

Three young women born in the Soviet Union find their way to Cato

## From Russia with Freedom

**T**he Soviet Union represented the antithesis of the Cato Institute's principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace. Cato podcast reporter Anastasia Uglova describes the Soviet Union, her country of birth, as a place where "the concept of choice was foreign."

She is one of three Cato staffers who were born in the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. Although many of their former countrymen are still hesitant to accept the concept of choice that comes with a free market, these three women hope that they are representative of a younger generation of ex-Soviets who embrace liberty.

Anna Krasinskaya, the editor of Cato's Russian-language website, [www.cato.ru](http://www.cato.ru), was too young to remember living under the USSR. But she recalls the perestroika era of post-Soviet Russia vividly. "I remember watching commercials at the time about privatization," she said. "But what happened was that a few people who were most influential grabbed everything up very fast. Privatization became scary because it was not explained enough."

Through her work at [www.cato.ru](http://www.cato.ru), Krasinskaya now tries to educate Russians and others about the difference between a corrupt "crony capitalism" and the true free market system. She believes the work will be hard because of what she sees as a cultural bias among Russians in favor of governmental authority. That bias, she says, explains why "there are still people in Russia who think Stalin was a great leader." Krasinskaya cites the high approval ratings of the Putin regime as a sign that in Russia there is "an idea that power is just good. People trust power, as opposed to the distrust found in the West."

How can this mindset change? Uglova is clear about the Soviet Union's impact on

her intellectual development: "I don't think I would be a libertarian if I hadn't been born in Moscow." But she added that her experiences as an American were also instrumental in her conversion to libertarianism. Because her family was fortunate enough to have a comfortable lifestyle, and she had nothing to compare it with, for a

her the power of the free market, and the power of ideas to create social change. "People given access to ideas will realize there are other means." Uglova now puts that philosophy into practice at Cato, where she records interviews with Cato scholars and then beams these ideas out to the world on the Internet.

But like Krasinskaya, Uglova is disturbed by many Russians' nostalgia for the old days of communism. According to her, many people over 40 in Russia think, "at least we had money under the Soviet Union; now we have to fend for ourselves." But she also believes that the younger generation is more "entrepreneurial" and has taken to post-Berlin Wall liberty with more vigor than its elders.

She is not alone in this assessment. Yana Vinnikov, who works in development for Cato, was born in Ukraine in 1982. She left that country for Texas not long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but on a recent return visit she was impressed by the number of people her age who are also skeptical of government authority. "I think Eastern Europe has more

libertarians than anyplace else in the world," she says.

Vinnikov is hopeful that the former Soviet bloc will continue to supply the United States—and Cato—with young thinkers who have a special insight into the benefits of a free society. "If more of them started coming over, you'd have a lot more libertarians in the United States," she says.

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Anastasia Uglova, Anna Krasinskaya, and Yana Vinnikov

her long time she did not see her childhood in Russia as particularly unfree. She left Russia with her family in 1992, when she was eight years old. But on a return visit to Russia as a teenager, her impressions changed. "I realized what a sham it was and how pathetic it was compared to living conditions in America."

This experience, she says, confirmed to