Russia 2020: alternative scenarios of the near future

By Andrei Melville and Ivan Timofeev[1]

The future may be approached from different perspectives. The first is that of a professional "statesman." His vision is often biased in favour of a particular political goal which should be fulfilled by every means possible. Following this logic, the future is a linear projection of the subsequent steps towards desirable results.

The second is the vision of a "scientific man"[2] who can allow himself a non-linear way of thinking. Unlike the statesman, he is focused on different projections, bifurcations and trajectories of existing strategies. Instead of linear extrapolation of current trends, this approach implies alternative scenarios—extreme images, ideal types or *gestalts* of the future. These *gestalts* may never come true. However they may highlight various important and sometimes unintended consequences of present trends, being rationally justified and causally linked to existing trends and strategies. Scenarios may be driven by variables such as economic factors, demographic and cultural forces, technological innovations and social cleavages, strategic choices of elites and the quality of bureaucratic machinery, and so on. The intrigues of the scenarios are composed of different combinations of those "drivers" and their interactions.

The scenario approach seems to be well recognised (see Lindgren, Bandhold 2003; Schwartz 1996; Veer 2005; Ogilvy 2003). During the Cold War it was often used as a tool of strategy by, among others, the Rand Corporation and the Hudson Institute, though the end of the Cold War did not simplify the task of analysing Russian affairs. Both Russian and foreign scholars found that the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union appeared to be very uncertain and a small fluctuation could dramatically change the future path of the country. As a result, the "crisis paradigm" was very much in vogue among the scholars (see Horelick 1991; Yergin, Gustafson 1995; Oliker, Charlick Paley 2002). The latest trends in research, however, are much less inspired by the transition and crisis of the 1990s. They reflect changing dynamics of the 2000s in terms of new developments in Russia's political regime, foreign policy and economy (see Krasnov, Satarov and Fedorov 2003; Satarov, Blagoveschenskiy and Blagoveschenskiy 2005; Kuzyk 2004; Kuzyk, Yakovets 2004). These two waves of research

[1] Professor Andrei Melville, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), Vice-Rector.
Dr. Ivan Timofeev, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), Department of Political Science, Senior Lecturer.

[2] This opposition of a "statesman" and "scientific" man was proposed by Hans Morgenthau in one of his early publications. However, for Morgenthau it is the statesman who should have non-linear thinking and be able to take into account different alternatives, being critical of all defined schemes of development. See HJ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946.

gave fruitful and provocative results, though very much determined by the experience of the recent past.

Four Alternative Scenarios of the Future of Russia

This experience was much helpful for scenario research project, conducted in 2007-2008 by MGIMO University. Scenario plots were brainstormed by the experts from MGIMO[3] and other Moscow-based think tanks, as well as others from Kaliningrad, Vladivostok, Tomsk, Ural, Irkutsk, Voronezh, Saratov and other universities.

The expert seminars aimed to reveal alternative scenarios of the Russian future as determined by external and internal drivers. Each path has a particular intrigue, related to specific present day challenges as well as the ones, historically faced by Russia. These challenges are the following.

First is the influence of the international environment which is often tightly correlated with the priorities of national development. Russian industrial growth in the 20th century, for instance, was focused on the responses to international hard-power challenges. The goals of Stalin's industrialisation and the ones of the Soviet economy after the Second World War are quite similar in this regard. Russia has often faced the choice between extensive global military competition and reduction of its international influence, albeit for the sake of domestic reforms. Most recent was the choice of the 1990s , when Russia had virtually self-cancelled from the global competition facing its severe economic crisis and focused on domestic affairs. However, Russia may face this bifurcation again, especially regarding the local conflicts near its borders, devaluation of international law, erosion of security regimes, a recurrent arms race and international terrorism. Our experts agreed that the future of Russia might be strongly affected by the pressure of these challenges.

