



DOMESTIC POLITICS

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Divisions within the Russian Political Elites¹

By David Lane, Cambridge

Abstract

The author contends that Russia should be regarded as a hybrid economic system supporting two major elite constituencies: a politically led national statist bloc and liberal Western-oriented economic interests favouring neo-liberal market policies. The political leadership is considered to be constituted of a political coalition offering a balance between these two groups.

The political leadership in Russia is generally portrayed in the Western media as a power elite similar in character to that of the Soviet Union. Under the conditions of post-communism, it is contended, the leader recruits associates from the power ministries (police, security and army). Moreover, such 'siloviki', are not only placed in government, but also are appointed to the boards of companies in which the government has an interest.

Some things, however, have changed. Now the Soviet political and military threat has been superseded by economic control over energy supply. As Marshall Goldman (Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia) has put it, Russia is 'again a superpower... Gazprom, and by extension, the Russian government, are already beginning to enjoy a power over their European neighbours far beyond the dreams of the former Romanov Czars or the Communist Party Secretaries'.

This image of President Putin, acting as Puppet Master, controlling the strings of power, occludes a more complicated process of elite interaction between the Presidential leadership and economic and political leaders and institutions. The strongest political leader is dependent not only for sustenance on support of military and economic resources, but also on those who mobilise (and financially sponsor) electoral campaigns and provide political backing.

The factual, as opposed to the assertive, base in support of these commonly held views is surprisingly fragile. Marshall Goldman's table 'Siloviki in business' lists only twelve current politicians with positions on the boards of companies. Others have strongly contested this conclusion. The Russian scholar, O.F. Shabrov for example, claims that the 'siloviki' have always been far outnumbered by businessmen and civil servants (chinovniki) in the political elite. He contends that the dominant group was, and still is, composed of people from business corporations and generalises from this that Russia is a corporate state. This means a market economy set

in a regulative state operating on the basis of a politically led pact between fractions of the ruling elites—'oligarchs' and politicians. Such an approach brings to the forefront the role of capital and also draws attention to actual and potential differences of economic and political interests among members of the economic and political elites.

The Hybrid Economy

The political elites work in the context of a hybrid economic system. Under Western and Russian capitalism, there are two frameworks of power: state and economy. In the West and particularly in the USA, the scope and activity of the state is restricted as an actor in the economy. In Russia, the state has an independent economic property base as well as a stronger coordinating role over business. But a corporate state does not undermine capitalism—the state may strengthen it through financial support, contracts and subsidies. Moreover, unlike China, Russia is not a state capitalist formation because the private corporate sector is much more strongly entrenched.

There is a potential here for conflicts between the state and corporations if the state intervenes to direct their resources to politically inspired (though legitimate) goals, or when it redefines relationships with foreign corporate interests.

The hybrid economic system gives rise to two main elite constituencies. A statist oriented bloc leaning towards President Vladimir Putin and a liberal Western-oriented set of interests symbolized by current Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. This dualism (Putin's statism and Medvedev's liberalism) is at the centre of elite politics.

The Putin Bloc

President Putin can rely for support on a faction of the business elite as well as the political elite, which seeks to assert a state driven variety of corporate capitalism. Interests here include the power ministries (emphasised by Goldman) over whom the President has control; he is also dependent for support on a circle of directors of state owned companies or partly privatised companies, often controlled by government friendly oligarchs.

¹ This article draws from my book, *The Capitalist Transformation of State Socialism*, to be published by Routledge in November 2013.

Private companies become dependent on the state not only for contracts and finance, but also seek protection through tariffs.

Through joint ownership and overlapping directorships the government seeks to coordinate the Russian economy. These include state economic associations and companies in the financial block (notably German Gref), the transport sector, the agrarian complex, communications, security and technology, and the building bloc. Other supporters include: the head of Rostneft (Igor Sechen) and siloviki such as Mikhail Fradkov (Foreign Intelligence Service) as described earlier.

President Putin has not undermined the position of private business. On the contrary, he has strengthened it. It is true that he brought under state ownership and control many private companies, including the oil giant Yukos and he has also renegotiated and strengthened state control over Western oil companies with interests in Russia.

However, the Russian state's share of ownership in energy resources is not particularly large in comparative terms. In 2011, some 85 per cent of world energy resources are owned by state firms. Defining exactly the 'state share' in Russian oil production involves complicated calculations of ownership. According to Heiko Pleines, in Russia, state ownership of oil resources rose from 13 per cent in 2004 to 40 per cent in 2011. Nat Moser, on the basis of oil production and company reports on ownership, has calculated that the figures for 2004 and 2007 respectively were 15% and 37% for state owned companies—after the TNK-BP purchase by Rosneft, he further estimates that the state's share will rise to 55 per cent in 2013. The gas industry, even under Yeltsin, remained under state control and accounted for 85 per cent of production in 2007. These figures show a remarkable rise in state ownership of oil production under Putin. However, in a global context, state ownership of oil assets is lower than the world norm.

The nature of state ownership is put into perspective when we consider that the number of economic enterprises with foreign capital rose steadily from 16,196 in 2005 to 19,650 in 2010. There were over 4 million private companies in operation in 2010. Under Putin no controls have been exercised over capital export to restrict property rights of Russian and foreign owners. Between 1990–2010, capital export from Russia amounted to 798 billion dollars. Russia joined the WTO in 2011 (ratified in 2012) after protracted negotiations. These facts indicate the political elite's commitment to the privatised market sector.

The other major buttress to Putin's power is his control of political organisation and ideology. Putin's early assault against hostile oligarchs led to restrictions on the

media and an increase in state controlled TV stations. Members of the business elite—oligarchs like Gusinsky and Berezovsky—lost their TV channels. Putin has been able to secure political control: he has destroyed the vocal opposition of the economic oligarchs, and co-opted others. Putin has also firmly controlled the state media and limited foreign-based Non Government Organisations. The state controlled media support government policies. As Castells has put it: 'What does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind'.

Putin shifted the balance of power from corporate business to the politicians forming the ruling elite. His compact with the oligarchs has allowed them to keep their assets and profits and he has maintained political order.

Putin has his own political apparatus. He controls the United Russia Party, which effectively is a 'party of the state' promoting the President's policies. Through it Putin can also channel resources as patronage as well to influence elections. In the latter he has been successful. Liberal-democratic advocates standing for election against Putin received a derisory share of the vote, even compared to the second largest party, the KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation).

This is one side of the story. On the other side are more liberal market orientated politicians and interests.

The Liberal Opposition in the Political Elite

Under Yeltsin considerable privatisation of industry occurred, and the presence of Western companies with affiliates in Russia has grown under the Putin/Medvedev administration. These subscribe to a neo-liberal vision which sees Russia's interest in a global economy with open free markets and foreign direct investment opening up the country to foreign firms. The government includes neo-liberal reformers (supported by external bodies such as the IMF) particularly in the Ministry of Finance.

Dmitri Medvedev has been belittled somewhat in the Western media and portrayed as a soft pedalling partner on a tandem (a Putin Batman and Medvedev Robin partnership), yet his policies are liberal and Western leaning. He has consistently advocated more liberal policies and, when President, was supported by neo-liberal members of the political elite.

According to Russian commentator, Aleksey Mukhin, these included Yuri Petrov of RFFI (the Russian Fund for Fundamental Research) and the Ministry of Economic Development, Igor Shuvalov (vice prime minister) and Sergey Brilev (RTP—a leading investment company). Domestically, Medvedev has had the support of political liberals such as Vyacheslav Lebedev, and people in the federal government legal system, such as Aleksandr Konovalov and others with pro-American leanings such as Aleksandr Voloshin, Arkadiy Dvorkovich and Sergey

Prikhod'ko. He represents a more American orientated neo-liberal market ideology. He is reputed to have a rapport with US President Obama and is derided on critical TV programmes as an 'American Boy'.

Medvedev's neo-liberal outlook was expressed by his address at the World Economic Forum at Davos in 2011. He condemned 'populist' solutions, particularly policies of nationalization in general, and bank nationalisation in particular, and supported developments in the private sector. He also endorsed neo-liberal austerity measures which were necessary to 'live within one's means'. He emphasised that his policy in Russia was to 'privatise major state assets', to involve 'leading global banks' in managing Russian privatisation. The government's Strategy 2020 Document proposes to reduce even more state guidance.

He has stressed the importance of 'integrating Russia into the global economy' and making the 'Russian judicial system more effective for finance sector companies'. He envisions Russia joining the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD) and has endorsed the principles of the EU in promoting the 'free movement of people, capital and goods'. On 22 June 2012, Medvedev announced that the following privatisations would take place: 50% of Sovkomflot, 7.58% of Sberbank, 25.2% of VTB (bank), all of United Grain Co, 49.9% of Rosalroleasing, 10% of nanotechnology holding Rusano and 25% of Russian railways. He has long declared the importance of Russia joining the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which promotes a free market economy.

