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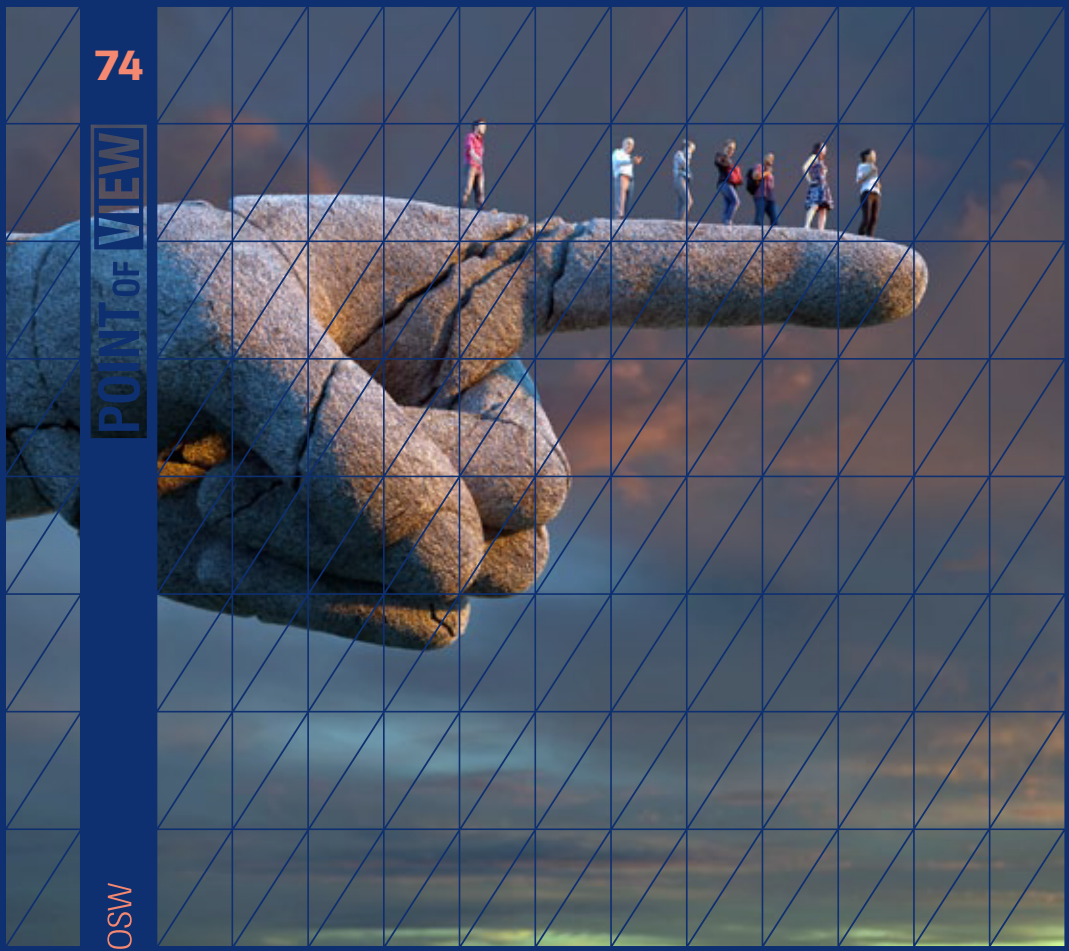
POINT OF VIEW



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EXCESS CULTURAL BAGGAGE

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NUMBER 74
WARSAW
JUNE 2019

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OSW | CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES
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Photobank gallery/Shutterstock.com

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ISBN 978-83-65827-38-8

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KEY POINTS

- Russian society's attitudes, values and activity remain largely rooted in the country's traditional socio-political culture that crystallised over the centuries. This culture assumes a hierarchical model of organisation of the state, a concentration of powers in the main centre of power, and the subordination of society as a whole and of each individual to the state. The attitude of citizens towards the authorities, for its part, is a combination of two partly conflicting attitudes. On the one hand, society manifests its subordination to the ruling elite, which results either from people's support for it or from the feeling of helplessness which the individual has towards the state and the conviction that there is no alternative to the existing socio-political order. On the other hand, citizens maintain a high degree of distrust and distance towards the ruling elite. Social diagnoses that focus on Russia frequently refer to the term "doublethink" coined by George Orwell. It denotes the phenomenon of combining seemingly contradictory norms and beliefs: rational thinking when it comes to everyday life and sober criticism of the authorities along with susceptibility to ideological and political manipulation.

- In contemporary Russia, the traditional socio-political culture has left a legacy of conviction that the political leadership, headed by the president, are the only body empowered to act, capable of making decisions and entitled to make them, while society is subordinate to the government and acts as a petitioner appealing to the goodwill of the decision-maker. The conviction that this model is natural for Russia is upheld by an extensive network of actors, both those who deliberately foster the state-centric vision (representatives of the state administration, PR advisors, journalists) and average citizens, teachers, parents, who unknowingly reproduce the view that certain things are a "natural course of events" for Russia. As a result, society's dissatisfaction with the condition of the

state is frequently accompanied by a feeling of helplessness and disbelief in any change of the present system.

- However, increased standards of living, technological progress and open borders boost the mobility of a portion of Russia's society and generate a gradual change of people's mindset. The development of the social fabric is particularly evident in big cities: people have learned how to carry out grassroots initiatives, to become involved in political activity, including at the level of local government, and in various other grassroots projects focusing on urban life, charity, environmental protection and other issues. Horizontal social networks have emerged, activists have gained legal awareness and organisational experience. Over the last decade, street protests have become a permanent element of the political and social landscape in Russia. These include politically-motivated protests as well as protests focusing on urban, social and environmental issues, against specific decisions taken by the federal and local level authorities. In addition, in-depth sociological research points to gradual changes in people's awareness (including their disappointment with the paternalistic model of the relationship between the authorities and the citizen) and an increasing willingness to become actively engaged in various initiatives, including in politics. Social mobilisation has become a fact.

- However, this mobilisation does not affect the relationship between the state and the citizen, or the Russian model of governance. Despite the above-mentioned changes, over the last decade civil liberties in Russia have been curbed, while the quality of state governance has declined. Alongside this, there has been a decrease in the transparency of decisions taken by state administration bodies, an increase in the scale of corruption, and a deterioration of the investment climate. Moreover, the government reacted to the Russian 'social awakening' with a wave of repressive measures and legal restrictions

intended to curb political liberties. The comprehensive nature of the repressive policy pursued by the Kremlin is meant to increase the cost of engaging in independent initiatives. Ultimately it does prevent the emergence of a critical mass of dissatisfied citizens, also by triggering the increased emigration of individuals who are critical of the present situation in Russia and unable to achieve their professional or private goals. Thus active opponents of the regime are filtered out of society. The authorities are also capable of interfering in the dynamic of social processes. This was evident during the annexation of Crimea, which boosted the legitimacy of the Kremlin's actions and for several years diverted society's attention from Russia's internal development to focus it on an imperial agenda.

- The expansion and institutionalisation of social activity in Russia is also being prevented by long-term factors which include the above-mentioned 'petitioner-like attitude' society has towards the authorities, deeply rooted passivity, the atomisation of society and mutual distrust of its members. All of these are a legacy of the USSR. Another impediment is a poor organisation culture and the weakness of the institutions established to defend the rights of citizens (courts, the media, trade unions). As a consequence, society's actual discontent remains largely passive or is defused in everyday life situations, while the protests remain local, spontaneous and mainly short-lived.

- Russia's changing society is clashing with an authoritarian regime which intends to remain in power using increasingly repressive methods. Despite the fact that the authorities have much greater potential at their disposal, society confronts this with its own 'weapon', i.e. it withdraws its support for the ruling elite including the president, intensifies its protests and manifests the need for a change. However, more will be needed for this discontent to translate into organised, long-term actions and civic structures which in the long term could

empower society. One factor needed would be the emergence of suitable conditions which would foster the spread and crystallisation of discontent, and the right leaders would also be a requirement. Moreover, most dissatisfied Russians expect "things to quickly change for the better" and if a change brings shattered hopes and unclear consequences, society may once again return to long-term 'domesticated' cultural codes and patterns of behaviour. Recent decades have shown that political crises, such as the attempts to change the existing system or even the collapse of the state, ultimately revived the urge to return to a centralised, hierarchical model of governance, which is proof of the sustainability of Russia's traditional political culture.

INTRODUCTION

Among the key processes which have been taking place in Russia in recent decades, special attention should be paid to social mobilisation, i.e. the developing habits of taking up grassroots activities, the emergence of horizontal social networks, the large number of formal and informal civic initiatives (both political and non-political). This mobilisation should not be analysed separately from the evolution of the model of the state as a whole, which – especially since 2012 – has seen an increase in repression and a decline in economic efficiency. The main question posed by this study concerns the conditions that make social mobilisation and the citizens' dissatisfaction with the condition of the state only result in short-term and local outbreaks of protest and not into a change in the entire model of governance. In this context, the text considers both the current and personnel-related factors, and the long-term cultural, social and political factors.

The text opens with a description of long-term beliefs and social attitudes that make up the socio-political culture and affect the relationship between an average resident of Russia and the authorities, fellow citizens, and also the citizen's own role and responsibility. The following chapter discusses the changes in and the development of the social fabric, which are happening in spite of the unfavourable cultural conditions and repressive policy of the government. This chapter also points to a gradually evolving social awareness, including people's disappointment with the patriarchal model of society. Chapter three presents the strategy the authorities have adopted to curb citizens' activity, involving an escalation of repressive measures and legal restrictions, and the results thereof, including the emigration of white-collar workers that leads to an outflow of active individuals from Russia. Ultimately, the text tries to assess the two clashing trends: the durability of the patriarchal socio-political culture, boosted by the policy pursued by the government, and the germs of discontent and 'new thinking' – and their possible development.

