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From civic protest to
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the case of Russia

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case of Russia***



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From civic protest to political reform: the case of Russia

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ABSTRACT: The article is focused on the set of mass protest meetings in Russia in 2011-12s, which led to substantial shifts in its political system. To understand the case, the article analyzes the changes in international and domestic contexts. An analysis of global and national contexts of these meetings-turned-movements, their values and goals, disposition of forces, and phases of its development the author came to the following conclusions: (1) contemporary Russian society is split into numerous adversarial groups: the central vs. the provincial; the ‘new middle-class’, a challenger of the above changes, vs. the adherents of stability; the TV-people vs. the internet-people; the internationalists vs. the patriots; the radical patriots vs. the responsible nationalists; (2) a network-based protest movements are being rapidly formed nationwide; (3) in their efforts to spearhead these movements the old-model democratic oppositionists fall behind the network leaders both ideologically and tactically; (4) the government is stepping up pressure on the opposition forces, while the changes in the political system it offers are more of cosmetic character; (5) the emergent ‘new middle-class’ is yet too small and politically immature to initiate the overcoming of fundamental duality in the historical evolution of Russian society: a modernization breakthrough – a slow and painful retreat – a new head start.

. What it was and what has been at stake?

In October 2011 — May 2012, for the first time after perestroika (ie after 1985-91s) Russia was embraced with mass protest meetings. Having begun as civic protest, they quickly acquired a political character. A real political opposition has emerged and has got access to political arena. It has been a serious challenge to existing political regime. From the bird-view, it was a set of mass protest meetings across the country against the unfair campaign of parliamentary and presidential elections lasted almost half-a-year. But it is rather superficial and one-sided view. Actually, we were dealt with a highly transformative systemic phenomenon with changing aims and forms of collective action. It began long before the first mass protest meeting and still not ended. Initially, the mistrust to the existing electoral procedures has been at stake. This mistrust grew gradually, expressing itself in local protest actions, mobilisation of already existing social movements, first of all human rights movement. But this cycle of protest actions had not been a movement in a strict sense of the word (with clear-cut goals, written programs, etc.). Rather, it had been a *mass resistance movement* which was very diverse in ideology and action repertoire, but united by the said mistrust. This mistrust may have open (petitions, marches, rallies) or overt forms (protest voting or rejection from it at all). Nowadays, when the above electoral cycle was over, and new president and parliament (the State Duma) initiated some steps toward more democratic political system, the protest cycle seems ended as well. But the sharp feeling of injustice has remained. The Solzhenitsyn's ethical imperative 'To live without lie' come to the forefront. It means that mistrust to the basic principles of existing political system still remained and it would engender new forms of opposition's activity. Naturally, every next protest meeting generated the new form of the state response. Therefore, we were actually dealing with the developmental *process of struggle* between the state and pro-Kremlin movements, on the one hand, and their political opposition, on the other. In one way or another, a reform of Russian political system is at stake.

2. A 'new middle-class' as the collective actor and its constituency

The period of 2000s was the time of intensive empirical study of the processes of social stratification in Russia and in particular of the evolution

of a middle-class (Anikin, 2009; Golenkova, Igitkhanan and Orekhova, 2010; Golovlyanitsyna, 2009; Gorskov, 2011, 2012; Lapin, 2011; Tichonova, 2007; Tichonova and Mareeva, 2009; Yavlinsky and Kosmynin, 2011). Basing on these works, I define a ‘new middle-class’ as a part of Russian middle-class which is engaged in the sphere of informational production and, accordingly, is actively embedded in various social networks and network communities. I attribute to this class those involved in innovational practices, ie those who is capable to take decisions and to assume the responsibility for them; those who prepared to creative activity beyond the prescribed norms and procedures. The crucial point is that the expectations of this class could not be met by existing regime.

‘New middle-class’ is mostly represented by young people (20-35 years old), who lived in Moscow and some largest cities of Russia. As a rule, they grew in families in which both parents have a higher education. Members of this class are engaged in science, education, private business or in various NGOs, though this fact is usually missed by the majority of researches of social stratification. But this is a principled fact because in the cases of social conflicts these NGOs are often transformed into the SMOs, that is, into the nuclei of protest movements. Among the meeting attendants one could observe a lot of liberal professionals. It is indicative that nearly a half of the ‘new middle-class’ were jobless or were forced to become blue-color workers during the crisis of 2008-09s. These people are politically active because have a risk to repeat this sad experience of ‘downshifting’ in the run of forthcoming economic crisis. They are politically active for the reason that their satisfaction in their labor and quality of life are the lowest among all categories of modernizing countries in the world (Lapin, 2011).