Second, the trajectories of Russian development are often influenced by the quality, agents, methods and resources of modernisation. For centuries Russia strived to overcome its semi-peripheral status and to make its economy comparable with the ones of the developed world. It experienced both the extremes of authoritarian modernisation as well as the chaotic transition to a market economy under the devolution of state authority. Today the issues of modernisation are still relevant due to Russia's poorly diversified economy, the technological gap and the lack of social capital.

Third, the paths of the country are determined also by the type and quality of its political regime. Today in Russia democracy is mostly discussed as a political mechanism for "good governance," modernisation, redistribution of resources, and so on; while the normative issues

[3] Professor Irina Busygina and Dr. Michail Mironyuk are the key authors and contributors to the project.

about the correspondence of the political regime to "democratic standards" tends to be underestimated. However, it would be misleading to think that these questions are not relevant for Russia today, and especially tomorrow. The opposition of autocracy and democracy in the near future may regain its political and ideological importance in Russia.

Fourth, Russia's past, present and future are strongly affected by the organisational structure of its territory—by the level of centralisation and the logic of relations between the centre and the periphery. During the last century Russia also faced extremes, when the enlargement of the country under extra-centralisation was replaced by periods of disintegration, regional localisation and the collapse of infrastructure and the public sphere. Apparently Russia has managed to solve the territorial dilemmas of the 1990s, when further disintegration was considered to be extremely probable. However, questions of the balance of powers between regional and federal authorities as well as the problem of backward regions are still a matter of concern. Thus the alternatives in this domain remain quite uncertain.

These four variables, of course, do not cover all the possible parameters of the country's dynamics. Rather we treat them as fundamental assumptions which compose a structure of scenarios. It is also crucial that these variables correspond to the current context of Russian and international affairs, and reflect challenges that are historically peculiar to the Russian state. Their combination composes the following scenarios for the Russian future in 2020.

Scenario 1: "The Kremlin's Gambit"

In 2020 the world economy is growing up, oil prices remain high. The G7 nations enjoy the leading role in global economy and trade. However the share of Brazil, Russia, India and especially China has increased dramatically. Globalisation is characterised by a growing diversity of economic and political regimes, albeit fraught with the deepening cleavage between the "winners" and the "losers."

The world system is still prone to conflicts. Among them are the Iranian and North Korean nuclear deadlocks, the civil wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, severe Israeli-Palestinian armed dispute, new outbreaks of violence in the Caucasian region, ethnic and interstate clashes in Sub-Saharan Africa, and so on. The challenge of Islamic radicalism, international terrorism, drug trafficing and international crime become even more acute. Global tension is injected by rapidly increasing competition for natural resources. No real progress in arms control has been achieved.

At the same time the major powers compete with each other, avoiding armed conflicts. Thus, the falling off in relations between Russia and the West has not turned into another Cold War. Although Russian politics remains a matter of harsh critique from the West, it performs

as one of the great powers of the world and benefits from integration into the international trade regimes (WTO etc).

The bulk of Russian influence is composed of fuel and arms exports, pragmatic diplomacy and military strength. All of these advantages accumulate within a successive political course, generally supported by the population. The Russian government plays the leading role in the economy and investments. Economic growth is provided mostly by the export of natural resources and the growth of the country's internal market. Oil production and strategic branches (engineering industry, high-technologies and military production) are controlled by the state.

The government sets the rules of the game in domestic politics as well. The Russian political regime is often described in the West as a "managed democracy," where the executive power strongly prevails. The federal structure has become more centralized—Moscow controls all major regional affairs. Political opposition has neither resources, nor public support. The Russian people are quite satisfied with the rate of economic growth. They are not motivated to change the status quo.

The Kremlin's policy is a sort of "gambit": political and economic competition at home is sacrificed to the strategic goals of rapid modernisation and the growth of Russia's international influence.

Scenario 2: "Fortress Russia"

The world of 2020 is unstable and prone to severe crisis. International law and international institutions are dramatically undermined, to the point of being replaced by force and military power. A rapid arms race is accompanied by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear ones.

Russia finds itself in a hostile international environment. Numerous local armed conflicts menace the borders of the country, especially in Central Asia. The US and the EU come to the conclusion that they have "lost Russia." They fail to influence Russian politics and return to deterrence, which in fact means the Cold War. Russian business is discriminated against abroad. Volatility of oil prices damages Russia's development and economic growth.

