



# The Russian Opposition: A Survey of Groups, Individuals, Strategies and Prospects

The Russia Studies Centre at the Henry Jackson Society

By Julia Pettengill

Foreword by Chris Bryant MP

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## Foreword by Chris Bryant MP

Russian politics has a seemingly infinite capacity to disturb, distress and depress me. It's not just the individual human rights cases – Khodorkovsky, Magnitsky, Litvinenko – nor the manifest electoral irregularities that get me down. It's the sheer adamant determination with which the Russian state pursues its self-protection.

When I first visited Russia – the Soviet Union as it then was – in 1987, the apparatus of state surveillance and a control economy was evident everywhere. We were followed whenever we strayed from our Inturist-specified path. There were just two (state run) makes of car on the streets. Shops were empty (apart from Dom Knigi, the big book shop) and queues were ubiquitous.

Today all that has changed. The vast mall by Red Square, GUM, is now not only the favoured spot for wedding photos (rather than the tomb of the unknown warrior) but the home of Burberry, Ralph Lauren and Prada. Conspicuous consumption – preferably as conspicuous as possible – is the order of the day. There is variety, there are fewer queues.

Yet the apparatus of the state is still pervasive, and the democratic excitement of earlier days has been subsumed into a dull acceptance that “Putinocracy” is here for a good while longer. Independent television stations and radio networks have been closed down, the murders of critical journalists have gone unpunished, the depredations of a political barbarian like Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya are allowed to continue, torture is a standard part of the criminal justice system, prosecutions are pursued for entirely political reasons, and, whilst corruption is endemic, the wrath of Putin falls capriciously on just a few.

All this appears so obvious from outside Russia that it seems curious that the pressure for reform inside Russia remains relatively weak. Yes, the Russian winter with its mass demonstrations in several notable cities was impressive. Yes, there are notable exceptions to the rule. The likes of Alexey Navalny, the independent anti-corruption blogger, prove that it is possible to create a political space in Russia, despite the massive odds against you.

This inaugural report by the Henry Jackson Society's Centre for Russia Studies explores the central dynamics underpinning the contemporary Russian opposition, and helps to explain why the opposition is still unable to make major headway. Some of the reasons lie within the opposition itself. A lack of clear unified leadership, ideological differences, and associations with the former national leadership during the period of “Wild West” capitalism all play their part.

Yet despite the many obstacles to political freedom in contemporary Russia, and however gradual the development of a free political space, it is clear that one day Russia will awaken to a greater possibility.

**Chris Bryant MP**

## About the Author

Julia Pettengill is the co-chair of the Russia Studies Centre at the Henry Jackson Society. She is the co-author of *The Age of Impunity: Russia After Communism and Under Putin*, *Regional Actors and the Fatah Hamas Unity Deal*, and the author of *A Guilt Beyond Crime: The Future of Genocide Prevention in the Anglo-American Sphere*. Pettengill has contributed to publications including *Foreign Policy*, *The Weekly Standard*, *Standpoint*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *City A.M.*, and has appeared on BBC News and Al Jazeera.

## About the Russia Studies Centre

The Russia Studies Centre is a research and advocacy unit operating within the Henry Jackson Society. It is dedicated to analysing contemporary Russian political developments and promoting human rights and political liberty in the Russian Federation. The Centre is jointly headed by the Henry Jackson Society's Communications Director Michael Weiss and Research Fellow Julia Pettengill. *The Russian Opposition Movement* is the Centre's inaugural report.

## Acknowledgements

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- The protest movement which erupted in reaction to the widespread fraud and restricted political competition of Russia's December 2011 parliamentary elections represents the most popular challenge to state authority since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- The relative decline of the protest movement following the re-election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in March 2012 has raised the question of whether or not the post-election protest movement has strengthened Russia's hitherto marginal political opposition in the long-term.
- Russia's political opposition can be divided between the "systemic" opposition, which is permitted to operate by the state but does not challenge state authority and/or actively colludes with the ruling power structure, and the "non-systemic" opposition, which encompasses parties and groups that are unable to officially register as political parties and/or freely operate and compete in elections.
- Growing popular frustration and fatigue with corruption and the authoritarian ruling structure—particularly amongst the urban middle class—provided the momentum for the protests between December 2011 and March 2012.
- While polls demonstrate that Vladimir Putin remains the only viable leader in the minds of the public on a national level, they also indicate that this is borne not so much from satisfaction with Putin as a lack of political alternatives and the premium placed on stability.



- Prior to the beginning of the post-election protest movement, the Russian Opposition was unable to engage significant portions of the public, and the segment of the non-systemic opposition which organised the largest protests was the nationalist camp. While nationalist groups individually do not command large degrees of popular support, polls reflect a broad swath of nationalist sentiment in Russia, particularly in relation to immigration, which some oppositionists have suggested needs to be engaged.
- Liberal oppositionists have benefitted from the pro-democracy, broadly liberal character and support base of the recent protests, but face significant challenges in overcoming popular associations of liberals with the “Wild West” capitalism of the 1990s.
- Left-wing opposition parties have in the past been outflanked by the systemic left-wing opposition parties the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and A Just Russia. The protest movement has lent renewed vigour to the non-systemic left-wing activists, and inspired a growing level of cooperation between the systemic and non-systemic left-wing, with important protest leaders emerging from the ranks of A Just Russia. The socioeconomic disparities and the consequences of the economic downturn have the potential to bolster the appeal of left-wing oppositionists in future.
- Civil society groups—which encompass such diverse figures as anti-corruption blogger Alexey Navalny and environmental activist Evgenia Chirikova—have emerged as the crucial and unprecedented force. Their grassroots quality has lent legitimacy to the concept of a political opposition, previously perceived to be dominated by the liberals of the 1990s who turned against Vladimir Putin.
- The most significant opportunities for the opposition to gain influence are presented by the decline in Vladimir Putin’s popular appeal, which had lent the ruling structure its appearance of legitimacy; popular pressure for political liberalisation; the waning fortunes of United Russia, now popularly thought of as the “Party of Crooks and Thieves;” the looming, large-scale problems presented by the failure to invest in essential services and infrastructure; and the inefficiencies and disaffection created by systemic, state-sponsored corruption.

- The most significant challenges to the “non-systemic” opposition are the continued power monopoly of Vladimir Putin and the United Russia Party; lack of access to the mainstream media; limited resources; the possibility of further fragmentation and the difficulty in keeping the multifarious groups united; and parties of the non-systemic opposition working together towards a common goal.
- The growth of Russia’s non-systemic opposition could be achieved through an evolutionary process of exploiting the space created by the recent protest movement to push for genuine political reforms through a combination of continued mass protests, grassroots political engagement and the strengthening of political parties/alliances.
- The non-systemic opposition must also try to induce systemic oppositionists to abandon Putin, and must remain wary of the potential for extremist, anti-democratic elements within the nationalist and far-leftist opposition camps to come to the fore.
- There is virtually no public appetite for an “Orange Revolution”-scenario, a fact which most opposition leaders understand; their ability to build a pro-democracy alternative to the status quo will depend upon their ability to remain loosely united under a broad agenda of political liberalisation and anti-corruption: the two key weaknesses of the current government.

## INTRODUCTION

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Russia's power structure faces the most significant challenge since Vladimir Putin assumed office in 1999. The fraudulent Duma elections of 2011— which delivered the ruling United Russia Party a significantly reduced majority— sparked a wave of popular protests in Moscow and smaller protests in major cities such as St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. The first protests, held on 5 December, demanded redress for the electoral fraud, but subsequent demonstrations were marked by broader demands for political reform, and drew crowds of up to 100,000.<sup>1</sup> Ahead of the 4 March 2012 presidential elections, the protests assumed an increasingly explicit anti-Putin tone, as opposition activists forecast another fraudulent election and objected to the lack of genuine political competition in the presidential race.

Credible international<sup>2</sup> and domestic<sup>3</sup> observers have concluded that Putin's victory arose from a combination of fraud, the massive mobilisation of state resources, pro-Putin propaganda by the state-controlled media and the heavily restricted field, which prevented viable candidates from competing. This brought activists back to the streets for protests on 5 March and 10 March, both of which reportedly drew crowds of up to 15,000<sup>4</sup>, as well as smaller-scale protests—which some have interpreted as a sign that the protest movement will prove to be a short-lived phenomenon. Opposition activists have continued smaller protests across the country ahead of Putin's inauguration on 7 May—perhaps mostly notably in Astrakhan, where up to 10,000 activists, including opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov, Sergei Udaltsov and Alexey Navalny, gathered to support the reformist mayoral candidate Oleg Shein's protest against election fraud<sup>5</sup>—and plan to hold a large-scale rally on the day of Vladimir Putin's presidential inauguration, 7 May 2012.<sup>6</sup>

Russia's contemporary opposition movement has come together from a variety of political backgrounds under a broad banner of rejecting the

Kremlin's pseudo-democratic authoritarianism—a strategy which has seriously challenged the legitimacy of both the newly-elected President Putin and the entire ruling structure of the Russian Federation. Whether or not the movement is able to maintain its momentum and exert further pressure on the ruling regime, the protest movement has significantly diminished Putin's once-unquestioned authority and legitimacy, and highlighted the mounting frustrations of Russia's growing middle class in particular—a development which could eventually lead to his departure from Russian politics.

This protest movement has surprised many observers of Russian politics, and has brought the groups and individuals who have worked to oppose the Kremlin in various forms into the spotlight. This report provides a survey of the dynamics at work in Russia's contemporary national opposition movement, including original insights from Russian activists, politicians and scholars on the character and future prospects of the Russian opposition, and an assessment of the next steps forward for the opposition.

The report is divided into broad thematic sections. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of some of the political dynamics at play in Russia which have produced this movement, as well as the strategies employed by the opposition in the current protest movement. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 analyse (respectively) the liberal, left-wing and nationalist components of the contemporary opposition, including key groups and figures, and Chapter 5 explores the emergence of civil society groups as an important force in the contemporary opposition. Chapter 6 concludes with an exploration of the prospects of success for the contemporary opposition, with an emphasis on the opportunities and challenges facing the protest movement.

It should be noted that the term “opposition,” for the purposes of this report, denotes the “unofficial” or “non-systemic” opposition groups operating on a national level which are not permitted to fully participate in the political process in Russia, and are in some cases banned. This term should be distinguished from the “systemic” or “official” opposition groups, which are permitted to participate in political life by the state, and which have not generally represented a sincere form of political opposition to Putin and United Russia's monopoly on power. The increased cooperation between the official and unofficial opposition, and the possibility of further defections from the official opposition, is discussed further in Chapter 1. In some cases, the term opposition is used more loosely, to denote the protestors who have informally participated in the demonstrations that began in December 2011.

This analysis is by no means intended to be exhaustive, but to introduce the reader to the broad domestic dynamics underpinning the current movement and the key facets, factions and leaders of the unofficial opposition. It must also be emphasised that the protest movement under analysis is Moscow-centred and does not attempt to analyse the broad swath of public opinion in the Russian Federation; rather, it approaches the protest movement as a significant indicator of the influence and prospects for this politically active vanguard to exert pressure on the Russian government.

# CHAPTER 1

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## THE REVIVAL OF THE RUSSIAN OPPOSITION

### **Political competition in the Russian Federation: the systemic and non-systemic opposition**

Political competition in the Russian Federation is severely constrained by a combination of anti-democratic, anti-competitive legislation; the state monopoly on the media; and the use of unlawful tactics and state resources to secure United Russia's dominance. Legislative restrictions to political competition began with the 2001 Law on Political Parties,<sup>7</sup> which required a minimum of 50,000 members and branches in at least half of the country's 83 federal subjects in order to be considered for registration as a political party. Rules restricting the registration of political parties were relaxed in April 2012 in response to the post-election protests, reducing the number of members required for registration to 500, but it is likely that this measure was undertaken:

- A. As a token reform designed to give the appearance of liberalisation, whilst leaving room for the state to arbitrarily manipulate or interpret to suit its own ends; and
- B. As a means of sowing fragmentation amongst the opposition by encouraging competition between individual political parties and bringing them within the sphere—and temptations— of power whilst banning the ability to organise electoral blocs;
- C. An opportunity for the proliferation of even more pro-Kremlin, systemic opposition parties to confuse voters and detract from the influence of genuine opposition parties.

Additional laws restricting the ability of parties to form and to compete in elections include:

- A law prohibiting the practice of putting forward candidates or parties as part of a multi-party bloc;<sup>8</sup>
- The replacement of the direct election of regional governors with presidential appointments;
- Changes to extremism laws which broadened the language so that the state could ban groups on the basis of extremist language;
- Restrictions on the time and geographic distribution of signatures collected for membership, and;

A law increasing the electoral threshold required for parties to win proportional parliamentary seats from 5 to 7 percent, which has been somewhat liberalised under Dmitri Medvedev's presidency.<sup>9</sup>

These legislative measures were combined with unlawful, unofficial practices of electoral fraud, intimidation and the marshalling of state resources to secure the ruling United Russia party's monopoly on power in the Russian Federation. Powerful opponents of state policy such as the oligarchs Boris Berezovsky, media baron Vladimir Gusinsky and former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky found their companies expropriated and criminal charges levelled against them. The state controls the major television channels, which broadcast a regular supply of pro-government propaganda, and journalists critical of the government have been subjected to harassment and even violence, with the evidence in many cases pointing to Kremlin proxies. Putin and United Russia also invested considerable resources in building mass movement groups like the youth group Nashi to bolster the regime's visibility and perceived popularity, through a combination of populist community activism, intimidation and indoctrination reminiscent of the Komsomol or Hitler Youth.

The use of a mixture of authoritarian and pseudo-democratic methods to restrict political competition is symptomatic of a "hybrid regime," in which the ruling party— United Russia— relies upon a mixture of coercion and a version of popular legitimacy in order to survive. One of the most common traits of hybrid regimes, in their pursuit of the veneer of democratic legitimacy, is to permit nominally independent political parties to exist and compete in elections—the so-called "systemic opposition."

Russia's systemic opposition is not entirely owned and controlled by the Kremlin; indeed, the recent protest movement has galvanised some

covert and even open support from the parties, and increasing numbers of individual party members now straddle the line between the systemic and “non-systemic” opposition. Yet it is still important to distinguish the systemic opposition from Russia’s unofficial opposition, which has been the force driving the ongoing protest movement.

The systemic opposition consists of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), the Communist Party, the social-democratic Just Russia Party, the nationalist, Kremlin-loyalist Patriots of Russia party and the pro-business Right Cause Party. Although Yabloko is also a registered political party and thus distinct from the unofficial opposition, for the purposes of this report it is not considered systemic, as the party has existed since the early days of the Russian Federation and is relatively independent from the Kremlin’s orbit.

As a “catch-all” party which draws inspiration from various ideologies without committing to one particular programme, United Russia has been able to successfully marginalise the parties the state has permitted to exist by adopting elements of nationalist, pro-business, and even left-wing agendas, shifting the emphasis on each facet to suit their needs whilst restricting genuine political competition.<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Putin is the ultimate manifestation of this strategy: as the late political scientist Yuri Levada famously observed, he is “...a mirror in which everyone, communist or democrat, sees what he wants to see and expects.”<sup>11</sup>

When opposition parties have not gone along with Kremlin policy, the state has undermined those parties either by adopting similar programmes or confusing voters by directly undermining the opposition candidates.<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of systemic opposition is one of the reasons that Russia’s unofficial opposition has struggled to be viewed as legitimate actors by the Russian people, as the Kremlin has been so effective in both silencing stalwart oppositionists and suborning others.

## **RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SYSTEMIC AND NON-SYSTEMIC OPPOSITION**

The past six months have seen the rise of (mostly unofficial) cooperation between the systemic and non-systemic opposition, primarily through the ongoing protest movement. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this cooperation thus far has been the mobilisation of opposition protests in support of Oleg Shein, the former hardline communist-turned reformist



politician from the party A Just Russia who lost the mayoral election in Astrakhan amidst allegations of massive voter fraud. Shein has waged a hunger strike in protest against the authorities' refusal to annul the fraudulent election results since 16 March 2012, and personal sacrifice has made him a morally powerful figure in opposition politics. This has further intensified the role of dissident A Just Russia politicians such as Ilya Ponomarev in the protest movement, and induced the deputies of A Just Russia to walk out of Vladimir Putin's final address to the State Duma on 11 April.<sup>13</sup>

This development is important, as it indicates that the political elite may be sceptical about the survival prospects of the current ruling order. "Since December we have seen quiet cooperation between the systemic and non-systemic opposition, in monitoring polling stations and demanding fair elections," said liberal politician Vladimir Milov. "That's important, because it's a development which the Kremlin has always tried to prevent."<sup>14</sup> Even the LDPR, which hardly ever challenges the Kremlin, has participated in the protest movement (although not in cooperation with other groups)<sup>15</sup>, and the Communist Party has allied itself with the unofficial Left Front coalition.<sup>16</sup> "They're all joining the protests, because they realise now that they won't have any effect on society unless they take a genuinely oppositional posture," veteran dissident and former presidential candidate Vladimir Bukovsky commented. "It's funny to see them like that, because we know they are puppets, but even they can lose their puppeteers in this kind of situation. The same thing happened with the popular fronts Gorbachev created in 1989—they lose control of them when the population radicalises."<sup>17</sup>

It is unlikely that the systemic opposition will formalise their support for the protest movement en masse at any point in the near future, as their political power is maximised by their ability to play the Kremlin and the protestors off one another. "The systemic opposition can't be too critical or they face pressure to back off," said Milov. "In the current situation, both the systemic and non-systemic opposition have a common interest in bringing down the monopoly of power and introducing more competition, but systemic parties are not interested in bringing in new players."<sup>18</sup> Although the majority of the political elites are dissatisfied with Putin, it is clear that the absence of a coherent and reliable alternative, combined with their own varied and sometimes conflicting interests, complicates and obstructs the possibility of turning against Putin.

