

2013

# Putin's Youth: Nashi and the Pro-Regime Youth Movement in Russia, 2000-2012

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Putin's Youth:  
Nashi and the Pro-Regime Youth Movement in Russia, 2000-2012

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Prerequisite for Honors  
in History

May 2013

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Nina Tumarkin for her patience, sound guidance, and endlessly good humor. I would also like to thank all my History professors at Wellesley for their dedication to teaching and their passion for the subject, and also to the Russian Language Department for making the process of learning Russian a joy during this past year. I am grateful to those who were part of the History Honors Thesis Seminar for the rich discussions and thought-provoking questions. I am thankful to Professors Mark Kramer, Ivan Kurilla, Valerie Sperling, and Elizabeth Wood for their willingness to direct me to the right sources for my research. And finally, I am indebted to the love and support of my parents and siblings for all these years.

## Introduction

“The question for Russia now is what to do next.  
How can we make the new, market mechanisms work to full capacity?  
How can we overcome the still deep ideological and political split in society?  
What strategic goals can consolidate Russian society?  
What place can Russia occupy in the international community in the 21st century?  
What economic, social and cultural frontiers do we want to attain in 10-15 years?  
What are our strong and weak points? And what material and spiritual resources do we have now?”<sup>1</sup>

-Vladimir Putin, “Millennium Manifesto,” December 29, 1999

Since becoming President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (2000-2008; 2012—) and the ruling elite have attempted to mobilize the youth for political participation in support of the regime. A number of pro-Kremlin youth organizations emerged in tandem with Putin’s accession to, and consolidation of, power. My thesis explores the formation, development, and transformation of these pro-regime youth organizations in Russia from 2000 to 2012, with a particular focus on *Nashi* (“Ours”), established by Kremlin officials in 2005. As the most visible and influential politically-oriented youth organization to appear in Russia during this time period, *Nashi* was, for a time, a powerful symbol of patriotic youth activism and official state politics. Along with my historical discourse on *Nashi* and the pro-Kremlin youth movement, I identified a set of youth groups whose activities aimed to oppose or undermine the personal figure and politics of Putin, and correspondingly, *Nashi*. In doing so, I examined the divergence of political imperatives and competing interests between *Nashi* and the opposition youth movement that made youth politics specially contentious during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, “Rossiia na rubezhe tysiacheletiiia,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, December 30, 1999. Translated. Accessed August 16, 2012. [http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4\\_millenium.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millenium.html).

I begin my thesis with a background and context chapter on the historical framework of youth mobilization in Russia with a discussion of the premier organization for young people in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol (1918-1991). Given its similarities with the Komsomol in its organizational structure and mobilization tactics, Nashi struck a familiar chord with Russian society. In my first chapter, I outline the earliest attempts by Putin's regime to mobilize the youth with Nashi's immediate predecessor, *Idushchie Vmeste* ("Walking Together"). In Chapter Two, I discuss the formation and development of Nashi from 2005 to 2008, when the organization underwent its largest growth in membership and gained explicit support from the Kremlin. In my third chapter I examine the leadership and structural changes within Nashi in the context of the political transition from Vladimir Putin to Dmitry Medvedev as president from 2008 to 2012. In all three chapters I discuss the emergence of politically opposing youth groups and their efforts to undermine Nashi and the regime. This thesis highlights especially the political and ideological challenges that undermined the viability and sustenance of Nashi in order to understand what place in current history organized youth movements have occupied within the larger scope of Vladimir Putin's Russia.

I first became interested in Nashi through my earlier academic interests in the personal figure and politics of Vladimir Putin himself. In particular, I was interested in the state- and nation-building processes of Putin's Russia, and the seemingly paradoxical nature of the Russian state as both powerful and institutionally fragile. As research assistant to Professor Elizabeth A. Wood at MIT's History Department (January 2011 - May 2012), I conducted research on the role of gender and masculinity in Putin's leadership. In particular, I analyzed images of Putin taken between 2007 and 2011, when an increasing number of professionally photographed images captured him horseback riding through Siberia shirtless, driving a Harley Davidson motorcycle,

putting out wildfires in Western Russia from a firefighting aircraft, and emerging from the Greek Black Sea in his scuba diving outfit with two ancient amphorae in each hand. Such explicit displays of masculinity have boosted Putin's popularity among Russians, especially among women, because the images reflect an image of a strong, capable, and disciplined leader. In the process of conducting research for Professor Wood, I identified a number of Russian and Western news sources, including English versions of major Russian publications such as *Ria Novosti*, *Itar-Tass*, *Vedomosti*, *Novaia Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *The Moscow Times*, the Kremlin website, and the president's official website – putin.ru, most of which I consulted for my thesis research. I also navigated the websites of the major youth groups I studied, including Nashi's, which uses the suffix “.su” (Soviet Union) for its URL address.

My work was based primarily on government documents, speeches by the president and prime minister, media reports, and materials available online through government and institutional websites, blogs, social media websites, and online news sources. Additionally, I selected a number of images to include in my thesis if only to highlight the great symbolic value that political youth movements held in Russia. Finally, my research and analysis has been greatly supplemented by existing scholarship in books and journal articles on Nashi and the political history of Putin's Russia.

## Background and Context

### The Komsomol

As part of a multifaceted effort to consolidate power and maintain its political status quo, Putin's government did what its Soviet predecessors had accomplished in the past – it attempted to rally the nation's youth in support of its politics and ideology. In the Soviet Union, youth organizations organized by the Communist Party had effectively monopolized almost all spheres of public youth activity. During the 1920s and 1930s, as the new Communist regime was laying down its Marxist-Leninist foundations, a comprehensive youth program took shape that consisted of three separate but linked groups. The youngest were the Octobrists, children aged seven to nine, who were next enrolled in the Young Pioneers until the age of fifteen, when they could apply to join the Komsomol.<sup>2</sup> The All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (VLKSM), universally known as the Komsomol,<sup>3</sup> was officially formed on October 29, 1918 to enhance the Bolshevik Party's centralized control over the young, as well as in response to the social, economic, and political problems confronting the newly-established Party. Prior to 1917, neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks had maintained separate youth branches, since many young people had already joined both revolutionary parties and others such as the Socialist Revolutionary Party.<sup>4</sup> The revolution of February 1917, however, gave rapid rise to the spontaneous formation of radical youth groups. Fearing the potential instability and political

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Komsomol is a contraction of the Russian title for the Young Communist League, *Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezhi*.

<sup>4</sup> Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 61.

chaos these nascent youth groups might cause, the Bolsheviks began formulating their own youth branch.

When Bolshevik officials discussed the nature and structure of a proposed Communist youth league at Bolshevik Party meetings in July and August of 1917, the main challenge for them was determining the degree of control it would exercise over the new league. While the majority of Bolshevik leaders feared the consequences of allowing a group of young radicals to function entirely independent of the Party, they also recognized that a strictly regimented youth league controlled by the Party might restrain mass membership. Finally, in a resolution adopted by the Sixth Party Congress in August 1917, the Party announced its intention to create “independent organizations, not subordinated to the Party organizationally, but connected with it only in spirit.”<sup>5</sup> The ambiguous meaning of “spirit” in this statement legitimated the Party’s occasional redefinition of the goals and structure of the Komsomol throughout the seventy-three years of the league’s existence. As such, the institutional character of the Komsomol remained constantly in flux, responding to the needs of the Union’s leadership and to the changes occurring within Soviet society.

The history of the Komsomol can be divided into two distinct periods: before and after the Second World War. In the years preceding the war, the youth organization was predominantly characterized by the political activism of young, radical communist enthusiasts who actively sought to promote the class struggle and topple the old power structures in society.<sup>6</sup> According to Hilary Pilkington, the memoirs of Komsomol members seemingly contradicted the popular notion that young people were “coerced into the revolutionary movement,” and reveal

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<sup>5</sup> “On the Youth Leagues,” Resolution of the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the RSDLP July-August 1917 as quoted in Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, 61-62.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Roth, “Komsomol 2.0,” *Ria Novosti*, September 28, 2011, accessed February 10, 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20110928/167047288.html>.

instead that most had been eager to join the Komsomol because it had offered them organized social activity, mobility in both education and employment, and an “appealing ideology of social justice.”<sup>7</sup> Soviet thinkers in the 1920s and 1930s frequently defined the relationship between the Communist Party and the Komsomol in terms of mechanistic images in which the Party stood as the “engine” of society that would “provide the forces necessary for change and development,” while the ideas generated by this machine would come to the “masses” by “transmission belts,” or organizations such as the Komsomol.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the Komsomol was meant to convey and preserve Party ideals through active political and social participation among the younger generations.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, under Joseph Stalin’s regime, the Komsomol successfully mobilized masses of young people to participate in large state construction projects around the country as part of the rapid industrialization initiatives of the Five Year Plan.<sup>9</sup> The Komsomol’s ability to organize and dispatch large units of young, male “shock workers” to build massive power stations and new factories in parts of the Urals and Siberia made the organization a major source of manual labor for the Communist Party.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1930s, however, the Komsomol had lost virtually all aspects of organizational independence and was subjected to Party purges. From July 1936 to the end of 1938, Stalin’s regime conducted a widespread terror campaign, known as the “Great Purges,” to repress “former kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements and criminals,” according to Order No. 00447 executed on 30 July 1937 by the People’s

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<sup>7</sup> Hilary Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth and its Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53.

<sup>8</sup> Kenez, 84.

<sup>9</sup> Solnick, 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the law enforcement agency of the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> The purges of 1937 decimated Komsomol leadership and membership ranks after a full-blown campaign to root out “enemies of the people within the Komsomol” was outlined in the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the VLKSM (21-28 August 1937).<sup>12</sup> It was not until a year later, in November 1938, when the Party ended the purges, that memberships were restored to surviving Komsomol activists and new recruits alike.

The Great Patriotic War (World War II, 1941-1945) saw a dramatic growth in Komsomol activities and enrollments, as wartime patriotism spurred millions of young people to join Komsomol organizations and the Red Army. While the Komsomol continued growing during the war, the fighting took a great toll on its ranks. In the postwar period, with the expansion of secondary and postsecondary education under Nikita Khrushchev, Komsomol membership in educational institutions increased dramatically.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Komsomol numbers continued to grow steadily as the Soviet youth program provided youth with opportunities to improve their social conditions through education, enhance their political mobility within the Party, and to participate in the Virgin Lands Campaign begun in 1953 by Khrushchev to increase agricultural production on uncultivated lands scattered across the Soviet Union. By 1958, Komsomol enrollment soared to 18.5 million and by 1963 to 19.4 million.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Komsomol had become an increasingly powerful instrument of social control by allowing young people to participate in the state’s major industrialization projects, as well as serving as a political recruitment mechanism for the state through political training and ideological discipline.

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<sup>11</sup> Vadim Rogovin, *Stalin’s Terror of 1937-1938: Political Genocide in the USSR* (United Kingdom: Mehring Books, 2009), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>13</sup> Solnick, 65.

<sup>14</sup> Pilkington, 70.

Yet, even as Komsomol membership continued to rise during the Khrushchev period, Soviet authorities were also confronted with the increasing problem of deviance, also known as “hooliganism.” Although hooliganism had been a familiar form of deviance since the late nineteenth century and throughout the Stalin era, by 1958, it appeared to have become a unique problem that “surpassed all previous bounds.”<sup>15</sup> In 1963 alone, one out of every twenty-five Soviet men between the ages of 18 to 40 was either arrested or charged in court for hooliganism.<sup>16</sup> Young people across the Soviet Union began expressing discontent towards the Soviet leadership and its socialist policies after they were particularly inspired by the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, when thousands of students in Hungary demonstrated against the Soviet-influenced government of the People’s Republic of Hungary. KGB reports to the Central Committee indicated a significant rise in what authorities called “anti-Soviet phenomena,” which included anonymous and threatening letters to Party officials, and public, spontaneous outbursts of discontent against the government. Subsequently, the Soviet Union would occupy Hungary until 1991.

The volume of dissent was also largely a result of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” that he delivered to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party (CPSU) on February 1956, articulating the need for openness and public criticism in the post-Stalin era.<sup>17</sup> The death of Joseph Stalin three years before had ushered in a new era of Khrushchev reforms with the intent of melting away an icy totalitarian past. This period of liberalization was subsequently named “the thaw,” after a second-rate novella by Ilya Ehrenburg.<sup>18</sup> The combined impact of the

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<sup>15</sup> Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Sergei Alex Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat.” *Public Culture* 13 (2001): 193.

<sup>18</sup> Ludmilla Alexeyeva. *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 4.

Hungarian Uprising and the Secret Speech gave way to more young people engaging in acts of public dissent, or at least, what the authorities perceived as anti-Soviet behavior and propaganda. In the Soviet Union, the courts generally charged hooliganism as a crime and the state perceived hooligans as agents of resistance who posed a serious threat to the established Soviet order. Even within the Komsomol, dissent among the Communist Party's youth wing seemed pervasive. According to a report dated 10 December 1956 sent to Vladimir Semichastnyi (a member of the Komsomol Central Committee at the time, and later, chairman of the KGB), it noted that "in some Komsomol branches an unhealthy atmosphere has appeared with mistaken views on life, speeches alien to Marxist-Leninist views and a tendency to think in bourgeois terms."<sup>19</sup> These official reports reflected the generational divide that had begun to emerge since the Twentieth Congress, as more young people expressed resentment towards the generation before them that had "either participated in the abuses of the Stalin years or had remained silent in order to protect themselves."<sup>20</sup> The percentage of convicted hooligans who were Komsomol members increased from 5 percent in 1947 to 9 percent in 1961.<sup>21</sup> Despite the fact that more Komsomol members committed hooliganism over this period, they still remained a small presence among convicted hooligans.

