Abstract. The two recent cycles of mass political mobilization and anti-system protests in Russia – during the period of perestroika (1989-1991) and during the “winter of discontent” (2011-2012) bear similar slogans of democratization of country’s political regime. However, the intergenerational differences between these two cycles are striking. The democratic movement of the perestroika was led by the representatives of generation of “sixtiers” (shestidesyatniki), who were very mature in the time of their political ascendance, and who left political scene soon after achieving their goal of destruction of the Soviet system. The protest wave of the 2010s brought to the streets young post-Soviet generation, who grew up and became adult after the Soviet collapse, and whose direction of future political evolution is unclear as of yet. By contrast, most representatives of generation of “seventiers” (semidesyatniki) played rather negligible role in democratization during the period of perestroika but began to dominate Russia’s political scene in the early twenty-first century. The article concentrated on the impact of inter-generational tensions in political developments in present-day Russia and discussed the impact of generational changes on political trajectory of the country.

The wave of post-election protests which swept Russia since December 2011 and culminated in a number of mass rallies and manifestations in Moscow, St.Petersburg and some other cities, got a broad coverage among observers of Russian politics and society (see Gel’man, 2013; Robertson, 2013; Greene, 2014). No wonder that in analyses of causes and effects of these protests some parallels were drawn with regard to several comparative referents, ranging from experience of neighboring post-Soviet “color revolutions” (especially, Ukrainian Euro-Maidan of 2013-2014) to more geographically and politically distant Arab Spring and even Occupy movement. While the

---

1 Professor, European University at St.Petersburg, and Finland Distinguished Professor, University of Helsinki. The article is a part of “Choices of Russian Modernization”, a collective research project, funded by the Academy of Finland.
scholarly potential of cross-national comparisons of anti-regime mobilization in authoritarian regimes is certainly high and worth further elaboration, the cross-temporal within-nation comparison of Russian protests of 2011-2012 protests remained a relatively neglected item of the research agenda. Meanwhile, many striking similarities between mass protests on Bolotnaya Square and Sakharova Avenue in 2011-2012 and the preceding “protest cycle” (Tarrow, 1994) of rallies and manifestations on Manezhnaya Square and Luzhniki in 1989-1991 (Urban, 1997) are noteworthy. Indeed, participants of both protest cycles bear similar slogans of democratization, which are focused on fair elections, political and civil rights, media freedom, and the rule of law. Even though targets of anti-regime protests, mechanisms of mobilization, and the very repertoire of collective actions (Tilly, 1978) were rather different in both cases, it would be not an exaggeration to consider both protest cycles as various stages of the continuing struggle of Russians for political democracy against (different) non-democratic regimes. Yet the protest cycle of 1989-1991 greatly contributed to an overthrow of Communist rule and to the end of the Soviet system (Fish, 1995; Urban, 1997; Hough, 1997) but in the end not resulted in establishing democracy, while the protests of 2011-2012 heavily lost (Gel’man, 2013; Smyth and Soboleva, 2014a) but they can be perceived just as an episode in the continuing battle against authoritarian regime in Russia (Gel’man, 2015), and the outcome of this struggle is not predetermined as of yet.

However, if one will switch the focus from macro-level of anti-authoritarian mobilization under the slogans of regime changes to micro-level of protest participation in terms of activism and leadership, which certainly affected the whole protest industry (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994), then the major differences between two protest cycles will be even more striking than the similarities. The protests of 1989-1991 as a part of pro-democratic movement during the period of perestroika to a major degree were led, organized, and populated by the representatives of generation of “sixtiers” (shestidesyatniki), who were mature enough in the time of their political ascendance, and who left political scene soon after achieving their goal of destruction of the Soviet system (for some evidence, see Fish, 1995; Lukin, 2000). The protests of 2011-2012 brought to the streets mostly representatives of the young post-Soviet generation, who grew up and became adult after the Soviet collapse (for evidence, see Volkov, 2012, Smyth and Soboleva, 2014a), and whose political future is unclear as of yet. By contrast, most representatives of generation of “seventiers” (semidesyatniki), who were relatively young by the period of perestroika, played rather negligible role in pro-democratic movement at that time and (with some exceptions) were not in the vanguard of the protest cycle of 1989-1991. But representatives of this generation began to dominate Russia’s political scene by the early twenty-first century and intend to rule the country at least for a
foreseeable future. This is why the dynamics of two protest cycles in Russia could be analyzed not only through the lenses of regime changes over a quarter century but also through the lenses of generational changes within the same time period.

