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THE RISE AND FALL OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT: THE CASE OF PETROZAVODSK

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On September 8, 2013 the mayoral election was held in Petrozavodsk, the capital city of the Republic of Karelia. An independent candidate Galina Shirshina gained success in this contest. On December 25, 2015 Shirshina was dismissed by the Petrozavodsk City Councillors. Her misgovernment of the city's public sector was the official explanation for her dismissal. An alternative explanation of why she lost her position, was her refusal to conform with the regional power vertical. In accordance with the obtained results, the leading role in Shirshina's recall was played by the Karelian authorities. They decided to remove Shirshina after their failure to control her actions as mayor. The key step towards the implementation of this decision was elimination of the autonomy of the local political elites, who supported the mayor of Petrozavodsk and controlled the majority of the municipal deputies. The regional authorities replaced popular mayoral elections in the city with the appointment of a city manager to assure their political control in the future. This case study shows that the survival of mayoral governance and the direct mayoral elections in the cities of Russia depend on mayoral loyalty to the regional authorities.

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1 Introduction

The results of the unified national election day, held on September 8, 2013, were unusual for two regional capitals. Yevgeniy Roizman, the candidate of the Civic Platform party won the mayoral election in Yekaterinburg, the capital of the Sverdlovsk Region, and Galina Shirshina, an independent candidate, supported by the *Yabloko* party, won the mayoral election in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia. The nominees of the United Russia, the pro-presidential party, lost the elections in both cities. Soon after their victories, Roizman and Shirshina found themselves under the considerable political pressure (Moses 2015: 191). Since then, the former has retained his mayoral position, while the latter is no longer mayor of Petrozavodsk. Shirshina was forced out at the end of 2015 as a result of the decision of a more than two thirds majority of Petrozavodsk City Councillors.

Shirshina's recall was forerun by the replacement of direct mayoral elections in Petrozavodsk with the procedure of appointing a city manager, chosen by the City Councillors from nominees put forward by the competition committee, half of whom were nominated by Karelia's governor. Thus, the political autonomy of local self-government in the capital of the Republic of Karelia, which had been one of the most democratic regions of Russia (Petrov, Titkov 2013: 25-28), reached its lowest level (Gel'man et al. 2008: 227-270) within just two years.

What was the causal mechanism which led to the Petrozavodsk mayor to be recalled and the consequent drawing of a line under the history of local self-government in the city? The answer to this question has some theoretical implications. First, the description of the causal mechanism, which foreran the Petrozavodsk mayoral recall, sheds light upon the development of the local political process under electoral authoritarianism which is typical for present-day Russia (Gel'man 2015). Second, as the direct elections for the Petrozavodsk mayor were eliminated five months prior to Shirshina's recall, this paper checks hypotheses which interpret the abolishment of local elections by the senior authorities' unwillingness/inability to control local political elites (Reuter et al. 2016) and the latter's lack of political autonomy (Gel'man et al. 2008: 227-270; Reuter et al. 2016).

Section 2 contains a literature review and Section 3 a description of the main methodological tool: process tracing. Section 4 contains the hypotheses and the information on the empirical data collection methods. The empirical part of the paper, Section 5, analyses two alternative causal mechanisms, which could have led to the recall of Petrozavodsk mayor. The main results are presented in Section 6.

2 Literature Review

The recall of popularly elected mayors by city councils is common practice in present-day Russia. The legal mechanics for this procedure were introduced to Russian legislation in May 2009 when then president Dmitry Medvedev initiated the amendments to the Federal Law “On the General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation” (hereafter, the Law on Local Self-Government). These provisions allow city councils to get rid of the directly elected mayors under “vaguely defined official malfeasance” (Moses 2010: 1433-1434). Moreover, it became possible to push forward the procedure of recall of directly elected mayors not only via city councillors, but also via regional governors. According to data provided by Moses, from February 2010 to November 2013, 51 mayors, including 26 regional capital mayors, were dismissed (Moses 2015: 189-190).

At the same time, there is a lack of studies which explain the *causal* mechanisms for this. Studies have been more concerned about the related issue of why passing the Law on Local Self-Government resulted in the abolishment of direct mayoral elections and their replacement with city-manager governance in several Russian cities and why it make no changes in the others. (Gel'man, Lankina 2008; Reuter et al. 2016; Golosov, Gushchina, Kononenko 2016)². The general answer to this question, if the focus is on procedural rather than structural causes, is that the local elites lack political salience (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011; Reuter et al. 2016) and/or the political disloyalty of mayors (Gel'man et al. 2008; Reuter et al. 2016) served as the key factors, provoked by the elimination of direct mayoral elections.

According to Reuter et al. (2016), whose research was based on data collected in 207 Russian cities, the probability of direct mayoral elections being abolished was higher in the regions where the governors were not interested in co-opting the mayors. This was typical for cities where the mayors had few political resources or demonstrated their political independence from the regional authorities. In addition, according to Gel'man, et al. (2008), who conducted an in-depth analysis of local politics in four cities of Russia, it was the opposition of the local elites, interested in the autonomy of local self-government which prevented the regional authorities from abolishing direct mayoral elections.

² The first wave of mayoral elections elimination began within two years upon the Law on Local Self-Government had come into effect (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011: 460). This Law did not imply replacement of popularly elected mayors by the appointed city managers (see, e.g. Buckley et al. 2014: 95-96) and it did not lead to decrease of the political role of local self-government by default (see, e.g. Campbell 2006; Young, Wilson 2007). However, the political circumstances of its implementation, defined by the policy of recentralization, launched by Vladimir Putin, resulted in fitting local self-government with the hierarchical model of governance (see, e.g. Ross 2007; Gel'man et al. 2008; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011; Golosov, Gushchina, Kononenko 2016).

The main conclusion of these works is that governors serve as the driving force in the abolishment of direct mayoral elections in Russian cities. This was the conclusion of other studies devoted to the issue of local self-government in Russia (see e.g. Makarkin 2007; Gel'man, Lankina 2008; Ross 2009; Moses 2010; 2013; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011). Some scholars also briefly provided the examples of the tools used by the governors for removing undesirable mayors (Ross 2009: 297-298; Moses 2010: 1434; 2013: 13; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011: 455; Buckley et al. 2014: 111).