Besides hooligans, the *stiliagi* consisted of a separate, but related, category of individuals whose nonstandard styles and forms of self-presentation the state had deemed to be another form of deviancy. The *stiliagi* was the first non-Komsomol cultural youth group to emerge in the postwar period during the late 1940s. Komsomol secretary A.N. Shelepin in 1954 described the *stiliagi* as "young men with Tarzan haircuts (*tarzan 'iepricheski*), dressed up like parrots" who

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Hornsby, "Political Protest and Dissent in the Khrushchev Era," (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2008), 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> LaPierre, 154.

neither worked nor studied, but loitered on the “streets of Moscow, Leningrad, Tbilisi, Erevan, and several other cities.”<sup>22</sup> At the conclusion of his observation, Shelepin wonders, “What kind of people are they?” The crude description of young stiliagi men by Shelepin made a clear reference to the group’s radical style (*stil’*), which had generally consisted of the men wearing bright-colored shirts, flared trousers, outgrown hair, and an air of disaffection that went along with their seemingly dissipated lifestyle. The stiliagi mainly consisted of sons of the Stalinist elite who decidedly chose to live in this “un-Soviet manner,” in reaction to the form of masculinity linked to frontline experience that had dominated the postwar gender discourse in the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> According to Mark Edele, for men who had been too young or otherwise unable to fight in the war, their inability to fight had “robbed” them of this crucial source of masculine identity that in turn had elevated the social status of those who did serve at the front, the *frontoviki*.<sup>24</sup> The war veteran’s classic masculinity was virtually impossible for these young men to imitate because a core feature of this masculinity included recounting wartime exploits, which was only possible to do for one who actually experienced and fought in the war. Instead, the stiliagi imitated what seemed to them to be more viable and accessible – Western clothing, which had been brought from the West by veterans themselves. Thus, the stiliagi established their own dominant form of masculinity by means of stylish dress, and radicalizing it to such an extent that it became “the core of an alternative form of manliness.”<sup>25</sup> Inspired by Western dance and clothing, the stiliagi fashioned for themselves a colorful ensemble of wide trousers, patterned ties, and broad-shouldered jackets, all while dancing to “the fox-trot, the tango, the

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 5 (2002): 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

rumba, the lindy-hop, or the self-made dance called the “stiliagi tse-dri” which consisted of “terribly complex and ridiculous movements.”<sup>26</sup>

For Soviet authorities, who saw the potential for the group to become an “alternative avant-garde of youth to the Komsomol,” the stiliagi posed a serious challenge to Soviet ideology, “not because they were numerous or powerful, but because they were the first manifestation of a new phenomenon for which the country was ideologically unprepared.”<sup>27</sup> In the context of the Cold War, the Party conceived the youth as primary targets of Western subversion and anti-Sovietism. Thus, Komsomol “brigades” were established to crack down on the stiliagi, ridiculing the young people in the satirical journal *Krokodil*<sup>28</sup> and in the cities, forming patrol groups that reportedly went around cutting the trousers and the hair of local stiliagi. Pilkington also points out that the Communist Party took full advantage of the “youth-as-victims-of-Western-influence” paradigm to reinforce the idea among youth that, as constructors of communism, they remained integral to the future of the young socialist state. Between 1955 and 1966 it was estimated that 500,000 Komsomol youth were sent to the so-called ‘Virgin Lands’ of the Urals, Kazakhstan and western Siberia on state agricultural projects to build the foundations of communism by their own labor.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the 1950s and 1960s were a period of greater intellectual and cultural freedom that saw the growing influence of the stiliagi culture. At the same time, it was a period of “renewed commitment to ideological unity and purity,” that significantly expanded the scope and membership of the Komsomol.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Edele, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Pilkington, 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> Edele, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Pilkington, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

The stiliagi were only part of a wider cultural phenomenon affecting youth behavior in the Soviet Union and in Western Europe. Nowhere was the reaction to American popular culture stark as in divided Germany. In East Germany, authorities claimed that American music and film imports were destroying German cultural heritage and “‘barbarized’ both East and West German adolescents,” while in West Germany, already by the late 1950s city officials were opening jazz clubs for adolescents.<sup>31</sup> American influences in the form of “young rebel” movies featuring actors like Marlon Brando, James Dean and Sidney Poitier, and rock ‘n’ roll music increased the anxiety of parents and government authorities, who were witnessing a dramatic, and often, rebellious change in young people’s behaviors. The youth riots in East and West Germany from 1955 to 1959 only highlighted what many alarmingly viewed as the growing influence of trends linked to consumption and sexuality.<sup>32</sup> Soviet authorities especially eyed American culture, and youth absorption of it, as potential “sources of resistance,” as well as important forces in changing gender mores in Soviet and Western European societies.<sup>33</sup> The influence of rock ‘n’ roll, for example, presented a moral dilemma for authorities who viewed the behavior of female fans at dances and concerts as alarming proof of the disintegration of traditional norms of female respectability in society. Dance styles in which men traditionally led and women followed dramatically changed with rock ‘n’ roll, as more “open dancing” made it possible for girls to dance independently without a male partner or with other girls. As a result of breaking away from traditional norms in this manner, American culture contributed to the redefinition of gender roles in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>31</sup> Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

According to Steven Solnick, the Komsomol under Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev had attempted to reinforce two main tasks that in previous decades had been the focus for the Komsomol: the indoctrination of the youth both politically and ideologically, and the mobilization of large numbers of young people to meet specific economic and military needs.<sup>34</sup> Khrushchev especially sought an active Komsomol that promoted mass membership by emphasizing the latter approach, while Brezhnev had wanted the central work of the Komsomol to be the indoctrination of young people, and highlighted the former approach.<sup>35</sup> In 1957, Moscow hosted one of the most widely attended International Youth Festivals organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). According to the WFDY, 34,000 young people from 131 countries attended the Festival in Moscow, where they celebrated jazz music and art works by abstractionists.<sup>36 37</sup> By embracing popular music and contemporary works of art, the International Youth Festival symbolized a departure, albeit temporarily, from Soviet socialist realism.

Under Brezhnev (1964-1982), the relatively liberal measures of his predecessor's cultural "thaw" were countered by a move towards increasing the militarization of the youth with the support of the Soviet army. In 1967, the Law on Universal Military Obligation reduced the term of military service for draftees, but it also mandated a Basic Military Training program for boys. The "military-patriotic education" program sought to educate and train future army recruits as soon as they entered primary school.<sup>38</sup> By second grade children were familiar with civil defense

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<sup>34</sup> Solnick, 65.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.wfdy.org/festivals/>.

<sup>37</sup> James von Geldern, "International Youth Festival" *17 Moments in Soviet History*, <http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1956festival&Year=1956>.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Gillette, "Soviet Military Might: A Nation Girds Itself Through Intensive Training," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1983, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1243&dat=19830821&id=cKNYAAAIAIAJ&sjid=qoYDAAAIAIAJ&pg=6264,1999403>.

exercises, and by ninth grade, they knew how to “disassemble, assemble, and fire an automatic rifle.”<sup>39</sup> The program was created in a way such that by 1983, almost all 4.3 million men in the Soviet conscript army had been trained in military tactics, weapons, discipline, and patriotic ideology since childhood.

In March 1985, upon succeeding to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev launched a campaign for the restructuring of the Soviet economy (*perestroika*), followed by a campaign for openness in public expressions of opinions (*glasnost*). Both reform campaigns brought about economic and social changes in the USSR on an unprecedented scale. Despite wanting to advance his reforms with socialism intact, Gorbachev had unforeseeably initiated a historic shift in Soviet economics from state socialism to partial free-market capitalism, and had thus paved the way for Boris Yeltsin’s capitalist initiatives in the first half of the 1990s.

During the early stages of *glasnost*, informal groups (*neformal’nie ob’edineniia*) of people who wished to express their own views and opinions in the public sphere, flourished.<sup>40</sup> Gorbachev encouraged the creation of these alternative cultural formations, collectively known as the *neformaly*, with the goal of generating support for the Party leadership’s reform efforts. In 1989, there were almost 60,000 *neformaly* groups in the USSR, and by the summer of 1990, there were an estimated 90,000.<sup>41</sup> Independent clubs were largely organized by young people with a variety of interests in music, dance, sports, and politics. By 1988, however, a number of them began challenging the one-party system by demanding radical political change, such as the establishment of free trade unions, new pension and consumer-protection laws, and the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Pilkington, 119.

<sup>41</sup> John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 73.

elimination of special privileges for the Communist party elite.<sup>42</sup> As such, these informal organizations had the reverse effect on the leadership; rather than supporting Gorbachev's reforms within the Party umbrella, they instead posed a threat to the Party by questioning its policies and seeking more radical action.

The growing influence of the neformaly led to "speculation about the possible transformation of the Komsomol from a political organization enmeshed in the structure of the Soviet state into an umbrella organization of interest-based clubs."<sup>43</sup> The Komsomol, too, began its own restructuring and refinement phase at this time. During the Twentieth Congress of the VLKSM (Young Communists League) in April 1987, Party leaders amended its statutes regarding the Komsomol's position so that it was no longer a "social organization embracing the wide mass of progressive youth" but a "socio-political organization embracing the advanced section of youth."<sup>44</sup> This amendment indicated the Party's choice in shifting the Komsomol's position from serving as a mass organization to a small, political avant-garde for the youth. By 1991, however, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Komsomol had dissolved, leading to a new phase in political youth policy under President Boris Yeltsin. The major federal youth policy to emerge out of the 1990s was a program entitled "The Youth of Russia," which in 1997 broadly defined the role of youth organizations and addressed the issue of juvenile crime.<sup>45</sup> However, no major youth movement had emerged during the immediate post-Soviet period in the first half of the 1990s.

Nashi, as proven by the long history of the Komsomol, emerged from a long-standing tradition of state-sponsored youth programs in the Soviet period. The Komsomol had been a

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>43</sup> Pilkington, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>45</sup> "Molodezh Rossii," Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation, no. 746, June 18, 1997.

Communist Party youth project created to indoctrinate the younger generation with Marxist-Leninist ideology and to prevent the formation of independent youth groups that might challenge the official order. Similarly, Nashi was a Kremlin project, but one that was specifically created to mobilize support around the figure and politics of Vladimir Putin. Nashi's close relationship with Putin and the Kremlin served as the backbone of the movement. Unlike the Communist Party, which had Marxist-Leninism as a source of ideological unity and identity from which members of the group could act collectively, it seemed as though the Kremlin in the 2000s had virtually no other viable source from which pro-regime youth organizations could gather its political legitimacy from except in the charismatic leadership of Putin.

## Chapter One

### Idushchie Vmeste, 2000-2005

On December 29, 1999, on the eve of his ascension to the acting presidency, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin published a blueprint for Russian policy that became known as the “Millennium Manifesto.” In it he expressed his conviction that ensuring Russia’s prosperity over the course of the new millennium would be not only an economic and political problem, but also an “ideological, spiritual and moral problem.”<sup>46</sup> Although adamantly opposed to the adoption of an “official state ideology” (unconstitutional under Article 13 of the 1993 Russian Constitution),<sup>47</sup> Putin argued that the “Russian idea,” a national project initiated by his predecessor Boris Yeltsin in 1996 to define the core values of the Russian polity, needed to be realized in order to ensure Russia’s revival and prosperity as a “great power.” The process of revitalizing the nation and state seemed all the more pressing to Putin in the aftermath of the destabilizing events of the 1990s which included the war in Chechnya, 1994-1996, the mass privatization of industrial enterprises and the subsequent rise of a cohort of oligarchs, and the economic chaos following the collapse of the ruble in August 1998. At the core of this “Russian Idea” were what he deemed traditional Russian values: *patriotizm* [patriotism], *derzhavnost’* [great-powerness], *gosudarstvennichestvo* [state-centeredness], and *solidarnost’* [solidarity].<sup>48</sup> These values, asserted Putin, were tied to the belief that a strong state was “the source and

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<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the New Millennium,” 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993, Article 13, Clause 2.

<sup>48</sup> Gavin Slade, “Deconstructing the *Millennium Manifesto*: The Yeltsin-Putin Transition and the Rebirth of Ideology,” *The Journal of Russian and Asian Studies* 4 (2006): 76.

guarantor of order, the initiator and the main driving force of any change” and that society desired “the restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state.” Instead of advocating for an ideology,<sup>49</sup> Putin’s words strongly emphasized the need for a consensus of values, or “social accord,” and like any leader of a political system, he was guided by a set of assumptions and values that influenced his political decision-making.<sup>50</sup> The values he outlined in his Millennium Manifesto (patriotism, great-powerness, state-centeredness, and solidarity) would serve as the ideological underpinnings of his leadership, aimed at achieving an internal social and political consistency. Therefore, Putin deftly steered the political discourse away from the Soviet emphasis on ideology and towards a system of universal and traditional values that outlined a reformed view of contemporary Russian state and society.

