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AGEING RUSSIA, POSSIBILITIES OF SUBSTANTIAL REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES AND YOUTH-RELATED PROBLEMS

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the problem of demographic ageing in Russia, some forecasts of the possible substantial revolutionary changes, and present youth activities. The author discusses results of the recent study conducted by the Department of Elite Studies of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Data of this survey and personal observations of the author confirm the opinion about the absence of such changes in contemporary Russia, despite the involvement of a portion of youth in protest rallies which occurred in winter 2012/13 in the capital and big cities which was reduce to the slogan “For honest elections!” The issue of youth violence was slightly tackled.

Key words: Russia of 21st century, demographic ageing, possibilities of substantial revolutionary changes, youth activities, Putin.

INTRODUCTION

When one looks through the most influential international media, he or she may be very disappointed with what he or she reads about Russia. A part of what gets the person frustrated about most mainstream media coverage of Russia is that media tend to conflate the current conditions (e.g. people drink a lot, do not make much money, and the entire nation looks miserable,

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generally speaking) with the country's prospects in the observed future (e.g. the Russian people are drinking even *more* than today, people are making *less* money, and the entire nation is getting *more* miserable). But, are some of these forecasters right, or is it simply a part of a new (Cold war-like, – some say) ideological attack? – These two points are indicating, obviously, two very different things, but they are often treated as if they are interchangeable.

This paper deals with two main issues broadly debated in modern mass media. The first one is the present-day Russia's demography, the youth activity and a chance of the new revolution in a contemporary Russia. All this relates (directly or indirectly) to politics of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. This man has been dominating on the scene of international and domestic politics since the very beginning of 2000. Putin claims that he represents the interests of the Russian people demanding the restoration of Russia's State. Some Western journalists asked in this regard (we are not citing here): What does this mean? Is the restoration of the quasi-authoritarian regime to suppress the instability that what people really considered a byproduct of dissent? Others said: The entire nation and the national leader are maturing, but the national mentality does not change a lot. What is the truth in all these assessments of the media? In this paper, we are looking for answers.

On a popular Russian website the author has learned that Russian young people are afraid of authorities, do not believe the opposition, but do praise President Vladimir Putin, and simultaneously are waiting for his overthrowing, i.e. the socio-political revolution.² This conclusion refers to the data of the research of the respected Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.³ Is it also a truth?

2 See: http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/04/19_a_5261565.shtml.

3 The study has been conducted under the supervision of the Head of the Center of Elite Studies Dr. Olga Krishtanovskaya. The survey was performed from December 2006 to February 2013 in 26 cities in Russia. It included a set of focus groups and in-depth interviews with representatives of four groups, namely: students-humanitarians, students-technologists, specialists with higher education, and workers. The results of the study were published in the online journal "Gefter" (a spring 2013 volume). The study could not be qualified as a nation representative one. We doubt the authors had any intention to make a truly representative survey. It did not cover various gangs without ideological inclination, leftist youth formations, right-wing organizations, apolitical yuppie groups, and some other minor youth groupings. While the main attention in the study was placed on university students, gang violence has been rapidly developing in Russia during the research period, and a growing number of acts of youth-related violence have been recorded by law enforcing agencies, – all like in the EU and other nations. The reader should be very skeptical concerning the study!

Yet, the authors of the mentioned research totally rejected the very idea of a new socio-political revolution in Russia in the 21st century and a set of vital questions could be aroused up: What were orientations of the Russian youth they are speaking about? Can we begin to identify a new path of political socialization for a youth generation, and what implications does it have to a longer-term consolidation of democratic politics and the civil society in Russia? Or should we be worried that if the current state initiatives failed, then the People would revolt and the country would return back to the dark days of past? These questions are no rhetoric at all, in our view, at least.⁴

The second main question – to name only a few issues touched in the essay– is how to convince everyone that Russia does not have global (imperial) ambitions. Here, we must tackle the link between the international environment and Russia's foreign policy. And do not forget about the Russian public opinion and the specific youth opinion as well. Today, the Russian public opinion tends to believe that the Russians have to be protectors of the Syrians, like they were the 'virtual protectors' of the Serbs in the 1990s, and that the US and its allies constantly see Russia as an evil empire. There is no reason to expect that the views of the opposition leadership on Syria, whatever they are, reflect the views of the Russian society.

The Syrian issue is a really most serious separating point at any today's meetings between the West and Russia on the top level, and the public opinion is well informed about the present discrepancies. There are also regular notations of Western leaders concerning human rights in Russia. The Russians made a little progress in persuading their American (and/or – more broadly – Western) partners not to lecture them.⁵

Today, Putin seeks to restore the former glory of the country, and this is of paramount importance for the survival of the regime in power. Now when Russia's economic growth has declined causing a discontent among the nation's majority, the Russian leader revives nationalism for the sake of rallying the public opinion. The anti-Western mood amongst the Russians is growing up, and the state-controlled TV continues to support this process and there can be no doubt that most of the Russians are on Putin's side. As for the specific youth opinion, we have to say that, yet the Russian youth looks rather apolitical and lazy, its opinion does differ drastically from what the national opinion polls show.