I. PATH DEPENDENCE: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURE

The attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour of contemporary Russians are to a large degree rooted in the traditional socio-political culture which crystallised in the Soviet era and in the period of tsarist Russia. Over its history, Russia has developed a hierarchical form of self-organisation in which all powers to supervise are concentrated in the main centre of power. This stands in contrast to the Western model which is pluralistic, open to peer supervision and ensures a balance between various actors[1]. According to the Almond & Verba typology of political cultures, the Russian political culture could be defined as a "subject culture"[2]. This is characterised by: limited political activity from the major portion of society (combined with its little interest in politics[3]), the use of repressive measures against the opposition, the propagation by the authorities of an ideology that requires society to be subordinate to the state. In this typology, the relationship between the population and the authorities is a combination of subordination (which often results from the feeling of powerlessness) with indifference and alienation. Even if it is dissatisfied, society frequently sees no opportunity to change the existing regime and remains subordinate to the ruling elite. This resonates with the statement by Russian sociologist Boris Dubin that Russians may love or hate the current regime but they see no alternative to it, just like they see no alternative to the seasons of the year.

The subordination of society and the individual to the state has been one of the permanent elements of the Russian state

1 Н. Захаров, *Социальные регуляторы деятельности российского государственного служащего*, Издательство РАГС, Москва 2002.

2 A theory of political cultures formulated by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in their book *The Civic Culture*, Princeton University Press, 1963.

3 According to a survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2014, a mere 12% of Russians claimed that they have any impact on the state's decisions and 85% said the opposite. 19% would like to be more active in politics and 75% were not interested in any political activity.

model since it fully developed in the 16th century. This model re-emerged following each crisis; the most recent example of this was following the collapse of the USSR. The primacy of strong, personified power, the absence of society's supervision of the ruling elite, the lawlessness and impunity of the state administration are all fundamental characteristics of the Russian system of power[4]. Yuri Levada, an eminent Russian sociologist, pointed out twenty years ago that the function of the authorities as the most important, 'axis-forming' social institution is deeply rooted in tradition and this remains valid today[5]. A contemporary incarnation of this rule is the belief that **the authorities, primarily President Vladimir Putin, are the only body empowered to act, capable of initiating important processes and making decisions, while society is subordinate to the government and a petitioner appealing to the goodwill of the decision-maker**. Even for oppositionists, Putin remains the ultimate authority whom they criticise or refer to. Russian society, for its part, is characterised by widespread **feelings of powerlessness and helplessness towards the authorities**[6]. According to researchers, due to its weakness and amorphousness, society turns to the authorities whenever it needs a 'leader' or a 'saviour'[7]. Even in a situation of accumulated discontent and an outburst of protest, **the role of petitioners assumed by social groups reduces their threshold of expectations and makes the protests die out, even when the authorities merely offer partial or symbolic concessions**.

4 Л. Гудков, 'Советский человек в социологии Юрия Левады', *Общественные науки и современность* 2007, no. 6.

5 Ю. Левада, 'Феномен власти в общественном мнении: парадоксы и стереотипы восприятия', *Мониторинг общественного мнения*, September–October 1998.

6 In a survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2012 to investigate the relationship between citizens and the state, 19% of the respondents said they feel that they have some impact on the state's decisions, whereas 79% were convinced that they have no impact whatsoever.

7 Т. Ворожейкина, *Развилки истории: был ли (есть ли) у России выбор?* (published by Liberal Mission Foundation).

The traditional vertical structure of the 'governors' and the 'governed', rooted in the political culture, is being upheld and solidified by a giant narrative and propaganda machine which is not always public and official. According to cultural scientist Daniil Dondurey, messages and cultural codes permeate into social awareness through a number of channels: they are encoded in the language, traditions, historical remembrance, popular culture. He coined the term "smysloviki" (the creators of meanings)[8], thereby making a reference to the term "siloviki" (uniformed officers, functionaries of law enforcement agencies). While siloviki are the hard power of the state used for physical protection of the government and for repression against opponents, **"smysloviki" are the state's soft power which generates beliefs favourable for the authorities and instils them in people's minds – such as the need to preserve the *status quo* and the lack of any alternative to the "eternal order of things".** It is worth noting that "smysloviki" include spin doctors hired by the Kremlin, state officials, journalists and scriptwriters, as well as large numbers of unaware citizens – teachers, parents – who unknowingly propagate the belief in what can be described as the "natural course of events" and instil this belief in the minds of their employees, students and family members. Vladislav Surkov, advisor to President Putin, is an example of an official "smyslovik". In his policy statement published in February 2019, he criticises the "illusion of a choice imposed by the West" as regards Russia's development opportunities, calling it an "imported chimera". He advocates the "realism of determinism" and a separate sovereign path of Russia's development whose optimum example is "Putin's Russia"[9]. In pop culture, a recent example of "smysloviki" activity is the film series "The Sleepers" about sleeper agents of Western intelligence, who include

[8] Д. Дондурей, 'Смысловики могущественнее политиков', *Ведомости*, 8 June 2016.

[9] See В. Сурков, 'Долгое государство Путина', *Независимая газета*, 11 February 2019.

Russian oppositionists, human rights defenders and bloggers. The US uses them to trigger a 'colour revolution' in Russia and when this fails, they are sent to Ukraine. Dondurey argues that the omnipresence of "smysloviki" and their **wide-ranging, albeit not always deliberate, activities makes Russian 'feudal matrices' durable and revived after any major crisis**.

Russian society is characterised by high **susceptibility to manipulation by the authorities** (see below "The flexibility of Russian public opinion") as well as a readiness to endure economic hardships. **The annexation of Crimea happened in the period when President Putin's approval rating had started to decline and there had been unrest within the elites and in society. The decision to annex Crimea triggered euphoria and for several years successfully diverted society's attention from domestic problems, the decline in living standards and socio-economic deterioration**. Manipulation is facilitated by **imperial attitudes**[10] which are rooted in Russian mentality and to a large degree serve as compensation; the vision of Russia as a superpower is intended to compensate the citizens for their economic and social hardships[11]. However, geopolitical campaigns such as the annexation of Crimea and the military intervention in Syria are rather short-lived and require new actions and new areas of expansion. When their impact dwindles, Russians begin to attach greater attention to domestic problems, mainly pauperisation and the unpopular decisions of the authorities, such as the pension reform and increase in prices, as evidenced in recent years[12].

[10] 75% of Russians are convinced that Russia is a superpower (an increase of 27 percentage points versus 2012, or Putin's return to the Kremlin), 88% say that Russia should maintain this status (10% are of the opinion that Russia should not aspire to be a superpower). Levada Center survey conducted on 17 January 2019.

[11] 'Мечты о прошлом. Почему кризисы приводят к реанимации советских представлений', 14 April 2016.

[12] See J. Rogoża, 'Cracks in the marble. Russians' trust in Putin on the decline', "OSW Commentaries", no. 297, 13 March 2019.

The flexibility of Russian public opinion

One example of the Russian public opinion dependence on propaganda campaigns carried out by the authorities is its attitude towards the US over the last 25 years. Public sentiment has remained closely correlated with the Kremlin's current interests. A survey conducted by Levada Center to investigate the attitude of Russians towards the US since 1997 has shown that this attitude has been subject to major fluctuations. The high approval rating recorded in 1997 (72%) later dropped to 32%, following NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, which was accompanied by a sharp anti-American media campaign. It rose again in 2002 (69%) following the visit of President George W. Bush to Russia, which President Putin described as an event that helped to "achieve a new quality of bilateral relations", and fell again to 27% following the US's intervention in Iraq. In 2008, a drop to 23% was recorded following the Russian-Georgian war, which was accompanied by increased anti-American rhetoric on the part of the Kremlin. In 2011, in the period of the Russian-American 'reset', the proportion rose to 64% to finally decline to 18% in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea (due to an anti-Western campaign in January 2015 the proportion dropped to its all-time low of 12%)[13]. Similar fluctuations in the approval rating, correlated with the state's official rhetoric, were recorded as regards Turkey. In 2015, following the downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish air force, the proportion of Russians who considered Turkey an enemy rose from 1% to 29%. A year later, when the dispute de-escalated, it dropped to 8%[14].

One of the main messages the authorities communicate to society to prove the relevance of the myth of the "good tsar and bad boyars", is the belief that **a strong President Putin is the Russia's**

[13] 'Россия и Запад', a survey conducted on 2 August 2018.

[14] '"Друзья" и "враги" России', a survey conducted on 14 June 2018.

primary decision-maker, its tough albeit fair ruler. One instrument to solidify this image of President Putin is the formula of televised 'direct lines' connecting the president with the nation. He directly interacts with citizens, deals with their requests and appeals, criticises and punishes government officials and managers responsible for specific problems[15]. This belief is also evident in the slogan "Putin, help [us]!" which has been displayed during many protests, and in the fact that criticism is voiced mainly towards the ministers or the regional authorities, not the President[16]. Many social groups struggling with various problems consider "handing their humble plea to the tsar" to be a more effective method of solving the problem than organising a protest. **Protest, i.e. open confrontation, is viewed as a risky action and a challenge to an almighty state, posed by an undeniably smaller and weaker partner.**

Russian society is not convinced that social pressure can be effective and that a dialogue on equal terms with the authorities is possible. Most frequently, protest is a manifestation of citizens' desperation when all other methods of coping fail[17]. Ordinary Russians will resort to protest only when the problem becomes physically or financially unbearable as in the case of the

15 For years, the Kremlin's narrative has been based on the split of the ruling elite into Putin, the president of "the common people", and his collaborators who are involved in various forms of abuse and conceal the truth about the condition of the state from him. See for example 'Россияне заметили коррумпированность бюрократии'. In a survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2015, 56% of the respondents were convinced that Putin's collaborators do not present him with accurate information regarding the domestic situation, see 'Вера в Путина и цифры'.

