

# Plain Stupidity Caused the Krasnodar Floods

July 17, 2012

**The**  **Moscow Times**

Ten days have passed since the floods in Krymsk, and we can already observe some interesting patterns connected with that tragedy.

The first, and most unpleasant for the authorities, is the persistent rumor that the flood was not caused by heavy rains but by a surge of water from the Neberdzhayevskoye reservoir above the town. The suggestion is that either the dam broke or a large quantity of water was released from the reservoir toward Krymsk in order to prevent flooding President Vladimir Putin's palace in Gelendzhik, 60 kilometers away.

But the dam did not break, and the Naberdzhai River actually rose less than other rivers in the area. But that does not worry critics of the government. If you try to convince them of the facts, they just accuse you of selling out to the authorities.

It is noteworthy that rationally minded opposition members, such as independent environmentalist Suren Gazaryan, inspected the rivers in question and rejected the conspiracy theory outright. But the population of Krymsk, 95 percent of whom apparently

voted for Putin in the March election, firmly believe it.

This is a well-known psychological phenomenon and very bad news for the authorities. It is common for victims of natural disasters to believe that they were victims of an evil plot of some sort. The famine of 1317 was blamed on Jews, and the black plague epidemic of 1347 was blamed on Jews and witches, who were subsequently burned at the stake.

This is bad news for the authorities because the people of Krymsk do not blame their troubles on Jews, witches, U.S. State Department, foreign agents or anti-government protesters. These once-steadfast supporters of Putin place the blame squarely on the Russian government.

The people of Krymsk also don't believe the official death toll of 171. Whenever a conscientious journalist investigates rumors about "thousands of deaths" and says clearly that they are nothing but rumors, the response from Krymsk residents is usually: "It is your duty to prove the rumors to be true."

As I have already written, the disaster that struck Krymsk was, in fact, more the result of human rather than natural causes. This is because natural disasters only occur in places where nature, not civilization, is the predominant force. As Napoleon once said, there is no point attributing something to evil intent that is actually the result of plain stupidity.

Many Russians gladly voted for Putin in March, despite knowing that he essentially forced his will on them by sending busloads of individuals to vote in multiple polling places and manipulating the electoral process as much as he could. The truth is, average voters don't analyze deeply.

If baboons could vote, they would clearly vote for the alpha male. And the most subjugated baboons turn out to be the leader's most enthusiastic supporters.

The problem for Putin is that the most powerless members of society voted for him. But they can withdraw their support for him just as irrationally as they gave it.

That is exactly what we are seeing in Krymsk. When it comes to disasters that personally affect them, average voters will not accept the stupidity of their elected officials as an explanation when they can instead attribute it to evil intent.

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvya radio.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/07/17/plain-stupidity-caused-the-krasnodar-floods-a16329>