

A Revolution of the Mind

INTERVIEW WITH YULIA MALYSHEVA

Yulia Sergeevna Malysheva is one of the leading youth activists in Russia. An elected municipal deputy in Moscow, a researcher at the Institute for the Economy in Transition, and leader of the youth organization Oborona (which she cofounded) and of the youth branch of the SPS party, Malysheva also later became the leader of the youth branch of the People's Democratic Union, the political movement led by former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov. In this interview, she speaks about the possibility of a color revolution in Russia, cooperation with other domestic and international youth groups, the Kremlin's worried reaction, the nature of the Nashi pro-Kremlin youth group, the attempts to unite the Russian democrats, the successes of Oborona, the chances the democrats have of returning to power, and what she expects from the West.

Demokratizatsiya: Tell us about Oborona.

Malysheva: Oborona is a youth organization that appeared with the Orange wave in Ukraine. It was important for us that many others were waiting for us, since youth have always been in the avant-garde. At that time, our adult colleagues kept arguing as to who was more important. In the end, they got 3 percent [in the Duma elections]. It was evident that they were not well presented before the Russian voters. We founded Oborona not only with young people who sympathize with SPS, Yabloko, the [former SPS leader and independent candidate Irina] Khakamada movement and other such formations—but also with those who support the democratic process and oppose the Putin regime. All who were in favor of honest elections, of civil society, of the concept that each individual has a choice, and against the “putinist” regime, with a small “p,” since it does not necessarily depend on Putin but is a manifestation of totalitarian impulses in our society. We are opposed to this putinism, and for our first birthday we organized a street protest called “enough of Putin.” We also organized a few radical activities, one of which made us famous worldwide—when we organized a big protest in Belarus together with Ukrainians and with opposition Belarusians, in April 2005 during the anniversary of the Chernobyl accident. [Alyaksandr] Lukashenka arrested twenty-five activists and they were jailed from seven to fifteen days. I remained behind to help them and attempt to ameliorate the situation, spoke to our ambassador, who of course did not sympathize with us democrats. A few people had spontaneously gathered in Belarus over the years on that

The interview was conducted in Moscow on March 7 and 8, 2006, by *Demokratizatsiya* founder Fredo Arias-King. Copyright © 2007 Heldref Publications

day to protest, but every year fewer and fewer would show up, until it was forbidden. In our protest, five thousand to ten thousand people participated, which was the largest number ever. So we organized a prohibited protest, and people gathered the strength to participate nevertheless. We revived that slogan, “for your freedom and ours.” At that moment we did not realize we would end up in the same prison as our Belarusian colleagues. Together with some colleagues from [the Belarusian youth movement] Zubr, I tried to help those who ended up in prison. Some were let go right away, namely the Russians. But several Ukrainians and Belarusians remained, and I continued to stir. Four political groups that hardly ever cooperated with one another—the United Civic Party, the Popular Front, Zubr, and Mlada Front—all came to protest the situation, and I am very proud of that. It is interesting that sometimes it takes people from outside to help unite forces that do not do so by themselves. Later we returned to Russia and organized another protest in front of the Belarusian embassy and were again arrested for six days. But it was one of those defining moments when people sympathized with us. In the year that we have existed, Oborona has organized about fifty public activities, has twenty-two regional branches, and usually attracts more people than just members of SPS and Yabloko, since we do not support someone specific for a political post. We will never become a political party. We will just help people choose whomever they want and will attempt to change the situation that we have in Russia today whereby people no longer believe in politics. I see my main task as returning that faith in the vote, that people see their vote as meaningful for change. So our revolution should manifest itself not so much in a Maidan but in the head of each individual. So in that sense we are revolutionaries.

Demokratizatsiya: What allies do you have in Russia as well as in other countries of the former Bloc?

