My Goal Is to Lay Down My Conditions

Interview with Ella Pamfilova

Demokratizatsiya: How could you describe the situation in the Russian ruling elite which we call the “Party of Power.”

Pamfilova: I would say it is a so-called Party of Power because if you take Zyuganov, Kuptsov, Maslyukov, and other members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government on the one hand, and Chernomyrdin and the members of the Russian government on the other, there are many more commonalities than there are differences. That is why we see such strong support for Chernomyrdin personally, his government, and his budget, from the opposition. In principle, it’s not two different wings, but two sides of one coin, with the same roots. This is why Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov are, for them, absolutely a strange organism. This is why the opposition always blames them for mistakes in the government’s work.

At the same time, we can see inside the Party of Power the process of shaping a third force—or better to say third forces. They are absolutely different, and it is absolutely unpredictable who will unite with whom. Already by the end of 1997 we can begin to see the genesis of absolutely unbelievable combinations. Of course, they will form under different circumstances, including the health of the president. Today it is easier to name those who do not want to be the Russian president.

Demokratizatsiya: Do you personally want to be president?

Pamfilova: It’s a difficult question; I don’t want to answer. If I say “yes,” it would not be completely true. If I say “no,” nobody will believe me. For me, the goal to get the position is not important. No power just for power’s sake. It has happened very often that a person gets power but in the end they don’t know what to do with it. My goal is to obtain such political power that, under different circumstances and in any situations, I would be able to, let’s say it rudely and cynically, to barter and to lay down my conditions. This means that I would like to be able to do what I believe is necessary at this time in Russia. The goal for me is not opposition. The goal for me is the ability to do whatever I think is necessary.

Now the new presidential campaign has begun, and each politician is analyzing all of his possible competitors; with whom it could be possible to unite, and

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with whom, impossible. There is now a heated search for partners. And paradoxically, as future candidates are more similar, more like one another, have more common positions and programs, and as the voters see them more as similar, then there will be more friction between them. They are competing for the same social groups. I am absolutely sure that Grigory Yavlinsky and Boris Nemtsov will never be united, because Nemtsov is going after exactly the same voter as Yavlinsky. It also looks like there is a lot in common between Alexander Lebed and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. But I don’t think they will be able to unite, because their programs overlap one another. This is why political unions can be very whimsical.

Of course, you cannot ignore the possibility that some dark horse, whose role was foreseen in analytical centers by experts, and whom one of the main candidates will try to use for his own purposes, will suddenly get his own ambitions and thoughts and try to act independently.

**Demokratizatsiya:** In your opinion, which of the scenarios of the future Russian political evolution is the most desirable?

**Pamfilova:** The most desirable among the realistic scenarios, it seems to me, is that our political elite will finally realize how serious the situation in Russia is and will find some common ground, on the basis not necessarily of national interests but at least state interests. And on this basis we can built what Gorbachev used to say in his time “some kind of consensus.” It should be common understanding that we have to cooperate with each other. At the same time, we have to realize clearly which political spot each of the political parties and movements occupies. Then, our political mechanism will work like a Swiss watch. I think there is a place even for the Communists, at least if they will organize a good *subbotnik* [unpaid Saturday work]; then it will be a big deal already. The main point is to find the right spot, the right place, where the political power will work as a united mechanism but at the same time will satisfy its political ambitions. I think this could be the ideal scenario for Russia.

But it will work only under two conditions. First, we should clearly work out a strategy for Russian development, find a common definition for its global interests. If the conception of our development will build not on contradictions but on the coordination of interests, if all of its key moments can be accepted and understood by society, we will be successful. The most important is not to shove this conception on the very passive Russian people. Our people are the people of passive resistance and if they don’t like something, they will repudiate it in the end. But if our political elite can involve everyone in the process of realizing this strategy, everything may happen in the best way.

