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Chapter 1

Civil Society and Protests in Russia

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Some scholars have suggested that little has changed in civil society in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet system (Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers 2013: 164). It is true that most independent social organisations in Russia were weak and marginal at the end of the first post-Soviet decade, and the situation has not improved greatly for most of them to the present day. It also may be said accurately that Vladimir Putin has sought to subordinate civil society to domination by the state. Certainly some aspects of the relationship between the state and social organisations that is envisioned in Putin's model are reminiscent of features of the Soviet system (Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers 2013: 164). Yet this chapter will argue that a great deal has changed in civil society in Russia since the beginning of the post-Soviet period. The assessment of the degree of such change depends to a large extent on the perspective of each person who analyses trends in Russian society and politics. Those who have directed their attention to civil society in Russia mainly because they have hoped that it would contribute to the success of democratisation in that country are likely to conclude that there has been little significant change. Yet as Russians themselves look at organisations in their society, most of them do not assess such organisations in terms of their contribution to the growth of democracy in their country's political system. A variety of evidence indicates that most Russians evaluate the work of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in terms of the impact that they feel in their lives. They ask whether any of those organisations have produced improvements by addressing the problems that most trouble them. We need to keep that perspective in mind as we examine trends in civil society in Russia.

Problems of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia

The 1990s, the first years after the demise of the Soviet system, were a painful and difficult period for most people in Russia, in which providing for basic necessities in the face of economic instability was the overriding concern. The consensus of scholars is that during this period, most Russians continued to rely primarily on informal networks of family members and friends to satisfy their most urgent needs (Crotty 2009: 88, Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers 2013: 158). Indeed, it is recognised that Russian citizens continue to resort to informal practices based on friendships and trade-offs of favours at the present day to ensure the adequate

provision of key services (Greene 2012: 138). As part of the unofficial legacy of the Soviet system, Russians have regarded the public sphere – including not only political institutions but also social organisations – with suspicion, as a realm of corruption and cynicism (Richter and Hatch 2013: 331). Thus in the 1990s, as Sarah Henderson (2010: 261) says, ‘many viewed NGOs with hostility, mistrust, or, at best, indifference’. Lev Jakobson and Sergei Sanovich (2010: 292) argue that the public’s lack of confidence in such organisations is still the main obstacle to the expansion of civil society in Russia. Support for organisations dedicated to the defence of human rights has been particularly weak (Volkov 2011: 39), partly because the discourse about individual rights that comes from Western countries with more liberal traditions does not evoke as positive a response in Russia.

In general, after the fall of the Soviet system, civil society in Russia was marginal in its place in society and the political system. As Henderson (2010: 250) puts it, ‘the non-profit sector that emerged in the first decade of the post-Soviet era was weak, fragmented, and poorly connected with political elites and with the populations it claimed to represent’. A major handicap of non-profit organisations in that period was a lack of funding, and that continues to be a serious deficiency (Chebankova 2013: 147, *Obshchestvennaya palata* 2013: 26). Surveys of the leaders of NGOs in Russia have consistently found that most of the respondents identify a lack of financial resources as their most troubling problem. Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova (2010: 174) report on a survey of NGO officers in which only 2.9 per cent identified ‘pressure on organisations from government’ as one of their primary problems, while ‘not enough money, material resources’ was named by 59.1 per cent of respondents, putting that problem in first place. It is not surprising that Jo Crotty (2009: 96) says of NGOs that she has studied that ‘economic pressures, coupled with an absence of resources ... led to the decline of these groups, rather than attempts by the state to reign in their activity’. Raising funds by soliciting donations from Russian citizens was not feasible for the vast majority of non-profit organisations for a number of years, not only because of widespread suspicion of social organisations, but also because most Russians found themselves with marginal financial resources due to decreases in their real incomes. Recently Sergei Ljubnikow and Jo Crotty (2013: 5) concluded that the absence of domestic sources of funding is still the factor that is most detrimental for the development of nongovernmental organisations in Russia. When Janet Elise Johnson and Aino Saarinen (2011: 48) asked the officers of women’s crisis centres in Russia about their main problems, the respondents pointed ‘first and foremost’ to the lack of sufficient financing for their facilities and services.

Initially, in the post-Soviet years, financial support for NGOs from businesses was scarce; even in more recent years, most businesses have not been eager to assist non-profits, according to Denis Volkov (2011: 7) of the Levada Centre. Though some other scholars report that during the last several years the business world has begun to give funds to the non-profit sector on a growing scale (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010: 293), they add that corporate donations flow only to projects that

are approved by government authorities on one level or another (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010: 293, Volkov 2011: 7). For organisations that have a contentious relationship with the political regime – resulting from their confrontation of authority over violations of citizens’ rights – funding from Russian business is said to be impossible (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010: 293). In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet system, assistance from local governments was crucial for many social organisations, particularly for those that had been sponsored by the state earlier. Ol’ga Alekseeva (2010: 309) estimates that in the 1990s, non-profit organisations in Russia received 40 per cent of their resources from local governments. A large proportion of that assistance was not in the form of money, but consisted of office space, equipment, telephone service, and other resources at the disposal of local officials. On the other hand, some NGOs stepped into the role of contractors who entered into agreements with local governments to provide social services that government entities previously had delivered directly to citizens (Fröhlich 2012: 375).

