

PROBLEMS OF INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN RUSSIA: TREND FOR SOCIAL WORK

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In the first place I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the International Council on Social Welfare and Vilnius University for the given opportunity to take part in this very representative European Conference.

Problems of equal opportunities for individuals, groups and nations are of extreme importance for the formation of civil society in Eastern European countries which have realized deep social and economic transformations in a very short period of time.

My speech deals with a topic in the center of which are two controversial, even incompatible concepts: lack of equal opportunities and violence in Russia. In other words, violence might be considered as a result of inexistence of equal opportunities in the Russian society.

I'd like to start from the opposite – from the concept of equal opportunities and prerequisites to fulfill them in real life.

1. What do we mean while speaking about equal opportunities?
2. Which documents contain the right for equal opportunities?
3. Who and how represent them?
4. Who can take advantage of them and to which extent?
5. Which conditions are needed for their implementation?

Let us try to answer these questions.

So, what do we mean while speaking about equal opportunities?

We part from the necessity to form a just society, every member of which possesses the right to work, the right to use the results and products of his work as we part from the double nature of a human – to be a producer and to be a user, or consumer. We also mean the right to decent education, shelter, health care, security and right to express freely one's opinions. These rights can be realized only in secure social medium, without any hint of possible persecution or violence towards dissidents.

Which documents contain the right for equal opportunities?

First of all, these are international documents. The main and the most important is Word Declaration of human rights and other documents approved by UNO (United Nations Organization). Some documents of regional character are of no less importance, such as European social Charter and so on. At the national level these are mainly national Constitutions.

As far as Russia is concerned, the human rights are depicted in the Russian Constitution. The article 7 says that Russia is a social State. Such declaration by a State means that it assumes responsibility to set up conditions for implementation of these rights and its citizens are given opportunities to take advantage of them. In other words, *any State and its institutions are the main subjects to guarantee equal rights and to create conditions for equal opportunities.*

Who and how represent them?

One of the most significant instruments to realize equal right and opportunities is the State social policy.

The main objective of the social policy is to secure normal conditions for reproduction of human and social capital. In other words, social policy, in the first run, is directed to create favorable conditions for development of the mostly required labor force. It is the kind of labor force which provides further economic and social prosperity of the whole society. Therefore social policy is to envisage other objects and strata of population who are in the most vulnerable position or socially unprotected. Such policy is necessary to provide not only economic, but as well social and political stability in the society. Models of social policy vary due to different State structures altogether with the objects of this policy, the circle of which may be wider or narrower.

Now I'd like to dwell on the situation in Russia. Representatives of different scientific trends and schools – economists, sociologists, politologists, and psychologists are trying to analyze the society which had been created since 1991, from the point of view of human rights. It is a difficult task, since historically the period is very short, only 16 years.

In our considerations we are used to use definite terms, such as totalitarian society, democratic society, civil society, equal opportunities society, etc. Speaking in these terms, we can maintain that Russia went through transition from totalitarian society to the democratic one, offering equal opportunities to its citizens. Let us see if such statement corresponds to the reality.

Concerning constitutional declaration of rights and possibilities, we must recognize that it has not changed though the social, economic and political system has faced deep-rooted changes. The main Law of the country, its Constitution has not been changed in respect of equality of rights.

Democratic forces considered it necessary to change the economic basis of the society for equal rights and opportunities implementation. Voucherization or distribution of common property between all the citizens of the society was considered to be the most efficient instrument for such changes. It was voucherization in particular that should have turned into the practical or economic basis for every citizen to take advantage of the offered equal opportunities. But this brilliant idea of setting up economic prerequisites for equal opportunities did not come to reality.

In the first place, vouchers turned to be blank sheets of paper for majority of the population. They did not have any value or application, though its declared cost was 10 thousand rubles. Secondly, for a very small group of the most entrepreneurial people vouchers became the source of initial capital which later helped them to purchase important industrial enterprises. In conclusion, voucherization as a direct way to democracy led, on the contrary, to deep social disintegration of the society, in which money and wealth started to determine life of a human being.

The social policy has changed as a result of the model of the State. Its main objective today is to offer all the citizens equal opportunities in search for the way of survival.

The rights to food, shelter, health care and education declared by the Constitution, are provided at the formal and very basic level. They do not correspond either to the level of maintenance or survival.

As an example, the minimal salary in the country can be mentioned. In spite of the Constitution and Labor Code, minimal salary in Russia is a little bit more than a quarter of a subsistence minimum. The salary of more than 20 million workers (one third of the total labor force) is less than subsistence minimum. Two third's or about 40 million, people get salary which does not let them support themselves, their families and their only child. The salary of low payed people is 30 times less than that of well-paid. In 2006 real wages are two times less than it was 1990.