The second condition is if our oligarchy, our financial political elite, will start, using the cynical language of [Minister of Economics] Alexander Livshits, to “share with others.” The elite will not repeat the mistakes of the tsar’s bourgeoisie, but will understand, as the rest of Europe understood, that salaried workers have a right to get decent pay. The unlimited stinginess of the elite will later lead to its own demise, because the poorest of society will sharply increase extremism in Russian politics. With the poor workers, the extremists
can do whatever they want to do. Material poverty and spiritual poverty are very fertile grounds to manipulate the masses. The first result of this avarice is that the elite will crash in the dust. In other words, it is necessary that national capitalism work correctly. I would very much like this scenario to come to fruition in Russia.

**Demokratizatsiya:** What do you think is the most undesirable of the realistic scenarios in Russia?

**Pamfilova:** The third general redistribution of property has begun in Russia and has provoked infighting in our small financial elite. They finally decided to split whatever they had not split before. There are still several tasty untaken pieces—not only in the oil industry, but also in communications, in our still-pristine forestry, where we can see very strong old mafia, and so forth. Our financial oligarchy has absolutely lost the feeling of reality, the feeling of the public’s mood.

But at the same time, there are two very serious processes developing in society that overlap one another. The first is a sharp social and spiritual divergence and the growth of discontent. The emotional situation in society is very very bad. Two-thirds of the population lives under some kind of stress. The level of social optimism is not even at zero, but is actually negative. People do not believe in the future, and they have no feelings or perspective. People don’t understand what is going on or what the goal is. What will Russia get from this?

There is a second process going on at the same time, a mass spiritual renaissance. The Russian people are gaining a consciousness and an identification. People are not only deep down understanding that they can count only on themselves; there is also a belief in their own power—“I can, I must!” “Nobody will do it for me—my salvation is in my own hands!” This is a very difficult natural selection but we can see a new type of Russian entrepreneur taking shape. And this type is very far from the image of the “new Russians” of the media—with golden chains on their necks. This new entrepreneur is a man who deeply understands that he has roots in Russia, and this is why he will never, as we say in Russia, cut the branch on which he is sitting. And this process is no less powerful than the first process, the process of divergence. But it is less evident. The first process is going on at the top, the second is a bottom-up process.

If our elite, let’s say it politely, overplays its hand in a new redistribution of property, then it will provoke the first process—the process of divergence—which will be followed by very powerful social blows. Social blows are going on even now, and it is not even necessary to identify them with strikes or other vigorous actions. The social blow can be very long and demonstrate itself in a very unclear and passive shape. It may portray itself in mass alcoholism, mass suicide, or the sabotage of state or government actions. The people know that the state always screws over the people. “You don’t pay my salary, or you pay me a humiliating sum, so I make you so unhappy with my work.” Unfortunately, our political elite is so distant that it lost the feeling of its own people, their moods and their social health. If it will be so, then this elite will fall off like a scab. And then the way for a renaissance will be closed for a long time.
**Demokratizatsiya:** But as I understood, you are generally optimistic about the Russian future.

**Pamfilova:** I hope the instinct of self-preservation of the Russian nation will start to work. This instinct usually worked before, over our long history. Lately, our country has started to show at least some kind of predictability. Even our oligarchy, or even more fashionably, our oligopoly, started to understand that they cannot hide from the country. The world is afraid enough already and they cannot hide anywhere with those fantastic bank accounts, the size of which depend on the level of access to state property that they used to have. They are absolutely transparent to the world with those doubtful businesses. Nobody waits anywhere to hug them. They cannot hide. And they are not mostly stupid people, and I hope they will understand it. That is why I do not see apocalypses in Russia coming.

**Demokratizatsiya:** But anyway, you are building a new movement, For a Healthy Russia.

**Pamfilova:** That is our all-Russian civic movement. But it’s not political. What is it? We started to work on this movement right after the 1995 election. I won them over even with practically no money in my campaign. And I was perfectly happy with my success, because I personally got more voters than the Ivan Rybkin bloc or the trade unions, which spent tons of money. Even more, our campaign technology, our materials for my program, were used later in the presidential campaign by Yeltsin’s team. Entire pages from my program became part of Yeltsin’s plan that he proposed for the year 2000.