It is necessary to distinguish this ‘new middle class’ from another new specific middle-class which shaped in 1990s at the expense of extra-income from the selling of natural resources. This class is a kind of service-class subjected to the ruling elite (Yavlinsky and Kosmynin, 2011).

3. Shifts in national and global contexts

The said mistrust is both tightly bound with turbulent context, national and global. The looming second wave of the economic crisis; entry into the WTO, which is fraught with complete conversion of a good many branches of economy; the volatility of exchange rates and other uncertainties

in economic sphere. The situation at the world political arena is not promising as well. A series of ‘colour revolutions’ and coups in North Africa and ex-Soviet countries as well as the ‘Occupy Wall Street!’ movement still troubling the Russian establishment. Next, the growing threat to Russia from the south brought about by the anticipated withdrawal of the NATO contingents from Afghanistan; the mounting political frictions with the UNO and leading Western powers engendered by Russia’s position in relation to Syria; smaller-scale but sensitive frictions with China and Japan. On the whole, the geopolitical map of the world into which Russia is embedded, is changing actually before our very eyes. Russia is presently holding firm to Europe by its ‘oil sleeves’, but for how long? [1].

Home affairs are lacking stability too. I spoke about the burden of past problems in my previous paper (Yanitsky, 2011). However, during the ‘fatty years’, when the working population’s living standards were improving and any conflict could be put out using oil dollars, society seemed to be more or the less homogenous because the greater majority of the people accepted the public contract offered by the government: ‘we pay you, and you do not interfere in our affairs’. Besides, the mass media had been inculcating an idea upon Russian society that the superrich live in a world of their own and all the rest live separately from them. As long as the population’s welfare was on the rise, such social order appeared to be legitimate and even natural. But the past and forthcoming crises raised the degree of public dissatisfaction: why has it fared ill only with us while they fare well as before? Here a great role was played by the proliferation of living on credit to which the Russians had been absolutely unprepared and because of which a large number of borrowers who lost their money and health joined the ranks of those who were socially concerned and irritated.

In the run of protest actions it is became clear that contemporary Russian society has long been split into numerous antagonistic groups: the large city’s residents vs. those who lives in the provinces; the ‘new middle class’ vs. the adherents of stability; the TV-people vs. the Internet-people; the internationalists-democrats vs. the patriots-statists, responsible nationalists vs. ultra-nationalists, and so on. And each of these groups has serious claims on the government. All in all, Russian society *is divided into two large groups*. The major part of Russian society is *budgetniki*, ie people who lives on salary. Except high-ranked managers, the majority of them are poor, ill-educated and immobile workers and civil servants (office employee), who

lived in numerous decaying small towns and villages in the depth of the country [2]. A subgroup stands close to them is the wasted people: drunkards, drug addicts, spongers, tramps and hobos. The former's fear of the future and the latter's dissatisfaction with their existence sharpen the general feeling of uncertainty. Since they both live under the sign 'let it not be worse', they are *the partisans of the idea of stability*.

In institutional terms, military-industrial complex, oil-gas, and agricultural complexes, regular forces and so called independent trade unions are the stronghold of Russian conservators. As Igor Jurgens, the director of the Institute of modern development, stated, 'their <leaders> perceived the very word "modernization" as something hateful for them' (Jurgens, 2012: 13). The true 'new middle class' is displeased at the absence of social lifts and opportunities for opening private businesses, corruption and all-round bureaucratization of social life that hamper their social progress and making a decent living in general. The idea of 'normal life' and honest labour are accentuated in the political discourse of this advanced group.

Honest labour is very important notion in Russian culture. From pre-Soviet times onwards, honest labour meant work in strict accordance with particular technological norms and standards, without deception, delays, and without all that what might be called a 'symbolizing work' (a kind of symbolic behaviour) which today became widespread in Russia. Recently, honest labour practically ceased to be a measure of individual wellbeing and a source of public good having been ousted by the practice of goods and benefits distribution by the employers. The whole atmosphere produced by media and corrupted business tells to the young people that it is much easier to swindle, to steal, to bereave, to catch property belonged to somebody else by sheer force even to merry advantageously, etc., than to earn money by honest everyday labour.

Labour remuneration as an economic category was replaced by *payment for service and loyalty* to the boss or political regime, that is, by a political category, and at the same time made into a criterion of promotion up the social ladder. This shift also entailed gradual cancellation of economic and social remunerations for past employment. Honest labour as a pledge of social recognition and promotion up the social ladder shrank to the minimum which produced an additional source of dissatisfaction and irritation.

