



**CONFLICT STUDIES
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Potential Challenges to Public Order and Social Stability in the Russian Federation

A CSRC Review

August 2011

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Introduction

In the last week of July 2011, Russian commentators noted with alarm the extent of popular support in Russia for the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik¹. Breivik had referred specifically in his “manifesto” to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the Nashi movement as inspirations,² and the motivations expressed there struck a chord with a range of dissatisfied elements of Russian society, all of which share strong nationalist and anti-migrant sentiment. Shortly afterwards, Russia’s Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev called for additional measures against nationalist extremism, and research into its appeal for young people in Russia.³

Nationalism in the broad sense is a current concern for the Russian authorities, with an increasing incidence of outbreaks of serious inter-ethnic violence.⁴ But it is far from the only potential challenge to social stability or cause for mass disorder. Local economic and ecological issues, unemployment and industrial relations have also sparked organised protest in recent years after a period of relative quiescence in Russian society.

The years 2008-2011 have seen a greater inclination among the Russian public to organise for the purpose of social protest, and greater willingness to express direct and public criticism of the leadership including Prime Minister Putin. The response by the Russian authorities has been mixed, sending contradictory signals. Meanwhile, organised political parties remain weak vehicles for opposition, with shallow roots in Russian society - but the emergence of spontaneous citizens’ groups, facilitated by the internet, may be beginning to fill this gap.

This short study maps some emerging trends in the self-organisation of Russian civil opposition, and some key societal factors around which dissent may coalesce.

¹ BBC Monitoring (BBCM): “‘Hero Worship’ of Breivik on VKontakte ‘Proof of Danger of His Views to Russia’”, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 July 2011 p2. Nikolay Svanidze, “Hero Of Russia Murderer Breivik”, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 25 July 2011. Vladimir Vorsobin, “Otkuda v Rossii poklonniki Breivika?”, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25 July 2011, available at <http://www.kp.ru/daily/25723.5/2716145/>

² Andrew Kramer, “Russia Youth Group and Putin Distance Themselves From Killer’s Compliments”, *New York Times*, 25 July 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/26/world/europe/26russia.html>

³ BBCM: “Russian Interior Minister Calls For Beefing Up Extremism Prevention”, RIA-Novosti, 04 August 2011

⁴ Prominent examples range from the Kondopoga riots in Karelia in 2006 - <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071116.html> - to clashes in central Moscow and other cities in December 2010, but there is also a steady background noise of ethnically-motivated mass incidents, including arguably the Sagra confrontation in July 2011 – see “Ethnic Minority Leaders: Russian Politicians Seeking to Capitalize on Village Fight”, Interfax, 15 July 2011

Russia's Fragile Economy

In 2008-09, following the global financial collapse, the Russian leadership appeared concerned that economic difficulties could pose a challenge to socio-political stability. A modest economic recovery took place in 2010 which partially allayed these fears, but by that stage the leadership faced the challenge of increased social protests and of a nascent civil society. Furthermore the economic recovery has done nothing to resolve fundamental structural problems, which combined with Russia's inescapable demographic challenge could provide the grounds for serious social impact in the medium term.

In the period 2008-09, the Russian economy was the worst performing of the G20 and of the BRIC nations. According to estimates from the official statistics agency, real GDP contracted by 7.9 per cent in 2009.⁵ But a moderate recovery began in the fourth quarter of 2009 and continued through 2010. The World Bank Economic Report for Russia published in November 2010 predicted GDP growth of 4.2 per cent in 2010, followed by a 4.5 per cent growth in 2011, and 3.5 per cent in 2012.⁶

Finance Minister Aleksey Kudrin said at the Krasnoyarsk economic forum on 18 February 2011 that:

In the next few years we will have steady growth of around 4 per cent and above, although this is not enough for Russia; this is the rate of the average world economy... We need substantially higher growth rates - 6 or 7 per cent.