Ukraine and Georgia have completed the process of integration into NATO, while some other post-Soviet republics also strive to enter the alliance. Elements of the US National Missile Defence system are deployed near Russian borders. All the major powers try to increase their influence in Eurasia, including the regional ones—China, Iran, Turkey, etc. Russia is forced into all-round defence.

Meanwhile, the competition between "old powers," including the US and its European allies, with the new pretenders—China, India, Iran and others—tends to become more and more intensive. Besides that, new areas of conflict and instability emerge or get wider in Latin America, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Balkans, etc. Russia does not interfere in these conflicts. It does not join any coalitions, while trying to utilise the contradictions between world leaders.

The new Cold War has provoked the outflow of foreign capital and investments from Russia. Russian defense expenditure has radically increased. Russians have to bear the slump of incomes and growth of taxes. Volatile oil prices and a hostile international environment significantly undermine prospects of modernisation. The country has to mobilise resources by all possible means to counteract the external threats and challenges for the sake of sovereignty and integrity of the country. The representatives of the security forces predominate in the government and manage the "rules of the game." Political opposition does not exist. All strategic branches of the Russian economy are nationalised. GDP share of military production is similar to the Soviet one. Moscow enjoys absolute centralisation and dominance over the regions.

Russia needs to be united and mobilised to respond successfully to external threats, even if this limits economic competition, political rights and freedoms. Russia is a "fortress," towering over a dangerous ocean of chaos.

Scenario 3: "Russian Mosaic"[4]

The Western model of globalisation is the dominant one in the world of 2020. The United States, EU members and Japan represent the models of successful economies and polities. Other countries, especially China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey etc, strive to adopt and adapt to these models.

The world economy is growing up. Oil prices are not terribly high due to new sources of energy and innovative energy technologies. International institutions and organisations (the UN, WTO, NATO etc) set the rules of the game in the world. The international community is able to control regional conflicts which, however, have not disappeared. Most of the "non-systemic" forces in world politics—i.e. terrorism, Islamic radicalism, drug traffic, criminal networks, are dislodged into the world periphery.

Russia has had to give up some of its ambitions and adopt new rules of the game. The country is well integrated into international institutions and regimes. It is an open society, and has become a member of the Western community. Its markets are open to foreign investments and capital. Some of the most successful Russian regions, which are most integrated into the

[4] This scenario was designed by Irina Busygina.

world economy, profit a lot from the politics of domestic and international openness. However, the unsuccessful ones are depressed and face stagnation, brain-drain and capital outflow.

The Russian Federation tends to be more and more decentralised. The most prosperous regions crave more sovereignty, defining their own strategies and rules. They rely on foreign investments and international partnerships. These regions are represented by the ones which are rich in natural resources or have an important infrastructure for their transportation. At the same time the most depressed regions are still devoted to the federal centre, hoping to get subsidies and aid. The competition between the regions is soaring, however. Moscow does not interfere into the inter-regional tensions.

State bureaucracy dominates neither in the economy, nor in public affairs. Most state ventures are privatised, including transportation and infrastructure. Social programmes are reduced. Taxes are low. People are free to choose their own way of life. This gives advantages to the most active of them, though fraught with corruption, social inequality and a collapse of human development in a number of regions.

Russia becomes more decentralized, a mosaic. The international community and the most prosperous and active regions reap the rewards of this new pluralism.

Scenario 4: "New Russian Dream"[5]

The world in 2020 enjoys new technological breakthroughs which provide intensive economic growth. Global demand for natural resources is still relatively high; however oil prices are gradually decreasing. The cleavage between "North" and "South" continues to be a matter of concern, though the international community has made significant and successful efforts to diminish global inequality and control conflicts. The UN reform has been successfully completed. International law sets the rules of the global game. The role of force in international relations has been radically reduced. International peace-keeping forces control the situations in the regions which are prone to conflicts (especially in the Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus, etc.). New leaders of the industrial growth—China, principally, but also India, Brazil, South Africa—are well integrated into the global economy. Sustainable development, ecological issues, health and education are among the priorities of the international community.

