

# Russia's Political Youths

MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

**Abstract:** Although most Russian youths are politically apathetic, a small cross section is engaged in political activity—mostly consisting of protest actions—in preparation for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. Youth-based political and civic organizations can be defined generally by their support for, or opposition to, President Vladimir Putin and the party of power. Ideological differences between opposition youth organizations have prevented the formation of an effective civic movement. Putin's administration has employed a number of tactics, including the creation of the pro-Kremlin youth organization Nashi (Ours) to counteract anti-Kremlin youth groups such as Youth Yabloko, The National Bolshevik Party, and Oborona. Western nongovernmental organizations, along with youth alumni of the “colored revolutions,” have been helping Russian opposition youth to overcome these difficulties, much to the dismay of the Putin administration.

**Keywords:** democracy assistance, elections, Orange Revolution, politics, youths

Russia's youths are preparing for battle. With the State Duma and presidential elections approaching, youth-based civic and political organizations, aided by Western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and alumni of the so-called colored revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Serbia have been gearing up for a contest against the firmly entrenched United Russia Party (YeR) and the administration of President Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, the Kremlin has been pumping millions of rubles into its own youth groups with the hope of thwarting a Ukrainian-style revolution.

Enhanced focus on youths in Russia has come mainly in response to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Youth-based organizations have played an important role in the colored revolutions that have swept across the postcommunist space in the last five years. The knowledge of organizational techniques and movement management developed in Serbia by Otpor and a host of Western-based NGOs has infiltrated into Georgia and Ukraine, helping to fuel the rise of democratic culture if only in response to flagrant infringements on democratic principles. In Ukraine, organizations such as Pora and Znayu not only provided the passion and sense of purpose that contributed to the spirit of the Orange Revolution, they also played a major role in mobilizing the Ukrainian people to challenge the authorities.

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Following their success, activist youths from Ukraine have joined their colleagues from Georgia and Serbia, along with a number of Western-based NGOs, in exporting organizational knowledge and democratic participation to other countries in the former Soviet Union. Many of these organizations have focused on Russia as a small number of youth-based political and civic organizations prepare for parliamentary elections in 2007 and presidential elections in 2008. Activists from Pora and Znayu have held seminars on organizational techniques and movement development with their counterparts in Russia. NGOs from the United States and Europe have provided funding for these activities in addition to running their own programs for Russia's youths. These efforts have drawn the ire of the Putin administration, which has launched its own campaign targeting Russia's youths in an attempt to counteract a potential Orange Revolution in Russia.

I have conducted an investigation into the activities of Russian youth-based political and civic organizations and their support network of Western NGOs and colored revolution alumni to assess their political effectiveness in confronting the political monopoly of the Putin administration and YeR in 2007 and 2008. Although an opposition youth movement in Russia has been developing some of the elements that made groups such as Otpor in Serbia and Pora in Ukraine successful civic mobilizers, internal divisions, public apathy, resource deficiencies, and countermeasures by the authorities have all undermined its ability to wage a successful civic campaign.

For most of the 1990s and into the early years of Putin's first term, the general thinking on youths among both academics and politicians was that they were apathetic and apolitical, more interested in material acquisition and career building than political and social issues. In the 1990s, most active youths realized themselves through business rather than politics.

Youth role models are exemplary of this trend. According to a study conducted by the All Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) in 2004, oligarchs were admired almost as much as pop stars among youths.<sup>1</sup> Boris Dubin, a researcher with VTsIOM pointed out in a 2003 interview that participation by youth in social movements, clubs, and parties was minimal; there was even less interest in political organizations.<sup>2</sup> Results from another VTsIOM survey in 2003 showed that only 17 percent of youths ages 18–25 would vote in an upcoming State Duma election, while 58 percent responded to the question “How much are you interested in politics” with the answer “Not at all interested.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast with their Western European and American counterparts, the majority of Russian students have been unwilling to engage in protests, strikes, or mass rallies. Igor Ilinsky, rector of the Moscow State Social Academy, has noted that “In my time as rector of this academy, we have had not one public gathering of students or conflict between the administration and students, except for one instance when I was called upon to organize an action in connection with the happenings in Iraq.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, youths have been disinterested in official politics. According to a VTsIOM survey, 40 percent of youths do not trust even one political party, and participation by youths in elections has been much lower than for adults.<sup>5</sup>

Although youths—and Russian society at large—has remained quite apathetic in terms of politics, it would be fallacious to classify all young people in this regard. A small cross section of Russia's youths have been engaged in political activity and numbers appear to be growing. The polarizing policies of the Putin administration coupled with the inspiration or fear of the Orange Revolution, has catalyzed the politization of Russian youth.