In December 2010, Anders Aslund gave a sobering assessment of Russia's limited economic prospects given current government policy. He wrote:

This year, growth will be about 4 per cent, less than half of India's and China's. Government finances have faltered accordingly. The Finance Ministry expects a budget deficit of 4.6 per cent of GDP this year. By current Western standards, that is not bad, but deficits are forecast for the foreseeable future, and public expenditures have changed structure. This year, pensions rose sharply by 30 or 40 per cent while infrastructure investment was cut, the opposite of investing in the future. Russia's fiscal policy has swung from solidly conservative in 2000–2008 to quite populist. The sad truth is that Russia's anticrisis policy has greatly reduced the efficiency of the economy. With its inadequate incentives, Russia's anticrisis policy was a policy of stagnation.⁷

In December 2010 the IMF also warned:

The current large fiscal deficit is incompatible with the government's goals of economic modernization, macroeconomic stability, and fiscal sustainability. At 13 per cent of GDP,

⁵ "Jobless Recovery?" The World Bank in Russia *Russian Economic Report*, No. 21, March 2010, pg.4. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRUSSIANFEDERATION/Resources/305499-1245838520910/6238985-1269435660465/RER21eng.pdf>

⁶ "Growth with Moderation and Uncertainty", The World Bank in Russia *Russian Economic Report*, No. 23, November 2010. Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRUSSIANFEDERATION/Resources/305499-1245838520910/RER23__Eng_final.pdf

⁷ Anders Aslund, "High Corruption and Low Growth Spoil 2010 for Russia", *Moscow Times* 22 December 2010, available at <http://www.iie.com/publications/opeds/oped.cfm?ResearchID=1731>. See also Sergei Aleksashenko at <http://www.carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=42182>

*the federal government nonoil deficit - which should be the anchor for fiscal policy in oil exporting countries, given the volatility of oil prices and nonrenewable nature of oil - is some 8½ per cent of GDP above the government's long-term target of 4.7 per cent of GDP, which remains appropriate. Most of the fiscal expansion in 2009-10 took the form of permanent measures, increasing the risk that the stimulus will not be reversed and that fiscal policy will become procyclical as the economy recovers. This would fuel inflation and real exchange-rate appreciation, undermining competitiveness. These risks are further exacerbated by ambitious infrastructure spending plans.*⁸

The results of these continuing macroeconomic challenges can be seen at a local level in Russia, but there are wide variations between different parts of the country. Although the headline overall unemployment rate is declining (to 6.7 per cent at the end of 2010 compared with 8.6 per cent at the end of 2009),⁹ unemployment is still higher in 2011 than it was in 2008 in more than 60 per cent of Russian regions – and in some regions, unemployment has doubled.¹⁰

The Putin years (2000-2008) had an annual average growth rate of about 7 per cent, and GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity increased from under \$7,000 in 1999 to almost \$16,000 in 2008 – around that of Ireland in 1987 or Portugal in 1989.¹¹ This strong growth resulted in increased living standards, and the leadership consequently enjoyed high popularity ratings. Overall the social mood in Russia at that time was optimistic.¹² There was little social protest in the Putin years, in contrast with the high level of social protest that occurred at the end of the Gorbachev period – for example the miners' strike of July 1989, and the massive demonstrations in Moscow in February 1990 calling for the removal of Article 6 from the Soviet constitution.¹³ Even the financial crisis of August 1998 did not result in significant social upheaval.

But given the expert commentary cited above, it seems unlikely that Russia will be able to enjoy such growth rates in the foreseeable future. Even the prospect of further increases in oil and gas prices resulting from instability in the Middle East may have a limited effect: Russia would benefit from the rise in oil prices just as after 2003, but at the cost of a powerful disincentive to carry out economic reform, which would mean stagnation would continue. At the same time, even if oil prices fall significantly, there is doubt that the Russian leadership would have sufficient political will to implement a meaningful economic modernisation.¹⁴ In common with other nations, therefore, Russia thus faces continuing economic challenges which are likely to have a direct impact on the perceived standard of living of its citizens.