Russia is an important and legitimate member of the new world order. Tensions and conflicts along the country's borders are under control. However Russia does not pretend to be the only key "player" which has an influence in the post-Soviet space and cooperates with other "stakeholders."

[5] This scenario was designed by Michail Mironyuk.

Under these conditions Russia has a unique chance to concentrate its resources on domestic modernisation. Oil prices go down and this stimulates investments into new technologies and innovations. "The knowledge economy" and "social capital" is a matter of priority for the government. "The Russian Breakthrough" is a key slogan for a new generation of the political elite. The country is ruled by a coalition which has nothing in common either with the Soviet past, or with the corruption and chaos of the 1990s. It relies on the most active groups of Russian society. The coalition is composed of young technocrats, top-managers of the leading companies, young and successful politicians, and business people from Russian regions. They need, and generate, innovative growth.

The quality of governance has to meet the new ambitions of the Russian elite. The rule of law has become a sine qua non in Russia, though not everyone is prepared for this. Bureaucratic obstacles for small and medium size business have been liquidated. For the first time in Russian history there is an influential, vibrant and active middle class. However, taxes are relatively high and people have to pay for healthcare, housing and education. The gap between rich and poor is still a matter of fact. Mortgages are available to most of citizens and are guaranteed by the state. Personal effort and ability are the key factors of success.

A new and active generation of Russians is interested in open political and economic competition. It's a new Russian dream, which is about to come true.

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Each scenario has an intrigue—a combination of "drivers" which determines a particular trajectory of the future. Thus, the "Kremlin's Gambit" is an extreme projection of the plans and strategies of the current political establishment. State control over political and economic competition is justified by the goal of modernisation "from the top" and the strengthening of Russia as a great power, which is able to react "asymmetrically" to external threats. Oil and gas exports provide resources for modernisation as well as being an instrument of political bargaining with foreign powers. Playing its gambit, the Kremlin avoids overheating the economy and the political system by extreme interventions. These excessive interventions may have unintended and uncontrolled consequences, undermining political and economic stability, which is also considered a matter of priority. Therefore the Kremlin prefers to sustain some minimal political competition (primarily to legitimise itself) and to cooperate with business within the projects of modernisation.

The intrigue of "Fortress Russia" implies extreme and cumulative growth of external threats. Authoritarian and uncompromised mobilisation is the only means of survival in the face

of external challenges. This scenario reproduces deep cultural and historical patterns in Russian politics. On the one hand it can be compared with the experience of 1930s when increasing international threats and the recent military collapse of the First World War provoked the concentration of all possible resources into achieving the goals of industrial and military modernisation. The fact that this mobilisation finally led to the victory over Nazi Germany and a tremendous industrial breakthrough increases the probability that it may be reproduced under similar international conditions. On the other hand, this pattern corresponds to the recent Cold War experience, when authoritarian modernisation focused on military goals and sustained Russia as a super-power. This scenario implies, therefore, that in a state of international emergency the Kremlin will violate the limits of its intervention into political and economic spheres, as traced in the "Kremlin's Gambit." Thus it is the security crisis that makes the regime eliminate competition, centralise political decisions and mobilise all possible resources. "Fortress Russia" is a much more extreme scenario than the "Gambit" and corresponds closely to the cultural and historical patterns of Russian politics: where there are extreme external threats, Russian elites and society do not surrender and tend to mobilise in order to counteract them.

