

A SYSTEM SHAPING ITS ACTORS

A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE RUSSIAN TOWN OF TOLYATTI



THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES

Leiden University, The Netherlands

Student name:

J.L.F. Betting

Student number:

1036726

Address:

Rotterdamseweg 416E
2629HH Delft, The Netherlands

E-mail address:

j.l.f.betting@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Total number of words:

22533

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Chapter I: Exploring the concepts of civil society	9
Civil society as the state of civility	9
Civil society as a separate sphere	10
Civil society as social action and a mechanism of the state	12
The study of civil society in Russia	14
Chapter II: Civil society, post-communism and the case of Russia	15
Civil society and the public sphere in the 1990s	15
Civil society under Putin and Medvedev	17
The Russian state and civil society after 2011	20
Chapter III: Tolyatti as a Russian monotown	22
Russian monotowns, government legitimacy and labor protests	22
Labor representation and social partnership	25
The structures of social partnership in Tolyatti	26
Politics in the Samara region and the municipality of Tolyatti	28
Chapter IV: Society and government in crisis: the case of AvtoVAZ	33
The bankruptcy of AvtoVAZagregat: from ‘fake news’ to civil action	34
A lot of action, but few results	36
Shifting the blame: the government reaction	40
The governor intervenes	42
Chapter V: Protecting nature as a cause for civil action	44
From construction to planting: the state in charge	47
Protesting forest clearance: the return of civil society, or conflicts within the elite?	49
Chapter VI: Analytical assessment	52
Maintaining the state of civility	52

The separate sphere and the lifeworld	53
Civil society as a state mechanism	54
Reflections on earlier research	56
Conclusion	57
Bibliography	61

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, civil society in Russia has found itself more and more under state pressure. In 2012, the State Duma adopted a law requiring NGOs to register as ‘foreign agents’ if they accept foreign funding - a term which in Russia is interpreted as ‘spy’.¹ From May 2014 on, the Ministry of Justice can unilaterally list organizations as ‘foreign agents’ and plan unscheduled audits. Bloggers have come under pressure from a law that requires any website with more than 3000 visitors per day to be responsible for the ‘accuracy of all information published’.² Freedom of assembly was restricted, the police was given more rights to use violence, and journalists are now required to be clearly identifiable during public events. Several websites were blocked, and pressure on critical media outlets such as radio station *Ekho Moskvy* and independent television channel *Dozhd* increased.³

Despite the fact that Russia’s regime has become more authoritarian, it differs from some other authoritarian regimes, such as China’s, in that its law formally guarantees freedom of speech, multiparty democracy and rule of law.⁴ Although these values exist in name only, the Russian government tries to keep up the façade of being a more or less ‘normal’ democracy, while at the same time controlling the mechanisms of the state in order to extract rents from it.⁵ In order to maintain the façade (both externally and domestically), the Russian government allows a certain degree of freedom, while at the same time exerting control over the public arena by embarking on propaganda campaigns to confuse audiences⁶ and setting up pro-Kremlin organizations to ‘fill the public sphere’.⁷ In this way, the regime has constructed a public sphere itself, albeit highly controlled.

Research on civil society in contemporary Russia leads to contradictory observations, depending on the focus and theoretical framework. On the one hand, scholars describe civil society as weak and underdeveloped.⁸ According to the Levada Centre, 37% of the adult Russian population do not read newspapers and 46% do not read books.⁹ Television is dominated by trivia, and striving for financial success is deemed more important than

¹ Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups. The Battle Chronicle."

² The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, "Civic Freedom Monitor: Russia."

³ R. Orttung, "Why Has Putin Spared Ekho Moskvy? (Op-Ed)," *The Moscow Times* 2015.

⁴ K.R. Brady, "The Façade of Russian Democracy: Examining the Quality and Truth of Democracy in the Russian Federation" (San Jose State University, 2012).

⁵ M. Galeotti in 'In Moscow's Shadows', 2015.

⁶ P. Pomerantsev in 'Politico', 2015.

⁷ G.B. Robertson, "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and the Regime in Putin's Russia," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 542.

⁸ S. Henderson, "Civil society is alive in Russia but it is not well." *OSU Center for the Humanities*.

⁹ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia* (London 2013), 53.

engagement in public activity.¹⁰ On the other hand, despite the weak position of civil society in Russia, there are also signs of more active citizen participation in the public sphere. The *Bolotnaya* protests of 2011 were the largest since the end of the Soviet era,¹¹ and a clear sign that civil society was very much alive. Dr. Elena Chebankova, an expert in the field of civil society in Russia, sees the public rallies that appeared in Russia in 2014 after the *Maidan* events in Ukraine as a positive sign: large numbers of ordinary Russians showed political engagement by joining rallies in support of Crimea and the Donbas.¹² Although, without doubt, this activity was fueled by the propaganda campaign on Russian TV channels, she sees the degree of engagement on itself as a positive development.

Very much connected to the question of the strength or weakness of Russian civil society is the issue of how civil society should be characterized. Important developments within civil society often happen in the “invisible realm of social consciousness”¹³ and are difficult to identify. In her account on Russian civil society in Putin’s Russia (2012), Chebankova explores three notions of civil society to assess the civil landscape. The first conceptualization (or ‘realm’ in Chebankova’s terms) of civil society consists of associational life, i.e. voluntary organizations, associations, clubs and networks. This conceptualization of civil society is not necessarily political, but forms a social environment that exists between the state and the individual. Although this conceptualization is relatively easy to study because of its concrete nature, it largely ignores the ideological, ‘mental’ dimension. As I wrote before, it is unclear which associations should be considered part of civil society, and to which extent they ought to be independent to be considered as such. For instance, the trucker actions in late 2015 against the road tax for heavy trucks are a clear example of civic action. However, the actions were directed against something very specific that had very clear effects on the truckers’ life and financial situation, and (at the time of writing) do not have a real ideological dimension.¹⁴ As such, it is unclear whether the protests are a sign of a vibrant civil *society*.

When it comes to the invisible, ‘mental’ and ideological dimension, Chebankova’s second conceptualization offers a better view. This conceptualization focuses on the realm of ideas, and it views civil society as ‘a kind of society’ that pursues norms, beliefs and values. In this view, civil society is a means by which individuals can realize their ideas of a morally ‘good’

¹⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹¹ B. Whitmore, "The Power Vertical Podcast: Putin's Protest Problem," *RFE/RL* (2015).

¹² E. Chebankova, "Grassroots movements in Putin's Russia: A ray of hope for civil society?," *Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper* 15, no. 7 (2015): 10.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ B. Whitmore.

life. Civil rights and environmental movements are, in this view, clear examples of civil society. The third conceptualization views civil society as a ‘public sphere’, in which ideas and ideologies can be exchanged, critical discussion and assessment can take place, and opinions are formed. This idea of civil society finds its realization in newspapers, independent radio stations and internet. In this view, it is paramount that the public sphere be independent from state or private interests. As Habermas noted, both private interests (through market mechanics) and state interests (through force) can ‘hijack’ the public sphere and manipulate public opinion.¹⁵ The media campaign of the Kremlin in 2014 is a clear example: although it had widespread mobilization as its effect, it is difficult to view it as ‘civil society’ in the third sense, since the influence of the state media (most markedly television) on public opinion was enormous. A similar problem occurs when assessing organizations such as *Nashi*, a pro-Kremlin youth organization. Although opinion forming, interaction and the pursuit of ideological goals are clearly present, it is difficult to classify these organizations as signs of a vibrant civil society, due to their forced character. But even though these organizations were set up by the government, the influence that this phenomenon exerts on society is very real.

Apart from the difficulties regarding the definition of civil society, there are big differences between large cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, and smaller cities and rural parts of the country. Thirty percent of the Russian population lives in cities with more than half a million inhabitants – usually, those cities are characterized by a more vivid cultural life and a younger population (e.g. in Tomsk, almost one-fifth of the population consists of students) and more independent news channels. However, these cities are not representative for the whole country. Natalia Zubarevich, an specialist in the economy of the Russian regions, distinguishes ‘four Russia’s’. The ‘first Russia’ is the Russia of the big cities, such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The ‘second Russia’ consists of smaller cities in which ‘blue-collar workers’, working in dated Soviet-style industries, constitute the bigger part of the population. The ‘third Russia’ consists of the countryside, and the fourth Russia consists of the most underdeveloped regions of Russia, such as Tuva and the Northern Caucasus.¹⁶ The 2011-2013 protests were largely concentrated in the first Russia, which is one of the reasons they failed; the protests of *Bolotnaya* were largely political, and did not connect to earlier protests (2005-2011), which were mainly focused on socio-economic issues.¹⁷ The fact that there is a big difference between

¹⁵ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*, 6.

¹⁶ N. Zubarevič, "Četyre Rossii," *Vedomosti* 2011.

¹⁷ I. Busygina and M. Filippov, "The Calculus of Non-Protest in Russia: Redistributive Expectations from Political Reforms," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015): 210.

the four Russia's when it comes to socio-economic situation and reasons for protests, points at different mechanisms in different regions Russia. Even though research addressing Russian civil society in national terms can be very valuable, since there are many factors (television, national newspapers) that apply to the whole country, such research does not provide very concrete insights in the workings of civil society on a sub-national scale.

There are several studies regarding civil society on a local scale in Russia. Belokurova and Vorobyov assessed local participation in current-day Russia. The authors distinguish between different kinds of NGOs and describe the way they interact with the local government.¹⁸ The study gives a basis on which it is possible to study local civil society in more detail, but the authors do not give concrete examples from Russian cities or regions or an in-depth view into the mechanisms of local civil society. Lankina and Voznaya presented relatively recent data on protest trends in different regions of Russia. Although the authors do not delve deeply into any specific regions or cities, their research confirms the exclusiveness of Moscow and (to a lesser extent) Saint-Petersburg: In the period 2007-2012, Moscow City was the region with by far the highest number of protests (1428 in total). Second comes St. Petersburg, with 520 protests (about three times fewer than in Moscow), and the third city in the list, Samara, experienced only 210 protests. After that, the curve becomes less steep with four regions experiencing between 100 and 150 protests.¹⁹

Although the collected data on protests are certainly insightful, a more profound assessment of civil organizations in the form of a case study is necessary to really understand how civil society functions in regions of Russia outside Moscow or Saint-Petersburg. The city of Tolyatti, in the Samara oblast', is a good candidate for such a case study. The city has a population of about 700.000 inhabitants, but despite the large population, Zubarevich classified this city as part of the 'second Russia': it is an industrial city with a population of blue-collar workers. The city has considerable industrial importance due to the presence of the AvtoVAZ car factories. AvtoVAZ has suffered severe economic problems over the last years, partly because of mismanagement and corruption. However, since the car manufacturer is the main employer for most of the population, the Russian government had tried to keep the car industry alive by means of subsidies to prevent social upheaval.²⁰ In recent years, though, economic troubles

¹⁸ E. Belokurova and D. Vorobëv. "Obščestvennoe Učastie Na Lokal'nom Urovne V Sovremennoj Rossii." *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* 13, no. 2 (2010).

¹⁹ T. Lankina and A. Voznaya, "New Data on Protest Trends in Russia's Regions," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015): 334.

²⁰ C. Clover, "Russian one-company towns face decline," *Financial Times* 2009.

have led to tensions and demonstrations. This makes Tolyatti a good subject for a case study on the structure of civil society and its interaction with the government in the 'second Russia'.

This thesis will use the city of Tolyatti as a case study for assessing the interactions between civil society organizations and movements and the local government. What are the most important properties of civil society in Tolyatti? How does civil society in Tolyatti react on political, economic and social issues,²¹ and in which ways does it interact with the local authorities? The first chapter contains a theoretical exploration of the concept of civil society. The second chapter gives an overview of existing research regarding the functioning of civil society in current-day Russia. The third chapter will describe the political and social situation in the city of Tolyatti and its region, and the different institutions that exist for interaction between the government and society. The fourth and fifth chapters will give an account of two important topics in which civil society has been playing an important role: the problems at AvtoVAZ, more specifically at one of its suppliers, and the protection of forest areas in and around the city. These accounts will bring to the fore important structural properties of civil society in the town. These will be discussed in the conclusion of this work.

This thesis will give a clearer picture of the state and development of civil society and its organizations, and the challenges they encounter in a town that is very different from Moscow and St. Petersburg. This will give a better insight in the civil society situation in the 'second Russia', where a significant part of the Russian population lives.

²¹ Categorization based on T. Lankina and A. Voznaya, 332.

CHAPTER I: EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Although ‘civil society’ has become a widely used concept in political science, it is also an ill-defined one. Usually, different studies use very different definitions of civil society, sometimes choosing one that best fits the case studied (as was done by Chebankova), but also quite often narrowing the focus to non-governmental organizations – the most ‘visible’ part of civil society. Although this has led to valuable insights, it has also made the study of this phenomenon somewhat incoherent. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the concept of civil society in its different meanings, especially when it comes to interaction with the state. In this chapter, three concepts of state-civil society interaction will be explored: civil society as the state of civility, civil society as a public sphere, and civil society as a mechanism in modern states.

One needs to keep in mind that civil society is both a normative and descriptive concept – that is, it is a concept in political philosophy to define how societies are shaped by the existence of a state, as well as a concept in political science to study societal activity that happens outside the formal state apparatus.²² This chapter will explore both normative and descriptive concepts of civil society. This will help in creating a framework for the case study that is to follow, as well as interpreting the existing vast literature on civil society in contemporary Russia.

Civil society as the state of civility

In early modern Europe, as states started to exert more and more centralized power over their territories, philosophers started searching for a justification for the existence of states. One of the most important authors in this field is Thomas Hobbes. According to Hobbes, the natural condition of humankind is a state of perpetual ‘war of all against all’, in which every person is strongly guided by their own interest. Since there is no security, people can only rely on their own strength.²³ The solution to this, according to Hobbes, is the creation of a dominant authority, which Hobbes calls *Leviathan*. Here, every person of the community agrees to give sovereign power to one entity (preferably one man) that will arbitrate between members of the community and treat them equally. In exchange for a state of peace, the members of the community should obey the sovereign.²⁴ This view was nuanced by John Locke and the

²² O. Hoppe-Kondrikova, *Struggling for Civility. The Idea and the Reality of Civil Society. An Interdisciplinary Study with a Focus on Russia* (Nijmegen 2012), conclusion.

²³ J. Gray, *Post-Liberalism. Studies in Political Thought* (New York 1993), 6-7.

²⁴ S.M. DeLue and T.M. Dale, *Political Thinking, Political Theory, and Civil Society* (New York 2016), 132-33.

philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, who stated that individuals are guided in their actions by universal morale and reason.²⁵ The state, according to Locke, is necessary to guard ‘civil interests’, but it does not dictate religious views, and people are free to form associations, and to rebel if the state fails at its task. Peace is maintained by mutual respect and toleration.²⁶

What becomes clear in the views of Hobbes and Locke, is the fact that state power is a prerequisite for the existence of civility: without state authority guaranteeing civil interests and peace, civil society is impossible. This contrasts with the view that has been dominant in Eastern European studies, in which civil society is an opponent of the authoritarian state,²⁷ as was witnessed in the revolutions of 1989 in central and eastern Europe. However, it is a very useful insight for the case of Russia, which experienced a collapse of state power in the 1990s, and with it, failed to build an effective civil society.

Civil society as a separate sphere

The idea of civil society being a separate entity from the state starts with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. As the idea of universal reason accounting for human action was challenged by David Hume, Hegel sought to find other mechanisms that create unity in civil society.²⁸ The basis for Hegel’s civil society is founded in Immanuel Kant’s foundation of morale in Reason. Whereas Kant reserved morale for the private sphere (distinguishing between private *morality* and public *legality*), Hegel considers this morale the ethical framework of civil society.²⁹ Civil society is thus a sphere that is separate from the state, and divided into realms: corporations, estates and social classes are places where moral socialization takes place. Civil society also mediates between the state and the private sphere.³⁰

Hegel’s view of civil society as a separate sphere of different realms, in which socialization and mediation take place, influenced the concept of civil society that political scientists started to use, as in the 1970s and ‘80s, the world witnessed struggles between authoritarian regimes and society organizations. The concept of civil society, a concept that was largely neglected by political scientists in the decades before, was rediscovered.³¹ The transformations of 1989-91 further increased the popularity of the concept, and civil society not only became a dominant theme in the discourse of political science, but civil society promotion also became a main

²⁵ A.B. Seligman, "Civil Society as Idea and Ideal," in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, ed. S. Chambers and W. Kymlicka (Oxford: 2002), 14-20.

²⁶ S.M. DeLue and T.M. Dale, 154-58.

²⁷ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*, 99.

²⁸ A.B. Seligman, 20-21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

³⁰ N. Chandek, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (New Delhi 1995), 126-28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

policy direction for many actors, for example the European Union in regard to its eastern neighbors.³²

This is where a view of civil society *against* the state became dominant: civility was seen as a phenomenon separate from state power that could be a positive force in the process of democratization.³³ A central aspect here is the idea of modernization, as described by Max Weber: with technological progress and increased mobility, societies become less defined by tradition and more by rationality.³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, building on Weber's theory, stressed the importance of *language* in the rationalization of, what he called, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). This lifeworld is the 'background environment' of values and interpretations that a person regards as 'self-evident'. Elements of this lifeworld are individual, but an important feature of a society is that members experience a shared lifeworld which connects them. According to Habermas, the process of rationalization that Weber described should be understood as "a shift from *normatively ascribed agreement* to *communicatively achieved understanding*".³⁵ What this means is that, rather than adherence to fixed ascribed norms, the modern lifeworld is defined by communication and discussion, in which agreement is reached based on rational argumentation. This gives the possibility of constant reflection and renewal of existing traditions and values.³⁶

Habermas provided his theory with a historic basis by describing the rise of coffee houses, salons and table societies in the 17th and 18th century, where the developing bourgeois class met to discuss political issues. He pointed at the creation of journals of opinion and the establishment of social networks that gave rise to a separate sphere of communication and opinion-making. Habermas described developments in France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and stressed the importance of civil law that guaranteed individual freedoms. What unites this public sphere is the power of reason: consensus is formed around the most convincing argument.³⁷ Although Habermas admitted that this description of a common sphere of communication is, in fact, an ideal-type, he emphasized the empirical base on which his theory is founded.³⁸

³² N. Shapovalova and R. Youngs, "The Changing Nature of EU Support to Civil Society," in *Civil Society and Democracy Promotion*, ed. Timm Beichelt, et al. (Zurich: 2014), 86-87.

³³ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*, 101.

³⁴ O. Hoppe-Kondrikova, 80-83.

³⁵ W. Outhwaite, *Habermas. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford 1994), 74-76.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁷ C. Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (London: 1992), 10-15.

³⁸ J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (London 1992), 214.

