

REALITY OF RUSSIAN POLITICS

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EVENTS

United Russia party congress

On December 7 and 8, United Russia held its annual party congress in Moscow. This year, the gathering had particular political significance. First, for the past two years, the party has become a battleground for competing “curators”: Sergey Kiriyenko, the president’s first deputy chief of staff, and Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of the State Duma. Second, there were growing rumors about the likely emergence of a new ruling political party, amid the Kremlin’s rising dissatisfaction with United Russia and the authorities’ falling ratings. Third, there have also been questions about how the party plans to respond to mounting social discontent and minimize the risks of repeating this fall’s electoral setbacks.

NB! According to [data](#) from the Levada Center, United Russia’s rating slipped 11 points during the course of the year (from 39% in June 2017 to 28% in August 2018). [VTsIOM data](#) reveals an even steeper decline from a peak of 60% in 2014 to 33–35% in November–December 2018.

Based on the results of the party congress, several conclusions can be drawn:

- By visiting the congress and giving a speech, President Putin clearly demonstrated that United Russia will remain the regime’s single main political pillar, and no one inside the Kremlin is seriously considering any moves to oust the party from power.
- Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev - who also gave a speech at the congress - remains the party’s formal leader and confirmed his special political status as one of the most politically significant figures in Russia’s decision-making system.
- Sergey Kiriyenko is gradually expanding his influence within the party. The All-Russia People’s Front (ONF) — which he oversees, and which some observers have called a potential alternative to United Russia — will remain just a “social” addition to the ruling political party. This is entirely in keeping with the Kiriyenko’s management style who prefers to rely on already-established, “time-tested” structures. He also understands Putin’s need to avoid any active political creativity or innovations and instead focus on preserving existing institutions. Kiriyenko plans to use personnel mechanisms to advance his own interests within United Russia such as a party-based version of the “Leaders of Russia” contest called “Political Leader,” designed to replenish the party’s personnel reserve, and the Higher Party School (a project by Konstantin Kostin). This will lead to the party’s gradual “technocratization” and depersonalization.
- Boris Gryzlov, the former State Duma speaker, was also a notable public presence at the congress. Gryzlov is also Russia’s representative in the Minsk group (in this capacity, he reports to Vladislav Surkov), and Sergey Kiriyenko’s predecessor as head of Rosatom’s supervisory board. Seated at Putin’s right hand during the congress, Gryzlov chairs [United Russia’s Supreme Council](#) — a mostly dormant “body” that unites some of Russia’s most diverse figures of significant political status. His attempts to rehabilitate the Council in 2016 failed. Gryzlov also tried to enhance his status within the party in 2016 as the head of the board of trustees of the Expert Institute for Social Research, which was created under Kiriyenko, but he nevertheless failed to gain any real influence over the party’s operations. His proximity to Putin at the congress reflects the consolidation of his role as a “placeholder” oriented toward the interests of both Kiriyenko and General Council Secretary Andrey Turchak.
- Andrey Turchak’s influence within the party is expanding. Turchak has staffed the General Council (a key executive body) with close associates, including Senator Andrey Klimov (the chairman of the Federation Council’s Interim Commission on Defending State Sovereignty) and 32-year-old State Duma deputy Alexander Gribov, who served as lieutenant governor of the Yaroslavl Region in 2012 - 2015, overseeing the administration’s internal policy. Turchak is thought to be personally selected by Putin (who is friends with his father), but the initiative to promote him to United Russia’s leadership in 2017 could have also come from the president’s chief of staff, Anton Vaino. Both Turchak and Vaino are close to Sergey Chemezov, the head of the state corporation Rostec. However, it is not likely that Turchak has much independence from Kiriyenko: Kiriyenko works very closely with Vaino on a daily basis and Turchak appears to act in the accordance of Kiriyenko’s priorities.