16 The slogan "Putin, help [us]!" is regularly presented during protests and desperate attempts by protesters to attract attention to their problem. See for example the action organised by construction workers involved in the construction of the Vostochny Cosmodrome and the protest organised by residents of a town in Kuban region requesting the renovation of a bridge.

17 According to the theory of political cultures, in societies characterised by a parochial culture, protest breaks out whenever a certain critical limit of problems and repression from the authorities is crossed ("the cup of bitterness flows over").

hospitalisation of children poisoned by gas vapours from the landfills in Volokolamsk or the risk of truck drivers going bankrupt following the introduction of high road charges[18]. Most Russians will more likely try to adapt to the new, less favourable circumstances by all means – by earning their income in the grey economy, growing their own fruit and vegetables, seeking additional sources of income and using alternative medicine (various healers) when their local health care centres are closed down etc. The authorities for their part **try to persuade the public that any collective action is pointless or even counterproductive and stoke citizens' fears** of engaging in such actions by toughening the penalties for taking part in unsanctioned protests, persecuting the protests' leaders and attendees.

Only last year society's confidence in a tough but fair president was shaken. After his 2018 decision to increase the retirement age by five years, which was opposed by more than 90% of the population, the president recorded a serious decline in his approval rating[19]. However, **society's dissatisfaction is largely passive and limited in scope, and lacks demands for system change**.

The fact that citizens acknowledge the superiority of the state and its officials is not tantamount to active support for them. Russian society's attitude to the authorities is contained in two seemingly contradictory attitudes, associated with the above-mentioned concept of a "subject political culture". On the one hand there is a **feeling that there is no alternative to the existing socio-political order combined with passive waiting for the authorities to take the initiative to improve the situation.** On the other – there is a **widespread and permanent distrust of government officials**. When discussing this phenomenon, sociologists from the Levada Center frequently refer to the term "doublethink" coined

[18] See J. Rogoża, 'A stinking business. Environmental issues, protests and big money in the waste business in Russia', "OSW Commentaries", no. 83, 27 August 2018.

[19] See 'Cracks in the marble…', *op. cit.*

by George Orwell, meaning the ability to combine seemingly incompatible norms and beliefs. They point to the fact that the Russian version of doublethink has shaped a man distrustful of the state, yet sufficiently flexible to bear control and external pressure ("Russian patience"), one who is "socially infantile", unable to act in collective solidarity, ready to adapt to changes by reducing his expectations and living standards, and thus easily manipulated[20]. **The product of "doublethink" is an "amalgam man"**[21] – a contemporary Russian citizen who is driven by rational, progressive motives when it comes to their private life and living standards (they use new technologies, manage their household budget in a rational manner, make savings in foreign currencies, the US dollar in particular, are highly critical of the authorities etc.). However, they 'switch off' their common sense when it comes to the political system of the state, historical memory and foreign policy, and prove to be highly prone to manipulation by the authorities.

Passivity is another deeply-rooted feature Russians have inherited from the Soviet era and earlier periods in Russia's history. Decades-long suppression of any initiative and brutal elimination of opponents, alongside the top-down, command-based nature of the most important political, economic and social processes, have formed a permanent reluctance and inability to show enterprise and commitment (the popular saying goes "инициатива наказуема" – "initiative will be punished"). In the Russian mentality, passivity coexists with an attitude of expecting others to solve the problems and the absence of a feeling of responsibility. It is typical of Russians to put the blame for their situation on others, mainly those who occupy higher ranks in the social hierarchy, and also on all types of 'external forces'[22]. It is worth noting that **society usually remains**

[20] Л. Гудков, 'Советский человек…', *op. cit.*

[21] "Amalgam man" is a notion coined by Lev Gudkov, director of Levada Center. Л. Гудков, 'Рационализация повседневности и слепые зоны', 30 November 2018.

[22] Л. Гудков, 'Советский человек…', *op. cit.*

passive both in its discontent (relatively few protests compared with the scale of the problems) **and its support for the authorities**. Despite deeply rooted imperial sentiments, even following the annexation of Crimea, society's euphoria recorded in opinion polls was largely passive. Rallies intended to show support for the annexation were organised by the authorities, their attendees were bused into specific locations and received a fee for their attendance. Other pro-Putin and pro-government rallies (the so-called *putings*) were also organised in this manner, including rallies held in 2012 following Putin's victory in the presidential election. **This characteristic is double-edged – it considerably reduces society's potential, especially as regards its anti-government sentiment. Furthermore, it compromises society's official support for the authorities because it is not combined with the public being ready to show active support for the government and to carry out its orders.** Most Russians manifest a similar, indifferent attitude towards declared values (and values that are advocated by the authorities). For example, despite claiming that Russia is a stronghold of traditional and Orthodox values, a negligible proportion of Russians regularly go to church and Russia tops the global list of countries with the highest rate of abortions and divorces[23].

Social atomisation is another attitude which developed as a result of several deep socio-political shocks in the 19th and 20th century. **Several factors have damaged the horizontal social networks, increased**

[23] 77% of Russians say they believe in God; 68% of them declare themselves Orthodox Christians, of which 14% go to church and receive sacraments at least several times a year (Levada Center survey, 2013). According to data compiled by Russia's interior ministry, in 2013 less than a mere 4% of the population took part in Easter celebrations. Moreover, according to the OECD Russia has the world's highest divorce rates, which is also evident in UN statistics. According to data compiled by the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, in 2017 in Russia there were 1.05 million marriages and 611,000 divorces. Russia tops the global list of countries with the highest number of abortions (in Russia abortion is legal and refunded by the state) – it is ranked first in proportion to the number of inhabitants and second in absolute numbers (after China), UN figures contained in the most recent report on abortion published in 2013.

society's distrust of the law and institutions of the state, and boosted mutual distrust and fear among citizens. These include: the abolition of serfdom and large-scale urbanisation in the 20th century, the 1917 revolution that undermined the former order, widespread terror resting on the practice of denouncing fellow citizens to the security agencies, and a few decades later – a crisis and collapse of the Soviet state. The catastrophic consequences of political and social breakdowns have implanted a strong **fear of changes** in the minds of many Russians. Despite the declared collective model of society, the authorities of the USSR deliberately maintained social atomisation because it fostered citizens' loyalty to the state. In a comprehensive survey of the condition of Russian society, conducted since 1989, sociologists from the Levada Center have noted that many elements of the "Soviet man's" identity have survived in contemporary Russian society[24]. The legacy of the previous system includes a suspicious attitude towards anything new and complex, and distrust of fellow citizens and of the authorities. The reason behind this is past experience which convinced Russians that the authorities treat them instrumentally and use them to attain their goals[25]. Paradoxically, despite the fact that society has limited confidence in the authorities, the deeply rooted distrust of fellow citizens makes Russians more prone to manipulation by the authorities, at least in the scope which is necessary for the authorities to remain in power[26].

Another permanent problem is the **weakness of institutions**, which has become worse during Vladimir Putin's presidency. This

[24] A Levada Center project entitled "Average Russian man" carried out from 1989 to 2004 in cooperation with VCIOM. For the most recent publications in the series see: http://www.levada.ru/tag/sovetskij-chelovek/.

[25] 52% of the respondents claim that the authorities lie to citizens, another 33% say that the authorities sometimes lie and sometimes they tell the truth (a mere 12% of the respondents are of the opinion that the authorities tell the truth). This level of distrust is considerably higher than the level of distrust of fellow citizens – 25% of the respondents are convinced that their family, friends, other people they know lie to them (37% believe that they tell the truth). Levada Center survey conducted on 11 February 2019.

[26] Л. Гудков, 'Советский человек...', *op. cit.*

phenomenon refers not only to the weakness and superficiality of political institutions (elections, the judiciary, the media), but also to the **imperfection of property rights as the fundamental right which fosters citizens' subjectivity**. Neither the average Russian citizen nor a billionaire or a public figure have the guarantee that their civil rights will be respected – their property rights, personal freedoms, the right to physical integrity. Not only are citizens unprotected against infringement of their rights, but also such infringements are frequently carried out by state institutions – courts, fiscal services, law enforcement agencies. Individuals deprived of their assets and their liberty have included both oligarchs (the cases of Vladimir Gusinsky, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Yevgeny Chichvarkin, Vladimir Yevtushenkov and others) and average citizens who faced relocation imposed on them by the local authorities (the programme involving the 'renovation' of housing infrastructure built in the 1960s) or who went bankrupt after fake lawsuits and their companies were taken over by state-affiliated entities[27]. The weakness of Russian institutions further reduces Russian citizens' confidence in them[28]. This aggravates the above-mentioned feeling of powerlessness towards the state, the belief that the state decides on the scope of rights enjoyed by specific individuals, and the view that any resistance to this omnipotent machine is pointless.

Poor organisational culture is one element of this institutional weakness. Groups which have reasons to protest against socio-economic problems are characterised by conservatism and an inability to self-organise. Due to this, their discontent becomes the discontent of powerless social groups which are dependent on the state – public sector employees, pensioners[29]. **In Russia, institutions (mainly trade unions) which in many countries guard**

[27] See for example 'Мнение: сокращение внеплановых проверок повысит комфорт бизнес-среды', *Известия*, 5 August 2017.