Ideologically he has opposed Vladislav Surkov's ideas on 'sovereign democracy', which are designed to strengthen Russia against Western values and economic interests. He views the components of democracy like a Western liberal—favouring a market society, the rule of law and accountability of government to society. In this context, external political actors also become a major determinant of the direction of economic change.

Medvedev's liberalism is expressed in a greater concern than Putin for property rights, the rule of law, greater pluralism and democratisation. He strongly promotes a more positive attitude towards the West, particularly to the USA. Indicative of this relationship is the fact that US Vice President Joe Biden's visit to Moscow in May 2011 was hosted by Medvedev, who was praised by Biden for his personal leadership. Biden also courted the democratic opposition during his visit.

Unlike Putin, who has the backing of the United Russia party and considerable electoral support, Medvedev is politically weak and he lacks a strong popular domestic political base. Even if one concedes that the elections are biased against his challengers, Putin has considerable cha-

risma and is clearly favoured by public opinion reflected in his landslide electoral victories.

The domestic political weakness of the neo-liberal bloc around Medvedev pushes them to succour support from the West. Both internally and through the international media, the new liberals seek to discredit Putin personally and politically. He is alleged to be a major source of corruption as a head of a 'mafia state'. Anatoly Chubais coined the idea of the fascist state in Russia, which was taken up by many Western journalists, such as Edward Lucas (*The Economist*) and Luke Harding (*The Guardian*). Massive Western media campaigns delegitimize the election process by amplifying the extent of election fraud. The proposed antidote is further privatisation and minimising the role of the state.

Internally, a democratic opposition has arisen in a somewhat haphazard coalition of divided civil society groupings. One leader is Mikhail Kasyanov, a previous Prime minister under Yeltsin, who has consistently campaigned against Putin. Among his demands are a new round of market reforms, a move to an American type corporate economy and the institution of the rule of law. Under the banner of Freedom House and the UK Foreign Policy Initiative, he has criticized Putin's 'illusion of democracy'.

The Putin-Medvedev Coalition

The Russian globalised neo-liberal capitalist class can shelter under the Putin/Medvedev tandem. During the economic crisis of 2008, for example, Russia's oligarchs doubled the amount of cash flows diverted offshore, while concurrently demanding financial support from the administration, which they received. Their foreign debts increased and credit which could have been utilised for domestic economic development was siphoned off in profits. Support for the private sector was shown by the government bailing out privatised companies, rather than nationalising them.

A Russian capitalist class coupled to foreign affiliates is able to maintain an area of autonomy against the Putin administration. Any concerted attack by the political leadership against the oligarchs as a class would undoubtedly have foreign repercussions and lead to internal instability. To maintain a political equilibrium, rather like the UK's David Cameron and Nick Clegg coalition, the political leadership concedes to these pressures. The tensions between the Russian leadership and leading Western trading nations reflect the attempts of President Putin to maintain a Russian national presence in strategic industries and to support the Russian emerging transnational energy companies.

President Putin might like to move further in the direction of a national capitalist economic formation,

combining a state-led economic formation with significant private, as well as state owned capital. But he and his circle are currently limited by the constraints not

only of the domestic oligarchs, but also of foreign companies, especially those with affiliates in Russia.

About the Author

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ANALYSIS

Forward to the Past!

The President's Message to the Federal Assembly

By Hans-Henning Schröder, Berlin

Abstract

This article analyses Putin's first keynote speech of his new term in office. It is argued that it is significant not for the policy agenda it outlines, which is largely nothing new, but for its attempt to set in place a national-conservative narrative that evokes Russian traditions and past glories as a frame for official policy. In so doing, Putin is trying to regain the support of the majority of the Russian populace. However this risks alienating the minority—including business elites and liberal middle-classes—and thus stoking societal divisions.

2012—A Critical Year

The president took his time. He only presented his annual "Message to the Federal Assembly"¹ to the representatives of the Federation Council and the State Duma on Constitution Day, 12 December 2012. The late date was likely due to a number of factors: Elected in March, the president was sworn into office in early May. In autumn, he was stricken by a mysterious ailment that prevented him from travelling abroad and apparently also made major public appearances undesirable. Furthermore, the political situation was complicated throughout the year. Discontent among parts of the population, which had led to the demonstrations in the winter of 2011/12, had not abated, and there seem to have been disagreements and conflicts within the top leadership as well. It is thus not surprising that the president delayed the first major keynote speech of his new term in office as long as possible.

This was despite the fact that the economic situation was not unfavorable. International energy prices remained high – with the spot price for a barrel of Brent

at between US\$105 and 109 in early November 2012² and ensured protracted economic growth. The year-on-year increase of GDP between 2010 and 2012 was above 4 per cent, which was less than the desired rate, but far above the corresponding values for the Western European industrialized nations. Industrial output was also on the rise, although at 3.2 per cent, the increase for the first half of 2012 was noticeably lower than in the previous year.³ Since the unemployment rate decreased from 7.2 to 5.4 per cent between 2010 and 2012 and average wages in 2011 and 2012 were significantly higher than before the financial crisis of 2008–9, the external socio-economic conditions were not unfavorable.

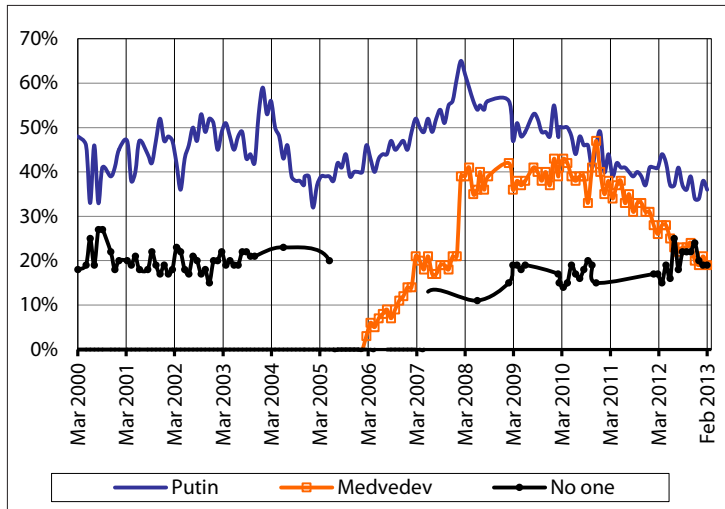
However, the auspicious economic development was apparently not sufficient to put a hold on the gradual process of dwindling trust that has been underway since 2008–2009. According to the ratings supplied by the Levada-Center (see. Figure 1 overleaf), trust in Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev has been declining since 2008 and September 2009, respectively. While these

1 A translated transcript of the speech is available at <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/4739>

2 Cf. http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist_xls/RBRTed.xls, 10 November 2012.

3 Cf. http://www.suomenpankki.fi/bofit_en/seuranta/venajatilastot/Pages/default.aspx, 4 September 2012.

Figure 1: Please Indicate Five or Six Politicians You Trust (Only Results for “Putin”, “Medvedev”, and “No one”)



Source: representative opinion polls by Levada-Center (originally VTsIOM) from March 2000 to February 2013, <http://www.levada.ru/print/21-02-2013/fevralskie-reitingi-odobreniya-doveriya-i-polozheniya-del-v-strane>

ratings had always spiked in the context of the 2003/4 and 2007/8 elections, the media campaigns ahead of the 2011/12 elections had only little effect. While “Brand Putin” remained largely unchallenged in Russian public opinion, its attractiveness diminished progressively. The general public was still shaken by a fear of inflation; it criticized the leadership for failing to provide sufficient social security; and a growing number of respondents perceived the leaders as egotistic and corrupt (see Figure 2 on p. 9).

Repressive Stabilization Instead of Reform

Putin’s new team apparently found no recipe for a short-term resolution of the issue. Sergei Ivanov and Vyacheslav Volodin, who headed the presidential administration, did not attempt to integrate the protesting middle class politically, as Medvedev had done as recently as January 2012 with his reform of electoral law. The one-and-a-half party system was not reformed, and the notion of forming a liberal party that might have appealed to critical middle-class voters was discarded. Neither did the administration have any short-term success in asserting itself against the critics of the regime on the internet and social media websites. Instead, it apparently preferred to cobble together ad-hoc laws allowing repression against critics, such as through changes to the law on protection of children that allowed takedowns of websites or through regulations used to brand critical non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as “foreign agents”. Leaders of the street opposition were smothered in legal proceedings. The performance by punk band Pussy Riot

in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior, of which a majority of the population disapproved, was an opportunity to mobilize a conservative populace against protestors and dissenters. The regional elections on 14 October demonstrated that the United Russia party was able to manipulate gubernatorial elections and to eliminate political competitors even before the actual polls. While all of these factors secured the stability of the regime, they did not increase trust among the general public.

