

Denis Volkov. Protest Movement in Russia through the Eyes of its Leaders and Activists

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Results of previous research.

The Levada-Center experts have analyzed protest activity in several ways. The corpus of quantitative research comprises polls at the opposition rallies in Moscow (in December 2011, February 2012 and September 2012), regular Russian public-opinion polls about the attitudes towards the protests, as well as several qualitative polls conducted in Moscow. This article represents the results of qualitative research conducted in April-June 2012 with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy¹. The aim of the present work is to describe the 'infrastructure' of the protest movement, i.e. major organizations and citizen associations involved in the events of the end of 2011 and the first half of 2012. The objective is to understand why the spirit of protest emerged and how it evolved. This is all the more important to do in order to contest the opinion that "the absence of institutional structures of mobilization is a characteristic feature of current Russian protest (with occasional exceptions uncharacteristic of the general trend)."² The first part of the article addresses this task. The second part includes the description of the motives of leaders and activists, their inspirations and concerns, and what their protest has helped them to achieve. The work quotes extensively from interviews.

In these events, we may distinguish several stages of public mobilization: a) protest voting during the elections to the Duma on December 4, 2011, which the public resolved to do 1-2 weeks before the elections; b) monitoring the polling stations, the attention to which was heightened due to the events of the preceding weeks (i.e. a scandalous election campaign) and the publication of the facts of violations on the election day; c) mass rallies (starting from the first protest on December 5 in Chistie Prudy and finishing with mass rallies).³ Therefore, we could talk about the fact that the wave of protests had started to grow already in November, well before the election day. The results of voting as well as the falsifications only added fuel to the flames already kindled.

Several factors contributed to the atmosphere of uncertainty and the development of significant tension in all strata of Russian society: economic recession, accumulated system tensions, conflicts of interest among the community groups aspiring to power, and the corrupt state – and, consequently, the instability of the state system in general, the rapid decline of government authority. As an outcome of a series of pre-election scandals, to which mostly the educated, financially and informationally independent big city inhabitants reacted, tensions gave way to agitation. Given these conditions, people enthusiastically reacted to the calls of the protest organizers to march into the streets. People responded to the messages on the radio and in social networks as well as to flyers that were distributed. Mass mobilization started from the grass-roots, with protest voting during the elections to the State Duma, which, apparently, enlarged the scope of the events to the whole of Russia.⁴ This is why these events were outside the sphere of influence of major players, who only managed to react and to adapt to the flow of events with varying degrees of success. Time flew by: mass mobilization, which outlined the framework of

¹ The topic of the causes of emergence and dynamics of Russian protest movement, which unfolded in December 2011, was considered before. Ref. Volkov D. "Protest rallies in Russian in the end of the 2011-beginning of 2012: demands for democratization of political institutes". Vestnik Obshchestvennogo mneniia, 2012. Vol.2. pp. 73-86.

² Bigbov A. "Research methodology of the "grassroots" street activism (Russian rallies and street camps, December 2011-June 2012)/Laboratorium .2012, № 2. P. 139

³ For the chronology of protest events in 2011-2012, please refer to: "Protest behavior"/Kommersant-Online <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2012447>

⁴ About the convergent synchronizing of the role of the "single" election day ref. Kynev A. "Preterm trap"/Gazeta.ru, November 20, 2012 issue, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2012/11/20_x_4860077.shtml

the political landscape for months to come, boiled down to two weeks (from the day of voting to the first mass rallies on December 10 and December 24, respectively). At that time, the key players were identified, and the relationships among them were established, which later formed the basis for new organizations.

Although the minority of the people (not only in the entire country but even in the capital) became the driving force of the protest, the protests were sympathized with and understood by almost half of the people in the country. This provided a conducive background for the recruitment of new participants to the protest movement. Significantly, most of those who showed up at the first rallies were driven not by solidarity with the organizers and activists but by their own emotions (i.e. indignation, anger, discontent).⁵ Many new people participated in the protests. For the first time, they paused to think about what was happening, they could not clearly express the reasons for their participation in the protest and their demands to the authorities.

However, the existence (chiefly in the capital) of quite a compact network of opposition political organizations, political, civil, and cultural initiatives, and associations ensured the taking up of a suddenly emerging wave of protest, structuring it, at least to a certain extent, despite explicit public discontent, to peaceful and civilized ends. At one point, the interests converged; various political and social groups who had various motives were united in their rejection of Russia's political regime. A grassroots protest, which is "primarily an emotional mass reaction" to the events, and relatively structured political action converged.⁶ The existence of political and civil structures independent of the authorities and their further development was likely to have defined the duration and character of protest in Russia.

Post factum it may appear that the events were well-orchestrated. The idea of a *coup* was suggested and voiced by several respondents even in the present research. Moreover, there was no convergence in opinion as to whether it was sponsored by the American Department of State or by the Russian government. Indeed, Navalny called for voting in protest, "Golos" ("The Voice") and "Grazhdanin Nabliudatel" ("Citizen Observer") were operating, the rally of "Solidarnost" ("Solidarity") was scheduled for December 5, "Shkola Deputatov" ("The School of Members of Parliament") was functioning, etc. Nevertheless, an alternative scenario of the events seems more plausible. From the moment when the accumulated public tension found its way out and was replaced by general agitation, the wave of protest did not give its participants a chance to recover. We can see that major participants act in the following way: (a) initially, a variety of projects, discussions, ideas and attitudes existed; this could be considered a form of pre- or proto-planning; (b) after society became agitated and the public was mobilized, certain projects and ideas were "triggered" and received unexpected public support and began to be developed; (c) these projects can receive wider recognition under the influence of new relationships and commitments among the participants, they may serve as a basis for the establishing of independent organizations or, if they fulfill current tasks, they may switch to the 'sleeping' mode (non-existent structure), but the relationships between the participants and the experience that they have acquired are preserved until a next call for action), or they may disappear entirely.

It appears that the protest movement can be tentatively subdivided into a few interrelated courses of action: (a) political protest (mass rallies, marches, individual pickets etc.); (b) various forms of civil disobedience ("white circles" (actions to support transparent elections), motor rallies,

⁵ According to the results of Levada-Center polls about the rallies on December 24, 2011 and September 15, 2012 ref., for instance, overview in this volume.

⁶ Levada Yu. "The uprising of the weak ones" /Ibidem. "Searching for a Man: Sociological essays, 2000-2005." Moscow: Novoye izdatelstvo, 2006. P. 134.

‘walks’, jamborees, ‘schools’, ‘nomadic/vagrant camps’ or “Occupy Abai”); (c) the monitoring of the elections, in which, according to various estimates, from 25 to 30 thousand people around the country were involved.

Methodology of qualitative research. This article makes use of 45 in-depth interviews with the organizers and activists of the rallies in Moscow. The database of potential respondents was compiled as the interviews were conducted (to the extent to which there was more understanding as to who was involved in active protest actions). By the end of the research we had a total of about 90 contacts of potential respondents. Candidates for the interviews were selected according to the following principle: they had to represent main participants of the protest events (people speaking on stage during protest rallies, those participating in the activities of the majority of important structures pertaining to the organization of political and civil protests, those who were observers during the elections, etc). We have received almost 10 refusals to give an interview, due to the fact that respondents were called to court or they were under arrest (some were being arrested repeatedly), some were also hiding from the NTV journalists or overwhelmed by rapidly developing events etc. More than half of the interviews were rescheduled at least once (some were rescheduled 4-5 times). 17 leaders of civil initiatives were selected (including environmentalists, defenders of the cultural heritage of the capital, LGBT activists, observers), as well as 10 journalists (including two editors-in-chief and three deputy chief editors of independent publications that actively covered protest events, 8 politicians (including members of the State Duma), 5 independent municipal members of the new parliament in Moscow, 4 “culture figures” (poets, writers, artists and musicians). Among those polled were members of the Rally Organization Committee, as well as participants and organizers of “Workshop of Protest Actions”, initiative “Citizen Observer”, the project “RosVyborny” (“RussElections”), “League of Voters”, the “Golos” (“Voice”) association, “School of MPs” (later known as the “Board of Municipal MPs”), writer’s “walks”, the “Occupy Abai” movement, members of the “Solidarnost” (“Solidarity”) movement, “Spravedlivaia Rossia” (“Just Russia”) and “Demokraticheskii vybor” (“Democratic choice”) parties, “Yabloko” party and Libertarian party etc⁷. Among those polled were 11 women and 34 men. Subdividing the participants based on their professional occupation is very tentative and reflects the sociologists’ initial intention: in the course of the conversation, it would often turn out that respondents could simultaneously play a number of parts, for instance, those of an activist, artist, or journalist. The interviews took form of conversations, the questions provided in advance (except when the answers were given in writing). Most interviews took 1-1,5 hours. A vast majority of the interviews took place in public spaces (cafes, coffee houses, restaurants, parks), and only occasionally at a respondent’s work place. The most efficient method to schedule an interview was over the phone (after previously receiving the respondent’s consent to schedule a meeting timw). Some respondents were contacted via Facebook. We rarely received answers to our emails.

Infrastructure of protest movement.

Observing during the elections.

“When the opposition suggested implementing a project of observation in the elections, we ended up waiting to do that, at the municipal elections we had to wait as well.” (Politician, April 2012)

Almost 30, 000 people across the country were observers at the elections, at its peak in the spring of 2012. This movement has its own prehistory. Observation, of course, had existed before, but it was usually performed by professionals. It was primarily undertaken by (a) political parties

⁷ More about this project ref. City politics//ExpertTVonline, April 24, 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvhuwS5ujHM>

activists (parties running in the elections wanted their party candidates to win); (b) journalists covering the elections and organizations doing the observation (for instance, the “Voice” association). In the context of the Duma election campaign in 2011 “Citizen Observer” initiative emerged to the foreground for the first time. It sought to ensure a transparent voting procedure and, presumably, to cover instances of violations on the Election Day as much as possible. The subsequent events contributed not only to an increase in the number of “Citizen Observer” participants from a few hundred to a few thousand people, but also to an emergence of a number of other organizations involved in observation. These included “The League of Voters” and Alexei Navalny’s “RussElections”, not to mention the existent party projects as well as new Kremlin projects. We would like to give the participants and organizers of independent civil observer initiatives a chance to tell us about the structures of their organizations.

“Citizen Observer”:

When I joined the movement of observers, it was an observer project that did not have a name. I was invited via the mailing list of “Solidarity” and we started to put together a general idea for this project. It significantly differed from everything I had encountered in the protest movement. It was an absolutely different approach, an approach with considerably more details; a more elaborate approach aiming to achieve a concrete result...Dmitri Oreshkin suggested we should cover 5% of polling stations in Moscow. And I think that it was this movement of volunteer observers that pushed people out into the streets on December 5. Because of these 500 people who went to the polling stations and saw what they had only heard about before with their own eyes...In 2009, I was an observer from the “Voice” during the elections to the Moscow city Duma. The “Voice” is famous for its policy of noninterference. Observation consists of jotting down everything into one’s notepad and if there are some violations, I don’t interfere in any significant way...

Among all the volunteers there were not so many members of the “Solidarity”, just a small percentage. Initially, everything was established by the people from the “Solidarity”, which, however, was not mentioned anywhere. Originally these people held the following stance: people from the “Solidarity” and other movements were invited via the internal mailing list. And, apparently, the majority did come from the “Solidarity.”

...Such a position of non-interference is good for the “Voice” and not a very efficient one for observers as an institution in general, since the observers are, after all, those who exert control... It is understandable that despite the generally welcoming nature of “Citizen Observer”, which was neutral, the people who came there had predominantly opposition views. They were radical or moderate to different degrees. But despite this fact, everything turned out to be more meaningful than, perhaps, some other projects which had existed before. We had a clearly set goal, a plan of how to achieve this goal and how to get the result we needed to account for. This project was very successful...

....We were very afraid that we would fail before December 4, we were afraid that half the people would not actually go to the polling station, that they would be unprepared or something else would come up. The night before the event our SIM cards, which we were supposed to use to communicate, were stolen from the office. Generally speaking, many strange things happened, but when we got some kind of a result, only after that happened, a large number of people who told us before that we speak the right words but asked where our results were (since they did not see any results), decided that they were ready to join us. Perhaps previously there had been no demand for such a structure, on the other hand, we had not had such an efficient team before. Thus, conventionally speaking, all of the 15 people that were leading various working groups, from October-November to March, formed a very efficient team...

... "Citizen Observer" had a coordination board, which had representatives from each working group that was previously formed. I cannot say that somebody was managing the whole project, everyone contributed to it, and we knew what was supposed to happen next in advance, and then everyone raised funding on his own or asked others to help in order to be able to do what he was supposed to... Okay, so, we would settle everything with these elections and then we would want to establish a regional NGO or something else, we would establish it later. There was no hint of making it a legal entity at the time. We worked with my Yandex-money and my bank card because I was a public person, so that it would not raise suspicions...

One of the things we were initially worried about was the work ethic of volunteers at the polling stations. We decided that there were so many of them that even if 10% of them did something wrong or even 15-20 %, the remaining 80%'s doing it right would be enough to get a clear picture. This was only because there were so many of them. (Civil activist, June 2012)

May it happen to all the falsifiers of election results. There was a kind of black list, so that the country might know its "heroes". May they think five times before doing something similar. Now with the media and the Internet it can be covered fully and it can be made public to the highest degree. Let them never forget they are public figures and every decision that they make will be known to everyone, including their neighbors. I have an example which my acquaintance in Balashikha told me about the head of the election committee who was a young man. The election committee, in fact, deceived people and falsified the results, there was evidence of it. The people starting putting up posters: "Such and such person in this school falsified the elections..." And he came to the police office, this young man, to tell them, "I am being bullied, there's no life for me." And the police told him, "Then move somewhere else if you don't like it." This happened in Balashikha. It is a simple example. Everybody has relatives, acquaintances. Nobody would like that kind of treatment...(Civil activist, June 2012)

Thus, civil mobilization significantly changed the "Citizen Observer" project, which emerged due to the participation of politicians from the "Solidarity" movement, and which had a precise aim and application to get at least an approximate idea about the scale of falsifications in Moscow. Initially having the support of a few hundred people, during the wave of protest events the project grew to a few thousand people, which allowed it to cover almost all the polling stations in Moscow. The resolution of the "Citizen Observer" members to persecute the violators (not only on the day of the election but afterward, too) were in tune with the general public agitation. The actions of the observers were covered in social networks and independent (primarily online) media, and this, as a result, agitated public opinion even more. In terms of its organization, the project was quite an informal structure, the core of which consisted of 10-15 people who were its coordinators⁸. The absence of a rigid hierarchy and the predominance of horizontal connections allowed it to increase the number of its participants, engaging new members more and more, while spreading horizontally to encompass new areas. However, such an organization, according to the participants themselves, creates obstacles to the process of long-term planning and creating a formal organization. Yet, the existence of a central group of motivated members will ensure that major skills for the future are retained after the decline of mass public mobilization.

"The League of Voters":

"The League of Voters is a sort of association of media persons..." (Artist, June 2012)

⁸ This reminds of new informal organizations of civil society, which the researchers have already encountered in one of the previous projects. In detail ref. Volkov D. Increase in the civil activity in Russia: establishing civil society or another dead-end?/ vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya, 2011, № 2. P. 18

I got into “League of Voters” by accident...it is not an NGO but a conglomerate. They ask you to join; it is quite difficult to say no. And there are no reasons for saying no. Because you want to see more like-minded people around you, all the more people belonging to some kind of organization. It was actually quite an honor for me, and it is still a very honorable and a very responsible step. Why did they call me? I think it might be because I had already been on Bolotnaya.... I had some activity to show. You see, all of these people who entered “The League of Voters”, they are, in fact, absolutely apolitical. And it will never become an absolutely political organization. We are not going to do politics, to make it our life and to be preoccupied with it. These were exactly the people who were previously unnoticed in politics. This was my case as well. Of course, everyone’s civic activity and public opinion about everyone, about each one of us, had existed before. And it let people understand that there is a group of people that are not going to be in charge of someone and are not going to organize new parties, which is the ultimate fear of everyone who lives in our country. These are just people who care about the civil society. And I was never indifferent to it. I still care. That is probably how I got there...

...All these violations in during the elections that overwhelmed people so much, all these violations were made public completely. We discovered them. Many people were observers, including me. And everybody saw the way it was happening...

... “The League of Voters” itself undergoes some organizational changes. It has sprung from a group of some 16 founders, there were 16 of them, they, naturally, are not capable of handling all of that territorial work, as Lenya Parfenov said. They cannot do it every day, every hour. We are now being transformed into these same numbers, we discuss some sort of statute, some other things that are totally foreign to me, I cannot even read them, they cannot even fit into my head. These statutes, budgets, etc. We are transformed into a non-governmental organization, in which the founders will act some sort of trustees of this organization. And concrete things, staying in the office and generating ideas or executing them will be done by other people, who by this time will have joined “The League of Voters” that have considered it worth their attention and who are ready to work. Young people will do that. Many of them are ready to leave their professional activities, if we may say so, if being “office plankton” could be called having a professional life. That’s what we gather here for. Some sort of the necessary budget of organization is calculated, it is available for the first 2-3 months, it is possible to get money from businessmen who wish to remain anonymous at least for the time being. And then it will all turn into some sort of an NGO, which will probably work. However, as we can see, everything is changing so quickly, and it is absolutely impossible to predict what’s going to happen tomorrow. (TV presenter, May 2012)

The responses show that from the very beginning the “League” has been different from “Citizen Observer”, despite the similarity of their aims and the cooperation between these initiatives. The “League” was initially envisaged as a project of famous people (writers, activists, poets, journalists) with the aim of attracting additional attention to the issue of observation and ensuring transparent elections. The “League” started as an organization with a fixed circle of participants, which quite easily evolved into a classical hierarchical structure. The participation of public figures secured attention from the press, the volunteers and the businesses willing to support civil society projects. The strength of this kind of structure is in a clear-cut division of power and the possibility of long-term planning. However, it may appear problematic to preserve this structure after the tension reduces and after the support wanes.

Navalny’s “RussElections”:

Previously, during the December elections (December 4) we wanted to do something similar, I suggested recruiting observers, but then the idea turned out not to be successful because Aleksei Navalny did not have time. Eventually, together we wrote a few posts with detailed instructions, with important information for observers. And from the end of December, in fact, starting January 1st, I began to work in “RussElections”. Our task was simply to gather observers, the

more the better, first of all, to organize people, to make elections more transparent and also to make sure that a certain number of people would go to polling stations and watch the process of falsification that was taking place and what an outrage it was with their own eyes....17,000 people registered on the “RussElections” website. We gave all of them the possibility to do training, to get guidance and to go to a polling station. It is difficult to say how many actually went because we did not have a system that allowed strict data reporting... Rather we had our coordinators in the regions, some parties, with which we partnered, among them the communists, Zuganov and Prokhorov...It is difficult to say, I think, there might have been around five thousand people in total.

(I: So you cooperated with the political candidates?)