[28] Russians have no confidence in institutions of the state (law enforcement agencies, financial institutions), nor in politicians, political parties and trade unions. Л. Гудков, 'Рационализация повседневности...', *op. cit.*

[29] Л. Гудков, 'Советский человек...', *op. cit.*

the socio-economic rights of citizens and channel social discontent, for example by organising large-scale protests and monitoring their duration remain underdeveloped. This is a legacy of the Soviet era, when trade unions operating in factories and offices were under the control of the Communist Party and factory management. Still today, major trade unions including the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) are viewed as organisations which are controlled by the Kremlin and are frequently used to water down protest activity rather than to defend employee rights[30]. A mere 20% of the population have confidence in trade unions[31]. Russia also has trade organisations which are independent of the authorities, however, usually their reach is local and their impact insignificant. As a consequence, society's evident dissatisfaction with the socio-economic policy remains largely passive or is manifested in everyday or family conflicts. Even when protests are organised, they are usually **local (isolated), spontaneous and brief**[32].

However, even when protest activity is initiated, it is undermined by **poor solidarity and coordination of actions carried out by various protest groups**. Each group is focused on its specific problem and unwilling to support other groups. Moreover, there seems to be a widespread belief that activity carried out by specific groups

[30] Since 2000, FNPR has officially cooperated with the pro-Kremlin party United Russia whose members include deputy chairpersons of specific trade unions. In 2016, 11 representatives of FNPR were elected to the State Duma on United Party's electoral lists. FNPR is a component of the pro-presidential National Front. In the 2012 and 2018 presidential elections, the trade unions officially supported Putin, prominent trade unionists criticised the Russian opposition and took part in actions organised by the pro-Kremlin Anti-Maidan movement. See for example В. Козлов, 'Расследование РБК: на что живут российские профсоюзы', РБК, 29 April 2016. Also SOCPROF, another major association of trade unions, closely collaborates with United Russia and opposes protest actions.

[31] A Levada Center survey conducted on 12 October 2017.

[32] В. Гельман, *Почему пенсионная реформа не выведет россиян на улицу*, «Ведомости», 29 June 2018. See also Л. Гудков, *Почему 90% россиян против пенсионной реформы, а массовых протестов нет*, 11 September 2018.

is a zero-sum game because these groups are competing for the attention and support of the authorities[33]. The lack of coordination is evident even in case of protests focused on a single problem – as seen during the protests in Moscow against the demolition of apartment blocks built in the 1960s (the so-called *Khrushchovki*), when several groups protested separately and showed no readiness to join forces. Similarly, truck drivers who organised the longest continuous strike in Russia's recent history were alone in their protest. As regards political protest, major rifts in the already small opposition camp are clear. The fragmentation of protest groups is being additionally deepened by the authorities. In the context of the pension reform, the trade unions loyal to the authorities (such as FNPR) acted to channel and dampen the frustrations of the protesters and to divert them from independent unions and the opposition.

This is combined with the **unwillingness or inability of protest groups to view their problems as an element of how the state functions as a whole**. Most frequently, the protesters only expect a fragmentary solution which would meet their demands. They do not expect any system change or openly defy it. In Russia, society still fears systemic reforms and any transformation of the state. The authorities stoke this fear arguing that any 'revolutionary' change will trigger chaos in the country, destabilise it, that power will be seized by unpredictable forces, which will result in the collapse of the state (this rhetoric is illustrated with the manipulated picture of the situation in Ukraine following the Euromaidan events). Many Russians, even if they are critical of the state leader's policy, would not demand his resignation, and are far from demanding a more profound change of the state model.

Another long-term factor which hinders the formation within society of formalised and large-scale civic structures (dealing with property rights and other) is a deeply rooted practice involving finding 'individual solutions' to problems affecting a person or a company

[33] Д. Волков, *Не только большие протесты*, «Ведомости», 6 May 2018.

by entering into secret and often illegal deals with representatives of the state. **In Russia, corruption has become a widespread and acceptable mechanism for solving a number of problems which, it should be noted, are generated by the system itself**[34]. Corruption is widespread, and many dissatisfied citizens prefer to reach for this solution rather than engage in protests which entail a political risk and do not promise to bring the desired results. It can even be said that, despite their criticism of corruption, many Russians *de facto* accept it as a kind of a 'shortcut' and a way to quickly solve many problems. The systemic nature of corruption is yet more proof for the superficiality of the Russian formal and legal framework. As the popular aphorism by the 19th century writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin goes: 'the severity of Russian laws is mitigated by the fact that obeying them is optional'.

Writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin on Russia

"If I fall asleep, wake up 100 years later and somebody asks me, what is going on in Russia, my immediate answer will be: drinking and stealing".

"In all countries, the railways are for movement, and we use them additionally for theft".

"When has it been that a bureaucrat was not convinced that Russia is a cake which you may approach freely and have a bite of?"

"Large print was used to print only unimportant words and all that was important was printed in the smallest print".

[34] В. Иноземцев, *Секрет путинского консенсуса*, World Crisis, 12 February 2015.

II. LITTLE BY LITTLE DOES THE TRICK: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Despite the durability of authoritarian, paternalistic social matrices and unfavourable conditions for the development of social activity under Putin, social capital continues to develop in Russia and there are periods of increased protest activity. **The previous 'social boom' happened during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012), who declared the need to modernise the country, extend civil liberties and humanise many fields of the state's functioning. However, this 'thaw' ended when Vladimir Putin returned to the Kremlin. Aspirations of urban groups were suppressed by a wave of repressive measures.** The participants in the 2011–2012 protests, mainly members of the middle class, were punished, intimidated and branded a "fifth column" separate from the nation, "traitors" and "US agents". Moreover, the very idea of organising a protest against the Kremlin was discredited. The annexation of Crimea that followed in 2014 put an end to the ongoing debates on Russia's development to become a liberal-democratic country, and resulted in the consolidation of most of the society around the Kremlin. In addition, Russians were discouraged from engaging in protests by the aggressive anti-Ukrainian narrative which presented the popular uprising on Kyiv's Maidan as action inspired by external forces and inevitably leading to anarchy and the collapse of the state[35]. Active social groups which had formerly expressed their aspirations and hoped for change, became apathetic and discouraged for the next several years.

Since the end of 2015, there has been a gradual revival of social protests. The first large-scale economically-motivated protest was the strike of truck drivers against the introduction of road charges (the Platon system). The protest covered 40 Russian regions, gathered together many thousands of road carriers and lasted for

[35] Д. Волков, *Не только большие протесты*, *op. cit.*

more than a year. In subsequent years, many Russian cities witnessed protests organised by: farmers, teachers, opponents of the demolition of apartment blocks built in the 1960s, and cheated clients of development companies and banks. Other protest actions included political rallies organised by Alexey Navalny gathering from ten to fifty thousand protesters, and protests in Ingushetia against the planned change of the border with Chechnya. In 2018, the biggest protests included the rallies focused on environmental problems caused by overloaded waste disposal sites that lack adequate safeguards, as well as rallies against an increase in the retirement age[36]. **The geographic spread of the protest has expanded**: whereas formerly most protests were organised in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and several regional capitals, by now the protests have spread to most large Russian cities and have reached the North Caucasus[37]. There has also been a **generational shift** in the ranks of protesters, which is evident mainly during opposition rallies organised by Alexey Navalny.

A build-up of problems directly affecting the majority of citizens has been the reason for the reactivation of protests. These problems include a decline in real income[38] combined with an increase in various charges and quasi-taxes, an exacerbation of environmental (and health-related) problems, a five-year increase in the retirement age which forced some citizens to work longer and prevented others from combining their old age pension with supplementary sources of income. **The fact that people tend to efface the memory of the tough reaction of the authorities to**

[36] See J. Rogoża, 'Protests against pension reform in Russia', "OSW Analyses", 25 July 2018, and J. Rogoża, 'A stinking business...', *op. cit.*

[37] М. Завадская, 'Протесты как новая нормальность', Riddle, 27 September 2018.

[38] The estimated drop in Russians' income over the last five years is more than 12% and its main causes include economic slowdown (triggered by the exhaustion of the economic model based on raw materials), sanctions against Russia imposed by the West following the annexation of Crimea, and Russia's counter-sanctions. For more see *Putin for the fourth time. The state of and prospects for Russia (2018–2024)*, "OSW Reports", Warsaw 2018.

the 2011–2012 rallies might have been another incentive to protest. Increasingly frequently, protesters **are backed by local government officials and representatives of the local authorities.** This results from the fact that independent activists are increasingly frequently being elected to municipal councils and from an increased awareness on the part of the local authorities (for example as regards environmental problems) triggered by decisions of the regional or central level authorities[39].

The **legal awareness** of civil rights activists, including street protest organisers and attendees, is growing year on year. As the authorities tighten up laws on assemblies[40], the protest organisers disseminate information to potential participants about their rights (e.g. the right to check a police officer's ID) and about the obligations of law enforcement officers. Protesters are instructed how to behave if they are detained, during police searches in their apartments, how to write a complaint and what legal aid can be requested. Protesters receive support from organisations involved in monitoring the cases of the violation of the right to peaceful assembly and educating civil rights defenders[41].

The protests attract media attention but they are not the only field of social activity which is not controlled by the state. **The**

[39] Ilya Yashin, opposition politician and chairman of the council of Moscow's Krasnoselskaya district, offered his support for truck drivers. Several representatives of local level authorities in Moscow Oblast including Pyotr Lazaryev, mayor of Volokolamsk and member of the Communist Party, and Aleksandr Shestun, governor of Serpukhovsky District, expressed their support for protests focused on environmental issues.

[40] See J. Rogoża, 'Restrictions versus protests: the government hinders opposition activity', "OSW Analyses", 25 July 2012.

