



Career Appeal of KGB

OE Watch Commentary: This past December, Russia marked the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet secret police. The first excerpt from the popular daily, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, commemorated this date by describing in glowing terms a visit to one of the major secret police buildings in St. Petersburg. The article makes no mention of the awful repression or arbitrary punishment during the Soviet period by the predecessors of today's secret police (FSB-Federal Security Service), but rather highlights the heroes who worked for this agency (to include Vladimir Putin).

This positive change in public attitudes toward Russia's secret security agencies stands in stark contrast to those of the 1990s. Then, the Russian media was filled with reports at how the Cheka/NKVD/KGB had used terror and coercion to keep the Soviet system alive. Over the past two decades, however, the media's portrayal of these security agencies has been more positive. Not surprisingly, as the second excerpt from the pro-business site, *Vedomosti*, points out, today, many young Russians aspire to a career with the security services.

The article provides polling data which reflects this "increase in the popularity of the special services," asserting that this change coincides "almost exactly with Vladimir Putin's time in power." One of the experts quoted in the article suggests that "the rising prestige of the special services stems from the growing confrontation with the West," and that this "besieged fortress syndrome... has been created, first and foremost, by television." Moreover, today, "many people consider it [career in the special services] an effective social ladder." This sentiment is echoed by another expert cited in the article who asserts that "people can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country and they want similar success in life for their family members." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“People can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country...”

Source: Elena Molchanova, “100-лет ВЧК-КГБ-ФСБ: экскурсия по альма-матер петербургских чекистов,” [100th anniversary of the Cheka-KGB-FSB: an excursion to the alma mater of the St. Petersburg Chekists] *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 20 December 2017. <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/26769/3805599/>

This year, 20 December, marks the 100th anniversary of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (the Cheka) - the State Security Committee (KGB) - now the Federal Security Service (FSB). On the anniversary “Komsomolskaya Pravda” visited the main building of the FSB in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region and saw what lay behind the thick walls of the building...

...If you climb up the spacious staircase to the floor above, visitors will be shown a stained-glass window with a distinctive control symbol and a plaque with the names of the St. Petersburg heroes who fell on the fighting post.... By the way, in one of them - under number 643 - in 1998 the future president of Russia worked, Vladimir Putin.

Source: Pavel Aptekar, “Как спецслужбы стали престижными. Почти половина россиян хотели бы видеть своих детей чекистами,” [How Special Services Became Prestigious. Almost Half of Russians Would Like Their Children to Become Intelligence Officers] *Vedomosti Online*, 6 February 2018. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/02/06/750030-spetssluzhbi-prestizhnimi>

The key role of the special services (first and foremost, probably of the FSB [Russian acronym for the Federal Security Service]) in the implicit hierarchy of the law enforcement structures and their PR activeness against the background of deteriorating relations with the West have rendered the profession of a security officer more prestigious: Nearly half of the Russians would like their children and grandchildren to serve in the security bodies.

A survey by the Public Opinion Foundation has revealed an increase in the popularity of the special services over a period of time which coincided almost exactly with Vladimir Putin's time in power. In 2001, almost the same number of people assessed the special services' work positively and negatively (35 and 34 percent respectively), but the number of those who assess their work positively almost doubled to 66 percent by January 2018, while the number of those who assess it negatively dropped by a factor of three to 12 percent. Over the same period of time, the number of Russians who consider service in the FSB attractive grew from 42 to 69 percent...

...Grigoriy Kertman, head of a division at the Public Opinion Foundation, noted that the rising prestige of the special services stems from the growing confrontation with the West: The besieged fortress syndrome which has been created, first and foremost, by television...The backgrounds of Putin and many of his cohorts who have worked in special services also matter: Many people consider it an effective social ladder.

...Political analyst Nikolay Petrov believes that it has become a universal controller overseeing both the law enforcement structures and the state apparatus. People can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country and they want similar success in life for their family members.