Yes. We searched for them and they found us. The activists of Prokhorov in the regions wrote to us sometimes. We found the communists who were interested via the people who are members of their party and play a role in it. “Yabloko” is an old connection of Aleksei, they helped him with finding a headquarters in Moscow. In Moscow, we published at two places – at Prokhorov’s...we...I cannot even tell how they found us, we worked together as observers and at that time we agreed to publish also at their headquarters. Because we have a huge support for “Yabloko” and it might not be convenient for everyone. So, in the regions we published in the headquarters of the Communists and in the headquarters of Prokhorov. That is to say, we did not cover, I think, only one region, there were simply no issuing points in that region and we did not have observers in that region. In principle, it was, I suppose, Khanty-Mansisk or Chukotsk region... (Civil activist, “RussElections”, April 2012)

“RussElections” was initially a closed structure. We (in “Citizen Observer”) were always criticized for being closed, allegedly because it was not clear who was responsible for what things, but we had a list of working groups on our website and the contacts of each person responsible for a particular working group. For some reason “RussElections” could not manage to do this in any way. Navalny is a busy person, so you can’t call him when you please. We then contacted their IT guys, analysts and others too, but, in general, we did not understand if they were successful. Perhaps I have partially forgotten something at this time but the explosion as a result of their work was not very strong. It was not very clear at first what polling stations they were covering, which ones they were not covering, how many teams they had. There was something similar at Prokhorov’s headquarters. They attempted to get involved in observing and said that they would start to work together with us and then we would all need to work in the same call-center which would be theirs. Then it turned out that this would be less efficient. They, of course, have more phone numbers and lines, but if all the organizations started calling them, the number of people whom they can involve would be smaller than if everyone created their own call center. These misunderstandings were most intense with Prokhorov’s headquarters and “RussElections”. It was understandable that they were doing a useful thing just like us. But how they were doing it, we couldn’t understand and what result they got we couldn’t understand either...Perhaps it was because they had a smaller working team...and had a few more people who were doing everything and whom you could talk to about various issues. Therefore, it is hard for an outsider to understand their structure, if you address one person about one issue and then another one, it is hard to understand what that is doing and what is being done by other people. They have not publicized their structure anywhere, the fact that they had mobile groups, a call center and something else. They have simply not publicized it. I don’t know what guided them in this decision. Maybe they lacked time for that, maybe it did not appear to them that it was important...[It is important to do] because it increases trust on the part of the people that participate, in the quality of working with volunteers that need to understand what they are supposed to do. This helps to cooperate with other organizations as well, because if we understood their structure, we could offer more efficient options for cooperation in training people or in some other area... Since the structure was not clear, the fact whether they had groups responsible for training at all and who was responsible for the courses of lectures so that

we could compare them. We also did not have the time to search for this information specifically, to fish it out, and to find out. If there's nothing to hide, it would be good to find a person who would tell everyone how it functions in reality in order to assist cooperation, to make it easier to be mutually understood by other participants of the process. (Civil activist, "Citizen Observer", April 2012)

While conversing with the activists and the leaders of "RussElections", the organization that was founded after the protest movement had gained momentum, it was clear that this formation was one of the series of projects by the Alexei Navalny's team ("RussCut", "RussPit" etc.) The main objectives of "RussElections" were, as it seems, its involvement into the observation at the elections and 'plugging' the new people into the already existing teams of observers (and, thus, the initiative gained additional publicity and popularity). Initially, this project was intended not as an independent organization but rather as a temporary initiative aiming not to solve the problem, but to motivate others to solve it. It would seem that in this case planning was carried out primarily on the level of the team work of the supporters of Aleksei Navalny in general and not as support for an individual project.

Consequently, observing the elections appeared to be a separate current of mass mobilisation. And this involved many cities in the country. Main actors, sensing the growing protest attitudes and the wish of the people to be active, targeted not only Moscow and St. Petersburg but other regions as well. The attention of the observers was primarily directed to the cities where significant local elections were taking place at the same time (first in Yaroslavl, Astrakhan etc., later in Khimki etc.) and cities close to Moscow. But the activity was not confined to those areas. It appears that the work in the regions was approached differently, it was judged by the characteristic features of the organizations themselves. "Citizen Observer" seemingly worked via a network of similar initiatives. The "League" repeatedly organized trips and round tables in regional centers, at these the renowned founders of the organization spoke. "RussElections" attracted attention to the problem first of all thanks to the authority of Aleksei Navalny. The "Voice" had its professional regional network, it provided major expert support to various observing structures. All of these organizations cooperated with the registered political parties (primarily with "Yabloko" and the Communist Party of Russian Federation and on the presidential elections with CPoRF and Prokhorov that alongside the media could, according to the law, delegate its representatives to be observers.

Time will show to what extent the existing network of various organizations and initiatives is stable and can act under the new circumstances: after the legislation was tightened in the sphere of financing and financial reporting for the not-for-profit organizations, the activity of observers, etc., and after the period of public agitation ends. It is still unclear whether the activists would manage to provide resources for their everyday work and to motivate their former supporters to become observers as well as to involve new people.

Political protests.

Mass protest rallies with political demands in December 2011 were a surprise for many, including the organizers⁹. The mobilization of the protest groups, the influx of many new people

⁹ Ref., for instance, the "Big City" magazine interview with Nadezhda Mitiushkina, member of the "Solidarity" movement, who was among those initiators of the December 10 rally: "Indifferent people cannot control the authorities/ Bolshoi Gorod 10.02.2012 http://bg.ru/society/ravnodushnye_ljudi_ne_mogut_kontrolirovat_vlast-16001/ In this interview Mitiushkina talks about the announcement for December 10, which was thought of to be made just in case.

drastically changed the format of action¹⁰. It is a reminder that according to the Levada-Center polls about the rally on December 24, 2011, the main reasons that motivated the people to go into the streets on that day were “indignation at the election falsifications”, “discontent at the politics of the authorities” and “frustration over Medvedev’s policy.” In the interviews with the leaders and activists of the protest movement, these motives are revealed most fully.

“Ethical and “stylistic” incompatibility with the authorities, abuse of power:

“My personal protest is in no way connected to social standards, for instance, to the fact that the teachers are not paid much. I can always find ways to earn money; my reason is probably stylistic differences with Vladimir Churov...Stylistic things. People don’t like it much if they’re lied to in their face. Afterwards a desire arises to do something about it, to end this. I thought this way and the people who were working in banks or big companies and who dedicated a large part of their time to doing some additional work thought the same. (Civil activist, observer, April 2012)

It seems to me that this is because the active cohorts of people in the society, name them whatever you want, those who have the conventional wisdom, the brains of the country etc, they understand the impossibility of further living under these circumstances and, therefore, they experience an ethical dissonance, an esthetical dissonance with the people around them. It is not very pleasant to live like that anymore and there is a feeling that it needs to be changed somehow. (Journalist, April 2012)

People have been shown many times, quite rudely, that, in fact, they do not interest anyone. It was made clear that they would be ignored, but not simply ignored but that the government is not hesitant to show that. Nobody needs you, not at all, go to hell, get lost, it is none of your business and who do you think you are. It seems to me that the majority of people who played these games, all those rallies and all that civic activity, these people understood that, as a matter of fact, they have the right to wish to participate in the life of the country. No logical, no right, nor adequate reaction of authorities followed. Vice versa, insults, absolutely filthy hints. (TV anchor, May 2012)

Personally I.... receive very often such banal questions from journalists and evil-wishers, “What ill has Putin done to you? What ill has the Russian state done to you?” To this I can say only, “None”. Only that they built such a country where, I think, it is a shame to live. (Journalist, May 2012)

It is humiliating to live in this country. Surely, the protest and the slogan, “For transparent elections!” is because of that. It is about everyday humiliations associated with living in Russia. These start from acquiring a driver’s license to obtaining a license for importing raw materials for your enterprise. It is always unpredictable and humiliating. Elections, in this sense, are a very prominent example of this humiliation. (Journalist, May 2012)

(I: You have been talking about social sensitivity, what do you mean by that?)

It is sensitivity to lies, to fraud, to societal ill taste and ill taste in behavior, it is a very important thing. There is this Russian word “poshlost” (“vulgarity”), which is hardly translatable into other languages, but it is only untranslatable on the surface. As for me, in all that authoritarian...They behave absolutely like rogues, even when they used to behave as vegetarians the first thing that struck me was their anecdotal vulgarity. All these Putin words, all this gesticulation, all this “priblatnennost”, first of all, it really strikes the eye of those who are

¹⁰ How the rally of December 5, 2011 was organized and what was new in the preparation ref. Volkov D. “Protest movement...” P. 80.

sensitive to matters of style. Andrei Siniavski said long ago that his dissidence with the authority is purely stylistic. Then it seemed only an aesthetic utterance, but it goes deeper than that...People are divided into various social, socio-cultural strata and we, the local people, are incomprehensible to foreigners, and we who are locals, we grew up in this kind of environment, we understand where the person comes from, which stratum. I know this from my adolescence, I know how the neighborhood gangs, the national security guys, the “whistlers” behaved, we all know that and judging by his everyday behavior we understand to which stratum a person belongs. (Poet, July 2012)

Complaints of the people in power:

A sweeping process currently takes place but it is of a different kind...these authorities are first in the history of Russia, who have a single aim, that of self-enrichment. And they are ready to do everything, including murdering people in order to achieve this goal...(Civil activist, April 2012)

The regime is illegitimate. It was ‘privatized’ by a bunch of scoundrels...The power is privatized by the people that don’t have state vision and overall state thinking, who monopolize it for their personal goals. It is a very important feeling that people have. That is, they don’t trust these authorities. And there are more of those who are critical of the regime. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Our enemies are the people who falsified the elections, who practice corruption, they are criminals. Our enemies are the people against whom criminal charges have to be raised...(Civil activist, April 2012)

Occupants are in power, they have occupied all offices, they possess all the material wealth, moreover, this material wealth is already being inherited. Thus, an ordinary person cannot move up the social ladder in any natural way. And the most repulsive thing is that they, these occupants, do not associate their further life and the life of their children with Russia. They use our country to gain profit and, at some point, as I understand, their families already live abroad and they are here as if on a business trip to earning money. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Here a stratum of people emerged, not a very numerous one, they think that they are gods here and can do here whatever they like, disregarding everything. These are singular cases, but they think they are beyond good and evil, that is, they get pretty brazen and disregard everything...the major mistake made by Putin is that he made power accessible to the people who are guided by the basest feelings they have, by gain, avarice, greed, pride, gluttony etc. All these people, they constantly are eager for power, at all times, they cut up the budget, they steal it and then they do not know what to do with this money...they buy golden toilets, they buy themselves Bentleys, they buy themselves yachts for 100 or 200 million dollars. They buy themselves football clubs instead of giving competent people professional authority and so on, they don’t give chances to these people to fulfill themselves. In this way bureaucrats, rogues and thieves who “cut off” money for the sake of..., I don’t even know for the sake of what. They push the country into the state of depression...Here people would choke for a thousand dollars. Besides, the people who are pinchpennies are millionaires, billionaires, they simply cannot manage their money well. They are afraid of losing it. They have laundered this money on some sort of contract and they then sit on this bag of money like Scrooge McDuck, they put it into a vault and have jitters over something happening to it. (Civil activist, June 2012)

Inefficiency of authorities:

“One of my key complaints about Putin is that 12 very fruitful and profitable years civil initiative has not only unsupported...not only has it lacked nurture, it has been choked. Instead of creating opportunities for development using these finances, they were simply showered on poor people

so that they would feel an absolutely Soviet-like dependence on the state. And now in fact this money is being used as bargaining money during the elections and everything else. It is more convenient this way. It is self-evident that it is easier to govern people this way. (Journalist,

May 2012)

A political system of a certain sort is established...it preserves people's position in power. Its consequence is the following: it is not at all grassroots, it has no feedback from the populace. As a result, it is not about the state for the people but about the people for the state. (Politician, municipal MP, April 2012)

Certainly, this is not an exhaustive list of quotes (and we can hardly speak of representativeness in qualitative research), however, we shall attempt to single out some general ideas of the activists' motives.

Firstly, the reasons for rallies are viewed by those polled, first of all, in the actions of those in power. The people are critical about that. In the words of many of the respondents, one can read aggravation, disdain and even hatred of the authorities.

Secondly, opinions and criticism on the part of the activists are quite articulate, deliberate and most certainly voiced repeatedly. And, hence, the difference between the activists and the leaders of the protest movement (politicians, public figures, journalists, human rights activists) and the ordinary participants who hardly identify their criticism of the government and the reasons for their participation in protest rallies¹¹. The leaders approached the December events with ready-made formulae¹². They had had an experience of confrontation with those in power under their belt, they had had time to think it over.

Organizing political protest.

Practices of collaboration among various political and civil powers within the "Other Russia" opposition coalition, Committee-2008 and others were instrumental in making the protest activity of 2011-2012 from quite organized from the very beginning

Organization Committee

There is no doubt that the main function of planning, preparing and leading the rallies was taken on by the "Organization Committee", which included not only politicians and activists but also famous journalists and public figures. This enlarged regular opposition agenda. The Organization Committee was formed from the grassroots already after December 5 in the course of preparing for the upcoming rally. It assumed the function of regulating protest activity. Its sessions were broadcast live, and the viewers' live responses received immediate attention. We shall cite a few excerpts.

(Organization Committee) is a very unstructured organization. There were several groups of people, interest groups, which....there were some left-wing politicians around Udaltsov, there was "Solidarity", both organised their own rallies. Then along with "Solidarity" this journalist

¹¹ Ref., for instance, Bikbov.A. ibidem, P.134

¹² In this sense the reply by Izabelle Magkoeva is critical, an activist of the protest events and member of the Coordination Council of the Opposition at the mutual seminar of International Memorial and Levada-Center "Self-governance and self-organization in the "Occupy" movement on December 7" about the protests not changing her worldview much. For the "novices" protest rallies became a revelation, they changed not only their view of reality but sometimes their profession as well, which will be mentioned later.

and others emerged. Thus, the rallies started and everyone who found himself involved or who got attached, clung, what you call it...they do it themselves and sometimes they help each other and sometimes they interfere. It was an unsophisticated mechanism, which did not have a clear-cut hierarchy, an organization, a structure or a leader... (Journalist, April 2012)

The Organization Committee, which lasted the whole winter, was established in many ways as a result of this rally on December 5. The people that played their part in the events of December 5 joined it. Initially, to a certain extent, they have organized the events on December 10. And The Organization Committee, which was busy organizing the rally in Sakharov avenue on December 24 was simply a consequence of preparing December 10. There were people who made a great contribution in terms of the turnout. Akunin contributed, since many people came to the Bolotnaya rally on December 10 because of him. He wrote and spoke about it, he came to Moscow personally, he held talks with other men of distinction, he convinced them of the importance of coming there, of why it was important to write about it beforehand and to speak in public. When the Organization Committee was established for December 24, it was clear that it also needed to be involved. To a certain extent, it can be said about Parfenov, Bykov and me. The question often arises: who appointed these people? They were not appointed by anyone; they have emerged based on the previous results. At first, this was happening in terms of the turnout, in terms of the initiative and then it was fixed. The same case as with the people treading the path through the lawn and then this path is paved; if people walk using a certain path, then it means it is convenient for them. The same happened here, if a person is involved in this, let him continue being involved, everyone is happy with the results of this person's previous work. Besides, the fact that I find myself in a transitional position played its part: on the one hand, I have quite an extensive social network among journalists, I have been in the field for many years, I was editor of various magazines, many people know me. On the other hand, I have a long history of relationships with the people who call themselves opposition politicians. In the mid-2000s, in 2004-2005 I was one of those who created Committee-2008. It is now well-forgotten and it seems it was in vain. It was a very interesting experience; it was an experience of an attempt at unifying people of widely different occupations into one working group, people who find themselves in widely differing relationships with the political process: politicians on the one side and journalists on the other. Committee-2008 in its structure was very similar to these other Organization Committees. When people say now, "For the first time politicians and media figures, famous people and people who draw attention to themselves, found themselves sitting at the same table," then it must be said that this has not happened for the first time. The first time was at the Committee-2008, where there were Nemtsov, Khakamada, Shenderovich, Latynina, Nosik, others and I. It was a very good experience, absolutely forgotten by many, simply underestimated, conscientiously mocked in an absolutely unjustified way and in vain. It was a very interesting attempt at uniting a variety of worldviews, a variety of professional approaches, it was an attempt to exploit some public potential, let's say, of journalists, of media people, to encourage the politicians to join a dialogue, a conversation, mutual, deliberate work...

....You probably do not even notice that they are doing their work here and, meanwhile, they are simply doing it at the same time when you are doing your work. It seems to you that some things happen on their own, and, in fact, it doesn't simply happen this way, these things happen because they are written about and talked about with great numbers of people in a systematic way. A community formed and there were many registered people in this community. Something which for you seems to be happening automatically is a result of a conscious effort...

....An important feature of the Committee in many respects is the fact that not only professional politicians were involved in it but that this structure has turned out to be more sensitive than what was usual for other analogous structures, it was way more sensitive to the voice of the protesters due to the fact that two groups of people were gathered there. One group (as such is the nature of their occupation) were convinced that they were in control of the process, that they were at the helm, that everything happens as they please, that it can be done this or that way,

this or that turn may be taken or this or that direction. To turn in a geographical sense when the intention of the marches, transitions in their sense and content are at stake. And there was another group, to which I belong, which was convinced that it could not influence anything but only tuned to the opinions of certain masses, attempts to shape this opinion in some way and to analyze it. We felt it very strongly, we attempted to exert the same pressure that we felt from the outside, from various groups of people on the work of the whole Committee...I don't control anything. An illusion should not exist that, having settled the issue with me, you can reach a result. You can agree with me on any number of things, but it does not mean anything. People whose behavior you are interested in, as a matter of fact, our dear officials, they are absolutely insubordinate to me, they are not obliged to me in any way, they are absolutely not obliged to execute whatever you and I decide now. If you and I would mistakenly suggest a solution that would not satisfy them, they would simply ignore it. We would go out and triumphantly declare that we have agreed upon such and such matter. They would tell us, "You are fools," and then they would turn around and carry on as before if it turns out that that which we have agreed upon and decided with you does not correspond to their expectations. It needs to be said that this tactic appeared to be very efficient. (Journalist, June 2012)

When you find yourself in this circle (in the circle of those participating in the protests), it goes without saying that you are in the thick of history, you don't want to quit, you understand what is going on where. The process of entering history turns out to be abrupt, when a great amount of information showers on you, you start to process it faster and faster, thus, it's a flow of knowledge. (Civil activist, June 2012)

It can be gathered from the interviews with the members of the Organization Committee and the people who participated in some of its sessions, that this entity carried out a wide range of functions for the direct coordination of the events: (1) fundraising for the rally was organized, so that it would not be funded by only one politician or by one movement (the rally on December 10 was allegedly sponsored by "Solidarity" and Nemtsov himself). For precisely this purpose Olga Romanova's "e-purse" account was set up; (2) The Committee provided the stage and the equipment; (3) It defined the format of events and possible itineraries for people; (4) the number and the suggestions for speakers. All those issues became subject to debate, various agreements in an attempt to make the procedure of decision making transparent; certain sessions were not only broadcast, but various voting procedures were used; the lists of the rally speakers were published for voting in social networks.; (5) besides, the members of the Organization Committee had an uneasy task before them, they had to agree on the venue, time, and format of the rally with the Moscow authorities; (6) informing the public about plans of events. Moreover, the Organization Committee became a platform for interaction between various political and civil powers. The dialogue had certainly been going on previously, but as a rule of thumb, it is easiest to find common ground when working together, that is, at a certain point and for a certain time the organizers were united not only by the rejection of the regime but also by the common cause.

Now that the Opposition Coordination Council has been established instead of the Organization Committee, we may talk about a consistent tendency to expand the representations of various political forces and interest groups in the protest movement. We can identify the following stages; (1) the December 5 rally organized by "Solidarity", which, in the last couple days, was spontaneously joined by activists, individual journalists and public figures; (2) the December 10 rally, whose claimants were "Solidarity" and "Left Front" activists; it was sponsored by "Solidarity" but in the process of its preparation the Organization Committee begins to take shape; (3) subsequent rallies were coordinated by the Organization Committee, which represented quite a broad coalition of forces but formed from the grassroots; (4) after the elections to the Coordination Council, a number of participants with the right to vote making a decision including the one concerning the united actions of the opposition significantly expanded and was brought to order.

