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¹Liberty / Freedom² and the Russian Federation

A sense of the need for national liberation in the Russian Federation has occupied the thoughts of many minds. At the same time, quite often this feeling is operationalized in the discourse at the level of "democracy is when just democrats are in power"³, leaving serious gaps in the very foundation of the rhetorical position of the Russian "liberators", and this requires a good thorough conversation on the topic of freedom and liberty in society.

I

Let us first consider the **personal aspect of the concept of "freedom"**⁴. I think that everyone has experience with actualizing the concerns of freedom on an individual level when his/her "volition"⁵ has run into a non-previewed obstacle erected by someone or other external reason. The emotions that arise at the time of such a "conflict" can well be defined as "emotions of unfreedom". The clearness of the individual's identification of such emotions shows, first, that the phenomenon of freedom is given to a person through its opposite – through non-freedom, and secondly, that the social phenomenon of freedom / liberty has "biological roots"⁶. It would be possible to imagine that a decrease in the level of "a feeling of unfreedom" is precisely what signals an increase in the

¹ The essay is a translation from Russian of the publication (Крупкин П.Л. [Свобода и РФ](#) // Вопросы национализма, 2017, 1(29), с.20-24.)

² In Russian, the meanings of these two English words "freedom" and "liberty" are contained in one Russian word "svoboda".

³ The sarcastic presentation of some discussions among Russian politicians and political consultants.

⁴ A detailed model of personal affects associated with the concept of "freedom" can be found in the article: Krupkin P.L. ["It's time to talk about freedom in Russian"](#) // Polyarnaya Zvezda website. Moscow: September 13, 2008 (in Russian). And the book: Krupkin P.L.

[Russia and Modernity: Problems of Compatibility](#). Moscow: Flinta: Nauka, 2010, pp. 189-194

(in Russian).

⁵ Here I will refer to "volition" as a person's desire, which in her/his personal view is quite realizable and which s/he has already begun to realize.

⁶ In the non-artificial unhuman animal world unfreedom / being captured usually means for a creature / living body the end of life via being eaten.

individual's zone of freedom, her/his personal liberation⁷. However, there is a well-known fact that people can be "hammered", i.e., they can be brought to such a state when their "feeling of unfreedom" keeps silent while the individuals themselves are in very constraining circumstances⁸. Such relativism in relation of the individual with her/his "sense of freedom" necessarily requires some "external crutches" to determine the level of her/his freedom / liberty in her/his social and geographical environment; to somehow objectify her/his level of liberation. A typical response to this need were lists — lists of what should be exactly possible for people to do, for which they should definitely not receive any sanctions "from the outside". One of the most famous such lists is the "**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**", adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) on December 10, 1948⁹. Understanding that arise from such a marking of the "freedom space" are usually denoted by the words "freedom from" or "negative freedom" (I. Berlin)¹⁰. Usually, this is supplemented by what is usually called "positive freedom"¹¹, or "freedom to" — determining the "permitted activities" of a person, and her/his corresponding supply of available resources. "Freedom to" is especially interesting, when a person "approaches her/his limits", or moves her/his activity to the very boundary of what is allowed.

The transition from the perspective of "one acting agent in the environment" to the classical situation of "slave and master" generates additional dimensions in the area of freedom / liberty. First, this contributes to the theory of emancipation in the form of the "neo-Roman theory" (Skinner)¹². To understand the approached problems, let us assume that there is a very good master who has created such living conditions for his slaves that when viewed from the

⁷ Growing the value of something in moments of scarcity presents this very something in the form of a resource. And on mature reflection, we can really recognize that freedom may well be interpreted as a resource necessary for a person to create her/his biography.

⁸ At this point, it is appropriate to recall the notorious Marxists' thesis: "*Freedom is the knowledge of necessity*", which ensured the silence of the "sense of unfreedom" of people, for example, in the Soviet GULAG.

⁹ The text of the Declaration can be found on [the UN website](#).

¹⁰ See, for example, Isaiah Berlin's essay "Two Concepts of Liberty": (Berlin I. "Two Concepts of Liberty" // Berlin I. *Four Essays on Liberty*. London: Oxford Univ. Press: 1969.)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See, for example, the book: Skinner Q. *Liberty before liberalism*. (Russian translation: St. Petersburg: EUSP Publishing House, 2006.)

perspectives of "freedom from" and "freedom to", there are no complaints about the quality of the freedom / liberty of the slaves. Are these slaves free? It is clear that with such a question, we find additional dimensions to understanding the phenomenon of freedom / liberty, those aspects being considered in terms of "freedom from / to" that usually remain in shadow. In addition, such "absence of governing other" is relevant both for an individual and for a community of individuals, and in the second case there is a significant relationship with the concept of sovereignty.

