SOCIO-POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN RUSSIA IN PUTIN’S ERA

Mikhail Gorshkov
Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences Director. Phone: +7 (495) 719 09 40. Fax: +7 (495) 719 07 40. director@isras.ru

In spring 2008 Russians became witnesses of «political eras change»: eight years of Vladimir Putin – former president of the Russian Federation – being in power came to the end. In contrast to many other historical epochs these years didn’t «shock» Russia, but totally transformed it.

Sociologists have good reasons to believe that during the years of reforms the most qualitative new and quantitative widespread changes took place in three spheres of Russian society: social stratification, social inequalities, social ordinariness. Qualitative and quantitative characteristics, by means of which we could describe the depth of above changes, let us conclude that in fifteen years of reforms Russian society was formed as a new social reality. How does this new Russian social reality look like from the point of sociological view?

INTRODUCTION

In spring 2008 Russians became witnesses of «political eras change»: eight years of Vladimir Putin – former president of the Russian Federation – being in power came to the end. In contrast to many other historical epochs these years didn’t «shock» Russia, but totally transformed it.

On the eve of Vladimir Putin’s leaving presidential post his rating increased considerably. What achievements of president are really undeniable and wouldn’t be forgotten as soon as he’ll leave his post?

It looks like that Putin’s main and greatest achievement consists in overcoming – due to skilled and efficient intellectual approach and managerial talents – of national system crisis, the one dangerous because of its ability to strike all cells and spheres of society. Only seven or eight years spent in order to balance the situation are incredibly short historical pe-
period. No matter how we treat Putin, we should give him his due. Analyzing history of the country, we have to admit that the latter eight years could be compared perhaps only to first decade of Soviet power, when at the cost of vast and enormous common efforts we were able to overpass collapse, get over illiteracy as well as to solve a problem of homeless children – the one which we, to our shame, can’t solve today.

The second – according to its significance – achievement of «Putin’s era» consists in the fact that majority of Russian population passed on from unacceptable to minimally acceptable living standard.

The third «advantage» is achieving stability in the main spheres and fields of Russian society. The fourth one is, according to sociological data obtained during the last years, creation of necessary and essential macroeconomic, social, political and (this is especially important) macro-psychological preconditions of Russian society’s further development.

We have to define as well one more «element» of this very economic-social-political-psychological structure. Due to successful market opportunities and conditions as well as to the good conjuncture of prices for raw materials and other objective favorable factors at present time Russia possesses firm and safe basis of strength, the one which has not been estimated yet at its true worth. In case we focused our efforts on «human capital investments» and modernization of mass consciousness a little bit earlier and more seriously, we could draw from this favorable situation much more benefits (Добрынина 2008).

Step-by-step we began to understand that «social constituent» is extremely important and even determining part of all economical projects. In order reforms will meet with success, they should be supported and appreciated by a society. This doesn’t mean at all, that authority should devote itself to «populism». Even when a person lacks means of subsistence, he is guided by more complex than financial motives. And presently people give state a kind of preferential «credit of trust», which is not accidentally.

Some years ago answering a question: «Who are you?», our respondents tended to identify themselves mostly with representatives of either one or another nationality, citizens of some town or regional locality <…> During the last 2-3 years an answer «I am Russian!» won first place. Number of those choosing it became twice as much: it is not a simple growth, but boom of civil self-consciousness! And we see in it though modest but real preconditions for Russians consolidation, first step towards formation of civil nation.

We should regard it as a great merit of Vladimir Putin as well as his brilliant and striking diplomatic abilities. Let us be honest: in 1990th many our countrymen didn’t understand in what country they lived after USSR dissolution. Answering a question: «What is Russia?», respondents were not able to specify it. And now they can do it. Russia is considered to be a country with its own development goals, which it could express and defend without making advances to the West. Being a sociologist I would like to call it «rebirth of sovereignty», new surge of pride for the country.

Sociological surveys let us to conclude that growth of patriotic spirits could make up in many respects material deficiency. Such is a specificity of Russian self-consciousness: we are able to put up with many things, in case we have a reason to be proud of our country. I can give you one interesting historical example. In the middle of the XIX century Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov, who was a messmate, close friend of Pushkin and one of the most outstanding and prominent Russian Ministers for Foreign Affairs, drew up a report on new directions of Russian foreign policy which was addressed to Tsar Alexander II. This document stressed Russian government’s strive for dedication of «primary concern» to internal affairs, extending its activity beyond the bounds of the empire «only in case it will be useful in a positive way for Russia». And further on a really astonishing
phrase, which for some reason is practically forgotten today. «They said, Russia is angry, but it’s not the case. Russia is concentrating», - Gorchakov wrote. And contemporary «concentration», so typical for our country, bears a strong resemblance to that time. National self-consciousness is focused on pain points which are discussed and subjected to treatment. However Russia doesn’t only stop internal holes and gaps. It restored its international prestige. It has one of the biggest gold and exchange currency reserves in the world. It got clear of all debts and now – in contrast to recent times – is indebted to nobody. This growth of «national pride» is no less important than all economic results obtained during the last eight years.