Putin’s first presidential term, 2000-2004, was primarily focused on state-building. His initial efforts to rebuild the state proceeded in three major stages: the restructuring of the Duma through a series of reforms in 2001 and 2002, the reining in of the oligarchs beginning in 2003, and the restoration of central authority over regional governments in 2004. Putin was especially intent on establishing direct control of the regional governments, which had grown tremendously after the rapid decentralization of the 1990s. A week after taking his presidential oath, Putin confirmed the enforcement of a law that consolidated the country’s political administrative framework into seven federal districts.<sup>51</sup> This recentralization of power under Putin meant that power ministries at the regional level would now be subject to Moscow.

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<sup>49</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 12: “An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify, or overthrow the existing system of power.”

<sup>50</sup> Alfred B. Evans, Jr. “Power and Ideology: Vladimir Putin and the Russian Political System,” *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 1902 (2008): 4.

<sup>51</sup> Brian Taylor, *State Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 128.

The ongoing war in Chechnya, which had been launched in 1994 by Yeltsin, provided a primary justification for political centralization. The independence movement in Chechnya and its growing terrorism against Russia was indicative of Russia's weak central government. The Russian government feared that the Chechen problem would spread to the rest of the North Caucasus region. In September 1999, four apartment buildings in Moscow were bombed, killing more than 300 people and injuring hundreds more. The Russian government blamed Chechen terrorists for the Moscow bombings, and used that assertion as a partial pretext for launching a second military campaign against Chechnya.<sup>52</sup> Critics, however, claimed that the Russian security services, not the Chechens, were responsible for the bombings as part of a Kremlin machination to promote public support for Putin, the newly appointed premier who was a relatively unknown former KGB agent at that time. Subsequently, the Moscow bombings had bolstered support not only for the war, but also for then Prime Minister Putin, whose tough stance against Chechnya won significant support among the Russian population after he famously pronounced this threat to Chechen guerrillas: "If we catch them in the toilet, we will rub them out in the outhouse."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Putin's tough stance and brute language on Chechnya helped him gain popularity at home, in time to win the presidential elections the following year. His approval ratings jumped from 31 percent in August 1999, before the military conflict broke out in Chechnya, to 80 percent that November, and would remain at an average of 70 percent throughout much of his first term in office.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory Feifer, "Russia: Three Years Later, Moscow Apartment Bombings Remain Unsolved," *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, September 6, 2002, accessed September 14, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1100714.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Wines, "Why Putin Boils Over: Chechnya is His Personal War," *New York Times*, November 13, 2002, accessed September 16, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/13/world/why-putin-boils-over-chechnya-is-his-personal-war.html>.

<sup>54</sup> "Do You Approve of Putin?" Indices, Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>.

Against this backdrop of politics, war, and Putin's popularity, the ruling elite agreed to support a young official from the Presidential Administration, Vasily Yakemenko (b. 1971) and his brother Boris, in founding the youth organization, *Idushchie Vmeste* ("Walking Together") in May 2000. According to Yakemenko, *Idushchie Vmeste* was intended to fill a "moral and cultural vacuum" that had previously been filled by groups like the Young Pioneers or the Komsomol.<sup>55</sup> At its core, the newly formed organization would concentrate its activities on promoting patriotic education and forming spiritual, moral, and physically strong youth, in addition to promoting a democratic society.

The main text of *Idushchie Vmeste*, the "Moral Codex," was strikingly reminiscent of the Communist Party's "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism" formulated in 1961, which had outlined specific rules that members of the Party were expected to follow.<sup>56</sup> Jussi Lassila illustrates how, in many parts of the Codex, the ideals prescribed to a member of *Idushchie Vmeste* were almost the exact same as those outlined in the Communist Party's Moral Code. They included: "the feeling of patriotism," "high morals," "political maturity," and a "high level of cultural consciousness."<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the first set of commandments outlined in the "Moral Codex" included showing respect for elders and forswearing drugs, alcohol, and foul language. The emphasis on proper individual behavior reflected the group's belief that "there are no bad nations – there are bad people."<sup>58</sup> In an effort to form educated and responsible citizens, therefore, members of *Idushchie Vmeste* were required to "attend six concerts or plays a year,

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<sup>55</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "Russian Group is Offering Values to Fill a Void," *New York Times*, February 16, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/world/russian-group-is-offering-values-to-fill-a-void.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

<sup>56</sup> Jussi Lassila, *The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia: The Search for Distinctive Conformism in the Political Communication of Nashi, 2005-2009* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2012), 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> RI Rozovskaya, «ИДУЩИЕ ВМЕСТЕ»: ПУТЬ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО САМООПРЕДЕЛЕНИЯ» *Journal of the Russian State University for Humanities* 3 (2002).

visit four historic cities, check out six books from the library and volunteer at least once a month at orphanages or senior citizen homes.”<sup>59</sup> By fulfilling these duties, the creators of Idushchie Vmeste presumed that members would cultivate an appreciation for Russia’s Soviet past and generate patriotic feelings that would enable them to participate more willingly in the state- and nation-building initiatives of Putin and his regime.

Correspondingly, members were encouraged to actively recruit among their peers with promises of rising through the organization’s ranks. Members were divided into groups of five called “red stars,” each led by a “foreman” who received a free pager and a small stipend for their services. In turn, each of his/her five “soldiers” received free T-shirts. Once members had a red star, they were encouraged to persuade another 50 to join, and if they got another thousand to join, they would be promoted to “coordinator.”<sup>60</sup> By 2002, Idushchie Vmeste had an estimated 50,000 members of whom 80 percent were students.<sup>61</sup> Without a cohesive ideology, the organization’s attempts to attract membership by offering material incentives ultimately proved unsustainable.

The group’s recruitment and indoctrination methods together prompted critics of the organization to compare it to the Komsomol and the Hitler Youth, designating it the nicknames “Putinomol” and “Putin-Jugend.”<sup>62</sup> The word play on Putin’s name furthermore reflected the views that Idushchie Vmeste was established by the Kremlin to form a “cult of personality” around Putin as part of a wider initiative to promote his image and gain support for him among the Russian populace. What started as a Kremlin-engineered move by Vladislav Surkov to

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<sup>59</sup> Steven Lee Myers, “Russian Group is Offering Values to Fill a Void.”

<sup>60</sup> Clem Cecil, “Pro-Putin Cult Urges Return to Soviet ‘Glory,’” *The Telegraph*, January 27, 2002, accessed November 1, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1382860/Pro-Putin-cult-urges-return-to-Soviet-glory.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Rozovskaya.

<sup>62</sup> Dale R. Herspring, ed. *Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 76.

promote Putin's face on billboards, televisions, and newspapers in Moscow turned into a booming commercial market all throughout Russia with Putin's face adorning "znachki [pins], coins, cakes, countless T-shirts, salt shakers, posters, postcards, playing cards, notebooks, and calendars."<sup>63</sup> Putin had repeatedly denied personally invoking a cult of personality and even denounced it as an indication of "repression" in reference to the term being highly associated with Stalin and his well-groomed cult of personality.<sup>64</sup> Yet about a year into his first term, Putin fell short of disapproving the actions of his fans, citing his powerlessness in preventing them from publicly supporting him: "I understand that when somebody does such things, he or she is probably guided by the best of intentions, and that he or she thinks well of me. I would like to thank them, but ask them not to do this. [But] I cannot actively stop this."<sup>65</sup> Regardless, Putin continued to enjoy tremendous popularity; in 2002, a pop song titled "I want a man like Putin" hit music charts all across Russia. Sung by the female duo *Poyushchie Vmeste* ("Singing Together"), the techno-pop song lamented an abusive, alcohol-drinking boyfriend and extolled Putin as the ideal Russian man:

My boyfriend is in trouble once again:  
Got in a fight, got drunk on something nasty  
I've had enough and I chased him away  
And now I want a man like Putin

One like Putin, full of strength.  
One like Putin, who won't be a drunk  
One like Putin, who wouldn't hurt me  
One like Putin, who won't run away.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "The Ultimate Celebrity: VVP as VIP *Object d'Art*" in *Celebrity and Glamour in Contemporary Russia: Shocking Chic*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Vlad Strukov (New York: Routledge, 2011), 32.

<sup>64</sup> "Putin Says Cult of Personality Cannot Happen in Russia Again," *Ria Novosti*, June 9, 2010, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/news/20100609/159362061.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Goscilo, 35.

<sup>66</sup> "I Want a Man Like Putin," English lyrics, <http://unleashingchiang.blogspot.com/2010/01/i-need-man-like-putin.html>.

The lyrics were written by a former press secretary of the Russian Supreme Court who denied any link between Poyushchie Vmeste and Idushchie Vmeste after a number of media commentators noted the striking similarity of the two names.<sup>67</sup> Although the song popularized Putin as a symbol of true Russian masculinity, it also carried political overtones by commenting on Putin in his leadership role:

I've seen him on the news last night  
He was telling us that the world has come to crossroads  
With one like him, it's easy to be home and out  
And now I want a man like Putin<sup>68</sup>

Putin's attraction, therefore, was not limited to his persona, but was intrinsically linked to his presidential power. Idushchie Vmeste not only operated within this Putin-as-celebrity culture, but even benefited from Putin's popularity as the "pro-Putin" youth organization.

Idushchie Vmeste, however, did not appear to be the only example of attempts by the ruling elite to bring back certain traditions and symbols from the Soviet period. In 2000, Putin restored the music of the old Soviet anthem as the official anthem of the Russian Federation, prompting media speculation that Putin's efforts to create a "strong, effective" state had a "distinctively reddish hue of the past."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the armed forces adopted the communist-style red banner as its official standard and Parliament approved the "imperial double-headed eagle as the state's coat of arms and the pre-revolutionary tricolor as the national flag."<sup>70</sup> In 2001, the Defense Ministry reintroduced compulsory military training in high schools as a

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<sup>67</sup> Douglas Birch, "Putin's Popularity Reaches High Note," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 3, 2002, accessed December 1, 2012, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2002-09-03/news/0209030055\\_1\\_putin-vladimir-v-pop-song](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2002-09-03/news/0209030055_1_putin-vladimir-v-pop-song).

<sup>68</sup> "I Want a Man Like Putin," English lyrics.

<sup>69</sup> Marcus Warren, "Putin Revives Soviet National Anthem," *The Telegraph*, December 9, 2000, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1377685/Putin-revives-Soviet-national-anthem.html>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

critical aspect of “military patriotic education” for Russian youth.<sup>71</sup> The *gosudarstvennichestvo* (state-centeredness) Putin spoke of in his Millennium Manifesto appeared to have a fundamental role in the official adoption of these practices and symbols from the imperial and Soviet past.

Idushchie Vmeste was officially registered as a public organization on July 14, 2000, but only became known to the broader public in May 2001 when an estimated 10,000 young people gathered in Red Square to celebrate the first anniversary of Putin’s presidency. The boisterous crowd of young people chanting “Russia” and “Putin” and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with Putin’s face was only a preview of the many pro-Putin rallies that were to come under his continued leadership. On November 7, 2001, Idushchie Vmeste organized a nation-wide event called the “General Cleaning of Russia,” where 46 thousand young people in 50 cities participated in picking litter off the streets.<sup>72</sup> The event served primarily as an opportunity for Idushchie Vmeste to support Putin publicly as members held signs that read “The President – the hope of Russia,” and “Youth for President.” In this regard, the social actions of Idushchie Vmeste were symbolic; by endorsing Putin while engaging in “cleaning” the streets of Russia, the organization made it clear to the general public that its activities were linked to the power of Vladimir Putin.

Idushchie Vmeste also focused its activities in what Vasily Yakemenko described as “purifying Russian literature.”<sup>73</sup> In the summer of 2002, Idushchie Vmeste conducted a “book exchange” on the streets in Moscow. Members of the public were encouraged to turn in modern “liberal” books, which portrayed the difficulties of modern Russian life, in exchange for books

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<sup>71</sup> Herspring, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Rozovskaya.

<sup>73</sup> Clem Cecil, “Pro-Putin Cult Urges Return to Soviet ‘Glory.’”

on the Red Army's "glorious victories" during the Great Patriotic War.<sup>74</sup> In particular, the group launched a protest campaign against the writer Vladimir Sorokin to condemn his 1999 book *Blue Lard*, which in one scene featured a clone of Khrushchev sodomizing a clone of Stalin.<sup>75</sup> Idushchie Vmeste filed an obscenity suit against Sorokin on the grounds that he was disseminating pornography. In June 2002, members of Idushchie Vmeste staged a protest in front of the Bolshoi Theatre, ripping out pages from *Blue Lard* and then throwing them into a cardboard toilet. In another instance, the organization held a public book-burning ceremony, burning works by writers whom the group deemed unpatriotic. These activities by members of Idushchie Vmeste demonstrated the organization's apparent strict adherence to moral values. Their actions reflected a patriotism that had its roots deeply embedded in the Soviet past, when the emphasis on reading books was largely a matter of also denouncing works of literature that went against the moral values and political views of the Communist Party. Furthermore, Idushchie Vmeste's denunciation of Sorokin's book was, in part, a reflection of the group's close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. The moral and conservative values upheld by Idushchie Vmeste seemed to echo Russian Orthodox teachings.