However, the literature does not contain a detailed description of the causal mechanisms which resulted in the recall of popularly elected mayors of Russian cities, nor the role of regional governors in the elimination of direct mayoral elections. This work fills this gap.

The case of the mayor recall in Petrozavodsk was chosen for the analysis for two reasons. First, Petrozavodsk is one of few regional capitals where popular mayoral elections existed until 2015 and where all the preceding attempts of the regional authorities to replace direct mayoral elections by an appointment scheme had ended in failure (Gel'man, Lankina 2008: 57; Gel'man et al. 2008: 264-268). Second, regional and federal media covered the elections of September 8, 2013 and the political situation in Petrozavodsk in detail, as Galina Shirshina was an independent candidate, supported by the *Yabloko* party. Consequently, there is a large amount of secondary data which cover every stage of Shirshina's carrier, including the interviews and the comments of the key political actors. All these materials constitute a valuable source base for the research.

3 The Process Tracing Method

The main analytical tool used is process tracing, which is a method of studying “causal mechanisms in a single-case research design” (Beach, Pedersen 2013: 2). This method was developed and comprehensively described in George and Bennett (2005) and has become a common research tool for case studies within the past few years (see, e.g. Trampusch, Palier 2016).

The application of process tracing requires four steps (see, e.g. Bennett, Elman 2006: 459-460; Bennett 2008: 704-705; Kay, Baker 2015: 10-18). The process tracing analysis starts “from a suitably chosen beginning to the end of the story” (Bennett, Elman 2006: 459). A study begins from an event *X*, which is the initial step in the causal mechanism. This event results in outcome *Y*, which is the focus of the research. At the second stage, the researcher formulates the main and alternative causal mechanisms (*H*), linking the event *X* with the outcome *Y*. Each link of these causal mechanisms can be considered as a separate hypothesis (*h*), which must be substantiated by empirical evidence. Such empirical evidence is coined in the literature as “diagnostic” (Bennett 2008: 208) or “causal-process observations” (Collier 2011: 823). At the third stage

of the process tracing analysis the researcher collects the empirical evidence. Finally, the assessment of the supposed causal mechanisms (H) is performed assessing the validity of each link (h). Assessing the validity of the hypotheses (h), from which the causal mechanisms (H) are derived, is performed by matching them with the collected evidence. For these purposes the process tracing empirical tests (see Table 1) are applied (Van Evera 1997: 30-34; Bennett 2010; Collier 2011; Kay, Baker 2015).

Table 1. Process Tracing Tests for Assessment of Hypotheses and Establishment of Causal Inference

		Sufficient to Check Hypothesis and Establish Causation	
		No	Yes
Necessary to Check Hypothesis and Establish Causation	No	Straw in the Wind (the weakest)	Smoking Gun (stronger)
		<i>Passing</i> affirms relevance of a hypothesis but does not confirm it	<i>Passing</i> confirms a hypothesis
		<i>Failing</i> does not eliminate a hypothesis but slightly weakens it	<i>Failing</i> does not eliminate a hypothesis
	Yes	Hoop (stronger)	Doubly Decisive (the strongest)
		<i>Passing</i> affirms relevance of a hypothesis but does not confirm it	<i>Passing</i> confirms one hypothesis and eliminates the other ones
		<i>Failing</i> eliminates a hypothesis	<i>Failing</i> eliminates a hypothesis

Source: Adapted from Van Evera (1997: 30-34), Bennett (2010: 210), Collier (2011: 825) and Kay and Baker (2015: 15).

A hypothesis passes a *straw-in-the-wind* test, if there is evidence indirectly connected with it. Passing this test is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for its acceptance; it only provides useful information for the confirmation of a given hypothesis. This test is not decisive (Bennett 2010: 211). If a hypothesis fails a *straw-in-the-wind* test, it is weakened just slightly. A hypothesis passes a *hoop* test, if the evidence connected with it serves as a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for its acceptance. Consequently, if a given hypothesis fails a *hoop* test, it is discarded. The decision on the evidence's correspondence with the necessity criterion is made by a researcher on the basis of Bayesian logic, usually in its informal application (Kay, Baker 2015; Beach 2016). A condition X is determined as necessary, in case it "must always precede Y for Y to occur; Y will not occur if X is absent" (Beach, Pedersen 2013: 81). If a hypothesis passes a *smoking gun* test, it means that there is at least one sufficient, but not necessary argument, supporting the hypothesis. Such evidence looks very specific in the context of Bayesian logic: it can be hardly discovered, in case the tested hypothesis is not valid (Beach 2016: 470). The failure of a hypothesis to pass such a test does not reject it. Finally, if a hypothesis passes a *doubly decisive*

test, the evidence serves as a necessary and sufficient criterion for its acceptance. If a hypothesis passes a *doubly decisive* test, it is confirmed, while in case of failure it is discarded.

The process tracing approach does not imply any order of the test results in relation to the particular hypotheses (*h*) of the tested causal mechanism (*H*), in order to reach any conclusion on such a mechanism's validity (Fairfield 2015: 48). At the same time in the methodological literature there are some general recommendations on this point (see, e.g. Bennett 2010; Collier 2011; Beach, Pedersen 2013; Bennett, Checkel 2015). In general, if the hypotheses within a given mechanism pass strong tests, for instance, *smoking gun* or *doubly decisive*, and do not fail the *hoop* test, the given mechanism is considered plausible, especially if any of the alternative mechanisms fail the *hoop* test. Moreover, if the hypotheses systematically pass weaker tests, for example the *hoop*, it produces a cumulative effect and the analysed mechanism is also considered to be plausible (Beach, Pedersen 2013: 104-105).

4 Hypotheses and Data

Galina Shirshina's victory in the mayoral election on September 8, 2013 in Petrozavodsk is taken as the starting point for the further analysis (*X*), while her dismissal is taken as the endpoint (*Y*). The fact that Shirshina had no political background until that time determined this choice.

At the same time, Shirshina's electoral success became possible thanks to the support of the *Yabloko* regional office and its informal leader Vasiliy Popov³, a well-known Karelian businessman. Popov together with his political ally Devletkhan Alikhanov, a businessman and a deputy speaker of the Karelian Assembly and a member of the United Russia party, controlled the majority of Petrozavodsk City Council (the *Petrosovet*) deputies up to the beginning of 2015⁴.

