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RUSSIA IN 2012: CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Russia is moving towards 2012 Presidential elections. The most recent developments and changes in its political landscape since December 2011 evidenced in higher level of activity of various social groups, open expression of dissatisfaction with the current political system, and nervous responses by the power structures triggered by the shifts in the traditionally perceived predictable future of the country. The new developments in civil society set the stage for the advanced preliminary forecast of the future of the political situation in Russia.

This paper summarizes preconditions to the most recent changes in the Russian civil society. It reviews the evolution of the major social organizations and civil groups with the emphasis on their attitude to and participation in the election process, studies the mechanisms of the party and non-party structures in the pre-election campaign, emphasizes the role of the existing and emerging leaders in the "social opposition" and current administration in changing the traditional political status quo, explores the trends in the public opinion towards elections and political developments, highlights the role of Internet in informing and motivating social groups, and considers the impact of the media on shaping the process and character of the approaching presidential elections.

The paper is based on observations and information from public sources. It presents my view on the pre-election developments and Russia's political situation in the aftermath of March 2012.

I.

The conclusion based on the analysis of the current social and political developments in Russia can be summarized as follows: **In its political life Russia will be able to avoid two potential extreme scenarios – either continued political stagnation or radical transformation like the regime changes in a number of Arab countries.** My forecast of Russia's future seems to be more optimistic when compared to other expert estimates.

This forecast is based on my great conviction that the most recent events on the surface of the Russia's society are quite different from the deep and complex internal processes as evidenced by the substitution of political life with cynical farce. In my opinion, those processes, which eventually would erupt to the surface and rekindle public political life, may **make the country less dependent on V. Putin or any other possible leader than in the recent past**. However, it is not clear in which form those deep internal processes would erupt so quickly and how radical their consequences could be.

To better understand the possible scenarios for the Russian political landscape it is important to analyze the preconditions of recent changes in social activity and the configuration of civil society in the 2000s.

II.

The foundation for the currently emerging social civil activity has been growing over the past decade. It started with the creation of the First All-Russia Citizens Forum in 2001 which was the first serious attempt by leaders and society to establish the arena for formal and informal discussions about Russia's social and political life. This Forum was officially opened by the legendary rights defender and head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Liudmila Alekseeva, and the new Russian president, V. Putin, who was elected in 2000.

The entire complex and contradictory development of Russia's civil society with its achievements and defeats, swinging between dialogue and confrontation with the leadership[*], did not occur for naught. This process resulted in the first, still unripe, new type of movement of new informal actions and initiatives in 2009-2010. Very much like in some other countries, this outspread of activity first occurred via the Internet. The virtual space turned into a filed of real self-organization of the independent Russian citizens. Again, I emphasize that a strong impact was made through Internet communication for the emerging social activity and became particularly apparent in 2009-2010 in the form of new ideas, initiatives, actions, protests, self-organization, mobilization, solidarity, mutual aid and mutual responsibility.

The activity became particularly pronounced during the unprecedented fires that erupted in Russia in the summer of 2010. At the time, left without any options and without any aid from the government, people were forced to organize on their own to fight the fires.

The phenomenon of voluntary civic responsibility in a moment of emergency was unprecedented in recent history, thus becoming a catalyst for qualitative changes in the allocation of strengths on the social sphere—from one side, the **"traditional society"** of existing non-profit, non-governmental organizations, and from another informal **"new society"** which is difficult to structure or classify, but was free of corruption in its mobilization, self-organization, and effective provision of aid to the fire's victims. This "new society" emerged from people who were not tied to any sort of organization and in general did not previously have any sort of serious affiliation with social or voluntary activity. Multiple and different social networks were able to coordinate between themselves. Particularly significant and atypical for Russia, all of this was based on public self-financing.

This "New Society" worked out of necessity both with government and with traditional social organizations. At the time, the public approached organizations with caution and a certain lack of trust. This invaluable experience of implementing and accumulating social, civil and public capital was not transformed into formal, permanent organizations. It rather "moved underground" to understand what happened, to take root, and to await a new situation to "ripen" into a new emergency that would force its mobilization, organization, and action.

As a person who, together with Russian NGO-community leaders, has dedicated significant effort toward establishing and developing civil society in Russia in the course of this difficult decade, I would like to emphasize that current civil activity did not emerge from

[*] The paper does not address those confrontations.

nothing. Its foundation was formed over a long period of time, painstakingly and with efforts by the most active part of Russia's NGO-community and, most importantly, by dedicated human rights defenders.

This goes for the meetings on Triumfalnaya Square in defense of Article 31 of the Constitution; and protests against building roads between Moscow and St. Petersburg through the Khimki Forest. This also goes for the unprecedented public reaction to the cruel beatings of journalist Oleg Kashin in the center of Moscow and the public defense of Yegor Bychkov from Nizhni Tagil who was sentenced to forced "treatment" of drug addiction. It includes the strategic fight for preserving architectural monuments in Moscow, mass protests in Kaliningrad, opposition to building of the Okhta Center in St. Petersburg, the "blue bucket" campaign against elites driving cars with official flashers, and the scandalous actions by the art group "War." These actions and groups are only a snippet of what emerged by the beginning of 2011 with varying degrees of success and failure. By this time the desire of civil society for profound changes in the nation's socio-political and socio-economic life became fully developed. Tendencies which had formed at the time erupted to the surface full-scale after exactly one year like lava from a newly-woken volcano.

The rising tide of civil actions testified to the needs of civil society undergoing radical changes in the country's socio-political and socio-economic life.

III.

Several major events and phenomena preceded the electoral campaigns in 2011. At the beginning of the previous year many sociologists and political scientists believed that the Russian population considered the forthcoming elections of deputies to the Russian State Duma as an insignificant formal procedure by the ruling power of "appointing" a well behaved parliamentary majority to rubber stamp desired executive laws. The general public consensus was that the entire "opposition" in the form of the CPRF, LDPR and "A Just Russia" had not only become part of the current political system, but were also a stabilizing element designed to project the illusion of a political "struggle." According to a survey conducted by the All Russian Social Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) in April 2011, the number of Russians who lost interest in socio-political life in the country rose from 45 percent in 2008 to 61 percent in spring of 2011. Interest in voting participation also decreased in the same period from 40 percent to 27 percent.

This is quite logical. As a direct witness and participant in several electoral campaigns, I can affirm that the violations became massive and chronic, beginning with the 1996 presidential elections. However, liberal legislation, competition in the mass media, and a slew of other democratic elements remained intact. This provided a real political life, and as a consequence, interest in it from society. During the last decade, massive violations of the entire electoral campaign became the norm, and not only during actual elections. Violations occurred alongside a consequential grip over the regulatory and legislative framework, the "truncation" of the election legislation, and the emasculation of the electoral process. In particular, gubernatorial elections were cancelled and requirements for party registration became more rigorous (the required registration increased from 10,000 to 50,000). The electoral barrier to enter parliament

was raised from 5 percent to 7 percent (though based on President Medvedev's initiative the barrier will return to 5 percent in 2016). The "against all" line was removed as a voting option, and parties were deprived of the possibility to form coalition blocks, in essence destroying small parties.

All this and many other factors, including the shameful use of administrative resources during elections, led to a complete monopoly by the ruling party, making it practically irremovable.

As a consequence, popular interest in elections decreased significantly. Society underwent political apathy. "Elections" became increasingly regarded with quotation marks and accompanied by the word meaningless. In a certain sense, a low turnout served the leadership as it provided increased opportunities for the party of power, United Russia, to gain higher results.

However, during the elections in March local authorities began to hear a quiet, urgent call. Formally United Russia gained a victory, having received a total of nearly 70 percent of the mandate. But from the point of view of the leadership, a dangerous tendency became apparent.

According to the data from TsIK, the March 13 elections in legislative power apparatuses, "United Russia" received less than 50 percent of the votes in seven out of twelve regions. In particular, results were poor in Nizhgorod (42.9 percent), Kaliningrad (42.2 percent) and Kirov oblasts (36.7 percent). The best results for "United Russia" were seen in Chechnya and in Chukotka (76.33 percent). At the same time voter turnout increased by 8 percent in comparison with the previous cycle.

The first to hear this quiet alarm turned out to be the chief ideologue of "Sovereign Democracy," First Deputy of the Presidential Administration V. Surkov. To a considerable extent, thanks to the efforts of V. Surkov, a once-rapidly developing political field in Russia had turned into a political cemetery over the course of a decade - a cemetery in which the party-ghosts simply imitate political life.

Having understood that the leadership used him to "bend the stick," thus making it necessary for the leadership to safely "bring life" back to the process, Surkov said in a meeting with students of leading universities in November 2010 that Russia "lacks an influential liberal party" but that "everything will come in its own time." He also said that "United Russia will see reduced numbers in parliament…Still the 2011 State Duma elections must still be won by the ruling party, United Russia…But I am certain that United Russia will have a much more difficult time obtaining a constitutional majority…"

Later the original message was transformed into a pro-Kremlin statement by informational channels whenever political conjuncture deemed it necessary. At the same time during closed meetings with highly placed United Russia functionaries, the main Kremlin ideologue on several occasions criticized them for failing the party.

In fact, the March regional elections already created a painful situation for the leadership: from one side they had to decide "how to calm electoral agitation" and from the other to ensure that the situation would not fall to such a low voter turnout as to create suspicion about the election's legitimacy.

By this time the phrase used by blogger A. Navalny "the United Russia party is one of crooks and thieves" was aired on Feburary 2 on Radio Finam-FM and rapidly circulated throughout the country. Over time the phrase has become so identified with United Russia that

the party has been forced to make peace with it. According to many experts and political theorists, this became one of the most successful discoveries as a method for opposing the ruling party in the current election season. Coincidentally, on the same day (February 2) the well-known ballerina and social "lioness" A. Volochkova exited from the party with a loud scandal. The blogosphere reacted with lively interest and favorably, notwithstanding the irrelevance to A. Volochkova.

Having noted the party's falling popularity, and with the upcoming presidential elections in mind, United Russia's leadership wanted to use civil society resources and the non-profit sector as a whole. This was an attempt to cover the increasing losses in authority and popularity of United Russia with a "social blanket."

The irony of the situation lay in the fact that for years the leadership tried to force civil society into the same cemetery as the political parties. But despite the administrative burdens and other serious injuries sustained by the NGO-community, including restrictive legislation that had been weakened by D. Medvedev at the end of 2010, civil society, unlike the political parties, could not be stifled by the Kremlin. And this social island would later become imperative for the ruling government.

The pro-Kremlin movement "Nashi" ("Ours"), V. Surkov's favorite child specifically fostered for political persecution and to confront the non-system opposition, was unsuitable for his aims.