FIGURE 1. «I-self-identification» of Russians (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Russians between 16 and 65 years old</th>
<th>Working people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian citizen</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local inhabitant</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative of a concrete profession</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative of a concrete nationality</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class’s representative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor man</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectuals’ representative</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet man</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee of a concrete company or enterprise</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Russia has extensive veto power over life of the mankind. The rest countries fully appreciate the fact: they have reasons to be afraid of our country, which is held in high international respect. However we can’t ignore their opinion as well. We live in a globalizing world and it’s impossible to enclose ourselves with an iron curtain. Moreover, we have to compete with others. To be among totalitarian regimes – «social outcasts» means a real disaster for Russia.

Let us however remember French philosophers-materialists who asserted that «interests govern the world». It remains valid until now. And in order to «see each person in the ranks», it is not necessarily to force him or her to be commissioned. A person should feel, that his or her private individual interest is contained within the frames of the interests of a whole society.

By the way, one modern tendency consists in shouting about typical for Russians indifference towards politics – indifference especially evident as against former times. In fact, I don’t see here any serious problem. Who ever told, that real political participation is better and more important than, for example, children upbringing, leisure time spending in an effort to continue education or recover health? We are in the power of former soviet-time conception of a «politically active» man. However actually the more people spend free time rationally, the more it contributes to national human capital development.

During our latest, conducted at the end of 2007, large-scale survey on Russian self-consciousness we managed to specify three groups of respondents with different Weltanschauung, singled out according to nine characteristics: «traditionalists» (adherents of collectivist psychology, considering social to be above individual), «modernists» (individualists, «Westerners», those who first of all thinks of themselves and then of a state) and intermediate group combining both principles of existence (Тихонова 2007).

FIGURE 2. Distribution of Russians by types of Weltanschauung, 2004/2007 years (%)

So, part of «traditionalists» has increased recently from 41 to 47 percent. Actually this type of Weltanschauung rehabilitates itself now and goes through a kind of Renascence. Part of «modernists» has decreased six percent (21 versus 27 percent). The rest are those
who votes today for the Reds, and tomorrow for the Whites, who strives for human rights and «strong hand» simultaneously, who dreams of rebirth of sovereignty against a background of smooth relations with the West.

The ratio is self-explanatory. Moreover, above tendency affected, though to a different extent, all age cohorts. Thus at present time we can’t find any of them in which modernists dominate over traditionalists.

**TABLE 1. Those loyal to modernist and traditionalist Weltanschauung among representatives of different age groups (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Weltanschauung</th>
<th>16-25</th>
<th>26-35</th>
<th>36-45</th>
<th>46-55</th>
<th>56-65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2007</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernists</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediates</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernists</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediates</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A good consensus exists among traditionalists and modernists as to only one question regarding role of the state in economy. Both traditionalists and modernists (more than 80 percent in sum) advocate a mixed model under which freedom of private business activities combines with state regulation and complete state control over power engineering, extractive industries, passenger transportation, public health service, food industry and so on. In fact the case in point is a system of «state capitalism», which we have already tried to create in the form of a New economic policy.

Strange as it may seem, in above case position of Russia in society for the first time turned out to be in disharmony with statements Vladimir Putin made during one of his meeting with population. «We are not going to build state capitalism», - said he. Nevertheless, it seems to me, that we shouldn’t understand everything told by high-ranking politicians literally.

Economists are sure that the most important things took place in Russia during the last 15 years relate to revolution in attitudes toward property. Sociologists have good reasons to believe that during the years of reforms the most qualitative new and quantitative widespread changes took place in three spheres of Russian society: social stratification, social inequalities, social ordinariness. Qualitative and quantitative characteristics, by means of which we could describe the depth of above changes, let us conclude that in fifteen years of reforms Russian society was formed as a new social reality.

Conclusion in question is readily apparent from the analysis of results obtained in the course of longstanding surveys organized by the Institute of Sociology (Russian Academy of Sciences), which, on the one hand, were conducted on representative all-Russian samples, and, on the other, were monitoring ones – the fact that allows to recognize clearly dynamics and scopes of social changes which have been held in Russian society. How does this new Russian social reality look like from the point of sociological view?
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Let us start with the results of social stratification analysis based on special index of living standard developed by research team of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences according to data available from three national-wide surveys: «The Rich and the Poor in Modern Russia», «Property in the Life of Russians: Myths and Realities» and «Social Inequalities in Sociological Dimensions».

Stupendous change took place: instead of typical for Soviet times «triple alliance» uniting working class, kolkhoz peasantry and «people’s intelligentsia», ten social stratum appeared, each of which has its own stable and solitary interests (those that «govern the world»).

So, presently Russian population could be divided into ten main social stratum with fundamentally different levels and qualities of life. And, we would like to stress it particularly: during the last three years modern Russian society stratification model underwent no changes according to living standards characteristics. Most likely, it is a good evidence that above model has been formed and become stable in general (Горюнова 2008).

TABLE 2. Social structure of Russian society (March 2008, %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strata 1 – 2 (below the poverty level)</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strata 3 – 4 (underprovided)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strata 5 – 8 (middle class)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strata 9 – 10 (rich people)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In March 2008 the first two lower strata of the model joined together 16 percent of Russians. It is just a part of Russian population, which – according to its real living standards – is under the poverty level. In order to understand situation, characterizing their everyday life, we have to notice, that two third of them estimates the possibility of basic needs’ (nutrition, clothing, so on) satisfaction as extremely negative one.