[41] At present, the best source of information on detentions during rallies is OVD-Info – a project run by the Memorial association modelled on the "Chronicle of Current Events", a bulletin published by Soviet dissidents in 1960–1980. Several years ago, the Sakharov Centre and the "Russia Behind Bars" organisation (Русь Сидящая) established the School of Civil Defenders to train the so-called public defenders who are authorised to take part in court trials and offer help to the accused. These and other similar projects are funded from foreign grants and by way of crowdfunding.

most important process recorded over the last decade is the ability to take collective action to defend civil rights, which is expanding and encompassing successive social groups and regions. These rights include not only political rights but also property rights, social rights etc. Over the last decade, in particular in Russia's big cities, there has been an abundance of grassroots initiatives and charity projects (helping the diseased and disabled, children, supporting animal shelters etc.), urban, environmental and educational projects, and initiatives focused on history and tourism. Many business start-ups were established alongside various political initiatives to monitor the electoral process and civil rights and to expose cases of corruption. In many local issues, these groups are able to take organised action and attain their goals[42]. Frequently, active communities behind these projects get involved in more than one initiative. For example during elections activists serve as observers and when the elections are over, they return to their usual educational and charity initiatives[43]. **In Russia, activities intended not only to defend one's own interests but also to offer selfless help to strangers are a novelty and an exception against the backdrop of widespread attitudes of social atomisation, mutual distrust and a perception of social interest in categories of gains and losses** ("my gain is your loss")[44].

[42] See А. Скрыльников, 'Как жители Гагаринского района борются с московскими властями', МБХ Медиа, 7 February 2019. In 2013, residents of Moscow's Gagarinsky District formed an association which managed to prevent the construction of a shopping mall alongside around 20 other development and transportation projects. This district is a model example of civic activity – its residents mainly include academics and professionals and the 2017 district council elections were won by the opposition – the Yabloko party won 100% of the seats.

[43] See the research by Jan M. Dollbaum from the University of Bremen.

[44] See for example the lecture by Prof. Grigori Yudin from the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences regarding permanent attitudes of atomisation and distrust, 'Кто мы — индивидуалисты или коллективисты?', Lenta.ru, 30 November 2018.

Map 1. Politically-motivated protests in 2015–2018

Regions Alexey Navalny visited (during his pre-election tour)

Cities where protests were held

Moscow 30,000	Volgograd 2,000	Khabarovsk 1,000	Magnitogorsk 500
Saint Petersburg 10,000	Voronezh 2,000	Cheboksary 1,000	Kirov 400
Yekaterinburg 5,000	Omsk 2,000	Smolensk 1,000	Tver 400
Novosibirsk 4,000	Chelyabinsk 2,000	Togliatti 1,000	Ryazan 400
Perm 3,000	Ufa 1,500	Kaliningrad 600	Petrozavodsk 400
Saratov 3,000	Irkutsk 1,300	Ulyanovsk 550	Nizhny Tagil 300
Samara 2,000	Izhevsk 1,200	Komsomolsk-on-Amur 500	Orel 300
Nizhny Novgorod 3,000	Krasnodar 1,000	Cherepovets 500	Syktyvkar 300

Sochi 300
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 200
Stavropol 200
Yakutsk 50

The emergence of the so-called 'second memory' is one manifestation of grassroots processes in the fields of education and ideology. This involves Russians' increased interest in the history of their families and regions that frequently reveal not-so-glorious pages in the history of the USSR and Russia, which stands in contrast with the so-called 'first memory', i.e. the ideological, glorious and victorious narrative promoted by the authorities[45]. One example of the 'second memory' and genuine grassroots interest is the "Last Address" project under which in many Russian cities the last residential addresses of victims of political repression are commemorated (plaques with information on specific individuals are installed on buildings). Denis Karagodin, a resident of Tomsk, played an important part in the process of how the "second memory" was shaped. His great-grandfather, a farmer from Tomsk who was accused by the authorities of spying for Japan and executed in 1937. Following several years of research, Karagodin managed to identify the names of all the NKVD officers, who had been involved in sentencing his great-grandfather to death and executing him by firing squad. The account Karagodin published online has triggered a wave of similar stories in which people shared their family stories, wrote about their repressed ancestors, as well as their persecutors and secret police informers.

Another noteworthy result of the awakening is society's **increased interest in taking part in the work of local government structures**. A large number of independent candidates ran in the 2017 election to the Moscow local government, and won approximately 15% of the seats. In Russia, local governments have limited powers and rather minor budgets. However, the activity of independent city councillors in Moscow has demonstrated that the work in municipal councils can be a good 'school of civic activism' for them, and they can impact a number of local issues,

[45] Комитет Гражданских Инициатив, *Какое прошлое нужно будущему России?*, see also: A. Kolesnikov, 'A Past That Divides: Russia's New Official History', Carnegie Moscow Center, 5 October 2017.

reduce the scale of malpractice on the part of the city hall and its executive structures in specific city districts[46].

The dynamically growing crowdfunding market fosters the development of the above-mentioned initiatives – many projects are implemented thanks to a great deal of small payments from supporters. In 2017, the value of funds transferred using this method almost doubled compared to the previous year[47]. For many initiatives, crowdfunding is becoming the only method for funding their activities including in a situation of state repression[48]. **Digital technology, including the availability of the Internet and smartphones**, is of great importance for the organisation of nearly all grassroots initiatives, including protest actions. Internet coverage in Russia is almost ubiquitous, nearly all age and income groups have access to the Internet[49]. It is worth noting that even in low-income families living in rural areas, Internet expenses have become a permanent element of their household budget. Despite the barriers imposed by the authorities, for years the Internet has been a school of civic activism and a way to circumvent a number of restrictions the authorities have imposed on social and political activity[50]. When facing

[46] 'Независимые муниципальные депутаты: чего они добились за год в Москве?', Deutsche Welle, 25 October 2019.

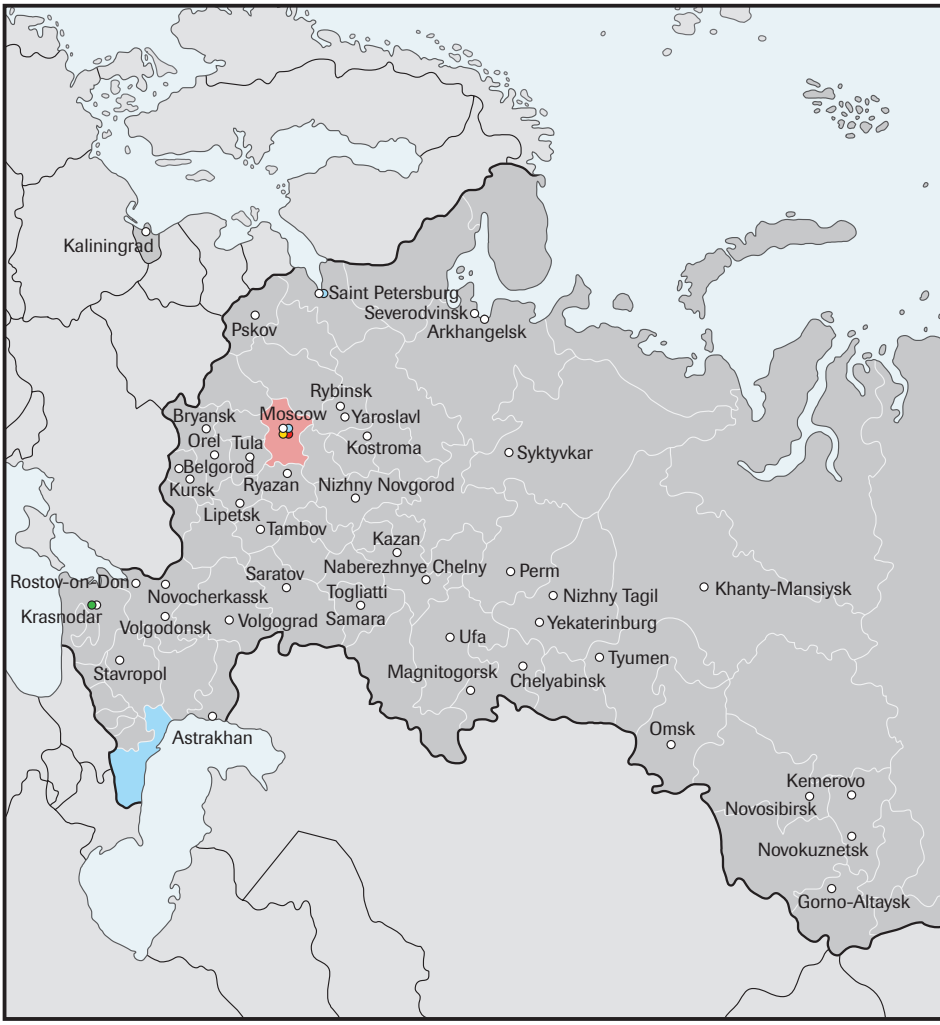
[47] According to the Russian Central Bank, in 2017 the value of such payments stood at 11 billion roubles (US$ 165 million) versus 6 billion roubles in 2016 (US$ 90 million). The bank estimates that within five years the value of such transfers will reach 1 trillion roubles (US$ 15 billion).

[48] One crowdfunding project involved raising funds for "The New Times" opposition weekly which had been fined 22 million roubles (US$ 330 thousand) for failing to meet the deadline for submitting its financial statements. This was the Russian Federation's heaviest fine imposed on a media outlet. The event sparked public outrage. As a consequence, over four days a sum exceeding the imposed fine was collected by way of crowdfunding. This was one of several similar initiatives carried out recently. For more see К. Мартынов, 'Ликвидационные штрафы', Новая газета, 27 October 2018.