Financial support for non-profit organisations from foreign governments and foundations was a new feature in Russia in the post-Soviet period, and it was very significant for some NGOs although the majority have never received funding from foreign sources (Alekseeva 2010: 308). Foreign donors largely concentrated their assistance on organisations that had come into existence during the late 1980s or the 1990s, and those focused on human rights, women’s rights, and other issues that the donors considered central for the building of democracy (Henderson 2010: 255). Sarah Henderson (2010: 264) notes that the emphasis of Western donors led them to work with ‘a relatively narrow’ selection of NGOs, and she argues that those organisations were ‘unrepresentative’ of most of Russian society. Christian Fröhlich (2012: 379) points out that in the 1990s the non-profits that were the focus of support from Western donors sought to follow ‘Western liberal models of a civil society independent of the state and the market’. Though grants from foreign sources did make it possible for the leaders of some NGOs to learn the professional practices employed by Western non-profits, studies by several scholars have found that organisations that relied mainly on foreign funding devoted their efforts to the goals which most important for the funding organisations instead of emphasising issues that were of primary concern for their potential constituencies in Russia (Henderson 2010: 264; Chebankova 2013: 119). Thus NGOs that depended heavily on foreign support built ties with donor organisations outside of Russia rather than strengthening their links with groups in the population of their own country (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010: 286).

After the end of the 1990s foreign funding for non-profit organisations was decreasing because of shifts in the priorities of foreign governments and foundations (Jakobson and Sanovich 2010, 287–288; Johnson and Saarinen 2011: 41). At this point it is worth emphasising that the decline of support from outside sources for organisations in civil society in Russia began because of factors other than the actions of the government of that country, although it is true that within a few years the Putin administration did voice its distaste for foreign financial support

for NGOs. According to Jakobson and Sanovich (2011: 287), the model in which some Russian nongovernmental organisations depended primarily on foreign money had exhausted itself in the early 2000s. The combination of the effects of the decrease in interest in Russia among foreign donors and the imposition of greater restrictions by the Putin regime has led to a 'crisis of financing' for some non-profit organisations (Volkov 2011: 11). There may be different interpretations of the probable consequences of that situation. One could view the decline of foreign grant funding for some NGOs as weakening Russian civil society, and there undoubtedly are serious problems for those organisations that have depended heavily on such grants. On the other hand, for the majority of non-profits which never received grants from foreign sources, the lack of availability of such funding will hardly make a difference. Further, some scholars think that the drying up of most money from abroad will encourage the growth of a civil society that is more deeply rooted in domestic society, as social organisations in Russia seek to replace external sources of support with internal ones (Jakobson and Sanovich 2011: 289). In other words, the changed situation might give organisations that previously placed primary value on their relationship with agencies in the West an incentive to devote more attention to meeting the needs of groups in Russian society in order to win greater support within their country.

Some nongovernmental organisations have been successful in cultivating support among groups in their society. One key factor in gaining confidence from a domestic constituency appears to be framing issues in a manner that is compatible with the values and attitudes of Russian society. Fröhlich (2012: 376) points out that organisations of the disabled in Russia that avoid presenting their goals in a framework drawn from a human rights-based approach (which would be more acceptable in the West) and instead emphasise 'social inequalities and the poor living conditions of children with disabilities and their families' achieve greater resonance in Russian society. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom (2006: 186) has shown that the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers have gained a high level of credibility among the majority of Russians by framing their goals in relation to the image of a mother who strives to protect her son, an image that is firmly grounded in traditional Russian culture. Further, Fröhlich (2012: 385) has found that most organisations that seek to improve conditions for the lives of people with disabilities in Russia have not chosen a strategy consistent with the Western notion of civil society as independent from the state and often in conflict with it, but have sought cooperation with the state, which has worked to their advantage by cultivating connections that facilitate the representation of the interests of their constituents. As he puts it, the close relationship between the All-Russian Society of the Disabled (VOI) and the government has enhanced the political opportunities for VOI (Fröhlich 2012: 380–381). In his view, professionalised NGOs serving people with disabilities have adapted a 'Western human rights-based approach of social inclusion' in order to make it more compatible with the norms of Russian culture and the necessity of entanglement with the state (Fröhlich 2012: 384).