The third strata has intermediate character and unites 16 percent of Russian population, balancing on a verge of poverty. Its characteristic feature – as regards two lower strata – is not so much living standard (which is the same in many respects) as another essential fact: representatives of the strata in question have not fallen out of social life as such and lead the same – as more well-off Russians – mode of life.

The forth strata includes those of our nationals (27 percent) who could be identified as underprovided. Its living standards is «middle» and typical for a given region of residence simultaneously. Representatives of this strata specify and preset standard of consumption – the one that is taken by Russians as possibly acceptable living wage. And here we would like to stress one extremely negative tendency: the only significant change in size of above strata, occurring over the last three years, was connected with «sliding» of a part of its representatives into the third strata.

What does it mean? Obviously it is an apt illustration of the fact that a part of underprovided Russians exhausted its own resources necessary for self-dependent sustenance of minimally acceptable living standard.

The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth strata join no less than one third of Russians and represent the so called middle social groups. Being distinctly different among each other,
they however could be regarded as relatively well-off against an all-Russian background. The core of these strata is Russian middle class (20-22 percent of Russian population). While isolating it we use quite severe criteria:

1. level of education which is ought to be not lower than middle special one;
2. income level per family member which has to be not lower than middle median for a given region of residence;
3. not physical character of labor;
4. self-identification with the middle social stratum.

The ninth and tenth strata include about 5 percent of population, which, from the point of view of the majority of Russians, could be referred to as rich one (approximate personal monthly income USD$ 1500-2000 (in provinces) and USD$ 2500 (in Moscow and St. Petersburg)). According to classical international criteria, the case in point is rather higher level of middle class.

What are the results? In 2008 approximately 60 percent of Russian population are characterized by three parameters of living standard: below the poverty level, «at the poverty level», «being underprovided».

Let us especially take note of middle stratum’s position as it is in Russian society. The main conclusion is that 15 years of reforms brought Russia to the processes of mass middle class’ formation. However there are considerable differences as regards sizes of middle class’ representatives in different types of settlements. Thus, in towns with population up to 250 thousand of people it turns out to be only 2 percent higher than the same characteristic for villages and urban-type communities, coming to 13 percent of economically active population. As far as the towns with population from 250 thousand of people and higher is concerned, it is already 24 percent. And in millionth population cities size of middle class is equal to 28 percent (Тихонова 2006).

Another one third of adult urban population residing in all types of towns and cities forms periphery of middle class, representatives of which fall short of only one of the above criteria in order they could be attributed to middle class.

In modern Russia middle class is characterized not so much by lower – as compared to Western countries – living standards as by existence of considerable «periphery», part of which could enter (under certain conditions) it rapidly. Every second representative of middle class’ periphery is not able to do it because of low incomes. Taking into consideration that more than half of this group consists of employees occupied in budgetary fields and branches (education, science, public health service), situation in which could change dynamically – for example, in case of advance of wages or successful realization of national projects – above group could be rated as essential and considerable resource of middle class’ replenishment.

Middle class is a complex formation which has its own internal structure and differences in origin of some separate social strata entering it. Thus, the greatest (54 percent) part of middle class is formed by state sector’s employees, and 35 percent – by those employed at private enterprises.

Considering middle class in branch aspect, we could state that the greatest part of its representatives accounts for industry, transport and construction. A lot of them could be found among those employed in education, army, law machinery and trade spheres. At the same time there are few of them among those employed in science and scientific services, municipal and rural economy as well as in forestry (Данилова 2006).
There are essential distinctions between the «old» and «new» middle classes. The first one consists of petty and medium private owners, whereas the second – of employees, possessing developed skills of intellectual activity (mass intellectuals, white-collar office workers and officials of different levels).

Another interesting point is an educational structure of Russian urban middle class. Its representatives are the most educated part of population, and this fact determines theirs advantages at labor market under modern conditions. Conclusion in question could be attributed to the representatives of middle class’ periphery.

Among positive aspects of middle class’ professional activity we could find a number of peculiarities, determining its specificity as against the rest social groups – functionality and autonomy of its labor as well as greater stability of its socio-professional status. Moreover, in a structure of these workers or employees’ labor motivation factors, concerned with labor content, are dominated, because of the fact that for them their work is not only means of subsistence, but rather an instrument of self-realization. At the same time subsequent development of middle class depends on optimal functioning of labor market, its demands and requirements for highly skilled and qualified workers.

**TABLE 3. Work for me is, first of all, … (%*, unlimited number of responses)**

|                                          | Middle class | Periphery | Other mass strata |
|                                          |             |           |                  |
| An important part of my life, opportunity to show my worth and self-realize | 63          | 42        | 26               |
| A main source of livelihood              | 67          | 82        | 85               |
| An opportunity to communicate            | 33          | 33        | 29               |
| Means to meet with public approval and recognition | 21          | 19        | 9                |
| Unpleasant duty and necessity            | 3           | 6         | 11               |

From economical consciousness and behavior point of view, Russian middle class tends to expend spare cash in order to buy durable goods and currency, support relatives or bank. Frequently above listed opportunities are used simultaneously. These behavioral practices could be identified as traditional ones. They are not investment and are actually divided into two strategies: consumption (41 percent of middle class’ representatives) and saving (40 percent of them).