4 We do agree with the general conclusion of interpreters of the reported survey, which is not against to author's personal observations.

5 Of course, nobody in Russia is expecting a change of moods overnight. But, the Russians consider this a part of efforts to re-establish Russia as a real major global player.

The following discussion is divided into sections according to the aforesaid comments. The first section outlines the general idea of the paper. The second section is about the Russian demographic decline, while the third examines in some details the term “revolution”, and the fourth one comments basically the data of the youth survey. The final section, or “Concluding remarks”, considers a possible outcome tackling links between the international situation and domestic youth politics.

RUSSIA’S DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

During the recent time, the main attention of scholars has been focused on Russia’s re-emergence as a global political force,⁶ fuelled by natural resources-driven economic growth, but it is also important to mark that the country’s population is ageing. According to the UN projections, by 2040, Russia’s median age will be 44.9, or close to 45, placing this nation amongst the oldest countries in the former Soviet Union, and, perhaps, too close to the oldest in the world.⁷ The Russian demographic decline has resulted in the Russian population falling from a peak of 148.6 million in 1993 to the present figures (about 143-144 million) and the average life expectancy at birth equal to 66.5 years (men and women together).⁸

The problem is in the low birth rate and high mortality in the first. The life expectancy of Russian men has dropped to 58 years quite recently. These facts may become a serious halt on the nation’s economic growth in the coming future. The Russian leadership is aware of the seriousness of these problems and has put forward certain measures to deal with them. Yet, the American expert doubts in their efficiency: “Some of Russia’s recent policies will have a limited demographic

6 See, for example: Roger Kanet, (ed.) *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power*, Houndmills, UK, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

7 Currently, Russia has a population of 142.9 million with a share of those who are 65 years and over close to 13%. According to the projections, the nation population will be about 114.12 million in 2050.

8 Life expectancy at birth for Russian men fell from an already low level of 64.9 years in 1987 to the lowest level of 57.5 years in 1994. Currently, Russian men are among the world’s largest consumers of alcohol and tobacco. Mortality levels and patterns of death and disease in Russia are far out of line for the country at its level of development. The female life expectancy advantage in Russia is the largest in the world with women outliving men by 12 years, largely due to the high male death rate from cardiovascular diseases and external causes such as murder, suicide, accidents and alcohol poisonings. The excess of deaths over births is partly compensated for by an influx of migrants to the Russian Federation from other parts of the former Soviet Union.

effect and recent trends are moving in a positive direction. But it appears that Russia will inevitably need to adjust to a smaller and older population”. (We are citing the words of Dr. Timothy Heleniak, Director of Research at the American Geographical Society, April 2013).

According to another group of experts in demography, the reported view might be the most common error in the Western media opinion about Russia. Because in reality, Russia’s population is marginally higher now, i.e. in 2013 than it was in 2006. It is true that Russia’s population *was* declining rapidly during the late 1990s and the early 2000s (one may recall in memory the so-called ‘Russian cross’ chart), but this decline has leveled off and the population has stabilized. In 2013, Russia has a growing birthrate,⁹ decreasing mortality, declining numbers of alcohol deaths which is still very high, and likely a broadly flat level of military spending (yet this theme is out of our essay). Russia’s population could very well start declining again in the future, but at the moment, it is actually growing (albeit at a glacial pace).¹⁰

We should not jump to conclusion, which side is right in this dispute.¹¹ As we have seen, while some experts have insisted the Russian decline could not be ever halted, others have a more optimistic opinion.¹² Only the coming future can give an exact answer.

ABOUT THE TERM “REVOLUTION” AND SOME OTHER RELEVANT MOMENTS

Let us turn to the issue of etymology of the term “revolution”. The initial meaning of this word could be qualified as “astronomic”. The reader should remember that in astronomy it means “the movement of the heavenly body in orbit around another body, especially in the sense of a perfect traffic, that is, the return of the body to the same point of the orbit by passing the full path”.¹³ There is also

9 A whole package of pronatalist policies was introduced in contemporary Russia by the end of 2000s, but - looking on things soberly - we have to say that these policies had little effect: the fertility rate was already beginning to increase before they had been implemented, and has risen only slightly since.

10 Mark Adomanis, “Five Myths about Russia”, *Forbes International*, on-line, 2/04/2013.

11 See also (in Russian): Алексей Михайлов, “Демографический императив” (Алексей Михайлов, Demographic imperative), *Газета. Ру*. 21 июня 2913 г. (*Gazeta.ru*, 21. 06. 2013); on web: <http://www.gazeta.ru/column/mikhailov/4762837.shtml>.

12 See, for instance: Mark Adomanis, “Russia’s demographics are now better than the Baltic’s”. *Forbes International*, on-line, 4/02/2013.

13 The interpretation is based on the meaning of the word “revolution” taken from the popular on-line encyclopedia.

a predictive technique of “revolutions” (or “return”) in astrology, based on the analysis of the astrological chart when a planet returned to its original position.