Vladimir Putin and State Domination of Civil Society

After Vladimir Putin became president of Russia, he proceeded to reduce the independence of all centres of power outside the institution of the presidency as he concentrated more and more authority in his own hands. As a result, the degree of pluralism in the political system of Russia decreased dramatically between 2000 and 2008. Around the time that his second term as president began in 2004, Putin openly turned his attention to civil society (Evans 2006: 149, Robertson 2009: 531). He has often spoken of the importance of developing civil society, but it is clear that his vision of civil society is quite different from that which is usually endorsed in the West. Putin does not see civil society in his country as being independent from the state and often entering into an adversarial relationship with the centre of political authority. Instead, as this author pointed out several years ago, Putin 'interprets civil society as a network of organisations that, while remaining technically outside the state, will be co-opted to assist the leadership of the political regime in pursuing the objectives that it has chosen for society' (Evans 2006: 152). In short, Putin's model is of a civil society that is dominated by the state and that serves the interests of the Russian nation. The Russian political regime has increased its efforts to put that model into action after the events in Ukraine in 2004 and 2014, which the Kremlin has viewed as showing the danger of a civil society that supports opposition to the state.

Among the measures that the Putin administration has taken to try to translate that model into institutional reality has been the adoption of legislation designed to tighten the regulation of nongovernmental organisations. The laws that have been approved with that end in mind during the last several years have been covered in detail elsewhere, and their impact has been widely debated (Richter and Hatch 2013: 336). It is clear that the law on NGOs which was adopted in 2006 increased the requirements for reporting by such organisations, and that it has imposed a greater burden on the staff of non-profit organisations in filling out forms and gathering information for reports, thus further straining the resources of such organisations (Johnson and Saarinen 2011: 48, Ljubownikow and Crotty 2013: 2). On the other hand, some NGO leaders were happy that the legislation of 2006 could eliminate fake non-profits that diverted money to purposes other than those for which it was contributed (Johnson and Saarinen 2011: 42). The language of that law suggested that it could be used to justify closing organisations whose goals were not approved by state officials, but reports on the enforcement of the law indicate that it has not been employed to terminate organisations whose work has irritated the government (Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova 2010: 174). Some scholars have said that the law of 2006 made it more difficult to obtain funding from foreign sources (Ljubownikow and Crotty 2013: 8). Since early 2013, the enforcement of the more recent legislation that requires any non-commercial organisation in Russia that receives foreign funding and engages in political activity to register as a 'foreign agent' has been extraordinarily heavy-handed in some cases, in which a bevy of officials of various agencies have

simultaneously descended on the offices of each NGO, demanding information about a variety of aspects of the operation of that organisation, most of which have nothing to do with the provisions of the 'foreign agent' law (Winning 2013). Also, in practice the definition of political activity under that law has been very broad in some cases, for example including the Levada Centre publishing the results of opinion surveys that it has conducted (Zakharov 2013). The legislation regulating nongovernmental organisations that has been enacted at the behest of the Putin regime is part of a system of selective incentives and disincentives that encourage civil society organisations to cooperate with the state and make life more difficult for those that choose to confront the structures of authority (Evans 2006: 154, Richter and Hatch 2013: 329).

The political leadership of Russia has made efforts to create organisations that it has sponsored as it tries to implement its vision of a civil society that serves the state (Richter and Hatch 2013: 335, Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers 2013: 162). So far the most widely publicised of those organisations have not been highly successful, as was implied when the youth organisation *Idushchie vmeste* – a Kremlin project from the start – was replaced with *Nashi*, which now seems to have little energy and may itself be due for retirement. The political regime has also created institutions that are part of the state but were intended to strengthen connections with civil society and provide channels for feedback from the population. The new institutions that the Putin leadership probably saw as most important for that purpose are the public chambers on the national, regional and local levels. The national Public Chamber (*Obshchestvennaya palata*) came into existence following a proposal by Vladimir Putin in 2004, and began functioning in early 2006 (Evans 2008, Richter 2009). It has 126 members who were drawn from nongovernmental organisations and a variety of professions, and the presidency plays a key role in selecting those members. During the initial period of its operations, that chamber got involved in some well-publicised conflicts, but after that it seemed to become more careful and has remained quiet on the most controversial issues arising from Russian society during the last few years. A recent proposal for changes in the membership of that body is probably designed to make it more clearly part of the system of support for the national political leadership (Nagornykh et al. 2014). It is often said that most of the public chambers, rather than providing forums for dialogue, 'have come to resemble state bureaucracies' (Richter and Hatch 2013: 337).

The official who is usually called the 'Human Rights Ombudsman' of Russia, who from 2004 to 2014 was Vladimir Lukin, has consistently been more willing to speak out on actions by the state that he sees as infringing on basic rights. His suggestions that go against the grain of official policy are rarely put into practice by the president, however. Another institution that at times has provided representation for independent groups is the President's Council on Human Rights and Civil Society, currently headed by Mikhail Fedotov. Though the composition of that council has been broadened in a manner apparently intended to weaken its connection with human rights groups and other dissenters, Fedotov also has been

a critic of some official actions on controversial matters. It is perhaps surprising that a former chairperson of that council, Ella Pamfilova – who resigned after reportedly being pressured by some within the presidential administration – has been chosen by Putin to replace Vladimir Lukin as the Human Rights Ombudsman (Gorbachev 2014). That appointment reflects one side of Putin's strategy for dealing with discontented members of society, which contrasts with another side of his strategy which aims to keep contention within acceptable boundaries.