Workshop of Protest Actions

However, although the Organization Committee was the main structure (bringing together various parties, circles and groups), which organized the protest actions, but it was not a single structure of this kind. Conversely, civil headquarters started to operate alongside it. The “Workshop of Protest Actions” was, in contrast to Organization Committee, principally open to everyone willing to participate in organizing and conducting events and. It was accessible to all who knew about it, as the information about it was spread via social networks and among friends. This, of course, drastically limited access to the information about its sessions. Let us turn to the utterances of the “Workshop’s” direct participants:

It seems it was already after December 10. And then someone from the Organization Committee...wrote that...a meeting of the Organization Committee would be taking place... in the Bolshoi Gorod premises and it could be watched online. He said that via the webcast meant participating for everyone, please watch. I wrote that to watch does not mean to participate. There are a huge number of people who want to participate and this energy needs to be immediately utilized in some way. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. To that he reasonably answered, “How do we harness this energy?” I said, “There are ways to harness it. There are ways to gather large numbers of people and persuade them to take a large and a small number of direct actions. It was done this way by “Act Up” for instance. To this X...reasonably answered, “If you’re so smart, then do it yourself.” With this kind of attitude. I said, “Fine. If I’m so smart, then I need to arrange the quarters”...

...Initially, we wanted it to be a big movie theater, some building where there is a stage, first of all, and, second of all, where there is a huge auditorium with a sound system. All the cinemas promptly refused. “Masterskaya” (the “Workshop”) agreed, the first club which we contacted...We needed to do it on Thursday morning before the concert began in the “Workshop”. That was it. Then I announced it in a few groups. And then I started thinking of how this needed to be organized...I wrote a Facebook post, which had the following message: a large number of people gathered there once a week. They suggested their own initiatives. These initiatives were either approved or disapproved by those present. A person received the right to vote if he was present. There was also a desk selling T-Shirts and accepting donations. In accordance with the results of the voting of those present the funds were distributed...

...It became clear at once that the point was not just people staying there to debate. It turned into an opinion-exchange area of sorts. There were suggestions of actions, there were those willing to participate. In the sense that...before December 5 I did not think that I would be so involved in politics, and then it happened to me. And we said once, “No, it has happened to all of us, therefore, we won’t speak loftily but we will talk exclusively of particularities. In general, at that time the rules of the “Workshop” were established. These rules we now announced at the beginning of each meeting. One of the rules is that these meetings are only for suggesting concrete initiatives or for reporting their results. We are not voting, we are not criticizing the suggestions; we are not taking the floor. If the initiative does not deserve support, it would simply find none. If you came and found what you were looking for, you can leave... The “Workshop” is not a place for debates. We utter this phrase from time to time. However, most importantly, it is not a place for criticism. We have created such a strange place of universal love, which was in tune with the euphoric feeling in December. Later we started to meet every week... the “Workshop” has become in effect a working entity for all the steering committees. Outside of the sphere of influence of that Organisation Committee, the Bolotnaya and the Sakharov rallies or the initiatives from “League of Voters”, such as “White Circle”. We understood that we could do everything that is was done in the street. Starting with distributing flyers and ending with organizing small flash mobs inside every big event...

...At a certain point after the rally on Sakharov avenue we lost the building...then we arranged to meet in the “Zavtra” (“Tomorrow”) café, where we currently meet...

...When it seems to me that it is important and, what is more, that I play a key role in it, then it means that I manage to find time, even though I always lack it. I do not have this feeling anymore. Perhaps since finally many centers of this movement have appeared. And I feel that they would do just fine without me. In the winter, I had a clear feeling that if I did not organize it then...nobody would. I had the feeling for quite a long time that if I did not do this later, if I did not continue doing it, then a huge piece of a puzzle would be lacking. At present with the “Assembly” perhaps and, in general, regarding everything happening around the “Occupy” I do not have this feeling anymore. Generally, with the “Workshop,” a huge number of some sort of formal and informal groups emerged. (Journalist, May 2012)

All discussions were cancelled. There was only a story...that if you know what we can do between rallies, if you know what we can do for a rally, then come, suggest, we will find help for you...There are two principles: we are not criticizing each other and we suggest only what we are willing to do ourselves. It is meaningless to go onto the stage and say, “I have an idea, maybe, there will be someone here who will bring it to life.” It is a very interesting, it seems to me...in general, it is the most valuable experience of this “Workshop” that in the very beginning at that first meeting especially the majority of people went on stage and said, “I have thought of something, I don’t know how to do it-I am a little fellow, it would be nice if one of the famous people took this up...” The organizers said, “No, no, wait a minute, what do you want to do? Do you want a long white ribbon to be in the rally? What, in your opinion, do you need so that this long ribbon is there?” The person starts pondering on the stage, “Hm...I suppose 80 meters of white material is needed.” “Can you buy it yourself or do you need the money?” “Yes, I probably need the money, I would hardly be able to find it”. “And do you know where to buy it?” “Yes, I know a warehouse.” “What else do you need to unfold the ribbon?” “I probably need 8 people that would unfold it together with me and also a person who will help to bring it there.” “Are there volunteers in the audience?” “Yes.” That’s it, this person’s mind is fully transformed. As it turns out that he can do it himself. And the feeling, “I can do it on my own”, dawned on many people thanks to the “Workshop”, which, it seems to me, is the most precious acquisition. Because later it is spread in circular motions. Indeed, first of all “Citizen Observer” did everything for the observation to be such a massive phenomenon, but it is a turning point in conscience, which happened for us as well, I am sure, which helped spread this. (Journalist, May 2012)

The “Workshop” is a gathering, a very interesting community, a set circle of people who started searching for new forms in political movement, they get to know each other.... (The participants) change all the time, undoubtedly, it is no organization, but it is a circle of people, a crowd, that’s the name for it, which plays a very important part, it is formed, people get to know each other, they see each other, they attempt to understand how to act. (Civil activist, June 2012)

This forum started a stock exchange of projects *sui generis*, weekly meetings could be attended by anyone willing to do so who could suggest an idea to organize a specific event and who could find support for his idea. The condition for considering the project was the person’s readiness to work on the idea’s implementation with the help of other participants (in this way personal experience of similar participation of one of the organizers, that of Masha Gessen, in New York’s movement “Act Up”, which emerged in the 1980ies, was introduced into the Russian protest).¹³ Here an idea emerged and was implemented to spread the information about the rallies as far as possible beyond the Internet: a few dozens of thousands of flyers and stickers were printed and distributed throughout the city. This, undoubtedly, played its part in expanding the

¹³ Ref. in detail <http://actupny.org>

number of participants in the first and subsequent rallies on Bolotnaya square. Here various actions filled rallies and marches (various banners, chants, etc.) and also independent events of civil nature, such as the “White Circle”, walks along the boulevards on the inauguration day of May 7, etc.¹⁴ Consequently, this association of citizens became one of the important components of the protest movement “infrastructure” at the peak of its activity.

The “Workshop of protest actions” as well as the Organization Committee emerged in response to general enthusiasm, it played its part in the development of peaceful protest, in the emergence of new faces, potential new leaders. However, until the summer, according to its organizers, the “Workshop” (as opposed to the Organization Committee) practically exhausted its potentials: the sessions of the “Workshop” are still held, but now, according to the participants, it lost its dynamics and is no longer topical. At different times it was attended by various politicians (Nemtsov, Udaltsov, Romanova, Verzilov and others) in order to synchronize their actions. This only shows once more that informal associations of ordinary citizens, participating in protest activity had significance in the events that took place.

On the role of “Solidarity” Movement.

To conclude the overview of the ‘infrastructure’ of the protest movement, and prior to moving on to the evaluation of its results, it is impossible not to mention the role of the “Solidarity” political movement. It appears to be important since its members (and former participants that had left the movement by the time of the events described here) actively participated in all types of civil and political activity, which were encompassed by the protest movement: (a) they were observers during the elections and established “Citizen Observer”; (b) among them were municipal MPs, among the founders of “School of MPs” were former members of the movement; (c) the first and the second rallies were organized by “Solidarity” and its leaders entered Organization Committee and were elected into the Opposition Coordination Council; (d) they were involved in “Occupy” and participated in establishing some of its structures; (e) they created funds for supporting public initiatives in the regions, they also organized educational conferences, etc. The reasons for this success become apparent from the interviews.

A huge number of people who considered themselves part of the “Solidarity” appeared in significant and active roles in organizing the whole thing (protests). Notably, on many different levels, not only on the level of a media committee, but also on the level of the real organizational activist work. This is the structure which had an activist pool and which participates among other things thanks to them. (Civil activist, June 2012)

In due time the “Solidarity” gathered many people who were democratically and liberally inclined... The “Solidarity” is more large-scale than other opposition movements because it is more numerous than “Left Front” or “Other Russia” or some other leftist organizations...

(How would you characterize its projects? Are these the projects of an organization or the projects of individuals?)

These are the projects of individual people because within the “Solidarity” some inner projects rarely succeed and the chance of making them successful in reality is slim. But those who find a few like-minded people there and start doing something individual often become successful. Since “Solidarity” has people who are too diverse, yes, they are united by some common values but they have very different structural views. Even now if we were to talk about the parties, some

¹⁴ For instance, ref. “White poster of May holidays”//

people enter some parties, some go to the “December 5 party”, some join the “Parnassus”, some other parties, it is a very wide association, where it is difficult to agree internally. (Civil activist, June 2012)

The “Solidarity” at some point united all people who held more or less democratic views. It was planned as a large-scale movement. At its very beginning, in 2007, when it was envisioned and created, in 2008 it started to form on the level of organization. There was a great number of people. There was Petersburg’s “Yabloko”, Moscow SPS, small Moscow organizations similar to “Oborona” (“Defense”) or the movement “My” (“We”) or “Svobodnie radikalny” (“Free Radicals”), the OGF... A huge number of people, almost everyone united, in reality, into a whole core group. And when there were almost no promises, everyone united to do something together because they were doing something together already... (Some time later) a number of people decided to launch their solo careers because certain incentives appeared, the opportunity to be elected as municipal MPs, the opportunity to...start a business and politicize more or less...At the beginning everyone united, everyone exchanged their experiences, everyone was there, this was a real core of people who did everything in Moscow, everything in general. Besides, there were also the left-wing... (Politician, June 2012)

Frankly speaking, what the “Solidarity” and other opposition movements are doing...Systemic opposition is not oppositional. This is public awareness campaigns, creating some kinds of coverage opportunities. In terms of the decision making and influencing the decision-making, we have practically not been influential for 2-3 years. (Politician, April 2012)

In Moscow a very stable democratic environment has developed within the “Solidarity”, where everything, in principle, is decided on the elections. The decisions are made there that do not always satisfy federal authorities and this is a great advantage in the Moscow division. (Politician, April 2012)

It was important in itself that at least some organizations exist: the OGF, the “Solidarity”, someone else. Everyone understood that they are in principle important. The people invested in them, participated and did other things. Later when such an outburst happened, an explosion of indignation, it was under way because such organizations existed, because 100 of “Solidarity’s” activists were engaged in these rallies day and night. Someone wrote press-releases, someone, a number of people, ordered the equipment...At a critical moment an organized force, which can undertake the task of resistance, is needed, a force, which can fight and make some organizational efforts...People need to have certain experience, certain boldness, something else. And a very small number of people organized these rallies, they provided notifications, they did a great amount of technical work... A website was created, an idea was contrived, 10 notifications were made, out of which 9 were banned, something else, some kinds of negotiations were conducted, money was found to place advertisement on the “Moscow Echo” radio, that is to say, we have launched these mechanisms, which we had, they were in tune with public attitudes and it worked. In fact, that is why attempts are being made to pull these structures down, to break them because they pose such a danger. (Politician, June 2012)

In general, the “Solidarity” was established on the basis of a vast range of movements, parties and everyone else. This association was conceptualized as a global, democratic new unionizing of democrats, which, in fact, is not of democrats already since 2006. “Committee-2008” was included, I participated in it in 2006, I have talked about it. And when “Solidarity” appeared, it seemed as if everyone agreed with each other...all the leaders united with each other. And there were an immense number of so-called small organizations, which was revolving at that moment around that political field. There was the “Defense”, the “Smena”(“Change”)...There were also the...political prisoners. And when this organization emerged, initially, a large number of political activists and politicians who existed at that moment in that field joined its ranks. It was

2009, if I am not mixing something up. The establishment of the organization happened; this movement united a large number of truly bright, interesting and positive people. And everyone joined its ranks. And it so happened that we all joined and started to invent it. When squabbles, scandals and everything else started, some bright interesting people began leaving gradually. I do not know, maybe in dozens so to speak...Participating in the "Solidarity" was valuable for me because of its social aspect, we have gotten to know each other, all those that weren't acquainted with each other. Besides, many were acquainted but many weren't. And at a certain moment when people left and started to do their own projects, I think that one another's experience gave incentive to undertake one's own individual projects outside the "Solidarity". (Politician, June 2012)

To summarize the responses, such a prominent role of the "Solidarity" in the protest movement can be explained by the fact that in the beginning, after its foundation, it united a significant part of democratically-oriented activists that have got to know each other closer and who found new acquaintances, acquired experience of collective actions, mutual cooperation, and criticism. An exchange of knowledge and skills among various generations of activists is happening at the movement. In addition, an agenda is developed (even if too general) in the movement. The events show that planning various initiatives and projects plays a large role in the work of activists. The luckier ones may evolve into successful independent organizations and even into a whole movement, as in the case of observers during the elections. The readiness to negotiate among the "Solidarity" leaders has undoubtedly played a vital role in forming a broad opposition coalition, including not only liberal but also leftist and nationalist forces. It all reminds one of the role of the Czech Charter 77, as envisaged by V. Benda.¹⁵

Civil protest.

There is a question whether civil protest should be singled out from the overall mass of protest actions? There are a few reasons for doing that. First of all, mass mobilization, which happened in the wake of elections, was not limited only to a series of several thousand mass opposition rallies with political demands for transparent elections, Putin and the government's resignation etc. It encompassed several spheres of public and political life: observation during the elections, municipal elections in Moscow, civil disobedience (without distinct political demands but showing their dissent with current developments and civil solidarity) planned both in a 'centralized' and 'individual' way. All these activities have attracted new people. Apart from that, there were additional motives to participate in civil actions (as opposed to political ones) and to transform the format of political actions.

(Political rallies) were a bit aesthetically deficient because in this new movement, I call this a movement, many people appeared with a fully developed aesthetic taste and demeanor. You give many people these dull slogans, as "Out! Away with," and they are already perceived....a bit....well, people frown at it, therefore, something else appears more attractive... And I have noticed and you have probably noticed and many have noticed that these rallies had an objective in themselves, to gather, and to look at one another and to be happy with one another. A very short time ago at these rallies, the very nature of the rally was hardly identified. Many would ask after the rally, "Do you remember who spoke today?" "No". So, there was certain inertia, inertia of the general framework. The genre itself of this classic rally, it has apparently exhausted itself in a way because a large number of people attended for other reasons rather than to chant slogans. (Poet, July 2012)

In these words, discontent is expressed not only with the people in power but with opposition politicians, those "of the old guard" as well as with their methods. Besides, possibly at the peak

¹⁵ Benda V. Parallel polis/History lessons from December 5, 2012
<http://www.urokiistorii.ru/taxonomy/term/424/51645>

of the public mobilization, there was so much energy that it was splashed out between massive rallies, being forged into “circles”, walks and marches.

The “White Circle” and motor rallies around the Sadovoye traffic circle in Moscow are the projects of the ‘Workshop’.

Here’s the story of the white circle, probably the most successful action at that moment because it is impossible to cancel, it cannot be banned, nobody violates anything and in the sense of symbolism it is full of widely different meanings, in the sense of implementing it is done quite easily and in general it is cool. Such things, I believe, will emerge from the grassroots in the protest movement in the widest meaning of the word, on social networking sites first of all. (Journalist, April 2012)

It succeeded because it was beautiful. The features of our cityscape were used, since the city consists of different circles. Such a circle would not be possible in St. Petersburg but in Moscow it was possible because we have a circle. Therefore, walking through the avenues and White Circle, this using of circles, it is very symbolic and beautiful. At White Circle I was standing together with my girlfriend who is a theatre critic...we were standing next to each other and talked about why it turns out to be so good and why it is conveniently different from, let’s say, the rally as a “genre.” She says, from the theatrical point of view, a rally is traditional, conservative theater. There is an audience, there’s a stage, there are actors who act on the stage and this structure is so archaic, obsolete. And here all are viewers and all are participants because the square divided people into the audience and the actors and here everyone is an actor and a viewer on his own. (Poet, July 2012)

In fact, I started participating only on February 26. My friends laugh, they say that I have worked myself up from “I will not go to your rallies”, that’s why I think that it is right to create, to build relationships with the people in your life in the right way and through creating small “cells” around yourself; if everybody would do that, then in such a way civil society is built. I am at a point in my journey where I have a court hearing on the 7th. From cooking borscht, roughly speaking, to the hearing at the 70th judicial district. Initially my girlfriend who attended all December events brought me to the one on February 26th. I simply had an interest. An interest to look at the people who participate in all this. And at the “white circle” I saw the biggest number of positive people in all of the time I have lived in Moscow....On February 26th everything changed, I understood that people who want change in the same way that I do, there is quite a number of them. They may not coincide in their political views, that is, they may be left- or right-wing, it is of no consequence whatsoever, but we coincide in mutual understanding of the moral principles, in the principles of integrity. This, from my point of view, is the most important of all. (Civil activist, June 2012)

Please note that while “White Circle” became unique to Moscow, white motor rallies (where cars with white balloons, stickers and ribbons participated) were held in other cities as well. In addition, civil action was adopted by the opposition politicians (I. Ponomarev, S. Udaltsov, D. Gudkov) who organized a “white car rally” from Moscow to Siberia. This is yet another example of ideas and discoveries of civil activists borrowed by the politicians.¹⁶

From the March of Millions to the Walks on May 7th and Moscow’s “Occupy”.

Another interesting phenomenon of civil protest was Moscow’s “Occupy Abai”, street camps patterned after the well-known American movement “Occupy Wall Street”. The interviews taken as part of this research explain why and how Moscow’s “Occupy” appeared, at the moment when protest movement evidently reached its climax on May 6-7. It was directly preceded by

¹⁶ Opposition “white car rally” will take place from Siberia to Moscow/ Ridus, July 3, 2012
<http://www.ridus.ru/news/38564>

two actions: The March of Millions on May 6th, during which clashes with the police happened and also the action called “White City”, planned for May 7th, the Inauguration Day of the President Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, among the “Workshop’s” activists the practice of “blitz” protest without a fixed time and place had already been subject to discussion for some time.

The whole “White City” as such, from which the walks originated and which then resulted in the “Occupy,” we have thought of for one and a half months. As a result, it turned out not quite as we had planned it, but in spirit it was equal to the one planned. However, I had a feeling that just when these walks transformed into “Occupy”, it was a climax of our actions. Probably, it is worth stopping at that. And perhaps the assembly which exists in “Occupy”, which I have, frankly speaking, never went to for reasons beyond my control. Perhaps this is a continuation of the “Workshop” and we need to stop (....)

...That is we planned a very simple thing. When we met on March 19th, it was 1,5 weeks after March 10th. It was clear that the inauguration would take place...By that time Udaltsov had announced that he would organize the March of Millions. Frankly speaking, I was absolutely certain that it would be banned. In addition, it seemed and it seems up till now that to announce the event the day before the inauguration is not the best idea, the event needs to be designated to take place specifically on the Inauguration day. There were the following entries: Inauguration Day, it means that we will not get anything approved, not for any mass action. If we attempt to organize an event that was not approved, then it would be suppressed in an extremely violent manner. Accordingly, we need to think of some kind of an event that would not have a place, time or organizers. So that the organizers could not be arrested, so that the place could not be blocked and so that there would be no place to meet people at a specific time. It needs to be said that later we discussed it with a great number of people during a specific time with great difficulty because many people came with their own views on the “Workshop” ...