The presidential candidacy of Mikhail Prokhorov demonstrates the complexities of the current intersection between the systemic opposition and the non-

systemic opposition movement. Prokhorov had a very public falling-out with the Kremlin in 2011, when his criticisms of the government apparently resulted in his being forced out as the head of the Kremlin-created Right Cause party. Prokhorov subsequently launched his own bid for the presidency, in which he won third place, receiving 7.9 percent of the vote nationally, and significantly, 20.45 percent in the city of Moscow.<sup>19</sup> Analysts have assessed these results as indicating the electorate's desire for new participants in the political process.

Prokhorov has lent his support to the protests following the 2011 Duma elections and has spoken at protests including the 5 March demonstration,<sup>20</sup> and cooperated with the League of Voters movement in deploying thousands of electoral monitors to Russia's polling stations.<sup>21</sup> He has announced his intention to create a new, "non-political" party to unite various strands of Russian civil society, which former Finance Minister Alexey Kudrin has reportedly said he would be willing to work with through his new think tank, the Committee of Civil Initiatives.<sup>22</sup> Putin has said he intends to cooperate with the party once it forms,<sup>23</sup> and has suggested that there could be a place for Prokhorov in his cabinet,<sup>24</sup> an offer which Prokhorov has said he would not accept.<sup>25</sup>

Given his previous ties to the Kremlin, the nature of Prokhorov's intentions remain unclear. Some believe that Prokhorov's support for the protests represent a sincere turn against the status quo. According to Vladimir Bukovsky, "He supports the demands of the protestors, and a lot of what he wants to do coincides with the liberal agenda. I think he's past the point of becoming part of the systemic opposition."<sup>26</sup> As a member of the elite with national recognition, this could leave Prokhorov well-placed to gain influence with the government, perhaps as a Cabinet member, and press for reforms via his new party. On the other hand, Prokhorov may simply be positioning himself to gain political power within the existing system under the guise of representing opposition interests—an arrangement which could suit both him and the Kremlin very well.

## RUSSIA'S POST-ELECTION PROTEST MOVEMENT

*"It is unclear to me what is going on now with the middle class, but for example five years ago, or ten years ago, my work would have been impossible, because of cynicism in society... Maybe it's a new generation, or maybe people are just tired and they realise that it's just wrong and we cannot live like this."*—Alexey Navalny<sup>27</sup>

Alexey Navalny, the anti-corruption blogger who has emerged as one of the key leaders of the current opposition movement, made this prescient statement at an event hosted by the Henry Jackson Society on 22 September 2011. This event was held just two days before Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev announced they would be swapping places for the upcoming presidential elections; a development which many consider to have been a key factor in igniting the current protest movement. Navalny anticipated what all-too-many Kremlinologists failed to see: that slowly but surely, the Russian public was growing tired of the "electoral authoritarianism" which treated them with such contempt.<sup>28</sup>

The announcement of Putin's return to the presidency, and Dmitri Medvedev's sheepish admission that this swap had been planned all along, brought the feelings of frustration and humiliation Navalny described to the fore of Russia's—albeit constrained—public sphere. Putin's kitschy, staged public appearances increasingly became the subject of ridicule in online forums like Twitter, LiveJournal and Facebook, which the regime has not yet been able to bring under state control. A "booing revolution"<sup>29</sup> erupted at several public events featuring Putin or mentioning the ruling United Russia party, which is substantially less popular than Putin himself. Soviet-style jokes and satire made a comeback, in events such as the "Citizen Poet" performances funded by exiled Putin opponent Yevgeny Chichvarkin.<sup>30</sup> Even Russia's middle class—traditionally relied upon to trade political involvement for the promise of an ever-improving standard of living—showed signs of disaffection, as rampant corruption, nepotism and disregard for the rule of law had created a system which increasingly did not serve their interests. "Never in my life has there been such a huge number of people willing to participate in these protests," said civil society activist Oleg Kozlovsky. "There has been this awakening of society, which hasn't required much from the opposition groups."<sup>31</sup>

The Duma elections transformed this public disaffection into public opposition and protest. The flagrant electoral violations of the 4 December

parliamentary elections were hardly unexpected; yet the public mood created an environment in which they were no longer tolerated. Protests erupted at which opposition activists including left-wing firebrand Sergei Udaltsov and anti-corruption blogger Alexey Navalny were arrested, and public attention focused on opposition activists for the first time in years. Prior to this, protests by opposition groups were far more limited: the largest protests in recent years have been the annual nationalist-organised “Russian March.” The last instance of large-scale, broad-based protests erupted in 2007 prior to the Duma Election, when activists participating in the so-called “Dissenters March” were beaten, harassed and detained by the security services.<sup>32</sup> The protests of 2011 and 2012 have, in contrast, been treated with far more restraint by the authorities.

While the Russian Opposition shares many of the complaints which motivated the “Arab Spring” uprisings—namely, corruption and a growing sense of frustration and humiliation at the lack of free political competition—Russians have not demonstrated their readiness to “occupy” public spaces in the way that the protestors in Tahrir Square did, nor risk violence. Indeed, “revolution” is a word with very negative connotations in Russia, and the opposition has, for the most part, been careful to couch their demands in language which will appeal to the public’s desire for peaceful reform and a return to the genuine adherence to the Russian Constitution. As the veteran liberal politician Boris Nemtsov has observed: “People ask me ‘will there be a Russian Spring?’ But I don’t think so. I’m for a peaceful scenario and not to repeat Russia’s terrible experiences of the past.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, whereas the “colour revolutions” of the former Soviet states involved powerful opposition parties, Russia’s opposition was marginalised, disunited and weak prior to the December elections. The post-December protests have empowered and united the non-systemic opposition, but have not given them a national power base in the way that Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko’s coalition possessed in 2004.<sup>34</sup>

The spontaneous outpouring of public support for reform and anger at the Kremlin provided oppositionists with a window of opportunity to cooperate in organising a programme of demands and street protests. The multifarious groups and individuals—including mainstream figures like Mikhail Prokhorov, as well as unofficial oppositionists like Alexey Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov<sup>35</sup>—were able to cooperate in organising the “For Fair Elections” street protests and to unite under the following broad demands:

1. Freedom for political prisoners;
2. Reform of the law on elections and the restrictions on the registration of political parties;
3. The abolition of censorship and restoration of a free media;
4. Term limits for the presidency and the reform of executive power;
5. The annulment of the Duma election results;
6. The resignation of Vladimir Churov, head of the election commission, and an official investigation of vote fraud;
7. New democratic and open elections.<sup>36</sup>

In March, the protestors added demands to halt the prosecution of businessman Alexey Kozlov and the holding of new presidential elections to their demands.<sup>37</sup>

This is a significant achievement given the history of bitter conflict even within the different ideological camps. Disagreements over strategy following the presidential elections—particularly in relation to the protests being planned ahead of Putin’s inauguration on 7 May— certainly threaten the prospects for cooperation in the long-term.<sup>38</sup> Yet the phenomenon of cooperation between liberals, nationalists, leftists and the formerly-apolitical is a truly novel and significant development for Russia’s burgeoning civil society, and could be truly transformative—if it proves sustainable. In a fascinating series of studies on Russia’s new breed of civil society activists, Leon Aron argues that this phenomenon shares broad similarities with the civil rights movement in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s, as both movements brought together a diverse array of individuals and groups in a peaceful protest movement in pursuit of a broad goal: “Equality before the law and the end of disenfranchisement.”<sup>39</sup> The journalist and former liberal politician Vladimir Kara-Murza echoed this characterisation: “These protestors come from across the spectrum of society. In many ways this is more significant because it’s not really motivated by economic demands, but by a demand for civic dignity and political rights.”<sup>40</sup>

While the first protests on 5 December focused on demanding free and fair elections, the demonstrations which followed featured increasingly anti-Putin rhetoric, and have been characterised by a general rejection of the corruption and dishonesty which permeates the political system. The protests have been primarily confined to urban centres, and attract predominately educated, middle class participants. The protests themselves have lacked a specific ideological thrust, and have focused on broad, anti-Putin slogans or slogans calls for political reform and liberalisation. However,

polls taken by the Levada Centre at the 24 December protests on Sakharov Avenue indicated reflected a mostly “liberal” or “democrat” orientation by the attendees, and 38 percent reported voting for the liberal Yabloko party in the Duma elections.<sup>41</sup> Nationally, the protests have attracted strong-to-moderate support from roughly 64 percent of respondents in a Levada Centre poll—with 10 percent expressing strong support, 26 percent expressing support and 28 percent expressing some support; although it should be noted that a roughly equivalent volume of respondents reported supporting pro-Putin rallies.<sup>42</sup>

“The people in the square are not interested in party politics; most of them don’t have any leaders they want to nominate,” said Maria Lipman, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment’s Moscow Centre.<sup>43</sup> “This is more morally-driven than politically driven, which is why it has engaged such a broad segment of society, as well as cultural figures.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, many of the protests were characterised by a carnivalesque-atmosphere, with live performances and a notably friendly atmosphere.<sup>45</sup> Denis Volkov, a sociologist and Public Relations Director at the Levada Centre, commented that his polls indicate rising engagement with politics by the young professionals contemptuously referred to as “office plankton,” who were generally assumed to be apolitical.<sup>46</sup>

Thus far, the opposition’s decentralised approach has proven far more successful than the factionalism which has characterised the opposition in recent years. Veteran dissident activist Vladimir Bukovsky reflected that this was an approach he has long advocated, and which proved effective in previous opposition movements such as Poland’s Solidarity trade union movement. “Rigid organisational structures are not effective, because they are vulnerable to interruption by the state,” he said. In contrast to the liberal opposition leader Vladimir Milov (also interviewed for this report), Bukovsky advocated focusing attention first on the street protests and popular engagement. “Now is the time to focus on the mass movement—political parties can come later,” he said. “Nemtsov and these people always want to create a party, but it’s too early.”<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, an emphasis on the need to widen political competition by pushing for reforms to the country’s electoral law has—at least in the short term—borne fruit. Although some oppositionists, such as Yabloko chair Sergei Mitrokhin, have dismissed the change of party registration rules as merely a cosmetic measure that is meaningless when parties cannot form electoral blocs, others—notably the left-wing leader Sergei Udaltsov—

acknowledge it as a necessary and positive achievement, demonstrating the increasing influence of the protest movement and its ability to cooperate towards a common goal.<sup>48</sup>

Low-level political engagement has proved to be an important element of the opposition movement's strategy, in the form of protest voting and election monitoring. The protests helped to convince many opposition leaders of the importance of encouraging participation in the elections, which some leaders such as Garry Kasparov had rejected in the past. Vladimir Milov reasoned: "I'm not saying the population sees the elections as free and fair, but it's the only game in town, and people participate. The reason why the opposition has been empowered is because people voted against United Russia in the Duma elections and showed how unpopular they are."<sup>49</sup>

Participation and voter monitoring in the elections proved a more effective way to focus public attention on the injustices of the system than boycotts, which had the effect in the past of further marginalising the opposition. Voter monitoring has been a key element in mobilising protests against the fixed elections in Astrakhan, and in attracting national attention to the reformist mayoral candidate in Yaroslavl, Yevgeny Urlashov, who won a stunning 70 percent of the votes in the mayoral election in April by running on an anti-corruption platform.<sup>50</sup>

The decision to engineer constitutional changes to return Putin to the presidency (removing presidential term limits and lengthening the terms from four to six years) may ultimately be viewed as the Putin-Medvedev ruling "tandem's" key tactical mistake. According to the leading left-wing oppositionist and MP Ilya Ponomarev, if Putin had not attempted to return to the presidency and allowed Medvedev to remain in place, the protests never would have happened.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, while most oppositionists view Medvedev as a puppet of Putin, many Russians viewed him as a potential reformer and a genuine moderniser, and recent Levada Centre polls indicate he retains a high degree of public approval.<sup>52</sup> Vladimir Kara-Murza concurred, contending that this swap was the "...point at which acquiescence gave way to indignation," common to many authoritarian regimes, echoing experts including Leon Aron and Anders Aslund.<sup>53</sup> Oleg Kozlovsky elaborated on this theme: "Maybe he will survive two more years, or even six, but it will be at the price of a totally destroyed reputation and popularity. There will certainly be no more stability like we're used to."<sup>54</sup>

# CHAPTER 2

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## THE LIBERAL OPPOSITION: GROUPS, INDIVIDUALS AND STRATEGY

### OVERVIEW

Russia's liberals enjoyed a period of ascendancy in first decade of the post-Soviet era, before their fortunes quickly declined under the Putin administration. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic liberals Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Gaidar put the economic policies in place to bring about Russia's transition to a free market economy, and liberal allies of Boris Yeltsin came to dominate the state Duma, in various permutations and alliances, including Russia's Choice, which became Democratic Choice under Yegor Gaidar's leadership and transformed into the Union of Right Forces in 2001.

Some of the figures who emerged in this movement during the 1990s such as Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Ryzhkov and former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov remain key liberal leaders today. This is responsible for their high profile and influence within the liberal-democratic opposition, but is also a political liability, inasmuch as they are associated in the popular imagination with the chaotic economy and privatisation schemes of the 1990s or even, in Kasyanov's case, with support for Putin himself.

The liberals experienced a series of struggles for dominance between the economic liberals, who coalesced around the Union of Right Forces from 1999-2004, and the social-democratic Yabloko party. Whereas Yabloko's share of the vote in parliamentary elections declined year on year, the Union of Right Forces was able to win a significant share of the vote in the 1999, with apparent Kremlin backing. However, the formation of the United Russia Party



in 2000 and the consolidation of Vladimir Putin's power base brought about a sharp decline in influence for the liberals, and by the 2003 Duma elections both parties fell below the threshold for proportional representation to the Duma.<sup>55</sup> Infighting within the liberal camp, coupled with popular distrust of liberals, worked to the benefit of United Russia, which cannily exploited the impression of liberals as out of touch elites consumed by petty infighting.<sup>56</sup> Liberal groups were further marginalised by a combination of United Russia's popularity, public animosity towards liberals, and pseudo-legal manoeuvres introduced to constrain political competition.

Throughout the past decade, the liberal groups have embarked upon a series of short-lived attempts to form electoral coalitions. Prior to the 2003 Duma elections, even the tightening of Kremlin control was not sufficient to create a lasting coalition between Yabloko and the other principal liberal party of the time, Union of Right Forces; a mooted reconciliation fell apart prior to the election, partly due to the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a shared financial supporter of both parties and one of the facilitators of the relationship.<sup>57</sup>

Even in 2007, when both Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces failed to capture the 5 percent threshold necessary to send representatives to the Duma, the parties still could not come to a unity arrangement. Vladimir Putin was able to successfully exploit these divisions to further marginalise the liberal opposition when he came to power—for example, by allying with the Union of Right Forces in 1999 and lending the appearance of support for Yabloko in 2003, after Putin's public falling-out with Boris Nemtsov.<sup>58</sup>

The Union of Right Forces was riven by disagreement between those who wished to confront Putin over his democratic deficiencies, led by Nemtsov, and those who sought accommodation, such as Anatoly Chubais. Following electoral defeat and increasing marginalisation, the Federal Council of the Union of Right Forces voted to dissolve the party in 2008 and merge with the parties Civilian Power and Democratic Party of Russia to form the Kremlin-orchestrated Right Cause. Many liberal activists opposed this, as Right Cause was co-opted as a member of the systemic opposition and does not stray far from the Kremlin line, and switched their support to other, unofficial liberal parties or groups such as PARNAS or the Solidarity movement.

Ideologically, the liberal parties are united by their support for liberal democracy, civil rights and their embrace of moving closer to the European fold through cooperation with and/or membership of European and Western-

oriented organisations like the European Council, the European Union and NATO. The contemporary opposition consists of interlinking liberal groups, often in and out of coalition with one another, in varying degrees of alliance and often engaged in internecine splits. Since 2003—which marked the end of liberal influence in government and an increase in authoritarianism by Putin—liberal groups and leaders have been subjected to consistent harassment by the Kremlin, and all genuine liberal opposition parties—with the exception of Yabloko—have been denied the right to register as political parties. In the 2007 Duma elections liberal oppositionists were routinely harassed by the Kremlin-backed youth group Nashi and the police, and were subjected to intimidation, detentions and physical violence.<sup>59</sup>

With the exception of Yabloko, which is the only genuinely liberal opposition group with registered political party status, none of the groups can participate in elections; the terms “party” “organisation” “movement” and “coalition” are often used interchangeably, and there is significant crossover in activities between the varying types of groups. Support for liberals tends to be confined to urban, educated classes; with the economically liberal wing usually more attractive to entrepreneurs, and Yabloko favoured by professionals in education.