NB! *Andrey Turchak actively draws on Kiryenko's staff at Rosatom to develop the projects that are most politically important to him. This summer, at Turchak's initiative, the Federation Council agreed to establish the Digital Economy Development Council. The group met for the second time on December 18 and agreed to create a special "Digital Industry" subdivision, to be headed by Ekaterina Solntseva, Rosatom's digitization director.*

- The Kremlin is not ready for a serious rebranding of United Russia. The only action taken in response to the growth of social discontent and declining ratings was the creation of a special ethics commission that will monitor inappropriate public statements by party officials and deputies. Recently, there have been too many statements of this nature, which exacerbate resentment among the public. United Russia will also adopt an Ethics Code that will establish a list of "commandments," which is mainly a way for party members need to demonstrate politically correct behavior.
- Vyacheslav Volodin's influence continues to decline. Despite the fact that his ally Olga Batalina maintained her position on the General Council (according to some reports, she has actually distanced herself from Volodin and established an effective relationship with Turchak), the State Duma speaker's sphere of influence has narrowed to just the United Russia's party faction in parliament. Even here he is likely to face new challenges. At the congress, the party decided to set up an internal procedure for the preliminary discussion of "high-profile legislative initiatives", - this may be another way for them to influence United Russia's legislative activities.
- Unofficially there are also thought to be growing concerns among United Russia's most active members: in particular, regional deputies are concerned that the Kremlin will "purge" the party in the next elections, revitalizing its ranks in an effort to rid itself of party members associated with the unpopular pension reform. Many party members are dissatisfied with how the federal center used them to implement unpopular reforms. A number of party functionaries are now considered their political careers outside of United Russia and rejecting the Kremlin's whole approach to addressing social affairs – the are particularly disgruntled that they had to take responsibility for Putin's decision.

NB! *The authorities' inertial approach to United Russia amid the party's falling ratings maintains high risks for future regional elections: governors will increasingly try to run as independent candidates, and the party could lose its majority in some regional legislative assemblies. This is becoming one of the most important and underestimated challenges facing the Kremlin in 2019.*

Formation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

The Ukrainian Local Autocephalous Orthodox Church has been created in Ukraine, headed by 39-year-old Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko) of Kiev and All Ukraine, the right hand of Patriarch Filaret (the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate, or UPTs-KP). Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko failed to secure the election of his own protégé, Metropolitan Simeon (Shostatsky) of Vinnitsa and Bar — one of the two bishops from UPTs-KP who took part in the synod. Ukraine now faces a period of fierce competition between the two churches (the new one and UPTs-KP), and the struggle for control over individual parishes and monasteries could become heated.

NB! *Russia watched the synod closely and had three main narratives about the church's independence. The first was that new church's "autocephaly" is not genuine, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would be put under Constantinople's control. This is not entirely true, but the purpose of this idea was to reduce Poroshenko's political credit. Second, Russia maintained that the new Church was created in addition to three already existing churches, and it would become the most marginal of the three after failing to draw away the bishops that were subordinated to Moscow (only 10 or 90 bishops were represented at the synod). The third narrative that the Kremlin has been playing up (with good reason) is the anticipated wave of pressure on UPTs-KP clergymen, which drives conservative circles in Russia to advocate a tougher Ukraine policy. The situation is genuinely complicated and there are serious risks of violent conflicts at parishes and monasteries, which gives hardliners grounds for advocating for the defense of "Russkiy Mir" at any cost. The Kremlin is increasingly worried about the prospects of Petro Poroshenko's re-election to the presidency, which it considers to be the worst-case scenario. With Putin's full political support, Moscow plans to intensify its game against Bartholomew I of Constantinople (as evidenced by the president's disrespectful statements addressed to him during*

the end-of-the-year press conference) and against other local churches, in order to turn them against Constantinople's actions.

ACTORS

Oleg Kozhemyako — Primorsky Krai's new governor

On December 16, Primorye held its gubernatorial election, where the Kremlin's protégé, Oleg Kozhemyako, officially won 62% of the votes with an abnormal turnout of 46% (compared to 30 and 35% turnouts in the first and second rounds in September). This was a repeat election, after the Central Election Commission invalidated the original results in late September (see bulletin #11 (12) 2018 for more details). In those elections, Putin-favorite Andrey Tarasenko won an extremely dubious victory, pulling ahead of his rival, Communist Party candidate Andrey Ishchenko, only when the very last votes were being counted, prompting much criticism of electoral brazen and spontaneous fraud. This time, the Kremlin made every effort to ensure that Kozhemyako won in the first round.