Based on my experience as minister of social protection and head of the Committee for Social Policy under the president of Russia, I made a conclusion that the cornerstone for the conception of Russian national security should be its social security, the environment, health services, education, social protection, rehabilitation, science, culture—everything should be judged from the point of how to protect the human being in this aggressive environment. The internal aggression of man and the aggression of the environment are very close. But active social policy can be economically profitable. This thought for a long time seemed unbelievable for my colleagues in government, the monetarists. They always thought that social policy is an expense. “We are,” they would tell me, “making money in industry. You are wasting it.”

There are 160 different organizations now joining our movement. There are 53 regional branches. As usual, the kind of structure built from above depends on how much money the organizers have. We were created exclusively from the bottom up, and with no money at all. We grew up as a social necessity.

For example, the medical scientists who are members of our movement created a unique medical technology that has no comparison in the world. Different countries, including the United States, offered tremendous money for it. But these scientists are still working here for almost nothing and hope that Russia in the end will need their talents and hands. They have not yet lost hope, and there are a lot of people who still believe in their own power, in their own country, and in
this way they are turning on the mechanism of Russian self-reliance, but on very
new principles. That is why our goal is not only to find money and then spend it
on food. No. Our goal is to create profitable social technologies, a system of self-
development and self-reliance of the country. And I think that this is the basis for
a normal Russia. This is why my personal political ambitions are very, very high.
I want, I dream, and I do everything to make our movement the strongest one. We
have huge potential.

For example, we have an institute of medical and social rehabilitation, which is
five years old and teaches the unique specialty of rehabilitation. And rehabilitation
is needed by 90 percent of the Russian population—even the rich. They also live
under permanent pressure and are afraid that tomorrow some-
body will hook their child on
drugs, and the day after tomor-
row somebody will shoot their
wife in the back yard, and on the
third day the state will pass a
law and he will lose all of his
money. So, nobody feels com-
fortable in our state. Everybody
needs rehabilitation. But after
medical rehabilitation should come professional, social, psychological, and so forth.
Our institute is the only institute in this area. We work directly with the World Health
Organization. We created a new technology to prevent and to treat alcoholism and
drug addiction, a new technology to collect ecologically clean harvest on radioac-
tive soil. Our next plan is to build a system of rehabilitation for our men who went
through the war in Chechnya. This is extremely important because men in their
reproductive ages are dying in Russia. We don’t have many more youngsters.

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Our organization has begun to work on the problems of information aggres-
sion as a tool to make a zombie out of man; he is involuntarily getting informa-
tion he does not know what to do with. The question of information security is
very important today in Russia now that our modern mass media has become very
aggressive and are making cosmopolitans out of us, and so we are forgetting our
traditions, roots, and origins. You don’t need a lot to make our people happy. First
of all you have to strangle him a little bit and then to release him. And he will
bow down and thank you very much that you did not kill him.

At the same time, Russia is the last big territory that has not yet been fully
occupied by the drug business or the mafia. So you cannot yet completely manip-
ulate Russia. That is why it is very important to struggle against internal aggres-
sions, internal decay, to save ourselves as a race and as a culture. We cannot act
aggressively, but instead propose to the world new ways to fight the culture of
vulgar consumerism. This is why I believe that our movement, in any political
circumstances, will play a very stabilizing role. Only then will I be able, to put it
crudely, to bargain and lay down my conditions, to follow my interests. I want it.
I am able to do it. And I will do it. That is my goal.
**Demokratizatsiya:** What kind of relationship does your movement have with religious organizations?

**Pamfilova:** We are cooperating with the Russian Orthodox church in programs to prevent drug addiction and alcoholism. I think that is a very good cooperation. But there is another problem. Russia does not have a state ideology right now, so in its place it is trying to use the church. And this is not right! The church is only part of the culture of society, part of its civilization. It cannot replace the general conception of development and should not be elevated to that level.

**Demokratizatsiya:** What kind of relations do you have with the government, with the military, and with law enforcement structures?

**Pamfilova:** We have very good relations with military organizations, because in my time as minister I helped a lot of military personnel, particularly in retirement issues. We worked with some organizations of Afghan War veterans, with the Russian Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers, which as you know received the alternative Nobel Prize. The famous detective Alexander Gurov is a member of our movement, a lot of military specialists and experts, and a lot of generals as well.