⁸ IMF website at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2010/120810.htm>

⁹ "Meeting on economic issues 28 December 2010, 1600, Gorki, Moscow Region", Russian presidential website on 29 December 2010; Vladimir Putin Interfax 18 September 2010, and Rossiya 1 TV, 18 September 2010.

¹⁰ "Growth with Moderation and Uncertainty", The World Bank in Russia *Russian Economic Report*, No. 23, November 2010. Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRUSSIANFEDERATION/Resources/305499-1245838520910/RER23__Eng_final.pdf

¹¹ Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, "Why Moscow Says No", *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2011, <http://www.ihavenet.com/World-Russia-Why-Moscow-Says-No-Foreign-Affairs.html>

¹² M. K. Gorshkov, "Fobii, ugrozy, strakhi: sotsial'no-psikhologicheskoe sostoyanie rossiyskogo obshchestva", *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 7, July 2009, pp. 26-32.

¹³ This was the article that enshrined the CPSU's leading role in the political system.

¹⁴ Katri Pynnöniemi, "Russia's Modernization Reloaded: Political Constraints on Economic Development". FIIA (UPI) Briefing Paper No 67, November 2010. http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/151/russia_s_modernization_reloaded/

The Growth Of Social Protest

After the upheavals of the late Gorbachev and early Yeltsin years, a period of exhaustion and adjustment saw little active social protest. For most of the Putin period this lack of protest continued, due to rising prosperity and the re-assertion of the control of the state over society, groups and individuals.

It was for this reason that mass protests in December 2008 in the Russian Far East – with protesters against new car import regulations joined on the streets by senior retired officers in uniform coming out “to discuss issues which have come to a head”¹⁵ - seemed all the more dramatic, and prompted an alarmed response from the federal authorities in Moscow.¹⁶ The incident highlighted the role of a new type of social group, typified by the Fellowship of the Self-Motivated Citizens of Russia (*Tovarishchestvo Initsiativnykh Grazhdan Rossii*, or TIGR).¹⁷

The leadership has expressed concern subsequently about the possibility of economic difficulties resulting in further, and broader, social protest. First Deputy Interior Minister Mikhail Sukhodolskiy first warned in December 2008 that the economic situation could lead to unrest. In December 2009 he noted that the MVD had registered a slight increase in the number of people's protests in view of the difficult economic situation in the country. In April 2010 he commented that:

In the first quarter of this year [2010] the number of socio-political and other public events almost quadrupled in comparison with last year - from 1,269 to 4,900, without even counting election campaigning. Around 1.8 million people have taken part in them.

The Centre for Social and Labour Rights reported an increase in industrial action in 2009 compared with 2008. Industrial action declined in 2010 as a result of the improvement in the economic situation, the Centre noted:¹⁸

	No of industrial actions	No of work stoppages
2008	96	60
2009	272	106
2010	205	88

Street protests also increased in 2009-2010. In February 2009, protests against mass redundancies in the car manufacturing industry were held in Tolyatti, St Petersburg, Taganrog, and Moscow. In June 2009, workers of the town of Pikalevo in Leningrad Region blocked the federal motorway to Vologda, protesting against the closure of the town's three main enterprises. In a theatrical personal intervention, Putin visited the plant, severely criticised the local administration and cement plant owner Oleg Deripaska and instructed Deripaska to reverse his decision to shut down the plant.

In early 2010 a wave of protests took place in several Russian cities and those protesting were more willing than hitherto to criticise Putin, the federal authorities and the United Russia party. Banners in Vladivostok read: “Down with Putin!” “LiLiPut, get

¹⁵ See Youtube, “*Generalny protiv OMONa*”, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_WVYaSeV70

¹⁶ “Moscow riot police flown in to smash protests against car tariffs [sic] in Vladivostok”, *The Times*, 22 December 2008. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article5379438.ece>

¹⁷ Leon Aron, Russia's New Protestors, AEI, *Russian Outlook*, Spring 2010, pg.4.