Inadequate performance of the labour institution and its derivatives (trade unions, technical safety services) is to a great extent accountable for the accumulation of social unrest and psychological tension. The growing number of accidents and disasters, non-motivated acts of violence and murders, large-scale adulteration of foodstuffs and drugs, and, what is most important, the endless chain of fraud and extortion cases in financial and other spheres – all this taken together means that *no safe places have been left* in the everyday life space; there remain only more or less dangerous places.

Finally, two sociopsychological factors of dissatisfaction should be mentioned. The former is that the gestalt of the ‘favourite leader’ shattered and even those who loved it got bored with it (Radzichovsky, 2012). Taking into consideration the age-old Russian tradition to sacralise supreme authority, its delegitimation is a very serious destabilizing factor. The latter is mistrust again. The government simply stopped paying attention to it. ‘...So many stillborn empty slogan-like campaigns have been engineered by the rulers over the past decade: “modernisation”, “commercialisation”, “transformation”, “intellectualisation”, “nano-technolisation”’ (Gurevich, 2011: 16). But How will all this improve people’s sociopsychological well-being had not been addressed at all.

4. Accumulation of a critical mass of protest

An illusion persisted in Russia that if something had not been shown on central TV, it not happened at all. Two events put a stop to wishful thinking: forest and peat fires in Central Russia which TV could not keep silent about, and arrangement of aid to victims via the Internet, which boosted the potency of networking and, what is even more important, imparted a new quality to it (Yanitsky, 2011a). The internet has made public the government’s incapacity and reluctance to perform its functions.

And so the protest movement started to expand steadily beginning in 2010. At first, there emerged small seats of protest, then protestors began to unite into regional and local coalitions and, finally, series of mass protest meetings combusted in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities [3]. The general trend: transformation of social, environmental and others civic protests into political ones [4]. Another feature: their network affiliation, to which the traditional Russian power vertical had been absolutely unprepared.

Surprisingly, the ruling party United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*) practically disappeared from the arena of public politics all of a sudden. The feeling of a mass of people exclusion was multiply enhanced by the public statement concerning exchange of chairs that had been made in advance by the ‘ruling tandem’: V.Putin will be president and D.Medvedev will be prime minister (what is really happened in May 2012). The people called this deal ‘tiny casting’.

An All-Russian Popular Front was urgently set up in parallel with, or rather in substitution of, the ruling top that had been moved aside by the rulers themselves. Putin, the acknowledged political leader of the country and its new president, headed it and delegated guidance of the ruling party to the ex-president D. Medvedev. And the longer the government was irresponsible to protestors’ demands, the more explicit and persistent the latter’s political demands became. The people came to understand that the state machine had fully alienated itself from civil society and lived by its own laws.

Then, the idea of modernization in Russia had ‘suddenly’ faded away somehow and vanished from the front pages of newspapers and TV news programmes. The key figures of the Institute of Modern Development that had been specially set up to translate this idea into concrete programmes and projects of modernization likewise left the public arena. And judging from Putin’s pre-election promises what might be expected is just a conservative project of Russia’s modernization (Yanitsky, 2011b). Eventually, elections to the VI State Duma (the parliament) held in December 2010, which civic organizations appraised as being falsified, topped off formation of the critical mass of protest [5; 6].

5. Models of the mass protest movement

My further considerations are based on recent work of the US sociologist K. Ash (2011) who analyzed models of protest movements in post-communist countries. Ash states that in these countries civil society took on the role of a challenger to the power of the state and of an imperative for the functioning of a democracy. By creating non-state associations civic organizations created the capability to confront and repel the forces of an intrusive state. Organizations evolved and built networks with one another, which then retained the capability of mobilizing and challenging the policies of a

government. This permitted opposition forces to organize and to demonstrate their strength during protest cycles (Tarrow, 1995: 54-61).

Then, Ash distinguishes three modes of interpreting the emergence of these movements. The first, advanced most prominently by Valerie Bunce, Sharon Wolchik and Mark Beissinger, proposes that the color revolutions spread through a process of diffusion from other successful movements in Europe and around the world. These scholars argue that seasoned organizers from successful movements collaborated with aspiring democratizers in unconverted countries to evangelize the 'electoral model', or non-violent protest against electoral fraud by an incumbent government efficient in directly causing a successful revolution. Instead, scholars such as Lucan Way, attribute protest revolutions to a breakdown in authoritarian patronage and coercion structures, saying that, 'regimes with little coercive capacity...have had far more difficulty coping with even modest protest.' Accordingly, it is evident that only regimes with large financial constraints were overthrown by a color revolution and relatively well-financed regimes held on to power and survived post-election challenges (Way, 2008).