Thus, at the May 6 conference in Volgograd, V. Putin suggested including within the list of United Russia candidates for the 2011 Duma elections advocates and representatives of various associations. He spoke in favor of establishing an All-Russian National Front (ONF). The following day at the Premier's near-Moscow residence, a meeting took place with the leadership to hammer out the organizational plan and establish the committee. The "process" had been started. All leading organizations representing large, medium and small business, pensioners, veterans, women, disabled persons, labor collectives, associations, the most varied non-profit organizations, some quite bizarre, entered the ONF. The groups included the Russian Buttercream Union, the grain gathering and storage association Krasnoyarsk Grain Product, the Alians Primorsk Water Utilities, the Vladivostok Gemini Club, the regional public organization of admirals and generals of the VMF, the club of centenarians in the name of Deng Xiao-ping (!!!), the Council for Rolling Stock Railway Service Operator Members," the All-Russian public organization of invalids diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and many others. A campaign was begun to record the number of government supporters. The resulting lists of the ONF included 188 Russian organizations, including the United Russia party and 1,788 regional parties.

The reasons for groups to register varied. Some entered voluntarily or were volunteered. Others registered in hope that it would help them solve urgent problems, and some with genuine enthusiasm. Sometimes the ruling power was forced to suppress such enthusiasm in order to limit entry into the "front" by completely absurd or offensive "supporters." The public as a whole found this idea to be quite questionable. Given the survey conducted in May by VTsIOM, those who were most opposed to the national front were primarily opponents to Putin's policy (25 percent) and highly educated respondents (15 percent).

The purpose of forming an All-Russian National Front at the time was unclear to Russians (62 percent). Eighteen percent suggested that this pre-election method was intended to

strengthen “United Russia.” Ten percent of Russians were potentially ready to become members of the All-Russian National Front.

Other surveys conducted by the Fund for Public Opinion (FOM) found that public awareness of the ONF at the beginning of June was about 49 percent of the respondents. Among those respondents who paid closer attention to the situation concerning the ONF were those who did not approve of V. Putin’s actions (54 percent), supporters of non-parliamentary parties (58 percent) and the elderly (61 percent). The remaining respondents who claimed to have been unaware of the organization at the time primarily consisted of the youth (66 percent). Appendix 1 displays the results of the study by the end of the year by the Levada Center*.

Especially impressive was the fact that after six months of PR campaigns and enormous efforts by the government to unveil it, the level of trust in the ONF was 5 percent and the number of those who had difficulty in identifying the intentions and in whose interest the organization was established more than doubled, growing from 12 to 28 percent. Thirty-two percent responded that they did not distinguish between United Russia and the ONF. Overall, the population’s attitude to the new developments can be characterized as indifferent.

At the same time the formation of the ONF was accompanied by a series of scandals. First the wealthy co-owner of the popular opposition paper “New News” and businessman A. Lebedev amused himself by attempting to enter the Front. By contrast, his colleague in big business, M. Prokhorov, refused to enter. Several organizations refused to enter the ONF, including the Union of Architects of Russia and the St. Petersburg Department of the All-Russian Preservation Society for Memorials and Architecture. Members of the Composer’s Union refused to enter the ONF without its members’ agreement.

The widely touted idea of joint primaries of United Russia with “veterans” was essentially disavowed by the party bureaucracy. Many social activists were agitated and even complained to V. Putin about frequent falsification of results and that social activists were being replaced by Moscow functionaries. Based on the election results, it was publicly declared that 25 percent of deputy mandates were granted to social activists. However, using open sources my research showed an absolutely scandalous situation. The ONF site presents a list of last names from among 80 deputies pushed into the ONF. There is no other information, including biographies or which organizations they represent, on the ONF site. There is also practically no information about newly elected deputies on the United Russia site. The State Duma site also currently provides only lists of last names. In one word: “conspiracy.” Given only bits and pieces, some effort was necessary to assemble information to assemble a full picture. In part, information from TsIK tells about the list of candidates and deputies from United Russia and a “list of State Duma deputies, nominated by the ONF.”

If the basic data is valid, then to put it mildly, a fairly ugly picture becomes apparent. The list of seats granted to activists consists of 80 people. Among them, 18 come from the former assembly. Another 41 are not affiliated with public organizations in any way, are primarily highly-placed bureaucrats and managers of major business-structures, enterprises, financial and other companies. The list includes a chairman of the supreme court from one of the republics, a head oblast prosecutor, one mayor, one deputy governor, a vice mayor, a republic minister, the director of a trade port, and so on. Most of them are also party members. The remaining 21 people are non-party “activists,” and this a bit of a stretch given that “social activists” include the

*organization recognized as a "foreign agent"

president of the “Transport Union” and a series of major union bureaucrats. Bottom line: out of 80 people, 41 (more than half) are members of United Russia; 18 are former deputies. Only 21 are actual “activists,” making up 8.8 percent instead of 25 percent of the listed United Russia deputies!

Overall – 59 people who are the so-called chained “trailing wagons.” The loud campaign of the ONF essentially turned out to be a failure. It becomes clear why information was presented in such a form – so that no one could understand anything.

Aside from V. Lysakov (Automobile Association) and another two or three names, including M. Safin and M. Kozhevnikova, from those nominated from the ONF Deputies, there were no other well-known or authoritative non-party social activists on the state level. Some fairly well-known social activists who entered the ONF abstained from publicizing their participation in the “front,” and were not noticed in the frantic agitation for United Russia. With rare exception they limited themselves to formal interviews with official media channels. Notably, members of the ONF completely lost their active opponents to the blogosphere and were unable to make effective use of internet resources.

The ONF turned out to be a formal multi-skinned assembly that barely played a role in the electoral committee and did not emit new public leaders and, with rare exception, did not enrich the Duma with deputies from civil society, who would have received a wide range of public support. It is quite obvious that authority held by party members did not increase the overall power of United Russia. More likely the opposite occurred, as nominating these people into the electoral pool under the United Russia flag weakened their position in professional circles as well as in regional public opinion. Social activists from the ONF, such as, for example, the well-known child physician Dr. L. Roshal’, who would use the general public confidence from across the country, were hardly present among the deputies. Public and other organizations within the ONF hardly stood out either in debates or in other forms of agitation in support of the party of power. The majority of these limited themselves to joining the ONF and shamefacedly stepped into the shadows of the public “common front.”

“The “Popular Front” of V. Putin and United Russia is a scam.” This statement was made by the former United Russia member from Samara, A. Aladin. In early 2011 he left the party with a scandal, turning in his ticket (number 99339057). He says:

“Sensing defeat at the next elections, the party leader came up with the new blitzkrieg (fraud). At the leader’s call, a sham around United Russia began to gather strength in opposition to the people – there is no other domestic enemy. This masquerade is needed in order to preserve the monopoly of power for United Russia and the tandem, and to finally destroy the people and ruin Russia. The bureaucratic United Russia clan, with their Brownian rule, led Russia to degradation. The government has created a clan-based system, which obeys the leader; professionalism is lacking at work, though slavish servitude is exacted to the master. Instead, the government members either have a “candle factory,” “warehouse of pills,” or else “feed off of the government table.”

A. Aladin notes that: “trade unions, rather than defending workers’ rights, in the words of the Great Helmsman, ‘as the political prostitute’ ran to serve the ruling state which brought people to poverty and extinction, having forgotten for whom they were created and whose rights they were defending. Women’s organizations, instead of ringing the bell because of falling birth

rates, have fallen to the government monetary trough and pecked for a place in the Duma, forgetting about women and children."

If during his presidential election campaign V. Putin hopes to make the ONF his main base of support, in its current form, then one can hardly envy him. With all due respect to a wonderful conductor and member of the ONF, S. Govorukhin, whom V. Putin appointed has appointed as his election campaign manager, to "move from its place" this generally inertia-based and opportunistic mass toward a more intelligent, active and effective side for V. Putin's election is quite unrealistic. For now the participation of the "National Program" ("Program of National Initiatives") is no less tragic.

Its formation on the basis of mandates and wishes of ONF members was widely advertised on all general federal television channels. However, during the Duma election campaign there turned out to be little demand for the Fund. In terms of self-justification, members of the ONF have expressed confidence that it would become V. Putin's program during the presidential elections. It has become known as "United Russia's electoral program for Russia's presidential elections."

The program is practically fantastic in its beauty and correctness. Especially the following: "Ecology has an enormous effect on the health and quality of a person's life. Problems in defending the environment in the past were put aside by other more urgent social concerns. Today the situation needs to change drastically. In the nearest years we put forth four directions which take priority: waste management, quality of water and air, forest preservation, expansion of parks and squares." And especially that: "We need to rethink the entire system of public interest defense, to reject its essentially repressive inclination. Such a situation deforms our society, making it morally unhealthy." But in order to carry out even such modest wishes, the party and V. Putin must turn into another party and to "transform" into another V. Putin by at least by 90 percent.

In counterbalance to the ONF representatives of the systematic and non-systematic opposition began to establish their own alternative associations. There were attempts by the non-systematic opposition from the right and left to organize a "Movement of non-unification," "Committee for national rescue," "Sovereign Union of Russia" and others. In July the KPRF called for the convocation of the All-Russian National Defense. The result, in accordance with KPRF information, was that more than 1,200 social organizations joined the National Defense, unifying about three and a half million people.

The leader of the CPRF, G. Zyuganov, stated that the "National Militia" was formed to counteract V. Putin's "All-Russian National Front of United Russia." But this initiative by the communists is also difficult to call successful. It seems that a particular bias against the national front reflected negatively against the National militia's idea. A significant number of people considered this to be one and the same, having become confused in similar titles. Results of deputy post-election candidates who were supported by the Militia turned out to be modest.

Moving further along, one can confirm that neither the ONF nor the National Militia have created a substantial influence on the Russian people's electoral preferences.

In parallel with the formation of the ONF, the government decided to rehabilitate the "Right Cause" party (PD). After a long search and behind-the-scenes conversations with potential leaders, an unanticipated figure emerged in the form of one the most successful

billionaires in Russia, M. Prokhorov. At that instance, interest from the government, PD and M. Prokhorov himself to begin a political career merged in a particular form. On June 25, 2011, during the extraordinary PD assembly, M. Prokhorov was accepted into the ranks and immediately nominated as leader for a four-year term. But M. Prokhorov's first political project turned into a knot stuck in the throat of the leading party in the form of a popular political figure and social activist and founder of the organization "City without Drugs," E. Roizman. In truth, this was just a pretext.