The "Russian Mosaic" scenario reflects the (still ongoing) public fears of the early 1990s, namely of central governance erosion, chaotic decentralisation and vulnerability to external threats. It is no less extreme than the "Fortress," but is an inversion of it. Instead of a non-competitive authoritarian regime and centralised economy it implies a fragmented political system, devolution of power to the regions and an ineffective and unregulated economy, dominated by foreign corporations. Democracy and the market economy are in fact illusory. The same can be said of federalism—the integrity of the country is undermined by local governments striving to increase their political status and power. It is noteworthy that the oil prices slump is just a trigger for this scenario. In fact it is driven by the inability of the government and bureaucracy to cope with the economic challenges in conditions of international peace and to react to the "soft-power" external challenges. In the Russian political tradition there are almost no clear patterns of survival in such domestic and international conditions. Paradoxically, the peaceful competitive environment of the "Mosaic" scenario makes Russia more vulnerable than the hostile and "hard-power" conditions of the "Fortress."

However this does not mean that the relaxation of international tensions is a blind alley for Russia. The "New Russian Dream" implies international conditions similar to the ones of the "Russian Mosaic." Petro-incomes go down while most international challenges are of the "soft-power" and economic type. Nevertheless, the Russian government manages to cope with the crisis. Rule of law, political and economic competition and decreasing corruption appear to be the only rational strategies for the country's survival. This scenario is more extreme than the

"Kremlin's Gambit." It is quite stressful for political elites due to the change of hierarchy in favour of the new generation of politicians who are committed to promoting a transparent and non-corrupt political order. Also it is quite stressful for Russian society—this change is hardly possible without active public support and civil activity which is not typical for Russian political traditions. Thus, the "New Russian Dream" should be treated as a virtually unprecedented breakthrough in a critical domestic situation and a peaceful, though extremely competitive, external environment. It implies deep changes in Russian political culture and institutions, changes which are organic and not imposed from the outside.

The Four Scenarios in Focus Groups Discussions

Our four scenarios were developed as the result of a series of expert seminars. How do they correspond to the expectations and political perceptions of "ordinary" Russians? Are these four scenarios "recognised" by the Russian public? Which scenarios are perceived as most probable and most desirable? What are the motivations for the choice of this or that alternative scenario of the future of Russia?

To answer these questions we conducted a number of focus-groups discussions. This method provides deep involvement for respondents into the context of scenarios in a manner that is hardly manageable by means of a regular public opinion survey. Also this method combines the advantages of group discussion with the possibilities of deep enquiry into the personal attitudes of respondents. However, we are aware that focus group discussions are poorly formalised (by definition) and are influenced by group dynamics (conformity, social facilitation) and the skillfulness of the moderator.

Our initial hypothesis implied that perceptions of alternative scenarios in terms of their probability and desirability would be determined by the electoral preferences of the respondents. Our research was conducted in March 2008—just after parliamentary elections and just before the presidential ones when the electorate was highly mobilised. Thus, electoral preferences seemed to be very reasonable as an independent variable.

Following this hypothesis we (together with Bashkirova and Partners) conducted sessions of five focus groups. Four of them were composed of members of the electorate of parties represented on the 5th State Duma. Each focus-group was represented by respondents aged 25-60, who gave their vote to one of the following parties—United Russia (UR), Just Russia (JR), the Communist Party of Russia (CP) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDP). The fifth group was composed of young people, aged 18-24, who proportionally represented the electorate of four parties. There were eight participants in each group, equally represented by gender and so on. Our four scenarios were presented in a random fashion without titles to avoid

any positive or negative associations. All the respondents live in Moscow (which is one of the more serious limitations of our research). The electorate of parties that failed to win the last parliamentary elections was not represented, though its overall share in the population is low.

We expected that the electorate of pro-presidential parties (United Russia and Just Russia) would be biased in favor of the "Kremlin's Gambit" since this scenario represents the projection into the future of the current Kremlin's policy. We also expected that voters for the Communist Party and for the Liberal Democratic Party would be inclined to choose "Fortress Russia" due to its "rally around the flag" claims and the neo-imperial rhetoric. Finally we thought that the group of young people would support the "New Russian Dream" scenario since this new generation of Russians did not directly experienced either Soviet paternalism or the chaos of the early 1990s.