Youth politics in Russia is not the politics of columned halls and boardrooms, but politics of the street. It is loud, rude, and can be highly contentious. Youth organizations frequently express radical ideologies and beliefs that range from the far Left to the far Right. Yet, while these organizations have adopted defined positions on issues such as education reform and the draft—on which these groups share surprisingly similar outlooks—overall, their political messages have been devoid of specific policy pronouncements. Rather, these organizations employ vague, sound-bite-quality slogans with general themes calling for idealistic notions of equality, liberty, justice, and so on, in the face of corruption, deceit, and general immorality.

There are several prominent youth organizations in Russia today. They can be defined, generally, according to their support or opposition of the Putin administration. Ideological affiliation—which, particularly among the opposition, can serve to undermine attempts at coordinated action—is of lesser importance. The most notable organizations in the pro-Putin/progovernment camp are Nashi (Ours) and the Youth Guard, the youth wing of the dominant party in Russia, YeR. These organizations were launched by the authorities mainly in response to the Orange Revolution and the proliferation of Russian opposition youth groups. They will be discussed in greater depth in the section on government responses to youth mobilization.

Many of the most influential opposition youth organizations today are affiliated with the major—although largely disenfranchised—opposition political parties. These include Youth Yabloko, the youth wing of the liberal Yabloko Party; The Union of Youth “For the Motherland,” affiliated with the populist, nationalist Motherland Party (NPS)<sup>6</sup>; and the youth wing of the liberal Union of Right Forces party (SPS). The National Bolshevik Party (NBP)—although unregistered as an official party—has gained a great deal of notoriety because of its attention-grabbing street theatrics and the outlandish pronouncements by its eccentric leader, Eduard Limonov.

The great political differentiation between these organizations has thus far undermined attempts, however concerted, to forge alliances in opposition to the Putin administration. Most interorganizational cooperation consists of joint participation in protests. The NBP and Youth Yabloko have participated in a number of protests together. Shortly after the Orange Revolution, activists from Walking without Putin (a smaller anti-Putin organization), Youth Yabloko, the Union of Communist Youth, and the NBP held a protest on the square outside of Finland Station in St. Petersburg under the slogans, “Retirement for Putin,” “Ivanov to the Barracks,” and “Medvedev to the Zoo.”<sup>7</sup> Again, on May 23, 2005, youths from Yabloko, the NBP, the avant-garde of Red Youth, and the NPS, among others, gathered in front of the Ostankino television center in Moscow to protest government censorship of the media. According to organizers and the militia, about two thousand people took part. Heads of organizations spoke positively of their ability to coordinate efforts with a number of different parties. Ilya Yashin, who heads Youth Yabloko, was quoted as saying that “It’s damned important that all arrived to protest censorship—communists and democrats.” Even Limonov from the NBP seemed pleased by the turnout: “We are on one side of the barricade; we are all looking to one embrasure.”<sup>8</sup>

Leaders of the parties with which these groups are affiliated have shown some signs that they desire unity as well. On October 19, 2005, after meeting with Limonov, Maksim Reznik, chair of Yabloko’s St. Petersburg branch, announced his intentions to enhance political cooperation between the parties. In comments posted on Yabloko’s Web site

Reznik declared that his party and the NBP “are united in the fact that today the main task of all progressive forces in Russia is the fight for political freedom and social justice.” “I agree with Eduard Limonov,” he continued, “that different opposition to the current regime . . . needs a cooperative effort to fight for political freedom and social justice in Russia.”<sup>9</sup> The St. Petersburg branch of the NBP released a statement stating that “NBP and Yabloko, regardless of different political platforms are the most influential, earnest and consistent opposition organizations in the city.”<sup>10</sup>