Although the ongoing protest movement is widely interpreted as non-ideological in nature, but the activist organisers and general tenor of the protests can be broadly described as liberal-democratic, and the liberals have emerged as key organisers of the protest movement. “Solidarity, PARNAS, Yabloko have all been very active—with Yabloko particularly important in uncovering the fraud in the Duma elections,” observed Vladimir Kara-Murza. “The democrats are definitely the leaders of this movement; but what makes the movement important and likely to last is its broad base, and the fact that these are issues that can unite economic liberals with leftists like Ponomarev: to get the regime out and bring back democracy.”<sup>60</sup>

The groups remain unlikely to forge a formal alliance, but have worked together relatively well in the context of the ongoing protest movement. The creation of PARNAS and the Solidarity movement were important achievements for the liberal camp, bringing together previously fractious groups, including social liberals like Ilya Yashin and old-fashioned economic liberals like Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov.<sup>61</sup> However, given the history of personality-driven in-fighting within the liberal camp, this unity could prove ephemeral—particularly once liberal parties are allowed to register under the broadened legislation.

Despite years of mutual criticism, Milov now advocates a strategy of reaching out to Yabloko, whom he argues have won a significant amount of popular credit through Yavlinsky's conduct in response to Yavlinsky's candidate registration being rejected: "We [Democratic Choice] have been working together a lot recently, and have developed an alliance, and hopefully will build an electoral bloc. Of course there are disagreements but what is important is that Yabloko have been very active and helpful in this campaign; they aggressively monitored the election results and probably saved many votes on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December."<sup>62</sup>

Oleg Kozlovsky disagreed with Milov's interpretation, arguing that Yabloko's main advantage—its status as a registered party—was not of much use during the presidential elections, in which it was not permitted to participate: "Yabloko is a less influential organisation compared to what it was eight years ago, and they have generated a lot of fallout from their twenty years of existence, so it's a questionable strategy—especially as what we are aiming to secure is the expansion of registration, not to follow Yabloko's lead."<sup>63</sup> Kozlovsky stressed a common concern by many non-Yabloko liberals that Yabloko party leaders Gregory Yavlinsky and Sergei Mitrokhin are unwilling to compromise with other parties, and thus undesirable partners for anything more than short term, broad-based cooperation. "Their leadership is very egocentric and believes that they are the only legitimate democrats; their answer to any question is 'Just join Yabloko,'" Kozlovsky said.<sup>64</sup> Maria Lipman commented that "Yavlinsky has a very strong ego, and his response to coalition invitations in the past was to join under his banner, which was not acceptable to many potential allies-- not least because they had their own egos."<sup>65</sup>

As with the protest movement generally, no one leader has emerged capable of uniting the liberals under one banner, and some speculate that the current crop of opposition leaders are too personality-driven to be able to cooperate in a more formal merger of parties. According to the liberal activist Andrey Sidelnikov, now living under political asylum in London, "There's no clear leader who is capable of assembling everyone under one tent. So the right strategy is to fight for these broad principles: free elections, the right to register political parties and the release of political prisoners."<sup>66</sup> Oleg Kozlovsky agreed that the liberals have functioned best in a loose coalition of opposition groups of varying ideological stripes, as it has avoided the type of personal conflicts between leaders which has long characterised the liberal camp.<sup>67</sup>

The liberal camp has wisely embraced broad, non-specific demands for democratic and political reform to facilitate cooperation with other groups. Yet a significant problem remains in translating support for the protest movement to popular support for a liberal political agenda, primarily because figures like Kasyanov (who has been accused of corruption and is known as “Misha 2 percent” by his detractors) are tainted by their association with the Yeltsin and early Putin years. Maria Lipman observed that “The figures with political experience in the 1990s are unacceptable to the public at large. The people will never accept them as leaders. Only figures like Navalny, fresh, young faces, may have a chance.”<sup>68</sup>

When asked how the liberal camp intends to confront this challenge, Vladimir Milov said: “The fact that liberals are viewed as people who wish to restore the 1990s is wrong. That’s why it’s important to renew our image and revive our rhetoric, and promote the idea that we are the new liberals who have learned the lessons of the 1990s. The Russian population is supportive of the idea of democracy, even though they supported Putin. We need to speak to ordinary people with the right language.”<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Kara-Murza argued that over 50 percent of the protestors are between 18 and 39 years old—an age bracket that doesn’t remember the 1990s in the same way that the people who have supported Putin do. “So Putin’s strategy of threatening a return to the ‘bad old days’ of the 1990s worked for a while, but not anymore.”<sup>70</sup>

## KEY GROUPS

**The Russian United Democratic Party, aka Yabloko** is a national political party initially formed as an electoral bloc by its founding leaders, Gregory Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev and Vladimir Lukin in the 1993 Duma elections, with the name formed from the initials of the founders’ surnames, which also translates as “apple” in Russian.<sup>71</sup> The bloc was joined by large segments of the Republican Party of Russia, Social Democratic Party of Russia and Christian Democratic Union, and became a formal political party in 2001, when it became officially registered as the Russian United Democratic Party. Yabloko is among the oldest of the post-Soviet Russian political parties.<sup>72</sup>

Yabloko endorsed a social democratic programme when the bloc became a formalised political party in 2001, and published its “Democratic Manifesto.” The manifesto specifically commits the party to a “liberal-social ideology, with the goal of establishing a stable democratic order, implying the rule of law, a social market economy, civic society, modern security system

and post-industrial strategy mirroring European development,”<sup>73</sup> including commitments to universal health care and education. The party is also unique within the liberal camp for its strong longstanding support for robust environmental regulations, and it has also distinguished itself from other liberal groups in its stark intolerance for working with nationalist groups of any persuasion. Yabloko’s 2011 election platform has re-emphasised the themes of its 2001 manifesto, with additional promises to un-do the authoritarian restrictions introduced between 2001 and the present day, and an emphasis on anti-corruption efforts and an anti-monopoly drive. Yavlinsky’s presidential platform reiterated these key promises, with the addition of holding new parliamentary elections to redress the fraudulent results of the December 2011 Duma elections and investigation into the electoral commissions.<sup>74</sup> Yabloko has encouraged voters to participate in elections and vote against United Russia—a position which is consistent with its longstanding approach of “...leverag[ing] all legal options for opposing Putin’s authoritarian regime.”<sup>75</sup>

Yabloko’s share in the 1995 elections was reduced to 7 percent, and their electoral decline continued thereafter, due to a mixture of factors including lack of general popularity, increasingly unfair electoral practices and the return of authoritarian restrictions after Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. The party was unable to capture the 5 percent needed to win seats in the Duma in the 2003 parliamentary elections and in the 2007 Duma elections, and did not put forward a candidate in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections.<sup>76</sup> Gregory Yavlinsky stepped down as leader of the party in 2008 and was replaced by Sergei Mitrokhin.

The rapid growth of the protest movement in Russia’s urban centres in response to the fraudulent 4 December 2011 Duma elections has once again raised Yabloko’s profile, and Yavlinsky’s decision to run for president—and the Central Electoral Commission’s subsequent disqualification of his candidacy—has boosted the party’s somewhat tired credentials. According to a Levada Centre poll, 37.6 percent of the participants of the rally at the Sakharov Prospect voted for Yabloko.<sup>77</sup>

The Central Electoral Commission registered Yabloko’s list of candidates for the 2011 parliamentary elections; however, Yabloko was not allowed to run in the elections in six of the regions where its ticket was certified.<sup>78</sup> Yabloko has also alleged that rampant election fraud and intimidation prevented their candidates in the Duma election from seeing a fair result. Gregory Yavlinsky’s participation in the 2012 presidential elections was denied by

the Central Election Commission, on the grounds that over 25 percent of signatures in support of his candidacy were claimed to be invalid. (Yavlinsky is not the party chairman, but is generally acknowledged to be the de facto party leader). Yabloko chairman Sergei Mitrokhin was arrested and held in police custody for two days following his participation in the first anti-fraud protests in Triumfalnaya Square on 5 December 2011, alongside other Yabloko activists.<sup>79</sup> One of the sources of discord between Yabloko and other liberal opposition groups has been its “ambiguous” relationship with the Kremlin, inasmuch as the group receives limited state funding, and prior to the current protest movement shied away from attacking either Putin or Medvedev outright.<sup>80</sup>

**The United Civil Front** is a pro-democracy movement founded by chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 2005. It is key component of another Kasparov venture, the Other Russia Coalition. The group’s programme, adopted in 2006, is based on four pillars: fair democratic elections, reform of the federal system, reform of executive power and the civil service, and the promotion of civil rights.<sup>81</sup> The United Civil Front and Kasparov promoted an outright boycott of the Duma elections in 2011, with Kasparov arguing that participation perpetuates the lie of the elections’ legitimacy.

Kasparov urged his supporters to remove their names from official voter rolls and participate in a new “online parliament” with the aim of developing an independent political discourse outside of official structures. Opponents of the boycott have argued that this tactic is too passive, and that it will be impossible to distinguish between prominent organisers and participants in the marches For Fair Elections.<sup>82</sup> It is also part of “the Civic Committee,” a coalition for organising rallies for fair elections which features The Other Russia coalition, PARNAS and several nationalist organizations.<sup>83</sup>

**The Other Russia Coalition** is a non-partisan pro-democracy and anti-Putin coalition, spearheaded by United Civil Front leader Garry Kasparov, and which includes the controversial, borderline-fascist leader Eduard Limonov, as well as liberals such as Vladimir Ryzhkov.<sup>84</sup> The coalition attempted to register candidates (despite its lack of status as a political party) in the 2007 Duma elections, and tried to nominate Garry Kasparov for the 2008 presidency, but was rejected in both occasions.<sup>85</sup> The coalition was instrumental in organising the “Dissenters March” street protests surrounding the 2007 Duma elections, when several of its leaders were imprisoned. The coalition’s model of broad-based cooperation in organising protests against the

Putin regime has emerged as the defining strategy of the current protest movement.

**The Russian People's Democratic Union** is led by former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, who was elected chairman in 2006. It is affiliated with PARNAS and the Other Russia Coalition. Although Mikhail Kasyanov remains individually influential, the party itself is among the less powerful groups in the liberal opposition, and is mainly important for its work in PARNAS. Kasyanov was selected as the party's candidate for the 2008 presidential elections, in which he was not permitted to compete.<sup>86</sup> In February 2010, Mikhail Kasyanov announced that the PDU were going into coalition with the Yabloko party. However, there was much ambiguity as the leadership of Yabloko denied an agreement had been reached, and only admitting negotiations were continuing.<sup>87</sup>

**The Republican Party of Russia** is led by Vladimir Ryzhkov, and is a leader of PARNAS. Despite credible claims that the party had a membership exceeding the minimum of 50,000, the party was denied the right to officially register in 2006, in an exercise Ryzhkov claimed was a "purge of genuine oppositional parties" prior to the 2007 Duma and 2008 presidential elections.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, attempts to register Ryzhkov as the candidate of other liberal groups were apparently quashed due to significant pressure on those parties by the authorities. It has boasted renewed significance after the European Court of Human Rights held in 2011 that its dissolution in 2006 by the state was unlawful, and most recently the party co-chair announced that the party would be registered with the Justice Department in the near future.<sup>89</sup> The recent law liberalising party registration rules has made it likely that the Republican Party will be among the first parties permitted to register.

The programme and policies of the Republican Party include 5 main areas of "change for the better:"

1. "The struggle for the democratisation of Russia, the fight against corruption and bureaucratic arbitrariness;
2. Investing in...quality and accessibility to all modern education, health, development, science, sports, leisure and domestic culture;
3. Fundamental reform of the army, police, security services;
4. The fight against the extinction of Russia.
5. The empowerment of regions, cities and districts, villages and towns."<sup>90</sup>

**Solidarity** is a liberal-democratic movement founded in 2008 by the liberals

disenchanted by the now-defunct Union of Right Forces' decision to dissolve and form the Kremlin-backed Right Cause party. The movement also attracted disaffected members of Yabloko who sought to support a protest-oriented movement.<sup>91</sup> Solidarity includes members of a variety of liberal groups and coalitions, including the Other Russia, Yabloko, and former members of the Union of Right Forces, and seeks to bring together the divergent strands of Russia's opposition in united activism against the Kremlin and in support of democratic reform.<sup>92</sup>

Solidarity has favoured a strategy of loose-coordination around broad-based principles, and relies heavily on employing street protests as a method of pressure on the Kremlin. This is reportedly the reason why Vladimir Milov left the movement to start his own political party, as his strategy is more party-centric.<sup>93</sup> The group has been a significant organising force in the protest movement following the Duma elections of 2011 and in the lead-up to the presidential elections of March 2012, working with other opposition groups to organise the mass protests in Moscow on 5 December, 10 December, 24 December and 4 February, 5 March and 10 March, as well as smaller protests in the interim. Solidarity operates quite loosely, with members active across the country largely pursuing their own activism agenda under the broad rubric of the Solidarity movement.<sup>94</sup>

**The People's Freedom Party (aka PARNAS)** is an unregistered political party headed by Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Ryzhkov and founded in 2010.<sup>95</sup> Its founding organisations were the Russian People's Democratic Union, Republican Party of Russia, Solidarity and Democratic Choice, although Democratic Choice leader Vladimir Milov withdrew from PARNAS in 2011. Despite reportedly garnering a sufficient number of signatures to officially register as a political party, PARNAS was denied the right to register and field candidates in elections. According to Oleg Kozlovsky, "The reason there was a strong conflict between PARNAS and Democratic Choice was largely a personality issue that compelled Milov to leave PARNAS. Solidarity is probably the best known of the members, but Kasyanov's Democratic Union has been largely forgotten since Kasyanov's failure to run in the 2008 elections; but since Kasyanov is well-known, this is a benefit."<sup>96</sup>

Kozlovsky points out that if the pending court decision granting Ryzhkov's Republican Party the right to register goes through, this would greatly enhance the power of PARNAS. However, he contends that at present the Republican Party does not dominate PARNAS, which is mostly comprised of activists from Solidarity or the Democratic Union.<sup>97</sup> The recent law liberalising



party registration rules has made it likely that PARNAS will be among the first parties permitted to register. Following the Presidential elections, Medvedev instructed the Ministry of Justice to provide information about the grounds in which the People's Freedom Party was not registered.<sup>98</sup> Mikhail Kasyanov has stated that PARNAS is ready to create a democratic coalition with Yabloko and whatever party Mikhail Prokhorov creates, which he believes would be capable of becoming a significant political support.

## KEY PEOPLE

**Grigory Yavlinsky** is one of the founders of Yabloko. He served as party leader until 2008 but remains the de-facto party leader, working alongside party chair Sergei Mitrokhin.<sup>99</sup> Yavlinsky is an economist who briefly served in government in 1991 and helped to draft the "500-day plan" to transition the Soviet Union into a market economy. Yavlinsky's influence was decisive in leading Yabloko away from the economic liberalism espoused in the 1990s towards a more social democratic persuasion. Yavlinsky stepped down as chairman of the party in 2008, and returned to politics in September 2011.

In December 2011, Yavlinsky was nominated as Yabloko's presidential candidate for the March 2012 elections, but was subsequently denied registration as a candidate on the spurious claim that he had not collected a sufficient number of valid signatures.<sup>100</sup> Yavlinsky is now reportedly considering running for mayor of St Petersburg—a move which could be interpreted as further evidence of the opposition's strategy of turning to regional and local elections in the absence of a national power base.<sup>101</sup>

**Sergei Mitrokhin** is the Chairman of Yabloko. Mitrokhin trained as a sociologist and became politically active during the perestroika period and participated in the founding of the Yabloko electoral bloc in 1993.<sup>102</sup> Mitrokhin served as a Yabloko representative to the State Duma from 1994-2003, and as a deputy to the Moscow City Duma from 2005-2009. Mitrokhin was a key figure in orienting the formalised Yabloko party towards a more social democratic stance in the Democratic Manifesto of 2001. Mitrokhin served as Deputy Chair of Yabloko party from 2001 until 2008, when he was elected to take Gregory Yavlinsky's place as party leader. He remains an active organiser and participant in the protest movement and has spoken at several of the rallies.<sup>103</sup>

**Boris Nemtsov** is a co-founder of Solidarity, and co-chairman of the PARNAS.

He is the former Deputy Prime Minister under Boris Yeltsin and former head of the Union of Right Forces. In 1990, Nemtsov was elected to Parliament as a candidate of the anti-communist “Democratic Russia” movement. Between 1991 and 1997, he served as Governor of Nizhny Novgorod region, earning the reputation of a successful free market reformer. In 2004, he participated in Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution,” and became an advisor to President Viktor Yushchenko from 2005-2006. He is the co-author of a series of prominent “White Paper”-style reports indicting Putin’s leadership and corruption. Nemtsov was among the opposition leaders arrested after the 5 December protest and sentenced to 15 day imprisonment.<sup>104</sup> He is known as an economic liberal in the classic sense, and his charismatic and energetic style has enabled him to retain prominence despite the Kremlin’s hostility to his politics.

