

Surprisingly, the ruling party United Russia (*Yedinaya Rossiya*) practically disappeared from the arena of public politics all of a sudden. The feeling of a mass of people exclusion was multiply enhanced by the public statement concerning exchange of chairs that had been made in advance by the ‘ruling tandem’: V.Putin will be president and D.Medvedev will be prime minister (what is really happened in May 2012). The people called this deal ‘tiny casting’.

An All-Russian Popular Front was urgently set up in parallel with, or rather in substitution of, the ruling top that had been moved aside by the rulers themselves. Putin, the acknowledged political leader of the country and its new president, headed it and delegated guidance of the ruling party to the ex-president D. Medvedev. And the longer the government was irresponsible to protestors’ demands, the more explicit and persistent the latter’s political demands became. The people came to understand that the state machine had fully alienated itself from civil society and lived by its own laws.

Then, the idea of modernization in Russia had ‘suddenly’ faded away somehow and vanished from the front pages of newspapers and TV news programmes. The key figures of the Institute of Modern Development that had been specially set up to translate this idea into concrete programmes and projects of modernization likewise left the public arena. And judging from Putin’s pre-election promises what might be expected is just a conservative project of Russia’s modernization (Yanitsky, 2011b). Eventually, elections to the VI State Duma (the parliament) held in December 2010, which civic organizations appraised as being falsified, topped off formation of the critical mass of protest [5; 6].

5. Models of the mass protest movement

My further considerations are based on recent work of the US sociologist K. Ash (2011) who analyzed models of protest movements in post-communist countries. Ash states that in these countries civil society took on the role of a challenger to the power of the state and of an imperative for the functioning of a democracy. By creating non-state associations civic organizations created the capability to confront and repel the forces of an intrusive state. Organizations evolved and built networks with one another, which then retained the capability of mobilizing and challenging the policies of a

government. This permitted opposition forces to organize and to demonstrate their strength during protest cycles (Tarrow, 1995: 54-61).

Then, Ash distinguishes three modes of interpreting the emergence of these movements. The first, advanced most prominently by Valerie Bunce, Sharon Wolchik and Mark Beissinger, proposes that the color revolutions spread through a process of diffusion from other successful movements in Europe and around the world. These scholars argue that seasoned organizers from successful movements collaborated with aspiring democratizers in unconverted countries to evangelize the 'electoral model', or non-violent protest against electoral fraud by an incumbent government efficient in directly causing a successful revolution. Instead, scholars such as Lucan Way, attribute protest revolutions to a breakdown in authoritarian patronage and coercion structures, saying that, 'regimes with little coercive capacity...have had far more difficulty coping with even modest protest.' Accordingly, it is evident that only regimes with large financial constraints were overthrown by a color revolution and relatively well-financed regimes held on to power and survived post-election challenges (Way, 2008).

A third group of scholars, notes Ash, stress individual motives in participating in protests as fundamental to understanding electoral revolutions. This direction can be traced back to analyses of the non-violent protests that brought about the fall of many communist governments in Eastern Europe in 1989. 'Revolutionary bandwagoning' was the most influential of the individualistic models to explain the rationale for protest. The model proposed that each individual in a country had a certain degree of discontent with the incumbent government. However, considering the threat of repression was strong under communism, these individuals had no incentive to dissent unless they felt that their anti-communist principles trumped the consequences of protest.

All the above three interpretations are applicable, at least partially, to the period of mass protests under discussion. The general atmosphere of 'colour revolutions' spreading, the 'Arab Spring' in the first place, played a mobilizing role here (Korotaev et al., 2011). The 'Occupy Wall Street!' movement that swept over the USA and EU also produced its effect. The second interpretation is true too because the regime has been repressive 'point-wise', that is, only against those who in the opinion of the ruling elite posed a direct threat to the regime (like, for instance, the banned National-Bolshevik party). As to the protest meetings, the authorities tried to hush

them up and even prohibit, but they sprang up over and over again. However, the third conception appears most adequate to the Russian situation.

First, for the reason of forced introduction of market economy and propagation of liberal ideology Russian society have become highly individualized in the last 20 years. Therefore, each individual citizen assesses the risk of his/her participation in each of the meetings independently. Second, the younger generation of protestors is the strangers to the fear that is still lurking in the minds of the older generation. Third, the emotional factor is a very strong driver. Russian sociologists seem to have so strong faith in the omnipotence of the market and its sociological derivatives, such as ratings, ranks and so on, that they come to forget about two more motives and at the same time *resources* of mass protest: moral and emotional. The politically engaged experts have got so much accustomed to converting any social act into roubles or dollars that they miss the driving force and impact of *human emotions*: resentment, indignation, and anger incurred by the unjust status of the majority of the population.

Not only Russians are discontented though [7]. I think nobody might suspect me of calling for levelling but the slogans of today's protestors in Russia and all over the world state clearly: one percent of the population has everything and the remaining 99 percent have what is left [8]. Does not what is happening today, 25 years after *perestroika*, mean the onset of a new wave of struggle for civil rights, but now on the scale of entire civil society? However it might be there have been no *upheavals on such a scale* and calls to fight for changes in the current social order over the past quarter of the century. And virtual networks act as a powerful multiplier of the feelings of anger and resentment. It became again clear that the principle of social justice is an indispensable prerequisite to the formation of a democratic system.

6. Evolution of the protest movement

Meeting as a mass congregation of people at the moment when some critical situation took shape has always occupied a special place in Russia's historical and cultural tradition. In the official Soviet tradition, such event was a 'demonstration', that is, an organized procession of people [9]. Since the events discussed here unfolded in the capital city, the question of where a