Perhaps ever since the time of Ivan Turgenev’s famous novel “Fathers and Sons”, first published in 1862, at the height of Emperor Alexander II’s reforms, tensions and contradictions between different generations in Russia has been at the center of attention of various observers. An analysis of the problems of political changes through the prism of and generational changes is important not only in rethinking more distant history and the recent past of Russian politics and society but also for an understanding of the logic of processes that determine current tendencies in Russia and its political future. This article is aimed to contribute to the discussion on the role of various generations in late-Soviet and post-Soviet political changes with consecutive reassessment of the impact of “fathers” (or “sixtiers”) (Alexeyeva and Goldberg, 1993; Zubok, 2009), of “sons” (or “seventiers”) (Yurchak, 2005; Travin, 2011) and of “grandsons” (or post-Soviet generation) (Mickiewicz, 2014). It extend the argument elaborated previously (Gel’man, Travin, and Marganiya, 2014) and offer some conclusions and tentative implications about connections between political changes and generational changes in Russia and beyond.

From Generation to Generation: Wine, Vinegar, and Cocktail

For the purposes of further analysis, I will depart from a standard functionalist sociological perspective, which link the phenomenon of generations with specific age cohorts (Eisenstadt, 1956) and associate their formation with the processes of socialization and adolescence. In this regard, the boundaries of age cohorts are not as important as the sharing of both the political context and the collective experience of the generations, which significantly influence the formation and evolution of their “mental models” (Denzau and North, 1994), or the worldviews of representatives of various generations, and their subsequent effects on participation (or non-participation) in political actions. This approach (Manheim, 1952) recently became more conventional for analysis of late-Soviet society (Yurchak, 2005; Zubok, 2009) and applicable to post-Soviet period as well (Gel’man, Travin, and Marganiya, 2014). Also, my analysis does not concern generations as a whole, but rather focuses on the representatives of the political class – not only of elites, who affects meaningful political and policy decisions, but also of auxiliary actors: activists, professionals, experts, journalists, and the like. Since the major changes in late-Soviet and post-Soviet society were mainly initiated and implemented “top-down” – as the product of the actions of the elite rather than
the masses, with all the advantages and shortcomings, the focus on this tiny but very important segment of the generations looks relevant for the purposes of this article.

Based upon this angle of view, I consider three major generations, which played decisive roles in political changes of 1989-2012 in Russia. First, “sixtiers”, whose political views formed and whose professional and public careers were launched in the period between the twentieth congress of the Communist Party in 1956 and the suppression of the “Prague Spring” in 1968: these landmarks served as crucial points of their trajectories. Second, “seventiers”, who had grown up and begun their active professional work in the period between the Prague Spring of 1968 and the beginning of perestroika (the period of “stagnation”), and who experienced the Soviet collapse and subsequent developments as the major turning point in their professional careers and public roles. Third, representatives of post-Soviet generation (no name given to it as of yet), who became adolescent during the post-Soviet period, at the time of both turbulent period of the 1990s and unprecedented economic growth of the 2000s, and for whom the public discontent of 2011-2012 most probably was the first (but maybe not the last) major experience of large-scale participation in contentious politics.

I would argue that the collective experience of each of the generations affected their worldviews in various ways and to a major degree contributed to modes of their political actions before, after, and during critical junctures of 1989-1991 and 2011-2012.