...For the less radical part of (the people), there should be an opportunity to go out in the streets. If the authorities do not readily guarantee safety for those going out, then we need to think of it for ourselves. And then we twist into all kinds of unnatural positions. As a result, we think up this action without a place and without time, which is safe nevertheless... The audience of protests, which I want to organize, is not Putin. I am absolutely not interested to wave a kerchief at him or to throw eggs at him, I am not at all interested. The audience of the protest, which I organize, includes the people that could join the ranks of protest movement, if it provided an opportunity for them to do so. These are the building blocks in the lower part of the pyramid of authority that could be taken out of there one by one so that the pyramid eventually collapses. And, accordingly, the protest needs to be beautiful, it needs to be fun and it needs to be safe. In general, it exists for its own sake; it exists so that people would participate in it. And then the next day when they are either offered to take a bribe or to give a bribe, to falsify the results of the elections etc., they would feel their belonging to this protest, in which they participated and not to the authorities which are called to support their actions... my aim is not to distort the image, but to give a beautiful image. People dressed in white are absolutely awesome. You look at it and think, “Too bad I missed it.”

... We called people to go from subway circle stations to avenues, with a list of avenues given. And if they are ready to risk, then they could go along the way of the procession. Then the unpredictable events of May 6th happened...

...When we converged in Nikitski boulevard, the first clash happened. Then chasing through the boulevards started. For some time we walked and ran around with the Special Police Force (OMON), by that time, I think 100 people had been arrested and I thought that everything was over....Somebody wrote that we were going to Chistie Prudy. First of all, I thought that everything had ended, and, secondly, I thought that everything had ended with great success because we had spoilt the whole picture for them. Because it was a picture of a “cleaned up” city. I am sure it happened thanks to 70, 000 flyers, where we said that we would stand along the

way of the procession. And, second of all, it was a picture of Special Police Force on a sunny day chasing boys and girls with white ribbons along the boulevards. The first and the second ones were really dramatic... And then the reaction happened on a designated day because people were awakened. Those who on a previous day went to Department of Internal Affairs or those who were not 'tagged and bagged'All those people piled out into the street with their unexhausted potential. Then Navalny showed up and said, "We're not leaving." And so the "Occupy" was born. This idea without time and place, it turned out to be very efficient. We are not leaving, but at the same time we are moving, it is a mobile camp. It has taken root and it turned out to be a genius part of everything that we thought of. Everything else, as I have described here, turned out completely different from what we expected. (Journalist, May 2012)

I remember going down to Kitay-Gorod and then realizing that we can't get to the monument there because it is under construction. We decided to go to "Pushka", here's how it was. We decided to walk. And at that moment we see prison trucks, we go to Polytechnical Museum, quite a big group of people because before we gathered once again, we had united into such small groups, only at Kitay-Gorod we gathered into a crowd, more than 100 people. We cross to the Polytechnical museum and one of the Special Police Force transmits from the prison truck, "Stop." We turn around and run away. You know the venue, Pushkinskaya square. I remember running in Maroseyka, but I don't remember why. And a surreal, absolutely immeasurable number of Special Policemen and I don't understand what I did in order to run away from the OMON.

(I: What did you do?)

Nothing. We simply walked with a large group of citizens. I remember getting into a café, the two of us. And bearing in mind the clash at Zhan-Zhak, I was very much against the idea. We went all the way to the Rock-café.

(I: With white ribbons?)

Yes, absolutely, with white ribbons... And we enter, we run in, to be more precise, into this café, throw our things on the floor and the waitress looks and sees OMON running just outside the window. She says, "Guys, what's going on?" And we say, "They are chasing us." Her eyes are wide open, she says something to someone else, after 30 seconds she says, "Don't worry. We closed the door for you." I felt like Stirlitz in Germany. They locked the door for me. Sure, it is extremely pleasant, absolutely awesome but it is quite absurd to live in a country where the OMON chases you even if you didn't do anything. (Civil activist, participant of the "Occupy", June 2012)

Chistie Prudy, generally speaking, seemed an ideal place, with good passability, which allowed to carry out, as a matter of fact, the main function of the camp, from my point of view. This function was communicating with people not involved into this. And there are quite many of those. And since there are many people walking in the square, it is a perfect place. (Civil activist, participant of the "Occupy", June 2012)

The debates of the "Workshop" participants about how to organize "direct actions" in different parts of the city, which would not need "constant presence" and would, thus, be less vulnerable to the police (reference to "Act Up" could be traced again in this), preceded Moscow's "Occupy". Preliminary discussions, "walks" scheduled for the Inauguration Day, clashes between the participants of the "March of Millions" and the OMON on May 6th, subsequent directive from the authorities to break up any unapproved protest actions for the time of passing of the president's passing along the streets in the capital and subsequent official events (which were accompanied by multiple incidents of the police chasing activists in the streets of Moscow, and breaking into cafes and restaurants, where the participants of the protests traditionally gathered to discuss their actions), constant connection between the "runaways", tracing the

movement of their companions around the city on Twitter and Facebook, available through mobile apps, famous political figures joining the protests at some point (and also their calls to action through their blogs, social network profiles and the independent media for the rest of the people to join the protests). All this spontaneously and involuntarily lead to “Occupy Abai”. After its emergence, its participants tested many practices of the American movement “Occupy Wall Street”, such as “Open mike”, Assembly and others. Famous politicians and less famous activists of left-wing movements, nationalists and ordinary citizens joined the movement, they attended the public lectures given by the “White school,” etc. Despite the fact that very soon the Chistie Prudy camp (not far from the venue of the first protest rally) was scattered by the authorities, as a result of its work at the Russian political scene, several new faces appeared, “the 6th May Committee” was formed, which helped those detained in the rallies on the Bolotnaya square, individual protest actions such as “Occupy Court”, “Occupy Investigation Committee” and others were widespread.¹⁷

Writers’ walk on May 13th.

Akunin’s, Bykov’s and other writers’ and poets’ walk, and then the artists’ walk on May 19th, became a well-planned and intentional (in contrast to the spontaneous “Occupy”) response of civil activists to the Bolotnaya square upheaval on May 6th and subsequent violent reaction of the authorities.¹⁸ The organizers of the action saw its main aim in making the protest peaceful, in slowing down the rise of radicalism, which started to spread after the clashes between the protesters and the police during the mass protest action on Bolotnaya square on May 6th. Devoid of any political demands, the walk turned into an action of civil disobedience with several thousand participants:

It was a reaction to severe aggression shown by the authorities in the first post-Inauguration days. We needed to demonstrate the complete idiocy of what was happening....As a result, the vector of the protest movement turned to peaceful means, from whence everyone was blown out by the May 6th events. That’s the first thing. The police were detaining people indiscriminately. That’s the second thing. The frightened Duma passed the law on rallies and marches showing its foolishness, and planted a delay-action bomb which will surely explode some day. That’s the third thing. (Writer, one of the organizers of the walk, July 2012)

There was something very nice for many people in this action, which was not forced and not ideological, everyone walked out with no slogans... It was a very pure, very Moscow intelligentsia idea. In terms of its aesthetic purity I would compare it with the White Circle only, which, in to my view, was parallel to this Writers’ walk. It was the best action, when people held hands... After all, this is our city, we walk where we please...and so each of us announced on his Facebook page that we intended to go for a walk. In general, we did not invite anyone, we simply said that we would go out for a walk. As a result, 15 thousand people went for a walk with us, the walk was very pleasant and very peaceful, I felt this way, generally speaking, the weather was good and everything was wonderful. Then there was “Occupy Abai” and we reached them, it was not broken up then, it was very nice. Such a walk we had. (Poet, one of the organizers of the Walk, July 2012)

One cannot say that there was any organization responsible for the Walk:

Actually there is no writers’ association. And in general, it would be ridiculous to talk about something like that. Writing is a very lonely profession. There is a certain number of friends, let’s say, like-minded people, I have very good relationships with certain people. We talk often

¹⁷ For instance ref. <http://6may.org>

¹⁸ “Attention: lethal attraction “Control walk”!//Publication in Boris Akunin’s blog on May 9, 2012 (<http://borisakunin.livejournal.com/2012/05/09/>).

with Akunin, or with Gandlevskiy, or with Ulitskaya. We have known each other for a long time, in many ways we are like-minded, we are anthropologically close to each other, but it is not a professional association. (Poet, one of the organizers of the Walk, July 2012)

Municipal Elections in Moscow.

Protests were not the only a form of civil activism, which was strongly influenced by the general atmosphere of agitation and interest in politics, and by the vector of general development of the country. One of the significant forms of civil participation in that period was the municipal elections in Moscow. The framework of this independent election campaign can be approximately set from December 2011 when the documents for candidate registration had to be submitted and until the elections on March 4th, 2012. The significance of the campaign lies in the following: (1) professional (mainly young) politicians as well as civil activists who deal with the problems of the city participated in it; (2) public mobilization intensified the inflow of citizens and increased the number of those who registered; (3) according to the deputies polled, general enthusiasm and intensity of emotions, perhaps, made the authorities approach the registration of candidates with great loyalty, although there were more than enough obstacles (including the inconvenient submission deadline on the New Year day, the fact that the addresses of official printing establishments where the candidates could print propaganda materials were not revealed until the very end); (4) “The deputies’ movement” had its own coordination body, the “School of deputies” (5) finally, the elections proved to be effective, around 500 independent candidates won, i.e. one third of the overall number. We will provide several quotations revealing various motives for participating in municipal elections:

In the previous term I was among the municipal deputies. I participated in various conferences, round tables and so forth, as well all our colleagues. (Politician, municipal deputy, June 2012)

I went to be an deputy, being aware of the fact that to fight against the unwanted construction as a resident is quite problematic because our bureaucrats have thought up the following curious scheme: if you do not reside in the building in question and if your building is not affected by the future construction pit, then they would not let you attend the hearing. That is, how many times I tried to fight my way in...earlier I came to these hearings only with no less than 30 journalists with me...That's the only possible way. I understood that some ways of influencing the officials are needed as well as access to information, which is why I ran to be a deputy. Now I can get any information in the construction department of the municipal council, I can establish conflict commissions myself, not only attend them but I can form them myself. Since I know virtually all the residents in the district I know clearly who needs to be brought where, who can have a row, who will talk in a constructive way, who will reassure, i.e. this scenario can be played out in advance and I will get the result that I need in the hearing. (Politician, municipal deputy, April 2012)

When these first...the first Bolotnaya rally...I heard conversations about a new niche, municipal elections, that there is no information about them, that it is hidden from the people and, in fact, civil activists need to go into the sphere....I was absolutely indifferent about the fact because....I was absolutely sure that in our democratic district there would be some democratic candidates, so to speak, therefore, it is not necessary to participate in this, that I could carry on with whatever I had been doing in the past, they would do well without me. But before the New Year I decided to see if that was the case, and taking advantage of the fact that I had acquaintances in “Yabloko”, they said that “Yabloko” had a program of supervising independent candidates, providing legal assistance to them. I inquired about our districts. It turned out that everything looked sad...it appeared that in only one district there was a person from “Yabloko”...Generally speaking, I have seen that in my district, where I resided, there was simply no one... And it was then....that I had to come to the conclusion that I either put up with the fact that there is no one running in the elections in our constituency or, it means that I would need to fill the gap myself. I

understood then that I would need to submit documents after all. (Politician, municipal MP, June 2012)

(About colleagues): Mostly people fighting against something, against any problem, any injustice ran for deputies. They understood that an ordinary resident of Moscow had neither the right to vote, nor any rights whatsoever, that a person who fought and did something for other people needed some sort of power, some ways of influencing the authorities. That is why they ran for deputies...I tried my best...While everyone was preparing for the parliamentary elections, I was spending my time on the phone and wound everyone up, told them about municipal assembly and that we needed it...we ran in constituencies of 15 thousand people, you know all local issues, you virtually know all locals and you can solve district problems. (Politician, municipal deputy, April 2012)

The “School of deputies” was a project run by several people who were municipal deputies and had experience of participating in political movements (including “Solidarity”). Already before the previous elections the same people did a similar project but significantly smaller in scale. The aim of the project was to gather all independent candidates, to overcome the difficulties of the upcoming registration and election campaign together, and later, to form an independent deputy fraction for solving the problems of the city, and even a separate organization. According to the organizers’ estimates, from 100 to 200 people went through the “school”. At the moment of taking the interviews, three months after the elections, the organizers of the “School” conducted two city forums of municipal deputies; they conducted negotiations with the Moscow authorities about the touch points. Steps towards registering a non-profit organization were taken. We will cite excerpts from the interviews:

(Having won the previous elections), we encountered the following problem that among the deputies who thought the same way I did, there were very few people...The same day the year before when we had to decide whether to run for the next term or not, the idea appeared to be fully developed. We had an idea to recruit various opposition activists, civil activists, people who fought for their rights in the districts, and to try to cover the spectrum of political activists of the civil society, which had emerged a year before. Such vestiges were manifest among the people in the districts. You could see some newly emerging people who were interested. And we needed to train them. So, the task was to gather and train them. This is the way we thought of creating “School of deputies”. Last September we gave an ad telling about the “School of deputies”. That people could enroll. A website was launched, where people could register. And on November 1 we started the training....

We did not put any filters, we did not select people...And very different people came. And, in fact, after the first, the second meeting quite a large number of people dropped out who learnt what a municipal deputy is at all...We got quite an interesting class of people who got interested...In fact, the people were very different...And in these people I can see something they have in common: they were civil political activists, these were the people who emerged on the wave of protests who had not known at all that municipal deputies existed, they started to get interested in protests. Apparently, when they started reading Twitter and Facebook, they learnt that such a project as “School of deputies” existed and they decided to try to participate...

...It is hard to estimate the number of people who received training in “School of deputies” because the sessions were once a week, then twice a week and then at some moments we had additional sessions when the registration was underway, it was very fast, in a chaotic way... “Gorod 2012” (“City 2012”) grew out of the “School of deputies,” where we published a list of independent municipal deputies whom we supported. And in that list there were just slightly over 100 people trained in our “school”, the whole list was about 250 people. That is to say, that 50% comprised those who received our training and 50% were the people who asked to be listed, these were the activists that learnt about our initiative later...

...Currently the “School of deputies” exists and it has now turned into a helping hand of a kind for those deputies who were working on their own. That is to say, that out of the project which was intended to get as many adequate deputies into the municipal assembly, 2 directions emerged: firstly, the “School” for deputies themselves; secondly, a certain movement we attempted to create. Currently our documents for registering an NGO are being reviewed by Ministry of Justice. We have held 2 forums of municipal deputies, they were held in Izmailovo, the first forum we organized together with “Yabloko” party and the second forum we organized independently of all parties, on our own... the plan is global, I hope it works out. (Politician, municipal deputy, June 2012)

(I: And why have you decided to do it on a larger basis this time?)

Financial opportunities offered themselves as well as development of information technologies. The Internet in 2008 was an absolutely insignificant factor, now it is significantly larger and is the main way to spread the information. A vast number of people learned about our initiative on Facebook. (Politician, June 2012)

“Parallel economy”.

So, the “School of deputies”, like many other current initiatives, emerged thanks to initiative and perseverance of its organizers, it came about thanks to new opportunities of attracting investments from outside. In the last several years a number of socio-political projects implemented with the financial investments from ordinary people and businesses, increased. A few years ago it seemed almost impossible. Apart from various charities, thanks to public support, an expert report “Putin: A Resume” appeared on the “Solidarity” movement’s website, Navalny’s “RussDust” and Fund to Fight Corruption. In such a way, tested ways to attract investments came in handy in the period of public enthusiasm, when the number of people who wanted to participate at least in some way in public initiatives grew drastically, and uncertainty as to how the situation would be developing (which opens up possibilities for many scenarios and it means that alternative projects can interest also some key players who count on changing the status-quo). Therefore, in a period like this all the alternative possibilities of financing nongovernmental organizations and associations are most manifest.

If we summarize everything that respondents have been talking about, we can distinguish several sources of independent resources. These are: (a) increased wealth of people and a wish to be a part of something, to help someone, and for some it is easier to donate money than to be constantly involved in some project; (b) emergence of effective (beneficial, understandable) initiatives and projects, the aims of which are in tune with the ideas of the donors about them; (c) rise of social networks increases transparency and provide an access to individual donors, they connect like-minded people; new information technologies allow the donors to remain anonymous; (d) participation in the political and charitable activities of famous and actors, admired by many, writers and TV hosts, makes this sort of activism fashionable in a way; (e) finally, inefficiency of the state institutions, the feeling of reaching a dead-end and possible chaos prompts ordinary people and businessmen alike to support alternative projects. All of this resembles forming a “parallel economy”, independent of the suppressive state control.¹⁹

The interviews with leaders and activists of various initiatives within a broader protest movement reflect a whole spectrum of used sources of financing, not tied to the state. This included: (a) collecting private donations via the Internet (e-money, spreading the information about it in social networks); (b) membership fees and finances of the participants; (c) support of big business, connected to politics.

¹⁹ “Parallel economy” is a part of the concept of “parallel polis”, suggested by Vaclav Benda. Ref. Benda V.’s indicated essay.