A third group of scholars, notes Ash, stress individual motives in participating in protests as fundamental to understanding electoral revolutions. This direction can be traced back to analyses of the non-violent protests that brought about the fall of many communist governments in Eastern Europe in 1989. 'Revolutionary bandwagoning' was the most influential of the individualistic models to explain the rationale for protest. The model proposed that each individual in a country had a certain degree of discontent with the incumbent government. However, considering the threat of repression was strong under communism, these individuals had no incentive to dissent unless they felt that their anti-communist principles trumped the consequences of protest.

All the above three interpretations are applicable, at least partially, to the period of mass protests under discussion. The general atmosphere of 'colour revolutions' spreading, the 'Arab Spring' in the first place, played a mobilizing role here (Korotaev et al., 2011). The 'Occupy Wall Street!' movement that swept over the USA and EU also produced its effect. The second interpretation is true too because the regime has been repressive 'point-wise', that is, only against those who in the opinion of the ruling elite posed a direct threat to the regime (like, for instance, the banned National-Bolshevik party). As to the protest meetings, the authorities tried to hush

them up and even prohibit, but they sprang up over and over again. However, the third conception appears most adequate to the Russian situation.

First, for the reason of forced introduction of market economy and propagation of liberal ideology Russian society have become highly individualized in the last 20 years. Therefore, each individual citizen assesses the risk of his/her participation in each of the meetings independently. Second, the younger generation of protestors is the strangers to the fear that is still lurking in the minds of the older generation. Third, the emotional factor is a very strong driver. Russian sociologists seem to have so strong faith in the omnipotence of the market and its sociological derivatives, such as ratings, ranks and so on, that they come to forget about two more motives and at the same time *resources* of mass protest: moral and emotional. The politically engaged experts have got so much accustomed to converting any social act into roubles or dollars that they miss the driving force and impact of *human emotions*: resentment, indignation, and anger incurred by the unjust status of the majority of the population.

Not only Russians are discontented though [7]. I think nobody might suspect me of calling for levelling but the slogans of today's protestors in Russia and all over the world state clearly: one percent of the population has everything and the remaining 99 percent have what is left [8]. Does not what is happening today, 25 years after *perestroika*, mean the onset of a new wave of struggle for civil rights, but now on the scale of entire civil society? However it might be there have been no *upheavals on such a scale* and calls to fight for changes in the current social order over the past quarter of the century. And virtual networks act as a powerful multiplier of the feelings of anger and resentment. It became again clear that the principle of social justice is an indispensable prerequisite to the formation of a democratic system.

6. Evolution of the protest movement

Meeting as a mass congregation of people at the moment when some critical situation took shape has always occupied a special place in Russia's historical and cultural tradition. In the official Soviet tradition, such event was a 'demonstration', that is, an organized procession of people [9]. Since the events discussed here unfolded in the capital city, the question of where a

mass meeting was to be held acquired primary importance and actually triggered conflicts between the authorities and the organizers of any meeting [10]. The matter is that Moscow has a ring-radial master plan since the city's foundation, with the Kremlin and Red square in the centre. The Kremlin, Red square and the adjoining streets retained their sacral implication in the mass consciousness of post-Soviet Russia: the closer to them, the closer to the centre (and the symbol) of state power. No wonder the authorities always tried to prevail on meeting organizers to hold their meetings in places away from the Kremlin [11].

The four meetings in Moscow [12] organized by one and the same group of opposition politicians under the slogan 'For Fair Elections' that would be then emulated countrywide marked a new phase of mass protest movement. There have been practically no politics in the European understanding in Russia in the past decade. 'The Parliament is not a venue for discussions,' declared speaker of the Duma of the previous convocation publicly. The country only had political technologists, administrators and commentators of decisions made 'at the top'. The politicians whom the incumbent government was qualifying for many years as non-system opposition were in isolation. Now they joined with a mass of discontent people. It was the large attendance at the meetings ('the digit mean all' as journalists would say later) coupled with discussions in various social and political media, publications in the press and in the Internet by the known persons, the appearance of new public figures on the public arena that signified that Russian society 'had wakened up politically'.

Why did lots of people come to the meetings? Here are the judgments of independent civic experts. First, the people were disunited (ie individualised), they had not gathered together for a long time. Second, the people came not only to express their discontent but also to listen and to learn. In particular, to hear and understand whether the organizers of a meeting were capable of working out any sound program of action at least for the moment. Third, the protestors included the people who do not want to emigrate, who want to do their job here at home. Fourth, today, as never before, it is not so much the result that is important as the process – the process of starting to bring in social and political changes. And, as a matter of fact, 'those who have not come to Bolotnaya <bog square> missed History. They let it pass them' (Romanova, 2011:3).

