

**Anna Vavilova:**  
**The Rise of Nationalism in Russia**

Let me share with you my story. I was raised in St.Petersburg. The city is called “Russian window to Europe,” so I like saying that I had been watching the EU from my window until I jumped out. My landing was soft in Finland, where I’ve been living for past 5 years. Helsinki became my new home and in fact the trip to old home is really short – 400 km – 3.5 hours by train. Many people ask me what I feel when I go back. And the only thing that I can possibly answer is that I feel like I’m travelling to another world. There is a serious gap that separates us, and over the last three to four years, it has grown dramatically.



Back in 2011 I was the only family member who went to vote in parliamentary elections. I voted in favour of the “Yabloko” party who got 3.5% and never made it into the Duma. But no one cared much except for some active young people who started to monitor the elections procedures. We all believed those are not legislative.

**Kommentar [BV1]:** What does this mean? We all believe those aren't legal?

The vote that year marked some sort of a turn-around in the society. At least that is how I see the situation. Before, nobody every liked to talk about politics much. But now, every kitchen is loud with political dispute. Families have arguments; friends stop communicating; everybody has an opinion. This all happened out of the blue, and the phenomenon is commonly called *the rise of nationalism and patriotism*.

With the help of propaganda, people get a highly distorted picture of a world in which Russia is powerful but needs more time to become independent from West. The rest of the world is in painful struggle and miserable decline. USA is the common wicked enemy, and EU is full of rotten values. Whatever the propaganda story is, its aim is to unite a nation behind a leader whom it will follow without questions – be it war or dramatic economic crisis or both...

The biggest problem in my opinion is the lack of information – as Russian people are *stewing in their own pan* – not many speak English, and not many can travel abroad.

The true reasons for the Western sanctions and the decline of the oil price remain a mystery to most. This results in a society which can't analyse the situation objectively and therefore is ready to believe all kinds of weird conspiracy theories fabricated by the leaders.

Patriotism is about love for one's country and its values. However, we don't get to choose the country to be born in. If I had to choose a country I would like to feel patriotic about, it would be Finland which gave me advanced education and lots of opportunities to make my contribution to this world. In my view, patriotism that is dictated from above is as fake as anything else that attempts to force love.