

A wave of demonstrations against the authorities has swept over Russia since the end of 2011. It was sparked by the election frauds that took place during the parliamentary elections (December 2011) as well as the presidential electoral campaign and the elections themselves in March 2012. Moscow was at the centre of events where the biggest rallies were staged. The main impulse for the protests was a demand for free and fair elections.

A question of key importance is therefore worth asking: Are these events a symptom of change in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in Russia, judged from the perspective of a few decades or even a few hundreds of years, or are they rather a passing phenomenon that will not leave any significant trace in the history of Russia? This report attempts to answer this question.

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REPORTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

GRZEGORZ GROMADZKI

ŁUKASZ WENERSKI (cooperation)

HISTORICAL BREAKTHROUGH THE RULERS AND THE RULED IN TODAY'S RUSSIA



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Introduction



A wave of demonstrations against the authorities has swept over Russia since the end of 2011. It was sparked by the election rigging that took place during the parliamentary elections (December 2011) as well as during the presidential electoral campaign and the elections themselves in March 2012. Moscow was at the centre of events where the biggest rallies were staged. The main impulse for the protests was a demand for free and fair elections. Slogans referring to social or economic issues were practically nonexistent.

A question of key importance is therefore worth asking: Are these events a symptom of change in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in Russia, judged from the perspective of a few decades or even a few hundreds of years, or are they rather a passing phenomenon that will not leave any significant trace in the history of Russia? This report attempts to answer this question.

For ages, the relationship between the authorities¹ and society in Russia has been fundamentally different from that in the western world, where the societies, especially since the 19th century, have been gaining an ever greater influence over the authorities even though the process has not been linear in a number of countries due to the rise of fascism, Nazism and authoritarian tendencies in the first half of the 20th century. As a result of that process, the system that has prevailed in western countries is that of liberal democracy, where the main principle is the rule of law and the separation of powers it entails, assuming the existence of a system of checks and balances between the powers. In Russia, on the other hand, over the ages the ruled have been fully dependent on the rulers, especially during the era of the Soviet Union, but during the times of the tsarist Russia as well. The classic separation of powers has never existed there, as the legislative, executive and judicial powers were all in the hands of the tsar and later, in the hands of the communist party and its leaders. Faced with such authority, the society was defenceless and subject to arbitrary actions of the rulers. The only attempt to move away from such a model were the reforms initiated after the revolution of 1905, when some elements of constitutional monarchy were introduced. The issue of a new form of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled reappeared at the end of the Soviet Union with the emergence of modern Russia at the turn of 1980s and 1990s.

The events of the last year and the interface of the authorities and society can only be understood in the context of the processes that have been taking place in Russia over the last 20 years. Demonstrations and other forms of opposition against the authorities, such as for instance, severe criticism on the Internet, result not only from the political situation of the last few months but

1 Many different groups can be perceived in Russia as the authorities – the rulers, not only the central authorities, but also the local authorities, the enormous bureaucracy, state power agencies staff (police, the military), representatives of the judicial system.

are also a sign of the processes that have been continuing for the past 20 years, or even more if we count the times of *perestroika* beginning in the late 1980s.

On the other hand, the changes in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled over the last two decades should be viewed with reference to the more distant history of Russia, particularly to Soviet times. Their importance can only be assessed if one takes into consideration the comparative material that could highlight the similarities and differences between the current and previous relations between the authorities and society.

It should be emphasised that this report, while focused on an analysis of the rulers – ruled relationship, does not aim to give a comprehensive presentation of the political, social and economic situation in Russia. However, some of the conclusions related to the relations between the authorities and the society can help to get a better understanding of the political, social and economic processes taking place in this country.



1. Phenomena

Looking at the last 20 years and comparing them to the earlier history of Russia, especially the times of the Soviet Union, one may notice three new phenomena of fundamental importance for the shaping of the relations between the authorities and society.

1.1. Lack of a “supreme force”

For the first time in the history of Russia, the legitimacy of authority is derived not from a “supreme power” (God – at the time of the tsars, or ideology – at the times of the USSR) but is based on the necessity, imposed on the rulers, to prove that the majority of the people indeed want their rule. For that they need to win the elections. This is a revolutionary change as it assumes, by definition, the subjectivity of society. However, those in power in post-communist Russia don’t and cannot even imagine that society could be the subject and not merely an object that can be manipulated at will. This contradiction inevitably leads to tension between the authorities and society – or at least a part of it.

For the first time in the history of Russia, the legitimacy of authority is derived not from a “supreme power” – God or ideology

During the times of tsarist Russia, the tsars’ power was derived from God. This belief was already evident in the second half of the 15th century, when the ruler of the Moscow state, Ivan III, the first to place the Byzantine double-headed eagle in his state’s coat of arms, said about himself, “We have been, by the grace of God, the lords of our land since the very beginning, from our first ancestors, and we have the right to this land given to us by the God Himself”. This belief was shared by all subsequent rulers of Russia, including the last tsar, Nikolay II.