Empirical testing has largely falsified our hypothesis. Electoral preferences as well as the age of respondents do not greatly influence their assessments of alternative scenarios for Russia's future. We revealed an unexpected level of consensus among respondents regarding the four alternatives. The electoral and generation differences are not influential as a factor of attitudes towards such issues as political competition, democracy, regulation of the economy, the role of the Russian state in the world arena, or its territorial structure.

Areas of Consensus

Regardless of electoral preferences, the probability and desirability of scenarios were assessed in the following order:

Probability

Most probable	"Kremlin's Gambit"
	"Russian Mosaic"
	"Fortress Russia"
Least probable	"New Russian Dream"

Desirability

Most desirable	"New Russian Dream"
	"Kremlin's Gambit"
	"Fortress Russia"
Least desirable	"Russian Mosaic"

Respondents' perception of the "Kremlin's Gambit" corresponded to one of the experts. They regarded this scenario as a projection of current trends in Russian politics, society and economics. Consequently the "Gambit" was assessed as the most probable. However it is only the second-best in the list of preferences despite a tremendous victory for the pro-presidential parties. The participants pointed out that this scenario has various attractive components:

- "*Economic growth," "no wars and civil conflicts"* (UR)
- "*Sustainable and gradual development," "government takes care of everything"* (JR)
- "*Something clear and understandable"* (CP)
- "*Economic super-power"* (LDP)
- "*Pragmatic scenario without extremes"* (Youth)

Our respondents were nevertheless concerned about Russia's dependence on oil prices and the lack of political competition (including the ones who voted for pro-presidential parties). Communist voters were the strongest opponents of the "Gambit," though it was still only second-best in the list of their preferences. All in all, the respondents did not see this scenario through rose-tinted glasses. Stressing economic growth, they emphasised the absence of clear goals and dynamics:

- "*Oil is not endless," "no future," "stagnation and deadlock"* (UR)
- "*Oil is the only source of growth"* (JR)
- "*No step forward," "no opposition"* (CP)
- "*We are the pawns"* (LDP)
- "*Slow development"* (Youth).

"Fortress Russia" was perceived negatively by all respondents. No one is ready to sacrifice their rights and prosperity for the sake of domestic mobilisation vis-à-vis external threats. However, some elements of this scenario were well appreciated, such as the growth of patriotism. But participants were hardly ready to pay for their quality of life and freedom with the slogan, "rally around the flag."

- "*We need democracy," "we do not want to return to the totalitarian cage," "it is war communism"* (UR)
- *"Alarming scenario," "coming generation should not support it," however, "it will need devoted patriots to come true"* (JR)
- "*Nothing good, a scary scenario*" (Youth)

In contrast to our expectations this scenario was not attractive to voters, though they are often expected to support it. It was not appreciated by communists—those who vote for the Communist Party strongly oppose the centralisation and nationalisation of the economy for the sake of a "bright future." Also it was not much appreciated by voters for the Liberal Democratic

Party, though its leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky resorts frequently to neo-imperial rhetoric and populist patriotism.

- *"Dangerous scenario," "war," "much worse than now"*—claimed the communist supporters.
- *"Incomes are low while taxes are high", "no prosperity and well being"*—said the Zhirinovsky supporters, who are more prone to argue along welfare lines.

The "Russian Mosaic" scenario was perceived in an even more negative way. Having a choice between authoritarian "Fortress" and disintegrating and collapsing "Mosaic," respondents definitely preferred the first one. We have verified our initial assumption that the "Mosaic" should be treated as a concentration of the worst fears concerning the future of the country. The erosion of central authority and the collapse of the federation were considered to be unacceptable, regardless of any possible advantages for single individuals or regions. The respondents were not ready to lose their prosperity and freedom in favour of authoritarian modernization, as implied by the "Fortress." However they were much more reluctant to lose their country in favour of personal success, as implied by the "Mosaic." This is a very important finding which reveals the scope of legitimacy for the future political course.

