statement made by liberal intellectuals in America results in more arrests, fines, and searches of democratic activists and just plain people here in Russia.

We do not need any favor but a very simple one: an understanding of the reality that has developed in Russia today. Stop identifying Putin and his gang with Russia. Realize at last: those who want the good of Russia and the Russians cannot but be irreconcilable enemies of this power.

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