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Poll Suggests Russians Oppose Further De-Stalinization

By Paul Goble

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The Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights has said that de-Stalinization and de-Sovietization programs are preconditions for modernization. But according to a recent poll, Russians are categorically against such reforms.

In an article for the Rosbalt Internet portal, sociologist Yulia Krizhanskaya wrote that the poll clearly shows that "despite all 'the dark places' of the Soviet past, people do not want to disown it," at least in part because "everyone understands that the Soviet past is what unites us" now.

Krizhanskaya says the poll was provoked by the Presidential Council's controversial proposals, which she says included equating the Soviet Union with Hitler's Germany, accusing the Soviet government of genocide against Russians, and declaring "the entire Soviet period" a criminal one.

She says the council declared that modernization would be impossible without "the modernization of the consciousness of its citizens" in a "de-sovietized direction" that would also unite society.

Such an assertion, Krizhanskaya says, means that "they want to modernize the consciousness of the citizens of Russia, that is, all of us, supposedly in our own interests but without asking us."

The Essence of Time Public Movement decided to find out what the public thinks about this idea. In April, some 1,500 activists asked more than 36,000 Russians spread across 1,700 population centers in 77 regions. The main finding: "Russia decisively said 'no' to 'de-Sovietization.'"

Nearly 90 percent of those surveyed said they would vote against any referendum "which would recognize the Soviet Union as a criminal state that conducted genocide against its own people and was guilty of unleashing World War II."

Only 10 percent said a de-Stalinization program would be "correct and useful," while 20 percent said that they were "indifferent," and 70 percent were completely opposed. "But even among those who reacted positively, 40 percent voted against [such a program's] realization."

This pattern held for all social, regional, ethnic and age groups, Krizhanskaya continues. "Everyone understands that the Soviet past is what unites us. Consequently, everything that is directed against it divides us" and won't be supported if people, in fact, have a choice.

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