This term’s meaning initially came out from observations over stars. However, we are more interesting in the contemporary interpretations of the term or the approaches spread among modern social scientists. Generally speaking, in modern social sciences the meaning of the term heavily depends upon a context that is more precisely described by attributives or adjectives: readers could remind of such wordings as “industrial revolution”, “informational revolution” and the like, which indicated a radical change in economic backgrounds of the society along with the speedy movement to the another type of production (together with rather radical changes in the social content and social structure). The term “social revolution” that focuses on radical changes in the entire societal composition, including as a part the so-called “political (or socio-political) revolution” – a radical change in power structures, plus big changes in the economy and society (the so-called “socio-economic revolution”). Socio-political revolutions, however, are the rule, not the exception, and as history has shown, none of more or less developed countries could avoid them. We do not refer here to the concrete historical cases; we are sure we could find plenty of relevant examples.

Societies are often undergoing sharp (regular or sporadic) changes in economy, technology, science, art, etc., but in this section, we will focus only on changes in the political sphere. The latter is fairly autonomous, yet, it influences movements in other areas (it may be, for instance, radical changes of technology, or other important steps). Synchronously with the stripe of changes in politics came revolutions of the secular education, non-traditional work, and so on, because political revolution, by a definition - as some experts like to say, – are destroying the former order, creating a new one, and leaving ruins of the past on various dimensions.

The social (or socio-political) revolution is usually considered a deviation of normality, it produces on contemporaries an impression of a chaos with a large-scale violence. It is important to mark that contemporaries are psychologically involved in what is taking place, bringing their own conceptual position close to the position of one of the parties that means they are acting in the accord with their ideological inclination. It is important to mark that memoirs of contemporaries are psychologically a mix of rational and emotional-volitional preferences. Fortunately, according to the historic experience, political revolutions have ended, sooner or later, and each society returns to a certain stability (at least, conditional) stage. Historians, studying social revolutions, are not the exception, alas. They look like contemporaries in many regards. The above described phenomenon happens when they come “to live” in the subject. They simply could never get rid

of their own ‘ideological clothes’ (sometimes covered by the so-called “author’s position”).

We are sure that images of the Communist Party’s propaganda are still fresh in the memory of many readers, and therefore do not repeat them, but it could be also noted that they (images) were overthrown as the “inherently deceitful and unjust tyrant’s production.” In short, analyzing memoirs and historical books we should not forget that too much depends on who is a winner of revolutionary changes – there, where Liberals prevail, there is their doctrinal interpretation which predominates, if the winners are communists or their allies then, the communist doctrine is “working”. Such a one-size-fits-all approach looks more like a “brainwashing” machine, and obviously, it is unfit for a perfect interpretation of what had happened.

These revolutions could be characterized as hard-nosed and conflicting ones, but it is very difficult to predict the victory of any party involved in events. Revolution as the acute crisis makes all participants and witnesses worry: the enemy is strong, the outcome (or the result of counter-fronting) is unclear until the last moment. Like always, in politics, during social revolutions emotions and private (mis)understandings dominate over any rationality and objectivity in estimates of political events. One may find boring evaluations everywhere – concerning economy, social changes, culture, and a personal behavior of leaders, except the sphere of politics. Misunderstandings and emotions legitimize uncertainty of the outcome, give merits to historians, witnesses and the so-called “objective observers”, or even legitimize memoirs of participants of events. The list of reasons of such a behavior can be long, but what is important is that all these people are warmed by thoughts of self-worth and of historical freedom, that no one can take away.

One may easily trace the classical so-called Marxist (Marx-Leninist, or a historical-materialistic) approach to the issue of revolution in the author’s considerations presented above. Yet, we said nothing about the Army and Special Forces which play a very important role in social revolutions. Wars and revolutions have defined the look of the 20th century, which was, recalling the famous Lenin’s prediction, “a century of wars and revolutions”. What will be a look of the 21st century? Who knows?¹⁴

14 The author tried to consider this question in his book (in Russian) published in Germany and available on a request: Рукaвишникoв В. *Ассиметричные войны и прогнозы на 21 век. Социологический комментарий*. Pulmarium Academic Publisher (Pulmarium Verlage), 2012 (Vladimir Rukavishnikov, *Asymmetric wars and projections on the 21st century. Sociological comments*. Pulmarium (Germany), 2012).

There is also a liberal approach to “revolution” presented in the famous book of Hanna Arendt,¹⁵ and the more modern world-system approach developed by the American Professor-sociologist Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein.¹⁶ We have no room for a detailed analysis of each approach in this paper.

In short, the term “revolution” indicates *a radical or profound, mainly qualitative (and quantitative – sometimes) change (move) in the development of nature, society (more correctly – in so-called mass society), or in the process of cognition, adjoin of an open break with the previous state of development.*

The word “revolution” in the Russian spoken language often means the year of 1917 (for example, take the traditional usage of the word in the sentence “before/after the revolution”) - almost all events in 1917 were closely connected to the liberal-democratic February revolution of 1917 and/or to the consequent Great October (1917) Socialist Revolution (or the Bolshevik’s October 1917 turnover).