If God himself chose the tsar, his subjects could do nothing else but obey. The tsar anointed by God could not possibly be evil. Only his aides could be so.

In Soviet times, supernatural forces were replaced by ideology, pronouncing the inevitability of the laws of history, of the progress of humanity from feudalism through capitalism to socialism and communism. Many people, not only in the USSR, were convinced of the truth of that claim. It was the origin of the natural leadership of the communist party. Whoever tried to oppose it acted against the laws of history and common sense.

In those two eras of Russian history, violence against society, sometimes reaching the level of terror, had its justification in reference to the “supreme power”. Opponents of the tsarist regime or Soviet rule were treated like criminals destroying the natural order of things or like people who were insane and should be isolated from the rest of the society.

In comparison with the past, in contemporary Russia there is no religious or ideological justification for the necessity that the rulers remain in power. Their legitimacy can only be confirmed by elections. In spite of this, elections in Russia obviously have nothing to do with elections in the countries of liberal democracy. They should rather be referred to as a plebiscite in which the authorities intend to remain in control at any cost. Every election in Russia since the early 1990s, be it presidential or parliamentary or even local can be given the name “Mission: Elections” as the rulers make every possible effort, including undisguised pressure and fraud, to show that they enjoy the support of the majority of the society and they are the only force able to govern Russia or its regions. That was particularly the case during the presidential elections in 1996, when Boris Yeltsin, extremely unpopular at the time, sought re-election and during the 2000 presidential elections when the authorities wanted to make a relatively unknown candidate, Vladimir Putin, the president. The presidential elections of March 2012 were similar in nature, which Putin relatively easily won for the third time in the first round.

It seems that Boris Yeltsin and the people around him realised that it was necessary to convince the public of their influence over the election, to convince them that they could vote not only for the representatives of the authorities but also for the opposition. That was why, during Yeltsin’s times in the 1990s, real opposition parties existed which had their place in the official political life. Their representatives were members of the State Duma. They included democratic parties such as Grigory Yavlinsky’s *Yabloko* and the Communist Party. The 1996 presidential elections involved real political struggle. Gennady Zyuganov, the communist candidate, made it to the second round where he received 40% of the vote. However, Yeltsin and his circle skilfully manipulated the fear of a great part of the society that the old regime could be restored and thus won the support of the majority. In spite of this,

Every election in Russia since the early 1990s, be it presidential or parliamentary or even local can be given the name “Mission: Elections”

the political system during Yeltsin's time in power only offered a limited choice, as in reality it was impossible to effect a change of the rulers, so strong was their power and clout over society as compared to the opposition. This has been one of the most important features of the Russian political system after the collapse of the USSR. However, in the 1990s the rulers at least tried to convince society that ordinary political competition did exist in Russia, exactly as in the countries of liberal democracy.

When Putin became president in 2000 he did not play that game. His aim, evident from the very beginning of his term, was to destroy the real, albeit actually harmless, opposition and to create licensed opposition, fully controlled

The Putin team could not understand that, with their actions, they were destroying a certain illusion of democracy from the Yeltsin times

by the Kremlin. He managed to achieve that aim within a few years, pushing the democratic opposition to the margins of official political life and subduing the communists. Such behaviour was consistent with the mentality of Putin and his associates, many of whom, just like Putin himself, came from the intelligence service. They believe that they must have full control.

Any degree of freedom, from their point of view, would be an unnecessary sign of weakness. The Putin team could not understand that, with their actions, they were destroying a certain illusion of democracy from the Yeltsin times which had legitimised the rulers in the eyes of society.

1.2. A degree of freedom not known before

Apart from the missing "supreme power" ensuring the legitimacy of the rulers, another element is missing as well, something that would enable the rulers to stay in power which was indispensable during tsarist Russia as well as in the USSR, namely violence, sometimes bordering on terror. Obviously in today's Russia there are still cases of persecution and the violation of human rights by the authorities, but the last two decades, including Putin's rule, have been the times of the greatest freedom for Russians in their entire history.

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Three types of freedom are vital in the lives of contemporary Russians. The first is the freedom to travel. For the first time in Russian history people can leave the country freely. Over the last 20 years, Russian authorities have practically not interfered in this area (in this respect we can talk about liberal behaviour of the authoritarian rulers). Bans on leaving the country, especially for political reasons, are very rare². Although the Russian people are not particularly mobile, the most active among them, especially those living in big cities, like to use the opportunity to travel. The number of Russians travelling all over the

² Recently such a ban has been imposed on the leader of the left-wing opposition Sergei Udaltsov, accused of instigating riots.

world must be already reaching millions. Most of them visit democratic countries. Contact with the outside world must have an impact on their perception of their own state. The possibility to travel, existing for more than 20 years now, is something completely opposite to the practices of earlier times in Russian history. During the times of the Soviet Union, the ability to leave the country was strictly regulated. Soviet authorities were particularly reluctant to let people visit western countries as they wanted to isolate society as much as possible from any influences of the democratic world.