One part of the Putin administration's strategy for reshaping civil society that may have a substantial effect is the increase in the state's funding for non-profit organisations. Sarah Henderson (2010: 255) has said that the government is pursuing an 'import substitution' model of development of civil society, in which financial assistance from foreign donors will be replaced by funds from the state. The 'foreign agent' law is widely reported to have prompted the few organisations outside Russia that were still giving grants to NGOs to back off from providing such assistance. At the same time, financial support for nongovernmental organisations from the Russian state has been expanding; Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova (2010: 177) observe that since 2007 the amount of funding flowing from the state to social organisations has 'jumped enormously'. They add that the volume of state grants is rather small in comparison with the size of Russia's population and the needs of its third sector, but that amount of money must look large to organisations that are starved for cash. The total awarded in grants from national government grew to 3.4 billion roubles in 2013 (Gorodetskaya and Nagornykh 2013). Of course, accepting financial support from the state may present the threat of the loss of independence by organisations in society (Volkov 2011: 30). However, Chebankova (2013: 129) reports that for several years the state has occasionally given financial assistance to groups that regularly criticise the government. In 2013, an organisation headed by Ella Pamfilova, who earlier had emerged as an advocate for independent-minded groups, was given responsibility for distributing some of the funding in grants to NGOs. Before the end of that year, when Pamfilova announced the organisations to which grants had been awarded including some human rights organisations which often have criticised the state, such as Memorial and Golos (Bekbulatova 2013). The logic of the regime's strategy in channelling funds to such organisations is open to different interpretations but it is clear that Putin prefers for all organised groups, including those with a more independent point of view, to receive financial support from the state rather than foreign donors.

As the Russian economy grew at a high rate from 1998 to 2008 the incomes of most Russians rose substantially, and a large segment of the population became more prosperous and economically secure. Perhaps partly because of improvements in the standard of living, activism in civil society has increased gradually during the last several years, according to the results of a survey by the Levada Centre (Volkov 2011: 18). Denis Volkov (2011: 10) reports that many respondents in that survey spoke of the expansion of work by volunteers in non-commercial organisations. Elena Chebankova (2013: 165) agrees that in recent years a growing number of Russians have shown themselves willing to take part

in social initiatives. She (Chebankova 2013: 106) and other scholars (Jakobson and Sanovich 2011: 236) say that charitable activity outside of informal networks has increased noticeably in recent years. Volkov (2011: 10) affirms that donations to non-profit organisations by individuals have become more widespread, and that fundraising is often aided by the use of the Internet and social networks. The use of the Internet by Russians has increased rapidly since 2001 (Obshchestvennaya palata 2013: 63). Chebankova (2013: 151) argues that the Internet plays a significant role in the growth of social movements, as it helps them communicate their messages and mobilise people for activity.

Yet even Chebankova (2013: 147) – who is generally optimistic about the prospects for Russian civil society – admits that forming grassroots networks to support civic activity is a ‘slow and intermittent process’. She also cautions that the social base for activism in civil society is limited to certain segments of the population, mainly consisting of the more prosperous citizens, and does not include wider sections of the general public (Chebankova 2013: 165). Volkov (2011: 18) emphasises that the recent growth of participation in social organisations must be seen ‘against the background of indifference and passivity of the basic mass of the population’. Among most Russians, suspicion of the public realm, including non-profit organisations (described earlier in the chapter), has proved to be quite persistent. That fact underlines the point that the potential for the growth of civil society is shaped not only by the actions of the state, but also by the attitudes of people in society, which condition their readiness to join together in cooperative endeavours (Volkov 2011: 11). We should keep that point in mind, since the attention of Western scholars and journalists is usually absorbed by the Putin regime’s initiatives as it deals with civil society.

Protests in Russia in Recent Years

The large-scale protests that erupted in December 2011 were some of the most remarkable phenomena in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet system. Yet there had been many protests before 2011, and it seems quite likely that the number of such demonstrations had increased since the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s second term as president in 2004 (Robertson 2011: 186, Evans 2013: 111). Most of the protests in Russia since 2004 have focused on narrowly defined issues that were raised when government on one level or another took actions that had an immediate and adverse effect on the daily lives of groups of citizens (Evans 2012: 238). In such cases the demands of the protesters were concrete and specific, and called for the defence of rights that groups of people had considered to be well established. Each of those protests was firmly grounded in support from the group whose interests were at stake. In contrast, most citizens paid little attention to demonstrations by political dissident, who sought to defend basic principles of democracy and demanded change in the character of the political regime. Volkov (2010) has said that those protest actions ‘do not come into the field of view of

the basic mass of the population’. We also should note that for years the number of people taking part in such demonstrations was always small, rarely consisting of more than one 100 participants, and often drawing fewer than that. Thus it was very surprising when tens of thousands of Russians turned out for protest rallies following the parliamentary elections of December 4, 2011.