Malysheva: What do you mean by allies? Anyone who struggles for democracy, freedom, for honest elections, civil society, those are our allies. It also means that we can work in parallel and not intervene with one another. Or sometimes we can form provisional coalitions with those that also think they can do a better job than Putin. More than allies [*soyuzniki*], they are our comrades [*tovarishchy*]. What do I mean by comrades? Those who also want to change the situation for the better. We are prepared to support some of them for the presidency—people like [SPS Chairman Nikita] Belykh, [Yabloko Chairman Grigory] Yavlinsky, [former world chess champion and democracy activist Gary] Kasparov, [former prime minister Mikhail] Kasyanov, Khakamada, whomever is necessary. Each of us has a right to think whatever we want about each of these potential candidates. But our common vector is democratic development. My goal is also to organize a series of events in the context of which we can also reach out to other forces, such as leftist organizations, because today they are also in the opposition. And if we were to look at what is happening in other countries of the former Bloc, such as Ukraine and Belarus, we see that only when all opposition forces cooperate—from Left to Right—only then something happens. Right now we are seeing a very serious coalition, the United Civic Front, which is not a party but a movement headed by Kasparov. From what I remember, in Voronezh they already took in several disparate movements, such as Rodina, Communists, democrats. So his goal is to unite all parties and all movements. I like to say that Kasparov’s movement is somewhat of an “adult Oborona.” Again, youth begin these revolutionary activities but when they bear fruit, then the adults catch on.

Demokratizatsiya: Some say that it was the example of Oborona that compelled the two major democratic parties to field joint candidates for the city Duma in Moscow.

Malysheva: At SPS youth, we began to reach out and cooperate with Yabloko youth last spring. I would go to the Yabloko headquarters and not even need a permit, they would accept me as one of theirs. We all realized that we could overcome the stereotypes and caricatures the adults had of one another—they saw that not all of us were like [former controversial privatization tsar and SPS dignitary Anatoly] Chubais, we saw that not all of them were like Yavlinsky. As this warmth between us grew, we then compelled the Moscow branch of SPS to contact the Moscow Yabloko. By law, we could not form a pre-electoral bloc, but yes form a party. So that's what we did, using Yabloko's label and calling the new party "Yabloko-United Democrats." And this was a small breakthrough, since the SPS candidates for the Moscow Duma felt perfectly normal wearing that Yabloko label. So now we have this experience that we can develop further. Now the federation-wide party leaders are talking about it as well—Belykh is speaking about the readiness to unify, as is Yavlinsky. It was more difficult before with [former governor and then SPS leader Boris] Nemtsov. With Belykh it is possible to come to an agreement. This is important because in the past, Yavlinsky did not want to unite with anybody. About the remaining democratic forces, that is another story altogether.

Demokratizatsiya: This achievement of unifying the democrats in Moscow in a way scared some of the leaders in the federal party headquarters. Why?

Malysheva: That is a good question, and we can begin by saying that one needs to understand the logic of the adult parties. The adult leaders have specific ambitions, Yavlinsky as much as Belykh. But Yavlinsky's ambitions suffered a setback when his party did not enter the Duma, since he had been used to being in the Duma and always scolding the regime from there, such as when he proposed an alternative budget, which was a big deal. His main goal is to return to the Duma and from there continue his usual argument that he is the true opposition, etc. And he has two ways of returning to the Duma. The first is through a coalition of democrats, but then he would not be the big leader he is used to being. The second is to reach some agreement with the Kremlin and become a pocket opposition, which the former can then show to the West, "look, we're a democracy, here we have Yavlinsky back in the opposition," etc. As far as Belykh, he is young, he came from Perm, he is attempting to build the party, so he is engaged in a career both for himself and for the party. He can afford to be more flexible than Yavlinsky. I suspect that when both parties were negotiating the common list of candidates for the Moscow Duma, the Kremlin was putting a lot of pressure on Yavlinsky and Belykh. Belykh was probably concerned, but also understood that if he led that party list for just SPS and in the election the party did not cross the 10 percent barrier, that would be a defeat for this young leader. I think this concern was one of the reasons why he decided to enter this coalition with Yabloko. The Kremlin-controlled media were hysterical during this, leading us to believe that the Kremlin was quite upset about the unity of the democrats for the Moscow Duma elections. This union was repeated in other regions, where both parties ran as "Yabloko-United Democrats." This is a very good development but will have to see what happens before 2007 [when the next presidential elections are scheduled]. When you see Belykh the day after tomorrow, he may recall the moment of