The creeping crisis of confidence between “the power” and “the people” was not the only problem facing the new administration, however. There were noticeable irritations even among the elites. There were complications from the personnel reshuffle in the political leadership, which saw Putin’s most important ministers switch over to the presidential administration, though the appointments to Medvedev’s cabinet had mostly been second-tier politicians. It became evident that access to resources had to be revised to some extent. One aspect of this development was the move of influential deputy prime minister Igor Sechin to the private sector. He became the head of oil giant Rosneft, which he restructured with the takeover of TNK-BP and a partnership with BP. A group of Russian oligarchs who had made a bid to buy TNK-BP lost out.

At the same time, a campaign was started against officials, politicians, and entrepreneurs who were moving capital overseas. Oil trader Gennady Timchenko, a former KGB officer and now a Finnish citizen, temporarily lost his Russian delivery contracts. Rumor has it that Putin had instructed him to employ his capital in Russia. A similar purpose was to be achieved by a legislative initiative launched from within the United Russia parliamentary group that intended to ban deputies and officials from owning overseas bank accounts.

The corruption scandals of recent months—in the Defense Ministry, at Rostelekom, at GLONASS (the Russian satellite navigation system), in the agricultural sector, and in residential construction—further contributed to a sense of uncertainty among the elites. It is very difficult to tell whether these were mere clan feuds or whether the self-enrichment system is being seriously challenged. Rumors about Putin’s ill health, strenuously denied by his retinue, are another symptom of irritation among the elites. In a stable system of power, reports of the leader’s temporary inability to travel and possible illness would be insignificant. It is only due to the unclear power structures between groups of elites that the president’s possible sports injury becomes a political problem.

Putin's "Message"—the Narrative of a Spiritual Turning Point

In this situation, the "Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation" was necessarily of great significance. It gave the president the opportunity to cast himself as a political leader while presenting a narrative that would restore trust between "the people" and "the powers that be". This is precisely what Putin aimed to achieve on Constitution Day in December 2012.

He consciously declined to outline a program of concrete political measures. In this context, he referred to the programmatic articles he had published as a presidential candidate at the beginning of 2012 and to his first decrees of May 2012, in which he had sketched the forthcoming steps in social and economic policy. He did not comment on security or foreign policy issues either. Neither missile defense nor relations with NATO, the EU, or neighboring Asian states were on the agenda. The president's remarks focused on a sovereign, strong Russia that is very conscious of its thousand-year history and derives its strength and moral legitimacy from tradition and traditional Russian values.

For a Russian president, this is indeed a new tune. In 2009, Medvedev's remarks had focused on modernization and referenced the mistakes and aberrations of the past. In 2012, by contrast, Putin evoked Russia's "unique, uninterrupted thousand-year history, on the basis of which we obtain inner strength and the purpose of national development". Such phrases illustrate that the Putin administration has turned towards a new spiritual bearing and is moving closer towards the nationalist camp. For the narrative as such is not new; it has long been a staple of debates on national intelligence that take up the Slavophile discourse of the 19th century and reject "foreign infiltration" of "Western" ideas.

It is no surprise that this regressive discourse has now found its way into the president's political agenda; however, it is an ominous development. A similar tendency had already been indicated in the personnel policies of Putin during his presidential bid, when he invited a representative of the nationalist school of thought into his campaign team, appointed Sergei Ivanov to head the presidential administration, and entrusted a shady character like right-wing populist Dmitrii Rogozin with important governmental duties. The decision to focus foreign-policy efforts on the integration of the "Eurasian space" and the neglect of relations with the EU and the US are similar developments that should be noted in this context. This policy has now been ideologically grounded in the president's "Message". Apparently, Putin and his speechwriters believe that a shift towards the right-wing and playing the nationalist card will win them back the trust of a majority within the population.

Pragmatism With a Right-Wing Flavor

Besides presenting a narrative of national greatness, however, Putin also referred to real political issues facing Russia. He spoke about the question of demographics, promising to present a solution for this problem; he deplored the shortcomings of the healthcare system and inadequate payment of state officials in this sector as well as other parts of the social system. The recommended remedies once again reflect the intellectual framework of Russian traditionalists. For instance, state employees are to become the "provincial middle class" that in earlier days were "in all phases the professional and moral mainstay of Russia". Education is to be improved by hiring strong, talented teachers and dipping into to the wealth of Russian culture. In the matter of migration and inter-ethnic relations, Putin on the one hand argued for a return to a multiethnic Russia and was harshly critical of nationalist tendencies and its supporters, who stir up inter-ethnic hatred. On the other hand, however, he wants to make it more difficult for CIS citizens to enter Russia by requiring an international passport, rather than a domestic travel document (which is roughly the equivalent of an ID card).

The president also spoke about the development of the political system and announced a new change to the electoral system. In the future, votes by party list will be again be combined with direct elections, and party blocs will be admissible. Beyond such technical considerations, Putin made an explicit commitment to the principle of democracy and completely rejected any form of totalitarianism. However, he believes that this democracy should be a Russian democracy in which standards are established by the Russian people, rather than being imposed from outside. No person who receives funds from abroad and represents foreign interests can be a politician in the Russian Federation, according to Putin. This was a clear reference to the law on NGOs according to which NGOs must register as "foreign agents" if they receive funding from abroad and are politically active. At the same time, the president also stated his rejection of street protests: Any political dialog, he said, would only be held with forces behaving in a "civilized" manner. These remarks show that the leadership will stay its domestic course and employ all means to sideline and disenfranchise potential opposition actors.

In the sphere of economic policy, too, the "Message" took up familiar themes. The president demanded that Russia be liberated from dependency on the international commodity markets and its industry restructured: The development of new technologies and the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises were named as core tasks of economic policy—these are not new ideas. The country's leaders aim to make progress

by improving the business climate, enhancing the quality of regional administrations, reforming the tax system, decentralizing the economy, balancing out regional disparities, and providing funding for the armaments sector. Under these plans, the arms industry is also to become a catalyst for accelerating the development of high-tech solutions. None of these propositions are original or offer the prospect of a real breakthrough in economic development.

However, Putin did also discuss obstacles to development—such as the lack of efficiency in the government apparatus, corruption, or poor dispensation of justice—and promised redress. Once again casting himself as the harbinger of a spiritual-moral turn, he emphasized the moral authority of the state as a fundamental condition for successful development in Russia. In this context, the bogeymen are entrepreneurs and other elites who have enriched themselves through corruption, compounded by a lack of patriotism, since they have stashed their ill-gotten gains overseas. Putin called for support for his proposal to limit the ability of officials and politicians to secure bank accounts, securities, and shares for themselves in foreign countries. He also criticized the tendency of Russian entrepreneurs to do business offshore, i.e., beyond the reach of Russian laws. The president announced a bundle of measures for *deoffshorizatsiya* – abolishing or limiting the ability to do business offshore. With this criticism of business executives and officials, the “Message” reflected the massive public criticism of the power elites’ behavior. The “power”, according to Putin, must not be an isolated caste, but should be transparent and accessible. Only in this way can a sound moral basis emerge that will bring about an assertion of “order and freedom, morality and civic solidarity, truth and honesty, and of a nationally oriented consciousness”.

Playing with Fire

Putin’s “Message to the Federal Assembly” is a remarkable document. For the first time, a Russian president has taken up the national narrative and made it the basis of official policy. Putin is consciously playing to a conservative majority; not so much in the social and economic policy measures that he announces, but through the ideology in which he wraps his entire policy. It is permeated by a wacky, retrograde, Slavophile worldview that is centered on a strong Russia enchanted with its own past and

in which the outside world plays only a negative role, if it is featured at all. This approach is illustrated by Putin’s suggestion to revive the traditions of the Semenovskiy and Preobrazhenskiy guards regiments established by Peter I. Such a move does not contribute to the creation of a capable military armed with state-of-the-art equipment that is commensurate to future conflicts; but the notion appeals to nostalgic memories of past greatness.