The largest protest actions in the winter of 2011–2012, as measured by the number of people taking part in such demonstrations, were held in Moscow. Many observers have remarked that the number of people participating in similar protests since that time has decreased substantially (Weir 2013, *Vedomosti* 2013, Sukhov 2013, Obrazkova, 2013). For example, independent sources estimated that from 40,000 to 80,000 people took part in each of the largest demonstrations criticising the Putin leadership (Evans 2013: 115), but only 10,000 to 20,000 people participated in the largest protest march of early 2013 (*Moskovskie novosti* 2013, *Kommersant* 2013). The number of people who attended the protest rallies in Moscow on 12 June of each year declined from about 50,000 in 2012 to about 10,000 in 2013 (Weir 2012, *Winning* 2013). Ol’ga Kryshstanovskaya (et al. 2013: 13), a prominent Russian sociologist, has said that attendance at major protests in Moscow has decreased since its peak by a factor of approximately five. She believes that it has become harder to attract those who took part in earlier demonstrations but whose commitment to the goals of protests has wavered. It may be true that some people who attended earlier protests have come to fear persecution by the state, and it is likely that efforts by the regime to make an example of protesters like the Bolotnaya defendants are intended to instil fear in potential demonstrators.

On the other hand, those who still participate in political protests have become more dedicated to the cause that is symbolized by those demonstrations. Kryshstanovskaya et al (2013: 12) describe the forming of a ‘core’ or ‘nucleus’ of protest, consisting of 8,000 to 10,000 people who continue to voice their discontent. Denis Volkov (2013a) of the Levada Centre in Moscow affirms that ‘the core of active opponents of the political regime has grown and also has increased its activism’. Polling of people who were taking part in protests, conducted by Kryshstanovskaya et al’s (2013: 12) sociological laboratory showed that the percentage of participants who had taken part in some previous protests increased from 2012 to 2013. Surveys by Kryshstanovskaya et al (2013: 14) also revealed that closer ties had formed among participants in protest actions over time and that the regular participants in such demonstrations had become more nearly homogeneous ideologically, with most agreeing in their support for liberal democratic values, and decreased proportions of participants associated with the far left or far right.

The mood of protesters has also changed markedly since the winter of 2011–2012. Maria Lipman (cited by Weir 2013) of the Moscow Carnegie Centre has said that the feeling among most of those who took part in demonstrations at that time was one of ‘naïve enthusiasm’, as the numbers and energy of participants in the first large political protests since the early 1990s inspired optimism. She also has noted that for most of those who were present at such events, that feeling has

given way to disappointment and demoralisation, with many convinced that they cannot change the status quo in Russia. As Kryshtanovskaya et al (2013: 6, 13) describe it, for many protesters the euphoria of two years ago has been replaced by pessimism. A survey by the Levada Centre in February 2013 found that very few protesters believed that their actions had obtained concessions from the political regime (Levada Centre 2013a: 8–9). It is often said that such a sense of a lack of concrete accomplishments is one of the main reasons for the decline in the number of participants in the principal protest meetings.

Among those who have continued faithfully to take part in political protests, there has been a trend of radicalisation (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 2013: 14). The agenda of major protest demonstrations has changed since late 2011 and early 2012. The slogans and speeches in demonstrations of those days focused on the goal of fair and honest elections, and criticism by the protesters mainly targeted Vladimir Putin and a few other officials. The orientation of protests since that time has broadened. Recent protests have voiced not only criticism of Putin, but also the rejection of the whole political system (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 2013, 8: 13). Impressions of the political regime among protesters have become more negative over time, as shown in surveys by the Levada Centre (2013a: 5–6). While the persecution of some opponents of the power structure may have intimidated many who had taken part in earlier protests, it also has had the effect of uniting the more determined participants in demonstrations who are inspired by those who they see as victims of repression (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 2013: 10). As Kryshtanovskaya et al (2013) says, people like the defendants in the Bolotnaya case and Aleksey Navalny have become ‘cult figures’ in the eyes of many protesters. The core of the political protest movement now consists of very determined participants, those dubbed by Kryshtanovskaya et al (2013) as ‘steadfast protesters’ who share a strong sense of the duty to voice their indignation. Those dissidents have high ideals and are devoted to ethical resistance in the face of a regime that they consider deeply immoral (Rowley 2013: 3–4).