democratic unity as June or July of this year, and toward the fall of next year. The feeling at SPS is that this unity is inevitable, but that it is already happening. But, as usual, there are two sides at SPS. One believes that we must cooperate with the Kremlin, since Chubais and other SPS members have high positions in power, “so we are in power,” they think. Another side believes, “no, let’s criticize the Kremlin since there are very few normal people left there and we are just losing face before our electorate, unable to understand why we are cooperating with the Kremlin.” One of the main architects of this coalition was our good friend Sergei Zhavoronkov, who was the ideologist of the unity of the Moscow democratic parties, a sort of democratic gray cardinal, who now works for Vladimir Starikov (the former governor who stood in opposition to Leonid Gozman) and has gone into the anti-Putin opposition. They expelled Sergei because he was very active in participating with other democratic forces—that was the excuse. All SPS leaders except [Yevgeny] Yasin, Starikov and Nemtsov voted to expel Sergei. It goes to show how the SPS Political Council is subject to influence by strong individuals, who are pursuing personal interests. That is a pity. Starikov said it was a blow against him, not against Sergei, and after a while also left the party, and went to the Democratic Party of Russia. That party was led by Kasyanov, where Starikov and Khakamada also participated. It held a session where everyone understood that Kasyanov would be elected leader, and that would serve as a platform for the unity of all the democrats that had not yet lost elections. What happened in that party congress? Delegates were bought, others were driven away. OMON riot troops surrounded the place, and people were not allowed in. But Kasyanov and his allies were ready for this so they organized the congress in another building. Kasyanov in the end is heading a nonparty movement with the goal of uniting the democrats, and Starikov and Khakamada are working with him. I do not know what will happen, but I think that the new democrats such as Kasparov and Kasyanov have a better chance than the old democrats. On the other side, what is happening with SPS and Yabloko? This miraculous law appeared, whereby parties need to have fifty thousand registered members throughout Russia. In reality, not every party can meet those strict quotas. However, together SPS and Yabloko would be able to meet this quota and even attract activists from other parties. So they are unifying on technical, not ideological, grounds. This is paradoxical—the regime attempted to make it hard for the democrats to win, but that compelled us to unite more.

What concerns the old-wave democrats versus the new-wave democrats? Maybe SPS and Yabloko will unite for some future federal elections, enter the Duma, and become a sort of Putin-ist screen. It will not be a real opposition. And as for the rest—Kasparov, Kasyanov, Khakamada, [opposition politician Vladimir] Ryzhkov—they also currently are not in conditions to lead a united opposition that includes Yabloko and SPS, since these do not want to be relegated to the margins. But we cannot predict what will be with these new democrats, since they could form a real basis for unity that will fight for power. So there are three possibilities: the old democrats going at it alone, the new democrats, or all of them together. That Belykh is ready to negotiate, I think that is positive since SPS is really the most preeminent of the democratic organizations, around which the democrats can build something. What concerns a new ideology that can rally the democratic forces, it would be something that includes elements of nationalism. However, the idea of nationalism is very discredited in Russian society, and any attempt to use nationalism is immediately labeled as fascism. And fascism of course is a very bad word here, and not by

chance. For example, Nashi likes to call itself an “anti-fascist youth organization.” Why? Because Putin looks like a great liberal and a great democrat in the context of some fascist threat—in the context of other parties such as Rodina, NBP [the National Bolshevik Party], etc. His strategy is to scare the world with a red-brown boogeyman, to present himself as the white salvation. That is incorrect.