The quotations below can serve as evidence for the tendencies described above:

From an organizational point of view, everything got a lot better because many businessmen came who share project-oriented approach, they came from large and small corporations and also independent businessmen who know how to find money for something specific. It is not a problem for them to chip in 1000 dollars each and to book a stage for the rally. (Politician, June 2012)

Business elites who want to live honestly, who earned their money with their own hands, and who would like to live in a country where the court can protect their property, their money and not sentence them for the drugs planted as fake evidence. Definitely, one can count on the support of such people...Entrepreneurs, of course, are very often criminally prosecuted, very often, but there is a mechanism than allows to support the work anonymously, some anonymous payment systems, the documents that can be sent. (Civil activist, April 2012)

What do I support? I support that this idea, the idea for transparent elections is very significant. Everyone says that he is for transparent elections. If it is a transparent choice of the people, it means that it is a real opinion, their real preferences. They want the authorities to change not because someone is bad and someone is good, but because the authorities need to change. Such things need to happen in society; otherwise they would lead to the wrong things happening. I support the representatives of civil society, the representatives of people whom I trust, who cannot agree to be in the election committee. People were observers because of their beliefs. Many of my colleagues spent their time at the polling stations. And these are the people that cannot be bought; it is needless to say, they participated based on their principles. They want to see for themselves how everything takes place in reality. And such people, I don't know, if this may be happening all over Russia or no, but I think there is public pressure here, people need to be alert. Not those who want to locate violations but those who need to be convinced in the absence of these violations. You see? Those who act based on reason. I think that people who have their own civil stand, out of conviction and not to gain publicity for themselves...The aim of this activity is to increase trust for the system of conducting the elections. Why specifically for this system? Because, I think, it is an element, which can pull everything else out as well....I wish that the feeling of adequacy of the authorities did not disappear. In order for this to happen we need people whom we trust in the election committee....Otherwise, there is no trust. Everything is false, including investment, investment stories, including international finance center, but it's simply not right! (The businessman, May 2012)

Since I am a public figure, many have learnt about this, I am in constant contact with everyone, with a large number of influential people, elites, and businessmen. Many are interested to contribute, absolutely incognito, it goes without saying. Some people come, for instance... She reached me somehow, called and said, "We want to help." (TV anchor, May 2012)

Despite the fact that I always had a budget for charity, I don't know what it is now, everything goes to revolution. Nonetheless, I always somehow have food in my house; somebody gives me money for my cell phone. It appears from somewhere, I don't know where because I give it away. And so it goes. Everyone shows support... (Journalist, May 2012)

We want them to refuse to carry out admittedly unlawful orders. We want them to disobey the order to "capture people with white ribbons," we want them to refuse to do that. We want court enforcement officers to do the same in court, for instance. We want some lay magistrate to refuse to try a case of the opposition. We want the prosecutors to refuse to bring a charge against them. It is absolutely clear that these people will have employment ramifications. We will provide the best attorneys for them at no charge, should they be needed, at the expense of this fund. Businesses and owners of business, participants of the project are committed to employ these people with the remuneration that would not be less than they had in their workplace before. And

if they have documents that they are waiting in line for an apartment, this apartment will be bought. (Journalist, May 2013)

There is a “beautiful” story of Tatyana Ivanova from St. Petersburg, a teacher who was eventually fired and even brought to court. I don’t know how the story ended but 100, 000 rubles as a fine for who knows what for a teacher, it’s a lot. As a matter of fact, just recently at the meeting in St. Petersburg a decision was made to reward this poor Tatyana Vasilievna with a cash bonus for civic courage. Again, with this money gift, people wrote on Facebook, they asked where to chip in and how. When we compile a black list, “League of Voters” about how and who had violations during the elections, a “white list” definitely needs to be in place as well. And people who go against, who don’t go against their conscience but against those who made them falsify the elections or to act against their inner conviction, these people deserve respect and all kinds of encouragement. And they can be used as role models for everyone. (TV host, May 2012)

It was not quite clear what can be done...because it was completely unclear what happens with the money. But then the idea with Romanova’s e-purse was born. Romanova came to the “Workshop” and said some magic words about where real life happens. After that we received injections from Romanova’s purse... (I: And where does the real life happen?) In the “Workshop”. (Journalist, May 2012)

Several entrepreneurs, businessmen that previously couldn’t, or were afraid or didn’t want to participate...Now it’s not that they are no longer afraid, look, now even Navalny published a list of people who supported him. Why did he publish it? Because it means that those people had overcome the feeling of fear. Accordingly, some people who were ready to contribute their finances to the creation of the... The resources, they did indeed appear... (But) we are in constant search for these resources. And even... which I told you about was done by means of the money that I had saved up for a vacation for some time. (Politician, municipal deputy, June 2012)

In connection with this a few other points need to be mentioned. First of all, several fundraising initiatives for socio-political activity are institutionally established, “e-purses” of various initiatives and organizations and also specialized funds (Navalny’s Fund for Fighting Corruption, Romanova’s Fund to Support the Employees Prosecuted for Refusing to Participate in (total) lawlessness” and others).²⁰ Secondly, the emergence of more ways to finance socio-political initiatives and organizations can facilitate their structural changes. Thus, in the opinion of one of the respondents, financing the parties and the movements “is confined to specific people...the money is given not to the “Solidarity” but to Nemtsov and Kasparov and the project is perceived as a project of the individual” and this hinders competition and the changeability of leaders within the movement. Increase in independent sources of financing and their diversification can promote the change in the situation, to increase the fundamental strength of political organizations.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the stratum of people who can afford to dedicate to politics not only “their free night but their whole life” gradually increases, the professionalization of politicians, not dependent on the state, therefore, increases. We can classify financial sources of active opposition politicians: (a) their own large funds, for instance, for the politicians of the “old guard”; (b) young people from the well-off city families who can count on their parents’ support; (c) free professions, allowing for flexible schedules, for instance, among the candidates for Coordination Opposition Council there was a large number of programmers; (d) the opportunities to attract additional financing for socio-political projects described above.

²⁰ Chelishcheva V. “Olga Romanova announced the establishment of the Fund to Support the Employees, Prosecuted for Refusing to Participated in total lawlessness//Novaya Gazeta, May 14, 2012 (<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/56702.html>).

Protest results

Influence of protest movement on political system.

The consequences of the protest movement for the political system could be characterized in the following way: (1) systematic contradictions manifested with new vigor, tied to the impossibility of formal solution to the conflict of interests of civil groups becoming active and corrupt political regime; (2) certain concessions to the authorities in the sphere of electoral legislation; (3) initial mobilization by the authorities of its supporters, which only heightened proneness to conflict and instability of political system; (4) a transition from the mobilization of supporters to the policy of repression and increase in the control of the independent public and political sphere by the authorities, i.e. an attempt to solve conflicts by suppressing unwanted activity instead of creating mechanisms for conflict regulation, a conservation of political system; (5) exposing other system contradictions. We will describe these consequences in more detail as well as illustrate them by the respondent's citations.

Activization of various interest groups: opponents and supporters of the regime.

As mentioned earlier, decisive, organized and articulated reaction of the minority to the falsification during the parliamentary elections became an important event in the political life of the country.²¹ In the protest movement a substantial role was played by the leaders of civil initiatives, who for a long time have claimed that they are outside the political realm. In a certain sense the speed of development and the scope of December events, mutual commitments with the colleagues in the protest movement, made such people as, for instance, E. Chirikova, embrace the role of a politician.²² The following utterance is very characteristic of that:

I remember myself five years ago and how I liked Putin a lot. He has such a striking demeanor. After Yeltsin he was simply a cutie, and one was not ashamed of him...

(I: What happened then?)

This is what happened: when I was robbed, my lifestyle was taken away from me, yes, I started to organize the work of the people, my mind started to change...I don't believe that you can make agreements with the thieves. That is for four years I tried to strike some compromise, we organized roundtables and all that, and nothing happened. And they have deceived us and the president who suspended work, yes, he promised community hearings, he did not fulfill his promises... (Civil activist, April 2012)

Virtually every issue ended up being a political problem. Because any concession, if Putin had refused to build a motorway across the Khimki forest, Chirikova would not be in politics. The problem is that any concession from the authorities is perceived to be impossible. Because they are such tough guys and they don't want to concede to Chirikova. And such things become political automatically. People understand that the issue with the forest becomes political since Putin does not want to make concessions. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Medvedev or Putin are simply not ready to share anything. It is their business, their scope of activity and they are not ready to let in people who are not their friends, who are not members of the "Lake" cooperative, people that were not employed by the KGB. They are not ready to let someone else into their circle. (Civil activist, May 2012)

²¹ Volkov D. "Protest rallies in Russia..." P. 79

²² Process of politization of civil initiatives was described in detail in the previous research. Ref. Volkov D. "Increase in protest activity..." p. 26. and Volkov D. "Protest rallies in Russia..." P. 82.

Current authorities have become one with their idea of the state. "We are the state." (Politician, June 2012)

How we can agree upon something with such authorities, I, frankly speaking, do not understand... And with the individuals, it seems to me, it is pointless to make agreements because this system is one hand washing the other one and it is impossible to agree with one element here. That is, it is impossible to agree with one human hand, yes, with one of them, one needs to agree with the whole mechanism that is. I do not believe that any changes from above are possible, I believe only in consistent change from the grass-roots and in the creation of such a society where thieves could not steal. (Civil activist, April 2012)

The reaction of the authorities to the organized civil protest cannot be confined to the conventional limits. Combative calls of the presidential candidate at Luzhniki to his supporters, mass rallies to support Putin in Moscow and in other cities were meant to demonstrate the popularity of the political regime, but at the same time it was a transition from the deliberate maintaining of the passivity of the people to their mobilization, encouragement to action and then self-determination, articulation and defense of their interests.

In the 2000s, all the people, all this Putin majority was being convinced by all possible means that in general, all is well but there are some drawbacks here and there; there are also certain hostile forces but they are somewhere far away... And everything is ok all in all. And please don't think about politics. Watch a TV show, drink "Klinskoye" beer with friends and take it easy! And now during the presidential campaign they were told, "Guys, do fret! Guys, Russia is in danger! Guys, look, enemies are everywhere! Guys, think, everything might be very bad! And if you don't want that, you have to do this and that!" That is, the political conscience was artificially awakened in these people. And it also...we don't understand yet what this will lead to.... and for now it is being forcefully expanded with all these campaigns against the enemies of the church and so on. But if a person starts to think about it: is everything ok? And if not, then why not? If a person starts to think politically, then it is later absolutely unclear where this political thinking will bring him.

(I: What do you mean when you say "thinking politics"?)

I mean analyzing certain publically significant decisions, significant public actions, decided on by various political forces. That is for 10 years the population was in nirvana and then it was announced to people, "People, Awaken! There are "red", there are "white", there are State Department agents, there are enemies of the church: choose which side you're on!" and it's an absolutely different mental situation we find ourselves in. It seems to me that whatever the consequence of this, it is definitely a positive development. (Journalist, April 2012)

Earlier it was considered vulgar to engage in politics and talk about such topics. In general, big words were prohibited, in the sense that it was a social taboo. Big words like "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood", I don't know, "democracy" even all of this was...needed to be in quotes, to put in parentheses and smiled at ironically. Now everything starts to change slowly, the words stopped to be used in quotes; it is not shameful to utter them when standing on a stool. It is quite an important syndrome within the society. This happened in the 90ies, in 2000s it became absolutely impossible, as with postmodernism, it was considered to be vulgar and now to toast is not as obscene as it was before. (Journalist, April 2012)

Tightening the screws.

Apparently, having realized the danger of mobilizing its supporters and being afraid to lose control over the situation, with the emergence at the same time of several independent and organized political forces on the political stage, the authorities quickly switched to the tactics of

repressions towards the participants of the protest actions, they started to tighten the screws. The course was set on tightening the legislation (for the media, regulating the Internet and electronic payments, the activity and financing the non-commercial organizations, holding rallies, actions of volunteers and independent observers, laws on libel, violation of believers' feelings, homosexuality propaganda and others) and suppressing various independent initiatives, the propagandistic campaign was started against the opposition and court prosecution of political opponents of the regime-participants and organizers of protest actions.²³ Upon government's demand on November 1, 2012 the American agency USAID, which supported many non-commercial organizations in the country, had to leave Russia. The promised reforms in many ways turned out to be the imitation of reforms. At least most of the respondents of the present research said so. The following logic of government's behavior could be traced: from confusion to recapturing the initiative to tightening of policies.

However, over the past months nothing has changed. The rallies and the authorities' reaction to them led to a further conservation of the political system, which is fraught with more and more manifestations of public, since the main causes of current events which lie in the inability of the political system to successfully cope with the external (economic recession) as well as internal challenges (increase of systematic contradictions, the downfall of the legitimacy of power, etc.) were not removed. The system remains unstable. Moreover, the risk of the open expression of dissent is heightened. By prosecuting civil activists and opposition politicians the authorities destroy the structures that have been directing the protest into a peaceful vein. In the middle- and long-term perspective, the tension in the society needs to rise and to accelerate the advance of the next overt and less controlled outburst of mass discontent along with setting up obstacles for timely forecast.

Unreformability of Putin regime "from above".

None of the polled participants of the quality research project believe that the Russian authorities will introduce reforms that would limit its powers voluntarily. The uncompromising opponents of Putin who demand his immediate resignation and large-scope lustration for the representative of Putin nomenclature as well as advocates of dialogue with the authorities are convinced in this. In the answers of the respondents (and these are the leaders and most prominent participants of the protest movement) a whole tangle of concerns arise, for instance, the irremovability of Russian authorities from office: it is an understanding that Putin won in the elections and demonstrates his certainty, and people who hold power will cling to their offices until the end, under Putin (and generally speaking under the current system of power) there will be no change. Without the change the system is not stable, new protests and even a complete economic and administrative collapse, and a breakdown of the state are possible. To achieve the replacement of authorities and even concessions on their part is not working out well at the present moment.

(I: Do you expect some improvements from...)

From Medvedev and from Putin? No. One cannot expect improvement from them, it is not realistic. (Civil activist, April 2012)

I don't even for a minute believe that Putin will surrender power himself. Everything that he does, he does in order to retain power. (Journalist, May 2012)

²³ What is meant here is court hearings of the participants of protest actions on May 6, girls from the PussyRiot band, Aleksei Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov, Taisiya Osipova, liberation of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev and Aleksei Kozlov, which never took place, stripping of Gennadiy Gudkov's deputy mandate, resignations of the leadership and change of format of certain independent mass media, etc.

It happened that it is “Yedinaya Rossiya” (“United Russia”) that is centered around all that corruption, in my opinion. Until we get it out of that, there wouldn’t likely be any change, it seems to me. (Civil activist, April 2012)

(Dialogue with those in power) would only be possible when the grassroots protest carries on. In general without a growing grassroots protest, preferably a peaceful one and without a constant enforcement of claims on the part of the public, nothing will happen here. No reform from above is possible. There are no bearers of the idea of this reform and there is not much desire for it. (Journalist, May 2012)

Let’s say with select representatives, since in the ministries, even in the Ministry of Education there are select officers who want to do something for the better, and who are ready also on a high level, on the level of advisors and deputy ministers. However, in general, the system is the following: it is very difficult to change something with the powers that be. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Putin’s (regime), no, it’s not prone to change. It is prone only to ossification, if we understand Putin regime as a group of Putin’s friends, the “Lake” cooperative...I do not see any evolutionary (ways to change). The collapse, that we can discuss. I am saying that the system itself will not change. It is possible to tear it down somehow. (Civil activist, June 2012)

The perception shared by the participants of the protest movement that no change is possible while Putin is in power, is remarkable in a few ways. Part of the polled protest leaders claimed that they express not only their personal opinion but the opinion of vast strata of Russian elite (including those who are in power, a part of the representatives of the big Russian business and this suggests a certain agitation in the upper stratum of the ruling elite.

Discussing Putin’s fate.

Putin’s symbolic role in the time of crisis does not serve him well: for some (the majority), he is a symbol of stability, which, however, it gets more difficult to provide, for others (protesting minority), he becomes an obstacle for needed change, although some suggest that it’s not about the person in power, it’s the way the system is constructed, which allows for unlimited concentration of power in the hands of one person or a small group of persons. For the third part (a minority, which has accumulated managerial leverages and vast financial resources), he becomes a ‘useful’ person at times, on whom the failures can be blamed.²⁴ Absence of a visible way to replace those in power pervades among those discontent, there are conversations about the possible violent ousting of the head of the government. The interviews contained multiple allusions to history: the assassination of Paul I and the Romanian leader Ceausescu, coups in the Latin American countries, the overthrows of Kaddafi and Mubarak, the peaceful resignation of general Jaruzelski. The list can go on.

There are not many options. The experience of bloodless coups (velvet revolutions) in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union has shown about three options. There are only three of them. It is the option of a roundtable, as was the case in Poland when the authorities agree to talk and, as a result, they made concessions. It is the option of transparent and free elections, as was the case in Hungary, when, eventually the communists surrendered power. And it is the option when the authorities are not open to any dialogue with the public, and this ends the way it ended in Romania. Therefore, generally speaking, it does not depend on us or on a creative class of people, how Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin is through. Whether it is the same way as marshal Jaruzelski or as Ceausescu, it is all up to him... (Journalist, May 2012)

²⁴ In connection to this it needs to be mentioned that in recent months a number of Russians that blame Putin for the events has increased. In August 2012 their number reached record 51% (before this number reached 31% and in the last 12 years it usually oscillated between 18 and 25%)/<http://www.levada.ru/28-08-2012/vlast-v-strane>

If you talk to scholars, I also tend to think this way, we will, of course, have count Panin's scenario. I think that count Panin already strolls near a boutique where he will buy a white silk scarf, with which the emperor will be choked to death. A new variety of "mushrooms" will be announced to the orphaned people and also the name of the successor, who, of course, would not be any Medvedev. (Journalist, May 2012)

The elites surrounding Putin and hating him understand that they have lost ground. They are feeling this turf and they are at the same time giving money for protest movement. When they understand that their ground has shaken to such a degree that they need to get rid of him, they would, because otherwise he would get rid of them. Then we have a palace coup which ends in some provisional government, which later leads to another replacement of the regime, I think.

(I: Why do you think that they hate him?)

I know many of them personally. I know that for sure. And others I observe from outside and I see that virtually everyone who is close to Putin was at some point personally and in public humiliated by him. Taking the pen from Deripaska, taking the party away from Prokhorov, taking many other things away from everyone else. These are all the cases of deep public humiliation. (Journalist, May 2012)

If the politics would be constructed the way it is done at the moment, the polarization within society and its radicalization would reach such scope that the authorities would be simply ousted. Putin only needs to stay sick for two months. Let's say, pneumonia with complications. He simply needs to be sick for two months and everything will start to collapse. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of the Rallies, June 2012)

I think that the palace coup scenario is the most plausible one, something in the spirit of Gorbachev's perestroika. I think it is most likely. But there are other scenarios, including a violent one. (I: That is, you think that in this case danger for Putin may come from his inner circles?) I think that there is a certain number of people in power... Not such "hardcore", Putinoids, mainly national security guys in the past, siloviki, the 'Lake' cooperative, etc. But beside them, there is a large number of people who are quite influential and smart enough who understand that the mechanism is out of control, that it can all end in absolute unpredictability, chaos, violence, etc. And they would like to mitigate the whole thing, to drop the whole thing... Let's say, Kudrin is a typical example. (Journalist, May 2012)

The discussion of specific terms and mechanisms of Putin's possible resignation is the case here (whether or not he should be guaranteed immunity and to which extent, who and how can do it). These kinds of discussions mainly among the participants of the protest movement are nevertheless so widespread that from time to time they come to the foreground in the newspapers.²⁵

It seems to me that is a question of guaranteeing safety. When Putin came to power, he was the guarantee of safety to Yeltsin and the members of his family. But the case of Putin is more complicated, perhaps, they can guarantee safety to Putin and members of his family but, let's assume, some provisional people from the "Lake" cooperative, I don't think that they will all be given a guarantee. There are too many of them, these people, and the so-called Putin's team. (Journalist, April 2012)

Different points of view exist on the issue. My point of view is that when the price of changing to the rule of people is his safety, then we need to pay the price. I don't think that he has to end up like Kaddafi or Mubarak. I don't care about him as a person, if we need to guarantee his safety

²⁵ Nekrasov D., Voronkov k., Gudkov D. "Protest movement: what do the revolutionaries want"//Vedomosti, June 26, 2012.

so that later the country could have transparent elections and so forth. I will be, for instance, for the safety being guaranteed to him. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

Please note that coups happen within factions in power. And in such scenario there is no place for public movement. In a sense hoping for split within the elites is very similar to the expectation that the authorities would change on their own; it does not require efforts on the part of the opposition and civil activists and can serve as an excuse for their inaction. In a similar way, changes that were a result of economic recession are beyond the influence of activists. Among those polled, there is a common idea that the authorities may change as a result of: (a) a mass popular unrest, where poor provinces will join the capital; (b) under the pressure of big businesses, interested in changing the ineffective political regime, which cannot keep inflation at bay; secure increase in profit, sound foreign policy climate for cheap credit, and prevention of civil disorder.

The idea dominates that Russia's authorities will not change on their own, whether we are referring to the complete change of executive officials or at least to partial concessions to the opposition demands. And this conviction is a result of the events of the past six months. In order for a change to happen, according to the majority of those polled, the authorities need to be put under pressure. However, the protest movement still lacks resources for exerting such pressure.

It appears to me, it is now too early to talk about it and in the near future nothing is going to come out of it, there might be some rotations, shifts, but all of that is, as they say, too little too late. The system itself will remain where it was. It is, of course, very tragic, but, nevertheless, nothing can be done about it. A miracle won't happen. (Civil activist, April 2012)

No, in the relationship between the authorities and society not a bit, has, unfortunately changed yet. But apparently the authorities understand that one cannot completely ignore this story. (Journalist, May 2012)

Our opponents are strong and we need to attempt to exert full-scale pressure on them. (Civil activist, June 2012)

Vague feeling of a dead-end.

Hidden under the surface, the understanding that systemic contradictions were not resolved and cannot be resolved in current situation, evokes in most of those polled, on the one hand, a sensation of the instability and incompleteness of the situation, despite the continuing strengthening of state control over the public sphere and repressions against the political opponents of the regime. On the other hand, the realization of a dead-end, to which the country is led by the politics of the authorities, is growing.