Another aspect of freedom / liberty comes from thoughts around the personal potential of "being for her/his own sake, and not for another's / being not a tool" (Aristotle)¹³. When considering the personal qualities of the slaves and freemen, as well as the personal aspects of liberation, we can build on the theoretical line (*Hegel–Nietzsche–Kojève–Lacan*):

1. All people start their life journey from the position of a "slave"¹⁴.
2. Everyone at some point tries to "escape from slavery", to self-identify as a free autonomous person. The first step in such a self-determination is to make an effort, and start acting for her/his own sake – even if only in her/his own mind. Start gaining skills and abilities to "behave autonomously".
3. The process of self-determination brings a person "to the edge", to the border of the "slave state", and this situation is usually perceived by the individual as containing a great risk to life, even only in her/his imagination¹⁵.
4. In this situation, the individual either gives up returning to her/his previous condition, and "settles" himself with this newfound experience, or makes a breakthrough.
5. If the person was not scared and passed the "test" – s/he enters into a co-existence with the already existing autonomous free people who exist for their own sake – as well as receives recognition in this new status acquired by her/himself.

¹³ "... as the man is free, we say, who exists for his own sake and not for another's..." – Aristotle: *Metaphysics*; slave "... is a piece of property ... a tool ..." – Aristotle: *Politics*.

¹⁴ This thesis is not difficult to justify / understand, if we remember that we all come out of childhood.

¹⁵ In general, with rare exceptions, from the external view, this personal situation is rather defined as containing only a risk to the fate of the individual, to her/his biography. However, in the individual imagination of the person the situation is sharply existential. At the same time, the above does not negate the possibility of an individual getting into real situations with a really high risk to life.

The described scheme of individual liberation can be supplemented by a social aspect: a person can try to escape from "slavery" / from being used for another's sake as part of a group. This option does not exclude the person from individual work, but the social barriers to liberation may become significantly lower on this path¹⁶ – especially if the social identity that binds the group is at the necessary good level.

The phenomenon of freedom becomes even more "rich" when the "point of view" is transferred from the personal level to the social one. The main thing that arises here is the "*paradox of freedom*", which "*can be expressed by saying that unlimited freedom leads to its opposite, since without its protection and restriction by law, freedom must lead to a tyranny of the strong over the weak. This paradox, vaguely restated by Rousseau, was solved by Kant, who demanded that the freedom of each man should be restricted, but not beyond what is necessary to safeguard an equal degree of freedom for all.*" (K. Popper)¹⁷. This "*Kantian method*" of liberating people becomes very clear from the perspective already discussed above – from the perspective of unfreedom. If we estimate the level of unfreedom of society as the sum of the particular unfreedoms of all its participants, then **a significant restriction of the freedom of units in favor of even a very small reduction in the degree of unfreedom of millions can turn out to be a very productive social practice of liberating society, and reducing its total lack of liberty.**

The emancipation method through the establishment of restrictive institutions¹⁸ / taboos against the arbitrariness of the "strong" – has turned out to be the main method of liberation at the present time and in the discernable historical time-until recently. This approach includes both the struggle of communities to limit and regulate violence, and the efforts of people to limit economic dictates – through the creation of social insurance systems. Along with the method of "limiting powerful minorities in favor of the majority", the method of social emancipation "limiting the majority in favor of minorities" has recently appeared and gained strength. Usually, the result is achieved through

¹⁶ Let us not forget that with individual release, a person's status changes both in society and in her/his immediate environment. With group liberation, the person no longer needs to accustom his inner circle to her/his new status.

¹⁷ Popper K. [*The Open Society and its Enemies*](#), v. 2: *Hegel and Marx*.

¹⁸ "*Institutions ... are usually called the whole set of rules and norms that determine human behavior, both formal (constitutions, laws, standards, norms) and informal (customs, traditions, internal systems of people's motivation)*" (Krupkin P. L. [*Russia and Modernity: Problems of Compatibility*](#), Moscow: Flinta: Nauka, 2010, pp. 189-194. – in Russian)

reformatting individual images of the world in the minds of people in order to ease the burden that various minorities living in an environment generated by the traditions / institutions of the majority are confined to^{19,20}. This result can also be achieved by changing social institutions.

II

In terms of operationalizing the phenomenon of liberty in society, transforming everything said in the previous section into the format of "concreteness and measurability", we can suggest the following approach. Let us take into consideration the "standard social place" of an average person in a society / a society's everyman and assume that the **social order has a measure of freedom / liberty of zero if this social place is isomorphic to that of a sheep in a sheep pen under shepherds**²¹. Further, any right that gives a qualitative difference from the social order of measure zero adds one to the measure of freedom. Any infringement of rights — deducts one. As a result, we obtain a measure of the freedom of a social order under consideration²².