Speaking about the government, in the past few years, I have changed myself a lot. I have understood that because of success, because of the necessity to go forward, you have to cooperate with everyone. This is why I abandoned my position of hardened opposition and have begun to cooperate constructively with the powers-that-be. For example, recently I tried to explain to members of our government why Gennady Zyuganov was sitting the entire three days in the Pavlov Medical Congress. He understands that doctors go to each house. But our authorities completely forgot about teachers, doctors, and military officers. These are the new poor. But they are the basis of our intelligence. There is a librarian sitting in each little village, and the biggest political stupidity will be to hand them to the Communists. That is why our movement will fulfill public needs and will cooperate with everyone whose strategic interests will be adequate to ours, and not just look to fill their own pockets.

**Demokratizatsiya:** Has your hypothesis on the basis for the national security of Russia found any support in the government, in the Security Council, and in the presidential administration?

**Pamfilova:** There is no understanding and support yet. Everybody that is there has a very narrow area of responsibility—some care only about military reforms, others only Chechnya, and so forth. This way, they are losing a lot of things; they don’t understand that tomorrow the decayed youngsters won’t be able to defend their homeland. But we won’t have other ones. And not only because the rate of birth is falling, but because of the high rate of unhealthy, defective, and psychologically unstable babies born. The government has no understanding of this at all. But as we say in Russia, the drops are breaking the stone.

**Demokratizatsiya:** Maybe there is no understanding because there are not enough women in the government?
Pamfilova: There are women and there are women. Of course, if someone with all of the best female qualities—good, with a big soul, kindhearted, and humane, and at the same time intelligent, strong as a politician, and able to out-maneuver men—it will be such a mixture!

Demokratizatsiya: Is it difficult to be a woman politician in Russia? Is there any specific thing that you can find only in Russia?

Pamfilova: Of course; tremendous specifics. In some countries, for example, in the United States, feminism became very aggressive. In others, some kind of status quo was shaped and it doesn’t matter what a man is thinking, they cannot say it out loud. There are countries in which quotas exist for women, and so forth. But women in politics in Russia is only a March 8 [International Women’s Day] effect. It’s close to the problem of NATO’s enlargement to the east. What do I mean by that? NATO just tricked us very simply. Like promising first to marry, the girl agreed, then she lost everything that she could possibly lose, then people started to trick her, and then they were surprised that she is unhappy. We know that we lost against NATO, but why are we trying to pound our heads on the wall and cry, then complain that NATO was unfair to us? It won’t change, it’s too late.

Women in politics cannot model our position after the NATO question—to cry and yell that we are women, not recognized, not understood, not sympathized, and so forth. No! We decided to go into politics—don’t cry, don’t whine, don’t pray, just act, and act sharply! If you’re able, that’s good. If you are not able, then get out. But don’t ask for quotas and guarantees, because they discredit and humiliate women in politics, because there is a sharp male struggle. If you are able, you will survive. I always said that for women to get into politics unexpectedly is possible in Russia. But to stay there, and to get stronger, is impossible. Believe me, because I’m experienced.

Demokratizatsiya: How has the state of women, active women, changed in Russia lately? Is it easier or more difficult now?

Pamfilova: The state of women became more difficult but more interesting. Now, women have many more options. The system of natural selection gave active women many more options, but the struggle against her became stronger too, because the state guarantees disappeared. But what we call a strong woman should provide breakthroughs not only for herself but also to break ground for the average woman. But let me say one more time that the social group that’s dying the fastest in Russia are males in their reproductive age. They are much more psychoemotionally vulnerable. The Russian woman is a marathon runner. Man is a sprinter. And he is breaking down much faster. Too many men in our country just suddenly happened to find themselves lost with no jobs, and not everyone can go sell something, particularly in small towns and cities. And imagine that, at the same time, your wife is complaining about life, and your child complaining that you cannot buy the “in” things for him unlike the other dads. Man is quiet for a while, and finally he either becomes an inveterate drunkard or commits suicide or has a heart attack. I think that this social group is the most
vulnerable part of our society. More vulnerable than the handicapped and even than the, very respected by me, elderly. This is why, if you want to help Russian women, you have to think how to save Russian men.