This is a significant development, and by all appearances, a new one. In a recent interview with *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* Yashin points out that “Five years ago, I would say that the limonovtsy [the NBP] were our most fierce opponents. The situation has changed. . . . After the last election a wall was erected; Russia was divided. On one side are the administrative resources and the police truncheon of ‘United Russia.’ On the other is the disorganized and demoralized civil society. For me this is the communists, Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces . . . All quarrel among one another, but instead need to organize systematic resistance.”<sup>11</sup>

The NPS’s youth wing has also jumped on the unity bandwagon. Its leader and spokesman, Sergei Shargunov, argued that “if the party did not unite with other opposition forces, then it was unlikely that it could impact the situation in Russia.”<sup>12</sup>

Still, these groups have yet to move from street protests to concrete political cooperation. Divergent ideologies and political platforms are one reason for this. Liberal parties have been at pains to define their relationships with the radical National Bolsheviks, whose slogans such as “Stalin, Beria, Gulag!” are completely at odds with the pro-Western, democratic outlooks of groups such as Youth Yabloko and the SPS. Despite their softening rhetoric against the NBP and their occasional joint protests, Youth Yabloko’s representatives are careful to point out that they do not organize protests or directly cooperate with the party. “We have very serious disagreements with the National Bolsheviks,” said Yashin from Youth Yabloko. “Nevertheless, we do not believe that is a significant basis for beating party members and throwing them in jail for a few years,” a fate which regularly befalls members of the NBP.<sup>13</sup>

Official representatives from Yabloko and the SPS declined to attend the “Other Russia” conference, a meeting of opposition parties and organizations held a week before the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg. One of the major reasons for this was the presence and participation of Limonov and NBP activists. Meanwhile, Limonov spent his time at the conference calling for unity. He said that although ideological roots between opposition groups were different, all need political liberty. “We will always wish for consolidation” he said.<sup>14</sup> When former prime minister turned opposition politician Mikhail Kasyanov wrapped up his remarks at the conference calling for a national consensus, he stopped to shake Limonov’s hand before exiting the stage. The absence of the two main liberal opposition parties from this consensus, however, will greatly hinder efforts to form a unified opposition.

More successful have been young activists’ attempts to develop cooperative, apolitical blocks linking youth from different parties and organizations with a similar ideological bent. Of all the organizations in Russia vying to be the next Otpor or Pora, the civic organization Oborona (Defense) is now the most developed. Founded in 2005, shortly after the Orange Revolution, the organization consists of members from Youth Yabloko, the SPS, and Walking without Putin, along with a number of other youth-based political and civic organizations. “Our goal,” says Yulia Malysheva, Oborona’s international coordinator, “is to make

youth think and to make them active.”<sup>15</sup> There are representatives of the organization in twenty-five of Russia's eighty-nine regions. The regional subgroups that comprise the organization are largely autonomous, though the unofficial headquarters is in Moscow.

For a time, youth from Youth Yabloko and the SPS were able to overcome, through Oborona, the disunity that plagues their parent parties. This unity was compromised in January 2006 when Oborona's former leader, Youth Yabloko's Yashin, failed to be reelected to the organization's coordinating committee. Rather than stay on as a regular member, Yashin left Oborona, taking several dozen of his Yabloko colleagues with him. The organization has largely recovered from this scandal, however. The majority of the coordinating committee consists of members without party affiliation. “This is important,” says the organization's new leader, Oleg Kozlovsky, himself a member of the SPS youth contingent, in that it ensures that Oborona stays free from political influence.

The organization Da! (Yes) is similar to Oborona in that it incorporates members from different liberal parties including Youth Yabloko and the SPS. It has refrained from the strong anti-Putin rhetoric of Oborona, however, and instead has run a very positive campaign promoting civic engagement. Through their activities, Da! activists have said that they hope to show citizens that they have the means to participate in the development of their country.

Despite tentative cooperative overtures, Russian opposition youth organizations lack many of the features that made youth movements in other postcommunist countries successful political forces. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine youth-based political and civic organizations—in the presence of a united oppositional front and the spark of stolen elections—played their most effective and dynamic roles in mobilizing the broader population for collective action. Each of these countries had youth organizations that came to represent the spirit of the revolution and played an integral role in mobilizing the population in protest against electoral fraud. The Serbian youth organization Otpor set the precedent for later groups such as Kmara! in Georgia and Pora in Ukraine.