The protestors' slogans were: 'We've had enough of you, turn it up!', 'Russia without oligarchs!', 'Putin, go away!', 'Return fair elections!', 'Why the Olympiad when we need houses to live in!', 'Prague is closer to us than Pyongyang', 'We'll come again and there'll be much more of us!'. White ribbons, a symbol of protest movement, were tacked to cars, coats, bags, balloons.

What changes took place in these several months? For one thing, the number of participants was gradually growing (the notorious 'digit'). If the first two meetings could be classified as *general civic*, the third protest fell into three different meetings held separately in Moscow, each having its own political colouring: democrats, liberal democrats and ultra-liberals together with a few representatives of the first-generation Russian dissidents. The authorities' treatment of the protestors changed too. While the gathering at Chistye Prudy boulevard was tightly controlled by the police, the meeting on prospekt akademika Sakharova and the next meeting on Bolotnaya square went on smoothly, the order being maintained jointly by meeting organizers and the police. One more important aspect: the progress of protestors' political demands. Starting with the slogan 'For fair election to the State Duma' the protestors then advanced the slogan 'For clean and honest living' and laid down a whole package of demands (see Table 1) [13]. After that the organizing committee of the meetings proposed to create an instrument of public control over the conduct of presidential election. A 'Moscow league of voters' was set up to be followed by similar associations in other Russian cities. A coordination committee of these associations was formed soon after. The committee appealed to the leaders of the Duma parties asking them to issue credentials to public watchers permitting them to control the voting process and to obtain primary records from the local electoral commissions.

Last but not least was the use of the Internet as a major instrument of mass mobilization and accumulation of resources. All organizational work on the preparation and conduct of meetings has been done via the Twitter, Facebook, Livejournal, 'In Contact' (*V kontakte*) social networks as well as through the sites of social movements and public associations. The public 'purse' of donations for the organization of meetings, including platforms mounting and equipment, audio gear, etc. was also created in the Internet and was therefore absolutely transparent [14].

7. The problem of a movement leader

A change in the context implies generational change and, consequently, replacement of movement leaders. There are still a good many politicians on the national political arena whose leadership mentality practically has not altered over the past 25 years. Such mentality is inherent chiefly to the communist, liberal democratic and social democratic factions whose leaders have been already elected to the new State Duma. One more thing is of no less importance: the mentality of leaders of the so-called non-system opposition is altering [15], but *slower than the changes taking place in society required*. Democracy is initially a process of learning, and it is an infinite process.

To begin with, the tactics of the leaders of the old political opposition lagged behind the tactics of the leaders of new, civic opposition, that is, network tactics which were practiced by rank-and-file activists. Second, opposition politicians wanted fair elections, chiefly in order to create equal competition positions for all political parties, while network-based organizations of civil society had been long practicing ‘non-political politics’ (U. Beck) resting upon horizontal links. The alternative agenda was worked out precisely here. That is why the former’s tactical lagging behind the latter was quite logical. The former, the ‘first-wave’ opposition politicians, fought for the construction of a fair parliamentary and presidential election mechanism, whereas the latter, relying on local protest groups, wanted to create a mechanism of *countrywide* network pressure on government structures aimed at democratization of the whole political system. Third, for the first-wave opposition politicians, part of whom had already been members of the parliaments of previous convocations, engagement in politics was akin to playing a card game: having completed (lost) the first round, let’s start a second one.

As to maturing ‘network opposition’, the continuity of action was crucially important. They had to build up an extra-parliamentary pressure continually because this was the only instrument of political struggle available to them to which the authorities did respond. At the same time, the ‘network opposition’ opposition was to enlighten and to mobilize their local allies and sympathizers. A round table modelled by the Polish Solidarity of the 1980s, suggested by some of the first-wave oppositionists and to which government representatives consented, would have been a step back since the right to draw up an ‘agenda’ belonged to the power elite. Fourth, the employment of direct democracy methods is probably unavoidable at a certain

stage of such struggle. These are not mass protest meetings only but, more importantly, structured pressure on all echelons of power. Fifth, the question when 'it is too early' and when 'it is too late' stood prominently in the Russian political discourse from the early 20th century. This question keeps its relevancy today. But another, no less important question, is practically not discussed: what political colouring should network power assume? It will be democratic, conservative, national-patriotic or some other? In my view, if network power establishes itself in the foreseeable future, it will be anything but democratic. Because 'democracy' in the current Russian version means mass top-down organized support to the first candidate to presidency and the policy he is going to pursue.