- *"Weak and fragmented country," "the same as in 1991," "we do not need this kind of globalisation"* (UR)
- *"Middle ages," "slavery"* (JR)
- *"Disintegration and fragmentation," "vulnerable state"* (CP)
- *"Feudal regions," "chaos"* (LDP)

At the same time, this scenario was considered quite probable—the fear of the country's collapse was reproduced by middle aged and older respondents who witnessed the collapse of the USSR and its devolution from the status of super-power to a mass of weak, independent republics. However we did not expect that this fear would be voiced by young participants, who did not experience the breakdown of the USSR. But they were no less concerned with the integrity and vitality of Russia than the older generations.

- *"Dark future," "disorder," "the country should never be in this future"*—remarked the young respondents

Finally, the "New Russian Dream" was considered to be the most desirable but least probable for Russia. All the respondents welcomed the idea of a technologically developed state and an open society with a strong middle class and a wide range of possibilities.

- *"We want this future for us and for our children," "a civilized state"* (UR)
- *"Russia is a full member of the international community"* (JR)

- *"Russia and the world enjoy political stability and order", "it is a model of the normal state"* (CP)
- *"I am fascinated by this breakthrough"* (LDP)
- *"I want this future to come true"* (Youth)

Rule of law and political competition were very much welcomed. The position of a communist participant seems to be most interesting here:

"The multiparty system should not be just an illusion, for decoration. It is not an ideological bias which makes me vote for the communists. I just want competition and alternatives in our politics."

However the respondents also voiced their concerns regarding the costs of this scenario. Participants were not ready to pay much for education, medicine and housing. They were anxious about the growing gap between the middle and the lower strata within this scenario. The paternalistic "nanny state" nostalgia is still quite peculiar to them.

- *"Those who are rich become richer, and those who are poor—poorer"* (UR)
- *"One has to pay all taxes," "the gap between rich and poor," "I do not want to pay for education"* (JR)
- *"Commercial medicine and education are not desirable"* (CP)
- *"Everything is paid from my own pocket"* (LDP)
- *"No chances for the poor"* (Youth)

At the same time no respondent could imagine himself as a loser in this scenario.

Areas of Disagreement

Despite the overall consensus, each group had a specific style and way of thinking. Thus, the representatives of United Russia were quite optimistic about current tendencies. Paradoxically, this optimism combined with the conviction that their projection into the future as implied by the "Kremlin's Gambit" did not have enough motion, attractiveness and ambition. In general, this focus group had rather diverse points of view—it could be explained by the "catch-all" character of the party:

"Crisis is behind us," "Russia is growing up," "forgetting the 1990s," "oligarchs under pressure," "sporting successes," "churches' restoration."

And at the same time:

"There is no clear economic strategy," "bureaucracy is enormous and inflexible," "inflation," "lack of professionalism," "lots of populism."

Those who gave their vote to Just Russia stressed social and paternalistic issues—they favour the idea of the "nanny state" and appreciate state regulation of the economy and public

life. Their attitudes to the scenarios were strongly connected to the ability of the state to guarantee their social welfare:

"By 2012 electricity fees will be twice higher," "women will have to retire when they are 60, instead of 55," "there is no middle class," "we would like to be well-off when we retire," "we don't want to pay for education and medicine," "paying for everything is awful."

The communists in the group were also concerned with social maters, though much more skeptical of current trends:

"Most people cannot buy a flat," "factories and plants are collapsing," "land will be private," "education provides nothing," "trade-unions are ineffective," "the military are underpaid," "medicine is expensive."

However, perhaps most surprising were their concerns about democracy and political competition:

"It seems like there is no alternative," "voters are blind," "media manipulates people," "there are no alternatives among four candidates in the presidential race," "opposition should be strong, it should have its own opinion," "politicians do not keep their promises."

Voters for the Liberal-Democratic Party were most pessimistic in their assessments of the future as well as of the present, despite having stable income and jobs. Their vision of the future was quite negative:

"The feeling of instability," "all the factories are in crisis," "no economic growth," "agriculture is collapsing," "poor industry, imports dominate," "economic crisis forthcoming," "Russian regions resemble a hell."

This group was also very concerned about possible decline of Russian influence abroad:

"The Russian Far East will have the fate of Kosovo," "foreign policy should be independent," "the world is unipolar," "Russia does not play any key role in the world".