These were all complex organizations that identified with broader social movements and mobilized for the purpose of implementing a set of common goals. They were very well connected both internally and externally, which allowed for efficient coordination of the center with the periphery. They employed the use of information technologies such as the Internet and e-mail, taking advantage of those means of communication not controlled by the government.

Such an organization does not yet exist in Russia. Although showing increased willingness to work together and participate in collective action, Russian youth organizations lack key features of the aforementioned organizations. They do not have clearly defined political strategies and cohesive organizational structures. These organizations have also allowed ideological differences to overshadow broader commonalities, as was the case in Oborona. This has inhibited them from establishing a broad support base. Another

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alienating feature of these groups is that many of them actively seek power, which is one more impediment to unity.

What links the NBP, Youth Yabloko, Rodina, and others is opposition to the Putin administration and a desire for increased competitiveness within the government. Opposition to the ruling authorities, however, is not sufficient to achieve meaningful political results, especially because Putin enjoys a high degree of popularity. This, coupled with the fact that the government essentially controls all national television media and maintains a monopoly on power, practically ensures the opposition's continued disenfranchisement.

Opposition youth groups have also failed to achieve deep societal penetration. Despite the proliferation of youth organizations in the past few years and their increasing prominence in the Russian media, statistics have shown that the majority of Russian citizens are largely unaware of them. According to a September 2005 Lavada Center survey, 48 percent of Russians could not name at least one youth organization. In the same survey, 86 percent of the respondents could not identify the political platforms of individual youth organizations. Skinheads and neo-fascists were the most well-known, with 32 percent of the respondents claiming knowledge of what amounts more to a subculture than a defined organization. Interestingly, Youth Yabloko was more recognizable than Nashi, the pro-Putin organization, despite its government-funded advertising campaign. Among youths aged 18–24, 17 percent had heard of Youth Yabloko, while only 12 percent had heard of Nashi.<sup>16</sup>

Opposition youth have had assistance in their attempts to overcome some of the tactical and strategic hurdles they face. A number of Western-based NGOs have assisted local organizations in the development of democratic culture and institutions in Russia. Organizations such as the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and others have funded programs aimed at developing political culture among Russia's youth.

The IRI has worked with the youth chapters of several political parties "on strategic and organizational development."<sup>17</sup> The organization has held forums that bring together politically active youth across Russia. At a youth political forum in Moscow in 2002, College Republican President Scott Steward discussed youth political involvement from a U.S. perspective.<sup>18</sup> In June 2003, the IRI held a forum in St. Petersburg called "Youth and the 2003 Elections," which brought together youths from four major Russian political parties as well as NGO representatives to focus on youth involvement in the December 2003 parliamentary elections.<sup>19</sup> Most recently, on May 14–15, 2005, three hundred activists attended a forum in Perm. There, participants received training on such topics as how to become an elected official, understanding political opposition, how government works, how young people can be involved in decision-making and how to develop volunteer organizations.<sup>20</sup>

In 2004 the NED gave the IRI a \$160,000 grant to train twenty to thirty young political activists in campaign techniques, constituent relations, and the legal and organizational basics of local self-government in Russia.<sup>21</sup> It also gave Tochka Otpory (Fulcrum Foundation) \$51,000 to conduct a small grants program for regional youth NGOs. These grants went to regional organizations for projects building civic and political awareness among Russian youth, as well as attempting to foster youth involvement in political affairs.<sup>22</sup>

The NDI has been actively supporting democratic political parties in Russia since 1990.<sup>23</sup> It has received a good deal of its funding from USAID and the NED, which it has used to aid civic organizations by teaching organization management, resource development, coalition building, advocacy methods, and trainer development.<sup>24</sup> The NDI

currently has no programs devoted to Russian youths specifically, although it works regularly with Yabloko and the SPS, both of which have strong youth contingents.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to support from Western NGOs, youths in the opposition have drawn increasingly on the wisdom and experience of their counterparts abroad, veterans of the colored revolutions who have offered their expertise on the tools and techniques of promoting nonviolent change. Sergei Shargunov, leader of the Union of Youth for the Motherland, informed the weekly *Itogi* that he spent last summer at a Pora training camp in western Ukraine.<sup>26</sup>

