



## FILM, IDENTITY AND THE MARSHRUTKA

### ■ ANALYSIS

- Great Patriotic War Narratives in the Russian Cinema:  
Collective Self, Internal Others, and Dislocations of Identity 2  
By Andrey Makarychev

### ■ ANALYSIS

- The *Marshrutka*—An Overlooked Public Good? 5  
By Nicholas M. Wondra, Tbilisi

### ■ OPINION POLL

- “They Go Everywhere”: Opinion Poll On *Marshrutki* in Russia 9

## Great Patriotic War Narratives in the Russian Cinema: Collective Self, Internal Others, and Dislocations of Identity

By Andrey Makarychev

### Abstract

This article examines how recent Russian films about World War II play with traditional Soviet narratives of the war. Rather than simply repeating themes of the victorious Soviet Union and the defeated aggressor, the films examine topics with much greater nuance, including an Orthodox priest who is forced to collaborate with the Nazis, young Russian criminals coerced into fighting, and people who fall in love with someone from the other side. Ultimately, these films shed light on a complex and evolving post-Soviet Russian identity.

### Recent Russian Films

Post-Soviet Russia has inherited from the Soviet Union the heroic narrative of the Great Patriotic War as a key identity-building instrument. This narrative, grounded in a stringent distinction between the victorious Soviet Self and the defeated aggressor, played a primordial role in ideological mobilization under the Communist regime, yet nowadays it undergoes various transmutations that saturate the war memories with more subtle, nuanced and variegated meanings. Not all of them can be conveyed through—and inscribed in—the hegemonic political discourse orchestrated by the Kremlin that seems to borrow from its Soviet predecessors the assumption of the alleged homogeneity of the victorious “Soviet people”, instrumentalized today as a precondition for the much needed—yet still imaginary—integrity of post-Soviet Russian identity. In contrast with the “old” Soviet war narrative that presumed purification of the heroic Self from negatively marked deviations, the “new” Russian discourse—introduced basically through cinema—deconstructs and decomposes the previously unquestioned collective Self, thus showing meaningful ruptures and dislocations within it. This alternative discourse focuses on situations void of direct military clashes between the Soviet Army and the Germans in the battlefields. Instead, it is interested in indirect encounters of the Soviet Self and a variety of its Others, including internal ones. It is in these situations that identity games become possible not only due to the high volatility of the previously taken-for-granted Self–Other demarcation, but also due to the “contamination” of the Self, its incoherence and unevenness. Being short of politically correct inhibitions, this alternative discourse seems to be much freer than the official interpretation of the Great Patriotic War as an event loaded with a variety of meanings grounded in sovereign politics and the logic of great powerness. In this article, I will focus on the most indicative interpretations of the war in contemporary Russian cinema, and will borrow for my analysis some concepts developed by one of most influential European critical thinkers Giorgio Agamben.

Paradoxically, the Kremlin is not only aware of this slow and gradual rethinking of the old Soviet narrative, but sometimes seems to be willing to sustain—and take advantage of—it. One of the most indicative in this respect is *“The Priest”* (Vladimir Khotinenko, 2010), a movie that tells a controversial story about the collaboration of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Germans in the occupied territories. The fact that the movie was sponsored by Gazprom, the Ministry of Culture and the Foundation for Patriotic Films evidently speaks for its legitimation by—and even inclusion in—the dominating narrative. Yet the patriotic message of the movie is far from obvious, since the Russian Orthodox Church, one of the shapers of the hegemonic discourse in today’s Russia, features as a pawn in the great game between the two political giants, Germany and the Soviet Union. The story sheds light on the expatriated Russian Orthodox Church in Lithuania that during the Second World War accepts the provocative proposal from the Nazis to cooperate for the sake of reviving Orthodoxy in the occupied territories of the western parts of the USSR as a potential counter-weight to the Bolsheviks. The movie hero, the priest, is an incarnation of the situation of indistinction between the seemingly natural belongingness to the Russian collective Self and voluntary exclusion from it. The Church did not consider the country of “Godless Soviets” its “genuine” motherland, which made the movie character—the priest—a hostage of the impossibility to unequivocally make a political decision and take the side of either the Germans or the Russians. Paradoxically, this undecidability can be interpreted as the ultimate virtue of the Orthodox priest who, standing beyond the military clash of the two mortal foes, did his best to defend, as Giorgio Agamben would say, life as such, any life in a situation of war which obviously requires people to take sides and thus values “politically qualified life”. The main protagonist is evidently weak and unable to prevent the Germans from committing atrocities in the conquered villages, yet the church is benevolently portrayed as a spiritual institution above the Soviet–German war. It

is exactly at this point that the political consequences of its seemingly de-politicized stance appear, since the glorification of the priest's vacillation as an ethical position could be interpreted as synonymous with the equation of Stalinism with fascism, which the Kremlin harshly rejects as an inimical and politically-biased interpretation of history.

In "*Bastards*" (Alexander Atanesian, 2007) we see another example of questioning the immaculacy of the winning Self. The movie features a group of young criminals that in the midst of the war are forcefully formed into a "death squad" trained to carry out subversive acts in German-occupied territories. These youngsters are treated as outlawed outcasts, who might be legitimately killed by the state, which acts as a classical bio-political machine aimed at producing docile and serviceable human beings. In a typical remark, one of the Soviet officers refers to these adolescents as "non-humans", which logically presupposes that they are incapable of any hint of patriotism and are valuable only as "cannon fodder". Indeed, they are sent to almost guaranteed death and have no other choice than to submit reluctantly to the brutal force of their "own" state. The two survivors of the squad ultimately fulfilled their "impossible mission," mainly because they are motivated by a desire to avenge their mates who were killed by the Germans. At the core of the story are thus young people who are aware of both their abandonment by their own state and their inevitable mortal fight with the enemy. What is interesting is that "*Bastards*" was harshly criticized by the adherents of the Soviet-type interpretation of the victory over fascism as a feat of arms performed by the conscientious exploits and sacrifices of a patriotically-minded people. To their dislike, the movie shows the tragedy of those who, as Agamben would argue, are included in the collective social body only by means of being cruelly excluded from it.