[49] In spring 2018, the number of users of the Russian segment of the Internet aged 18 and older reached 74.7 million individuals, i.e. 4.3 million more than in 2017. See *Интернет в России: динамика проникновения. Зима 2017–2018 гг.*

[50] J. Rogoża, 'The Internet in Russia: the cradle of civil society', "OSW Commentaries", no. 72, 21 March 2012.

Map 2. Economically-motivated protests



- 2015-2018 Moscow – small (tens – hundreds participants) but regular protests of foreign currency loan holders
- 2016 Krasnodar – farmers took to the streets to protest against the policy of banks and large agricultural holdings
- 2015-2017 Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Dagestan – truck drivers' protests against the new system imposing higher road tolls (Platon)
- 2017-2018 Moscow – protests against the demolition of low-cost apartment buildings built in the 1960s and resettling their residents; the largest protest – 20,000 people (Moscow, May 2017)
- 2018 Moscow Oblast (Volokolamsk, Kolomna, Klin and other places) – protests against landfills, the largest manifestation – 7,000 people (Volokolamsk, March 2018)

○ 2018 (June – September), around 100 Russian cities – protests against extending the retirement age and estimated numbers of participants, including:

Moscow 12,000
Saint Petersburg 7,000
Omsk 7,000
Samara 5,000
Yekaterinburg 3,000
Kursk 2,000
Volgodonsk 1,500
Severodvinsk 1,000
Novocherkassk 1,000
Togliatti 700
Tyumen 500
Bryansk 500
Arkhangelsk 300
Kaliningrad 200
Nizhny Tagil 150
Volgograd 100
Khanty-Mansiysk 100

a problem, people go online to search for information they need, to find a 'companion in misery', to win supporters for a specific cause, to raise funds, to create a network of mutual support and to organise actions[51].

The processes described are a sign of a slow but visible change of social awareness, mainly among residents of large cities. The increasingly evident shifts in social attitudes have also been recorded by researchers in a 2018 survey carried out by the Committee of Civil Initiatives known for its accurate predictions regarding the previous major upsurge in popular protest (2011–2012)[52]. The researchers have recorded **Russian society's growing demand for change**, but at the same time they noted that this demand is accompanied by unrealistic assumptions that these changes will bring rapid improvement. According to the survey, the Russians feel a growing alienation towards the authorities, and as a solution they see opposing the state with the power of the collective united by a common interest or problem. They have observed that Russians **increasingly rarely view strong authority as a remedy** (7%), and increasingly frequently voice **the need for greater justice** (80%) understood not only as social support and the elimination of disparities as regards the living standards, but also as the equal status of all citizens before the law. Research shows that Russians feel increasingly alienated from the authorities and see the solution in confronting the state with the power of the community united by common interests and problems. Finally, there has been a major shift **in how the respondents perceive their**

[51] Usually, protest organisers and attendees communicate using dedicated contact groups on social media, including via encrypted services such as Telegram and Signal. For example during the protests over environmental issues organised in Moscow Oblast several discussion groups were created in the Telegram network to exchange information on landfills in specific locations. The messages contained not only organisational details but also links to texts dealing with environmental issues, the latest news about the decisions of the authorities, advice etc.

[52] Комитет Гражданских Инициатив, *Признаки изменения общественных настроений и их возможные последствия*, 11 October 2018.

own power to act: 94% of respondents claim responsibility and impact on occurring events, and a mere 6% view external factors as responsible. A major portion of the respondents expressed the belief that one should start by changing one's own mentality[53]. The researchers have made the reservation that further observation and analyses are needed to be able to formulate final conclusions as regards the change in social attitudes. However, they admitted that the changes in awareness, which until recently were latent, are slowly becoming apparent.

[53] This statement was supported by around 30% of the respondents, considerably more than statements containing demands for change in specific fields of life also affected by problems – health care, education, corruption etc. *Ibidem,* p. 26.

III. PUTIN'S RUSSIA: BARRIERS TO SOCIAL CHANGE

The authorities view the development and potential empowerment of society as a threat to the current system of power in which society and the individual are subordinate to the state, there is no social supervision of the ruling elite, and lawlessness and impunity of public officials are widespread. This is why in order **to prevent social discontent the government targets the mechanisms of social self-organisation whenever they grow stronger**[54]. The authorities resort to both immediate repressive measures intended to punish active opponents and intimidate others, and to actions designed to revive the traditional Russian social culture which implies the subordination of society to the state.

Periods of social awakening were followed by waves of restrictions and a curbing of civil liberties on the part of the authorities both in the legislative field and in the form of repressive measures targeting specific individuals. Following the 2011–2012 protests and Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin, the government introduced restrictions affecting many spheres of life, including the operation of non-governmental organisations (a law was enacted which introduced the status of a foreign agent), freedom of speech (restrictions on bloggers, granting media outlets the status of foreign agents, a broad interpretation of anti-extremist regulations concerning Internet activity), freedom of assembly (barriers to the organisation of rallies, toughened administrative and financial penalties, mass detentions) etc[55]. Opposition politicians and activists defending civil rights (including property right) were subjected to increased repression. The assassination of Boris Nemtsov near the walls of the Kremlin was the

[54] Т. Ворожейкина, *Развилки истории…*, *op. cit*.

[55] For more see K. Chawryło, M. Domańska, 'Strangers among us. Non-governmental organisations in Russia', "OSW Commentaries", no. 184, 28 September 2015.

most striking manifestation of this policy. The repression affected not only anti-Kremlin groups and liberal organisations but also a number of active, well-organised groups capable of carrying out autonomous grassroots initiatives. **The catalogue of actions the authorities carried out following Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin has considerably increased the cost of involvement in opposition activities or any initiatives that escape government control.**

The law that recognises organisations receiving foreign financial assistance as foreign agents has been a blow dealt to institutionalised civil activity. It introduced major restrictions on the operation of non-governmental organisations with foreign agent status which are now subject to regular and exhaustive administrative and financial inspections and receive heavy fines for even minor offenses. It is worth noting that all Russia's major organisations defending human rights have been included on the list of "agents"[56]. In 2017, the **foreign agent status was expanded to include media outlets as well**[57]. Next, **the status of "undesirable organisation" was introduced for foreign (*de facto* Western) organisations** which the authorities view as a "threat to the constitutional order". The law requires the immediate removal of these organisations from Russia, which resulted in **major donor organisations supporting the Russian third sector** being expelled from Russia. These included the National Endowment for Democracy, Open Society Foundation (George Soros), Open Russia (Mikhail Khodorkovsky) and the European Platform for Democratic Elections. Fear-

[56] In December 2018, the list of organisations with foreign agent status kept by the Ministry of Justice contained 71 names including well-known organisations such as Memorial, the Sakharov Center, the Moscow Helsinki Group, the Moscow School of Civic Education, the Golos and Dynasty foundations, the Levada Center polling organisation etc., for details see: http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx.

[57] Media outlets that received this status included Voice of America and Radio Svoboda funded by the US Congress. Due to their foreign agent status they are banned from entering the State Duma and the Federation Council.

ing that they may receive the status of an agent, many non-governmental organisations switched to informal cash settlements with their foreign donor organisations, which exposes them to a number of risks. The Russian government is entitled to obtain information on such settlements because in 2018 Russia joined the BEPS international system of the automated exchange of fiscal information to combat tax evasion[58]. **The actions carried out by the authorities have severely affected the financial potential of independent NGOs and deprived them of a major portion of foreign funds as well as funds provided by Russian private companies which now consider supporting organisations with a foreign agent status a political risk**. Since the introduction of these amendments, several NGOs have ceased to exist. Many others were registered as foreign agents and are forced to devote a lot of their funds and efforts to defending their interests in courts and complex bookkeeping, instead of their statutory activities.

Also **the right to assembly (including the right to organise street protests) is subject to further restrictions**. In 2012, penalties for taking part in unsanctioned protests were made stricter, while the possibilities of organising a legal action were further as reduced. Officially, street initiatives do not require formal consent from the local authorities which only need to be notified about them. In reality however, city mayors frequently refuse opposition activists consent to organise a protest in a specific location in the city centre (especially in Moscow and Saint Petersburg) and point to more remote locations instead. In this way, marches organised in city centres become "illegal" and administrative charges are brought against their organisers – this is why Alexey Navalny was repeatedly sentenced to administrative arrest. In December 2018, a law was enacted to toughen criminal and administrative penalties for organisers of illegal assemblies

[58] See 'Россия присоединилась к международному обмену налоговой информацией', ТАСС, 31 December 2017.

attended by minors. This can be referred to as "lex Navalny" because teenagers make up a major portion of the attendees of opposition rallies organised by Navalny.

