



Proposal to Restore Veterans' Benefits

OE Watch Commentary: While Russian military veterans enjoy a number of government benefits, modern Russia has no equivalent to the US Veterans Administration. As such, depending on the type of uniformed service and current place of residence, there is often a wide disparity of benefits and care provided to Russian military veterans (those who have served 20 years or more). The accompanying excerpt from Russia's main government newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, discusses a proposed initiative which would guarantee military veteran benefits regardless of where the veteran lives within Russia.

The article explains that some of the disparity in benefits stems from a past decision which mandated that providing benefits to these veterans be shifted from the federal level "onto local and regional administrations." Unfortunately, while the federal government transferred the responsibility, they did not always provide the necessary funding for the local authorities, or even if they did, local authorities had other uses for the money. For example, the article points out that even if "a military pensioner has a right to travel on public transportation free of charge," he/she may not be able to exercise this benefit if residing in "Tula or Khabarovsk." This is also true for the more important benefits: "healthcare, housing and municipal services, and the notorious housing problem." The article describes how the current legislation negatively affects those who might be considering a military career: "Look what awaits you, Lieutenant, when you are sent into the reserve or into retirement."

Guaranteeing veterans' benefits at the federal level will be an expensive proposition. As the article points out, the number of Russians who would benefit from this proposed change is "43 million people, one third of the country's population." The article also discusses the possibility of creating "a Federal Agency for Veterans' Affairs," which would be responsible for "rendering assistance to veterans," among other functions. These are just proposals and some believe it is not surprising that the main government newspaper would include such an article just prior to the Victory Day celebrations. Whether such changes to improve assistance to Russian military veterans are actually carried out remains to be seen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



President Putin meeting with military veterans, May 2007.
Source: Kremlin.ru <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/39334> CC BY 4.0.

“The crux of the problem is the military veterans’ loss of federal status, which was previously enshrined in legislation...”

Source: "Mikhail Falaleyev, "Льготы могут вернуться: Статус ветеранов военной службы предлагают повысить (Benefits May Be Restored. It is Proposed that Military Service Veterans' Status Be Raised)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 7 May 2018. <https://rg.ru/2018/05/07/v-rosgvardii-predlozhili-vernut-lgoty-veteranam-voennoj-sluzhby.html>

Military service veterans, that is to say, people who have served for 20 years or more in the security structures, must have their benefits reinstated at federal level, which means amending the Federal Law "On Veterans." Such an initiative has been proposed by the All-Russia Public Organization of Veterans of the Troops of Law and Order (Rosgvardiya) whose council is headed up by retired Lieutenant General Petr Rovenskiy.

The matter concerns not only former soldiers and officers of the internal troops -- now the National Guard -- but also pensioners of all categories, branches of the Army, and security departments. And this means 43 million people, one third of the country's population. The crux of the problem is the military veterans' loss of federal status, which was previously enshrined in legislation.... Apparently, it was decided during some economically difficult period that budget money be saved and a "small" ruse be adopted -- to shift the care of ex-service personnel onto local and regional administrations.

Ostensibly, all of the declared benefits have remained, but only within the boundaries of specific territories where, again, specific veterans reside. Let's say a military pensioner has a right to travel on public transportation free of charge. But if he lives in Moscow, say, it applies only within the capital. In Tula or Khabarovsk, he will already have to buy a ticket for the bus at his own expense. In the same way, too, a resident of Kursk, for example, will be compelled to pay his fare on the capital's subway. And this is only one aspect of the "benefits war." But there are also healthcare, housing and municipal services, and the notorious "housing problem." Furthermore, there are known cases where even the supposedly home administration simply forgets about its own veterans.

The officials' logic is understandable. Since everything has been farmed out to local authorities and the federal "obligation" has been long gone, it is possible to save money on old people whom no one needs any more. Or rather, to remove the monies they are obliged to allocate for veterans from their own budget. But who will check and discover this, and when?

It is clear that such an attitude to a person does not raise the self-esteem, not only of a military pensioner, but also of a young officer who, someday, will also have to become the same kind of military pensioner. As if to say: "Look what awaits you, Lieutenant, when you are sent into the reserve or into retirement."...

...But then, veterans care not only about their own prosperous old age. They are still fully prepared and able to serve the Fatherland. They are proposing the creation of a Federal Agency for Veterans' Affairs. After all, a similar agency for youth affairs exists, and extremely effectively. It is anticipated that this agency will render assistance to veterans, engage in charity work, put up memorial plaques and commemorative signs, and tend graves....