On September 15, 2011, the day of the scheduled party assembly, PD was practically seized by "black political operators" run by the Kremlin administration. M. Prokhorov was consequently forced to leave the party in a scandal, blaming the "main puppet-master of the Kremlin" V. Surkov. At the same time, M. Prokhorov publically promised to have V. Surkov fired. M. Prokhorov temporarily moved into the shadows, in all appearances, taking time to work out his mistakes. In this case the greatest of his "mistakes" resulted in unexpectedly high, for the Kremlin, growth in both M. Prokhorov's popularity and that of PD. Keeping in mind the high rating of E. Roizman in the sizeable Ural region and a series of other factors, the Right Cause party broke free from its "Procrustean bed" which was prepared for it by the Kremlin. It was intended to provide a veneer of competition during elections and to draw votes from the liberal opposition outside of the system. Instead, M. Prokhorov began to compete for the United Russia electorate. Disregarding his political inexperience and criticism from all sides, he began to position himself not as in the opposition but rather as part of the party of power. He was heard, and the Kremlin suddenly woke up to the realization that instead of a "whipping boy" that could draw dissent through declarations of the most unpopular yet unavoidable reforms, M. Prokhorov managed to arm himself with an unorthodox populism. Instead of attracting discontent, M. Prokhorov pulled off United Russia's electorate. The fact that he kept his word and did not betray E. Roizman, plus his attack on V. Surkov, enabled M. Prokhorov to accumulate some political capital.

Continuing the chronicle of the more important social-political events leading up to the December 2011 elections, one must not omit the "Antiseliger-2011" forum of civil and environmental activists that took place over June 17-20, 2011 near Moscow and the Khimki forest. The idea of the "Antiseliger-2011" civil forum belongs to O. Melnik from the youth movement "Alternative." The Movement for the Defense of the Khimki Forest was the initiator. As the leader of the movement, E. Chirikova announced: "…this is our answer to all sorts of Seligers, national fronts, and so forth…So that normal citizens . . . could meet, discuss, consult and understand how it would be possible to unify and fight for personal rights…People who we invite are different: of different nationalities, political convictions and faiths. This is why the first rule is respect toward people who are not like us. No one is to be insulted or demeaned. Respectful behavior toward each other is obligatory. No provocation, we have nothing to split over. We have a different enemy." "Antiseliger" became an open field for leaders of the most varied groups and organizations: Solidarity, Yabloko, Left Front, Pirate Party, Sakharov's Movement, Sinie Vederki (Blue Buckets), and even the leader of DPNI, A. Potkin, S. Mironov, V. Nemtsov and many others came together.

This meeting was the debut of A. Navalny as a politician from practically unwinding projects (such as "Rospil," "Rosiama," "the party of crooks and thieves") onto the field of real and lively discussions.

The Antiseliger initiative was replicated regionally. In a forest near Krasnoyarsk during the peak of the official meeting at the "Birius" camp, the opposition held a forum called "Antibirius." Representatives of the most varied parties and movements assembled here: PARNAS, Another Russia, VKPb, "Freedom," "Left Front," "Solidarity," Communists Union, Rights Defenders and the Union of the Repressed. In the words of the organizers: "All discussions went through in a civilized manner, but very turbulently. One witnessed the cooperation between Stalinists alongside survivors of Stalin's repressions, liberals alongside communists, national Bolsheviks alongside social democrats."

One of the forum organizers, Denis S., wrote on his blog: "… today, during the opening of "Birius," the governor of Krasnoyarsk Region, Lev Kuznetsov, put in a good word for "Antibirius," saying that the organization is being paid for by the U.S. State Department."

On August 21, 2011, the movement "naX-naX" was established, with the motto "Vote against everyone." Among the founders were D. Bykov, E. CHirikova, V. Shenderovich, V. Ryzhkov, P. Sheremet, V. Korsunskii, O. Romanova, A. Ryklin, N. Boltianskaia and others.

As one of the leaders of the unregistered "Parnas" party, B. Nemtsov declared in his blog: "We all consider the coming parliamentary and presidential elections to be fraudulent and farcical, which is why we are calling for an active protest. We urge citizens to come and participate on the day of elections, to cross out the bulletin by x-ing it out and to write 'Down with the power of crooks and thieves!' or something along these lines." The others followed. D. Bykov: "We will be honest: this is a game–not to win, but to have fun. Because they are powerless only against laughter, which has for a long time been the only normal reaction to Russian political life." A. Ryklin: "We have chosen a form through which to send you further. Thus, this is "naX-naX"… How much further can we "send" you in the Russian tradition?" The aim of the new movement was called "an attempt to disrupt election fraud when boycotts are illegal and the ballot does not include a line for "against all."" B. Netsov suggested the slogan: "Place an X on the thieving power." In turn, D. Bykov suggested creating a campaign symbol in the form of a Nax-Nax piggy. But the opinion of meeting members was that the slogan "naX-naX" was obvious to all Russians.

Several leaders of "Another Russia," "DemVybor" and several other opposition movements treated the given initiative with skepticism. In part, E. Limonov noted that: "…the name is not the most desired, being frivolous and not considering the psychology of our people. Our nation approaches everything seriously when politics are concerned. This is ironizing a tragic occurrence. There is nothing ironic here."

IV.

At the beginning of the new political season, discussions based on strategy over the coming elections became among the key topics in the blogosphere. Several events triggered the outburst of intense discussions.

Gasoline was added to the fire by V. Matvienko's transformation from governor of St. Petersburg to speaker of the Federal Council through urgently organized municipal elections. Again, coincidental concurrence – the August 21 "special" municipal elections near St. Petersburg - "Petrovsk" and "Krasnaya Rechenka" (Little Red River) - and the announcement by

B. Nemtsov of the "naX-naX" action on the same day. It is altogether logical that the reactions to the election would reflect the elections themselves. B. Nemtsov called the elections a shame for the country and city. Politicians, experts and political theorists were of the same mind in their evaluations, comparing them with results "attained" only in certain North Caucasus republics. The blogosphere was still more merciless and led an analogy with the elections in North Korea: as the informational agencies reported, "almost 100 percent of the votes went to V. Matvienko. With a 28.9 percent attendance rate, V. Matvienko received 97.29 percent and 95.61 percent of the vote." One of the party leaders of "Just Russia," O. Dmitrieva, announced her intention to go to court as all opposing St. Petersburg parties were of the opinion that the elections were practically held in secret from both the public and political organizations. Thus, the political opposition was unable to participate. The opposition could not create competition to V. Matvienko or send observers to monitor the elections.

Public outrage did not stop V. Matvienko from stating after the elections that "throughout history, there have not been more transparent elections in Petersburg than during the Krasnaia River elections and regional elections near Petrovsk." Since then, the phrase "elections in the Krasnaia Rechenka**"** has become a symbol of the electoral absurdity and mayhem in the "great December elections." Following the "hot trail," on August 19-23 the Levada Center questionnaire showed that over half of the citizenry (54 percent) were convinced that elections would be manipulated and fraudulent (Appendix 2). Moreover, 62.1 percent of those questioned gave their opinion that "manipulation and fraudulent results" would benefit United Russia. At that moment 54 percent of the citizenry had shown no interest in the forthcoming elections.

At the time it was difficult to imagine that by the end of December, based on such varying questionnaires, the State Duma elections would become among the most important events of 2011.

But let us return to the important beginning of the election season, which was unprecedented in terms of the scale of other events, such as the 12th Assembly of the "United Russia" party. On September 24, 2011, V. Putin and D. Medvedev nominated each other: D. Medvedev nominated V. Putin as candidate for president; V. Putin nominated D. Medvedev as first on the list of United Russia election nominees and hypothetically for future post of prime minister. The decision to "switch places," which, according to D. Medvedev's admission, they had agreed to long before, threw the political elite into a state of shock. The majority, of course, did not doubt that Putin would return (though, if truth be told, some had hoped for some miracle or Russian "well, what if…" scenario). But all parties were staggered by the "HOW" in which this was done. Having been "pushed" to number one in the party lists, D. Medvedev, nominating Putin as president, could not hide his emotions and worries, understanding the debasement of the entire situation. I am certain, that D. Medvedev underwent a deep personal drama.

In turn, the speechless and defeated assembly of thousands listened to the debasement, nervously and agitatedly clapping with surprise. From among eleven thousand party members there was not one who suggested discussing these implications. There was no discussion, no alternative! "I hope that my colleagues have managed to include in the ballot the name Medvedev Dmitri Anatolievich," noted the Party Chairman V. Putin. He emphasized that the last name of the last leader on the list remained an intrigue. "I speak without irony because we left a dash here.

So, the party of speechless members was given full entitlement to vote for "a dash." Thus the August "Krasnaya Rechenka" has flown into the September DASH.

I disagree with those who claimed and continue to claim that this "castling" at the congress outraged the entire country. My view is that everything was much more confused. Yes, the "castling" created a more depressing opinion in the Russian establishment and the more intellectually "advanced" sector of society. As an example, I refer to the September 26 online questionnaire by INFOX on the "hot trails" to which 106,908 people responded to the question "What emotions did you undergo, having learned that the elections would be in tandem?" On September 26, 2011 at 2:19 p.m., MSK, 106,908 people voted - 8 percent were happy, 6 percent felt appeased, 41 percent disappointment and 45 percent were devastated.

It seems that it was particularly this section of the blogosphere which later attended the meetings.

V. Putin's foreseen return also pushed the bureaucratic and business elite political sector into shock, which had "placed" D. Medvedev and expended a considerable amount of effort into nominating him for the presidency. By mid-September the Kremlin–White-House under-the-carpet battles became so heated that the embers became increasingly difficult to hide.

I am certain that D. Medvedev and those who supported him until the last moment had hoped for the possibility of his nomination. Particularly he and the liberal semi-opposition, opposition, and pro-government cadres, but in effect those opposing mass media, **flung their personal shock of the proceedings onto the public masses**. The other no less intrinsic shock was undergone by the United Russians and those who supported United Russia with certainty as Putin's party. But their concerns became deeply entrenched in the bins of party discipline. With a salute, they haphazardly attempted to reorient their election campaign tactic for D. Medvedev.

As concerns the broad public sphere, the initial reaction was quite calm. According to VTsIOM, questionnaires protest activity even subsided at the beginning of October to 33 percent in comparison with 39 percent in April. According to data from the Levada Center, V. Putin's trust rating between August and November remained practically the same: 68/68/66/67. The FOM (Foundation for Public Opinion) witnessed the similar trend.

According to VTsIOM's survey of 1,600 people in 138 populated regions within 46 oblasts and regions of Russia's republics on October 1-2, 2011, the decision heard during the Congress was not unexpected (55 percent). That Congressional results were entirely unexpected was claimed by only 7 percent of respondents. The belief that decisions made during the Congressional meeting were predictable was upheld by supporters of non-parliamentary parties (71 percent), but among the party supporters themselves such responses came out to be considerably fewer (51 percent). Those who anticipated such developments were mostly middle-aged and pre-pension Russians (59-60 percent) and well-educated citizens (60 percent); less frequently - the youth (44 percent).