Such a policy is based on the hope that a national narrative can integrate a majority of the population. However, such a worldview also requires the image of an antagonist—the outside world and its agents in the homeland. It is at this point that Putin’s spiritual-moral turn becomes dangerous, for it is based on the exclusion of a minority in order to integrate the majority. Putin is playing with fire here, since he is sowing the seeds of societal division. For the power elites, too, this is an uncomfortable move: The national narrative is opposed to their “business model” of self-enrichment at the expense of the state and the public. A return of Russian capital to Russia – in other words, *deoffshorizatsiya* – is contrary to the interests of large parts of the elites. Therefore, if the national narrative should become the guideline for practical policy, Russia faces massive conflicts among the elites.

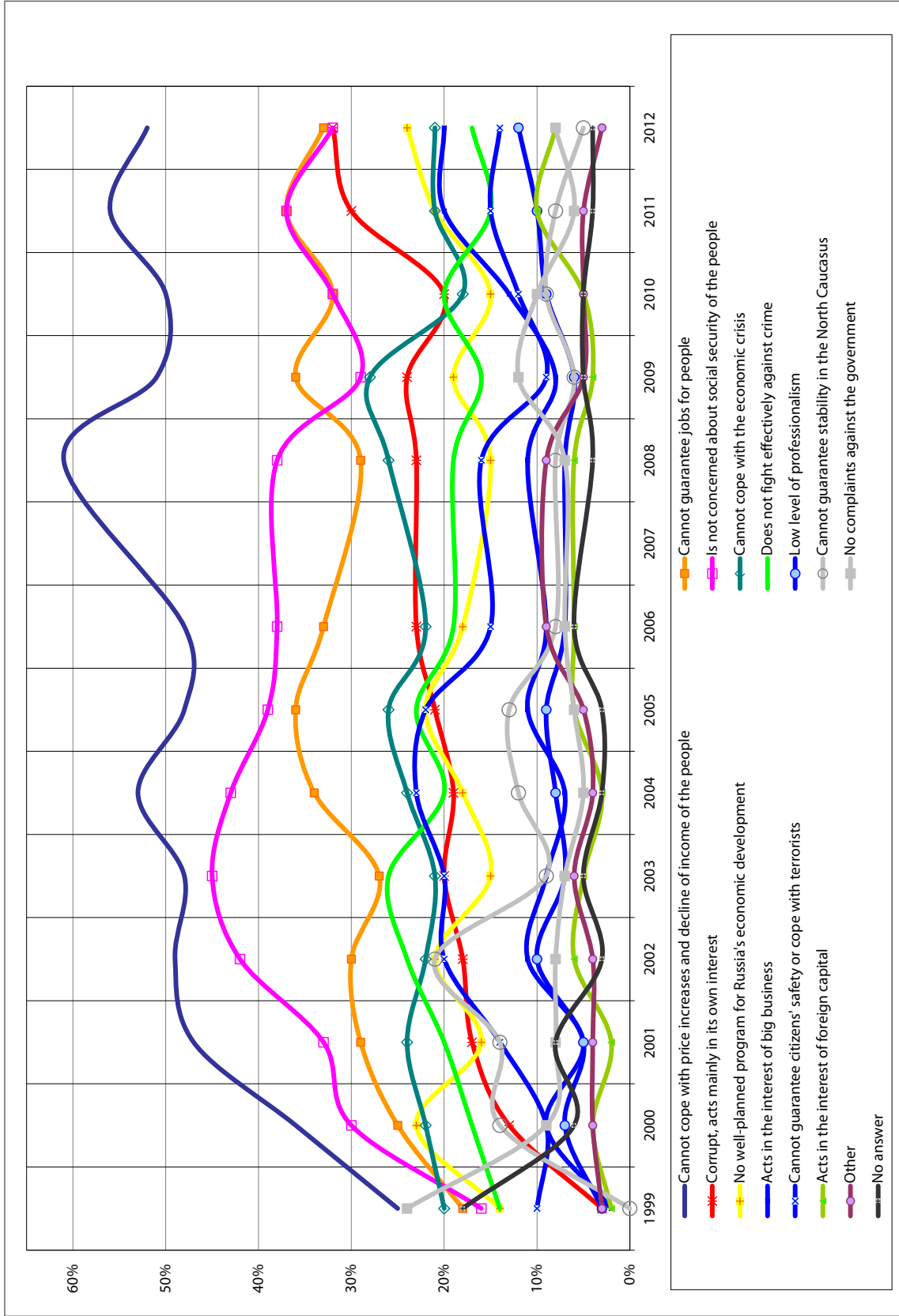
This may be the reason why Dmitry Medvedev, who had in effect been a political corpse since September 2011, is making public appearances again. In three major interviews with French newspaper “Le Figaro” (26 November 2012), with Russian daily “Kommersant” (28 November 2012), and with five Russian television stations (7 December 2012), he generally toed Putin’s line, but explicitly accentuated liberal positions and hinted that he might consider another term in the presidential office. Against the background of Putin’s nationalist speech, addressed to a national-conservative audience, Medvedev’s sudden political resurrection might be interpreted as a sham. From this perspective, Medvedev would represent the liberal leadership figure catering to the liberal spectrum. This, however, would be a dangerous game to play. Putin is conjuring up spirits that are very difficult to banish, and Medvedev certainly does not have the stature that he needs to constitute a political counterweight.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

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Figure 2: What Are Your Main Complaints Against the Present Government?



Source: representative opinion polls by Levada-Center (originally VTsIOM) from 1999 to November 2012, <http://www.levada.ru/print/11-12-2012/rossiyane-o-pravitelstve>

The Russian Dream: Justice, Liberty, and a Strong State

By Felix Hett and Reinhard Krumm, Berlin

Abstract

Eighty-three per cent of all Russians perceive the distribution of income in their country as unjust, according to a survey conducted by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The purpose of the poll was to identify the “Russian Dream” or the nature of the society in which Russia’s citizens would like to live. It showed that social justice is the highest priority for a majority of respondents. According to many, this can only be ensured by a strong state that protects the rights of the weak against the claims of the strong. However, a majority of those questioned do not wish to see state intervention in their personal lives. The quality of democracy is measured not so much in terms of respect for political rights, but rather in terms of preserving basic social rights and the rule of law.

Protest and Dream

The wave of protests that swept Russia in the winter and spring of 2012 has made one thing very clear: Russia’s citizens are becoming more and more important as a factor in the country’s politics. The exchange of offices between Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, who now lead Russia as prime minister and president, respectively, was seen by many as evidence of stark disregard for the voters’ wishes. The manipulations at the parliamentary elections of 4 December 2011 were the straw that broke the camel’s back: The general discontent with societal conditions had long been building up, and was now discharged on the streets of Moscow and other cities. Sociologists at the Moscow Center for Strategic Research had already registered signs of growing frustration months before. However, for the majority of observers, it was the scale of the protest wave that came as a particular surprise, suggesting that Russia’s society should be studied more closely in the future.

An oft-heard criticism is that the citizens’ movement only demonstrates against Putin and the “party of power”, United Russia. But, the critics say, the street has no alternative policy proposals to offer. This charge is partially justified and yet unfair, as independently organized platforms of political opinion formation have been prohibited by the state in recent years. With the registration of new parties having been significantly simplified in response to the protests, new opportunities may arise here in the future. In any case, an intense debate is needed on the future shape of politics, the economy, and society.

Against this background, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation together with the Institute of Sociology at the Russian Academy of Sciences produced a study of the “Russian Dream” in the spring of 2012. A representative survey of 1,750 Russians in 20 regions—from Arkhangelsk in the north of Russia to the Caucasus in the south, from Tula in the west to Khabarovsk in the far east of the country—asked respondents in which kind of country and society they would like to live. In the following,

a brief outline will be offered of a “Russian Dream”, or a vision of a desirable future.

Russia’s Dreams

The overwhelming majority of those surveyed have a dream: Only five per cent stated that they did not tend to dream, and another eight per cent said that they used to have dreams, but had given up on them in the meantime. The higher the socio-economic status of respondents, the greater the likelihood that they have dreams. Conversely, this means that those who have no dreams are generally part of the poorer classes. The absence of any dreams for the future should be seen in the context of a dominant perception among this group that most life schemes are not realizable. Here, more than half of respondents state that they see hardly any chance of becoming rich or securing a prestigious workplace. Overall, about ten per cent of the population are disillusioned and have no hope of improvement in their personal lives. It is important to remember here that all respondents were in the age bracket 16–55. It is likely that inclusion of Russia’s often impoverished retirees in the survey would have significantly increased the share of disillusioned respondents.