A basic problem for the core of protesters, however, is that their base of support in Russian society still is rather narrow (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 2013: 14). Evidence from survey research by Kryshtanovskaya et al (2013) indicates that among the majority of Russians the goals of the political protesters have low resonance. Kryshtanovskaya et al (2013: 8) point out that the slogan, ‘Freedom for Political Prisoners’, which has received central emphasis in recent political demonstrations, ‘has not evoked a broad response in the population’. The Levada Centre (2013c) has found that more Russians disapprove the slogan than approve it. An editorial in *Vedomosti* (2013) stressed the lack of ties between dissatisfied middle class protesters in large cities and people in ‘the provinces’, who have their own reasons to feel dissatisfied. Polls by reputable organisations have found that support for the political opposition’s protests, which never included a majority, has decreased since December 2011 (Levada Centre 2013b, 2013d, RIA Novosti 2013). In addition, there is a very low level of support among the public for the main leaders of the political opposition (Levada Centre 2013d).

The Levada Centre has compared the answers of protesters to the question, ‘What is now happening in Russia?’ with answers to the same question by a sample of the whole population (Levada Centre 2013e). Striking differences were evident. For example, in January 2013, a larger percentage of the protesters than the public chose the answer, ‘the strengthening of repressions and the establishing of dictatorship’, while a larger percentage of the general sample than the protesters picked ‘temporary difficulties’ or ‘stable development’. Even in Moscow, the city where there seems to be the most support for the opposition to the Putin leadership, the Levada Centre (2013f: 8) found sharp differences between protest participants and the general public in answers to some questions, including one about each respondent’s willingness to participate in ‘mass protest actions’. Thus it is not surprising that Russian liberals are said to see themselves as isolated in their own country (Pain 2013), and that Konstantin Remchukov (2013) has drawn a contrast between a vocal minority of political protesters and the ‘silent majority’ of the people of Russia. Some political activists and researchers in that country have emphasised the need for the political protesters to appeal to the majority of their fellow citizens (Gudkov 2013), in order to broaden the base of support for their protests (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 2013: 14).

We should not assume that most Russians are satisfied with the performance of the state. In fact, a number of sources have said that there is widespread discontent among the population (*Gazeta.ru* 2013, Vishnyakova 2013). Lev Gudkov, the Director of the Levada Centre, has disclosed that polls conducted by researchers of his organisation have found that dissatisfaction among Russians is growing (Levada Centre 2013g: 1). In addition, the actions that the author of this chapter has referred to as ‘local protests’, which express discontent with moves by political authorities that disrupt the everyday lives of people in particular localities, have continued to the present as revealed by many accounts in the Russian press (Kolesnikova and Provornaya 2013, Nemirova 2013, Vorontsova 2013). Some commentators in Russia even say that the number of such protests has increased in recent years (Evans 2012: 234, Doronina 2013). According to Denis Volkov (2013b), a feeling of injustice is growing among the population, and has ‘enormous mobilizing potential’. Consistent with that interpretation, Samuel Greene (2013, 30) argues that the idea of injustice has been at the heart of protest movements in Russia for years. However, while that idea might potentially be the foundation for uniting the forces of protest by the political opposition and protest by myriad local residents over specific abuses, in actuality those two streams of protest remain largely separate from each other.

So far, discontent with the state on all levels has not been translated into majority support for the political opposition in Russia (Vishnyakova 2013). Many surveys have shown a gap in perceptions between the participants in large-scale political protests on the one hand, and the majority of Russians on the other. For example, people taking part in political protests in Moscow and representative samples of all Russians give different answers to the question of Russia’s main needs (Levada Centre 2013a: 6). Even in Moscow, most people identify the main problems

troubling their city in a way that contrasts with the themes that are emphasised by major protest demonstrations (Levada Centre 2013f: 4–5). Across the whole country, most Russians indicate that they do not consider problems of democracy, freedom, and the protection of human rights as very important (Levada Centre 2013h). In surveys by the Levada Centre (2013g), most Russians show themselves to be indifferent toward the repression of opponents of the political regime.

Another persistent problem of the movement that has produced large protests against the Putin regime is that it has not succeeded in achieving a high level of institutionalisation. We should recall that the first major protests that took place in December 2011 were spontaneous (Greene 2013: 41), bringing together diverse groups and individuals without coordination by a single organisation. Volkov (2013b) argues that even more recently separate, independent movements have come together to hold political protests. As Nicole Bode and Andrey Makarychev (2013: 53) observe, the movement that grew out of those protests is still so loosely networked that it is really a ‘movement of movements’. Though participants in political protests in Moscow have become less diverse with respect to ideology, the opposition continues to be divided among leftists, liberals, and nationalists, with people of each of those tendencies split into many small groups, as noted by Aleksandr Tarasov (Barabanov and Rozhdenstvenskaya 2013). The most conspicuous attempt at institutionalisation of the protest movement has been the creation of a Coordinating Council of the opposition, but that body has been hampered by internal disputes to the point where it really has ceased to function (Zheleznova and Biriukova 2013, Epifanova 2012). It appears that the council has been a collection of small groups of activists with each pursuing its own goals which are determined primarily by the agenda of their leaders.