¹⁸ <http://trudprava.ru/index.php?id=1926>

lost yourself!” “Putin, shoot yourself!” “Tariffs/duties - no, resignation - yes!” In St. Petersburg, protesters demanded, “Putin Must Go!” A slogan in Moscow read, “Russia without Putin!” In a regional poll, 39 per cent of Siberians thought Putin was “Siberia’s biggest enemy” (followed by Deripaska at 16 per cent and United Russia at 13 per cent). A “Putin Must Go” website appeared at <http://www.putinavotstavku.org/> on 10 March 2010, with a list of high-profile signatories to its petition.¹⁹

The Growth Of Self-Organisation

The protests of early 2010 were not led by an organised movement, but were more a case of spontaneous self-organisation of citizens. The willingness and capacity of citizens to self-organise and conduct protest actions has grown significantly in the last two years. The tightening up of legislation concerning the registration of NGOs has not prevented moves towards self-organisation. Citizens have created informal groups and networks which do not require registration, and these bring people together on the basis of a wide range of shared interests and concerns. In August 2011, Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev “noted that in the Urals Federal District alone there are over 2,000 public associations and organisations, including 264 ethnic associations and about 1,500 religious organisations”.²⁰

The internet is becoming a more important means by which such groups can organise. In the first half of 2010 internet usage in Russia increased by 25 per cent in comparison with the first half of 2009, and 75 per cent of Moscow households now have broadband.²¹ Citizens have used the internet and Twitter to organise protests, and this enables local protests to gain wider resonance. In Kaliningrad, a flash mob of two thousand assembled within “a few minutes.”²² In Moscow, organisers of multiple “Day of Wrath” protests use Twitter to communicate with their followers.²³ Meanwhile it is still persuasively argued the authorities tolerate free expression on the internet – not only the “Putin Must Go” website but others far less moderate - as a means of permitting people to “let off steam.”²⁴

Alongside the greater willingness to engage in social protest, support for the United Russia party declined in the regional elections which took place in March 2010. United Russia’s share of the popular vote went down from 61 per cent in the 2007 national elections to 49 per cent in March 2010. Compared to regional election results in March 2009, United Russia’s support declined in seven out of eight regions; and, in four regions, the party’s vote dipped below 50 per cent for the first time. However United Russia’s performance improved in regional elections in October 2010.²⁵

¹⁹ Growth of the petition since then has been modest; the site reported 7,500 signatures in the first five days, 78,230 by 25 February 2011, and at the last count (6 August 2011) it stood at 94,932.

²⁰ BBCM: “Russian Interior Minister Calls For Beefing Up Extremism Prevention”, RIA-Novosti, 04 August 2011

²¹ Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov (eds.), *Obshchestvo i grazhdane 2008-2010*, Moscow Carnegie Centre, no.3, pp.14-15.

²² Leon Aron, op cit., pg.5.

²³ Ibid. See also “Over 30 held at Moscow Day of Wrath protest”, RIA-Novosti, 12 October 2010. For a study of the Russian blogosphere see Karina Alexanyan and others in *Russian Analytical Digest* No 69, December 2009, available via <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/>

²⁴ Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov (eds.), *Obshchestvo i grazhdane 2008-2010*, Moscow Carnegie Centre, no.3, pp.14-15.

²⁵ Clifford Levy, “Putin’s Party Wins in Russia’s Local Elections”, *New York Times*, 10 October 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/11/world/europe/11siberia.html>

According to sociologist James C Davies, protests and socio-political upheaval often take place “when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal.”²⁶ If economic stagnation adversely affects living standards over the next five years, then the optimism felt for much of the first decade of the 21st century will dissipate, and a decline in living standards will erode the support base of the current regime. The apathy that characterised the Yeltsin years may also have diminished as memories of the turbulence of those years fades.

Although in relative terms the number of protesters is small, and protests are currently localised in nature, what is significant is the emergence of a greater capacity for self-organisation and self-expression in Russian society over the last two to three years. The slogans quoted above suggest that in some circles at least, the regime is considered less legitimate, and more easily challenged, than it was prior to the economic crisis of late 2008.

