The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Newspeak for the Russian New Economic Policy

Negative growth and lots of stability.

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

October 01, 2022



Tetiana Shyshkina / unsplash

Набор слов: word salad

In my continuing quest to read Russian media sources and understand what on earth they mean, I've made some progress with military matters but am still having trouble with the Russian economy. Actually, everyone is having trouble with the Russian economy, which is why they have developed their own sub-set of новояз (Newspeak).

I get it. If you're the head of a region of the country, or the CEO of a huge enterprise that provides two thirds of the income for a city, or if you are a bureaucrat in one of the economic ministries — and you didn't get out with that fake passport when it was still possible — you can't exactly announce to the world (and your higher-ups): Мы в ж*** (We're ****ed.) You

have to say something!

A good start is the word стабильность (stability). Everyone likes stability: safe, predictable, calm. Here's a good example of regional stability: Госдолг Брянской области сохранил стабильность (The state debt of Bryansk oblast has remained stable.)

And here's a case of unstable stability or stable instability: Складской рынок остаётся наиболее стабильным сегментом коммерческой недвижимости, однако объём вакантных площадей с начала года постепенно увеличивается (Warehouses remain the most stable segment of commercial real estate, but the volume of vacant space has been increasing since the start of the year.) This begs the question: if warehouses with diminishing income are the most stable segment of the market, what's the worst performing segment?

Давайте называть вещи своими именами (let's call a spade a spade): Экономическая ситуация в области – на стабильном уровне (The economic situation in the region is stagnant.)

But economic новояз is designed to cast failure as success. ОЭСР Организа́ция экономи́ческого сотру́дничества и разви́тия улучшила прогноз по снижению ВВП России в этом году (The OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development upgraded its forecast concerning the fall of the GDP in Russia this year). That sounds positive, doesn't it? It isn't: В России замедлился спад ВВП (In Russia the decline of the GDP has slowed). So we're losing money, but not as quickly as we were losing it last month.

This is also called отрицательный рост (negative growth), which I am told is a standard economic term. Why say "loss" or "decline" or "we're losing money hand over fist" when you can make it sound like a little dip in the line of the graph, like someone's thumb got in the way when they were drawing it? Произошёл отрицательный рост самой стабильной валюты в мире (The most stable currency in the world is experiencing negative growth — that is, the ruble fell against the dollar).

But the trick is to keep your hopes up: Несмотря на негативные тенденции в вышеперечисленных индексах, предприятия обрабатывающей промышленности отмечают максимальную степень оптимизма (Despite the negative trends in the aforementioned indexes, the manufacturing industry factories are registering their maximum level of optimism.)

Down at the micro-level of the factory or business, it's the same story. First of all, lots of businesses announced простой (down-time, work stoppage). This might be, say, because the microchips they need to build their cars or the bleach they need to make paper are sanctioned. Сейчас сборочное предприятие находится в вынужденном простое, а сотрудники завода получают выплаты в соответствии с трудовым законодательством (Right now the assembly plant had to stop production, but the workers are getting paid, in accordance with the labor laws).

So простой is not really "down time." It might be better translated as "company death sentence": pay everyone, produce nothing, have no income.

The problem of having a component part on the sanctions list is the fabulous two-prefix word

недопоставка (insufficient supply), as in: Идут недопоставки того оборудования и комплектующих, которые раньше были заказаны у партнёров за рубежом (We have a shortfall of equipment and parts that we used to order from our foreign partners). When this happens, don't panic. Call it something else, like this store is doing: Планируется переделка всего помещения, а также корректировка ассортимента (There are plans to rebuild the entire space and make some corrections in the assortment of goods).

In the past, people figured out ways to get around a law. Now the state does that for them. It's called параллельный импорт (parallel imports). This was signed into law by none other than President Putin: Закон, подписанный Путиным, о легализации параллельного импорта, по сути, открыл ввоз в страну импортных товаров без разрешения правообладателя. Правда, завозить их придётся через страны, которые не имеют санкционных и каких-либо других ограничений. Например, через Армению, Турцию, Казахстан, Китай и прочие (The law signed by Putin legalizing parallel imports essentially opened up the import of goods without the permission of the owner of the goods. They have to be imported through countries not under sanctions or other restrictions like Armenia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, China, etc.)

But Russian consumers should not worry! They aren't getting fakes! Nope. Контрафакт и параллельный импорт — не одно и то же. В первом случае это подделки, схожие с фирменными, во втором — брендовая продукция (Bootlegged goods and parallel imports are not the same thing. The former are knock-offs that look like the originals, and the latter are real brands.)

Now that's a relief.

The result of all this happy talk goes something like this: Обновлённая конструкция "бюджетных правил" сохранит базовые принципы сбалансированности расходов и позволит обеспечить поддержку экономики в период адаптации при сохранении доверия к проводимой макроэкономической политике (The updated system of "budgetary rules" will retain the basic principles of balanced expenses and allow us to provide support for the economy during a period of adaptation while maintaining trust in the current macroeconomic policy). Got that? Russians call it набор слов. We call it word salad.

The other result is a good meme: Алло, МЧС? У нас тут вызов, произошёл хлопок газа, несколько человек самоизолировались под завалами. Возможен отрицательный рост жильцов. (Hello? Is this the Emergencies Services? We're experiencing a challenge. There was a gas pop and several people are self-isolating under the ruins. A negative growth of residents is possible.)

Dark. Very dark.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/01/newspeak-for-the-russian-new-economic-policy-a78938