In the historical novel “The Death of Vazir-Mukhat”, which focused on Russia in the late 1820s, Yury Tynyanov made a major distinction between different generations: the “people of wine”, who flourished in the atmosphere of the great expectations after the Patriotic War of 1812, and the “people of vinegar”, who made their careers shortly after the suppression of the Decembrists’ uprising in 1825 (Tynyanov, 1985: 7-8). According to him, the change in political climate in Russia after 1825 not only dealt an irrecoverable blow to the “people of wine” generation, but also set back progress of the country by three decades, until the time of the “people of vinegar” came to an end. The dichotomy proposed by Tynyanov to some extent is also relevant for the sixtiers and seventiers, each of whom ultimately got the chance to put their own ideas into reality. In a similar way, the critical junctures of dividing lines between the late-Soviet and post-Soviet generations in second half of the twentieth century were the suppression of the “Prague Spring” in in 1968, which put the end for positive changes of political climate in the country, and the collapse of the Communist regime and of the Soviet Union in 1991. The former critical juncture put the end to the “Thaw”: a liberalization of the Soviet political system launched under Khrushchev, interrupted the ascendance of the best and brightest sixtiers – the “people of wine” – who were intended to reform it, and contributed to their “long decline” (Zubok, 2009, Chapter 9), which is continued till the period of
perestroika. The latter critical juncture not only marked the end of previous political and economic system, but also put a final end to the hopes (or illusions) of the sixtiers, who soon lost the top positions in the country. At the same time, the Soviet collapse gave to seventiers – the “people of vinegar”, who had very limited aspirations before perestroika – the chance to build a new Russia on the Soviet ruins and to dominate the public scene for the next two decades and more.

Although considering 2011-2012 protests as a new critical juncture in Russian politics would be a wild exaggeration, no doubt that these events brought to the front stage of public arena a whole bunch of representatives of new post-Soviet generation, ranging from an anti-corruption activist and blogger Alexey Navalny to a TV celebrity Xeniya Sobchak. It will be premature to discuss their worldviews and modes of political actions despite the fact that some studies underlined certain differences of this generation vis-à-vis their predecessors (Zimmerman et al., 2013; Mickiewicz, 2014). However, one might argue that the political profile of post-Soviet generation is far from monotonic: its representatives received mixed signals of many simultaneous changes both within and outside the country, experienced rapid globalization and technological changes, learned from doing various things, and faced with numerous new opportunities and new (and old) constrains. This is why in spite of Tynyanov’s liquidity metaphor the cocktail might be an appropriate parallel for this generation. But while the top positions in politics, governance, and business in Russia are still merely held by the representatives of seventiers (including Vladimir Putin and his inner circle), there is no doubt that intergenerational tensions will be likely to increase over time. These tensions are not only related to the bitter struggle for the top positions but also to the different frame of references: for seventiers, the Soviet Union as a part of personal experience is considered as a role model in positive and/or in negative sense, while for their “sons” (or “grandsons” of sixtiers) this is more or less a matter of either glorious or inglorious past. Thus, the expectations of the ageing seventiers became more and more retrospective and backward-looking facing the challenge of rising post-Soviet generation, more prospective and forward-looking. Whether or not inter-generational tensions will be resolved in a peaceful way in the foreseeable future is remain to be seen, but we will certainly observe the new wave of generational changes in Russia, which will again – for good or for bad – change country’s political landscape.

Sixtiers: The Last True Believers

The Khrushchev’s Thaw, which coincided with the rise of generation of sixtiers, was the time of great expectations at least in three important respects. First, the political liberalization against the
background of economic growth brought them the major hopes on reforming the Soviet political and economic system. Second, ideas of building of “socialism with human face”, which were resonated not only with the slogans of the Prague spring but also with the revival of the global left in the 1960s, strengthened their believes in “true Leninism” as a positive alternative to Stalinism. Third, rapid technological progress of this period contributed to illusions of achieving of the bright future in the foreseeable future. These great expectations fueled the rise of social activism and numerous innovations on various fronts with intentions to improve the system rather than to ruin it (Alexeyeva and Goldberg, 1993; Barkabadze, 2007; Zubok, 2009). The abrupt end of Thaw and following conservative turn in Soviet politics, which soon degenerated into almost two decades of decay and stagnation, had a devastative effect on the generation of sixtiers. The rising Soviet reformers faced with the increasing need of conformism and adjustment to preservation of the status-quo, their proposed solutions for improvement of Soviet economy and society remained unclaimed, and the time horizon for a new round of changes became seemingly endless. Yet, among the sixtiers there were many courageous people who opposed the Soviet system either by openly criticizing the regime, or by still looking for the chances to improve the country without breaking with the Communism. But due to many constrains only a limited number of brave and courageous dissidents preferred “voice” (Hirschman, 1970) against the regime, while for most of intellectual and professionals took the forced “exit” in various forms (ranging from emigration to alcoholism) was the only available option.