There are two potential causal mechanisms explaining Petrozavodsk mayor's dismissal. Within the first mechanism (*H₁*) it is supposed that Shirshina's recall was initiated by the Karelian authorities, namely by the governor, who had failed to control her performance. It became possible to oust Shirshina from office by side-lining the local elites, namely, Shirshina's supporters Popov and Alikhanov (see Table 2).

The outcome observed under this causal mechanism (*Y*), simultaneously serves as a link between *X* and *Z*. If we suppose that the Karelian authorities decided to recall Shirshina from office due to their inability to control her performance, they would have chosen an absolutely loyal person as the Petrozavodsk mayor (*Z*). For this reason *h₆*, which has no direct connection with

³ Taisiya Bekbulatova, "Mezhdu gorodom i gubernatorom", *Kommersant*, February 13, 2014, No.24, P.4.

⁴ Interviewees No.4, No.5, No.9 (see Appendix 1).

the causal mechanism, was placed between X and Y . Thus, the outcome of Z and h_6 , which are beyond the H_1 causal mechanism, are an additional argument in favour of its validity.

Table 2. The First Causal Mechanism of Petrozavodsk City Mayor Dismissal (H_1)

Links of the Causal Mechanism	
X	Shirshina wins Petrozavodsk mayoral elections
h_1	The Karelian authorities try to control the performance of the newly elected Petrozavodsk mayor
h_2	The Karelian authorities fail to control Shirshina
h_3	The Karelian authorities decide to remove the Petrozavodsk mayor from office
h_4	The Karelian authorities obtain control over the majority of the <i>Petrosovet</i> deputies, who have legal powers to recall the city mayor with a two thirds majority
h_5	The Karelian authorities look for reasons the <i>Petrosovet</i> deputies can use to recall the mayor
h_6	The Karelian authorities ring-fence themselves from the risks of disloyalty of the mayor to replace Shirshina
Y, h_7	The <i>Petrosovet</i> dismisses Shirshina
Z	The new mayor of Petrozavodsk is loyal to the Karelian authorities

As opposed to this causal mechanism it is also important to test an alternative (H_2) which is defended by the Karelian officials and the loyal deputies of the *Petrosovet*⁵. In accordance with this causal mechanism (H_2), Shirshina was dismissed because the deputies of the City Council found her work unsatisfactory, namely they claimed that Shirshina failed to fulfil her obligations within a three-month period (see Table 3).

Contrary to the first causal mechanism (H_1), the second (H_2) is much shorter, as it contains only the obvious facts of Shirshina's non-fulfilment of her obligations, the discovery of this fact by the City Council deputies, and Shirshina's subsequent dismissal.

A search of the empirical evidence relating to the links of the proposed causal mechanisms, included interviewing the members of the political elites, analysis of newspaper reports and the data provided by the official web-sites of the *Petrosovet*, the Karelian Assembly and Karelian government. Official documents, namely the *Petrosovet* decisions, were also considered.

Table 3. The Second Causal Mechanism of Petrozavodsk City Mayor Dismissal (H_2)

Links of the Causal Mechanism	
X	Shirshina wins Petrozavodsk mayoral elections
h_1	Shirshina fails to fulfil her obligations over a three-month period
h_2	The majority of the <i>Petrosovet</i> deputies suggest that all the necessary grounds for Shirshina's dismissal, namely her non-fulfilment of her obligations within a three-month period, are present.
Y	The <i>Petrosovet</i> dismisses Shirshina

⁵ Taisiya Bekbulatova, "Karelskii konflikt pereekhal v Moskvu", *Kommersant*, June 29, 2015, No.112, P.4. Interviewees No.2, No.9 (see Appendix 1).

According to the methodological literature, non-probability sampling is preferred to elite interviewing when applying process tracing (Tansey 2007; Lynch 2013: 40). Within this study purposive sampling, a kind of non-probability sampling, was used. The interviewees were chosen in accordance with the characteristics essential for this research (see, e.g. Tansey 2007: 770; Lynch 2013: 41). The interviewees' active participation in city politics during Shirshina's governance and their attitude to the mayor were considered as key characteristics. Both allies and opponents of Shirshina were considered, to give a wider range of interpretations. The names of the interviewees, their key characteristics and the technical details concerning the interviews conduction are provided in Appendix 1.

5 Empirical Analysis

In this section two causal mechanisms proposed as an explanation of recall of Petrozavodsk mayor Galina Shirshina are analysed in turn. Firstly, the mechanism by which Shirshina was dismissed due to the purposive actions of the regional authorities (H_1) will be considered.

The evidence shows that the Karelian authorities tried to take control of Shirshina's mayoral performance (h_1). For example, in November 2013, when Shirshina initiated some personnel changes in the city administration, Oleg Gromov, the first deputy governor, was opposed to her appointment of Evgeniya Sukhorukova to the positions of the deputy mayor and chairperson of the city's Committee of Economics and Municipal Facilities. Gromov was unsatisfied by Sukhorukova's administrative background, and that Shirshina had not agreed upon Sukhorukova's appointment with the regional authorities⁶. Besides Gromov, the Karelian governor Aleksandr Khudilainen also recommended Shirshina implement her personnel policy with his consent⁷. These facts constitute *sufficient* evidence for coming to the conclusion that the senior Karelian authorities tried to control the performance of Petrozavodsk mayor (*smoking gun*).

Shirshina's decision to appoint Sukhorukova as the deputy mayor, despite the distinct opposition of the regional authorities, is *necessary and sufficient* evidence of their failure to control Shirshina's actions (*doubly decisive*). By making this decision Shirshina clearly showed that she would not follow "the rules of the game" which the Karelian officials tried to impose (h_2).

The following evidence also shows that the Karelian authorities' attempts to control Shirshina failed (h_2). On January 20, 2014 Shirshina dismissed Oleg Dezhurov, who was the creature of the Karelian governor and was appointed to the position of the first deputy mayor of Petrozavodsk at the beginning of June 2013 under Shirshina's predecessor. Contrary to the previ-

⁶ "Deputatov Petrosoveta ustroili kadrovye perestanki v merii", *Karelia*, November 21, 2013, No.90, P.2.