A representative from Oborona said in an interview that the organization has consulted with the Ukrainian organizations Pora, Znayu, and Maidan, and with the Belarusian group Zubr (Byson). Yashin went to Ukraine to take part in the demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan Nezheleznosti during the Orange Revolution.<sup>27</sup> On April 26, 2005, members from Youth Yabloko, the SPS, and Walking without Putin took part in a rally along with members of the Belarusian youth group, Young Front, and Pora close to the presidential administration building in Minsk, Belarus, on the nineteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy. They carried signs saying: "For Our and Your Freedom" and "Today Ukraine Tomorrow Belarus." Forty people were arrested from these groups, fourteen of which were Russian citizens.<sup>28</sup> Russian activists also participated in demonstrations following Belarus's presidential election in March 2006. A group of Oborona activists holding a poster with the organization's trademark clenched fist said that they had come to show their solidarity with their Belarusian colleagues.

There has been a growing web of interaction among veterans of "democratic" revolutions and activists in those countries still mired in political stagnation. Youth activists from Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Georgia, Lebanon, Macedonia, Russia, Montenegro, Serbia (including Kosovo), Ukraine, and Uzbekistan gathered in Albania's capital, Tirana, on June 3–5, 2005. The Activism Festival, as it was called, included screenings of documentaries, roundtables, forums, and seminars focused on the strategies and tactics of nonviolent civic mobilization.<sup>29</sup>

Like-minded activists abroad have been eager to assist their Russian counterparts in preparation for the 2007 parliamentary and 2008 presidential elections. Representatives from Znayu have been traveling to Russia to train youths in political strategizing. Znayu successfully rallied thousands of Ukrainians to contest the purported victory of Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election.

According to Dmytro Potekhin, a member of Znayu and a well-known civic activist among Russia's opposition youths, training focuses on "crystallizing these groups and making them strategically oriented around concrete aims."<sup>30</sup> Members have also provided moral support. Like their Russian counterparts, members of Znayu were once on the frontlines, battling a political machine that many considered unassailable. It is important, said Potekhin, that activists understand that they are capable of success.<sup>31</sup>

Znayu has held at least two training sessions in Russia, as well as several consultations with a few of Russia's more prominent youth organizations. It recently received a grant from NED that will be used for more training sessions and to develop a communications network linking activists at home and abroad.<sup>32</sup>

To date, assistance from foreign youth civic organizations consists of moral and technical support. The question of financial support, particularly from the West, is ambiguous. Neither activists nor donors have been willing to openly speak about it. A representative

of Oborona in an interview categorically denied that the organization had received revenues from abroad. However, Oborona and Youth Yabloko have taken part in conferences and round tables organized by IRI, NDI, and other such organizations. Representatives from Pora and Znayu deny that they received funding from Western aid organizations during the Orange Revolution, claims backed up by aid organizations. More likely, youth organizations in Russia and elsewhere have taken advantage of Western funding indirectly by participating in seminars and trainings sponsored by IRI and NDI and then distributing that information to colleagues throughout their own country and abroad.

Cooperation between Russian youths and alumni of the Orange Revolution has not sat well with the Kremlin, which actively supported Ukraine's current Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election and saw his defeat as a profound setback. Kremlin officials have made numerous statements condemning the events in Ukraine and have vowed to prevent a similar revolution from occurring in Russia. To help them in this task, government officials created the pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi. YeR followed with the creation of the Young Guard. Through these organizations, the authorities have attempted to co-opt politically active and potentially oppositional youth into the service of the state. Participation in these organizations has provided many young people opportunities for social mobility that they would not have otherwise had. The Soviet Komсомol operated along these lines, promising its members lucrative careers in exchange for political loyalty.