Among those Russian citizens who do have dreams, those aspirations relate mainly to individual well-being: For three quarters of all respondents, this is the main concern. Forty per cent wish for material wealth, i.e., the ability to spend money without having to worry about every kopeck. Another 33 per cent dream of health, 23 per cent of having a happy family, and 21 per cent aspire to be homeowners. The results are similar in the case of open-ended questions: Here, the top stated desires are health for oneself and one’s family and friends (43 per cent), followed by material wealth (39 per cent) and happiness for loved ones (25 per cent). Romantic dreams, e.g., of true love, fame, or beauty, are only found among a minority (see Figure 1, p. 12). A majority aspire to fulfill their dreams through efforts of their own (see Fig-

ure 2, p. 13). One-third of respondents have the wish to live in a more just and rationally structured society—however, this response is only given if the option is formulated by the interviewer.

Strong State and Liberty

If Russian citizens are asked about their dreams in the sphere of politics, there is a noticeable preference for a strong state. When given the choice of selecting from a series of political keywords those that most accurately reflect a personal dream for the future of the country, 45 per cent choose social justice, equal rights for all, and “a strong state that looks after its citizens”. Values such as “democracy, human rights, and individual fulfillment”, social stability, or a return of Russia to great power status are less prevalent (see Figure 3, p. 13).

For an overwhelming majority of Russian citizens, there is no doubt that only the state can establish social justice: A total of 91 per cent believe that it is precisely the government that should take on responsibility in protecting the social rights of the population, 71 per cent wish for the state to have a stronger role, and 60 per cent agree that the state must enforce the interests of the entire population against those of individual groups. This also appears to be the main reason for the pro-government enthusiasm, which, however, clearly clashes with the high appreciation of individual liberty, without which more than two thirds believe that the purpose of life is lost. In this context, the notion of liberty is mainly understood as the possibility of being the master of one’s own destiny and not having to put up with any kind of encroachment when it comes to decisions about personal choices. This unusual state of affairs—advocacy of a strong state that imposes limitations on others, but should stay out of one’s own business—is further complemented by the stereotypical rejection of “Western-style individualism and liberalism” by 54 per cent of respondents. Apparently, there is generally a positive view in Russia of collectivist values and norms, which has little effect, however, on the reality of everyday life. In particular, feelings of community are most acutely perceived in relations with one’s own family (65 per cent), friends (63 per cent), and work colleagues (40 per cent), but not so much with people who share similar political views (five per cent) or are fellow citizens of Russia (4.5 per cent).

Social Justice and Democracy

Across all social groups, there is widespread appreciation of social justice, even in the more affluent classes (see Figure 4, p. 14). One apparent reason is the fact that the current situation in Russia is perceived as particularly unjust: Two thirds of respondents wish for social equality, which in turn is understood by 59 per cent as equal-

ity of opportunity and a sizeable 41 per cent as equality of income. The disparity of rich and poor is seen by 83 per cent of respondents as being too great. Two thirds perceive the distribution of private property as unjust, and just as many share that view when it comes to the current structure of incomes. About half of the population believes that they personally are receiving unjust pay levels.

The high appreciation of justice does not mean, however, that inequality is not accepted at all. Certain disparities of income resulting from varying levels of education or effort are seen as justified. However, a relative majority of Russians (48 per cent) do not accept that someone should have access to better medical care due to higher income. A society is perceived as democratic if social and economic rights are preserved (79 per cent of respondents agreed). When asked to name indispensable conditions for all dreams of a democracy to be realized in society, 77 per cent mentioned equality before the law. Another 40 per cent believe that a prevalence of low disparities of income is a basic condition for democracy, and 37 per cent referenced independent courts. The perceived importance of free elections (27 per cent) has diminished in public opinion, however—possibly because of widespread disillusionment with regard to the electoral process. Three quarters of respondents stated that their ideas for building democracy in Russian society had not been fulfilled (see Figure 5 on p. 14).

Mixed Economy

The high expectations for social justice are to be met by the state: Two thirds agree that it is necessary to enhance the role of the state in all areas and to nationalize major enterprises, as well as sectors of strategic importance. The opposite view is held by 28 per cent: They believe it is necessary to “liberalize all areas of life and to liberate the economy from the power of bureaucrats”. Statists, or adherents of a strong role for the state, therefore form a clear majority of the population, but find themselves opposed by a sizeable liberal minority.

When it comes to preferences regarding the economic system, there are both overlaps and differences. One quarter of the liberals advocate pure capitalism, as do 15 per cent of statists. The remainder is either a proponent of a socialist economy or in favor of a “mixed economy” consisting of state direction as well as free-market elements. It is this last option that is favored by more than half of respondents.

A Polarized Society?

There is reason to believe that the protest movement that has formed since the elections is dominated by the

liberal spectrum of Russian society. This also seems to have been the assumption of some of Moscow's more vocal political strategists, when they tried to position the conservative majority of the population against the liberal minority, the "saturated Muscovites". However, the success of this strategy is far from certain, and a polarization of Russian society is not inevitable. It is possible to build political bridges, as the study on the "Russian Dream" also shows. Values such as social justice; a conception of democracy that is not purely procedural, but also involves awareness of the social foundations of democracy; rejection of economic models based on market radicalism; and the conviction that everyone must

do their part—all of these mark the contours of a Russian Dream that enjoys a widespread consensus in Russia's population. However, this dream also still involves a strong preference for societal stability. Averseness to revolutionary upheaval is seen in the question relating to the historical epoch in which Russia was closest to realizing its dream: Here, 32 per cent of respondents named the Putin era, while 14 per cent chose the last decades of the Soviet Union, the "golden autumn" of state socialism (see Figure 6 on p. 15). However, one third stated their concern that the Russian Dream has never even come close to being fulfilled.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

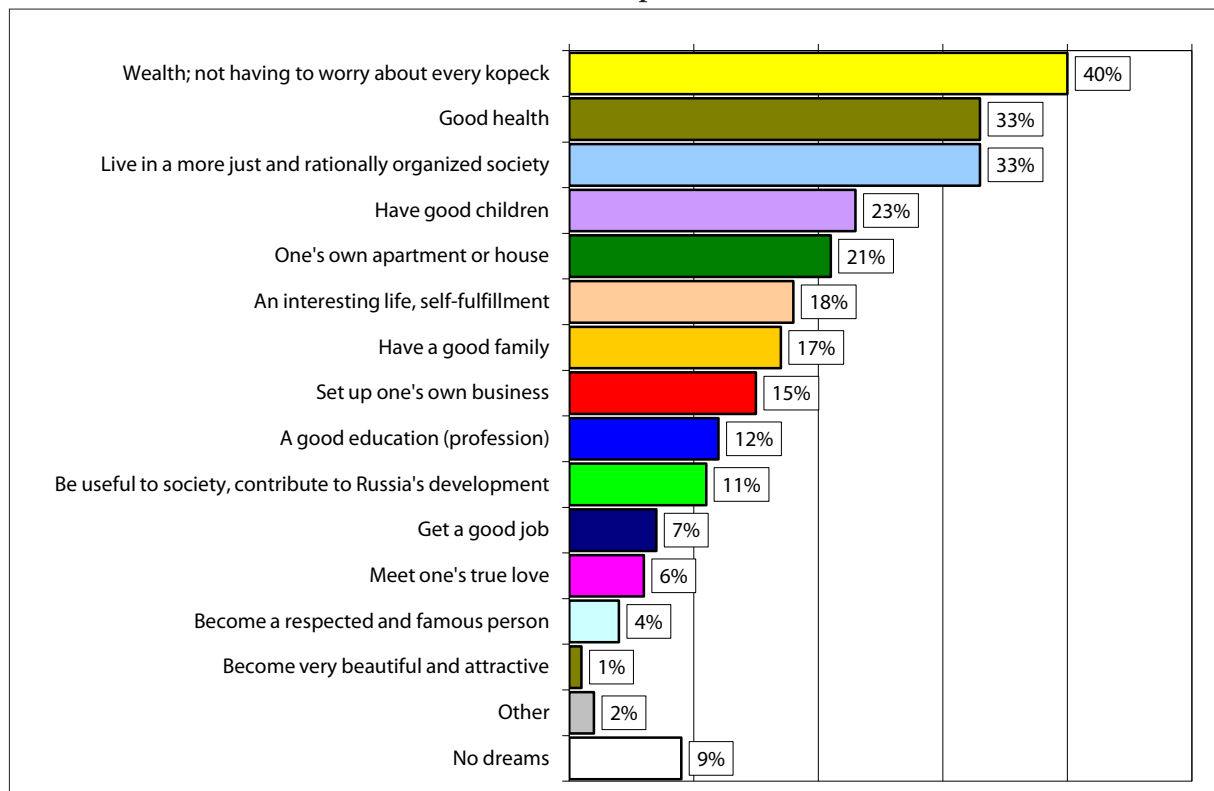
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Further Reading