At the same time we observe qualitatively different strategy – active investment of funds into commercial banks in order to gain profitable and beneficial interests, buying of habitation in an investment efforts as well as less widespread purchasing of securities and credit of private persons. Above practices could be combined into investment strategy – the one, which 14 percent of middle class’ representative is adhering to.

Complex analysis of urban middle class’ economic consciousness and behavior let us to conclude, that under modern Russian conditions this strata is the very one, representatives of which possess such characteristics as rationality, striving for achievements and self-
realization. In other words, those characteristics that could be identified as modern productive values.

Comparative analysis demonstrates successive and logical growth of middle class representatives’ monthly personal incomes. For example, at the end of 2006 middle class families’ income per head was equal to USD $400 (middle class periphery – USD $300, other mass strata – USD $200). Earlier, in 2003, monthly personal income per head was equal (as regards middle class families) to USD $250.

FIGURE 3. In what ways do the representatives of different social strata command free finance? (%)

- Buy expensive durables
- Use bankbook
- Keep money in a commercial bank in order to draw high interests
- Buy securities (shares, bonds and so on)
- Invest in land, habitation, so on
- Buy currency
- Lend at interests
- Use in order to help relatives, friends and acquaintances
- Put away for a rainy day
- Spare cash is not enough for covering current expenses
- Spare cash is enough for covering current expenses, but is not enough for saving up

Legend:
- Well-off Russians
- Middle class
- Periphery
- Other mass social strata
Overwhelming (85 percent) majority of middle class families has such individual property as flat or cottage. As compared with 2003 provision of middle class’ representatives with flats and other types of habitation increased steeply – at that time part of private (personal) habitation’s owners made up approximately 70 percent. It is obvious that middle class’ representatives used the possibility to privatize habitation.

![FIGURE 4. Property of middle class families and other social groups (%)](image)

More than one third of middle class families are the owners of summer cottages, lawn-and-garden lots with cottages; one third of them has garages or private parking places at collective parking lots. 8 percent of them have second place of habitation (as regards other social strata this figure is essentially lower – only 3 percent).

At the same time only 25 percent of middle class’ representatives have private flat, car and summer cottage – traditional set, testifying worth-while level of material well-being – simultaneously. As for the middle class’ periphery is concerned this figure is equal to 18 percent (other mass social strata – 14 percent).
Majority of middle class’ representatives is politically indifferent and low-active.

However we should not dramatize this situation. First of all, because any modern society is liable to quite natural, organic pluralization of forms by means of which people realize their interests. The fact that these interests are not concentrated on politics alone is quite natural and well-taken. Secondly, today problem of mass political participation is not so actual as it was earlier. At present time politics doesn’t start where millions of people are present: because of modern mass media even small groups of activists could exert substantial influence on authorities as well as on public opinion.

Another important question which constantly arose recently and continues to arise today is a question of Russian society’s attitude towards the West and Western model of development. What is middle class position?

**TABLE 4. Are you interested in politics? (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the last year took personal part in political activity (such as functioning of political parties, political mass-meetings, demonstrations, strikes)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carefully keep up with the latest information and news on political events and developments in the country</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not keep up with the information on political events carefully, but sometimes discussed them with friends or relatives</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not interested in politics</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous surveys, conducted between 1980th and 1990th, demonstrated that orientation towards the West became the dominating one in social and intellectual life of our country.
However by the end of the XX century there was fundamental and radical crisis or turning point, affected mass consciousness as well as social practices – the one that was identified earlier as conservative revolution, the meaning of which was connected with returning to the so called «native» way of development and a kind of original «Russian» values’ rehabilitation. This tendency is actual even today: so, one third of Russian population supports Western way of development, whereas two third of it – distinctive and original one. This particular ratio is stable (at least) from the end of 1990th.

**FIGURE 5. Orientation towards Western or original way of Russia’s development manifested by the representatives of different social strata (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Strata</th>
<th>Support Western</th>
<th>Support Original</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mass social</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strata</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Russia should live and develop according to the same rules and regulations as modern western countries do
- Russia is a particular civilization, so western mode of life will never become established in it

Addressing ourselves towards European continent as it is perceived by Russians, we could come to very interesting and substantial conclusions. In all age groups Europe is perceived in a much more positive way than, let us suppose, America or Asia. As for middle class, it could be unambiguously identified as pro-European class. Here the level of positive reactions to word «Europe» (92 percent) is almost equal to the level of loyalty toward Russia itself (98 percent).

What is this Europe? It is quite interesting to compare emotional reactions of Russians to two, practically identical by implication, words «Europe» and «European Community» (EC). It was discovered that among the respondents, attributed to middle class, difference in the level of sympathy for Europe and EC comes to 20 percent in favor of Europe.

Conclusion is that Russia identifies itself as a part of European cultural and historical universe and gravitates towards it psychologically. At the same time this gravitation is especially evident in middle class. However being «the Europe as well», it is yet «another Europe». For example, relations between individual and state are treated in Russia differently than in the majority of other countries. In Russians opinion the state is not so much «night guard» and referee looking after law compliance as generator of life senses and sub-
ject of joint (collective) historical objects setting. This means that democracy is perceived by Russians in a slightly another way than it is perceived in Western Europe. More than half of respondents thinks that the state should present and defend national interests’ priority as compared to private or personal ones. Only 10 percent of respondents does not agree with this statement.