They have finally lost the sense of reality. (Journalist, May 2012)

The major problem is to have the time to normalize our life; I don't know in what way: by joint, consolidated effort; before an explosion from the grassroots happens, which will be disgusting and dangerous as usual, and it will rebound us far away. (Journalist, May 2012)

The authorities exist absolutely isolated from the country. Not in the sense that they are isolated from it emotionally, information-wise, it was like that before. And now it is the same. But in the sense that the country functions in a way as a chicken with its head cut-off. It still continues to run, but its head is cut off for good. I have a feeling that this is the way Russia functions right now. In this sense May 6th was a key moment for me... The fact that this clash of protesters with the police could happen and the way it happened is the symptom of the last stages of decay, it is agony. The same thing, Putin riding through an empty city streets, it's an agony. The

Inauguration, to which the leaders of foreign countries are not invited, it is agony. He is in a cabin. The cabin has become way too small. (Journalist, May 2012)

I don't believe that Putin would decide to simply resign because now he already makes an impression of a thief, like previously, at that the thievery has become so bad that it is clear that in his whole establishment there is a feeling of the end times. It doesn't matter how long it may last, it is the end. (Journalist, May 2012)

We want to influence the authorities so that these processes would happen even in small steps, and we see the opposite when to these appropriate queries the authorities find the most inadequate responses. (Civil activist, June 2012)

Unfortunately, our elite, although they understand that the way we are going leads to a dead-end, they are nevertheless very selfish, they are not interested in the public good and they are not ready to sacrifice themselves, their money, their freedom for the common good. (Politician, June 2012)

The more the situation is cornered, the less room for maneuvers the authorities have left. The window of decision-making is closed for good, in order to overcome the systemic crisis, it is closed now, maybe, until the end of this year it will close, or, maybe, it has closed already. Perhaps the point of no return has been passed. Nobody knows. (Civil activist, June 2012)

The signs of the crisis in the system are thought to manifest themselves in low morale of the authorities and a recent increase in the number of incidents when people built into the system refuse to cooperate with the authorities and take an independent stand:

...greed for gain, power and fear to get busted. Three things: accumulation of wealth, power and fear of getting busted. These are rotten unifying things. First of all, they are constantly at each others' throats for these dripping roasts. Inside their circle, there is, obviously, high tension since there are not as many dripping roasts. Secondly, many of them are offended that they are not valued enough. That they are not given enough chances to accumulate wealth and so forth. Nevertheless, all of them are opportunists, judging by their basic values. In that case, they would beat along the wind. People united by ideology, who believe in some idea, are usually monolithic. And what kind of idea do they have here? A bank account at a Swiss bank? This is not an idea. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

When in March I had to troll the prison a little, so that it came to its senses, but in a very small way compared to my first entry. I see how every day with my every meeting the atmosphere changes. Earlier upon entering the prison I took the ribbon off. But now, of course, I no longer do this... When the prison guard (in the beginning of April) approached us furtively and said, "Guys, we are all for you". Very furtively. Now they meet me at the checkpoint, "Come on in, guys!" Openly, everyone. (Journalist, May 2012)

I feel how everyone who works for those in power, for Putin, people who work for the federal TV channels became ashamed, I know, I am from the Journalism department, I know them all, they all mix in the polite society. Yes, they go to Italy, buy fashionable stuff, they go to the theatres, restaurants, they have the so-called get-togethers of educated people, the creative class that hates Putin, does not support him at all. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

My friend and I, I won't name her, no, but why, I can tell, with..., my old friend, my TV friend, we have known each other for a long, long time. For a long time. And so she refused to be Putin's authorized representative. She was offered... It is already a deed. I tell her-why didn't you tell anyone about it? Why, what for? Not that she said, "I won't because I hate him more than anything. People like her, they all say, "I don't want to be involved in politics, I am conflict-free." But nevertheless. (TV anchor, May 2012)

The conviction in the inefficiency of the authorities, the inadequacy of the actions taken, the feeling of the imminent collapse can prompt people to take action, despite increased risks of expressing dissent. Such sentiments one of the respondents characterized with a quote from Leo Tolstoy, "He tries to frighten me, but I am not afraid." This sets a question about how far Russian authorities are willing to go so that to protest and publicly express one's opinion would become really dangerous. However the scope of "uprising" of the elites and also the force of the protest movement does not need to be overstated. Despite the symptoms of low morale in the ranks of the police officers, the loyalty of the law-enforcement officers (and other civil servants) guarantees their dependence on budget payments and narrow options at the employment market.²⁶ The majority of the participants of the September March of Millions, according to the survey, do not yet believe in the perspective of the police taking the side of the protesters. In the same way, the authorities are capable of "buying" MPs, journalists, actors, TV hosts and others by opening access to high-level positions, state subsidies, broadcasting time, etc.

Nobody asks them to be authorized representatives, nobody asks them to be the best students in the school of dicks, they do it themselves; they want it themselves. Because they need more money, they need more time on air, they need more office parties, etc., etc...I don't believe in all these stories, that if I hadn't...they would drain me dry. Nobody would drain anybody dry. Look at me-I am where I was. I have the money, a house and everything is great. (Journalist, May 2012)

We are constantly arguing about judge Danilkin, we have an endless discussion, an hour-long one. I keep saying all the time, that if he acted honestly, he would have had a chance to live an interesting life. I think that week after that he would have been a visiting professor at Yale. He would have been popular and not be left... maybe his former co-workers would have treated him badly but he would have made so many friends here and would become a world star of a very different scope. And I am sure that he understood that. I was very surprised that he refused. I wouldn't have been able to escape the seduction. Yes, but my colleagues object, "That's how you are, you are ready to risk, but for a judge, heroism is not, in general, a very typical trait. They are used to obeying, and for them it is impossible." (Journalist, May 2012)

Limits of the protest movement.

The fact that the protesters understand their own limits may be considered yet another result of the events of the few past months. After the presidential elections that happened in one round and after the authorities started to tighten the screws, the weakness of the protest movement became obvious. The understanding appears that civil structures stand against a huge well-orchestrated state mechanism. The authorities have at their disposal huge financial and media-resources (at that, rigorous recruitment of those who have access to the state TV channels, controlled by the state), multilevel bureaucratic apparatus, institutes for obtaining the information ("who possesses the information, possesses the world," as one of the respondents remarks), and coercion (by means of special forces, police, army). The courts find themselves under control more and more frequently. The authorities are assisted by a large number of excellent professionals in the sphere of management, statistics, propaganda, etc. They are supported by a large number of public figures (sportsmen, musicians, actors, singers). All of them are interested in preserving the regime.

Putin's administration outwitted everyone else. (Journalist, April 2012)

²⁶ In a few interviews with activists and leaders of protest it was mentioned the alleged refusal of one of the members of the special force to carry out an order to detain the protesters. About the confusion and frustration of the police officers (but at the same time, preparedness to accept the events, to carry out the orders from the authorities) ref. an anonymous interview of the member of the law-enforcement bodies, conducted by Artur Solomonov for Snob.ru// <http://yarodom.livejournal.com/453723.html> (cited from Livejournal, since it was later deleted from the website of the magazine).

Our opponents are.....very strong. They all have administrative resources and financial resources that are unlimited. Therefore, to say that some specific measure will change something, it is naïve, no protest, walk-out in protest or statement of a famous person will do that...I think that an overwhelming majority of people (representatives of elites)....the powers that be are not pleasant aesthetically, from the point of view of morality, but until they are plugged into the system economically..., and the majority of people do not want to put into jeopardy their position, first of all, their financial position on which they depend. (Civil activist, June 2012)

(The politics serves) the interests of a very narrow circle of people who can be considered a collective Putin. Putin is not alone, it is a certain team, it is a good many people. Not too many, but you can't really tell whether the tail spins the dog or vice versa. Not always, that is at least known. Certain elements of coercion on the part of the leader to do certain actions are evidently there. (Journalist, May 2012)

Several respondents have pointed out that the authorities can change the rules of the game as they please: they can refuse to register independent candidates and opposition parties, they can cancel the results of elections, change the date of voting, pass new laws and introduce a single day of voting, and make obstacles to the work of independent observers. In case of a failure, the authorities are capable of quickly shifting the tactics, “to buy up” votes, election protocols and the candidates themselves, to put all sorts of pressure on the opponents and to intimidate them.

The authorities should not be underestimated, they have been clinging to power for a long time and they have developed their own instruments. They are working to advance as well, they attempt, if they see that the situation is the following, to strike an agreement...And then, they have a huge potential in terms of information, they have special forces in their pocket, they have the whole law enforcement system and, needless to say, they also possess personal information...They have a coercive instrument. They detain people, activists...because in the regions all of activism, all active people....all of them are, as the saying goes, taken note of by the center...They control the situation in the country in any case and they understand what is going on. But, nevertheless, judging by the Astrakhan case, they don't obtain further insights...This system, undoubtedly, has a certain breaking-down point. That is to say, it can solve some local issue in Astrakhan, or an issue in Chelyabinsk, or in Volgograd. However, when these issues started to arise in all regions, in different points, that is, the system will not function one-hundred percent, it will cross the line, it will infuriate people, it will be inadequate. In principle, it is now inadequate in many respects but there are not as many of them.... And if such a critical mass of issues accumulates, then all of this, a set of circumstances would converge, then some serious...serious mishap could happen. (Civil activist, April 2012)

The authorities can be very sharp-toothed, they can react extremely violently in extreme cases, they may not be afraid of any level of resonance, and in Pussy Riot's case it was high-level, it received the most of what international attention means. And, one would think, what else the outside regime may fear than some pointed questions that other countries would ask. (Artist, June 2012)

The intellectual resources of the opposition are ten times weaker than those of the authorities...Since there are simply no people who can regularly engage in intellectual activity in opposition, there is no audience, which is ready to perceive that, it is not elaborate enough yet. (Politician, June 2012)

I am not afraid in the sense that I don't care. If they put pressure on me, I won't work here. It is as simple as that. I am afraid because my feelings would be extremely hurt-it is an awesome publication, a pleasant working atmosphere, an excellent editorial staff. (I: And you think it is possible?) Yes, it is possible. (I: Do you have where to go?) I have not thought about it. (Journalist, April 2012)

It was obvious that it was an illusion, when mass media circulated that there is a dozen of thousands civil observers. Sure enough, this is not true...in all of the country there was about 20 maybe 30 thousand civil activists, not including the partisan ones...However, we know that we have 90 odd thousand polling stations, yes, and every station was covered by two or five people. Therefore, there was, I don't know, in the best scenario, about 5 percent if not less than that of the polling stations in the whole country which were covered. Thus, the authorities also understood that to gather information about the facts of violations and falsifications from all of the participants wouldn't work out. They may say, "How many violations have you discovered?" And they would answer, for instance, about one thousand. Ok, fine, one thousand. But out of this thousand, we will check, and about 500 will be left. And out these 500 we will divide into those that have influenced the election results and there would be, for instance, 200 left. From 2000 we have found only 200. "Any questions?" It is exactly what happened. It happened like this in the end. Unfortunately, non-systemic oppositions did not find the resources to organize large-scale observation. Mass media...created such a feeling that observation is everywhere, yes, that the committees are all under control, that we try hard, how should I say it, to cut all of this short, to uncover it somehow, all kinds of falsifications. As a result, during voting we failed to uncover mass, serious systematic falsifications. Yes, there were certain instances, yes, of course, there were some, but people seem to forget that falsifications start in our country well in advance the elections day. (Civil activist, April 2012)

One of the main resources of the current regime remains as it was before the support of the majority of population, even if it's passive, conditional and partly forced. The nature and rationality of this support among those polled is not understood by everyone. Some admit that openly.

I can say as a journalist that this is the main problem for me every time. Because.... before the Duma elections I came to the city of Ekaterinburg, I was walking along the streets trying to find at least one person who would name a valid reason why vote for "United Russia". I polled about 50 people and I have not met a single one who planned to vote for "United Russia". The main blunder of the authorities is that it is supported by this phantom majority, bought by some sort of subsidies and other chocolate bars. And to find people who would be for the authorities and who would not occupy some bureaucratic position, who are not in the Duma and so forth, it is, unfortunately, very difficult. Therefore, how can I take into account the opinion of those whom I don't know, whom I don't see and cannot understand, and I cannot even talk to? Here's the rub. (Journalist, May 2012)

The level of awareness varies greatly, if you live in a big city, if you live in the big city of Moscow, if you live somewhere near Petushki or Vladimir, I've been there recently and these people are completely out of it....It's like the 2000s and it will stay like that for a long time. (Journalist, May 2012)

Most people are preoccupied with their own problems, with their current life, and the elections that were held, perhaps, attracted some attention...and after the elections, the issue of transparency of elections, the issue of protest, let's say, actions, movements, I think, are nowhere to be found in the five or ten top priorities for their life. Although there is certain weariness...understanding that the authorities are indeed corrupt and that certain problems exist. However, once again, they don't see a way out of this situation because they are so absorbed into their own problems that they don't have an opportunity to think about what they personally can do to change this situation because there are no...leaders....strategies...plans...scenarios that are offered to these people, and...there are either none of them or there are certain drafts which never reach the people. Hence, common self-doubt, that we won't change anything, we won't change anything. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Of course, I can relate to them. I can relate to what is going on in their lives, I can do that very well. I don't like it at all that it's happening to them because it seems to me that this is exactly

the story about complete rejection of personal responsibility, complete rejection of the wish to look ahead, as a matter of fact. And rejection of perspectives as well. (Journalist, May 2012)

Unfortunately, the rest of the country is passive and this process of its activation, of its awakening, can take considerably more time. However, as history shows, revolutions are not made in Novosibirsk, Kutaisi or Donetsk, they are made in Kiev, Moscow and Tbilisi. Therefore, here the processes that would be happening in Moscow and St. Petersburg are vital. (Journalist, May 2012)

You know, it is very difficult to reach people, neither the New York Times, nor Novaya Gazeta nor the Echo of Moscow reach some village in Mordovia or Udmurtia. It is understandable that these people are guided by what Channel 1 shows them and not the "Rain" channel and, of course, they are certain that the elections were transparent and there were no violations. (I: And what should be done about it?) Nothing. Unfortunately, nothing. If we look at world history, change is made not by 70% but 2-5% of the educated and active. Unfortunately, it never works to be guided by all people. (Journalist, May 2012)

The opinion that most people are passive, but their opinion can be disregarded, since everything would be decided by 3-5% in the capital, is quite widespread among the respondents. And the examples of Russian history in the early 1990ies allegedly give ground to believe this option plausible. However, the respondents remain certain that active minority, which went in the streets in Moscow (and in other cities) in the end of the 2011-2012, couldn't obviously achieve any change. The impracticability of the initial demands of the protest movement, such as the president's resignation, new elections, etc., and admitting the limitations can have a significant result. The theory that "history is made" by the active 5%, and the participation of the majority is not necessary under the circumstances, when the regime remains as strong, (despite the "inherent" instability of the system), probably does not work. Accordingly, those who are interested in change need to search for allies among vast strata of the population, including those who voted for Putin and the party in power at the elections. The awareness of the incomparability of the forces of the protest movement and the forces of a huge state apparatus can become an incentive for developing a strategy of the subsequent actions for the opposition.

Consolidation and civil solidarity.

...I already anticipate the unavoidable question to what extent they (protests) are efficient. For now it seems not very much. They are effective only in a sense that their participants receive a certain charge of positive energy, which counts for something. (Poet, July 2012)

Let us turn to the "positive" results of protest movement. And what is meant here is, first of all, a new experience for those who participated in the last year's events and also changes within the movement. Each and every surveyed concurred that the main achievement of protest rallies and civil activity is a shift in the inner outlook of its participants, the feeling of resilience and civil solidarity which has emerged.

If you operate in the underground, in the semi-underground state, it is very difficult to get rid of that. And when you do get rid of that, it is very important for you to find like-minded people. In other words, it was this very important step for consolidating the society itself. (Civil activist, April 2012)

They change the perception of people, the people become more politically active, political culture has now shifted to an absolutely new level. They come to actions that have never been there before. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Every one of us who went onto the streets, indeed everyone deep down considered himself to be a city idiot: everyone likes Putin and I don't, probably, something is wrong...with me...Everyone sees how smart, handsome and manly he is, and you see nothing but a rat. Something wrong with

the vision. And the main thing is, you won't go to the doctor because it's sort of embarrassing. And then suddenly in December we have discovered that there are many of us. We are all so beautiful, young, smart, interesting and we are very similar...When they say, "When will you calm down, when will you grow weary"...This can, of course, happen, but it is not likely. The problem is that we have changed very much. We know that we are the ones who are sound. And we know who is sick. It is not going to go away. (Journalist, May 2012)

A dialogue of sorts within the society started. If earlier we didn't know our neighbors who live on the same floor, we didn't know who lives in our riser block of flats, now people find points of contact on the level of protest or you could hear dialogues in the subway about it, in the public transport, in some cafes, on the streets, in the waiting lines in some state bodies. People discuss, it became the rule of decency-to discuss, to go out...never before was it a norm to express one's opinion. Now it became one of the characteristics of a contemporary civilized Russian: besides self-interest, some stuff, he is also interested in politics. (Civil activist, May 2012)

Very diverse people realized at the same time that, yes, most of their problems had absolutely political roots. If we further allow the authorities, so they could brazenly and openly deceive and steal votes, to play politics according to their own rules then, undoubtedly, we will find ourselves in a very bad place, whatever our political affiliations...the main result in the last six months is that a vast number of people really became aware of themselves as a new political class, they saw that there is a huge number of people who are ready to fight and stand for their rights and who felt the supportive shoulders of others and it turned out that it is a lot of fun, it is very effective and it is only right to do it together and that we need to extend, to search for comrades and to get stronger in our own understanding of the political. (Artist, June 2012)

In fact, absolutely everything has changed. You are understood and supported and your views are shared and, most importantly, now everything will certainly work out...perhaps it sounds a bit pretentious but I have felt what it means to be the people's representative, the people's deputy. Because when you have a mandate, when you think, press the buttons to vote and when you are being shown somewhere on TV-these are all things of the past. This is, as it were, not politics anymore. It is simply a get-together. And when you go out into the street to the people, even when you are arrested... (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

The situation has changed and public attitudes have changed, it was no longer possible to get rid of a candidate at municipal elections as it was 4 years ago. Because there was an electric atmosphere in Moscow, and it was also the case in a number of regions. But it was not a systematic phenomenon. (Politician, municipal deputy, April 2012)

The White square and, in general, all these protest actions that happened, they played a very massive role...They enabled the emergence of people that didn't know anything about municipal deputies that joined and participated in this event, who decided, who got interested. Civil activists appeared, they now work in a team with municipal deputies in their districts, the activists have also learnt that such a body exists and that it is doing something in their districts. And, thirdly, I believe that the issue of registration is by no means unimportant. Earlier, when I registered four years ago, it was virtually impossible to register as an independent candidate...That time we also got ready for something similar, but when the society reached the point of destabilization, the authorities seemingly didn't know what to do. It was just the end of December, between Bolotnaya and Sakharov. And at the very moment, I think, many election committees decided not to blow the situation out of proportion. And they let a large number of independent candidates register. This, I believe, played an immense role in the view of the fact what we now have in terms of local governance. (Politician, municipal deputy, June 2012)

Summarizing everything that was said by the respondents, it may be mentioned that participation in the protest movement enriched the activists with new contacts, new skills (teamwork on a

project, quick fundraising, etc.) The tragedy in Krymsk and volunteers' instant reaction, among whom were activists and ordinary participants of the protest rallies, showed that the experience of collective action can be used in various situations. Those who had not participated in political activities (and there were many of them in mass actions), were either made to ponder about what was happening, or were allowed to find their interest in politics, to find likeminded people. For certain novices the protests literally changed their lifestyle, social circle, profession. One of the results of the events, according to some of the participants of the research project, could be considered an increase in the "core" or body of active participants of the protests: whereas previously a few hundred of people had participated in protest activity, now it was few thousand people. The data of human rights defense center OVD-Info shows that in 2012 the number of individual pickets, actions, organized by small groups of people on their own initiative without any coordination with main opposition organizations increased significantly.²⁷ Another characteristic trait of the events was seen by the respondents of Levada-Center in the fact that at least for half a year the "liberals", "left-wing" and "nationalists" managed to coordinate their work and hold a constructive dialogue. Of course, political leaders already had an opportunity to cooperate within "Other Russia", various joint actions and projects (let us remember, for instance, camp "Antiseliger" and combatants wearing T-shirts with the inscription "Russian Forrest" in Khimki). However, relatively peaceful coexistence on the rallies of nationalists, anti-fascists, pacifists, LGBT-activists, etc., was a novelty.

