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## Street protests. Msgr. Pezzi (Archbishop of Moscow): “The people's discontent deserves immediate answers”

The Russian people are voicing their discontent, and apart from a few exceptions, they are doing so peacefully. Russian political authorities must now listen to the voice of the people, take their cries seriously and above all provide concrete answers. In a phone interview with SIR the Archbishop of Moscow, Msgr. **Paolo Pezzi**, analysed the situation in the country that remains a source of concern for Europe and the rest of the world, in the light of protests that flared up following the return of Alexey Navalny and the arrests of demonstrators throughout the Russian Federation. **Msgr. Pezzi, what is happening?** *First of all, we must point out that not only young people are taking to the streets, but also families, adults and the elderly.* Thus the protest does not involve only a specific part of Russian society, but is in fact widespread. Secondly, the latest protests clearly stemmed from developments in Navalny's case following his return from Germany where he was being treated. But from a broader perspective, I think that what we are looking at here is the manifestation of discontent. In this respect today's protests and those of the past few years, generally appear to be different from those of the 1990s. At that time there were signs of hope and renewal. What emerges today, however, is discontent. **Discontent over what?** *It is primarily related to the way in which the State is managing the current situation in the country, which is partly linked to the long-standing problem of corruption.* Russian authorities are prosecuting cases of corruption on an almost daily basis, but it appears to be an unending malady. The people have unfulfilled expectations that things will change, but in fact they never do. There is constant talk of fighting corruption, but corruption ultimately just continues to spread. The pandemic broke out against this backdrop. In my opinion, it was handled well, but in some regions of the Federation there was very little information. The gravity of the health crisis was never properly communicated, nor were the number of people infected, with confusing data that left everyone perplexed. This lack of clarity led to widespread discontent. **Is the country's economy holding up well?** Nowhere in Russia was the economic issue predominant in the street protests. In some places, the unease was linked to political decisions regarding the choice of some governors over others. However, it cannot be denied that the economy is facing a serious crisis, and the global economic downturn is not helpful. But, I repeat, the economic and financial crisis was not on the protesters' agenda. **The issue at stake was the lack of freedom of opposition, and Navalny somehow represents this discord.** I consider the Robin Hood role that the West attributes to Navalny to be somewhat exaggerated. Having said this, more convincing and concrete answers to protesters are expected from the State. Simply regulating the manifestation of this discontent by law, merely saying that all is well and that there are no problems, is not enough. Society demands more concrete signs today. Despite few cases of overreaction, most people took to the streets in a peaceful and civilised manner. *Their discontent should be taken seriously, it cannot be overlooked as if it did not exist. Nobody is happy with the present situation, that's a fact.. Despite few cases of overreaction, most people took to the streets in a peaceful and civilised manner. There again, I think that government authorities should see the urgency of providing certain answers.* **Such as?** I don't know. I must also say that it is not the task of the Church to give indications. To me it's important to remember that we should not lose sight of, or rather rediscover, the principle of the common good that lies at the heart of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Or better still, rediscover the idea expressed by the Pope, even recently, when he says that daily steps must be taken for the common good, for human fraternity. I consider this to be the approach and the perspective we should adopt.