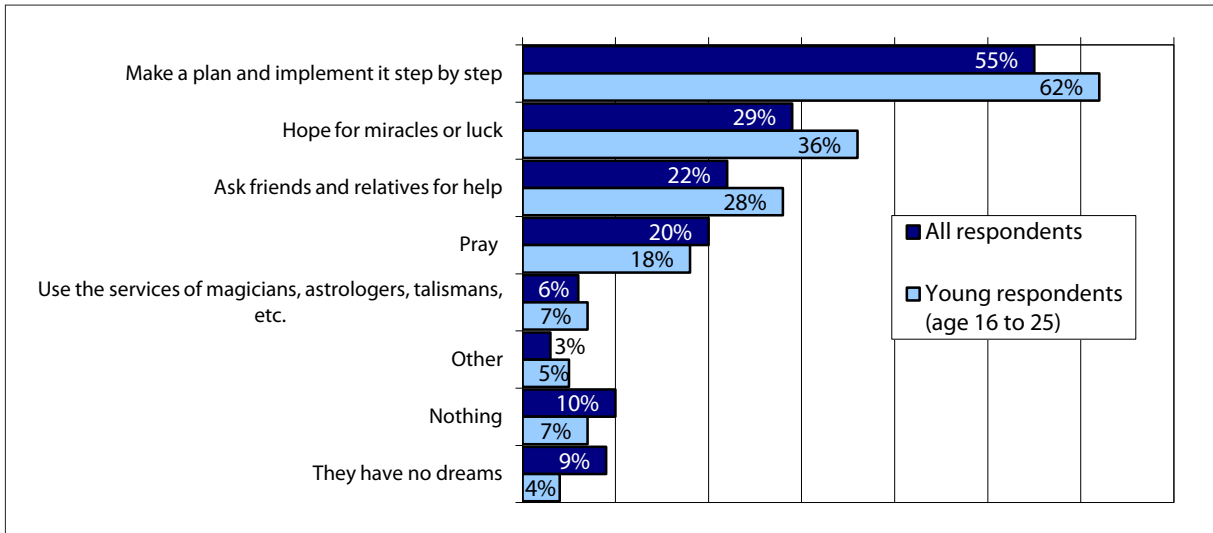
- Hett, Felix and Krumm, Reinhard, *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums*. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau, July 2012, available (in German) at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>
- Institute for Sociology, Russian Academy of Science, *O chem mechtayut rossiyane (razmysleniya sotsiologov)*, 2012 [complete survey, in Russian] available at: http://www.isras.ru/analytical_report_o_chem_mechtayut_rossiyane.html

Figure 1: What Are Russians' Dreams?
(Choices for Answers Predetermined, Up to Three Answers Possible)



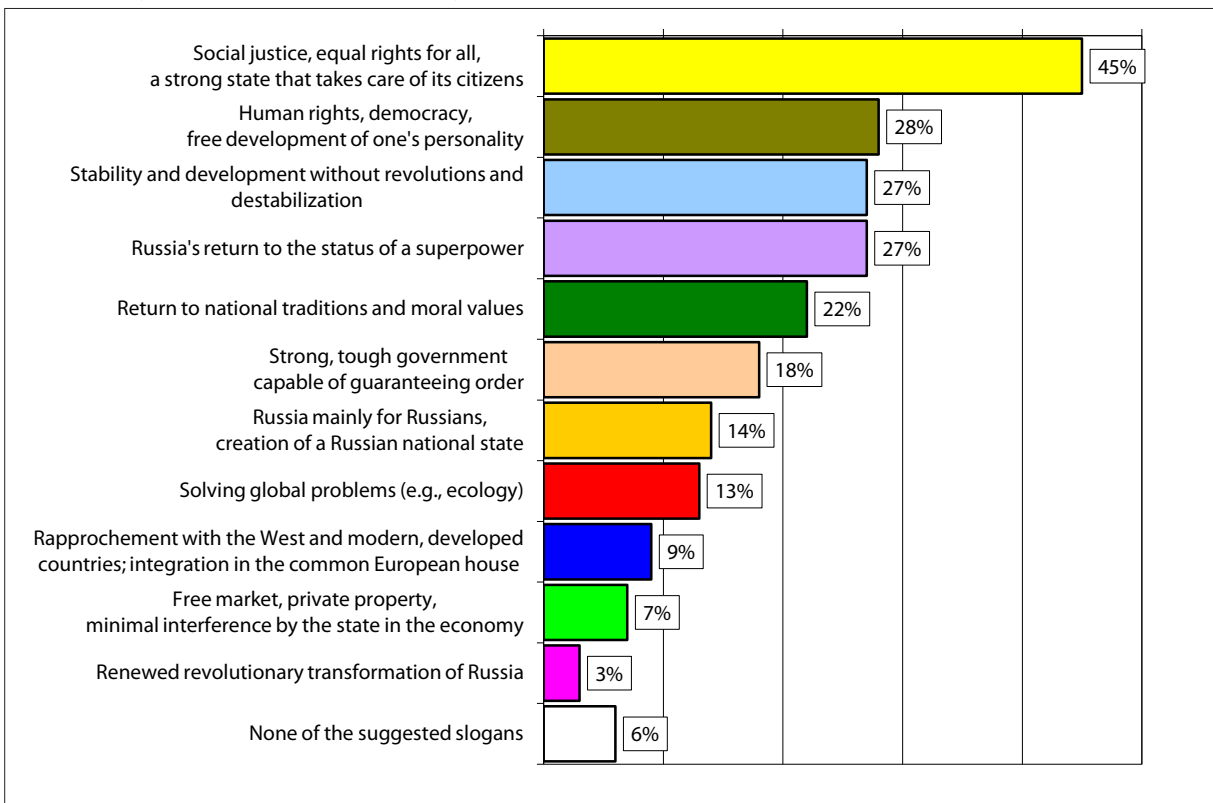
Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums*. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau. Perspektive, July 2012 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

Figure 2: What Do Russians Do To Realize Their Dreams?
(Choices for Answers Predetermined, Several Answers Possible)



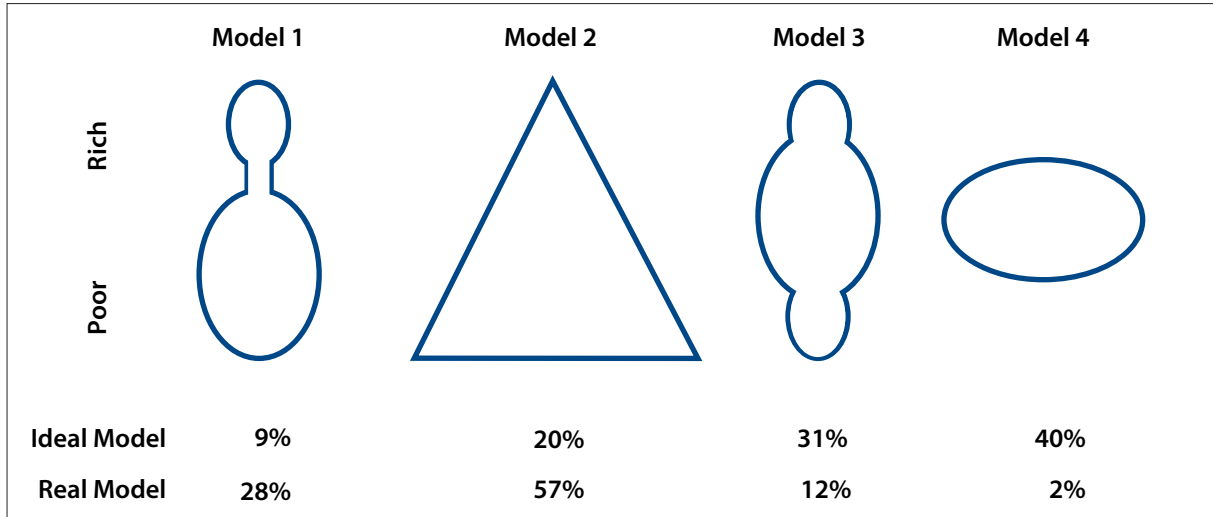
Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums*. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau. Perspektive, July 2012 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

Figure 3: What Political Slogans Express the Dream of Russia's Future?
(Several Answers Possible)