Kozhemyako's campaign was of an exceptional nature:

- Kozhemyako bet on outright populism, which the Kremlin typically does not welcome. This was the first regional campaign in many years in which a governor proposed his own solutions and showed substantial initiative. However, Kozhemyako's many pledges to address social issues are to be difficult to fulfill, which is likely to raise and then dash expectations, leading to the public's rapid disappointment. One of his most debated initiatives — legislation granting special welfare payments to “the children of war” (citizens born between 1930 and 1945) — is something the Kremlin cannot afford at the federal level. Kozhemyako also advocated for a return to direct elections in Vladivostok, at a time when most regions are moving away from direct elections, and in a place where the authorities often have to compete against (and lose to) opposition candidates.
- The Kremlin allowed Kozhemyako to “play with fire”: he actively exploited anti-Moscow sentiment in the region, sharply criticizing the federal center and demanding greater financial autonomy and benefits. But at the same time, Kozhemyako relied on strong federal support - Putin endorsed his idea to move the Far Eastern Federal District's capital from Khabarovsk to Vladivostok. For the sake of its candidate's victory, the Kremlin was effectively ready to provoke centrifugal sentiments, which indicates a desire to solve a short-term problem at the expense of long-term priorities.
- Kozhemyako faced virtually no serious competitors. Andrey Ishchenko was not allowed to run in the third round, and he essentially removed himself from the race by calling on his supporters to invalidate their own ballots, which had almost no chance of damaging Kozhemyako's election odds. The Communist Party (KPRF) bowed out of Primorye's campaign altogether, having received the Kremlin's guarantee of immunity for another candidate, Valentin Konovalov, the surprise winner of Khakassia's election. Admittedly, according to a [Znak.com's source](#), the Kremlin plans to rid itself of Konovalov and other “accidental” governors within a year.
- On election day, independent observers were virtually barred from polling stations, and the KPRF, which traditionally puts its members on local election commissions in advisory roles, effectively withdrew from observation.
- Kozhemyako's main rival was Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) candidate Andrey Andreichenko, who barely campaigned but still officially won 25% of the vote. In reality Andreichenko won even more votes — a dangerous signal for the Kremlin. The other candidates played their role of extras.
- Despite such high stakes for the Kremlin to ensure Kozhemyako's victory, the campaign did not go as planned. The politically powerful local elites (particularly former Vladivostok Mayor Igor Pushkarev, who retains great influence in the region's capital, as well as former Governor Sergey Darkin, who enjoys a prominent position in business) were hostile to Kozhemyako. There were also tensions between the political strategists that Sergey Kiriyyenko had dispatched (Alexander Kharichev managed the campaign) and the strategists sent by Far Eastern Federal District Presidential Envoy Yuri Trutnev. This is what largely fueled the active dissemination of rumors on anonymous Telegram channels about Kozhemyako's supposed inability to win the race. Defeat would certainly have been blamed on Trutnev, and in the end Kiriyyenko's team managed to “privatize” the victory.
- Kozhemyako lost the “battle” for the Sakhalin Region, where he was governor before his appointment in the Primorsky Krai. The new head of Sakhalin became Valery Limarenko, a Kiriyyenko protégé.

NB!

The official election results showed a convincing win of Oleg Kozhemyako but evidence quickly emerged suggesting that a significant number of the votes were rigged, which is confirmed by data from the “Golos” [movement](#), and [multiple election experts](#). Apparently, a significantly higher percentage of votes for Kozhemyako was introduced at multiple polling stations, where he received 70% of the votes, instead of the 38-52% he averaged across the region. Another sign of fraud could be the unusually high turnout — almost 15% higher than turnout in the first round of voting in September, when there was greater suspense at the polls. According to mathematician and electoral [statistician Sergey Shpilkin](#), Kozhemyako is likely to have received closer to 46% of the vote, excluding the polling stations with anomalous results. In other words, there should have been a runoff election.

A separate point of intrigue in this story is the growing competition between Russia’s Japanese and Chinese geopolitical orientations.

NB!

Over the past two years, there has been a noticeable strengthening of the “Japanese group” among the Russian authorities, which is represented by Anton Vaino (thanks to his experience at the Russian embassy in Japan and then at the Foreign Ministry’s Second Asia Department), Sergey Kiriyenko (through Rosatom’s projects in Japan), Valery Limarenko in the Sakhalin Region (who is known as the curator of Rosatom’s joint project with Japan to clean up the Fukushima nuclear disaster), and partly Rostec (which has interests in mechanical engineering, medicine, and access to advanced technologies). The “Chinese direction” is more connected to energy and the defense industry and remains Russia’s geopolitical priority but it now exists in more “competitive” conditions. The “Japanese group” can also be linked to the mainstreaming of signing a peace treaty with Japan. The mainstreaming of the “Japanese group” is leading to increased competition for influence in the Far East (and by extension Russia’s Arctic projects, the Northern Sea Route, etc.) between Rosatom (Kiriyenko), Trutnev, and energy companies.