The long 1970s was the nearly lost time for sixtiers not only in terms of inaction but also in terms of freezing of their ideas: the life experience in the Soviet Union did not broaden knowledge and transform the worldviews that had emerged during the period of Thaw, but rather conserved them. Against the background of stagnation, intellectuals did not receive new incentives for analysis and had almost no opportunities for open and prospective discussions. Not only all acute polemics were aimed at the past, but also any open debates, with the exception of “kitchen talks”, were adapted to Soviet ideological censorship and conducted in “Aesopian language” to avoid punishment for disloyalty to the authorities, or for deviation from the only true dogmas. The quality of discussion in such conditions could not be very high. Moreover, the evolution of the sixtiers was hindered by the lack of opportunity for turning words into deeds. Intellectual discussions held till the period of perestroika had practically no relation to policy changes. Accordingly, the formulation of ideas, the elaboration of views, and finally the publication of a text, often written in Aesopian language, turned into a goal in itself. The dissemination of ideas was more important than putting them into action: the sixtiers probably did not think seriously about becoming true reformers, as the time of changes
seemed incredibly distant to them. So the sixtiers could not be interested in how the ideas they expressed would work in practice: they probably did not give much thought to how to achieve their goals. This was true for both among regime loyalists and some of the dissidents: with some notable exceptions (see Amalrik, 1970), alternative visions of problems and prospects of the Soviet society were in shortage.

In light of this ideational legacy, with the beginning of perestroika the Soviet Union seemed to return suddenly to the era of the Khrushchev Thaw for a while. Under Gorbachev, a number of reform-minded sixtiers occupied certain key positions in power apparatus, dominated journalism, and discussed key concepts for the development of Soviet society. They became major public figures: most popular pundits and media observers belonged to this generation – writers, scholars and essayists who regularly expressed themselves on the issues of the past, present and future of the country. In a sense, perestroika was a last “Hurrah!” of ageing sixties, many of whom by that time were above fifty years old, and they rightly considered this opportunity as the last chance for the Soviet Union and also for themselves. It wasn’t the fault of the sixtiers, but rather their ill fortune, that in terms of their knowledge and worldviews they proved to be insufficiently prepared to make use of the new opportunities for change provided by perestroika. At that time it became quite clear that many representatives of this generation almost entirely lacked a positive agenda. It was true in case of Gorbachev and his intellectual advisors but it was also true for leading intellectual figures of the emerging pro-democratic irrespectively to their views. The title of a documentary made in 1989 by the popular film director Stanislav Govorukhin summarizes the argumentation many of sixtiers: Tak Zhit’ Nel’zya ("We Can’t Live Like This"). In other words, many sixtiers justly criticized the Soviet system, but it was completely unclear how to move out of this state of crisis and how to reach the ideals they envisaged. The numerous proposals made by the leading sixtiers during the period of perestroika often proved rather naïve, or somewhat wishful thinking, with little chance of being implemented in practice.

The lack of positive agenda contributed to inconsistency of major changes launched during the period of perestroika. In terms of economic reforms, the sixtiers began from experiments with workers’ self-government (which was employed in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and failed later on) and legalization of private business (co-operatives) but not tried to liberalize consumer prices or initiate large-scale privatization. Instead of that, partial and ill-considered reforms contributed to the rise of inflation, increasing shortage of goods, and, in the end, the major recession which begun in 1990 (Gel’man, Travin, and Marganiya, 2014, Chapter 3). In terms of state- and nation-building, the sixtiers sluggishly reacted to the rise of nationalism and ethnic conflicts or took one-sided partisan
views but failed to propose viable solutions to multiple troubles of the fading Soviet empire. Although these faults were merely resulted from poorly prepared and spontaneous moves by Gorbachev and its allies but one must confess that pro-reformist opposition intellectuals were no better prepared to changes: they often spent almost all the time in endless discussions aimed to blame the Communist past rather than to offer reasonable solutions for the future (Fish, 1995; Lukin, 2000).

Yet, the sixtiers played a crucial role of the destruction of the Soviet system but they not much benefited from this outcome themselves: rather, the nearly simultaneous end of the Communist regime and of the Soviet state resulted in mutual annihilation of both competing political camps of the period of perestroika – pro-reformers and conservatives. In fact, the sixtiers after 1991 soon lost their battle for leadership in politics, government, and especially in business to the seventiers, and gradually left the public arena in the wake of “roaring” 1990s. This shift only partly related to the natural ageing of the sixtiers. More importantly, the change of the country’s agenda required new leaders from the new generation: those who primarily focused on deeds rather words.