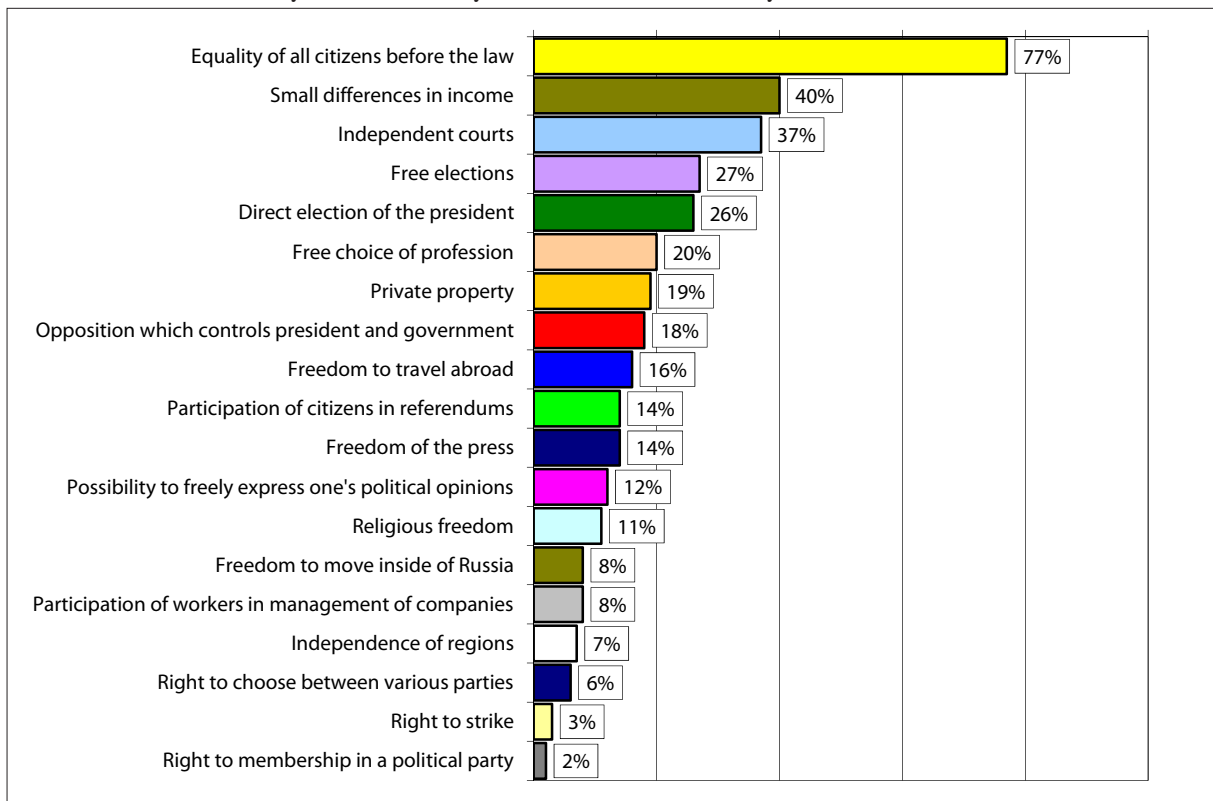
Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums*. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau. Perspektive, July 2012 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

Figure 4: Which Model Is Best Suited To the Ideal and Real Structure of Russian Society?



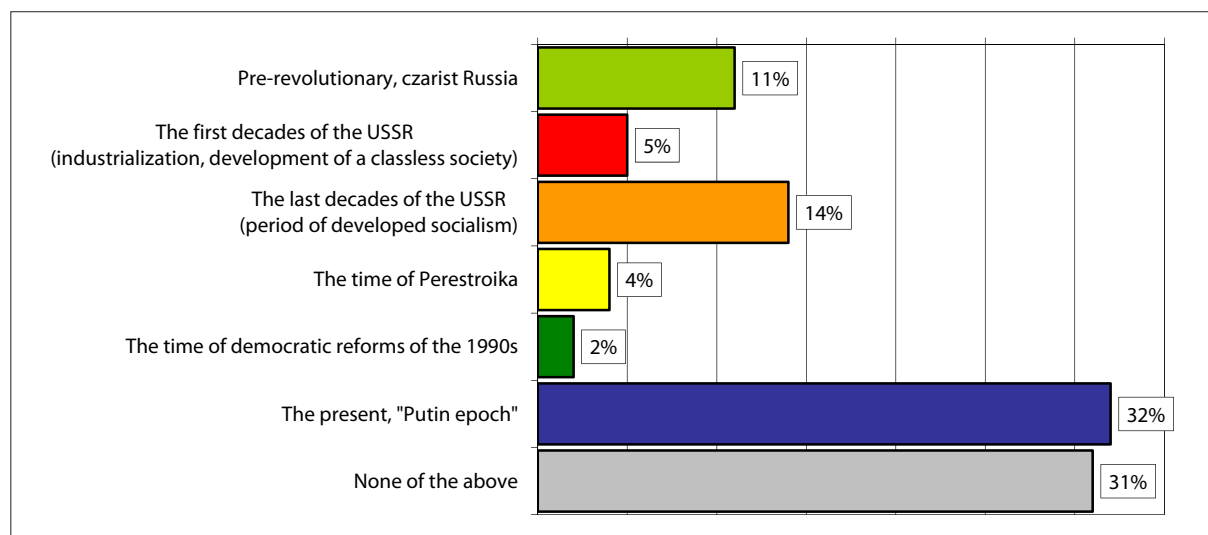
Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau. Perspektive, July 2012* <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

Figure 5: Which of the Following Elements Are Absolutely Necessary in Order to Say: Yes, This Is the Society In Which My Dreams of Democracy Have Been Realized?



Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums. FES Internationaler Dialog. FES Moskau. Perspektive, July 2012* <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

Figure 6: Which Period of Russia's History Most Corresponds to the Ideals of Russian Citizens and Their Ideas of What Russia Should Be?



Source: Hett, Felix; Krumm, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und ein starker Staat. Konturen eines widersprüchlichen Russischen Traums*. FES Internationaler Dialog, FES Moskau, Perspektive, July 2012 <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/09212.pdf>

ANALYSIS

Seven Challenges of the Russian Protest Movement

By Oleg Kozlovsky, Washington

Abstract

This article describes some of the tests facing the Russian protest movement in 2013. These include balancing between moderates and radicals, dealing with regime defectors, reducing the influence of extremists, institutionalizing the movement, broadening its appeal to a wider public, encouraging citizens to play a more active role in politics, and developing support in the regions outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

An Evolving Movement

The Russian democratic movement (a.k.a. the “protest movement”) made international headlines in December 2011 when tens of thousands took to the streets of Moscow and other cities to protest fraud in the Parliamentary elections. After initial confusion, the regime eventually regained confidence and responded with a series of repressive actions, from restricting freedom of assembly and going after independent NGOs to jailing opponents. As a result, the protest movement lost its momentum and found itself in a defensive, reactive position, unable to assert its own agenda.

However, the movement is far from being dead, as was demonstrated by the recent protests in Moscow against the “anti-Magnitsky law,” banning Americans

from adopting Russian babies, and by its unceasing online activity. In order to overcome the present crisis, the protesters will have to find solutions to numerous problems, some of the most crucial of which I will pose and briefly discuss in this article.

Moderates and Radicals

Inherent to all social movements is the array of opinions ranging from moderation to radicalism, and this range is reflected in both the strategic and tactical approaches of activists. Some strive for a regime change and the effective recreation of the state, while others simply want to reform it by removing the ugliest forms of corruption and autocracy, leaving the rest to take care of itself. Some believe that it is more important to guarantee the safety

of protesters, even at the price of accepting sometimes embarrassing conditions, whereas others claim that no compromise is possible with the regime.

This was one of the earliest conflicts that the protest movement experienced when the relocation of a rally from Revolution Square to Bolotnaya Square in December 2011 caused the first split between the camps. Negotiations have the potential to display goodwill and trustworthiness, but can also be seen as a sign of weakness or used to force a group into a disadvantageous position. There is little trust between the regime and the opposition, with each side expecting dishonesty and provocations from their counterpart. On the other hand, refusal to compromise increases pressure on the regime, shows the protesters' determination and raises tension, but if used too often and without success, can marginalize the movement. In reality, of course, there are more than two views on the issue, and the truth, it appears, lies between the extremes.

It appears reasonable to argue that a movement should only negotiate when the process can be used to gain advantage. Further, a movement can only gain such advantage if it is strong enough to enforce any potential agreement, or at least to create significant problems for the opposition, should it choose to dishonor its obligations. In fact, what is really important is not even the movement's and regime's *actual* relative strength, but their *perceptions* of it. There was a brief period, from December 2011 to February 2012, when such negotiations could possibly have been used advantageously by the opposition, but the movement was too disorganized to make good use of its position. Now that the regime feels more secure, any such talks become impossible again until the situation changes.