The second freedom is the freedom of access to information. In the 1990s there was pluralism in the realm of electronic media (TV, radio) as they were controlled by various interest groups (oligarchs). After Putin's team came into power they tried to recover a monopoly of information by taking over the traditional electronic media. They managed to achieve this, however, only for a very short time, since in the second half of the last decade the Internet started to develop in Russia and that was not as easy to control as television or radio broadcasters. Therefore we can still talk about freedom of access to information for those Russians who use the Internet.

The third type of freedom is the freedom to carry out business and/or professional activities – the freedom to get rich – which is a relatively major shift compared to the times of the USSR. During the first decade of Putin's rule, that freedom was based on an informal “social contract” concluded at the beginning of that rule between the authorities and the active part of the society stipulating the possibility to get rich at the price of refraining from any political interference. One must, however, remember that the freedom of economic activity in today's Russia is relative as it is exercised in a country where the principles of the rule of law are not applied equally and where anyone may, at any time, be accused, convicted and deprived of his or her property.

Over the last 20 years, repressive measures used by the authorities against society have been limited. Although this does not mean that there have been no violations of human rights, the scale of repression cannot be compared to that of Soviet times. This results primarily from the fact that there is now no justification for the use of violence which, in the past, was provided by religion or ideology. The principle “the more freedom the less repression” has also seemed to be right.

1.3. A lower level of fear

The significantly lower level of repression compared to the times of the Soviet Union must have had some impact on the reduction of the level of fear of the authorities felt by society. The sense of fear is difficult to measure. It may be treated as an unverifiable factor and thus impossible to take into account in an analysis of the relations between the authorities and society. It would, however, be a mistake to ignore it completely, since in totalitarian and

authoritarian regimes it is of key importance in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Fear is something that cripples any action against the authorities. That was the case during Soviet times, where the secret service was omnipresent³. Spying and informing on one another reached monstrous levels. The aim of the authorities was to pacify society completely by evoking a sense of total fear which would cripple any activity directed against the authorities. Soviet rulers managed to achieve that goal. The fear eroded only during the *perestroika*, when the USSR was at its decline.

A new generation of Russians has emerged which no longer knows the crippling fear of communist times

The last 20 years have seen a shift far away from the Soviet model of repression, despite the fact that for the last 10 years the power has been in the hands of people who, in great proportion, came from the security services. A new generation of Russians has emerged which no longer knows the crippling fear of communist times. New technologies have also been conducive to lowering the fear level, especially the Internet, which gives people a sense of being a part of a larger group and thus enables its users to criticise the authorities more easily.

It would be a mistake, however, to claim that there is no fear of the authorities in Russian society. The older generation still vividly remembers the repression and the omnipresent fear from the Soviet times. One should also remember that the current actions of the government, which does not follow

The lower level of fear has had a positive impact on the readiness of various social groups to criticise the authorities and to oppose them

the rule of law, evoke concern and even fear in many Russians.

The level of fear of the rulers is definitely not the same for all social groups. It may be assumed that it is linked with the level of education and the place of living. It is probably lower among the educated people living in big cities, where it is easier to remain anonymous, than among people with poor education and those living in small towns or villages.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the lowering of the level of fear, which has undoubtedly taken place over the last two decades, has had a positive impact on the readiness of various social groups to criticise the authorities and to oppose them.



2. Consequences

The phenomena presented in the previous section have had a fundamental impact on the changes in the relations between the ruled and the rulers. They also have contributed to changes in the structure of Russian society, which now differs significantly, even fundamentally from what it was in the Soviet times.

³ One must also remember that an extensive secret police system existed also in the tsarist Russia.

2.1. Emergence of a social group independent from the state and the authorities

One of the profound consequences of the phenomena presented above is the emergence of a social group which is, at least partly, independent from the state – from the rulers. It may be described as a post-industrial society and comprises some of the inhabitants of Moscow and, to a much lesser extent, several other big cities (notably St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg).

Obviously such a group could not have existed at the time of the USSR. Every individual (and therefore the entire society) was dependent on the authorities, which had the power to make fate-defining decisions (their place of living, property and even life). If there were groups with a certain degree of independence, they were only some outsiders (e.g., the inhabitants of the remote areas of Siberia) or individuals who were treated as “parasites”, such as the poet, Iosif Brodsky (eventually expelled from the USSR). Earlier, in tsarist Russia, it was also difficult to talk about any group in Russian society that would be independent from the state.

Today the independent ones are not outsiders but represent the most active, creative part of the society which has been formed over the last 20 years (primarily in Moscow). Its members are usually specialists with a high or medium level of qualifications, experts in areas such as finance, management, and new technologies as well as representatives of small and medium enterprises who sometimes conduct business not only in Russia. Those who want to join them include representatives of the younger generation (students) who wish to repeat the success of the older generation. They all can be described as the Internet and travel community as they enjoy the freedoms described in the previous section. They have no or only limited fear of the authorities.