As to the leaders of the 'new middle-class', they want political freedoms and fair competition, but lack the sense of responsibility and empathy to 'others' – they are individualists. Neither do they have an ideology of their own. This middle class has been formed in consumer society and therefore it is alien to Russian culture. There are leaders in fashions, pops, sports and glamour life in consumer society, but there are no real political leaders because of the absence of competitive environment where they might have been raised. The pre-election debates featured on TV looked more like TV shows than serious discussions on the political course and social programmes. The 'new middle-class' have not been briefed in democracy and do not know what types of democratic leaders come to the fore in the periods of political upsurge. Democracy had been proclaimed in Russian Federation for more than 25 years on end, but almost all declarations remained on paper.

On the other hand, the above young people paying short visits to foreign countries actually saw only the façade of Western democracy. There had been no democratic traditions in tsarist Russia for many centuries except for peasant communities perhaps. There may be a long way from the onset of de-sacralisation of rulers today to democracy as a fundamental principle of social system, an immense distance in fact. There are no new brilliant political leaders so far. In the opinion of Vladislav Inozemtsev, a leading Russian political analyst, today's leader 'must be not a politician who has dropped out of power earlier, but a young agitator who is striving to get there... Russia needs its own Vaclav Havel, an unblemished intellectual who has never collaborated with the government and has never been drawn in it' (Inozemtsev, 2011: 3). But Russia has no such people – all Russian intellectuals have already been involved in power in one way or another. Finally, in

my opinion, *democracy as a way of life* is closely connected with the quantity and quality of labour of its bearers. The foundations of democracy cannot be built under conditions of redistributive economy (Bessonova, 2006), where the value of the honest labour of creative minority is ignored.

8. The power elite response

As many democratic observers and organizers of the above protest meetings stated, in order to extinguish a protest wave the power elite usually employed three successful tactics. The first was deception and secrecy. The authorities promised the concerned public to investigate the case, to set up special commissions (a parliamentary commission of inquiry, in particular), they invited politically engaged experts, worked in full secrecy and many months later said that the protestors had been wrong and they, ie the authorities, were right, acting in strict accordance with law. The second tactics aimed at breaking the unity of leading protest forces into numerous competing groups. The publicity (*glasnost*) of all actions of the too adversarial sides could be the only remedy against such tactics (Parchomenko, 2011). Last but not least was the setting up of the All-Russian popular front and formation from it of a mix of counter-movements, rallies and meetings in support of the existing political system.

Theoretically, the authorities could use several strategies to meet the protestors' challenges. First, they could try to guide the process of social renovation themselves. But for this they had to leave the cocoon and stop shying away from their fellow citizens. Another variant: to get away by chucking a few important but not key figures. Plus to mobilize Russian provinces by spreading a myth that the protestors are rich, uppish and fed-up people. A more advantageous variant might be leadership of movement toward modernization, but this necessitates a partner-like dialogue with the opponents, to which the government is not accustomed yet. Finally, the variant of 'tightening the screws' in the atmosphere of all-out corruption is viewed by experts as an unlikely one (Gorbachev and Samarina, 2011: 1, 3).

What actually happened? At first, the government pretended that nothing had happened at all: there had been and would be protests, but the government strategy would remain the same notwithstanding. Taking the lead of the opposition movement was out of the question. One more princi-

ple of the power elite is known well: ‘we do not give up our fellows’. Therefore the protestors’ proposal to remove a few top functionaries had not been accepted either. The attempt of Kremlin political technologists to present the situation as if mass protests in Moscow had been organized by sated and corrupt bourgeois against labouring and poor provincials appeared to be too risky politically for the officials themselves. Neither had the revivification of the external enemy image, that is, representation of the opposition as the US agent allegedly attempting to trigger a new ‘orange revolution’, brought about anything except a chill in the US relations with Russia.

Then a different instrument, tested more than once, was put into operation: counter-meetings under the slogan ‘We have things we don’t want to lose!’ organized by supporters of the present ruling elite. This tactics proved effective. Putin’s supporters mobilized not only the forces of the ruling party and the All-Russian Popular Front but also huge numbers of population groups dependent on the government (ie the abovementioned *budgetniki*): teachers, the medical profession, public service personnel, etc. What was bad was that these people were compelled to attend the meetings and rallies (sometimes they even had to drive from other towns), and this fact soon became known (Garmazhapova, 2011: 3-7). It was a real shock, for instance, to both teachers and students. Nevertheless, the opposition leaders understood well that the authorities were able to recruit practically an unlimited number of ‘participants’ who would attend such counter-meetings. More than that, the new tactics for raising the per cent of pro-Putin votes had been invented by Kremlin technologists. It just appeared that there were a lot of plants of uninterrupted production cycle whose workers should vote in accordance with authorized list of voters at special electoral districts (Mostovszchikov, 2012).