"*One War*" (Vera Glagoleva, 2009) uncovers another socially marginalized group whose role identity was actualized by the war. The movie relates the story of Russian women exiled to a remote island for their liaisons with the Germans and thus considered "traitors", or—academically speaking—"internal others". Very much like the juvenile delinquents in "*The Bastards*", those women implicated in "sleeping with the enemy" are outcasts, whose loss of rights and even execution may be considered a legitimate gesture of ultimate justice during times of bloody war. Yet it is they who venture to question the narrative of a unified Soviet body facing the external Foe: "You failed to defend your sisters and wives. Be at least tolerant to them", one of the women pathetically exclaims. What is even more challenging is another strong utterance: "The Germans threatened to

kill us, now you do the same. What is the difference?"—one of the ladies throws in the face of a Soviet officer, thus again blurring the seemingly well established distinction between "us" and "them". Seen from this vantage point, "One war" becomes a lexem that bears a unifying message, questioning the universality of distinction between the mortal enemies in the battlefield. Therefore, the war is portrayed not as an event where 'We' and 'They' are separated by an unbridgeable gap, but as a more complex phenomenon that, on the one hand, unifies all human beings worthy of this name in the face of possible death, and, on the other hand, elucidates the rather deep gaps within the Soviet Self.

In "*Cuckoo*" (Alexander Rogozhkin, 2002), war is portrayed more as a locus of social and cultural communication than as a site of conflict. The movie depicts a situation of inter-cultural communication during the Soviet–Finnish war implicating three persons (a Russian soldier, a Finnish soldier, and a Saami girl) who randomly encounter each other somewhere in the borderland. They speak three different languages and can't understand each other but still manage to make up a "love triangle". In a culturally indicative way, the Russian character eventually becomes "a nameless man", known only to the other two characters by the self-ascribed nickname of "Psholty", which sounds like the Russian for "Get out of here".

In "*The Edge*" (Alexei Uchitel, 2010) one may see another story about the disintegration of the essentialist discourse grounded in the indispensable mobilization of the collective Self against the inimical Other. Correspondingly, all lines of distinction between "ourselves" and "others" lose their validity. The title of the movie can be understood in two aspects: as a denotation of geographical marginality/remoteness of the scenery, and as a problematization of the fuzzy boundaries between the insiders and the outsiders, "ours" and "aliens" against the background of traumatic post-war experience. The movie is a story about a macho-type of war veteran transferred to a Siberian colony for former Soviet prisoners of the German camps; yet on a more philosophical level it turns into a story of struggle between the essentialization of differences and their relativization. The war hero first beats a Baltic colonist for speaking German, and then gets involved in a love affair with a young Russian woman who had a child after her liaison with a German soldier. This metamorphosis could be explained by the shift from the war as an exceptional event that legitimizes hatred to the "normal times" that leave no room for it. The movie thus is instructive for demonstrating that the lines of distinction between the Soviet collective Self and the alleged "traitors", sustained by Soviet officialdom, are not work-

able as soon as it comes to what might be dubbed, following Agamben, “bare life”, or a life in its purest void of institutional regulations. It is symptomatic that the movie hero’s sympathy for—and then marriage to—a German girl hiding for years in the taiga does not make him an outcast in the community of colonists, yet the wider Soviet society, however, does not seem to be that tolerant: the German wife had to pretend to be mute in order to hide her accent.

“*Franz + Polina*” (Mikhail Segal, 2007) describes another situation of a loving couple squeezed between the two mortal enemies, the Soviet Union and Germany. In the movie a young German soldier in love with a Belorussian girl is forced to join the locals escaping from the Nazi troops. The story is demonstrative of a perfect type of split personality identity which divides others as well: Russian fugitives have to take an ethical decision on whether to accept Franz’s mimicry or not (very much like the German lady in “The Edge”, Franz had to pretend to be mute yet unfortunately failed to play this role and revealed his true identity). The end of the movie is pretty traditional though: in an act of brutal vengeance, a local boy kills the German soldier who has almost integrated into the community of displaced people looking for refuge from the Nazi army. The lesson of this gesture may be interpreted as a triumph of the inevitable pressure of traditional divides and the impossibility of steady communicative links between enemies. In a war-time milieu, alterity is not tolerated even as an exception, and dividing lines are reproduced in all their destructive force.

In “*Ours*” (Dmitry Meskhiev, 2004) the story of “*Franz + Polina*” turns the other way round: it is the Soviet officers who have to escape from the Germans and pretend to change their identity. The movie portrays a series of confusions between “us” and “them” in a time of war where no one can be trusted or even properly identified. Paradoxically, what ultimately unfolds within this seemingly post-modernist situation of distorted roles and masked identities is a very Hobbesian world which returns the viewers to the reality of an everlasting battlefield.

A similar message is inscribed in “*The Enemies*” (Maria Mozhar, 2007), a movie depicting an interactive situation in a village occupied by German troops, which turns into a site of communication between the invaders and the oppressed. The very possibility of such an interaction appears to be important as an evident revision of the canonic Soviet interpretation of the Great Patriotic War. However, the end of the story is again as traditional as it is tragic: the emerging communication instantaneously collapses as soon as the Germans shoot dead a local woman. The enemy thus shows its

true and inescapable identity restoring the Self-Enemy gulf in its purest form.

### An Evolving Russian Identity

The movies which I have described, on the one hand, challenge the Soviet-era Great Patriotic War narrative by shifting attention from the mass-scale feat of arms to much less known aspects of the war related to the souls and bodies of human beings. In this regard, the war discourse is moved from a great-power triumphalism to much a more subtle bio-political reflection grounded in human bodies rather than hard power politics. The new war discourse, expressed in the language of mass culture, forms its own subjects, previously completely non-existent as artistic characters. As I have ventured to demonstrate, an Orthodox priest, young criminals, and Russian lovers of German officers are certainly among them. What is crucial at this juncture is that the bio-political representations of these characters blur lines of distinctions between “Us” and “Them”, thus making the loyalty—and submission—to the state weaker than the carnal and sensual gravitation of human bodies, a sphere “over which sovereignty has no hold”.