It is a paradox that this group has formed and grown strong during the rule of Putin. It has proved indispensable for ensuring the connection between Putin’s Russia and the contemporary, post-industrial world, since the bureaucracy and other social groups do not have the necessary skills. That is why its representatives have a sense of independence from the authorities; they know that even if they lose their job in one place they can relatively easily find another one elsewhere.

One should, however, remember that this group has grown on the “oil rent”, which is a source of wealth for the rulers. It has been formed largely to “provide services” for the Russian regime. That is why it is strongly dependent on the economic situation, particularly on the raw materials market.

It is difficult to say how numerous this group is, though it is definitely a minority if viewed against the total population. It is sometimes estimated at the level of 20%⁴, but in reality it probably accounts for a much lower

Today the independent ones are not outsiders but represent the most active, creative part of the society

⁴ See Lev Gudkov “Sotsyalnyi kapital i ideologicheskiye oryentatsyi” in *Pro et Contra*, May-June 2012, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra55_6-31.pdf.

This active part of the society should not be idealised. Not all of its members are supporters of liberal democracy

percentage. It may be assumed to constitute (including family members) about 10% of the total population, which translates into the substantial number of approximately 14 million people. Some educated people who are to a great extent dependent on the state budget, such as university staff, who, however, get part of their income from outside the state budget and many NGO activists as well are closely related to this new group.

This active part of the society should not be idealised. Not all of its members are supporters of liberal democracy. Some of them could do with the so-called “Singapore model”, a system of governance far removed from the principles of liberal democracy, which, however, in its dealings with society and especially with regard to business activity, is guided by a certain set of rules. That is something that is lacking in today’s Russia. For many people, what matters first of all is the security of their assets.

2.2. Divisions in Russian society

The emergence of the new social group described above has led to the most significant and deepest split in contemporary Russian society. It is divided into two groups: the first, those living in the modern, post-industrial world (a minority) and the rest who do not belong to that world (the great majority).

This great majority, however, is not homogeneous. It can be divided into two parts: blue-collar Russia, which emerged more than a half century ago as a result of Soviet-era industrialisation through planned economy⁵ and the Russia of rural areas and small towns, with a predominating natural economy, where physical survival is the main concern of the people.

Such a division of the society into three parts – the modern Russia, the anti-modern Russia (to a great extent still immersed in the Soviet era) and the pre-modern Russia of small towns and villages, is proposed, among others, by Lev Gudkov⁶. Natalia Zubarevich suggests a similar division, differentiating the three Russias and labelling them, respectively, as *the first Russia* – a land of post-industrial cities, *the second* – blue-collar workers and *the third* – the rural and semi-urban population. She also adds a fourth group – the under-developed Russia, inhabited primarily by ethnic minorities⁷. However, *the fourth Russia* may be incorporated into the *second* and *the third* Russias. In this report, for the sake of brevity of description, we will use the above terminology – *the first Russia*, the *second Russia*, *the third Russia* – to talk about the separate groups of Russian society.

⁵ Small and medium-sized industrial towns, sometimes with only one plant, but also part of the inhabitants of big cities, including Moscow.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ Natalia Zubarevich, *Four Russias: rethinking the post-Soviet map*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/natalia-zubarevich/four-russias-rethinking-post-soviet-map>.

According to Lev Gudkov, the size of each of the groups is as follows:

- ▶ *The first Russia* – the modern Russia – 20%, or over 28 million people (see above for a critique of this figure).
- ▶ *The second Russia* – the anti-modern blue-collar Russia – 35-40%, from 50 to over 57 million people.
- ▶ *The third Russia* – the pre-modern Russia – 20-25%, from over 28 to almost 36 million people.

The above figures raise some doubts, since if we add up their higher end values we arrive at 85%, which would mean that there is one more social group accounting for 15% of all inhabitants of Russia, i.e., more than 21 million people.

Certainly a large part of them are people at different levels of power, the entire enormous bureaucracy, state power agencies staff (police, the military). All of them belong to the rulers. Although the above estimates are clearly arbitrary, they do, however, give us some idea about the size of each of those social groups.

Divisions in Russian society are manifested not only in different lifestyles but also in their differing expectations of the state

Divisions in Russian society are manifested not only in different lifestyles but also in varying relations between each of the groups and the authorities and in their differing expectations of the state.

The active, modern part of the society – *the first Russia* – would like to see more freedom, less interference of the authorities in everyday life, the law being obeyed by those in power. *The second Russia* (and *the third* for that matter), on the other hand, just expect the state/the authorities to take better care of them. These two attitudes are contradictory and it is difficult to find any common elements in them.

2.3. Wave of protests

The protests of 2011-2012 are distinct because of their character. Their cause (or the catalyst) were the unfree and unfair elections. Almost all the demands of the protesters were related to the elections and ensuring their freedom and fairness. The protesters believed that by rigging the elections the authorities became usurpers and that gave them, the voters, the right and even made them obliged to talk about it in public⁸.