**Vladimir Ryzhkov** was a politician in the pro-Yeltsin Russia’s Choice party in the 1990s and became the Deputy President of the State Duma in 1997, and ran as an independant in 1999, briefly joined the pro-Kremlin Unity Party but was dismissed from government once Putin came to power. Ryzhkov managed to remain in power when other liberals were being pushed out of the Duma, and has retained a strong profile as a political independent. Ryzhkov took over as head of the Republican Party of Russia in 2005, and has overseen efforts to secure the registration of the party, which has been denied by the central electoral commission, and which also subsequently denied his right to run as an independent candidate. Ryzhkov has been a leading figure in the recent protests. He is a leader of PARNAS and has been affiliated with the Other Russia coalition. In February 2012, Ryzhkov met, alongside other opposition leaders, with President Medvedev as representatives of the Movement for Fair Elections.<sup>105</sup>

**Mikhail Kasyanov** was a high-level politician in the Yeltsin government, serving as Deputy Finance Minister. He served as Prime Minister in Vladimir Putin’s government until he was dismissed by Putin in 2004, amidst the fallout between the two men over the Yukos affair and other issues increasingly dividing the liberals from the siloviki—the strongmen Putin loyalists in government. Since his dismissal, Kasyanov remained a prominent figure in the liberal status quo, although tainted in the public eye by his association with Yeltsin, Putin and accusations of corruption. He became the leader of the People’s Democratic Union party in 2006. He attempted to run for president in 2008 but was denied the right to do so by the Central Election Commission. Kasyanov is one of the co-leaders of PARNAS and has been a

key leader in the recent protests.

**Garry Kasparov** is the former chess champion and founder of the pro-democracy movement United Civil Front and the opposition coalition The Other Russia. He attempted to run for President as the (unregistered) Other Russia coalition's candidate in 2008, but was denied the right to register as a candidate. The coalition was boycotted by Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces for its inclusion of nationalist and leftist parties. Kasparov's United Civil Front declined to join PARNAS over a difference in strategy, arguing that PARNAS' aim to register as a political party and participate in elections would undermine the democracy movement as it gives credence to a process that is fundamentally illegitimate. Vladimir Milov and Kasparov are known to have significant differences in opinion over this strategy, and Milov has criticised Kasparov and others who emphasise the importance of street protests over political participation.

**Vladimir Milov** was a protégé of Boris Nemtsov, and served in government as an energy adviser and Deputy Energy Minister from 2001-2002. He is currently the head of the Democratic Choice party and president of the Institute of Energy Policy. Milov had been a member of the Solidarity movement and a co-chair of PARNAS; he resigned from Solidarity after the group expelled a colleague for racist comments and resigned from PARNAS over differences in strategy. Milov has been criticised for his willingness to engage with nationalists, as when he appeared at the "Stop Feeding the Caucasus" protest in 2011.<sup>106</sup>

Milov has long advocated a strategy of using party politics against the Kremlin, and despite his history of opposition to Yabloko,<sup>107</sup> told the author in an original interview that he supports the liberals allying behind Yabloko, as it is the only registered political party. "The problem with Kasparov and others," Milov told the author, "is that they prefer to speak about generic things like freedom of speech, but when it comes to the practical issues they have very little to say. We need to be able to offer statesmanship and professionalism to the voters."<sup>108</sup> In the past, Milov has criticised the Other Russia coalition for its strategy of fomenting color-revolution-style change through street protests.

**Ilya Yashin** is a prominent blogger, a leader of Solidarity, the leader of the Moscow branch of PARNAS, and also participates in the Strategy-31 campaign for freedom of assembly. Yashin was one of the opposition leaders sentenced to 15 days imprisonment following the 5 December 2011

protests, and has been arrested for his activism several times in the past.<sup>109</sup> He has been a key activist in the post-election protest movement. Yashin was previously a leader of the Yabloko youth movement, but was expelled due to his involvement in Solidarity. Yashin claimed that Solidarity and Yabloko were natural partners rather than competitors, but the party council voted 15 to 7 to expel him.<sup>110</sup> At 28, Yashin is one of the youngest leaders of the opposition movement, and runs a popular blog in the activist community, which he used to expose a “honey trap scheme” by the authorities using a prostitute designed to record prominent oppositionists in embarrassing circumstances.<sup>111</sup> In the 2011 Duma election, Yashin was one of the initiators of the so-called “Nah-Nah strategy” of protest via spoilt ballots.<sup>112</sup>

## **THE OUTLIER: MIKHAIL KHODORKOVSKY**

Mikhail Khodorkovsky is an important figure in the Russian opposition, but as a political prisoner he has been prevented from occupying a formal role in the opposition, and his oligarch status has limited his popular appeal. As CEO of the now-defunct oil company, Yukos, Khodorkovsky was one of the wealthiest and most powerful figures in Russia, and in the years preceding his arrest in 2003, he had greatly expanded his political activities and outspoken opposition to Vladimir Putin.

Khodorkovsky funded civil society programmes and opposition parties including Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces and select Communist Duma representatives, and widely considered to have been imprisoned due to his unwillingness to abide by the Kremlin’s instructions for oligarchs to refrain from becoming involved in politics. He was convicted on charges of fraud and has been imprisoned through trials inconsistent with international standards of fairness, and he is considered to be a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

Since his imprisonment, Khodorkovsky has released a considerable volume of political tracts, including a scathing 2004 treatise accusing Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces of failing to act in the public interest and discrediting liberalism as a result.<sup>113</sup> He has made rousing political speeches at his trials, indicting Russia’s power structure for rolling back political liberty. Imprisonment has re-cast Khodorkovsky the oligarch as a Soviet-style dissident, which has increased his public appeal and political potency. In a recent profile of Khodorkovsky for Vanity Fair, Masha Gessen argued that “If released, he may be capable of mobilizing a true mass movement.”<sup>114</sup>

According to Andrey Sidelnikov, “Khodorkovsky may be the only person capable of uniting the liberals—so if he is released, everyone else vying for a top leadership position may end up being disappointed.”<sup>115</sup> Khodorkovsky declined to comment on the protest movement until February 2012, when he responded to a written correspondence with *Novaya Gazeta* and released a statement calling for peaceful political change and analysing the prospects of a democratic transition, and has published several articles since that time. After the presidential election, outgoing President Medvedev ordered a review of Khodorkovsky’s case as part of a roster of “olive branch” measures aimed at placating protestors,<sup>116</sup> but in April announced that he would not pardon Khodorkovsky unless he received a petition for pardon from Khodorkovsky himself.<sup>117</sup>

# CHAPTER 3

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## THE LEFT-WING OPPOSITION: GROUPS, INDIVIDUALS, STRATEGY

### OVERVIEW

Left-wing opposition groups have joined in the current protests in favour of democratic reforms and calling for Vladimir Putin to leave politics. The left-wing groups have been notable for their cooperation with the left-wing systemic opposition parties, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and A Just Russia.

“The majority of those who have come out to protest in Bolotnaya Square are more on the liberal end of the spectrum,” observed Denis Volkov of the Levada Centre. “But at the same time, that doesn’t mean the left-wing won’t benefit from the protests—much of the population is still very poor, and are inclined to be more pro-left-wing if given the chance. This is an inclination that could be exploited by left-wing parties as well as the more socially-democratic wing of the liberals. Some politicians in A Just Russia have tried to take advantage of that, but they haven’t been very effective so far.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the Communist Party won a significant minority of the vote in the December parliamentary elections, capturing 19 percent of the vote in the Duma elections and 17 percent of the vote in the Presidential elections.<sup>119</sup>

Liberal activists have responded positively to the left’s participation, which they feel is constructive and based on genuine pro-democratic principles: “Under Yeltsin, the only opposition to the government was an unreconstructed Stalinist [Zyuganov], whereas in Eastern Europe a diverse array of left-wing parties emerged following the collapse of communism,” Vladimir Kara-Murza pointed out. “Today, we are seeing the emergence

of a democratic left-wing movement, and people like Sergei Udaltsov will likely win a significant amount of representation in the future.”<sup>120</sup> Others, such as Oleg Kozlovsky, feel that the leftists and the nationalists have been marginalised by the current spate of protests: “These groups used to think of themselves as the active part of the protest movement, but they have been marginalised by this movement, which is much more liberal than they would like to see,” said Kozlovsky. “However, the left-wing is better represented and involved than the nationalists, and A Just Russia is quite well-represented. So in general, the liberals and the left-wing believe they are the political core of this movement.”<sup>121</sup>

Some have speculated that part of the reason the liberals have successfully taken control of the tenor of the protests may be because of divisions within the nationalist and left-wing camps—both of which command a high degree of public sympathy. “There are many divisions amongst the left-wing and the nationalists—in fact, the liberals are the most united of all the segments of the opposition movement,” claimed Vladimir Milov.<sup>122</sup>

One of the challenges the left-wing opposition has faced is the tendency to be outflanked by the systemic opposition left-wing parties, the CPRF and A Just Russia, which can detract from the appeal of non-systemic groups by offering voters an officially recognised alternative. This was very much the Kremlin’s intention in backing the formation of A Just Russia and in entering into cooperative arrangements with both of the left-wing parties in the state Duma. Left-wing parties also face broader problems in their association with the Soviet era, which Ilya Ponomarev acknowledged “...makes a lot of our terminology problematic, even though I would not consider the communists left-wing—they were conservative, nationalist and imperialist.” However, Ponomarev also stresses that the “shock of 1991” is fading and today’s young adults, who cannot remember the Soviet Union, are increasingly attracted to left-wing ideology.<sup>123</sup>

United Russia operates as an intentionally non-ideological party, a tactic which has undercut both the right and left-wing in Russia. The failure of the left-wing groups to appeal to the electorate—despite the left-leaning nature of the public’s sympathy—has also been attributed to problems with the left-wing leaders, who do not present themselves as a viable candidates—with Zyuganov viewed as an historical anachronism more concerned with his customised BMW than the working class<sup>124</sup>; Mironov as a creature of the Kremlin; and the Left Front as too radical.<sup>125</sup>

The alliance between the non-systemic Left Front coalition and the CPRF has emerged as perhaps the most significant development in the left-wing opposition movement since the beginning of the protests in December. Yet some observers, such as Marxist intellectual and former Soviet dissident Boris Kagarlitsky, are sceptical of such moves, claiming that the movement has yet to devise a responsible and sustainable strategy to provide a viable left-wing alternative to the status quo. In a recent article, Kagarlitsky alludes specifically to the alliance between the Left Front and the CPRF, offering this withering criticism: “As officials experience a disastrous loss of reputation, they suddenly become interested in dialogue with informal political groups, the existence of which they barely acknowledged until recently. The result is that both sides are rushing into each other’s arms. The only problem is that there is no consensus among the radicals who have come to their senses concerning which of the corrupt members of the political elite to adopt as a patron.”<sup>126</sup>

Ilya Ponomarev expressed a view that seems to be widespread, but has yet to translate into a straightforward plan of action, that leftists “...need to create a unified left-wing party, through a merger of the CPRF, A Just Russia and the Left Front,” Ponomarev stated. However, he warned that he considered this to be “...unlikely to come together in the near future because the Kremlin is purposely fuelling divisions among the left.”<sup>127</sup>

Key politicians within A Just Russia—namely Ponomarev and the father and son Gennady and Dmitry Gudkov—have emerged as important figures in the opposition as a whole, and for the left-wing in particular, and may be well placed to either move their party in a reformed direction or build a reformist, forward-looking left-wing coalition capable of either attracting the support of the CPRF or promoting much-needed change within its ranks. According to recent reports, Gennady Gudkov and Ponomarev are actively seeking an alliance with other forces on the left flank, and three weeks ago they announced plans to create a Social-Democratic Union, a new discussion platform aimed at bringing together Russia’s left-wing, along with Sergei Udaltsov’s Left Front movement.<sup>128</sup> However, as with other segments of the opposition, the unification of the left into a broad-based, electable political party or bloc of parties does not appear to be imminent, and will perhaps be further delayed by the competition generated by the registration of left-wing parties under the revised party registration law.



## KEY GROUPS

**The Left Front Coalition** is a coalition of left-wing groups committed to building socialism in Russia, including the United Russian Labour Front and the Vanguard of Red Youth, and is led by Sergei Udaltsov. Although the group officially advocates the direct transfer of power to the working classes, it has recently turned to party politics for the sake of expediency: in January, the organisation signed an agreement with the CPRF to cooperate to ensure that the demands made by the “For Fair Elections” campaign are met, and for coordination during the presidential elections, pledging the Left Front’s support for Zyuganov’s candidacy.<sup>129</sup> However, the likelihood that this will translate into a significant boost for the CPRF has been viewed with suspicion.<sup>130</sup>

In a recent resolution of the Council of the Left Front, the organisation pledges to deliver a programme of “...real democracy at all levels,’ and argues that this programme can be ensured only through a complete break with capitalism as a global system, and deep socialist transformation of society.”<sup>131</sup> To deliver these results, the Left Front proposes to take the following steps:

1. “Implementation of rapid political mobilisation and the creation of a united, democratic anti-capitalist organisation of the Left...that can inspire the society to carry out their ideas and profound social transformation. Left Front sees itself as a key element in the process of such an association...
2. “Strong support of popular demands made at mass meetings, from December 2011 (the abolition of the outcome of the elections illegal, comprehensive reform of the electoral and political laws, the resignation of the illegitimate leadership of the country). We must work together with these trade unions and social movements to promote inclusion in the protest movement of the masses, and the enrichment of the radicalisation of its agenda at the expense of social needs...
3. “Using the presidential campaign started 2012 with a view to building mass protests (demonstrations, marches, the peaceful campaign of civil disobedience, political strikes) for the realisation of people’s demands.”<sup>132</sup>

**The United Russian Labour Front** was founded in 2010 and is led by Sergei Udaltsov, and includes members of the Russia’s left front and other left-wing groups, parties and trade unions. The organisation is part of the Left Front

coalition. In April 2011, the Justice Ministry refused to register the party for the fifth time, on the grounds that the party's emblem – a clenched fist – symbolises extremism.<sup>133</sup>

**The National Bolshevik Party** was founded in 1992 by the writer Eduard Limonov, who continues to lead the group. It is banned by the Russian state on the grounds of extremism. The group's doctrine combined Marxism and xenophobic neo-fascism, advocating a union between the left and right-wing to form a common revolutionary front.<sup>134</sup> In the 1990s, it was a leading nationalist party, occupying the left-wing of the ultra-nationalist movement. The Kremlin has waged a sustained legal attack on the NBP using anti-extremist legislation since the late 1990s, when it was stripped of its political registration, and has been subjected to further harassment due to its pre-eminence as both a nationalist and leftist group, and Eduard Limonov's refusal to engage in any rapprochement with the Kremlin and his severe criticism of Putin.<sup>135</sup>

In 2005, Limonov apparently made a strategic decision to publicly embrace "general social democratic principles, free elections, free choice and social responsibility."<sup>136</sup> The organisation moved away from nationalism towards a more leftist focus, and significantly did not explicitly involve itself in the anti-immigration activities which characterised most other nationalist groups.<sup>137</sup> The NBP joined the pro-democracy Other Russia coalition led by Garry Kasparov in 2005. The NBP has also cooperated with Kasparov in the activities of his United Civic Front organisation and the so-called "alternative parliament," the National Assembly. The rehabilitated NBP has contributed to the revival of street protests, using tactics like flash mobbing and street theatre.<sup>138</sup> The NBP organised protests in 2006 designed to foment a "colour revolution" in Russia, and have been active in left-wing protests such as the anti-G8 summit demonstrations, as well as the post-election protests.

**The Other Russia Party** (a separate entity from the Other Russia coalition) is affiliated with the National Bolshevik Party and was founded in 2010 by National Bolshevik Party leader Eduard Limonov, with the purpose of registering the party to participate in the 2011 Duma elections and in the 2012 Presidential Elections.<sup>139</sup> The party is unregistered and was denied registration in January 2011,<sup>140</sup> on the putative grounds that its charter contradicts federal law. This decision was upheld in August 2011 on appeal.<sup>141</sup>

The party's platform includes the following stated goals:

- Democratisation;

- Nationalisation of the energy sector;
- Restoring the real independence of judiciary; and
- The cancellation of the obligatory army draft.<sup>142</sup>

## KEY PEOPLE

**Gennady Gudkov** is a Deputy of the State Duma, the Deputy chairman of the State Duma Security Committee, and Deputy Head of A Just Russia.<sup>143</sup> Gudkov served as a KGB Officer from 1982 – 1992 and was once a member of the “United Russia” party. He joined A Just Russia in 2007 after it was formed under Kremlin guidance in 2006. Before the 2011 parliamentary elections, Gudkov made a speech to the Duma warning of vote rigging and accusing United Russia of unfair campaign tactics.<sup>144</sup> He also asked Russia’s election commission to investigate an advert which suggested couples vote together, as he felt it violated the constitution, remarking that “United Russia has forgotten that voting in Russia is meant to be secret.”<sup>145</sup> Since the election, he has been outspoken on his support for the protests, in common with his son the A Just Russia MP Dmitry Gudkov.<sup>146</sup>

In March 2012, Gudkov submitted to the presidential administration a list of 39 inmates whom he described as “political prisoners.” He was quoted saying that by law there are no political prisoners because Russia “doesn’t have charges for anti-Soviet propaganda or anti-Putin propaganda...But the political nature of many criminal prosecutions is perfectly obvious.”<sup>147</sup> This list has already had some success in inducing Dmitri Medvedev to pardon thirteen prisoners, including the Strategy-31 activist Sergei Mokhnatkin, in April 2012. In February 2012 rumours circulated that Gudkov was preparing to resign from A Just Russia; however, he has denied these rumours via the party’s official website.<sup>148</sup> These rumours coincided with rumours of a rift in the party after Gudkov attended a protest rally in Moscow on February 4th, and criticised his party leader, Sergei Mironov, for declining to attend.<sup>149</sup>

Gudkov has also been at the centre of controversy after he was secretly filmed with Vladimir Ryzhkov discussing plans for the upcoming protest rally. This video was then posted on the internet in what was described a bid by the Kremlin to discredit them.<sup>150</sup> He has stated during the protests and upcoming presidential elections that he sees his function in A Just Russia as a champion for the “...triumph of principles of social democracy and an expansion of the party’s social base.” He also stated that he is working for A Just Russia to become a united social-democratic party of Russia

incorporating a wider segment of left-wing forces.<sup>151</sup>

**Ilya Ponomarev** is a left-wing politician in the A Just Russia party, and is also a prominent leader of the ongoing protest movement in Russia and an anti-corruption activist, and currently Member of Parliament for Novosibirsk for the A Just Russia party.<sup>152</sup> Ponomarev is a former member of the Communist party, and was elected into the State Duma in 2007 on the A Just Russia ticket.