Yet the bio-political interpretation of the war narrative, seemingly deconstructing the Soviet-era triumphalism, under closer scrutiny may strengthen it, since one of the strongest messages conveyed by the reviewed movies concerns the ability of the winning Self not only to defeat the enemy militarily but—what seems to be of no less importance—to forgive and understand those compatriots officially stigmatized as “accomplices” and “abettors”. This message is most clear in “*One War*” where the Soviet officer in charge of transferring the women from the island to the prison lets them escape and, by doing so, signs a death verdict for himself. This ethical gesture asserts the primacy of “natural life” over “politically qualified life” with its inevitable boundaries between Us and Others<sup>1</sup>. The movies claim that “natural life” is not necessarily definable in sovereign—and thus politically divisive—terms, and in their biological existence human beings—both Russian and Germans—share “their singularity, their being-such or their whatever-ness”<sup>2</sup>, “the simple fact of living”<sup>3</sup>. The “line-drawing strategies”, those making distinctions between human beings, which for Agamben constitutes “sovereign moves”, are either avoided or questioned.

1 Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 88.

2 Johnny Edkins. *Whatever Politics*, in *Sovereignty and Life*. Edited by Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli. Stanford University Press, 2007, p. 74.

3 Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 2.

Seen from this philosophical angle, the movies represent an attempt to decouple/liberate the domain of “bare”/“natural” life from its political “weight”. However, the realm of “natural life” may contain strong political components of its own, since within it there is much room left for individual choices which are always personal. Perhaps this is what might be dubbed “non-sovereign politics”.<sup>4</sup> The priest has to make his own choice between defending “any life” and a “politically qualified life” that is predicated upon a friend–foe distinction. This is also the case of the Soviet officer who in “One War” was ordered to transport the women and their kids to the camp but ultimately released them, having paid the highest price for his individual—and explicitly anti-systemic—decision, arguably more heroic than his previous military deeds. The killing of Franz was not a sovereign act of punishment either, but an individual gesture of grass-roots vengeance.

The analysis of these movies makes clear that the political claim of Russia’s status as the successor of the USSR does not automatically translate into the deriva-

tion of the Russian identity from the “good old” Soviet times. The post-Communist Russian identity certainly keeps sharing the legacy of the Great Patriotic War as a historical proof of Russia’s great power status, yet this legacy, in cultural terms, is not static (i.e. it is not attached to a well fixed set of meanings) but rather mobile and open for some rethinking. The changing cinematographic language in Russia makes clear that the inscription of the war **problématique into identity discourse** requires moving from the simplistic dichotomies like “falsification of history” versus “adherence to objectivity” to accepting the value of different interpretations of the past. Arguably, it is the language of artistic representations, images and metaphors that is more suitable for uncovering new meanings in the war narrative than the much more conservative language of politics. Yet the later will definitely have to react to the multiple attempts to raise new issues in cultural terms and thus offer a more complicated view on the historical foundations of Russian identity.

*About the Author:*

Andrey Makarychev is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the Public Service Academy in Nizhny Novgorod.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Calarco. *Jamming the Anthropological Machine, Sovereignty and Life*. Edited by Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli. Stanford University Press, 2007, p. 163.

ANALYSIS

## The *Marshrutka*—An Overlooked Public Good?

By Nicholas M. Wondra, Tbilisi

### Abstract

In the former Soviet Union, one of the most persistent fixtures of life is the *marshrutka*. Even in the smallest towns where there are no other public institutions, the *marshrutka* fulfills important economic roles. The importance of the *marshrutka* has only increased with the collapse of Soviet institutions and transport infrastructure. The *marshrutka* deserves serious academic attention because it is one of the few institutions which survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a mode of transportation, goods conveyance, postal service, news carrier, and provider of other indirect services, the *marshrutka* has been overlooked and undervalued by academics and students of development. *Marshrutki* serve in important roles for which there are often no, or poor, substitutes. Additionally, they provide numerous positive externalities. Future research should identify new methodologies to study this difficult-to-measure, wide-ranging fixture of post-Soviet life.

### Introduction

To live or study in the former Soviet Union (FSU) with little income is to know the shared taxi: the *marshrutka*. In the large-scale context, *marshrutki* (pl.) act as a net-

work: connecting people, towns, and productive capabilities. For many, this is the only form of conveyance, encompassing personal transport, news and goods distribution, and an informal postal network. By default



it has no or few substitutes, and the network of drivers enforces a clear set of rules over the *marshrutka* market. Ultimately, the *marshrutka* is more than just a taxi. A close examination of its secondary and tertiary services shows that *marshrutki* provide useful public goods in addition to moving people where they want to go.

There is little written about *marshrutki*, perhaps because they are so ubiquitous in the FSU that they seem unworthy of note. However, they deserve much greater attention because the *marshrutka* may be the most robust Soviet institution, one that survives essentially unchanged to this day. *Marshrutki* fill many necessary roles and comprise an informal system which presents many development opportunities. While *marshrutki* are mentioned in the literature, they are not the focus of specific research among foreigners. This is possibly due to the fact that the primary observers (i.e. academics and expatriates) typically choose more prestigious modes of transportation, like taxis or even private cars, with or without hired drivers. This leads to few observations, and even fewer technical considerations of the importance of *marshrutki*.

## Background

A “*marshrutka*” is a shared taxi, often a ramshackle vehicle, which from a western perspective looks as though it has risen from a junk yard. It is usually a poorly maintained 15–20 passenger van with redistributed seats and handles which maximize occupancy and minimize leg-room. However, it is also much more. Variations on this mode of transport can be found all over the world from Africa to South America. This type of vehicle, and the term *marshrutka* is widespread in the former Soviet Union. The word, *marshrutka*, which is of Russian origin, means “transport.”

The method of catching a *marshrutka* is similar throughout the FSU. The *marshrutka* indicates where it is going either with numbered routes or sometimes with the destination on a placard under the front windshield. One hails the *marshrutka* with a raised arm. If the driver has space (sometimes only standing room) he will slow to a stop, often cutting through traffic to do so. You slide open a typically noisy, rusty door and enter, closing the clamorous door behind you. The driver takes off again on his fixed route, stopping when asked by passengers and picking up those who hail him on the street; you ask him to stop at the given point on the

route where you need to be, and pay the driver the fixed price, regardless of distance traveled (if you did not pay when you entered the van), and exit. Even in big cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, passengers can ride from one side of the city to the other for a reasonably priced fare.