In other countries of the former socialist camp, such as Ukraine and Georgia, when they get a chance to choose who they want to be with, either Russia or the West, they choose the West. But with Russia this is more difficult since Putin has discredited that option. I remember when we had Beslan [when Islamic terrorists took over a school in North Ossetia and hundreds of children died when security forces stormed the buildings],

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Putin blamed this on “Western influence.” Now we have a new law on NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], which forbids foreign support for Russian NGOs. What this means is that Putin fears the West and any other independent influence on Russian democrats. That is why for us the option is not about choosing between the West or something else. Notice how the largest protest in recent time, when real people spontaneously protested in the streets, was about the monetization of subsidies. The pensioners did not like this. So for the democrats, our vector must also have proposals of a social nature. Of course, some of our democrats say that we cannot do this, we cannot use nationalism, etc. I think we can. But democrats must also talk about tangible things which affect people—things like illegal immigration, the unity of Russia, on the hyper-centralization of power in one pair of hands. As Kasparov said the other day, Russia must be united and indivisible. But when so much power is concentrated in a few hands, when everything depends on Moscow, we are more threatened with division than when power is decentralized. Some oblasti in Russia want to leave the federation because they feel that they give too much to Moscow with very little in return.

Demokratizatsiya: What do you think of the Nashi youth group? Do you feel threatened by them?

Malysheva: Well, you probably expect me to start by saying that “Nashi is a horrible movement, filled with horrible people, against whom we need to fight,” etc. Oborona should not fight against Nashi, but against Putin-ism. Nashi functions based on the vertical principle, is extremely well funded, something which we could never match. To struggle against Nashi based on mass or on financial resources would be impossible. For every person we can attract to a protest, they can bring ten. For every tent we can put in a plaza, they will put ten. Nashi was founded so as not to permit an Orange revolution in Russia, and to discredit such Orange revolution, to crush any such possibility. Nashi was founded with the same techniques as was Pora in Ukraine, but of course with a different task altogether. What is scary about Nashi is not its huge financing, since as you know when the

regime falls and the money ends, this youth group will collapse. The worst part is they have this ideology that unfortunately they have begun to believe. You notice that their booklets have a lot in common with the Hitler Youth. And what you notice is their emphasis on social and political upward mobility. They are told that they will certainly enter the power structures, that they are the new generation that will eventually replace the people that are there now. So they have developed this idea that “we are the worthy youth, the rest are the unworthy, unchosen ones.” That is called fascism of cadres.

What concerns our personal relations with Nashi, I can tell you that I was at their camp, and they invited me there to attempt to debate with me. But that debate went as follows. Fifteen commissars one after the other recited to me their manifesto, which they had memorized, like little soldiers. Then I had a chance to respond. After that, once again fifteen commissars, twenty commissars, thirty commissars, forty commissars again recited. So there was no debate, just a sort of training in the beating of an opponent. But it was evident that among them, there were very few who had some independent criteria or who could independently formulate an argument. They just learn their manifesto by heart, and that is all. They also understand that they need to always oppose something. But there is nothing to oppose now. That human wave that they expected after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine did not happen, since it is something that may happen in the future, say before some elections, but our society is not developed enough for it now. People have not gone through that mental revolution yet. Nashi is now attempting to put 150,000 people in the streets in a protest later this month. I do not think they will manage. They are telling their allies, even in the Duma, to mobilize whatever they can. What is frightening is that they are also agitating in the schools, which to us is forbidden. For this they use administrative resources, which of course is also incorrect.

Demokratizatsiya: Recently there was a struggle inside Oborona and the Yabloko faction left. What happened?

Malysheva: I notice that bad news travels fast. Recently I spoke at Oxford University together with the Yabloko youth leader Yashin, and they asked the same question. Oborona is a living organism, which was founded from the grassroots, which grows, develops, which moves and changes. We cannot speak of a “split,” since Yabloko, in other branches such as in St. Petersburg, in Yekaterinburg, and in other places, did not leave Oborona. The one that left Oborona was Yashin, an ambitious, charismatic leader who was not elected at the first congress of the movement, and after a month when he had another chance to be elected member of the Coordinating Council, he did not present himself and consciously left Oborona. He wanted to take revenge on and divide our organization. But when that happened, the leader of Moscow Yabloko—you have to remember that Oborona has more than two dozen regional branches—and only the Moscow Yabloko decided to leave. Its leader, Ivan Bolshakov, openly declared that an Orange revolution is impossible in Russia, and that is why they are leaving Oborona. Well, he of course has a right, in the name of Yabloko, to do what he wants. I told Yashin when he left that we wish him luck, and like the communists, we may be on different sides but in the same barricades. But I want to underline that not all the Yabloko people left. For example, soon we are going with many of them to the hospitals to assist our servicemen there; in St. Petersburg the majority of the Oborona branch is actually Yabloko people. I repeat, what is important is not the party