What can we say about the most recent revolutionary change in this country in the previous century – the collapse of the Soviet Communism in August of 1991 and consequent events? - First of all, up to the day of writing, according to the author’s personal observations, there is no commonly accepted interpretation of the events of August 1991 and of October 1993 in the Russian spoken lexicon. The Russian history of the 20th century is still a place for sharp discussion.¹⁷

15 The Russian translation of this important, really classical, book of Hanna Arendt is now available for plain readers in our country too; see also on a website <http://onrevolution.narod.ru/arendt/index.html>.

16 Among a variety of Mr. Wallerstein’s works we found one piece oriented to modern Russia, see: <http://www.expert.ru/expert/2011/01/lenin-i-leninizm-segodnya-i-poslezavtra/>.

17 According to the state of author’s mind in late fall of 1993, the August 1991 victory of Yeltsin’s team over the hard-line communist coup d’état was named a non-violence anti-Communist (anti-totalitarian) turnover, a democratic counter-revolution (please, take into account that the author spoke about these issues in his old essay (“A split society: Political crisis and popular support for transition to a free market and democracy in Russia.” In: *Sociale Wetenschappen* (the Netherlands), № 2, 1994. Pp. 30-65) when the events were really hot). The August 1991 break-out of the Russian communist history and the September-October 1993 upheaval were really crucial moments of the process of transformation, the 1991 event was a pike of mass’ frustration that had started in the mid-1980s and was primarily covered under the so-called perestroika’s (rebuilding of socialism) slogans. The September-October 1993 events were the tragic resolution of a relatively long-standing conflict between President Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet (the Russian parliament of that time) that, in its turn, initially had supported the August 1991 anti-Communist turnover. Certainly, it was an *anti-Soviet* turnover that occurred in late October 1993. It was absolutely an anti-constitutional action equal in this respect to the August 1991 hard-line Communist putsch. This turnover was organized by the President

Secondly, some people in the Russian official media tend to name the events of August 1991 as *Russia's democratic revolution* implicitly referring to the popular revolutions such as those events, which happened in Eastern European countries in the late 1980s. They consider the October 1993 Moscow's bloodshed as a *popular revolt against Yeltsin's regime*. Others (mainly from the opposition forces) tend to classify the August 1991 events as a *counter-revolution*, and this definition refers to an understanding of socialism as a more advanced stage of human development comparing modern capitalism, etc. The October 1993 events are often named by the representatives of this wing in literature as a *mass communist-led revolt*.¹⁸

Unquestionably, in fall of 1991, the historical turn in modern Russian history happened, but this fact does not mean that everything in Russia fundamentally changed in a moment. Transition in economy, perhaps, has ended by the 2010s, but transformations in the political area are not completed at the time of writing the paper. No doubt, the anti-totalitarian orientation of the August 1991 turnover was supported by the majority of the nation. The final elimination of the Soviet Union Communist party's total control over the life of the society might be considered the benefit of all Russians, and this has been the opinion of most of the Russian people up to today. It was a one more step towards the creation of the Russian civil society. So, broadly speaking, the radical turn to freedom and democracy which occurred in 1991 was in the interests of Russia as a whole.

The author could not agree with the view, still popular in the West, that in the fall of 1993 the challenge was to make Russia safe – to save the country for democracy and market, to prevent the communist regime restoration, etc. In our view, the Russian reforming could not be halted, and the country would never return to the communist past. Despite the involvement of some communist and

Yeltsin's team, who earlier had stood in public against the coup for the peaceful and gradual development of transition towards democracy and a free market economy, for a superiority of constitutional law, and so on. About one thousand people were killed and wounded in fighting during October 3 and 4, 1993. This was a bloody cost of the upheaval. From a pure theoretical point of view, the liquidation of the Soviets, one of the main political institution of the previous communist regime, should be considered a very important episode in the process of radical switch of the socio-political system in this country. The nascent Russian democracy was heavily damaged.

18 There are different views in the Russian and international literature, and, of course, we are not able to resemble all opinions on this point in this chapter. See more in: Rukavishnikov V. "The August 1991 occurrences in Moscow: a retro view at events about twenty years after". *Central European Political Sciences Review*. Vol. 11, No. 41, Fall 2010, pp. 53–69; Vladimir Rukavishnikov, "Reminding the year of 1993 and rethinking the Russian transition in retrospect", *Central European Political Sciences Review*. Vol. 11, No. 42, Fall 2010, pp. 66–85.

national-patriotic formations in the anti-Yeltsin's armed rebellion in October 1993, the author feels that may be it would be much more correct to describe the Russian conflict of 1993 as a bloody clash of interests of different elites' groups sharing the former state and public property.¹⁹

The complex process of transition towards democracy and free market economy in is still not finished Russia nowadays. It is an "empirical fact", as some colleagues say.

One could say that the political system of one time ought to be reformed through to the logical final, because a liberal-democratic political system is a consequence and on the other side – a vital condition of success of any economic reforms, aimed at free market, strengthening of a plurality of property forms, etc. And an intention to produce fundamental changes in the sphere of property relations exerts decisive influence on political institutions and other elements of the socio-political system. The basic achievement of post-perestroika's politics was the deletion of restrictions on private initiatives in the spheres of trade and production that ended in politically relevant changes in the social and economic structures of the Russian society. From the author's viewpoint, further development of economic and political pluralism in Russia is impossible without fulfilling all demands of complete modernization of the Russian socio-economic-political system. However, this is another aspect of the theme or the special theme, which is out of this essay.