Being combined with Russian mentality’s specific features, on the one hand, and Russians attitudes towards Europe, on the other, this information contributes, perhaps, to the better understanding of a well-known fact: sympathizing sincerely with «the first Europe» and recognizing the necessity of taking into account and adopting its experience, Russian population is not disposed – in contrast to, for example, Poles or Estonians – towards implicit accepting of European dominating ideas and the so called «European standards».

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Russians are quite tolerant towards the majority of the so called «common», everyday social inequalities (such as, for example, inequalities in housing conditions, access to educational, medical services and leisure facilities). Much greater discontent is raised against excessive gap in distribution of property and incomes.

FIGURE 6. Social justice as Russians perceive it (% , being ranked by part of those taking corresponding inequalities as just )

Current system of income differentiation

Current system of property distribution

The fact that wealthy people have an access to high quality medical services

The fact that those with higher wages will have higher pensions

The fact that wealthy people can buy better real estate

The fact that wealthy people provide their children better education

The fact that someone has more money than others in case they had equal opportunities to earn them

[Diagram showing percentages of respondents who believe various inequalities are just or unjust]
The key factor determining Russians’ position as regard justice of either one or another inequality is not their personal, individual interests, but common notions of justice which are a kind of socio-cultural norm, typical for Russian society at modern stage of its development.

Idea of possible or acceptable gap between the incomes of managers and well-qualified specialists, on the one hand, and average incomes in the country, on the other, is *sue generis* core of this dominating in modern Russian socio-cultural environment norm. Russians think that this gap should be not more than 4-5 times. It’s noteworthy that those, adhering to this point of view, prevails in all income groups. Thus, for example, more than half of high-level managers believes that the gap between the incomes of above groups and average incomes as they are in the country taken as a whole should not exceed 5 times.

What does it mean? It means that Russians – regardless of their own incomes and socio-professional statuses – are enough close to each other in respect of their opinions on just and fair incomes gap as well as on justice of everyday social inequalities. The only group adherent to the principle of higher egalitarianism is pensioners. However working pensioners (younger and with higher level of education than that of non-working ones) turned out to be more tolerant as regard this issue.

It should be noted that basic and primary discontent of Russian population is connected not so much with some separate manifestations of social inequalities or low level of personal incomes. Remaining at micro-level, dissatisfaction of this type, does not, as a rule, gives rise to deep and aggressive protest. Under modern Russian conditions social dissatisfaction isolates itself in basic value and Weltanschauung positions of Russians and, as a result, turns into dissatisfaction with social-economical relations (including distribution of property and incomes) – the ones that was formed in the country during reforms years. At the same time protest proceeds from the individual to macro-level, transforming from the dissatisfaction with personal state and position into dissatisfaction with a new system of social relations taken as a whole.

Consequently, a problem of social inequalities’ legitimization, as well as overcoming Russians dissatisfaction with current situation in the country could be solved by means of not only increase of pensions or salaries to budgetary employees, but also by general modification of «rules of play». These changes should bring above rules together with those ideas about social justice which are basic to Russian national self-consciousness. At the same time, according to Russians’ notions, labor and its just and fair remuneration, but not closeness to authorities or ability to get something to oneself during privatization, are the legitimate basis of differences in material comforts and well-fare.

Does it mean that Russians are persistent private property’s adversaries? No, it does not. It’s enough to say, that 87 percent of them agree that the right to private property should be an inalienable right of any human being.

So, we have to do not with negative attitude of Russians towards private property as it is, but with such an attitude towards its illegal distribution in the society – situation under which all national wealth, created by many generations, and «god-given» natural resources became concentrated in hands of small group of large-scale owners.

Among the important reasons or sources of mass dissatisfaction is not only denial by Russians of current social inequalities’ model, but sharp inconsistency between peoples’ social and professional statuses and level of their social expectations. Thus, two third of working Russians are sure, that (taking into consideration the level of their qualification and real commitments and loads) they earn noticeably less than should earn. And only 18 percent think that their labor is estimated at its true worth.
Obviously, we should consider this as an evidence of the fact that – according to the level of dissatisfaction with social status – psychological condition of Russian society is mediated by Russians' reaction to social inequalities’ depth. Moreover, if earlier (in the middle or end of 1990th) this dissatisfaction was personified as regards the first President of Russia, now it has no particular «addressee» and therefore is more dangerous, because it is very difficult to predict how, when, where and in what forms above dissatisfaction becomes apparent. Society, in which two third of population feel themselves more or less as representatives of «low classes», is extremely unstable. This situation is fraught with not only social tenseness, but with possible social shocks, and simply couldn’t exist for a long time.

This is especially true for those representing poor strata of Russian society, which (in case we take in account stagnant poverty and needy people) comes to 40 percent of population. They are characterized by common features which are officially considered to be qualitative indications of poverty – such as lack of sufficient (according to standards of a concrete society) material potential, impossibility to renew eventually available property, limited structure of consumption including denial of a number of essential services (for example, partially paid medical services), lack of acceptable housing conditions, as well as hope and prospect to get out of difficulties and so on.