you are in, but that you are also struggling against Putin, that is the principle of Oborona. I do not think we should be concentrating on what quota each party has in the movement. And that is why Oborona today is alive, it is strong, and just because twenty-five people left does not mean that Oborona has fallen apart.

Demokratizatsiya: Yes, but at the same time, much of the Oborona mystique originally, for those of us who follow these things both in Russia and outside, was its symbol of unity of both democratic parties that has eluded us in the past, and starting with the youth branches. That brought hope.

Malysheva: I repeat, Yabloko has remained in Oborona. It is only Yashin and his friends who left. They are very ambitious people who openly believe that an Orange revolution in Russia is impossible. But Moscow is not Russia, and in St. Petersburg and many other regions, the Yabloko people remain.

Demokratizatsiya: What do you think of that St. Petersburg youth group called Walking Without Putin?

Malysheva: It is an excellent project, a great organization, I love them because they are ultra-radical liberals, by ideology they are closest to SPS, and its leader Mikhail Obozov, was suppressed by the Yabloko faction of the St. Petersburg Oborona. But nonetheless they have basically merged with us and no longer organize activities by themselves. But again, I want to underline something about the Orange movement in Russia. One thing is to unite the democrats to compete in the elections, to propose an alternative, a united candidate. That is possible only through the party point of view. However, from the civic point of view, like Kmara!, like Pora, like us, we need to operate on a nonparty principle. That is why Oborona cannot be a coalition of the parties—that is up to the adults. The parties may put forth a common candidate. But Oborona cannot support this candidate openly. We are really attempting to organize a revolution in the minds of the people.

Demokratizatsiya: You speak of the need to wake up the people. Besides the indifference of the Russian people, which is your biggest obstacle?

Malysheva: The biggest obstacle is the lack of faith by the people that things can change. Why are they indifferent? Because they do not believe things can change. Since we do not have an independent media, we also do not have a way of giving birth to a new way of thinking in Russia. Only on the Internet can you find a variety of opinions, but that only reaches maximum 10 percent of the population. The television channels have a uniform point of view which, to put it mildly, does not coincide with what we are trying to do in Russia. The media brag that we have a strong hand, a strong state. But somehow they cannot explain how this strong hand cannot end the war in Chechnya, cannot fix the army, and only concentrate on avoiding an Orange uprising. The media tell us that everything in Ukraine is bad since the Orange Revolution. The price of oil is high, which gives the regime here something to play with, but much of the surplus goes to service our debt and to the pockets of our bureaucrats. Before, the television would trumpet the regimes' struggle against terrorism. But these days, they trumpet the struggle "against fascists."

Demokratizatsiya: I saw yesterday walking downtown that the buildings of the Presidential Administration added iron curtains to their windows after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. That to me is an indication that Putin is really concerned about a similar event in Russia.

Malysheva: So worried in fact, that he founded this group called Nashi that also includes hooligans trained in street combat and motivated by nationalist slogans, that can physically counter street demonstrators. If Putin already has the FSB and the MVD, why would he need these thugs? Yes, he is scared. Regimes of that type are built on fear. But that cuts both ways. His main fear is an Orange revolution in Russia, and after that, terrorism and “fascism.” But the more fear he has, the more he provokes the democrats and other opposition into unifying. So thank you, comrade Putin, for that favor!

