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Why Russia Was Not Ready for VTimes

The example of VTimes confirms what we have known for a long time already: There is no place for independent media in Russia.

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Vtimes

On June 12, Russia Day, VTimes will cease to exist. It's very strange to be writing an obituary, and not for a person but for a publication, when its demise has not yet occurred but is inevitable. But for the first time in my life, I feel that I want to write one.

VTimes was with us for around a year. How imperceptibly, thoroughly and quickly you get used to good things when everything else around you is going from bad to worse, and is even repugnant.

I wrote columns for the publication and was free to suggest any ideas; there was no censorship. A year ago, when they gutted Vedomosti, it was difficult to imagine that it would all end with the creation of a quality new business publication in Russia.

But then VTimes appeared. It was a publication with a free political platform, tackling issues like decarbonization, the switch to green energies and climatically responsible investment among the big players, as is today the custom in the whole of the civilized world (rather than a distinctly secondary concern, as is usual in Russia). It may be a banal observation, but it was truly a breath of fresh air — as if you had been sick for years and suddenly you felt healthy again.

For the whole of this year, VTimes has shown what a quality journalistic product should look like.

It is one that writes genuinely for thinking people, and not for groups with influence over the man sitting in the bunker, but on what is really happening around us — not about what it is permitted to cover or, even worse, what it is ordered to cover.

In the announcement of its closure, VTimes writes that it did not want to turn into an opposition media outlet, which is the niche it is now being shoved into. And this was the paper's special merit — it was in the middle, the place where the journalist should be.

Alas, it is precisely this middle ground that is being liquidated in Russia. You are not allowed to be an observer, you are not allowed to be objective in the positive sense of the word.

If you do not agree with the authorities — then bear the label of a foreign agent.

You are not allowed to sit here beside us and be discontented without punishment — we have places for the discontented, so off you go. You can either be with the authorities, or against them. You are not allowed to occupy a balanced position.

Related article: Why We're Closing VTimes, One of Russia's Last Independent News Outlets

The closure of VTimes is a refusal to play according to dictated rules, an act of contemporary civil disobedience. And it is the only honorable answer to what is taking place.

The example of VTimes confirms what we have known for a long time already: There is no place for independent media in Russia. They either close down or are pushed into the niche of an opposition cage with an enormous sign reading "foreign agent."

NGOs have already been through all of this.

VTimes was a ray of light from some tiny window in the future, through which we were shown what news publications should look like. And one day they surely will look like this. Open to different positions, debating the issues, reflecting what is taking place, and not what somebody permits or dictates.

As a business publication, VTimes was not afraid offending big business with its content. And only in a publication like this did it make sense to print articles from the Financial Times, since many of them would simply not have made it past the censor anywhere else.

For me personally, VTimes had everything I needed. It was like in the old days, when a person would subscribe to one newspaper and that would be enough — it presented them with

different points of view and provided necessary news coverage from different spheres. And I could be confident that this, my newspaper, would not tell lies or foist made-to-order pieces upon me, and if it made an error somewhere, it would correct it.

Related article: Independent Russian News Site VTimes Shuts Down Following 'Foreign Agent' Labeling

VTimes was not ahead of its time, because in the civilized world it would simply be an ordinary business publication.

It is Russia that is not ready for VTimes, because the country has plunged into the abyss of political obscurantism. For almost a year you could believe that somehow, even if in the form of an exception, the publication would survive. Probably, like in all dark times, I hoped for a little bit of a miracle, in spite of everything.

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