The conceptualizations by Hegel and Habermas, to a large extent, explain the function of civil society in open democracies in Western Europe and North America. Media and organized groups (such as NGOs, but also political parties) are actors in the common sphere of communication, in which consensus is formed. These organizations also form the places where socialization of the population takes place, where public issues are discussed and debated. In Russia, the sphere of media and organized groups is heavily influenced by the state. Media freedom is heavily restricted, but there is some variation in repression, with the biggest media being state-controlled, but smaller outlets usually remaining autonomous (though they are often under duress). Weblogs and social media groups on the Internet, which can be considered an extension of the Habermasian public sphere,³⁹ are more autonomous, but also here, pressure of the state is increasing.⁴⁰

Although Habermas' focus on communicational consensus formation, in which discussions and media play a big role, goes a long way in explaining how civil society can spread ideas and advance consensus, the interaction between state and civil society remains unclear. Habermas considered state and civil society separate spheres, which means, as Cohen and Arato pointed out, that the sphere of civil society and its members "have a polemical, critical, argumentative relation to the state rather than a participatory one. They can supervise, influence, and perhaps somehow 'control' power, but they cannot themselves possess a part of state power."⁴¹ Here, there is friction with Habermas' historicist argument that "public opinion came to regard itself as the only legitimate source of law".⁴² Habermas pays little attention to social movements and organizations. When he takes them into account, he views them as 'communicative action movements' that challenge and might change the existing communicational consensus, but do not directly influence the political process.⁴³

Civil society as social action and a mechanism of the state

The question of how modern civil society influences social action and the state, leads us to the third concept of civil society: that of a mechanism of social action and the state. The way in which the process of modernization influenced social action was described by Charles Tilly. According to Tilly, until the mid-nineteenth century, most collective action was motivated by

³⁹ J. Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy," in *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, ed. Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts (Oxford: 2004), 133.

⁴⁰ *Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net 2016: Country Profile Russia,"*

⁴¹ J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, 222.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ W. Outhwaite, 106-07.

‘reactive’ and ‘competitive’ claims, exercised by community groups. Competitive claims are caused by rivalries between different local communities, usually about resources. Reactive claims are motivated by changes outside the community, such as tax increases by the state, or changes in market conditions. When local communities were replaced by the larger structures of society, collective action became motivated by ‘defensive’ and ‘offensive’ claims. In a modern society, groups of interest are formed and mobilized to achieve a common goal. These groups can form independently from the state, on a voluntary basis.⁴⁴ Modern communication and media attention play a big role. These groups operate in a rational way, using social and financial capital to attain their goals. Struggle within civil society, here, is not a problem but a feature: groups may grow and decline, mobilization may gain traction, be successful, or fail, after which new groups are formed.

A civil society not based on competitive claims and tug of war between local communities and the state, but on mobilization to achieve a common goal through rational methods is extremely useful for both society and the state. In a modern, bureaucratic state, it is difficult for the state to check the behavior of bureaucrats and other actors. Especially corruption negatively influences the quality of state services – even more, if state officials on high positions (such as in parliament) are corrupted, this severely influences the rational, “Weberian” quality of bureaucracy, which leads to reduced state capacity. Civil society and collective action serve, as McCubbins and Schwartz named it, as ‘fire alarms’: an external type of monitoring and coercion, stimulating state organizations and officials to act according to norms. States that lack an effective civil society are often forced to rely much more on policing (‘internal coercion’), which is a less effective oversight mechanism.⁴⁵ Mechanisms in states with weaker civil societies will often be more defined by patrimonial relations and less by rational-legal methods than states with more active civil societies.⁴⁶

In Russia, state capacity has increased significantly in the first decade of the 21st century, as the Kremlin reasserted control over state agencies. The government became more successful in fighting terrorism and crime. However, Russian state capacity and quality remains significantly lower than in other states, since informal and patrimonial practices continue to be dominant in the country’s bureaucracy, as coercive mechanisms, especially external coercion, failed to improve. This is not surprising, since the existence of a patrimonial system is highly

⁴⁴ J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, 500-03.

⁴⁵ Taylor B.D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (2011), 29-30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

advantageous to the political powerholders themselves – they use their position to extract rents from the state.⁴⁷ This, however, forms a paradox: on the one hand, the Kremlin aims to increase state capacity and quality, but on the other hand, it fails to develop (and even suppresses) those mechanisms that could lead to increased state capacity. This paradox could explain the often-contradictory policies of, on the one hand, applauding some civil initiatives, but on the other hand, suppressing civil organizations that are critical of political power.⁴⁸

The study of civil society in Russia

The three concepts that were described in this chapter are important in the study of civil society in Russia. The first concept emphasized the often-overlooked notion that without the state guaranteeing peace and stability, civil society cannot exist. It is useful to assess to what extent the state, in maintaining civility in society and serving the interests of the governing elite, relies on outright repression in the absence of a strong enough consensus in society, and to what extent it can rely on societal consensus (either pre-existing or constructed).

The second concept, which conceptualizes civil society as a sphere, emphasizes the importance of communication and socialization in the public domain, which defines public consensus. In Russia, the public sphere is heavily influenced by the state, which controls most media outlets – in this way, consensus in society can be expected to be heavily state-influenced as well.

The third concept, in which civil society in its modern form increases state capacity and quality, is a double-edged sword for the authorities. On the one hand, the Kremlin would like to harness its power to increase state capacity, but on the other hand, it forms a danger to the regime itself, which benefits from the continuation of paternalistic mechanisms on the highest political level. How such mechanisms work on a lower level is one of the research topics of this thesis. It is also of interest to which extent civil society groups act as ‘modern’, acting in a rational way to achieve common goals.

The following chapter will describe and assess several studies that have been conducted on post-Soviet Russia, and how the different concepts of civil society have been applied in a Russian context.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

⁴⁸K. Latuxina, "Prezident prizval NKO rešat' obščėnacional'nye zadači," *Rossijskaja gazeta* 2015.

CHAPTER II: CIVIL SOCIETY, POST-COMMUNISM AND THE CASE OF RUSSIA

In the years after the end of the Cold War and the establishment of democracy in many countries in central Europe, hopes about the future of democracy and civil society in post-Soviet states were high. However, although many post-communist countries have developed real democracies and active civil societies, other states have turned towards authoritarian rule. In the 1990s, it was unclear in which direction Russia was heading, and until 2004, the country was still labelled 'partly free' by the Freedom House⁴⁹ (whereas e.g. Belarus was already considered 'non-free' in the 1990s).⁵⁰ However, since the 2000s, the political and associational freedom has been steadily declining.

This chapter will use publications from the past decades to assess the state of civil society in Russia, and define them with the help of the insights that were obtained in the previous chapter. In this way, this chapter will serve to give a background to the case study that is to follow.

Civil society and the public sphere in the 1990s

The communist experience severely impacted civil activity in central and eastern Europe. In 1995-97, surveys showed that the average number of organizational memberships per person in post-communist countries remained less than one (0.91) - almost twice as low as the number for post-authoritarian countries, such as Chile and Argentina (1.82).⁵¹ The effect of a past communist regime is even stronger than the effect of economic and institutional development, or the number of years a country has had democratic institutions.⁵² Post-communist citizens are usually twice and sometimes thrice less likely to be a member of any type of organization, with the notable exception of trade unions: for this type of organization, citizens of post-communist countries are more likely to be members than citizens of post-authoritarian states (though not as likely as in older democracies), which can probably be explained by the fact that in post-communist countries, trade unions are often former state organizations of which workers automatically become members.⁵³

Professor Morjé Howard used an interpretive approach to explain the roots of non-participation, by conducting interviews in the former GDR and Russia. In this way, he

⁴⁹ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2004: Russia".

⁵⁰ "Freedom in the World 2004: Belarus".

⁵¹ M. Morjé Howard, *The weakness of civil society in post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge 2003), 62.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 74-91.

discerned different factors. Firstly, because membership of organizations was obligatory under communist rule, citizens often distrust public organization. This does not mean that citizens are disinterested: interviewees expressed willingness to take part in demonstrations and strikes, but apprehension to commit to organizations on a more permanent basis. The relative strength of family and friendship networks in post-communist countries is another reason that citizens do not feel the need to participate in public organizations: they feel content with the personal contacts they have. The last factor that Morjé Howard discerns, is a general feeling of disappointment in post-communist developments: people seemed to have held beliefs in sudden, 'spontaneous' improvements in their economic position and personal happiness. However, the process turned out to be much slower and more difficult, which made people retreat in their personal spheres, rather than put energy in seemingly unattainable, abstract ideals.⁵⁴ These three aspects distinguish the post-communist world from older democracies and post-authoritarian countries.

The media in Russia in the first decade after the end of the Soviet Union were largely free from government control. However, news coverage was far from fair, and regulations regarding funding by interest groups were ignored. In this way, political parties and candidates could buy huge amounts of media coverage, despite their low support among voters. Rather than investigative journalism, many journalists practiced tactics of *kompromat*, in which candidates were smeared with scandal stories that had little basis in facts. In this way, rather than facilitating the birth of a 'public sphere' in the Habermasian sense, the media contributed to the disengagement of citizens from public affairs.⁵⁵

The weakness of civil society in the 1990s can be linked to the weakness of the Russian state at that time. This decade was characterized by the loss of state capacity and decentralization, which made state organs subordinate to interest (sometimes criminal) groups.⁵⁶ Here, we can speak about a loss of civility in the Lockean sense of the word, where the absence of authority leads to a struggle between individuals and interest groups. This benefited those who had financial resources, but not the population at large.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 121-47.

⁵⁵ S. Oates, "Media, Civil Society and the Failure of the Fourth Estate in Russia," in *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, ed. A.B. Evans, L.A. Henry, and L. McIntosh Sundstrom (London: 2006), 62-63.

⁵⁶ V. Gel'man, "Leviathan's return. The policy of recentralization in contemporary Russia," in *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, ed. Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell (New York: 2009), 3.

Civil society under Putin and Medvedev

The period under the presidency of Putin and Medvedev is usually characterized as an era of administrative and industrial recentralization, in which the role of both independent business and regional elites sharply declined. This recentralization was initiated by the Kremlin and stimulated by economic growth that was based on raw materials.⁵⁷ Despite the economic growth, civil society continued to be regarded as weak, in the organizational sense as well as in the ‘Habermasian’ sense. NGOs, already suffering from a lack of enthusiasm from Russian people, were accused of serving dubious, commercial and foreign interests by the Kremlin, and Russian media, already lacking a critical journalistic tradition, came under pressure of a more and more authoritarian state.⁵⁸

Up to 2011, most of the literature on Russian civil society has followed the line of Morjé Howard: Russian civil society is weak, because of a lack of trust in public organizations and disappointment in the post-communist changes.⁵⁹ This weakness served both as an explanation for the existing situation and a cause for the constriction of pluralism by the Kremlin. Putin’s initiative to announce a Civic Forum in 2001 and his endorsement of the idea of civil society were regarded either lip service, or parts of a bigger design to restrict pluralism and increase state power.⁶⁰

The situation changed in December 2011, when Moscow experienced the largest street protests since the end of the Soviet Union, after the fraudulent Duma elections of that year and Putin’s announcement that he would run for president again.⁶¹ It became clear that Russians are well-aware of the political situation, willing to press their demands and capable of mobilization.⁶² Although the protests did not bring about any change in the political situation in Russia, it did lead to a reassessment of civil society by political scientists: instead of simply classifying civil society in Russia as weak, scholars started paying more attention to its nature and development.

In ‘Civil Society in Putin’s Russia’, Elena Chebankova characterized two ‘phases’ of civil society: a private phase, which is characterized by withdrawal into the private sphere, and a

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁸ S. Oates, 69.

⁵⁹ S. Greene, "Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin's Russia," (Stanford University Press, 2014), 219.

⁶⁰ A.B. Evans, L.A. Henry, and L.M. Sundstrom, *Russian civil society : a critical assessment* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 148-49.

⁶¹ S. Greene, 206-8, 19.

⁶² Ibid., 220-1.

public phase, which is characterized by active engagement.⁶³ She sees a transition from the private to the public phase in the years 2006-9, as a result of economic prosperity and disappointment with the level of civil rights.⁶⁴ She sees a positive re-evaluation of the immediate post-Soviet period, with the dislike of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin decreasing, and increased public activity, for example in the form of independent trade unions.⁶⁵

Chebankova remains pessimistic about the state of the Russian public sphere: TV and press are dominated by trivia, sensationalism and entertainment – public affairs are marginalized. A large part of the Russian population does not read books or newspapers at all.⁶⁶ Rather than a Habermasian sphere of ‘normative understanding’, she views the public sphere in Russia as dominated by radical and extremist movements⁶⁷ (Chebankova also considers liberals who consider the current regime as illegitimate, such as Garry Kasparov and his United Civic Front, radicals⁶⁸).

She discerns the positive effects of the new ‘public phase’ in the emergence of grassroots movements. She sees a trend in which civic movements start around local issues, but then become politicized and start focusing on broader, more structural problems.⁶⁹ An excellent example is the *Svoboda Vybora* movement, which started as a reaction on the proposed ban on right-hand-drive cars in Russia in 2005, which it successfully contested. After that, activists set up a campaign against the use of vehicle emergency lights (*migalki*) by officials, and later even participated in the opposition movement ‘The Other Russia’.⁷⁰ Several grassroots labor organizations and ecological movements followed the same trend.⁷¹ Chebankova, however, warns against excessive optimism, as the social base of such movements is confined to the proto-middle class. According to her, “the majority of Russians are keen on change theoretically, [but] they are not prepared to sacrifice their time, energy and in particular comfort for the achievement of these goals.”⁷²

Samuel Greene’s “Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin’s Russia” takes a different approach by focusing on the relationship between the Russian state and Russian

⁶³ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*, 164.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 144-46.

⁷⁰ S. Greene, 169-98.

⁷¹ E. Chebankova, *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*, 153-63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 165.

society. In this, he harks back to Locke's definition of civil society, in which civility is the result of state regulation of civil interests. According to Greene, Russia is characterized by a strong regime that, paradoxically, finds its power in the weak institutionalization of the Russian state: the Russian elite has the power to determine the rules of the political game.⁷³ Although institutions similar to democratic states do exist, the Russian elite regards them as their private property, which can be used for personal benefit and should be shielded from outsiders.⁷⁴ Greene introduces the concept of 'club goods': a category between 'private goods' and 'public goods', that can be accessed only by members of an exclusive group. In Russia, officials do not hold their position for the job itself, but as a way to become a member of the 'club' and gain access to 'club goods'. Becoming a member of this 'club' means giving up economic and political freedom, in exchange for state money and large-scale consumption. 'Club rule' is nothing new for Russia. The Soviet *nomenklatura* is the classical example of a club, in which scarce goods (e.g. dachas) were distributed. As the Soviet Union fell apart, so did the club of *nomenklatura*. However, the economic growth of the 2000s has led to the establishment of a new 'club' – one could say, a new *nomenklatura*.⁷⁵

The way the state is run has a profound impact on civil society in Russia. The Russian elite does not really need Russian society for its own well-being, since its wealth depends on the export of oil and gas. As a result, the Russian state is disengaged from its citizens and tries to minimize interaction. Therefore, it makes little sense for Russian citizens to engage in collective action, since the ruling *nomenklatura* has the power to block such initiatives – after all, none of the state institutions – be it judiciary, executive or legislative – are real, independent organs. However, Russia's elite needs society for its 'legitimization rituals': the acts that are characteristic of democratic states, elections being the most visible of them. Here, then, civil society has a chance for collective action, by refusing to passively play its designated part in the ritual. This is exactly what happened in the 2011 protests.⁷⁶

Greene, therefore, argues that Russian civil society is not 'weak' because of a lack of awareness of democratic principles, but because Russian citizens are very much aware of their limitations and opportunities in the current political environment. The nature of civil society, therefore, reflects the nature of the state: when the state acts in a deinstitutionalized way,

⁷³ S. Greene, 221.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 220-21.

Russians react as individuals; when the state acts in a more institutionalized way, Russians react as citizens.⁷⁷

The Russian state and civil society after 2011

After the 2011 protests, one of the questions that researchers asked is whether the protests were a sign of a new era in Russian civil activity. In a 2013 paper titled 'Beyond Bolotnaia', Samuel Greene distinguished between 'legacy' networks, which existed before the mass protests, and 'greenfield' networks, which were formed during the demonstrations. By analyzing Facebook data, he concluded that members of greenfield networks were more likely to have an affinity for online liberal media outlets than members of legacy networks. Members of legacy networks, however, played a more prominent role in the protests (e.g. as speakers at rallies). What he concludes from this, is that the 'greenfield' participants were, most likely, already politically engaged before the start of the demonstrations, albeit passively. What activated them was the confluence of 'legacy' civic activity and the bigger story of the injustice of the elections. In other words, neither 'legacy' activity nor 'greenfield' political engagement were new – what was new, was the interplay between both domains.⁷⁸

In the face of mass protests, the Kremlin also changed its policy towards civil action and protests. Whereas initially, the protests were tolerated by the authorities, the tone changed in February 2012, as Putin declared that the protests were instigated by the West, branding the protesters as traitors. The narrative of protesters as a 'fifth column' of enemy forces allowed the regime to further restrict civil society organizations, and gained traction after the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine: the new Ukrainian government was branded a 'fascist junta' and became the face of the anti-Russian threat in Kremlin propaganda.⁷⁹ The annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine were used to influence public opinion, and also stimulated civic action in support of the regime, such as large rallies in support of Crimea, and also activities to revive the memory of the Great Patriotic War. At the same time, both anti-regime protests and grassroots movements continued to be active.⁸⁰

Increased pressure from civil society and an increasingly felt need to 'manage' society, rather than ignore it, however, is not the only problem the Russian regime is facing. After 2012, the Russian economy has come increasingly under pressure from low oil prices, foreign sanctions and countersanctions. For the Russian population, this often led to lower salaries (or

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Beyond Bolotnaia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (2013).

⁷⁹ "The End of Ambiguity in Russia," *Current History* (October 2015): 256.

⁸⁰ E. Chebankova, "Grassroots movements in Putin's Russia: A ray of hope for civil society?." 2015.

no salaries at all) and thus lower welfare. For the Russian elite, the economic hardship led to lower rents, and the foreign sanctions meant less opportunities to enjoy their wealth abroad.⁸¹ Some members of the elite, such as German Gref (the CEO of the state-owned Sberbank), started advocating structural reforms of the economy to maintain economic growth in the face of low oil prices.⁸² This would mean a course towards a more 'rationalized' government structure, away from the corruption that cripples state capacity. However, this would endanger the very basis of the current regime, and would give civil society actors more possibilities to interact with the government.