Despite its adherence to these values, Idushchie Vmeste found itself embroiled in a scandal in 2004 when a leading official of the group was caught distributing pornography. Around the same time, financial disputes had arisen between the St. Petersburg and Moscow branches of the organization, further disabling the organization. In addition to these issues, Idushchie Vmeste was confronted with the growing presence of opposition youth groups. On January 5, 2005, 21-year old Mikhail Obozov launched an anti-Kremlin youth group called Idushchie Bez Putina ("Walking without Putin," a twist on name of the pro-Putin youth group) in

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<sup>74</sup> Clem Cecil, "Pro-Putin Cult Urges Return to Soviet 'Glory.'"

<sup>75</sup> Birch, "Putin's Popularity Reaches High Note."

St. Petersburg. As Robert Horvath notes, “[U]nlike more traditional youth movements sponsored by political parties, Idushchiye Bez Putina was a product of the Internet.”<sup>76</sup> Obozov had been inspired to found Idushchiye Bez Putina after an online discussion with active-thinking youth who unanimously reached the conclusion that “it was time to move from the virtual world to the real one,” and that it was “time to go out onto the streets” and voice their demands to the authorities.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the group’s online manifesto “exhorted students to join the opposition to Putin, ‘a president who treats us like cattle.’” While Obozov did not advocate a revolution per se, he alluded to the recent events that had sparked colored revolutions in former Soviet states by declaring, “It’s time to say ‘ENOUGH!’” The phrase combined references to Ukraine’s *Pora* (“it’s time”) and Georgia’s *Kmara* (“Enough!”).<sup>78</sup> As Robert Horvath recently noted in his work on the spectre of velvet revolution in Russia, the manifesto’s seditious language was further enhanced by the fact that the website hosting it was swiftly deleted soon after being posted, inevitably giving rise to suspicions about official involvement in closing down the website.<sup>79</sup>

Yet even the name of the group, Idushchie Bez Putina, highlighted the fact that its founders included former members of Idushchie Vmeste. There were several instances of disaffected youth who crossed party lines after harboring a personal sense of estrangement from Putin and his politics. Twenty-eight year old Maria Baronova, a former Putin supporter who had opposed the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, gradually “outgrew” Putin after repeated incidents by the government, including the handling of the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004.<sup>80</sup> The opposition youth movement partially derived its legitimacy from activists like Baronova who had

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Horvath, *Putin’s Preventive Counter-Revolution: Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 75.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Julia Ioffe, “Lady Dada,” *The New Republic*, August 2, 2012, accessed February 26, 2013, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/magazine/politics/105735/maria-baronova-anti-putin-activist>.

formerly identified with the politics of Putin and the Kremlin, but underwent a political conversion that landed them on the opposite side of the official line. As if to highlight their disaffection, Horvath notes, Yakemenko denounced them as “traitors” funded by rich Westerners like George Soros.<sup>81</sup> Boris Nemtsov on the other hand, a veteran opposition figure, hailed the new group as not only a sign of rising demand for freedom among young people, but also a promising sign that Putin had ceased to be “fashionable,” referring to a popular move begun by thousands of Idushchie Vmeste members of wearing t-shirts with Putin’s portrait on them.<sup>82</sup>

Youth from a local cell of the Communist Party noticeably reversed this fashion statement when a group of approximately fifty young men staged a protest outside of Putin’s house in his hometown of St. Petersburg. The protestors wore masks that strikingly resembled Putin and t-shirts that read “Vova! Go home!”, which referred to the diminutive form of Putin’s first name, “Vladimir.” The informal use of Putin’s name combined with the imperative “Go home!” — as in Putin should exit politics — undermined the extensive PR campaign that Putin and his team had been forming since he came into power in August 1999. In what must have been an ironic spectacle, policemen went after the young men to tear off their Putin masks.

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<sup>81</sup> Horvath, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1. Protestors wear Putin masks during a rally in downtown St. Petersburg, 28 February 2004.<sup>83</sup>

The symbolic retaliation of this kind not only sparked a political movement, but also an artistic one, as young protesters began more and more to use art as a means of disseminating anti-government messages. *Voina* (“war”), a group of young street artists who specifically engaged in political protest art, had proven to be a pioneer in this art protest movement. Since its founding in October 2005, it has had approximately 200 members participating in its actions. According to a website that raises awareness of the arrest of two *Voina* members, the group identifies itself as “anarchist,” and considers the regime its enemy.<sup>84</sup> The Russian Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor’s Office publicly announced that *Voina* was “a left-wing radical anarchist collective whose central goal is to carry out PR actions directed against the authorities, and specifically against law enforcement officials with the aim of discrediting them in the eyes

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<sup>83</sup> Uwe Klussman, “A Growing Protest Movement Challenges Putin,” August 12, 2005, accessed February 23, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/russia-a-growing-protest-movement-challenges-putin-a-347822.html>.

<sup>84</sup> “Free Voina,” <http://en.free-voina.org/arrest>.

of the public.”<sup>85</sup> According to one of its leaders, Alexei Plutser-Sarno, Voina members vary politically and socially, ranging from anarchists to punks, socialists, and libertarians.<sup>86</sup> Yet, what unites them is a common desire to express radical political views through art. Voina’s artwork, known to be provocatively sexual, violent, and grotesque, has become a “symbolic weapon full of satire and laughter,” which no pro-Kremlin youth group has been able to compete with in terms of creativity and gaining mass public attention. New groups like Idushchie Bez Putina and Voina positioned themselves as alternatives to Idushchie Vmeste and thus led to the weakening of its mobilization capabilities.

The growing presence of these groups reflected the general decline in public confidence in the government and its institutions by the end of Putin’s first term. According to several polls that were carried out in 2005 by the independent Russian pollster, the Levada Center, 47 percent trusted in Putin, followed by 41 percent who trusted the Russian Orthodox Church, and 31 percent the Russian Army.<sup>87</sup> On the lower end of public trust were the security agencies at 25 percent, the media at 24 percent, regional authorities at 17 percent, and the federal government at 14 percent.

By the end of 2004, the combination of competitive youth organizations and bad press made it challenging for Idushchie Vmeste to mobilize and recruit new members. Critics and sympathizers of the regime alike became increasingly skeptical of the group’s Soviet-inspired actions and indoctrination methods. The scandal involving the dissemination of pornography, the financial disputes between the St. Petersburg and Moscow branches, and the growing threat

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Paco Barragán, “Voina: A Russian Revolution,” *ARTPULSE Magazine*, <http://artpulsemagazine.com/voina-a-russian-revolution>.

<sup>87</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Trust in Public Institutions in Russia: The Lowest in the World,” June 27, 2005, accessed February 25, 2013, <http://www.russialist.com/9186-29.php>.

of opposition youth movements all contributed to the Kremlin's decision to dissolve Idushchie Vmeste in the beginning of 2005 and to found Nashi in its place.

## Chapter Two

### Nashi Emerges, 2005-2008

“What is it ‘to be part of the movement’?  
Being part of the movement means going out into the streets.  
It means to tell a villain that he’s a villain.  
Being part of the movement is to be ready to be cursed by those who don’t want changes.”<sup>88</sup>

-Vasily Yakemenko, Former *Nashi* Leader  
Speaking to *Nashi* Commissars, 2009

In January 2005, thousands of pensioners took to the streets in cities across Russia to protest against a new law that abolished a wide range of social benefits and replaced them with cash payments. It was the largest show of discontent in Russia since Putin became president in 2000. According to the independent Russian polling agency, the Levada Center, Putin’s approval rating, which had exceeded 70 percent for most of his 2000-2004 presidency, dropped to 65 percent that January, down from 79 percent exactly the year before.<sup>89</sup> For Putin and his government, the demonstrations calling for his resignation and in some extreme cases, insisting on a revolution, confirmed what they perceived as an alarming trend that was spreading across Eastern Europe, and which had already brought about regime change in Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, and Ukraine in 2005. In all three countries, youth had played a significant role in mobilizing protestors, and in the case of Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” in 2004, youth-organized action had helped pro-Western presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko prevail in an election dispute. Meanwhile, in Russia, pensioners and veterans staging street protests were

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<sup>88</sup> A scene in *Putin’s Kiss*, directed by Lise Birk Pederson (2012; Copenhagen, Denmark: Monday Production), DVD.

<sup>89</sup> “Do You Approve of Putin?” Indices, Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>.

conspicuously joined by members of the youth branch of the opposition party, Yabloko. Largely in reaction to these events, especially the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, the Kremlin established Nashi.

The Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement “Nashi” (*Molodezhnoe Demokraticeskoe Antifashistskoe Dvizhenie “Nashi”*) was officially established on 15 April 2005 by Kremlin officials. Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s then Deputy Chief of Staff, devised Nashi to function as a mass youth organization that would become part of a larger effort to build a “following of loyal, patriotic young people” for Putin’s government and that would “defuse any youthful resistance” that might develop over the course of the 2008 election cycle.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, the Kremlin’s strategists formed Nashi partly in apprehension of a potential “orange-like” scenario in Russia. It became clearer, too, that Nashi would be the successor group to Idushchie Vmeste when its leader, Vasily Yakemenko, announced that he would become Nashi’s leader.

The creation of Nashi appeared to have been triggered in part by the regime’s desire to “prevent a repeat of the Ukrainian ‘Orange Revolution’ during the 2007-2008 electoral cycle in Russia,” but also to create a system that would enable its members to integrate themselves into the political elite and as such, would function as a career ladder for the regime’s future bureaucrats and leaders.<sup>91</sup> The movement was conceived entirely by the Kremlin and had the political backing from its highest officials including Putin himself, who had met with Nashi representatives on multiple occasions, and Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office and Aide to the President, who had been heavily involved with

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<sup>90</sup> Steven Lee Myers, “Youth Groups Created by Kremlin Serve Putin’s Cause,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/world/europe/08moscow.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/world/europe/08moscow.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&).

<sup>91</sup> Maya Atwal, “Evaluating Nashi’s Sustainability: Autonomy, Agency and Activism,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 5 (July 2009): 744.

Douglas Robert Buchacek, “NASHA Pravda, NASHE Delo: The Mobilization of the Nashi Generation in Contemporary Russia,” M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2006), 3.

Nashi's initial activities.<sup>92</sup> Before assuming the leadership of Nashi, Vasily Yakemenko had also worked in the Kremlin for a brief period within the Presidential Administration in the Department for External Relations, where he developed ties to Surkov and Gleb Pavlovsky, a well-established figure in the Kremlin who had been instrumental in founding the pro-Putin United Russia party.<sup>93</sup> Given its strong connections with Kremlin personnel and as a consequence, access to Kremlin funds, Nashi became the most visible and influential group of all the politically-oriented youth organizations to emerge during this time period.

Nashi, unlike its predecessor *Idushchie Vmeste*, sought to transform itself into a more structured, disciplined, and radical youth organization that could respond to the political and social threats facing the Putin regime in the aftermath of the colored revolutions. It was easier for Nashi to stage rallies in a short period of time because it already had a cohort of *Idushchie Vmeste* members, including Vasily Yakemenko, at its disposal. In that sense, *Idushchie Vmeste* never completely fragmented; rather, it was redefined under the new label of Nashi. The newly formed pro-Putin youth movement had simply adopted a number of *Idushchie Vmeste*'s tactics, discarding the ones that happened to be more controversial, such as the "book exchange." Whereas *Idushchie Vmeste* sought to mobilize youth by means of a cultural program through reading patriotic-themed books and visiting historic sites, Nashi centered its agenda on fighting domestic and foreign opposition, and promoting education and social action not only for cultural purposes, but for political ends.

As a Kremlin youth organization that was "imposed by adults," to borrow from the same expression that sociologist Allen Kassof used for his observation on Soviet youth

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Buchacek, 4.

organizations,<sup>94</sup> Nashi did not appear to function as an organization of or for the youth, but stood as an agency of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party and of Putin himself, established to resist internal and external opposition, as well as to prevent the formation of opposition youth groups in Russia by dominating the public sphere of youth activism. Therein lay both the strength and weakness of Nashi. In serving the interests of Putin's regime, Nashi was accorded the political and financial backing of the Kremlin, and as a consequence, garnered the sources and vital institutional support needed to attract young Russians to the organization. Yet, as a Kremlin creation, Nashi was constrained as a social movement. Sociologists define social movements as consisting of "networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity."<sup>95</sup> Nashi, however, never fully functioned as an informal network; it was a formal organization of young people summoned by the Kremlin to work in tandem with the commitments and policies of the regime. Instead of a shared and constituted collective identity conceived by youth activists themselves, Nashi's identity was Kremlin-oriented and Kremlin-dictated. Similarly, Nashi members were not united by a set of common beliefs or ideas so much as they were by their support of the personal figure and politics of Vladimir Putin. According to Yakemenko in a 2001 interview, a youth movement without Putin was "unrealistic," because "any movement, especially a youth movement, needs certain things: there should be a leader, there should be an idol."<sup>96</sup> A youth movement whose identity was exclusively linked to that of Putin and his politics implied that Nashi's fate was likewise dependent on the outcomes of the regime. The Kremlin's attempts at controlling all aspects of the activities and processes of

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<sup>94</sup> Allen Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 183.

<sup>95</sup> Mario Diani, "The Concept of Social Movement," *Sociological Review* 40, no.1 (February 1992): 3.

<sup>96</sup> Julie Corwin, "Russia: 'A Youth Movement Needs a Leader,'" *Radio Free Europe*, April 21, 2005, accessed March 5, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1058597.html>.

the pro-regime youth movement had ultimately created an artificial network, in which its viability and sustenance were determined by external decision-making.