What concerns our personal safety, well, yes, they have put pressure on leaders of our organizations, some have been summoned to the FSB for “long chats,” they have applied violent methods, our telephones are being tapped, and we know that they send infiltrators to our organizations. So if that is not a dictatorship, then what is? When there is an absence of free elections, when there is a monopolization of the media and of public opinion, is that a normal government? Because of the price of oil, here in Moscow we have the illusion of prosperity—expensive cars, nice restaurants, construction. But go just one hundred kilometers outside of Moscow and you see real poverty, which is why the average Russian became disillusioned with the democracy of the 1990s. Despite the problems, I believe that then a normal person had a better chance of opening a business and building a career than now. Now, the Kremlin is probably more beholden to oligarchs than it was then, even though the propaganda tells us the opposite.

Demokratizatsiya: In prior postcommunist revolutions, such as Ukraine and Yugoslavia, there were in each case two groups of youth activists. One was the “hard” opposition—such as Pora and Otpor—while the other one was the “soft” or “educated” opposition—groups like Znayu and the G-17. I notice that in Russia, the youth activists are also organizing themselves along these lines. There is Oborona, which adopted the same fist that was used by both Pora and Kmara!, and then there is “Da,” led by Maria Gaidar. That somehow reflects the situation in prior revolutions. Was that conscious? How do you relate to Da?

Malysheva: Well, it is a new project and they are starting small, with about twenty people at the events organized by Masha [Maria] Gaidar. Yes, Masha declares that her movement is positive, that they have a project, that they influence the youth and students, that they will not use negativity, never yell “no to Putin!” They will just do small things that they hope will turn into larger things. Masha has very good contacts with Znayu, as we all do, but I really do hope that they can gather enough resources and momentum to reach a critical mass so as to influence things. Unfortunately, Nashi has also thought of that approach, and they have infinitely more resources to carry it out. So when Masha organizes an outreach program at some hospital, Nashi will go to ten hospitals. So Masha’s approach of cultivating civil society is great, it is right, and namely with these small steps one must begin. But on the other hand, one must also keep in mind that with few resources, and with limited time, how can you do things in this direction that will influence Russia, when you can count on, maximum, one hundred people? Masha actu-

ally states that this approach will take about fifteen years to bear fruit. I am supportive of the idea—cultivate civil society in a country that has none, since people are indifferent. But how can you compete with Putin’s regime and with Nashi on that basis? That is why in Oborona we have another tack about struggling with the regime. For example, when Putin invited Hamas to Moscow, we organized a big protest criticizing the double standards of the Kremlin—how could they claim to be fighting terrorists when they officially invite Hamas to Moscow? That protest was a big success, and it was even reported in the main four television channels. We managed to break that information blockade. On the other hand, we also engage in small civic activities. For example, we are going soon to a hospital to help servicemen call their families. We recently helped students get into the dormitories to live, with petitions, and in the meantime they lived at our offices. That is also civic work. Unfortunately, in Russia there are very few of these associations that know what to do. There is another association called “My” [We], there is also a discussion club called “Ya dumayu” [I think], which I think is also great, why not. Actually, the youth branch of the Rodina party could probably organize a Maidan all by itself. As you know, the regime prohibited Rodina from participating in the last elections to the Moscow Duma, since they saw that they could get upward of 19 percent of the vote, and in six of the eight regions where there were elections, the regime refused to register Rodina’s candidates. So the regime is taking a cue from Lukashenka.

Demokratizatsiya: Even though it is widely believed that Rodina was created by the Kremlin?

Malysheva: Yes, it was. But then it started to fight against Putin, and went into opposition. What helped is that [Rodina leader Dmitry] Rogozin’s ambition made him become a real opponent to the regime. A parliamentary party has a much bigger chance of influencing as opposition than all the rest of us put together. In my fight for democracy, I find myself supporting Rodina, even though I think they are fascists and ordinary populists, which earn their points with populist slogans, and right behind them is a terrible red-brown revolution. However, anyone now who goes into the real opposition is closer to the people than this regime is. Any change would be better than what we have now, which is just this movement backwards.

Demokratizatsiya: Under what conditions do you think there will be another breakthrough in Russia? Under which conditions will the democratic forces find themselves in power again?