Almost all the demands of the protesters were related to the elections and ensuring their freedom and fairness

The timing of the protests was not accidental – from the elections to the State Duma (December 2011), through the presidential electoral campaign and the elections themselves (March 2012) to the time a few months after the elections. The short distance in time between the parliamentary and the presidential elections definitely had a positive effect on the intensity and duration of the protests, which lasted over six months. It may be said that in Russia, between the autumn of 2011 and

8 Slogans appeared saying: *protiest eto zakonno*.

the spring of 2012, a constant election campaign was in progress at the national level.

In the second half of 2012, when both national campaigns became more distant, the protests died down naturally. However, the very fact that the protesters had had a chance to “count their numbers” can be deemed a success. Many of them admit that it had been the first time that they have seen so many people who thought in the same way and were ready to protest openly against the authorities.

The mass demonstrations were initiated and staged primarily by representatives of *the first Russia*

The mass demonstrations were initiated and staged primarily by representatives of *the first Russia*. New technology proved very useful here – the Internet and the new methods of social communications such as social networks and blogs. One should, however, remember that a wide variety of people took part in the protests, including the extreme left and the extreme right (nationalists), who should rather be included in *the second Russia*, although both among the extreme left and the extreme right there may be a sizeable group representing *the first Russia*.

The protesters had a programme that was mainly negative, expressed in the slogan, “Russia without Putin”. They did not have a clearly specified positive programme describing how they see Russia after Putin. One of the reasons for that was probably the ideological diversity of the protesters. The nature of the protests, which can be described as civic rather than political, also played an important role. The only positive element of the programme that united all demonstrators was the demand for fair elections.

Strong discontent with the authorities is also visible in *the second* (and even *the third*) *Russia*, evidenced by the poor electoral result of the party United Russia in the elections to the Duma in a number of regions.

In the local elections there have been cases of negative voting against the candidates of the party in power, i.e., United Russia. The elections have often been won by those candidates whom the voters consider to be the lesser evil.

Strong discontent with the authorities is also visible in *the second* (and even *the third*) *Russia*

That was, for instance, the case of the elections of mayors in Yaroslav, Togliatti and earlier (spring of 2011) in Berdsk near Novosibirsk. The main reason for the negative vote in those cities was probably the belief, typical for *the second Russia*, that the people in power had so far failed to properly perform their duty of providing care and ensuring social security for the inhabitants.

This discontent is not merely a recent a phenomenon. *The second Russia* has shown opposition to the actions of the authorities earlier, for example, during the wave of protests in 2005, on a scale not smaller than those of 2011-2012, caused by an attempt by the authorities to introduce housing reform and to reduce social privileges, particularly those of pensioners. In the protesters’ view that would only mean further decline of the care the state owes them.

2.4. Problem with pluralism

The appearance of the phenomena unmet so far described in the first section has had both a positive and negative impact on the acceptance of pluralism by Russians. In today's Russia, on the one hand, some evidence of pluralism is evident – more than half of Russians believe that the opposition has the right to exist and is necessary⁹. In the world of liberal democracy such a statement seems obvious, even trivial. But this is not so in Russia, where there had never been such an understanding of the need for pluralism neither in tsarist Russia nor in the USSR (this matter may only be a subject of speculation as public opinion surveys were not carried out in Soviet and tsarist Russia). A view other than the obligatory one, questioning the actions of the authorities, was treated in those times as apostasy or even a mental disease, of which the best example is the fate of Pyotr Chaadayev, who was recognised as insane by tsar Nikolay I for his criticism of tsarist Russia or the fate of people locked up in psychiatric hospitals during the Soviet era for their political views. It seems that the need for unanimity also enjoyed the support of the society. Having different views was treated as creating unnecessary chaos, making it impossible for the authorities to perform their duties properly.

On the other hand, in today's Russia strong opposition against pluralism as a symbol of the world of liberal values is evident. This attitude is particularly visible in *the second* and *the third Russias*. The negation of liberal values (seen as destructive to Russian tradition) by the circles connected with the Russian Orthodox Church – considering *the first Russia* advocates of those values, also plays a part. Opposition against liberal values and thus against pluralism has clearly grown in recent years.

In today's Russia strong opposition against pluralism as a symbol of the world of liberal values is evident

3. Responses



It may be assumed that the rulers are concerned about the new phenomena and about their consequences as described above and that is why they try to counteract them. The actions of the authorities are reactive in character.

3.1. Preserving the status quo

The rulers treat the execution of power as a source of income. That is why they try to control those branches of the economy which bring big profits. The current power elite operates following a model of symbiosis between politics

⁹ Denis Volkov, "The Protesters and the Public", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 23, Number, 3 July 2012, p.60 (a survey by the Levada Center).

and the economy. This model of exercising power requires a passive society which will not protest in a massive, organised way against the rulers. Putin and his associates are probably convinced that authoritarian rule is the best solution. This also follows from a specific “genetic code” of the *siloviki*, their idea of effective governance. The authorities would not let any social group (let alone society as a whole) challenge the existing political-economic model and the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. They want to convince Russians that they are the only force able to govern the country.