The places where the tension between elite corruption, the economic downturn, and ordinary citizens has become most visible, are the towns in Russia in which a large part of the population is dependent on a few big companies for its employment. Economic troubles in these companies – often highly outdated and inefficient plants – have a negative impact on the entire town. Tolyatti is such a town: a large part of the population is dependent on the automotive industry, which has been struggling at least since the 2008 financial crisis.⁸³ In 2015, AvtoVAZagregat, one of the largest suppliers of AvtoVAZ (the manufacturer of Lada cars) stopped its production as a result of financial problems, and the procedure to declare the company bankrupt was started.⁸⁴ On August 30, 2016, the company was officially declared bankrupt.⁸⁵ The situation has led to demonstrations of workers, whose salaries were no longer paid, and tensions with the local authorities, including the governor of the region.⁸⁶ The unfolding of the events and the interaction between society and the local state will be the topic of the fourth chapter of this thesis. However, first, it is necessary to give an overview of the political and social situation in Tolyatti and the Samara region, and the structure of social partnership in Russia. This will be the topic of chapter three.

⁸¹ S. Greene, "The End of Ambiguity in Russia," 258.

⁸² Ibid., 257.

⁸³ T. Lasseter, "Facing massive layoffs, Russia's 'Detroit' feels the chill," *McClatchy Newspapers* 2009.

⁸⁴ E. V'juškova, "«AvtoVAZagregat» podvezli do bankrotstva," *Kommersant* 2015.

⁸⁵ "«AvtoVAZagregat» priznali bankrotom iz-za dolgova," *Republic.ru* 2016.

⁸⁶ "Gubernator Samarskoj oblasti prigrozil «nikogda» ne pogasit' dolgi postavščika AvtoVAZa," *Republic.ru* 2016.

CHAPTER III: TOLYATTI AS A RUSSIAN MONOTOWN

The city of Tolyatti (population in January 2016: 712.619 people) used to be the ‘automotive capital’ of the Soviet Union: it is home to the AvtoVAZ plant, which produced cars with the brand name ‘Lada’. However, in the years after the demise of the Soviet Union, it has more and more become the symbol of a widespread phenomenon in the Russian Federation: the monofunctional town, or *monotown*.⁸⁷ These kinds of towns are mostly dependent on only one industry. Approximately 13.5 million Russians live in these towns with populations roughly between 5000 and 700.000 inhabitants. The social and economic problems in these towns are characteristic of the Putin era: the move towards authoritarianism and centralization have reduced state capacity in these regions, and the absence of mechanisms of checks and balances (such as fair elections and uncensored press) gives little perspective for improvement. In this chapter, I will first give an overview of the symptoms and causes of the problems in Russian monotowns, using the existing literature. After that, I will give an overview of the social, economic, and political situation in Tolyatti.

Russian monotowns, government legitimacy and labor protests

The urban geography of dispersed monotowns is unique to Russia and a result of the state-enforced industrialization of the Soviet era, in which proximity to basic materials and national security trumped market logic.⁸⁸ This makes Russian industry in its current form very uncompetitive in the global economy. On the other hand, modernization would require massive layoffs and relocation of capital and workforce, which could lead to major social unrest.⁸⁹ The disengagement of the Russian state from society, as described in the previous chapter, makes the state incapable of performing such a transformation. Increasing interaction with society by installing and enforcing formal procedures is against the interests of the *nomenklatura*, and is therefore unlikely to happen. However, enforcing a modernization in more informal ways could trigger a legitimacy crisis: the current Russian government maintains its legitimacy by maintaining order and stability, and enforcing an initially disruptive transformation would undermine this. Therefore, the government has no choice but to subsidize the outdated industries and, as Gaddy and Ickes wrote, “keep the lights on”.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ T.N. Ivanova, I.V. Tsvetkova, and N.B. Gorbacheva, “Tolyatti’s Innovation Prospects as Estimated by Its Residents”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* vol. 6 (2015).

⁸⁸ S. Crowley, "Monotowns and the political economy of industrial restructuring in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 5 (2016): 399.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁹⁰ C.G. Gaddy and B.W. Ickes, *Bear traps on Russia's road to modernization* (2013), 6.

The government has been able to perform this task more or less successfully over the last decade, thanks to the raw materials boom of the first decade of the 21st century. However, as the global economic crisis of the late 2000s affected Russia, Vladimir Putin intervened personally several times to prevent a local crisis from escalating. These interventions were personal action of Putin himself, and ‘bypassed’ the Russian state. For example, in 2009, workers in Pikalovo, one of the monotowns, blocked a major road out of anger over unpaid wages. Putin, who was not president, but prime minister at that time, gathered the owners and management of the plant and publicly shamed them for their ‘greediness’. He personally ordered them to pay the wages by the end of the day.⁹¹ Observers likened the events to those in pre-revolutionary Russia, where the ‘good’ czar punished ‘bad’ boyars to placate the angry mobs of common people.⁹² The events made clear that the Russian state is still a very weak state (as in the 1990s), even though the regime tightened its grip on the country. This situation benefits the regime: a weak state leads to a weak civil society, as interaction between society and state is minimized. Where the failure of state mechanisms leads to crises (as in Pikalovo), personal, non-state intervention is preferred over state intervention. The latter would be the implementation and enforcement of policy to prevent and resolve these crises.

The increasing number of labor-related protests in the end of the first decade of the 21st century led some observers to predict Putin’s popularity rating to decrease sharply. Although, according to the Levada center, his approval rating indeed declined (from 88% in September 2008 to 61% in November 2013), the rating did not fall lower than 61% - which is still a rating leaders in the West would be more than happy with. This shows that, in general, the Russian population keep seeing Putin as separate from the government and its officials; as Lev Gudkov of the Levada Center said: “He plays a symbolic role, not a practical one.”⁹³ The fact that Putin’s approval ratings soared as the Ukraine crisis of 2014 set in confirms this view: even though economic hardship has worsened in the country, the annexation of Crimea and Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war made Putin look like a strong leader to most Russians.⁹⁴ Some Russia observers (such as RFE/RL’s Brian Whitmore) observed that Putin had reinvented himself, putting in place a ‘new social contract’, replacing stability and relative welfare for the idea of Russia as a great power, as a means of legitimizing his rule.⁹⁵

⁹¹ J. Kusluch, "Russian Monotowns: Tinderboxes For Unrest – Analysis," *Eurasia Review* 2016.

⁹² L. Aron, "Darkness on the Edge of Monotown," *The New York Times* 2009.

⁹³ E. Teague, "How Did the Russian Population Respond to the Global Financial Crisis?," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 27, no. 3-4 (2011).

⁹⁴ Levada Center, "Putin's Approval Rating".

⁹⁵ B. Whitmore, "Russia's Patriotic Fix," *RFE/RL* 2014.

However, even if we can speak about a ‘new social contract’, this seems to be very much limited to Putin as a person. According to the Levada Center, the approval ratings of prime minister Dmitri Medvedev have declined from 68% in October 2014, to 48% two years later. The approval rating of the Russian government was relatively low in October 2013 (before the Ukraine crisis), namely 44%. A year later, the rating spiked to 64%, after the Russian intervention in Ukraine. But by October 2016, the rating had declined sharply again, to 47%.⁹⁶ Whereas, for the President, the change in the means of legitimization seems to be sustainable, for the Russian state, it seems to have led to only a temporary boost in approval ratings.

The declining faith in the government in the years after the intervention in Ukraine coincides with an increasing number of labor protests across the country: whereas between 2008 and 2014, the average number of labor protest was 241 per year, the number grew to 409 in 2015, according to the Center for Social and Labor rights. Some of the protests gained nationwide attention, such as the protest of truck drivers over the so-called *Platon*, a road use fee for trucks. Most of the labor actions are organized by independent trade unions or are wildcat actions, and only a few actions were interregional.⁹⁷ Protests erupt for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason for workers to protest is the non-payment of wages: in the first eight months of 2016, little more than half (53%) of all protests was ignited by wage arrears. Dismay over decisions by management and owners are the second most common cause for protests (34%). In such situations, management decisions are often taken without consent from the workers, and presented as accomplished facts.⁹⁸

Protests usually erupt as a reaction to an immediate, local cause, and do not get a more institutionalized character – a notion that is underlined by the fact that since 2010, just nine percent of labor protests were carried out according to the Labor Code, making them technically illegal.⁹⁹ Protests usually remain intra-regional; only in a few exceptional cases, the protests grows to nationwide proportions (the *platon* protests were such an exception; and even then, the protest movement did not crystallize into an institutional form). This makes labor protests in Russia different from those in most Western countries – in Tilly’s characterization, much more pre-modern rather than modern. This is surprising, given that Russia is an industrialized country with a large working class, in which (as we have seen earlier) a large part remains a member of a trade union.

⁹⁶ Levada Center.

⁹⁷ P.T. Christensen, "Labor under Putin," *New Labor Forum* 26, no. 1 (2017): 69.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Labor representation and social partnership

The high degree of trade union membership in Russia is one of the legacies of the Soviet past. Soviet era labor unions were state organizations, that functioned as ‘transmission belts’ of the Communist party, by overseeing the implementation of party policy in enterprises. Almost all workers were members of trade unions, which were organized in a single hierarchy that was headed by the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS). The workers mostly perceived union membership as a means of gaining access to healthcare facilities and vacation resorts, not as a way to defend their rights as workers.¹⁰⁰

In 1990, the VTsSPS was replaced by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR). The organization inherited the resources of its predecessor and saw for itself a role as protector of both productivity and workers’ living standards. Because of this double role, it was unwilling to engage in labor protests, even though such protests surged because of the economic reforms. As a result, alternative labor unions emerged, which started leading and organizing protests. The biggest associations of independent trade unions are the All-Russian Confederation of Labor (VKT), the Russian Confederation of Labor (KTR) and the Trade Union Association of Russia (SOTSPROF). The official trade unions usually emphasize the common interests of employers and workers in ‘keeping the lights on’. The free trade unions focus more on mobilizing workers to put pressure on the employers. The relationship between the alternative and official unions is usually tense, which led to a ‘divided labor movement’ which is characteristic not only for Russia, but also for other post-Soviet countries, such as Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁰¹

In 2001, Russia adopted the new Labor Code. This code was based on the idea of ‘social partnership’, and was designed after the model as it exists in Europe, in which employers, employees and the government engage and bargain as partners. However, since Russia lacked strong government institutions, a stable economy and a strong welfare state, the effects of the Labor Code were very different from what one would expect in European countries. Instead of creating equal partners, the Labor Code gave the leading role in collective bargaining in the first place to the state, and in the second place to the employers; the labor unions are by far the weakest partner. In the Labor Code, the unions lost their right to announce a strike independently. If a strike is announced and approved, the trade unions must announce the date

¹⁰⁰ I. Olimpieva, "Labor unions in contemporary Russia: an assessment of contrasting forms of organization and representation," *WorkingUSA* 15, no. 2 (2012): 267-68.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 270-72.

when the strike ends.¹⁰² This put the free unions at a huge disadvantage vis-à-vis the official unions, as their main source of power consisted of workers' mobilization. Furthermore, free unions were almost excluded from commissions that engaged in collective bargaining, as they have much fewer members than the official ones.¹⁰³

As a result of the less militant attitude of the official unions and their position as least powerful of the three partners, employers treat them, as Olimpieva phrased it, "as a subdivision of the human resources department whose job is to motivate and support worker morale, or to help in distributing social benefits and conducting social policy at the enterprise."¹⁰⁴ 'Social partnership', in this way, has become a mechanism in the goal of 'keeping the lights on', in which the labor unions play the role as 'lubricant' to keep the factory working, by functioning as an intermediary lobby for the workers, and providing help to the members, in material form (e.g. interest-free loans and health insurance) as well as in non-material form (e.g. help with the preparation of official documents).¹⁰⁵

In non-crisis times, the existing structure performs fairly well in keeping factories working. However, when a crisis develops and becomes acute, the model offers no real institutional levers to resolve the problems between the workers and the employers. Strikes are not considered a constructive way to resolve a conflict, and employers often simply refuse to negotiate with labor leaders they consider too militant. If the threat of a strike erupts, usually the free unions take the lead, and the official unions function as a 'buffer' between workers and the management, trying to prevent open conflict. The official unions then try to resolve the problem via a 'hierarchical dialog', usually in a non-institutionalized way. Sometimes, this mechanism does not work: in Pikalovo, the local official union took the lead in spontaneous protest actions, which caused a negative reaction from the FNPR before the problem was resolved by personal interference by Putin.¹⁰⁶

The structures of social partnership in Tolyatti

In the city of Tolyatti, the implementation of the idea of 'social partnership' predates the new Labor Code: a tripartite committee on the regulation of social and labor relations has been active since September 1997. This committee regularly signs agreements on the regulation of

¹⁰² Ibid., 273-74.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 274-75.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 276.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 281.

social and labor relations, usually valid for three years.¹⁰⁷ The government is represented by the heads of several municipality departments, such as economic development and labor protection. The employers are represented by managers of several larger companies of Tolyatti, and by a local representative of the Samara regional branch of Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP). Smaller companies are represented by the Tolyatti Chamber of Commerce. Labor is represented by the official unions of several companies, including AvtoVAZ and several related companies, such as AvtoVAZagregat (a producer of car components that are used by AvtoVAZ).¹⁰⁸

The division between official and independent labor unions, as described in the previous section, is very visible in the case of the car industry in Tolyatti. The city is home to the labor union Edinstvo, which is the oldest independent labor union in the Russian motor industry. The union was born after a strike in September 1989, in which the traditional union sided with the management. Although the union has been active, not only in the Samara region but also in other regions, it is usually ignored by the AvtoVAZ management, and is not represented in the tripartite committee. In 2006, the head of Edinstvo, Pyotr Zolotaryov, found out about a meeting of the committee and tried to attend but was thrown out. As the union is excluded from the 'official' structures of social partnership, and found its rights to organize a strike restricted by the new Labor Code, it has resorted to protests meetings and pickets. Its potential for influence has shrunk, and so has the union's membership: whereas the union counted 3425 members in October 2000, the membership had fallen to a mere 300 persons in April 2010.

The official automobile industry trade union in Tolyatti, ASM, dwarfs Edinstvo when it comes to its membership. The union has enormous resources to spend on social and welfare benefits and activities, and its ban on dual membership has prevented independent unions from flourishing. The union is represented in the tripartite committee, but its position is relatively weak: it admitted that it would only be able to achieve pay increases for the workers if this is combined with massive layoffs. Its policy, therefore, has been to strive for gradual wage increases, combined with reducing the number of jobs in line with 'natural wastage' (i.e. as workers leave the work force due to retirement). In practice, however, this meant a decline in real wages due to inflation, especially as the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 set in.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ O.E. Vlasova and O.V. Speranskij, "Social'noe partnërstvo v Tol'jatti," *Tatiščevskie čtenija: aktual'nye problemy nauki i praktiki* (2015).

¹⁰⁸ Administration of the urban district of Tolyatti, "Meeting minutes of the tripartite committee".

¹⁰⁹ T. Pringle and S. Clarke, *The challenge of transition : trade unions in Russia, China and Vietnam* (London 2010).

Politics in the Samara region and the municipality of Tolyatti

Politically, the Samara region remained integrated in the economic networks of the Russian state for the whole post-Soviet period, even as many other regions functioned as *de facto* autonomous fiefdoms of their governors. Because of the importance of its industry, the region was of great interest to the state. Regional politics was relatively competitive, and the region can be considered a ‘birthplace’ of many oligarchs (e.g. Boris Berezovsky and Yuriy Kachmazov). Small business was relatively successful in the region, and although a plethora of criminal groups was active, the region did not experience the same high degree of state collapse as many other regions in Russia.¹¹⁰

Konstantin Titov, a supporter of Yeltsin and member of the *Nash Dom Rossiya* party, was the region’s governor from 1991 to 2007; he was elected twice in partially competitive elections, and appointed once. Titov was critical towards Yeltsin’s successor and ran against Putin in the 2000 elections (receiving 20% of the vote in the Samara region, but only 1.5% of the national vote). Titov reconciled with Putin and kept his position as governor, which was extended by the president in 2005. However, in 2007, he was replaced by Vladimir Artyakov, a *Edinaya Rossiya* (‘United Russia’, ER) member. This can be seen as part of the instatement of Putin’s ‘power vertical’ over the regions. The position of governor became less political, and more ‘managerial’. It can also be considered an attempt to integrate the political and business elite: Artyakov was the head of AvtoVAZ between 2005 and 2007 and has extensive networks in the private sphere. He attempted to attract investments for the region’s industry and took measures to improve the efficiency of public spending, but was less interested in negotiations with the trade unions than his predecessor, refusing their proposals to increase the minimum wage above the federal level.¹¹¹ During his term, Artyakov also set up a platform for interaction between civil society organizations and the regional government: the Civic Chamber. Among the objectives of this Chamber are the development of civil society institutions and the formulation of public opinion to bring it to the attention of the authorities. The counteraction of corruption, too, is mentioned as an objective. The chamber consists of 45 members: fifteen of them are appointed by the governor, fifteen are appointed by the regional Duma. The remaining fifteen are appointed by the chamber itself.¹¹² In other words, the

¹¹⁰ M.L. O’Neal, *Democracy, civic culture and small business in Russia’s regions : social processes in comparative historical perspective* (2016).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹¹² Official website of the Civic Chamber of the Samara Region (<http://www.op63.ru/>).

composition of the chamber is entirely controlled by the government, which is likely to undermine its function as a true sound board between society and government.

In 2012, Artyakov was replaced by Nikolai Merkushkin, who had been governor in Mordovia before. In that region, which is one of the poorest republics of the Russian Federation, he had managed to construct an authoritarian, centralized system of governance, strongly connected to the federal government. His governorship in the Samara region, however, turned out to be more problematic. Merkushkin's attempts to govern in the same authoritarian manner as he had done in Mordovia were met with resistance, which led to a range of scandals that attracted national attention. In August 2016, he accused a woman who asked about the non-payment of salaries at AvtoVAZ of being instructed by the US ambassador, who had visited the region in April. He also suggested that Samara was the target of a plot by the CIA to overthrow the Russian government. These events were met by a public outcry and a petition on change.org, calling for a medical assessment of the governor's mental health.¹¹³ Although many expected Merkushkin to be replaced, the Kremlin decided to keep him at this position;¹¹⁴ apparently, Merkushkin's loyalty to Moscow is deemed more valuable than his success as a governor. However, these scandals and his inadequacy as perceived by the media remain a liability for the regime.¹¹⁵

Local politics in Tolyatti have been riddled with scandals, and organized crime, often connected to the problems at the AvtoVAZ plant, was widespread. In 2002, two editors of the local newspaper *Tolyatti Observer* were murdered, after the paper investigated a local corruption case; one of the victims was also a municipal council member. In 2007, the city's major, Nikolai Utkin, was forced to resign after seven years in office and was imprisoned, after he became the subject of a corruption case.¹¹⁶ The subsequent mayoral election of 2009 can be considered an effort to extend the vertical of power to the municipal level. The most popular contenders were Aleksander Pushkov, the main engineer at AvtoVAZ and member of ER, and the independent candidate Sergei Andreev. Andreev, a Baptist minister, is a member of the 'December' group of regional *Duma* deputies, which was established after a historically low turnout of 14.5% at the city council elections in August 2004.¹¹⁷ Andreev pledged to fight

¹¹³ G. Sharafutdinova, "Regional Governors Navigating through Putin's Third Term," *Russian Politics* Russian Politics, no. 1 (2016): 381.