Malysheva: I think that the regime will be very difficult to bring down from the grassroots, since it is strong due to the price of oil. However, like in Mexico, maybe the regime will fall by itself. Around Putin there are many who are not satisfied. In the Kremlin there are many who fight with one another. At a given moment, they will not need Putin anymore. I know that there is unrest in the MVD and the FSB. One of these days they will fall and it will be our task to take power in Russia. The regime could degrade very quickly. Monopolies usually have this fate—those that have too much power also make many mistakes. And one fine day Putin will make one too many mistakes, and he will not be saved from it. You know, his actions are unpredictable and have no logic whatsoever. Maybe he learned those skills at the KGB. That is what concerns change from the top. From the bottom, we can

have another Beslan and that will tip the balance of trust against Putin. Almost as what happened in 1986 with the Chernobyl disaster, when the Soviet media were not reporting anything, so people spontaneously gathered for a large public meeting, which was the seed of future changes to come. When people come to realize that they are being hoodwinked, they will react, and that can provide the breakthrough.

Demokratizatsiya: Besides the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, do you have other sources of inspiration? For example, the Bulgarian revolution of 1996–97, Slovakia in 1998, Yugoslavia in 2000, and Georgia in 2003. Any unique lessons from those?

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Malysheva: The main inspiration is our understanding that we need to live in freedom. I, of course, know about those other events, but their recipe needs to be adapted to our conditions. For example, Putin is very smart, and he thinks a few steps ahead. In Ukraine, Serbia, and Georgia, there was no organization such as Nashi. Our authorities are a bit smarter and are moving so as to stop an Orange threat. So that is why we need to think of a more complex recipe than what they

had in Ukraine and Serbia. But the air that our Russian activists breathed in Maidan will really help us.

Demokratizatsiya: You have a very fruitful cooperation with other youth activists in Georgia, Moldova, and Belarus, where you have been many times. What surprises me is how youth leaders reach out to one another all the time, whereas the adult democrats are more reluctant, maybe by chance running into each other at some conference in a Western capital. Why do you think that is?

Malysheva: Fire burns in the hearts of the young. We may not be rich or have many prospects, but we are active. When our Ukrainian colleagues were organizing Maidan, we sent many activists from here to help them. We helped them with many seminars to discuss elections and strategies, etc. Then, we were both in opposition. Now, they are in power and we are still in opposition. I hope that they do not forget about us. Unfortunately, this desire to help the Russian democratic opposition is not very widespread throughout Europe.

Demokratizatsiya: Why did you get into this work? What motivated you?

Malysheva: I would not use the word “work,” but more like “calling” [*prizvanie*]. The former implies that somehow I am gaining some profit or income out of my democracy activism, so it is really a calling. My motivation was a firm belief that I can influence things. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, but I do believe that if I do what I can the best way I know how, the situation will change for the better sooner or later. Maybe we will be successful tomorrow, two years or maybe three years from now. With me, things began when I was eighteen, and I was drawn to youth protests against com-

munism and against fascism. I became a member of the Russian Anti-Fascists, but later I also realized that I needed to get more serious about this work. So I spent a lot of time thinking which party I should cooperate with, and in the end decided to do something for Russia's Democratic Choice. I became an assistant to a deputy at the Moscow Duma, and in a year was elected a deputy of a municipal council, and the rest is history. I became involved with the youth branch of Russia's Democratic Choice, which became, of course, the youth branch of SPS. But I came to the realization that becoming a deputy is becoming increasingly difficult to influence things for the better, as it is just a screen. In our State Duma, there is no place for discussion. In the Moscow Duma, thirty-five deputies answer to all of Moscow. On the level of municipality, deputies decide very little. Our powers are really limited to dog-catching statutes. If the people chose me, I should be able to do something for them, but in reality we can do very little. That is why I am fighting for democracy in a global sense. That is why even though I have had two terms as municipal deputy, I do not think I will run for a third since it is not effective. We need to fight for changes so that being a deputy will mean something again.