Inter-city *marshrutki* are similar, leaving from de facto motor stations where honking and yelling is commonplace due to inadequate space and little or no official oversight. Embarking from the suburbs is similar to the process within cities, passengers hailing the driver on the sides of roads, then packing in their cargo wherever it will fit, sometimes on the roof. The primary difference is that journeys are longer. Because the network is a permanent de facto organization, information is not readily available in one place, but one can usually contact a driver, via other drivers, by mobile phone. Seats can sometimes be reserved and special pickups arranged in this manner.

## History

*Marshrutki* first appeared in the USSR in the 1930s in Moscow, running fixed routes around the city. In the post WWII period, *marshrutki* became commonplace in other cities as well. The low cost and high effectiveness made official and unofficial operation of the conveyances attractive. The vehicles did not initially provide a niche service since they often ran parallel to uncoordinated public transport services and the duplication led to economic inefficiencies which are well-addressed in the economic literature. For example, factories would operate buses for their own workers along identical routes to public buses, or run transport at times of day when it was not needed. It is telling that *marshrutki* survived even in intra-city transport-saturated environments, alongside buses, trams, and trollies. The *marshrutka* paradigm was, by its nature, more reactive to the economic environment. It did what other Soviet institutions never could: pushed responsibility and decision-making down, rather than up. Drivers could select their own routes and set prices. They could make loose timetables with other drivers. They could “own” routes according to their relations with other drivers in the network. There were direct feedback mechanisms which were incentivized. The small size of the vehicles virtually eliminated the free rider problem, as drivers could keep track of who had paid. It is perhaps because of these primary



Photograph © Nicholas Wondra

reasons that the *marshrutka* is one of the few fixtures of the USSR which survived into the post-Soviet period. For these reasons, it has even flourished.

*Marshrutki* gradually filled roles that other modes of transport, like the metro, trams, trolleys, and buses, could not. It is possible that this is due to the institution itself: in a command economy, the *marshrutka* was one of the few market-sensitive institutions. During the disintegration of public institutions and services which accompanied the collapse of the USSR itself, privately-run *marshrutki* became a primary mode of transport and began to fill roles previously serviced by public conveyance. Public transportation became more difficult to maintain and operate than *mashrutki*, thus the private system survived and succeeded when other forms of transport did not. This was spurred by problems not only in the management and funding of public transportation systems themselves, but also problems in supplementary goods provision, such as electricity to power the metro or trolley, or unique parts to service machines which were out of production. It is the flexibility and relatively low cost inputs for *marshrutki* that allowed the system to be successful. The vehicles were ubiquitous in the USSR for other commercial purposes, and were easily converted into a mode of transport.

Modern populations in the FSU are not as static as they were in Soviet times. Much of the Soviet economy became defunct following the collapse of the USSR, and as such the transportation infrastructure no longer reflected the economic realities or needs of the transition. *Marshrutki*, by virtue of their flexibility and low inputs, filled the void. *Marshrutki* became and remain an efficient means to move people and things between communities. The conveyance is cramped, but the cost is borne by all who ride, making a rather affordable, albeit uncomfortable means of getting person and property from place to place. This holds especially true in communities where there is little more than a single school which comprises the public sector— relative efficiency is easy to achieve in the context of zero substitutes.

### Secondary and Tertiary Functions

The primary purpose of a *marshrutka* is transportation for people. Without much regulation, however (safety or otherwise) the *marshrutka* has become a primary means of goods transport as well.

The network of *marshrutka* drivers and routes functions as something of a multipurpose service-provision mechanism. In smaller countries, such as Georgia and Armenia, this network is flexible and robust, encompassing just about every reach of road which is accessible year-round. Drivers trade their routes, buy them, and engage in collusion to fix their routes and prices. On busier routes, there is more competition. In some cases, there is a ticket booth and an organizer who coordinates between drivers and ticket sellers. There are redistributive economic effects and other positive externalities which require a closer look.

The network is key and functions as a de facto “Western Union.” In Georgia, packages and news come on board with each stop and are delivered en route to the final destination. Packages often travel unaccompanied, and I have even observed envelopes of cash (several instances of

hundreds of US dollars) dutifully passed on to their recipients. Interestingly, the only place that I have seen this is in Georgia. In some cases, those asking that packages be delivered offer a small sum to drivers to compensate travel expenses. This is significant because many places in the FSU lack a unified formal system of addresses or a functioning official postal service. This affects other developmental aspects, such as democratization associated

with election administration, as voters have no official addresses, as the OSCE has pointed out in its election monitoring reports. The system is dependent upon the personal networks throughout the towns and villages along the *marshrutka* route. For example, while passing through a village, a *marshrutka* driver will pass a package on to the first local resident he sees, trusting that the package will be dutifully delivered by a neighbor. Completing a feedback loop in the sector of residency could improve aspects of representative democracy.

Tertiary functions are both positive and negative. The tight network of drivers which may control one or a series of routes may effectively prevent transport alternatives from creeping into the market, reducing competition. This may limit the supply of goods, which then has effects on a local economy. Collusion may mean passengers are paying too much. One route may cannibalize another, leading to inefficiencies. There could be artificial scarcity due to predatory scheduling. A tangential issue is that the fixture is so robust, discrimination can



Photograph © Nicholas Wondra

occur in who can even become a driver. The author on one occasion was traveling from an ethnically-mixed region of Georgia, when members of an ethnic minority were asked to move to the back of the *marshrutka* in order to give their present seats to Georgians. Such observations are troubling, considering the civil rights ideals to which Georgia professes to aspire.