Love-Hate Relationship

Another problem is how the opposition movement should deal with regime agents and defectors. It is an almost universal understanding now that a split within the elites is desirable and even necessary for peaceful change, but its accomplishment is a much more difficult task. It is not just hard to be friendly with the police force, for instance, when it keeps arresting your comrades, but the "us-versus-them" attitude also plays an important role in maintaining the identity and motivation of movement members. Many protest campaigns in other countries that have faced similar problems, including Serbia in 2001 and Ukraine in 2004, have used the formula of "regime's victims" to describe both themselves and members of the police and armed forces. This approach was not entirely successful in the sense that the officers did not defect to the opposition side *en masse*, but the eventual peaceful resolution of those conflicts suggests

that such an approach may make it harder for authoritarian regimes to repress opponents.

This problem also applies to defectors from the regime. Since the protests began, and especially in their first weeks, a number of well-known members of the political, economic, and cultural elite have criticized the regime or openly sided with the protesters. Each such move, however, elicited a controversial reaction from within the movement as activists decided whether to welcome defectors as new allies or distance themselves from them. For instance, Ksenia Sobchak managed to become one of the movement's new leaders despite facing a degree of opposition, while former Finance Minister Alexey Kudrin is still widely viewed with suspicion. This issue will only become more important as the movement gains strength and attracts more defectors.

Anger Management

It is generally acknowledged that when a movement faces a crisis and its strategy seems ineffective, the most extreme elements in it gain strength. This is particularly dangerous in Russia, with its long history of associating political struggle with physical destruction of the adversary. The current protest movement has been remarkably peaceful, even in face of government violence. Even immediately after the clashes with the police on Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012, the protests returned to their previous non-violent form. Perhaps the historical memory of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War remains a strong deterrent for most protesters.

Despite this, Russia is not immune from political violence. Some radical groups from the far-right and the far-left have been using it against each other for years. Moreover, a significant portion of the public supports at least some forms of violence. A quarter of protesters surveyed in January by the Levada Center said that the government "only understands the language of force" while earlier polls indicated that 25% to 47% Russians sympathized with the so-called "Primorye guerillas" who were killing police officers near Vladivostok in 2010.

While eruption of large-scale political violence remains a relatively unlikely event in the immediate future, isolated cases of it pose serious danger to the movement's goals and the nation's well-being in general. The government predictably used the May 6 clashes to crack down on the opposition, raise the level of fear among citizens, and to portray the protesters as irresponsible hooligans who lead the country to bloodshed. The protesters would be best-served by maintaining non-violent methods, despite growing repression by the regime.

Uniting and Institutionalizing

When the protest movement appeared in December 2011, it was completely spontaneous. There were some activists who organized the rallies, but the vast majority of protesters didn't know—or care—who these figures were. What filled the vacuum was the so-called Organizing Committee, an informal body of self-appointed leaders without strict membership that claimed responsibility for coordinating the protests. However, this body almost immediately faced serious problems both from within the movement and from the outside. Not only were most of their decisions criticized, which is certainly normal, but their very legitimacy was questioned by activists and groups that believed they were underrepresented. Vladimir Putin and his allies used the lack of internal structure of the movement to mock the idea of negotiations: “Are we supposed to speak to *all* these people simultaneously?” they asked rhetorically.

After several months of internal discussion of a possible structure of the movement, an ambitious idea was proposed—to elect its leaders. Most surprisingly, it was quite successfully done, and in late October 2012 more than 80,000 opposition-minded Russian citizens participated in the biggest unofficial elections in nation's recent history. The elected 45 activists represent every major ideological camp within the movement, but, remarkably, a majority of them may be called liberal democrats.

The work of this Coordinating Council hasn't been particularly effective so far. In the first four months of its existence, the Council has only managed to stage one protest, adopt several statements, and develop a strategy which is yet to be implemented. One of the problems impeding the Council's progress is a de facto boycott by a number of opposition groups and leaders, including the “systemic opposition” (Yabloko, the Communists, and A Just Russia leadership). It should not surprise us; these organizations have demonstrated the same pattern of behavior in the past, for instance in their relationship with the Other Russia coalition between 2006 and 2008 or their reluctant support (with some notable exceptions) of the December 2011 protests. In any case, the Coordinating Council hasn't yet been able to win the sympathies of a majority of the movement. According the Levada Center poll, only a third of them approve of its work (still slightly better than any other opposition platform).

Demands and Demographics

One problem that haunts every political force is the choice between having a clear and concise message and broadening its support base. In terms of the Russian protest movement, this most importantly deals with the question of bringing in economic and social demands.

From the onset, the movement was unique in being almost totally about political and ethical issues. What citizens have been demanding was democracy, rule of law, respect, the truth, and so on—all the things considered “abstract” by many people. It has been argued by some activists, mostly left-wing, that the only way to get more people to support the movement is to introduce economic demands. As of now, however, nobody has managed to present a particular set of such demands that would resonate within the movement and outside of it.

Moreover, the opponents of this approach warn of the risks of shifting the focus of the movement to the economy. It would be relatively easy for the Kremlin to break such a protest by some monetary concessions, as has been done frequently in the past (for instance, during the anti-welfare reform rallies of early 2005). This step could also lead to the movement being hijacked and carried away from its original aims by populists and demagogues. Developing a formula of such demands, or timing their introduction is another challenge that the opposition faces.

Small Victories Go a Long Way

Like in most authoritarian and hybrid regimes, the political system in Russia is based on the apathy and passivity of its citizens (as opposed to civic participation in democracy and fanatical loyalty in totalitarianism). Indeed, surveys and discussions with ordinary Russians demonstrate that the primary factor preventing mass protests is not support of Vladimir Putin's system or fear of repression, but people's skepticism regarding their ability to improve the situation. Although no government institution is trusted by a majority of the population (Levada Center, June 2012), few see grassroots activism and democratic politics as an effective way of producing positive change. This fundamental pessimism is partly reflected even among the demonstrators themselves: according to a survey conducted among rally attendees on January 13, 2013 by the Levada Center, 24% of the demonstration participants do not believe that street protests can lead to “a real change in the country.”

If the opposition wants to regain momentum and overcome demoralization, it must raise the morale of its present and potential supporters. In order to do this, it is necessary to identify, publicize, and celebrate even the smallest accomplishments of the movement. Praising their own achievements is almost, by definition, a difficult task for activists, who tend to focus on problems but pay little attention to victories (perhaps, because they see them merely as a “normal” state of affairs). For instance, opposition leaders failed to recognize the concessions made by the regime in December 2011 with the liberalization of political party registration and elec-

tions or the fact that Vladimir Putin received the fewest votes since the 2000 elections. It looks like the protesters implicitly expected a complete and unconditional surrender and defeat of Putin in the elections. As a result, disappointment has become widespread among the less patient protesters: "I have already attended four rallies, but Putin is still in the Kremlin." Expectations elevated too high and an all-or-nothing approach should give way to a more realist, adequate worldview and a conscious search for achievements to celebrate.

All Roads Lead out of Rome

The last, but definitely not least, dilemma that the opposition faces is between concentrating most forces on Moscow and going to "the regions." The capital, with its better educated, wealthier, more Internet-savvy and more politicized citizens has become the focal point of the movement. The Moscow protests weren't just the biggest ones, even in comparison to the city population; they were setting all the trends, creating all the controversies, and giving birth to new opposition leaders. Unsurprisingly, 35 out of 45 elected members of the Opposition Coordinating Council are Muscovites. Moreover, while the early protests in December

2011 were supported by numerous, if not massive, rallies in the provinces, the activities of the movement have become much more Moscow-centric over the last year. All the efforts to boost activism beyond the Moscow Ring Road only led to brief, unsustainable changes that were undone after the "sorties" ended.

In a super-centralized country like Russia, the role of Moscow in producing political change will always remain crucial. The future of the Russian political system will be decided primarily in the capital. But the role of the regions should not be underestimated. Not only will they demonstrate who the "real Russia" stands behind, but their votes will be decisive in any election. It is sufficient to say that if the whole country voted in March 2012 as Moscow did, Putin would not win in the first round. But it is necessary to recognize that the level of political awareness and activism is objectively much lower in the smaller cities than it is in the capital. Attempts to artificially raise it through one-time actions will barely change this situation. What is required is a long-term, strategic effort aimed at developing local groups and organizations that will be able to change attitudes in their communities over time.

About the Author

Oleg Kozlovsky is currently a visiting scholar at the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs.

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, 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), the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), the Resource Security Institute, the Institute of History at the University of Zurich (<http://www.hist.uzh.ch/>) and the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University. 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), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.css.ethz.ch/rad), 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.

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

Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, Michael Clemens

ISSN 1863-0421 © 2013 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

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