Nashi is strongly pro-Putin and has practically created a cult of personality around him, much like Walking Together (Nashi's predecessor) did. At Nashi's annual summer camp this year, on the banks of the Seliger River, members listened to lectures such as "The Ideology of President Putin," while surrounded by posters emblazoned with the president's face and ideological slogans. *Kommersant* correspondent Yekaterina Savina said that it reminded her of a Soviet Pioneer camp.<sup>33</sup> According to its manifesto, "under the current circumstances Nashi will support Putin. This support will not be of Putin personally, but support for his political course, his call to protect the sovereignty of the country, the realization of [Russia's] economic and political modernization, guarantees of its stable, non-violent development, and the realization of its future position as global leader."<sup>34</sup>

According to Nashi organizers, Russia must take a different path. To achieve the global hegemony and cultural and economic preeminence that is befitting to Russia, the organization has urged the formation of a functional civil society. Such a society, however, could not be achieved without the "modernizing initiatives from the top are given political support from below."<sup>35</sup>

Nashi began to make headlines in early 2005 in the wake of the Orange Revolution. Although speculation and conjecture clouded its beginnings, it exploded onto the political scene, drawing the attention of both national and international observers. Its public demonstrations have been impressive. On May 9, 2005, Victory Day, fifty thousand Nashi activists, clad in identical T-shirts and carrying flags assembled on Tverskaya Street in Moscow.<sup>36</sup>

Nashi organizers dispatched 3,500 commissars to observe the Moscow City Duma elections, held on December 4, 2005. The Putin administration and the Central Elections Commission supported the program, titled "Our Civic Control," to guard against an "orange upheaval." In all, Nashi observers recorded 500 violations of electoral law, none of which compromised the official election results. According to Nashi's information service, the group plans to have one hundred thousand observers ready for the 2007–08 election season.<sup>37</sup>

In a meeting with future Nashi members in March 2005, the deputy chief of the Putin administration, Vladislav Surkov, made clear that “the revolutions in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine . . . would not be allowed in Russia.”<sup>38</sup> Addressing a crowd of Nashi members, called “commissars,” at the organization’s first summer camp on the Seliger River in 2005, Gleb Pavlovsky, a prominent Kremlin ideologue warned of the potential for an Orange Revolution in Russia. “Your task,” *Gazeta* quoted Pavlovsky as saying, “is to protect the constitutional order and physically to resist attempts at unconstitutional revolution.”<sup>39</sup>

The Putin administration has used the threat of revolution in Russia, whether real or perceived, to crack down on opposition figures and organizations, rein in the media, and hinder the work of Western NGOs devoted to democracy assistance. This growing authoritarianism has great ramifications for opposition youth organizations. As election season heats up in Russia, the authorities have begun to take measures to prevent the kind of mass mobilization seen in Kyiv in December 2004. The Interior Ministry has been stocking up on weapons in anticipation of social unrest. Russian Deputy Interior Minister Mikhail Sukhodolsky announced in April 2005 that his ministry had “already signed a contract with the Israelis on the purchase of a water cannon that will be used very soon for the liquidation of unauthorized rallies and mass street disorders.”<sup>40</sup>

On November 24, 2005, the Moscow Interagency Anti-Terrorist Commission declared its intentions to restrict mass street demonstrations in the period between November 27 and December 6, to prevent possible terrorist attacks in the run-up to the December 4 Moscow Duma elections.<sup>41</sup> A day later, OMON riot police converged on an “antifascist” protest on Tverskaya Square in Moscow, arresting about fifty people, including prominent human rights activists Boris Belenkin from Memorial and Svetlana Ganushkina from Civic Assistance. Nikita Belykh, the head of SPS, and Sergei Mitrokhin, a Yabloko Party luminary, escaped arrest.<sup>42</sup>

In another development, on January 10, 2006, Putin signed a controversial law on NGOs directly affecting the work of Western aid groups in Russia. The law, which has been decried by Western politicians and human rights organizations both within and outside of Russia, will increase Kremlin control over NGOs working in Russia. It is less restrictive than the original draft passed by the State Duma in late November 2005. Russia’s nearly three hundred thousand NGOs will ostensibly be allowed to carry on as before, but will be required to provide a government agency with information on its activities and the amount of financial resources supplied to Russian citizens and organizations. Under the earlier draft of the law, foreign NGOs would have been prevented from working directly in the country, and Russian organizations would have had restricted ability to accept foreign funding or hire foreign staff.