⁷ "Neobkhodimo vzaimodeistvie", *Karelia*, November 28, 2013, No.92, P.2.

ous evidence, this is “only” a *sufficient* but not necessary (*smoking gun*) condition for the confirmation of the second link (h_2) of the first causal mechanism.

Beside these arguments, there is also indirect (*straw-in-the-wind*) evidence, showing that the Karelian authorities failed to control Shirshina. From the end of November 2013, when Shirshina refused to agree upon her personnel policy in Petrozavodsk city administration with the regional officials, up to the end of her term in December 2015, Shirshina’s activities had been negatively assessed in the governmental official paper *Karelia* (see Figure 1).

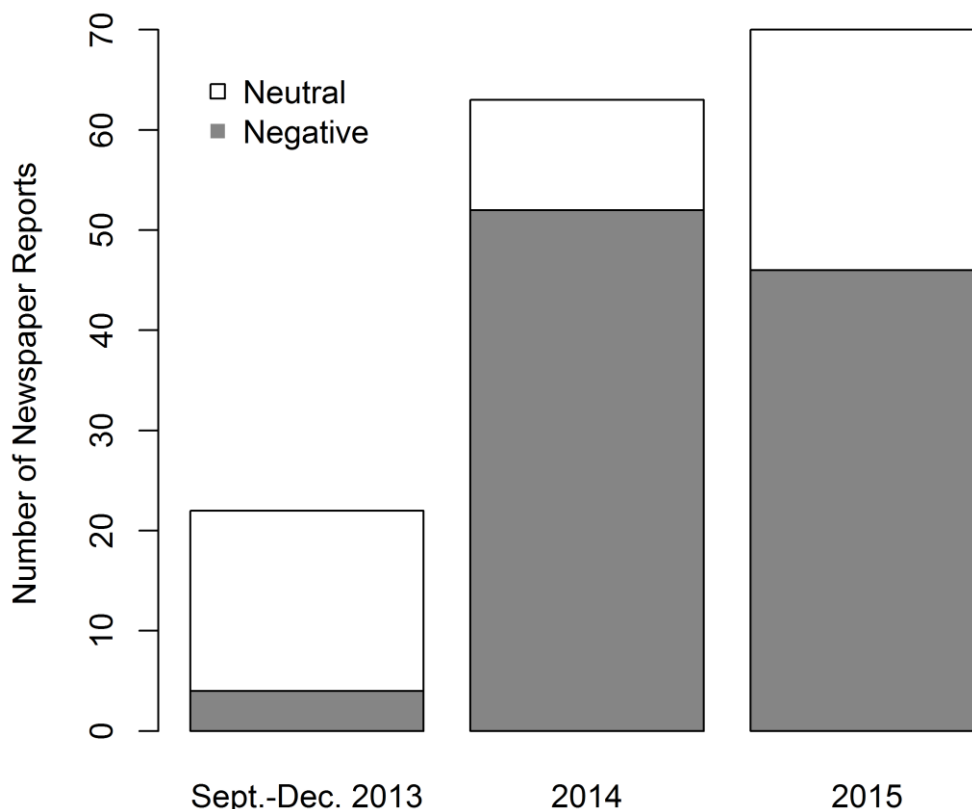


Figure 1. The number of reports, published in the governmental official paper *Karelia* within the period from September 2013 to December 2015, mentioning Shirshina. There were no positive reports within this period.

Source: The author’s calculations.

The criticism of Shirshina in *Karelia* paper, serves also as indirect (*straw-in-the-wind*) evidence that the Karelian authorities decided to dismiss Shirshina (h_3). However, there are other pieces of evidence substantiating this hypothesis.

At the end of April 2014, on the eve of the *Petrosovet’s* regular session, Pavel Sandberg, an active member of the For Petrozavodsk deputy faction, which was established with the support of the Karelian authorities⁸, stated that he was going to assess Shirshina’s activity as unsatisfactory on the basis of her 2013 annual report, and in this he was supported by some other depu-

⁸ Taisiya Bekbulatova, “Mezhdu gorodom i gubernatorom”, *Kommersant*, February 13, 2014, No.24, P.4. Interviewee No.4 (see Appendix 1).

ties⁹. Sandberg and his allies were bolstered by the fact that Shirshina had been Petrozavodsk mayor for only four months, as she had been elected on September 8, 2013. This evidence, along with the fact that the municipal deputies were made to vote against Shirshina by the members of Karelian Government¹⁰, *sufficiently proves (smoking gun) that the Karelian authorities had decided to dismiss Shirshina (h₃)*¹¹.

Oleg Fokin, the speaker of the *Petrosovet* from March 30, 2011 to February 18, 2015, described the events prior to the April session of Petrozavodsk City Council as follows: “*Some deputies, who believed that Galina Igorevna [Shirshina] did not cope with her obligations started to attack her. Such attacks were supported by the regional authorities [...] by the first deputy governor and the others deputies*”¹².

Dmitriy Makeev, the *Petrosovet* deputy who put forward his candidature for new City Council speaker at the same April session and who opposed Oleg Fokin, confirmed Fokin’s claims about the intervention of the regional officials in the City Council’s work: “*There were deputy governors [...who] began forming a group which was aimed at removing Fokin. [...] The power vertical shall exist, and the city officials cannot be in opposition to the republic officials: it is wrong. Accordingly, [deputy governors] began to draw the deputies step by step to the regional authorities side*”¹³.

In May 2014 a pre-investigation check was launched against Shirshina’s decision to allocate subsidies to the trolleybus administration of Petrozavodsk¹⁴. This fact could be also considered as an attempt by regional officials to remove Shirshina (*straw-in-the-wind*) (*h₃*) by initiating criminal proceedings (Moses 2015: 191) however, these were not implemented¹⁵.

Though the Karelian officials attempted to recall Shirshina by a decision of the *Petrosovet* in the middle of 2014, it was not a success. The presentation of Shirshina’s annual report on her performance for the year of 2013 was shifted from April 23 to June 3, 2014 and was approved by 18 deputies of the *Petrosovet*; only 8 deputies refused to support her¹⁶. The point is that the *Petrosovet* supported Shirshina, as she enjoyed support of the influential Karelian busi-

⁹ Natalya Ivanova, “Mera sravnili so shkolnikom, kotoryi boitsya idti na kontrolnuyu”, *Karelia. Moi Petrozavodsk*, April 26, 2014, No.17, P.4.