¹¹⁴ N. Fomina, "Razrešite otstavit'? Vse ždut «dembelja» gubernatora Samarskoj oblasti Nikolaja Merkuškina," *Novaja Gazeta* 2016.

¹¹⁵ G. Sharafutdinova, 381.

¹¹⁶ O'Neal, *Democracy, civic culture and small business*, 86.

¹¹⁷ T. Guzaeva, "Obščestvennoe dviženie «dekabr'»: dviženie našego goroda," *Ponedel'nik. Delovaja Gazeta Tol'jatti* 2013.

corruption, promoted adherence to Western values and respect for human rights.¹¹⁸ His message was picked up by Tolyatti's residents: a VTsIOM survey suggested that a plurality (33.2%) of the respondents supported Andreev. Support for Pushkov was significantly lower at 25.3%.¹¹⁹ However, nine days before the election, Andreev was removed from the ballot in a court ruling, after he was convicted of breaking copyright law by using a photo of a local building in his campaign materials without the permission of the architect.¹²⁰ After that, Pushkov easily (69.23%) won the election against the only remaining serious contender, Edinstvo's Pyotr Zolotaryov (13.54%).¹²¹

The absurdity of the verdict that led to Andreev's exclusion might have very well been the basis for his later success. It seems that the election had undermined trust in the Edinaya Rossiya party: in the 2011 State Duma elections, Tolyatti was one of the municipalities where ER lost the position of largest party. Pushkov's term as Tolyatti's mayor was difficult, marked by the start of the global economic crisis, which led to great job losses in Tolyatti. In 2011, Pushkov decided not to run again for the upcoming elections, and Andreev returned as a contender for the position of mayor of Tolyatti. His campaign, again, faced repression and 'black PR' (he was, as a follower of a 'non-traditional religion', accused of being educated in the United States). However, his ER opponent, Alexander Shakhov, was unpopular with Tolyatti's political elite due to his connections with organized crime groups. Fearing the prospect of increased influence of criminal groups under Shakhov, part of the elite chose Andreev's side. The independent candidate managed to win the election with 57% of the vote.¹²² He became Tolyatti's mayor in 2012.

Although ER tried to avoid framing the election result as a loss for the Russian authorities, instead hailing it as 'real elections, in which youth and charisma triumphed',¹²³ Andreev's plans formed a departure from the 'club rule' of ER. During his mandate, he has tried to make the city administration more transparent by publishing the budgets of different local government departments and keeping a blog on *LiveJournal* and a page on *Vkontakte*, on which he explains government decisions and activities in the town, such as the repair works on

¹¹⁸ V. Pavlukevich, "Letter from Togliatti: ugly brides go to the polls," *openDemocracy* 2012.

¹¹⁹ "V gruppe liderov na vyborax mera Tol'jatti - edinorossy Puškov i Savenkov: ekspert (Samarskaja oblast)," *Regnum* 2008.

¹²⁰ "Sud postanovil otmenit' registraciju Sergeja Andreeva v kačestve kandidata na post mera Tol'jatti," *Regnum* (2008).

¹²¹ "Glavnyj inžener AvtoVAZa stal merom Tol'jatti (Samarskaja oblast)," *Regnum* 2008.

¹²² D.j. Danilova, "Poslednij ot gorožan," *Ekspert* 2014.

¹²³ A. Kamynin, "Kak baptist pobedil edinorossa v Tol'jatti," *Telekanal Dožd'* 2012.

Tolyatti's roads.¹²⁴ Andreev also worked to attract more investment to Tolyatti, meeting with representatives of European companies.

Andreev rejects the title of 'opposition mayor' and he is forced to be extremely careful as an independent politician in a ER-dominated political environment. The party occupies 29 of the 35 seats in the city council, and has the power to enforce his resignation. The mayor seems to lack control over some of the municipal departments, after several of his team members were forced to leave their posts.

On the regional level, governor Merkushkin was appointed one and a half month after Andreev was elected. After his election, the governor immediately started berating the mayors of the oblast for their inability to solve the problems in the cities, to gain support among the citizens of the oblast: a variation on the 'good czar, bad boyars' tactic as employed by president Putin. However, over time, Andreev managed to develop a good working relationship with the governor; the mayor understood that standing up to Merkushkin would improve neither his personal position, nor the situation in his city. However, working under the authoritarian Merkushkin, who demands that he be the only real political player in his region, has had a negative effect on Andreev's image as a bringer of change: many of Tolyatti's citizens started perceiving him as a powerless figure, and started looking at the governor in their hopes for positive change.¹²⁵

Andreev's term ended in March 2017. He did not obtain a second term. In 2015, the regional authorities decided that candidates for the position would be selected by a specially created 'competition committee', headed by the governor. The local Duma then chooses between these candidates.¹²⁶ This will even further diminish the role of the mayor as a politician, and is another step in minimizing the interaction between the government and the citizens. Although, because of his effective working relationship with the governor, Andreev was still perceived to have a chance to stay for a second term, this did not happen.

In the case of local politics in Tolyatti, we see the gradual extension the power of Edinaya Rossiya, and with that the vertical of power, to the lowest levels of government: during the mayoral elections in 2008, the independent candidate was barred from running in the election by the court. In 2011, Andreev could only win because part of the local political elite was unhappy with the candidate their own party floated. Now that mayoral elections are abolished, the power of ER over local politics in Tolyatti becomes even greater.

¹²⁴ A. Gremin, "Sergej Andreev o pervyx sta dnjax na rabote," *Ponedel'nik. Delovaja Gazeta Tol'jatti* 2012.

¹²⁵ D. Danilova.

¹²⁶ I. Dmitriev, "Duma Tol'jatti dala start procedure otbora novogo glavy goroda," *Ploščad' Svobody* 2017.

However, paradoxically, the extension of ER's power does not mean that candidates from outside the party have no chance. The fact that Andreev was not dismissed during his term, even though the political environment is completely dominated by the party of power, shows that the political elite sees the benefit of having an outsider in an official position: after all, the fact that they are not part of the 'club' is a sign that they treat their job as more than just an asset, and are more genuine when it comes to improving the situation of their citizens. On the other hand, the 'outsider mayor' is not allowed to act as a real politician; his role is strictly that of 'city manager'. As long as he fulfills that role effectively, he is of use to the political elite, but if he gets political ambitions, he could become a threat to them, and would probably be replaced.

This strategy of 'depoliticizing' local government positions is not without danger: in the case of Tolyatti, many of the citizens clearly see that Andreev has little power, and that real power over the region resides with governor Merkuskin. This also means that, in crisis situations, anger will be directed not at the mayor, but at the governor. At a rally of workers and pensioners in March 2017, about 1500 protesters demanded the dismissal of the governor. In a declaration, the local branch of Russia's Communist Party (KPRF), which organized the meeting, called Andreev 'a key player of the governor's team'.¹²⁷

In the following chapter, an acute crisis in Tolyatti will be described: the sudden closure of the factory of AvtoVAZagregat in July 2015, which led to protests by workers of this company and AvtoVAZ in general. This will give the possibility to analyze what kind of actions citizens can undertake, and in which way the authorities and other actors respond to this.

¹²⁷ KPRF Tol'jatti, "Avtograd vyrazil svoj protest vlasti," <http://kprfult.ru> (2015).

CHAPTER IV: SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT IN CRISIS: THE CASE OF AVTOVAZ

During the Soviet era, working at Tolyatti's AvtoVAZ was prestigious: as one of the most productive car manufacturers in the world in the 1970s and '80s, its Lada cars were sold in many communist countries. In contrast to other automotive giants, AvtoVAZ produced most of its components itself, which was not uncommon for Soviet companies. However, as the Soviet era ended, AvtoVAZ encountered great difficulties. The company was privatized in 1992. In the years 1993-5, several joint-stock companies that would act as suppliers to AvtoVAZ were formed, as part of the company's adaptation to a market economy. However, as supervision was lacking, many of these 'supplier companies' were created with an unclear purpose, and were often used by their founders (often AvtoVAZ executives) to bring company assets under their own control. At the same time, car production fell with 30% and the company lost much of its share on the Russian car market to second-hand imports.¹²⁸

For the Russian government, AvtoVAZ, an employer of 120.000 people, was too big to fail, and rescue packages were issued to help it survive and stimulate restructuring. The 1998 devaluation of the ruble proved beneficial for the company, and as the Russian car market expanded in the early 2000s, AvtoVAZ managed to maintain its production volume, but steadily lost its market share. As part of Putin's economic transformation, AvtoVAZ was nationalized again in 2005 as state corporation *Rostekhnologii* obtained the majority of shares. In 2009, Putin (then prime minister) saved the company, which was selling its cars at a loss, by injecting \$2.5 billion. The Russian state decided to hand over its control to the company to Renault-Nissan, and in 2012, the Franco-Japanese partnership obtained more than 50 percent of the shares of the company. This proved a successful decision: under a new management, production increased and the company started making profits again. However, the success was short-lived: as the Russian economy came to a standstill because of the erosion of property rights, the plummeting oil price and Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the following international sanctions, the sales of AvtoVAZ plummeted and the company suffered a record loss, making its future survival uncertain again.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ M. Glazunov, *Business in post-Communist Russia : privatisation and the limits of transformation* (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹²⁹ S. Aleksašenko, "Čto xorošo «Žiguljam» – xorošo dlja Rossii? Možno li spasti AvtoVAZ," *Republic.ru* 2016.

The bankruptcy of AvtoVAZagregat: from ‘fake news’ to civil action

Although AvtoVAZ itself has been kept afloat time and time again by the government, this cannot be said about some of its supplier companies. Under the new, foreign management, AvtoVAZ started producing cars based on Renault models, often with parts that are produced abroad – a break from its Soviet structure. As a result, supplier companies that depended on AvtoVAZ for their existence got into severe trouble, leading to a great loss of jobs and even bankruptcy.

In June 2015, AvtoVAZagregat (AVA), AvtoVAZ’s largest supplier company, consisting of a main company and three daughter companies, stopped its production after an agreement with AvtoVAZ was cancelled. The reasons for the breakdown of the agreement were unclear. However, the consequences were large: the company’s 2300 workers suddenly found themselves without salary, even though, according to Russian law, workers are entitled to two-thirds of their original salary if production is stopped. Under financial hardship, many workers struggled to survive, and were sometimes forced to take bank loans at high interest rates, just to be able to buy food.¹³⁰

When two months later, on August 10, it became clear that AvtoVAZ was unwilling to take over the assets and workforce of its ailing supplier, workers decided to act. On social network VKontakte, the following message was posted: *“Tomorrow at 11 o’clock, there will be a rally at AvtoVAZagregat. It is said that the governor and television will come. The questions regarding the payment of vacation money and salaries will be resolved. To anyone to whom this is important: come!!”*¹³¹

Of course, neither the local and regional government, nor the management of AVA had organized such a rally. Merkuskin had no plans to attend, and neither had any other government official. However, some workers heeded the call and went to the factory. The rally also drew the attention of a local TV station. Government officials were afraid that the call would have serious consequences, and deputy mayor Alexei Buzinnyi decided that he would organize an event with the workers the next day. The local TV station later reported that ‘the unsanctioned rally was absolutely peaceful and ended quickly’, and that the workers ‘got hope that the difficult situation would be resolved well’.¹³²

In the meeting, Buzinnyi promised that the next day, an event with the head of the department of social support would be held, in which the workers would obtain more

¹³⁰ O. Boldyrev, "Russia's car workers who struggle on no pay," *BBC* 2016.

¹³¹ https://vk.com/avtomobilnaj_stolica?w=wall-37094684_2938229, last accessed 31-05-2017.

¹³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-ky1yfaXV4>, last accessed 31-05-2017.

information about their rights. However, the very same day, the event was postponed to August 17.¹³³

By that time, workers had formed the ‘Workers’ Initiative Group AvtoVAZagretat’, led by long-time employee Antonina Larina. She represented the workers’ interests at a meeting on August 13 at the public prosecutor's office, in which the debt of AVA towards to workers was determined and a legal investigation was started.¹³⁴ The meeting was ignored by the management of the company. It is striking that, although representatives of several government agencies were present at the meeting, none of the trade unions (neither ASM, nor Edinstvo) seem to have taken part in it. In the July and September editions of the newspaper of ASM (‘*Vesti Profsoyuza*’), the case is not mentioned.¹³⁵ Instead, the July edition stresses the need to work together with the management of AvtoVAZ, given the difficult situation on the automobile market. This underscores the fact that these unions do not see it as their task to take a confrontational stance towards the management, and prefer the ‘we are all in the same boat’ narrative.¹³⁶

When the meeting with the management was about to take place, it was postponed again, as the general director of the company, Viktor Kozlov, was not in town. However, as the accounts of the company had been frozen and the future of the company was unclear, the management was forced to come and offer an explanation. On August 20, a meeting between the workers and the management of AVA finally took place. Kozlov declared that the final decision about the future of the company would be made ‘sometime in the beginning of September’. When it came to the payment of salaries, the general director advised the workers to let the judge decide about that, since several workers had already started a legal case.¹³⁷ The representative of the local government, Marina Bratanova, promised the workers that they would get financial assistance to pay their bills. On the same day, governor Merkuskin commented on the case for the first time, saying that he would ‘have the issue resolved’.¹³⁸

The meeting did not pacify the workers. On the contrary, while wages remained unpaid and the final decision about the fate of the company was postponed, rumors spread that management members were trying to sell AVA’s assets to line their own pockets before

¹³³ “Vstreča predstavitelja mērii s rabotnikami «AvtoVAZagregata» perenositsja,” *tlgorod.ru* 2015.

¹³⁴ “Rukovodstvo terpjaščego bedstvie AvtoVAZagregata proignorirovalo soveščanie v prokureture,” *tlgorod.ru* 2015.

¹³⁵ ASM did not publish any August 2015 issue of *Vesti Profsoyuza* on its website.

¹³⁶ ASM, *Vesti Profsoyuza* 120 (2015).”

¹³⁷ “Direktor «AvtoVAZagregata» posovetoval svojim rabotnikam idti v sud,” *Gubernskij portal Samara.ru* 2015.

¹³⁸ “Gubernator ocenil rabotu žigulevskogo pansionata dlja veteranov vojn i invalidov,” *guberniatv.ru* 2015.

bankruptcy was declared, anger among the workers grew. Some were even convinced that the management had deliberately led the company to bankruptcy, to sell its assets.¹³⁹ Their anger was not only directed at AVA's management, but also at AvtoVAZ and its Swedish CEO Bo Andersson: after all, it was the breakdown of the agreement with AvtoVAZ that led to the ongoing crisis. The government authorities were accused of not doing enough to prevent a social catastrophe. The official trade union ASM declared that it was unable to get into contact with the management, and advised the workers to search for another job.¹⁴⁰

At this point, the case started attracting the attention of other civil society actors. On September 8, the local department of the Russian Communist Party (KPRF) organized a rally (sanctioned by the local authorities), which attracted more than 500 people. Antonina Larina attended the rally, as well as Pyotr Zolotaryov, the former head of Edinstvo. Under a sea of red flags, the protesters demanded that the outstanding wages be paid immediately, and that the government take full control of the company, checking the management's every action. The government, too, was heavily criticized: leading KPRF members said that the United Russia party had led the country's industry to crisis.¹⁴¹ At this point, the case also started attracting the attention of national media outlets, such as newspaper *Kommersant* and the popular news website *gazeta.ru*.

A lot of action, but few results

The outspoken support of a sizeable systemic actor as KPRF gave the workers of AvtoVAZagregat the confidence to press their demands in a more aggressive way. Antonina Larina said that she was willing to block the M-5, the highway that connects Tolyatti to Samara. The momentum was increased even further when local news website *tlgorod.ru* reported that at AvtoVAZ, ten to twenty thousand people would soon lose their jobs.¹⁴² Edinstvo started planning a new rally on September 20 and demanded that AvtoVAZ be nationalized again, and that workers' salaries would be increased by 20%.¹⁴³ The choice of the date was a sensitive one: opposition leader Alexei Navalny had called for mass protests against the authorities on that very date, as it almost coincided with the fourth anniversary of the so-called 'castling'.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ "Terpjaščij bedstvie AvtoVAZagregat dobilsja otsročki bankrotstva," *tlgorod.ru* (2015).

¹⁴⁰ E. V'juškova, "Partnery AvtoVAZa vyšli na miting," *Kommersant* 2015.

¹⁴¹ "Žertvy černogo peredela. KPRF podderživaet rabotnikov «AvtoVAZagregata» v bor'be za ix prava.," *Tol'jattinskij navigator* 2015.

¹⁴² N. Fomina, "Tol'jatti: mjatežnyj gorod," *Novaja Gazeta v povolž'e* 2015.

¹⁴³ "Profsojuz potrebuje na mitinge nacionalizacii AvtoVAZa," *Kommersant* (2015).

¹⁴⁴ On September 24, 2011, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev agreed that the former would run for president again to win his third term as president, after Medvedev had held this position for four years. This event is known as the 'castling' (рокировка, *rokirovka*), and led to large protests.