Analysis of various survey results attests to the fact that the growth of negative reactions progressed slowly up until the elections. The growth of tension changed the general tendency at the beginning of November, then moved "deep within," gained strength during elections and suddenly emerged in the form of rather unexpected, for many, voting results. Only at this point did the negative impact on public opinion after the September castling become fully evident. Affected by the broad blogosphere discussion of the changeover by public opinion leaders,

which had “caught up with” the wave of public agitation with the character of the entire electoral campaign, the situation began to unwind completely at the beginning of November.

Psychologically deformed by the turnover, D. Medvedev and the traumatized leaders of United Russia finished the electoral campaign in the same ridiculous manner in which they began. The first victim of the “castling” and D. Medvedev’s emotional condition was the First Prime Minister of State and Head of Ministry of Finance A. Kudrin. The motives stemmed from A. Kudrin’s comments during his visit to Washington, D.C. that he would not work with D. Medvedev in the same government. On September 26 during the committee assembly on modernization, the president suggested to A. Kudrin in a harsh manner, in front of the camera, to resign immediately. A. Kudrin replied that he would make a decision after consulting with the Premier V. Putin. “You can consult with whomever you please … But while I am president, I make such decisions myself,” – D. Medvedev stated. A. Kudrin was fired that very evening.

Moving ahead, one can add to the list of incidents D. Medvedev’s inauspicious visit to the School of Journalism at the Moscow State University (MGU). The meeting, as it turned out, was attended by specially selected students. Real MGU journalism students who had planned to ask poignant questions were held back by security guards. And what would have been his reply to slogans printed on student banners: “Why is Khodorkovski in prison while you are on Twitter?” “Press – from the word “to pressure”?” Some of D. Medvedev’s trips to the regions were quite ridiculous, when V. Putin’s United Russia supporters and D. Medvedev did not understand one another.

But the apotheosis of the election press coverage became video footage of the tandem rides along corn fields on combine trucks and badminton games. Such anecdotes eclipsed even Putin, as he dove for ancient amphoras. The video-clip of a popular and perhaps, in my opinion, the most successful satirical project Grazhdanin Poet (Citizen Poet), titled “Putin and the Man,” based on Tvardovski’s poem “Lenin and the Baker,” was dedicated to the tandem combine rides, the corn harvest and badminton games; these videos became a major hit on the Russian web. Also, the runet Rabfak video “Our Vote in the Loony-Bin is for Putin” received a large number of hits. (The clip received first place in a contest announced by A. Navalny). **The government clearly missed the moment when public indignation transformed into ridicule, satire and biting humor.**

It became evident that D. Medvedev stopped being shy in his public expressions; this to the joy of the blogosphere, which gave D. Medvedev ample reason to sharpen his wit. Particularly ample for the “harvest” was a statement on October 15 when, during a “meeting with UR supporters,” D. Medvedev announced: “I am now flesh and blood with United Russia.” That same day, when one of the present members noted that “many in the press are attacking the Skolkovo project. Such press needs to be firmly rebuffed.” The president replied thus: “When Skolkovites criticize the mass media, they raise their hands against our most holy possession. For this they must be punished.” At the same meeting, D. Medvedev called upon supporters to “be an example to everyone.” “I do not travel abroad for vacations, and you could also behave in the same manner.” He further suggested: “Let’s vacation at home.” The declaration speaks for itself…

D. Medvedev went on to announce his idea of establishing “Big Government.” This idea, just as the establishment of the ONF, seriously puzzled United Russians who have not clearly understood how to continue building relations with the ONF and fear remaining in the periphery

of a “Large” or current government. Consequently, by the beginning of the election campaign, United Russia was in many ways demoralized, lost and disoriented. One may ask what brought such a blow to the party – Navalny’s slogan of: “party of crooks and thieves” or the tandem’s activities...

V.

The very idea of creating the ONF and “Big Government” is its own kind of simulation; a replacement of traditional systems of cooperation between public society and the state underlines yet again how the political system of Russia has come to an utter standstill. Instead of developing different fundamental democratic principles in the form of political competition, independent courts, mass media sources, establishing conditions for the natural formation of political parties and public organizations, developing parliamentary and local self-government as channels of national expression of freedom and impact on the quality of rule, our government has, at every turn, preferred to establish and rely on conveniently well-behaved and manageable structures. These structures are inert, lack initiative, and are opportunistic and essentially rotten. These “points of support” are easily fractured. It began during election campaigns and has not ceased.

Except as a comical farce, the idea of Big Government has not been productive. This is the same surrogate generation as the ONF: a condition in which the ruling government prefers to continue working with convenient and easily led artificial pseudo-entities instead of establishing partnerships with real non-profit organization and associations.

An illustrative example was the situation with “Golos” (“Voice”), an organization that has conducted independent analysis since the 2000 elections. Since November 2011 a particular group has waged a media campaign against Golos. Some deputies have asked the Procurator General’s Office to check into the possibility of stopping the organization’s activities in connection with its “interference with the country’s inner political life.”

On November 28 the NTV television station camera crew broke into the Association’s office attempting to find out in whose interests the group operated and who funded the association. In response, the deputy acting director of Golos, G. Mel’koniants, repeated the phrase “You are Surkov’s propaganda” or “NTV is Surkov propaganda” 77 times for over six minutes to prevent the manipulation of the recorded footage. The video of this incident was posted on YouTube and became one of the most widely viewed videos.

On December 1 administrative activity was initiated against the association, accusing it of abusing electoral law (i.e. they authorities played the “abuse card”). As a result, the project “Abuse Card” was created in September 2011 by Golos together with Gazeta.ru to monitor abuse during elections. On December 2 the Meshchansk regional court in Moscow fined Golos 30 thousand rubles, declaring it guilty of disrupting electoral law. The TV channel NTV aired a film “unmasking” the Golos accusing it of being financed by Americans, of spreading “in essence fictitious” journalism, of factually supporting the opposition, and of “falsifying the election watch.” The film argues that Golos is influenced by the U.S. in attempting to proclaim Russia’s elections illegal.

On December 2, 2011, head of Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC), V. Churov, accused Golos of illegal agitation against United Russia, and filed a complaint to the Prosecutor's Office.

On the night of December 3, the acting director of Golos, L. Shibanov, was detained at the Sheremetevo airport while returning from abroad. Her notebook was taken "to apprehend strategic information." The director was then deprived of the right to see her lawyer. Social activists are currently working on taking such incidents to court.

On the night between December 4 and 5, 2011, the Golos website was hacked. On December 8 the website LifeNews published an illegally obtained partial correspondence between members of Golos with the U.S. Department of State. A slew of human rights organizations, including Memorial and Moscow's Helsinki Group, stepped out in defense of Golos.

Golos remained active. The organization planned to publish a detailed report at the end of January 2012 describing the December election results. After the elections, the organization continued working as usual.

The "anti-Russian" activities of Golos are being "balanced" by the leaders under the auspices of the CEC, which monitors the election using a "Russian form of control" and a "Russian fund for free elections," which obtains grants from the Russian government instead of the U.S. Department of State. Here, at least, we can observe compare how the financing "works" more effectively…

The phrase "youaresurkov'spropaganda" has picked up the token "Krasnaya Rechenka" which merged with "dash" and taken an honorary position in the blogosphere...

In October 2011 the site "White Ribbon" was registered. The site's founders described themselves and their movement as follows: "White ribbon is not a party or an organization. White ribbon is simply the community of concerned thinking people. Our ribbons are growing in number. If you have not seen them on the streets of your town or city, then this is your chance and your obligation to begin the movement. With the aim of preparing our participation at the meetings, pickets, flash-mobs and other protest actions, active supporters of the White Ribbon movement have gathered and organized the Council of White Ribbon activists. The Council will be responsible for: coordination for action participation; coordination and assistance to regional groups; development and promotion of common symbols; and cooperation with the press and volunteer movements. The White Ribbon Council will include those ready to participate in pushing through ideas and who will propose their organizational contribution or resources."

For now it remains difficult to understand how the movement will unfold. However, the recent meetings of December 10 and 24 were covered "in white." Clearly, the movement possesses a good and varied abundance of resources.

Disregarding their differences of opinions and varied positions, politicians and public leaders of the opposition are striving to unify in order to establish joint actions against authority violations during the election campaigns. Discussions are being held in different spheres about how to resist the election's use of administrative resources and, if such violations are unpreventable, how to at least catch them as they occur. Between September 30 and October 2 a second forum of civic activists of "The Last Autumn" marched under Zelenograd as a continuation of the summer's "Antiseliger" action.

The main forum event was the debate between A. Navalny, B. Nemtsov and G Kasparov about strategies for how to proceed during the coming elections. G. Kasparov and B. Nemtsov spoke in favor of spoiling the ballots. The lawyer A. Navalny called for voting for any party except United Russia: "…it's necessary to remember that during free elections we will most likely lose. One cannot say that our one-and-a-half non-systemic diggings are the only credible form of opposition. The circle of our supporters must broaden. If we establish a single political space, if we all (even the parties within the system) step out against United Russia, then it will be fair."

Not one of the discussants could evade the accusation that their variant was more favorable for the leading power. However, the voting results were as follows: G. Kasparov–67, A. Navalny–159, B. Nemtsov–52.

In blogger commentaries following these discussions as internet translations, the consensus formed that "…non-system liberals cannot gather a majority vote even in a three-hundred seat room filled with their supporters. Nemtsov is either very weak in mobilizing supporters or his supporters are worthless." ("MK")

Within the blogosphere, the pervasive expert opinion was that during the forum not only A. Navalny's supporters but also PARNAS party supporters failed in using B. Nemtsov's "naX-naX" strategy. Actually, A. Navalny's victory went far beyond the hall and, given the results of the "big" elections, showed its full potential. During October and November, protests continued in Russia in one form or another.

On October 12 Moscow police arrested several participants of the sanctioned "Day of Fury" action while attempting to lead a procession from Teatralnaya Square toward the presidential administration building. Among those detained were "Left Front" leader S. Udaltsov and his colleague K. Kosiakin.

"After the sanctioned meeting ended on Teatralnaya Square, which proceeded without incident, Udaltsov attempted to organize and lead an unsanctioned march. There was an attempt to stop the unsanctioned march," a source from the law enforcement told Interfax.

Police appeared at Capital City Hospital No. 64, where, after a debilitating hunger strike, the leader of "Left Front" S. Udaltsov was undergoing rehabilitation. Yet again, the police were planning to take Udaltsov to court. This was published by the movement's press secretary and oppositionist's wife A. Udaltsova in her microblog. The OVD escort "Chinatown" filed a warrant signed by the judge O. Borovkova to take Utaltsov to the Tversk court.

Yet again, S. Udaltsov was detained on December 4 near the "Sokol" metro station while on his way to an opposition meeting on election fraud. On the same day, the opposition leader declared a hunger strike in protest to the illegal detention sentencing. Having spent over a month in confinement, which included hospital treatment, S. Udaltsov was released from prison in the beginning of January.

VI.

The new public reaction and emergence of political initiatives was evidenced in various and diverse responses from the systems opposition and from the administration.