Targeting Russia’s youths for incorporation into the governing apparatus through groups such as Nashi and the Youth Guard is just one element in a Putin strategy to shape civil society in Russia. The administration’s efforts in this regard directly confront the activities of NGOs, both domestic and Western. Unfortunately, young political activists in Russia are caught in these two policy strategies. This has led to political polarization, based not on divergent ideologies and political platforms, but on support for, or antipathy to, Putin and his administration.

Those who support the status quo tend to be enfranchised within the current administration; Nashi, the party of power, YeR, and a host of other clans and factions all enjoy the fruits of government patronage. Youth Yabloko, the NBP, and every other organization not paying homage to the government remain external to the country’s political affairs.

Youths on this side of the fence, as mentioned, most often tend to be the recipients of Western aid. Because of this, the issue of youth political mobilization transcends domestic political affairs. Youth politics in Russia is interlaced with geopolitical undertones that reflect change in the relational dynamic between Russia, Ukraine, and the West since the Orange Revolution. Many in Russia have viewed the colored revolutions, especially the Orange Revolution, as attempts by the West to manipulate elections to achieve its leaders' preferred outcomes. The programs and activities of Western-based NGOs focusing on democracy assistance have likewise been viewed with suspicion and distrust. That there have been young alumni from previous colored revolutions active on Russian soil as well,

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training Russian youths in the art of political mobilization has merely compounded the fears of those subscribing to this “Western conspiracy” view of Russian international relations.

Regardless of whether there is a Western conspiracy to control Russian politics from afar and manipulate Russia's power dynamic, powerful interests in Russia, including within the Kremlin, either view it as true or at least are willing to use the fears created by this belief for political gain. Thus, follow-

ing the Orange Revolution, Putin has continued to crack down on the press, restrict citizens' right to public assembly, and outlaw certain political groups.

The question remains, how can opposition youths and their allies become politically effective within Russia's present political environment? Ultimately, the form youth politics takes in Russia depends as much on the political environment as the political culture and awareness of youths themselves. As it stands, the monopoly on political power in Russia, held by the Putin administration and YeR, ensure that youth in the opposition remain in the political shadows, forced to engage in contentious political actions such as protests, conferences, and the occasional building occupation. Youths who choose to join the authorities through groups such as Nashi can only hope to become bureaucratic tools in a politically uncompetitive, corporatist nomenklatura. In neither case will the political culture of Russia's youths mature.

For those youths in the opposition, there are two goals of equal importance: incorporation into an open, competitive political system and participation in a civil society whose purpose is to monitor and regulate that system. Both require a concrete, strategic framework for contesting the dominant political power within an environment largely devoid of opportunities for direct political competition. Organizations such as Otpor, Kmara!, and Pora became masters at this, finding free societal outlets through which they waged successful civic mobilization campaigns.

Where these organizations fell short was in their post-transition planning. By shirking political affiliation, these youth organizations tended to dissolve once the opposition came to power. The ill effects of this decision can be seen in the political chaos in Ukraine. When Viktor Yushchenko took power in Ukraine, Pora threw in its lot as a political party, rather than evolve into a civic watchdog over the government to become a part of it. Governments

who promise to bring democracy are just as prone to sliding into authoritarianism as those governments they replace. This is a lesson people in post-Soviet states should remember. Russian organizations, in particular, should bear this in mind, though as yet, they are too disorganized to effectively engage the present political environment, let alone orient to a distant future one.

The track record of Western organizations engaged in democracy assistance is mixed. They can help provide the resources, expertise, and training that politically marginalized youths need but are unable to actually instill a sense of political awareness and civic responsibility. Additionally, Western NGOs and alumni of the colored revolutions may find it impossible to overcome the stigma attached to them by their association with the Orange Revolution and with opposition parties and youth groups in Russia. The same goes for activists in Ukraine, Georgia, and elsewhere who offer their support to Russian activists. As long as Russian policymakers continue to view Western motives in Russia with suspicion and distrust, the NGOs affiliated with the West, and those who have been the recipients of their services, will provoke their enmity.