It has frequently been argued also that, as a general rule, the more developed a state institutions' structure and the more pluralistic society and the array of interest groups are, the easier it will be to constrain authoritarianism and produce an intergroup competition which necessary to sustain a liberal democratic system. At the core of such a system, there will be a range of political parties providing an opportunity for political participation. This is true for Russia, too. Yet, modern Russia is often called a quasi-democratic nation with a strong autocratic president's ruling.²⁰ This is only a partly true definition.

The Russian political system has been transformed from a one-party monopoly to a multi-party one. During the recent years, the parliamentary political opposition to a ruling political regime has been already formed, and a set of pro-government political actors has become active, too. However, the author cannot say that the participation through a party has become a "natural" expression of interests of

19 See, as an illustration of the author's words, the latest (2013) interview of Dr. Ruslan Khasbulatov, who in 1991-93 was the head of the Russian Supreme Soviet: <http://9tv.co.il/video/2013/02/16/40651.html>

20 See: Roger Kanet, (ed.) *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st century*. Houndmills, the UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

different strata of the Russian society. “More than 90 per cent of surveyed young people confidently stated that there is no party, expressing their concerns”, the aforementioned youth study said.²¹ This is an illustration of the author’s rightness.

All now existing non-parliamentary Russian opposition political parties are weak and small in numbers. Some Russian political scholars even insist that most of newly emerged Russian opposition formations are still “proto-parties” or the so-called “Moscow-ranged” formations without broad bases in regions.²² The author, in his turn, would say a role of most of the non-parliamentary oppositional political formations in the contemporary Russian political life is like the role of the ghost in the Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”: it is on the periphery of the action, - no question - but the play cannot do without it. The Russian civil society is poorly developed and weak.²³ This is true. But, further debates of this theme are again out of this short paper. Let us also stop here with the discussion on definitions and other relevant points.

INTERNATIONAL, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

We think that there is a close link between international affairs, foreign and domestic politics of the state and national mentality. For Russia, at least, it is a truth.

Take the old Russian-American dispute on the US antiballistic missile (ABM) system located in Europe as the example.²⁴ The break of the ABM impasse could

21 Cit. in http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/04/19_a_5261565.shtml.

22 About author’s viewpoints see: Vladimir Rukavishnikov, “Russia’s Policy after Putin’s Return to Kremlin in 2012”. *Central European Political Sciences Review*. Vol. 12, No. 45, Fall 2011, pp. 46-65.

23 Ibidem.

24 Russia has long objected to the prospects of the American anti-missiles deployment in Central Europe, saying the American interceptors could target the intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that are the core of Russia’s strategic nuclear deterrent (see more in: Rukavishnikov V. “The US-Russian dispute over missile defense”. *Connections*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Fall 2008, pp. 81–94). The USA administration recently announced the cancellation/correction of an initial plan of the anti-missile shield’s deployment in Central Europe. We do not know exactly whether the reported American step is a signal that the Russian objectives have been heard in Washington or not. The Russians, generally speaking, positively evaluated the US action, but, in our view, its real value will become clear with the passage of time. The US experts point to two reasons of that American step: a lack of “free” money needed for further deployment, and a sober evaluation of North Korea’s ability to miniaturize a nuclear weapon and put one on a long-range missile right now. As for Russia’s military experts and state officials, according to open media reports, they do not demonstrate any specific fear concerning the missile threat from North Korea.

low the heads of the two countries to enter into a meaningful dialogue on the further reduction of nuclear weapons.²⁵ It may also help halt the process of further cooling both the Russian-American relations and the Russian-European relations which became visible during recent years. It may influence a shift of the public moods in both countries, because it leads to a diminishment of anti-Russian phobias in the USA and to a temporal halt a growing anti-Americanism in the Russian federation. But, the progress in the area is far from desirable. Alas, only the future knows the actual final result of the dispute.²⁶

The biggest social problems for the people in Russia are theft, corruption and poverty. The principal carriers of social evils (mainly, corruption) in the eyes of plain public are state officials. This, according to the authors of the study conducted by the Department of IS RAS, is not called into a question, and does not require a proof by those surveyed. In this regard, the views of the surveyed young people do not differ drastically from the opinions revealed by numerous recent polls amongst the entire Russia's population. It could be a result of media's impact, a popular media's cliché. Why is it so popular? We have no room to discuss the answer in this paper.

25 Russia's concern, linked with the US ABM defense shield in Europe and with a deeply rooted fear in the national mentality of the war coming from the West, led it to repeatedly threaten to leave the US-Russia nuclear-arms reduction talks. This concern was also against the possibility of normalization/improvement of Russian relations with the United States, NATO and the EU. The US announcement of the interceptors in Europe might/could warm up US-Russian ties. Of course, in considering this question, in account must be taken a set of all factors affecting strategic stability, including not only ABM defense, but also the existing balance of nonnuclear strategic weapons, possible weapons in space, etc.