The local authorities therefore decided not to sanction the rally. Edinstvo's leader, Igor Vitushchenko, decided not to fight the decision to avoid accusations of being a 'fifth columnist'. The rally was postponed to September 27.¹⁴⁵

Although the protest seemed to gain momentum and spread to workers of AvtoVAZ itself, the local authorities remained inert. On September 15, mayor Andreev held a meeting with citizens, in which he would answer questions from citizens. According to a journalist of local newspaper *The Free City*, the mayor tried to gain the sympathy of the attendants, avoided difficult questions using jokes and charm, and explained the inactivity of the local government by a lack of money – noting that a considerable part of the inhabitants does not pay for public utilities.¹⁴⁶ To keep the momentum going, some resorted to extreme measures: Alexei Krasnov, a KPRF city council member, took his folding chair to the central square, sat down, and declared a hunger strike. He was later joined by Edinstvo member Viacheslav Shepelyov. When Krasnov was asked what exactly he asked from the local government, he answered: "First of all, that they explain themselves to the people. (...) Mayor Andreev should tell his voters: 'Dear people! I found out everything. The salary of this-and-this sum will be payed...' Or 'I am sorry, but I cannot do anything in this situation...'"¹⁴⁷

Krasnov's answer illustrates the difficult phase the protest had reached. On the one hand, the backing of important players as KPRF and Edinstvo, and the publicity the case had obtained in the media gave the protesters a strong position: it made it impossible for the government to simply forbid the protests. On the other hand, it remained unclear what the workers could achieve with rallies and media actions: it was not in the government's interest to nationalize an ailing company in crisis time, and it would certainly not make the plant more efficient. The local government pointed at the fact that the legal investigation was in the hands of the prosecutor, and that the workers had already received some emergency support. The regional government declared that it would only give financial support in the case of mass layoffs.¹⁴⁸

The rally on September 27, 2015 attracted 700 to 1500 people: far more than planned.¹⁴⁹ The rally was organized by KPRF and Edinstvo. Although participants held banners expressing support to the workers of AVA, the theme of the rally was broader: the 'asocial policies' of the leadership of AvtoVAZ, which had laid off thousands of workers earlier that year, and was

¹⁴⁵ "Mèrija poprosila perenesti datu provedenija mitinga rabotnikov AVTOVAZa," *Radio Avgust* 2015.

¹⁴⁶ A. Lipov, "KPD dlja gorozhan ot podobnyx vstreč viditsja nevyšokim," *Vol'nyj gorod* (2015).

¹⁴⁷ "Deputat Krasnov golodaet na Central'noj ploščadi," *Vol'nyj gorod* 2015.

¹⁴⁸ "Pravitel'stvo Samarskoj oblasti ne smožet pomoč' kreditom AvtoVAZagregatu," *CityTraffic.ru* (2015).

¹⁴⁹ The number of 700 participants is given by the local police. The organizers estimated that the number of participants was 1000 to 1500 people (source: Kommersant). Journalist of the local newspaper *Ploščad' Svobody* estimated that the number of participants was at least 1000 (source: augustnews.ru).

expected to shed more workers soon. Although the government was criticized, most of the anger was directed at Viktor Kozlov and Bo Andersson. Antonina Larina accused Kozlov of stealing the money of the workers, and it was demanded that he be punished and ‘give the factory back to the workers’. Andersson was criticized as being a typical capitalist, who had no social obligations towards the workers, but wanted to buy AvtoVAZ for little money and turn it into a simple ‘screwdriver department’ (*otvyortochnyi tsekh*) of the long Renault-Nissan assembly line, that would not produce cars, but simply assemble them from imported parts. The protesters felt nostalgia for the time that AvtoVAZ was a state company (in 2005), ‘before the plant was handed to the foreigners’.¹⁵⁰

Did all the protest yield any results? It did seem to wake up some other actors, but it is doubtful whether this helped the workers. The council members of Edinaya Rossiya expressed their concerns about the situation and invited both general director Kozlov and the head of the official trade union, Kuznetsov, to their meeting. Kozlov did not attend, Kuznetsov did. The politicians adopted several ‘recommendations’ towards the local government about optimizing the distribution of social help. They also expressed the intention to start an inquiry into the news of new layoffs at AvtoVAZ, to answer the question “why the factory has not overcome this negative news”.¹⁵¹ ASM organized its own rally on October 7. There were no red flags here, but flags with the AvtoVAZ logo and flags with the Russian tricolor. The organizers barely sought to motivate people to come, received little attention from news outlets. The rally was later mocked in local media: protesters appeared to have no idea what they were doing there and were constantly looking at their watches. The speeches were read from paper, without any expression.¹⁵² One of the demands was ‘legislation that allows agreements between the employers and the trade union, to provide special privileges only to members of the union’.¹⁵³ The tripartite committee, which met in September 29, did not address the issue directly, according to the meeting minutes.¹⁵⁴

The bankruptcy case moved forward, albeit sluggishly. On October 8, the official bankruptcy procedure was started. A few weeks later, Kozlov met with mayor Andreev and several regional politicians, and announced that he would make sure that the debts from the

¹⁵⁰ A. Lipov, "Igor' Vituščenko: Nikakix social'nyx objazatel'stv u kapitalistov pered rabočimi net," *Vol'nyj gorod* 2015.

¹⁵¹ "Tol'jattinskije "edinorossy" v šoke ot togo, što rabočie AvtoVAZagregata poseščajut besplatnye obedy," *CityTraffic.ru* 2015.

¹⁵² "V Tol'jatti pokazušnyj nedomiting profsojuzov prošel bystro i nezametno," *tligorod.ru* 2015.

¹⁵³ L. Stukalova, "Zanjatost', zarplata, zaščita!," *Vesti Profsojuza* 122 (2015).

¹⁵⁴ Meeting minutes of the tripartite committee.

months July to September towards the workers would be paid before November 15, and the rest before the end of the year.¹⁵⁵

The communists of KPRF tried to maintain the attention of the authorities and general population, but encountered more and more difficulties. One of the hunger strikers, Viacheslav Shepelyov, was fired from his job. The authorities started to consider the protests more and more of a nuisance. On October 22 and 23, the city was holding the event 'The city of the future' (*Gorod budushchego*) to showcase the 'shining perspectives' of the town. It goes without saying that the ongoing protests were an eyesore to the local authorities. A mass picket at the event was forbidden. Krasnov, who had stopped his hunger strike because he 'wanted to focus on more effective methods', started a picket in Samara, hoping to raise enthusiasm for a rally in the regional capital on the October 27. The turnout became a disappointment: only about a hundred protesters went to the rally.¹⁵⁶ A KPRF rally in Tolyatti on November 7, the anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution, drew no more than 500 protesters. Workers of AvtoVAZ were reported to be under threat of losing their jobs if they attended the protest, and many figured that this was too great a risk.¹⁵⁷ The AvtoVAZ workers might have lost interest in mass protesting, given the fact that the process of bankruptcy had already started and Kozlov had promised to pay the debts to the workers by the end of the year.¹⁵⁸

The promise was not kept: the workers were indeed reported to have received some money, but far less than promised. According to Antonina Larina, each of the workers had received only 132 rubles in November.¹⁵⁹ However, whereas in earlier months local media repeatedly reported about protest actions and plans for protests, it seems that the enthusiasm for large-scale protests among the workers and their supporters had died out, even though the main activists of KPRF continued emphasizing that "the only thing that can help the inhabitants of Tolyatti, is a mass protest, a series of protest actions."¹⁶⁰ Many of the workers decided that it was better to spend energy on survival methods: growing vegetables on the *dacha* and doing unofficial work. The local KPRF department founded a new 'independent' trade union, MOLOT, which would be headed by Shepelyov.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ S. Fedorov, "Dni «AvtoVAZagregata» sočteny. General'nyj direktor predprijatija Viktor Kozlov sdelał odnoznačnoe zjavlenie.," *Ploščad' Svobody* 2015.

¹⁵⁶ "Oppozicionery «predupreditel'no» trebujut otstavki Merkuškina," *Zasekin* (2015).

¹⁵⁷ D. Gus'kova, "Ne bolee 500 čelovek vyšli na miting protiv sokraščenij na predprijatijax «AvtoVAZa»," *Novaja Gazeta* 2015.

¹⁵⁸ "V Tol'jatti «krasnaja» akcija protesta sobrala do 500 čelovek," *Tltgorod.ru* (2015).

¹⁵⁹ "132 rublja v mesjac polučili zarplatu rabotniki «AvtoVAZagregata» v nojabre ètogo goda....." *Ploščad' Svobody* 2015.

¹⁶⁰ "Točka kipeñija. Tol'jattincy gotovy dvinut'sja v Moskvu," *Tol'jattinskij navigator* 2015.

¹⁶¹ S. Dubrovina, "Bespredel na «Agregate». V OAO «AvtoVAZagregat» prodolžaetsja narušenje zakonov Rossijskoj Federacii.," *ibid.*

KPRF/MOLOT changed its strategy from organizing rallies to more subtle ways of generating media attention. One of the methods was inviting media outlets for ‘excursions’ to the homes of the families of the AVA workers, who had been virtually without wages for five months now. Showing the poignant poverty in which they lived could help spread awareness among citizens, which could strengthen calls for action. The success of this strategy was limited: most stories only appeared in local news media and smaller outlets like *Novaya Gazeta*. Furthermore, MOLOT tried to gain access to the closed AVA workplace to obtain evidence of the theft of assets, but were denied access.¹⁶² Attempts to move forward in legal processes were slowed down by red tape measures: the court demanded that workers obtain a declaration from the management of AVA, stating that they had not received their salary. However, the management was unwilling to give their workers those declarations – giving as an excuse that the only one who could sign it, Kozlov, was said to be out of town. The management reckoned that the workers would eventually lose faith and resign themselves. A third field in which MOLOT was active, was emergency aid: parcels with food were given to those families that were hit hardest by the situation.¹⁶³

Shifting the blame: the government reaction

Although the protests had decreased in intensity by November 2015, they nonetheless seemed to have made higher government circles aware of the risk of rising popular discontent in Tolyatti. The September 27 rally had shown that there was a risk of a snowball effect: the rally was organized in support of AVA employees, but had attracted large numbers of AvtoVAZ workers who feared the prospect of further rounds of layoffs, and disagreed with the policy of the foreign management to turn AvtoVAZ into a ‘conventional’ part of Renault-Nissan. On November 10, *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti* and other major news outlets reported about increasing disagreement between majority shareholder Renault-Nissan and minority shareholder Rostec,¹⁶⁴ a state company headed by Sergei Chemezov, a longtime friend of president Putin and one of the most influential men of the country.¹⁶⁵

Chemezov sharply criticized Andersson’s policy, saying that “it is necessary to be more careful and considerate”. He said that the policy of large-scale layoffs was “probably European

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ "Kriki o pomošči. Rabotniki «AVTOVAZAGREGATA» bedstvujut v Tol'jatti. Pjat' mesjacev bez zarplaty. Ljudi na grani goloda.," *ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ J. Cinoeva and E. V'juškova, "Prezidenta AvtoVAZa prosjat byt' delikatnee," *Kommersant* 2015.

¹⁶⁵ "Èffektivnyj staryj tovarišč. «Meduza» rasskazyvaet istoriju Sergeja Čemezova, odnogo iz samyx vlijatel'nyx ljudej Rossii," *Meduza* 2016.

practice, but we think that it should not be done in Russia".¹⁶⁶ He announced that he would discuss the issue with Renault-Nissan at the meeting of the board of directors on November 30. According to him, "the question of replacing the CEO is *not yet* on the table, but some educational work needs to be carried out."¹⁶⁷ At the meeting on November 30, the board of directors failed to agree on the budget for the next year. The press service of the company announced that "AvtoVAZ took the decision to continue the work on the budget for 2016, adding supplementary measures directed at increasing the profitability of the company, supporting social stability and the supporting the core team."¹⁶⁸ To prevent layoffs, the management planned to introduce a four-day working week. The situation attracted the attention of the national government; deputy prime minister Arkady Dvorkovich declared that the government was aware of the problem, and that he would soon go to Tolyatti to discuss the problems.¹⁶⁹

Publicly taking such a harsh stance against Andersson benefited Chemezov and the Russian authorities in several ways. Apart from being a show of strength, the action also cemented the narrative that the foreign management was to blame for the company's malaise. Among employees, 'that American' (as workers called the Swedish CEO) had already become deeply unpopular, and Chemezov's declaration amplified this critique, whereas the structural causes of the malaise (such as the old-fashioned structure of the plant and the corruption) moved to the background. Moreover, his remarks suggested that in the first place AvtoVAZ, and not the state, was responsible for the well-being of the employees after dismissal, thereby shifting blame from the failing government institutions to the company management.

The communists joined Chemezov in his criticism of Andersson. In January, State Duma member Leonid Kalashnikov published a long letter in which he accused Andersson ('a foreign citizen') of 'destroying the company' by dropping local suppliers and favoring foreign companies and consultants. He complained about the fact that 'Alliance Rostec Auto B.V.' (the mother company of AvtoVAZ, in which Renault-Nissan is the majority shareholder) is registered in the Netherlands, a NATO member state. Kalashnikov accused prime minister Medvedev (who had visited Tolyatti that month and made a ride in a new Lada XRAY) and Rostec of closing their eyes to the problems of AvtoVAZ and AVA workers. He ended his letter by accusing Andersson of being guilty of sabotage and espionage, and expressed the hope

¹⁶⁶ J. Cinoeva and E. V'juškova.

¹⁶⁷ "«Rostex» raskritikoval rukovodstvo AvtoVAZa za uvol'nenie sotrudnikov," *RBK* 2015, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁸ R. Asankin, "AvtoVAZ ostalsja bez bjudžeta iz-za sporov ob uvol'nenii rabočix," *ibid*.

¹⁶⁹ "V Tol'jatti Arkadij Dvorkovič najdet rešenje problemy sokraščenij na AvtoVAZe," *Regnum* 2015.

that president Putin (whom Andersson ‘mised’) would take action.¹⁷⁰ Edinstvo took a similar stance, and demanded that the state take responsibility by nationalizing the company, ‘since the management was misbehaving.’¹⁷¹ Viktor Kozlov, too, joined the criticism in an interview with *The Samara Review*, saying that the cancellation of the deal with AVA (which led to the company’s bankruptcy) was a ‘huge mistake’, by which “Andersson consciously or unconsciously caused a loss of 750 million for his company.”¹⁷²

Although the criticism of Andersson’s policy was widely shared, some were critical of Chemezov’s motives. One retired AvtoVAZ employee, Yuriy Tselikov, criticized Chemezov in an interview with local newspaper *The Free City*. He considered Chemezov’s criticism insincere, as in April 2015, the head of Rostec had praised Andersson’s policy. According to Tselikov, Chemezov just wanted to distance himself from AvtoVAZ’s CEO, as Putin would hold him partly responsible if the situation in Tolyatti would escalate.¹⁷³

Whether the wave of criticism towards Andersson was justified or not, it severely damaged the position of the CEO of AvtoVAZ; a position that was already precarious due to the losses the company had suffered in 2015. On February 28, *Vedomosti* reported that both Rostec and Renault-Nissan sought to replace him. According to several sources close to the company, the shareholders of the company were actively searching for a new top manager.¹⁷⁴ On March 11, Andersson declared that he would leave AvtoVAZ on April 7.

The governor intervenes

Nicolas Maure, who had been the head of the Romanian car producer Dacia, became the new CEO of AvtoVAZ. Although it was unlikely that the economic situation would improve soon, and although some (such as the communist Kalashnikov) complained about the fact that ‘again a foreigner’ was going to lead the company, the immediate threat of a AvtoVAZ-wide protest had been removed. The media outlet *Lenta.ru* noted that Maure had successfully resolved a labor conflict in Romania by reaching a compromise with the trade union.¹⁷⁵ This new hope of a solution helped temporarily pacify the protest.

¹⁷⁰ L. Kalašnikov, "Mina pod Tol'jatti. Deputat Gosdumy Leonid Kalašnikov o tom, kak idet ko dnu AVTOVAZ," *Svobodnaja Pressa* 2016.

¹⁷¹ "Prekratite massovye uvol'nenija zavodčan. Trebovanija profsojuza AVTOVAZa «Edinstvo» k pravitel'stvu Rossii i al'jansu «Reno-Nissan»." *Vol'nyj gorod* (2015).

¹⁷² "Viktor Kozlov: "Pričina bankrotstva AvtoVAZagregata - narušenie dogovorennostej so storony AvtoVAZa"," *gorodTol'jatti.rf* 2016.

¹⁷³ A. Lipov, "Jurij Celikov: V bedax VAZa Čemezov vinovat bol'se Anderssona," *Vol'nyj Gorod* 2016.

¹⁷⁴ V. Štanov and V. Petlevoj, "Akcionery «AvtoVAZa» iščit zamenu Bu Anderssonu," *Vedomosti* 2016.

¹⁷⁵ A. Sivašenkov, "Roboty ne bastujut. Čto izvestno o novom prezidente «AvtoVAZa»," *Lenta.ru* 2016.

The case of the bankruptcy of AvtoVAZagregat and the payment of the wages was still not resolved. The ownership of the company was shady: the majority of issued shares was held by 'KopperBerg Ltd', registered on the British Virgin Islands, and most likely, the money with which the debts could have been paid had disappeared through this offshore company. However, the case continued to generate media attention, which prompted governor Merkuskin to act. Viktor Kozlov was arrested at an airport in Moscow. Merkuskin then summoned Alexei Kozlov (majority shareholder of KopperBerg Ltd and brother of the general director of AVA) to Samara and forced him to sign a declaration that he would pay all the unpaid wages to the workers of AVA before March 31, 2016. Then, Viktor was released. The regional government also provided a one-time 'social benefit' of 10,000 rubles. A new legal case was opened against the despised CEO of AVA. Merkuskin received praise from the regional union of trade unions, for acting decisively. Antonina Larina, too, thanked the governor for his support.¹⁷⁶

Indeed, in March, the workers of the main branch of AvtoVAZagregat had received their salaries. However, the 700 workers of its three daughter companies (AvtoVAZagregatplast, PoshivAvtoVAZagregat and AvtoVAZagregattrans) still had not received their salaries, and despite promises from the governor, these were not paid for the next months. When in the end of August 2016, a worker of PoshivAvtoVAZagregat confronted Merkuskin with the fact that they had not been paid for a full year, the governor reacted angrily, and accused the woman of being 'stirred up' by foreign agents, and reminded that he himself had broken the law to help them, to give them the social benefit of 10,000 rubles.¹⁷⁷ The conversation was recorded and placed online, which led to an outcry that reached national media outlets. A few days later, on August 29, some workers decided to take radical action, and blocked the M5 highway between Tolyatti and Samara. The case damaged the reputation of the governor, and in the following months, KPRF turned against him and demanded his replacement.¹⁷⁸

The action on the highway attracted no more than 80 people, and was ended quickly. A day later, on August 30, 2016, AVA was officially declared bankrupt. At the moment of writing (April 2017), the debts towards the employees of the daughter companies have still not been paid.

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hcBLKSsknY> (last accessed 01-06-2017)

¹⁷⁷ "Gubernator Samarskoj oblasti prigrozil «nikogda» ne pogasit' dolgi postavščika AvtoVAZa."

¹⁷⁸ KPRF Tol'jatti.

CHAPTER V: PROTECTING NATURE AS A CAUSE FOR CIVIL ACTION

Evans (2012) noted that action against concrete problems to achieve clear-cut goals appeal to far more people than general protests for civil rights. The protection of nature is an important cause for such action: the clearing of forests and natural areas to make place for new building activity affects people directly, and preventing the destruction of natural areas is both a clear-cut goal and an aim that evokes a positive response from a large part of society.¹⁷⁹ It is therefore no surprise that quite a lot of scholarly activity has been focused on this kind of civil society activity.