Deputy Interior Minister Sukhodolskiy’s comments cited above illustrate concern by the leadership of the potential for protest, and in July 2010, first deputy head of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov confirmed that “we have a heightened perception of [political] turbulence... We give a jump up each time anything begins to move.”²⁷ This is the background against which legislation was introduced in 2010 enhancing the powers of the FSB. Under this new law, the head of an FSB body or his deputy will be able to issue an official warning to a citizen “on the impermissibility of actions creating the conditions for committing crimes, the inquiry and preliminary investigation of which is assigned by the legislation of Russia to the sphere of responsibility of the FSB bodies, in the absence of grounds for criminal prosecution” – in other words, to issue an official warning before any actual crime has been committed.²⁸

Commenting on the growth of social protest in Russia, Maria Lipman of the Moscow Carnegie Centre wrote in December 2010 that:

*Most such outbursts have subsided, hardly generating any social organisation, but dissatisfaction is growing. To appease socioeconomic fears as the 2011-12 election cycle approaches, Moscow has increased social spending. But the dramatic slowdown of the Russian economy in the past two years means that this generosity cannot last much longer. Sooner or later the government will have to seriously cut social spending, and the public's sour mood may translate into action that can't be quashed by tricks. Then the temptation to resort to oppressive ways may be hard to resist.*²⁹

Commentator Nikolai Petrov wrote in similar vein in August 2010:

People are tired of promises from the authorities that everything will be ok and that the economy is beginning to grow. They are tired of the authorities in general. In this atmosphere, anything can spark a protest. It could be higher taxes. It could be ecological issues like in Khimki forest. It could be something else. The social and political mood is much more charged than it was earlier... The authorities are nervous and are doing what they can to calm people down and escape mass protests and confrontations... The

²⁶ James C. Davies, “Toward a Theory of Revolution”, American Sociological Review, vol. 27, no. 1 (February 1962), pp. 5-19.

²⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/08/AR2010080802394.html>

²⁸ Interfax, 16 July 2010.

²⁹ <http://www.carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=show&id=41366>

problem is that there is no other normal channel. like political parties, for the authorities can hear the people without protests and social upheaval.³⁰

The Political Opposition

Political parties have at best weak roots in Russian society. They are unlikely to become significant opposition vehicles. It is an open question as to whether United Russia could, or would be required to, survive the eventual passing of Vladimir Putin from the political scene.

The rise (albeit very limited) of civil society at the end of the last decade has been a significant development in view of the Putin leadership's attempts to enhance state control over social and political processes. Nevertheless, the impact on the official political scene has so far been modest. There is no shortage of registered liberal opposition organisations, but they are mainly marginal, largely not noticed by the national authorities, and do not have wide public support. It is still the case that the processes which take place in this narrow community, mainly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, have few links with the main tendencies in Russian public life.

There is a niche for political opposition in society which these groups have so far not filled. Given the growth of spontaneous self-organisation since late 2008, and the growing dissatisfaction with the quality of governance and administration, the emergence of groups with broader social support and a broader agenda in response to specific situations cannot be ruled out. The response of citizens in some regions to the fires of summer 2010, and the protests in Kaliningrad against former governor Georgiy Boos, are indicative of a mood and potential for action that did not exist during most of the first decade of this century.³¹ According to Tatyana Stanovaya of the Centre of Political Technology:

The set of political and socio-economic risks is now growing, because of the post-crisis phenomena, the unequivocal nature of the electoral consequences after the unprecedentedly serious fires on Russian territory, the disagreements between various interest groups, and the lessening of the dependence of the ruling regime on the will of one single 'national leader.' It is also not completely clear right now what the potential is of the new forms of protest that have appeared in the last two years: the mass actions of the union of motorists, the blue bucket brigades, etc.³²