November 20, 2011: In the Olympic Sports Complex, filled with thousands of viewers who came to view the fight between world champions in Mixed Martial Arts, F. Emelianenko against American Jeff Monson, an incident that was extraordinary for contemporary Russia occurred: the audience greeted Prime Minister V. Putin with jeering and whistling as he entered the ring to congratulate the winner Emelianenko. This was unprecedented event in V. Putin's political career. Moreover, the incident was shown live on national Russian television… Many experts commented on the Olympic incident as indicative of societal changes. If previously the vast majority of citizens were content with the state of domestic affairs and the political situation, by December they had become irritated and tired. The echoes of the September 24 castling wave finally reached the public.

Other related events followed. On November 23, 2011 Prime Minister Putin came out during the last assembly of the Duma, calling on the opposition not to "rock the boat." And seemingly as an aftershock of the Olympic jeering, many deputies did not rise when V. Putin entered, as was the custom until then. It was clear that the deputies from the Communist faction and "Just Russia," S. Mironov and G. Gudkov, remained seated as a form of demonstration.

After September 24 the forward-moving majority of politicians and political scientists proclaimed that the tandem had fallen. In my opinion, it was not the tandem itself that fell but rather its **illusion, given that a real tandem had never existed.** But in the absence of political competition, even this illusory duumvirate unwittingly demolished the current system as the emerging intra-group and intra-system competition shook up the system, even as a weak shadow of competition. The demolition occurred unwillingly, given that the aging face of the political system required the exact opposite kind of a modern makeover, solely with the aim of strengthening it, but certainly not of destroying it.

Until that moment the "Right profile" of the duumvirate was oriented toward the West in the image of D. Medvedev. From such a position, his liberal fanatics emerged which the West was "happy to be easily swayed by," contrasting D. Medvedev to V. Putin. But the symbolic "left," in the image of Putin, was naturally geared toward Russia's boundless vastness in the form of a leading gatherer of Russian lands and a defender of her national interests. The application of the "liberal carrot" and "state-patriotic stick" alternated and varied, depending on inner- and surface-level political conjecture. It was strange to witness how the Russian establishment, including politicians, analysts, and journalists, seriously "gave" credence to and believed in Medvedev's potential, after which they earnestly grieved over the unfulfilled hopes.

Even more dramatic was their disappointment when, following September 24, Medvedev streamlined to "return to himself," to the real "flesh to flesh" with not just United Russia, but with the whole system. For example, according to Elisabeth Surnachev's blog in Gazeta.ru: "The rules of public behavior have changed in Medvedev's Russia: it became customary to save face. To speak about the freedom of the press and inadmissibility of the tightening of bolts, to be further removed from publicly interfering with inner party and company activities, not to discharge but later threaten bureaucrats with dismissal after failures, to form any form of primaries. One hoped to believe in this façade, here and in the West. This new face of Russia was stripped from the real, sincere image in one jerk, as though it was plaster. And then we observed the spectacle of Kudrin's dismissal – a stage on which the head of state, purified by Congress of the stupid liberal coating – showed the face of a man from the system; a man who could never seriously move against the system"…

D. Medvedev's earlier statement was not accidental, but completely serious: "My words must be laid in stone." Perhaps this was a joke, but one through which a deep discrepancy between ambitions and actual possibilities clearly emerged. I presume that a serious political future is no longer in store for D. Medvedev.

All attempts by D. Medvedev to contrast V. Putin and to pine over his inability to choose the "lesser evil," willingly or unwillingly played to the Kremlin spectacle. Yes, a split occurred between the rivaling groups – one could even blatantly call this "Split of the Elite," but from within, and inside the frame of a unified system. In the middle of the last year, in an interview with "Svoboda" Radio, I characterized the current regime as "a bomb shelter in which one can no longer breathe," not something that is pursuing "modernization." The current government speaks of "modernization" while actually meaning only a specific inner "repair" of this political "bunker." The difference between the "Medvedevites" and "Putinists" is in their support for different style of repair: hi-tech, as D. Medvedev and his contingent supporters would have it or something eclectic, with a Byzantine flair, which would be closer to V. Putin's style. But the mechanism of exclusive pumping of natural and other resources in the "granary" of the tank is what they hope to leave unchanged. The question is where more should be "pumped" – toward the "hi-tech compartment" or toward the "Byzantine compartment." The elections were followed by a rushed-feverish search of its "replacement." The more appealing the figure will be, the greater the probability of a cosmetic modernization of the current political system in the interests of the same two competing groups for ownership of a couple of "Homeland granaries."

VII.

The systematic opposition knew how to use the election agitation in the CEC and interparty debates, unanimously cursing "the unrequited" government, as not one visible United Russia figure from the top party ranks emerged during the debates. Practically no one from among the serious and respectable people from society lunged into the debate loophole to defend the ruling party. The narrow circle of specially formed goals of United Russia was unable to contend with the flood of complaints pressed by the opposition. It is worth noting that despite its informational privileges and administrative power, United Russia outright lost the informational battle to the system and non-system opposition, as well as to the "network hamsters" led by A. Navalny. By the end of the election campaigns, communication between United Russia and the people practically came to naught. The party of power attempted to "calm" the rising wave of interest in elections from the side of potential voters, given that **not "the right" voters** woke up. On the other side, the system and non-system opposition attempted to support and strengthen the electoral recovery.

The people's revulsion grew in relation to the increasing pressure from authorities' administrative resources before the election.

For example, the internet story about the 15-year-old M. Tsiviniuk, who studied at the Krasnoiarsk High School No. 3 and ruined a hanging United Russia banner during a demonstration, was widely circulated. The High School director threatened him with police action, as during the process of the "disciplinary conversation" the stubborn student insisted on his own view and pointed out the broken law.

Matvey recorded his conversation with the director on video, where it was evident that the school director threatened him "for destroying a political banner" with a fine, police investigation, and expulsion from the high school. Thanks to the efforts of ordinary citizens, the illegal activities conducted by officials from United Russia became increasingly public.

For another example, a controversial video illustrating the typical "campaign" was "extracted" and placed online by Izhevsk residents. The video shows the city's Head of Administration and Member of United Russia D. Agashin openly explaining to the men of veteran organizations who they must support during elections: "Those who supports the existing party of power - "United Russia" will be given monetary resources and increased funding… if the party will receive less than 51 percent in the region, then veterans will have nothing to count on and "there will be no change in funding."

But one of the most absurd manifestations of the election fever was a "village mystery," which occurred in Roi, in the Kirovsk oblast, where mostly elderly and retired people live. Someone from among the local United Russia activists noticed the presence of "black PR" in the village – several calendars were found with an appeal to vote against the "party of crooks and crooks." Local police showed unprecedented vigilance in raiding villagers, interrogating them and even taking their fingerprints.

Approaching the elections tension reached such a point that even the patient KPRF leader G. Zyuganov was forced to turn to the General Procurator. In his own words, independent organizations who led the election monitoring recorded over 1,000 violations by the beginning of elections at the same time as the law enforcement agencies and election commissions not only did not notice them but often "organized them on their own." He noted that United Russia "openly and brazenly bribes votes, giving out free foodstuffs, bed-sheets and medicine," it campaigns among students who are invited to have their photos taken with their ballots and then receive a prize – a movie ticket.

By the early elections, all "battle" participants found themselves "fully armed," however the ever prepared opponents could not even imagine **with what devastating force the preemptive strike would hit when voting began.**

On the day of elections, December 4, Denial of Service (DoS) attacks blocked the sites of the Echo of Moscow radio station, Slon.ru, Kommersant.ru, the magazines "Big City," *The New Times*, the association Golos and anti-fraud project "Antikarusel." The attacks continued the following day on the newspapers "Vedomosti" and television channel "Rain." "We are certainly not speaking of amateur DoS attacks; these attacks were carried out by professionals. "The attacks cost thousands of dollars per day – of no surprise, when it comes to politics," said A. Lyamin, CEO of Highload Lab (which had fought a reflection attack on Slon.ru, Echo of Moscow and a few other sites).

In an interview with Radio Liberty, A. Venediktov said that "the DoS attacks began at 6:40 am on election day. I attribute this directly to the fact that the Echo of Moscow site, which last month received two-million visits daily, published a history of violations during the State Duma elections. The people who carry out such violations either undertook or organized the DoS attacks in order to make the illegal activities less known. The attacks were organized with thorough understanding and knowledge of the situation."

A powerful blow was delivered to the Golos website, which experienced a devastating DoS attack. The most severe attack was carried out on the "Violation Maps" site. The internet attackers also organized a massive demand dial hotline, reporting about the violations. Despite this, the Golos experts managed to organize some 1,700 observers in over five thousand jurisdictions throughout forty regions.

Almost all polling stations were attended by observers from the political parties. And from almost everywhere, information streamed in about violations.

The electoral commissions attempted to expel observers from the stations by hook or by crook, so that they would be unable to preside during the vote count. Despite these obstacles, public observers managed to gather impressive information about violations and abuse. Of course, some violations could be seen elicited from other parties, though these were incomparable with the fact that the "demonstrated" power is a substitute for real observers and a "carousel" of appointees who roamed from one station to another on appointed transport, with absentee ballots and repeat voters. There was stuffing ballots in packs for which the ballot-box slots were illegally widened, the final protocols forged, and much more.

In Tula, for example, there was there an organized telephone terror attack on the regional headquarters of the KPRF and tire slashing. In addition to these and other provocations, members of the KPRF election commissions received shocking treatment. Observers and commission members found that the keyholes to their apartment doors were filled with glue (!!!).

On the night of December 4 and 5 another incident occurred: 146 percent of the regional electorate voted in the Rostov region. The federal television channel clip showing voting results for Rostov went viral over the internet and posted hundreds, if not thousands, times.

Entirely indicative violations were identified by social observers from the project "Citizen Observer" in Moscow. The project's initiator D. Oreshkin explained that: "In Moscow, Golyanovo district, on December 4. There are two schools in the region of Ussuriisk Street. (One – N 368, the other – N 1688) In terms of the electorate, they are the same people. It is a standard neighborhood. The number of voters is also the same: about 2,500 people each. The main difference is that in school N 368, supervisors of the independent organization "Citizen Observer" remained present from morning to night, having set out to prevent ballot-stuffing and protocol re-writing. At the next school, N 1688, "Citizen Observer" was not present. Instead, the political party United Russia was present. Now to compare: Where there were independent observers, the turnout was 47.5 percent and United Russia received 26.3 percent of the vote. Where there were no public observers, the turnout was 75.1 percent and United Russia received 92.0 percent of the vote!!"

The internet was literally "flooded" with audio and video clips of violations, filmed by people on their phones and other mobile devices. Mass indignation flooded not only the internet but throughout other media sources, including radio and print media. The process of violations and abuses during the elections affected an enormous number of people: some were pressed by directors, some became witness to the violations, and others were forced to carry out the violations.