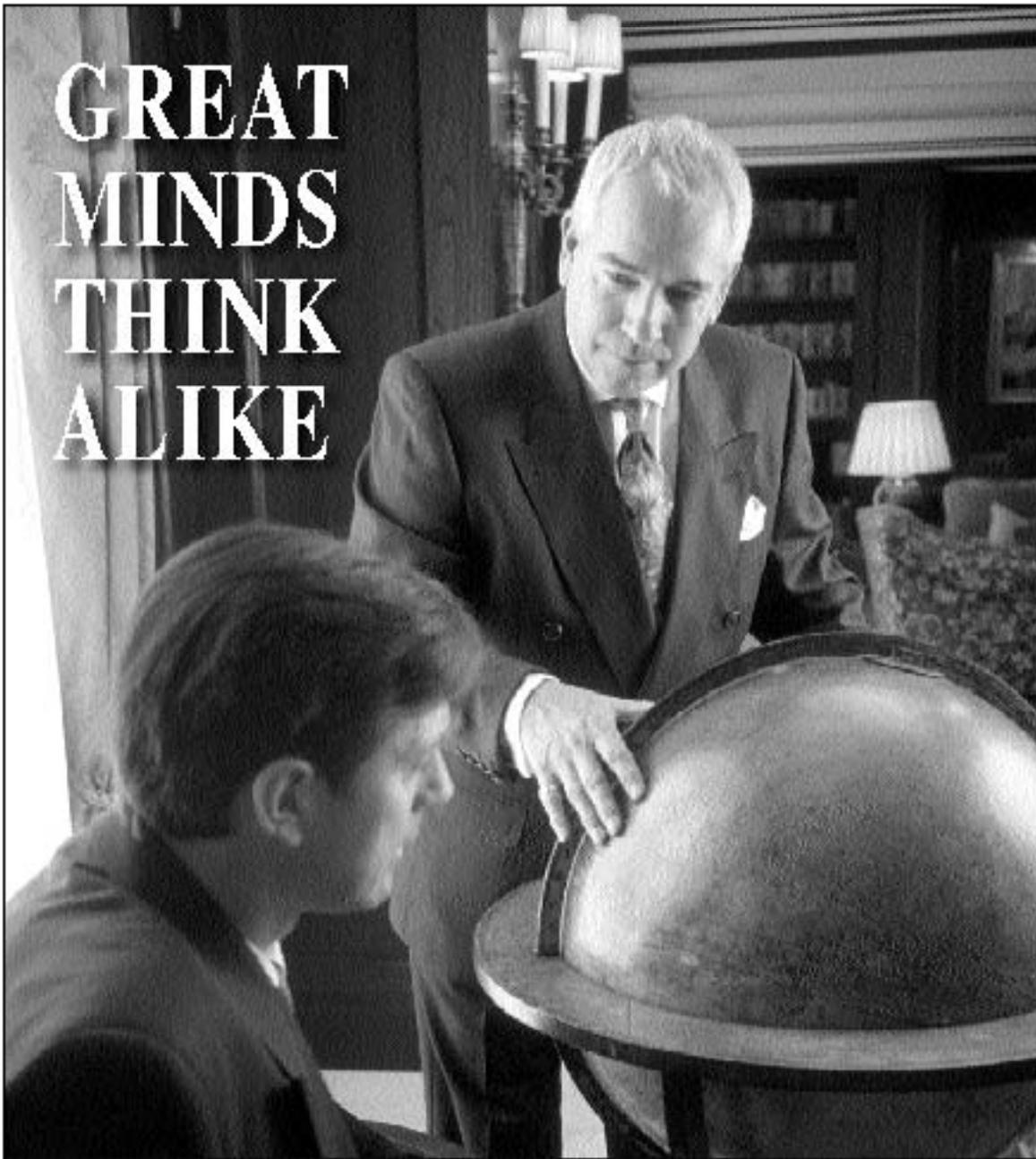
Ultimately, a stable, economically viable Russia is in the best interest of all and it is the youths of the country, largely untainted by the Soviet past, who must deliver the country to these ends. Whereas the youths active in the colored revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine did a tremendous service to their societies, their hard work and dedication are meaningless without sustained commitment to the democratic values underpinning these revolutions. Conversely, efforts by activists and NGOs in Russia need not focus exclusively on preparations for a colored revolution in the event of stolen elections in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary races. Mass public mobilization is no substitute for deep societal commitment to democratic and constitutional norms. Youths are not political tools to be used for winning elections, but a guarantee of continued civic and political vibrancy.

## NOTES

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