¹⁰ Interviewee No.5 (see Appendix 1).

¹¹ If Shirshina got an “unsatisfactory” assessment for two annual reports in a row, the City Council would have removed her.

¹² “So-mneniya. Odin na odin” as of April 29, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9T4ieuggD0>

¹³ Interviewee No.5 (see Appendix 1).

¹⁴ Taisiya Bekbulatova, “Protiv mera Petrozavodska vydvynuli trolleibusy”, *Kommersant*, August 5, 2014, No.136, P.2

¹⁵ Taisiya Bekbulatova and Anna Pushkarskaya, “Galinu Shirshinu ostavili bez ugolovnogo dela”, *Kommersant*, August 6, 2014, No.137, P.3.

¹⁶ See http://petrosovet.info/news1/rabotu_mera_i_administracii_ocenili_polozhitel_no/ accessed on June 29, 2016.

nessmen and politicians Devletkhan Alikhanov and Vasiliy Popov¹⁷, who, in their turn, controlled the majority of the *Petrosovet*¹⁸.

Thus, the intentions of the Karelian authorities to remove Shirshina were suppressed by the powerful and autonomous Alikhanov-Popov political group, which controlled the majority of the *Petrosovet*. Therefore, in order to remove Shirshina, the Karelian authorities had to eliminate that group first.

The purposive action of the Karelian authorities to eliminate the Alikhanov-Popov group was supposed to take place directly after the April session of the *Petrosovet*, where Shirshina's report on her performance in 2013 was to have been presented. At that time this group was able to control the majority of the deputies, notwithstanding the attempts of the regional officials on altering the status quo of the City Council. During that period an action was commenced against Anastasiya Kravchuk, Vasiliy Popov's wife and the deputy speaker of the Karelian Assembly¹⁹. Simultaneously, searches were made of the houses of Vasiliy Popov and Olga Zaletskaya, who is the *Yabloko*'s deputy of the *Petrosovet*²⁰. During the second half of 2014 a criminal case concerning the selling of municipal property, initiated in December 2012, began to gain traction²¹. Among those involved in this case were Grigoriy Kopnin, Alikhanov's nephew, and Evgeniy Zhuravlev, who was the right hand of Alikhanov during the term of Shirshina's predecessor. In the second half of November 2014 searches were made of Alikhanov's house. At the same time he was removed from the regional Political Council (*politsov*) of the United Russia party²². His ally, Oleg Fokin, who was also an active supporter of Shirshina, was expelled from the United Russia party²³.

Finally, in February and March 2015 a range of arrests and criminal proceedings were initiated against key figures in Petrozavodsk politics connected with the Alikhanov-Popov group. Notably, Karelian officials were aware of such actions in advance. For example, Yuriy Shabanov deputy governor of regional politics from December 10, 2013 to March 11, 2015, made the following statement to *Kommersant* magazine, published on January 26, 2015: he said that a row

¹⁷ Alikhanov and Popov managed to keep autonomy of local self-government in Petrozavodsk in 2006. At that time they prevented the attempts of the Karelian governor Sergey Katanandov to force in the amendments to the City Charter, replacing direct mayoral elections by the city manager model (Gel'man et al. 2008: 264-268).

¹⁸ Interviewees No.1, No.4, No.5 (see Appendix 1).

¹⁹ "Lider Karelskikh "yablochnikov" Vasiliy Popov uveren: ugolovnye dela vzbuzhdeny v politicheskikh tselyakh", *Karelskaya Guberniya*, June 4, 2014, No.23, P.4.

²⁰ "Politika – ne dlya silovikov. Lidery partii "Yabloko" vystupili s zhyostkim zayavleniem po situatsii v Karelii", *Karelskaia Guberniya*, May 28, 2014, No.22, P.4.

²¹ Interviewee No.5 (see Appendix 1).

²² Aleksandra Bondareva, "Novye obyski u Alikhanova – aktsiya ustrasheniya?", *Karelskaia Guberniya*, November 19, 2014, No.47, P.4. Anna Pushkarskaya, Irina Nagornyykh, Valeriy Lavskiy, "Edinaya Rossiya peremeshchaetsya na mestakh", *Kommersant*, December 1, 2014, No.217, P.2.

²³ Taisiya Bekbulatova, Anna Pushkarskaya, "Spiker Petrosoveta lishilsya partbileta Edinoi Rossii", *Kommersant*, November 20, 2014, No.210, P.2.

relating to some *Petrosovet* deputies would erupt soon²⁴. On January 29, 2015 Fokin was arrested and on February 4, 2015 Alikhanov was arrested. Finally, on March 25, 2015 *Petrosovet* deputy Zaletskaya was arrested. Popov, who was abroad during these events, decided not to return to Russia. On July 2015 Popov was put on the Interpol's wanted list.

Gleb Yarovoy, a journalist of "7x7" website: *"Fokin's arrest and the subsequent prosecution had the direct goal of showing the Petrosovet deputies who remained loyal to the city administration, that nobody counts in a prison cell."*²⁵

Anatoliy Tsigankov, a journalist and the editor of politika-karelia.ru website: *"Since 2014 [pause] in 2015 an abrupt attack on Alikhanov was launched. Alikhanov was actively bullied for the purpose of his removal from the political field. [...] The result was very sad – now he is in jail [unclear]. When the prosecution started, [...] his team began to disunite. Moreover, the members of his team were prosecuted as well, for instance, Oleg Fokin, the speaker of the Petrosovet, was arrested. As a result, Alikhanov's coalition began to collapse and lost its influence in the Petrosovet [...] and the members of the coalition in the Petrosovet started to look for a new patron."*²⁶

Dmitriy Makeev, Petrozavodsk City Councillor, the United Russia faction: *"When Galina Igorevna [Shirshina] was elected, it was suggested to Fokin and Alikhanov [...] that they abandon their powers and stop hewing their independent line, as the situation was about to drift out of control. However, they acted at their own discretion. As a result, the criminal proceedings were initiated."*²⁷

The arrests of the *Petrosovet* deputies connected with the Alikhanov-Popov group, and the arrest of Alikhanov himself, made the majority of the *Petrosovet* deputies loyal to the Karelian authorities. Consequently, the *Petrosovet* deputies ceased supporting Shirshina. For instance, on December 17, 2014 the majority of Petrozavodsk City Councillors approved an appeal addressed to the governor of Karelia, in which they criticized the Karelian officials for their unprecedented discrediting of the Petrozavodsk city administration and the City Council, and demanded an end to the "information war" being led against the Petrozavodsk city administration, the mayor and the *Petrosovet* deputies²⁸. Later, on March 26, 2016 the same deputies approved

²⁴ Taisiya Bekbulatova, "V karelskoy "Eдинoy Rossii" obnaruzhilsya krizis", *Kommersant*, January 26, 2015, No.11, P.2.