When I was out of prison, I immersed myself right away into organizing the rally on Sakharov avenue on December 24th (I was arrested for 10 days on December 5th). It became obvious to me that the situation arose, when a large number of people participated in organization, they were from absolutely different ideological, political and cultural camps, they didn't have the slightest experience of cooperation before, and here they had to learn somehow, to think of ways and to learn to communicate, to listen and to act together. (Artist, June 2012)

(I: What does participation in Organisation Committee mean to you?) First of all, I think that these people, especially the young ones, who participate in Organization Committee, in any case, they are future leaders of political parties, these are future politicians, opinion shapers and it's very important to learn to talk with each other, to find some compromises. In any case we will then join different parties, but, nevertheless, it is political culture, it is established in these sorts of gatherings. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

Eventually, the highest-ranking official in the country cannot act upon his interest only and the interests of the group he favors. Therefore, around the person who will become the leader of the movement if he becomes president, this is already the next step, there needs to be a well-formed team, many famous people with clear views and ideas, so that they would be interested not in one or two leaders, so that they would have interrelations, that they would be equal. But, at the same time, one cannot grant equal rights to all of the population of Russian Federation. (Civil activist, April 2012)

Besides uniting against one opponent, respondents saw positive foundations for solidarity, which they explained in the following way.

The council of municipal MPs... What unites us? We are united by the city. I have already said that it is irrelevant who will ditch the dump, what ideology would that person have. And when we gather together on the forum and talk about developing local governance and about current events, we don't have reasons to fight against each other or to squabble. But the moment when ideology comes into play.... I had a great example when we met with colleagues, municipal

²⁷ Ref. to the speech by Grigoriy Okhotin at the discussion of the report of Levada-Center "Protest movement in Russia" in International Memorial on November 8, 2012 <http://www.levada.ru/proekt-demokratiya-v-rossii/08-10-2012/protestnoe-dvizhenie-v-rossii-v-2011-2012-gg>

deputies of one of the districts and there were about 8 of us. And there is a representative of the Communist Party and a nationalist beside him. When some issue arises, when we talk about the city, about municipal issues, about local governance and some other administrative things, which is relevant to our circle specifically, there are no problems with that. But only when each of them goes into their ideology respectively....they immediately get into a fight with each other....I probably do not have an answer yet. I said this right away, that I don't have an answer how it all needs to function but I see that if we eliminate all these ideologies, try to unite them around some sort of action, then we get work done. And if they are not united around an action, then only talk happens or some statements, documents are issued. People now share ideas, at least in Moscow, and in some regions as well. People want something to happen. Something to change. (Politician, municipal deputy, June 2012)

What is LGBT-activism based on? On certain legal platforms, that is, for us it is very important that the courts are transparent, that the cases are considered impartially, that there is no pressure from the administration, from the authorities. Currently, we are deprived of that for one simple reason that the authorities are closely tied with judicial institutions, for instance, with the institutes of law-enforcement... It is important for us, of course, not to lobby a certain party, transparency in attitudes is important for us specifically, and it is now lacking. Therefore, the slogan "For transparent elections" has always been meaningful for us, since if we were to imagine a certain democratic structure in Russia as a certain ideal, i.e. when everything would function for us as it should....then there would be significantly fewer problems: marches to support the LGBT would not be prohibited, there would not be courts, to which a policeman would be brought that makes absolutely anecdotic claims about things that did not happen, and thus, unjust decisions would not be made. Unfortunately, the whole structure is so corrupt that we need to fight against the head, and "United Russians" are its head, in fact. Therefore, it is against them that the protest is directed, although, by and large, they don't interest me especially as a party, I don't really care about them. (Civil activist, April 2012)

It seems to me that the task of (new structures, such as "Citizen Observer" consists not in the fact) that they should influence the socio-political situation in the country...It is an instrument for ensuring honest count of votes. This instrument may be used by all who need honest count of votes. The way they use it is their business, which strategy they are using it for. The task of ensuring transparent elections may fit into a variety of strategies. If "Citizen Observer" adopted one of the strategies, it would lose more than half of its volunteers. It is the absence of such strategy, such ideology; some political agenda is one of the advantages of an organization of this kind, its strict functionality and neutrality. (Civil activist, July 2012)

The problem of civil control over authorities.

It must be noted that observers were trying to comply with the election legislation, they strove for transparent elections. In their turn, newly elected municipal deputies in Moscow see fighting against financial and administrative abuse as one of their main tasks. Fighters against corruption, bureaucratic arbitrariness on the roads, in the city, in the polling stations became the heroes of the rallies. From the respondents, who were of different ages, had different level of experience and different opinions, and their answers, we get the impression that they are all united by the wish to curb the tyranny of the state, to control and make the authorities efficient and accountable to the society.

The problem lies in the absence of control over the authorities. For me the main and chief role of civil society is to control the authorities. We don't need to rise up against them, we don't need to go to all these endless rallies, and we need to control the system... The society needs to secure control, here, it seems to me, is the main problem, we cannot carry out the function stated in the Constitution, when the society is in power in the country. (Civil activist, May 2012)

After all, I can see an active civil society emerging in the country, because at present the system is the following – no matter whom we elect – if Navalny all of a sudden becomes the president, then in 6 years we would be ousting Navalny. Because Navalny is in the same system. There are absolutely no mechanisms for the society to influence the authorities in our country. Even practical interaction is absent. When people begin to realize that they can interact with the authorities on equal terms, the main aim would be reached for me. (Civil activist, May 2012)

We talk from the following position: you (the authorities) violate the law, you prohibit public actions, you don't want to guarantee safety and you have called me here as a dork who would tell you where he would go, where to detain him and so on. Let us not talk like that, let's talk...you want to solve problems and we want to solve problems, let us find a compromise, when all of us would be happy. (Civil activist, May 2012)

A striking majority of activists said that they set a goal for themselves to achieve accountability on the part of the government – on the federal level as well as within the movement itself, which, therefore, has a distinct antiauthoritarian character. We may assume that the idea of the accountability of the authorities in contrast to the slogans about resignation of the government and Putin could be supported by most people. And although it does not work well enough to achieve the accountability of the authorities, the protest leaders have already felt control on the part of the society. And it is also another result of these events. Thus, Aleksei Navalny had to moderate his nationalistic rhetoric and Sergei Udaltsov publicly claimed to reconsider his attitude towards Stalin.²⁸ The “Solidarity” politicians, organizers of the first rally, had to share authority in organizing protest events first with journalists and then with civil activists within Organization Committee and later with the participants of the “Workshop of Protest Activity”. Most of the sessions of the Organization Committee were easily accessible to the public: journalists participated in them, activists could come, and they were broadcast online.²⁹ Virtually all the participants of the research talked about the necessity of civil control over the leaders of the movement, about mutual control, signing public statements and programs, departmentation of organization – the politicians themselves:

Politicians will never agree with one another unless under pressure. Putin's system will not change without external pressure, nor could the opposition politicians agree with each other unless pressured by the civil society. Let's say, the “League of Voters.” (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

Currently we need to work on our institutes and our security system...I mean political system...against the recurrences of autocracy of any kind. (Journalist, May 2012)

Many people are allergic to leaders, politicians, political activity, party construction, and being new people, quite experienced, they thought that to associate themselves with a political force, or a group is untimely. But the fact that they participate in political struggle is obvious. It appeared to them and now it appears to them that official political non-alignment expands their possibilities for work and expands their support. I believe that this may be right on the local level, but it is not right strategically. It is not right strategically because if you do not have an organization and you make use only of the Internet, you won't achieve anything in life. Because politics is the fight of the team, the fight of ideas, the fight of various groups. It is not a fight of loners... You cannot win alone, even if you are popular... (I: What else does a political party give

²⁸ “Udaltsov distanced himself from Stalin”//publication on the Radio Svoboda website, September 7, 2012 (<http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/24701664.html>).

²⁹ It is significant that similar methods are used by municipal MPs in Moscow, achieving maximum publicity of the decisions of the regional convention (they call publicity their main weapon in fighting the corruption): they invite journalists and locals to the conventions, they post pictures and documents in the Internet, they tweet at the conventions, in other words, they put local conventions under public control.

you?) Responsibility, commitment, human resources. What responsibility does a blogger have? The answer is: none, he is just one blogger. For instance, there is a great photographer and blogger Varlamov. You would agree that he is a cool photographer and a blogger. He is a nice guy, I like him a lot. However, the thing that happened in Omsk is very bad. You know what happened there? Why? The guy does not have an organization, he had a very low responsibility before the people and that's it. As a result, he did not gather enough signatures. Therefore, an organization gives responsibility, commitment, and an organization gives the people an understanding what will happen if this organization comes to power. It is dangerous to vote for a person if you don't understand what kind of team he has, who he associates with, with whom he works and with whom he doesn't. Right? That is why, for instance, a month-long primary is a good thing. Because primaries is a team battle and it's about commitments among the participants. (Politician, member of Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

Unification of the opposition forces does not seem to be an end in itself, nor are the protest rallies. Many of those polled would like to see results of their work. Including, therefore, real goals that could be reached in the foreseeable future, they are considered attractive. A good example here is the work of the observers: clear tasks, clear methods and possible victory of the candidate they sympathize with (as it happened, for instance, in Yaroslavl, or the compromise of conflict resolution in the elections of the mayor of Astrakhan).

Everyone wants to see a certain result. Because in the last 10 years nobody saw it. And opposition didn't see it and people in power didn't see it. No product that would be ready which could be touched, assessed, analyzed. Including those in opposition, there is no result of course. (Civil activist, May 2012)

All want all sorts of changes to happen. (Civil activist, June 2012)

All of them (participants of protests) want some change and some sort of decent life... in general; everyone can imagine some ideal model of the future of one's state. And all of these people want to participate in forming this future. Nobody wants someone else to do something for them, everyone wants to participate. (Civil activist, May 2012)

It seems to me that more important is not the change of the regime but the interaction among the people, building an alternative system of people's interrelations, not built into a vertical of sorts or into something else but the savviness of people in doing without the state such as speculation in Krimsk and in some other examples. If the government becomes inefficient and is a hindrance to the citizens, then it is important to learn how to do without it. At the exact same moment when they learn to do without it to a large extent, the regime may change, at least, there is no less hope for that than that it would change as a result of the elections. (Civil activist, July 2012)

Effective leadership and effective action for opposition politicians today seem to be a more important source of their legitimacy than any Coordination Council elections (their goal is rather to maintain the existing balance of power rather than to find a leader). In support of this statement, we may use advancements in the "rating" of trust to the protest leaders, which was done from December 2011 to September 2012 in the Levada-Center polls on the rallies. In the winter the list was headed by the non-political figures, which testified not to their personal popularity but also to the absence of an established authority among the politicians, of the deficits of trust to political system, of rejection of everything political as dirty and undignified. By the fall 2012, however, the positions of poets, writers, musicians and journalists have weakened. The first positions of the "rating" they gave away to politicians, members of the Organization Committee, ready to undertake everyday work of organizing and managing the movement. The results of the survey that fix the shifts in the list of leaders, implicitly confirmed by the materials of the interviews, expert assessment among the famous politicians and civil activists as to who gained or lost points.

Issue of leadership.

Russian protests of 2011-2012 posed, among other things, the problem of leadership within the opposition movement. And although this question requires detailed consideration, it would be appropriate to indicate some focal points. The protest movement didn't have one leader accepted by all, at the same time there existed and were in constant interaction (in competition, in antagonism, in cooperation on various issues), many, according to the estimates of several respondents of more than twenty "headquarters", territorially scattered around Moscow, meeting in various cafes, clubs, such as "Jean Jacque", "Solianka", "Zavtra" and offices of political parties and organizations etc. Chaos ruled, there were no established formal ties between the leaders, common organization structures which could order existing relationships and establish a certain hierarchy, were created as the events progressed, as sharing of the responsibilities and functions happened under the influence of the moment.³⁰ According to certain respondents, one of the merits of the protest movement in contrast to the existing political system lay in the fact that there was no obvious leader, and multiple claims were presented to the most noticeable figures, first of all politicians.

Absence of a single leader:

This "oscillation" does not have one, a leader, obvious to all, first of all, it is a question of time, second, it is even better because with the movement which has a leader different actions may be performed: this leader may be manipulated or hindered in this or that way. This movement, in essence, cannot have a single leader; it has a certain number of persons who represent someone. (Journalist, April 2012)

The alternative to Putin's regime is the variety and diversity of opinions, movements, and figures:

The majority cannot be classified as leaders...I think that when a movement is unfolding, the leaders would appear there's no other way it can be. Perhaps we are in too much hurry? It cannot be that the leaders don't appear. I understand that on the part of the most part of people participating in the movement there is an aversion to the topic of leaders. They are fed up with this leadership. This is, by the way, a good sign and it would be beneficial if it goes in parallel with the absence of Putin's demonization as a figure because this is also the wrong way, as it seems to me, this obsession with concrete figures. Today, as in the opponents' camp as well as in our own camp it is harmful so far... We now need to occupy ourselves with institutions and security system...I mean political system...against the revival of autocracy of all kinds... "Putin will go away and everything is going to be alright." (Journalist, May 2012)

I think that the question which is often found in journalists' texts and in some political discussions, and in the mass media discussions, if not Putin, then who else?-shifting persons into this category is not quite correct in its essence, since, by accepting the knowledge that the system of coordinates is distorted, in this system of coordinates this question is in hand for Putin himself. That is, I think, the question needs to be phrased this way: why was our political and media space distorted? What specifically was done? And how can we fight that? In particular, slogans for transparent elections, for freedom of speech, for freedom of assembly-these are indeed effective mechanisms which will allow making the system not deformed again, that is, return it into its normal state. (Journalist, April 2012)

The respondents noted that 'leaders' sometimes did not keep up with what was happening, they found themselves in the position of those "led", entangled into a whirl of activity. Indeed, the events were unfolding quickly and part of protagonists publicly challenged the existing political

³⁰ The popularity of various protest leaders (and about its dynamics) can be judged, for instance, by the polls at the rallies conducted by Levada-Center.

regime for the first time, it took on the role of politicians and, accordingly, did not have a clear action plan. The understanding of those who could be called protest leaders consisted of a few elements. Firstly, according to the majority of those polled, a person was considered a leader if he had access a media-resource that attracted attention from independent mass media, had his own popular blog or website. It is likely that this may be used to explain the sensitivity of the “Bolotnaya heroes” to the journalists’ opinions, influence of the latter on the organization of rallies and their participation in the work of the Organization Committee. Secondly, a leader is defined by his team, by the chance to rely on the organization, party, team or active supporters. It needs to be said that not everyone who spoke on the stage had his own team, his own organization. Thirdly, a leader, according to the respondents, needs to have his action plan, which describes a desired image of the future and concrete steps to approach it. The striking majority of activists did not have a program like that or they didn’t want to advertise it.

(I: They say that new faces appeared, but they lack something for real leadership. Do you have a feeling like that?)

For political leadership? They probably lack a political program. He had an attempt; he wrote an article in “Vedomosti” called “Not to lie, not to steal” and he received a lot of criticism that it is not a political program. Yes, indeed, it is not a program; it is only a life principle, a right, good principle. Yes. Political program and strategy, perhaps. Maybe Navalny has a strategy, but he does not declare what it is and that is why people are cautious with him ... Opposition goes after him but if you take wide masses, he is not very trusted. (Politician, May 2012)

Leadership is important. For once he couldn’t clearly answer the question, “What’s next?” Perhaps, he is absolutely right to think that it is too early to answer them and it is not the time to do that. Please. But he is still lacking that in order to become a leader. The leader, about whom everyone is crazy. (Civil activist, May 2012)

I believe that it is not right to work alone, separately, without being informed... Without a team it would be impossible to decide anything. (Civil activist, May 2012)

Society and as well as us have grown weary of the idle talk. We want some sort of result already. And people want to see that result...I don’t think in fact that Udaltsov, Navalny and Chirikova are such true leaders. It seems to me that each one of them needs to become a bit more mature. (Politician, June 2012)

(I: If they lack something, what do they lack, in your opinion?)

If I were to say now, on the spot, they lack, first of all, results. We need to admit that we have few results. In order for people to...why do people go after someone or trust someone? A person said something and did that. The results that we have that we could say, “Yes, we have achieved this, we got this,” there are few of them at present. Elections in Yaroslavl, where an opposition candidate of loyal position won, Urlashov, it was a result, it was a victory. We came, controlled the elections, moreover, even the Yaroslavl locals did not expect us to gain such a considerable victory over the former member of “United Russia”-this is a result. Perhaps, also not enough coverage in the media, in people’s TV sets. These guys, leaders and so on, who fought, they are recent and, accordingly, not everyone knows them so that after them...their ideas...Again, there is a lack of experience. (Civil activist, May 2012)

No superman has appeared among them yet. I think that the mechanisms of identifying this kind of person are lacking. Access to mass media is, of course, lacking, general coordination is also perhaps lacking, not only general coordination but human solidarity: everyone talks of everyone else behind their backs, some big or small shit, this is quite unpleasant. But I think that in principle out of these 4-5-6 people 2-3 very serious leaders can emerge...in my opinion, if we talk about the present Russian situation, serious leaders are, unfortunately, not quite Che

Guevaras or maybe it is not unfortunate... These are not Che Guevaras but rather Makhatma Ghandis. I believe that the movement has to be nonviolent and mass. (Musician, May 2012)

For the time being, it is after all not a huge number of activists, journalists, it is not large yet, some rules of get-togethers govern. Get-togethers, stars, etc....Now, for instance, some may bring a thousand people but nobody would write about them simply because they are not interesting for anyone, they are not media appearances. A few newspapers at best. And some person who has 12, 000 readers in Twitter, he is in some information space, he plays a more important role, that is, he influences more, he knows more people, somebody reads his posts. (Politician, June 2012)

It needs to be said that virtually all the participants of the research were quite skeptical about the leaders (and, as a matter of fact, about their colleagues in protest movement). The criticism of them can be summarized the following way: (a) general weariness of the “old guard”, unchangeability of opposition politicians of the 90ies who however, (this was noted by not many most informed respondents) not only possess the highest recognizability, but have accumulated key financial and organizational resources; (b) increased claims to the “old ones” on the part of the new generation of young ambitious politicians, who, however, do not possess the resources of the old colleagues, (c) widespread opinion that every politician needs to be controlled, which without public control by the media, public figures, and mass participation of the citizens does not differ in any way from the existing authorities. In order to prove it, I will provide a range of quotations from the interviews.