Among the most notable protests against deforestation were those in the ‘green belt’ around Moscow, especially the protests in defense of the Khimki Forest. There, protests started in 2007, in response to government plans to build a highway straight through the forest. At first, protests were oppressed violently, and journalists who published articles criticizing the plans were beaten up. Despite the oppression, the protesters managed to attract more and more media attention. In August 2010, protesters held a rally on Pushkin Square in Moscow. At this point, members of the Russian political elite started to express their concerns about the controversy, and the same month, the leadership of *Edinaya Rossiya* asked president Medvedev to suspend the construction project, which he did.

When Medvedev later still approved the construction, the protest movement became more politicized, aimed at, as one of the protesters stated, “the replacement of the political order”. Political scientists argued that this could be a more general pattern for Russian grassroots civil movements: when they are organized around a very concrete issue that directly affects people’s lives, these protest movements are able to obtain media attention and grow fast. When there is a direct confrontation between the authorities and the protest movement (as was the case in the Khimki Forest protests), the movement can become politicized, and redefine their goals more in opposition the existing political order.¹⁸⁰

Although Tolyatti is a far smaller city than Moscow, it has faced similar issues regarding the preservation of nature. The city is divided in three districts (*Rayony*): *Avtozavodskiy rayon*, *Tsentral’nyy rayon* and *Komsomolskiy rayon*. The districts lie approximately in a half-circle. In the middle of this half-circle, on the banks of the Volga river, there is the ‘microdistrict’ (*mikrorayon*) *Portposyolok*. In and around the microdistrict, there are parks with cottages,

¹⁷⁹ A. Evans, "Protests and Civil Society in Russia: the struggle for the Khimki forest," *Communist and post communist studies* 45 (2012).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

owned by (and only accessible for) the elite.¹⁸¹ Between the different parts of Tolyatti, there are sizeable areas of forest.

In July and August 2010, fires destroyed more than a thousand hectares of forest. The destruction sparked civic activity: citizens started organizing on social media and organized planting events. The initiative was supported by media outlets (such as the local radio station 'Avtoradio Tolyatti') and politicians, and in October, Avtoradio reported that 600 new trees had been planted.¹⁸² Even though there was cooperation between citizens and the local government, several citizens remained suspicious of the government's plans: on social media, rumors circulated that on former forest areas, the construction of new cottages was planned. The plan of the mayor to lease damaged forest areas to private parties, who were supposed to help in restoring the forest, caused more suspicions: if third parties were interested in renting a plot of forest land, they would certainly want to make use of it. Although the forest was managed by the local authorities, the ownership and protection status of much of it was not clearly defined, and citizens feared that third parties would start constructing cottages for private use. According to the authorities, this fear was unfounded, given that the Forestry Code forbids the construction of housing in forest areas.¹⁸³

During the period of forest fires in 2010, several public groups were created on VKontakte, Russia's most popular social networking site. A few of them still exist today; the largest one (under the name 'Help to save the forest in Tolyatti'¹⁸⁴) still has a member count of almost 4500 people. The community is rather young – many members are in their twenties. Some non-citizen actors, such as the local department of Edinaya Rossiya and newspaper *Molodyozhaya Gazeta* are also active in the group. Although the group was initially meant to quickly spread information about the forest fires, the group was later used to organize events, such as a tree planting event on June 12 (Russia Day) of 2013. With some regularity, links to petitions (on change.org, or on the Russian website of Greenpeace) were posted, often aimed at improving the protection of the forest or preventing the clearing of certain areas of forest. Posts also diverge to different topics unrelated to the original subject of the group, such as calls to find a home for stray dogs. There are periods when these groups are virtually silent; in some periods, nothing is posted for months.

¹⁸¹ I. Dmitriev and M. Svetlov, "Èlitnyj poselok, zakrytyj dlja prostyx smertnyx," *Ploščad' Svobody* 2016.

¹⁸² "V Tol'jatti posadjat 600 derev'ev," *Avtoradio Tol'jatti* 2010.

¹⁸³ E. Katkova, "Čužimi rukami gar' razgrebat'. Mèrija Tol'jatti xotela by vosstanovit' sgorevšie lesa, sdav ix v arendu," *Kommersant* 2010.

¹⁸⁴ <https://vk.com/club19041482>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

Another way in which citizens interacted during the period of forest fires was via blogs. In Russia, LifeJournal, a blogging platform with social networking features, is especially popular. Popular bloggers can become very influential – opposition politician Alexei Navalny became prominent thanks to his LifeJournal blog. Tolyatti, too, has popular blogs, such as *Zapiski gorozhanina* ('Notes of a townsman') of journalist Fyodor Bystrov.¹⁸⁵ In the summer of 2010, he was one of the initiators of a petition, calling for the resignation of mayor Anatoli Pushkov. In the petition, the mayor was accused of not having reacted effectively to the danger of forest fires: he did not take preventive measures, even though already in spring, ecologists had warned that inaction would have serious consequences. When Bystrov and other initiators tried to personally offer the petition to the mayor at the town hall at a regular press meeting, they were not allowed to enter.¹⁸⁶ The mayor later responded to the petition, calling the accusations 'absolutely unfounded'.¹⁸⁷

There is some activity of environmental NGOs on the local level. Several grassroots organizations exist, although it is unclear how organized these groups are – some groups that present themselves as 'organizations' (such as 'ecological youth organization *eKoisTY*'¹⁸⁸), turn out to be little more than small groups of enthusiasts who are willing to put energy in setting up an organization, but lose interest after some time. More stable, usually, are the organizations that are part of a nationwide network. An example is the movement 'No.More.Garbage' ('*Musora.Bolshe.Net*'), which describes itself as 'a network of initiative groups', organizes cleaning activities, stimulates waste sorting, and tree planting days:¹⁸⁹ non-political and uncontroversial activities. A more politicized organization is the Social-Ecological Union. This organization, which was founded in 1991, cooperates with Greenpeace and WWF to push for more ecologically friendly policy. The organization has sharply expressed its concerns about the labelling of ecological organizations as 'foreign agents', and appealed to president Putin to stop the prosecution of such organizations.¹⁹⁰ The union itself does not appear on the list of 'foreign agents', and the leader of the Samara regional branch, Sergei Simak, was also a member of the regional Civic Chamber from 2008 until 2014, a platform for civil society organizations (as mentioned in chapter III).

¹⁸⁵ His blog can be found on <http://pro-derek.livejournal.com/> (last accessed 01-06-2017)

¹⁸⁶ E. Kolyčeva, "Mèrija vključila zadnij vxod. Inicijatoram otstavki glavy Tol'jatti ne udalos' vručit' podpisi lično v ruki," *Kommersant* 2010.

¹⁸⁷ F. Bystrov, "Čto otvetil mèr Tol'jatti," *Zapiski gorozhanina* 2010.

¹⁸⁸ <https://vk.com/club8250329>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

¹⁸⁹ <http://musora.bolshe.net/>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

¹⁹⁰ "Oxrana prirody Rossii, zaščita okružajuščej sredy i zdorov'ja naselenija – èto ne političeskaja dejatel'nost'," <http://rusecounion.ru> (last accessed 31-05-2016).

From construction to planting: the state in charge

The period of forest fires had led to interpersonal contacts and engagement with the case of preserving the forest. To protect the forests from being cleared, citizens of Tolyatti decided to organize ‘thematic walks’ through the forest. As this was not an official rally, the citizens were not obliged to ask permission from the local government: people just brought their children and enjoyed the walk along the affected parts of the forest. There was no real organizational structure or environmental organization that stimulated these actions, but many of the participants of the walks had helped in the fight against the forest fires. The idea that the forest they had so fervently tried to rescue would have to make place for new buildings was unacceptable to them.¹⁹¹ The case for the protection of Tolyatti’s forest drew the attention of Anatoli Ivanov, a State Duma member of Edinaya Rossiya, representing the Samara Oblast, said that he had received numerous complaints about the clearing of the forest, even in parts that were not damaged by fire. He requested that a local attorney consider the situation, to check if the reports were factual, and whether the clearing was legal.¹⁹²

Even though local authorities in Tolyatti kept emphasizing that all the forest areas that were damaged by the fire would be restored, there were strong signals that they were changing their position. In November, Aleksei Kiriyyenko, a member of the regional Duma, told *Kommersant* that ‘a polemic was kindled’ on the possibility of urban development on the forest areas. Sergei Simak noted that there were plans to build a road through the forest between *Avtozavodskiy rayon* and *Tsentral’nyy rayon*, and suggested that the fact that a forest fire had raged there was not a coincidence, as the destruction of the trees could give the local authorities the right to start construction. However, he warned that if the government would indeed take the decision to build a road, this could lead to a ‘Khimki situation’, as many of the inhabitants were opposed to it.¹⁹³

On December 29, it looked as if the fears started to become reality: the mayor approved a plan to change the zoning of one of the burned forest areas, to allow the construction of major infrastructure. Simak saw it as the first step towards the disappearance of the entire forest area, and noted that citizens and State Duma members were opposed to the plan. He insisted that the forest should obtain the status of national park. However, it cannot be said that all Tolyattians were unhappy about the plans: some inhabitants close to the selected area were looking forward

¹⁹¹ "Žiteli Tol'jatti zaščiščajut ot vyrubki «les-pogorelec», kotoryj spasali ot požara v 2010 godu," *RegNews*.

¹⁹² "Počemu v Tol'jatti vyrubajut zdorovye derev'ja?," *TLTnews.ru* 2010.

¹⁹³ M. Gutorova and E. Kolyčeva, "Činovniki uglubilis' v les. Na sgorevšix territorijax mogut pojavit'sja žilye kvartaly," *Kommersant* 2010.

to the development of new infrastructure. According to the plans, the roads would be repaired, and there would be new facilities, such as a school and a GP. In March 2011, the Prosecutor's office intervened. The office declared that the area was not owned by the local government, and issued a warning to mayor Pushkov that the plan was illegal.¹⁹⁴

In April 2011, the Tolyatti authorities started to try to bring the forests under the ownership of the local government, reasoning that this would allow them to maintain and protect them more effectively. This would also allow the local government to allocate these areas to construction projects.¹⁹⁵ However, this process turned out to be lengthy: only in June 2014, the documents for the transfer of ownership were signed, and even then, the construction plan was still controversial.¹⁹⁶ The most immediate threat to the forest areas was therefore not construction, but neglect. The regional government gave the right to remove the dead trees to commercial organizations: the faster the trees were removed, the more money the companies would receive. However, according to Simak, the government did not provide enough materials and equipment to plant new trees: he warned that inaction could lead to insect plagues the next year.¹⁹⁷

As the government did not plant trees itself, people were called to action. On Friday, April 22, 2011, such a day took place. It was organized by the regional ecological company EkoVoz and local radio station Avtoradio. The movement 'No.More.Garbage' also helped organizing. Many volunteers were enthusiastic about the initiative, but complained that it was planned on a working day. Calls from volunteers to move the event to the weekend were ignored. Participants reported that teachers brought large amounts of school children to the event, just 'to tick the box' ('*dlya galochki*'). Although some participants were enthusiastic and asked when the next planting event would be, others were disappointed. One of the participant called it an 'empty event', and announced that he would never attend such an event anymore.¹⁹⁸ A similar event was held the Monday after: there, workers of the company 'Tolyattikauchuk' went to the damaged areas to plant new trees.¹⁹⁹

This is the kind of 'civil society activity' that was characteristic for the restoration of the forest: although there were a lot of citizens that were genuinely willing to help, much of the

¹⁹⁴ E. Kolyčeva and M. Gutorova, "Lesu ostavili «Lesnoe». Prokuratura Tol'jatti predosteregla mèra ot zastrojki federal'noj zemli," *ibid.* 2011.

¹⁹⁵ D. Maleeva and A. Tarxanov, "Lesnaja kladovaja. Vlasti Tol'jatti namereny oformit' zelenye nasaždenija v sobstvennost'," *Volžskaja Kommuna* 2011.

¹⁹⁶ E. Kryvun, "Kak deljat les. Lesnaja doroga odobrena ešče odnoj instanciej," *Ponedel'nik* 2014.

¹⁹⁷ A. Šipilina, "Vesnoj tol'jattinskije lesa ždet vspyška vreditelej," *RegionSamara.ru* 2011.

¹⁹⁸ <https://vk.com/event25900324>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

¹⁹⁹ "V rajone «Lesnogo» posadili sosny," *TLT.ru* (2011).

activity was organized by companies and state institutions which coerced people to take part. Also, the social media groups that were founded by grassroots activists became more and more dominated by commercial and state organizations (in Russia, private organizations are often dominated by the state). Although this is the kind of ‘civil society’ of which the Russian authorities openly state that they want to develop it (e.g. through platforms like the Civic Chamber), it is difficult to classify these activities as ‘society-based’: on the contrary, by ‘recruiting’ some of the initial grassroots activists and estranging others, the state leaves very little space for citizens to remain in charge of their own actions as citizens.

Protesting forest clearance: the return of civil society, or conflicts within the elite?

The ‘colonization’ of the forest protection movement by the state, in which the planting of new trees by citizens was emphasized instead of protesting against building plans, continued in the years following 2011. However, this does not mean that the protest had faded away entirely. Although the construction plan from December 2010 was stalled, the local government allowed several parts of the city forest to be cleared to make place for construction. This regularly led to protests. In February 2015, the city administration of mayor Andreev decided to allow the clearance of 500 to 600 trees on two locations in the western part of the *Komsomolskiy rayon*, to allow the construction of a hotel and a housing complex.²⁰⁰ According to the general allocation plan of the town, one of the plots (near *ulitsa Chaikinoy*) was a ‘town forest’; however, to make way for the construction, its status was changed.²⁰¹ The reasoning behind the decision remains unclear. The other plot (near *ulitsa Yesenina*) was already marked as a zone for urban development in the general plan of the city, even though there is a small forest.

Citizens appealed on the town council to prevent the clearance, and found support with local deputy Borislav Grinblat. Grinblat is a former ally of mayor Andreev in the regional Duma, as part of the ‘December’ group. However, because of disagreements about the political orientation of the group, a conflict arose between Grinblat and Andreev. In 2014, Grinblat said in an interview with local newspaper *Ponedelnik* that he would never shake hands with Andreev anymore. As a member of the town council, Grinblat accused Andreev of ‘selling fairytales’ to improve Tolyatti’s image, whereas in fact, the city was stagnating and corruption was rampant. Although Grinblat used to criticize Edinaya Rossiya in the past, he has become

²⁰⁰ O. Belova, "Tol'jattincy vystupajut protiv vyrubki 500 derev'ev," *Vesti Regiona* 2015.

²⁰¹ <http://radomirkka.livejournal.com/111183.html>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

part of the ER fraction in the city council. He stated that ER is “the only party that can resist the corrupt lawlessness that currently exists in the executive branch”.²⁰²

Several citizens were genuinely concerned about the construction plans. However, for Grinblat and ER, the aversion to the mayor and the fact that the party had tried to brand itself as a protector of the forest (e.g. by organizing tree-planting days and calling for a moratorium on forest clearing in the town council) formed a strong political motivation to oppose the plans. On June 22, 2015, the town council reported (via a news article on their website) that deputies and inhabitants had acted together to protect the trees. The commission for urban development, headed by Grinblat, declared that the clearing violated the general allocation plan of the city, and that the mayor had exceeded his powers. A month later, after the working group had discussed the problem with residents of the district, council members issued an appeal to the mayor to stop the destruction of the forest.²⁰³ They also wanted the mayor to change the zoning, so that any major construction on either of the sites would become illegal.²⁰⁴ The mayor argued that he could not cancel the permission to clear the forest for construction, which was issued months earlier, pointing out that in a similar case where the mayor had done so, this had resulted in criminal cases for ‘obstruction of entrepreneurial activity’.²⁰⁵

So far, the most vocal opposition against the construction plan had come from the city council. However, in September and October, there were signs that civil society started to become more active. Activist and blogger Natasha Kozlovskaya reported on her blog that Grinblat had drawn her attention to the case. She stated that the construction plan was part of a corrupt scheme, in which local government officials line their pockets by allowing construction in forest areas.²⁰⁶ On social media, Grinblat and others started calling for protest actions.²⁰⁷

On October 5, the first protest action started, in the form of a picketing. About forty people, mostly pensioners and students, went to the town hall, carrying signs with texts like ‘*Mayor, we were not waiting for such a thing!*’ and ‘*In Tolyatti, we need a garden town, and corrupt officials need a kick in the butt!*’. What immediately stands out, is the quality of the signs: they

²⁰² E. Savel'eva, "Borislav Grinblat: «Edinaja Rossija» protivostoit korrupcii v mèrii», " *Ponedel'nik* 2014.

²⁰³ dumatlt, "Parlamentarii vyšli s obraščeniem k mèru po voprosu priostanovki snosa zelenyx nasaždenij Tol'jatti," *dumatlt.ru* 2015.

²⁰⁴ J. Romanenko, "Pod topor. Sotni derev'ev mogut vyrubit' v Komsomol'skom rajone v interesax samarskix zastrojščikov.," *Ploščad' Svobody* 2015.

²⁰⁵ J. Romanenko and E. Xalilov, "Obratilis' ne po adresu. Zaščitniki lesa Komsomol'skogo rajona požalovali' v prokuraturu na rešenje mèrii o zaprete massovogo piketirovanija.," *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ <http://radomirka.livejournal.com/111183.html>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

²⁰⁷ <https://vk.com/komsahelp>, last accessed 01-06-2017.

were well-printed and all had the same design. The protesters also held a long banner, with photos of Sergei Yesenin and Liza Chaikina (the persons after whom the streets were named). The fact that such a small protest, the very first one about this case, was so well-organized, suggests the support of Grinblat and his fraction.²⁰⁸ Andreev did not engage with the protesters, but entered the town hall through a back door. He later reacted, stating that he respected the rights of the picketers to express their opinion, but he also said that the decision to allow construction was the only legal option.²⁰⁹ A new action was planned for October 22, when the city was holding the event 'The city of the future' (*Gorod budushchego*) (mentioned in the previous chapter in the context of the AvtoVAZagregat issue), but a mass action was forbidden. Despite the ban, several protesters turned up with banners.²¹⁰

Grinblat and the Edinaya Rossiya fraction continued their political work against the destruction of green areas. On January 20, 2016, the town council adopted a new policy document for the protection of green areas, establishing a committee of local council members, representatives of the town districts and members of the local government. This committee would take decisions about the clearance of forest.²¹¹ However, the future of the two disputed plots was still unclear, and the protest continued. In April, inhabitants of the *Komsomolskiy rayon* appealed to governor Merkushkin to intervene. KPRF also held a rally against the clearing of town forest areas.²¹²

After April 2016, no more media reports about protests concerning the two sites could be found. It is unclear whether the two sites had been saved definitively, but the case clearly damaged the reputation of mayor Andreev, who had won the election with his promise to make the town a better place to live. In April 2017, he was replaced by Sergei Antashev, a member of Edinaya Rossiya.²¹³ Although the policy regarding the clearance of forest was adopted, social media users are continuing to report about cases of forest clearing in different parts of the town.²¹⁴

²⁰⁸"V Tol'jatti u mèrii pikety. Andreev pronik v zdanie čerez černyj xod," *TLTgorod.ru* 2015.