PROCESSES

Increasing activity among Russia’s “conservatives”

Recently, there have been several initiatives aimed at curtailing public freedoms and increasing the state’s regulatory role, particularly on the Internet.

- [A package of laws](#) has been submitted to the State Duma that equates disrespectful and “indecent” online statements about the authorities with “disorderly conduct.” The authors of the draft law (Federation Council Constitutional Legislation Committee Chairman Andrey Klishas, Senator Lyudmila Bokova, and lower house deputy Dmitry Vyatkin, known as “legal lobby”, close to the judiciary) propose administrative penalties: fines and jail sentences up to 15 days. The legislation’s authors suggest giving the Prosecutor General the right to block any internet websites that feature “disrespectful” comments. Another bill equates the distribution of false information with inciting extremism. If adopted, this legislation would markedly expand the Prosecutor General’s remit, rendering the agency a kind of “censor” of Internet content and the “guardian” of the authorities’ reputation against any criticism. Judging by anonymous comments sent to the newspaper [Vedomosti newspaper](#), the Kremlin intends to support the legislation, though it could be softened through amendments by the State Duma.

NB!

One of the legislation’s objectives is to discourage Alexey Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation’s informational activities. The catalyst for the laws’ appearance was National Guard head Viktor Zolotov’s sharp response to allegations that his agency violated public procurement regulations. As the [magazine RBC](#) later revealed, the Federal Security Service (FSB) in May had requested an inquiry into the National Guard’s purchases, and the Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS) launched its own case in November. The well-known journalist Oleg Kashin [has suggested](#) that Navalny has been used in the infighting between the two security agencies. The mounting tensions between the security forces, however, ultimately work against Navalny, regardless of the role he played in this situation. Within the government, there is a consensus about the need to “contain” out-systemic opposition’s activity.

At the same time, Zolotov himself appears to be somewhat vulnerable. As well as being subject to an audit by the FSB and FAS, the courts rejected his lawsuit against Navalny, demanding that he reformulate his claim. It is important not to exaggerate this fact, however, as it reveals two things: first, that the lawsuit was indeed executed carelessly (Zolotov's attorney thought that the court would not pay much attention to the usual formalities when dealing with such an influential plaintiff). Second, the court did not receive the "political 'green light,'" and so in this instance it acted completely independently. However, this does not mean that Zolotov is being prevented from bringing a lawsuit against Navalny.

- Senators Andrey Klishas and Lyudmila Bokova and State Duma deputy Andrey Lugovoi have introduced [amendments](#) to two of Russia's laws "On Communications" and "On Information, Information Technologies, and Data Protection". The legislation proposes establishing new state infrastructure under the control of Roskomnadzor and creates [a mechanism for blocking any Internet content](#) that the authorities consider undesirable. In the Russian news media, the legislation is already being compared with China's Golden Shield Project and has attracted criticism even from loyal media figures such as the chief editors of Komsomolskaya Pravda and Moskovsky Komsomolets. The bill reflects the interests of a number of influence groups with varying proximity to Russia's security forces: Igor Shchegolev (who retains his influence at Roskomnadzor through his protégé Maxim Zharov), the Orthodox circles (Father Tikhon and businessman Konstantin Malofeev), and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev. The initiative essentially comes from the same circles that lobbied for Telegram to be blocked in Russia.
- Roskomnadzor's deputy director Vadim Subbotin announced that the agency intends to [block Google](#) in Russia if it continues to ignore demands that it filters prohibited content from its search results. A day earlier, Roskomnadzor [fined Google](#) 500,000 rubles for refusing to filter prohibited content, and the agency is prepared to repeat this process endlessly.

Given this, another development deserves attention: over the past three years, observers have repeatedly noted Putin's declining interest in politically significant domestic subjects. It is now becoming clear that this indifference is reducing the head of state's access to objective information, and the *siloviki* are starting to get out of control. This is especially evident in the situation surrounding the *Novoye Velichie* (New Greatness) and *Set* (Network) on "extremist communities."

