

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

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

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

## **6. Evolution of the protest movement**

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

mass meeting was to be held acquired primary importance and actually triggered conflicts between the authorities and the organizers of any meeting [10]. The matter is that Moscow has a ring-radial master plan since the city's foundation, with the Kremlin and Red square in the centre. The Kremlin, Red square and the adjoining streets retained their sacral implication in the mass consciousness of post-Soviet Russia: the closer to them, the closer to the centre (and the symbol) of state power. No wonder the authorities always tried to prevail on meeting organizers to hold their meetings in places away from the Kremlin [11].

The four meetings in Moscow [12] organized by one and the same group of opposition politicians under the slogan 'For Fair Elections' that would be then emulated countrywide marked a new phase of mass protest movement. There have been practically no politics in the European understanding in Russia in the past decade. 'The Parliament is not a venue for discussions,' declared speaker of the Duma of the previous convocation publicly. The country only had political technologists, administrators and commentators of decisions made 'at the top'. The politicians whom the incumbent government was qualifying for many years as non-system opposition were in isolation. Now they joined with a mass of discontent people. It was the large attendance at the meetings ('the digit mean all' as journalists would say later) coupled with discussions in various social and political media, publications in the press and in the Internet by the known persons, the appearance of new public figures on the public arena that signified that Russian society 'had wakened up politically'.

Why did lots of people come to the meetings? Here are the judgments of independent civic experts. First, the people were disunited (ie individualised), they had not gathered together for a long time. Second, the people came not only to express their discontent but also to listen and to learn. In particular, to hear and understand whether the organizers of a meeting were capable of working out any sound program of action at least for the moment. Third, the protestors included the people who do not want to emigrate, who want to do their job here at home. Fourth, today, as never before, it is not so much the result that is important as the process – the process of starting to bring in social and political changes. And, as a matter of fact, 'those who have not come to Bolotnaya <bog square> missed History. They let it pass them' (Romanova, 2011:3).

The protestors' slogans were: 'We've had enough of you, turn it up!', 'Russia without oligarchs!', 'Putin, go away!', 'Return fair elections!', 'Why the Olympiad when we need houses to live in!', 'Prague is closer to us than Pyongyang', 'We'll come again and there'll be much more of us!'. White ribbons, a symbol of protest movement, were tacked to cars, coats, bags, balloons.

What changes took place in these several months? For one thing, the number of participants was gradually growing (the notorious 'digit'). If the first two meetings could be classified as *general civic*, the third protest fell into three different meetings held separately in Moscow, each having its own political colouring: democrats, liberal democrats and ultra-liberals together with a few representatives of the first-generation Russian dissidents. The authorities' treatment of the protestors changed too. While the gathering at Chistye Prudy boulevard was tightly controlled by the police, the meeting on prospekt akademika Sakharova and the next meeting on Bolotnaya square went on smoothly, the order being maintained jointly by meeting organizers and the police. One more important aspect: the progress of protestors' political demands. Starting with the slogan 'For fair election to the State Duma' the protestors then advanced the slogan 'For clean and honest living' and laid down a whole package of demands (see Table 1) [13]. After that the organizing committee of the meetings proposed to create an instrument of public control over the conduct of presidential election. A 'Moscow league of voters' was set up to be followed by similar associations in other Russian cities. A coordination committee of these associations was formed soon after. The committee appealed to the leaders of the Duma parties asking them to issue credentials to public watchers permitting them to control the voting process and to obtain primary records from the local electoral commissions.

Last but not least was the use of the Internet as a major instrument of mass mobilization and accumulation of resources. All organizational work on the preparation and conduct of meetings has been done via the Twitter, Facebook, Livejournal, 'In Contact' (*V kontakte*) social networks as well as through the sites of social movements and public associations. The public 'purse' of donations for the organization of meetings, including platforms mounting and equipment, audio gear, etc. was also created in the Internet and was therefore absolutely transparent [14].