Volkov (2013a) has remarked on the ineffectiveness of the structures created by the opposition, which, as he put it, appeared ‘not very convincing’ even in the perception of participants in a protest demonstration. Perhaps the most impressive mobilisation of activists associated with the opposition was displayed in Alexey Navalny’s recent campaign for mayor of Moscow, which succeeded in winning over 27 per cent of the vote in September 2013 (Petrova 2013, Whitmore 2013). It is significant that the large numbers of volunteers who devoted their time and energy to that campaign were supporting an individual leader rather than an organisation. So far, in protests, in election monitoring and in some election campaigns, the political opposition has shown more capacity for mobilisation than for institutionalisation.

Conclusion

It is generally agreed that the number of protests in Russia increased after 2004 (Evans 2013: 110–111). Most of the protests have been of the sort that some observers have characterised as ‘local’, arising out of the disruption of people’s lives by the effects of decisions by figures in authority. It seems likely that

familiarity with the protests over social issues helped to prepare conditions for the large-scale protests of the winter of 2011 and 2012 by making demonstrations that criticise the exercise of authority seem more acceptable to the population. In turn, the protests of the last two years in which tens of thousands of people have taken part may quite possibly have made such actions seem even more acceptable to the majority of citizens. Aleksey Grazhdankin of the Levada Centre (2013i) has reported that the acceptability of participation in protests has grown in the view of Russians during the last two years. So the large-scale political protests of the last two years probably have had an impact in that way, although it is impossible to know how great that impact has been. A survey of participants in a protest in Moscow in January 2013 that was conducted by the Levada Centre (2013a: 8–9) showed that the result of protest actions of the preceding months that was identified by the largest number of protesters was that they ‘awakened active sections of society’.

Have those protests contributed to ‘the evolution of a broader social base’ for the cause(s) to which they are committed, as Graeme Robertson (2013: 22) asserts? A variety of evidence suggests that such a trend has taken place only to a limited extent. Initially, after the parliamentary election in early December of 2011, the number of people participating in protests voicing criticism of national political leaders increased very rapidly. Since February 2012, however, the number of Russians taking part in the major demonstrations by the political opposition has decreased greatly. Of more fundamental importance is the fact that opinion polls consistently show sharp differences in outlook between the participants in the major protest rallies and the majority of citizens in Russia. It is striking that, while a majority of the participants in the demonstration in Moscow in January 2013 who were polled by the Levada Centre (2013a: 9) believed that protests had awoken ‘active sections of society’, only a small minority of those participants (17 per cent) thought that ‘the protesters have received support from broad sections of the population of Russia’. Surveys by respected organisations also show dramatic differences between political protesters and the majority of Russians with respect to their perceptions of the situation today and the needs of their country at the present time.

There is still a wide gap between the viewpoint of the core of the political protesters and the thinking of most of their fellow citizens. The ‘local’ protests that some members of the majority have carried out when they were pushed hard enough and the ‘political’ protests by those who openly repudiate the political regime still move in largely separate channels. Most Russians have not shown that they have made connections between concrete issues with an impact on their everyday lives and abstract issues arising out of the nature of their country’s political regime – or if they do see the connection between the two types of issues, they choose not to reveal their awareness of it. Perhaps the most crucial question facing the movement that has carried out major political protests is how to convince wider circles of citizens that it is addressing issues that are relevant to whose effect they can feel in their lives, and that it has the potential to solve those problems. That

would be necessary if the opposition were to take advantage of the pervasive sense of injustice among Russians that has been identified by sociological researchers.

In the first part of this chapter the question of whether little has changed in civil society in Russia since the end of the Soviet era was raised. The answer must be that much has changed since the early 1990s. Vladimir Putin is a product of the Soviet system, and his ideal is of a model of state dominance over civil society, partly to rule out any possibility of the kind of regime change that opposition forces brought in Ukraine in 2014. Yet he shows no desire to reproduce the degree of control of organisations in society that the Communist Party achieved by the 1930s, perhaps partly because he does not want the state to have the full range of responsibilities that it had under the Soviet regime. In his model the state would manipulate incentives and disincentives to influence NGOs' choices of goals but would not exert direct control over their internal workings. Also, the limits on the values served by such organisations would not be as narrowly defined as in the Soviet system. In Putin's outlook there is no echo of an ideology of wide-ranging social transformation of the sort that justified the Soviet regime's project of creating of a network of organisations that extended throughout all of society. The Putin administration has been the author of a number of government-organised nongovernmental organisations (GONGOs), or marionette organisations, but they were never intended to be the only organisations in Russian society.