Along the way, I met some very interesting people that organized the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. It was a defining moment for me when we witnessed the Rose Revolution in Georgia as observers. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine was to us pure happiness, because, as in Russia, they were also doubtful, saying "this country is too big, too backward, has a different mentality" etc. We met with several of their young leaders such as Galina Fomenchenko, with Oleksandr Yarema, with Denis Bogush, and many others, witnessing their victory. That was defining for me, that is when I knew what I wanted to do. I knew we had to study what they did and bring that experience to the Russian context.

Demokratizatsiya: If you find yourself in power, what is the first thing you will do with it? How will you avoid the mistakes that the Russian democrats made after 1991, or that the Serbian ones made after 2000? Are the Russian democrats ready to take power again? Do you have an action plan?

Malysheva: Once again, we are mixing two things: politics and civil society. If you ask about Oborona, we will never be in power. What concerns democrats, we never lost power since we never really had it. However, we do have many specialists that have concrete programs and plans. We know that the first thing is to break up our FSB [laughs]. We need to fix the police and create a fully professional army; we need to make the courts independent and the Parliament once again a serious place for debates. If we come to power, we need to find a way to provoke civil society to activate itself, because we cannot build democracy from above, but from below. We need to release the media from the clutches of government, privatize the television stations. And not just to one owner—since Putin's rich allies would just buy them up and create another monopoly. We need to make sure that they end up with three or four different owners that will compete with each other and finally broadcast the truth. At the Gaidar Institute [the Institute for the Economy in Transition] there are some serious studies on how to make the judicial power work properly.

Now the price of oil is high, so driving around Moscow we can see many expensive cars, wealth, expensive restaurants, but when you go just two hundred kilometers outside of Moscow the situation is quite different. It seems that money only works here, only makes a profit here, but in the rest of Russia the logic is different. A professor I met in Hong Kong, Michael Enright, was describing China's development, and I noticed how dif-

ferent it is from that of Russia and Mexico. In China, you seem to know how much things will cost. Say, you know that something will cost one hundred yuan, but that you need to pay twenty yuan as a bribe to get things moving. So there is this predictability in doing business there. In Russia, it is not clear how much they will demand in bribes. If you need to invest one hundred rubles, you may have to pay another twenty to one bureaucrat, and fifty to yet another, and down the line. So you end up paying more in bribes than what you are prepared to invest. That is not a good situation for Russian businessmen. They would like their businesses to be stable. But in reality they do not know even for how long their business will be allowed to exist. As happened with Yukos, the Kremlin can essentially nationalize any business it sees fit. So in Russia we do not have a guarantee of property rights the way it should be. From the outside, things look stable here. But do not forget that we have a potential scandal with gas, we have problems with Georgia, we use money to influence the internal politics of the neighboring countries, and we even are attempting to blackmail Europe with the gas supplies. This is not sustainable because our potential partners will rethink their relations with us.

Demokratizatsiya: As a Russian freedom fighter, what do you expect from the West?

Malysheva: I would like those countries where democracy has triumphed, to realize that not everything in Russia has been lost. To the superpowers, to George Bush and the German leaders, I would like them to stop being so friendly with Putin. Putin wants to be on one hand the big dictator but on the other he has ambitions to be close to Bush, with [then German Chancellor Gerhard] Schröder—whom he appointed to the board of Gazprom. He is not like Lukashenka, who is happy to be an isolated dictator. But if Putin fails to befriend world leaders, he will go out of his mind. Look at what he is doing with Hamas. He is showing that he can be friends with Hamas, as he blackmails everyone else. What else? The world should know that Russia has young democrats that are ready to struggle, who are ready to engage in a revolution of the mind for Russia's passive citizens. I hope this is not the last interview we have before I have to ask for political asylum [laughs].

Concretely, we would like support from the EU Parliament, from the European People's Party, not to accept United Russia as a member party. Putin attempts to befriend the European People's Party at the same time as China, while building a union with Belarus. That contradicts Europe's democratic goals. What concerns NATO, Russia is attempting to befriend NATO while selling arms to Syria and Iran. This policy of double standards to me is not very attractive. What strikes me is that Western media and political analysts are much more aware of our problems than our very own people. Their views largely coincide with mine, and I feel comfortable speaking with them.