Alternatively, the human touch is not lost on drivers from small communities. Drivers sometimes do go to great efforts to ensure good quality service. To travel from Yerevan to Gyumri, in Armenia, calling ahead is necessary, but you can be picked up at home if you live in the right part of the city. On a Georgian *marshrutka* from Zugdidi to Mestia, Svaneti, a remote region of Georgia, the driver was willing to travel 10km off-route to drop passengers at their homes. In other rural areas, it is common to request to be picked up at one's home. This particular *marshrutka* to Mestia was weighed down with supplies which were unaccompanied, and received at their destination by a designee. Residents of small villages in the southern part of Azerbaijan often take weekly trips to Iran to purchase produce, and bring back 20 kilo bags of fruits or vegetables on *marshrutki*. These are areas which are not reachable by bus and prohibitively expensive to reach by taxi. Hiring a truck is unimaginable. Individuals from these regions do not have the means to buy private cars, making the *marshrutka* absolutely essential to isolated residents and businesses. It is necessary for citizens' inclusion into other institutions, as well. This is all the more true in circumstances where there is a lack of communication resources such as a post office, telephone, or Internet.

### Prospects for Development

With regard to development, considerable gains could come from building and improving the existing *marshrutka* network into one which can more directly impact economic development. Transparency and regulation must be increased whilst quality research is undertaken. In one applicable example relevant to the study of economic development, an internally displaced family in west Georgia uses the system of *marshrutki* for their blossoming flower business. Without private conveyance, they would have no way to get their lilies to market. The arrangement is made with the driver, who saves a regular space for the flowers in addition to carrying regular passengers.

In rural areas of the FSU, the *marshrutka* is the closest thing to resembling an "institution." While the longevity of the institution is evident, the physical endurance of the vehicles is not. Traffic accidents and mechanical problems are common, but can be expected with vehicles running almost exclusively with more than 500,000 km

on their odometers. While there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence about crashes, roll-overs, and other misfortunes, which one might think would dissuade travelers, the absence of transportation substitutes means riders continue to brave the *marshrutka* regardless of the risks. Despite all this, the network of *marshrutki* presents a basis upon which to build and grow other economic sectors. Conversely, good policy must answer the safety needs of the population.

One way to capitalize on the de facto network would be to grow and improve it. This would mean adopting incentive schemes to suit the current network, with the goals of firmer, more predictable schedules and improved transit safety. Formalizing the existing network would certainly be commensurate with recent economic changes in Georgia which have seen relocation of informal vendors and the use of tax police. A main difference here is that there are no real disincentives for improving transit safety across-the-board, on all types of conveyance. The current state of the *marshrutka* network seems entirely dependent upon personal contacts and held together logistically by the mobile phone network. While introducing technology or formal structure may be ill-received at first, being labeled a "restriction on rights" or "government interference," this may be the only effective means of establishing universal seat belt laws or ensuring appropriate loading/unloading facilities for passengers, and ample parking space for the vehicles themselves. Formalizing the system will make it safer, easier to navigate, and less intrusive upon other vehicles.

Another way in which the network could be improved would be expansion into commercial transport. My heritage is not too far removed from the dairy trucks that came around to my parents' farm in rural Wisconsin, whereupon the driver was authorized to purchase produce and then deliver it to the rest of the distribution network. This is possible in the south Caucasus, albeit on a smaller scale. Agriculture sector expansion is often touted as a possible growth sector in Georgia, but because of timidity in incorporating land and resources both vertically and horizontally (some Georgians refer to it as the "new collectivization"), Georgians are hesitant to fill the void by risking their own capital. Without pooling resources, there are few options for a small farmer. Transport is among the larger hurdles. If transport could be first subsidized to collect and distribute produce, small-firm agriculture may follow apace.

### Conclusion

*Marshrutki* are more than meet the eye. More research is warranted on the subject and in particular, where *marshrutki* are being under-utilized. The permanent de facto network of drivers and vehicles which reach to



the far corners of the FSU constitutes a service that is directly and indirectly beneficial to the populations at large and paid-for by the clients who use the service. The effects of redistribution and goods transport on the economy are undeniable, though currently need measurement and quantification. It is certain that without the *marshrutka* network, many towns would be isolated from governance structures and may cease to function within the greater economy.

More work is needed in measuring de facto networks and the positive externalities they provide. The

simple fact that *marshrutki* exist at such a high density and that there are few substitutes makes this a useful subject for study. The academic community ought to give the *marshrutka* serious economic consideration and view it not just as a burden on the eye, but as the workhorse of post-Soviet middle-classes. What else has survived from the USSR? The simple resilience of the institution warrants its serious consideration as an important economic component of the FSU.

#### *About the Author:*

Nicholas Wondra is currently a Fulbright fellow in the Republic of Georgia and has also lived in Ukraine, Russia, and Armenia.