I suppose that there were not many more violations then in past years. Simply this time the public managed to expose these "black manipulations" and show them in the "white light."

The principal differences between the current election campaign and previous campaigns in terms of violations and their identification, in my opinion, are in the following:

1. Managers at different levels responsible for the "necessary percent" in favor of United Russia had lost the "elective qualifications" over the years. Unlike the old guard (Luzhkov, Shaimiv, Rosell and others), previously elected by a direct vote, the majority of new appointees no longer had any experience in election campaigns nor working with people on whole. This is a symptom of vertical power when the country has only one politician and the rest of the appointees depend solely on him and not on the people. Having received the directives from the top, they feared for their positions more than for their personal integrity. They began to behave rudely, clumsily, shamefully. Thus, the first reason is they lost the skill of more subtle falsification that they once had in the past.
2. Sudden growth of social activity among the youth and a new generation of voters which "ripened" in the depths of social online networks. Elections became an attractive point for realizing the potential, but unused, either by society or government, energy.
3. In the course of the past four years, modern home audio and video technical equipment increased significantly among people, which they commonly used in the elections.
4. Given that a vast number of people were subject to brutal administrative-informational force during the election campaign, many hoped to take their vengeance, grabbing the arms of government violators at any given opportunity.

Unfortunately the current electoral legislation is in such a distorted-cynical form that overturning election results through legal means is basically impossible. Court complaints about the elections often turn into a farce. In response to people's indignation about the violations, authorities urged them to file for legal action – they know the result and are cunning.

Against the backdrop of mass agitation and anger during the past elections, unseen "miracles" occurred. Thus, a member of a regional political council of United Russia, V. Semago, announced on December 21, 2011 in *Novaia Gazeta* (New Journal) that: "...the past elections showed a horrific weakening of the influences and authority of my party and my leadership. If one believes what is being said in its corridors by the very members of the electoral campaign, then it becomes apparent that at least in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and some other regions, United Russia has lost hopelessly…Evaluating such a hopeless prospect, a designated group of people familiar with the true as opposed to televised mood in society decided to falsify the elections in Russian parliament, aiming to retain power. Churov and his devotees attracted election results of the chairmen of grassroots organizations in order to rig them. And most likely, all actions were coordinated at the top...This is not falsifying election results, but a conspiracy to forcibly retain power."

In response to public demands, CEC head and "wizard" Churov (as aptly dubbed by the now ever-joking Dmitry Medvedev), promptly rejected all international efforts to broadcast video of violations, stating that they are "fake and installations." Moreover, he suggested that some of the stories were "staged and filmed in advance in prepared apartments."

To the government, this cool and unbeatable functionary is indeed an invaluable discovery. He turned to the Attorney General and Foreign Ministry with a complaint about international observers, then he asks the Prosecutor to conduct an inspection of Golos, on the suspicion that the "...activities of the association might be considered as attempts to (more or less!) assume authority."

And indeed, why would such an annoying outfit as Golos be needed, when one has the very dependable, loyal, friendly to the CEC associations "Citizen's Control" and the Russian Fund for Free Elections, which are ever ready to support the position of the CEC? And the fact that in its own time the Fund also received an American grant from USAID, designated for "the hot line," did not bother anyone and did not offend the country's officials for the Homeland...

On January 5, 2012, speaking on the radio station Echo Moskvy, V. Churov barely replied to any of the 833 questions from his listeners. He had more than 120 thousand radio listeners via internet (during the holidays!) and then 1,210 perturbed letters and comments! Thus people became concerned by politics! People heard answers to their many questions, worthy of the "magician": "...Thus I want to repeat that trust in the Russian Federation's electoral system was, is and will be greater than in any other European country today." (!!!) Thus emerged the "Magic aired on the Echo."

On December 5, the CEC announced preliminary data, showing that United Russia received the majority – 238 mandates (49.32 percent). The KPRF – 92 mandates (19.19 percent); "Just Russia" – 64 mandates (13.24 percent); LDPR – 56 mandates (11.67 percent).

The same evening a sanctioned meeting was held in Moscow by the opposition after the Duma election results. Two- to five-thousand people marched toward Lubyanka. The police responded by arresting about 300 people, including J. Yashina and blogger A. Navalny, who was then sentenced to 15 days.

On December 7, a protest went through Triumfalnaya square, which also led to massive holdups. The social network spread the call on December 10 for an all-Russian protest against election rigging in the State Duma. First meetings were proposed on Revolution square, where 300 people were expected to appear. But as the number of "signatories" on Facebook and other networks continued to grow, the city government allowed for the meetings to be held on Bolotnaya square. The permitted number of members increased to 30 thousand.

Agreement between meeting organizers and Moscow leadership to move the meetings from Revolution square to Bolotnaya created a conflict with the author of "Strategy-31" and the national Bolshevik E. Limonov. He proclaimed that "Liberals stole the revolution." "...And certainly, for over a year the 'limontsy' were beaten with sticks, faces were dragged along the concrete pavement in bus stations, and people were even arrested and taken to prison, as everyone continued their actions. When over 30 thousand people marched into the city streets, then no one remembered Limonov's initiative, not even out of gratitude; nor the sacrifices made by his supporters. Worse even OMON refused to arrest them during the protest actions today against election fraud. "Limonovites" and "Left Front" remained on Revolution square until the end, but police did not pay any attention to their slogans and banners... Strange and also unfortunate." Why did this happen? Because what happened on Bolotnaya square in Moscow was not a social revolution, but an "ethical" one. The question of social morality was at hand, a question of ethics. Leadership, in its political technology destroyed social ethical norms it was this situation that perturbed all the social layers and enabled social consolidation."

VIII.

On Saturday, December 10, 2011, the meeting on Bolotnaya Square initiated the most intense protest action against the country leadership since the end of the 1990s – the meeting essentially changed the political landscape of the country.

Over the assembled group flags of "Solidarity," anarchists, red flags and flags of nationalists, and Yabloko could be seen. Among those present were representatives of Left Front, Just Russia, Parnas, Memorial, For Human Rights, defrauded real estate investors, the civil movement Change, Pirate Party and many others.

Many people could be seen with white ribbons, white balloons and flowers. People chanted: "Russia without Putin," "Freedom to Political Prisoners," "We demand free elections!" "One for all and all for one," "We'll come back." The meeting Resolution claimed to release of political prisoners, canceling election results in the Duma, resignation of Central Election Commission Head Vladimir Churov, investigation of violations during elections, registration of all opposition parties, and holding new open and honest elections.

The next meeting was to be held on December 24. The meeting was summed up with the chant: "Comrade, believe, she will ascend, the star of captivating joy!"

The action went off practically without incident. The police was respectful and benevolent. Various data showed that between 25 and 80 thousand presided during the meeting. For the first time, with a multitude of CEC representatives assembled, the meeting was showed on government television. Unprecedented for the "zeroes," the meeting practically changed the logic and character of upcoming presidential election campaign.

According to the political analyst and participant of the Citizen Observer project D. Oreshkin, this action was not from the opposition but rather from people with an offended civil sense. "There were left, right, centrists, nationalists and people who did not sympathize with any party. This was not a structured oppositional movement posing for a parliamentary position. Rather, these were people with divergent political views." D. Oreshkin explained that this was a "meeting of the youth generation, which was supposed to be interested only in money and careers. It turned out, however, that it has a sense of dignity. This was also a meeting of tax-payers who were offended that their voices went uncounted and falsified. People simply want the law to be upheld. They resented the blatant disregard of electoral law. It was not so important which party would win; most important was the integrity of the process."

D. Medvedev reacted on Facebook on the following day, posting that he disagreed with the protest slogans. However, he requested that the information about election violations be verified. V. Putin's 4.5 hour reaction after December 15 was aired on live television as a "discussion with the people." He suggested placing web cameras at all polling stations, so that the March presidential elections would be "completely void of fraud," and that the opposition would be able to control everything that happens at the polls.

He also promised to reinstate the election of governors, though in a truncated form, to simply party registration and even to leave his post if he will not feel the people's support. He spoke out about Internet censorship.

In late December at a meeting with journalists, Putin said that as a New Year gift to Russians, he wanted to place "Fair Elections" under the Christmas tree. And in regard to those presiding at the meetings, he said: "I really did see people on television screens, though mostly youth...with their own positions, and the ability to assemble in clear and precise form. This is a pleasure to see. And if this is a result of "Putin's regime," then it is good."

V. Putin would not be Putin if he had not moved through the meetings in his usual form. When commenting that white ribbons were a symbol of the protest – a "worked out scheme of societal destabilization," he said at first he had not observed them closely enough and mistook them for contraceptives, as a sign for the struggle against AIDS. Having compared the white ribbons with condoms, he further compounded his statement by assuming that "students were given money" for attending the meetings and that the non-system opposition was associated with banderlogs (the monkey people from *The Jungle Book*). "There are of course the people who have a Russian Federation government passport but serve the interests of foreign governments and using foreign money. We will attempt to assuage our communication with them also."

To sum up: One the one hand, V. Putin attempted to make certain concessions to the protesters, but on the other, he could not resist mocking and practically insulting them. In any case, V. Putin had to form certain conclusions about the events; his tone became softer than it had been previously. Did he understand, however, that the country was changed? Thus far, I remain skeptical in answering this question.

V. Putin undoubtedly amplified the number of people who attended the December 24 meeting at the Sakharov Prospect. Moreover, he instigated a rapid outburst of national art in the form of various banners and other visual art. The most popular themes were banderlogs, condoms, and the terrifying American government that manages to seep everywhere. Slogans flashed: "Putin, I don't love you for free!", "I am searching for the State Department bursar of small change!", "Churov, where are our voices!? Gosdep, where is our money!?" Volunteers who served hot tea to the people handed out napkins on which dollar signs were printed. Even Communists criticized the government for scapegoating its defeat using the "Washington Committee."

Clearly the "Washington Committee" did not pay for A. Navalny's breaking mailboxes, the writer B. Akunin's blog, and releasing to the yellow press outlets wiretapped conversations between B. Nemtsov, in which he insulted almost every one of his associates from the non-system opposition.

To the credit of the meeting's organizers, they did not argue because of this. On the eve of the meetings they held a live internet committee meeting and composed a list of those presiding in coordination and rated voting, taking place over the web. On December 24, on Sakharov Avenue, there was even more people in attendance than had come to Bolotnaya; the numbers varied between 40 and 120 thousand. In any case, the staff and trainees of *The New Journal*, having stood in the metal detector gates from beginning to end, counted 102,486 participants.

The most varied forms of society and political organizations participated in the protests, but most people who came who did not belong to any. Clearly, as on December 10, the meetings carried a character of a national civil protest. Attached to the previous demands, the slogan "We won't give a single vote to Putin!" was used, thus, this time carrying a clear anti-Putin character.