Another commonly used instrument for criminalising uncontrolled activity, especially on the Internet, are accusations of extremist activity and inciting hatred, constituting references to art. 280 (incitement to extremism) and 282 of the Penal Code (inciting hatred). After 2012, a clear increase in the number of charges and verdicts made from these articles was observed, including for publications criticising Russia's policy towards Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, as well as those "offensive to the feelings of believers"[59]. It is worth noting that most charges and sentences concerned Internet users who re-posted information and memes originally created by other users (mostly from Ukraine) and did not publish their own content. Identification and prosecution of these users was possible owing to the cooperation of Internet service providers and law enforcement agencies. Since 2012, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications (Roskomnadzor) has been authorised to block websites which are considered to violate the law. A report compiled by the Agora organisation indicates that the number of blocked websites is growing year by year – in 2018 662,800 websites were blocked. At present **the authorities are practically capable of limiting the spread**

[59] In 2012, 103 sentences were pronounced on charges of extremism, in 2013 – 226, in 2014 – 132, and in 2015 – 203. For example, in 2016 Andrey Bubeyev was sentenced to 2 years and 3 months in a penal colony for "incitement to extremism" which involved having reprinted a press article entitled "Crimea is Ukraine". Another well-known case involved Vladimir Luzgin, a resident of Perm, who was fined 200,000 roubles (US$ 3,000) for "spreading false information on the USSR's activity during the Second World War" – on his website the blogger republished an article which said that in September 1939 the USSR and the Third Reich attacked Poland. The number of sentenced individuals is growing: in 2016 502 individuals received sentences pursuant to Article 282, in 2017 – 572 received sentences, pursuant to Article 280.: in 2016 – 143 individuals received sentences, and in 2017 it was 170. See 'Официальная статистика правоприменения в сфере борьбы с экстремизмом за 2017 год'.

of information on the Internet[60]. The government is pushing through new legislative acts to impose further restrictions on Internet activity. Laws enacted in March 2019 introduced penalties for publishing so-called fake news and information which is considered an offence against public morality or which is found to show disrespect to representatives of the state and state symbols (due to a broad definition of these notions it is possible to expand the scope of persecution of critics of the authorities). The law on the so-called **autonomous Runet** will come into effect in November 2019 and will provide for the creation of infrastructure to secure the operation of Russian Internet servers should they be disconnected from foreign servers[61].

The Kremlin combines the legal restrictions targeting its opponents with various types of repression. In fact, today the Kremlin has a modern form of "oprichnina"[62] **at its disposal**, composed of an extensive special services apparatus, law enforcement bodies and various types of services and agencies capable of neutralising any opponent, and in doing so, maintaining an appearance that their actions are legal. Recent years have seen a major **increase in Russia's expenditure on the law enforcement agencies responsible for maintaining public order. In 2016, the Federal National Guard Troops Service of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardia) was established to maintain public order. It was created on the basis of the interior army of the Ministry of the Interior and is supervised directly by the president.** It is headed by General Viktor Zolotov, the former head of President Putin's security guards and his close associate. Rosgvardia including OMON, which is one of its components,

60 Доклад Международной Агоры *Свобода интернета 2018: делегирование репрессий*.

61 See M. Domańska, J. Rogoża, 'Russia: stricter Internet censorship', "OSW Analyses", 13 March 2019.

62 This is a reference to a military formation created in the 16th century by Tsar Ivan the Terrible, supervised directly by him and used to enforce obedience by terrorising the elites and the population.

is most frequently sent to pacify opposition rallies, often using force that is disproportionate to the alleged threat posed by the protesters. In 2015, the **powers of the Federal Security Service were expanded** – it gained the prerogative to use weapons during mass protests, to search private apartments, to gather citizens' biometric data[63]. Human rights defenders point out that most frequently legislative amendments are introduced to sanction practices which are already in place, while noting an upward trend in political arrests and searches in private apartments[64]. **The "outsourcing of violence"** by the authorities has become a novelty in recent years. "Hybrid forces" which formally are not subordinate to the Kremlin have been used to carry out physical assaults on the opposition. These forces include Cossack units and nationalist-imperialist militias (acting as legal social organisations) such as the National Liberation Movement (NOD), which is against 'colour revolutions' and the opposition, and the SERB movement (South-Eastern Radical Block) which is involved in supporting separatists in south-eastern Ukraine[65].

The authorities combine their repressive measures with a strong **propaganda message intended to consolidate society around the negative feeling of being threatened by an external enemy** (the West) as well as an internal enemy (opponents of the government, citizens "disloyal" to their homeland), and discredit any strategies and programmes which are conceived as an alternative to the Kremlin's policies. This message is created and disseminated by a comprehensive network of actors (such as "smysloviki" mentioned in chapter I), including commentators from major state-controlled TV stations, a large group of journalists and feature

63 Ю. Минеева, 'Госдума разрешила ФСБ стрелять по толпе, женщинам и детям', Новая газета, 22 December 2015.

64 A report of the Agora organisation published in March 2018.

65 NOD is known to have assaulted oppositionist Alexey Navalny using a chemical substance (causing injuries dangerous to his eyesight), writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya etc. Cossack formations and NOD attacked the attendees of the rally organised by Navalny on 12 June 2017.

writers who follow orders from the authorities (though not always openly) and, finally, by masses of unidentified "trolls"[66].

The authorities have also targeted another active social group, i.e. **the group of ethnic nationalists**[67]. Although this group cannot be considered the democratic opposition, it is well-organised, capable of carrying out independent actions and its members frequently have combat training. Formerly, the authorities had used this group as an ideological counterbalance to the liberal opposition or even as perpetrators of physical assaults on opposition activists. However, during Medvedev's presidency, groups of ethnic nationalists developed a strong anti-Kremlin and anti-Putin sentiment. Websites associated with these groups increasingly referred to the authorities as "Russia's enemies" and accused them of profiting from admitting excessive numbers of immigrants into Russia. Attendees of nationalist Russian Marches chanted "Russia without Putin". Following the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression against eastern Ukraine, **law enforcement agencies have toughened their persecution of nationalist groups**, especially those which did not support the Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine, including the "Novorossiya" project. Numerous criminal investigations, prison sentences for leaders (including Aleksandr Belov-Potkin, Dmitri Dyomushkin, Dmitri Bobrov, Nikolai Bondarik) and many ordinary members, and various forms of pressure and persecution **have resulted in the marginalisation or even break-up of nationalist groups**[68]. The number of attendees of the so-called Russian Marches organised by nationalists has declined, the number of their actions and "raids" has been reduced to a minimum, and the most popular nationalist website "Sput-

[66] The president's administration offered money to several popular bloggers requesting them to publish content which is favourable for the authorities, see for example '«Зачем я вел ЖЖ, если за него ничего не получу?»', Газета.Ru, 6 February 2012.

[67] For more see J. Strzelecki, 'Russian nationalism three years after the annexation of Crimea', "OSW Commentaries", no. 246, 8 August 2017.

[68] A report by the SOVA Center.

nik and Pogrom" has suspended its activity due to the blockade imposed by Roskomnadzor and the crisis of the nationalist group as a whole. The ones who successfully continue their activity are nationalist organisations which are loyal to the authorities, support imperialist views and the Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine and the West – including the above-mentioned NOD and SERB. These are often used to attack the opponents of the government.

The authorities also resort to the tactic of **co-opting selected opposition activists**. This involves both the so-called system opposition, i.e. Communists for whom the Kremlin sets "the limits of their opposition" in exchange for posts in regional administration, as well as opposition activists and protest attendees. It is best evidenced by the course of the spontaneous social protest following the fire in a shopping mall in Kemerovo, which killed 60 people including 37 children. Igor Vostrikov, who lost his wife and three children in the fire, became the protest's leader. However, after a few appearances at the beginning of the protest he quickly withdrew from his criticism of the authorities, lured with the prospect of a career in pro-Kremlin structures. To demonstrate that they care for human rights, the authorities use institutions such as the Social Chamber, an advisory body established in 2005 and whose members are appointed by the Kremlin and regional authorities, and the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights – an advisory body to the president, established in 2004 on the basis of a former committee. These bodies have no impact on the policy pursued by the government and are merely sham civil society institutions. However, they bring together human rights defenders with an untarnished reputation, which allows the authorities to point to these institutions in Russia's dialogue with the West.

The intensive emigration of representatives of groups which advocate changes is another **factor reducing the level of discontent in these groups**. Following Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012, there has been a surge in emigration figures, and the share of white collar or **middle class representatives** in all

emigration is growing[69]. Research shows that among those who intend to emigrate, there is an increased proportion of people who do not feel protected by the law or who would like to be more involved in politics[70]. This indicates that **emigration is more frequently chosen by individuals who oppose the present regime and are frustrated by being unable to fulfil their potential and aspirations**. This causes the active social fabric to shrink and the risk of an outbreak of social discontent to become absorbed to some degree.

Paradoxically, permanent changes resulting from the emergence of a critical mass of discontent are prevented, at least in the short term, by factors which can be viewed as socially favourable, albeit limited to the middle class residing in big cities. These factors include: an increase in living standards over the last two decades, a broad scope of personal freedoms, opportunities for self-fulfilment offered by big cities, open borders. At least in the short term these conditions make **the existence of a major portion of citizens bearable, if not satisfactory**. Better educated and more affluent groups are able to find their 'niches' in big cities in which they are free to make up for their unfulfilled

[69] Statistics compiled by Rosstat show that the number of individuals leaving Russia has increased from 122,800 in 2012 to 377,200 in 2018 – for more on this see the report *Иной Русский мир* of 16 January 2019. Observers estimate that these figures are at least six times too low – in its statistics Rosstat only includes individuals who report their departure to their local administration, it does not include those who leave the country for a few years or live partly in Russia and partly in another country. Moreover commentators point to the fact that in recent years Rosstat changed its methods for compiling statistics several times. It is worth noting that the "departure" figures offered by Rosstat are much lower than the figures compiled by the host states which took in immigrants from Russia. For example, according to Rosstat 4,694 individuals left Russia for Germany, whereas according to German statistics 24,983 Russian citizens arrived in Germany. The corresponding figures are: for the US 1,404 and 9,297 individuals, for Israel 1,142 and 6,992, for Poland – 190 and 2,609 etc. The proportion of individuals with a university degree among people who leave Russia is growing – in 2012 the figure was 13,900 and in 2018 it was 58,584 (data compiled by Rosstat).