Seventiers: Politics without Illusions

To some extent, the rise of seventiers in the wake of Soviet collapse marked by the appearance of Yegor Gaidar and his team in the vanguard of economic reforms (Kokh and Aven, 2013) was caused by the outcome of political struggle and personal rivalry between Gorbachev and Yeltsin: Yeltsin did not trust the former members of Gorbachev’s team, including his critics, and was not inclined to rely on the experience and ideas of the sixtiers without urgent need. But to a great degree, the shift in policy leadership in Russia after 1991 was a side effect of the inevitable process of generation changes. The seventiers in many ways looked at things differently than the sixtiers. They were much more capable of not just arguing about big ideas, but achieving at least a small practical result. The approaches and values of the “sons” proved to be rather far removed from the worldviews of their “fathers” (see Travin, 2011).

The seventiers grew up in rather different conditions than the sixtiers. If in the Thaw era, it seemed to young people that the positive changes toward a bright future was possible in the short-term perspective, in the 1970s such hopes no longer existed, and so the rising generation of this time had to learn to live “here and now” and to adapt to the existing political, social, and economic environment without any of those earlier dreams. Instead of thinking about a collective bright future, each person had to formulate their own individual dream, i.e. a personal goal, and then try to achieve
it within the framework of the Soviet system. These living conditions helped to develop pragmatism, and in many cases also cynicism, among seventiers. It was only possible to achieve one’s goal if one silently agreed with the Soviet “rules of the game.” Yet there were also marginal nonconformist figures among the seventiers who tried to retain individual freedom and avoid following Communist rituals, and formed an alternative sub-culture (see Yurchak, 2005). However, these exceptions do not reflect the nature of the major changes in the 1970s. The mainstream of young people adapted to the conditions set by the political regime, not wishing to eke out an impoverished living without means of feeding their families.

The pragmatism of the seventiers could take different forms: from cynical acceptance of the political status quo for the sake of a successful career and a high salary, to the aspiration to become a well-qualified specialist in a certain field. Their indifference to Communist ideology did not mean their complete insensitivity to any ideas by any means. They simply perceived these ideas through the prism of pragmatic interests, i.e. not as goals for the society, but as a means to achieving individual desires. The seventiers supported ideas of market reform as a way of overcoming the inefficiency of the Soviet economy and of raising living standards. But they saw the ideas of democracy which came to the fore in the late 1980s in a rather ambivalent way. While they unequivocally approved of political liberalization as a way to eliminate the most awkward Soviet restrictions (limited access to information, bans on foreign travel etc.), but democracy as a model of elite competition and political representation met a mixed reaction at best. They perceived long and often fruitless discussions on political issues as useless “chattering”, particularly against the background of a worsening crisis of the previous system.

If reforms had not begun in the Soviet Union when Gorbachev came to power, the best and brightest seventiers would perhaps have remained unclaimed. But perestroika created better conditions to make use of their pragmatism and professionalism than to use the qualities that distinguished the sixtiers. No wonder that most of the seventiers (with some exceptions) were not so much visible in political movements of the perestroika (Fish, 1995; Urban, 1997). But many of representatives of this generation choose the way of launching their private businesses in a very turbulent environment of economic and political changes. Despite failures and misfortunes, the most successful representatives of this generation reached the top of entrepreneurial careers and formed the core of Russia’s business elites by the turn of centuries (for some vivid descriptions, see Freeland, 2000; Hoffman, 2002). And some others, who went to the career in government, were most directly involved in reforming the Soviet political and economic system.
Unlike their predecessors, the seventiers had no illusions about the socialism, equating it with the shortage of goods and hopeless egalitarianism. Rather, from the beginning they focused on ideas of a liberal market economy with private property yet considered democracy as just one of possible (but not necessarily) means to achieve this goal. They had their own views on how these changes should be implemented, and what sort of economy should be built as a result of the transformation of the Soviet system. However, and this also distinguished them from the sixtiers, they were prepared to adapt easily to changing circumstances, and if necessary make compromises to achieve possible results, while focusing on short-term goals rather than a vague “bright future”. In other words, the seventiers preferred to have a bird in the hand rather than two in the bush.