Comparative analysis

<i>Before</i>	<i>Now</i>
Equal rights and opportunities are declared in Constitution	Equal rights and opportunities are declared in Constitution
Driving force in the society is ideology	Driving force in the society is wealth and power
Social policy was mainly aimed at working people to increase their potential and to motivate them for work	Social policy mostly motivates people to search for ways of survival
Highly qualified workers, intellectual, cultural, Communist Party and Trade Union elite were given the widest access to opportunities	Great owners and top managers, bureaucrats, State functionaries, members of Parliament and leaders of criminal structures have most opportunities
Wide opportunities were offered freely for the development of working people to strengthen their productive capacity (education, art and sport clubs, etc.)	All the services of quality for human development of an individual are offered on a commercial basis
Main slogan: all the opportunities for those who work hard	Main slogan: if you are clever why aren't you rich? Money settles all the problems and it is the key to wide opportunities

As the salary has fell till the lowest level it stopped to fulfill the following functions:

- reproductive function (it cannot ensure even the simple reproduction of the proper worker's labor force);
- economic function (it does not stimulate motivation of quality and high labor productivity);
- social function (it causes disintegration of the society due to brute wages differentiation).

At the same time, shadow forms of salary must be mentioned, which according to the State Statistic evaluation in 2006 corresponded to 27.7% of the whole volume of the salary fund. Some Russian economists consider shadow salary as the main reason of poverty reproduction. They think that the Government should have paid more attention to the differentiation between the income of the poor and the rich than to the level of inflation. The aim of the wise Government is to undertake all the possible measures to cut the gap between the poor and the rich in the country.

In Russia the situation is unique. Each year our income is to increase as life is becoming more expensive. During the years of the reforms the share of the poor 20% group decreased two times. In other words, the poor became two times poorer. The share of the second group fell in one and half times. The third group of people is considered to be middle-paid. They have a permanent job; they are constant consumers, struggling not to loose their position. But even their income became in 30 percent less.

The fourth group did not loose anything but it did not win, either. In conclusion we may say that 80 percent of the population has lost much because of the reforms. Only the last group managed to increase their share in total income of the society in one and half times. It gives us the following picture: the poor have become poorer meanwhile the rich have become much richer. The increase in one ruble of income in the first mostly socially vulnerable group corresponds to 8 rubles increase of income for the last group.

Our president has been speaking several times about the necessity to overcome poverty. But if we give 1 ruble to the poor then the rich immediately gets 8 rubles. It is the essence of Russian economic system. It makes the poor even poorer, and multiplies the wealth of the rich. This system might be called as mechanism of self reproducing poverty. We were witnessing of it for the last 15 years. What equal opportunities can we speak about in this situation?

This economic inequality is incremented naturally by legal social insecurity.

One of the most acute problems is growing depopulation of the Russian society. For the first time this problem attracted attention not only of the scientists but also of the ruling elite. President Putin in one of his messages to the Federal Assembly considered the demographic problem as the primary at the State level. According to him the causes of it are economic factors. But researchers objectively prove that this problem appeared because of social, psychological, and even existential aspects of common life in Russia. Two main controversial social-psychological situations are characteristic for our people now: social apathy and social aggression. The main indicators of social apathy and aggression are the rate of suicide, and the rate of murders, respectively.

From my point of view, the main reason of demographical crises lies in pathology of violence which flooded Russia.

Let us start with the fact that the main part of human losses in Russian Federation is not the result of low birth rate or emigration. It happens because of high level of violent deaths. Such high level of mortality cannot be overpassed by the proposed increase of birth rate when a woman reproduces at least 2.15 child. The Russian population continues to decrease. Speaking about the number of murders, we only rely on the official data which often does not reflect the real situation. It is a tradition. But Russia has reached another record: in other countries as a rule more women than men are victims of violence. In Russia these figures are equal.

During the last 15 years Russia is the leader in absolute number of the female and children murder victims. This number exceeds 45–70 times the same index in France and Great Britain, 16 times in USA, and even 7 times in Pakistan. We mention women and children because they are considered to be weak. We feel empathy with them. We don't speak much about violence committed against men who are considered to be strong. There is no statistics or research about male victims in the Russian Federation.

What about mental health? According to data for 2006, at least more than 9 million Russians had psychiatric disorders. In the majority of cases the cause of them was violence committed against them.