Thereupon we have to take into consideration that visible gap between living standards of the poor and well-to-do Russians is not the only gap. There is a serious differentiation within the social group of the poor depending on the level of their poverty. Bearing in mind sluggishness typical for instruments and mechanisms responsible for social problems solving, it looks like that – in spite of all tricks resorted by a system of state statistics – part of the poor population will rather increase than decrease in the nearest future as a consequence of final exhausting of their property potential (a kind of «safety margin»), social nets of support, progressive deterioration of their state of health, insufficiency of state social transfers (since the majority of needy people does not find themselves among recipients of the so called addressed social support), lack of opportunity (owing to specificities of their human capital as well as peculiarities of regional labor markets) to overcome crisis and so on.

Real estate is one of the most important sphere of manifestation of social inequalities as they are in everyday life of Russians. According to our data, approximately 60 percent of Russian population have neither real estate (besides housing habitation of, as a rule, poor quality in which they live), nor savings (at the same time every second of them incurs different debts). This implies that presently the majority of Russians lacks for economic resources, so inequality in their living standards is determined, for the most part, by specificities of their current incomes and expenses. This part of population differs from that consisting of more safe and successful nationals (35-40 percent of Russians): inequalities between them relate not only to current incomes, but also to available to them economic potential of different character and scope.

At the same time material well-being and Russian households provision with movable property (for the sake of which Russians fall to an increasing extent into dependence on consumer credits) not only varies significantly in different social strata, but also is very low in basic strata in which it is supported to a considerable extent by morally and physically obsolete property.

It turned out to be that social inequalities typical for modern Russian society couldn’t be reduced to income inequalities only, but manifest themselves in different quality of separate life aspects, socio-psychological state, state of health, available opportunities and adaptation strategies, improvement of social position, in perception of life as a whole.
Different types of residence and settlements, age discrimination, educational differences are the most important inequality factors. On the whole, dissatisfaction as regards quality of life and available opportunities tends to decrease in Russian society, though part of negative estimates remains too high and often dominates over that of positive ones.

In spite of some positive dynamics, traced in the ways by means of which Russians tend to estimate subjectively their lives, it is too early to speak about some qualitative changes. Quality of life of the majority of our nationals has not changed recently: they were not able to achieve anything significant.

**TABLE 5. What did Russians manage to achieve during the last year? (%)**

| Increase the level of material well-being | 15 |
| Better oneself or find new good job | 9 |
| Make expensive purchases | 9 |
| Improve level of education and / or qualification | 8 |
| Improve housing conditions | 7 |
| Improve the state of health | 4 |
| Visit other countries | 3 |
| Start own business | 1 |
| Couldn’t achieve anything from above | 61 |

Those who managed to do it was younger, with higher levels of education and material well-being, i.e. has deliberately better life prospects, than the rest. Situation with paid social services looked like the same.

**TABLE 6. Paid social services used by Russians during the last year (%)**

| Medical services | 31 |
| Educational institutions or services for children | 11 |
| Educational services for adults | 10 |
| Health-improving and sanitary services for adults | 5 |
| Health-improving and sanitary services for children | 4 |
| Tourist or educational travels abroad | 4 |
| House building or purchase | 4 |
| Didn’t use anything from above | 54 |

So, we observe an obvious tendency towards further increase in inequality, since quality of life improves mostly for those already well-off. It means intensification – or, at least, conservation – of existing inequalities.
For the sake of justice we ought to mention objective reasons of above inequalities as well as of impossibility to improve state of unfortunate strata, such as low level of education, lack of skills, necessary for advantageous employment at labor market (computer skills, knowledge of foreign languages). Therefore, state social policy, focused on tempering inequalities as they are in modern Russian society, should be pointed to developing opportunities in the sphere of human capital building-up (Добрынина 2005).

In most cases Russians tend to appreciate education deeply. However existing social inequalities call for special attention to the fact, that the majority of them is absolutely sure that in modern Russia their intellectual efforts and qualifications are underestimated. Such a situation makes expenses, putting up in human capital accumulation, unconvincing. As a result, only small part of our nationals is drawn into a process of investing into human capital. Thus, only every tenth Russian invests spare cash into education!

Taking into consideration the role of human capital in processes of social differentiation’s conservation, such limited investments contribute to further intensification of social inequality. We have to mention as well that during the last year only 10 percent of respondents were able to use paid educational services for adults (such as colleges, over-qualification courses, private lessons). Virtually the same (11 percent) part of them paid at their own expenses for their children education (hobby groups, musical schools, private lessons and schools and so on). As a rule, those investing in «themselves» and those paying for their children education were one and the same.

We have to conclude that young people with lower level of education residing in settlements with low level of urbanization have less opportunities to receive a good education. They are quite pessimistic estimating their possibility to receive necessary knowledge in the future as well. As a result, social inequalities in accessing to valuable education predetermine for this part of youth further insufficiency of its human capital as well as its future noncompetitiveness as against representatives of more well-off social groups.

In many respects education is taken in modern Russia as a terminal value but not as an effective resource able to secure interesting and skilled work, to increase level of material well-being and quality of life.

