

**Dmitry Gromov**

## **Introduction: Mass Protests in Moscow Through the Eyes of Anthropologists, Folklorists and Sociologists**

December 2011 was marked by a powerful surge of civil activity in Russia, as the many violations of procedure at the parliamentary elections on 4 December provoked a huge wave of discontent. Demonstrations against the rigged elections spread all across the country, although the largest and most prominent were in Moscow. As early as 5 December a large protest was held at Chistye Prudy, where according to several estimates up to 10,000 people gathered. Other mass protests took place at Bolotnaya Square on 10 December and Sakharov Prospect on 24 December. The number of people participating in the protests was growing continually.

The government's reaction to these events was a state of quiet alert. The demands listed in the protest resolutions were not met, although certain moves were made towards liberalising the political system. At the present time (15 January at the time of going to press) the situation has not been resolved. New mass protests are being planned. The crucial event of the coming months will be the presidential elections on 4 March 2012.

The events of December are frequently compared to the 'colour revolutions', and the current unrest has even been called the 'Snow Revolution'. This comparison is hardly appropriate, since Russia lacks one of the key factors of the 'colour revolutions' — an alternative

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group that might replace the government that has lost its people's trust. The country has no authoritative leader whom protesters can support or any strong opposition party in a position to take power. Therefore there is a direct conflict between the country's people (or at least a significant section of them) and its government (the president, prime minister and the party United Russia). The people have made their position clear using peaceful, non-violent protest. While discussions claiming a close kinship between the events of December 2011 and the 'colour revolutions' should proceed with caution, the link to the traditions of non-violent opposition is obvious. As a rule, peaceful political activism is about creating a spectacle, and produces numerous social forms and artistic objects, which is the root of its interest for the purposes of research.

Following this surge in civil activity, there has also been a surge in research activity: scholars from various scientific disciplines have independently shown an interest in these events. Unfortunately, at the protests on 5 and 10 December no serious studies were carried out; this was probably a time for reconnaissance and surveying the terrain. At the protest on 24 December on Sakharov Prospect, at least five sociological surveys were carried out.<sup>1</sup>

This collection contains articles written by sociologists, social anthropologists and folklorists, and are all dedicated to the political events of December 2011. These articles form part of some broader projects, such as 'The Folklore of the 'Snow Revolution'',<sup>2</sup> launched by Andrey Moroz on 16 December. Of note also is Vadim Lurye's project built on the principle of Wikipedia and designed to categorise current folklore by theme.<sup>3</sup>

*Translated by Rosie Tweddle*

<sup>1</sup> In particular, see: 'Protesters in Moscow: who, why and how came to Sakharov Prospekt on Saturday?' on the website of the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre <<http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=112274>>; 'A survey on Sakharov Prospekt on 24 December' on the website of the Levada-Centre <<http://www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya>>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <<http://www.facebook.com/groups/236087386462841/253295634742016/#!/groups/236087386462841>>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <<http://24december.visantrop.ru>>.