In her work analyzing the political sustainability of Nashi, Maya Atwal explains that the Kremlin had viewed any form of independent political engagement by Nashi activists as a potential risk for generating a genuine political debate and accountability that would have been “anathema to the authoritarian ambitions driving Nashi.” Instead, the Kremlin had encouraged “an aggressive patriotic solidarity amongst Nashi activists, which could be manipulated and directed against any perceived potential political rivals at the behest of the state.”<sup>97</sup> This particular form of “aggressive patriotic solidarity” was evident in Nashi’s manifesto, which stated that the organization was founded specifically for the purpose of forming an “anti-fascist movement” to fight a wide spectrum of regime-opposing groups broadly labeled as fascists, liberals, Westerners, communists, ultra-nationalists, and oligarchs.<sup>98</sup>

Vladislav Surkov, better known as the “gray cardinal” of the Kremlin for his behind-the-scenes role in shaping the ideological and political framework of Russia from 1999 to 2011, was recognized as the mastermind behind Nashi. It was Surkov who coined the famous phrase, “sovereign democracy” in 2006 to describe the Kremlin’s position on governing principles. He defined the term at great length as a mode of political life in which the bearer of sovereignty and the sole source of power in Russia is its “multiethnic people” whose power, in the national context, could never be usurped.<sup>99</sup> Surkov distinguished the two words as “standing for two different phenomena, with ‘sovereign’ denoting a country’s position in the outside world and

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<sup>97</sup> Atwal, 745.

<sup>98</sup> “Manifest molodozhnogo dvizheniia ‘Nashi,’” <http://www.nashi.su/pravda/83974709>.

<sup>99</sup> Vladislav Surkov, “Nationalization of the Future: Paragraphs *pro* Sovereign Democracy,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 9.

‘democracy’ being a method of organizing society and the state.’<sup>100</sup> Basically, Surkov rejected the notion that there was only one type of democracy (i.e. American), and argued that each country should be able to determine its own form of governance.<sup>101</sup> Surkov’s concept of sovereign democracy influenced Nashi significantly. In its manifesto, the only works that Nashi cited were by Surkov. Moreover, the language of the manifesto placed significant emphasis on the ideas of the Kremlin’s ideologue when it stated that “[T]he task of our generation is to defend the sovereignty of our country today, as it was defended by our grandfathers 60 years ago,” and went on to state explicitly that Nashi’s primary goal was to “preserve the sovereignty and integrity of Russia.”<sup>102</sup>

By the beginning of Putin’s second term in 2004, a marked shift in political rhetoric reflected the regime’s view of the nation as being deeply embedded in global competition, “the struggle for energy resources, attempts by some countries to restrict the sovereignty of other countries, ‘colored revolutions’” and more.<sup>103</sup> According to political scientist Andrei Okara, the concept of sovereign democracy had grave implications for Russian politics. First, it implied that the sources of legitimacy were to be found in Russia, not the West; and second, being the power-wielding force for Russia, the sovereign elite were the ultimate guarantors of Russia’s sovereignty and thereby the protectors of the nation within the context of globalization and other external threats.<sup>104</sup> To that end, one of the Putin regime’s strategic responses to the colored revolutions spreading across Eastern Europe at the time was to create an organized movement

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<sup>100</sup> Andrei Okara, “Sovereign Democracy: A New Russian Idea or a PR Project?” *Russia in Global Affairs* 5 (July-September 2007): 17.

<sup>101</sup> Armine Ishkanian, *Democracy Building and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Armenia* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 161.

<sup>102</sup> “Manifest molodozhnogo dvizheniia ‘Nashi,’” <http://www.nashi.su/pravda/83974709>.

<sup>103</sup> Okara, 18.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

consisting of a segment of the population's most active and politically unassertive members in order to affirm Russia's status as a sovereign and functionally democratic nation.

Hence, the Kremlin creation of Nashi was inspired by the fear engendered by the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. On November 22, 2004, a crowd of hundreds of thousands had gathered in Kiev's Independence Square chanting "*Razom nas bahato! Nas ne podolaty!*" ("Together, we are many! We cannot be defeated!"). Conspicuous election fraud had brought waves of people displaying the color orange, the color of opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko's campaign, to protest the election's rigged results that had declared the incumbent, Viktor Yanukovich, to be the winner. After hundreds of thousands of participants staged nonviolent protests to demand a revote, which took place on December 27th, Yushchenko was declared the victor.<sup>105</sup>

In Moscow, news of the defeat of the Kremlin's favored Ukrainian presidential candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, did not bode well. The Kremlin had invested much of its personnel and financial resources, including a team of Kremlin spin doctors, to help run Yanukovich's campaign.<sup>106</sup> A week before the first round of elections, Russian President Vladimir Putin had been promoting Yanukovich in lengthy interviews and press conferences. The unexpected victory of Yushchenko, therefore, proved to be a "humiliating defeat for Putin."<sup>107</sup> Political scientist and Putin advisor Gleb Pavlovsky described the Orange Revolution at the time as a

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<sup>105</sup> "An Orange Victory," *The Economist*, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004, <http://www.economist.com/node/3522123>.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 102.

<sup>107</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005. Accessed October 22, 2012. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60620/adrian-karatnycky/ukraines-orange-revolution>.

“serious wake-up call for Russia,” warning that if Russia did not take greater strides towards strengthening its political system, revolution would be imminent.<sup>108</sup>

Moscow took note of the influential participation of Ukrainian youth in the Orange Revolution. Media images of “tens of thousands of photogenic youngsters in orange scarves” embodied the kind of youth, idealism and Western political influence that the Kremlin feared might inspire a similar popular uprising in Russia.<sup>109</sup> Youth had already played a crucial role in bringing about regime change in the elections in Serbia (2000) and Georgia (2003).<sup>110</sup> In the democratic revolutions of Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, the youth groups *Otpor*, *Kmara*, and *Pora*, respectively, had played a significant role in mobilizing protestors, organizing logistical support for the protests, and initiating the first wave of protests. Altogether the creation of Russia’s youth movements was seen by political experts as the Putin government’s attempt to prevent a future Orange Revolution with its own ‘preventive counter-revolution.’<sup>111</sup>

Thus, in February 2005, the “Antifascist Democratic Youth Movement Nashi” was officially established with the approval of the regime. *Nashi*, meaning “ours,” was followed by the creation of similar groups such as *Molodaya gvardiya* (“Young Guard”), which belonged to the pro-Putin party United Russia; *Mestnye* (“Locals”), a group endorsed by the Moscow region government that had launched an anti-immigrant campaign in the summer of 2007; and *Grigorevtsy*, a group affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>112</sup> Nashi, the largest and most notable of the groups, identified itself as a movement that supported Putin “not as an individual,”

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<sup>108</sup> Angus Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 145.

<sup>109</sup> Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin’s Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 78.

<sup>110</sup> Taras Kuzio, “Civil Society, Youth, and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (2006): 365.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Horvath, “Putin’s ‘Preventive Counter-Revolution’: Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (2011): 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

but through his “political course of action.”<sup>113</sup> Its primary goal as a movement was to mobilize Russia’s youth so as to advance the country’s efforts towards a sense of proprietorship in the state: modernization by instilling in them

Our goal is to ensure that millions of young people take part in the process of modernization with our President and those who have inherited an ineffective bureaucracy from the past. We live here. The future of our country is our future too. The success of each one of us depends on the success of Russia. It is therefore today’s youth that is the force most interested in modernizing the country.<sup>114</sup>

The creation of Nashi helped to modify public opinion of post-Soviet Russia’s youth. During the 1990s and up until the end of Putin’s first term in 2004, the general public had perceived Russian youth as “apathetic and apolitical.”<sup>115</sup> The Kremlin’s ability to mobilize young people through groups like Nashi had allowed it to intimidate political opposition groups while gaining the support of pro-Kremlin ones. The group was used for breaking up opposition rallies and for confronting major threats against Putin’s regime. In this way the purpose and uses of Nashi differed from its predecessor, *Idushchie Vmeste*; while the latter had focused on forming a tight web of support around Putin, often deemed a cult of personality by media commentators, Nashi was partly intended to address the threat of foreign groups and foreign money from taking root in Russia. State sponsorship gave Nashi total legitimacy and allowed a minority of Russia’s population – the youth – to exercise tremendous political will in the public sphere.

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<sup>113</sup> “Nashi Youth Movement: History & Manifesto,” trans., Danya Spencer and Michael Smeltzer, School of Russian and Asian Studies, June 12, 2011, [http://www.sras.org/nashi\\_russian\\_youth\\_movement](http://www.sras.org/nashi_russian_youth_movement).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Russia’s Youth,” *Demokratizatsiya* (2007): 74.

Running parallel to the official discourse centered on youth politics were the youth themselves, and their reasons for joining Nashi. In the first instance, prospective members were beckoned with the following recruitment announcement on Nashi's website:

YOU

do you want to realize your own project?

do you want to change the world around you?

do you want to influence the future of your country?

do you want that the world would remember you?

do you search your place in your life?

You have a chance to change your life, influence the world politics, to come new intellectual elite

Our people are already in the Public Chamber, political state organs and in the biggest Russian companies.

Are you worth the higher education in our university with the best teachers of the country?

Are you worth a traineeship in the company you want, in Russia, or abroad?

Are you worth realizing your own project?

Prove it! Fill the form!

Come to our team.<sup>116</sup>

This announcement suggested entrepreneurial independence, self-actualization, and the promise of a better, brighter future based on one's own efforts, but only on the condition of joining Nashi. The message also challenged readers to "prove" that they were "worth" certain privileges, such as a higher education, an internship, or a self-initiated project, by designating themselves supporters of the Putin government through joining Nashi. To that end, this particular advertisement for recruiting potential Nashi members portrayed the movement as a career advancer, a sure path towards achieving one's professional goals in the field of politics, business, and education, and as a result, an excellent opportunity to join the nation's elite. The Komsomol had functioned in the same way, as a recruitment mechanism and the Party's training

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<sup>116</sup> Jussi Lassila, Dissertation: "Anticipating Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia: Symbolic Capital and Communicative Demands of the Youth Movements "Nashi" and "Idushchie Vmeste,"" 2011, 51.

ground for future bureaucrats, leaders, and military officials. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, these formal structures of career mobility in politics and the military were subsequently eliminated. Nashi offered the pro-Putin political party, United Russia, a viable platform for training future members and government officials.<sup>117</sup>

Because Nashi was a project of the regime, political analysts generally perceived it to be a passive instrument of state agenda; however, the language Nashi used on its website to attract members implied that it enjoyed a relative amount of freedom from the official party line. Such opportunities for self-accomplishment regardless of one's social background also dramatically heightened Nashi's appeal, both to the politically minded and the politically uninterested.

On the ground level, Nashi drew its members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some of its leaders, called "commissars," had already been active in their local government politics. Others included self-proclaimed fans of Putin, young aspiring political activists, those from remote areas who were rewarded with free dinners and tours of the capital by participating in Nashi events in the metropolis, and those who believed Nashi could improve their chances of attaining a better level of higher education. The diversity of its members was aptly captured in the 2012 documentary film, *Putin's Kiss*, which followed the life of nineteen-year old Masha Drokova and her experiences as a Nashi member.<sup>118</sup> Masha had been active in Nashi since the age of fifteen, and had quickly advanced within the organization when she became the host of a youth-oriented state television program. As the key spokeswoman for Nashi, Masha Drokova and her career in pro-regime youth politics were hardly representative of her Russian peers, but she became a symbol of Putin's power and represented the first generation of Russian youths who had not grown up under the Soviet empire for most, if not all, of their

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Ivan Kurilla, Professor of History at Volgograd University, March 5, 2013, Wellesley College.

<sup>118</sup> *Putin's Kiss*, directed by Lise Birk Pederson (2012; Copenhagen, Denmark: Monday Production), DVD.

lives. Masha and her generation had come of age in a post-Soviet Russia that coincided with Vladimir Putin's rise to power. These were the youths who had been born during *perestroika* (1985-1991) years and were of university-age (18-24) by the time political youth movements emerged under Putin's regime.<sup>119</sup>

Members were primarily drawn to Nashi if not by political ambition, like Masha, then to receive material rewards such as university scholarships and grants, or in more ideal terms, the organization provided youth with an opportunity for self development. One Nashi leader explained, in vague terms, that the reason why he joined Nashi was because he saw the movement as a possibility to achieve something real, not only at the regional level, but on a global scale.<sup>120</sup> Nashi appeared to represent a youth movement in which one could be part of the "big issues," while also cultivating one's own personal development. Another Nashi leader explained that a principal reason he had joined the movement was because the idea of "maintaining the country's sovereignty" around the "orange events" was important to him.<sup>121</sup> Another Nashi member explained that he had joined Nashi because ultimately he viewed his own personal success as connected to the state:

Well, we talk that you must gain personal success but it must be linked to the state's success. If you're a successful constructor of airplanes...the country will be glad about that, it will have good air-planes, right? You can be a talented artist, doctor, or poet, it doesn't matter...but the whole society wins. Here I don't see any point in separating the country, the state and society. I think they all can unite. That's what we think about that.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ekaterina Levintova & Jim Butterfield, "History Education and Historical Remembrance in Contemporary Russia: Sources of Political Attitudes of Pro-Kremlin Youth," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43 (2010): 139.

<sup>120</sup> Jussi Lassila, "Making Sense of Nashi's Political Style," 262.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>122</sup> Lassila, Dissertation, 83.