26 Recently, Washington offered Moscow a compromise in the form of personal assurances of US President Barack Obama about ABM defense shield. For the Kremlin, however, this is not enough: it wants arrangements that are not dependent on political considerations in the United States. In 1937, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the presidential executive agreements (executive agreement) had the same force as international treaties approved by the Senate. To sign such a document President Barack Obama does not need to seek the consent of Congress. The minus of the agreements is that they are binding only for the Administration to sign and not their successor: Obama's successor has every right to refuse to perform them. In addition, Washington is not ready to commit itself to introduce certain technical limitations. The very idea Washington likes so much refers only to the transparency of the system being deployed. So, it is too little for Moscow's authorities. They want long-term legally binding guarantees and implementing agreements, not political declarations. As Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said: "we should not talk about declarations but are eager to talk about guarantees which will be verifiable on objective military criteria, i.e. an approach which may safeguard the Euro-Atlantic region, and not directed against Russia's nuclear capability" (see: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2176643>).

What we do definitely know is as follows. The years that have passed since the start of “reforming from the top” (one may also recall the unsuccessful Gorbachev’s “perestroika”) have not brought a strong relief to the bulk of Russians, yet the number of really poor people has declined during the early 2000s according to the statistics.²⁷ The gap between social expectations, hopes for better life and the trend of economic and social changes taking place in this country is essential, - it exists, at least, and, probably, is still rapidly increasing, thus enforcing frustration and dissatisfaction and growing impatience with reforming among the entire population.²⁸ It seems that Soviet propagandists lied about Communism as the happy future of the whole mankind, but told the truth about modern Capitalism.

However, the vital question does not disappear: whether views of the surveyed young people reflect the real socio-economic and socio-political situation in the country correctly? None of the focus groups, and less than a half of the number of respondents taken as a whole, were truly interested in the current events in the country (among the surveyed students a clear picture of the actual events were revealed only by 15 (!) percent). Most of the surveyed young people described their views as *liberal* or *democratic*, but do they understand the real meaning of these attributes or just repeat popular clichés? – “In terms of ideological clichés, respondents tend to have a little understanding of their true meaning,” – the authors of the aforementioned study claimed in a foresight, indicating the high frequency of recorded responses, not implying the existence of particular ideological commitments of respondents (“I’m good”, “I’m moderate”). And therefore, the reader should be very skeptical concerning the mentioned study! If we do agree with the *general conclusion* of the interpreter of the reported survey, which is not against the author’s personal observations, then let us look at this point precisely.

There is no road back, and a new revolution is not a solution. The realistically thinking Russian young men and women recognize this fact. The desirability of a new revolution in modern Russia has been expressed mainly by students - humanitarians and a minor part of those of surveyed, who are studying natural sciences and technical subjects at universities as well (this moment has been recorded in interviews). On the second position there were working professionals with higher education and workers; this group had a much smaller number of those who desired a new revolution in our country. But, do all these people understand the very meaning of the word “revolution” properly? In my opinion, the answer should be negative. Here are the reasons.

27 See: <http://www.gazeta.ru/finansial/2012/11/13/4851137.shtml>.

28 Such a conclusion was drawn from the available opinion poll’s data. We do not think it is necessary to present the data.

In all selected focus groups, it has been noted that the current Russian opposition is unable to complete the desirable task. “The opposition today is fighting for its Add to this point piece of the pie. The current opposition is fighting for a place in state and public offices, and had nothing to do with the revolution. The revolutionaries are heroes, noble knights, ascetics, who are ready to go at death and bloody battle for your ideals; we do not see such persons among the present opposition leaders,” the respondents had noted in that study.²⁹

To recap: the students interviewed by the Department of Elite Studies of the Institute of Sociology of the RAS saw no alternative to Vladimir Putin amongst the present opposition’s leadership. Vladimir Putin is considered a legitimized national leader entering the new presidential term, despite widely spread negative evaluations of his activity in the first year of his third presidential term.³⁰

’Who is Mr. Putin’? The question was common in the West after the triumphal victory of the ex-spy in the presidential elections in spring 2000. Since the end of 1999, Vladimir Putin has dominated the Russian political scene, and it is obvious that he is an object of both adulation and abuse, but never indifference both in the West and at home. Putin has created the so-called vertical framework of rule which has simplified the procedure of naming governors of provinces or heads of regional police departments, strengthening the hand of the central authorities in their selection, etc. In fact, Vladimir Putin has continued the Yeltsin’s approach to reforming, blocking free political competition and preventing the opposition from playing an institutional role. Young people are against Putin’s authoritarianism and rise of nationalism, but in reality, they are concentrated basically on private life, not politics.

Of course, politically, economically, and socially Russia is changing, but the effects of those changes will become visible only in the distant future. The ethno-psychological characteristics of the peoples of the Russian Federation have been formed over centuries, and the Russian national character will not become much different in the foreseeable future. In the case of Russia, the national mentality, which has been developed over centuries, is responsible for the permanence of the domestic political system and hinders potential rapid changes.