The authorities go unpunished more and more often, not only at the central level but also (or perhaps particularly) at the local level

The authorities go unpunished more and more often, not only at the central level but also (or perhaps particularly) at the local level. The will to preserve the status quo fosters this as the ruling elite does not wish to correct any mistakes because that would mean admitting that they are unable to govern. This is the situation not only at the top levels of power but also to no lesser extent at lower levels as well.

The rulers strive to create a new ideology and to present themselves as defenders of Russian tradition and Russia’s strong position in the world. They want to show the distinct and exceptional character of Russia. So far, the attempts to create a new ideology have not been very successful, an example of which may be the rejected concept of “sovereign democracy” developed in 2005 by Vladislav Surkov. It is really difficult to say what the “sovereign democracy” was supposed to be. From the rather vague descriptions presented by Surkov and others only one thing clearly emerges: “sovereign democracy” is something different from democracy as known in western countries.

One cannot say that the rulers are not aware of the problems faced by Russia. Putin fiercely criticises the internal situation, an example of which may be his speech during the 16th St Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2012. The Russian president said, among other things, “Unfortunately corruption is without exaggeration the biggest threat to our development. The risks are even worse than the fluctuation of oil prices. People are tired of everyday corruption, of bribery in the state bodies, courts, the judiciary and state-owned companies... It is impossible to become truly competitive in the international arena without honest domestic competition, without the rule of law, without truth and justice in relations between business and the state. Competition in politics and the economy is the main engine of development”.¹⁰ Earlier, an even more severe diagnosis was presented by Dmitry Medvedev, the president at that time. Both of them repeatedly promoted sensible solutions that could change the situation in Russia. But the actions of the authorities are just to the contrary, sustaining the existing state of affairs and sometimes even consolidating it, as, for example, was the case with the takeover of TNK-BP

¹⁰ <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/4056>.

by the state-owned company Rosneft, managed by Igor Sechin, one of the closest associates (possibly the closest) of Putin in October 2012. One may wonder whether it is a sign of “schizophrenia” or cynicism of the rulers. One thing is certain, the rulers do not think strategically about the future of the country in the long term but rather try to gain as many tangible benefits for themselves as possible in the short term. According to some Russian experts and journalists, the mentality of the authorities resembles the mentality of a colonial administration trying to squeeze as much income as possible from the colony they manage.

Among the rulers there are also people whose views are close to those of *the first Russia*. That was the case at the times of Yeltsin but it is also happening, no less, during Putin’s rule. The “liberals” such as Alexei Kudrin, the minister of finance in the years 2000-2011, or German Gref, the minister of economy and trade in the years 2000-2007, were needed so that the state, and particularly its finance, could be managed in accordance with the requirements of a modern economy. But the presence of the “liberal-reformers” was not expected to lead to change or to modernisation of the country but was supposed to help preserve the existing political and economic system, saving it from being completely outdated. That is why it may be said that the activity of that group of people within the Russian power elite has in fact helped preserve the status quo.

The presence of the “liberal-reformers” was not expected to lead to modernisation but was supposed to help preserve the existing political and economic system

3.2. Removing the “liberals”

Over the last few years, it has been possible to see how the *siloviks* have been closing ranks by removing the “liberals” who have not played any particularly important role in the process of governance. This group seems to be much more poorly represented in the power elite now than it was a few years ago. The more and more visible aversion of the *siloviks* towards the “liberals” may result from a fear of a potential alliance of the “liberals” with *the first Russia*. This reasoning is not entirely groundless, as may be judged – for instance, from Kudrin’s participation in the recent demonstrations. The “liberals” clearly realise how anachronistic and inefficient the current system of governance is in Russia and hence their appeals for dialogue between the authorities and *the first Russia*.

One may argue that the emergence of *the first Russia* has influenced changes in the internal structure of the ruling group, but not by increasing the importance of the “liberals” but just the opposite, by strengthening the conservative forces, which have prevailed in the Russian power elite in any case, especially during Putin’s rule.

3.3. *Divide et impera*

The division of Russian society as described above (Section 2.2) is manipulated by the rulers, who try to contrast the “healthy fabric of the nation” (especially *the second* but also *the third Russia*) with *the first Russia*, portrayed as a group of cosmopolitans and liberals (in the official propaganda this term has a negative meaning). With this policy the authorities increase the already dangerous split in society, especially the division into the active and modern part of society on the one hand, and the anti-modernist and pre-modern majority on the other.

The authorities increase the already dangerous split in society into the modern part of society on the one hand, and the anti-modernist majority on the other

It seems that the authorities are indeed aware of this. However, for tactical reasons, at least in the short and medium term such antagonising of individual groups is believed by the authorities to be one of the best methods to maintain control over the entire society. Certainly the worst scenario for the authorities would be joint protests by both *the first* and *the second Russia*. That is why their priority is to prevent any possibility of that scenario coming to fruition which, as has already been mentioned, does not seem to be objectively possible.