²⁵ Interviewee No.1 (see Appendix 1).

²⁶ Interviewee No.4 (see Appendix 1).

²⁷ Interviewee No.5 (see Appendix 1).

²⁸ Appendix to the Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/30-480 as of December 17, 2014 "On the Appeal to the Head of Karelia".

an appeal to Shirshina²⁹, containing criticism of her performance, similar to official media claims.

Alikhanov and Popov controlled the majority of the *Petrosovet* deputies. That is why the Karelian authorities could not take the control over Petrozavodsk City Council and use it against Shirshina without eliminating their influence. The removal of Alikhanov's and Popov's in the spring of 2015, can be considered as the fourth hypothesis' (h_4) passing a *hoop* test.

Within the first causal mechanism (H_1), it is supposed that the regional authorities were directly or indirectly searching for the grounds for Shirshina's recall (h_5). According to the data, provided by the interview with Dmitriy Makeev, the *Petrosovet* deputy, it was revealed that the regional Executive Committee (*ispolkom*) of the United Russia party was searching for such grounds, not the *Petrosovet* deputies³⁰. This evidence is a substantial, though an *indirect* confirmation of participation of the regional authorities in removing Petrozavodsk mayor from office (*straw-in-the-wind*).

More detailed information was obtained during the interview with Galina Shirshina: “I know that for about six months prior to my dismissal a man called Bekhov, arrived in the city. [...] I was told that he was a lawyer who had been working with the Just Russia party. [...] Later he was bought by Khudilainen. Bekhov came to the *Petrosovet* requested some documents. It is obvious that he was searching for those very grounds for my dismissal.”³¹

The fact that a Karelian politician told Shirshina that Bekhov was working for Khudilainen, is neither a necessary, nor sufficient condition. It cannot be considered as a sufficient basis for making the conclusion, that Bekhov was fulfilling the order of the regional governor to search the grounds for Shirshina's recall, however, it is quite possible. First, Bekhov represented the *Petrosovet* in the court³² where Shirshina tried to rebut the arguments for her recall, second, he was not a member of the *Petrosovet* apparatus, and, third, he worked in the electoral committee of the United Russia party in Karelia³³. Thus, the hypothesis that the Karelian authorities participated in search for the grounds for Shirshina's recall (h_5) passes a *straw-in-the-wind* test.

On June 3, 2015 the *Petrosovet* deputies issued a decision, assessing Shirshina's performance in 2014 as unsatisfactory³⁴, and appealed to the Karelian Assembly to abolish direct

²⁹ Appendix to the Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/32-508 as of March 26, 2015 “On the Appeal to Petrozavodsk mayor”.

³⁰ Interviewee No.4 (see Appendix 1).

³¹ Interviewee No.10 (see Appendix 1).

³² “Rabotu otnyali, teper khotyat lishit svobody”, *Karelskaia Guberniia*, January 27, 2016, No.4, P.7.

³³ Vadim Martynov, “Galinu Shirshinu khotyat dozhat lyubym sposobom”, *Radio Svoboda*, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27503149.html> accessed on June 30, 2016.

³⁴ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/34-554 as of June 3, 2015 “On the Annual Report of Petrozavodsk City Mayor as of 2014”.

mayoral elections in Petrozavodsk. In two weeks, despite the negative decision of the dedicated committee³⁵, the *Petrosovet's* claim appeal was satisfied, due to the votes of the United Russia deputies and their allies³⁶. The abolishment of direct mayoral elections in Petrozavodsk serves as a *necessary* condition for confirmation of validity of the sixth hypothesis (h_6) of the causal mechanism (H_1) (*hoop*).

There are two other pieces of evidence supporting the sixth hypothesis (h_6) passing *straw-in-the-wind* and *smoking gun* tests. First, direct mayoral elections in Petrozavodsk were abolished only when the Karelian authorities gained control over the *Petrosovet* and launched Shirshina's recall procedure but not before when the preconditions for placing a loyal actor at the top of Petrozavodsk city administration were absent. Second, the head of the Republic of Karelia supported the *Petrosovet's* proposal to abolish direct mayoral elections in Petrozavodsk³⁷ and personally asked the deputies of the Karelian Assembly to consider this issue as soon as it was possible³⁸.

On December 25 over two thirds of the *Petrosovet* deputies voted for Shirshina's recall for the non-fulfilment of her mayoral obligations during a three-month period³⁹. The head of the Republic of Karelia, Aleksandr Khudilainen, approved that decision⁴⁰.

The fact that a person loyal to the Karelian authorities became the head of the city upon Shirshina's dismissal (Z) is an element beyond the considered causal mechanism (H_1). However, such an outcome is expected if we suppose that Shirshina was dismissed for her unwillingness to obey "the rules of the game" imposed by the Karelian officials.

According to the amendments made to the Charter of Petrozavodsk on August 5, 2015, a head of the city must be elected by the *Petrosovet* deputies from candidates selected by a competition committee, half of which is elected by a representative body, and the other half is appointed by the head of the Republic⁴¹. This fact clearly shows that the competition committee could not have an anti-governor majority. Moreover, the other half of the competition committee was formed by the *Petrosovet* deputies, absolutely loyal to the regional authorities, which criticized

³⁵

See

http://karelia-zs.ru/presssluzhba/novosti/obsuzhdayutsya_izmeneniya_v_zakonodatel_stvo_o_mestnom_samoupravlenii/ accessed on June 30, 2016.