Without entering into endless polemics about whether other scenarios for economic and political reforms in Russia in the 1990s were possible, and whether these alternatives could have been carried out more successfully than the actual reforms conducted by the seventiers, it is worth noting that the features of that generation had a considerable effect on the trajectory of transformation. They resulted in a choice of priorities and methods of achieving goals based on a pragmatic agenda: thinking about what was possible rather than what was desirable, a short-term planning horizon, flexibility and a tendency towards compromise were combined with their willingness and ability to achieve goals. In addition, the unsuccessful experience of their predecessors, the sixtiers, who had lost their chance to transform the previous system during the perestroika, gave the seventiers’ a clear signal of how not to act. In this situation, the approaches of the “fathers” and the “sons” almost inevitably turned out to be diametrically opposed, including in the choice of the sequence of the transformations of the economic and political system. The seventiers drew lessons from previous experience, and they were able to achieve their goals at considerable cost, although their success proved to be incomplete and partial.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the seventiers seemingly got what they wanted. The rapid growth of the Russian economy after a long and protracted recession brought a feeling of relative prosperity against the background of major consumption boom and abundance of goods and services. The increasingly authoritarian trends in Russian politics under Putin perceived as a trouble only for a tiny minority of ideationally-driven seekers of freedom or for those who for various reasons did not find for themselves a suitable room in a new political and economic system. But even some successful seventiers faced with bitter disillusionments about their achievements: the country remained a laggard vis-à-vis developed world in many respects, the dreams about Russia’s partnership with the West not materialized (Kokh and Aven, 2013), and the crucial development issues ranging from the law and order to public infrastructure remained unresolved. While a number
of successful seventiers opted for an “exit” choice in terms of residence beyond Russia, for a large part of the generation the growing resentiment and nostalgic views towards the Soviet past as well as anti-Western attitudes became more and more widespread over time (for elite survey data, see Zimmerman et al., 2013). Still, the country is run by seventiers, who became ageing over time and tend to perceive current developments more or less retrospectively. Thus, the slogan of “stability” as an idea of preservation of political, economic, and social status quo in the country – at least as the second-best solution – was proposed by the Kremlin but largely resonated with the wishes of many representatives of the seventiers who dreamed about a safe harbor after a long turbulence in late-Soviet and early post-Soviet period. In a sense, this claim for “stability” also resembled the Soviet decades of stagnation. However, challenges for the status quo lies ahead, and the new wave of changes in the 2010s again coincided with the process of generation changes.

Post-Soviet Generation: A New Turn?

The post-Soviet generation, which grew up in the turbulent time of the 1990s, came to adolescence in the 2000s, when the Russian regime enjoyed a high degree of public support thanks to the steady economic growth (Treisman, 2011). However, despite these positive trends, the most ambitious representatives of new generation find limited opportunities for upward mobility given the rise of crony capitalism and electoral authoritarianism in Russia. Unlike romantic-ideological sixtiers and pragmatic-cynical seventiers, the post-Soviet generation perceived their roles as rather skeptical with regard to both status-quo in Russia and the Western political and economic models (Mickiewicz, 2014). While political career required conspicuous and unconditional loyalty to the Kremlin within the framework of GOGNO-like activism (Lassila, 2012), many young people dreamed on improving their life chances through getting prestigious jobs in large state-owned energy companies or in the government: according to Public Opinion Foundation 2009 survey, Gazprom and presidential administration are considered as top dream employees among the Russian youth (see Opros, 2009). For non-conformist youngsters, who slowly began to be affected by contagion of post-materialist values pretty much as the West European post-WWII generation (Zimmerman et al., 2013), a menu of available alternatives remained not so rich. However, a visible number of young educated residents of big cities find themselves in milieus of social activism, which spread across Russian cities well before the protests of 2011-2012 (Greene, 2014). Emerging groups of environmental activists, cultural protection movements, human rights defenders, more often led by those, for whom the Soviet period was just the matter of past. The relatively soft
political climate of the 2000s and especially the interregnum of presidency of Dmitry Medvedev in 2008-2012 (Gel’man, 2013, 2015) provided a fertile ground for advancement and politicization of new leaders and for the emergence of new communities. In other words, social activism paved the way for generation changes among the opposition while the leadership in the ruling group remained in the hands of the same ageing seventiers.