He is the Chairman of the Russian parliament's Innovation and Venture Capital sub-committee and is chief of International Business Development for the Skolkovo Technology Centre. He has recently launched a new anti-corruption initiative called STOPVOR, dedicated to finding international solutions to Russia's corruption problems. When interviewed for this report, Ponomarev said: "I will try to unify the left-wing parties,"<sup>153</sup> and given his activism in the non-systemic opposition movement, as well as his strong influence within the Duma, he may be among the best-placed leaders to achieve this.<sup>154</sup>

**Sergei Udaltsov** is the leader of the Russian United Labour Front, the Vanguard of the Red Youth, a communist youth movement, and unofficial leader of the Left Front coalition. In the past, he has taken a soft stance on Stalin and is considered as occupying the far-left, though this reputation has been somewhat moderated by his involvement in the post-election protests. Udaltsov is notorious for his frequent stints in prison, often because of his participation in unsanctioned protests and in organising left-wing protests known as "Days of Rage." Most recently, this included a three month stint in prison in 2011, and another 25-day stay when he was arrested for protesting against the fraudulent 2011 Duma elections. His importance to the most recent protests was magnified by his imprisonment, and became a rallying cry bridging ideological differences across the protest movement. At the 24 December mass protest, a speech by Udaltsov was recorded and broadcast on large screens.<sup>155</sup>

According to Oleg Kozlovsky, "Udaltsov is well-known and well-respected by most of the liberals and the nationalists."<sup>156</sup> Given his youth, his success in organising left-wing protestors and his recent pre-election pact with the CPRF, some have speculated that he could make a suitable candidate to take over the leadership of the CPRF and modernise the party.<sup>157</sup> Udaltsov has repeatedly tied Russia's protests to the "Occupy" movements of the West, and focused his rhetoric on both the need for democratic political reform and radical economic reforms to address income inequalities.<sup>158</sup> He has advocated increased cooperation and coordination amongst the

wider opposition movement, arguing that “coordination structures should be gradually created in Moscow and other cities.”<sup>159</sup> He is a proponent of the view that the opposition must concentrate on street protests before considering political party activities, and in common with most opposition leaders sees the restrictions on forming party blocs as the key obstacle to true political competition.<sup>160</sup>

In March 2012, Udaltsov was arrested for leading an unsanctioned rally following the presidential elections and shortly imprisoned, and he joined the hunger strike in support of the contested Astrakhan mayoral elections in April 2012.<sup>161</sup> He refused to meet with Medvedev at the signing of the law reforming the registration of political parties in April, and was detained by police for attempting to protest against Putin’s final Prime Ministerial address to the State Duma on 11 April.<sup>162</sup>

**Eduard Limonov** is the founder and leader of the National Bolshevik Party, the Other Russia Party and a leader of the Strategy-31 protest movement.<sup>163</sup> Limonov has had a long career as a poet and a writer, and was expelled from the Soviet Union prior to its collapse. He has been imprisoned several times. His combination of left-wing and nationalist sentiments had made him unpalatable to many liberals as well as many on the left, although the NBP’s move away from nationalism since 2005 has tempered some of this opposition. Limonov incited the anger of the left and of many liberal oppositionists when he joined Garry Kasparov’s Other Russia coalition in 2005, in which he is an active leader. He has a popular blog.

According to Vladimir Bukovsky, “Limonov can’t really be called a Bolshevik or a nationalist anymore. He’s a radical, but he is not so far away as he used to be.”<sup>164</sup> Limonov has been an active participant in the current protest movement, where he has been a speaker and organiser, and he was briefly detained for participating in an unsanctioned protest in March 2012.<sup>165</sup> He attempted to run for president in the March 2012 elections but his candidacy was rejected.<sup>166</sup>

**Darya Mitina** is the Deputy Head of the Left Front.<sup>167</sup> Most recently, Mitina commented that the agreement with the Communist Party is a sign that Zyuganov sees a tactical advantage in siding with the protesters, but believes that the Kremlin will not allow challenges to Zyuganov’s leadership: “They make sure that all challengers to Zyuganov’s leadership are destroyed.”<sup>168</sup> Mitina is also a member of the Russian Union of Communist Youth and has criticised what she views as Utopian visions of uniting Leftist parties.<sup>169</sup>

# CHAPTER 4

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## THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION: GROUPS, INDIVIDUALS AND STRATEGY

### OVERVIEW

Nationalism is a broad and complex phenomenon in Russia, encompassing a range of political proclivities and activities, and often intersecting with left-wing politics. The spectrum ranges from moderate, democratic nationalism, as embodied by figures such as Alexey Navalny, which can be broadly characterised as embracing patriotic rhetoric and robust controls on immigration; to traditional Orthodox Christian conservatives; to openly xenophobic agendas and calls for restrictions on immigration from the (predominantly Muslim) Caucasus republics. Extreme nationalism in Russia can take the form of right-wing or fascist groups, some of which use and justify violence in service of their agendas.

Nationalist groups first rose in the initial post-Soviet period, with organisations such as Alexander Barkashov's Russian National Unity gaining hundreds of thousands of adherents by appealing to conservative Slavophile tropes such as "One nation, one people, one state."<sup>170</sup> Culturally, this period saw a revival of conservatism and traditionalism in reaction to the cultural and political crisis triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and characterised by a distrust of foreign influences and the resurgent power of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Nationalism has been actively encouraged by Putin's Kremlin, which has attempted to channel nationalist feelings into support for United Russia and the Putin-Medvedev tandem. However, the authorities have not been

able to remain in control of the sentiments they have nurtured, and the nationalist sentiments they have stoked have at times turned against the regime over issues such as the immigration of migrants from the Caucasus. In the current context, Putin has tried to distinguish his agenda from that of the ultra-nationalists, in order to paint protestors as an extremist threat to public order, whilst appealing (mostly by proxy) to nationalist sentiments.<sup>171</sup>

This has led to high profile demonstrations by nationalist groups, including the annual Russian March, begun in 2005, which has resulted in the largest street protests prior the 2011 post-election marches. Ultra-nationalists have also been a consistent source of both low-level and organised violence and crime, fomenting violent demonstrations such as the anti-Chechen riots in Kondopoga in 2006, which implicated groups including the Movement Against Illegal Immigration.<sup>172</sup>

It is important to note that there is often a significant degree of overlap between unofficial nationalist opposition groups and activists, systemic opposition parties, groups affiliated with the ruling United Russia party and even with the state itself. To a more limited extent, there is also occasionally overlap and cooperation between liberals and nationalists and the left-wing and nationalists—for example, the National Bolshevik Party and the CPRF both openly embrace both left-wing and nationalist agendas.

For those nationalists who do not support the ruling United Russia Party, their reasons dissent can range from their belief that Putin has not adequately addressed the social problems associated with immigration, to xenophobic and chauvinist beliefs that Putin has not asserted the primacy of the Russian nation, at home and abroad. This phenomenon is widely attributed to the identity crisis that followed collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the demographic crisis and high volume of immigrants with different cultural backgrounds which has entered Russia in recent years.

Nationalist leaders have been involved in the post-election protests, and have surprised some observers by even appearing as speakers—NBP leader Eduard Limonov and ultra-nationalists Vladimir Tor and Ilya Lazarenko have addressed the crowds at the protests. They have displayed support for the central opposition demands in these speeches, although democracy promotion has not been at the forefront of most of the nationalist agendas.

Polls reflect a significant degree of sympathy for broadly nationalistic ideas and a high degree of popular distrust of immigrants by the Russian public, as well as distrust of both Western and Eastern influence. According to polls

conducted by the Levada Centre, the majority of Russians identify with the nationalist slogans “Russia for the Russians:” with 15 percent embracing the slogan outright, and 43 percent responding that it ‘would be nice to implement, but with reasonable limits.’<sup>173</sup> Some studies indicate that up to two thirds of the population find the influx of new migrants threatening.<sup>174</sup> Some studies indicate that the trend towards cross-party xenophobia has been on the rise since the 1995 elections.<sup>175</sup> According to Ilya Ponomarev, the nationalists remain broadly popular—even in urban centres like Moscow. “They are the only force capable of independently organising large protests,” Ponomarev told the author.<sup>176</sup> Andrey Sidelnikov concurred, and argued that, given the appeal of nationalist parties, fears of their influence are well-founded. “In Russia, the ‘national question’ is a populist issue, and that’s why it has attracted more protestors until now.”<sup>177</sup>

This populist appeal is why some opposition figures like Alexey Navalny and Vladimir Milov have advocated engaging with nationalist issues and groups. While Milov has not advocated direct engagement with nationalist groups, he supports appealing to the elements of the population who support those messages. “The influx of immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia brought in a huge group of people with no experience of Russian culture, and it became a problem,” explained Vladimir Milov. “However, xenophobic groups have emerged as the only ones who engage with these questions, and we can’t let them occupy that subject. Russians have a right to a national identity, and we need to engage with that. It’s unfortunate that so many within the democratic camp won’t touch the issue.”<sup>178</sup>

Vladimir Bukovsky believes the relatively small presence of nationalist groups in the ongoing street protests is symptomatic of the tendency to overestimate the extent of nationalist support and activities in Russia. “They are not terribly effective in their protests. Liberals in Russia and in Europe are so afraid of discussing issues like immigration that they have become overly sensitive to this—and there are some very nasty people involved, but a lot of them are not supremacists.”<sup>179</sup>

The past decade has witnessed the rise of neo-Nazi activity amongst extra-parliamentary nationalists, with skinheads held responsible for racially-motivated violence and premeditated attacks, often timed to coincide with significant anniversaries, such as Adolf Hitler’s birthday.<sup>180</sup> Official political parties have occasionally veered into support for skinheads: the LDPR has openly supported some skinhead actions, while United Russia has often turned a blind eye to skinhead activities.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the incidence of



sympathy for ultra-nationalist activities amongst state employees—including the security services and the police—is so extensive that the police have been accused of failing to reign in nationalist violence, even on orders from above.<sup>182</sup>

The annual “Russian March,” inaugurated in 2005, has had some success in bringing together radical and moderate nationalists: securing the anti-corruption blogger Alexey Navalny’s participation brought significant media attention and, arguably, mainstream legitimacy to the march. In addition, the Stop Feeding the Caucasus march, held in September 2011, featured over 7,000 participants. This demonstration was fuelled partly by public outrage at public spending in the Caucasus republics, which activists such as Navalny claim are marred by systemic corruption, as well as xenophobic protests against immigrants from the Caucasus living in Russia.

Extra-parliamentary nationalist groups rarely attempt to participate in the electoral process, although some nationalists occasionally run in regional or municipal elections, or run on the ticket of an official party such as the LDRP or United Russia.<sup>183</sup> While extra-parliamentary nationalist groups have been unable to transcend doctrinal disputes and personal conflicts, they have also consistently attempted to reconcile through movements such as the Russian March and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration.<sup>184</sup>

The majority of the extra-parliamentary nationalist groups rely upon street protests, and commonly encounter legal problems for offences such as incitement to racial hatred, fraud, illegal possession of weapons and links to organised crime.<sup>185</sup> A number of nationalist groups enjoy unofficial ties to the LDPR as well as United Russia. The LDPR held a roundtable in May 2011, and invited nationalists like Georgiy Borovikov of Pamyat, Dmitry Dyomushkin of the banned Slavic Union; Aleksandr Belov, leader of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and Aleksandr Sevastyanov, co-founder and former leader of the National Sovereignty Party of Russia. The LDPR have included ultra-nationalists in their electoral lists, and are known to have expressed sympathy for some actions and agendas of skinheads.<sup>186</sup>

Oleg Kozlovsky contends that while the nationalists “...used to think of themselves as the most active part of the protest movement or the political spectrum, they have been marginalised in this new movement, which is much more liberal than they would like to see. So I think they are frustrated at the moment, and I personally don’t think they will be able to increase their influence.”<sup>187</sup> Vladimir Kara-Murza agreed with this assessment: “The

regime is trying to overplay the extent of nationalist influence in order to scare people away from supporting the opposition,” he argued. “The bottom line for opposition activists is, if the nationalists are embracing democratic programmes, that’s a good thing, and moderate nationalists like Navalny who embrace democracy are a good thing. And if you look at the nationalist camp, many of them, such as Alexander Dugin, have gone to the Putin camp.”<sup>188</sup>

Nationalist participation in the post-election protests has also been constrained by the suspicion in which they are held by varying factions of the opposition. Ilya Ponomarev notes that this is because the affiliations of the nationalists are never quite clear, alleging that many nationalist groups are “...heavily infiltrated by police agents, so their agenda can become police-driven; this makes them unreliable to other opposition activists.”<sup>189</sup> Maria Lipman agreed, arguing that while nationalist sympathies are broad, “...the fragmented nature of the movement has made it difficult for those groups to organise, and the government has capitalised on this and launched covert operations to fragment them even further. But in a totally open field, there would no doubt be a range of nationalist parties.”<sup>190</sup>

## KEY GROUPS

**The Movement Against Illegal Immigration** is a banned, ultra-nationalist group founded in 2002 and led by Alexander Belov, who has been convicted with inciting hatred, and Vladimir Tor.<sup>191</sup> The group has attracted considerable support due to its lack of a specific ideology, and is characterised by racist and xenophobic rhetoric claiming that immigrants from the Caucasus are responsible for various social ills including drug addiction and crime. The group disseminates its views through propaganda using militaristic language.

Their main objective is the “deportation of all illegal migrants outside of Russian territory,”<sup>192</sup> and the group further demands the introduction of language and culture exams for all migrants who entered the Russian Federation after 1991, a ban on migrants receiving welfare, the repatriation of Russians from the near abroad and pro-birth policies for ethnic Russians.<sup>193</sup> Unlike some other nationalist groups, the organisation is pro-European, and advocates a policy of uniting with other “white” capitals of the world against Asiatic and Muslim populations.<sup>194</sup> The group has created voluntary militia brigades, which have offered their services to security services,<sup>195</sup> and presents itself as social movement as opposed to a political party. The

group attracted controversy by participating in the recent pro-democracy protests.<sup>196</sup>

**The National Democratic Party** is a new, unregistered political party formed by the leadership of the Russian Public Movement, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration and the Russian Civil Union. Krylov claims that the party represents a moderate voice within the spectrum of nationalist groups. Krylov has announced plans to register the party under the reformed rules for party registration, and has attempted to court Alexey Navalny to join, who declined. He describes the movement as modelled on the nationalist movements that came to fore in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union, stresses its interest in democratic reforms and claims that “Our party isn’t about working with skinheads—we’re oriented towards creating a situation where skinheads don’t exist at all.”<sup>197</sup>

**The Russians** is an illegal nationalist coalition of over forty organisations, led by the Slavic Union and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and operates a revolving leadership including figures such as Aleksandr Belov, Aleksandr Turik, Georgy Borovikov and Stanislav Vorobyov and Dmitri Dyomushkin.<sup>198</sup> Its goal is to facilitate “ethnic and political solidarity of Slavic Russians,” in order to “...establish the national government and declaration of the Russian national state.”<sup>199</sup> Most recently, the coalition has set up an organising committee to investigate the possibility of founding a new nationalist party.<sup>200</sup>

## KEY PEOPLE

**Dmitri Dyomushkin** is the founding leader of the ultra-nationalist Slavic Union and the Russians coalition, and is one of the leaders of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration. He was referred to as the “Führer” within the Slavic Union and is a regular figure in the media.<sup>201</sup> Dyomushkin has been arrested several times, once for poisoning human rights campaigner, and on suspicion of bombing a mosque in 2006.<sup>202</sup> Dyomushkin was a co-organiser of the 2011 Russian March, and was detained on extremism charges two days prior to the march but released in time to attend the event.<sup>203</sup> He has justified violent protests as a “uprising” against the state for failing to deal with “attacks” on ethnic Russians.<sup>204</sup> Dyomushkin was briefly detained and released following the 4 March protests for planning an unsanctioned rally near the Central Election Commission building.<sup>205</sup>

**Vladimir Tor (aka Vladlen Kralin)** is a leader of the ultra-nationalist Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and is on the Executive Committee of the new, unregistered National Democratic Party.<sup>206</sup> He is one of the main organisers of Russian March. In January, Tor was detained and incarcerated for attending a rally that was pre-empted by the police.<sup>207</sup> He was also a speaker at the opposition rally in Pushkin Square Moscow on 5 March and earlier protests, appearing alongside both liberal and nationalist leaders. He is a member of the For Fair Elections committee.<sup>208</sup>

**Alexander Belov (aka Alexander Potkin)** is the leader of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and former leader of the Pamyat National Patriotic Front. Belov has sought to transform the group into a nationalist movement on European model. Belov has acted as an intermediary between radical movements, political parties and the state over migration, and is credited with moving nationalism away from an overly-ideological approach towards a broader appeal to xenophobia and racism.<sup>209</sup> Radical nationalists have accused him of being bought by Kremlin.<sup>210</sup> He is a member of the For Fair Elections organising committee.<sup>211</sup>

**Konstantin Krylov** is the head of the Russian Public Movement and a leader of the newly-founded, unregistered and purportedly “moderate” nationalist party, the National Democratic Party. Krylov advocates cutting off aid to the Caucasus, and he has also spoken at post-election opposition rallies.