This quote reflects how notions of the official youth policy were compatible with the autonomous decisions of the individual members of the movement. According to Jussi Lassila, it demonstrates how “the concept of youth is almost always accompanied with a certain conceptual broadening, typically with the state, the country, and the society.”<sup>123</sup>

Confronted with the emergence of a Kremlin-formulated youth movement led by Nashi in 2005, a number of existing youth groups began increasing their political activities to counteract Nashi’s growing influence among young people. In mainstream political discourse, these alternative youth organizations (irrespective of whether or not they held similar political views among themselves) occupied the complete opposite end of the political spectrum. As Valerie Sperling asserts, “in a largely authoritarian regime like Russia’s, where one party dominates the political realm and exerts significant efforts to marginalize the opposition, political youth organizations are polarized, adopting pro- or anti-regime positions by default.”<sup>124</sup> Hence, the extreme polarization of Russian politics manifested itself in youth politics, whereby the political course of the Kremlin came to be understood as the ‘official road’ and all other views were collectively dismissed as unofficial and illegitimate by the regime. This “us” versus “them” rhetoric captured headlines in February 2005 when Nashi members discovered that two opposition figures had sneaked into the organization’s first training conference held at a hotel resort outside of Moscow. Ilya Yashin, who was twenty-one at the time and the Moscow coordinator for the liberal Youth Yabloko group, and his friend Oleg Kashin, a twenty-four year old journalist for the newspaper *Kommersant*, had managed to spend several hours at the conference before they were recognized and as Yashin later recalls, were brought out in front of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Valerie Sperling, “Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political Youth Activism in Putin’s and Medvedev’s Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28 (2012): 232-261.

a crowd of about 200 people by Nashi organizers and described as “the very people who Nashi is to fight.”<sup>125</sup> Later, Nashi leader Vasily Yakemenko allegedly ordered a handful of Nashi participants to take Yashin outside and beat him up.<sup>126</sup> This incident made it clear that the name Nashi was by no means accidental on the part of its creators and that it was meant to imply “Ours” as in “Those on Our Side.”<sup>127</sup> Those on the other side, or organizations that held alternative political views from the Kremlin, comprised a separate youth movement, one that I refer to in this thesis as the ‘opposition youth movement.’

The most notable and influential organizations in the Kremlin-opposing camp were affiliated with major (and in some cases, disenfranchised) opposition political parties. The major groups included Youth Yabloko, the youth wing of the liberal Yabloko Party, which joined hands with the small anti-Putin group *Idushchiye Bez Putina* (“Moving without Putin”) in March 2005; the youth arm of the Union of Right Forces, otherwise known as the SPS Party (*Soyuz Pravykh Sil*); the Union of Communist Youth under the Communist Party; the National Bolshevik Party, a radical left-leaning youth-dominated party led by Eduard Limonov; and the youth wing of Rodina, the nationalist ‘Motherland’ party.<sup>128</sup> Civic youth organizations, though not always explicitly political in their goals, also began amplifying their activities and increasing their membership in 2005. The most prominent civic groups to come out of this period were *Oborona* (“Defense”) and *Da!* (“Yes!”). Collectively, these youth organizations shared a common opposition towards the Kremlin’s attempts to preserve the status quo, but beyond that

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<sup>125</sup> “Nashi Beats Yabloko Leader,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, March 1, 2005, accessed March 1, 2013, [http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=2892](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=2892).

<sup>126</sup> Masha Gessen, “Kremlin Youth Encourages ‘Us’ to Get ‘Them,’” *Moscow Times*, February 28, 2005, accessed March 2, 2013, <http://www.russialist.com/9071-19.php>.

<sup>127</sup> Sperling, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Russia’s Youth,” *Demokratizatsiya* (2007): 75.

they struggled to form a cohesive movement against Nashi and its related pro-Kremlin youth groups.

In Reuven Kahane's work on the origins of postmodern youth, he describes how the concept of youth has evolved over the last century from an "immature, hot-blooded, heavily controlled group, to an autonomous entity, to an informal authentic culture."<sup>129</sup> This new authenticity was based on a new code of behavior – the code of informality, a "symbolic and behavioral construct with which individuals or groups strive to maximize what they perceive as their genuine self-expression."<sup>130</sup> The National Bolshevik Party (NBP), the youth-dominated political party that was led by Eduard Limonov, embodied this informal authentic culture by being "one of the most scandalous, controversial, but also aesthetically well-known youth movements in post-Soviet Russia."<sup>131</sup> The NBP's favorite tactics against people they considered symbols of the regime were "throwing mayonnaise or tomatoes at prominent public figures."<sup>132</sup> In August 2004, a group of NBP activists protested the unpopular social-benefits reforms by breaking into the office of Health and Social Development Minister Mikhail Zurabov and demanding his resignation for his part in enacting the reforms. Later that year, thirty-nine members of NBP were arrested after occupying the presidential administration visitors' room to protest Putin's political reforms.<sup>133</sup> The NBP's extremist ultranationalist propaganda and actions has made it impossible for the group to be officially registered as a political party in Russia. In a Supreme Court decision in 2005, the government banned the NBP "on the grounds that it had

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<sup>129</sup> Reuven Kahane, *The Origins of Postmodern Youth: Informal Youth Movements in a Comparative Perspective*, (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 3.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Jussi Lassila, "Making Sense of Nashi's Political Style: The Bronze Soldier and the Counter-Orange Community," *Demokratizatsiya* (2011): 270.

<sup>132</sup> Victor Yasmann, "Russia: National Bolsheviks, The Party of 'Direct Action,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 29, 2005, accessed January 23, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1058689.html>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

violated the law on political parties by calling itself a "party" without having official registration."<sup>134</sup> It was clear, however, that the ban was a pretext for the government to continue excluding the NBP from official politics.

Another group to oppose Nashi was Youth Yabloko, the youth wing of the pro-Western, liberal party "Yabloko." In February 2005, Youth Yabloko made a pact with Idushchie Bez Putina to oppose what they perceived to be Putin's growing "authoritarian political regime" by forming a student protest movement.<sup>135</sup> Ilya Yashin, the leader of Youth Yabloko, declared that the two movements would form a "vanguard of social opposition to Putin's regime."<sup>136</sup> Together with the youth division of the Union of Right Forces, they held a rally in Moscow on March 8, 2005 to protest the new federal law that would replace the election of regional governors with Kremlin appointments.<sup>137</sup>

In spite of growing opposition, Nashi remained a powerful mobilization tool for the Kremlin. In the summer of 2005, nearly five thousand people, from ages 18 to 30, convened at Lake Seliger in Central Russia for the inaugural of a Nashi-sponsored summer camp. Over the course of three weeks, participants attended lectures on business and politics and met with top officials in Putin's administration. By 2009, the annual camp event drew tens of thousands of participants and in 2011 invited international students to participate for the first time.

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<sup>134</sup> "Supreme Court Upholds Ban on National Bolshevik Party," *Ria Novosti*, November 15, 2005, accessed March 5, 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20051115/42096057.html>.

<sup>135</sup> "Youth Groups Say the Time Has Come to Oppose Putin," *The St. Petersburg Times*, March 1, 2005, accessed February 26, 2013, [http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=2863](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=2863).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Kira Latukhina, "Moving without Putin Reaches the Capital to Join Yabloko and the URF in Speaking Out Against the Appointment of Regional Leaders," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, March 9, 2005, accessed February 21, 2013, <http://0-dlib.eastview.com.luna.wellesley.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=7&id=13771950>.



Participants at Nashi's Camp Seliger standing in rows in order to illustrate the organization's red-and-white flag<sup>138</sup>

The annual summer camp at Lake Seliger effectively served as the training grounds for pro-Kremlin youth movements; there, participants got to learn about 'President Putin's domestic policies' and 'President Putin's ideology'. Daily activities and events were centered on instilling values of patriotism as participants awoke each morning to the sound of the Soviet anthem playing over the loud speakers. Throughout the day, participants attended lectures, conferences, meetings, and training sessions. In the afternoon, they were expected to work on their individual business projects. The purpose of Seliger, according to the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, which began sponsoring the camp in 2010, was to "help young people kick-start their careers by providing them with the support and contacts necessary to realize their business or social projects."<sup>139</sup> Seliger participants were encouraged to work on their social or business project by networking with peers, speaking with representatives of some of Russia's largest corporations,

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<sup>138</sup> Image taken from <http://seansrussiablog.org/2012/04/07/nashi-is-dead-long-live/>.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 187.

and finding business sponsors or investors to fund their projects. However, most camp participants did not have their own projects and seldom did the camp actually cultivate an entrepreneurial environment. The main purpose of the camp, made explicit by larger than life photos of Putin and inspiring phrases by Kremlin leaders that overpowered the tents throughout the camp, was to respond to Putin's call for greater national identity among Russians. The camp's rather blatant promotion of Putin made it clear that the Russian national identity was intrinsically tied to Putin himself. Regional commissars, or leaders within the Nashi organization, were encouraged to become well-educated on the regime's politics and ideology, as well as engage in debates on ways in which the movement's programs could be carried out. Groups of commissars from various regions gathered for discussions that ranged from "USA – Ally or Enemy?" to "Should the Nashi movement become a political party?"<sup>140</sup> Camp Seliger, at least in its initial framework, was intended to form a vanguard of the most dedicated youth.

Moreover, the annual summer event allowed the state to address Russia's demographic crisis. According to preliminary results of the 2010 census, the Russian population had dropped by 2.2 million to 142.9 million since the last census in 2002.<sup>141</sup> Nashi explicitly endorsed procreation at Camp Seliger by setting up "couple tents." After exchanging vows in a group wedding ceremony on stage in front of all the camp's participants, twenty couples were assigned red-colored tents adorned with heart balloons.<sup>142</sup> Nashi leaders began wearing T-shirts with slogans such as "The health ministry advises: reproduction is good for your health," "I want to

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<sup>140</sup> Buchacek, 38.

<sup>141</sup> "Russian Census Results Show Continuing Demographic Crisis," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 1, 2011, accessed February 14, 2013, [http://www.rferl.org/content/russia\\_census\\_results\\_demographic\\_crisis/3543674.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_census_results_demographic_crisis/3543674.html).

<sup>142</sup> Luke Harding, "Welcome to Putin's Summer Camp..." *The Guardian*, July 23, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/24/russia>.

have three children,” and “I am the start of a demographic boom.”<sup>143</sup> The message for Russia’s youth was clear: procreation was the proper duty of a loyal citizen of the state. Implicit, also, was the notion that behavior which did not lead to procreation, such as abortion and homosexuality, would be seen as moral violations against the state. Hence, activities at Camp Seliger were closely monitored and purposefully directed towards promoting state-approved values.

Prior to the establishment of Camp Seliger, the Kremlin’s support for Nashi had been common knowledge. However, with the institution of the annual summer camp, the close relationship between the regime and the youth movement became unquestionable. The Kremlin’s fundraising efforts had made it possible to fund such large events as Seliger and Vasily Yakemenko alluded to this fact when he boasted: “The support of the Kremlin makes it possible to speak with any businessman and get financial support. To refuse to finance our project is a manifestation of an unpatriotic position.”<sup>144</sup> Therefore, the patriotism rhetoric also applied to businesses, implying that unless corporations endorsed the Kremlin’s projects (i.e. Nashi) financially, they would not have the protection of the state. Kremlin-backing thereby enabled Nashi to mobilize young people and organize events on a large scale more efficiently than other youth groups. Yet, dependence on the Kremlin and its sponsors to endorse Nashi’s major projects ultimately proved detrimental to the movement as it meant that its existence would be subject to the regime’s political whims rather than a genuine social movement with action being generated from participants themselves.

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<sup>143</sup> Andrew Osborn, “Kremlin Youth Group Does Its Bit to Reverse the Depopulation Crisis,” *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8464040/Kremlin-youth-group-does-its-bit-to-reverse-the-depopulation-crisis.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Robert Horvath, *Putin’s Preventive Counter-Revolution: Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution*, 114.

In addition to Camp Seliger, Nashi also participated in street protests against individuals and groups that the movement considered anti-Putin or that were known to have ties to the West. In the summer of 2006, after British Ambassador Anthony Brenton spoke at a conference organized by “Other Russia,” an opposition party, Nashi activists set a staged protest in front of the British embassy in Moscow. The Nashi activists demanded an apology from the ambassador, claiming that he had broken international law by interfering in Russia’s internal affairs.<sup>145</sup> They also accused the ambassador of promising to give Other Russia over \$2 million dollars to fund its political agenda. In a letter to Queen Elizabeth II, Nashi leaders urged Her Majesty to fire Brenton on the grounds that he had “wasted British taxpayers’ money.”<sup>146</sup> For four months, Nashi activists followed Ambassador Brenton around Moscow, heckling him at public appearances and standing in front of the British embassy holding the red and white Nashi flag with posters featuring Brenton’s face with the word ‘Loser’ written on them. In December 2006, the ambassador publicly denounced the group for “stalking” him.<sup>147</sup>

By refusing to order Nashi activists to end their picketing, the Kremlin had tacitly approved the harassment of Brenton, so the government’s silence on the matter encouraged youth activists to continue putting pressure on the ambassador and the British government. In remaining silent, the government had also avoided taking full responsibility for the group’s actions. It was clear nevertheless that orders had been coming from the Kremlin directly to Nashi activists; it was the only way Ambassador Brenton could explain how the youth activists knew where to find him every day for four months, sometimes even showing up before him at the spot of his next appointment.