²⁰⁹ E. Xalilov, "Oni takogo ne ždali. Sergeja Andreeva publično obvinili v bezžalostnoj vyrubke lesa.," *Ploščad' Svobody* 2015.

²¹⁰ "V Tol'jatti protestujuščie piketčiki osadili forum «Gorod buduščego»," *TLTgorod.ru* 2015.

²¹¹ "Deputaty prizyvajut uporjadočit' processy soderžanija, oxrany, snosa i vosstanovlenija zelenyx nasaždenij goroda," *TLTnews.ru* 2016.

²¹² "Samarskaja oblast'. Gorožane vmeste s KPRF vstali na zaščitu parkov Tol'jatti," *KPRF.ru* 2016.

²¹³ D. Bykov, "Sergej Antashev izbran glavoj Tol'jatti," *Volga N'jus* 2017.

²¹⁴ http://vk.com/wall-37094684_4910103, last accessed 01-06-2017.

CHAPTER VI: ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT

Although civil society in Russia is often simply labelled as weak, it has become clear that the actual situation is more complex. The context in which Russian civil society develops and operates is very different from that of the countries on which the concept was initially modelled, even though on the surface, the situation might seem comparable. Russia, like Western countries, has platforms for the interaction between state and civil organizations. However, we have seen that these platforms are often platforms in name only. The Civil Chamber of Samara is firmly under control of the government. The Tolyatti Tripartite Committee between companies, trade unions and local government is a Potemkin organization: we have seen that it did not play any role during the crisis in AvtoVAZ and AVA in 2015 and '16. The official AvtoVAZ trade union, ASM, does not remotely resemble trade unions in the West. Analyzing these organizations as if they are simply weaker forms of equivalent structures in Western countries, therefore, makes little sense. To obtain a better understanding of the structures of civil society and interaction, it is necessary to go back to the three concepts of civil society that were described in the first chapter of this thesis.

Maintaining the state of civility

The first concept, of civil society as the state of civility, emphasizes that sovereign power is necessary to maintain the state of civility and guard 'civil interests'. In Tolyatti, the state, by and large, does this by 'keeping the lights on': subsidizing the ailing car industry to make sure that the citizens have work and income. This approach works, since it answers to what AvtoVAZ workers in Tolyatti find most important: a stable income, and the pride of working at a factory that aroused nostalgic feelings of a glorious past. For many of the workers, this job security is already enough to refrain from protests. There is not much interaction in either of the three 'realms' (of associations, of ideologies, and of public discussion) Chebankova describes, but state and society keep each other in balance.

The crisis around AvtoVAZagregat shows how fragile this balance really is. The government, attempting to improve the profitability of the company, brought AvtoVAZ under foreign management, which, according to market logic, cancelled a contract with one of AvtoVAZ's suppliers. Workers, suddenly without work and income, have no real structures to express their discontent and come to an agreement with employers and the government, can only resort to rallies. In the broader fear of mass layoffs in AvtoVAZ, these rallies have the potential to gain momentum and become directed against the authorities in general.

In the case of such a 'disturbed balance', the authorities can employ several tactics. The first option is to simply ignore or suppress the protest. This is the most effective option if the protests

have not yet gained much traction or media attention; after all, media reports about the suppression of workers who cannot feed their families could lead to further escalation. AVA workers managed to attract media attention at an early stage, which helped them to build momentum – however, even after the local KPRF department openly started supporting them, workers still were in danger of losing their jobs for attending rallies.

The next tactic that the authorities can employ, is that of ‘red tape’. Representatives of the local government can plan meetings and then postpone them. The Prosecutor can accept legal cases but let them drag on for months. The government and the CEO of the plant can promise to have salaries paid within some time, only to break the promise. The purpose of such feet-dragging is to exhaust protestors, who will then find ways to cope with the situation themselves: finding a job somewhere else, getting help from family members, or growing more vegetables at the *dacha*. The danger of this approach is, of course, that it can backfire if the situation is not resolved, as it makes the authorities seem complicit in the perceived injustice.

The third tactic the authorities can apply, is blaming others and acting on that. A popular scapegoat are the Western sanctions, and in the case of AvtoVAZagregat, it was easy to find a target. The foreign management, personified by the despised CEO Bo Andersson was sharply criticized by Chemezov (even though he had expressed his support earlier), and was forced to step down. This approach rings a bell with workers, who, because of the Soviet legacy and state propaganda, are deeply suspicious of foreigners. This method, however, can also backfire when applied at the wrong occasion. As governor Merkushkin experienced, accusing jobless factory workers of being stirred up by foreign agents is not very credible.

Maintaining the balance while minimizing interaction works for as long as either side is satisfied with the situation. If workers’ demands evolve beyond the desire for stability or the government cannot (or does not want to) pay the upkeep of the factory anymore, the balance is lost. Since there are no real official channels of interaction to resolve the issue, this can lead to crises to become acute very fast.

The separate sphere and the lifeworld

The second concept of civil society is that of a separate sphere, in which socialization, and mediation between the state and the private sphere (Hegel) take place, and the lifeworld (Habermas) is shaped. Here, too, we see that ‘the second Russia’ seems familiar, but in fact differs sharply from the experience in Western countries. As in the West, the Russian public sphere is a crowded place of trade unions, political parties, media and NGOs. However, whereas in Western countries, these organizations are the main actors in the process of communication and discussion that shapes the lifeworld, we see that this kind of interaction is

rare in Tolyatti's civil society. Newspapers are mostly descriptive, sometimes form a platform to other actors, but rarely develop opinions. Official trade unions attempt to stimulate workers to put their efforts into the company, and be understanding in times of crisis. 'Free' trade unions, and KPRF, too, hammer down the demand for higher wages and social justice. Groups on VKontakte and Edinaya Rossiya stress the importance of city forests and stimulate tree planting.

What does not, or rarely happen, however, is the *development* of opinions. The formulation of opinions on a policy to modernize Soviet-era industry to guarantee growth and employment in the future is not stimulated. Nature activists protest the clearance of forest and plant new trees, but an opinion forming process on how to develop the city while at the same time improving its livability does not take place. This striking underdevelopment of the public sphere is partially the result of the Soviet past: in the Soviet Union, the public sphere was completely suffocated by the state. However, it is just as well a result of the lack of interaction between those who have formal power to shape policy, and those who would benefit from such policy.

The lifeworld of Tolyatti's blue-collar workers, therefore, remains rooted in the values and ideals that were formed during the Soviet era: a stable job and fixed income, finding pride in the company they work for, and the support of one's country against external threats. This is one of the pillars of the balance of civil stability, described above. It also guarantees the continuation of the *nomenklatura*, in which members give up economic and political freedom in exchange for 'club goods'. The system is not continued due to the ignorance of ordinary citizens: on the contrary, Russian citizens are very much aware of the abundance of corruption and the limits on political freedom in their country. It is continued by the fact that the public sphere of Russia's regions is too underdeveloped to allow the formulation of a credible alternative to the current situation.

Could this situation change anytime soon? The most likely harbinger of change in this sphere is the phenomenon of weblogs. Although many of the local blogs do not yet transcend the level of the simple expression of indignation, experience on the national scale has shown that the potential is there. The clearest example of a blogger who successfully formulated key problems of contemporary Russia and formulated an alternative, is Alexei Navalny. It is very well thinkable that local bloggers will follow his example.

Civil society as a state mechanism

The third concept of civil society is that of social action and a state mechanism. As Tilly stated, a modern civil society in this sense pertains the existence of the formation of interest

groups that are mobilized to achieve a common goal. This contrasts with ‘reactive’ and ‘competitive’ claims of community groups, which marked the pre-modern period. A modern civil society in this sense is useful for the state, since it is an external type of monitoring and coercion: a ‘fire alarm’ (McCubbins and Schwartz). Again, at first sight, Russia seems to have an abundance of interest groups, uniting people to pursue a common goal, such as political parties and trade unions.

Some of these groups, indeed, do act as ‘fire alarms’ for the state – not against corruption, but against a possible escalation of a crisis. The actions of KPRF in the crisis around AvtoVAZ and AVA are a clear example: the discontent among workers was voiced by the party, which organized a rally that attracted more people than expected. The local and regional government, and later the head of Rostec, were forced to react on the situation before it would escalate even further. Apart from being a ‘fire alarm’, KPRF also functioned as a ‘pressure valve’: the party offered angry workers a legitimate way to express their discontent, albeit limited (when the protests tended to escalate, workers could still be fired for attending a rally). On the higher level, member of the State Duma Leonid Kalashnikov felt free enough to express explicit discontent with the political course of prime minister Medvedev. Direct criticism of president Putin, however, is taboo.

However, KPRF, as part of the structural opposition and as such part of Russia’s political system, should be considered an exception: most civil society groups, such as the independent trade unions, do not get such freedom to express themselves. The formation of new, independent interest groups, for which social media often function as an incubator, is actively countered by system groups. In Tolyatti, this was clearly visible when an independent forest protection movement seemed to come into existence. State-related actors, such as Edinaya Rossiya, recruited the grassroots activists by organizing tree planting days and artificially stirring up ‘enthusiasm’ among citizens. Those activists who recognized the events as ‘fake’ left the sphere of civil action altogether. In this way, the formation of independent interest groups remains very difficult. Because of this, and due to the underdeveloped nature of the public sphere (as described above) much of the allowed civil action remains reactive.

The case of Tolyatti’s forests shows what kind of civil society the Russian state prefers and tries to develop. Groups that organize tree planting days (but also groups that take care of elderly people, veterans, and organize humanitarian help) without criticizing government actions are stimulated and recruited by the government to take up those tasks the Russian state fails to perform. However, the pickets of 2015 against the clearing of city forests in Tolyatti also shows a different kind of civil society action: actions that are a reflection of factional

conflicts within the political elite. Although there was real discontent among citizens about the construction plans on a forest area, civil action received a boost because of the support of a political opponent of mayor Andreev. Although there was genuine anger, the fact that those protests could take place without being suppressed, gave away political discord, and plans to clear the way for a mayor of another faction. This, again, shows a phenomenon that, on the surface, seems similar to phenomena in Western countries, but in fact, is structurally different.

Reflections on earlier research

What do these insights add to the existing vast, but contradictory literature on Russian civil society? Professor Morjé Howard described the apprehension to commit to organizations, and the unfulfilled belief in ‘spontaneous’ improvements as important factors in the weakness of Russian civil society. This is an accurate observation, but it is more than a remnant of the Soviet past. More than twenty-five years after the demise of the Soviet Union, civil society organizations are, again, ‘fake’: they are organized by state actors, and many people participate in them ‘to tick the box’. Apprehension to participate in those organizations will therefore not disappear as memories of the Soviet past fade away over generations, but is likely to stay. The unfulfilled belief in ‘spontaneous’ improvements can be explained from the underdevelopment of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense. A firmer belief in the possibility of improvement, and possibly an increased motivation to engage in civic activity, is largely dependent on the development of civil society in this sense.

Elena Chebankova sees two ‘phases’ of civil society: a private phase, characterized by withdrawal, and a public phase, characterized by active engagement. In my view, this ‘cycle’ is, in fact, an interplay between developments within the three concepts of civil society, the state reaction on these developments, and the economic situation. Changes in one field can bring about changes in another field: economic development makes citizens less content with the balance of the status quo, which inspires them to express their desires in (social) media. This can lead to communicational activity and opinion forming in the public sphere, which can inspire people to take civil action: a move into the public phase. Economic downturn can shift the public focus on survival and security. Government repression of the public sphere aborts the opinion-forming process, and state annexation of social action demotivates citizens: the start of a private phase. Samuel Greene’s observation that the nature of civil society reflects the nature of the state is accurate. State intervention in the public sphere influences the way citizens mobilize, or fail to mobilize. In addition, this case study of civil society in Tolyatti showed that the structure of the state and civil society, and their interaction, also shapes the actors.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has assessed Russian civil society by performing a case study on the city of Tolyatti, by combining different theoretical concepts of civil society with empirical research. What has become clear is that the combination of social, economic, and political factors in contemporary Russia shaped the public sphere in such a way, that civil society in this country is structurally different from civil society in the Western countries on which the concept is based.

In the state of economic stagnation and the absence of reforms, blue-collar workers in the ‘second Russia’ on the one side, and the government on the other side both regard the continuation of the existing state as being in their interests. The ruling elite wants to continue extracting rents, and blue-collar workers want to maintain stability, their jobs, and an income on which they can survive. This has led to a situation in which the Russian government needs to subsidize outdated industries to prevent them from going bankrupt. Although workers are aware of the ubiquitous corruption, they see the state as the upholder of order and civility. In the absence of real institutions for providing interaction between government and society, any civil action could quickly lead to a crisis – a situation which both parties want to avoid. This is one of the reasons that the level of civil action remains low.

The low degree of civic interaction is one of the reasons that the ideological dimension of civil society is poorly developed. Although newspapers do, to a certain extent, perform the role of a platform for opinions, the limited degree of interaction prevents the development of a real *public opinion*. Censorship does play a role, but even if opinions of individuals are expressed in an uncensored way, they remain just that: opinions of individuals or parties. For the government, the underdevelopment of the public sphere is an important guarantee of its survival.

When the balance is lost, as happened in the case of the bankruptcy of AvtoVAZagregat and the layoffs at AvtoVAZ, the lack of institutionalized means of interaction becomes a problem, and the only way in which workers can really interact with the government is by attracting media attention through rallies. In such cases, the balance turns out to be fragile: discontent among the population immediately takes the form of a crisis, and there is no perspective on a real solution. The government can employ different tactics to subdue the crisis. It can ignore or suppress the protests at the onset of an escalation. It can use ‘red tape’ to delay the escalation, exhausting protesters and hoping that they will find the solution for their problems themselves. To prevent the protests from becoming politicized, the government shift the blame on other actors. In the case of AvtoVAZ, blaming the foreign management of the company for the

rounds of layoffs was an effective method: the population, deeply suspicious of foreigners, was receptive to the government's message.

The behavior of the Communist Party in the crisis around the closing of AvtoVAZagregat is interesting and paradoxical. On the one hand, KPRF is part of the 'structural opposition', and in this sense part of the Russian system of government. On the other hand, we have seen that in Tolyatti, KPRF not only supported the protests, but even organized rallies itself. This paradox of organizing protests while at the same time being part of a system that discourages state-society interaction can be explained in different ways. First, KPRF has a function of a 'fire alarm' and 'pressure valve' for the authorities. It can attract the attention of the national and regional authorities to the developing crisis, and prompt them to react. It also gives unhappy workers a possibility to express their anger, without being a danger to the system. Although KPRF sometimes voices criticism towards the government, the party does not question the legitimacy of the system, and Putin is not the subject of criticism. KPRF also functions as one of the parties that 'fill up' the associational and ideological spheres (Chebankova's first and second 'realms') of civil society. By 'adopting' the protests, the party prevents that non-system actors or new organizations that are more difficult to control become active. A third explanation could be factionalism on the local level, also genuine concerns of local KPRF members, such as Alexei Krasnov, as they are confronted with the suffering of workers in their own town.

Apart from minimizing interaction between state and society in non-crisis times, the government actively tries to 'fill up' the associational and ideological spheres of civil society. The study of the actions in protection of the forest in Tolyatti has shown this in two different instances. After the fires, there was a development of informal networks of active citizens, who wanted to restore and protect the forests. However, companies and state actors started organizing their own 'tree planting days', artificially stirring up enthusiasm by coercing people into taking part in these events. In this way, part of the genuinely active citizens was recruited by the state. Other activists, who recognized the enthusiasm as artificial, became disillusioned and turned their back on civil activity altogether. The second case in which we saw state actors filling up the civil society space, was that of demonstrations against the clearing of forests. Although some citizens were genuinely concerned about the building plans, the main cause of the demonstrations was, in fact, a factional conflict between the mayor of Tolyatti (an independent) and members of the Edinaya Rossiya party. In both instances, what at first sight looks like signs of civic activity, is in fact the result of the activity of actors that cannot really be considered part of civil society.

The activity of non-society actors in the civil society space is one of the explanations for the paradox posed in the introduction, that civil society at times appears very weak, and at other times appears strong. Chebankova described the flurry of activity in support of the Donbas region as a sign of a revival of civil society. However, this phenomenon resembles the artificial, state-organized activity that we saw in Tolyatti regarding the protection of forest, rather than genuine civic activity. It is important that researchers distinguish between state-organized ‘civil society’ and genuine civil society, even though the division is often vague. The second cause of the paradoxical state of civil society in Russia, is that the country lacks real institutionalized platforms for interaction between state and society. This means that lingering discontent within society remains hidden for a long time. When a crisis develops, people try to attract media attention, hoping that this will eventually resolve the situation. This suddenly makes them very visible. However, this visibility should not be mistaken for strength: in the case of the demonstrations of AvtoVAZ and AVA workers, by far the strongest actor was KPRF: a system actor. Larina’s ‘*Workers’ Initiative Group AvtoVAZagretat*’ more closely resembles a real civil society actor, but, as the name suggests, this group was only formed for a specific occasion, and it is unlikely to continue to exist long after the bankruptcy of AVA.