Such a situation could not be regarded as an accidental one because of the objective obstacles on a path leading to human capital formation and accumulation, such as territorial remoteness from large cultural and educational centers, low level of material well-being, lack of computers and computer skills and so on. Initial human capital expressed by educational level of parents and – especially – by educational level of a respondent plays even more significant and important role. The lower are these «input data», the more difficult will be for a person to mobilize available resources in order to enter in a purposeful and reasonable way into a continuous process of his or her human capital formation, extension and improvement.

All this is especially true for young Russians who enter life under the conditions of formation of a new type of a society – informational one in which education, knowledge and skills are the basic resources securing professional and social well-being. Under these conditions educational inequalities, being a consequence of other types of social inequalities, are at the same time a factor determining inequality in future human capital accumulation. As a result, groups of young people who initially – by virtue of some unfortunate social circumstances – turned out to be cut off from the access to valuable education and opportunities of its further improvement, would find themselves in the future displaced to the periphery of social development. That is why social policy of the state should be oriented towards overcoming of the most pointed manifestations of the above inequality.
It turned out to be that social inequalities have an effect on traditional practices of mutual support and quality of existent social relations which were and are an important additional survival resource. On the one hand, stable material well-being promotes conservation and development of social networks (whereas the latter help to support some certain level of material well-being). On the other hand, in respect of the two above mentioned lower strata it’s possible to speak about not only poverty, but social exclusion: they tend to find themselves out of a mainstream, couldn’t keep up traditional for the Russian society mode of life, i.e. perform as the active participants of the most significant social practices of traditional interchanges. They either lack for social capital, or it is manifestly insufficient.

Interpreting above data, we can conclude that everyday difficulties and misfortunes are fraught with the threat of isolation from the other people: in this case we observe a very uneasy and troubled tendency going against ideas that Russians will certainly cope with any problem owing to historical traditions of mutual aid especially typical for the provinces.

Moreover, in more successful regions of Russia social networks functioning tends to shift towards provision of more complex and economically important forms of support and help, namely such as relations and protection. For example, in Moscow and St. Petersburg 36 percent of population enjoy this type of support, whereas on average – in the country taken as a whole – it is used by 27 percent of Russian citizens. At the same time in other regions prevail more simple forms and types of exchanges, including exchange of services. The smaller is a settlement, the less are the possibilities of its population to improve their material well-being at the expense of social capital not only because of lack or absence of the latter, but also because of limited possibilities to transform existent social relations into significant economic dividends.

Resource of social networks is very important for formation and reproduction of social inequalities. However the majority of them are informal which is a good evidence of distrust shared by a significant part of our nationals towards formal institutions.

In spite of the fact that informal social networks play important role in a processes of Russians survival, approximately 20 percent of Russian population are fully deprived of any social capital and don’t enjoy even simple psychological support from the nearest neighborhood.

Another very dangerous tendency is that of gradual, step-by-step exclusion of needy (and especially poor) people from the most significant types of multifunctional interchanges of social capital as well as functioning of social networks for the sake of the most unsophisticated types of support in case the matter concerns the most underprovided people. That is why we share opinion of those experts, scientists and politicians who is sure that the main task of social policy should be not only support of the poorest strata but smoothing of highly varied and differentiated social chances and prospects of different social groups of modern Russia.

SOCIAL ORDINARINESS

Surveys, conducted by the Institute of Sociology (Russian Academy of Sciences) in 2005 - 2006, demonstrated increase in Russians’ dissatisfaction with everyday situation in social sphere. For the first (having in mind years of reforms) time this dissatisfaction increases in spite of relatively favorable economic situation in the country as well as rise (though not very significant) in population’s active incomes. Most likely it is an evidence of the fact that considerable part of Russians is not satisfied with existent social-economical model – the one, that presupposes stability without any development and economic growth which does not improve quality of life of the majority of nationals.
What do Russians think about changes, took place in the period from 2002 to 2007, in different spheres of Russian society? Estimating situation by fourteen parameters, respondents saw positive changes only with respect to the level of unemployment, possibility to earn money, family support and provision of pensions. The other spheres were estimated by them as the ones in which there were no any changes at all, or the ones in which situation became worse. Negative estimations dominated and substantially exceeded positive ones as regards such important problems as poverty, social justice, situation with infant schools and higher education, public health service, housing, ecology and private security.

We have to pay special attention to two interrelated positions, which are treated by Russian respondents absolutely different – «possibility to earn money» and «living standards of population». Virtually every second Russian (43.4 percent) agrees with the statement, that the latest years contributed to the development of possibilities to earn good money. However only 20 percent of them pointed to the fact that living standards of Russian population improved.

It is reasonable that possibilities to earn money are more actively called for by young capable part of Russian society. First of all, the matter concerns respondents younger than 30 years old as well as well-to-do Russians. Part of those estimating possibilities to earn money as good ones is equal among the representatives of youth groups to approximately 60 percent (70 percent in case the point is well-off respondents).

At first sight, situation looks like paradoxical: possibilities to earn money increase, however, living standards of Russians (as they are self-appraised by them) does not improve.