***NB!** Novoye Velichie was created on the initiative of the FSB agent who, after a few chat-room conversations, convinced several young people, including 19-year-old Maria Dubovik and 18-year-old Anna Pavlikova, to form an extremist group. He also wrote the group's charter, which endorses a genuinely extremist platform that supports the violent overthrow of the Russian state. The FSB then launched a criminal case and successfully solved the "case," which was a complete setup.*

The arrest of Anna Pavlikova (whose case was particularly difficult, due to her health problems) and her friends caused a major public backlash. In August, there was a grassroots "mothers march" in support of those jailed in the case. Active Putin supporters with reputations as "guardians," like RT chief editor Margarita Simonyan, spoke out in Pavlikova's defense. On August 15, effectively under public pressure, state investigators unexpectedly asked the courts to transfer the suspects Pavlikova and Dubovik to house arrest, which was the consequence of a lack of consensus among the elite over what constituted a "red line" for the FSB. A further eight people remain under arrest in connection with the case. Based on unofficial reports, the case has become extremely important for the FSB, and the fact that Pavlikova's pretrial detention was softened does not at all mean that the agency intends to abandon its pursuit of the "extremist community." In recent months, more and more often, the FSB has used its anonymous sources to cultivate news stories promoting the idea that extremism is rife among Russia's youth, an idea that resonates strongly with Putin. The arrest of Lev Ponomarev, incidentally, is also linked to the FSB's oversensitivity to his advocacy for the demonstrations in favour of the Novoye Velichie suspects.

On December 11, Vladimir Putin met with the new membership of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, where there were multiple questions about Novoye Velichie. Judging by Putin's statements during the closed part of the [meeting](#), the president was not informed about the details of the case and did not know about the FSB provocateur's fundamental role in the creation of the "extremist group." Putin seemed indignant and promised to look into the matter, but he also accepted the FSB's claim that Novoye Velichie presented a genuine "threat," and treated the danger quite seriously. "Aren't there enough

terrorist attacks for you or something?” the president asked, stating that “this movement, Novoye Velichie, planned to organize recruitment work in the North Caucasus, in the Volga Region, and in Crimea.”

***NB!** As reported previously, Russia’s domestic policy curators have spent the past two years working to humanize Putin’s image, and a lot is being invested in this effort. The president initiated the Criminal Code Article 282 decriminalization and made a series of symbolic gestures such as personally paying his respects to the distinguished human rights activist Lyudmila Alexeyeva, attending the opening ceremony for a monument to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and paying more attention to members of the Human Rights Council. However, these public gestures are merely a political-strategy initiative of Putin’s administration, which is trying less to revamp the president’s image and more to set boundaries for the “intelligence agencies,” which have started interfering too aggressively in the domestic policy curators’ sphere of influence. This makes it possible to discuss a new phenomenon where a tightening of the state’s repressive policies (initiatives by the siloviki and guardians) and efforts to fight certain “excesses” (albeit not always successfully) are observed simultaneously. Given that the latter is not the Kremlin’s political choice, but rather an effort to contain the intelligence agencies institutionally – these two trends in combination are likely to lead to curtailed rights and freedoms.*

The Maria Butina situation

The story of Russian citizen Maria Butina’s [arrest](#), trial, and deal with investigators in the United States has not only foreign but also domestic importance for Russia. This is an example of how representatives of the Russian elite try to provide services to the Kremlin while also trying to protect their own corporate interests.

***NB!** As is already well known, Butina’s activities in the United States were supervised by Alexander Torshin, who spent many years as a member of the Federation Council, and in early 2015 assumed the position of Central Bank state secretary. Torshin, who has a highly controversial reputation (thanks in part to his links with the “Tagansky” organized criminal group), was known as one of the Russian parliament’s most active lobbyists, often abusing anti-American and anti-liberal rhetoric and openly using conservative arguments to promote his agenda. In the Putin regime, however, Torshin’s excessive shows of initiative are unwelcome. At first, Torshin was ousted from the Federation Council and relocated to the Central Bank (at Senate Chairwoman Valentina Matviyenko’s insistence). Next, he was excluded from the regulator’s operations almost completely. On December 2, it became known that Torshin had resigned, which many observers linked directly to emerging reports from Bloomberg about Butina’s upcoming deal with American investigators. Interestingly, Kremlin sources publicly aired their sharp irritation with the U.S. Torshin’s activities in the U.S. as he sought to wield influence behind the Foreign Ministry’s back, discrediting “Russian channels” of dialogue in the United States and fueling yet more discussion about “Russian influence.” Torshin also provoked the anger of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), which felt he overstepped his bounds. In the end, Butina was granted political patronage (though even her father could not raise enough money to pay her lawyers’ fees), her deal with investigators was fully approved, and Torshin was cast out from the political power system. The campaign against Torshin is also being used actively in continued attacks on presidential aide Igor Levitin and his ally, businessman Konstantin Nikolaev.*