³⁶ "Demokratiya zakonchilas: deputaty otmenili vybory mera Petrozavodska", *Karelskaya Guberniya*, June 24, 2015, No.25, P.4-5.

³⁷ See http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/News/2015/06/0618_16.html accessed on June 30, 2016.

³⁸ "Demokratiya zakonchilas: deputaty otmenili vybory mera Petrozavodska", *Karelskaya Guberniya*, June 24, 2015, No.25, P.5.

³⁹ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/43-682 as of December 25, 2015 "On Dismissal of Petrozavodsk City Mayor Galina Shirshina".

⁴⁰ See http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/News/2015/12/1225_15.html accessed on June 30, 2016.

⁴¹ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/36-589 as of August 5, 2015 "On Making Amendments to the Charter of Petrozavodsk".

Shirshina's performance⁴². Thus, this is a *necessary* condition, confirming the hypothesis that the new Petrozavodsk mayor would be a person loyal to the Karelian authorities (*hoop*). As a result, on April 19, 2016 Irina Miroshnik, who was a public employee without any political background, was elected by the *Petrosovet* as the new head of Petrozavodsk. Miroshnik met the demand of the Karelian governor to the full extent⁴³ (*hoop*).

The analysis of the first causal mechanism (H_1) shows that each link has proof. The evidence, concerning h_1 , h_2 , h_3 and h_6 met at least one sufficiency criterion, while the evidence, concerning h_4 and Z , meet the criterion of necessity. Despite the lack of evidence meeting the necessity or sufficiency criteria for h_5 , two pieces of evidence passing two *straw-in-the-wind* tests allow us to take it into account. The combination of the collected evidence (Collier 2011: 827) leads to the conclusion that the causal mechanism according to which Shirshina's recall is thought to be initiated by the senior Karelian authorities (H_1) seems to be valid.

At the same time, according to the opinion of some *Petrosovet* deputies loyal to the Karelian authorities "*the reasons for [Shirshina's] recall go no further than the economic issues.*"⁴⁴ Thus, it is necessary to examine the causal mechanism explaining the dismissal of Petrozavodsk mayor by her non-fulfilment of the obligations during a three-month period (H_2)⁴⁵.

This mechanism is much shorter than the first one because it only supposes that Shirshina failed to fulfil her obligations (h_1), and that consequently the *Petrosovet* deputies found her inaction sufficient for her dismissal for the non-fulfilment of her obligations during a three-month period (h_2).

It is difficult to assess within the research, if Shirshina actually failed to fulfil her obligations during this period. Moses (2010: 1434) points out that "non-fulfilment of obligations during a three-month period" is an ambiguous definition, which was entered into Russian legislation in order to give governors an opportunity to initiate recalls of obstinate mayors via the subordinated city councils.

On January 21, 2016 the City Court of Petrozavodsk, where Shirshina was fighting this reason for her dismissal, considered the range of the grounds in favour of Shirshina's recall, presented by the *Petrosovet*, as sufficient for the dismissal of her claim⁴⁶. This fact serves as a *nec-*

⁴² Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/47-733 as of March 23, 2016 "On Appointment of the Competition Committee Members by Petrozavodsk City Council". Interviewee No.4 (see Appendix 1).

⁴³ See http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/News/2016/04/0419_22.html accessed on June 30, 2016.

⁴⁴ Interviewee No.2 (see Appendix 1).

⁴⁵ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/43-682 as of December 25, 2015 "On Dismissal of Petrozavodsk City Mayor Galina Shirshina".

⁴⁶ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Court of the Republic of Karelia concerning the case No.2a-1478/2016 as of January 21, 2016.

essary condition for validity of the first link (h_1) of the second causal mechanism (*hoop*)⁴⁷. Nevertheless, all the four grounds considered sufficient for Shirshina's recall by the court, illustrate that the problems, endemic for the city, remained during her governance. Among these problems are lack of a social housing for low-income citizens, a lack of municipal kindergartens, non-fulfilment of storm drainage repair and the unsatisfactory condition of a pontoon bridge in one of the city districts⁴⁸. The solution to these problems is a complicated task for any mayor of Petrozavodsk given the permanent deficit of the city budget⁴⁹.

The second link (h_2) of the causal mechanism (H_2) is based the *Petrosovet* deputies noticing the grounds for the mayor's dismissal and, consequently, initiating the recall procedure. This hypothesis faces at least two serious objections.

At first, the attitude of the *Petrosovet* deputies to the mayor dramatically changed within the three-month period from December 17, 2014 to March 26, 2015. Keeping in mind the second link (h_2) of the second causal mechanism, we can suppose that Shirshina failed to fulfil her obligations in that very time span. However, the list of the remarks concerning Shirshina's performance, approved by the majority of the *Petrosovet* deputies, attached to the appeal of March 26, 2015⁵⁰, the Decision of June 3, 2015⁵¹ and, finally, the appeal of December 9, 2015⁵², does not include any of Shirshina's actions within the period from December 2014 to March 2015. On the contrary, the deputies enumerated the problems, endemic for Petrozavodsk, starting with the bad condition of the municipal roads and finishing with the lack of municipal kindergartens. Thus, we come to the conclusion that the *Petrosovet* changed its attitude to Shirshina not due to her supposed inaction within the period from December 2014 to March 2015, but for some other reason. As a result, the second link (h_2) of the causal mechanism *fails a hoop* test.

Second, the list of the grounds for Shirshina's recall included the problem of the unsatisfactory condition of a pontoon bridge in one of the city districts. The deputies claimed that Shirshina's administration did not try to resolve this problem⁵³. However, according to the deci-

⁴⁷ The fact that Petrozavodsk City Court found Shirshina's recall legal, is not considered as a *necessity and sufficiency* criterion, confirming the first link (h_1), according to which Petrozavodsk mayor failed to fulfil her obligations during the period over three months. The point is that the judicial system in modern Russia is closely connected with the executive system. That is why courts often make decisions, profitable for the representatives of executive branch, especially concerning the political cases (see, e.g. Paneiakh 2015).

⁴⁸ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Court of the Republic of Karelia concerning the case No.2a-1478/2016 as of January 21, 2016.