Above paradox was caused and determined, first of all, by new perception of social reality, typical for Russians. In the middle and especially at the end of 1990th the majority of population understood distinctly, that the country was in a situation of deep crisis, and therefore did not expect seriously any positive changes. However the latest five or six years changed situation a lot: it became fundamentally different. Now there is a firm and steady feeling in the society, that the country’s way out of crisis is not far off: Russians need only to have a little patience and it will be possible to expect, that economic growth will convert into their life’s improvement. As a result, social expectations developed so much, that actual level of material and social well-being ceased to meet society’s new demands and requirements in the sphere of living standards and qualities.

Even more so, the latest years contributed to rapid formation of «middle strata» - groups of population for whom «strategy of survival» is not yet extra-actual problem. These quite large in number groups form demand for qualitative social services which, according to our surveys data, could not be met by means of existent social infrastructure. The majority of these services is (as it was previously) low-grade or inaccessible for the reason of their expensiveness.

On this point it should be noted that a problem of social justice becomes critical for not only underprivileged, but for quite successful people – the ones, that work hard, have good (according to Russian standards) earnings and could expect that their social demands will be met or satisfied. That is why Russians tend to characterize situation in the field of social justice principle’s realization as highly negative one. The only situation which is estimated as a worse one is a situation with housing. All social groups – except for highly profitable one – note, that Russian society became less just in a social sense of the word, warning authority, that all reforms and, first of all, social ones should be aimed at securing of common good principle, equal possibilities. At the same time «elitization» of access to qualitative social services should be limited.

As a whole we should conclude: results of our surveys testify, that in the social sphere we have a substantial and evident gap between public expectations and actual ordinariness.
The question arises as to whether society is ready to bear with such state of affairs and how much? Surveys, conducted by the Institute of Sociology (Russian Academy of Sciences), demonstrate, that at present time dissatisfaction of many Russians could be characterized as addressless one. Russian society is the one, in which stable opinion was formed, that public and political participation is of little use and the best living strategy is organization in one’s own immediate environment of social and economical niches, in which people feel themselves more or less comfortable.

In other words, at present time the majority of Russians obviously depends on themselves or on immediate relations and networks – family, friends, fellow workers and so on. Whereas existent relations between the state and the society develop according to the principle «live us alone, and we will not disturb you».

However, it will be incorrectly to contend, that conformism and indifference are total in their character. Against a background of political activity’s decrease we observe in Russian society not very remarkable, but, at the same time, enough intensive processes of collective integration, self-defense and self-organization proceeding in the framework of local communities. While delegating administrative and political functions to authorities and government body, a lot of Russians demonstrate relatively high level of inclusion into a process of solving one or another problems, with which they meet in their immediate environment, as well as (and even to a greater extent) willingness and readiness for such inclusion in the future. For example, today the so called movements of a «single claim» are prevailing – movements of motorists, defrauded shareholders – participators of housing pyramids and so on – the ones, that, from the one hand, are spontaneous and, from the other, well organized and very effective.

The main point is that such movements allow to solve concrete and specific social and material problems, stimulate people to communicate with each other and (which is very important!) create within the frameworks of local communities necessary prerequisites for group identity formation. This tendency looks like very prospective in respect to broader social and public institutions.

In fact, real democracy is, except all the rest, such an organization of public life which allows every individual choose its own living strategies according to its own ideas of «what is good and what is bad», what is important for him or her – politics, family, work, creative work, leisure and so on. The greater the choice of these possibilities will be in the society, the bigger will be social space for freedom, democracy and self-development.

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Весной 2008 года россияне стали свидетелями «смены политических эпох», связанной с завершением восьмилетнего пребывания на посту президента РФ Владимира Путина. В отличие от многих других исторических эпох эти годы не «потрясли», но преобразили Россию, сумевшую преодолеть системный кризис; достичь стабильности в основных сферах жизнедеятельности общества; создать необходимые макроэкономические, социальные, политические и макропсихологические предпосылки его дальнейшего развития.

Социологи полагают, что все качественно новое и распространенное по своим количественным показателям произошло за годы реформ в трех сферах российского общества – системах социальной стратификации, социальных неравенств и социальной повседневности. Можно утверждать, что годы эти российское общество сложилось как новая социальная реальность. Какова эта реальность в социологическом измерении?

Вместо типичного для советской эпохи «тройственного союза» рабочего класса, колхозного крестьянства и «народной интеллигенции», в России сложились как минимум 10 социальных слоев, уровень и качество жизни которых принципиально различны. Основное недовольство россиян связывается сегодня не с отдельными проявлениями социальных неравенств или низким уровнем личных доходов, но замыкается на их базовые ценностно-мировоззренческие позиции, приобретая характер недовольства сложившимися в стране за годы реформ социально-экономическими отношениями. При этом протест с индивидуального переходит на макроуровень, превращаясь из недовольства собственным положением в недовольство новой системой общественных отношений в целом. Результаты исследований фиксируют и рост недовольства россиян повседневной ситуацией в социальной сфере. Впервые за годы реформ рост этот наблюдается на фоне сравнительно благоприятной экономической обстановки в стране и повышения реальных доходов населения. Очевидно, это говорит о том, что значительную часть общества не устраивает более социально-экономическая модель, предполагающая стабильность без развития и улучшения качества жизни большинства граждан.

РЕЗЮМЕ

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