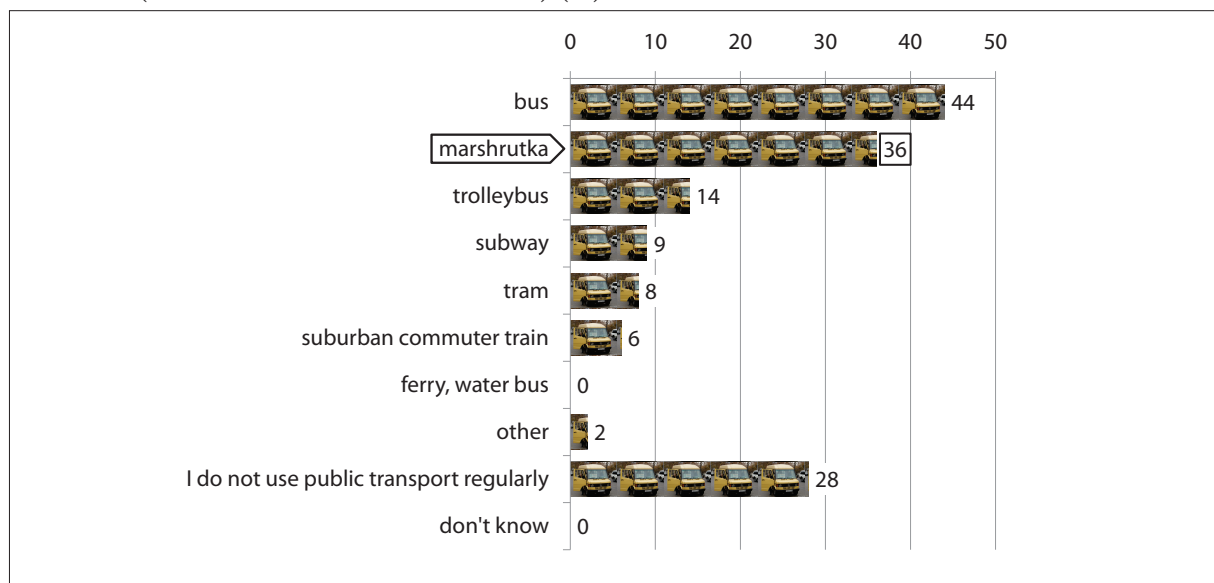
#### *Recommended Reading*

- Crouch, Martin. "Problems of Soviet Urban Transport." *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, April 1979, pp. 231–256.
- Grava, Sigurd. "Urban Transport in the Soviet Union." In Henry W. Morton and Robert C. Stuart, eds., *The Contemporary Soviet City*. Armonk, N.Y. M. E. Sharpe. 1984, pp. 180–201.
- OSCE/ODIHR. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions on the Municipal Elections in Georgia. 30 May 2010.

## OPINION POLL

### “They Go Everywhere”: Opinion Poll On *Marshrutki* in Russia

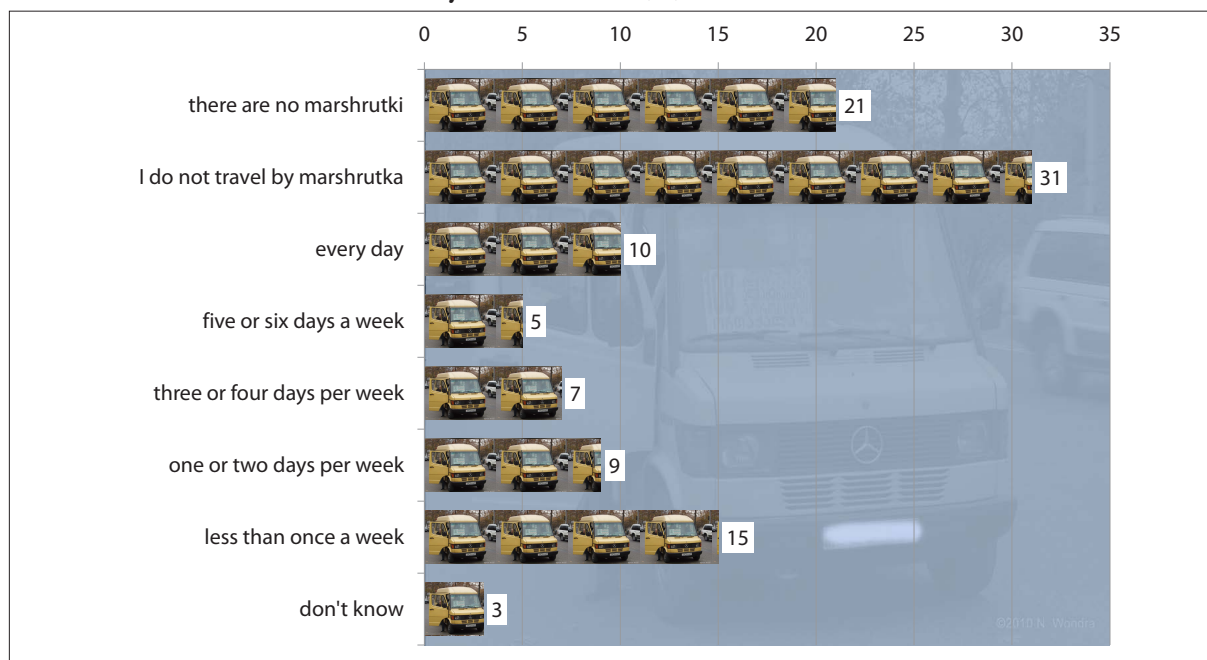
Figure 1: Which Means of Public Transport Do You Use on a Regular Basis?  
(Unlimited Number of Answers) (%)



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>

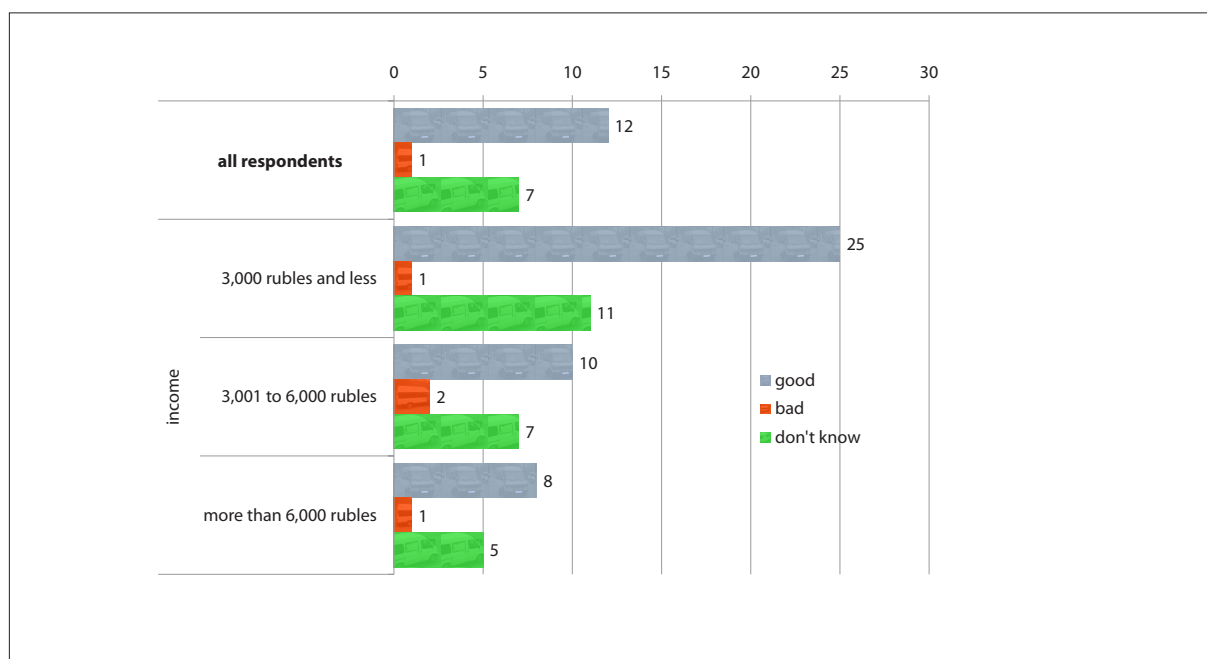
Image used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 2: Are There *Marshrutki* In the Area In Which You Live? If There Are, How Many Times a Week Do You Travel By *Marshrutka*? (%)**