Nationalist Movements

On 11 December 2010, rallies in St Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don and in Moscow's Manezh Square turned into violent ethnic clashes.³³ The riots are indicative of a potential for disorder resulting from nationalism and ethnic confrontation, which while provoking

³⁰ http://www.rferl.org/content/The_Kaliningrad_Syndrome/2137661.html The Khimki Forest refers to an ecologically-motivated protest against road construction: see "Police make arrests in Khimki forest protest", RIA-Novosti, 19 April 2011. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110419/163601111.html>

³¹ Nikolai Petrov, "Putin's Perestroika Experiment in Kaliningrad", *The Moscow Times*, 24 August 2010. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/putins-perestroika-experiment-in-kaliningrad/413497.html#ixzz1UGT8URO1>

³² http://www.rferl.org/content/The_Gathering_Storm/2166644.html

³³ Anna Arutyunyan, "Race Riot on Manezhnaya", *Moscow News*, 13 December 2010. <http://themoscownews.com/politics/20101213/188276816.html>

regular local incidents, has by and large not manifested itself as a significant mass force since 1991-2.

According to one argument, since 1991 the Russian leadership has succeeded in incorporating many elements of nationalist ideology into its own policies and thereby ensured that support for extreme nationalist movements has not posed a serious threat to the post-Soviet political system.³⁴ Putin was successful in promoting himself as a nationalist and in strengthening the state, so making any challenge by small more militant nationalist groups to be futile. At the same time, Putin (and other leaders) emphasise the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of the Russian state, and give no public encouragement to instigators of ethnic strife.

The riots in December 2010 took the leadership by surprise, and appeared to cause genuine concern (Medvedev spoke of a threat to the stability of the state).³⁵ At the same time the opportunity was not missed to use the events to attack liberal opponents of the Kremlin. The first deputy head of the president's administration, Vladislav Surkov, said in *Izvestiya* that there was a link between actions on the 31st [liberal opposition protests held on the last day of the month] and actions by nationalists on Manezh Square on 11 December.³⁶ In addition, the leader of the pro-Kremlin Young Russia youth movement, Maksim Mishchenko, accused the "non-systemic opposition" of being responsible for the clashes. He said that "everyone knows that this kind of opposition receives support from abroad and recently has been calling for 'Orange events'". Mishchenko's comments are an explicit criticism of both the West and liberal groups within Russia.

In a situation where citizens have developed a greater capacity for self-organisation and self-expression, as has happened over the last two to three years, then the potential for nationalist groups to do likewise should not be overlooked, particularly given increased discontent with the quality of governance and administration that has surfaced since late 2008. The mass support for Anders Breivik noted in the introduction to this paper is not the first instance of the current young generation of Russians showing considerable sympathy for extreme nationalist views.³⁷

Extreme nationalist groups are currently handicapped by two factors: first, the state is so far able to restrain them (in fact it is persistently argued that these movements enjoy close links with the security services), and second, they are split, and lack a single, credible, leader. But both of these factors could change with little warning. While extremist nationalism is currently in check, it is also argued that the Kremlin has also failed to articulate a nationalities policy that can satisfy both the Russian majority and the non-Russian minorities. Peter Rutland writes:

Putin brought stability and order to the Russian political system but made little progress in in trying to clear up the ambiguities in Russian ethnic policy. Rather he tried to restructure state institutions to limit any possibility for using ethnicity to challenge Moscow's political power. Putin preferred a 'statist nationalism' that served his interest in consolidating power at home and projecting it abroad, while keeping potential ethnic conflicts in check. In this he was fairly successful, more through guile rather than through

³⁴ A study on the Russian ultra-right by the SOVA human rights think tank can be found at <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2011/01/d20707/> For other reports on the ultra-right see <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/>

³⁵ Rossiya 24 news channel, 13 December 2010.

³⁶ Vladislav Surkov in *Izvestiya*, 16 December 2010.

³⁷ Marlene Laruelle, "In The Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia", Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.45-46.