**Ilya Lazarenko** is the former leader of the National Front and of the anti-Christian pagan sect Church of Nav. In 1997, Lazarenko was found guilty of hate speech and sentenced to an eighteen-month suspended prison term. Lazarenko has been a speaker and participant in the recent pro-democracy protests.<sup>212</sup>

# CHAPTER 5

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## **RUSSIA'S BURGEONING CIVIL SOCIETY: THE NEW WAVE OF CIVIC ACTIVISM**

### **OVERVIEW**

One of the most important and novel developments in Russia's contemporary opposition landscape has been the importance of individuals and groups expressing opposition to various government actions or policies outside of the conventional political activism of the liberals, left-wing or nationalist groups. These writers, artists, bloggers and grassroots activists have coalesced into a loose movement, united by the principle of holding the Kremlin to account for its performance on certain issues.

These groups operate on a horizontal model of loose cooperation between organisations run by self-starters, and lack centralised leadership, and is scattered across the country. Many of these groups and individuals have been instrumental in forming the League of Voters and the For Fair Elections movement, founded in response to the fraudulent Duma elections.<sup>213</sup> Journalist Yulia Latynina has argued that perhaps the most significant development in this burgeoning movement's influence was the mobilisation of the 28,000 citizen volunteer election observers, who monitored the polling stations on 4 March and reported numerous cases of voter intimidation and fraud.<sup>214</sup>

This phenomenon is partly a consequence of the restrictions upon political competition in Russia, which has made activists turn their energies from conventional political activities like building political parties, towards issue-specific causes like corruption or the environment, for which the country's

burgeoning civil society lends slightly more space to develop. According to scholar Graeme Robertson, “No longer is protest dominated by workers with economic demands, involved in bargaining games among the divided elite. Instead there are real widespread and numerous opposition groups actively challenging the Russia state wherever they can.”<sup>215</sup> Despite legal constraints on the formation of civil society initiatives, sheer civic initiative has allowed Putin’s Russia to experience the gradual growth of this hitherto unoccupied area of the public sphere.<sup>216</sup>

Denis Volkov argued that the Levada Centre polls show that these civic initiatives are more popular than the traditional opposition because they offer a chance to “...change the pattern within traditional oppositional politicians, which could be a positive development.”<sup>217</sup> It is telling that Levada Centre polls of protestors at the 24 December protests expressed a far greater degree of trust for figures such as the writer Boris Akunin, blogger Alexey Navalny and journalist Leonid Parfyonov more than traditional politicians like Mikhail Kasyanov.<sup>218</sup>

Oleg Kozlovsky argues that it is precisely the novelty and authenticity of these grassroots activists that is the opposition’s greatest source of strength. “The civil society revolution is the way forward—they have more legitimacy, because of the strong distrust of traditional politicians. The older politicians need to take a backseat,” Kozlovsky said. “For years the opposition has had the problem of not seeing new faces—especially in the liberal camp. The next generation of leaders will come from civil society, not from established political parties or groups.”<sup>219</sup>

Ironically, it was the spontaneous development of anti-Kremlin youth groups like Oborona which inspired the creation of groups like Nashi and the All Russia People’s Front coalition, as part of the Kremlin’s strategy to build and control their own ersatz civil society. Civil society activists have also been targeted for harassment, imprisonment and censorship by the state. However, in some cases they have cooperated with the local authorities in their efforts—for instance, being invited to join “expert groups” by governmental authorities.<sup>220</sup>

It should be noted that the emergence of civil society actors as an important component of the opposition movement presents certain organisational challenges. Vladimir Milov argues that the very source of their strength and legitimacy—their lack of centralisation and association with official politics—also means that these groups do not always possess the political skills to

carry their agenda beyond the initial period of street protest. “A large part of civil society activists have no clear idea about how the political structure works and the instruments you need to use,” Milov contended. “They have the authority and the energy, which is good, but they are political amateurs and sometimes promote the wrong things.”<sup>221</sup> Others point out that it is too early to assess how well this new generation of civil society activists has performed. “Some of the civic activists are quite impressive, but emerging as a leader is a more difficult question,” Maria Lipman noted.<sup>222</sup>

The following is a sample of influential individuals and groups who can be considered part of this new phenomenon, and who have participated in the ongoing protest movement as active organisers, speakers, performers or simply public supporters. The list does overlap with more conventional political activism, as the various spheres have cooperated under the broad rubric of the protest movement.

## SELECTED CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

**Non-partisan rights coalitions** like the non-partisan, semi-amateur **League of Voters** and the **For Fair Elections** movement, formed by activists and celebrities in reaction to the fraudulent 2011 Duma elections. The League of Voters’ self-proclaimed purpose is to continue the peaceful “...mass protests against rigged elections to the Duma,” and the group explicitly claims that it does not “...set policy objectives and are not going to support the individual parties or candidates for the presidency,” declaring its objectives to instead be to live in a “fair country” with “fair elections” “honest courts” “honest media” “honest police” and an “honest relationship between the government and citizen.” The founders of the League of Voters include activists, journalists, writers and artists, including influential blogger **Rustem Adagamov**, poet **Dmitry Bykov**, novelist **Boris Akunin** and Ekho Moskovy journalist **Sergei Parkhomenko**.<sup>223</sup>

The League has officially recognised the white ribbon—the popular symbol of the protest movement—as their own, and encourages any citizen to join, subject to authentication; this category also includes groups such as **Belaya Lenta (White Ribbon)**, **Oborona**, **Civil Action**, and **Strategy-31**, a civic movement which, since 31 July 2009, has regularly held protest meetings in defence of freedom of assembly in Russia on the 31st day of every month which has 31 days; (the protests defend the right to hold peaceful demonstrations, as enshrined in article 31 of the Russian Constitution)<sup>224</sup>; as well as **Maxim Vedenev’s TIGR**, a national movement in defense of human,

economic, civil, and political rights.<sup>225</sup>

**Artists, celebrities and journalists** like the novelist **Boris Akunin**, writer **Dmitry Bykov**, radical feminist punk band **Pussy Riot**, three members of which were detained after an impromptu, protest concert held at the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow<sup>226</sup>; journalist and music critic **Artemy Troitsky**; rock star **Yuri Shevchuk** and socialite **Ksenia Sobchak**;<sup>227</sup> **Leonid Parfyonov**, presenter and activist; **Olga Romanova**, who runs a prisoners' rights campaign called **Russia Behind Bars**,<sup>228</sup> and whose husband, Alexei Kozlov, was found guilty of fraud in March 2012 in a highly politicised case; and Ekho Moskvyy journalist **Sergei Parkhomenko**.<sup>229</sup> Many of these individuals have participated in the For Fair Elections marches or are members of the League of Voters.

**Issue-specific groups/activists** like **Evgenia Chirikova**, who heads the environmental lobby group **ECMO**; **Spravedlivost**, an advocacy group espousing electoral reform and economic justice;<sup>230</sup> **Natalia Vedenskaya's Bashne.net**, a campaign to preserve St Petersburg's historical and architectural integrity;<sup>231</sup> **Sergei Kanaev's Federation of Automobile Owners of Russia**, the largest non-governmental organisation in Russia which advocates improved transport infrastructure, traffic safety and lower petrol prices.<sup>232</sup>

These groups and individuals have become engaged in wider political questions from the platform of these issues-based campaigns. This also includes **activist bloggers**, a category which can bleed into the more traditional political camps, but which is indisputably led by **Alexey Navalny**, whose blog has catapulted him to the centre of the pro-democracy movement in Russia.

## **SPOTLIGHT: ALEXEY NAVALNY—ANTI-CORRUPTION BLOGGER-TURNED-OPPOSITION LEADER**

Alexey Navalny is an anti-corruption blogger who has emerged as one of the key leaders of the current protest movement, and one of the most powerful figures in Russia's new generation of civil society activists. Internationally, he is widely viewed as the face of the Russian opposition—winning a place on Time magazine's 2012 "100 Most Influential People in the World" list.<sup>233</sup> The 35-year-old attorney has risen to prominence rapidly since starting his anti-corruption blog, RosPil, in 2008, through which Navalny—in collaboration with his readers—uses investigative tactics including purchasing minority shares in state-run companies like Rosneft to uncover state-sanctioned



corruption. Navalny's profile has risen steadily over the past two years, but it was his role in the popular protests against the fraudulent Duma elections which catapulted him to both domestic and worldwide prominence.

In addition to RosPil, Navalny has also spearheaded the blogs RosAgit<sup>234</sup>, to organise protests, RosYama, which monitors corruption in the construction of road construction projects, the Democratic Alternative movement, and Rosvybory, a coalition of election observers.<sup>235</sup> Navalny coined the moniker "Party of Crooks and Thieves," now widely used in reference to United Russia, and he has been a key presence and leader of the ongoing protest movement. He has alighted upon corruption as an issue which unites Russians of all backgrounds, and has explained that "My work addresses existing problems, and one of the crucial problems in Russia today is corruption."<sup>236</sup> With kickbacks in business and state services estimated as amounting to up to 2 percent of Russia's GDP and high rates of popular frustration with corruption, Navalny clearly picked a winning issue.<sup>237</sup>

Navalny is not a member of any particular political party, and his views can best be described as a mixture of conservative-democratic and moderate-nationalist. Navalny began his political career as an activist for Yabloko, where he served as a member of the Federal Political Council. Navalny began his political career as an activist in Yabloko, in which he served as a member of the Federal political Council, but became frustrated with the party's agenda and political strategy.<sup>238</sup> Navalny claims that his problems with the party leadership—specifically Grigory Yavlinsky—led to his dismissal by the party's federal council, which formally expelled him on the grounds of "damaging the party and nationalistic activities."<sup>239</sup>

Prior to his dismissal, Navalny co-authored a treatise criticising the contemporary approach of the Russian opposition, and advocating the creation of a broad tent comprised of leftists, liberals and nationalists working together to challenge the regime through a horizontal, networked structure of "real"—i.e. non-systemic—oppositionists.<sup>240</sup> In October 2010, Navalny won the online "Mayor of Moscow elections" held by Kommersant and Gazeta.ru—an impressive indicator of his popularity amongst Russian liberal opinion.<sup>241</sup>

According to Ilya Ponomarev, "Navalny is a sincere nationalist—but not a radical. He would like to strengthen immigration policies if he came to power, although it's difficult to tell exactly what he would do, as he has not entirely exposed his agenda."<sup>242</sup> Most agree that this is a strategic decision

on Navalny's part, as his popular appeal depends to a great extent on his independence, given the widespread distrust of conventional politics in Russia. Navalny's conservatism is fused with a youthful and modern approach to activism, relying upon the internet and employing a combination of moral seriousness and scathing irreverence for the powers-that-be.

In common with many of the protestors who have taken to the streets in recent months, Navalny is an educated, middle class professional. Unlike liberal leaders like Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov, he is unsullied by any association with the politics of the Yeltsin or Putin eras. He is charismatic in person and in print—his speaking style is scathing and direct, and his writing style is humorous, frank and engaging. At the post-election protests, his rhetoric has at times veered into violent imagery, which he has described as a consequence of his “very personal, furious rage” at the fraudulent Duma elections.<sup>243</sup> While his conservative and nationalist positions are a cause for concern amongst many liberals and leftists, his youth and plucky determination to take on corruption have given him “hipster appeal.” He has most recently announced plans to rally the opposition in an internet campaign against the First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, whom Navalny has accused of corruption after releasing a damning dossier of evidence on his blog.<sup>244</sup>

Organisations and media affiliated with the Kremlin have accused Navalny of accepting money from the US and acting as a stooge for the American government, pointing to the time he spent as a “World Fellow” in Yale as evidence—a position the state television pundit Mikhail Leontyev has accused him of obtaining through the American Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul.<sup>245</sup>

In May 2011, the Russian government launched a criminal investigation against Navalny.<sup>246</sup> In November 2011, his email was hacked and his private messages were posted online.<sup>247</sup> In February it was reported that Navalny's bank was being audited,<sup>248</sup> and in March Navalny announced that he had been issued a summons by the anti-extremism department of the police,<sup>249</sup> and reported on his blog that he had been accused of vandalism by state authorities related to his involvement in protests in support of Oleg Shein in Astrakhan.<sup>250</sup>

## **NAVALNY THE NATIONALIST**

Navalny has participated in the annual Russian March and the Stop Feeding the Caucasus protests, both of which included participants from extremist

nationalist groups like the Slavic Union and Movement Against Illegal Immigration. However, in both cases Navalny has been careful to distinguish his participation and his views from xenophobic, extreme participants: he has argued that his association with the Stop Feeding the Caucasus campaign concerned anti-corruption work relevant to the systematised looting of publicly funded projects in the region.<sup>251</sup> He has defended his participation in the Russian March repeatedly, stating in an interview with Esquire magazine: "If you don't like the Russian March, the only way to do something about it is to go yourself. If normal people don't go, then the only ones flitting around there will be marginal types, nutcases who are struggling with Zionist conspiracies."<sup>252</sup> Some have wondered whether his statements vilifying Roman Abramovich and Boris Berezovsky at the Russian March signified an element of anti-Semitism in his populism, but this remains inconclusive and anti-Semitic rhetoric has not featured elsewhere in his public rhetoric.<sup>253</sup>

In 2007, Navalny founded a democratic-nationalist movement called The Nationalist Russian Liberation Movement (NAROD). The group published a manifesto embracing national revival and democratic reform, and denouncing xenophobia as harmful to the nationalist cause, which the manifesto equates with ending "....the degradation of Russian civilisation and to create conditions for conservation and development of the Russian people, its culture, language and historical territory."<sup>254</sup>

The NAROD manifesto also espouses the restoration of "...the organic unity of the Russian past, present and future, officially proclaimed successor to today's Russia of all forms of the Russian state - from the Kievan Rus and the Novgorod Republic to the Soviet Union," and advocates a policy of repatriation for the Russian diaspora. More controversially, the group advocates "...a sensible immigration policy... Those who come to our house, but do not want to respect our law and tradition have [to be] expelled," and also contends that "Russia should recognise the sovereignty and right to self-determination of those countries that are our historic allies, in particular, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia."<sup>255</sup>

Navalny has advocated measures designed to increase indigenous birth rates, and has downplayed any ideological elements of his nationalism, saying that "People in their kitchens discuss such problems. That's why I am supported more widely [than they are] because I discuss these problems."<sup>256</sup> He has denied accusations of xenophobia, and compares his support of limitations on illegal immigration to the debate over border security and naturalisation in the United States.<sup>257</sup> He has been criticised

for downplaying the threat posed by groups such as the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, which he reportedly compared to “girl scouts,”<sup>258</sup> and for comparing migrants to “cockroaches” in a video that circulated on the internet.<sup>259</sup> Navalny’s nationalism is Eurocentric inasmuch as it endorses the European development of the nation state as the best and most natural path for Russia, in contrast to the exceptionalist and anti-Western stances taken by some conservative nationalists.

## NAVALNY THE LEADER

More recently, Navalny has been a key proponent of voting for “...anyone except the ‘Party of Crooks and Thieves,’” which he argues is a more effective tactic than boycotting elections, because it shines a spotlight on Russia’s fixed and farcical electoral system.<sup>260</sup> To this end, Navalny maintains that the system Putin has created is actually very weak, and claims that Russia could see a pro-democracy revolt along the lines of the “colour revolutions” within the next few years.<sup>261</sup>

Navalny was arrested at the 5 December 2011 protest and detained for fifteen days, and was briefly detained on the 5 March 2012 protest, when he tried to lead an unsanctioned protest.<sup>262</sup> Since Putin’s victory in the presidential elections, Navalny has advocated a campaign of civil disobedience as the next sensible step for the protest movement, including permanent and escalating street protests.<sup>263</sup> In a March 2012 profile in the Wall Street Journal, Navalny explained that his appeal is the necessary next step for the protest movement: “I’m not going to appeal to violence or aggression—of course not. But the mood of the protests should be more and more political. It’s not just about the fun, hipster stuff. It has to be a kind of real political protest. The Kremlin should understand these tens of thousands of people will never leave the streets.”<sup>264</sup> In this vein, Navalny has reportedly called the decision to remain in Pushkin Square with Sergei Udaltsov and Ilya Ponomarev on 5 March in contravention of the official authorisation for protests an “experiment” designed to test the public’s willingness to engage in acts of civil disobedience.<sup>265</sup>

The nature of Navalny’s political ambitions remains unclear: he has admitted that he sees himself as a politician, but declined to put himself forward as a presidential candidate following his imprisonment in December 2011, which many would have considered the natural next step. He has described his long-term goal as putting together a party that is “...massive, effective and cheap.” He recognises that he must rely on the internet because of the state monopoly on the media, and that this automatically constrains

his constituency to the urban centres where internet is widely used, but has observed that an innovative approach can take advantage of Putin's declining popularity and attract a sufficient following in the cities to put pressure on the government.<sup>266</sup> Navalny's domestic popularity and notoriety has vastly increased since the beginning of the protests—winning a Levada Centre poll of protestors on Sakharov Avenue of support for potential presidential candidates with 22 percent support.<sup>267</sup> However, Navalny remains compromised by his controversial nationalist affiliations, his lack of presence beyond urban centres and the lack of clarity surrounding his political goals and agenda.