As an example, let us consider the USSR / Russian Federation. According to the proposed measure, the ***Soviet social order in the territory of Russia had a negative measure of liberty / freedom minus two*** – as the Soviet everyman had two exceptions compared to the "ordinary sheep" / Plato's philistine²³:

1. The everyman was "devitalized", s/he was not allowed to "kick", s/he was required to be exactly that "automatic sheep", "robot sheep"

¹⁹ A good example here is ensuring a barrier-free environment for making the lives of people with physical disabilities easier. Less regarded cases link to creating privileges for different groups of minorities – approaches of so-called "positive discrimination".

²⁰ These two classes of liberating practices also differ in their social consequences. If the restriction of powerful minorities was usually accompanied by eliminating legally-defined privileged classes in society, then decisions to restrict the majority and the so-called "positive discrimination" of minorities are associated with the fixation of these minorities in legislation and granting of various privileges to these "estates".

²¹ Obviously to see that the proposed model social place coincides with what Plato proposed to the "guardians" and "philistines" in describing his model of the ideal state. See: Plato: *The Republic*.

²² Note that the proposed measure of freedom includes only differences that affect the social order qualitatively. Quantitative improvements (for example, an increase in the amount of "food" and/or "living space") do not contribute to the proposed measure, although they, without any doubt, are also important in terms of general emancipation.

²³ See also G. Orwell's *1984*.

(infamous GULAG's: "step to the left – step to the right – is an attempt to escape...").

2. The everyman was obliged to be proud of her/his social place, praise it in every possible way, "sincerely" consider "all this" as the highest achievement of his life and humanity.

The next example is the post-Soviet Russian Federation. In the Russian Federation, in general, both Soviet everyman's exceptions were eliminated and in fact two qualitatively new rights were added²⁴:

1. To leave the country.
2. To make a downshift / to "go nowhere".

In total, the ***measure of liberty / freedom of social order in the Russian Federation in 2010 is plus two.***

Looking ahead, let us **consider the situation of how the existing social order could be emancipated without particularly affecting the existing political regime**, i.e., leaving out its authoritarianism and the basic institutions of its "vertical" / governing class. In my opinion, it would be quite possible in agreement with the existing political regime to grant the following additional rights for common men:

1. The right of an everyman to self-defense – especially in terms of changing law enforcement in those cases of so-called "excess of necessary self-defense".
2. The right of an everyman to defend her/his property, at least, her/his household.
3. The unconditional right to extract and systematize any information from open sources; the right to publish one's opinion²⁵. Automatic opening of government archives beyond a reasonable fixed period of their restriction from society.
4. The right to public assembly²⁶.

²⁴ In my model, I do not consider "presentational rights", which are written in some texts and do not oblige anyone to anything; I am basing this only on actual institutions, the effectiveness of which is counted according to the facts of punishments that have occurred in the real living society.

²⁵ We have in the RF's reality quite regular cases of "spy scientists" and punishments for "anti-corruption fighters".

²⁶ Unfortunately, in the RF, this constitutional right is practically eliminated by existing law enforcement.

5. The right to the "agora". The Russian Federation inherited from the USSR the arrangement of the central squares of settlements in the style of a parade ground (as well as other elements of the "devitalization" of the urban environment). At the same time, people archetypally need a temple, market, cafes/restaurants/pubs in this place, which would create conditions for public communication of the inhabitants of the commune.
6. The right to form political organizations²⁷.
7. The right to create effective self-governing communes. What will be important here is the right to ostracism and the right to a share in taxes that covers some standard level of the commune's expenses.
8. The right to "expel" local chiefs from their posts, for example based on results of local confidence referendums.

This list creates an agenda within which it would be quite possible to increase the measure of liberty / freedom of the social order of the Russian Federation from plus two to plus ten without creating any important problems for the current political regime, even without affecting its holy of holies – the change of the person in the President's chair and/or reformatting the way of its institutional arrangement from "top-down" to "bottom-up"²⁸.

²⁷ Unfortunately, the existing law enforcement system for registering political parties and other political organizations in the RF does not allow to assume that the common people of the Russian Federation have this constitutional right.

²⁸ See details on the institutional forming principles of arranging social orders in the publication: Krupkin P.L. [*On the control of changing institutions in various types of society*](#) // *Russian statehood: philosophical and political understanding and reality*. - Vladimir: RANEPА: 2013, pp. 71-93 (in Russian).