3.4. Increasing repression

One of the basic methods of carrying out “dialogue” with society that the Putin’s team knows and deems effective is repression. The measures that are currently undertaken are twofold. On the one hand, new legal provisions are very quickly being adopted that will, for instance, increase penalties for participation in demonstrations in a draconian way. It is also becoming more and more difficult for Russian non-governmental organisations to use foreign assistance. The latter shows that the authorities strongly believe that the underlying cause of all their problems can be found in the actions of external enemy forces. At the same time the rulers want to persuade *the second* and *the third Russias* that all of their problems are created by representatives of *the first Russia* supported by foreign forces. On the other hand, an evident toughening of repression against the opposition leaders can be noted. An example of that are the accusations of attempts to instigate riots made against a group of opposition activists – the case of the leader of the Left Front, Sergey Udaltsov, his associate Konstantin Lebedev and Leonid Razvozajev, whom the Russian secret service abducted in October 2012 in Kiev and transported to Moscow. It has been one of the most severe political repressions since 1991. Its aim is to intimidate both ordinary participants in demonstrations as well as the leaders.

The acts of repression are also to some extent a sign of the helplessness of the rulers in the face of protests

The sudden toughening of repression in 2012 is evidence that the demonstrations in Moscow and other Russian cities and the freedom with which the authorities are criticised on the Internet have raised the level of anxiety among the rulers. The acts of repression are also to some extent a sign of the helplessness of the rulers in the face of protests. Earlier, during the first decade of Putin's rule, it was possible to achieve peace and the neutrality of *the first Russia* with the informal "social contract" mentioned above.

4. Challenges



The changes in the relations between the rulers and the ruled presented in the previous sections will definitely pose some fundamental challenges for Russia in future.

4.1. How to rule Russia? – a challenge for the authorities

The authorities are helpless in the face of such challenges as demography, the lack of innovation resulting in a growing backwardness compared to developed countries, inefficient governance, omnipresent corruption. There are no indications that the situation is going to change in the coming years.

The evident support for *the second Russia* at the expense of *the first* can only lead to further stagnation, because *the second Russia* cannot become a driver of modernisation. Its goal is to maintain the existing model of economy based on industry going back to the era of the USSR. The slogans of the authorities about the need for re-industrialisation by re-vitalising the military-industrial complex (MIC), the foundation of the Soviet economy, will certainly be well received by the *second Russia*. Its representatives hope for the return to the "golden age" of the USSR. Such a strategy will probably end in failure because restoration of the MIC and the industries related to it is improbable if not impossible, for instance, because of the enormous technological backwardness of the Russian economy.

The evident support for *the second Russia* at the expense of *the first* can only lead to further stagnation

That is why the key question for the future of Russia is whether it is possible to rule a state efficiently and effectively by antagonising the active/the creative part of society.

4.2. Level of repression – how high?

The authorities' actions will to a great extent be guided by fear of the protests of *the first Russia* and the concerns of *the second Russia*, a realistic scenario, if the economic situation deteriorates. The rulers will try to pacify

society. For that they will need to increase repression. It may be assumed that as of the autumn of 2012, we have not yet seen the most that the regime can do. It is now difficult to foresee to what extent the current, sometimes draconian provisions will be enforced. It seems that the coming year will be decisive in this respect.

We can already now talk about a significant, even abrupt rise of the scale of repression which will probably lead to erosion of freedom

However, we can already now talk about a significant, even abrupt rise of the scale of repression which will probably lead to erosion of freedom described in subsection 1.2. And yet it is difficult to imagine a return to the era of the USSR. Such a high level of repression applied by the authorities against today's Russian society seems impossible because it can no longer be justified "from above" (by religion or ideology). Today's repressive actions by the authorities are just a sign of ruthless violence used by a group of people who are trying to stay in power. The rulers will probably try to mete out repression on such a scale as to pacify society, especially those groups that could actively oppose them. However, this process can be managed only in theory, particularly in a country as big as Russia.

A number of important questions arise: To what extent can repression be toughened in Russia? What will be the response of the ruled, especially of *the first Russia*? Will they in any way be able to oppose the growing wave of repression? Will they give up (easily)? What level of repression is needed to pacify society? How long can one rule today's Russia with the use of extensive repression?

4.3. Temporariness, emigration

The actions of the authorities have evoked a growing sense of temporariness visible particularly among people who are relatively well-off (not only those representing the authorities but also those who are part of *the first Russia*) who worry about the security of their possessions. Hence the willingness to transfer their assets abroad. This applies not only to rich people but also to those of moderate means. The main goal is to buy real estate outside Russia, preferably somewhere in the EU or in other European countries. This tendency will probably grow in the coming years.

In Russia, professional and social position is treated by many as something uncertain, something that one may lose at any moment because of a change in the policy of the authorities or because of the poor economic situation provoked by the crisis.