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<sup>145</sup> Alexander Osipovich, “Nashi Writes to Her Majesty,” *St. Petersburg Times*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.sptimes.ru/story/24082>.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Shleyenov.

On the one hand, the Brenton case appeared to demonstrate the way in which Nashi had become a political tool employed by the Kremlin to punish officials publicly for actions deemed anti-Kremlin. Yet, on the other, it exemplified how youth politics could often go beyond the recommended measures of the regime and consequently, generate potential problems for Russia's domestic and foreign politics.

Russia's youth movements had also played a central role in escalating tensions between Russia and Estonia. In 2007, Nashi activists targeted Estonia after the Estonian government relocated a Soviet-era World War Two memorial from the capital, Tallinn, to a nearby military cemetery. Many Estonians had viewed the statue as a symbol of Soviet occupation, while for many Russians both in Russia and in Estonia the statue recalled Soviet triumph over the Germans in the Great Patriotic War. Thus, the removal of the statue provoked anger both in Tallinn and Moscow. In April and May 2007, members of Nashi camped outside the Estonian Embassy in Moscow to protest the decision. Once again, the same tactics used to intimidate Ambassador Brenton in 2006 were used against the Estonian ambassador to Russia. In one incident, security officials at the Estonian embassy were forced to use tear gas to disperse the crowd of Nashi activists who had stormed a press conference held by the Estonian ambassador. Shortly after, Estonia accused Russia of "violating the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations for failing to protect its diplomats in Moscow."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Carl Schreck, "Estonia Bars Russian Official from Europe," *The National*, February 16, 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/europe/estonia-bars-russian-official-from-europe>.



Bronze statue of the Unknown Soldier at the center of the Russian-Estonian crisis in 2007<sup>149</sup>

The row between Russia and Estonia over the removal of the Soviet monument in Tallinn carried over to cyberspace. From 27 April to 18 May 2007, cyber attacks targeted Estonian state (and some private) websites with denial-of-service messages that forced many government, business, and political party websites in Estonia to shut down completely.<sup>150</sup> The cyber attacks had severely impacted the Internet-dependent country of Estonia, where 60 percent of the population in 2007 used the Internet on a daily basis.<sup>151</sup> Although the hacking could not be directly traced to a single or a collective group of individuals, it was widely known that the cyber attacks had been launched out of Russia.

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<sup>149</sup> Bronze statue of the Unknown Soldier, Tallinn, Estonia, <http://www.economist.com/node/9163598>.

<sup>150</sup> Stephen Herzog, "Revisiting the Estonian Cyber Attacks: Digital Threats and Multinational Responses," *Journal of Strategic Security* 2 (2011): 51.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

The combined actions by Nashi and the hackers in response to the removal of the bronze statue led to deteriorating bilateral relations between Russia and Estonia. Estonia barred hundreds of Nashi activists from entering Estonia, and because Estonia was also part of the Schengen zone, effectively barred them from most of Europe. Nashi's leader Nikita Borovikov challenged the Estonian government's response and told followers:

Let them forbid us entry into the European Union. We will not give up the memory of our ancestors, nor will we give up our history and, thanks to this, thanks to the unity of the whole country, together we will make Russia a global leader of the 21st century.<sup>152</sup>

Despite Borovikov's conviction that Nashi's actions against the Estonian government were legitimated by history, the incident had dampened relations between the movement and the Kremlin. According to political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky, "When Europe started denying Schengen visas to *Nashi* activists, all this started to look like playing with fire. After all, Russia would have had to make a symmetric response. And doing so would not be advantageous for Russia."<sup>153</sup> Thus, the movement's actions were gradually seen as getting to be out of control, much to the point where they posed a threat to the Kremlin's foreign and domestic image.

As Putin prepared to step down in 2008 in accordance with the Russian Constitution's two-term limit, the announcement of Putin's hand-picked successor Dmitry Medvedev raised questions about the future of Nashi and other similar pro-Kremlin youth groups. It was deemed at the time that another youth movement centered on Medvedev was superfluous and that the

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<sup>152</sup> Michael Schwartz, "Estonia Bans Travel for Kremlin Youth Group," *New York Times*, January 30, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/world/europe/30russia.html>.

<sup>153</sup> "When Medvedev becomes president: network government, youth politics, and relations with the West," February 1, 2008, <http://www.wps.ru/en/pp/politruk/2008/02/01.html>.

threat of another Orange Revolution had abated. In early 2008, Nashi leader Nikita Borovikov announced a radical reorganization of the group; the former fifty regional branches were reduced to five, those in Vladimir, Ivanovo, Tula, Voronezh, and Yaroslavl.<sup>154</sup> The dramatic reduction of Nashi's regional branches signaled the declining role of state endorsement in political youth movements in Russia.

Hence, the combined result of a diminished Orange threat and an increasingly aggressive Nashi led the government to shrink its Nashi operations significantly in 2008. The sequence of events that followed Medvedev's presidential inauguration, however, was far from spelling the end of Nashi; in the words of opposition leader and Young Yabloko leader, Il'ya Yashin, Nashi was a "very expensive electoral toy" that will be "put on ice [after the election] so that it can be reanimated in case of an emergency."<sup>155</sup> As long as the regime experienced relatively stable politics, it was assumed that Nashi would play a far less conspicuous and active role in Kremlin politics than it had during its first three years.

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<sup>154</sup> "Nashi to be Reorganized," *Kommersant*, January 29, 2008, [http://kommersant.com/p846635/political\\_youth\\_groups/](http://kommersant.com/p846635/political_youth_groups/).

<sup>155</sup> Maya Atwal, "Evaluating Nashi's Sustainability: Autonomy, Agency and Activism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 5 (July 2009): 745.

## Chapter Three

### *Nashi...on the wane?*

“There is no longer a threat of an 'orange revolution,' so we can concentrate on other things.  
But we will not disappear.  
We have simply outgrown our short pants.”<sup>156</sup>

-Nikita Borovikov, Nashi leader in January 2008

In 2007, Nashi underwent its first major leadership change when its founder Vasily Yakemenko announced that he would step down as Nashi’s leader to become head of the Federal Agency on Youth Affairs.<sup>157</sup> Nikita Borovikov, formerly a Nashi commissar and law student from Vladimir, became the next leader for Nashi. While Nashi’s leadership had ostensibly changed, Yakemenko continued to remain deeply involved in its activities as was seen by his continuing attendance at Camp Seliger in 2009 and other Nashi-related events. Despite media speculations that Nashi’s future was doomed with Yakemenko’s departure, his promotion gave him substantially more clout to determine the movement’s future.<sup>158</sup> On July 24, 2007, a few days after his public announcement, Yakemenko, joined by sixty-five pro-Kremlin youth activists from Nashi, Mestnye (“Locals”), Young Guard, Young Russia, New People, and Our Country, met Putin at the Zavidovo residence of the President to discuss the next phases of the youth movement. According to the Russian news source, *ITAR-TASS*, Yakemenko had allegedly proposed to Putin the possibility of uniting pro-Kremlin youth organizations and creating a

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<sup>156</sup> Yekaterina Savina, Yulia Taratuta, and Mikhail Shevchuk, “‘Our Own’ Are Estranged,” *Kommersant*, January 29, 2008, accessed January 23, 2013, <http://0-dlib.eastview.com.luna.wellesley.edu/browse/doc/20437190>.

<sup>157</sup> “Nashi’s Leader Intends to Step Down,” *The Moscow Times*, July 17, 2007, accessed January 28, 2013, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/nashis-leader-intends-to-step-down/195647.html>.

<sup>158</sup> “Рулевая игра,” *Kommersant*, August 1, 2007, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/791649>.

political committee dedicated to youth policy, to all of which Putin had supposedly replied: “Establishing a single center for youth management — I think that's in the past. Instead, the state should create conditions that enable young people to achieve their potential — in careers, private life, culture, and politics.”<sup>159</sup> Putin’s response was illuminating in multiple respects: first, he rejected the centralization of pro-regime youth organizations as an unachievable idea from the past; second, he reinforced the idea of the state’s intrinsic role in providing socio-political conditions for young people, particularly those who supported the regime, that would improve their lives; and third, his response provided no concrete objectives for the youth groups that were represented. However, Putin’s response seemed to imply that the Kremlin wanted to shift Nashi’s emphasis away from politics.



Putin meeting with members of youth organizations in the Zavidovo presidential residence, July 24, 2007<sup>160</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Galina Sedunova, “The Children of Vovanovo: Pro-Kremlin Youth Group,” July 27, 2007, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://www.wps.ru/en/pp/politruk/2007/07/27.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Presidential Press and Information Office. <http://www.kremlin.ru/sdocs/news.shtml?day=24&month=07&year=2007>.

Moreover, Nashi proved to be a sizable political and financial investment for the Kremlin. At Nashi's annual summer camp in Lake Seliger in July 2008, fewer than 5,000 participants attended, or half as many as had attended the previous camp in 2007.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, the blatant absence of high-profile Kremlin figures in comparison to previous years seemed to confirm earlier media speculations of Nashi's post-electoral downfall.<sup>162</sup> This led to rumors that the youth movement was becoming outdated and that it was not only struggling to recruit new members, but also losing state support. Such reasoning assumed that Nashi was almost completely dependent on the state to the extent that it acted primarily as an extension of the state.

A number of recent scholarly works, however, have refuted this interpretation of the relationship between organized youth activists and the state. In her evaluation of Nashi, Maya Atwal contended in 2009 that "despite the movement's allegiance to the incumbent regime and its utilization of state resources, Nashi activists have become increasingly politically autonomous and therefore capable of sustaining the movement in their own right."<sup>163</sup> Atwal's perspective addressed the dual issues of autonomy and agency among Nashi activists. The political transition in 2008 served as a moment of truth for Nashi. No longer with Putin as president, whose personal backing of Nashi had lent tremendous power and legitimacy to the group since it was founded in 2005, and faced with the possibility of losing state protection in the form of financing and political support, the future of Nashi looked uncertain. For these reasons, Medvedev's term from 2008 to 2012 would see changes within Nashi that would determine the limits of its potential to sustain itself without direct state support.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Atwal, "Evaluating Nashi's Sustainability," 744.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 743.

<sup>164</sup> Atwal, 744.

By 2008, however, the reasons that had served to create and sustain state-endorsed youth movements were no longer operable. For one, the threat of an Orange Revolution was virtually nonexistent. The absent threat of a colored revolution implied that the government no longer needed an ‘anti-orange’ force at command. Therefore Nashi and several other pro-Kremlin youth movements, which had been largely created out of the events of 2006, found themselves at a crucial turning point in the development of modern youth movements in Russia. And furthermore, Nashi had begun to operate largely and conspicuously as a representative of the Kremlin on foreign policy issues, showcased by Nashi activists when they exerted pressure on the British ambassador and picketed the Estonian Embassy in 2007. The need for a restructuring of the Kremlin’s original designs for its sponsored youth organizations became all too clear by the 2008 presidential election cycle. The consequence of Putin stepping down as president raised doubts as to whether the next president would have the sort of popular appeal that Putin had enjoyed among the youth, and whether Dmitry Medvedev would receive the continuing support of young people.

The year 2008 proved to be a transformative year for Russia’s internal and external politics. Dmitry Medvedev was elected President of Russia in May and appointed his mentor, Putin, as Prime Minister, enabling Putin to remain in power while circumventing the Constitution’s two-term presidential limit. The Putin-Medvedev tandem of 2008-2012 was such that, while Medvedev had occupied an important role in the Putin era, he was never meant to be an alternative power figure to Putin, in accordance with the agreement they had made prior to the

2008 elections.<sup>165</sup> Hence, a salient feature of the Medvedev presidency was the way in which the power structure continued to revolve around Vladimir Putin who, despite his new post as prime minister, remained the dominant power-broker in the Kremlin.

In 2009, Medvedev launched a nation-wide initiative aimed at modernizing Russia's economy and society by decreasing Russia's dependence on oil and gas revenues and establishing a new economy based on improved technology and innovation.<sup>166</sup> In an article published online titled "Go Russia!", Medvedev outlined the need for Russia as a democratic nation to "cultivate a taste for the rule of law, for abiding by the law, respect for the rights of others, including such important rights as that of property ownership."<sup>167</sup> For *Nashi* and similar pro-Kremlin youth movements, Medvedev's emphasis on the 'rule of law' and protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals appeared to contradict a number of their activities.

Given that his presidential slogan emphasized modernization, Medvedev was keen to tap into the potential of the country's youth, particularly in the sciences and in technology. He declared 2009 the Year of the Youth in Russia, calling various government bodies to focus "on supporting youth initiatives and ensuring the capacities of the young people." He posited that in other countries youth played a vital role in advancing scientific innovation, and indicated that Russia was moving in a similar direction by his establishment of a Presidential Award for young scientists, which offered a "sizable award worth 2.5 million rubles each [approximately 80 thousand dollars]" and increasing presidential grants for young PhD and D. Sc. Degree

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<sup>165</sup> On September 24, 2011, while announcing his intentions to return as president, Putin also admitted that he and Medvedev had arranged this so-called casting since back in 2008.