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Image used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 3: Would It Be Good Or Bad If There Were *Marshrutki* in the Area Where You Live (Answers of Respondents Who Answered That There Are No *Marshrutki* In the Area Where They Live—21% of All Respondents) (in % of All Respondents)**



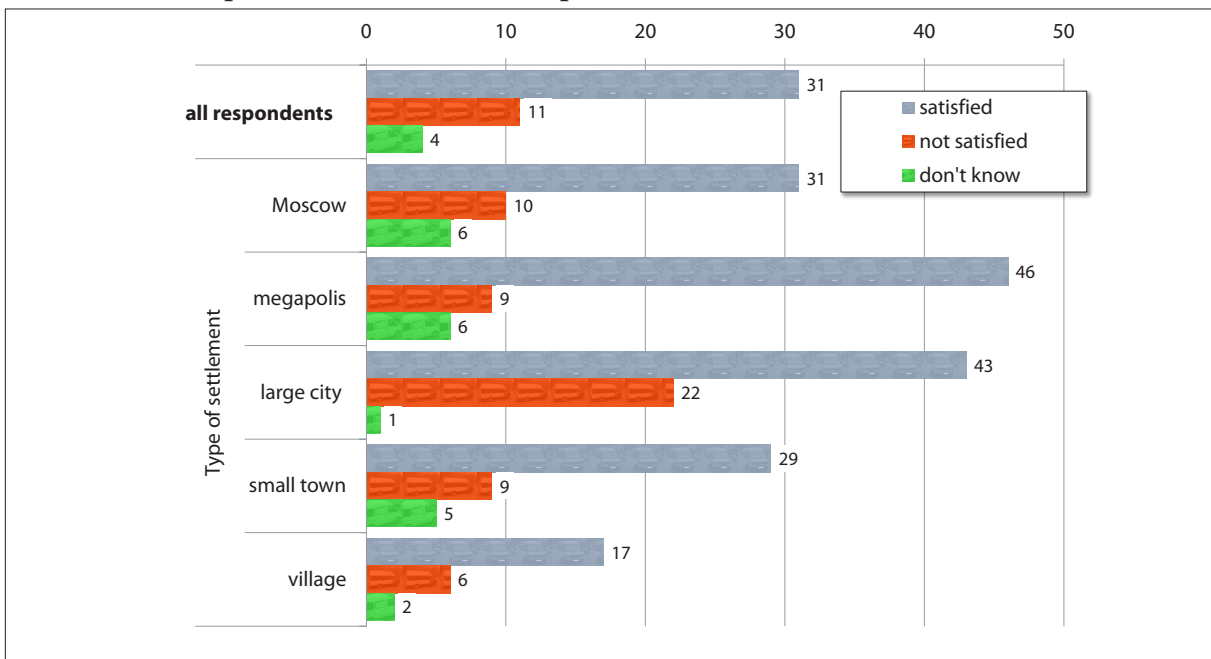
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Images used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 4: How Much Do You Spend on Average On *Marsbrutki*? (Answers By Respondents Who Answered That They Travel By *Marsbrutka* not less Than Once a Week—30% of All Respondents) (in % of All Respondents)**



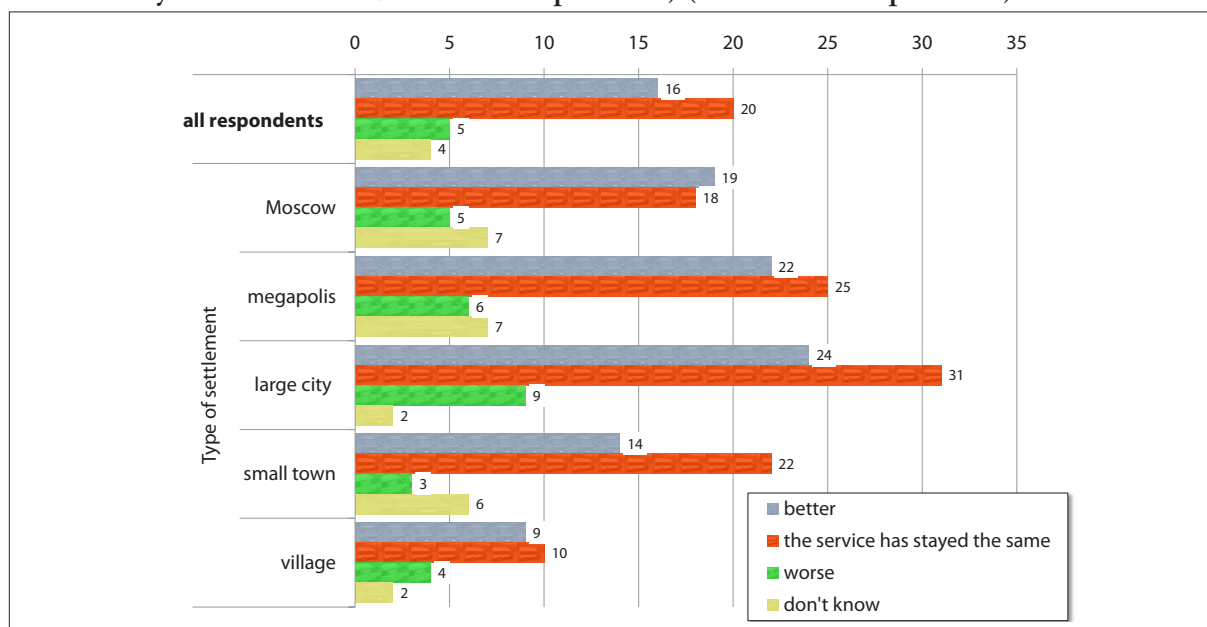
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Images used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 5: Are you Satisfied Or Not With the Way *Marsbrutki* Work in the Area Where You Live? (Answers By Respondents Who Answered That They Travel By *Marsbrutka*—45% of All Respondents) (in % of All Respondents)**