[70] Similarly, more affluent individuals are increasingly more interested in leaving Russia. Levada Center survey conducted on 4 February 2019.

aspirations, for example by engaging in consumerism and an active social life. It is also relatively easy for them to leave Russia and settle in culturally similar countries[71]. One good example of this is a phenomenon known as "Sobyanisation"[72]. The term refers to the policy pursued by Sergey Sobyanin, the mayor of Moscow, to make the city more comfortable, revitalise urban public space, and develop food and entertainment infrastructure. As a consequence, the residents of Moscow, despite being the leaders in social and protest activity, frequently and in large numbers enjoy the leisure opportunities offered by city hall, and the mayor's approval rating is constantly growing[73]. The ranks of active opponents of the authorities are not joined by many individuals who do not support the government but are to a large degree allowed to live their life as they wish, despite certain formal and legal restrictions. For example, although a law prohibiting the promotion of non-traditional sexual behaviour among minors (viewed as discrimination against homosexual people) is in force in Russia, the authorities did not initiate any large-scale campaigns against LGBT groups[74] and even invited selected representatives to cooperate[75].

[71] For example, the number of individuals who received a permanent residence permit in Latvia and Estonia after 2010 has increased five-fold compared to the previous decade, see 'Молодежь на чемоданах', Ведомости, 4 February 2019.

[72] 'Теория малых дел: спасет ли Россию модернизация снизу?', Radio Svoboda, 16 January 2019.

[73] In 2011, 29% of Moscow residents assessed Sobyanin positively. In 2016 this figure was 44%, and in 2018 it was 55%. Levada Center survey conducted on 14 November 2018.

[74] In this context, Chechnya is an exception. However, the persecution of LGBT groups there has never been inspired by Moscow.

[75] Among the teenage bloggers the president's administration engaged (via hired companies) to publish pro-Kremlin content was Igor Sinyak, a "beauty blogger" offering online make-up classes, whose image stands in contrast with traditional values advocated by the authorities. '«Об меня вытерли ноги и выкинули»: координатор проплаченных Кремлем Youtube-блогеров о том, как его «кинули» на 10 млн', TV Dozhd, 26 January 2019.

IV. SUMMARY AND PROSPECTS

The break-up of social ties, atomisation and distrust of state and social institutions are the standard baggage typical of societies which are departing from totalitarian or authoritarian systems[76]. This is what Russian society is going through as well. Back in the 1980s, it enthusiastically welcomed the *perestroika* initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev (i.e. the policy of reconstruction of the political and economic system) and the broadened scope of civil liberties. Later, however, it became bitterly disappointed with the condition of the "new Russia" including a major reduction in social allowances, an exacerbation of inequalities, the absence of protection offered by the law. Over the 1990s when their state was weak and dysfunctional, Russians developed initiative and entrepreneurial skills, but at the same time they began to long for a welfare state which is efficient and respected globally. Putin's Russia came as a fulfilment of these expectations. For a long time, it managed to deliver on the promises made to society and improved the standards of living (which was possible due to a favourable economic situation), in exchange for the subordination and loyalty of society.

In the social dimension, two decades of the current president's rule have resulted in a limitation of civil liberties and a revival of traditional patriarchal cultural codes. The major portion of society accepted the dominant role of the Kremlin and the top-down nature of important processes. **However, this model has numerous exceptions: an improvement in living standards and the fulfilment of basic needs have accustomed society to having a choice** of: consumer goods, information, people to socialise with. This stands in contrast with the absence of political pluralism. Society has become more aware of its rights (and violations thereof), has learned to carry out collective grassroots activities, and to pursue its rights in public offices and courts. As a result

[76] Б. Дубин, *Социальная атомизация как наследие и данность*.

of economic changes, better educated, more affluent groups living in big cities have developed higher aspirations regarding a broader scope of civil liberties and respect for their rights (civil rights, property rights etc.).

However, these processes do not impact the political realm and the model of the state because they clash with an incomparably stronger state machine which intends to maintain the *status quo*. They also clash with long-term mental barriers and with doublethink under which a critical approach to the state is combined with the belief that the individual and society are ultimately helpless towards the state and need to submit to it, and that any change will be initiated from above. Due to all this, acute problems do result in the outbreak of protests but **the energy of those protests quickly dwindles and hardly translates into large-scale protests and permanent institutionalised forms** such as structures of civil society's supervision of various fields of public life. **Doublethink and the flexibility of Russian society are deeply rooted features which form a barrier to both quick democratic changes and Russia's transformation into a police state**. Thus, despite the revival of archaic patriarchal attitudes in the last 25 years, Russians do have a potential for self-organisation; even if it is mostly latent, it is activated in periods of the liberalisation or weakening of the state[77].

The study conducted by the Committee of Civil Initiatives mentioned earlier shows emerging **changes of awareness, including a disappointment with the paternalistic model of the state-citizen relations**. This may resemble the periods of social awakening during Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* (although at that time the changes were triggered by a top-down process) and in the 1990s. **However, changes in thinking may only translate into organised actions and the creation of civil society structures, when there are favourable conditions, the right leaders, and**

[77] Т. Ворожейкина, *Развилки истории...*, *op. cit.*

catalysts fostering the spread and crystallisation of social discontent. Research shows that demand for change advocated by a growing part of the society is accompanied by unrealistic expectations regarding a quick improvement of the situation, and this in turn increases the risk of populism targeting the elites instead of fostering system reforms[78]. This increases the likelihood that **in a situation of shattered hopes, in turning points and critical moments of history, when faced with unclear consequences, society may again return to its long-term 'domesticated' cultural codes and models of behaviour**. It may exclaim, quoting a popular song: "Leader, where are you? Stop this chaos and lawlessness"[79].

In today's Russia, two clashing trends are evident. On the one hand, the authoritarian policy of the government which consolidates the patriarchal political culture (also by using new technologies). On the other, a gradual development of the social fabric, stimulated by economic and technological changes, as well as by a generational shift. In the short- and mid-term perspective, the authorities have the significant advantage of their potential, which enables them to neutralise active individuals and groups, and to prevent the formation of a critical mass of social discontent. The authorities are also capable of interfering in the dynamic of social processes. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 proved to be one such instrument of social engineering. It helped to reverse the downward trend in the approval rating of the president and the government, and put an end to the debate on Russia's internal development, replacing it with a 'victorious' geopolitical agenda. Although it seems unlikely that the 'Crimea effect' might be repeated, the authorities may resort to other military operations or escalate internal repression, especially if the present

[78] *Признаки изменения общественных..., op. cit.*

[79] „Где же, где же ты, вождь? Прекрати беспредел!" – a fragment of the song "Our madhouse votes for Putin" by the band Rabfak. The song satirises the traditional model of the relationship between the authorities and society.

unfavourable trends are maintained or aggravated. These include a decline in the legitimacy of the present ruling elite and a drop in the quality of the state's social infrastructure. Continued development of these trends triggers a number of questions regarding the very condition of the state and also the efficiency of its law enforcement structures since these form the foundation of this state, have broad powers and large budgets, and at the same time are riddled with corruption and may fail at a critical moment[80].

While reflecting on the further development of Russian society, one may refer to the debates by sociologists, philosophers and other specialists on **factors which would be most conducive to change in Russia**. One group of scholars, whose views can be conventionally reduced to the phrase **"the worse, the better"**, argues that only when the situation becomes unbearable, do people start to actively promote change. At the same time, such an accumulation of discontent may be combined with aggression and trigger undesired consequences. According to this line of thinking, a relatively good living standard alongside various "signs of normality" serve as a lightning rod, enable people to find a certain "comfortable alienation" and "niches of self-fulfilment", which dampens discontent and frustration. Another school of thought, whose views come down to the phrase **"the better, the better"**, claims that if citizens are accustomed to having a choice (even as regards consumption, information, interpersonal relations) they develop habits of enjoying freedom, higher aspirations and a demand for expanding their scope of liberties, and this experience gained by the most advanced part of society may radiate to other groups[81]. This question remains open because the events in Rus-

[80] "Сейчас опричнина, чекизм — та арматура, на которой держится пирамида государственной власти. Но, в отличие от советской арматуры, она все-таки ржавая. Коррупция разъедает ее. Может треснуть в любом месте". В. Сорокин, 'Тухлятина в замороженном виде как бы и не пахнет', Meduza, 22 August 2018.

[81] М. Волькенштейн, director of the Validata polling company, member of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research, [in:] 'Теория малых дел...', *op. cit.*

sia over the last 25 years provide examples to illustrate either line of thinking. Social protests were organised both in the period of severe socio-economic problems (in the 1990s) and in the 'sated' period during Putin's rule, for example in 2011 when the middle class staged large-scale political protests.

It is also worth noting that **society's weakness in its relationship with the state does not mean that social expectations, moods and attitudes have no impact on the decisions taken at the state level**. **The Russian government does not act 'in a vacuum' but rather makes every effort to manage social mood and channel it as it sees fit**[82]. To rule the country in a manner which is totally contradictory to what society expects would be costly in terms of both finances and reputation. This paradigm is also true for the emergence of President Putin in Russian politics: the fact that Yeltsin had appointed a politician with Putin's background and characteristics as his successor was the answer to society's expectations and its demand for security and a strong government. As long as it managed to meet society's most important expectations, the present ruling camp was almost free to pursue its own interests and benefit from this. **This time seems to be over; after two decades this model is becoming exhausted and the ruling elite evokes frustration and fatigue in society**. However, this does not mean that society will permanently reject the top-down model of governance in place under Putin and will be ready to take part in another democratic experiment which will expand the limits of civil liberties while also resulting in an increase in the citizen's responsibility in each sphere of life. At present, it seems that the prospect of society being ready to undergo such a complex change remains remote.

JADWIGA ROGOŻA

[82] А. Рубцов, [in:] 'Теория малых дел…', *op. cit*.