Though the Western model of civil society depicts social organisations as independent from the state and in an adversarial relationship with the political authorities, much of civil society in Russia does not fit that model. Fröhlich (2013: 385) has found that organisations of people with disabilities engage in collaboration with government to serve the needs of their members. Johnson and Saarinen (2011: 46–47) point out that most of the crisis centres that they surveyed had more of a collaborative than an adversarial relationship with local officials, which did not prevent the leaders of crisis centres from advocating for the defence of the rights of women, and urging that the state address the problem of violence against women. These authors report that among the crisis centres that they studied, 'there is not always a clear distinction between NGOs and governmental agencies', which leads them to conclude that many organisations in Russia are 'state-society hybrids' (Johnson and Saarinen 2011: 42). A relatively high degree of reliance on the state for support in terms of material resources was characteristic of many organisations in civil society even before Vladimir Putin came to power, and the recent expansion of grants for financial support for NGOs promises to increase that dependence on the state even more. As this author said several years ago when discussing Putin's efforts to begin implementing his model of civil society, 'the changes that Putin is introducing are probably not altogether unwelcome to many social organisations' (Evans 2006: 154) because some of those organisations might hope to benefit from greater amounts of assistance from the state.

In light of the collaborative relationship between many social organisations and the state in Russia, how can we explain the open expression of discontent in protests, both small and large? Such outbursts of dissatisfaction should be

understood against the background of an informal social contract. Some experts have argued insightfully that there is an unwritten understanding in Russia that citizens will remain politically quiescent, accepting their powerlessness in the realm in which the authorities are dominant, as long as the state refrains from interfering unduly in their personal affairs (Greene 2012: 139). When those in authority act in disregard of that contract, as Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov (2010: 5) have said, 'an invasion of the citizens' "space" is perceived as a violation of a secret treaty of nonaggression' between the state and society. As we have seen in this chapter, actions by the state on various levels that have been seen by citizens as breaking the implicit nonaggression pact have provoked protests on many occasions. What was new in December 2011 was that tens of thousands of Russians moved into public spaces to express their outrage over transgressions that affected political principles, such as the principle that in a democracy, elections ought to be honest and fair. Some Russians showed that they took election fraud personally, as an expression of contempt by which leaders dismissed them as if they were utterly insignificant, which they saw as an affront to their dignity. According to Sasha de Vogel (2013: 9), 'if there was a social contract between Putin and the middle class, fractures in it were already appearing before the outbreak of the electoral cycle protests, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg'. She contends that urban, highly educated professionals in Russia increasingly were dissatisfied with the corruption in public services that detracted from the quality of their lives, and had come to expect better performance from the government.

They were the Russians who were most likely to be offended when the political regime casually demonstrated that it regarded them as powerless and that it assumed they would remain passive even when they knew it was deceiving them about the results of elections. Before major protests in December 2011, Volkov (2011: 40) warned that tension was building up, as opportunities for dialogue with the authorities were decreasing. He remarked that the political regime's insistence on extending the reach of its control had created a situation in which there was 'forced politicization' (Volkov 2011: 50) of attempts by citizens to form associations in defence of their interests. In his view, the consolidation of the political system had ensured that the only means by which citizens could exert pressure for changes was mass protest, which had the potential to attract the attention of the mass media and political leaders (Volkov 2011: 38). Thus even before December 2011, Volkov (2011: 50) asserted that instability was built into Russia's political system, and that new outbursts of 'mass dissatisfaction' were likely. That certainly proved to be true.

The large-scale demonstrations that took place during the winter of 2011 and 2012 marked a turning point in the relationship between civil society and the state under Vladimir Putin. A substantial part of the population was no longer willing to accept the arrangements that political leaders had put in place in the post-Soviet years. Though the number of people attending protests has declined since that time, the issues that aroused the dissatisfaction of the participants in the largest demonstrations have not been resolved. A crucial problem for the protesters who

demand that the current political regime be transformed is that their base of support in Russian society is still too narrow, consisting of a minority of the population. Indeed, the most fundamental problem for organisations in civil society is the lack of support for them among most Russians, who remain suspicious of all organisational activity (Henderson 2013). We should be aware that the leaders of organisations that seek to defend human rights have not been in the habit of seeking broad public support (Volkov 2011: 39), as they say that in an earlier period their country's political leaders paid more attention to them and they could rely on foreign sources for financial support. More fundamentally, contemporary dissidents are the heirs of the tradition of the members of the intelligentsia under the tsars and under the Soviet regime, who took pride in the authenticity of their ideals and had no desire to build ties with the majority of the population, since it was important for the intelligentsia that their norms distinguished them from the masses (Mendelson and Gerber 2007: 51, 57). Fortunately, in recent years there have been signs that some of the leaders of social organisations that strive for change recognise the need to achieve rapport with wide circles of the public, and have focused on issues that have the potential to evoke support from many average citizens. Whether that tendency will broaden is a crucial question for the future of civil society and protest movements in Russia.

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