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Young people's political commitment in Russia today

In today's Russia, politics is an activity that is largely discredited in the population's eyes. Youth is a particularly apolitical category of the Russian population. Yet there is a small, but active layer of young people who are not only politically inclined, but also politically active. Studying this group helps to explore the Russian political outlook, in order to apprehend the trends of tomorrow's politics in Russia (long-term) and to appraise the perspectives for the 2008 presidential elections, when young people may play a key role as they did in Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine (short-term).

The analysis of existing political youth organizations and of their ideological orientation shows that the situation is complex; Russian youth activism cannot be summed up in a simple opposition to the government, as it is sometimes pictured in western media. On the contrary, liberal-democratic movements are a minority in the circle of youth political organizations, most of them being much more inspired by patriotic or pro-Soviet ideology.

From the extreme-left to the extreme-right wing, political youth organizations are numerous, though often very small, and offer an important variety of ideological options. Besides this fragmentation, the circle of political youth movements is characterized by another essential feature: its ideological confusion. Indeed, these organizations seem to be as yet unsolidified, still in formation. Therefore we can observe an important transfer of members and executives between competing movements, strategic alliances that are inconsistent with organizations' ideological positions, and severe ideological incoherence inside several movements.

However, several types of youth organizations may be isolated: left-wing (red), right-wing (liberal-democratic), extreme-right-wing (brown), red-brown and government-loyal. These movements differ by their ideology, their methods of action, their social composition and their relationship to the present government. All these factors have an influence on the final positioning of each organization and on its strategy for the 2008 events. Two camps are being formed today: one that is ready, in the name of democracy or of a more tactical opposition to the government, to support a Ukraine-style "orange revolution"; another that in the name of loyalty to the government or of more general patriotism is preparing to oppose such a scenario.

Therefore, the predictions of a triumphal democratic revolution led by some kind of Russian version of "Pora" seem highly unrealistic. Observation, on the contrary, points to the possibility of a conflict between competing fractions of politically inclined youth.