INDICATORS § CONTEXT

- **Is Russia preparing to absorb Belarus?** Belorussian president Alexander Lukashenko has been increasingly accusing Moscow of applying political pressure on Belarus. Now, discussions of a Russian-Belarusian integration project to create a single, unified state - which has long been Putin’s intention - have returned to the fore. The topic would supposedly lead in 2024 is again gaining momentum. However, there is no reason to take this seriously: it is likely that issue is being discussed now because Putin is concerned by the prospect of Moscow’s declining influence over Belarus and seeking to pave the way to regain the initiative there, in the event that Lukashenko’s power wanes and there is a need to ensure continuity in the country.
- **The “Nuclear” Elite: Russia’s new “siloviki.”** On December 18, Vladimir Putin took part in an extended meeting of the Defense Ministry Board. It is worth paying attention to the President’s particular emotional fascination with the development of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces, which it seems are becoming Moscow’s final argument in its confrontation with the West. Putin also devoted much attention to the issue

of nuclear balance at his annual press conference. The president made it clear that the risks of nuclear war are “obscured and underestimated,” thereby confirming again that Russia has started preparing for the worst, and it is doing so unilaterally. The part of the Russian military elite responsible for Russia’s strategic forces is acquiring special political weight and getting more opportunities to influence the psychology of Russian foreign policy as a whole.

- **The All-Russia People's Front (ONF) comes under “technocrat” control.** The ONF’s Executive Committee has come under the control of Khakassia’s former acting governor, Mikhail Razvozhaev, who failed to defeat Communist Party candidate Valentin Konovalov in Khakassia. Razvozhaev replaced Alexey Anisimov, one of Vyacheslav Volodin’s associates, following a decision reached at a meeting of the ONF’s Central Staff. Kiriyenko is continuing to promote technocrats to important political posts.
- **Putin’s ratings stabilize.** [Data from VTsIOM](#) in early December shows that the authorities’ falling ratings largely stabilized by late autumn. There are three main indicators: Vladimir Putin’s approval rating (which has fluctuated between 90% in 2015 and 58% in 2013) is currently 63–64%; the president’s trust rating was between 35–37% during the past two months (compared to his highest score of 70% in 2014 and 58% after the presidential elections in March); and his electoral rating (readiness to vote), which has stabilized. According to the Levada Center’s November numbers, the president’s electoral rating was 40% (meaning that this amount of all respondents would vote for Putin) and 56% among those who said they would go to vote.
- **Russians support the right to criticize the authorities.** [According to VTsIOM](#), only 15% of Russians believe that criticism of the authorities should be punished. Conversely, 36% of Russians say that criticism of the authorities and the state should be permitted. Almost as many respondents (35%) argue that no official response whatsoever is necessary.
- **Growing protest potential.** A poll by the [Levada Center](#) indicates that 30% of Russians have expressed their readiness to join demonstrations for social and economic reasons, and 22% say they are willing to protest for political reasons. Six months ago, these figures were 8 and 6%, respectively.
- **Soviet nostalgia as a sign of social insecurity.** [According to the Levada Center](#), the trend of rising Soviet nostalgia is becoming more common. In 2018, the percentage of Russians who “mourned” the USSR was 2.5 times higher than those who did not (66% versus 25%, respectively). Increasing nostalgia is also noticeable among young people who have never lived in the Soviet Union. This nostalgia peaked between 1999 and 2000 (74–75%) — a time of national crisis. Above all, the main cause of Soviet nostalgia seems to be economic problems and purchasing power. The trend indicates that people still see the state as a guarantor of social stability and are concerned that the state is losing its ability to fulfill this role.

Dear readers,

Due to the extended New Year’s holidays in Russia, the next issue of the bulletin will be published on January 15, not January 8.

I wish you a merry Christmas and happy New Year!

Tatiana Stanovaya