

Speech at the Press Prize Awards Ceremony

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By Lev Schlossberg

The main condition of freedom

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

On behalf of the editors of the newspaper «Псковская губерния», with courtesy of our colleagues, I would like to thank the Fritt Ord and Gerd Bucerius Foundation for the honor of awarding us the «Free Press» prize.

Your acknowledgment of the work performed by Russian journalists is both important for us and our readers – millions of those Russian citizens for whom Freedom is the most important value in life.

As recently as at the end of the XXth century we did not expect the possibility or impossibility of freedom to become the main discussion topic on the agenda in Russia at the beginning of the XXIst century. We felt that we had overcome the threats to freedom. The political and economical crises seemed to be only a part of the political and economical fight. All the participants of this fight could use their freedoms, first of all the freedom of speech. It seemed that the freedom of speech was necessary to everybody and that nobody would aim for its extermination.

Nevertheless, today, on the 15th year of the new century, there is less of Freedom of Speech and freedom as such in Russia than during the last 25 years.

The first steps toward freedom in an unfree country were made 30 years ago particularly with the help of the freedom of speech.

In the beginning was the Word, the speech.

And there could not be any other beginnings.

The freedom of speech is the first and foremost condition of freedom.

Any threat to freedom starts with a threat to the freedom of speech.

It's impossible to extinguish/eradicate freedom, without eradicating the freedom of speech.

The mission of the free mass media everywhere and always is to let the free speech to find its way to the society.

Russia's political system in the XXIst century moves from freedom to unfreedom.

And the freedom of speech has become the first victim on this way.

There are no politically significant national free media institutions in our country at present time. This is the condition of destruction of the freedom of the whole people, a condition of a creation of a state of unfreedom.

The country has travelled this way only during a little more than 10 years, and this way is, most regrettably, not yet brought to an end.

The values of freedom, including the freedom of speech, can not be introduced from outside, they have to be hard won, understood and accepted both by the individual as well as by the collective self.

Time is not the only prerequisite for this to happen. Political will is also necessary. The freedom of people is fostered and educating the people requires patience.

The reforms of the 1980ies in the USSR and the following reforms of the 90ies in Russia did not bring freedom to the country and did not succeed because the politically powerful ones sacrificed human freedom as the supreme value every time they were taking landmark decisions. They did not accept the society's

voice as an expression of freedom. Neither a country or a state can be built without an understanding of that.

The values of freedom did not become a necessity for the majority of the population, in the collective consciousness they did not become a condition for achieving personal life goals and the nationwide success. They did not bring to society an understanding of the fact that freedom, including the freedom of speech, - is the oxygen for human life.

The need of freedom, as well as the need of a free speech, of truth, are all part of the inherent/primordial natural human needs.

But these needs appear in particular within the conditions of freedom.

Within the conditions of unfreedom these needs are suppressed and even perverted.

Authoritarianism, totalitarianism and dictatorship take the place of freedom. Lies take the place of the freedom of speech and truth.

All unfree political regimes repose on lies and violence. Lies and violence are inextricably linked to each other, they are prerequisites to each other.

Freedom of speech represents the main threat for the political regime that is founded on lies and violence.

Such a political regime has become reality in Russia today.

Vladimir Putin started his work in the function of Russia's President with a consequent fight against the freedom of speech, against all the institutes of the political freedom.

He achieved a lot on this way and he transformed Russia into an unfree country.

But he did not manage to extinguish the part of the population for whom freedom, including the freedom of speech, is a natural life condition.

This part of society in Russia today continues to search for, to speak of and to make known the truth.

This part of the society in Russia is today represented by a few mass media institutions, - those who understand, remember and perform their mission, the mission of free speech.

Freedom is the main value in life for those Russian citizens who work in these media institutions. They have a public in Russia as well – those are people who are in need of the free speech, of the truth.

The values of freedom unite millions of people in Russia and dozens of independent media outlets that have preserved the immunity/integrity of the ideals and principles of the free speech.

The regain/restitution of freedom of millions of people depends on whether the journalists of the free media institutions in Russia will be able to withstand, to remain faithful to their own mission.

Thousands as well as dozens years ago, - in the beginning was and will be the Word.

The free speech can bring back the lost freedom to society because sooner or later the citizen will hear the free word, understand and acknowledge its meaning.

Based upon the current developments, the free speech has a long way to go in Russia. At least, our 40 years have not yet passed.

On this way, Russian citizens, that confess the freedom of speech, have to keep calm, self-confident and patient.

The free speech remains the first and principal condition of freedom.

Thanks to all those who speak of, search for and support the free speech.

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