After presidential elections campaign it became obvious that: (1) there is no changes in power elite. One could observe the exchange of the known cadres between new presidential administration and new government. The tandem cocoon remained the same; (2) the fact that the prime-minister D. Medvedev has become the official leader of the United Russia political party whereas the president V.Putin has remained an unofficial leader of All-Russian popular front pointed out that the tandem would want to construct be-party political system as in the US; (3) the process of multiplication of protest forms primarily emerged in capitals across the country confirmed the idea that capitals still remained the engines of social and political changes in

Russia; (4) during the Spring 2012, the protestors showed its flexibility in using various forms of action repertoire: pickets, meetings, permanent and mobile camps, walks along the city's boulevards with prominent writers, artists, painters as well as the counter-claims and litigations. All in all, in this period the protest actions embraced more than 30 cities. It is indicative that protest organisers in order to avoid clashes with the police used to practice carnival form of collective action open to all who wish to join it; (5) but this carnivalisation does not mean the decline of self-organisation. On the contrary, the new forms of self-organisation mushroomed. Each initiative group of the movement developed a particular form of activity ranging from the project the 'Observer' (of the electoral procedures of the past and forthcoming elections) to protestor's camps with disputes and lectures and full services including voluntary guards. The further the more an internet is used as a universal tool (for communication, fundraising, learning by doing, etc.); and (6) finally, the leadership of the movement is still an open question. On the one hand, the leaders of its radical wing who were sentenced many times have authority over a good deal of protestors. On the other hand, the young middle-class protestors move forth the leaders from their ranks. They incline to support the public figures which offer the concrete, mainly short-term, goals and programmes.

9. Conclusion

The very fact that for the first time after democratic upsurge (ie after perestroika) Russia was encumbered with mass protest meetings is rather indicative because it has already a set of political consequences. First, it means not only that Russian society is politically awakened, but that its confidence in the current political system has been exhausted. It became clear that substantial changes in existing political system are at stake.

Second, the protest mobilization revealed that contemporary Russian society is split into numerous antagonistic groups: the centre vs. the provinces; the 'new middle-class', a challenger of changes, vs. the adherents of stability; the TV-people vs. the Internet-people; the internationalists vs. the patriots; the radical patriots vs. the responsible nationalists. It means that mobilization has revealed the true disposition of social forces.

Thirdly, a new type of oppositional social movement – network-based – is being rapidly formed nationwide. This movement won a place on the political arena. More than that, it institutionalized in the form of new legal political parties; it engendered various forms of civic control over the electoral processes at all levels; and initiated the establishment of groups of the same control by the internet civic observers. Finally, the protest mobilization and its aftereffects forced the power elite to embark on the way of dialogue with opposition.

Fourthly, while the opposite part having the mighty financial and administrative resources at hand it nevertheless was forced to change its position from ‘full rejection’ to ‘preemption’ and to even the dialog and compromises with its adversaries. But to such a dialog when a steering wheel is kept in the hands of power elite.

Anyhow, the burden of the past keeps weighing upon the situation. The government is stepping up pressure on the opposition forces, while the changes in the political system it offers are not of a strategic character. As to the ‘new middle-class’, it is too small and politically immature to initiate serious political changes. It is indicative that the mass protest movement under consideration is not homogeneous and linear in character; there is no proportionality between its causes and its strength as well. This movement has a variety of goals and is heterogeneous as to the social and political forces involved, who act together in a short run only. Nevertheless, it is important that the set of protest waves had united internet-based ‘centre of command’.

What will be happening in the foreseeable future? The opinions of Russian analysts differ. Some hold that we shall see ‘retreat and restoration’ and ‘tightening of the screws’. Others think that the government will get weaker in the next six years, will make some concessions and try to appease the people in the habitual way: first give money to the one side, then to the other, and so on. Still others believe that Russia is back in February 1917 politically. All analysts agree that the government will try to fragmentise the opposition, while some are sure that the opposition has already divided. In my view, a new wave of mass political protest can be provoked only by sharp destabilization of the geopolitical situation (landslide of oil prices, international sanctions) or the belt-tightening policy, which would hit the masses of socially vulnerable population. Then it would be not a protest but

rather something akin to a ‘Russian revolt’ [16]. There is a probability of the first, and the second, and the third. However, as Russian social historians suggested a good while ago, in the longer term of a few decades we shall more probably be observing a specifically Russian ‘cycle’, that is, alternate motion: a modernization breakthrough – a slow and painful retreat – a new head start (Akhiezer, 2006). But such is a picture seen in historical perspective. As to the people, they ‘have to make existential choice actually every single day. They have to survive overcoming apathy – the reaction of the collective unconscious to the terrible 20th century,... to go on living and not degrading but becoming more sophisticated – that is how the task for the Russian intellectual stands today’ (Mirzoev, 2011: 20).