⁴⁹ For example, the amount, required for the repair of city storm drainage is approximately assessed as 7 billion rubles, while the annual budget of Petrozavodsk in 2014-2015 amounted to 4.5 billion rubles with the deficit of 250 million rubles (see, e.g. "Chetyre prichiny ubrat Shirshinu", *Karelskaya Guberniya*, March 2, 2016, No.9, P.7.).

⁵⁰ Appendix to the Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/32-508 as of March 26, 2015 "On the Appeal to Petrozavodsk City Mayor".

⁵¹ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Council No.27/34-554 as of June 3, 2015 "On the Annual Report of Petrozavodsk City Mayor as of 2014".

⁵² Appeal of the deputies of Petrozavodsk City Council to Petrozavodsk City Council as of December 9, 2015 "On the Initiative of Dismissal of Petrozavodsk City mayor Galina Shirshina".

⁵³ *Ibid.*

sion of the court, the Petrozavodsk city administration should have solved this problem by December 11, 2011, two years prior Shirshina's inauguration⁵⁴. Nevertheless, this circumstance was not considered as a sufficient basis for dismissal of the previous city mayor, who occupied the position from 2011-2013, the deputies somehow decided that it was enough for Shirshina's recall. This contradiction *cannot be resolved*. Consequently, link (h_2) fails *the second hoop* test.

The analysis of the second causal mechanism (H_2), according to which Shirshina was dismissed due to her inaction as the mayor of Petrozavodsk, allows us to come to the following conclusion: though the first link (h_1) of the mechanism passes a *hoop* test, the second link (h_2) appears to be completely falsified, which, in its turn, constitutes a serious objection to the validity of the second causal mechanism in the whole.

6 Conclusion

The case of dismissal of Petrozavodsk city mayor Galina Shirshina is examined in detail in this article. On the basis of a large amount of primary and secondary sources the most probable causal mechanism of her dismissal was reconstructed. According to this mechanism (H_1), Shirshina's recall was initiated by the Karelian authorities after their failure to control her performance as mayor. The autonomy of the local political elites who supported Shirshina and controlled the majority of Petrozavodsk City Councillors, prevented Karelian officials from a prompt implementation of their plans. Shirshina's recall became possible only when the regional authorities managed to eliminate the influential pro-Shirshina's politicians Devletkhan Alikhanov and Vasilii Popov, with the support of law enforcement agencies. In order to guarantee the loyalty of the new Petrozavodsk mayor, the Karelian authorities, acting through Petrozavodsk City Council, which had become subordinated to them after elimination of the Alikhanov-Popov group, and through the United Russia deputies in the regional Assembly, abolished direct mayoral elections in the city.

The case of Petrozavodsk illustrates the direct influence that the regional authorities in Russia have on local politics (see, e.g. Gel'man et al. 2008; Gel'man, Lankina 2008; Ross 2009; Moses 2010; 2013; Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011; Golosov, Gushchina, Kononenko 2016; Reuter et al. 2016). Moreover, the analysis supports previous studies on the problems of local self-government in Russia – that survival of Russian mayors and preservations of direct mayoral elections in the cities mainly depends on the mayors' willingness to subordinate their action to the regional authorities (Gel'man, Ryzhenkov 2011; Reuter et al. 2016). When mayors are dis-

⁵⁴ Decision of Petrozavodsk City Court of the Republic of Karelia concerning the case No.2a-1478/2016 as of January 21, 2016.

loyal to regional officials, it leads to conflict between them which results in removal of mayors. The solution of this conflict as zero-sum game can be postponed if the mayor is supported by the influential local elites (Gel'man et al. 2008). However, the analysis suggests this model can be applied only while these elites maintain their autonomy.

In broader terms the obtained results point at the importance of hierarchical control mechanism under the authoritarian electoral regimes. If the autocrats are not afraid that the lower politicians with a direct electoral mandate will use their resources against them, they are ready to allow direct elections at the lower level, especially if the lower politicians control the electorate, which can be potentially beneficial for the autocrats (Reuter et al. 2016). However, if the autocrats are involved in a conflict with the lower politicians with a direct electoral mandate, they will probably try to eliminate the disloyal actors and abolish direct elections at the lower level.

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Appendix 1. Interview Table

N	Interviewee	Relation to Shirshina	Status	Source	Format	Length	Recording	Confidentiality
1	Gleb Yarovoy, journalist, Interregional internet-journal “7x7”	Ally	Conducted in person 11.05.16	Sample frame	Semi-structured	33 min.	Audio recording	Not required
2	Deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, faction “For Petrozavodsk”	Opponent	Conducted by phone 11.05.16	Sample frame	Semi-structured	42 min.	Concurrent notes	Required
3	Yuriy Shabanov, deputy governor on regional politics from December 10, 2013 through March 11, 2015	Opponent	Declined 12.05.16	Sample frame				
4	Anatoliy Tsigankov, journalist, the editor of politika-karelia.ru website	Opponent	Conducted in person 13.05.16	Sample frame	Semi-structured	21 min.	Audio recording	Not required
5	Dmitriy Makeev, deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, faction United Russia	Opponent	Conducted in person 13.05.16	Sample frame	Semi-structured	17 min.	Audio recording	Not required
6	Aleksey Yablokov, deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, member of the KPRF	Ally → Opponent	Questions send via e-mail 13.05.16, no response	Referred by Tsigankov and Yarovoy				
7	Ol’ga Zaletskaya, deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, member of the <i>Yabloko</i> party	Ally	Questions send via “vk.com” 13.05.16, no response	Sample frame, referred by Tsigankov and Makeev				
8	Igor’ Artebyakin, deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, faction United Russia	Ally → Opponent	Declined 16.05.16	Sample frame, referred by Makeev				
9	Vyacheslav Kashin, deputy of Petrozavodsk city council, member of the KPRF, deputy head of Karelian Civic Organization of Veterans of War, Labour, Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Entities	Opponent	Conducted by phone 16.05.16	Referred by Tsigankov	Semi-structured	10 min.	Concurrent notes	Not required
10	Galina Shirshina, ex-mayor of Petrozavodsk	N/A	Conducted in person 16.05.16	Sample frame	Semi-structured	34 min.	Audio recording	Not required