After the phase of unrealistic euphoria about the speedy transformation from communist politics and state-planned economy to liberal democracy, market economy and affluent society along the Western recipe the phase of disillusionment came. This is a possible interpretation of the last data. It leads us to the question

29 A citation is taken from: http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/04/19_a_5261565.shtml.

30 Ibidem.

concerning possible youth-parents differences or to the generational theory, which may look old-fashioned nowadays, and therefore we shall not refer to this theory.

The Russians as a whole are currently more materialistic-oriented than they are post-materialistic. They prefer real goods to virtual values. Contemporary Russian capitalism is oligarchic in nature, perhaps, basically because of internal factors, plus the imported recipes for the Russian transition from a socialist centralized economy to a market one in the 1990s. These recipes that were so strongly recommended by the West during the Yeltsin years (or in the 1990s), proved to be ineffective. By the end of 2010s the Russian society was suffering an economic crisis (which in fact was a part of the global economic recession, but this is another story), and it was evident to many Russians that living standards of different strata of the population were falling down, yet the interviewed students were able to watch the dramatic pictures of the crisis in the consumer-oriented West on their television screens (certainly, it was a part of a governmental propaganda; it happened due to the factual state control over broadcasting in Russia). They, of course, could also travel abroad, communicate with others much more easily than their predecessors. Yet, at the same time, their families were under the pressure of obtaining material goods. And we doubt that many in provinces used the aforementioned chances to travel abroad. This was a period of early socialization of a majority of those surveyed. However, in retrospect, we may say that by the end of the 2010s the main changes in youth orientations resulted in a growing disinterest in social problems, alienation from any participation in collective forms of social life (most students are becoming more apolitical than before), increasing valuation of privacy and more traditional values (honesty, love, family). But, does the youth generation differ dramatically from their parents in terms of traditional values? The reply is a firm “No” (in my opinion, at least). And this is also the answer to the general question which was put before.

Indeed, ‘parents’ of the present youth, i.e. those who are around fifty, are too old to be re-socialized. “Parents” of those interviewed went through the 1991 revolution, October 1993 bloodshed, when they were at the age of the present students or a bit younger. They survived in bloody 1990s, and so on. Students as a generation, certainly, suffered too – with ineffective national economy and pauperization of a generation of their “parents”, but “parents” have created the present-day socio-economic situation to a large extent. And most of them feel responsibility for the entire nation; perhaps, in this regard, the generation of “parents” drastically differs from the generation of ‘kids’ which practically have no such a feeling.³¹

31 A conclusion is drawn from the data presented at the web site: http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/04/19_a_5261565.shtml.

Have “parents” lost moral authority over their children? Again, the author’s answer is “No”. Taking into account the flood of movies and advisors from the West, experts often ask us: the Russian youth generation are freer politically and economically than before, but are they psychologically freely? Our answer is simple: “We do not know, we do not have enough data”.

One, of course, may speak about the widely-spread collapse of authority (in the most general sense of that term) or about the growing political alienation of youth from the ruling regime especially in capitals, but all arguments in favor of these statements do not look serious and attractive (this is the author’s personal viewpoint). Yes! There are certain grounds for doubts. As a former university professor the author could not speak of the specific urban student youth subculture, or of growing consumerism of the Russian student youth, or of different changes in gender relations, and other life-style choices. Simply could not! Pro-president’s youth movements are unpopular amongst university students. Moreover, youth movements were switched to secondary and politically marginalized roles even in the anti-regime protest rallies of winter-spring 2012/13. In all these events student’s leaders were not an important mobilizing force despite the wide usage of Internet and social web nets by the opposition activists. The Russians do not fear the possibility of the student movements joining right wing or apolitical youth gangs attacking ethnic minorities, legal and illegal immigrants, asylum –seekers, etc.

The fact that youth groups played only a minor role in the occurrences of winter-spring of 2012/13 means that a specific generational political consciousness (political identity) in Russia has not crystallized so far. The author as a scholar has seen no signs of a possible student’s revolt comparable to the 1968 student’s actions in France.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general disdain for political life and political leaders from all parts of the political spectrum is reinforced by evidence of widespread corruption and scandals on the top of power vertical in Russia. Therefore, no wonder that those who desire a better fortune for themselves choose another career’s path than the murky and dirty business of party politics. This momentum emphasizes fears of growing political apathy for the years to come. It could be that in the Russian Federation in the coming future large segments of the post-communist electorate would be politically silent, because they removed themselves from the political activity and became just passive observers of the political life of the country. This, of course, would not pose a direct (immediate) danger to the Russian ruling clique - in case

of no deep economic crises, but it could make a severe damage to the Russian civil society. If Russia's economy goes into a new deep economic or financial crisis, then there is a fewer portion of admirers of a further transformation towards pure democracy and real market economy among the "youth generation" or a decisive segment of electorate coming to polling boxes.

