

When they buried Alexei Navalny they forgot that spring was so close!

Isabelle Eliat-Serck (2 March 2024)



Despite the abundance of hooded security agents, the scanning of faces by surveillance cameras and the chilling threat of arrest and imprisonment, thousands of Russians gathered on 1 March to honour Alexeï Navalny around the church and cemetery where he was buried. They chanted and repeated his name "Alexeï, Alexeï, Alexeï...", "Navalny, Navalny...", as if to convince themselves that the creative spirit of this free man, anti-corruption activist, upright and courageous, was still alive! Alexei represented hope. He must stay alive! Having survived a poisoning orchestrated by the Kremlin in 2020, Alexei nevertheless decided to return to Russia, his "beloved country", as a man on his feet. As soon as he arrived at the airport, he was taken away to be imprisoned.

After three years of imprisonment and torture, Alexei's favourite gesture from his gulag cell was still joining his hands to form a heart! In his speeches, Alexei used the word love, the exact opposite of Putin's language of death and hatred.

Some Russians at the funeral took the risk of confiding in the foreign press: "This man didn't just die for an ideal: he died for all of us", "This is a great day of mourning". Others dared to shout out their political convictions: "Ukrainians are good people", "Bring us back our soldiers", "No to war", which led to arrest and imprisonment for some.

Putin's great strategy, in which he excels, is the art of divide and rule. Using propaganda, threats, lies, murder, controls and merciless repression against anything that threatens his absolute power, Putin divides not only Russians among themselves, but countries, continents and the world against itself. More death leads to more hatred...

"Putin wants to kill our hopes, our freedom, our future and the proof that Russia can be different". Yet "there are tens of millions of Russians who are against Putin, against the war, against the evil he brings", says Yulia Navalny, urging us to remain creative, lively and innovative, as her husband was. "Be politically innovative", "by effectively fighting organised crime and the mafia", "rather than by multiplying diplomatic notes and declarations of war", she asked the European Parliament.

What can we do? As ordinary citizens of our European countries, what can we do to break new ground? Not much, no doubt, but that's no reason to remain paralysed: "It's not shameful to do little, it's shameful to do nothing" Navalny liked to repeat. It seems to me that what could weaken the power of Putin and his "gang" would be to create more links with the Russian people here or elsewhere. Meeting the Russians and Ukrainians around us, flooding all possible Russian networks with messages of support for the people, kind encouragement and enlightening information. Let's make the Russian people our allies. Yes, I think that in this respect, we can each find a way to make our own small contribution. "We must use every possible opportunity to act", Alexei insisted, adding: "All that evil needs to triumph is the inaction of good people"!

*... Where there is division, let me bring union. Where there is error, let me bring truth. Where there is doubt, let me bring faith. Where there is despair, let me bring hope... words attributed to Francis of Assisi*

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