Notes

1. Most probably, this will not last long. That is why the ideology of Eurasian community has been called into play once again by the power elite, this time with a definite purpose: to recreate the core of the former Soviet Union. ‘In the last months <of 2011 – *O.Ya.*> Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan achieved considerable progress in the matter of cooperation by signing a declaration on Eurasian economic integration’ (Zhiltsov, 2011: 11).

2. In accordance with some unofficial calculations, there are about 60 thousand small settlements without population at all.

3. In this way, large cities confirmed once again their role of political and social centres even in the presence of a network community.

4. During one year the protest environmental movement ‘Save Khimky Wood’ in a Moscow suburb turned from a one-point drive for preserving an oak grove into a symbol of movement against the destruction of Russian living environment. A. Chirikova, leader of the drive, became one of the leaders of the all-Russia movement ‘For Fair Elections’ in December 2011. One more example: A small volunteer group led by Doctor Liza who helped victims of forest and peat fires in 2010 turned into an international public charity organization ‘Fair Aid’ in 2011 (<http://doctorliza.ru>).

5. *Novaya Gazeta* published letters of students who allegedly had been organized and rewarded for voting 12 times for one and the same candidate to the State Duma (Garmazhapova, 2011: 3-7).

6. For the technologies of revealing the scope of falsification and the positions of citizens themselves with regard to election stealing see a description of the ‘Citizen Observer’ project. The author points out in particular that ‘today, along with the fast growth of the number of new observers, the old ones convert, if and when necessary, into legal advisers on election disputes’ (Oreshkin, 2012: 8). That is, there happens that about which many Western analysts have been writing: the emergence of citizens-experts and citizens-advisers is a real way to democratise society (Fisher, 2003).

7. For instance, how quickly the Americans have forgotten their own history. I mean the African Americans struggle for civil rights led by Martin Luther King in the 1960s. African Americans attained equal civil rights then (Branch, 1999).

8. The American protestors’ slogan ‘We are 99%’ corresponds to the slogan of their Russian counterparts: ‘We are 140%’ meaning that the protestors were expressing the demands of 140 million citizens of the Russian Federation.

9. Protest camps were practised in post-Soviet Russia, but mostly in the provinces. Chiefly radical environmentalists and anarchists used this form of protest.

10. Russian law stipulates not announcement-followed but sanction-followed procedure for holding meetings. It is a quite strict procedure: the applicants must notify the authorities in advance about the place, time (from – to) and the number of attendants. Violation of any of these requirements can entail a fine or administrative arrest of both meeting organizers and attendants who have violated this order.

11. The tradition of mass action embodying the unity of government and people in the communist period was broken in post-Soviet Russia: on the Red Square in Moscow (close to the mausoleum with the body of Vladimir Lenin), a skating-rink was arranged, concerts of Russian and visiting pop stars, and the like. Political acts were strictly forbidden there. Political events

remained to be the prerogative of highly-placed authorities and a source of mass consciousness splitting.

12. Meetings in Moscow were held on Chistye Prudy boulevard (November 14, 2011, 35,000-50,000 participants), Bolotnaya square (December 10, 2011, 35,000-50,000), pospekt akademika Sakharova (December 24, 2011, 70,000-100,000), a rally in Yakimanka street, then a meeting on Bolotnaya square (February 4, 2012, 80,000-120,000 participants), on Pushkin square (March, 2012, about 15,000), etc.

13. Later these demands were made more radical: liberation of political prisoners too, a system political reform, pre-term parliamentary election in 1.5 years, pre-term presidential election in 2 years.

14. This way of gathering donations at once quashed all accusations to the effect that mass meetings in Russia had been allegedly inspired by US State Department and other foreign sponsors.

15. The non-system opposition are aggregated political parties and movements denied registration by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and therefore unable to take part in the legal political process, primarily in elections to the State Duma and other representative government bodies.

16. Such like outburst of protest emotions was caused in its time by the Russian Federation Government decision on 'Monetization of benefits'. In the near future, in consequence of Russia joining the WTO mass dismissals are quite probable owing to the closure of uncompetitive industrial enterprises and bankruptcy of part of farms.

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