To everyone's amazement, this anti-Putin character was noticed at the meeting by all pro-government public television stations, with a series of quite detailed reports about the meeting.

On the other hand, the meeting participants were irritated by the speeches of radical politicians from both the liberal and nationalistic veins, and most objections were addressed to cultural figures. The most "jeered at" speaker was the glamorous party spokeswoman K. Sobchak.

Having generally discussed data from three questionnaires conducted at the December 24 meetings by the Levada Center polls, VTsIOM, and Sociological National Poling Service, a looming exemplary portrait emerged of the "new disgruntled city" (Appendix 3). The first rushed assumptions have not confirmed that this was a "Ruble rebellion" or the "Revolution of Fur Coats." Yes, some celebrity names perceived the meetings as part of a new fashionable fad. Only 6 percent of respondents, however, answered that "the meetings – are interesting, this is the modern trend." Importantly, 44 percent are ready to go as observers to the presidential March 4 election; 82 percent are planning to participate in protests against election fraud, should there be any. Experts and observers noted that those who protested did so out of a desire to defend their dignity – the action was firm, but civilized. They demanded justice and dignity. The middle class transformed into responsible citizens.

Another particularity of the meetings – a small but characteristic detail: After the meetings, the squares remained clean as volunteers cleaned the remaining garbage. It should be noted that in parallel with meetings on Sakharov prospect, protest activity "for fair elections" moved through roughly **100** Russian cities and abroad. The next opposition meeting is planned to be held on February 4, 2012.

In response to the meetings, United Russia held its own meetings over December 12-16 in 20 Russian regions. Pro-Kremlin youth movements united in support of V. Putin as the presidential candidate. The symbol for the joint movement will be a white glove. The slogan will be "V means Vladimir." "The white ribbon is a white flag that throws all dissent for the West to see. The white glove is a political challenge and responsibility for Russia's present and future," the statement writes. The new project includes "Locals," "Young Russia," "New People," and "Grouping for Change."

On a worker's initiative from "Uralvagonzavod" in Lower Tagil, a worker's committee was established to support Putin. I. Holmanskih said that "We do not want the country to go through upheavals; we understand that the country must develop with stability." A. Lenda said: "We made our choice…And if we need to rally and show that we are a sizeable group, that there are more than thousands and hundreds of thousands of us, we will do so." "We will answer to negative assessments…in a civilized manner." "Each has a right to speak their mind. And I believe that after forming a committee we will hear more negative responses. But we will be ready for them. Just look – those who rally are mostly those who sit on the internet and are distant from industry."

December 17, during a meeting with an activist, United Russia' D. Medvedev said "The Russian Federation's leadership must acknowledge that the old political model has become worn out and needs to be changed – only then will there be growth."

On December 22, in his address to the Federal Assembly, D. Medvedev basically met the Bolotnaya protesters by suggesting the simplification of party registration and gathering

signatures for presidential nominations, changing the election process for the State Duma, changing the order for election committee formation, decentralizing power, and the election of governors by direct popular regional vote.

On December 23 the president of the State Duma introduced a bill which frees all political parties from collecting voter signatures during any type of elections, with the exception of Russia's presidential election. He also allotted until February 15 to submit a bill on direct governor elections to the State Duma. This is the liberal answer to the protests, which, based on the Levada Center's recent survey, is supported by 44 percent of Russians. The opposition has responded with skepticism to the government's radical steps; just one month ago such measures would have been unimaginable.

The day prior, Kremlin's main ideologue V. Surkov came out on *Izvestia* in an interview that I am certain, shocked not only me. Quote: "...And so, the question emerges – what are we defending? Who will want to defend corruption, injustice? Who will want to defend a system that in front of our eyes is becoming deaf and decayed? No one! Even those who are part of the system will be unwilling. Because they do not feel that they are right." To hear this from a person who with his entire zeal and creative nature created the system, twisting the arms of independent politicians and civil activists; breaking and stomping into the mud those who could not be bent – this was costly!

He has raised an army of cynical "robots" shaped to discredit the "naughty" and "dissenting!" What a guard of journalists, politicians and sociologists he has nurtured to dupe the "electorate!" What a sophisticated system of mutual manipulation between the people and government he has created!

How poignant that a man with talents befitting a better cause wasted a decade of his life to create a system that visibly became deaf and decaying – even more dramatic was that this system practically strangled the country.

Admittedly, he did not hide behind his directors and took on the darkest and most unseemly work, allowing V. Putin and D. Medvedev to preserve their reputations. But it cannot be said that he was simply an executor of the state leadership's will. Far from simply an executor, given his talent to formulate this "will" to his purposes and to bring the leaders toward a needed decision – this was his "highest class"...

On December 27 he "left" the Kremlin. I am certain that this was his own decision and wish given that he understood perfectly what would happen further... His exit was timely, given that he is the sole person who knows fully what sort of a monstrous legacy is left for the Kremlin's newcomers... I presume that at least before the March elections this is a conditional exit intended to calm the public. The popular version played out by V. Volodin was a myth. In the coming months V. Volodin will be very attentive to V. Surkov, gradually "taking over" the puppet strings. I further anticipate that this will not aid V. Volodin; the power of scale and the times have changed, ...

My audacious hope is that the record level of activity in December 2011 has "launched" Russia to a new political orbit.

IX.

The objective of my research was not an analysis of the elections, as such, or the level of their legitimacy. The goal was to explore and evaluate the developments of the societal processes, social reactions and reactions within the leadership to these elections; furthermore, seeking an answer to the question: what can be expected and what happens next?

To point out and briefly characterize several public institutions and interest groups which are more or less became apparent during election campaigns and placed themselves in a specific image in relation to the government:

- "New Society" not united with formal institutions
- Rights Defenders;
- Journalistic community;
- Non-System opposition;
- System opposition;
- Church and religious organizations

Here is the brief summary of those groups:

"New Society" Not United with Formal Institutions:

A sizeable portion of the above report was devoted to this sphere.

Human Rights Defenders:

Protests in defense of Article 31 of the Constitution continued on Triumfalnaya Square, but as they continue to remain active during the currently forming situation, the opinions of experts, rights defenders, and politicians have diverged.

One of the initiators and organizers of the Triumfalnaya Square meetings within the framework of "Strategy-31" and permanent leader of Moscow Helsinki Group L. Alekseeva, stepped out alongside E. Limonov. By the end of the year many rights defenders and the liberal opposition considered the Triumfalnaya Square protests to have exhausted themselves.

On December 12, Constitution Day, a group of scientists, artists, intellectuals, and representatives of civil society became known as the "Committee of December 12" which aimed to impede a socio-political explosion and form a systemic alternative to the authoritarian regime under Putin's leadership. The committee included L. Alekseeva, M. Kasyanov and G. Satarov. The committee responded to A. Kudrin's statement about V. Putin and D. Medvedev's preparation dialogue with the opposition favorably; equally so for his initiative to mediate during discussions between the public and the leadership. The Organizational Committee also announced the first round-table assembly would be held on January 26, 2012.

On December 23 the presidential human rights council expressed its lack of confidence to the Head of the Central Election Commission V. Churov and suggested that he step down given the lack of confidence.

By the end of December 2011 the council publicized a peer review report on the results of the public examination case for M. Khodorkovski and P. Lebed (the so called "second YUKOS affair"). The report essentially affirmed that the court decision was groundless.

Previously, the counsel presented the president with a report of the circumstances behind the death of lawyer S. Magnitsky in the SIZO prison. Based on data from rights defenders, the lawyer's death was a result of beatings; the conditions during his detention in SIZO were tortuous.

The Journalist Community:

It is difficult to over-estimate the role of the journalistic community during the quickly growing processes, for which the elections became the catalyst. It was as though the multitude of valves, bolts, and caps which had been forcefully stretched over the press through control by V. Surkov's empire of propaganda and imitative journalism were "torn." For a long time the public media was forced to serve the government by helping to create a semblance of a political process. Each edition turned out in its own way, bargaining for its bit of "freedom" and a minute of "misbehavior."

The "journalistic rebellion" ripened simultaneously with public frustration and tension in society, which resulted from chronic official half-lying/half-truth which the press was necessitated to direct toward the public and general political "stagnation." Lacking the possibility to develop honorably their professional ambitions in a squalid information-political space, mass media representatives became actively involved in charity and investigative journalism in order to feel like humans. Even harsh investigation was permitted to air on general federal channels. But there were no serious measures to reorganize the stations from the government. By the end of 2010 during the Vlad Listev Award Ceremony, L. Parfenov called things by their name: "Russia's journalism died long ago." This made a small dent in the corporate conscience. Everyone shivered, but the media situation remained indecent. Radio station Echo of Moscow was "permitted" to remain more independent than the rest, thanks to the talents of A. Venediktov. The station created a unique playing ground for the most different opinions, thus drawing in an enormous audience of listeners and viewers. A large portion of the mass media was nervous (why was "Echo" was permitted and not them? A small segment of the media did not ask questions, did not look around at anyone except its own readership – just honestly did their job).

During election campaigns, the pent up civil frustration over events broke through even into the journalist community. The elections showed the "journo-community" as one of the most active and capable segments of society. First this was simply a desire to find another outlet besides charity in order to simply retain self-respect. Many young and not so young journalists made an effort to go through the training and attend the elections as election observers. I dare to confirm that the expressed civil project "journo-community" played an invaluable role in getting people stirred up by actively observing and using their talents to show honest reporting about what they witnessed.

The dismissal of the editor in chief, M. Kovalski, of the magazine "Kommersant-Vlast'" for publishing a photograph of an election ballot with an offensive note addressed to Putin, became just the extra drop that breached the limit of compromise among journalists.

Before the Bolotnaya meeting, political commentator from "Kommersant FM" S. Kucher delivered an open letter to journalists on federal stations: "...when in the centers of two capitals of our still shared homeland, for the first time in ten years thousands of people come to express their attitude toward the election, which is broadcast live from your stations by the president – and you remain silent, this is unprofessional. When the military converges in the center of the capital and stops movement, and you remain silent – this is also unprofessional. When your media colleagues are beaten and robbed and you remain silent – this is a no, I am not speaking of the moral side – this is not disgusting – this is still unprofessional, but .... You can throw out all the "Taffy" that you received for the "best informational programs." During these days you shame yourselves and the profession."

On December 10 the informational national space began to rapidly change with the country.

Non-system Opposition:

Unfortunately, leaders of the system and non-system opposition are guilty of the same sin as those for which they brand in the government. Calling for V. Putin's resignation, they are using all their strength to cling onto their positions and roles and are unwilling to admit that their potential as leaders is equally exhausted. They have become as trite as the veterans of the system's opposition.

At the same time, the non-system opposition has a strong potential to gain national support, as long as new faces replace the current leaders.