Objects of sexual harassment in 90% of cases are young people less than 25 years old. But most sexual crimes are committed towards those who are 17–18 years old. These young people constitute the genetic fund of the nation, on which we must rely. We lose a great part of the future nation or deform and injure it greatly. These young people are supposed to make the fundament of our society and organize the society following the experience and their conceptions about life they got. And their experience is based on violence and requires violence in return. Their psychic condition is grave and may be compared to that of the people who went through war and need help to recover to be incorporated into peaceful life.

Statistic data says that in Russia 1.5 million children suffer from violence at home: almost 60 thousands are victims of sexual abuse; 50 thousands leave their homes; above 2 thousands commit suicide; others perish. The country has about 4 millions of homeless children. Most of them

are incorporated into the industry of sexual exploitation. Of course, they may not be considered adequate as far as their psyches or their physical health is concerned. These children are also our genetic fund and the future of the nation. Just imagine!

Now I'd like to dwell on the issue of suicide which illustrates social apathy. The figures are astonishing – for the last 15 years Russia lost more than 800 thousand people – approximately 55 thousands a year. They committed suicide either because of the dominating social and psychological conditions or because of lack of adequately organized social help. The level of suicides in Russia is 38–42 people for 100 thousands. It is one of the highest rate in the world. The average world index is 14.6, and the critical level declared by the World Health Organization is 20 people for 100 thousands. Violent death and suicide take the same number of lives as heart diseases, considered to be the cause of death number one.

As far as the physical state of the reproductive health of the population is concerned, it becomes critical. Every one out of six women is unable to give a birth to a child. Every ten or nine years the number of babies which are genetically abnormal doubles. 80% of pregnant women are not capable to have healthy babies. What conclusions may be made out of it? I am sure that it is impossible to raise the birthrate by only social benefits proposed by president Putin.

Special category of the violence victims constitute those who are characterized by the so called “psychological infertility”. Those are people who have suffered psychological trauma and don't want to have children and family.

The health problems are reflected by the data related to life expectancy. According to this index, Russia is in the 107-th place in the world. Life expectancy is 51.5 years for men, and 61.9 for women. From 1999 we witness intensive growth of disability, approximately in 1 million people per year. Total number of disabled people in 2006 was about 17 million people. It would grow up to 20 million in 2015, while the population will be 131 millions.

The situation of the social work or the system of social welfare is terrible. There is no definite infrastructure for it, no skilled workers to cope with pathology of violence and social apathy.

The question raises: are there any State or social institutes in Russia that may be interested in stabilization of social development and harmonization of social relations? This question is just and correct. In order to answer the question, I'd like to give concrete examples of research connected with the specific social problem, that is social adaptation of the retired military officers. Speaking about equal opportunities, let us see what role plays the State and social institutions in there.

Why have I chosen this example as an evidence? Retired officers constitute dozens of thousands of highly trained people accustomed to definite living conditions and stable income and they are unnecessary in civil society.

Officers are made to retire due to different reasons. They possess organizational competency, obedience to discipline and rules. If they are not required by the society they might be required by extremist groups and organizations and may be used in violent actions. Having lost work and occupation retired officers have a tendency for criminalization. If they do not receive recognition and support from the State it may lead to the loss of extremely high productive potential in economics and social life.

Our specialists carried research of the former officers, inhabitants of Smolensk region. About 76% of the respondents confessed that they are constantly invited to work with criminal groups and take part in criminal structures.

The State pays attention to the problems of social adaptation of former officers. There are different federal programs and centers of social adaptation at different levels. There is an international assistance available, even through NATO. But the index of social adaptability of former officers is only 0.27. 11% of them are inadapted. 58% constitute low level of adaptability. 22% are at medium level. 9% are at acceptable level of adaptability. And there is no one at the level of full adaptability.

At the end of our research we came to the necessity to offer a new and complex model of social adaptation. Social and civil organizations of the officers should become the core of it. They must act relying on the principles of social partnership with State and private sector. It already works in three regions now.

Now I came to conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS. Equal rights and equal opportunities are the basis for the development of the democratic society and prerequisites for its social welfare. To reach these aims we need the following conditions:

- the State should be aware of the necessity to set up social and economic conditions which guarantee equal opportunities for all the citizens to maintain stability for its political, social and economic system;
- the State should work out a social policy aimed at getting rid of conditions which lead to poverty reproduction, social and legal insecurity and lack of protection;
- the proper concept of business is to be changed and is to get socially oriented character;
- legal illiteracy of the lay people is to be wiped out in the society which would help the people to know their rights, to take advantage of them and to defend them;
- wide network of NGO is to be created in the country to propagate ideas of equality of rights and opportunities for all the citizens.