Navalny has openly criticised the approach of the older, establishment liberals who have dominated the opposition movement. "I've watched various attempts to choose some opposition leader who can pose a challenge to Putin. But they couldn't choose one, because there is no mechanism. They use subjective criteria. They say, 'Well, I used to be a minister. I used to be a Prime Minister. I'm loved by the intellectuals.' But this is pointless."<sup>268</sup> Navalny has in turn been treated with scepticism by many in the liberal establishment.

Vladimir Milov is one such sceptic: "The problem with Navalny is the overestimated expectations he has inspired—he is seen as some sort of messianic figure." Milov argued that Navalny had not shown the political skills necessary to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the protests: "People compare him to Yeltsin, but I can't imagine Yeltsin going on vacation after getting out of jail for leading the protests [as Navalny did in December]."<sup>269</sup> For his part, Navalny has acknowledged the problems raised by the cult of personality that has formed around him: "Everyone loving you can change quickly into everyone demanding that you make miracles, and when you don't, their love quickly turns to hate."<sup>270</sup>

Both Vladimir Milov and Ilya Ponomarev have pointed out the problems inherent in Navalny's vague political agenda, which he appears to have intentionally left opaque in order to maximise his popular appeal. Milov argued that his lack of specificity on what he hopes to achieve could lead to disappointed expectations,<sup>271</sup> while Ponomarev observed: "He has charismatic legitimacy, like Yeltsin. But he has not created a real agenda, because he thinks it will alienate his supporters. He has populist instincts, and the question is whether, if he came to power without constraint, he would be like a second Yeltsin."<sup>272</sup> Vladimir Bukovsky was similarly cautious: "He is definitely a leader, but how much of that can be translated into his future activities, I don't know. He is very inexperienced."<sup>273</sup>

# CHAPTER 6

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## **RUSSIA'S CONTEMPORARY OPPOSITION MOVEMENT: PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS?**

### **PROSPECTS AND PROJECTIONS**

Russia's long history of autocracy has led many to assume that the country is either not equipped or not desirous of democratic reform. In this view, the "sovereign democracy" of Vladimir Putin represents a genuine reflection of popular will, and the best prospect for stability. Yet the internal contradictions of the mixed system Putin has created, and the inevitable instabilities which will result if the culture of corruption and state-led disregard for the rule of law is left unchallenged, have become increasingly evident. This presents a window of opportunity for the contemporary opposition movement—strengthened for the first time in a decade by the 2011-2012 protest movement—to push for genuine political liberalisation in Russia.

It is unclear what the final strategy of the regime will be to counter the current opposition movement, but it is unlikely that Putin would be able to introduce meaningful democratic reforms and survive. Genuine political openness would undermine the entire basis of the system that has kept him in power and above the law, and would submit him to challenges from political alternatives. Given Putin's well-known fear of an "Orange Revolution" scenario, he may be induced to launch tactical crackdowns against key leaders of the opposition movement, or even a wider crackdown. Some have pointed to the detention of activists in Red Square in April,<sup>274</sup> searches of the independent REN-TV channel<sup>275</sup> and the ousting of independent board members from the independent radio station Ekho Moskvy (known for being critical of—and hated by—Putin) as a sign

of more to come.<sup>276</sup> The intensification of Soviet-style rhetoric accusing the opposition leaders of being puppets of the American government has played an increasing role since the beginning of the protests in December: US Ambassador Michael McFaul's promises to allocate \$50 million towards funding Russian civil society projects has been seized upon as evidence that the civil society movement is in fact a vast American conspiracy. According to Ilya Ponomarev, "The possibility of a Velvet or Orange Revolution is very unlikely: we're not going to get the government to resign peacefully. I think violence is now more likely than non-violence."<sup>277</sup>

If this happens, Putin may in fact be more constrained than he appears: a crackdown risks fuelling public outrage, and may not even be effective given the decentralised nature of the protest movement. This is symptomatic of what Alexey Navalny has argued is the fundamental weakness in the regime's mixed model of electoral authoritarianism: "...if they try to do anything systemically against a huge number of people, there's no machine. It's a ragtag group of crooks unified under the portrait of Putin. There's no super-repressive regime. There are no mythical Cheka agents that we need to be scared of. It's just a bunch of crooks."<sup>278</sup> This weakness also makes the current power structure very vulnerable to street protests, as it reveals the essential contradiction between the constrained freedoms and the lack of a fully-developed repressive apparatus.<sup>279</sup>

In the past, Putin has dealt with this challenge by seeking to channel popular frustrations into popular movements controlled by the Kremlin, whilst relying on coercion to create an environment of caution. The relative light touch displayed towards protestors thus far is likely part of strategy to project an image of calm and tolerance towards the protestors, in the hopes that the movement will act as a temporary pressure valve but eventually lose its popular interest.

In the interim the state has so far preferred to deploy a strategy of token "reforms" and "engagement," such as the meeting Medvedev held with opposition leaders prior to the presidential elections and at the signing of the bill easing registration limits for political parties, but has restricted the application of the reforms to such an extent that they cannot shift the ruling party's monopoly on power.<sup>280</sup> For example, the proposal to restore the direct election of regional governors has stalled and is set to be hampered by new amendments proposed by the Federation Council—including a requirement that the candidates receive presidential approval, which would all but nullify the intended effects of direct election. Such measures are clearly designed

to prevent strong, popular leaders emerging from the regions capable of challenging Putin's monopoly on power.<sup>281</sup>

Putin's legitimacy has been fundamentally eroded by the protest movement, and the combination of a rising middle class and popular ambivalence could provide the oppositionists with the ingredients to further develop and extend their reach. "Putin is seen by many as a man of stagnation, so the momentum is on our side," said Vladimir Milov.<sup>282</sup> The fact that Putin received 47 percent of the vote—partly thanks to electoral fraud—in Moscow is a significant sign of the erosion of his power base. If the president's genuine support in the capital has withered to that extent, the rest of the country may follow in time.<sup>283</sup>

Moreover, social and economic such as widening access to the internet and enhanced expectations are creating an increasingly "horizontally integrated generation,"<sup>284</sup> a development which the Kremlin does not appear equipped to counter. However, the state has been known to use tactics such as redirecting users of VKontakte, the social networking site widely used by oppositionists, to malware sites,<sup>285</sup> and recent reports indicate that the siloviki are planning to employ new technologies to orchestrate an internet crackdown.<sup>286</sup>

The possibility that the systemic opposition will forge closer ties with the unofficial opposition is a significant threat to the stability of the regime, and the increased cooperation between the two forces—particularly in the mayoral elections in Yaroslavl and Asrakhon—have already demonstrated the power of such an alliance. One of the key weaknesses of hybrid regimes like the Russian Federation is the threat that hitherto cooperative elites will side with anti-regime forces and challenge the power structure. Maintaining the status quo consequently relies upon projecting an impression of invincibility and providing sufficient incentives to keep the elites in fold.<sup>287</sup> The fact that members of the systemic opposition are positioning themselves to take advantage of the insurgent opposition movement—coupled with the diminishment of Putin's popularity and the unpopularity of Unite Russia, may induce political elites in the systemic opposition to withdraw their support and demand political change.

However, the fact that the opposition do not have the guaranteed support of "court" figures who may facilitate negotiation and increase pressure remains a source of weakness—and may persuade some oppositionists to compromise their principles and ultimately undermine their own



movement.<sup>288</sup> Alexey Navalny has said that he is “...convinced that the main strategy of the Kremlin in the coming months would be neutralising protests by the usual deceit and bribes.”<sup>289</sup> This remains a source of significant suspicion and distrust within the opposition movement, and ironically, the reforms to political party registration could aid the state in its effort to co-opt oppositionists by courting individuals who weary of division or simply become greedy for power. Indeed, when asked the most important piece of advice he could give the new generation of oppositionists from his long career as a dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky advised: “Never agree on anything offered by the KGB, which in this case is the people in power. They won’t negotiate with you: they’ll just try to recruit you. And if you show that you’re willing to compromise, they see you’re weakness and you will only go further and further. Tell them to go to hell.”<sup>290</sup>

Opposition parties still face the considerable challenges of attempting to engage popular support in an environment in which they have virtually no access to the mass media, at a time when popular interest and engagement in the protests appears to be on the wane, whilst keeping party activists happy and maintaining relationships within a broad coalition of groups and interests. While the internet has emerged as an important tool with growing influence in Russia, it does not yet have the power to reach the entire country. As Vladimir Milov noted: “The problem is that the opposition has for quite some time existed in a different mode compared to what is required, and hasn’t been able to reach out to the average voter because of the information blockade. Now the protests have brought the groups a new dynamism, but some have been unprepared for that, and could fail to meet the expectations of the protestors.”<sup>291</sup> Going forward, Milov emphasised the need to focus on breaking through the “information blockade,” twinned with a strategy of party political pressure to force Putin into making concessions: “Some people say we need to focus only on protests, but that can’t happen without political engagement.”<sup>292</sup>

Milov warned of the divisions that remain in the ranks of the opposition between those who favour a protest oriented strategy, and those—like Milov himself—who emphasise the need for political engagement and mobilisation of parties: “People are overcome with a romantic revolutionary mood—people like Navalny deny the need to develop party politics, they want internet democracy. But that’s giving Putin what he wants—he doesn’t want us to develop those core institutions. That lack of understanding in the opposition may be a consequence of being out of power for so long. A horizontal

civil society network just isn't sufficient."<sup>293</sup> Yevgenia Albats, editor of the pro-opposition newspaper *The New Times*, has castigated the current movement for what she argued was an insufficiently clear and adaptable strategy. "Clearly, the For Fair Elections motto is too outdated now. They [the opposition leaders] should have foreseen that," Albats said in an interview with *Ekho Moskvy*. She also complained of the lack of unity between protest leaders displayed during the 5 March demonstrations, in which some leaders left the Square, while others stayed behind to face arrest and police harassment; but at the same time, has argued that Udaltsov's calls for protestors to remain in Pushkin square until Putin leaves power will prove counterproductive.<sup>294</sup> Accusations of amateurishness play into the hands of the Kremlin, which has charged that the opposition lacks a "...constructive programme for national development."<sup>295</sup>

This split over tactics has long been a source of division within the liberal camp, and disagreements over whether to initiate a "permanent protest" as Alexey Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov advocate, versus focusing on the mobilisation of political parties, as Milov and Nemtsov advocate, are likely to intensify now that the passing of the presidential elections has weakened the momentum of the protests. This decline in enthusiasm was, to some extent, inevitable; and the opposition's reliance on popular outrage at electoral fraud would always need to give way to a transitional message in the event that demands for an electoral re-run fizzled out. While the mass organisation of electoral monitors was extremely important in engaging citizens in the political process and in building a broader base of civic engagement, the chance of affecting the outcome in the short term was always remote. In short, the gains of the opposition have been subtle and evolutionary, and the opposition will need to communicate this in a way that does not make their supporters lose hope.

Finally, the lack of clear leaders capable of uniting the entire movement has been cited by many analysts as a key handicap of the contemporary opposition, and it is true that the movement would doubtless benefit from a figure like Andrei Sakharov or Vaclav Havel, capable of uniting and leading the movement across ideological lines, and possessed of unquestioned moral authority. Yet the fact is, the amalgam of ideological strains and pseudo-democratic practices which characterises the contemporary Russian state has produced a situation in which such a leader has not emerged—or at least not yet. Yet the absence of the type of all-encompassing totalitarianism that was challenged by dissidents like Havel and Sakharov may compensate for the absence of such a galvanising figure.

## **SPOTLIGHT: WHAT DOES THE LEVADA CENTRE'S POLLING INDICATE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF RUSSIA'S OPPOSITION MOVEMENT?**

As one of the only independent sources of polling data in the Russian Federation, the Levada Centre's research offers a compelling insight into the attitudes of ordinary citizens in Russia today. The polls taken on a variety of subjects since the height of the protest movement in December 2011/January 2012 up to the presidential elections of March 2012 reflect the complex collection of attitudes and impulses which characterise the Russian public's attitudes towards contemporary politics, and illustrate a society that is at once increasingly engaged on matters of reform yet unprepared to push for radical responses to these problems. The polls analysed below were conducted on representative nationwide samples of urban and rural populations of 1,600 people aged 18 and over, with a 3.4 percent margin of error.<sup>296</sup>

### **ATTITUDESTOWARDSPUTINANDAUTHORITARIANISM**

Support for the “vertical power” structure created by Putin has declined noticeably, and disapproval of vertical power has increased: with 30 percent finding vertical power useful in January 2012 (down from 38 percent in February 2011), and with 35 percent finding it more harmful (up from 27 percent in February 2011).<sup>297</sup> In another poll from January 2012, 38 percent supported concentrating all the power in the country in the hands of one person—down from 50 percent in February 2006—while 46 percent preferred power to be distributed across different structures—up from 36 percent in February 2006.<sup>298</sup> This indicates a decline in support for the concept of Russia's need for top-down, “sovereign democracy,” which has underpinned Putin's justification of his authoritarian style. Moreover, a majority of respondents agreed that presidential term limits should be restricted to two terms, with 25 percent “totally” agreeing and 32 percent “mostly” agreeing.<sup>299</sup>

However, a poll asking whether Vladimir Putin's management has brought Russia “more good” received a 66 percent positive response, and a mere 15 percent negative response—indicating that perceptions of Putin as a manager remain high across the country.<sup>300</sup> This correlates with polls indicating that the source of Putin's attraction lies in his energetic and strong-willed persona—with 24 percent of respondents in a January poll indicating this as his main source of attraction—as well as his political experience—with 30

percent singling this out as his most attractive quality.<sup>301</sup> The high premium placed on these qualities is indicative of the importance of stability in Russian politics. At the same time, while polling indicates an overall acceptance of Putin as the only viable president, it also speaks to an ambivalence towards Putin: a poll asking whether respondents supported the slogan “not a single vote for Putin” yielded interesting results, with 32 percent “rather” supporting the slogan and 35 percent not supporting the slogan.<sup>302</sup> However, another poll asking if respondents supported the slogan “Putin Must Go” was received more negatively, with a majority of respondents unsupportive of that sentiment.<sup>303</sup> Negative attitudes towards the ruling party, United Russia, were clearer: with respondents almost evenly split over the question of whether United Russia should be described as the “Party of Crooks and Thieves.”<sup>304</sup>

## **CORRUPTION AS A DEFINING POPULAR CONCERN**

Polling reflected a widespread belief that corruption has increased during the Putin era: 50 percent responded that corruption had increased over the past decade, and 35 percent judged the level of corruption to be roughly the same.<sup>305</sup> There is a high degree of cynicism about the motivations of public servants, which appears very clearly tied to the intense public awareness of corruption: when asked whether Russia’s power brokers put their own personal power above the prosperity of the country, 59 percent of respondents answered affirmatively, while only 28 percent responded that national prosperity was their foremost interest.<sup>306</sup> There is also a high degree of public support for investigating corruption at the highest levels, with 53 percent agreeing and 34 percent mostly agreeing.<sup>307</sup>

## **POPULAR OPINIONS OF THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT**

Recent Levada Centre polls indicate a considerable degree of popular scepticism towards the opposition movement’s ability to achieve change in Russia. When asked if they thought the opposition would be able to present a united front in response to the March 2012 presidential election, 40 percent responded “probably not” and 18 percent responded “definitely not.”<sup>308</sup> 20 percent of respondents in a January poll had heard of the “League of Voters,” but did not know its purpose, while 72 percent had never heard of the organisation; however, a majority of respondents agreed that the regime should negotiate with representatives of the League.<sup>309</sup> However, 25 percent of respondents thought that Putin should “definitely” consult with

the leaders of the mass demonstrations, and 42 percent agreed generally that he should consult with the demonstration leaders.<sup>310</sup>

The view of specific non-systemic political parties was marked by a combination of indifference and ignorance: in response to a poll asking if respondents would vote for the Republican Party, if registered to the Duma, 25 percent responded probably not and 33 percent responded definitely not, while only 8 percent responded “maybe.”<sup>311</sup> Individual, non-systemic oppositionists did not fare well either: 31 percent responded they “probably” did not sympathise with the systemic opposition, while 28 percent “definitely” did not support the non-systemic opposition.<sup>312</sup>

## POPULAR EXPECTATIONS OF STAGNATION

A recurring feature in recent Levada Centre polls is the popular expectation of political inertia, and the relatively low level of popular interest or engagement in politics. A poll asking whether the new government and presidential administration would be better or worse than before elicited a 62 percent response indicating it would be neither better nor worse.<sup>313</sup> 57 percent of respondents did not believe Putin’s regime would change, although 29 percent responded that it would become more stringent;<sup>314</sup> and 54 percent did not think he would introduce further democratic freedoms, while 19 percent responded that democratic freedoms would worsen following Putin’s election.<sup>315</sup> These popular expectations of stalemate coincide with the assessments of analysts such as Edward Lucas, who has argued that the opposition is currently too weak to win, yet faces a regime that is also too weak to undertake an effective crackdown.<sup>316</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, when asked whether they felt they had the ability to influence decisions in their “region, city or area,” a sizeable majority responded negatively: with 47 percent responding “definitely no” and 27 percent “probably not.”<sup>317</sup> A majority of respondents also reported that they did not intend to personally become more active in politics, with 31 percent responding “probably not” and 47 percent “definitely not,” and with neither of these figures changing significantly from polls taken in March 2010 or February 2006.<sup>318</sup> Such figures indicate a fundamentally sceptical attitude towards the likelihood of political change, and suggest that a large portion of the country outside the urban centres of the protest movement feel powerless and apathetic in relation to the current ruling structure.