Finally, the young people in this groups appeared to be most critical towards current trends, though more optimistic about the future. They did not reject any authoritarian perspective in favour of competition and open opportunities. They tended to rely on personal abilities and success.

"We have freedom of speech, though now we cannot change anything," "people must have the opportunity to influence the political course," "those who are elected should meet our demands," "I do not think that Russia is a failed-state—I have been to real failed states," "we are in a process of growth," "in 2020 Russia will be a technological power, and abandon the role of a petro-state."

Some Conclusions

Our research provided empirical evidence which makes possible some generalisations and conclusions.

First of all, the four scenarios of the Russian future, designed by experts, were well recognised by our ordinary respondents. The “Kremlin’s Gambit” was the most recognisable one, being a projection of current tendencies and policies. However “Fortress Russia”, the “Russian Mosaic” and the “New Russian Dream” were thought to be possible alternatives and were not perceived as unreal. Moreover our respondents shared the idea of the non-linearity and plurality of the future.

Empirical testing has falsified our hypothesis that the respondents of different party affiliations should have different assessments of the scenarios. On the contrary, we found that visions of the future were not particularly fragmented. At least, they are not determined by ideological cleavages and party preferences. We found an impressive consensus regarding such burning issues as the integrity of the state, political and economic competition, and technological development.

This conclusion contradicts the popular stereotype that Russia is prone to conflicts in terms of order vs freedom, autocracy vs democracy, reforms vs counter-reforms, East vs West and so on. We revealed that alternative futures of the country may be viewed from different perspectives. Rule of law, effective bureaucracy, opportunities to influence political decisions, political and economic competition, openness to the world, are all regarded as *sine qua non*. The significance and desirability of these norms is not a matter of disagreement. The same is true of patriotic values—respondents had no doubts that Russia should be a great power, playing a constructive though independent role in the world.

In other words, patriotism and democracy are not perceived as opposites. Regardless of party affiliation, participants in our focus groups preferred political rights, freedom and competition and were not inspired by the prospects of authoritarian order and the “strong hand,” even if justified by modernisation and external threats. At the same time, they were convinced that the strengthening of democracy should be driven by the national agenda and not foreign assistance or pressure. Russian national interests should not be the price paid for democracy. It is noteworthy that the respondents were quite suspicious of the outside world, though they did not support the idea of a new “iron curtain” at all. They did welcome the idea of a powerful and independent Russia, albeit one capable of sustaining the rule of law and political competition. Our respondents pointed out the rebirth of the first imperative, though they do not see any significant breakthrough towards the second one.

At the same time some alternatives were considered completely unacceptable. Neither the collapse of the country under the slogans of democratization, nor the authoritarian modernization, were thought to be the right future for the country. Respondents were convinced that there is no need to sacrifice civil rights and political competition for the sake of modernisation and international influence; or vice versa—to neglect national interests in favour of freedom and democracy.

We have already mentioned that the projection of current trends is perceived as the most probable scenario. However, while giving their preferences to the "Kremlin's Gambit" as a second-best alternative, respondents wanted a more ambitious and vibrant future. They want new strategies, intensive development and breakthroughs, new visions of the future, new ideas under free and fair competition.

It is noteworthy that their perception of the future was very different from Soviet-era dreams of the "victory of communism" as well as from the early post-Soviet illusions about the "Western path." Today they see no universal goal in the future, as determined by any kind of ideology, which should be achieved by all possible means. It seems that our respondents have abandoned ideological lenses in favour of pragmatic ones, though it is not clear how long their preference for pragmatism over ideology will last.

Finally we do believe that our conclusions about the respondents' consensus should not be exaggerated. This area of consensus coexists with clear disagreements, especially regarding current policy. Furthermore the falsification of our hypothesis about the influence of party preferences does not mean that there are no other factors which may determine splits and cleavages in visions of the future. These factors should be revealed in subsequent research. Still, the aforementioned alternatives of the future appear to be deeply rooted in the current preferences and expectations of the Russian public.

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