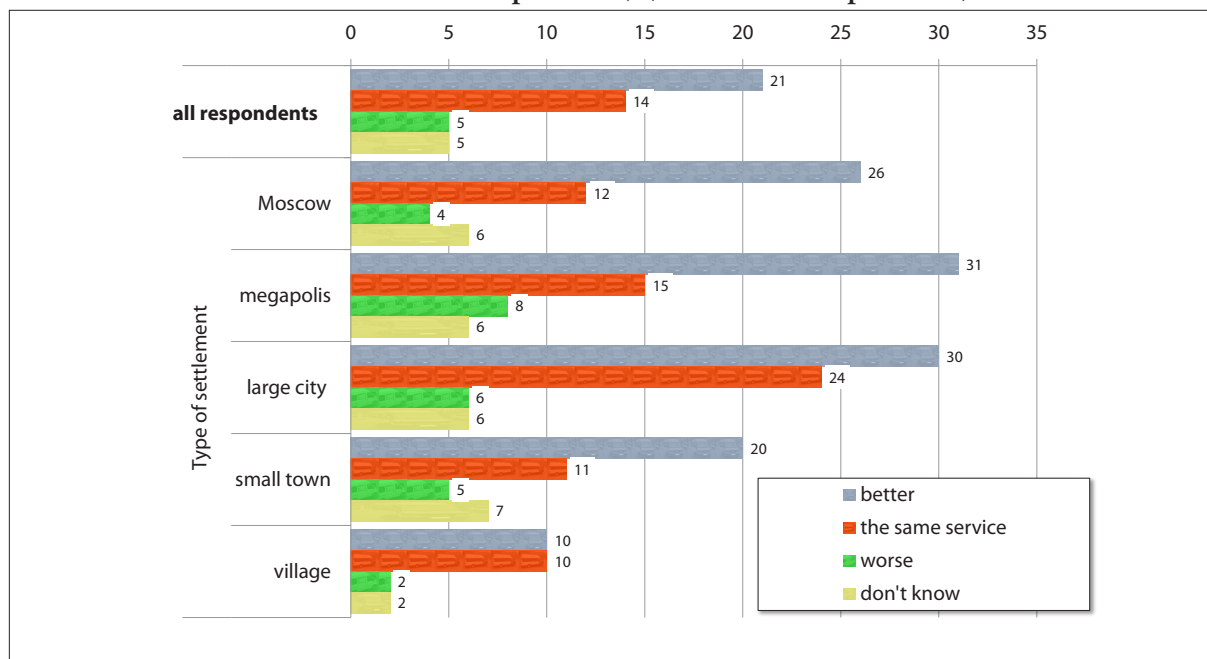
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Images used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 6: In the Area Where You Live, Are *Marsbrutki* Providing Worse or Better Service Than Two or Three Years Ago? (Answers By Respondents Who Answered That They Travel By *Marsbrutka*—45% of All Respondents) (in % of All Respondents)**



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Images used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra

**Figure 7: In the Area Where You Live, Are *Marsbrutki* Providing Worse or Better Service Than Public Transport? (Answers By Respondents Who Answered That They Travel By *Marsbrutka*—45% of All Respondents) (in % of All Respondents)**



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (FOM), 11–12 October 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d084124>  
 Images used in diagram: © Nicholas Wondra



## ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen ([www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de](http://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de)), the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), the Resource Security Institute and the Institute of History at the University of Basel (<http://histsem.unibas.ch/seminar/>). It is supported by the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language Russland-Analysen ([www.laender-analysen.de/russland](http://www.laender-analysen.de/russland)), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia ([www.res.ethz.ch](http://www.res.ethz.ch)), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

To subscribe or unsubscribe to the Russian Analytical Digest, please visit our web page at [www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad](http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad)

#### Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to socialist and post-socialist cultural and societal developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and the integration of post-socialist countries into EU governance. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email services with nearly 20,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.

With a collection of publications on Eastern Europe unique in Germany, the Research Centre is also a contact point for researchers as well as the interested public. The Research Centre has approximately 300 periodicals from Russia alone, which are available in the institute's library. News reports as well as academic literature is systematically processed and analyzed in data bases.

#### The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, teaching, and information services in the fields of international and Swiss security studies. The CSS also acts as a consultant to various political bodies and the general public. The CSS is engaged in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners. The Center's research focus is on new risks, European and transatlantic security, strategy and doctrine, area studies, state failure and state building, and Swiss foreign and security policy.

In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) in public policy degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS); offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students; and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Crisis and Risk Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

#### The Institute of History at the University of Basel

The Institute of History at the University of Basel was founded in 1887. It now consists of ten professors and employs some 80 researchers, teaching assistants and administrative staff. Research and teaching relate to the period from late antiquity to contemporary history. The Institute offers its 800 students a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in general history and various specialized subjects, including a comprehensive Master's Program in Eastern European History (<http://histsem.unibas.ch/bereiche/osteuropaeische-geschichte/>).

#### Resource Security Institute

The Resource Security Institute (RSI) is a non-profit organization devoted to improving understanding about global energy security, particularly as it relates to Eurasia. We do this through collaborating on the publication of electronic newsletters, articles, books and public presentations.

Any opinions expressed in Russian Analytical Digest are exclusively those of the authors.

Reprint possible with permission by the editors.

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder

Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, Michael Clemens

ISSN 1863-0421 © 2010 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

Research Centre for East European Studies • Publications Department • Klagenfurter Str. 3 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: [fsopr@uni-bremen.de](mailto:fsopr@uni-bremen.de) • Internet: [www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad](http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad)