eurozine

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Russia's systemic crisis

Negative mobilization and collective cynicism

Since Putin's takeover of power, Russia appears to be stronger than it has for a long time. However, appearances are deceptive. Russia is degenerating into a corrupt police state, society has descended into poverty, and the country is becoming increasingly isolated. The Russian public is united only in the view that common goals are "the empty rhetoric of demagogues". The political resolve, put on just for show, merely serves to hide the state's omnipresent incompetence.

In 2005, there was still consensus in Russia that the Putin regime was sitting firmly in the saddle. After a long period of social upheaval and unsuccessful, aborted reforms, the forces on the right −− the "liberals" and "pro−westerners" −− were seen to have failed. The debate about the future of Russia revolved solely around the issue of whether the authoritarian regime under Putin was striving to modernize the country, or whether its goal was to secure power in the manner of a traditionalist despotism. Some people argued that the new regime was exploiting the support of the population and the deeply insecure, demoralized elite in order to initiate the institutional reforms that were essential to the process of modernization. Putin was thus described in heroic terms, as the great statesman who would go down in history as the man who led his country back onto the right path. Others assumed that the new leader would underpin his power with the revenues from energy exports, and secure his control with preventive repressions and the arbitrary abuse of his administrative powers.

However, nobody considered it possible that the Soviet system would continue to disintegrate, and that Russia could degenerate into a corrupt police state with an ineffective administrative structure, a stagnant economy, a society descending into poverty, and a collapsed health system, with no leading figures in the sciences, education, or research, and with the country becoming increasingly isolated as a result.

Today, the crisis in the Putin regime, which had already become obvious following the catastrophe in Beslan, forces us to examine the cultural and human resources of the present socio−political order in Russia.[1] The helplessness and incompetence of state authorities is discussed not only by those online newspapers that remain uncensored, but also in the press that is loyal to the regime. The willingness to act among the political elite has been steadily decreasing since the summer of 2005. The planned pension reforms and the restructuring of the administrative organs led to a drop in popularity figures, quite apart from the Khodorkovsky case, which had a highly negative impact on the economic and moral climate in the country.[2] To this has been added a whole series of further errors. The foreign policy pursued by Moscow

has suffered serious setbacks in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. In terms of domestic policy, the attempt to annul benefits for pensioners, invalids, and war veterans and to replace them with direct monetary payments failed completely and unexpectedly in the wake of mass protests. The compensation payments, which were announced so unexpectedly, can be regarded as a sign of increasing tension and as a further loss of a sense of reality, in fact, as an indication of a panic attack among the leaders of state. They did everything possible to soothe the simmering anger among the population, which was directed against the ongoing decline in the health system, the continuous increases in subsidiary housing costs, or the cancellation of privileges for students, who now no longer retain the right to defer their military service until after they have completed their course of study.

The aggressive tone adopted by some of the high−ranking Kremlin officials, such as Vladislav Surkov, Dmitry Medvedev, and Igor Shuvalov, who since mid−2005 and for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, have again spoken openly of public enemies and traitors, of a "fifth column" and subversive elements also indicates a sense of panic. They referred to the Yukos case as a "lesson", and prophesied the disintegration of Russia if the elite and society did not stand resolutely behind the President. Every reform −− and equally, every rejection of reform −− is justified by the same argument: Destabilization looms, and enemy forces are at work. Currently, these forces are the West and Islam; in the future, they will come from China. The outdated ideological arsenal of negative consolidation is being summoned up in order to justify the strengthening of the axes of power. A systematic, negative mobilization of this nature, which invokes hatred of "the oligarchs", the United States, and NATO, as well as Georgia and Ukraine, testifies to the degree of instability of the current system of power, the crisis of legitimacy which will become apparent at the latest when voters next go to the polls.

This crisis in the regime demands a new analytical approach. It was still possible to understand the takeover of power by Putin and the "strengthening of the axes of power" with which he imitated an authoritarian leadership style within the conceptual framework of transformation research: In order to explain the transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic order, a model could be applied that was based on a systematic transformation through liberalization and de−nationalization as well as on the model of an "authoritarian transformation". Putin's populism and the cult of the leader still complied with this theory. However, the crisis within the regime, which has become particularly obvious in the light of the change of course in Ukraine and to a certain extent in Georgia, demands other means of explanation, or at least a change in the focus of research.

A decisive difference which cannot be explained by standard transformation research is that this crisis is not the result of a specific transformation strategy or policy of reform. Just like the crisis during the final years of the Soviet Union, it can to a far greater extent be traced back to a dysfunction in the entire regime, which has problems securing its continued existence.[3] In other words: The state organs are attempting to solve their own problems or the problems of society and in so doing are creating new problems that have already become systematic and can no longer be solved by them. These systematic problems are first and foremost caused by the fact that the regime is attempting to adapt institutions inherited from the Soviet period to the new reality, instead of pushing ahead with a general reform of the post−Soviet state, even though the dysfunctionality and loss of control are obvious. For this reason, the ruling

elite is suffering from schizophrenia. It realizes that "it is impossible to keep everything as it is". At the same time, however, it is not in the slightest interested in "changing anything". As a result, the debate surrounding the future of the regime has shifted to focus on the issue of how the transfer of power from the Putin administration to the administration of his successor should be engineered, or whether such a transfer should be made at all. Fundamental issues relating to the system are discussed as though they were dependent on the individuals who represent the current or future power.

Negative mobilization

Sixteen years of public opinion research have shown that since the beginning of the 1990s, social tensions in Russia have been steadily on the increase. At the same time, the level of trust in the state is falling continuously. This is reflected, for example, in socio−psychological indicators. An ever−increasing number of people are suffering from stress, depression, and exhaustion, or from anxieties of all kinds.[4] It was possible to prove this for the first time in 1994, although to a significantly lower degree than today. A first peak was reached during the election campaign of Boris Yeltsin prior to the presidential elections in 1996. Following a campaign of several months for the incumbent president that autumn, more people than ever before expressed their dissatisfaction with the political leadership of the country. A slight relaxation was recorded from February 1997 onwards. Then came the mass hysteria of the spring and autumn of 1999, the preparations for the Second Chechen War, and the bomb attacks on Moscow apartment blocks. Currently, the most recent negative impact on the public mood was recorded by the seismograph in the wake of the hostage−taking in the Moscow musical theatre *Nord−Ost* in October 2002. The public reactions to these events have several specific elements in common. Some −− although not all −− of these phases of collective tension followed as a result of negative mobilization. Negative mobilization refers to a dissemination of diffuse aggression and images of the enemy, together with a growth in anxiety about the future and the loss of values. In such a situation, the need becomes stronger for the security of the collective. The mechanisms involved in integration of this nature are negative simply because positive concepts and motivations for action are completely absent. An appreciation of the individual, or their potential, their ability to become part of a group and to develop as a result, is either not present at all or is even rejected out of hand. Instead, with negative mobilization, the danger of the destruction of the collective is perceived as being so great that the collective identity is actually destroyed. A mobilization of this nature destroys all hope that people can achieve goals together; it destroys any faith in a better future and in the attainability of ideals. Values that were previously considered to be binding are then suddenly regarded as being banalities, the meaningless rhetoric of demagogues, and empty chatter.

The overall lack of orientation and helplessness, the frustrations and aggression typical for crisis situations of this type, only become apparent, however, when public anger is given a structure in the form of symbolic roles and is then targeted at symbolic objects. Dissatisfaction, anger, and indignation must therefore be directed at specific persons or groups who are made to blame for the situation. A demonization of this nature prevents members of society from realizing the specific relationship between state and society in the post−totalitarian constellation. They lose the moral standpoint from which a critical reflection of the basic ideological principles and concept of humanity would be possible, and which in the history of Russia has time and again led to outbreaks of violence and self−destruction. The overall Russian reality −−

politics, society, and culture −− is regarded as being irrelevant, and as a random or consciously planned deviation from what should "really" be. This concept of "what is real" is usually compiled from wild and unreflected fragments gleaned from the ideology of socialism, the paternalistic state, and the planned economy.

The social elite is transferring the specific institutional continuity that it considers a "weakness" of democracy −− the dependence of the courts and of parliament on the executive −− as well as of civil society, to a process−oriented template for interpretation. It thinks in transitional categories and thus assumes that the policy of transformation is a targeted one. As a result, it also identifies specific protagonists who are to blame for its failure. These are either specific individuals or diffuse social forces that are anthropomorphized: "the West", "America", "the terrorists", "the oligarchs", "the democrats", "the reformers" −− that is to say, "the others".

The personified perception of social reality enables the average population and the elite −− both of which can be ascribed the socio−psychological characteristics of a majority −− to provide a causal explanation for events. A reality initially regarded as being completely irrational is thus given a clear and comprehensive meaning. Those who identify the enemy and demand that it be destroyed are seen as giving meaning to the situation.[5]

As a result, negative mobilization in no way triggers a social protest movement. A mobilization of that type has a more or less rigid organization, in which a group of activists announces a programme; defines symbols, specific goals, and methods; and identifies the opponents and allies of the movement. The supporters and sympathizers of the movement follow the activists. By contrast, negative mobilization is highly diffuse, its social base is elastic, its political principles difficult to define. Negative mobilization is not the result of conscious political activity or rational manipulation, but the mechanisms that trigger it can to a certain degree be set in motion by propaganda. Negative mobilization is, however, a "spontaneous" mass reaction. Many people who are in a particular social context appear to suddenly adopt similar attitudes quite independently of each other, to interpret the social reality in the same way and, accordingly, to behave in a similar manner.

In contrast to "positive" mobilization, such as for a successful election campaign of a political party, negative mobilization runs from top to bottom. Concepts, attitudes, anxieties, or moods among lower levels of society and fringe groups are adopted or consciously utilized by some people in the middle and upper levels. When they are utilized consciously, then declarations are issued that the voice of the people should not be ignored, and that their views are now an objective social fact. Attitudes of this nature make their way up the social ladder. At some point, they become incorporated into politics, the media, and, finally, into educational establishments.[6]

The dynamic of negative mobilization does not just depend on the extent of the pent−up dissatisfaction. A decisive factor is whether this dissatisfaction crystallizes itself in the shape of pre−formed ideological stereotypes. Opinion surveys may provide a clear indication that without crystallization patterns of this type, resentment, anger, anxiety, and mistrust of the rulers remain below the surface. They are only rarely taken up by the media. When the media does take notice of them, then it neutralizes the critical potential of this mood −− even when a broader swathe of society shares such emotions.

When a high level of social dissatisfaction crosses with practised preconceptions, the stereotypes become generally recognized ways of explaining reality. It is characteristic of Russia's situation that mobilization which uses stereotypes has always been directed against that section of the government, presidential administration, or elite which stood for a programme of liberal reforms. It first affected Mikhail Gorbachev and the "young reformers" surrounding Egor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais. Then Boris Yeltsin himself was in the firing line, followed by the "oligarchs" −− Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky in particular −− and finally, all the right−wingers and democrats. To the same degree that part of the ruling elite is discredited, negative mobilization, which draws on stereotypes, is designed to confer legitimacy onto the conservative social institutions −− the army, the secret services, the police, and the educational system −− together with the politicians who represent them. Part of the population then really does believe that they embody national values and symbols.

In this way, with a mobilization of this nature, negative emotions become a surrogate for political programmes. The particular feature of negative mobilization is, however, that these surrogates, which are adopted by a large number of people, include targeted discreditation and abuse directed against a specific person or group. Both the generators and the recipients of such surrogates are fully aware of this. This is therefore by no means an erroneous interpretation of the social reality that can be traced back to primitive patterns of perception. To a far greater extent, the demonstrative simplification that consciously distorts reality is intended. In general, both active and passive participants in the negative mobilization are also fully aware of this.[7] The social consensus, the shared language of society, is based precisely on the principle that such simplifications are accepted. Since they require a consensus, they are also presented as "the pure truth", which is not veiled by higher motives.

Only a few people in Russia welcomed the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. The perception of events was not coloured by envy or nostalgic memories of 1991. Many more people expressed mistrust and rejection in opinion surveys. Most, however, reacted with the apathy of people who have been schooled to believe that they in any case have no influence on politics.[8] The scepticism of most people in Russia in contrast to the enthusiastic mass protest against the Ukrainian nomenclature, which was given even more impetus by the failure of the attempts at intervention by Moscow, is not only connected with the fact that the "little brother" had dealt a blow to the imperial pride.

There was also a certain amount of that darker petulance at work with which a cynical old man who has failed to achieve anything in life looks down on the romantic fervour of youth. The Moscow journalists were happy to spread denunciatory rumours put about by the political technocrats in the Kremlin, who claimed that the Ukrainian democrats had been bought by the United States, and that the masses were being manipulated. It was all simply a question of political demagoguery; events were being masterminded by the Ukrainian oligarchs with their clan interests and were a conspiracy against Russia. The public behaved as though they believed all of this. This widespread inability to understand other people and their enthusiasm and feelings of elation in particular, is of key importance to the anthropology of the post−totalitarian, post−Soviet population. It is a constituent element of the Russian national identity. The reason is not, of course, that people living in post−totalitarian Russia are essentially stupid, nor that they have failed to develop an ability to understand the feelings of others. It is far more the case

that the inability to empathize is linked to the tendency to assume that other people, whether they are friend or foe, are compelled by the lowest motives. This also includes a willingness to believe the most ridiculous rumours when they are based on the fact that human wickedness forms the "rational" basis for all forms of human interaction. Most people select a model of explaining social action which assumes that all traditional notions and restrictions have vanished. In this way, the economic model of unlimited rationality is extended beyond the economic sphere, and it is assumed that no voluntary political or social commitment can be possible without an element of self−interest, and that even in the family, ethical issues are based on cool−headed calculation. This is also why Russian politicians, political technocrats, and political scientists are so obsessed with geopolitics: "We" −− Russia −− are just as "democratic", "civilized", "modern" as the others; we also have national "interests" that we pursue, and there is nothing unusual about that, since politics functions according to the principle of striving for hegemony, balancing power, and exploiting advantages. All other philosophical approaches are regarded as being hypocritical attempts at sugaring over malicious intentions with attractive phrases.

The images of the enemy so important for negative mobilization draw on archaic fears and ideological phobias that have been passed down from earlier eras. More precisely: They take the patterns of these fears and phobias as their structural basis. The anti−Semitism of today, which is generally passive, is used as a paradigm for other xenophobic and racist stereotypes. Negative mobilization incorporates set pieces from the national constructs established during the second half of the nineteenth century. In a bizarre way, they are combined with the templates used by Soviet propaganda, which initially stoked class hatred and aggression towards the "inner enemy", and which were later directed against the west. Today, elements of Russian attitudes as a major power and an imperial culture −− the Black Hundreds, the national−religious revival, the decadent Silver Age, Marxism −− merge to form a conspiratorial mass with elements of the closed, Soviet mobilizing society with its isolationism, arrogance, resentment, sensitivity, fear of threat from outside and within, passivity, and black−and−white thinking −− Russia against the rest of the world, and in particular, against the wealthy west.

There appears to be a moral boundary in place which prohibits any public mention of those fragments of ideological sources that serve a conservative or restorative function. The role of the cynic who oversteps this boundary has been adopted by a small group of prominent politicians: Vladimir Zhirinovsky, his epigones Dmitry Rogozin and Aleksei Mitrofanov, and other agents provocateurs. In actual fact, this boundary does not exist at all. Demagoguery, lies, and provocation are among the standard rhetorical methods used in Russian political culture. The president makes use of them in just the same way as a mediocre talk−show host. The phenomenon is so widespread that it is no longer evaluated by society in terms of ethical, religious, or aesthetic principles.

This pent−up anger among the population is not in itself sufficient to trigger negative mobilization, however. The apathetic mass simply passively adapts to events. The "storehouse" for these quarried fragments is not the organs of power, but the representatives of the institutions that specialize in social reproduction: teachers, specialists in the field of technology, and journalists.

Negative mobilization is triggered by subaltern provincial bureaucrats and groups that have suffered a loss of access to the system of redistribution as a

result of the collapse of Communism and the break−up of the Soviet Union, such as the ministerial bureaucracy, the army, the secret services, and the military. They have no access to power, but they harbour desires to attain it. They address a subconscious feeling of chronic dissatisfaction which the people themselves are unable to activate and articulate, but which can be used as a tool in the conflict between rival elite groups, above all against those who have come to power with a programme of modernization. As a result, it is the bureaucracy, burdened as it is with resentment, which is the real source of the collective Russian hatred of foreigners, that is far more dangerous than any group of marginalized skinheads.

Negative mobilization begins when a conviction becomes widespread that society is in the throes of a crisis, and that a point has been reached where things simply can't go on as they are. This does not by definition happen as a result of a worsening of the individual financial situation, or of political crises. Of far greater importance for negative mobilization is the social crisis, a lack of orientation affecting everyone, a persistent sense of pessimism and defeatism, the loss of all prospects for the future and any hope for a better life. In a situation like this, the normal level of scepticism towards politicians and institutions becomes chronic distrust, and dissatisfaction escalates into a sense of hopelessness.

When everyone talks of a crisis, it means that those people have now also become affected who had not earlier been consumed by this feeling of panic. It is typical for a situation in which the perception of the crisis, together with images of the enemy that explain the crisis, becomes a social convention, and that specific crisis phenomena and the naming of the enemy are not apparently engineered by any particular person. Things which were previously represented by a specific group, the media, or by a politician have now "suddenly" become common property and can no longer be traced back to any one source. Each individual in the mobilized mass believes that their perception of the crisis springs from their own personal assessment of the situation, and that the analysis of the causes is the product of their own reflection. Once the origins of the perception of the crisis have become blurred, stereotypes are accepted without question, becoming self−evident and "objective". This is precisely what is happening in Russia. Interests and ideas can no longer be attributed to a specific social or political group, and the views and positions of all social groups have become diffuse and unfocused.

A decisive element in this way of perceiving a crisis is that people feel constantly restricted, believing that their lives depend on circumstances that are beyond their control. This feeling of helplessness dominates everyday life to the same degree as their perception of key political events −− from the reforms initiated by Gaidar through to the politics of the Putin administration. Two−thirds of those surveyed by the Levada Centre stated time and again that they did not believe in a better future.[9]

It can be concluded in the light of this chronic lack of self−confidence that social values have become diffuse, and that they have become shaken and disintegrated −− which *nota bene* is not the same as a differentiation of values. Different value concepts are perceived as being increasingly incompatible. This also leads to the dissemination of a sense of helplessness. An increasing number of people believe that they would be unable to assert their rights and interests legally and via the official channels without having to accept the need for the superhuman sacrifices that human rights activists and promoters of a civil society demand of all citizens. There is no trace of "here I stand and am

unable to act differently". It is far more the reverse: Here I stand. Tell me what to do now. Value concepts are becoming blurred, and ideas about what is permissible, tolerable, or acceptable are becoming increasingly unclear. This condition, in which ethics and morals become amorphous and fluid, is underpinned by a loss of a sense of solidarity. Instead of solidarity being applied as a benchmark, the model of the "ego society" becomes more valid.

Collective cynicism

When Russian sociologists discovered the first indications of negative mobilization, they interpreted it as being a one−off reaction by the public to certain events, or as a specific mechanism of collective identity formation. It appeared that these sporadic waves, such as the ebb and flow of anti−Americanism, blind faith, and deep mistrust of "the leaders", vanished just as quickly as they had appeared, leaving no trace in the collective consciousness. In time, however, it became evident that these waves had indeed taken their toll: The value system in Russian society is eroding. The symptoms are on the one hand increasingly widespread cynicism, together with periodical outbursts of aggression, lack of empathy, indifference, and the loss of the capacity to make certain value judgements. On the other, more and more groups are being established that make dogma out of their ideas and aggressively try to make their mark on society.

This does not mean that society during the Soviet era was morally better or more humane. However, cynicism then was veiled by a binding and declarative canon of values and ideological self−descriptions. The semi−official "ethic" was imbued with particularistic norms for social regulation, such as loyalty, honesty, and reliability. To this was added a stock of traditional patterns of behaviour, conventions, and customs that was not rationally systematized and defined the boundaries of decent and appropriate behaviour.

Since the population reacted to the totalitarian repression and all−encompassing social control, to vertical dependence, the spy system, and the climate of denunciation, with a specific, complex method of adaptation −− double thinking −− they declined to consider whether or not an action was morally justifiable. In an atmosphere of organized violence, there is no space for the ethical classification and rationalization of individual or collective behaviour. After the Great Terror had passed, and when the preventive repression against individual groups or sections of society had come to an end, the great level of fear began to subside. What remains is a low level of fear; the fear of minor career setbacks, a loss of income, and fear of one's superiors. It is particularly widespread among the servile parts of the bureaucratic machine, and among those social groups that are dependent on state power.

The groups most severely affected by the change in values are those that are responsible for social reproduction. They are followed by the young, socially secure, productive groups, for whom the potential for innovation is being reduced or crippled. This is reflected indirectly in the fact that today −− in stark contrast to the Perestroika years −− aggressive attitudes and ideas are spreading among the young and most active groups, and that within these groups hatred of foreigners and nationalism are becoming more popular. Their open support of Putin, who personifies the friend−or−foe concept, is an indication that this deterioration in values is increasingly prevalent among these groups. Finally, the "middle class", in the broadest sense of the term, is also affected; the "normal people" whose attitudes and actions are in line with the specified norms and regulations. It is never the "centre" of society that

defines what is good, noble, and beautiful. Most people either adopt the norms and standards set by institutions that specialize in creating them −− the church, the education system, the cultural arena −− or follow an intellectual elite. For this reason, the fact that ethics and morals are becoming amorphous and fluid may indicate a crisis in these institutions. When the concept of an absolute truth vanishes, and a readiness becomes established in its place to be content with something that is regarded less moral, or even amoral, this could be classified as being "a lack of moral clarity".[10] However, this term is too general and says nothing about the causes of the diffusion or the social mechanisms that produce this cynical behaviour.

The dissemination throughout society of a social, cultural, philosophical, or aesthetic cynicism is nothing new. The phenomenon is sufficiently known in the historical context and has occurred time and again. A "fine" cynicism regularly appears after periods of large−scale social upheaval. It indicates the unbridgeable gap between aspirations and the reality of existence and brings to light the dark side of the new values by ridiculing the transcendental nature of the ideal −− while validating it in the process:

> It is no coincidence that modern England has become the home of black humour. Cynicism was always the reverse side of Liberalism, its shadow, its other face, which was not recognized officially, but which was inseparably joined to it.[11]

By contrast, vulgar cynicism, which derides everything "high" or "principled", is the dubious privilege of those who have failed, of epigones who are excluded from society and culture. This cynicism has nothing to do with relativism. Relativism alludes to the fact that all values are culturally and socially determined. Vulgar cynicism, however, maintains that there is no value in anything that lends human existence significance beyond that of the individual.

Acclimatization, adjustment, and adaptation to an institutionalized system of suppression and unrestricted administrative abuse of power leads to a life that is "set at a level of baseness" (Saltykov−Shchedrin). The *conditio humana* is devalued, and a general adaptation takes place to an order which is based on the general assumption that individuals are not destined to achieve higher aims, and that it is precisely the mediocre individuals in society who establish social standards. At the top of the social pyramid in such a society is the type of person of whom others say: "Of course he's the son of a bitch. But he's one of us".[12]

For this reason, figures from the second or third layer down −− members of the security organs or imitational traditionalists −− may temporarily enjoy great support among the population as a result of negative mobilization. After all, it is the function of these individuals to oust those potential leadership figures from power who promote a programme of modernization that contradicts the faceless and routine cynicism of the ruling elite.

As a result, the Russian democrats were unable to survive the enemy rhetoric and nationalistic demagoguery: When assessed in terms of their true intentions, instead of their declarations, they are just as cynical and etatist as the provincial nationalists and KGB patriots. When the Second Chechen War began, or when they were obliged to take a stance on the expansion of the EU to include eastern Europe, it became evident that the democrats, just like Putin and his supporters, were more concerned with re−establishing Russia's major

power status. The only difference between them is that the democrats regard the market and democracy as being adequate means which can be used in order to achieve this.

Essentially, it was only a matter of time before the democrats capitulated and abandoned their principles; they lacked strong arguments against the cynicism of the Soviet epigones and against geopolitical demagoguery. When society is imbued with rhetorical mobilization, the power of the state is far stronger than the democratic organizations. It is better organized and has more effective means to protect itself against threats from extremists −− at least, this is what most people believe in a post−totalitarian society that has once more become characterized by repression and militarization.

When power and society appear to become blurred after convulsions of this nature, this is a logical consequence, and yet also only an interim phase. It can only be followed by a police state in which power of any kind crumbles away, and in which the omnipresent incompetence of the state is veiled by a show of posturing political decisiveness.

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1 The large number of victims and the chaotic storming of the school in Beslan stand for the failure of Putin's Chechen policy overall. Beslan revealed the extent of the cowardliness and incompetence at the Kremlin, which sticks its head in the sand and refrains from taking responsibility, while at the same time shamelessly attempting to utilize the horrific tragedy for its own tiny political gain. The events in Beslan were used to justify the direct election of governors, the shuffling of posts in the ministerial bureaucracy, and alterations to the electoral system. The ideological prettification of the centralization of power failed, however, despite massive propaganda and the state control of the media. *Obshchestvennoe mnenie, 2004*. Yezhegodnik. Levada Centre (Moscow 2004), 116.

2 Boris Dolgin aptly commented that the state power had deliberately already made it a rhetorical question as to whether or not *Yukos*, the owner of the company, or its employees were legally in the right. In this way, they exposed themselves. Not only the judicial system and the concept of the legal state have been discredited, but also the state power itself, which quite openly exerted pressure on the court. It can be assumed that the prosecutors and organizers of this trial will in the foreseeable future themselves be sitting in the dock; ref. Boris Dolgin, *Eshche nichevo ne konchilos'*, www.polit.ru/analytics/2005/04/15/yukos.html.

3 This obviously does not mean that it could not be substituted by a completely different regime.

4 *Obshchestvennoe mnenie, 2004*. Ezhegodnik. Levada Centre (Moscow 2004), 8, 9, 21, 23 (diagrams 2.1, 2.2, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8).

5 One example is that the widescale support which Putin enjoyed after taking power corresponded with a negative reaction to the reforms by Egor Gaidar, whose policies had more substance than everything else which was attempted by other governments since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

6 During the crisis in 1998, the large−scale dissatisfaction among the lower sections of society broke through to the middle classes, even though the warning cries rang out in the name of the "poor", rather than of the middle classes.

7 This is indicated by the fact that phrases such as "Russia for the Russians" are met with widespread support in public opinion surveys when they are slightly toned down; in other words, when a policy of this nature should be pursued "within sensible limits".

8 For a more detailed analysis, see Boris Dubin, "Rossiia i sosedi. Problemy vzaimoponimania", in *Vestnik obshchestvennovo mnenia*, 1, 2005, 32−33.

9 In December 2004, the figure was 68 percent, in March 2005, 66 percent.

10 The term "lack of morality" was coined by Natan Sharansky: Natan Sharansky, Ron Dermer, *The Case for Democracy. The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* (New York 2004).

11 Wolfgang Lange, "'Elemantarnye chastitsy' Uel'beka i Menippova satira", in *Innostrannaia literatura*, 2, 2005, 240.

12 This quote is attributed to Franklin Roosevelt, apparently with reference to the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza.

Published 2007−09−13
Original in Russian
Translation by Anne Güttel
Contribution by Osteuropa
First published in "The Europe beyond Europe. Outer borders, inner limits"
(*Osteuropa* Special issue 2007)