There are several ways in which civil society could develop in future years. One is a development of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense, despite increasing government oppression. One of the most likely harbingers of change is the online sphere of blogs and social media. These means of communication in the public sphere are more difficult to curb than traditional media. It is possible that the example set by Navalny is followed by other local bloggers, which could lead to a modernization of civil society (as theorized by Charles Tilly) and more genuine civic action. Another possible development could be an increase in worker protests due to a decrease in living standards and job security. If this development is not combined with modernization of the public sphere, these labor protests will be like the ones we saw in Tolyatti: very visible, but without clear-cut goals or direction. However, if these two developments occur simultaneously, new forms of civil society and civic action could grow. On the other hand, it is necessary to remain careful, as the authorities can employ a range of methods to suppress or slow down these developments. If the government is successful in maintaining, and if necessary restoring, the existing balance within society, it is possible that the current system will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

Russian civil society often seemingly resembles Western civil society, but is very different. But it goes too far to describe the system in general as ‘fake’. Its actors are real people, acting with their own motivations: the independent mayor who envisioned great improvement, but

underestimated the preferences of the citizens; the communist who went on a hunger strike and emotionally expressed his dismay about the suffering of AVA's workers; the activists who want to improve their city by planting trees after the fires of 2010. However, the peculiarities of Russia's political system, economic situation and social conditions greatly influence the methods they choose and the achievements they make. As conditions are never stable, Russian civil society, however underdeveloped it may be, does have significant potential for bringing about change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aleksašenko, S. "Čto xorošo «Žiguljam» – xorošo dlja Rossii? Možno li spasti AvtoVAZ." *Republic.ru*, 2016.
- Aron, L. "Darkness on the Edge of Monotown." *The New York Times*, 2009.
- Asankin, R. "AvtoVAZ ostalsja bez bjudžeta iz-za sporov ob uvol'nenii rabočix." *RBK*, 2015.
- ASM. "Vesti Profsojuza (120)."
- Avtoradio. "V Tol'jatti posadjat 600 derev'ev." *Avtoradio Tol'jatti*, 2010.
- Belokurova, E., and D. Vorobëv. "Obščestvennoe učastie na lokal'nom urovne v sovremennoj Rossii." *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* 13, no. 2 (2010).
- Belova, O. "Tol'jattincy vystupajut protiv vyrubki 500 derev'ev." *Vesti Regiona*, 2015.
- Bohman, J. "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy." In *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, edited by Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, 131-55. Oxford, 2004.
- Boldyrev, O. "Russia's car workers who struggle on no pay." *BBC*, 2016.
- Brady, K.R. "The Façade of Russian Democracy: Examining the Quality and Truth of Democracy in the Russian Federation." San Jose State University, 2012.
- Busygina, I., and M. Filippov. "The Calculus of Non-Protest in Russia: Redistributive Expectations from Political Reforms." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015/02/07 2015): 209-23.
- Bykov, D. "Sergej Antašev izbran glavoj Tol'jatti." *Volga Njus*, 2017.
- Bystrov, F. "Čto otvetil mër Tol'jatti." *Zapiski gorožanina*, 2010.
- Calhoun, C. "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 1-50. London, 1992.
- Chandek, N. *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory*. New Delhi 1995.
- Chebankova, E. *Civil Society in Putin's Russia*. London 2013.
- . "Grassroots movements in Putin's Russia: A ray of hope for civil society?". *Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper* 15, no. 7 (2015).
- Christensen, P.T. "Labor under Putin." *New Labor Forum* 26, no. 1 (2017): 64-73.
- Cinoeva, J., and E. V'juškova. "Prezidenta AvtoVAZa prosjat byt' delikatnee." *Kommersant*, 2015.
- CityTraffic. "Pravitel'stvo Samarskoj oblasti ne smožet pomoč' kreditom AvtoVAZagregatu." *CityTraffic.ru* (2015).
- . "Tol'jattinskije "edinorossy" v šoke ot togo, čto rabočije AvtoVAZagregata poseščajut besplatnye obedy." *CityTraffic.ru*, 2015.
- Clover, C. "Russian one-company towns face decline." *Financial Times*, 2009.
- Cohen, J.L., and A. Arato. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. London 1992.
- Crowley, S. "Monotowns and the political economy of industrial restructuring in Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 5 (2016/09/02 2016): 397-422.
- Danilova, D.j. "Poslednij ot gorožan." *Ekspert*, 2014.
- DeLue, S.M., and T.M. Dale. *Political Thinking, Political Theory, and Civil Society*. New York 2016.
- Dmitriev, I. "Duma Tol'jatti dala start procedure otbora novogo glavy goroda." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2017.
- Dmitriev, I., and M. Svetlov. "Èlitnyj poselok, zakrytyj dlja prostyx smertnyx." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2016.
- Dubrovina, S. "Bespredel na «Agregate». V OAO «AvtoVAZagregat» prodolžajetsja narušenie zakonov Rossijskoj Federacii." *Tol'jattinskij navigator*, 2015.
- DumaTLT. "Parlamentarii vyšli s obraščeniem k mëru po voprosu priostanovki snosa zelenyx nasaždenij Tol'jatti." *dumatlt.ru*, 2015.

- Evans, A. "Protests and Civil Society in Russia: the struggle for the Khimki forest." *Communist and post communist studies* 45 (2012): 233-42.
- Evans, A.B., L.A. Henry, and L.M. Sundstrom. *Russian civil society : a critical assessment*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
- Fedorov, S. "Dni «AvtoVAZagregata» sočteny. General'nyj direktor predprijatija Viktor Kozlov sdelal odnoznačnoe zajavlenie." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2015.
- Fomina, N. "Razrešite otstavit'? Vse ždut «dembelja» gubernatora Samarskoj oblasti Nikolaja Merkuškina." *Novaja Gazeta*, 2016.
- . "Tol'jatti: mjatežnyj gorod." *Novaja Gazeta v povolž'e*, 2015.
- Freedom House "Freedom in the World 2004: Belarus."
- . "Freedom in the World 2004: Russia."
- . "Freedom on the Net 2016: Country Profile Russia."
- Gaddy, C.G., and B.W. Ickes. *Bear traps on Russia's road to modernization* [in English]. 2013.
- Galeotti, M. "Will 2016 See The Three Russias Diverging?" In *In Moscow's Shadows*, 2015.
- Gel'man, V. "Leviathan's return. The policy of recentralization in contemporary Russia." In *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, edited by Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell, 1-24. New York, 2009.
- Glazunov, M. *Business in post-Communist Russia : privatisation and the limits of transformation* [in English]. London: Routledge, 2013.
- gorodTol'jatti.rf. "Viktor Kozlov: "Pričina bankrotstva AvtoVAZagregata - narušenie dogovorennostej so storony AvtoVAZa"." *gorodTol'jatti.rf*, 2016.
- Gray, J. *Post-Liberalism. Studies in Political Thought*. New York 1993.
- Greene, S. "Beyond Bolotnaia." *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (2013/03/01 2013): 40-52.
- . "The End of Ambiguity in Russia." *Current History* 2015, no. October (2015): 251-58.
- . "Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin's Russia." Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Gremin, A. "Sergej Andreev o pervyx sta dnjax na rabote." *Ponedel'nik. Delovaja Gazeta Tol'jatti*, 2012.
- Gubernia TV, "Gubernator ocenil rabotu žigulevskogo pansionata dlja veteranov vojn i invalidov." *guberniatv.ru*, 2015.
- Gus'kova, D. "Ne bolee 500 čelovek vyšli na miting protiv sokraščenij na predprijatijax «AvtoVAZa»." *Novaja Gazeta*, 2015.
- Gutorova, M., and E. Kolyčeva. "Činovniki uglubilis' v les. Na sgorevšix territorijax mogut pojavit'sja žilye kvartaly." *Kommersant*, 2010.
- Guzaeva, T. "Obščestvennoe dviženie «dekabr'»: dviženie našego goroda." *Ponedel'nik. Delovaja Gazeta Tol'jatti*, 2013.
- Henderson, S. "Civil society is alive in Russia but it is not well."
- Hoppe-Kondrikova, O. *Struggling for Civility. The Idea and the Reality of Civil Society. An Interdisciplinary Study with a Focus on Russia*. Nijmegen 2012.
- Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups. The Battle Chronicle."
- International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, "Civic Freedom Monitor: Russia."
- Ivanova, T.N., I.V. Tsvetkova, and N.B. Gorbacheva. *Tolyatti's Innovation Prospects as Estimated by Its Residents*. 2015. Vol. 6,2015.
- Kalašnikov, L. "Mina pod Tol'jatti. Deputat Gosdumy Leonid Kalašnikov o tom, kak idet ko dnu AVTOVAZ." *Svobodnaja Pressa*, 2016.
- Kamynin, A. "Kak baptist pobedil edinorossa v Tol'jatti." *Telekanal Dožd'*, 2012.
- Katkova, E. "Čužimi rukami gar' razgrebat'. Mèrija Tol'jatti xotela by vosstanovit' sgorevšie lesa, sdav ix v arendu." *Kommersant*, 2010.

- Kolyčeva, E. "Mèrija vključila zadnjij vhod. Inicijatoram otstavki glavy Tol'jatti ne udalos' vručit' podpisi lično v ruki." *Kommersant*, 2010.
- Kolyčeva, E., and M. Gutorova. "Lesu ostavili «Lesnoe». Prokuratura Tol'jatti predostereгла mèra ot zastrojki federal'noj zemli." *Kommersant*, 2011.
- Kommersant. "Profsojuz potrebuet na mitinge nacionalizacii AvtoVAZa." *Kommersant* (2015).
- KPRF. "Samarskaja oblast'. Gorožane vmeste s KPRF vstali na zaščitu parkov Tol'jatti." *KPRF.ru*, 2016.
- KPRF Tol'jatti. "Avtograd vyrazil svoj protest vlasti." <http://kprftl.ru> (2015).
- Kryvun, E. "Kak deljat les. Lesnaja doroga odobrena ešče odnoj instanciej." *Ponedel'nik*, 2014.
- Kusluch, J. "Russian Monotowns: Tinderboxes For Unrest – Analysis." *Eurasia Review*, 2016.
- Lankina, T., and A. Voznaya. "New Data on Protest Trends in Russia's Regions." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015/02/07 2015): 327-42.
- Lasseter, T. "Facing massive layoffs, Russia's 'Detroit' feels the chill." *McClatchy Newspapers*, 2009.
- Latuxina, K. "Prezident prizval NKO rešat' obščenacional'nye zadači." *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 2015.
- Levada Center. "Putin's Approval Rating."
- Lipov, A. "Deputat Krasnov golodaet na Central'noj ploščadi." *Vol'nyj gorod*, 2015.
- . "Igor' Vituščenko: Nikakix social'nyx objazatel'stv u kapitalistov pered rabočimi net." *Vol'nyj gorod*, 2015.
- . "Jurij Celikov: V bedax VAZa Čemezov vinovat bol'se Anderssona." *Vol'nyj Gorod*, 2016.
- . "KPD dlja gorožan ot podobnyx vstreč viditsja nevysokim." *Vol'nyj gorod* (2015).
- Maleeva, D.j., and A. Tarxanov. "Lesnaja kladovaja. Vlasti Tol'jatti namereny oformit' zelenye nasaždenija v sobstvennost'." *Volžskaja Kommuna*, 2011.
- Meduza. "Èffektivnyj staryj tovarišč. «Meduza» rasskazyvaet istoriju Sergeja Čemezova, odnogo iz samyx vlijatel'nyx ljudej Rossii." *Meduza*, 2016.
- Morjé Howard, M. *The weakness of civil society in post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge 2003.
- O'Neal, M.L. *Democracy, civic culture and small business in Russia's regions : social processes in comparative historical perspective* [in English]. 2016.
- Oates, S. "Media, Civil Society and the Failure of the Fourth Estate in Russia." In *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, edited by A.B. Evans, L.A. Henry and L. McIntosh Sundstrom. London, 2006.
- Olimpieva, I. "Labor unions in contemporary Russia: an assessment of contrasting forms of organization and representation." *WorkingUSA* 15, no. 2 (2012): 267-83.
- Ortung, R. "Why Has Putin Spared Ekho Moskvu? (Op-Ed)." *The Moscow Times*, 2015.
- Outhwaite, W. *Habermas. A Critical Introduction*. Oxford 1994.
- Pavlukevich, V. "Letter from Togliatti: ugly brides go to the polls." *openDemocracy*, 2012.
- Ploščad' Svobody, "132 rublja v mesjac polučili zarplatu rabotniki «AvtoVAZagregata» v nojabre ètogo goda....." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2015.
- Pomerantsev, P. "We're all Putin's 'useful idiots'." In *Politico*, 2015.
- Pringle, T., and S. Clarke. *The challenge of transition : trade unions in Russia, China and Vietnam*. London 2010.
- Radio Avgust, "Mèrija poprosila perenesti datu provedenija mitinga rabotnikov AVTOVAZa." *Radio Avgust* (2015)
- RBK. "«Rostex» raskritikoval rukovodstvo AvtoVAZa za uvol'nenie sotrudnikov." *RBK*, 2015.
- RegNews. "Žiteli Tol'jatti zaščiščajut ot vyrubki «les-pogorelec», kotoryj spasali ot požara v 2010 godu." *RegNews*.

- Regnum. "Glavnyj inžener AvtoVAZa stal mèrom Tol'jatti (Samarskaja oblast')." *Regnum* (2008).
- . "Sud postanovil otmenit' registraciju Sergeja Andreeva v kačestve kandidata na post mèra Tol'jatti." *Regnum* (2008).
- . "V gruppe liderov na vyborax mèra Tol'jatti - edinorossy Puškov i Savenkov: èkspert (Samarskaja oblast')." *Regnum* (2008).
- . "V Tol'jatti Arkadij Dvorkovič najdet rešenie problemy sokraščenijs na AvtoVAZe." *Regnum*, (2015).
- Republic.ru. "«AvtoVAZagregat» priznali bankrotom iz-za dolgov." *Republic.ru*, 2016.
- . "Gubernator Samarskoj oblasti prigrozil «nikogda» ne pogasit' dolgi postavščika AvtoVAZa." *Republic.ru*, 2016.
- Robertson, G.B. "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and the Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 528-47.
- Romanenko, J. "Pod topor. Sotni derev'ev mogut vyrubit' v Komsomol'skom rajone v interesax samarskix zastrojščikov." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2015.
- Romanenko, J., and E. Xalilov. "Obratilis' ne po adresu. Zaščitniki lesa Komsomol'skogo rajona požalovali v prokuraturu na rešenie mèrii o zaprete massovogo piketirovanija." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2015.
- Samara.ru. "Direktor «AvtoVAZagregata» posovetoval svojim rabotnikam idti v sud." *Gubernskij portal Samara.ru*, 2015.
- Savel'eva, E. "Borislav Grinblat: «Edinaja Rossija» protivostoit korrupcii v mèrii." *Ponedel'nik*, 2014.
- Seligman, A.B. "Civil Society as Idea and Ideal." Chap. 1 In *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, edited by S. Chambers and W. Kymlicka, 13-33. Oxford, 2002.
- Shapovalova, N., and R. Youngs. "The Changing Nature of EU Support to Civil Society." In *Civil Society and Democracy Promotion*, edited by Timm Beichelt, Irene Hahn-Fuhr, Frank Schimmelfennig and Susan Worschech, 86-109. Zurich, 2014.
- Sharafutdinova, G. "Regional Governors Navigating through Putin's Third Term." *Russian Politics* Russian Politics, no. 1 (12 2016): 27-53.
- Šipilina, A. "Vesnoj tol'jattinskie lesa ždet vspsyška vreditelej." *RegionSamara.ru*, 2011.
- Sivašenkov, A. "Roboty ne bastujut. Čto izvestno o novom prezidente «AvtoVAZa»." *Lenta.ru*, 2016.
- Štanov, V., and V. Petlevoj. "Akcionery «AvtoVAZa» iščit zamenu Bu Anderssonu." *Vedomosti*, 2016.
- Stukalova, L. "Zanjatost', zarplata, zaščita!" *Vesti Profsojuza* (122), 2015.
- Taylor, B.D. *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism*. 2011.
- Teague, E. "How Did the Russian Population Respond to the Global Financial Crisis?". *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 27, no. 3-4 (2011/12/01 2011): 420-33.
- TLT.ru. "V rajone «Lesnogo» posadili sosny." *TLT.ru* (2011).
- TLTgorod.ru "Rukovodstvo terpjjaščego bedstvie AvtoVAZagregata proignorirovalo soveščanie v prokurature." *TLTgorod.ru* (2015).
- . "Terpjjaščij bedstvie AvtoVAZagregat dobilsja otsročki bankrotstva." *tltgorod.ru* (2015).
- . "V Tol'jatti «krasnaja» akcija protesta sobrala do 500 čelovek." *TLTgorod.ru* (2015).
- . "V Tol'jatti pokazušnyj nedomiting profsojuzov prošel bystro i nezametno." *tltgorod.ru* (2015).
- . "V Tol'jatti protestujuščie piketčiki osadili forum «Gorod buduščego»." *TLTgorod.ru*, (2015).
- . "V Tol'jatti u mèrii pikety. Andreev pronik v zdanie čerez černyj xod." *TLTgorod.ru*, (2015).

- . "Vstreča predstavitelja mèrii s rabotnikami «AvtoVAZagregata» perenositsja." *tligorod.ru* (2015).
- TLTnews.ru "Deputaty prizyvajut uporjadočit' processy sodержaniya, ohrany, snosa i vosstanovleniya zelenyx nasaždenij goroda." *TLTnews.ru* (2016).
- . "Počemu v Tol'jatti vyrubajut zdorovyje derev'ja?" *TLTnews.ru* (2010).
- Tolyatti, A.o.t.u.d.o. "Meeting minutes of the tripartite committee." <http://www.tgl.ru/structure/department/tolyattinskaya-gorodskaya-trehstoronnyaya-komissiya/5864/>.
- Tol'jattinskij navigator "Kriki o pomošči. Rabotniki «AVTOVAZAGREGATA» bedstvujut v Tol'jatti. Pjat' mesjacev bez zarplaty. Ljudi na grani goloda." (2015).
- . "Točka kipenija. Tol'jattincy gotovy dvinut'sja v Moskvu." *Tol'jattinskij navigator*, 2015.
- . "Žertvy černogo peredela. KPRF podderživaet rabotnikov «AvtoVAZagregata» v bor'be za ix prava." *Tol'jattinskij navigator* (2015).
- V'juškova, E. "«AvtoVAZagregat» podvezli do bankrotstva." *Kommersant* (2015).
- . "Partnery AvtoVAZa vyšli na miting." *Kommersant* (2015).
- Vlasova, O.E., and O.V. Speranskij. "Social'noe partnerstvo v Tol'jatti." *Tatiščevskie čtenija: aktual'nye problemy nauki i praktiki* (2015).
- Vol'nyj Gorod "Prekratite massovyje uvol'nenija zavodčan. Trebovanija profsojuza AVTOVAZa «Edinstvo» k pravitel'stvu Rossii i al'jansu «Reno-Nissan»." *Vol'nyj gorod* (2015).
- Whitmore, B. "The Power Vertical Podcast: Putin's Protest Problem." *RFE/RL* (2015).
- . "Russia's Patriotic Fix." *RFE/RL* 2014.
- Xalilov, E. "Oni takogo ne ždali. Sergeja Andreeva publično obvinili v bezžalostnoj vyrubke lesa." *Ploščad' Svobody*, 2015.
- Zasekin.ru. "Oppozicionery «predupreditel'no» trebujut otstavki Merkuškina." *Zasekin* (2015).
- Zubarevič, N. "Četyre Rossii." *Vedomosti* (2011).

Cover image: a creative sign of a picketer at the forum 'Gorod Budushchego' in Tolyatti (source: TLTgorod.ru).