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE OPPOSITION

The Levada Centre polls reveal a society which is at once increasingly opposed to “vertical power” and open to democratic reform, but pessimistic about the prospects of genuine reform and ignorant of—or indifferent to—the groups and individuals comprising the non-systemic opposition. The opposition, while strengthened by the protest movement, now faces an array of challenges if they are to translate that momentum into actual gains in their influence and popular appeal.

According to Vladimir Milov, the best strategy going forward is to “...focus all the momentum of the opposition on convincing the authorities to follow through with the concessions on political reforms, and continue the quiet cooperation between the systemic and non-systemic opposition.”<sup>319</sup> Mikhail Kasyanov has also made this point, arguing that political reforms such as easing the registration of political parties should be the top priority of the oppositionists.<sup>320</sup> Other activists such as the veteran human rights advocate Lyudmila Alexeyeva and Mikhail Kasyanov disagree with overemphasising reforms which will almost certainly prove cosmetic; still others conclude that the superficial nature of those reforms necessitates a strategy of direct confrontation with the authorities through mass protests and civil disobedience. Continued protests could conceivably compliment the politically-oriented approach advocated by Kasyanov and Milov, but may lead to counterproductive splits within the opposition over strategy.

The opposition must manage its message carefully, to convey a positive, non-ideological agenda that offers the public a genuine alternative to the status quo. Despite the success of the recent protests, the legacy of the opposition’s weakness presents a significant challenge to the movement’s growth and ability to attract and sustain a broader base of popular support. Ilya Ponomarev assessed the situation starkly: “Putin is weak—but the opposition hasn’t yet presented an alternative to the mass population.”<sup>321</sup> “According to our polls, the majority of Russians understand the desires of the protestors and sympathise,” observed Denis Volkov, “But the movement is not seen as useful or as having the potential to change people’s lives. There is still no real alternative to Putin.”<sup>322</sup>

Given the challenges the unofficial opposition faces, it is certainly possible that the movement will lose momentum and enter a period of quiescence. Yet it is unlikely that the streets will remain quiet for long—a combination of looming social problems may well erupt into social protests in the near

future, which could engage a new constituency in anti-regime sentiment: Russia's poor. The number of Russians living below the poverty line rose to 12.8 percent in 2011,<sup>323</sup> and the stark gap between the living standards of the very wealthy and the utter destitution of the rural poor remains a source of shame, anger and resentment. This could work to the advantage of Russia's left-wing parties—particularly if a new, more appealing left-wing coalition can be formed under a young, pragmatic leader.

The growth of support for pro-democracy and reform sentiments has been linked to the rise of Russia's growing middle class, which is estimated to have grown from 15 percent at the beginning of Putin's first term to 25 percent today.<sup>324</sup> Historically, the rise of the middle class correlates with increasing demands for political liberalisation—a phenomenon which can be seen in the fact that the recent protest movement was comprised of a predominately middle class base. While economic realities have hitherto bolstered Putin and the United Russia party, the failure to deal with infrastructural problems, corruption, the economy's over-reliance on the price of oil and issues such as the impending pension crisis could create significant problems for the government over time, and an opening for oppositionists to gain political ground. Additionally, Russia's demographic crisis is poised to fatally undermine the country's pension structure: an area which Alexey Kudrin has been particularly keen to reform.<sup>325</sup> Finally, the inherent difficulties of countering endemic corruption within the Russian state and society will make progress on this issue—which engages a significant portion of the population—difficult to achieve.

While it is premature to speculate which groups would be likely to gain power in the event of significant reforms to political competition, the liberal ethos which has characterised the street protests may not translate into significant support for liberal political parties. Despite these challenges, liberal activists are confident that they will be able to recast their message through the new generation of activists, and distinguish themselves from the popular perception of liberals as 1990s era privatisers. "If you consider the sentiments and specific reforms supported by the public, these are broadly consistent with our agenda—the demand for term limits or anti-corruption investigations, for instance," said Vladimir Kara-Murza.<sup>326</sup> However, given the widespread discontent surrounding issues such as immigration, and the persistence of social inequalities, it is plausible that the left and right-wing could emerge strengthened from any political change.

For Oleg Kozlovsky, the outcome depends more on the motivations of the

protestors than on opposition leadership. “I don’t know how deep the feelings and motivations of the people in the streets are, but everything depends on that.”<sup>327</sup> Undoubtedly, much will depend on whether or not the opposition has the ability to maintain their unity long enough to execute a sustained campaign of street protests. “There is no consensus on strategy, and most of the groups avoid these discussions because they don’t want internal conflicts,” Oleg Kozlovsky noted. “The coalition is good, but there are a lot of people who want pure ideology, and that can cause trouble.”<sup>328</sup>

Russia appears primed for a political evolution of some degree, but is unlikely to undergo revolutionary shifts. “Change will not be achieved through a direct standoff between the crowds and the government, as with the ‘Arab Spring,’” said Maria Lipman. “People will not camp out like they did in Tahrir Square.”<sup>329</sup> Indeed, both the lack of interest in engaging in civil disobedience at the March protests and the results of Levada Centre polling confirms that there is very little appetite for anything resembling revolution in Russia; a sentiment which the opposition must remain careful to keep in mind, and continue to pitch their agenda of peaceful reform rather than violent upheaval.

To this end, oppositionists including Mikhail Kasyanov and Ilya Yashin have affirmed that the movement should be prepared for a prolonged struggle, and be ready to change its tactics accordingly.<sup>330</sup> At the time of publication, the protest movement appears to be relatively united on the need to shift its strategy towards focusing on regional elections and taking advantage of the newly-restored direct election of mayors. This has paid off with reformist victories in the mayoral elections of Yaroslavl, Tolyatti, Toganrog and Chernogolovka, previously run by pro-Putin mayors. As Vladimir Milov put it, “The road to the Kremlin lies through Yaroslavl.”<sup>331</sup>

However, the protest movement still appears to be somewhat split between leaders who prefer a course focused on political parties and those who continue to emphasise the importance of street protests as an instrument of pressure. According to Sergei Udaltsov, further rallies will continue to emphasise the demands for political reform and early elections. The fact that many of the key leaders—including Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasyanov and Alexey Navalny<sup>332</sup>—did not speak at the 10 March 2012 protest indicates that many may be recalibrating their political strategies in the response to the presidential elections and the inevitable decline in enthusiasm for the protests. The rally scheduled to coincide with Putin’s presidential inauguration on 7 May 2012 will provide an important opportunity to assess the future direction of the protest movement and of the opposition as a whole.



The movement's survival may be best served by a combination of the following steps:

1. Maintain a broad-based movement, dedicated to applying continually-focused pressure on the regime for achievable reforms—namely, pushing for electoral law reforms and the right to form political party blocs; the “unfiltered” reform of direct gubernatorial elections; reintroducing term limits for the presidency; the removal of censorship and liberalisation of media ownership; and early elections to replace the fraudulent Duma and presidential elections;
2. Balance the need to maintain a broad-based movement with the imperative of opposing groups with anti-democratic and/or racist agendas;
3. Deprive the regime of elite support by inducing systemic opposition politicians to join the genuine opposition/protest movement;
4. Continue to hold strategically-scheduled mass protests, though not at the expense of building political parties which can offer concrete political alternatives to the ruling arrangement (and vice versa—a political strategy which does not ignore the need for mass action, and potentially the targeted use of civil disobedience tactics where appropriate and morally persuasive);
5. Continue to focus on putting forward credible reformist candidates in local and regional elections, to build momentum ahead of the 2016 Duma elections, maintain pressure on the national government and build strong leaders capable of challenging at a national level;
6. Individual groups must further develop the practical political agendas of individual groups in anticipation of the next Duma elections in 2016. This is particularly important for the new generation of civil society activists, who need to develop these skills and who offer the greatest degree of legitimacy to a potential electorate; and
7. Improve cooperation across the opposition in promoting anti-corruption efforts, in light of the fact that corruption is perhaps the government's greatest weakness in terms of domestic popularity, and is a cause capable of attracting considerable popular support.

The maintenance of a broad-based alliance, organised around a programme of specific, non-ideological demands aimed at increasing political freedoms is the most powerful strategy for undermining the control of the current power structure. The status quo is best served by a divided and discredited opposition, which it can paint as out-of-touch and ineffectual; a united, broad-based movement can appeal to the population at large and act as a consistent pressure point on the regime.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the contemporary opposition, as it entails keeping egos in check and settling on a single, broad strategy. The Kremlin is relying on the liberalisation of the law regarding the registration of political parties as the best way of keeping parties divided against each other; parties must remain focused on subverting that plan, and applying pressure for the repeal of regulations prohibiting the ability to form electoral blocs.

At the same time that the opposition must maximise its influence by maintaining its broad base, it must also remain vigilant that anti-democratic and racist elements in these groups are not strengthened or endorsed by the protest movement. The movement should also seek to induce more systemic opposition politicians to abandon their acquiescence or support of the Kremlin and support the protest movement—a strategy which, if successful, could fatally undermine Putin's hold on power.

The continuation of mass protests has the potential to be a powerful component of the opposition strategy going forward; particularly given the extreme sensitivity of authoritarian regimes to the negative attention and perception of illegitimacy generated by such protests. However, as Artemy Troitsky has ruefully pointed out, there is a danger in "...mak[ing] a fetish out of 'thousand-strong crowds'" when the regime can just "...bus in a few more thousand coerced public sector workers."<sup>333</sup>

As a consequence, it is crucial that the movement does not sacrifice long-term, political development to a strategy overly-focused on popular protest. At the same time, the moral persuasiveness of peaceful protests—and, in some cases, acts of political disobedience and self-denial such as Oleg Shein's hunger strike in Astrakhan—must be considered as a valuable tool, albeit one that must be strategically and carefully employed depending on circumstances.

Refocusing attention from national politics towards local and regional

elections has already been recognised by most oppositionists as the best means of maintaining momentum and building concrete political support ahead of the next national elections in 2016. This focus should be continued, and the opposition should strive to use local elections as a mirror for the national context, and vice versa. In this way, they can counter accusations that they have no credible national base of support and offer no concrete alternative to the status quo by demonstrating their commitment at the local and regional level. Individual political parties, particularly those which are able to register under the revised law, must demonstrate their bona fides by developing sound agendas to deal with the problems faced by the general public, in order to offer genuine alternatives capable of addressing common concerns.

Finally, highlighting state-sponsored corruption and demanding reform should also be a crucial component of the opposition strategy, as it has the potential to unite activists of varying stripes on an issue which engages and angers the Russian public. The power of the issue has been demonstrated by Alexey Navalny's rise to prominence, and the opposition activists interviewed for this report agreed that highlighting corruption was one of the most powerful tools available to oppositionists.

Opposition leaders have also embraced the application of external measures to exert pressure on the ruling system—for example, key activists including Navalny and Ryzhkov—have voiced their support for the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, the proposed legislation which would impose visa bans and asset freezes on any individual credibly suspected of human rights abuses, currently under consideration by the US Congress.<sup>334</sup> More specifically, these oppositionists have advocated repealing the outdated Jackson-Vanik amendment, a Soviet-era measure that has prevented the Russian Federation from normalising trade relations with the United States, but replacing Jackson-Vanik with the Magnitsky Act. In an original interview with the Henry Jackson Society, Alexey Navalny commented:

“In my opinion, for the West to engage with Russia economically while maintaining uncompromising stance against abuse of human rights, rule of law and principles of democracy would correspond the best to the interests of the Russian people and the world as a whole. It is difficult for me to comment and assess the internal American political considerations surrounding the repeal of the [Jackson-Vanik] amendment and the adoption of the Sergey Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act. But, no doubt the

majority of Russian citizens will be happy to see US Senate denying the most abusive and corrupt Russian officials the right to entry and participation in financial transactions in the US, which is the essence of Magnitsky Bill.”<sup>335</sup>

Further efforts by politicians in the UK and Europe to pass similar legislation, as well as other measures addressing gaps in anti-bribery and money-laundering safeguards, could provide another important source of support for domestic anti-corruption efforts on the ground in the Russian Federation—undermining the status quo and implicitly supporting the opposition movement.

## CONCLUSION: THE RUSSIAN EVOLUTION

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“It so happens that Astrakhan today is the place where two Russias have collided. The Russia of crooks and thieves and the Russia of honest citizens.”—Oleg Shein<sup>336</sup>

Oleg Shein’s struggle in Astrakhan has trained a spotlight on the sense of division in Russia between cynicism and conviction, coercion and liberty, and corruption and transparency which has brought about the most significant challenge to the political status quo in twelve years. For the past five years, genuine opposition politics in Russia has appeared, at the best of times, to be the marginal preserve of urban activists, and at worst, moribund. Yet even as opposition activists and politicians struggled to break through the state-imposed information blockade and legal restrictions on their activities, a far more important development occurred: the Russian public grew tired with United Russia, and Vladimir Putin lost his once-unquestioned air of invincibility. The growth of civil society groups spoke to a more engaged, independent and self-reliant concept of citizenship, and has proven both a source and a springboard for the ongoing protest movement.

Activists and politicians from across the spectrum of the non-systemic opposition have exploited this public mood by coming together under a broad platform of demands for free and fair elections and political competition, and have organised a significant protest movement, centred in Moscow but with an increasingly national presence. With the presidential elections concluded, and Putin—seemingly inevitably—returned to power, the movement now faces the challenge of remaining united and choosing the appropriate strategy to exert sufficient pressure on the government to extract genuine concessions.

The main strands of the opposition movement—broadly defined for this report as liberal, nationalist, left-wing and civil society groups—face

internal divisions and challenges in their outreach to the public, and the pro-democratic forces within the opposition must remain vigilant of the anti-democratic tendencies of nationalist groups and the extreme left. The current upsurge in public attention and influence for the unofficial opposition may well collapse; yet the protest movement will undoubtedly have lasting political consequences for Russia, in a process of political evolution which may occur more quickly than analysts had previously predicted. If so, it is conceivable that Russia's "managed democracy" could come under new management within the next decade.

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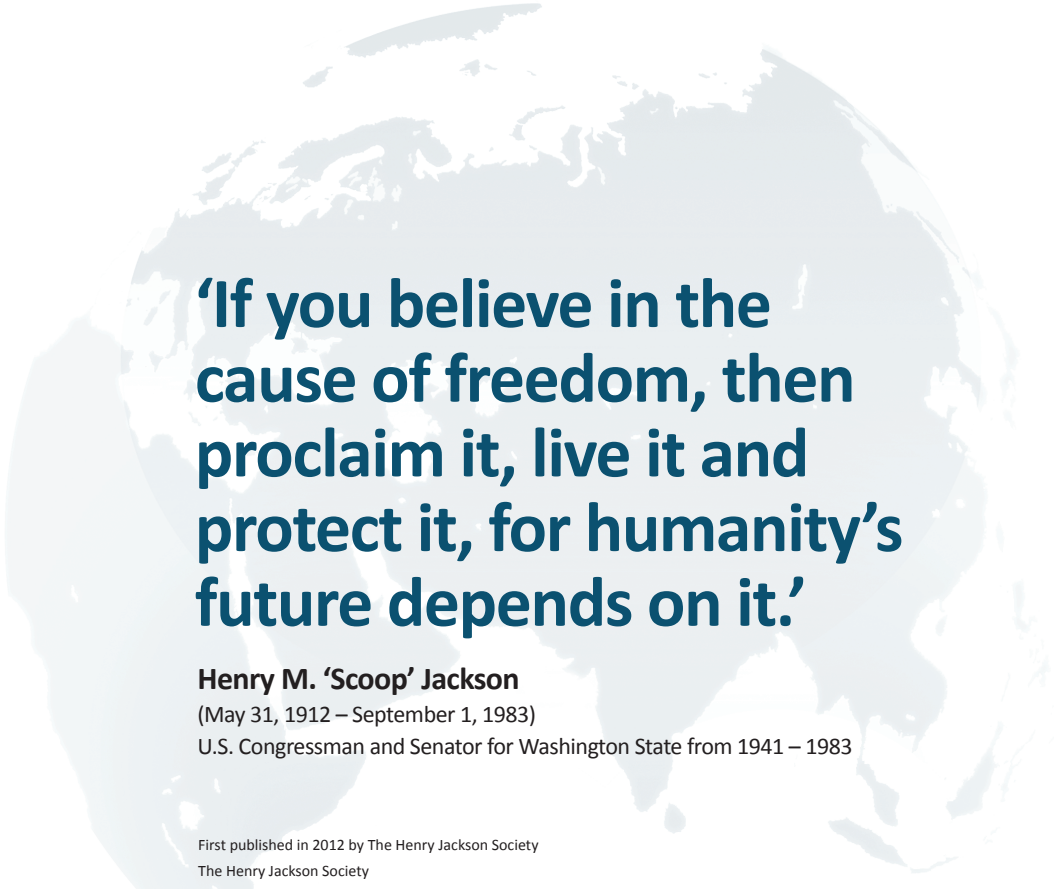


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**‘If you believe in the  
cause of freedom, then  
proclaim it, live it and  
protect it, for humanity’s  
future depends on it.’**

**Henry M. ‘Scoop’ Jackson**

(May 31, 1912 – September 1, 1983)

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