Yes, somebody keeps up in a better, somebody in a worse way. However, it seems to me, they lag behind in the process in general, they want to be leaders in some old sense of the word, but now the reality is different. Because the most interesting phenomenon recently, including the mentioned Writers’ Walks and the Occupy Abbai and these rings, they somehow did without the leaders, simply someone thought of this and someone else supported. (Poet, July 2012)

I hope that they (those speaking from the stage) realize that people come not to support them, yes, that is...many tell me among my friends that people come not to listen to Navalny...they simply come to demonstrate that there are many of us, that we are together. There is a certain problem in this that people don’t see some unified lines, some guiding posts that could guide somewhere further....It is a hodgepodge and these leaders; they, it seems, absolutely don’t understand how to work with people further because all of them are so different, this protest has really encompassed all society layers, that an approach to everyone needs to be found, it needs to be learnt. (Civil activist, April 2012)

I won’t be unique in saying that this could be seen based on people’s reaction at the last meeting for transparent elections. From all the speakers Navalny and Udaltsov were met with most enthusiasm. And, let us put it this way, on the wave of these meetings, these two politicians, Navalny and Udaltsov were most visible of all, and, moreover, they represented both wings: Udaltsov-the left, Navalny in a certain sense, the right wing. (Journalist, April 2012)

Without these global institutional transformations, let us say, Navalny or Kasparov comes to power and in two years he transforms into Putin because the system creates many opportunities for him to be that way. I know Kasparov personally and I can say that it is less likely. Knowing some sort of Nemtsov I can say that it is more likely that he would transform this way. Essentially, the system creates such incentives within it that any decent politician, he needs to refine himself and we have certain problems of inner democracy within our organizations that when a person would have such opportunities, having found himself in power, he would cut himself loose. (Politician, April 2012)

Distancing from “chieftainship”:

It seems to me that at the heart of this movement there is a certain ironic distance, certain mistrust to the so-called leaders. These leaders think that they are leaders up till now. I understand that for any political movement, any political structure these leaders are needed simply as a structure-forming element and they would probably appear. However, I hope that these would not be charismatic. Because it seems to me that even not leaders but the most active ideal-generating participants of the former movement were in their majority young people quite educated, quite skeptical and obviously distanced from any sort of chieftainship. I think that they would definitely treat with suspicion anyone who would seek to head this movement. Because the movement of the last six months, it seemed to me that it was different from every other ones that it was absolutely in principle horizontal. The fact that I put my trust absolutely not in any leaders but in these guys that self-organized into the community of observers and volunteer community that raised funds and things for Krimsk and then went to do everything possible there. (Poet, July 2012).

When we hear the statements of M. herself, of the N. himself and other leaders, they position themselves as very democratic leaders, but I am sure that should they come to power, they would not give a damn about our rights the same way as the authorities now. Therefore, for me to change these authorities is like six of one and half a dozen of other. Because what we have now, we see that it is all clear and so forth. But what will happen when they are in power-it still a big question. (Civil activist, May 2012)

The attitude to the “old” opposition politicians:

I think that it is very important what this wave has shown-how the old political leaders enjoy no trust and that by and large there is no interest in them. If we take a look, the speakers of this month are neither Boris Nemtsov, nor Harry Kasparov nor all of those whom we got accustomed to envision as the opposition leaders. A first part, in principle, is played by young figures. Perhaps Illia Ponomarev and Dima Gudkov lack something to be real leaders, some experience...however, Gudkov himself has grown greatly, in my opinion, in the last 3-4 years that I have known him. And Navalny and Udaltsov, in my opinion, are absolutely mature leaders. And the way that people follow them and are ready to listen to them, it seems to me, testifies to this fact. It is very important here that at the same time a process of rejuvenation of this protest movement happens: new people came and they are more willing to accept new leaders. (Journalist, May 2012)

I can say that old politicians are fucked. I am not considering them at all. That is, among them there are some simply comical figures, so openly comical like Limonov, Novodvorskoy- absolutely disregarding their political views, they can be left-wing, they can also be “cave” communists but they are over with, their song is sung, they are away with. There are middle-aged politicians; the most popular of them are Rizhkov, Nemtsov, Kasianov, Kasparov. The majority of them, unfortunately, are not taken into account as well, simply because they have discredited themselves. First of all, by the fact that they were in power, and, generally speaking, they are not considered honest people. Everyone knows about Misha 3% and 2 % and I think that if desired something similar may be said about Nemtsov as well, although personally I think well of Nemtsov. However, it seems to me that again these guys may in the best case scenario show some kind of support but they find themselves in no way in the center of the movement, they have become its veterans. That is, not “drop-outs,” absolutely withdrawn like Limonov, but marginal. Respectively, that, which we have now, is quite recent proportion which has existed for 1-2-3 years, among which there are equal numbers of people from the political camp and civil camp. That is from the political camp there are Udaltsov, Gudkov, Yashin. From the civil activists camp: Navalny, Chirikova and a certain number of public cultural and artist figures, Shevchuk, Akunin, Parfenov, Kseniya Sobchak and I think we can name about a dozen more less significant names. If these guys like Chirikova and Navalny are professional activists, then we are the accompanying humanitarians and dilettantes. (Journalist, May 2012)

Because he is so active, Limonov continues to be a politician. Whatever you do to him, however suppressed he is; he has such energized organization, which makes him an important political player in any situation. He has the so-called fighters that can go out to the rally, do something, distribute the flyers, campaign and recruit someone, find someone, raise money and do whatever. This is very important. Because even with no access to the media he can consider himself the most significant opposition politician based on party history, based on some structural ruins... (Politician, June 2012)

Why did the winter protest go to dogs? Precisely because of the stagnation in the opposition we had some well-known opposition leaders that turned out to be simply incapable to take on responsibility and announce some claims... They need PR, they need political party creation, and they need TV debates with other political parties. Strictly speaking, that's it. And they are neither ready to announce nor solve some real problems. (Politician, April 2012).

It is my problem as well, although I take it easier... we have a lot of VIPs that only promote themselves, and activists that write, find themselves in certain departments, organized rallies and do all the dirty work. And all the glory goes to the VIPs. The problem of assets is that these assets cannot go onto a serious level first of all in terms of money. Everyone can criticize that, but, for instance... it won't happen that these VIPs would be displaced. One can criticize them, one can scorn at them, but it's hard to displace them. (Politician, June 2012)

New generation of leaders.

The opportunities to raise funds “for themselves”, for a small new project, election campaign for municipal elections provides a certain independence of new young politicians that have gradually escaped the influence of major political structures and could express themselves on the municipal elections, gatherings of the Workshop of Protest Actions and the “Occupy”. In the interviews, the following people were mentioned:

They have said earlier, “This is our city,” and now they... start to do that efficiently, even if it is about painting the fence, but it will be the paint chosen by them. On the other hand, the authorities themselves understand that new people appeared that do not want... first of all, they want to change something themselves. We'll see what will happen after the story when everybody can... with the solution of multi-partite system where it will lead us. When young people go to power, it is an important thing, it seems to me, no extensive explanation of why it is significant is necessary. (Journalist, April 2012)

Concerning possible new leaders, I think that all these winter months, they, in fact, have not been causing any change of the elites. But they have pushed into the area of active political action a mass of people whom we have not seen before. If we look at activists from “League of Voters” or at people who are gathered in the so-called “Workshop of Protest Actions” organized by Masha Gessen, then we would see a few dozen of very active, fully involved into the process, extremely energetic and quite radical people, who were not interested in politics before December. One of my acquaintances characterized this as an emergence of new “democratic schizophrenia”. That is people who are about 30, who are quite radical, having come from business or some intelligentsia professions, who have forsaken everything during this winter and have quickly engaged into this movement. And I think that these kinds of leaders would emerge out of this movement inevitably... and they are emerging already. (Journalist, April 2012)

I think that leaders would also appear. Because the movement started, and if the movement has started, then it means that something will be put forth. Such microleaders have already appeared. There were none of them earlier, after all. You see, those whom everybody loves to scorn that they are brainless, that they go crazy, that they are such and such, but they are there, these people... there is a lot of people who are absolutely crazy. But they do exist. And there were none of them before. Then, yes, the leaders would appear. Clearly, it would not be Kasiyanov or Nemtsov. Not because I think badly of them but because they are the thing of the

past. And the fact that a lot of youth flooded any kind of protest activity, it is one of the guarantees of the fact that everything will be fine. (Journalist, May 2012)

They are not going to give a chance to us, our generation. But they are right in a way, since we had a chance before. Therefore, even if we had known how it is done, they wouldn't have listened to us. None of them asks, "Who is the leader," they already know that everyone is a leader. (Journalist, May 2012)

People themselves suddenly start thinking of mechanisms of how to talk with bureaucrats and how to achieve results, it is a pretty awesome and important symptom, it is clear that all of it somehow changes the urban landscape. On both sides people start to influence something, and the bureaucrats start to panic like crazy because they are being pressured, they see that new time has come. In order to understand that, it is a lengthy and complicated process, but only a year ago we couldn't even have thought about this. (Journalist, April 2012)

This youth, they are great, they are better than us. They are idealists, and we have looked with contempt at idealism for 70 years, but it is a completely different topic, people of the 70ies are a completely different story. Since I touched upon this, I will tell you in our next conversation that now, however strange this might seem, there is a new turn towards the 60ies of the 20th century, perhaps in a good and bad way. (Poet, July 2012)

Young leaders talk about themselves:

When a girl is detained for the first time, when she is kept in detention for one night, they suppose that the girl will get scared and then she would never show up anywhere else because she will say, let everything go to... But it is not like that anymore. Because this (the person talks about his peers and himself) is another generation. These are people who no matter what their gender is, are ready to do something on their own, they are ready to challenge others too, those who are not afraid to find themselves... They understand that they are doing nothing in order to find themselves imprisoned for 10 years, but they could take a night of detention, they are doing something good to find themselves there. That's how we live. (Civil activist, June 2012)

For us these leaders, banner-bearers, we don't need them... However, acquired experience of the recent events, it absolutely allows us to be independent. In a sense of efficiency, yes, of course, it is way faster to organize ourselves, to do something, to conduct something. But for the time being, at the stage of becoming, we are needed by the famous people and they are needed by us. (I: What for?) In the sense of media attention, coverage...if people would gather for a certain action under the auspices of Tatyana Lazareva, Akunin, Kasparov, it means that more people would come and the effect would be bigger, the turnout would be better for this event... If we take the politicians, of course, (we need) their experience...we need not forget that we have come here only in December and they have been encountering all of this for a few years. They have accumulated some knowledge, the actions they have conducted, something else. We need to learn on their mistakes in order not to let them happen again. So that we wouldn't do something wrong. Now I can absolutely freely approach Udaltsov, Nemtsov, etc., and ask, was it right to do that or no? There is no guarantee that I will act the way they tell me to but I can always ask. (Civil activist, May 2012)

Program of Action.

The absence of a program of action alarmed the majority of the polled activists and leaders of the protest movement, the words that "a program is needed" were reiterated in many interviews like mantra. The fact that this kind of document did not appear in the first couple of months is likely to be explained by the fact that mobilization of the public that unfolded has surprised many. Having started once, it unfolded with such speed that the participants only managed to adapt to the events, they lived, according to what they said, "from one rally to the next one." The majority

of the respondents, famous activists, confessed that they planned their actions for 1-2 months in advance at the most.³¹

The opposition, the civil society in general, lives in many respects for today, it is hard to predict what tomorrow would bring. We are preparing a rally, nobody talks about what happens after the 12th. We can conduct a rally on the 12th, we don't think what would happen after, because of both the objective and the subjective reasons. (Politician, member of Organization Committee, June 2012)

Every day we see a kind of shortcoming.... of coordination and aims. Therefore, it is obvious that all of these people, they don't know what for they... No, it is clear that now they are holding on until Navalny is let out, then they need to hold on until the next big rally takes place but it is not the aim, it is, so to speak, a deadline. That is, if somebody appears... There was a funny moment on the May 6th rally, the anarchists started chanting, "We have a clear plan," if only somebody has a clear plan, at least someone... I remember, for instance, in December everyone sighed, "Oh, what a pity that Navalny is in prison, he probably has a clear plan." Every time when he managed to send a message through someone who came out before him, everyone discussed that Navalny told us to go to that square, Navalny told us not to brawl, then we wouldn't. And then he was let go and, in general, he did not propose anything. (Politician, municipal deputy, May 2012)

On the other hand, it may seem that the program is known, since among the protesters and their leaders a consensus exists about the importance of establishing a democratic polity, of conducting a reform of justice system, of free and transparent elections, of the necessity of banning TV censorship, of limiting of the excessive presidential powers, and that means a constitutional reform. All of these provisions have been grasped by now by everyone, from the left-wing to the liberals, including ordinary protest participants.

(I: Can you name some general provisions that you have agreed on?) Certainly. It is changing the Constitution, limiting the presidential term; it is very likely, the parliamentary republic. This is indisputable, the mechanism of absolutely civilized elections. It is changing the system of justice, making it independent from the executive power. It is also expansion of the parliamentarianism and parliament's role, the role of political parties, endowing them with functions of control over the authorities. First of all, over the executive power. It is also transformation of the mass media into the public mass media, the most significant part, the most important federal mass media. These demands are the most significant and they can be summarized in the following way: it is conducting a substantive political reform of the political authorities of the country. (Politician, member of the Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

However, the majority of the respondents said that there is no program, although the program is needed but nobody reads party programs. One of the polled activists avoids this contradiction in the following way: not a senseless document is needed, but a "roadmap", which can show the way from the contemporaneous situation into the future. Without it, it is unlikely that they could count on the public support and the movement leaders understand that.

People are not interested in discussing that which would not be realized. People understand that we don't have a mechanism to realize our ideas in the framework of this system. Therefore, what

³¹ It is interesting that in the research of the opinions of 103 representatives of non-commercial organizations and civil initiatives, conducted in 2012, the majority of those polled also spoke about the impossibility of long-term planning of their activities but because of other factors (insufficiency of funds, living "from one project to the next one", hardship of "survival" under the pressure from the state ,etc.) In this the protest leaders and leaders of non-commercial sector, are, curiously enough, not different from the majority of the population.

do we discuss? Some kinds of sand castles. (Politician, member of Organization Committee of Rallies, June 2012)

A program is a good thing, but in the last two years I have attended many events where some sort of program was discussed, which then goes into oblivion and nobody carries it out. It seems to me, it needs to be written down, this program, in the course of doing something. That is, you are engaged in something, you have a few objects that you stand in defense of, or you stand against a certain law. Then, yes, you write this program, you look for like-minded people, but they start to gather around you when you are in the midst of action, specifically in the midst of a struggle. (Municipal MP, April 2012)

Actually, one of the main shortcomings of the reforms that are suggested by the politicians and experts is in the fact that they could only be carried out after those politicians' coming to power. There is no guarantee that with replacing Putin for one of the opposition leaders the system will change. In the conditions, when the authorities do not make any concessions and when there are no mechanisms of their replacement, then a step-by-step strategy is needed what needs to be done already today. The respondents explained that the program needs to paint an attractive image of the future, to show a place of the ordinary participant in the overall project, to explain what can and should be done to achieve the common goal, to help track the results of such actions: what was planned and what was achieved, who of all leaders is the most efficient. The availability of the program document is perceived as an additional control mechanism that activists can use to control the leaders, their words and actions.

Conclusion.

Mass rallies have clearly shown internal contradictions of the Russian political system, they could be judged earlier by the early explosions of public discontent. More and more, the interests of civil groups in the process of their establishment clash with the interests of the corrupt executive powers of various levels. The impossibility to defend one's interests in court, the impermeability of the authorities, their indifference or hostility towards civil initiative, leads to the emergence of the unsolvable conflicts, again and again it creates potentially dangerous explosive situations. The economic recession causes the feeling of insecurity in what the future holds, the uncertainty of life's perspectives heightens societal tension. In such a situation a series of pre-election scandals from the racketeering and hounding "Voice" association, it caused protest voting, attracted attention of the city strata to the election results and the work of the observers, they heightened the attention to the customary violations and falsifications, which, in the end turned into many thousands protest actions in Moscow and major Russian cities. At the same time, growing discontent with the actions of the authorities and the mobilization of the public have ensured the influx of the new people, earlier disengaged from politics, which on the first stages could hardly articulate the motives for their joining the protests and their demands to authorities. As a result, a group of activists has emerged who regularly take part in protest actions. However, as the emotions continue to find their way out, the wave of protest weakens, and for some time the rallies may cease.

The existing structures, ties and the former experience of the cooperation between opposition politicians, civil activists, journalists and cultural figures, turned out to be insufficient to order the protest that emerged from the grassroots and direct it to peaceful ends. The flow of new participants initially filled and transformed the already existing civil and political structures, and only later led to emergence of new organizations and initiatives. We may talk about a couple of directions of the unfolding protest movement: elections observation, participation of independent candidates in the municipal elections in Moscow, mass and individual protest actions with political demands, actions of civil disobedience, including "walks", "marches" and the "Occupy".

The influx of people into the protest movement, their participation in preparing the events and observation at the elections, fundraising for protest actions, their membership in the Organization Committee and other structures of the well-known non-political figures led to the fact that protest leaders found themselves controlled by the public. The necessity of accountability of the federal politicians and protest leaders to the civil structures is one of the unifying ideas of the movement on the whole, which, in this way, is distinctly anti-authoritarian. Thus, Aleksei Navalny curbed his nationalistic rhetoric, Sergei Udaltsov publicly renounced his former attitude to Stalin, the “Solidarity” politicians, the organizers of the first rally ceded part of their authority in organizing an event to the colleagues from the Organization Committee and civil activists from the Workshop of Protest Actions. As a result, these functions were taken on by the Opposition Coordination Council, its structure is formed as a result of the elections. The mechanisms of civil control, coordination of various views, representation of interests, which are hard to achieve on the federal level, were successfully tested within the protest movement. This is one of its most significant results.

The alternative to Putin’s regime, therefore, is now not some sort of “super leader” or a single opposition organization but a variegated, competitive, public political sphere, the guarantee of existence of which is the gradual establishment of “parallel economics”. More often the activists manage to raise funds for civil and political projects by attracting the money from businesses, various membership fees and voluntary donations of ordinary citizens. The scope of the phenomenon need not be exaggerated but a few years ago individual examples of such support seemed to be something unusual. Now it no longer surprises anyone.

The authorities react to the mass protest actions and they initially announced the mobilization of their supporters. In Moscow and in other cities many thousands of actions in support of Putin were held, mass “standings” and loud public utterances on political and public issues were distinct on the part of the church supporters. Once politically passive, the majority was being “pushed apart” in different directions, making them choose which side they were on. Sharp heightening of activity of various groups starting to establish and defend their often contradictory interests, the absence of the coordination mechanisms and conflict management, lead to the disruption of political order. It is likely that having sensed the danger, the authorities went on to customary ways to repress civil initiatives by tightening the laws, repressions on the spot and loud political hearings of the opponents, by this heightening the risks and the price of independent collective action, creating the mechanisms of choking the public sphere. The question of how far the authorities are ready to go in order to make protest actions really dangerous still remains open.

However, such actions on the part of the authorities in no way remove the systematic contradictions that led to the mass protests in December 2011. The conservation of the political regime gives a temporary respite but preserves inner instability of the system, in no way solves the problem of its inefficiency. Intentional destruction of civil structures that provided peaceful development of events this time makes it more likely that the next inevitable explosion of civil discontent might be less manageable and more violent.

The majority of the polled leaders and ordinary participants of the protest movement agree that no change from the top is possible in Russia. The confidence grows that change may only happen only under the pressure from the grassroots. It became simultaneously apparent that the movement lacks force to make the authorities agree to at least certain concessions. State machine is more powerful than protest movement. It possesses extremely vast financial and information resources, the apparatus of propaganda and violence; it can change the rules of the game however it pleases. And most importantly, Russian authorities are still dependent on the large societal strata: political elites and bureaucracy, significant part of the business sector, law-enforcement bodies, budget workers who voted for United Russia and Putin in the elections. The support of the population is in many ways conditional and forced, the system is not monolithic,

but it is strong as before. Feeling the limits of their own possibilities by the protesters questions a widespread theory that it is enough to have 3-5 % of population to have changes in the country. In order to get concessions on the part of the authorities, the support of the wide population strata is needed, including those who currently support Putin's regime and those who are not interested in politics.

Activists and ordinary protest participants agree that one of the serious problems with the movement is the absence of a clear program of actions. There is still no leader or party which has a "clear program" of action. It is not about the general principles of democracy, pluralism, party competition, court and mass media independence; everyone agrees upon that. A "roadmap" is needed, where concrete measurable goals, mutual obligations between leaders and ordinary participants of the movement, attractive and achievable image of the future would be mapped out.