A lot of representatives of *the first Russia* are considering the option of leading a "double life". That is, on the one hand, living and working in Russia which during times of economic prosperity provides high income, much higher than what could be earned by living and working elsewhere. On the other hand,

they think about preparing a “soft landing” in another country in case the economic and/or the political situation in Russia deteriorates. For that purpose, what is needed, among other things, is to have property abroad. Obviously it is also a safe investment, impossible to find in Russia, where the rule of law does not apply. It is the dream of many Russians to be able to provide education (perhaps also a job) for their children abroad.

It may be supposed that as the political and economic situation in Russia deteriorates, it will become more and more popular among the representatives of *the first Russia* to think about emigration. This phenomenon is already visible¹¹. At the same time the authorities may see emigration in the future as a safety valve, seeing it as a means to get rid of people dissatisfied with the political situation in the country.

It is obvious that such an attitude of the active part of the society (seeing the country as a source of income and not as a place to invest in) can only have negative effects on the country, not only in a purely economic sense but also in the social sense. Any potential increase in emigration of the most active and creative part of the society would be disastrous for the prospects of modernising Russia.

Any potential increase in emigration of the most active and creative part of the society would be disastrous for the prospects of modernising Russia

4.4. Diffusion of *the first Russia*

The expansion of *the first Russia* would be highly desirable. It is a *conditio sine qua non* for modernisation of the country and would lead to further changes in the relations between the ruled and the rulers. But in the nearest future and even in the longer term such a process seems impossible on a larger scale.

The reason for is not only the hostile attitude of the rulers towards this group but also the fact that such diffusion is no longer objectively possible. As it has already been mentioned, *the first Russia* emerged as a result of the appearance of the oil rent. This, however, cannot be used to fund its continuous further growth. A new impulse would be needed such as liberalising business activity and innovation which, in turn, is impossible because the existing political and economic system is based on the oil rent. The result is a vicious circle.

In the nearest future and even in the longer term the expansion of *the first Russia* seems impossible on a larger scale

4.5. Durability of *the first Russia*

The challenges presented above are of fundamental importance for the durability of *the first Russia* as a group capable of expressing criticism of the authorities in an open way. Decomposition of this group would not only pave

¹¹ Levada Center survey, http://en.gazeta.ru/news/2012/06/08/a_4618261.shtml.

way for the partial return of the “old order” in the relations between the rulers and the ruled where there is no social group trying to preserve significant independence from the state/the authorities, but would also have a very negative impact on the prospects of change in the political and economic system in Russia.

It is difficult to imagine this group disappearing completely. Even mass emigration would not lead to such a situation, as it would probably involve only a part (a minority) of *the first Russia*. But one must assume that those who would emigrate would be primarily or to a great extent the most active people, the best prepared for life in today’s developed world.

4.6. Quick changes not possible

The existence of a new group that is independent from the authorities does not lead to quick or easy changes in Russia towards liberal democracy, but (at least) in the short and medium term contributes to a deep split in Russian

Common actions by *the first* and *the second Russia* will probably be limited because of their completely different outlook on the world

society between those who live in the 21st century and those who are still immersed in the past. Even in big cities, including Moscow, there are still many people who belong to *the second Russia* and are dependent on the authorities.

It is a dangerous situation for Russia, but in a sense inevitable. This rift is much deeper than ordinary divisions according to political views. It is civilizational in nature. Aversion, even hostility, especially on the part of *the second Russia* towards *the first Russia* may increase in the coming years. One of the greatest challenges for Russia in the upcoming years or decades is to find a way to overcome this civilizational division.

The options for common actions by *the first* and *the second Russia* will probably be limited because of their completely different outlook on the world and expectations from the authorities. A common problem for the whole of society, which may at least partially unite the efforts of both *the first* and the other *two Russias* is the lack of even basic safeguards against the wilfulness of the authorities which causes harm to everyone. This situation builds a sense of common fate at least among those who have suffered injustice from the hands of the authorities of different levels, the law enforcement agencies (“gangsters in uniforms”) or the justice system, which in the Russian reality can often be called the “injustice system”.

5. Conclusions



The emergence of *the first Russia* as a result of the processes of the last two decades has fundamentally changed the relations between the rulers and the ruled. We may even talk about a cardinal change. That is why we should move away from the stereotypical way of thinking about the unchanging model of authorities versus society and about seeing the whole of Russian society as an “object” in the hands of the rulers. It is vital to notice the subjectivity (or attempts at gaining subjectivity) of one of its parts – namely *the first Russia* – in its relations with the authorities.

However, in the short- and medium-term perspective the appearance of new relations between the rulers and the ruled witnessed in the last 20 years will likely bring about more aggravation of internal conflicts in Russia than any positive changes. The two most probable scenarios are the following: the authorities will manage to pacify (at least partially) society, both *the first* and *the second Russias*, with the use of repression thus leading to long-term stagnation; or they will fail to pacify the people which will lead to social unrest in Russia and rising and fading waves of protests. Which of these scenarios is better for Russia? The first is a road to nowhere. The second is very difficult and dangerous but gives hope for positive changes in the long run.

The emergence of *the first Russia* as a result of the processes of the last two decades has fundamentally changed the relations between the rulers and the ruled

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