Today, the ideological challenges for the Russian youth range from militant nationalism to moderate centrist liberalism. This is Russia's reality. The business elites in Russia are split concerning the ruling clique. The pro-business and pro-government scientific institutions have drawn very contradictory conclusions about what kind of society in Russia should try to build the new president administration under Putin's leadership. Meanwhile, the Russian Orthodox Church has also been aggressively promoting its own program of engaging the Russian youth to its tenets; it is a very conservative religious indoctrination. In our view, there are no signs of the revolutionary situation in this particular country. Russia is turning from 'red' to 'grey' without a new revolution. Here, we must say again that there are also no signs of a revolutionary situation in the present-day Russia due to the youth activity. All relevant opinion polls' data and our private observations support our conclusion.

The state of things may change in the coming future, of course. Supporters of the gloomy predictions also put a finger on the mass protest rallies under the slogans "For the honest elections!", which took part in Moscow and St-Petersburg in winter 2012/13. The most active participants of the aforementioned oppositional events are prosecuted by the authorities as hooligans violating rules and battling the riot police. They all are rather young. Their number is small. Does it mean the Russian youth as a whole is getting more involved in politics? We do not think so. But, it is an alarming sign for political power structures, for those persons in power, who are responsible for the youth policy.

In this regard, experts usually say: first and foremost, there are leading political parties and/or representatives of the ruling elite who are responsible for possible youth's politicization; especially responsible for a perfect youth policy are those persons and/or political formations, which are winners at the local, regional and federal elections. The ruling structures should create a new political generation attracting the Russian youth into a pro-Putin vision of democracy and market capitalism. But, can they do it? It is too early to say that this opportunity has failed due to an enormous cost of economic and education restructuring, because the foreign experience shows the process of restructuring will take decades if ever succeeds.

Putin's administration may get certain success in non-visa traveling to the West for Russia's citizen including the Russian youth. This may provide a new

opportunity for those seeking more elements of democratic culture in Russia, or training and education in the West. Yet, it is quite clear that this could also provide backfire, since political cynicism and alienation from power are also on rise in the modern West, it is especially notable in the EU and among European's youth.

Youth violence exists in Russia. And at first glance, statistics on the youth violence in Russia cause for an alarm. However, the number of violent accidents is not extremely great, and, for sure, we cannot speak about the mass involvement of the Russian (student) youth into the criminal and nationalistic (or extremist of all kinds) militant activities on the national level.

We do understand that a nation's future rests heavily on the personal conduct and collective orientations of young citizens, and it is also quite clear that conflicts around Russia, Putin's foreign and domestic policy, and rumors about possible setbacks of post-communist democratization in Russia will continue in the years to come. And if neither the governing team, nor the "loyal" youth movements are able to catch support from Russian young citizens as a whole, then the situation in this country may become really revolutionary.

Is Russia's really specific "democracy" in big trouble *today*? We think there is no evidence that speak in a favor of such a gloomy diagnosis. Fortunately, the data of various opinion surveys and the personal observations of the author confirm the absence of revolutionary stage in the present-day Russia. It also seems to us that the real situation with a democratic development in this country is rather complicated, and we must consider various scenarios accounting the future.

The most likely candidate which may follow Russia's aging president Vladimir Putin in the future has to mobilize a large share of electorate including the present basically apolitical youth. Perhaps, he would be a nation-oriented leader and would be able to capitalize on economic hardships and a newly emerged competition for jobs, housing, education, and the limited access to various social goods provided by the government, i.e. issues, to which the young people are so sensible. He may also face new global challenges and new difficulties that may produce a new wave of disillusionment and bitterness.

According to Mark Adomanis, Russia still has a lot of problems, and it remains extremely troubled in comparison to developed Western countries, but things in Russia are actually improving at a reasonable clip. It is a huge contrast to the "period of stagnation," when Russia's most basic social indicators were visibly deteriorating. If we want to understand what Russia is and where it is going, we need to take its many positive developments into account.³²

32 Mark Adomanis, "Russia's demographics are now better than the Baltic's", *Forbes International*, on-line, 4/02/2013.

The author agrees with the above quoted statement, yet he considers the demographic decline the most dangerous threat for the nation's future. And more: if one wants to understand Russian policy, it is also necessary to take into account the international context in which the Russian foreign policy has been shaped as well as the specific domestic determinants of Russia's development, not only external ones.

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**RUSIJA KOJA STARI, MOGUĆNOSTI SUŠTINSKIH
REVOLUCIONARNIH PROMENA I RELEVANTNI
PROBLEMI MLADIH**

APSTRAKT

U članku je reč o problemu demografskog starenja u Rusiji, nekim predviđanjima o mogućnostima suštinskih revolucionarnih promena i nedavnim protestnim aktivnostima mladih. Autor razmatra rezultate studije koje je nedavno sproveo Odeljenje za studije elite Instituta za sociologiju Ruske akademije nauka. Podaci ovog pregleda i lična zapažanja autora potvrđuju mišljenje da u savremenoj Rusiji ne postoje osnove za suštinske promene, a da se učešće dela mladih na protesnim mitinzima u zimu 2012/2013 u prestonici i velikim gradovima svelo na slogan „Za poštene izbore!“. Pitanje nasilja mladih nije detaljnije razmatrano.

Ključne reči: Rusija 21. veka, starenje, suštinske revolucionarne promene, zahtevi mladih, Putin.