In many ways, the generational shift in political participation, which became visible in 2011-2012 (Volkov, 2012), has been prepared in the course of the previous years. During the new protest cycle, the opposition leaders from the generation of seventiers were overshadowed by their younger counterparts irrespectively to their ideological stances (liberals, democrats, socialists, or nationalists). This process was symbolically completed in July 2013, when the opposition party RPR-PARNAS (the Republican Party of Russia – People’s Freedom Party), co-chaired by 54-year-old Boris Nemtsov and 56-years-old Mikhail Kasyanov, nominated the 37-year-old Alexei Navalny as its candidate for the Moscow mayoral elections.

The generation change among the opposition greatly contributed to building a “negative consensus” against political status quo. First, unlike their predecessors, post-Soviet leaders and activists were not so bitterly divided by the old conflicts and by their perceptions of the past (such as assessments of the Soviet collapse and of the reforms of the 1990s) but were ready to build a new political identity beyond conventional ideological barriers. Second, the populist discursive juxtaposing of the ruling class as “crooks and thieves” vis-à-vis “the people”, proposed by the representatives of new generation, serves as a strong tool of anti-regime mobilization. Navalny, who identified himself through a combination of elements of both liberalism and nationalism, and organized an excellent innovative campaign for Moscow mayoral elections and received more than 600000 votes, became a prime example of this trend (Smyth and Soboleva, 2014b; Gel’man, 2015). Yet the protest cycle of 2011-2012 was short-lived and not brought the emerging opposition any immediate success. Moreover, the harsh reaction of the Kremlin, which used repressions and intimidation against its new (and old) rivals, prevented the spread of anti-regime mobilization, while the Russian annexation of Crimea and aggravating conflict with the West over Ukraine undermined foundations of the “negative consensus” to a certain degree.

Despite all of these troubles, the natural advantage of post-Soviet generation is their time horizon, which is certainly longer than those of the seventiers, whose capacity to offer attractive life chances to their successors will inevitably diminish over time. This is why one may consider the 2011-2012 protest cycle as the first (necessary yet insufficient) step towards the new round of country’s democratization. This round is likely to take different forms and employ different mechanisms than
the protest cycle of 1989-1991 not only because it may be merely driven from below, while the
democratic movement during the period of perestroika was by and large initiated from above
(Hough, 1997). The other important difference is concerned the core of leaders and activists: quarter
century ago, the anti-regime protests became the last battle of sixtiers, while the most recent wave of
protest mobilization in 2011-2012 might become a first sign of political awakening of post-Soviet
generation.

***

The conventional wisdom of scholars states that the public demand for democratization arises as a
side effect of economic growth, which encourages aspirations for greater political rights first among
the rising urban middle class and drives it onto the political arena (Przeworski et al., 2000). The
post-Soviet Russian experience provides rather mixed evidence (Treisman, 2011) and also leaves
open the question about the mechanism of conversion of public demands for political changes from
a latent to explicit form. Judging by the experience of protest cycles in Russia, one might argue that
the effect of generational changes has played an important role in this conversion. The differences
between ‘sixtiers’ and ‘seventiers’ may explain winding trajectory of the Russian reforms of the
1980s and 1990s, when emerging public demands for freedoms shifted to steady demands for wealth
at the expense of freedoms: the difference in collective experiences of these generations greatly
affected their “mental models” and played an important role in these changes. The intergenerational
differences were also crucial for the 2010s when the representatives of the post-Soviet generations
who had grown up in the 1990s and in the 2000s came to the front stage of Russian politics with
their own “mental models” formed against the background of crucial reassessments of experience of
their predecessors. The evidence about intergenerational differences is very tentative and far from
conclusive but may well be the case that in the eyes of new generation public demands for freedom
and for wealth will be not juxtaposed to each other as incompatible alternatives. If and when this
will happen, then there will be some hope that Russia will not repeat the same flight from freedom
that happened in the 1990s and in the 2000s. Therefore, the main slogan of opposition rallies –
“Russia Will Be Free!” – will be perceived not just as a call for action but also as a key item on
Russia’s political agenda. Russia will indeed become a free country. The question for the new
generation is exactly when and how this will happen, as well as what the costs will be of Russia's
path to freedom.
References


Gel’man V., 2013, “Cracks in the Wall: Challenges to Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.60, N2, P.3-10.


Tilly Ch., 1978, From Mobilization to Revolution, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.


