

## . What it was and what has been at stake?

In October 2011 — May 2012, for the first time after perestroika (ie after 1985-91s) Russia was embraced with mass protest meetings. Having begun as civic protest, they quickly acquired a political character. A real political opposition has emerged and has got access to political arena. It has been a serious challenge to existing political regime. From the bird-view, it was a set of mass protest meetings across the country against the unfair campaign of parliamentary and presidential elections lasted almost half-a-year. But it is rather superficial and one-sided view. Actually, we were dealt with a highly transformative systemic phenomenon with changing aims and forms of collective action. It began long before the first mass protest meeting and still not ended. Initially, the mistrust to the existing electoral procedures has been at stake. This mistrust grew gradually, expressing itself in local protest actions, mobilisation of already existing social movements, first of all human rights movement. But this cycle of protest actions had not been a movement in a strict sense of the word (with clear-cut goals, written programs, etc.). Rather, it had been a *mass resistance movement* which was very diverse in ideology and action repertoire, but united by the said mistrust. This mistrust may have open (petitions, marches, rallies) or overt forms (protest voting or rejection from it at all). Nowadays, when the above electoral cycle was over, and new president and parliament (the State Duma) initiated some steps toward more democratic political system, the protest cycle seems ended as well. But the sharp feeling of injustice has remained. The Solzhenitsyn's ethical imperative 'To live without lie' come to the forefront. It means that mistrust to the basic principles of existing political system still remained and it would engender new forms of opposition's activity. Naturally, every next protest meeting generated the new form of the state response. Therefore, we were actually dealing with the developmental *process of struggle* between the state and pro-Kremlin movements, on the one hand, and their political opposition, on the other. In one way or another, a reform of Russian political system is at stake.

## 2. A 'new middle-class' as the collective actor and its constituency

The period of 2000s was the time of intensive empirical study of the processes of social stratification in Russia and in particular of the evolution