Ellen Barry, "Putin Once More Moves to Assume Top Job in Russia," *New York Times*, September 24, 2011, accessed April 24, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/world/europe/medvedev-says-putin-will-seek-russian-presidency-in-2012.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/world/europe/medvedev-says-putin-will-seek-russian-presidency-in-2012.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>166</sup> Dmitry Medvedev, "Go Russia!", September 10, 2009, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/298>.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

holders.<sup>168</sup> Then he applauded the efforts of a Youth Innovation Convention that was held for the first time in Russia and suggested that the group focus on developing at the regional level as well, so as to form “regional young scientists and specialists’ councils.”<sup>169</sup> The emphasis on science then shifted to politics, in which Medvedev offered the following proposal on youth voting age: “I am proposing that we establish a single age requirement in every constituent entity for candidates in municipal government elections. I think that any citizen who has reached the age of 18 should be granted the right and opportunity to be elected to a municipal government.”<sup>170</sup> With proposals such as these, Medvedev made it clear that youth policy would be a priority during his presidency, but one markedly different from his predecessor’s.

In October 2009, Nashi activists picketed outside the home of journalist and human rights activist Alexander Podrabinek after he published an article that criticized the Moscow Union of Veterans. In the article, Podrabinek had suggested that the veterans group’s members were former “camp guards” and “executioners” for demanding that a Moscow restaurant change its name from *Antisovetskaya*, or Anti-Soviet, to *Sovetskaya*, or Soviet.<sup>171</sup> Soon after the article was published, Nashi activists, dressed in their trademark red jackets and accompanied by nearly a hundred veterans, protested outside of the journalist’s home, carrying World War II symbols and posters that read, “The freedom of the press doesn’t mean lawlessness in journalism.”<sup>172</sup> The protests against journalist Podrabinek drew warnings from the government. The Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights, a group of advisers convened by Medvedev to

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<sup>168</sup> Dmitry Medvedev, “Opening Remarks at Session of State Council on Youth Policies in the Russian Federation,” July 17, 2009, accessed January 30, 2013,  
[http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/07/17/1514\\_type82913\\_219811.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/07/17/1514_type82913_219811.shtml).

<sup>169</sup> Dmitry Medvedev, “Opening Remarks at Session of State Council on Youth Policies in the Russian Federation.”  
<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Alexandra Odyanova, “Kremlin Advisers Warn Nashi Youth,” *Moscow Times*, October 6, 2009,  
<http://www.russialist.org/2009-185-19.php>.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

address human rights issues, stated that Nashi had violated Articles 23, 24, 25, 27, and 29 of the Constitution. The articles, among other things, guarantee: “the inviolability of personal life and home; that a citizen’s personal information will not be spread without his consent; the right to choose one’s residence; and the rights to freedom of thought and conscience, including a freedom from pressure to retract or alter one’s beliefs.”<sup>173</sup> The Council went further by expressing “its deep regret and disturbance over Nashi’s actions, which not only recall the shameful Soviet persecution campaigns against dissenters. ... They also give Russia’s young people an unabashed example of legal nihilism,” using the same term that President Medvedev had used to describe a widespread disregard for the law.<sup>174</sup> The Podrabinek incident thus illustrated the changed relationship between Nashi and the government under Medvedev; rather than defending or endorsing Nashi’s actions as it had previously done before under Putin, the government, in this case the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights, condemned Nashi on the grounds that its members acted unlawfully.

As a sign of the Kremlin’s diminishing support for Nashi, Camp Seliger in 2009 became the first year that Nashi was not the main organizer and sponsor of the camp. The Federal Ministry of Sport, Tourism, and Youth replaced Nashi as the direct sponsor of Camp Seliger. Conforming to the theme of the “Year of the Youth,” Seliger 2009 promoted business and innovation noticeably more so than patriotism and nationalism. A series of week-long seminars included themes on leadership, business, and volunteerism. The following summer at Camp Seliger proved to be much more controversial when another pro-Kremlin youth group called *Stal* (“Steel”) set up wooden stakes with puppet heads displaying faces of prominent state officials, including Hillary Clinton, Condoleeza Rice, and five judges of the European Court for Human

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<sup>173</sup> Odynova.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

Rights, all adorned with military hats bearing Nazi swastikas. One of the camp directors, Ilya Kostunov, justified the puppet head exhibit declaring that “the persons depicted on the boards must think about why they draw such a reaction on the part of the youth movement.”<sup>175</sup> The puppet head exhibit, however, drew wide criticism both from within and outside of Russia, and led to a number of Seliger sponsors, including German auto maker Mercedes-Benz, to withdraw their endorsements. As a result, Seliger became largely discredited as a radical, extremist youth camp.



Figure 1. Puppet head exhibit put together by *Stal*<sup>176</sup>

Yet, the watershed for the regime and for Nashi happened after September 2011, when Prime Minister Putin announced that he and Medvedev had agreed to switch roles as president

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<sup>175</sup> Roman Shleynov, “Back in the USSR: Kremlin, Western Companies Back Soviet-Style Youth Camp,” *The Center for Public Integrity*, September 13, 2010, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2010/09/13/2530/back-ussr>.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

and prime minister “a long time ago, several years back.”<sup>177</sup> The so-called “swap” angered many Russians who felt cheated of their democratic rights. Prompted by the parliamentary elections of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011, tens of thousands took to the streets to protest the return of Putin as president and the ruling party, United Russia, famously coined the “party of crooks and thieves” by opposition blogger, Alexei Navalny.<sup>178</sup> Thus, in the months preceding the March 2012 presidential election, which Putin had won, the largest demonstrations took place in Moscow since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The 2011-2012 protests in Russia demonstrated the growing discontent among Russians, especially within the middle-class, towards Putin’s political system.

As early as April 2012, a month after Putin was elected president, the Russian online news source *Gazeta.ru* reported that Nashi founder Vasily Yakemenko had met with Nashi’s four Commissars, Maria Kislitsina, Artur Omarov, Aleksander Gagiev, and Sergei Blintsov, and told them that Nashi would be “disbanded” and that “the history of Nashi in the present form is over.”<sup>179</sup> The news was immediately dismissed as an unfounded “rumor” by Nashi’s spokeswoman, Kristina Potupchik, who in her LiveJournal blog wrote: “Nashi will not simply continue to exist, but will also birth new projects which will remain within the framework of the movement.”<sup>180</sup> Media speculation that the Kremlin had dissolved Nashi was further fueled by Yakemenko’s announcement the following month in May that he would be launching a new political party called the “Party of Power,” designed to attract the young, disaffected, middle-

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<sup>177</sup> “Russia’s Putin set to return as president in 2012,” *BBC News*, September 24, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15045816>.

<sup>178</sup> “Russia election: Hundreds rally against Putin in Moscow,” *BBC News*, December 5, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16042797>.

<sup>179</sup> “«Наших» закрывают,” *Gazeta.ru*, April 6, 2012, accessed March 12, 2013, [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2012/04/06\\_a\\_4151693.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2012/04/06_a_4151693.shtml).

<sup>180</sup> ““Наших” не закрывают,” Блог Кристины Потупчик (LiveJournal blog posting by Kristina Potupchik), April 6, 2012, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://krispotupchik.livejournal.com/346207.html?thread=98504543&>.

class voters who were drawn to the opposition protests from earlier that year.<sup>181</sup> According to Yakemenko, the party aimed to replace the ruling United Russia party and to target middle-class people between the ages of 25 and 35 who “have their own opinions” and “don’t want important decisions in the country’s life to be made without them.”<sup>182</sup> Upon learning of the Kremlin’s next project, political analysts predicted that Yakemenko’s project would fail, citing the Kremlin’s already tarnished image.<sup>183</sup> Yet, Yakemenko’s motive behind establishing the “Party of Power” was illuminating in multiple respects: first, it highlighted the Kremlin’s concerns about potential and ongoing unrest prompted by the mass demonstrations. Second, it identified a specific group of citizens whose anti-regime stance was troubling for the Kremlin, and finally, the motive behind this new party was to shift the emphasis away from state-organized movements to political parties.

For Nashi, the mass protests spelled out what appeared to be yet another new phase for the movement. On February 13, 2013, the Russian daily newspaper *Izvestia* reported that Nashi would split into several projects under the new name, the All-Russian Youth Society.<sup>184</sup> A Nashi spokesperson confirmed the news, saying that the name “Nashi” would remain for the time being, but that the “logic would change” and the group would expand geographically and broaden the scope of its activities.<sup>185</sup> The projects would address specific social issues: *Stopkham* (“Stop Boorishness”) would target poor behavior on Russia’s roads, *Khryushi Protiv* (“Piglets Against”) would go after expired produce on grocery store shelves, and *Begi Za Mnoi* (“Run After Me”) would promote healthy lifestyles. In this manner, the Kremlin had ostensibly

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<sup>181</sup> Natalya Krainova, “Nashi Head to Launch Political Party,” *The Moscow Times*, May 22, 2012, accessed March 14, 2013, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/nashi-head-to-launch-political-party/458952.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Krainova.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Jonathan Earle, “Kremlin Backs Youth Politics with Reformed Nashi,” *The Moscow Times*, February 13, 2013, accessed February 14, 2013, <http://russialist.org/kremlin-backs-youth-politics-with-reformed-nashi/>.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

shifted the focus of Nashi from a political youth movement to youth activism based on social projects.

## Conclusion

In Russia, where political youth movements have had an entrenched history since the Soviet period, the emergence of *Idushchie Vmeste* in 2000 and *Nashi* in 2005 marked a changing relationship between the government and the nation's youth. While both organizations borrowed several of their concepts and practices from their long-lived predecessor, the *Komsomol*, they each demonstrated a distinct form of public political participation in the post-Soviet era.

The youth-led Orange Revolution in Ukraine prompted Putin's government to artificially create a movement consisting of young, unquestioning supporters who would serve as a counteracting force against anti-Kremlin threats. In doing so, the Kremlin had attempted to control and legitimize youth participation in the public sphere. By instilling state-associated values of patriotism, nationalism, and modernization through participation at Camp Seliger and other organized events, the Kremlin had crafted its own weapon to fight real and imagined enemies of the state.

State-sponsored youth politics in Russia was “not the politics of columned halls and boardrooms, but politics of the street.”<sup>186</sup> Strategically coordinated and designed by the Kremlin, the activities of its youth groups helped extend its arm in places where it would not be able to reach otherwise. This particular arrangement between the Kremlin and its young supporters provided a channel for formal politics to operate outside of normal boundaries, and as a result, a

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<sup>186</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Russia's Youth,” *Demokratizatsiya* (2007): 75.

segment of Russian youths had not only become political but also became politicized themselves through their association with the Kremlin.

The formation of Russia's state-founded patriotic youth organizations was intimately linked to the personal figure and leadership of Vladimir Putin. As a KGB agent based in East Germany when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Putin had personally witnessed the collapse of the Soviet empire. As people took to the streets, Putin had allegedly stood outside the KGB quarters in Dresden with a pistol, resisting a crowd of street protesters who were attempting to storm the building.<sup>187</sup> When he called the local Soviet army barracks for help, he was told: "We cannot do anything without orders from Moscow. And Moscow is silent."<sup>188</sup> The silence of Moscow undoubtedly perturbed Putin, for to him it had confirmed that the Soviet Union no longer existed and that it had "disappeared." Lucian Kim, a journalist who writes about Putin's Russia, asserted that Putin's experience in Dresden during the fall of the Berlin Wall "went a long way in explaining his aversion to street politics and his messianic belief that only he can save Russia."<sup>189</sup> For Putin, after witnessing the fall of the Berlin Wall, the greatest disappointment was that no successful alternative to the collapse of the Soviet Union was considered in time to prevent the empire from dissolving. Putin expressed this sentiment years later in his 2005 State of the Union address: "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."<sup>190</sup> In their recent book, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy assert that contrary to the general public's interpretation of Putin's statement, he was not

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<sup>187</sup> Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of the Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 45.

<sup>188</sup> Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

<sup>189</sup> Lucian Kim, "A Weakened Putin is Questioned Abroad, Under Siege at Home," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 10, 2012, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2012/0410/A-weakened-Putin-is-questioned-abroad-under-siege-at-home>.

<sup>190</sup> Putin address to nation: Excerpts, *BBC News*, April 25, 2005, accessed February 2, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4481455.stm>.

lamenting the demise of the Soviet Union in 2005, but rather, was referring to the “weakening of the Russian state in the early 1990s.”<sup>191</sup> In Putin’s view, a strong state guaranteed Russia’s survival. In this regard, Putin identified himself personally with the Russian word *gosudarstvennik*, someone who believes that Russia should be, and should have, a strong state. Yet, according to Hill and Gaddy, *gosudarstvennik* in Russian does not refer to a politician distinguished by his or her own agenda, and representing a particular constituency by running for political office; the meaning of the term refers to someone either chosen or self-chosen to serve the country permanently, and who believes strongly in the role of the state as the ultimate source of order and stability.<sup>192</sup> Putin’s former deputy chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov, echoed this conviction in the providential handling of Russia’s affairs when he famously commented in 2011 that Putin was “sent to Russia by fate and by the Lord at a difficult time for Russia.”<sup>193</sup> For Putin, restoring the power and authority of the Russian state became a personal mission.

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<sup>191</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), viii.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>193</sup> “Top Kremlin Aide Says Putin is God’s Gift to Russia,” *Reuters*, July 9, 2011, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/07/08/idINIndia-58163920110708>.

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