*direct confrontation. But Putin largely failed to articulate a clear vision for the future of Russian national identity and the place of the non-Russian peoples within it.*³⁸

Concern about the potential for extremist nationalism can be seen in Medvedev's warning about Nazi tendencies which he expressed when he met senior members of the Duma and Federation Council on 17 January 2011.³⁹

Nationalist and anti-migrant sentiment in Russia would be exacerbated by any potential decline in employment, incomes and living standards in the medium term, and still more so by the perception that demographic trends will result in a substantial reduction of the proportion of the Russian Federation's population which is ethnically Russian. There may subsequently be a greater willingness by existing nationalist groups to engage in acts of social protest, or for new groups to form. Strong prejudice against non-Slavic immigrants from the former Soviet Union provides a unifying factor.⁴⁰ Aleksandr Belov of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration commented in February 2011 that various nationalist movements were planning to unite and produce a common political programme. A movement called the "Ethnopolitical Association – Russians" was formed in May 2011.⁴¹ There is fertile ground and ready support for any organised group that might offer an extreme nationalist agenda; in only its most visible manifestation, the Russian skinhead movement "has been estimated to have between 20 and 70 thousand members – depending on the definition of such membership", which makes it "the largest informal, openly neo-Nazi youth movement in the world".⁴²

Conclusions

"Civil society" in a Western sense has taken some modest steps forward in Russia since late 2008.

Groups and networks of citizens are more willing to self-organise, both for mutual assistance in a crisis (as during the rural fires in the summer of 2010) and to articulate grievances.

There is a greater awareness of shortcomings in state administration and willingness to criticise authority figures (including Putin). This can be effective: protests in Kaliningrad helped bring about the removal of the governor.

The internet (particularly tweeting and blogging) has provided a means of organising protest actions and self-help movements, and an alternative to mainstream mass

³⁸ Peter Rutland, "The Presence of Absence: Ethnicity Policy in Russia", in Julie Newton and William Tompson (eds.) "Institutions, Idea and Leadership in Russian Politics", Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.132.

³⁹ "Russia's Medvedev calls for crackdown on neo-Nazis", Reuters, 17 January 2011; "All Nazis are anti-national – Medvedev", RIA-Novosti, 17 January 2011

⁴⁰ See the opinion surveys cited in UNDP National Human Development Report Russian Federation 2008, Russia Facing Demographic Challenges, pp.102-104.

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/europethecis/russia/name,18666,en.html>

⁴¹ The movement's website can be found at <http://rusproekt.org/2011/05/08/obedinenie-russkih-v-rossii-sozdano/>

⁴² See Andreas Umland, "Russia: Nationalism's Revenge", *Foreign Policy Journal*, 17 December 2010.

<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/12/17/russia-nationalisms-revenge/> ; also

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/046a3e30-0ec9-11e0-9ec3-00144feabdc0,s01=1.html#axzz1G0UeR6sl>

media.⁴³ This also facilitates gathering support for protest activities outside the local area.

Most protest movements are largely non-political and non-national in scale, although use of the internet has the potential to change that.

Meanwhile, established political parties lack real support, and fail to link citizens with the political process. Opposition parties thus fail to provide effective opposition, and leave a niche to be filled by protest movements.

If a credible nationalist or anti-migrant movement emerges, it may find substantial popular support, especially if living standards decline, and particularly as demographic change and migration continue. It may not be possible for the authorities to channel this support into statist nationalism indefinitely in order to contain it.

The relative quiescence of society during the Putin presidency can no longer be relied on, and intense socio-political activism is more likely now than at any time in the recent past. Economic, national and social precursors for this activism are growing in strength, and public disorder or social unrest may result.

⁴³ Nevertheless, the Internet is not necessarily an irresistible force bringing about the irreversible liberalisation of political systems, according for example to Yevgeniy Morozov, who uses the example of his native Belarus to argue persuasively against internet utopianism. See <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/11/how-dictators-watch-us-on-the-web/> ; <http://www.evgenymorozov.com/> ; <http://www.economist.com/debate/overview/196&fsrc=nwl>

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