A. Navalny is the only bright new leader who has moved headlong into politics while taking with him a social network. He uses his charisma to "grasp" about a fourth of the "new protesters" who are able to respond to simple slogans.

The majority of the "new protesters" are self-contained, modern-minded creative people who cannot be taken in by charts, spells, and primitive slogans. They are difficult to manipulate. They only accept those of an equal intellect and are not ready to bow down to the "new Tsar." In my view, the time has come not for the solo-leaders, but for leading teams. It is with them that the future stands; they do not "make idols of themselves," are able to generate and realize new ideas and projects for the country's political reconstruction. They are certain to show up, and I hope, soon.

System Opposition:

The current system opposition is of the same character as the entire government structure. Having gained extra votes during the elections that were not intended for them, they did not heed the protesters' demands to surrender the mandates and disband; instead they divided their portfolios and positions with United Russia.

The situation could not be better illustrated then was done by lead editor of Echo of Moscow, Alexei Venediktov. In his blog on December 12, 2011, he wrote "I decided to count – one, two, three, four, five – I going out to search ..."

In the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly United Russia elected 20 deputies, the KPRF elected 7, the SRs (Just Russia) elected 12, Yabloko elected 6, and the LDPR elected 5.

The socialist candidates gained 13 votes (+1), KPRF -5 (-2).

LDPR and Yabloko did not nominate candidates - two members were absent.

"Question – at whose expense did United Russia win ten votes during a secret ballot and where are the 11 votes belonging to Yabloko and LDPR? Is this a new coalition?"

G. Zuganov and S. Mironov's promises in case of victory during the presidential elections to promote the dissolution of the Duma and call for new elections did not lead many astray. But steamy exclamations about violations committed during the elections do not alter their conciliatory nature. During all of this, the Duma opposition, using protest movements as a form of pressure against the government can play an important, if not decisive, role in shaping the conditions for civilized changes of the political system.

Church and Religious Institutions:

Despite the outer semblance of deep respect for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and a ritualistic attitude of respect toward other confessions, the Russian government believed that Church influence on elections was minimal, until the last election.

Accordingly, the leadership has tried to rebuild their relations with religious leaders, though without making any major concessions to the ROC in the last decade. It was only on the margins that the ROC has been significantly influencing the government. But recent developments have brought a few surprises. In the inner circle, most existing denominations have begun a heated debate and have voiced

opposing views on the best means in which to respond to the rallies. The patriarch, who had been silent, finally stated his view: one that was an unpleasant surprise for the state leadership. On January 7, the day of the Orthodox Christmas, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Kyrill, said: "...Society has the right to voice their disagreement with the current political situation; the government should also listen to the protests and adjusts their actions accordingly... The challenge is to ensure that protests are properly expressed so that they are able to lead to a policy correction. If the government is insensitive to the protests, it means that the authorities are failing at self-adjustment." He expressed the view that when citizens are denied the rights to vote and disagree with the government it is a "very painful" restriction of their freedom.

CONCLUSION

The research presented herein brings to the following important conclusions about the potential developments of the Russian political and social landscape in the aftermath of 2012 Presidential elections.

First, it is unlikely that the development of revolutionary events along the lines of the "Arab Spring" will occur in Russia. The fear of revolution dominates all layers of Russian society, partially confirmed by global research conducted by the International Sociological Service GlobScan, in-line with BBC guidelines. The analysis showed that Russia is the only country where a plurality of respondents (43 percent) has negative views of the Arab revolutions. Other nations' respondents to the BBC survey conducted before the fall of Qaddafi's regime in Libya and the new eruption of national protests in Egypt and Syria supported the "Arab Spring." If the study were to be conducted now, I am certain that the level of negative positions would be even higher. Russians were shocked by the extrajudicial execution of Qaddafi and the demand for the death penalty for Mubarak has unnerved them.

Second, there are grounds to assume that the elections themselves were not the reason for the socio-political tension which erupted in the form of protests. More likely, the elections became a pretext or a catalyst to vent public discontent that has been forming for a long time. The reasons behind the discontent are varied and differ based on social, regional, ethno-cultural, economic and other factors; but the common denominator for discontent for different forms and layers was one – the system's political dead-end. If in the given period there had been no elections, another pretext would undoubtedly have emerged for the mass protests.

Third, I believe that the development of socio-political activity among different groups and layers of Russia's population is of an irreversible nature. Social activity will not dissolve, will not "thin out," or be extinguished. But it will show itself in different ways during various periods of this new year. Such differentiation will not signify that public pressure against the government will subside. There are few who doubt that the majority of votes during the March presidential elections will go to Putin. But this will no longer be the "forced majority," but a "majority by inertia." There is a high likelihood of a second round during elections. Still, before the election Putin has a chance to not only hold the level of support which he holds today, but also to increase it slightly. We will most likely see various forms of opposition protesting against the government and those supporting the government. Putin may benefit from a variety of "games" that cultivate contradictions between them.

At the same time the traditional impulse to use anti-Western rhetoric during election campaigns will not have the same effect as before. There can be no discussion of two terms for Putin; his best hope is one term. In principle, the possibility of early elections is not discounted – but not earlier than the Olympics.

Fourth, after the presidential elections, protest pressures against the government will not subside, but on the contrary, will increase and assume an increasingly organized character. Simultaneously, the civil society of Russia is mature enough to avoid a radical development of events, given that neither government nor protesters are interested in this. "Third-party" provocations are possible, but are likely to be insignificant. The possibilities for the development of events will depend on who and how the awakened civil activists will be "controlled" and led in one direction or another as a means to place pressure on government. To no less degree it will be important whether the multidirectional protest movements will merge toward a single movement, or whether the government will be play them off against one another.

The peak of socio-political activity is most likely to emerge closer to summer, and not in March, as explained by the inability of both system and non-system opposition leaders to negotiate a common strategy. Hardly a single politician has the support, authority, and trust of "new protesters." Time is necessary for the sphere of "new protesters" to mature into nominating "their own" leaders from within who will be capable of clearly expressing their demands to influence the central government in a civilized manner. They are more likely to position themselves as social leaders – not political – before forming new parties.

And fifth, I presume that in the next two years, Russia awaits radical, cardinal changes in political and social landscape.

Appendix 1

Comparative research data on political perceptions from the Levada Center.

What do you think is the "All-Russian National Front?"	**December 2011**
The same "United Russia"	32
A pre-electoral project, established to provide support for "united Russia" and Vladimir Putin during elections.	29
A union from which a new political party will emerge.	13
Difficult to say	25

Which party do you trust more: "United Russia" or the "All-Russian National Front"?	**December 2011**
"United Russia"	22
"All Russian Front"	5
Both	15
Neither	45
Difficult to say	13

What do you think is the primary function of the "All Russian National Front"? (percent of those familiar with the party)	**May 2011**	**June 2011**	**December 2011**
Provide "United Russia" with more votes during forthcoming elections for the Russian State Duma	29	28	22
Support the falling popularity of "United Russia" by way of attracting unions and NGO's	28	28	27
Consolidate all healthy civil strengths to resolve problems which the country faces	16	18	12

Strengthen control by the leadership over parties and social organizations	14	11	10
Other	2	1	2
Difficult to say	12	15	28

Source: http://www.levada.ru/28-12-2011/rossine-ob-aktsiyakh-protesta-i-proshedshikh-vyborakh; 12.28.2011

Appendix 2

Opinions about elections as reported by the Levada Center

How do you think the State Duma Elections will proceed at the end of the year?	Oct. 03	Nov. 03	Nov. '07	Jan. 11	Apr.11	Jul. 11
On the whole honest and legal	21	28	45	31	32	29
More likely "dirty" (using slander, voter coercion, manipulation of voter ballots, and so on)	57	49	33	45	50	54
Unable to answer	23	23	22	23	18	18

Source: http://www.levada.ru/13-09-2011/rossiyane-o-dekabrskikh-vyborakh-v-dumu

Appendix 3

Surveys conducted at the December 24 meetings by the Levada Center polls, VTsIOM and Sociological National Poling Service.

64-65 percent of respondents – men, mostly under 45 years old (62 percent). Median age of meeting attendees – 39-40 years. More or less proportionally presented were differently aged groups, but unusual activity of the youth draws attention: 25 percent aged 18-24 years.

70 percent have a higher education, from the 8 percent - two higher degrees. Determined by income, the middle-class citizens dominate, though about a fourth of those who came were people with a modest income: thus less than ten thousand rubles per month is earned by 19 percent, 28 percent earn 10-30 thousand and from 30-50 thousand. Income between 50 and 100 thousand is earned by 15 percent of respondents and 10 percent is composed of those who earn more than 100 thousand rubles per month.

The highest degree of social consensus was in regard to private property violation – 87 percent.

By occupation: managers and business owners – 25 percent, Specialists – 46 percent, Office employees and service sector members – 12 percent, students – 12 percent, labor workers - 4 percent, housewives – 2 percent.

More than half – 52 percent participated in the previous meeting on Bolotnaya, indicating a broadening spectrum of protesters.

The meeting drew people:

Who wanted to express their indignation at the election fraud – 73 percent;

Accumulated discontent with the national situation between the government and state policy – 73 percent;

Complaints that the leadership does not work with those like me – 52 percent;

People came to the meetings because the majority of them voted during the December 4 State Duma elections (81 percent).

Seemingly much is explained by the most popular ideas of those present:

Demands to annul election results (80.7 percent);

Demands for fair elections – 57 percent;

Disagreement with State Duma election results – 32 percent;

For a change of the political regime – 29 percent;

Protest against the leadership - 15 percent;

A desire to actively show the civil position – 12 percent;

Amid slogans sounded during the meeting, participants gave the greatest endorsement to: "**For free, fair and just elections" (37 percent). "Down with Putin" – (25 percent), "Cancel election results" – (19 percent).**

The number of supporters for revolution turned out less then estimated.

Political Support:

Democrats – 38 percent; Liberal – 31 percent; Communist – 13 percent; Social Democrats – 10 percent; Green – 8 percent; National Patriots – 6 percent

Survey participants' Support:

Leonid Parfenov (41 percent), Alex Bulk (36 percent), Boris Akunin (35 percent), Yuri Shevchuk (33 percent), Grigory Yavlinsky (27 percent), Vladimir Ryzhkov (18 percent), Mikhail Prokhorov (15 percent).

Based on survey responses, those who would lead the Presidential Elections would be:

Alex Bulk (22 percent), Grigory Yavlinsky (21 percent), Mikhail Prokhorov (15 percent)

If the presidential election moves to a runoff, the nominees would be Vladimir Putin and either Zuganov or Mironov; from among the respondents, 2 percent are ready to vote for Putin and 47.6 percent for either Zuganov or Mironov. The remaining responded as either not planning to vote or would leave the ballot spoiled.

Sources:

http://mosnarodsobor.ru/?page=news&id=1215

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